

# Coping with Burdening History<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Types of coming to terms with historical harm and guilt

### 1.1 Outline of the argumentation

History is only learnt effectively under three given conditions: if new insights can be linked up with old ones, if it is connected to – negative or positive – emotions and if it is relevant in life. The learning of *affirmative* cases of heroism and glory/pride seems easier, but *burdening* experiences of harm and guilt/shame (or both of them) are much more difficult. The Holocaust and the other mass crimes of National Socialism are good examples. It is quite clear that *learning* means more than scientific investigation, it includes a mental conflict as well as change: Coping with burdening history is a problem of mental *working through* as well as of intellectual activities. There are productive forms of coping with burdening history and defective ones. Four of these defective forms will be analyzed below (see section 1.3.):<sup>2</sup>

- a. Hostile histories in a revenge and blood-feud system (*inherited enmity*),

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1 This text is to a large extent identical with the second half of a presentation given at the conference “Opening Historical Reconciliation in East Asia through Historical Dialogue” in Seoul in October 2007, meanwhile published (Borries 2009).

2 The typology presented here was introduced by myself some years ago (see Borries 2008: 121-137). It is the result of theoretical reflections as well as of observations and qualitative empirical studies in the culture of history (autobiographies, novels, interviews, historical narrations).

- b. The history of the winners and damnation/oblivion of the losers (*cynicism of power*),
- c. The underground history of losers and hope for inversion (*heroism of remembrance*),
- d. Lost hostile history discarded due to irrelevance (*priority of surviving*).

In parts, these mental reactions may be inevitable. Achieving a real *reconciliation* however – with former enemies (victims, perpetrators) and with yourself – is more complex (see section 1.4.). People need the experience of *moving towards each other and continuing together along the same path* (in life and historiography). But this involves – besides undoubtedly necessary analyses of historical events and interpretations according to intellectual standards – a process of *taking distance from one's own past and that of the other without forgetting one's history*. The aim is *to search for the conditions and chances of a common future* (in spite of a hostile history). Some examples will serve to illustrate this.

Afterwards, some German experiences with different strategies of reflecting and (self-)reflective methods of learning history<sup>3</sup> for promoting reconciliation via history are discussed (see section 2.1 to 2.4.).

## 1.2 Some reflections about the feelings of *guilt* and *shame* in respect to history

A remark about terminological – and systematic – issues is necessary. What is “burdening history”? Does it include *guilt* like *grief* and *harm*? Are there any examples of *collective* or *inherited* guilt? Or is this an inadequate notion? Of course, different ways of expressing and developing central categories are possible, but they must be logically clear and morally convincing.

*Guilt* can only be personal in the strict sense of penal courts. A punishment of another family member, another *hostage* from the same profession, city or nation is a clear violation of international law and human rights.<sup>4</sup> Any assignment of *guilt* to innocent and uninvolved persons or later generations is an unjust, illogical, archaic reaction in itself. For people born after 1945 any *collective guilt* in the context of National Socialism can only be a metaphor, and a dangerous one. This does not mean any denial of *guilt by default* (or omission) among many contem-

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3 In respect to the theoretical foundations, please compare the contribution of Andreas Körber in this volume.

4 The NS state often oppressed – or punished – completely un-involved relatives of opponents (“Sippenhaft”); this was one of the Nazi-crimes.

porary German bystanders, but this is individual guilt, not a collective one<sup>5</sup>.

That does not imply that members of later generations born in a country where political crimes against mankind (e.g. genocides) have been committed are completely disconnected from any special relation to the past, or are not involved any differently than anyone else in the world. Countries – we should better say: societies – have their unspoken continuities, self-evident truths, socially desired answers and traditions, transferred by socialization (like a *heritage*). Even if nobody can inherit guilt for a crime, he or she can inherit the consequences and costs of a crime. Of course, the benefits of past crimes (at least of the last decades) have to be returned – and the damages recompensated as far as possible. This is often called *responsibility*. The notion makes sense if understood correctly.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the word *liability* should be preferred, since *responsibility* often includes *guilt* (for instance, if a captain is *responsible* for the sinking of his ship). German citizens remain collectively *liable* for a lot of costs and problems, even in the *innocent* third and fourth generations and even if they are *innocent* (grand-)sons and (grand-) daughters of immigrants from Turkey or Russia.

*Shame* is a third problem. A son of a man who murdered his wife and buried her in the garden is not *guilty*, but he may feel very *ashamed* and *burdened* for the rest of his life. This is the case of succeeding generations in Germany (and perhaps other countries like Russia or Japan). Shame is a very strong and uncomfortable feeling. Therefore the temptation to escape shame via denial/refusal of the crime is also strong. Many reactions can only be understood as *avoidance of shame*. Forcing someone to be ashamed is an offensive act, often answered by aggression. Nietzsche famously wrote “‘*I have done that*’, says my memory. ‘*I cannot have done that*’, says my pride, and remains adamant. At last – memory yields.” (Nietzsche 1968: 86) Coping with shame – without denial or depression – is very difficult; it includes admittance and distance at the same time.

Fourthly, the decisive feeling in the case of *burdening history* is – or should be – *mourning* (Liebsch/Rüsen 2001). But what is mourning? In private life, we associate it with pity – and also self-pity. Mourning is coping with a loss, with a hole in one’s life, with the hurting absence of a beloved person or relation. Psychoanalysis experts refer to mourning

5 For an empirical analysis on the theme of victim and guilty in the case of Finland see the contribution by Ahonen in this volume.

6 The clear allusion to the character of an answer, a reply to a demand from outside (in English like in German) is an additional advantage of the term “responsibility” (see Jonas 1984, 1987).

as work, thus *working through history*, *work of commemoration*, and *work of mourning* become very similar. The emotion – while learning to live with a loss – is a mixture of pity with the unhappy, ill or dead person and of self-pity because of having lost a relative or a friend, simply because of being bereaved, perhaps lonely. In the case of mental burdens from history, we seriously have to ask which elements constitute the feeling of mourning. After the Holocaust for instance, who are the young Germans of 2010 mourning for, if they mourn: The murdered Jews and Slavs – or the lost honor, innocence, self-esteem, and territory of their great-grandfathers? Who do they mourn together with?

Thus the mental task of coming to terms with burdening history (in the sense of severe crimes committed by one's own side in the past) – in a country, a family or an institution – is rather complicated, protracted and mentally burdening. A productive solution includes the admittance of the crimes committed; the handling and reflecting – and avoidance – of temptations to deny or forget; the rejection of any personal guilt, while distancing oneself from the perpetrators and acknowledging liability; coping with feelings of shame and even more so with expectations or demands to feel shame expressed or made by others. For young generations in societies that have continuity with periods of major crimes, this does not imply simply internalizing the history as told by grandparents, parents, authorities and the state. Instead, they have to *reflect, study, compare, examine, and decide for themselves* when dealing with historical interpretations and their own orientation. Therefore, the common sentence “*Grandpa was no Nazi!*” – frequently used by young Germans – (Welzer et al. 2002) may often be wrong, but the sentence “*Don't confuse me with my grandpa!*” is morally correct.

### 1.3 Defective forms of *working through history*

Learning or grasping history is not a cognitive process alone, but also a question of emotions, aesthetics and moral judgments. To secure and connect certain little pieces of the past (some call them *facts*) may be important, but is not enough. The question is, how to give a general, valid, and agreeable version of the historical narrative and how to handle the effects for the present. The mental act of assimilating, digesting and overcoming burdening histories is decisive.<sup>7</sup> Of course, the process of

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7 For systematic and pragmatic reasons, the extreme case of “*Holocaust Education*” cannot be analyzed in detail here, but I have written some articles about it during the last years (see Borries 2004a/b, 2005, 2006a/b). Twenty years ago, any comparison of the Holocaust with other genocides and mass crimes (like those committed by the Japanese war in China) was

*working through* – to use a psychoanalytical notion – can, in a controversial case, take diametrically opposite directions.

The grandchildren of victors and defeated, of perpetrators and victims, of rich and poor may remember and digest a certain event or development in rather contrasting ways.<sup>8</sup> In addition to the technical process of *writing history*, the mental (social psychological) conditions for dealing with terrible experiences are the decisive point. Obviously, the processes follow certain patterns. When human beings *use history* in their lives and for their legitimations and decisions, i.e. when they orient themselves by means of history to confront and face the future (see Rösen 1994a),<sup>9</sup> they choose a limited set of strategies and logical versions.<sup>10</sup> To know them is a vital precondition for the description and analysis of chances and risks for reconciliation (comp. Borries 2004b, 2008, p.121-137).

1. If both sides only wait – and prepare – for the next clash after the end of a preceding war, the situation is clear but dangerous. Rome and Carthage fought such wars in the third and second centuries B.C. Peace was only a pause to gather new *assets*, i.e. weapons, troops, money and allies. The old wars had to be *re-enacted* in new campaigns until the complete destruction of Carthage. The situation between Rome and Persia in late antiquity was similar – up to the decisive victory of the Arabs against both Rome and Persia. The repetition of serious wars between

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considered taboo. Today one could be criticized for omitting “Holocaust Education” in an analysis of “historical reconciliation”. It is just the opposite. For me, the case is much more complicated, and therefore it cannot be covered explicitly here.

- 8 A remark about *perpetrators* and *victims* has to be added here. A perpetrator may, indeed, later on become a victim. Psychologically, it is not wise and fair to accuse the (former!) aggressors and their heirs of remaining fixed in their view when engaging in a discourse about harm and mourning within their own society. Of course, proportion and causation have to be taken into account.
- 9 According to Rösen (1994 and often), orientation for the present and the future is the basic purpose of history.
- 10 Rösen’s theory of the logical patterns of making sense out of history (1994a and often) is a very basic and important one, since it clarifies different modes of relating past and present/future, i.e. of concluding from history for the sake of a current orientation. “Traditional” sense-making means the prolongation of an institution or value invented in the past and remaining *valid* for the future. “Exemplary” sense-making is subsuming a historical event/structure as a *case* under permanent and lasting *rules* (e.g. pragmatic historiography). “Critical” sense-making includes an autonomous decision against a societal interpretation of history, e.g. the denial of an outdated tradition or a false (inapplicable) rule. “Genetic” sense-making accepts the change of rules in the course of time (*development*) also, but insists on continuities, on duration in change.

Sweden and Denmark or Sweden and Poland may also have been a main reason for the common decline of both *enemy* partners. These are the typical outcomes of such *assimilations of history*: total defeat and *annihilation* of one side or *common decline* of both sides caused by a third power from outside. This type of reaction may be called “*revenge system*” or “*blood feud*” with the character of a *vicious circle* – the opposite of *historical reconciliation*.

2. Another type is the “*winner’s history*”: If one party has really won, it can decide about memories, perhaps for a very long time.<sup>11</sup> We know a lot of cases where the victor destroyed the documents, memorials, memories, and leading families of the defeated (though not the whole population). Thus Shi Huang Ti, the first emperor of imperial China, is said to have burned all historical books of the other dynasties (except his own Chin) and of the other philosophical schools (except his own “legalism”). The question whether he really did so, is less important than the idea and structure as such. The story was taken for granted for more than 1500 years. Other victors acted alike, e.g. the Fulbe against the Haussa in Western Africa, the Spanish against the Maya in Yucatan and Christians against “*heathens*” in Central and Eastern Europe. The destruction of buildings, statues, paintings and monuments may be added to the burning of texts. This “*damnatio memoriae*” ([con]damnation of memories) can be a successful strategy in the long – or very long – run; perhaps the population may forget its ancestors or its descent. Nevertheless, this complete “*oblivion*” and “*loss*” is also far from “*reconciliation*”. It may be called “*cultural – not physical – destruction*”.

3. But it is not easy to completely destroy the traditions of defeated collectives. Mothers may tell their children, itinerant priests their believers. Oral traditions can be saved for centuries; they can be preserved and spread separately from the official histories of the ruling group (in schools or chronicles). This is “*underground history*” in slave language and only carries validity for the subjugated, but also for small ethnic groups in large European empires (Ireland, Basque region, Estonia, Slovenia, Czechia).<sup>12</sup> The case of Latin America is perhaps even more interesting. Of course, Spanish and Portuguese conquerors tried to force their victors’ histories on the native Americans (“Red Indians”). But very often, the official, written, so-called scientific version is counteracted and devalued by oral variants of pre-modern, mythical character

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11 “*History is written by the victors, at least by the survivors, at worst by the slayers.*”

12 If the one-sided history versions of the winners (the large empires) had been successful in all European cases, we would not have around forty but only around ten or fifteen European states.

among the “aborigines”, in particular when they live far from the big cities in remote areas and speak their pre-Spanish and pre-Portuguese languages. Thus, the old gods, old kings, old heroes, and old myths are surviving – and with it the hope for a future post-Spanish (or post-Portuguese) “golden and happy era”. Such “*underground history*” may guarantee *cultural diversity* and richness, but it is definitely no *historical reconciliation*.

4. On the other hand, the battles, hardships and crimes of the past between two groups can also fade away, even if no *winner* command and rule the *losers*. Progress of time and change of (economical, cultural, technological) conditions may simply overrun and devalue the heroes and hatreds of the past. In Italy, the parties of Guelphs and Guibellines fought, killed and executed each other in nearly all cities for a period of two hundred years (like the already mentioned “blood feud”). But some generations later it became difficult to understand – or internalize – the reasons of this existential struggle. Maybe, the relation of the two big Christian confessions in Germany is an even better example. Catholics and Protestants fought each other for a long time, not only in the *Thirty years war* (1618-1648). All over Europe, martyrs were executed and minorities were persecuted (*religious cleansing*); authorities forced their subjects to convert and robbed them of all their rights and property. In the end, formal tolerance was laid down in the “*Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation*”. The rivalry and mistrust, however, lasted much longer (they tolerated, but strongly disliked each other), maybe even until 1948. Today, only sixty years later, many – at least some – children do not know, whether they are Catholic or Protestant (or neither). There are a lot of mixed couples. The history of the religious split has become irrelevant, and the attitudes towards it indifferent, apathetic. Can this process be called *historical reconciliation*? I doubt it, because I prefer the notion *a-historical*, *anti-historical*, a falling asleep or a dwindling away of a conflict. The past does not only lose its power over the present (which is necessary and acceptable in some respect), but also its dignity and relevance (and perhaps that constitutes a problem).

These four types of “historical non-reconciliation” form a system of oppositions and similarities:

Table 1: Types of Missing Historical Reconciliation

|   |  |   |  |
|---|--|---|--|
| Integration of histories<br>Direction and perspectives                                      | Attempts to create common memories, assured peace without historical reconciliation.   | ↔ | Preservation of separate memories, threatening war due to lack of historical reconciliation. |
| Mainly seen from the viewpoint of the ruling institutions (history policy <i>top down</i> ) | Winner's history and loser's damnation/oblivion ( <i>cynicism of power</i> )           | ↔ | Hostile histories in a revenge and blood feud system ( <i>inherited enmity</i> )             |
| ↕   | ↕  | X | ↕  |
| Mainly seen from the viewpoint of populations (history policy <i>bottom up</i> )            | Lost hostile history dwindled away due to irrelevance ( <i>priority of surviving</i> ) | ↔ | Loser's underground history and hope of inversion ( <i>heroism of remembrance</i> )          |

#### 1.4 Strategies of historical reconciliation

If all these ways are misleading, what are the chances and structures of succeeding in reconciliation? Of course, there are political, cognitive, moral and aesthetic elements. But in its core, it is not only a historical-cognitive, but also a historical-social and historical-emotional process.

The main issue is *moving towards each other and continuing together along the same path*. But this is not at all easy; it has some mental preconditions: *taking distance from the past without forgetting the past, not allowing the past to completely determine the present, looking for the conditions and chances of a common future*. Thus, every side has to change its habits a bit and has to anticipate the other side's reaction: avoiding the simple *traditional* and *exemplary* patterns of making sense means achieving complex *critical* and *genetic* patterns of making sense (see Rösen 1994a, p. 85-90, 141-155, 231-235).

In particular, the process demands *continuously changing and comparing the perspectives to history, the criteria of selection, the attributions of causes*, that means *looking through the eyes, walking in the shoes of the "other", even the "enemy", singing the songs and telling the stories of the "enemy"*. But empathy in order to understand the "other" is not enough. It leads to *systematically comparing and exchanging the historical narratives, the historical orientations* (consequences for the present, conclusions for own actions). Sometimes, changing one's own position becomes inevitable: *abolishing historical falsifications and*

*biased myths about superiority and particular dignity* (“being chosen, being selected”) *of ones own group and the inferiority or lack of dignity* (“being damned, being degenerate”) *of other groups.*

Profoundly understood, this approach to history has a universalist basis: acknowledgment of universal and valid *civil and human rights.* Only after a serious study of contrasting concepts can one accomplish *the construction of new, plausible and convincing histories, at least compatible* (i.e. non exclusive) *ones or partly common* (i.e. agreeable) *ones.* Superficially, this version of history looks like a weakening of one’s own position, like a loss. But this is short-sighted: The superior – inclusive, encompassing – narrative allows *self-esteem out of own achievements and abilities,* not borrowed from the so-called (often dubious) heroic deeds of the ancestors. This means strength, not weakness, because there is a development in one’s own personality. In the end it may bring about *tolerance* – even mutual sympathy and mutual *acceptance* – for the other, in spite of the forefathers’ hatred.<sup>13</sup>

*Table 2: Mental Strategies of Historical Reconciliation*

|                                      | <b>Understanding history</b>   | <b>Revising behavior</b>  | <b>Dealing with the ‘other’</b>  |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|--|
| <b>Lower steps (self-distance)</b>   | Avoiding simple ‘traditional’ and ‘exemplary’ patterns of making sense         | Abolishing historical falsifications and biased myths about superiority and inferiority | Taking distance from the (own and foreign) past without forgetting the past                                    |
| <b>Intermediate steps (movement)</b> | Changing and comparing perspectives on history and criteria of selection       | Going towards each other and going on together (in life and historiography)             | Looking for the conditions and chances of a common future (in spite of hostile history)                        |
| <b>Higher steps (mutuality)</b>      | Systematically comparing and exchanging historical narratives and orientations | Constructing new, plausible histories, at least compatible or partly common             | Developing tolerance – even mutual sympathy and mutual acceptance – for the ‘others’ (including their history) |

Clearly, this includes a new approach to, use of and coping with history, a change in the traditional notion of history itself. It is no longer a fixed

13 One of the consequences of a process of reconciliation could be to learn to *mourn* in common ceremonies, as Germans and French meanwhile sometimes do when commemorating World War I and World War II.

and unchangeable value to hold on to, to preserve, but a valuable, and also hazardous, field to handle in an intellectually convincing and morally honest way.

## 2. Four approaches to “historical reconciliation” via “learning history”

Until now, nothing has been said about children and schools. In fact, all the problems and processes mentioned before take place in all parts of society, they are deep, often unconscious movements of the political and historical culture. Since historical awareness and historical interpretations are learnt by socialization, young people will clearly be involved in those changes. Often the generation growing up will turn to an alternative version, will promote opposing ideas and therefore will accelerate societal movements. This is a typical structure of the generation conflict in history.

Nevertheless, any *political class*, any *ruling group*, tries to implant its historical constructions, which in fact include the anticipated tasks for the future, into the thoughts, plans (and dreams) of the young ones, at least of those who will be influential (see Weniger 1969). History textbooks are a battlefield for this; winning means shaping the thoughts of young people, losing means a defeat in the transfer of ones own ideas to the next generation. Inevitably, *history teaching* in schools is *history policy*, even if a strong orientation towards *historical science* is claimed and aspired.

In the German case, we mainly executed and experienced four approaches to reconciliation in the more narrow field of learning history, especially at school and in the subject matter history:

- History textbook commissions and purification of textbooks,
- Common textbooks,
- Youth exchange programs,
- Comparing history textbooks and exchanging historical narratives by the pupils *themselves*.

Now we need to describe all four strategies in detail and to explain their effects and limits.

## 2.1 History textbook commissions and purification of textbooks

Already in the twenties before World War II, many left-wing teachers in different countries, e.g. Germany and France, had begun common work in comparing and correcting history textbooks in a mutual process of examining, discussing and deciding. The aim was not to find a uniform version for both sides, but to mitigate the hatred and the mistakes in order to find some solutions and some discourses with the aim of *agreeing to disagree* (controversial discussions are better than firing at each other). Already in those early times, the aim was explicitly called *decontamination of the national history textbooks*.

After World War II, a German professor of teachers' education in Brunswick, Georg Eckert (born 1912), took up the same activity. When Eckert died in 1974, a scientific institution with his name was founded and funded; until today it has edited a periodical and a long series of more than one hundred books (see Pingel 1995; 1999, 2000; Becher/Riemenschneider 2000). After long years, a series of *textbook commissions* was institutionalized with the help of the UNESCO. They were not governmental institutions, but produced a mixture of scientific expertise, peace-education policy and diplomatic negotiations. In fact, those processes of exchanging and understanding need a long time. Both sides have to gain confidence in each other step by step, and also insight into the special wounds, taboos, neuralgias and limits of both sides. That is a good reason why international help and status via the UNESCO is preferable to receiving support from national governmental agencies only. The commissions need a certain independence and distance from national blinkers.

Perhaps some remarks are necessary about the main method of the commissions' work. The neuralgic topics of the bi-national history are presented scientifically by both sides and the controversies are discussed. But textbook analyses – conducted cross-nationally – are even more important. In those mutual researches and diligent comparisons, the points which one partner cannot accept in the other's *official* narratives are identified. After that, scientific debates about interpretation and synthesis of history and about the *cultures of history*, the images of and dealing with history in the societies involved, has to take place again. Between both sides in the commissions, a difficult and long process of scientific and diplomatic negotiation – even bargaining – begins and hopefully comes to a mutually acceptable end, a common recommendation.

In this process, not every problem can – and should – be settled by an uneasy compromise in the middle; sometimes it may be better *to agree to disagree in some points* and to preserve this rest for the common future, when more insight and trust have evolved through the improvement of negotiation and exchange. Of course, the method can be applied to tri-lateral or multi-lateral textbook talks as well (German, Polish and Ukrainian or German, Russian and Baltic or German, US and Israeli or European and Latin American). But, as far as I know, this has seldom been wholly accomplished and has proven to be even more difficult than bi-lateral work.

The results of those commissions were textbook recommendations, not textbooks. The different systems of textbook production of the different partners were accepted. Some countries have rather varied textbook types and series on a free capitalist market, others have official and centralized (uniform) textbooks. Of course, the effect or success of the recommendations was tested and examined after some years. Often, one side was not satisfied with the publishers' practice in another country. Nevertheless, in the long run, most recommendations were fulfilled.

The German-French textbook reconciliations in the fifties were the first ones. Later on, the Israeli-German and Polish-German textbook commissions were the most important ones. The German-Polish case has become the most famous or most infamous. It took place at the time of the *policy of détente* (“Entspannungspolitik”) of Chancellor Willy Brandt. To summarize the conflict: Germany conquered Poland in 1939, took great parts of the territory, shot a huge number of people from all elites, killed three millions Polish Jews, displaced hundreds of thousands of Polish citizens and forced millions of them to work in Germany during the war. After the war, Poland (and Russia) took the Eastern quarter of Germany (mainly inhabited by German speaking people) and drove out – or did not allow to return – a population of about nine million Germans (*ethnic cleansing*). There is a lot of pain and hatred on both sides – and in a very asymmetric case.

During the textbook negotiations, a precondition had to be accepted. The Polish side was prohibited by its government to talk about the Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939 with the plan to separate and abolish interbellum Poland, giving the West to Germany and the East – today's Western Belorussia und Western Ukraine – to the Soviet Union. This secret additional protocol to the Hitler-Stalin-treaty of 1939 was officially called a Western secret intelligence falsification. Only in 1989 did Gorbachev admit to the existence of the document. But in 1969 or 1972, every mention of the loss of Eastern Poland was strictly forbidden. When the rec-

ommendations of the bilateral commission came out in 1976, the problem – like others – was excluded and postponed to the future.

The conservative opponents of Willy Brandt's policy of *détente* – including the conservative party leaders – were immediately up in arms and accused the German members of being *traitors of historical truth and German interests* (Jacobmeyer 1979). Indeed, they produced an alternative recommendation which looked much more convincing and plausible to German readers (Menzel et al. 1978). Ironically, it had only one mistake: It was a German position, not a common one that also incorporated the Polish viewpoint and Polish history culture. Affirming one's own position and securing it in documents full of pathos is just the opposite of *a reconciliation by history*.

If the textbook publishers write the opposite of what has been negotiated and decided in history textbook commissions, this is a problem. But if they simply omit a topic which had been considered and – after long controversies – agreed upon, they may undermine the common solution or they may decide in favor of more important themes. History inevitably is selection. Many topics the researchers or politicians of one country want to fix not only in their own curriculum but also in the one of their – formerly hostile – neighbor cannot be covered in detail or at all. Every country has to accept that others learn a different history. This is not easy. But in instances where a neuralgic issue is covered in one country, the others have a legitimate right to look at it and perhaps voice their differing opinions and respectful protest.<sup>14</sup>

## 2.2 Common textbooks?

The concept of a *common textbook* has to be sharply distinguished from the concept of *textbook examination* and *textbook decontamination*. Different states, nations, and regions remember different histories and therefore merit different textbooks, but – that is the result of a successful textbook commission – not at the emotional costs of the neighbour. Textbook negotiation (even textbook bargaining) is a question of good diplomacy, of intellectual honesty and of anticipatory peace-keeping. Common textbooks are a question of identity policy, of a type of *second order nation building* (or *federation/alliance building*). About twenty years ago, a private donator financed a common “European History

14 Commentaries from other positions (“controversial articulations”) are a good alternative to common history texts. This is not only true for (formerly hostile) nations, but for classes, genders, religious communities etc. as well. Remember that international history with diplomacy, trade, war and peace is not the only aspect of history!

Textbook”, written by more than ten scientists coming from more than ten countries (Aldebert 1992).

In my opinion the result was not convincing. On the one hand, the different versions in different languages have not been completely identical. Central notions and remarks varied. On the other hand, the text was rather abstract and boring. In this, it fell far short of the best textbooks in many European countries.<sup>15</sup>

Obviously, the same textbook has completely different effects in small countries (like Czechia) and large countries (like France), in geographically central countries (like Germany) and marginal countries (like Norway), in conservative countries (with a tradition of learning by rote, falsely called “learning by heart”) and in progressive countries (with a tradition of *free* learning). The idea of a common textbook, although it is often renewed in the public discussion, is not a good idea. What we need, is not a common history, but a history for every country with a common European aspect and perspective on one hand, and a basic idea of European peace and reconciliation on the other. This noble dream has not yet been wholly accomplished.

A second attempt to produce a common textbook was made by the French president Jacques Chirac and the German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder. A German-French youth conference itself had made the proposal; and the two leading politicians pushed it through against some experts’ warnings and all legal impediments (*top-down-model*). Now the second and the third volume have been published (Histoire/Geschichte 2006, 2007); chronologically they cover modern and contemporary history. It may be more difficult to agree when it comes to earlier periods.<sup>16</sup> Contrary to what the top politicians had in mind, almost nobody thinks that it can be used alone and exclusively. It is accepted as additional material only. The two partners’ common book is far from being a solution.<sup>17</sup> As a thought experiment, you only have to think about a generali-

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15 Perhaps an important illusion has to be destroyed: The content of history textbooks is not really *learnt* or *internalized* by the students. Therefore the quarrel for proportions and inclusion often resembles a *shadow-boxing*. 80 to 90% of the *facts* and *topics* covered in history lessons will be forgotten only one year later; only identity-relevant interpretations will be retained for a long time. Teaching does not mean *ordering* learning or *enforcing* learning, it can only *stimulate* or *encourage* learning.

16 But even in this case, the compromise was not easy (at least, there are hints): In the common textbook Germans stressed *multi-perspectivity* and the French *value education*.

17 Germany, for instance, has nine direct neighbours (not to mention the countries overseas that Germany has had historical ties with): The Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, France, Switzerland, Austria, Czechia, Poland and Denmark.

zation of the project of bilaterally common history textbooks. Can we want and use a British-German, a US-German, an Italian-German textbook – and many others – as well? We cannot. This is only possible – if at all – for one privileged partnership (as an anticipation of a closer unity?).

The Polish reaction to the German-French plan was very typical and very contradictory. On the one hand, Poland wanted to participate, to join a trilateral project. On the other hand, a parallel German-Polish project was demanded. And finally, a strong polemic discussion against the whole idea broke out and became dominant: As a perfectly sovereign nation, Poland cannot accept any interference in its textbooks. Anti-German slogans were uttered, even by the Polish government.<sup>18</sup> Reconciliation – as a long process – is mutual alteration and *rapprochement*, but not unification or uniformity. Experiments in adopting the *really differing perspectives of others* (empathy) may be superior to pre-given uneasy – and un-loved – compromises.

### 2.3 Youth exchange and youth encounter

Extensive programs of youth exchange and encounter are not possible without a lot of money; they do not effect positive results of reconciliation *automatically* and they often do not include much historical learning.<sup>19</sup> These points need to be mentioned at the beginning. Nevertheless, youth encounter and exchange are very important and perhaps the best of all concepts (Dethlefsen 2003). Many German school pupils of the higher grades in privileged types of school spend one year in a foreign country, normally France, Great Britain, and the USA, but also Canada, Australia, Spain or Italy. Exchange programs with Russia, Poland and Czechia exist as well, but the number of participants is lower and the exchange periods are shorter.

The special exchange programs are of another type; they are conducted in groups, with normally whole classes visiting France or Poland. And entire Polish and French classes come to Germany in mutual exchange programs. In the French case, a particular treaty was signed more than thirty years ago, and heavy funding was effected. Millions and mil-

18 This took place from 2005 to 2007; in October 2007, the Polish People elected a new parliament and the Polish parliament elected a new government (Donald Tusk) in November. A careful policy of *rapprochement* to Germany began immediately, even in the field of history policy. The common work for a common German-Polish history textbook has meanwhile begun. But the German - Polish relations remain complicated.

19 At least, this is the impression after observing the experiences of the German-Polish-Youth-Exchange Organization.

lions of young people have meanwhile visited the other country. In the Polish case, the parallel organization, the “German-Polish Youth-Exchange Organization”, was founded only after the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 (and it received far less money). Nevertheless, millions of young students have gone to Germany or to Poland. Unfortunately a German-Czech agreement has not yet been accomplished, because of repeated public discussion within both countries.

The linkage of *youth encounter* and *reconciliation by means of historical learning* is not really close. In the case of Poland, we know very well that doing sports, music, shopping, comparing fashion and dancing together is much easier for the young boys and girls than discussing history. Often they understand each other immediately if they do not talk about history. Often mixed friendships last for a long time, and there are also cases of love relationships. Thus, one might suggest that *history* only impedes reconciliation instead of promoting it. In fact, teachers often avoid history in such German-Polish exchanges instead of itemizing it.

A very important exception has to be mentioned. From the German side, many excursions are organized to the sites of the extermination camps of Auschwitz, Maidanek, Belzec, Treblinka, Sobibor etc. Financially, these trips are paid for by the German-Polish Youth-Exchange Organization like exchanges, even if there is no encounter with Polish students. Here, the asymmetric situation – German mass crimes in Poland 1939 to 1945 – is taken into account.

The practice of German-Polish encounters reflects the difficulties of *historical reconciliation*. As already said, history (except the history of the NS period) is often excluded or avoided – and the students therefore like each other. Unfortunately, *historical consciousness* takes revenge (like a restless and irreconcilable ghost), if it is omitted. The development of the last years clearly shows that history returns subconsciously (through the back-door) like a revenant if you try to exclude it consciously (via the front door). When the Polish government began with an anti-German policy, when it used anti-German feelings to promote conservative party policy, it became evident how thin, fragile, and endangered the practice of reconciliation actually is.<sup>20</sup> Resentment and prejudices dominate, instead of historical analysis. The majority is helplessly exposed to such tactics of history poetics.

The “German-Polish Youth Encounter Organization” clearly decided to promote common historical work of German and Polish groups, in the sense of local research projects (e.g. NS history, former German popula-

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20 This concerns the years 2005 to 2007 again; conditions changed with the re-election of October 2007 (see above).

tion in now Polish cities). But these are long-term projects. First, teachers have to learn and to work together. The early attempts have clearly shown a very different *culture of history*.<sup>21</sup>

Polish teachers (like Polish students) know a lot about history, but most of it is closely connected to a limited, even fixed interpretation (“myth”) of Polish history. There is only one, clearly nationalistic version (based on an a-historical understanding of “nation”). Certainly we can call this an *integral nationalistic* mode of making sense of history. The master narrative of history constitutes the nation (and has saved or preserved it during 120 years of partition from 1795 to 1918). History is used – but not acknowledged and reflected – as *construction of identity*. And this national identity is that of a *victim’s history* and a *homogenous nation* (not at all convincing in the case of the *Polish nobility’s republic* with Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Belorussian and German noblemen belonging to the Polish nobility nation before 1795).

German teachers – like German pupils – often know much less about history than the Polish ones. But their pattern of interpretation is normally no longer *national* or *nationalist*. The history of the German nation means *guilt* and *shame* since National Socialism. Therefore, the interpretation is mainly organized in a European or universal history perspective. Additionally, Germans are prepared to listen to differing types of making sense. Many of them have already moved to a “constructivist” concept/theory of history (hopefully!). They are more ready to compare and discuss other narratives – and perhaps to change their own opinions. An interchange between a rich, but narrow Polish and a poor, but flexible German version is very difficult, often uncomfortable and irritating. Thus, teachers have to be prepared to guide the students during their common history projects. First experiences with teachers’ summer courses have been collected.

Without any doubt, experienced teachers and students can do good work. For about ten years, there has been a network of students’ history competitions (Eustory 1999). Promoted by the Körber-Foundation in Hamburg, the approx. eighteen competitions from France to Russia, from Italy to Ireland, from Bulgaria to Estonia exchange their ideas and their winners. Common workshops are used to tell each other the respective investigated history and to investigate new topics together. It takes

21 Here I rely mainly on my own experiences in a couple of seminars with teachers of both countries (and some scientific meetings). Additionally in 1995, the questioning of 1 250 teachers and 31 500 ninth graders in 27 countries (see Angvik/Borries 1997; Borries et al. 1999: 85-89, 92-91, 95, 125, 174, 185, 187, 241, 302, 304-311 etc.) showed marked differences in German and Polish cultures of history and cultures of learning.

some time – and some language difficulties have to be solved, but the results are encouraging. Exhibitions and books have been produced. Long-term friendships have started (e.g. Wancerz-Gluza 2003). The best experiences were made in common summer-courses and international networks (e.g. EUSTORY 2007).

## **2.4 Comparing history textbooks and exchanging historical narratives among pupils *themselves***

Regional history research projects of school students are a good idea, but they only cover small fields. There is another chance to initiate an international debate or discourse among students themselves, e.g. through the comparison of textbooks. In 2006, a small pilot-study was done, financed by a German foundation. Students in many countries compared the textbook chapters about 1989/90 (the fall of the “Berlin Wall” and the “Soviet Empire”), presented their results to classes from other countries and revised them together. Very similar work was previously done with Polish and German teachers.

In some respects, communicative textbook comparison (and responsible textbook revision) is better than pre-fabricated *purged* versions after comparison by scientific textbook commissions. Of course, gross falsifications, myths or tirades of hatred can be eliminated beforehand. But the simple fact of completely different selections, perspectives and interpretations (and identity contributions) is striking for both sides. Similar experiences took place in several internet projects, but – and that is a restriction – *the language problems proved to be a crucial issue.*

Perhaps the logic of this fourth method has to be explained a bit more in detail. When textbook decontamination started sixty years ago, scientific work normally took place in national frameworks. In the process of the *textbook commissions*, nobody learnt more than the members of the commissions themselves. They broadened their horizons, they repeatedly changed their perspectives, and they developed a multi-perspective and a meta-perspective, without losing their individual – and national or cultural or religious – position. Today, in the era of globalization, school pupils travel and communicate as much or more than scientists did sixty years ago. Why should we not give them the same chances which were presented to the professors two generations ago? They will discuss their historical interpretations anyway. Why not prepare and organize this process systematically – and with the help of translations? The first experiments were very successful, although so far only among elite students.

To sum up: Reconciliation via history and coping with burdening history is a long-term project and program (for individuals as well as for societies). It needs reflection and (self-) reflection, not only more historical knowledge, but more self-distance, empathy and – as far as possible – mourning as well. It may be encouraged at school, but mainly challenges individual and public emotions and activities.

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