

# Exploring the Construction of Historical Meaning: Cross-Cultural Studies of Historical Consciousness Among Adolescents

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## *Abstract*

Historical consciousness has seldomly been compared internationally. This article presents selected results from two plot studies conducted in nine European countries with closed items in 1992 (8th-graders), and in eight European and Non-European countries with open stimuli in 1989/92 (highschool and university students). Some methodological implications related to the problem of measuring highly culturally dependent phenomena are discussed. The findings are supplemented by some references to a representative comparison between students in East and West Germany in 1992, which entered almost no differences in most constructs, but very heavy contrasts in the judgements of the two German states between 1949 and 1989.

## 1 Introduction

Historical consciousness - as opposed to individual life goals (European Study of Values, political attitudes (Euro-Barometer) and educational achievement in other subject matter areas (IEA studies) - has not been investigated empirically and cross-culturally, apart from a number of quantitative textbook analyses (cf., among others, Ferro 1991; Perez 1992; Koppetsch 1993; Riemenschneider 1994). The only exception is given by recently published works of Borries (1994) and Rösen (1994) which are at the center of interest here - in spite of their purely exploratory nature and their technical limitations.

The strategic importance attributed here to cross-cultural studies of historical awareness needs some immediate justification. Pragmatically, it appears plausible to assume that knowledge of another person's historical judgements facilitates predictions as to that person's political decisions. From the standpoint

of social and political science, the (empirical) investigation of dominant heroic folklore and legends of sacrifice, of projected enemies and utopian obsessions, of interpretative patterns and habits of critical reflection, bears significance comparable to the search for evidence on the economic potential and military power of a country. The present wars in the Balkans and in the Caucasus region provide renewed and ample substantiation of that suggestion.

Cross-cultural research is equally important in terms of fundamental theory. The fact that historical consciousness is culturally variable at the surface level (in particular with respect to knowledge and interest) is indisputable, even if it is far from being mapped in all its details. The cultural variability of the deep structure (i.e., the changing relationships between interpretations of the past, perceptions of the present, and expectations of the future) has, so far, never been studied. Seemingly plausible hypotheses, currently not much more than stereotypes concerning allegedly diverging philosophical orientations, warrant confirmation or disproof. Note, for example, the allegations of India being a cultural province "void of a genuine notion of history", as opposed to Europe as a "hyper-historical" continent, or Germany as a nation with a "damaged" national identity as opposed to France's "unbroken" self-image.

The main problem of cross-cultural empirical investigations is to be seen in the paradoxical task of having to measure culturally variable phenomena with (ideally) culturally invariant methods and stimuli. In the case of historical consciousness the difficulty is particularly grave, as compared with mathematics, science and even the mother-tongue. A fixed external frame of reference (like "Archimedes' Point"), a set of indubitable assumptions beyond all cultural relativity needs to be found. There are two fundamentally different strategies to cope with this task, i.e. "open questions" suitable for interpretative-inductive methods (for this approach, see Rösen 1994, pp. 79ff.) and "closed items" which are, so to speak, "deductively given" for further statistical treatment (Borries 1994, pp. 13ff.). In the first instance, the data are essentially qualitative, in spite of some tentative quantification; the second case, representing the purely quantitative approach, depends entirely on the explicitness and fruitfulness of its underlying research questions.

## 2 World-Wide Cross-Cultural Comparisons on the Basis of Open Questions and Qualitative Methods

Between 1989 and 1992 Rösen's group interviewed (non-random) samples of approximately 200 students from eight countries in Europe (Belgium, Estonia,

Germany, Russia, Sweden) and overseas (Argentina, India, South Africa); the rate of refusals and/or replacements is unknown. The interviewees' age ranged between 17 and 21 years. They all clearly stemmed from an educationally privileged minority. The stimuli used were rather unspecific, for example "Suppose, you could travel into any time period of the past. - To which time would you journey? - Where would you travel? - What would you do there?" or "Health-conscious or environmentally conscious people can be identified through their behavior. How, do you think, does a historically conscious person act?" (Rüsen 1994, pp. 83f.).

It is easy to see the advantages of such "open" questions. The researchers allow themselves to be guided largely by the interviewees' personalities, self-determinations, mental associations and imaginations. By virtue of their questioning technique, they exert as little influence as possible, i.e. they minimize the risks of artifacts and suggestive methods, probably also of "socially desirable responses". The material thus collected, which differs greatly in kind and extent, is then categorized *a posteriori* into high-inference terms, even if this is done on the basis of an explicit set of theoretical assumptions. This procedure contains substantial problems of inter-rater reliability (in the present case it is said to have reached 60 to 80 percent) making multiple (or "blind") coding necessary.

Understandably, the categories chosen for coding responses from different national cultures, even though referring to identical open questions, were by no means constant. Repeatedly, new categories had to be developed or existing ones abandoned. In the case of South Africa, for instance, "mourning" had to be added to the set of operations attributed to historically conscious people, in the case of Estonia the category "revenge", in the case of Russia the category "to be proud", and "to be helpless" in several others (op. cit., pp. 110f.). As opposed to these operations, the notions of "soliciting a prognosis" and "ask for counsel" which had been introduced on the basis of the German material analyzed earlier had to be subsequently dropped.

Even if it had been possible to adapt all of the codes from the sequentially implemented national studies to a single final coding scheme (which, in fact, could not be done due to funding limitations), the indicated problem would persist: An inductively developed system of descriptive categories leads to divergent definitions for each setting which - although tailored specifically to the local circumstances - blur any quantitative comparison or, to say the least, constrain its validity (op. cit., pp. 178ff.). In practice, a whole second round of interpretation became necessary during which the more finely-grained nation-specific categories were conflated into more global concepts that were suitable

for comparisons. This could not always be achieved without some degree of artificiality (see below).

National differences between categorizations became apparent even with respect to place (regions) and time (delimitation of eras). "Western Europe" and "Central Europe" are clearly different categories, if seen from the Belgian, German or Russian perspective. "Middle Ages" and "Classical Period" are, as will be recalled, quite problematic concepts even for the European context; they are virtually not applicable to other continents. For Estonia, the 19th "century" had to be delimited to the period between 1710 and 1917, for Russia to the time from 1812 to 1917, for Argentina to the era between 1848 and 1914, and for South Africa to a period ranging from about 1780 to 1870. Often, very ideosyncratic, entirely nation-specific concepts had to be introduced, such as "National Socialism" for Germany, "Silver Age" and "Stagnation and Perestroika" for Russia, "Revolution and Occupation of 1940" for Estonia (the latter being a quantitatively highly significant topic!) (op. cit., pp. 92ff.).

With respect to the preferred eras, it is most important that the 20th century, especially the era after 1945, carries quite different weights in the various countries (op. cit., pp. 181-184). In Russia, Germany, and South Africa, to a lesser degree also in Belgium and India, the most recent period, i.e., current history, meets by far the greatest interest ("dominant position of current history"). In Argentina and Estonia, the most pronounced motivation is articulated with respect to the classical era. It may be that the pattern in these two countries is meant to emphasize a close relationship with "Occidental Europe", which is decisive for a stable national identity, although this relationship may either be questionable or questioned in real terms. In Sweden, early Modern Times, i.e., the era of Sweden's greatest power and universal recognition, attract most attention.

Considering the levels of identification (op. cit., pp. 185-188), it is to be noted that "sub-national", "national" and "supra-national" orientations mean different things in each case. "Sub-national groups" are defined religiously in India, linguistically in Estonia and ethnically ("tribally") in South Africa. It is not surprising that South Africans, having barely overcome "Apartheid", retain distinctions according to color of skin, language and tradition and continue to define their identities at a level below the "nation". Similar patterns were to be expected for Russia; instead of the "nation", the interviewees often indicated their own individual person or their ethnic affiliation, as well as the "supra-national" Soviet Union, which applied in more than 25 percent of the cases.

Even those cases must be interpreted quite differently where the level of identification is predominantly the national one. In Germany, this frame of

reference is largely a negative one, namely a reflection of National Socialism (which is sharply rejected by the vast majority). In the case of Belgium and India, whose integrity as a state and identity as a nation are threatened indeed, the preponderance of the national level (if typical) indicates that intra-national conflicts are absorbed rather than intensified by a highly developed historical consciousness. The fact that Belgian interviewees often hint at artwork from the late Middle Ages and early Modern Times (i.e., a common heritage of both Walloons and Flemings) provides convincing evidence for this interpretation. Countries with a predominantly "supra-national" level of identification appear to stress their affinity to "Europe" (Argentina), to the "Soviet Union" (Estonians of Russian extraction) or to "Humankind" as a whole (Swedes and Estonians). In other words, their intentions are very specific in each case. This is particularly clear in the case of Estonia, where a "supra-national" orientation can either refer to "Humankind" (as with the ethnic Estonians) or to the "Soviet Union" (as with the Russian-speaking group in that country).

Comparisons of the mental operations of "historically conscious people" (op. cit., pp. 188f.) can be made only at a very abstract level where detached objective, cognitive, reflective operations ("knowledge", "observation", "experience", "explanation", "reasoning") are categorized as "passive" on the one hand and distinguished from engaged, subjective, emotional, interfering "active" operations ("judging", "interfering", "reconciling", "mourning") on the other. The terminology does not appear to be particularly suitable; probably, it would be more adequate to distinguish between "analysis" and "judgement".

Argentina, Estonia, Belgium and Germany display a higher level of "analysis" ("reflective observation"), Russia, India, South Africa and Sweden a higher level of "judgement" ("personal involvement"). Rösen also use the term "gradation of rationality" and its complement "gradation of activity" in their description of between-country differences (op. cit., p. 189). It is tempting to explain these findings by referring to the degree to which a country is presently subjected to critical present-day experience. This would lead to the question of who can afford indulgence in a form of historical consciousness which is balanced in psychological, social and political terms (and therefore superior).

Irrespective of some debatable aspects, it is one of the strengths of Rösen's approach to allow the construction of highly abstract ideal types, e.g. "questioning of the presence", "assurance of origin" and "distinction of historical alterity" (op. cit., p. 201; translation B.v.B.). Perhaps it is possible, in this rather indirect fashion, to operationalize Rösen's taxonomy of "traditional", "exemplary", "critical", and "genetic" constructions of historical

meaning. It is noteworthy, however, that at the higher levels of complexity cross-national differences were either not analyzed in detail or rather unconvincing.

### 3 A Cross-Cultural Study in Europe on the Basis of Closed Questions and Quantitative Methods

The alternative methodology was applied in a pilot study which the present author and his colleagues conducted in nine countries (Russia, Hungary, Poland, Germany, Italy, France, United Kingdom (England), Norway, Sweden). 900 8th grade students, i.e. approximately 14 years of age, responded to questionnaires administered to intact classrooms. The numbers of students varied between countries (only one classroom for Sweden!), but the 18 cells in the design were weighted *a posteriori* by country and gender to render a complete balanced-block design with a sum of weights of 50 per cell. The relatively small sample does not permit definite conclusions from this exploratory exercise. Even those findings which carry a high degree of plausibility can only serve as hypotheses for further research.

Following initial trials in Germany and Norway, a questionnaire was developed with the aim of minimizing ambiguities and problems of comprehension. The final instrument was the result of rather complex deliberations on the suitability of topics, figures, key concepts, and dilemmata for identifying general characteristics and likely specifics of "historical consciousness". This implied that such diverse fields as "knowledge", "interests", "mental associations", "values", "attitudes" and "inferences" had to be incorporated into the instrument.

A draft version was carefully reviewed by all persons engaged in this cooperative effort; controversial debates, significant changes, and a decision on the final version followed. It was a guiding principle to make sure that all respondents have an equal chance to know something about the context addressed, to consider it as relevant for themselves (or even feel emotionally affected), and to pronounce some judgement. It had to be assumed, of course, that the key concepts had an equal scope and identical meanings across all translations. It is only on that basis that item responses can be compared directly or used on an international scale.

It is acknowledged that this assumption is far from being a trivial one - even in Europe with its relatively minor cultural differences, as compared with other continents. "Nation" in German is not equivalent to "nation" in French or

"nation" in English. For Germans, "Europe" includes, as a matter of course, the British; from the British perspective, "Europe" often applies to continental Europe only. For the French, "European history" signifies a course of events in which they (or their forefathers) have almost always been involved; for the Norwegians, it mainly consists of the business of "others" dwelling beyond the sea and Denmark. Even the "Industrial Revolution" is probably perceived by the British as something linked to their own head start in the late 18th century. Italians are more likely to think of their efforts to catch up in the 20th. It is to be expected that the differences will be even greater with respect to eastern European countries of Slavonic tongue and post-communist coinage.

Nevertheless, the attempt to measure cultural differences with a common questionnaire does appear to have some potential. The requirement of "culture-free" items describes an ideal, not an attainable state. The problem of questionnaires semantically equivalent across countries and that of cultural differences in the conceptual frameworks to be observed are closely interrelated; the instruments and their domains are inseparably interwoven. Thus, cultural differences must have affected, at least to some degree, each vernacular version. Such differences, which are a well-established phenomenon in the tradition of research into the history of concepts, are themselves a manifestation of each country's historical culture.

Cross-cultural comparisons can refer to individual items, unidimensional constructs and highly complex relational networks. It is necessary to begin with a search for differences at the surface level, that is to say, for differences in the distribution of traits assumed to be common. It may be the case (and has indeed, been shown; Grześkowiak 1994) that Polish adolescents are more "conscious" (or "proud") of their nationality than German ones and that this difference can be explained qualitatively or quantitatively, e.g. with reference to the history of the 19th century and the atrocities of National Socialism.

The reliabilities and validities of the scales or factors are to be ascertained through techniques which are standard in empirical research. There is no guarantee *a priori* that their structure and consistency is stable across countries. In reality, difficulties in this respect arose only during the preliminary stage. In the example cited above, it is assumed that both Polish and German have a word for "pride", that "national pride" exists in both countries, and that this concept can be operationalized, e.g. by way of a scale consisting of six items ("to be proud of" one's home country, mother-tongue, national history, color of skin, nationality, cultural heritage). It is possible, however, that "color of skin" can justifiably be included in the scale only in one country, while in another "cultural heritage" is more closely related to a different construct

measuring, for instance, positive attitudes with respect to the process of modernization.

However, (possible) relational differences in the deep structure are to be taken into account. This can be also illustrated on the basis of the present example. Even if it could be shown that there is a construct "national pride" which is common to Poland and Germany, with a reasonably equivalent formal structure and a similar distribution, it is still possible that it has entirely different implications in the two countries. It may, for instance, be positively correlated with cognitive development and an altruistic value system in Poland, while these correlations are negative in Germany. This would imply diverging deep structures which would, indeed, be quite understandable, given the different historical experience of actors and victims. In other words, even a common set of constructs may unfold into different relational systems. It would then be the task to explain these on the basis of more general conditions in the countries involved, because it is not plausible to separate sharply historical consciousness (which is interdependent with the collective self-definition) from the cultures of political decision-making and school learning in a given country.

It follows from these observations, namely that strongly culture-specific phenomena are measured with nearly culture-free instruments, that the real differences are much more likely to be under- than over-estimated. The more finely-grained, more specific characteristics of one or more countries are beyond the resolution of generally understood stimuli from a common European background. For example, no common European instrument would be suitable to measure patterns of thinking which might be specific to the Balkans and which are possibly shared by the factions in the Bosnian civil war. This methodological conclusion (observed differences as lower rather than as upper bounds for the "true" differences) is to be considered in all subsequent evaluations, especially where some of the differences found are not overly impressive. Some examples follow. Only individual items are compared here, since a comprehensive presentation of the findings based on constructs is already available in published form (Borries 1994).

Germans - and apparently other nations as well - have long cherished an ambivalent, a "split" image of the Middle Ages ("Superstition" vs. "Golden Age"). The "enlightened" stereotype of the "dark" Middle Ages is just as alive as the utopian legend of the origin and universal recognition of the German nation. Medieval times are perceived as dismal on the one hand and - in the romantic tradition - as shining and colorful on the other (e.g., knights, cathedrals). If these perceptions of the Middle Ages are considered manifestations of imperatives to legitimize endogenous needs, the situation



appears to be rather complicated and to have clearly changed since 1945 (see Tab. 1).

However, Germany is not exceptional in Europe, if the responses of the 900 students are typical. If only the options "a dark and superstitious period" and "a romantic, adventurous era" are considered, Russia, Hungary, and Italy share the "colorful" image, while in Poland, England, Norway, France and (West) Germany the "dismal" projection prevails. This difference transcends the former border between communist and capitalist systems. Therefore, it cannot be a function of enduring effects of the official teaching of Marxism which were closely related to the "enlightened" stereotype.

Table 1: Mental Associations Referring to "Middle Ages".\*

Country	Dark and superstitious	Romantic, adventurous	Feudal system and oppression of peasants	Construction of magnificent cathedrals	Conflicts between church and state
Russia	- 0.28	0.91	0.77	1.04	0.62
Hungary	- 0.17	0.52	0.80	0.28	0.71
Poland	0.43	- 0.19	0.11	0.52	0.15
Germany	0.10	- 0.24	0.61	0.22	0.68
Italy	- 0.06	0.24	1.03	0.02	0.31
France	0.20	- 0.08	0.22	0.40	0.27
England	0.14	- 0.35	0.27	0.07	0.40
Norway	0.25	- 0.15	- 0.15	0.20	0.66
Sweden	- 0.11	- 0.19	0.67	0.85	0.28
Total	0.06	0.05	0.48	0.29	0.45

\* Means by country (theoretical range: - 2 through + 2; N = 900 students from 9 European countries).

Similarly, the seemingly "objective" position of the "ancestors" of present-day nations during Medieval times can hardly account for this, nor can a stereotyped image of the respective "heroic age" or of "decline and humiliation". German respondents are not (or no longer?) encouraged to express pronouncedly positive judgements of the "Holy Roman Empire", the Norwegians of the "Vikings" or the Polish of "Greater Poland and Papal church"; "Tartaric subjugation" and "absolute Zsar dominance" do not (any longer?) discourage nostalgic romanticism in the case of Russia, nor do "fragmentation and foreign

domination" in Italy. Earlier in this century, the respective stereotypes were very likely to be quite effective - not just in Germany. It is possible, however, that Hungarian adolescents (still?) admire their country's dominating role during the Middle Ages, while their French and English peers (continue to?) remember the "Black Death" and the "Hundred Years' War".

Apparently, nation-specific patterns of interpretation have evolved in rather complex processes on the basis of ideosyncratic cultural climates (with partially effective critical revisions during the last decades). All indications are that these patterns vary fundamentally even between countries in similar present-day situations; still they can be highly relevant for young people's actions today. Unfortunately, it was not possible to sample adolescents from the war-affected zones in former Yugoslavia and confront them with interpretations of the concept "Middle Ages" that may not be understandable in the rest of Europe, but which hold a key to the reasons for that conflict.

Table 2: Mental Associations Referring to Colonial History.\*

Country	Exploitation of foreign countries	Contributions to progress	Prejudice against other people	Discoveries	White universal supremacy
Russia	0.78	0.82	0.44	1.17	0.41
Hungary	0.24	0.02	- 0.07	0.28	- 0.39
Poland	0.95	0.02	0.46	0.88	1.02
Germany	0.85	0.16	0.64	0.74	0.44
Italy	0.55	0.41	0.27	0.45	0.10
France	0.65	0.04	0.40	0.49	0.41
England	- 0.17	0.27	- 0.46	0.70	- 0.25
Norway	0.95	- 0.07	0.66	0.40	0.87
Sweden	0.68	0.37	0.45	0.66	0.77
Total	0.61	0.23	0.31	0.64	0.38

\* Theoretical range: - 2 through + 2; N = 900 students from 9 European countries.

With respect to colonial history, there is a similar fundamental controversy although the "colonialist" pattern "contributions to progress" has become much less frequent during the last decades, as compared with the "anti-colonialist" stereotype "exploitation". Norway, Poland, Germany, and France are on top of this trend, while Hungary and Italy hesitate to follow it and appear to

attribute less significance to it. England and Russia, however, seem to retain more of the legitimizing concept - if the reactions of the few respondents are representative of the respective cohorts (see Tab. 2).

These differences also transcend the former border-line between competing political systems, as well as the distinction between traditional colonial powers, "late-comers" and "not involved"/"innocent" Europeans. On the one hand, one might argue that the former super-powers "Russia" and "England" have not yet overcome the loss of their empires, while France, Germany, and Italy have chosen Europe as a substitute and have lost, or buried, their colonial dreams. On the other hand, these same findings can be interpreted in a more positive and rather different manner: In Russia (and England?), an ambivalent interpretation of colonialism as "natural progress at inevitable costs" is given greater support, which, for instance, would be in line with Marxist teachings. It would have been helpful to clarify or substantiate these ambiguities.

Tabel 3: Mental Associations Referring to the French Revolution.\*

Country	Bloody and superfluous terror	Birth-hour of human rights	Triumph of the Bourgeoisie	Root of French Grandeur
Russia	0.64	0.57	0.35	0.41
Hungary	- 0.26	0.70	- 0.31	0.31
Poland	0.81	0.65	0.16	0.16
Germany	0.33	0.77	0.43	0.34
Italy	- 0.35	0.96	0.58	0.31
France	- 0.05	1.35	- 0.58	0.36
England	0.09	0.71	0.10	0.14
Norway	0.43	0.49	0.18	0.38
Sweden	0.92	0.05	0.25	0.51
Total	0.28	0.69	0.13	0.32

\* Theoretical range: - 2 through + 2; N = 900 students from 9 European countries.

Following Burke, the French Revolution can be viewed as "destruction by force", following Forster as "accelerated enlightenment". "Terror" ("Guillotine") and "human rights" are the respective key words. Understandably, in France (but also in Italy and Hungary), human rights prevail as mental associations. The critique which arose in the context of the

bicentennial celebrations in 1989 does not seem to have reached the students who cling to the national legend. In Germany and England, the "enlightened" version is much less prominent, but the "reactionary" interpretation (which is present, for example, in the transition of the anti-revolutionary of the classical poets Goethe and Schiller) is rather weak; Burke is no longer the dominating figure in his own country (see Tab. 3).

In Poland, Norway and Russia the interpretations of the French Revolution as "bloody and superfluous terror" and as the "inception of human rights" are balanced. Obviously, the emphasis on "terror" and on "human rights" varies greatly between countries, while "root of French Grandeur" does not display cross-national differences. If the countries are grouped according to the weight attributed to the legend of human rights (absolute prevalence vs. relative prevalence vs. balance), all three of these groups transcend the East-West divide. It would be necessary to test these findings by studying the national histories of interpretations and analogies of (or parallels to) the French Revolution.

Russia's traumatic experience with the "Great Proletarian Revolution" of 1917 (and the positive judgement on "1789", obligatory until 1989) may explain the present dismal perceptions. In the case of Norway and Poland, it is difficult to offer an explanation - and the small samples may not be typical in this respect. Hungary seems to be on its way towards a liberal interpretation (cf. the Hungarian revolutions of 1848 and 1956). One might have expected this tendency also for Poland, but there, perhaps, the local revolution of 1791 is preferred because it had meant liberation and constitutional government without terror. Germany appears to have caught up (albeit moderately) with the West European pattern, according to which the "democratic - bourgeois revolution" has generated modern society and constitutional government (and is therefore legitimized). It is easy to show that this pattern, too, amounts to a biased (partially legendary) construct.

Adolf Hitler and National Socialism, functioning almost like archetypes stand out among the most pervasive historical background experiences. Adolescents form their opinions not only depending on formal historical socialization through schools and mass media, but also by way of informal messages conveyed in their families and through their own imaginations and projections, e.g. nightmares and daydreams. Therefore, it seemed imperative to ask questions about Hitler, World War II and the Holocaust.

The European comparison of 1992 covered five concepts referring to Hitler. "Cynical dictator and aggressor, responsible for genocide" was meant as a relatively neutral statement, predominantly descriptive and obviously true. On

the average, this characterization as a *guilty dictator* does, indeed, meet the highest approval (mean = 1.44, see Tab. 4). Also, differences between countries are remarkably small; they are less than the standard deviations within countries.

Table 4: Mental Associations Referring to Hitler.\*

Country	Cynical dictator and killer	Insane criminal	Talented orator and organizer	Leading anti-communist	Puppet of big business and military
Russia	1.24	0.54	- 0.19	0.18	- 0.38
Hungary	1.44	0.46	0.69	0.38	- 0.53
Poland	1.48	0.98	1.43	0.70	- 1.19
Germany	1.45	0.67	0.94	0.42	- 0.60
Italy	1.13	0.81	0.46	0.04	- 0.84
France	1.48	1.40	0.58	0.16	- 0.31
England	1.37	1.52	- 0.53	0.02	0.20
Norway	1.53	1.22	0.67	0.39	- 0.32
Sweden	1.88	1.92	0.86	0.54	- 1.54
Total	1.44	1.06	0.55	0.31	- 0.61

\* Theoretical range: - 2 through + 2; N = 900 students from 9 European countries.

In contrast to this unambiguous interpretation of Hitler's role, the four other categories could not be coined into phrases quite as clear and distinct as it may have been desirable from the German point of view:

- "He was mentally ill, lacked social values, and acted as a criminal", i.e., the (pseudo-)explanation of an "*insane criminal*";
- "a talented orator (and) organizer and a leader with severe faults", i.e., the stereotype of the "*fascinating and irresistible seducer*",
- "the leading adversary of communism", equivalent to Nolte's tenet of "*Hitler and Stalin as antipodes in a global civil war*",
- "a 'puppet-on-a-string' of big business and the military", i.e., the interpretation as an "*instrument of German imperialism and militarism*".

The interpretation of Hitler as a criminal is second in acceptance (mean = 1.06) and it is particularly popular in those countries which are Germany's neighbors to the West (Italy, France, Norway, and, most notably, England where the "insane criminal" is emphasized even stronger than the "guilty

dictator"). In Germany and among the Eastern neighbors (Poland, Hungary, Russia), the "criminal traits" are stressed clearly less than Hitler's being a dictator. Perhaps, this can be viewed positively as a (tentative) critique of judgements which personalize (and thus defuse) the catastrophe as the product of a single person with a bad state of health and low moral standards.

A triangulation of these findings with the theory of the Great Seducer (mean = 0.55) confirms what was said above. Germans, Hungarians, and Poles find the explanation based on "talent" and fascination more convincing than the tenet of the insane criminal, whereas the opposite is true for Norwegian, Italian, French (and also Russian) adolescents. Acceptance is weaker also in absolute terms. Remarkably, any special Hitlerian talent in rhetoric and organization is almost completely rejected in Russia and England (note the huge mean differences between "criminal" and "seducer" there), while it is strongly emphasized in Germany and particularly in Poland. It is not easy to interpret these differences. Whoever underscores the role of the "seducer" has a claim based on real (and important) evidence, but is, at the same time, "personalizing" and possibly diverting attention from the core of the matter.

Consent to the theory of anti-communism is even weaker (mean = 0.31). As in the case of the characterization as a dictator, there are only small differences between countries. England displays the minimum (mean = 0.02), Poland the maximum (mean = 0.70). In summary, then, this means: In almost all of the countries the theory of fascination is more widely accepted than the interpretation of Hitler as an anti-communist; England and Russia are exceptions - probably for different reasons. Russia's own status as that of a victim is likely to be remembered more, while in England the possibility of fascination is denied.

Responses to the item depicting Hitler as a 'puppet-on-a-string' of imperialists and militarists do not render themselves to a simple explanation. By and large, this theory is rather strongly rejected (mean = - 0.61); only the English regard it as more or less neutral, while the Poles are the strongest opponents. Obviously, the English prefer the puppet-on-a-string interpretation even to the theory of anti-communism. This finding is important: The official doctrine of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union has lost credibility everywhere; it seems even that along with it an important tenet of social history is falling into oblivion, namely that the conservative German élite had rendered and delegated its power to the National Socialists. Tendentially, this could serve to isolate National Socialism from the rest of German history and to underestimate elements of its continuity.

If the above observation is correct, it should be possible to verify it on the basis of the responses concerning the respective responsibilities for World War II (see Tab. 5) and for the Holocaust. With very good reasons, the greatest share in the responsibility for World War II is attributed to Germany (mean = 1.54 on a scale ranging from - 3.0 to + 2.0). Interviewees from Germany and Italy tend to have stressed this component somewhat below the international average, those from Poland and Hungary somewhat above. The second largest share of the responsibility - second by a large margin - is attributed to the Soviet Union (mean = 0.17); adolescents in Russia and France tend to minimize Stalin's contribution ("Hitler-Stalin-Agreement"), while those in Poland and Hungary give particular emphasis to it. It is noteworthy that the judgements on Italy's share in the responsibility for World War II already tend to take on negative values (mean = - 0.40); Germans and Russians attribute the least significance to it, Poles and Italians the most.

Table 5: Responsibility for World War II.\*

Country	Germany	Soviet Union	Italy	Great Britain	France	Poland
Russia	1.42	- 0.13	- 0.66	- 1.05	- 1.14	- 1.60
Hungary	1.87	0.64	0.08	- 0.14	- 0.13	- 1.51
Poland	1.83	0.85	0.28	- 0.72	- 0.85	- 2.09
Germany	1.30	0.08	- 1.00	- 0.26	- 0.22	- 1.20
Italy	1.05	0.11	0.20	- 0.11	- 0.10	- 1.22
France	1.42	- 0.20	- 0.47	- 0.33	0.35	- 0.88
England	1.72	0.06	- 0.57	- 0.07	- 0.15	- 0.96
Norway	1.60	- 0.05	- 0.49	- 0.12	- 0.25	- 1.05
Sweden	1.61	0.16	- 0.99	- 0.24	- 0.49	- 1.55
Total	1.54	0.17	- 0.40	- 0.34	- 0.33	- 1.34

\* Theoretical range: - 3 through + 2; N = 900 students from 9 European countries.

The responsibility of the British (mean = - 0.34) and the French (mean = - 0.33) is perceived with amazing criticism, that is to say, as even slightly more significant than the Italian share. In both cases, internal critique is particularly high. In the case of Great Britain it is the English among all of the respondents who register the largest share of the responsibility; in the case of France it is the French. Remarkably, both of these groups accuse the Italian government

significantly less than their own government of having contributed to the outbreak of the war. The Italians show much the same tendency; only the young Poles of today accuse Mussolini more heavily than the interviewed young Italians.

Poland is treated rather benevolently in the distribution of responsibility (mean = - 1.34) and particularly so in the perception of present-day Polish adolescents (mean = - 2.09), while their English and French contemporaries do not attest their former allies complete innocence (mean = - 0.96 and - 0.88, respectively), which is a mean difference in the order of one standard deviation. These findings are rather exciting. While consciousness of the main responsibility leaves little to be desired, such nations which tend to minimize -as measured against the European average - their own responsibility (Germany, Russia, Poland) can be distinguished from those who critically tend to attribute an above-average share to their own governments (France, England, Italy).

As was to be expected, the responsibility for the Holocaust is primarily attributed to Hitler as a person (mean = 1.61 on a scale ranging from - 3 to + 2, see Tab. 6). Cross-national differences are small, but tendentially the personal component is stressed most heavily in Germany, Norway, and England, with Russia and Italy at the other end of the scale. The least responsibility is given to the Jews themselves (mean = - 2.35), although Russia and Poland have noticeably higher values. If this is typical, this could only be explained by the assumption that some antisemitic traditions and attitudes persist in these countries. The German respondents have a mean value close to the international average. This suggests that they do not try to place part of the blame on the victims.

"The German people" - as opposed to "100 Nazi leaders" (mean = 1.21) - is largely and surprisingly spared the accusation of a "collective guilt", as judged by the international mean (mean = - 0.65). Italian, French, and Polish adolescents tend to be somewhat harsher in their judgements, Russians (and Swedes) significantly milder. There is no apparent tendency among the Germans to exonerate their own kind (their mean value coincides with the international average). This finding is difficult to interpret, because the - tendentially - antisemitic Poles stress collective guilt in the case of Germany, while the - tendentially - equally antisemitic Russians appear to minimize it. Even the "Nazi electorate" is treated rather benevolently (international mean = 0.34) - with small differences between countries.



Table 6: Responsibility for the Holocaust.\*

Country	Hitler	100 Nazi leaders	The Nazi electorate	The German people	The Jews themselves	Non-German politicians
Russia	1.31	1.22	0.33	- 1.36	- 1.94	0.08
Hungary	1.62	1.40	- 0.03	- 0.79	- 2.43	0.38
Poland	1.72	1.44	0.42	- 0.10	- 1.97	- 0.17
Germany	1.80	1.33	0.35	- 0.65	- 2.42	- 0.40
Italy	1.31	0.53	0.20	- 0.32	- 2.36	- 0.20
France	1.70	1.50	0.69	- 0.20	- 2.34	- 0.20
England	1.83	1.16	0.51	- 0.64	- 2.50	- 0.24
Norway	1.77	1.19	0.40	- 0.55	- 2.49	- 0.03
Sweden	1.46	1.08	0.33	- 1.23	- 2.69	- 0.18
Total	1.61	1.21	0.34	- 0.65	- 2.35	- 0.11

\* Theoretical range: - 3 through + 2; N = 900 students from 9 European countries.

A final question referred to the responsibility of others, namely "Non-German politicians who knew what happened, but did little or nothing to stop it". This view is neither confirmed nor rejected (mean = - 0.11). It is highly significant, however, that almost uniformly "Non-German politicians" are accused more sharply of having a share in the responsibility for the Holocaust than the "German people". Cross-national differences are minor; the German respondents do not attempt to pass on the blame. Western European youth (from France, England, Norway, Italy, Sweden) attribute only an average share to non-German governments. The latter's inactivity is criticized more severely by the young Russians and especially by the Hungarians who accuse "Non-German politicians" even more strongly than the "Nazi electorate".

A comparison of the findings on "Hitler", "responsibility for World War II" and "responsibility for the Holocaust" renders fairly homogeneous and readily explainable patterns for some countries (or, rather, the small samples available there):

- German adolescents show a slight tendency to exonerate their country from the responsibility for World War II, but not from that for the Holocaust. Apart from the "dictator" pattern, a personalizing interpretation of Hitler as a "fascinating seducer" continues to occur among them. It would be misleading to say, however, that they downplay

National Socialism (Borries 1995, pp. 72-79). Also with respect to other topics, the German respondents are much in line with the European average rather than showing extreme patterns.

- The Russian respondents tend to downplay the Soviet share in the responsibility for World War II, attest Jews and non-German politicians a more-than-average share in the responsibility for the Holocaust, and emphasize somewhat Hitler's anti-communism. This demonstrates a fairly consistent affirmative pattern of exoneration and self-righteousness. In fact, the Russian respondents are characterized by their extreme average values (minimum or maximum) in all four dimensions measured, as compared with their European counterparts.
- Similar affirmative tendencies are likely to be present in the Polish responses (no share in the responsibility for World War II, Jewish co-responsibility for the Holocaust, above-average contribution of the "German people" to the outbreak of World War II and to the Holocaust). But the stress on Hitler's "talent" to lead the country astray may indicate some tendency to moderate that judgement.
- The English (and French) respondents give special emphasis to criminal elements in the actions of Hitler, his electorate, and Germany. At the same time, they tend to overemphasize their country's co-responsibility for the war, though not for the Holocaust. This gives the impression of rather emotional, moralizing value judgements in the sense of self-criticism and a remarkable absence of ethnocentrism (Borries 1994, pp. 60ff.).

### 3 Intra-German Comparisons with Closed Questions (Representative Sample)

The two studies described above suffer from some methodological limitations, since they are not based on representative samples. Moreover, cross-cultural comparisons are not the same as comparisons between countries (nation states). Rösen's study (1994) had already identified some differences between ethnic groups within states (Estonia, South Africa, India), which were greater than the differences between nation states. Therefore, some intra-German regional comparisons will be mentioned here, which were based on a probability sample questioned in 1992.  $N = 6,480$  students from grades 6, 9, and 12 (including the second year of training in vocational schools) in (former) East Germany, North Rhine-Westphalia, and two South-German states ("*Länder*") as well as  $N = 283$  of their teachers participated (Borries 1995). In the case of the 6th grade some

of the questions were optional, which resulted in the respective scale means being based on only about half of the eligible cases.

Table 7: Concepts of Teaching and Political Attitudes.\*

	East Germany	North Rhine-Westphalia	Southern States
Subject matter orientation	0.84	- 0.46	- 0.17
Emphasis on problem solving	- 0.55	0.37	0.05
Student-orientation	0.29	0.00	- 0.21
Residuals of Historical Materialism	0.49	- 0.16	- 0.27
Reservations towards nationalism	- 0.62	0.45	0.13
Distrust in progress	- 0.29	0.04	0.21

\* Standardized scores (z-scores) by region.  $N = 283$  teachers from three German regions).

Almost all item groups show substantial differences among teachers, not only between East Germany (all five "new *Länder*" and the former East Berlin) and the West, but also between the Social Democrat state of North Rhine Westphalia and the conservative ones (Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg) within the former West Germany (see Tab. 7). This is true for theories of history patterns of historical interpretation, convictions as to the aims and methods of teaching, as well as political attitudes. Expressed in terms of standard deviations, some of the regional differences, e.g. the much stronger "subject-matter orientation" and the much reduced "emphasis on problem solving" in the East, represent rather strong effects. Teachers in the three regions within the country appear to live almost in three different cultures. The degree to which the paradigm shift of 1968/70 (away from "political history" towards "social history", from "subject-matter orientation" towards "problem solving", from "closed" towards "open forms of learning") has gained influence in the regions, seems to be the decisive factor.

Table 8: Principal Learning Effects of Historical Consciousness.\*

Groups	Conventional interpretation of eras	Conventional explanatory patterns	Conventional mental operations	Unrestricted identification with the past	Unquestioned acceptance of the present	Unconstrained confidence in the future
Grade 6	- 0.78	- 0.67	- 0.46	0.43	0.32	0.41
Grade 9	0.10	0.19	- 0.04	0.03	0.03	- 0.03
Grade 12	0.68	0.49	0.27	- 0.46	- 0.34	- 0.38
Males	0.02	0.10	- 0.01	0.25	0.09	- 0.05
Females	- 0.02	- 0.10	0.01	- 0.25	- 0.09	0.05
East	0.04	- 0.01	0.01	0.05	0.02	0.11
North Rhine-Westph.	- 0.07	- 0.08	- 0.11	- 0.03	- 0.06	- 0.03
South	0.03	0.09	0.10	- 0.01	0.04	- 0.07

\* Standardized scores (z-scores) by grade, gender, and region. (N = 6.480 students from three German regions).

Obviously, the findings from the student data differ remarkably from the teacher results. Already in 1992, there were only marginal differences between the ex-Communist East Germany, the Social-Democrat West, and the conservative South. Generally speaking, the principal learning effects as they appear in between-grade (and between-track) differences consist of the acquisition of certain conventions ("interpretation of eras", "explanation of change", "mental operations") and of the extinction of unconventional attitudes such as the "unquestioned identification with the past", the "unrestricted acceptance of the present" and the "unconstrained confidence in the future" (as expressed in optimistic expectations with respect to peace and economic development) (see Tab. 8).

Details cannot be presented here (Borries 1995). It is noteworthy that there are no substantial effects associated with the former borderline between the communist and the capitalist system, as opposed to substantial gender effects, in addition to grade and school type differences. Thus, it is not so much that former East and West Germans live in different worlds or cultures, but, indeed, that male and female adolescents do.

A very similar situation is seen in the reactions to questions which asked for acceptable vs. unacceptable reasons for joining street demonstrations (meant to measure political engagement). Three dimensions emerged: "environmental

issues and women's rights", "authoritarian conservatism" and "international solidarity/responsibility". Here, too, gender (and grade) effects are much larger than East-West-differences. So it might seem that there are no longer any "mental walls" in Germany, at least as far as historical consciousness and the political concepts of adolescents are concerned. But this is - at least partially - an illusion (see Tab. 9).

Table 9: Political Engagement and Judgement of the (Former) Systems of Government.\*

Groups	Environmental issues and women's rights**	Authoritarian conservatism**	Universal solidarity**	Support for achievements in former West Germany <sup>+</sup>	Support for achievements in former East Germany <sup>+</sup>	Difference in favor of West Germany
Grade 6	0.02	- 0.27	0.57	0.51	0.11	0.40
Grade 9	0.10	0.09	0.02	0.52	0.25	0.27
Grade 12	- 0.12	0.05	- 0.31	0.30	0.43	- 0.13
Male	- 0.36	0.14	0.08	0.49	0.33	0.16
Female	0.38	- 0.15	- 0.09	0.37	0.26	0.11
East	- 0.03	0.10	0.05	0.12	0.88	- 0.75
North Rhine-Westph.	0.00	- 0.06	0.06	0.53	- 0.01	0.53
South	0.02	- 0.04	- 0.11	0.65	0.02	0.63
Alle	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.43	0.29	0.14

\* Mean standardized scores (z-scores) and scale means (theoretical range: - 2 to + 2) by grade, gender, and region. (N = 6.480 students from three German regions). \*\* z-score.  
<sup>+</sup> scale value.

If both groups are asked to which degree the two divided German states have solved certain political and social problems during the time from 1949 to 1989, substantial differences of opinion become visible. West German youth judge their side rather favorably (however decreasing with age) and have an almost neutral image of the opponent (German Democratic Republic), with the exception of "political participation of the citizens". In every aspect, albeit with limited engagement, they give preference to "their own kind". In former East Germany, the respondents have a more positive image of their own side (once again with the exception of "citizens' participation"! ) and a more negative one

of the opponent, this time increasing with age. The East German respondents were more "self-righteous" and "ethnocentric" in the higher grades, the West Germans more "self-critical". This is a rather strong contrast, which may be attributed to diverging biographical experiences in both parts or to the effects of teaching.

This is all the more surprising since it was the respondents' parents and siblings who in 1989/90 traded in the German Democratic Republic (now "nostalgically" glorified) for the Federal Republic of Germany (which is now "bedevilled" out of disappointment). Behind this is a psychological mechanism of protecting one's biography and self-concept, not a realistic cognitive judgement of a particular historical era or a serious political goal (at least not at this point). This mechanism has been intensified by critical economic and psychological developments following the re-unification of the two Germanies (unemployment, rising prices, closing-down of firms and institutions, return of property to former owners, loss of identity, insecurity). Politically, this is clearly relevant.

This finding also sheds light on the substantial differences among teachers. A good portion of their lives, their socialization and professional practice have been conducted in the former German Democratic Republic. A devaluation ("scrapping") of one's own biography is hard to bear psychologically and - except in the case of severe personal guilt - morally unacceptable. A tendency to compensate and describe one's own society and personal experience in unjustifiably positive terms seems inevitable then. Research on autobiographies from other eras demonstrates this very clearly. It should be added that not all models imported blindly from the West - especially those in the educational sector - have turned out to be "realistic", "proven", or even "superior".

## 4 Discussion

Obviously, cross-cultural data do allow the comparative reconstruction of meaning. National cultures of history construct images of the past in very different, highly specific ways, depending on their perspective, situation interests, and orientations. This is a collective process that is closely related to political power or rather the cultural power to define the terms of public discourse. In some cases the differences between country averages are larger than the standard deviations within the nation states. That is to say that in this sample, differences between countries are to be considered "(very) strong effects". This observation appears to justify the term "collective process".

In spite of some methodological reservations, the hypothesis of *a fundamental dependency of images and interpretations of the past* must be considered confirmed, especially since the differences are under- rather than over-estimated here. This is true for all levels discussed (items, scales/factors, deep structures). The comparisons referring to individual items (e.g., in the case of the Middle Ages and Hitler) and scales corroborate the existence of distinctly different concepts of eras, regions, persons, and historical domains. The open responses suggest a substantial variation between nations in their historical predilections and identifications.

It is an important fact that special emphasis and affirmative tendencies related to the role of one's own kind in history can be measured (more or less) precisely. "Ethnocentrism", in addition to "acceptance of history as subject", "historical knowledge" and "ability to criticize", represents a fourth dimension of historical consciousness (Borries 1994, pp. 57-70). The question may be raised, however, whether it represents a genuinely historical construct of meaning or rather an "exogenous" attitude which is related to the present, but also reflected in historical judgements. The highest mean values for ethnocentrism were found in the Russians and Hungarians, the lowest ones in the French and the English.

Possibly, cognitive independence of one's own group or nation indicates in some respect a more elaborated type of historical consciousness.

At least it seems that "Western" democracies have developed tendentially more open value systems and more liberal assumptions as to what is culturally self-evident, such that in these countries "ethnocentrism" is less "socially desirable" than in post-communist societies. Adolescents then simply follow the conventions in their countries. The same can be shown for the concepts of progress: The Russian respondents believe more than all others in a "repetition of the same". One cannot overlook the fact that certain interpretations have been acquired as *social conventions and as culturally unquestioned assumptions*. Without any doubt, historical interpretations have the function of legitimation, self-reassurance and praise of one's own group in the public. However, these functions must not be conceived of in too primitive terms. In Germany, massive renunciation of National Socialism is part of the foundations of legitimacy; in some neighboring countries to the West, the critique of colonialism is by all means culturally self-evident, i.e., functional - not dysfunctional - for public communication.

The degree to which self-criticism and detachment from one's own kind is possible or even "socially desirable" varies considerably (cf. the differences between the national identities of Polish and German adolescents: Grześkowiak

1994), even if few precise measurements are available so far. On the whole, each national or ethnic culture of history has *many degrees of freedom and quite diverse options* in its constitution within the bounds of traditions and contingencies. Thus, historical concepts can vary considerably even between structurally quite similar countries.

The personal significance of historical consciousness should be considered in addition to its collective role. This does not primarily concern the adventurous, fictional, instinct-driven, and projective engagement with history, which apparently exists even though it is difficult to measure with paper and pencil (the development of alternatives should have a high priority for further research). Rather, the individual domain is also characterized by the fact that historical images serve to *stabilize mental balances* and to *maintain a positive self-concept*. The positive evaluation of achievements of the former German Democratic Republic as found in the East German sample renders the most obvious, though by no means the only evidence to support this claim.

Nevertheless, the individual construction of meaning and choice of action remains difficult to understand in its details. This is only in part a consequence of the use of a closed questionnaire which does not allow for individual expression. One may also have doubts that the grand histories of the nation, of society, and of humankind really fulfill the needs of the learners which - in 8th grade - are virtually still children. However, "everyday life of ordinary people" is even less interesting for them than "wars and great events", although there are considerable differences between countries (Borries 1994, p. 31). Given the complexity and openness of a "genetic" construction of meaning, in particular with respect to governmental and economic systems, this may be evidence for a more anecdotal, adventurous form of interest, instead of an individual, very personal formation of experience through historical instruction.

Thus, the findings from cross-cultural comparisons so far appear to be more significant in terms of sociology or even political science than in psychology and education. There is much to be learnt about socially desirable interpretations, but little about the mechanisms of self-regulated concept formation or even the degree of internalization. Considering the four main themes with which historical consciousness is concerned (Jeismann 1985), this means that "morphology" and "function" are much better elucidated through this kind of research than "genesis" and "pragmatics". It seems that this is not just a consequence of the methods applied, but also of historical learning as it occurs and of its function in the construction of symbols which are unique for a society or a nation.

(Translation: Rainer H. Lehmann)



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