

## HISTORY IN SCHOOLS AND IN SOCIETY AT LARGE: REFLECTIONS ON THE HISTORICITY OF HISTORY TEACHING

By *Bernard Eric Jensen*<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

It should be noted at the outset that our understanding of what actually goes on in the course of teaching history at European schools has never been as informed as it is at the present time. This is due in large part to the many results and insights that have been generated by the "Youth and History" project. Some 32 000 students of 14 or 15 years of age in almost thirty countries have been asked in detail about their views on history and history teaching, and their answers have been subjected to a thorough, comparative analysis. The original report, *Youth and history: a comparative European survey*, was published in 1997, but it is so technical and detailed that it is probably only specialists in the field who will find the time to read it. However, with the publication of *The state of history education in Europe* in 1998, the results have now become available in a much more readily accessible form, such that politicians, educationalists and history teachers will be able to avail themselves of the many insights generated by this project.

When I accepted the invitation to present some reflections on the state of history teaching in Europe at the close of the 20th century, I was fully aware that it would imply that I had to make use of some of the results of the "Youth and History" project in my presentation. Yet, it is also important to make clear from the outset that there is no way in which I will be able to do justice to the enormous richness of detail and the nuanced lines of analysis found in this piece of collaborative European research. I will be singling out only a few of the most significant findings of the "Youth and History" project, and I will be subjecting these findings to some further scrutiny and comment. The title of my paper is "History in schools and in society at large:

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reflections on the historicity of history teaching", and it is meant to indicate the direction that my thinking will be taking. It should make two of my premises clear from the very outset. First, that one can only meaningfully discuss the role of history in schools within the context of a broader discussion of how history is experienced and used in society at large. Second, that it is important to attend to the specific features that constitute the teaching of history at the end of the 20th century. In other words, one has to bear in mind the historicity of that teaching – because the challenges that it is required to handle will tend to differ somewhat from one epoch to another.

### Some significant findings of the "Youth and History" project

Those history teachers who decide to take the time off to read *The state of history education in Europe* will not find it a very uplifting or pleasing experience. Readers of the reports will probably differ in their judgements when it comes to the question of specifying just how gloomy the present state of affairs can be said to be. They may differ in their assessments because the situation is somewhat different in different parts of Europe. But few history teachers if any – I believe – will be able to put these reports down, having read them, without feeling somewhat uneasy and disappointed. Moreover, there will also be those teachers – I would guess – that might feel quite overwhelmed by some of the challenges that they may be requested to take on in the years to come.

In the original research report one of the significant disparities revealed by the "Youth and History" project was indicated. This is the disparity that appears to exist between the ambitious aims of the history curricula on the one hand and what is actually being achieved in the history class on the other. On this point, it states:

Modern curricula assume that history education develops democratic skills and attitudes in young people. According to the answers to the questionnaire, it is far from certain that history educators have been able to arouse the interest of young people for topics like politics and the development of democracy. Although most of the teenagers believe that in forty years Europe will be democratic, they show little interest in learning about democracy... The results of this part of the investigation urge history educators to find ways to engage their pupils' interest in those topics, which are vital for the reinforcement of democratic societies.<sup>1</sup>

One of the chapters in *The state of history education in Europe* has been devoted to answering the question: "Is history teaching up to date?" The author's analysis of the available comparative data reveals another major

1. J. van der Leeuw-Roord in M. Angvik and B. von Borries (eds.) *Youth and history: a comparative European survey on historical consciousness and political attitudes among adolescents*, 1997, vol. A, p. 3.

disparity in the field of history teaching. Her main conclusion reads as follows:

Today's history teaching does not really meet student's preferences... Teaching methods, the use of media and the goals of teaching history, as observed by the students, are rather traditional. Dominating this are the storage of facts, textbook use and the narrations of the teacher. Empathy, the reconstruction of past situations, project work and modern media is really seldom encountered. This is not in harmony with the students' wishes. They prefer by far audio-visual media, sources and documents, and museums to their textbooks. This gives the impression that history teaching is not up to date and has not taken account of the innovatory debates of the last decade.<sup>1</sup>

The "Youth and History" project has pinpointed two very notable disparities in the field of history teaching in present-day Europe. The first concerns a disparity between the ambitions displayed in existing history curricula and the actual achievements of history education. The second concerns a disparity between the interests that students display in the kind of history that they meet inside the school and that which they meet outside the educational system.

In the present context it is worth noting that it is not only in Europe that history education is confronted with major difficulties at the present time. Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen have recently published the results of a nation-wide in-depth survey of this issue in the United States. It has the title *The presence of the past: popular uses of history in American life* and demonstrates that most adult Americans say that they felt less connected with the past during their school classes than in any other social setting they were asked about. Moreover, this survey report makes the point that the words "history" and "the past" have very different connotations in the minds of adult Americans. When asked if they are interested in history, most adults will tend to say "no". Whereas when asked if they are interested in the past, most of them will say "yes, very much so". Rosenzweig and Thelen explain this very interesting finding of theirs in the following way:

After listening to 1 500 Americans, we understand how a generation has grown up to say that something is "history" when it is dead and gone, irrelevant, beyond any use in the present. That is how many of the people we interviewed described their classroom encounters with the past. While some of them praised individual teachers, their stories only underscored how deeply respondents felt alienated from the structure and content of history classes.<sup>2</sup>

1. S. Barschdorff in J. van der Leeuw-Roord (ed.), *The state of history education in Europe: challenges and implications of the "Youth and History" survey*, 1998, p. 85 and 90.

2. R. Rosenzweig and D. Thelen, *The presence of the past: popular uses of history in American life*, 1998, p.113.

### What are the implications of these findings?

The disparities which the "Youth and History" project has revealed make it pertinent to ask: what are the implications of these findings for the teaching of history? In my attempt to answer this question, I would also like to reflect a little on the above-mentioned responses to these disparities. They are, it seems to me, rather typical of the way in which many people nowadays think about the problems facing history education. In both cases the operative assumption seems to have been that it will not be very difficult to change and amend the present state of affairs. Thus, the present state of history education is due mainly to the shortcomings of history teachers. Had they been better at appropriating the innovative debates about history education then things would have been much better than they are. The situation appears to be one that can be remedied easily. The other response is to urge history teachers to set about finding ways to engage their pupils' interest. But without giving any consideration to the dimensions or magnitude of the challenge at hand.

In contrast, I want to focus our attention on the fact that the teaching of history at the end of the 20th century seems to be a very difficult and challenging task indeed. Why this is so, I shall attempt to indicate in a moment. Before doing so, I want to make the point that if we begin to openly acknowledge that the teaching of history in many parts of Europe is a very challenging task indeed, then we will not be so prone to explain the shortcomings of this teaching by pointing to the failings of history teachers. Rather, we would be more inclined to acknowledge that many history teachers are – to use the rather apt phrase of the American psychologist and educationist Robert Kegan – "in over their heads" when they go about the task of teaching history in their classrooms.<sup>1</sup> What I am saying is, that before we set out to change the existing modes of history teaching, we need to be in the position of being able to give some plausible explanation of why the state of history education in Europe is as gloomy and fraught with difficulties as it appears to be from the pages of the "Youth and History" report.

It must be noted that we cannot plausibly explain the problems of the history classroom by claiming that there is a prevailing a-historical mood in society today, or by claiming that the up-coming generation is on the whole a non-history generation. It is not only surveys such as Rosenzweig and Thelen's about *The presence of the past* that demonstrates that this is simply not the case. If we look at the growth of the number of museums, monuments and memorials, or at the growing number of jubilees,

commemorations and anniversaries being held, there is little to indicate that most people nowadays are significantly less interested in the affairs of the past than earlier. On the contrary, in several fields there seems to be a growing public and private support for many different kinds of memory work. There are even those scholars who say that we are actually in the midst of a "memory craze" in the 1990s.<sup>1</sup> As I see it, these tendencies indicate that we must look elsewhere if we are to come up with some plausible explanation of why history classes are not enjoying a notable success at the present time.

If we try to bring a bird's eye perspective to bear on our attempt to look back at the history of history teaching in Europe, it becomes rather clear – I think – that in the 19th century and well into the second half of the 20th century this teaching mainly took place within the context of a series of ongoing nation-building projects. Most teaching of history during this period had a national tradition or community of memory as its axis and centre. At certain times and places the teaching of history sought to further aggressive or militant forms of nationalism. At other times and places it sought to further mutual understanding and respect between the members of the family of European peoples. Although this aspect of European history has not yet been fully researched, it seems fair to assume that the many nation-building projects in Europe could not have succeeded to the extent they did without a major contribution from their educational systems. It was of course not only the teaching of history that contributed to these nation-building processes. The study of national literary and artistic heritage also made their significant contributions to these projects. But the point that I want to make is that history education, as far as we know, seems to have functioned in the main as a successful and meaningful venture, in conjunction with other cultural endeavours, during the period in which it served as a cornerstone of a nation-building project.

During the past two or three decades, however, things have begun to change. In some parts of Europe these changes have been much more manifest than in others. The challenges that now confront history teaching are – as I see it – due to a significant extent to some more general changes taking place both within the educational systems and in society at large. There is much research that indicates that we are living through a period of change at the present time that is both dramatic and far-reaching. I shall not make any attempt to survey these ongoing changes. I shall limit myself instead to reflecting a little on three of the changes I find most relevant to our present concern. These three changes can all be characterised as processes

1. See, for example, A. Megill, "History, memory, identity" in *History of the Human Sciences* 11:1998.

1. O. R. Kegan, *In over our heads. the mental demands of modern life*, 1994.

of de-centring. It is in these processes of de-centring that I believe we may find at least part of the explanation of why it is proving so difficult to teach history today.

The first process of de-centring concerns our understanding of how history is learned and used. During recent decades our understanding of the aims of history teaching has changed significantly. It is becoming more and more common to see the overarching aim of history teaching as that of developing and refining the historical consciousness of students. The second process concerns a change in the position of the school as a place of learning – this change is partly due to the socio-cultural impact that the media and the market economy are having on the everyday lives of children and teenagers. The third process of de-centring concerns a change in the way in which history is being used in contemporary society. In many parts of Europe, the national community of memory is no longer able to uphold the dominant position that it had 100, 50 or even 25 years ago. This fact has of course also affected the ways in which history teaching is experienced in the school setting. I intend to say a little more about each of these processes of de-centring, and on that basis I will then present my concluding remarks.

### The first process of de-centring: teaching history in school

Formerly one could find history educators who conceived the learning of history as being similar to learning to read, write and do arithmetic. They tended to think of the school, therefore, as being a privileged place of learning and as a pivotal social institution in regard to the objective of learning history. During the past two decades, however, there has been a growing appreciation among history educators that children are not only well able to interpret and use the past before they begin at school, but that they also learn a significant amount of history outside the walls of the school. In close conjunction with the recognition of these facts, a significant shift in the way of understanding the purpose of history teaching has occurred. The overarching aim is no longer seen as that of giving pupils detailed and solid knowledge of the past. The aim tends rather to be seen as that of developing and refining the historical consciousness of children and teenagers.

At first sight, this shift in the aims of history teaching may not appear to be very significant or far-reaching. To my way of thinking, however, it amounts to a fairly radical shift of thought. So radical, in fact, that I think one may justifiably call it a paradigm shift in our thinking about history teaching. Not only does it modify and change our understanding of what is to be understood by the term "history", it also gives us a somewhat different starting point for understanding where history is learned and used, how it is learned and used and why it is learned and used.

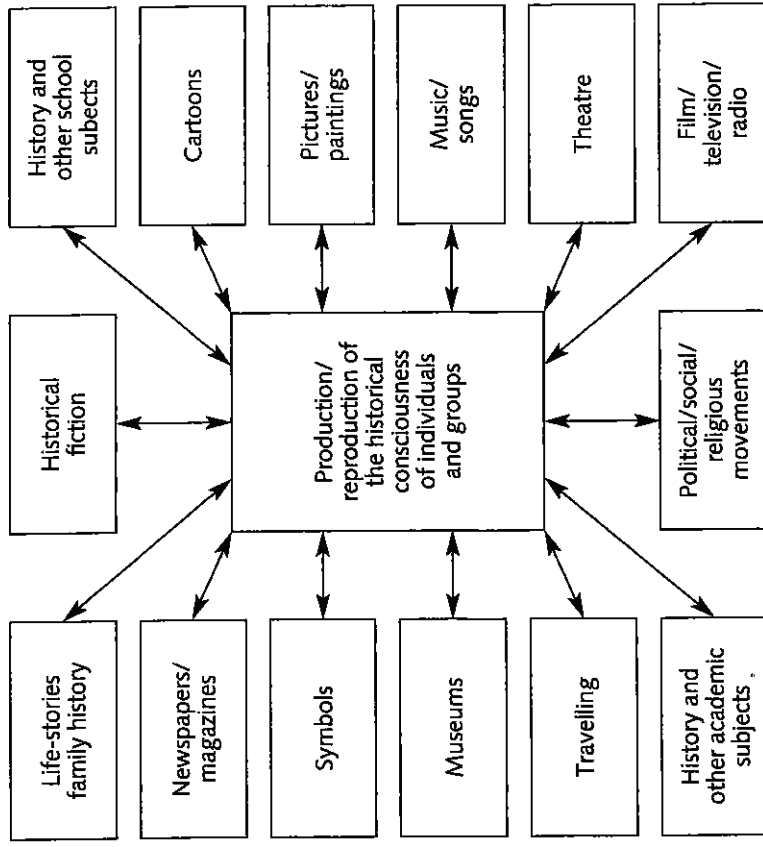
Historical consciousness is nowadays defined as an interlinking of interpretations of the past, not only with an understanding of the present, but also with the working out of expectations with regard to the future. It is important to note that this process of interlinking works both ways. Interpretations of the past may influence one's understanding of the present and the future. But it is also such that changes in one's understanding of the present and the future may also have feedback effects upon the manner in which one interprets the past.

I have not time to go into any details as regards the theoretical assumptions on which this way of thinking is based. However, I would like to make two small, yet basic points. First, that it is a conception based on the idea that to live in the present means that one recurrently has to go about remembering the past as well as working out expectations with regard to the future, and that this is the case in all fields of human life. It therefore applies to the lives of individuals as well as to that of groups. Second, it is a conception based on the idea that human life can be viewed – and here I borrow an apt phrase from the American philosopher David Carr – as "... a process of telling ourselves stories, listening to those stories, and acting them out or living through them".<sup>1</sup> Moreover, it is important to note that when one talks about historical consciousness, the term "history" is no longer identified with the past. Rather, history is conceived as a process that encompasses the past, present and future. Or to put it a different way: history is a term used to describe the kind of socio-cultural processes in which humans live their lives – that is history means to live in and through socio-cultural processes that are temporal in character.

It is relatively easy to demonstrate that historical consciousness is something that is not only shaped and developed, but is also used and transformed in many different fields of human life. If one were to illustrate this point, it could be done as it is outlined in Diagram 1 below. There is no need here to go into detail about the different parts of this diagram. It should of course be mentioned that the relative importance of the different areas might not only differ from person to person and from group to group, but may also play a very different role at different stages of the human life cycle. However, the diagram shows that as soon as one starts to place historical consciousness at the centre of one's thinking about history education, it means that one has also to begin to face the fact that history classes are no more than one factor among many that shape and transform the historical consciousness of our students. In other words, one is also forced to acknowledge there has occurred a very notable de-centring of the history teaching that takes place in schools.

1. D. Carr, *Time, narrative, and history*, 1986, p. 61.

Diagram 1



When one looks at the findings of the "Youth and History" project it is beyond dispute that many history teachers have started to think of history education in terms of developing the historical consciousness of their students. Thus, the teachers who were interviewed ranked the following aim highest: "to use history to explain the situation in the world today and to find out the tendencies of change." It was not the only aim that teachers were pursuing in their history classes, but it was the one that they thought the most important. However, the findings of the project also show very clearly that so far as the students are concerned, this aim does not come over to them. In their minds, the overarching aim of their history classes is that of acquiring "knowledge about the main facts in history." On some of the other points that are also concerned with the shaping of historical consciousness among the students, the gap between the perception of teachers and that of students is not quite so manifest. As far as the students are concerned, the task of coming "to acknowledge the traditions, characteristics, values and tasks of our nation and society" is rated as the

second most important aim pursued in their history education, whereas the imbibing of national traditions only comes in as number four among the teachers of history.

The findings of the "Youth and History" project appear to demonstrate that European history education has not yet succeeded to any notable degree in re-orientating the practice of teaching towards the aim of developing the historical consciousness of the students. This does not seem to be due, however, to any unwillingness on the part of the teachers. They seem to be more than willing to pursue this aim. Many different factors could account for the apparent lack of success in this endeavour of theirs. I shall at this point only indicate two such factors.

First, there has not been a sufficient appreciation of the magnitude of the task at hand. There is much more involved in this than the mere substitution of a new aim for an older one. To think of history teaching in terms of developing the historical consciousness of students has far-reaching implications that demand a major reshuffling of one's thinking about history education. It requires, for instance, that one gains some insight into the manner in which the learning and use of history in schools is and can be related to that learning and use of history that takes place outside the walls of the school.

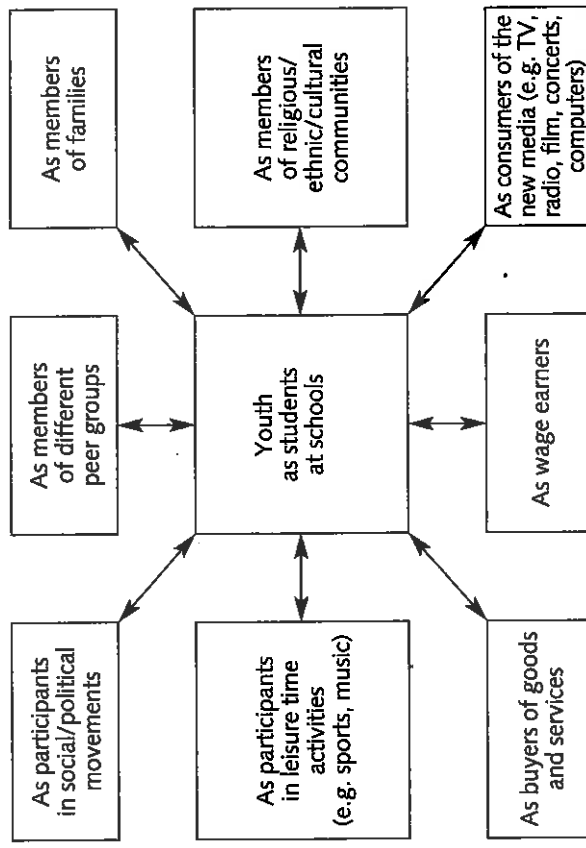
Second, we are not only talking about a difficult task when we talk of developing the historical consciousness of students. We need to openly acknowledge that we do not have the insights we need at the present time. Nor is this knowledge at hand. Whereas a fair amount of research has been undertaken about the relationship between academic history and history in schools, almost no research has been undertaken regarding the relationship between the teaching of history in schools on the one hand and popular history-making and everyday uses of history on the other. There is a fairly straightforward explanation for this. It is only in the last decade or so that scholars have begun to take a serious interest in finding out what characterises popular uses of history and the ways in which popular memory works. Things have started to change in recent years, but I still think that it is fair to say that we are talking about a field of research that only exists on the periphery of the academic world.

**The second process of de-centring: the place of the school**

When thinking about the historicity of history teaching, we should also focus attention on the changes that regard the place of the school in the everyday lives of young people. This is both a complex theme and a rather tricky one, and although there is only time to dwell on it for a short moment, I have mentioned it because of its importance and relevance to the issues that we are taking up for consideration at this symposium.

Were we to describe the place of the school in the everyday lives of young people, we might try to do so along the lines indicated in Diagram 2 below. As with the previous diagram, the point should once more be made that the relative importance of these different arenas may not only differ from person to person and from group to group, but also from one society to another. What is important is not so much the specific way of dividing up the everyday lives of young people into different fields. What is important, is to point to some of the changes that have been affecting the school as a place of learning during recent decades. I shall limit myself to one small point concerning a change that has affected the authority of the school as a place of learning.

Diagram II



In the history of mankind, oral culture is the culture upon which all other cultures of communication are grounded. People will always first learn to communicate with others by employing their own inherent physical resources. It should be noted that oral culture encompasses the use of both non-verbal and verbal means of communication. People learn to communicate with others first through the use of non-verbal means such as gesture, and subsequently by the verbal means of talking. That oral culture is the foundation upon which all other modes of communication is based is true both in phylogenetic and in ontogenetic terms – that is to say in the history of the human species as well as the history of any individual person.

It is at a third or later stage that people may begin to learn to communicate with others by such means as reading and writing. Literacy is not only a mode of communication that requires that one start to transform and use non-human materials for the purpose of establishing communication between people – by using for instance paper and ink. To become literate also presupposes that one is able to perform the tasks at issue – that one has learned a set of skills that go beyond those developed in the most basic forms of social interaction, that is those belonging to oral culture. The school is the place where most people acquire these additional skills of reading and writing, and it has thus traditionally functioned as the entry point to the world of reading and writing. To become literate not only meant that one gained access to the world mediated by writing, it has also meant for the last century and a half that one could begin to gain access to the adult world. It is this social function among others that has traditionally conferred authority upon the school as a place of learning.

However, during the last four or five decades the position of the school has been affected by the impact of ongoing changes in the world of communications. Scholars such as Walter J. Ong and Raymond Williams have made the point that the use of new electronic media of communication should not only be seen as an extension of the world of reading and writing. The use of these media also introduces a change in the modes of communication that partly runs counter to traditional forms of literacy. Although the new electronic modes of communication make their entrance in human history very much later than the techniques of writing and printing, these new technologies function in a manner that is in some ways much closer to oral culture. For this reason Walter J. Ong says that we are at the present living in “a new age of second orality”<sup>1</sup>.

The point I want to make is that this “new age of second orality” is also affecting the school as a place of learning. It can in fact be said to contribute to yet another aspect of the de-centring process. The school of course remains a place where young people acquire those skills that are necessary for entering the world of reading and writing. However, the school no longer holds a privileged position when it comes to initiating the exploration of the adult world. The new electronic media offer young people today the possibility of a much easier and freer access to the world around them than was the case a century or a half-century ago. In other words, it provides an access to the adult world that adults themselves have much more difficulty in structuring and controlling than earlier. The new media offer those young people who want, and are able to exploit the opportunities at hand, some further degree of autonomy or self-determination than was the

1. W. J. Ong, *Orality and literacy: the technologizing of the work*, 1982, p. 135. See also Raymond Williams, “Means of communication as means of production” in *Problems in materialism and culture*, 1980.

case earlier. In my view, these changes have begun to affect the authority of the school as a place of learning.

There is some evidence of this process of de-centring in the pages of the "Youth and History" reports. One of the aspects that this research project clearly demonstrates is that young people find that history teaching which is based on textbooks is rather dull and boring. They clearly prefer history teaching that is able to exploit some of the many possibilities that the new media have made available. This is precisely what one might expect to hear from a generation that have been brought up and are living in the "new age of second orality". Moreover, this process of de-centring not only concerns the place and role of textbooks in the teaching of history. It also affects the position of teachers. It implies among other things that teachers nowadays have to prove themselves *vis-à-vis* their students to a much greater extent than previously. They work under an increasing demand that they should be able to demonstrate in a manner that is convincing to their students that what they have to offer is meaningful and worthwhile. And this makes teaching – and not least the teaching of history – a very great challenge indeed.

### The third process of de-centring: communities of memory

I will now say a little about the third and last of the processes of de-centring that I think we should bear in mind when reflecting on the state of history teaching at the end of the 20th century. It is concerned with those communities of memory that form the framework around any history education.

Whenever people begin to form groups and establish forms of collective identity, they will normally also search for answers to questions such as: (i) who are we? (ii) where do we come from? (iii) what is our present situation? and (iv) where are we or where do we want to go? People employ their historical consciousness in order to establish among other things a community of memory. This seems to be a fairly universal process and the fact that it regularly takes place is one which few people, if any, would be inclined to dispute. The constructed character of such communities and identities is nowadays broadly acknowledged.

Such a community may also be described – to use Benedict Anderson's term – as an "imagined community".<sup>1</sup> People experience and feel that they have something in common with many other people whom they will never meet or talk to. This may be for the reason that these other people lived in the past, that they live in far away places at the present time or even that they will constitute future generations of people. Although such a community

1. B. Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, rev. ed., 1991.

is in a very real sense an imagined community, there is nothing imaginary or fictional about it. A community cannot exist and function, as a matter of fact, independently of the consciousness of its members, and an imagined community is a construction that has very great consequences indeed. It quite literally shapes the social world.

Although the establishment of communities of memory seems to be a universal process, actually established communities of memory are very much historical phenomena, and they will also therefore usually change character in the course of time. Moreover, it is such that different communities of memory may prevail or dominate in different periods. The history of communities of memory in the European context is far from fully researched at the present time. But several scholars working in this field tend to distinguish between at least three major and partly overlapping phases.<sup>1</sup>

There was a "pre-national" phase in which communities of memory tended to be either strictly local or relatively cosmopolitan. In that phase there were very significant differences between popular and elite memory. As from the 18th century we begin to move towards a national phase in Europe, and from that time onwards it is the national communities of memory that tend to become the more dominant ones. At first, the commemorations that upheld and kept these national communities alive had the character of being for the people, rather than of the people. But later on, national memory seems to have obtained a much more democratic form.

I would like to dwell on what is meant by a dominant community of memory. If we for a moment return to Diagram 1 – regarding the different settings in which the historical consciousness of a people is produced and reproduced – then one can define a dominant community of memory as one that manifests itself and makes its presence felt in a series of different settings at the same time. In European history there have been times and places when school children, whether they were reading literature, history or geography, whether they were reading historical fiction, watching films, going to the theatre or singing songs, were engaged in activities that all, more or less, referred to and re-affirmed the same community of memory.

The national phase was such a period in which a specific community of memory was dominant, and it was during this phase that history teaching seems to have been experienced as a fairly successful and meaningful venture. Unlike today, the need to legitimate the teaching of history does not seem to have been called for. However, when we look at the existing research into how contemporary communities of memory have been developing and changing, there are a series of factors indicating that parts of Europe

1. See, for example, J. Gillis, "Memory and identity: the history of a relationship" in *Commemoration: the politics of national identity*, 1994.

during the past two to three decades have been moving into what is called – for lack of a better term – a post-national phase.

I am well aware of the fact that it is necessary to differentiate between different trends in different parts of Europe in regard to this point. The transition to a post-national phase of memory is much more pronounced in western Europe, for instance, than in eastern Europe. I would also like to emphasise that speaking of a transition to a post-national phase does not imply an assertion to the effect that national communities of memory have ceased to exist in western Europe. Not at all. These communities most certainly continue to exist and play a role in the lives of people. But they do not – and this is the claim – play the same dominant role that they did earlier.

The reason why I have decided to dwell on the history of communities of memory in Europe is that this transition towards a post-national phase is beginning to have – I believe – a major impact on European history education. It lies behind what I have termed the third process of de-centring in the field of history teaching. In parts of Europe, history teaching can no longer meaningfully define and legitimate its main task in relation to a specific and dominant community of memory. The American historian John Gillis has described this situation in the western world in the following way:

Today everyone is her or his own historian, and this democratisation of the past causes some anxiety among professionals, most of whom still write in the nationalist tradition, and who still retain a near monopoly over professorships and curatorships, even as they lose touch with the general public... the reality is that the nation is no longer the site or frame of memory for most people and therefore national history is no longer a proper measure of what people really know about the past.<sup>1</sup>

Many people nowadays seem to spend more time on memory work than was common earlier. However, this work is sometimes experienced as being more burdensome than it was when the task was, in the main, one of defining oneself in relationship to an existing national community of memory. In a post-national frame people seem to be more concerned with issues relating to family, to local history and to global issues (such as the Holocaust, Hiroshima, the Vietnam wars) than they are with issues relating to national history. One of the more significant findings of the "Youth and History" project confirms this pattern. This project has pointed to the fact that European students nowadays think that family history should be given a much more prominent place in the teaching of history than is normally the case. Such a finding is precisely what one might expect at a point in time when the overarching importance of national communities of memory clearly seems to be receding in many parts of Europe.

1. *Ibid.* p. 17.

### The challenges at hand

In this contribution to our symposium I have attempted to reflect a little on the challenges that are at hand. At the centre of the picture that I have been attempting to draw is an open acknowledgement that teaching history today is a very difficult and challenging task indeed. In some parts of Europe it appears in fact to be quite a bit more difficult than in others. I want to emphasise that I have only been saying that it is a very difficult task. I have not tried to convey the message that it is an impossible task. What I have done is to attempt to make some sense of the difficulties by pointing to three processes of de-centring that are affecting the contemporary teaching of history. If we wish to change the present state of affairs, our ability to act intelligently and responsibly depends upon our understanding of the specific conditions of teaching history at the close of the 20th century. What I have tried to do is precisely to further our insight into the historicity of that teaching. I would like to conclude by pointing to three of the challenges at hand.

First, I believe that we misunderstand the challenge at hand if we assume that we are living in a period in which peoples' interest in history is at particularly low ebb. What some scholars interpret as a prevailing a-historical mood in present day society, I think should rather be understood as ongoing changes in the kinds of past that people find interesting and worthwhile today. If one looks at what goes on outside the walls of the school, there is ample evidence to show that popular memory and public history are flourishing as never before. Thus, one of the tasks at hand consists in reaching an understanding of the relationship between history as taught in the schools and the many kinds of memory work that are taking place in society at large. One might even start by considering the idea of making history classes a place where students were given ample opportunity to reflect on and to discuss how they employ the past in their everyday lives and for which purposes they use it.

Second, I think that we are standing in the midst of a major educational experiment at the present time. I am thinking of the different attempts that are being made to understand history teaching in terms of developing and refining the historical consciousness of students. As mentioned earlier, the "Youth and History" project shows that many history teachers certainly have begun to work along these lines when thinking about their teaching. But it is also very clear from the available evidence that the new message has not reached the students as yet. They still perceive the overarching aim of their history teaching as being that of acquiring "knowledge about the main facts of history". In this situation, some history educators and politicians may want to argue that when these experiments with the use of the concept of historical consciousness have not been more successful, then the time has come to abandon this new line of thinking about history education. In my view, however, it would be premature to draw this conclusion.



If one looks at the results generated by the in-depth survey done by Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen in the United States and published in *The presence of the past* (1998), they demonstrate clearly that the patterns of popular history-making in fact run along the same line of thought as that which has sought to make the concept of historical consciousness an axis and turning point of history education.

This brings me to my third and last point. When we are thinking about the challenges at hand, it is important to acknowledge that patterns of teaching only change slowly in the normal course of events. It not only takes quite a bit of time to acquire the required skills of history teaching, it also takes a fair amount of time to modify and change one's teaching habits. Insight into this socio-cultural fact is what the theory of historical consciousness is all about. That humans are historical beings means precisely that part of their nature is culture. In other words, that it is something they acquire and change by means of ongoing and life-long processes of socialisation and learning. It also implies that people with different kinds of historical experiences become different kinds of people, and that to come to an understanding of people different from oneself requires that one has to understand something about their history and culture. At the present time, I feel fairly convinced that the theory of historical consciousness can potentially make a significant contribution to re-shaping and re-vitalising history education in Europe. But I also think that we need to openly acknowledge that old habits most often die hard, and that it sometimes can be rather difficult to nurture new ones.

## THE TWO FACETS OF DISCRIMINATION IN HISTORY TEACHING: PERPETRATORS AND VICTIMS

By *Christina Koulouri*<sup>1</sup>

I am here today because of my background and experience: firstly, my work on Greek history and geography textbooks and their ideological messages since the 19th century; secondly, the fact that I teach history in a university located near the Turkish border, and therefore in a region inhabited by the largest ethnic minority in Greece. So in some ways my academic concerns tie in with everyday life – all the more so as, before I came to Thrace, my idea of this minority was rather vague and confused, as it seems to be for most of the inhabitants of Athens, if not of the rest of Greece as a whole.

On the other hand, we are all, or almost all, aware of the steadily increasing number of immigrants in Greek society. This is partly due to the media, of course, which continually cover acts of crime, particularly by Albanians and Romanians, in the daily news. As a result, the prevailing image of immigrants is undoubtedly negative.

The integration of indigenous and immigrant minorities into Greek society raises issues that go far beyond the education sector, encompassing the full range of ideological and social structures. I shall, however, concentrate on education issues, which are the subject of this seminar, and more specifically on history teaching. In order to understand the content of the Greek history syllabus, we must analyse the specific historical circumstances that have produced minorities within the Greek nation-state, and the relationship between Greek and European identity. Moreover, the minority status of Greeks in western countries since the war is a historical experience that

1. Ms Koulouri is associate professor of modern and contemporary history at the University of Democritus in Thrace (Greece). Her paper was originally presented at a CDCC seminar for the project "Democracy, human rights, minorities: educational and cultural aspects" (Athens, Greece, 22-24 October 1998).

# **The misuse of history**

Symposium on "Facing misuses of history"  
Oslo (Norway)  
28-30 June 1999

Keynote speech, by Georg Iggers  
General report, by Laurent Wirth

Project "Learning and teaching about the history  
of Europe in the 20th century"

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1. Albania, Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, San Marino, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom.

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