

Analysing Historical Narratives

Veranstalter: Nicola Brauch / Stefan Berger / Chris Lorenz, Ruhr-Universität Bochum

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During the last years the field of narratology, especially the multi-layered issues of narratological analyses, have been gaining significance in the humanities. The historical sciences, historical culture and history didactics are ultimately affected by this tendency. In terms of methodologies and theories, narratology is a heterogeneous research area and certainly a subject of controversial debate. Nevertheless, there has been a considerable amount of high level research in the field, using some shared terminology; to gain more insight in the common ground of narrative analysis across epochs and disciplines. NICOLA BRAUCH (Bochum), STEFAN BERGER (Bochum) and CHRIS LORENZ (Amsterdam/BOCHUM) organised an international workshop „Analysing Historical Narratives. Theory and Practice“, taking place on 7-9 July 2017. Experts from different disciplines were brought together, which made the workshop an interdisciplinary platform to explore and debate the various theories and methods that can be used to analyse narrative representations of the past.

In his contribution on „Narrating Global History“, DOMINIC SACHSENMAIER (Göttingen) provided a brief overview of the currently most influential narrative approaches in the field of global history. These strategies, Sachsenmaier pointed out, have to be understood within the context of current historiographical debates on and critiques of both, Eurocentrism and linear conceptions of time – developments which have added complexity to the search for suitable narratological strategies.

In her contribution on „Time, Narrative and Historical Sense“, ALEXANDRA LIANERI (Thessaloniki) discussed the tension between two configurations of narrative and historical time in the work of Thucydides. She argued that Thucydides came to represent both the

collapse of past, present and future attributed to the exemplary temporal order of antiquity, and the beginning of a sense of history culminating in modernity's recognition of past and future as different from the present. Thus, Thucydides' text invites us not only to complicate ancient configurations of time, but also to enquire about the specific „politics of time“ involved in modernity's periodisation of „ancient“ and „modern“ historical narrative.

All historical narratives, as LUCIAN HÖLSCHER (Bochum) argued in his keynote on „The Order of Times: Temporal Concepts of Historiography“, draw on historical time, distinguishing between what came later and what before. Therefore, time is the essential medium as no history can be told without relying on temporal relations and frameworks. The chosen concepts of historical time hereby substantially pre-determine the actual historical narrations. Proceeding from these considerations, Hölscher stated the need for more „empty“ concepts of time in today's globalised historiography in order to bring contradicting and conflicting ideas, developments and perspectives together without fostering any pre-determined meaning for interpretation of history.

With regard to two historiographical controversies on narrating national history which arose in post WWII Japan – the „Showa-shi (History of the Showa Era) controversy“ in 1950s and the „Controversy on the perception of history“ of the 1990s and 2000s –, MICHIO OKAMOTO (Tokyo) discussed the relation between scientificity and historiography. He pointed out a close entanglement of Japanese historiography and the construction of the modern nation state, which for long has prevented history writing from meeting scientific standards.

Inspired by François Hartog's concept of „regime of historicity“, NAOKI ODANAKA (Tokyo) introduced the term „history regimes“ to describe the prevalent perception of the logical structure of time and space – the temporal structure articulating past, present, and future, combined with the spatial structure articulating (near) here there and (over) there. With regard to post WWII Japanese high school textbooks on World History, he has analysed the logics

of explanatory regimes utilised in order to establish a certain historical master narrative resp. historical consciousness.

Comparing changes, continuities and ambiguities in the narratives of Ancient Persia in Italian and German Textbooks, BJÖRN ONKEN (Essen) traced back these narratives to concrete orientation needs to which these narratives are supposed to respond to. In this context, for example, the changes in the portrayal of Islamic expansion as well as the discussion of Western Imperialism and its present Impacts were considered as particularly revealing with regard to the orientation needs of modern, multicultural Western societies.

Based upon concrete examples of narratives about the Ceasar, the Gauls and Gallic Wars in French history textbooks, MIRIAM SÉNÉCHEAU (Freiburg) pointed out fundamental elements which constitute these narratives and raised the question how to analyse and explain the constants and transformations that have emerged within several generations of school textbooks until today. Dependent on the relative political situation, for example, the defeat of the Gaulish chieftain Vercingetorix in the battle of Alesia, Sénéchau stressed, was and still is characterised by different emphases and interpretations.

From the 19th century onwards, the Middle Ages, as the so called „closest other“ to European modernity, have become a central element of collective identity formation all over the continent. With recent processes of globalisation, transnational and transcultural identities have emerged, interweaving formerly clearly defined national, respectively „cultural“ identities. These transnational and transcultural „offers of identity“ („Identifikationsangebote“), however, have not entirely replaced national master-narratives. Behind this background, DANIEL WIMMER (Würzburg) outlined changes and continuities in these so called „offers of identity“ within narratives on the Middle Ages in German school textbooks published between 1975 and 2010.

In yet three editions since 2004, an official history of the UK as part of the „history“ chapter of the British Home Office’s publication *Life in the United Kingdom* (LUK)

has been published. Contextualising LUK, ARTHUR CHAPMAN (London) gave an intriguing introduction into methods of grammatical analysis and, in particular, an analysis of „transitivity“, to explore changes and continuities in the narrative strategies over time. Hereby, striking differences were shown, as for example in the function of as well as in the orientation and attitudes towards the past adopted by LUK’s history chapters.

With „Bloodlands and Black Earth“, as WULF KANSTEINER (Aarhus) stated, Timothy Snyder has created narrative universes which differ in important respects from the range of Holocaust narratives that historiography has produced since the turn of the century. Kansteiner therefore conceived Snyder’s oeuvre as a great opportunity to explore the political and ethical stakes involved in reconstructing the history of the Holocaust from a comparative and post-colonial point of view. Regarding, for example, profile and characteristics of the assumed narrator as well as the implied reader, he raised the question what ethical goals may be attained through Snyder’s narrative environment that could perhaps not be as easily achieved in more conventional narrative settings.

Based on several case studies, STEFANIE SAMIDA (Heidelberg) analysed a variety of stereotyped narratives that occur in living history-representations. In her presentation she pointed out that these representations, which are often considered to draw an „authentic“ picture of past living environments, turn out to be cultural constructs. The meta-stories that are told within these popular forms of time-travel, Samida has stressed, build an insightful starting point for reflections upon our contemporary orientation needs, social desires and gender roles.

Since the 1980s, historical subjects have become increasingly important in popular literature, featuring allegedly „realistic“ settings for stories of underdog heroes and heroines that offer a strong identification factor. Focusing on the current popular literature market sector, DANIEL FULDA (Halle an der Saale) analysed prevalent forms and perceptions of historicity. He therefore combined a narratological approach towards the literal works with empirical research on the readers’ re-

ception of historicity (through questionnaires of his students). Although historical images and views are constructed in narratives, Fulda concluded that they only gain social acceptance through their (varying!) reception by readers.

In his contribution „Media Narratives of 1970s left-wing Terrorism“, JÖRG REQUATE (Kassel) emphasised the meaning of the media in the process of constituting narratives, using the example of the changing German discourses on left-wing terrorism in the 1970s and 1980s. Requate argues that the media were an active part of constructing the narratives of terrorism, since they provided the fundamental narrative frameworks of the public images of the RAF. Relevant strategies like mystification and personalisation as well as their usability for the construction of a confrontational, generational narrative were presented. This clearly exemplified the social-political power of the narrative templates produced by the media.

Concerning the heterogeneity of Civil Rights Movement narratives in American historical memory, in his contribution KENAN VAN DE MIEROOP (Ghent) reflected on these narratives, focussing on how their form and function produce public meaning. Van de Mieroop emphasised the significance of narrative structure and of (auto-) periodisation in political discourse. Thereby he argued that in the understanding of narrative even single words – and not only full texts – can have narrative effects when they directly connect to the presumed knowledge of their recipients. He thus emphasised the significance of contextuality in narrative analysis regarding both signifier and signified.

In his contribution „National Narratives in Chinese Global History Writing,“ XUPENG ZHANG (Beijing) stated that global history approaches are widely accepted in Chinese historical sciences. Global history in China aims at overcoming eurocentrism as a consequence of Western-dominated world historical studies, but at the same time, many Chinese scholars build their claims concerning global history on the national historical culture of China. The question then arises to what extent the predominance of national tendencies is contradicting the original concept

of global history.

Historical narratives are constantly challenged, re-interpreted and manipulated, as KASHMIR DHANKAR (Delhi) pointed out in his contribution on the Khalistan movement and its re-interpretation of Sikh history, both in academic history and in popular historical culture. The re-writing of the past in Khalistani narratives has fundamentally changed the ways in which the Sikhs and Hindus are represented. Dhankar has attempted to reveal the narratological strategies of how the Sikhs are victimised in public and historical discourse, pointing at the usage of culturally and religiously meaningful symbols as well as at the evocation of empathy and animosity. Dhankar emphasised both power and effectiveness of narratives in the cultural and social sphere.

The complex process of modernisation between 1750 and 1850 lead to new experiences of history and reality; looking at this process from a narratological perspective, VALDEI LOPES DE ARAUJO (Ouro Preto) analysed how the heuristic usage of terminology has been changing, indicating the nationalisation of historical discourse. Using the process of Brazilian independence as example, Lopes de Araujo demonstrated how new national narratives produced the modern historical experience.

The workshop gave insight in diverse ways to analyse historical narratives. The workshop's discussions encourage further work to investigate the relationship between narrative theories and the representational practices dealing with the past.

Conference Overview:

Welcome and Editors' Introduction to the Concept

Nicola Brauch (Bochum), Stefan Berger (Bochum), Chris Lorenz (Amsterdam)

Dominic Sachsenmaier (Göttingen): *Narrating Global History*

Alexandra Lianeri (Thessaloniki): *Time, Narrative, and Historical Sense in Thucydides; or, Complicating the Temporalities of Historia Magistra Vitae*

Lucian Hölscher (Bochum): *Keynote: The Order of Times: Temporal Concepts in Histori-*

ography

Michihiro Okamoto (Tokyo): Notion of Scientificity in Historiography. Considering the Japanese Case

Naoki Odanaka (Tokyo): History Regimes in High School World History Textbooks in Post-War Japan. What has Changed? And What Remains

Björn Onken (Essen): Ancient Persia in Italian and German Textbooks

Mirian Sénécheau (Freiburg): Caesar and the Gauls in French Textbooks

Daniel Wimmer (Würzburg): Historicising Present-Day European Societies by Telling Medieval Histories. The Middle 21st-Century Territorial Identity Constructions

Arthur Chapman (London): Changing LUK. Nation and Narration in the 2004 and 2013 editions of *Life in the United Kingdom*

Wulf Kansteiner (Aarhus): Pride and Prejudice. The Narrative Vectors and Ethical Depths of Timothy Snyder's *Bloodlands*

Stefanie Samida (Heidelberg): Brave New World? Meta-Stories in Prehistoric Living History

Daniel Fulda (Halle an der Saale): Time Travel as Running Around in Circles. The Popular Historical Novel in Contemporary Media Systems

Jörg Requate (Kassel): Media Narratives of 1970's Left-Wing Terrorism

Kenan van de Mierop (Ghent): The Civil Rights Movement (Re)narrated

Xupeng Zhang (Beijing): National Narratives in Chinese Global History Writing

Kashmir Dhankar (Delhi): Re-interpretation" of Sikh History in Khalistani Narratives

Valdei Lopes de Araujo (Ouro Preto): Minding the gap between Brazil, Portugal and Europe in the first post-Independence Brazilian Historical Master Narratives (1826-1830)

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