

## National History and New Nationalism in the 21st Century

**Veranstalter:** German Historical Institute Paris

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In recent years, the dramatic rise in nationalism, in politics but also in research, has accompanied a renaissance of national history as a genre and patriotic „exceptionalism“ as narrative. The conference dealt with a broad international overview of the techniques, contents, and contexts of this resurgence of national historical narrative.

In her opening address, TATJANA SARANCA (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Paris) stressed the importance of research on nationalism in light of the rising popularity of populist parties across the world. THOMAS MAISSEN (German Historical Institute Paris) outlined the main features of traditional national history, touching on inclusion and exclusion, the cult of ancestral roots, and foreign and domestic threats. He noted the popularity of this genre with the public and that while historians have been looking for different approaches in the last decades, they gravitate towards a deconstructing perspective, showing little interest in the containers and teleology of national(ist) narratives. One has to ask how professional historians could or should react to the given rise of nationalist and populist parties on both the right, and the left.

The first session focused on memory discourses. STEFAN BERGER (Bochum) began with a comparison of several contemporary war museums based on Chantal Mouffe's typology of master narratives, which distinguishes between agonistic, antagonistic and cosmopolitan frameworks. Berger pointed out that there have been few attempts at cosmopolitan or even agonistic frameworks, while antagonistic elements are still very present. He claimed that we need an agonistic historiography, rather than a cosmopolitan

one. In the following intervention, MARTIN SABROW (Potsdam) reviewed the various attempts to challenge the consensus amongst German scholars and politicians on the memory of Nazi Germany and the GDR. The populists of the 21st century tend to break this consensus, as do some scholars, stressing the importance of educating rather than reproducing the same memory patterns. For Sabrow, the real problems are rather new nationalist interpretations lying within the consent than those questioning it.

The second panel concentrated on the historians' reactions to the political use of history in several western European states. In Switzerland, the nationalists rely on well-established elements of 19th century national historiography such as the „Rütli Oath“ as testament to the country's outstanding position that must not be weakened by any formal integration into the EU. According to GEORG KREIS (Basel), historians have not managed to invalidate the nationalist imagery and are now confronted with a social clash of national historiography and the neo-nationalists' irrational exploitation of history. For CHRIS LORENZ (Amsterdam), in the Netherlands, new nationalism corresponds to populism, as defined by three important aspects: collectivism, anti-pluralism and anti-elitism. Populist parties in the Netherlands are on the rise, such as Geert Wilders's Party for Freedom. Their discourse is based on the chauvinistic glorification of the Dutch Empire. Still, historians see populism as un-Dutch and often ignore its anti-pluralist – therefore discriminatory – aspects. AURORE CHERY (Lyon) demonstrated how public history has served nationalist goals in 21st century France. In 2005 France passed a highly contested memory law that favoured a positive interpretation of French colonialism. Two other big debates revolved around museums and their master narratives. Chery suggested that historians should tell history in an emotional way without losing its complexity.

The day ended with a panel discussion on national narratives and global history that focussed on France. Beatrice Heuser moderated the debate between Olivier Dard, Etienne François and Pierre Singarevelou.

On the second day, MILOŠ REZNIK (GHI

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Warsaw) discussed the current problems of Poland's national narratives. He examined the tendency to write history according to national categories supported by the government and how the government exercises limited, but growing, influence over scholars. BALÁZS TRENCSENYI (Budapest) delved into the emergence of a historical narrative of the neo-conservative party FIDESZ in Hungary. He focussed on the figure of Mária Schmidt and the construction of government-supported academic structures to spread a new state ideology. Exploring debates in the post-Yugoslav space, FLORIAN BIEBER (Graz) demonstrated how domestic debates remain antagonistic and nationalistic. He noted the continuity of elites after the Yugoslav Wars and the limited effects of Europeanization processes as the cause of the emergence of the nationalist discourse.

The fourth Panel focused on issues in Russian and Ukrainian national History. EKATHERINA MAKHOTINA (Bonn) opened the discussion with a historiographical debate on Russia's *Sonderweg* and the question of Russia's place in Europe, highlighting the ambiguity of the development of Russian national identification. In a similar spirit, TANJA PENTER (Heidelberg) paid attention to the historiography in Ukraine since independence and the inevitable revisionist processes associated with this. Revolution, Communism, Stalinism, and Nazism became the main revisited themes of an official history while Ukrainian participation in war crimes is neglected. Penter also reviewed the suppression of pluralistic narratives in favour of an official one, showing how this creates a tense relationship between Ukrainian and Russian historians.

In the fifth panel, MICHAEL BENTLEY (Saint Andrews) brought to light the particulars of the British case, which features several foundational events, rather than just one, hence the emphasis on the liberal constitution. Thus, most historians hold a liberal view. This dominating attitude also applies to the reactions on Brexit: „Historians for Britain in Europe“ counts more than 300 members, against only a handful on the pro-Brexit side. XOSÉ M. NÚÑEZ SEIXAS (Santiago de Compostela) stressed the coexistence of liberal and

traditional narratives of national history in Spain. With the democratic transition after Franco, liberal scholars seemed to dominate, while under Aznar the trend abated. Meanwhile, the resurgence of peripheral nationalism in the Basque region and Catalonia encouraged the development of proper regional histories. Academics are therefore confronted with both national and peripheral narratives exploiting history to serve right-wing nationalist or left-wing separatist agendas. LUIGI CAJANI (Rome) examined the instrumentalisation of history by the populist Five Star Movement in their 2017 commemoration of the victims of the Risorgimento in Southern Italy. During the 70s and 80s, the radical left glorified the rebellion as a fight of an occupied colony against the Italian army. This narrative ignores the atrocities committed on both sides. Today most historians neither support the one-sided representation of the Risorgimento nor the discrimination of Southern Italy by the Lega Nord.

The last session of the day left Europe for other countries. MORDECHAI KREMNITZER (Jerusalem) observes a one-sided view of history promoted by the Israeli government at schools and universities. As there is a gap of 2000 years of diaspora, the national narrative often refers to religious texts. Moreover, the Second Intifada in 1996 permitted the government to demonize the Palestinian people and to ignore the significance of Israeli settlements. Kremnitzer also underlines the existence of counter-movements that support a pluralistic perspective of Israel's history. As KONRAD JARAUSCH (North Carolina) argued, the narrative of American national history is based on exceptionalism. The Vietnam War and the Civil Rights movement were turning points that forced historians to consider minorities and societal problems. Finally, the end of the Cold War forged the clash of pluralist and traditionalist perspectives. Today, Jarausch detects a narrative focusing on the country's present and future, ignoring the shameful elements in the past. On the contrary, pre-colonial India is described as a harmonic, homogenous society during the struggle for independence. In the 70s and 80s, historians criticized this frame and recognized Indian plurality in focusing on con-

flict and marginalized groups. Consequently, NEELADRI BHATTACHARYA (New Dehli) sees more non-academic attempts to create a community by writing a history based on mythology. Hinduism is glorified while the external opponent of imperialism has been replaced by the internal enemy „Islam“.

The third day opened with a talk by TAKASHI YOSHIDA (Western Michigan) who focused on the revisionist attempts to reform school history textbooks in Japan during the 1990s and 2000s that sought a new understanding of Japan's imperial past which minimised the war atrocities. Led by University professors, the movement, though it did not succeed in imposing a new view, managed to challenge the critical discourse on Japanese war atrocities. Today, revisionist and progressive points of view coexist. RWEN-REN WU (Taipei) analysed a bottom-up student movement against the revision of guidelines for Taiwan's 2015 high school history curriculum. This movement led to a new type of nation-state, with a weak role of the state and a nation defined as a community of suffering. Rwen-Ren Wu underlined the rise of a civic nationalism, in opposition to the state's own narrative. HANS VAN ESS (Munich) highlighted the challenge for Chinese historiography to renew and modernize to catch up with European historiography. New approaches include a history of oppressed minorities and strong multi-ethnic focus in order to justify the occupation of some regions. Chinese scholars advocate ethnic nationalism by exploiting past distress to claim territories, even using fictitious sufferings to reach their goal. Tunisia, which was discussed by JOCELYNE DAKHLIA (Paris), presents itself as „leader in the Arab world“ since its 2011 revolution. However, the revolution deepened the rift between the Western-minded elites and Arab-Islamic population. As a result, an Arab-Islamic national narrative is being challenged by the Western-minded elites that reclaim their neo-Phoenician heritage. In their texts, anti-Islamic and xenophobic arguments have gained momentum. MICHAEL GOEBEL (Berlin) described the perception of the Argentine people of their country as a „cultural matrix“. New nationalist discourse based on revisionist arguments and the use of

heroic figures have produced a new kind of nationalism. Its key component is a new national history built on collective memory. It is discussed on all levels of society – including politics and historiography.

In the last panel TANIL BORA (Ankara) and THANOS VEREMIS (Athens) examined the cases of Turkey and Greece. Bora explained that in the current situation, transfigured and glorified Ottoman history serves as an explanation for the AKP-government's policies. Likewise, Erdogan's populism embraces different versions of Turkish nationalism. This can essentially be recognized as the cornerstone of Erdogan's regime. According to Thanos Veremis (Athens), Greek civic nationalism that had emerged in the 19th century only turned „malignant“ during the Greek Civil War. Today in the wake of the economic crisis, nationalism continues to contribute to the polarization of Greek society. Nevertheless, as a result of the university radicalism in the 1970s and the liberalization of society after the dictatorship, historiography is in full blossom as a counterbalance to nationalism.

The final discussion was animated by HENRY ROUSSO (Paris) and GUY P. MARCHAL (Lucerne). Marchal pointed out three fundamental assessments of new nationalism. Firstly, that the political sphere appeals to history more than ever, even when the dialogue between historiography and the political sphere is difficult, if not impossible. Secondly, historians are everywhere, including on the extremes of the political spectrum. Finally, nationalism is not a new phenomenon but today, historical narratives are adapted to political agendas.

Overall, the different contributions of the conference showed that this is a global phenomenon in which there are a number of similarities and differences that need to be taken into account in the analysis. Overall, it almost seems that the handling of history within politics is either subjected to the same rules or that the European model, as it developed in the 19th century, was adopted in most parts of the world.

#### **Conference Overview:**

Tatjana Saranca (Konrad Adenauer Founda-

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tion, Paris): Welcome

Thomas Maissen (GHI Paris): Introduction

Stefan Berger (University of Bochum): National Historical Master Narratives and War Museums in Contemporary Europe – a Comparative Analysis

Martin Sabrow (Centre for Contemporary History, Potsdam): Challenging the German *Aufarbeitungsdiskurs*?

Georg Kreis (University of Basel): The Swiss Case: Also a Clash of Culture

Chris Lorenz (VU University Amsterdam): National History and New Nationalism in the 21st Century: the Dutch Case

Aurore Chery (University of Lyon III): Usages publics de l'histoire et résurgence du roman national dans la France du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle

*Round table discussion*

Olivier Dard (Paris-Sorbonne University) / Etienne François (Free University of Berlin) / Pierre Singaravelou (Pantheon-Sorbonne University) : National Narratives and Global History

Miloš Reznik (GHI Warsaw): The Nation as Historical Actor and its Enemies. National Historical Narratives and their Ramifications in Present-Day Poland

Balázs Trencsényi (Central European University Budapest): Historical Politics and Authoritarian Regime-Building in Hungary after 2010

Florian Bieber (University of Graz): The Past that Never Left? The Yugoslav Wars as Source of Nationalism

Ekaterina Makhotina (University of Bonn): Between Europe and the Tsardom of Russia, Between Empire and Nation: Dilemmas of Russian Politics of History

Tanja Penter (University of Heidelberg): Independence, Revolution, War and Renaissance of National History in Ukraine

Michael Bentley (University of St Andrews): Nationalism in Modern British Historiography

Xosé M. Núñez Seixas (University of Santiago

de Compostela): On the Resilience of National Histories: The »two Spains« vs. the Periphery?

Luigi Cajani (University of Rome, La Sapienza): The Italian Risorgimento: a National Myth under Attack

Mordechai Kremnitzer (Hebrew University Jerusalem): New Nationalism in Israel: National History as a Political Tool

Konrad Jarausch (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill): National Pride Versus Self-Criticism: American Memory Wars

Neeladri Bhattacharya (Jawaharlal Nehru University New Delhi): Memory, History and the Politics of New Nationalisms in India

Takashi Yoshida (Western Michigan University): National History and Nationalism in Japan in the 21st Century

Rwei-Ren Wu (Academia Sinica, Taipei): Civic Nationalism and History as Societal Consensus: An Analysis of the Movement Against the Revision of Guidelines for High School History Curriculum in Taiwan, 2014–2015

Hans van Ess (Ludwig-Maximilian University Munich): Chinese National History: The Manchu-Qing in New Clothes Jocelyne

Dakhli (EHESS, Paris): La Tunisie et l'impératif historiographique de l'exception

Tanıl Bora (Tarih Vakfı/History Foundation, Istanbul): "National and Native" – The Nationalist Discourse of AKP and Erdoğan

Thanos Veremis (University of Athens): A National History in Spite of a Resurgent Nationalism: The New Trends of Greek Historiography

Michael Goebel (Free University of Berlin): The Partisan Past: Nationalism and History in Argentina

Guy P. Marchal (University of Lucerne) / Henry Rousso (CNRS, Paris): Closing remarks and discussion

Tagungsbericht *National History and New Nationalism in the 21st Century.*

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