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# Politics of identity through history curriculum: narratives of the past for social exclusion—or inclusion?

SIRKKA AHONEN

National curricula convey narratives that are never inclusive of whole communities, and history curricula in particular need examination of their role as forms of 'identity politics'. Minorities tend to be excluded from the master historical narratives. The examples are derived from Estonia and the new German *Länder*, which made up the German Democratic Republic. In both cases, the grand narrative of communism was used as the backbone of history curriculum. When, abruptly—around 1990—the narrative lost its credibility, a quest for a new narrative arose. In the case of Estonia, history was needed for nation-building and was, therefore, framed within the grand narrative of nationalism. In Germany, the educators challenged themselves by attempting to make school history into a Habermasian open space for critical communication. However, the question remains: how far can a curriculum be socially inclusive?

## Historical narratives, collective identity and political power

Past and present become comprehensible to a community through narratives rather than more analytical modes of knowledge. Narratives are symbolic tools that mediate shared experience within community. However, the referent of narration, human action, is never a raw or immediate reality. 'Reality' is made into representations by those who experience it, and it is reinterpreted and resymbolized in the course of time. Social reality is, therefore, a *construction* that is processed and re-processed by a community (see, e.g. Rüsen 1994: 25–63).

Narratives become objects of collective identification. The identity of a community is not an immutable essence, but rather a dynamic process, deriving its elements from stories told and retold in the course of inter-subjective mediation. But, an historical narrative, in addition to being a cognitive form, may also be a metaphysical construction. This applies

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above all to the 'grand narratives' with ideological frames, like nationalism, socialism or liberalism. Today, grand narratives are often said to be dead, but during the 19th century and the first part of the 20th century they were hegemonically supported and commonly held (see, e.g. Lyotard 1984, Iggers 1997: 118–133).

Grand narratives were constructed by ideologues, often in the service of politics, to make sense of the past and to give direction to the future. People's historical consciousness, i.e. their sense of connection between the past, the present, and the future, was thus manipulated through a 'conspiracy' between those in power and the ideologues serving them, and were widely affected by deterministic ideologies of one kind or another. Political leaders *imposed* a grand narrative on a community, using the common school as their instrument.

Thus, it was as a result of nationalism that history first became a hegemonic subject in the school curriculum. Modern nations were constructed through narratives about primordial nations that had their origins in the hereditary ethnic unity of communities, and which had inevitably, or would inevitably develop into nation-states. The '*Blut und Boden*', i.e. blood and ground, idea of nation was strongest in central Europe, where the most compelling national narratives were created in the 19th century. It was the task of the common school to convey these narratives to the whole community—but such narratives were developed in a way that ignored the experiences of each 'nation's' ethnic and social minorities (e.g. Smith 1991, Füredi 1992).

The grand narrative of nationalism was made politically obsolete at the end of World War II. However, with the coming of communist regimes in the 20th century, a new grand narrative was constructed—that of the course of development towards socialism. This 'new' narrative derived the idea of inevitable progress from the liberal narrative, but also introduced the rule of a dialectic process changing social formations into the lessons of history. Again, history was a hegemonic subject in school: socialist identity had to be created and reinforced.

But, despite the fall of communism in Europe, we can still ask if grand narratives are really dead? This was one of my questions in my investigation of what was happening to school history after the fall of the Soviet Union and its eastern European empire. I chose to look at Estonia and the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). Estonia, as one of the constituent republics of the USSR, had had the framework of its history curriculum sent from Moscow; in the GDR, school history was commanded by the communist party of the GDR, the SED, i.e. the German Party for Socialist Unity.

Estonians took command of their own history education in 1988, in the context of 'the singing revolution' of that year, while no changes took place in the GDR before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. I conducted my initial research on history education in Estonia and the GDR in 1990–1992,<sup>1</sup> but have monitored subsequent developments in the two countries through participation in collaborative projects.

Assuming that a curriculum is loaded with political power through ideologically empowered narratives, I asked what would happen to a school

curriculum when the grand narrative that supported it lost its credibility. Would educators adopt a multitude of small narratives, or look for a new ideological grand narrative? In addition to the old and new narratives of history, I was interested in their reception. Historical identity is eventually affected by family memories and by a shared collective memory. Controversies around the relationship between a school history and a collective memory may result in the fading of either, or in a double-consciousness of history.

### **From sovietization to national history in Estonia**

As early as 1980, when the Afganistan crisis shattered the Soviet Union, some 2000 Estonian school students rallied in Tallinn against Soviet rule. The incident was widely reported in the Western media, which soon received appeals from Estonian intellectuals asking them to publish manifestos in defence of Estonian culture. The popular movement grew gradually, in the course of the 1980s, into an annual history protest, held in Deer Park of Old Tallinn and focused above all on the official history's failure to account for the secret protocols of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact of 1939 (Ahonen 1992: 101–102). The possibility of a new narrative emerged, as people claimed that they wanted a 'true' history for rebuilding the nation. The foundational elements of 'the truth' were derived from collective memory, and reconstructed into a story that was an alternative to the official Marxist–Leninist school history.

This popular history discussion was eventually focused on a number of sensitive historical topics, where the spontaneous collective memory and the official Soviet history contradicted each other. The most crucial topics were the independence of Estonia between 1919 and 1940, the secret protocol of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact of 1939, Sovietization in 1941, and the deportations of Estonians in 1944 and 1949. The first three had been portrayed in official history from a Soviet point of view, while the deportations were left as an empty space, a blank spot. According to the public, a change of representation, and of narrative, was long overdue; in the atmosphere of the *glasnost* and *perestroika* of the mid 1980s, they wanted new representations. These new representations would have a nationalist frame (see table 1).

The purpose of the old Moscow-controlled curriculum had been to impose a Soviet identity on the Estonians. The All-Union identity was reinforced through the presentation of the Soviet Union as the Fatherland, and Estonia as 'an ethnic territory', with Estonian history restricted to ~10% of the time. In the new situation, there was a demand for the recognition of an Estonian 'nation' (ESSR 1986, 1990, Ahonen 1992).

Another element of identity was introduced through a new conception of the *agency* of history. In the Marxist–Leninist view, history was a predetermined process, determined by the transcendental forces of Progress and Revolution. The historical agency of ordinary men and women was ignored; an individual or spontaneous group was regarded merely as a

**Table 1. The change of representations in Estonian history curricula, 1986–1990.**

The old representation	The new representation
<i>Peasant leaders Lembitu and Kaupo:</i> [blank spot]	Freedom fighters
<i>The Swedes in the 17th century:</i> Robber conquerors	Founders of Tartu university
<i>The Russians in the 18th century:</i> Estonian–Russian friendship	Oppressors of Estonian peasants
<i>The national awakening in the 19th century:</i> A characteristic of the capitalistic formation	A cultural defence of the nation
<i>Estonian Independence 1918–1940:</i> Counter-revolution	Nation-state
<i>The arrival of the Soviet troops in Estonia 1940:</i> An extension of the happy family of the Soviet peoples; the re-establishment of the rule of the Soviets	Occupation; the end of Estonian independence
<i>Deportations of Estonians 1941, 1944, 1949:</i> [blank spot]	Stalin's 'rule of terror'
<i>Russian settlers after 1944:</i> [blank spot]	Uncontrolled industrialization and migration

Source: ESSR (1986, 1990), Ahonen (1992: 114–122).

tool of impersonal forces. With the new identification with western democracy, individual persons were acknowledged as the active agents of history (ESSR 1986, 1990, Ahonen 1992: 105).

Such a change of narratives had been proposed by Estonians as early as 1986, the year of *glasnost* and *perestroika* in the Soviet Union, in an All-Union history educators' conference. The proposed reform was rejected; however, the Estonians' demands continued, and, given the strong national feeling of 'the Singing Revolution' of 1988, they felt empowered to write their school curricula on their own terms. Above all, the history of Estonia was expected to be presented within a new ideological frame.

While the old narrative did not acknowledge Estonia as a nation, the new narrative of primordial nationhood started with early mediaeval local peasant rebels. They were portrayed as the first Estonian national freedom-fighters. For the later centuries, friends and enemies were re-arranged. Estonia, as a result of its geopolitical situation, had been overrun by Germans, Danes, Poles, Swedes and Russians over centuries. Under Soviet rule, Moscow portrayed Russians as helpful friends in contrast to the other invaders. In the new view, the Russians became historical oppressors.

The new narrative was a virtual resurrection of the school history of the 1920s and 1930s. In that period, Estonia had been a young nation-state in the process of constructing a uniform national identity. As was typical of nationalist historiography, the Estonian nation was seen as a primordial entity, inevitably developing into a nation-state. This approach was re-adopted in the new curriculum. Proofs of national will were

sought throughout history. According to the official history of the Soviet period, Estonian independence in 1919–1940 was a setback in the progress towards communism; in the reformed curriculum, the loss of independence in 1940 was portrayed as an offence, and seen as a setback in the historically inevitable rise of a nation-state. The periodization of Estonian history was changed from the determinist Marxist dialectics to a scheme based on the political status of Estonia as a nation (Ahonen 1992: 114–122).

Estonia became independent in 1991. In anticipation of independence, there was a compelling demand to reassert Estonia as a historical community through a nationalist interpretation of the past. The ethos of the Deer Park demonstrations and the Singing Revolution was introduced to the narrative of Estonian history. The new curriculum sought to empower the population to work hard for a new state.

This nationalistic approach was maintained in subsequent syllabuses throughout the 1990s. The story of Estonia was portrayed as a long line of development, as a predetermined path to a nation-state. No minority narrative was recognized in the curriculum. Russian-speaking Estonians were embedded in the story of the evil occupant, the Soviet Union (see Õispuu 1992, Ministry of Education 1997, Kiaupa *et al.* 1999; see figure 1).

The question of the inclusiveness/exclusiveness of the new curriculum was eventually taken up publicly at the end of the 1990s. Could the Russian minority, representing 36% of the population, be expected to identify with the narrative of the Estonian nation? The myth-likeness and political purposiveness of the post-1988 public presentations of history was acknowledged by Hvostov (1999), a young Estonian scholar. He observed that the new schoolbooks repeated the history of the imagined national past derived from the period of national awakening of the 19th century. He highlighted the difference between the texts being written for Estonian-speakers and Russian-speakers in Estonia: the Russian-language texts continue to concentrate, in addition to world history, on the history of Russia. He maintained that a Russian-speaker, given a choice, would adopt the Russian view on history, inasmuch as the Estonian view makes him or her feel excluded.

The political purposiveness of the Estonian narrative has been further analysed by the Finnish scholar, Lagerspetz (1999). He argues that, as a result of the quest for a membership in the European Union, Estonians want to draw a historical boundary-line between East and West along the eastern border of Estonia. A recognition of a Russian historical element in Estonian history is impossible. Russians have to be portrayed as a historical anomaly, i.e. as excluded from the historical community (Lagerspetz 1999: 19).

In Estonia, the conversion of history took place as one master narrative replaced another and not as a conversion from one mode of knowledge to another, e.g. from mono-perspectivity to multi-perspectivity. The new narrative was useful for the remaking of a nation-state, but, at the same time, inevitably excluded a large ethnic minority from any role in the task of nation-building.



Monuments are supposed to support collective identities. A statue was erected in Kadriorg Park in the Soviet period to commemorate a marine, Jevgeni Nikonov, who heroically defended Tallinn against the German conquerors in 1941; he was subsequently burned alive by the Germans. After the Singing Revolution of 1988, Estonians radically changed the story: Nikonov was a Soviet occupier, who had no special attachment to Estonia, and went home to Russia after the war to live there happily ever after.

**Figure 1. Monument to Jevgeni Nikonov, Kadriorg Park, Tallinn, Estonia.**

### **From the peasants' and workers' state to multi-perspectivity in the new *Länder* of Germany**

In the GDR, history in school was fostered as an identity subject that would make young East Germans regard themselves as children of the 'better' Germany. When the lure of the prosperous West grew in the 1970s, and as symptoms of social dissatisfaction were observed by those in power, historians were asked to help politics. A public discussion on 'heritage and tradition' was launched, with the purpose of proving that in the past the best elements of Germanness had appeared in the eastern counties. The

project was repeated in the 1980s—by rehabilitating prominent ‘East’ Germans like Martin Luther and Frederick the Great, both of whom had previously been regarded as reactionary agents. The GDR itself was named ‘The First Peasants’ and Workers’ State in the German territory’ (Menger 1990: 81, Wernstedt 1991: 289, Ahonen 1992: 59–60).

In the GDR, history curricula were written by the ‘leading’ historians and history educators of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences in Berlin, under the auspices of the SED. The Academy was one of the first institutions to be abolished after the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and, thereafter, curriculum development took place in each of the five new *Länder* individually. A political purge in the universities eventually removed all history educators of the old system from their posts, and ultimately the new *Länder* took up the history curricula of the neighbouring old *Länder*—which meant a total break with the GDR tradition of history education (von Borries 1990; Ahonen 1992: 92–94).

However, in 1990–1991, before the adoption of the West German curricula, an ambitious attempt was made by East German history educators towards an ideological conversion and reform of school history. Many of them had been Marxist–Leninists who, by the end of 1989, were actively involved in the reform movement and committed to the ideas of humanization of historical agency, multi-perspectivity of historical account, and the grand narrative of Western democracy (Ahonen 1992: 92–93).

In this section of this paper, I will focus on the re-interpretations of history offered in 1990–1991 by the East Germans themselves. They outlined tentative accounts that pointed towards a conversion of curricula from Marxist–Leninist to ‘Western’ interpretations of history. The resulting provisional curricula were eventually rejected, but they bear a testimony to how the East Germans initially sought to reform history *on their own terms*.

Like the Estonians, the East Germans started with a new approach to the foundations of history education. They rejected the idea of class dialectics and revolutions as the driving forces of history, and adhered instead to the ideas of a history created by human intentions and past constituted of alternative choices. More strongly than the Estonians, they defended the autonomy of history education against the state and politics, and they stressed the multi-perspectivity of historical accounts. They went so far as to deny the uniform collective identity of a historical community (Dresden 1990, Iffert *et al.* 1990, Brandenburg 1991, Sachsen-Anhalt 1991, Ahonen 1992: 66).

Thus in one of the reformed curricula, that of the Brandenburg (1991), there was an explicit emphasis on individual critical thinking in contrast to the traditional quest for an uniform identity:

For an individual learning process, school lessons contribute in terms of broadening of individual experiences and information. With her or his curiosity and interest as the starting point, the student should be encouraged to test his subjective experience, his information and his modes of explanation in order to decide whether his knowledge is valid and generalizable (Brandenburg 1991: 6).



The substance of the curriculum was reformed through removing the Marxist–Leninist periodization, filling in the blank spots, and rehabilitating some historical actors, persons and groups previously considered reactionary in Marxist–Leninist terms.

Was there any replacement of one grand narrative by another one, comparable to the Estonian case? The German scholar, Neuhaus (1999) has answered ‘No’. East German educators, when attempting to reform the curricula, resorted to a factual approach in history teaching; the past was presented ‘as it actually happened’, in the sense of the 19th-century objectivist Leopold Ranke. Neuhaus points out that the Communist education secretary, Margot Honecker, had recommended the Rankean approach in the late 1980s, after observing history education losing credibility. However, in the ideologically and politically sensitive topics, one can discern an ideological reframing of the narrative, albeit not as obviously as in post-communist Estonia. The old and new representations of history are rhetorically distinguishable in the crucial topics (see table 2; see figure 2).

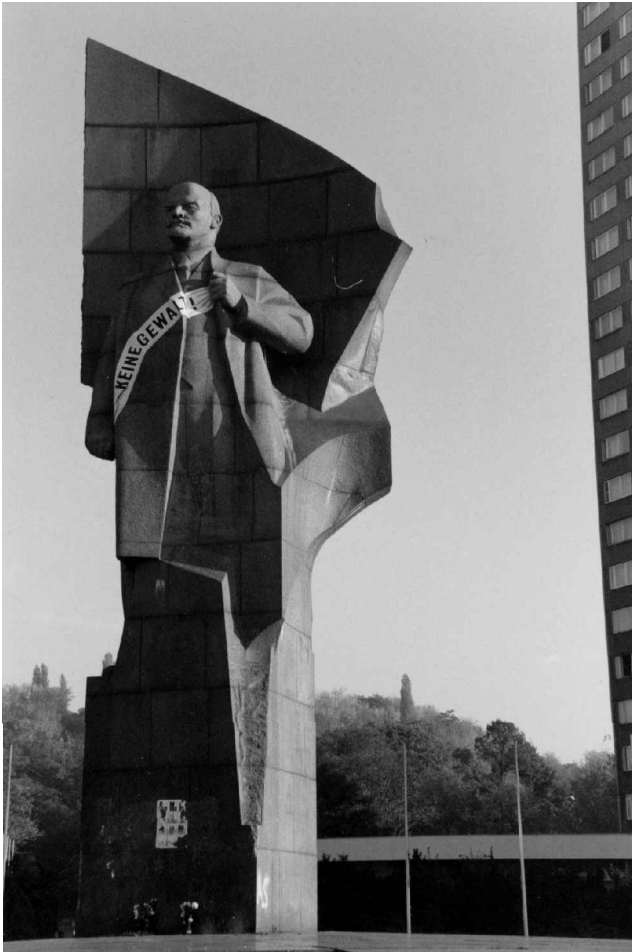
The two sets of representations have different narrative frames. The narrative frame of the first set, the ‘old’ representation, is from the point of view of Marxist–Leninist dialectics, while in the ‘new’ representation liberal values are fostered, e.g. through calling Martin Luther a liberator and through passing a moral—instead of ideological—judgement on Nazism. In their liberal ethos, the new representations did not differ too much from the West German curricula that soon substituted them. Still, there was one significant difference: while the East German history educators included ample space for the history of the GDR 1949–1989 in the new curriculum, the West German curricula marginalized the period and looked at it solely from the Western point of view (Rohlfes 1999).

In the West, the construction of the narrative of the GDR in the 1990s took place in two phases. First, immediately after *die Wende*, historians rushed to disclose the totalitarian nature of the GDR, for the purpose of

**Table 2. Changing representations in East German history curricula 1986–1990/1991.**

The old representation	The new representation
<i>Martin Luther:</i> A lackey of princes	A liberator of German minds
<i>The rise of Nazism in the 1930s:</i> The final stage of monopolistic capitalism	‘An enormous crime’
<i>Stalin’s terror:</i> [blank spot]	Dictatorship
<i>The end of the war, 1945:</i> Liberation	Capitulation
<i>The birth of the GDR:</i> The first German workers’ and peasants’ state	Stalinism
<i>Invasion of Czechoslovakia 1968:</i> Struggle against counterrevolution	Soviet aggression
<i>Die Wende 1989:</i> Reaction	Peaceful revolution

Source: GDR (1988), Dresden (1990), Iffert *et al.* (1990), Wermes *et al.* (1990), Brandenburg (1991), Sachsen-Anhalt (1991), Ahonen (1992: 76–91).



A built environment conveys historical meanings. As soon as the Berlin Wall was pulled down in November 1989, Berliners began arguing about the fate of the communist monuments of East Berlin. Should the gigantic statue of Lenin on the Leninplatz remain or fall? In November 1991, the defenders hung a banderol saying *Keine Gewalt* [No violence] around Lenin's chest. However, the attackers won and now there is no Leninplatz and no Lenin.

**Figure 2. Statue of Lenin in the Leninplatz, East Berlin.**

*Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit*, facing up to the past, a process which paralleled what the Germans had pursued for decades with their Nazi past. A special state commission was established to investigate the discrepancy between ideology and reality in the 'actually existing socialism', the atrocities of the Stalinist purges of the late 1940s and of the later police-state, the dependency on the USSR, and the economic collapse of the 1980s. Those who reminded the public about the other side of the coin were called 'apologists of communism' and ignored (Schröder 1995: 743, Schuller 1995: 738). A similar defiant view was adopted in school curricula (Rohlfes 1999: 545–562).

But, by the middle of the 1990s, it was obvious to educators that the dissatisfaction expressed by the former East Germans had to be dealt with. It had been harmful to exclude the 'Ossies' from the narrative of the past, and not to provide them with the opportunity to face up to 40 years of their own past. Educators had to counteract the division of Germans into 'A' and 'B' categories. The education secretaries of the *Länder* met in 1995 to write guidelines for the teaching of the 40 years of the GDR. In 1997, the union of history teachers published their recommendations and insisted that no community should be denied a request for a sense of continuity; in order to build aspirations for the future, the teachers and students had a right to choose between different interpretations of the past. The different developments of the two Germanies between 1949 and 1989 had to be studied in their own right (Krisch 1996: 11–13, Aus der Verband der Geschichtelehrer 1997a, b).

In 1999, Rohlfes, the grand old man of German history education, crystallized what a multi-perspectivity around German developments in 1949–1989 would require. He indirectly blamed the history teachers for the unhappy division of Germans into 'Ossies' and 'Wessies', and argued that the GDR should be presented as an historically changing society, not as one-dimensional panorama. The positive economic developments of the 1960s and 1970s should be noted; the totalitarian nature of the society should be problematized, not demonized; the comparison of developments in the GDR and the (western) Federal Republic should not be presented in black and white; unification should be presented as a crisis, not as a victory. By presenting history in this way, the East Germans would be helped to face up to their past (Rohlfes 1999).

### **Exclusion through curriculum as reflected in the reception of history**

The evidence on the reception of history by children and youth in the 1980s and 1990s is patchy, but still worth looking at. The Estonian evidence around the reception of the Marxist–Leninist history is only secondhand, but in East Germany some systematic monitoring took place. We have evidence on the reception of the reformed history curricula from both countries as a result of the all-European research project, *Youth and History* (Anqvik and von Borries 1997).

In Estonia, among ethnic Estonians, i.e. the majority, the Sovietized narrative seems never to have been properly established. This was indicated by the readiness of Estonians to reject the official history as soon as the system of command was loosened in the 1980s. Estonians maintained mediating family stories with links to the old history in the privacy of their homes (Tulviste 1994); feeling excluded from the hegemonic narrative, ethnic Estonians were eager to assume—rather resume—another narrative.

The *Youth and History* survey (Anqvik and von Borries 1997) shows that the reception of the new nationalist narrative was very positive. 'Country' and 'people' meant more for young Estonians than for most Europeans. Moreover, they saw the role of ordinary people in making

history as crucial. The recent popular re-creation of a nation-state of their own was still in mind, and the story was also told in school. Young people seem to have felt included in history as presented by the new narrative. The new narrative succeeded in reinforcing a collective identity (Anqvik and von Borries 1997: data on CD-ROM).

At the same time, the new narrative caused social exclusion. The Youth and History evidence shows that, in 1995, the Russian minority did not accept the idea of nationhood as a historical force in the same way as young ethnic Estonians. They did not agree with the statement that, 40 years ago 'Estonia was exploited by a foreign state'—as did their ethnic Estonian peers. Nor were they interested in Estonian history, but rather in local or world history. While not identifying with the history of Estonia, they were also less optimistic about the future of Estonia than the ethnic Estonians. They anticipated ethnic conflicts in the near future (Saar 1997: 263).

In East Germany, thanks to the GDR authorities' concern for socialist identity, we know something about the reception of the Marxist–Leninist grand narrative. In the 1980s, the Youth Research Institute in Leipzig conducted regular surveys of the extent to which young people identified themselves with the GDR. The results were so alarming that they were not published before 1989. They showed that the youth only weakly identified themselves with the GDR. Only 43% responded positively to questions on identification in 1987—and two years later only 19%. Only university students felt more than weak attachment to the GDR; in comparison to the young workers, they sensed some opportunities in the system (Central Institute of Youth Research 1990, Ahonen 1992: 54, Krisch 1996: 8–10).

The authorities' fear of a double-consciousness of history among people seemed to be established by the Leipzig surveys. One mode of historical consciousness was a socially useful lip-service to the rhetorics of the official history; the other mode was based on a spontaneous popular conception of history. The efforts of the party officials in the 1980s to utilize national sentiment through rehabilitating Martin Luther, Frederick the Great, etc., in order to enhance the collective socialist identity, had not succeeded in promoting a positive GDR identity. The official narrative was not robust enough!

The reception of the reformed narrative was studied in the context of the *Youth and History* survey. Von Borries (1993), the leader of the project, was anxious to find out whether the 1990s neo-nazi activities in the new *Länder* were founded on a special East German consciousness of history, and used the Youth and History research instrument to monitor the development of historically contextual political attitudes among the Wessies and Ossies. At the beginning of the 1990s, the data showed no major difference between the two groups (von Borries 1993). However, later, a difference appeared: the findings from the major survey of 1995 suggested that young people in the East were somewhat more enthusiastic about belonging to the German nation than the youth in the old *Länder*. Furthermore, when asked about Hitler, they expressed a slightly less condemning attitude than the Westerners. The straightforward anti-fascist rhetorics of the GDR were no longer salient, and the liberal lessons

borrowed from the Western *Länder* were not effective (von Borries 1993, 1999: 347–349).

With regard to the *Aufarbeitung*, i.e. the pursuit to come to terms with, the 40 years of the GDR, the *Youth and History* survey shows that East German youth do not reject GDR-connected values as readily as their West German peers. They share something of the collective memory of the period, and are likely to want to study it. However, no real GDR-nostalgia was apparent in the data (von Borries 1999: 347–349).

### From exclusive to inclusive curricula?

As history is used for identity building, any grand narrative diffused through a school curriculum tends to reinforce a uniform identity. Those with no place or role in the grand narrative will be excluded from the historical community. They either face a sense of double consciousness or lack resources to face up to their past. As the rationality of future expectations is dependent on a sense of the interdependence of the past, present and future, those who are excluded lack an important asset for the building of future expectations (Rüsen 1994: 70–71).

In order to be socially and politically inclusive, a history curriculum must recognize *alternative* narratives of the past. Only in this way will people with different experiences be included in a historical community; where the past is both shared and multi-faceted, discussion can occur in an open space, and the future can consist of options. But, such a curriculum implies a critical community that is harder to govern than a community with a uniform identity. It tends to be risky to those in power.

My study of two post-communist communities may illustrate two crucial questions about the identity politics of history curricula:

- Is there a post-1990 tendency for nationalism to substitute for Marxism–Leninism as the frame narrative of a history curriculum?
- How far is school history expected to be an open critical process rather than identity politics?

In regard to the first question, a positive answer applies to Estonia. In that the independence of 1991 was called a ‘restoration’, the nationalistic interpretation of history from the 1920s and 1930s was re-established in the national history curriculum. History was used to restore a nation-state.

In Germany, the conversion of the historical narrative happened in different ways than in Estonia. Since World War II, the German people have struggled for *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, for a coming to terms with their past. The quest has been shared; it has involved ordinary people at the level of memories, writers and artists, and, not least, politicians (Wengst 1995, Schulz-Hageleit 1996). In the 1990s, a new challenge appeared for history education: to help people to face up to the GDR past and live with it. The German reunification of 1991 did not bring any outspoken national rhetorics into the public arena. Instead, the removal of the Marxist–Leninist frame of interpretation was followed by a generally liberal approach, including multi-perspectivity and alternative narratives of the

past. The curriculum was based on the idea of inclusiveness. *What was missing, however, was a syllabus with topics that would have provided an opportunity for the former East Germans to deal with their recent past.* There was a gap, a blank spot, in the content, even if the form suited the new Germans.

The socio-political power of history curriculum was recognized both in Estonia and Germany during the political transition triggered by the fall of the Soviet Union. History education was not left as an autonomous intellectual field in either of the countries. In Estonia, it was needed for nation-building; in Germany, it was needed for educating in political liberalism. But, in each case, a part of the population was excluded from the curriculum. Are national curricula in history inevitably socially exclusive?

In his book *Mythical Past, Elusive Future*, Fűredi (1992) distinguishes between History with a capital 'H' and history with a small 'h'; he sees 'History' as an abuse and 'history' as offering a good, emancipatory use. 'History' refers to grand narratives, 'history' to a critical history that embraces multi-perspectivity. It is only through a critical study of history that people can become free (Fűredi 1992).

However, since the 19th century, one big *H* in a curriculum has tended to be substituted by another big *H*—nationalism by communism and vice versa—rather than the conversion of History to history. Is this the outcome of the search for political power, or do people need a significant common denominator, in the form of an ideology, in order to make sense of history?

Foucault's thesis of an ubiquitous power-knowledge suggests that power cannot be credited to any single intentional agency (Foucault 1972). Institutions like the school are simply embodiments and mediators of the power-knowledge. In schools, rhetorical power is identifiable with the curriculum: a curriculum is power, with a potential to create unity of thought and action, but, at the same time, with a tendency to exclude individuals and groups who hold to an alternative knowledge. There is no way out from the grip of power.

The alternative Habermasian view assumes a recognizable personal agency behind a curricular power. It can be a political party in a government, a powerful interest group, or a social institution, e.g. the school itself. The Habermasian view, however, acknowledges and seeks a civil society as a counterforce to established institutions. Civil society is an open space for the communication and sharing of narratives; as applied to schooling, a school which is an open space becomes socially inclusive.

Curricular power can thus, in theory, be concentrated or dispersed. States were the main agents of curricular reform in my examples. However, in the case of Estonia, civil society expressed the wish to have its past presented and mediated in a new way, a history that would be viable in a new situation. When Estonians debated school history in mass meetings, they were working within an open social space and dispersing curricular power. In the new German *Länder*, curricular reform occurred partly because the old history had lost its credibility.

But, although the new, reformed curricula seemed to arise from people's aspirations, they did not become socially inclusive. In Germany,

the 'Ossies' were deprived of their right to an elaborated account of the 40 years of the GDR and, instead, were asked to identify with West German history. In Estonia, two generations of the Russian-speaking minority were excluded from the 'new' story of Estonia.

These new exclusions show the problems imminent in the identity-politics around school curricula. The school is expected to support social cohesion by providing the common elements needed for identity-formation. But, individual identities in contemporary societies are multi-layered; society is a mosaic rather than a monolith. A sense of togetherness requires a Habermasian shared open space of interaction, rather than common lessons. A curriculum in the service of direct identity-politics will be inevitably questioned, and even discredited, by groups who see themselves outside its narrative. A critical curriculum may well achieve *inclusive* education.

## Note

1. I spent several periods of 2–6 weeks in the two countries, reading documents, papers, and periodicals, as well as interviewing history educators in the universities and pedagogical academies. In Estonia, the research was undertaken in Tartu and Tallinn; in Germany, I worked in Rostock, Greifswald, Erfurt, and Berlin. Empirical evidence of what happened to historical identity after the changing narratives is provided by the extensive all-European research project *Youth and History* (Angvik and von Borries 1997) which administered its surveys in 1995. As both Estonia and the new *Länder* of Germany were included in this study, I will use data from that study to draw some conclusions about the significance of history in the post-communist situation.

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