Towards a theoretical framework for comparing historiographies: Some preliminary considerations.

Chris Lorenz

Introduction

In his recent book *Making History in Twentieth-Century Quebec*, the author, the historian Ronald Rudin from Montreal starts his introduction with the following somewhat paradoxical observation: 'The point has often been made that history occupies a privileged place in Quebec culture. The motto of the province – "*Je me souviens*" (I remember) is but one indicator of this reverence for the past. Another is the special status still reserved in Quebecers'collective memory for Abbé Groulx, the first full-time university professor of Quebec history, more than twenty-five years after his death. In spite of this interest in the past, however, no single volume has yet been dedicated to a comprehensive analysis of Quebec historical writing over the course of the twentieth century. During this period historical writing was increasingly carried out, throughout much of the Western world, by people who viewed themselves as professionals engaged in a 'scientific' endeavour'[1]. And then, of course, the author informs his readers that the book they are about to read is the first book containing this comprehensive analysis of Quebec historiography.

Now, assuming for the moment that Rudin's observations of Quebec are correct[2], he points at the remarkable fact that at the end of the 20th century the privileged place of *history* in Quebec does *not* imply a similar privileged place for Quebec-*historiography* (the history of history writing). In his book Rudin develops an explanation for this apparent contradiction. This explanation basically goes something like this: the 'Quiet Revolution', that has revolutionised Quebec society since the 1950's, has also revolutionised Quebec-historiography by producing so-called 'revisionist' historians. These 'revisionist' historians have been promoting themselves as 'scientific experts' meanwhile profiting from the unprecedented

1

expansion of the universities. At the same time, however, they turned their back on Quebec's specific traditions. Instead of emphasising the continuing particularity of 'the French fact' in Anglo-Saxon North America, like most of their predecessors had done, the revisionists started stressing Quebec's essential 'normality'. They replaced Quebec's traditional discourse of *difference*, centred on the emphasis on '*la survivance'*, by a brand-new discourse of *normality*, centred on the emphasis on Quebec as a normal modern, Western society.

This change from a fixation on Quebec's difference to a fixation to Quebec's essential normality was a real 'paradigm shift' and Rudin interprets this shift both as a product and as a producer of a new collective identity of Quebec. Traditional Quebec-history, centred on the French period and the consequential defeats against the British, was pushed aside by the history of 'modern' Quebec, starting around the 1850's and centred on the unfolding process of industrialisation, urbanisation and economic rationalisation.

At the end of his book Rudin signals a recent but growing unease among the younger Quebec-historians with this type of revisionist approach, because the revisionists' apparent obsession with Quebec's 'normality' obfuscates its particular historical and cultural characteristics. Besides Rudin criticises the revisionists for their lack of a sound reflection on their own trade, Quebec-historiography itself. Their lack of reflexivity manifests itself in a contradiction: *if* it is true, as the revisionists say, that Quebec has been surprisingly 'normal' and modern for at least one century and a half, then how can it be that Quebec has produced a 'normal' scientific historiography *only* since the rise of revisionism, that is: after the 'Quiet Revolution'? This last conviction has also been part and parcel of revisionist writings, meaning that the predecessors of revisionism had been amateurs and partisan historians while the revisionists were the first real 'scientific' historians of Quebec. Rudin thus ends his book by criticising the revisionist historians for their lack of self-reflection. So much for Rudin's analysis of Quebec-historiography.

Here I have chosen Rudin's analysis of revisionist Quebec-historiography in order to introduce some *general* problems of comparative historiography, which are relevant for theorizing historical consciousness. However, I must inform the reader from the outset that my remarks in case respect do *not* constitute a theoretical framework in any stringent sense. The most I can offer here are some clarifications of questions and concepts, which may be useful when comparing historiographies[3]. Now, which general problems of comparative historiography am I referring to?

The *first general theme* brought up by Rudin is the *relationship between historical consciousness* in a broader societal and cultural sense - sometimes identified by the term *collective memory[4]* - at the one side and *professional history* at the other. This relationship definitely needs to be addressed because professional historians are far from the *only* producers of historical consciousness. From its beginning professional history has been in competition with several *other* representational forms of history, such as myth, literary fiction and 'amateur' forms of history (including the histories handed over from generation to generation in families and '*Stammtisch*'-histories)[5]. Moreover, since the sudden rise of cultural studies, the study of the past is also practised by professionals other than historians, such as literary critics and anthropologists, causing some alarmist reactions[6]. Since television and the film have replaced the book as the most important media of information, the non-professional forms of historical representation are gaining an ever-increasing influence on the formation of historical consciousness. In this arena no professional book can compete with films as *JFK* or *Schindler's List*. In this sense the *media* of representation have had a profound influence on the *content* of representation of the past.

This theme is an important one for at least two reasons. The first reason is that it concerns the *relationship between the production and reception of historical representations* (including the schoolbook versions of professional history). The issue here is that we can only determine the influence of professional historiography on historical consciousness *in relation* to the other influences. The second reason is that the relationship between the production and reception of the various sorts of

historical representations may also tell us something important about the *contents* of professional historiography. It is my hypothesis that one important problem with professional history nowadays is connected with its *neglect* of several domains of human experience, which are regarded as crucial for our modern age. I am hinting at *experiences of facing the extreme*, also labelled as liminal, catastrophic and traumatic experiences or the experience of the sublime. These domains of experience seem to escape the grips of 'normal' professional history, probably because these types of experience usually leave little controllable documentary traces -except for the individual stories about these experiences. This circumstance may explain why the experience of trench-warfare has primarily been documented in (memoir) literature written by former participants and not in 'normal' history books. It may also explain why the experiences of the modern concentration and extermination camps has been dominated by literary and not by historical representations.

However this may be, I shall argue that the relationship between professional historians and their societies can be analysed in a fruitful way by the *concept of collective identity*. Although the concept of identity, including collective identity, is also hotly debated[7], I think it is fundamental for the analysis of the practical functions of history. Through the concept of identity the three time dimensions of past, present and future can plausibly be connected, as has long been emphasized by Jörn Rüsen. The basic idea is that professional historians are both products *and* producers of the collective identities of the cultures they are part of (the very same idea that Rudin formulated in relation to Quebec).

The *second general theme* brought up by Rudin is the *practical function of historiographical discourse*. In identifying both the traditional *discourse of difference* and the revisionist *discourse of normality* in Quebec-historiography, he touches on the relationship between history and collective identity. Difference simply presupposes sameness or identity and the same holds for normality. Now, whenever the normality of a nation or of a state turns into an issue, this is the surest indication of a widespread suspicion of its *ab*normality. Only people whose normality is being

questioned seriously - by themselves and /or by others - are inclined to debate the issue. The postwar obsession of Germany with its *Normalität* is a paradigmatic example.

The same story holds for the discourse of difference: whenever individuals and collectives transform their difference into an issue, this is the surest indication that their experience of being different is under threat. This circumstance may explain why the discussions about identity issues are unevenly distributed in space and time. So both the discourses of normality and the discourse of difference are symptoms of perceived threats of identity alias *crises of identity* From a comparative point of view it may be worthwhile to note that we do not only find these discourses in Quebec-historiography, but also in English-Canadian historiography – in the discussion about 'limited identities'[8] – and extensively in German historiography[9]. So Rudin's second theme too leads to question the relation between history and identity.

I shall deal with the relation between history and identity in two steps. First I shall dwell on some of the *conceptual* characteristics of the slippery notion of identity in order to elucidate its fundamental *multiple* character. This *multiplicity* is essential for our understanding of multiplicity in historiography. In the second step I shall fill the concept of historical identity with some *material* content. In this part of my contribution I shall address the relationship between different forms of collective identity, especially national identity, religious identity, class identity etc. Further I shall identify some categories and problems that appear useful when comparing historiographies.

The concept of historical identity

When we are referring to the identity of individuals and collectives, we refer to the properties that make them different from each other in a particular frame of reference. It is on the basis of their particular set of properties that we can identify

them *as* individuals and tell them apart. Identity or sameness and difference or otherness, therefore, presuppose each other: without identity there is no difference and without difference there is no identity. For example, the notion of personal identity or of a 'self' presupposes the notion of the 'non-self' or of the 'other'. Therefore there can be no Other in any *absolute* sense, because the concepts of the Self and of the Other are conceptually related[10]. Identity and difference are thus fundamentally *relational* concepts and are, as such, fundamentally opposed to *essentialist* concepts (which imply that e.g. nationhood and ethnicity are invariant essences). When one locates historical understanding between the poles of familiarity and strangeness, as has been usual in the tradition of *Historismus*, this characterisation can directly be connected to the dichotomy of Self (familiarity) and Otherness (strangeness). And the fundamental multiplicity of descriptions of identity can also be connected to its relational quality, because one can relate any Self to various Others.

This relational quality, of course, also holds for the notion of *collective identity*. We can identify an 'in-group' - a 'we' - only *in relation to* an 'out-group' - a 'they'. There can only be *inclusion* in a collective if there is at the same time *exclusion*. The notion of a 'limited identity', that has popped up in the English-Canadian discussion, is therefore a *category mistake* because identity is limited *by definition*.

In history we can observe the relational character of collective identity concretely because we can trace the demarcations of in-groups from out-groups *in statu nascendi*. The discourses on national identity are a case in point. For instance, the discourse on German national identity in early 19th century was conducted by opposing characteristics of the Germans to characteristics of the French. In the discourses on Dutch identity, to take another example, we observe a change from opposing the Dutch to the French in early 19th century to opposing the Dutch to Germans from late 19th Century onwards. Similar observations probably pertain to the discourse on the Canadian identity, where the US often functions as the identity *ex negativo*. So we can observe that representation of collective identity is closely

related to particular *other* collective identities in a *negative* way. So identity is constructed by negation, as Spinoza, Hegel and Foucault argued some time ago.

This also holds for the special cases in which a new identity is constructed by negating one's *own* former identity. This phenomenon is not unusual in the aftermath of traumatic experience: both individuals and collectives may try to start a 'new life' by adopting a new identity. This transformation is usually accompanied by publicly acknowledging past 'mistakes' and by trying to make up for them. The Federal Republic of Germany offers a clear historical example because it defined itself politically as the democratic negation of totalitarian Nazi-Germany. Because undoing the past is impossible by definition, material reparations for past misdeeds and mourning - *Trauer* - is all that is left in the end.

In history this *negative bond* between collective identities is often connected to some sense of being under threat and is therefore embedded in power-relations. The Germans and the Dutch in early 19th century, for instance, had recently had bad experiences with France, but later in the 19th century many Dutch started worrying more seriously about the expanding German Empire. As mighty neighbours are usually perceived as (at least potentially) threatening, the negative aspects of collective identities are probably most outspoken among the less powerful collectives. And because power-relations may change over time, we can also expect parallel changes in the discourses of national identities.

This *negative bond* between different collective identities - this need of a 'negation' in articulating one's own identity - also helps to explain another important historical phenomenon, that of the collective *exclusion* of minorities by majorities-ranging from discrimination to expulsion and annihilation - especially in periods of crisis. These minorities are usually represented as some kind of '*aliens*' or '*strangers*', who pose a threat to the very identity of the majority[11]. From this angle the simultaneous rise of nationalism and of popular anti-Semitism in the 19th and 20th century is not accidental, nor the fact that anti-Semitism was especially virulent in regions with suppressed forms of nationalism, like in East-Central Europe. As we

shall see in the second part of my contribution, weak nations may also adapt to mighty neighbours in another way by defining themselves as 'blends' of neighbouring cultures or as international mediators. Their collective identity is then defined not primarily by *negating* other identities but instead by *absorbing* them[12]. Nevertheless, the need to specify the own identity in the mix of others then still remains.

Now before we turn to the concept of *historical* identity it is important to keep in mind that *historical* identity is just *one* type of identity, next to others. Individuals, for instance, can also be identified through their *biological* identity, that is their DNA-profile. And in a not so distant past serious attempts have been made in order to identify collectives in terms of racial identity. So the identification of individuals and collectives in terms of *historical* identity is not self-evident and therefore requires an explanation. Many historians are inclined to forget this fact, because it means that doing history needs an explanation and a justification[13].

Be that as it may, when we are talking about the *historical* identity of individuals and collectives, we refer to a type of identity that is defined by its *development in time*. The paradigm case of historical identity can therefore be conceived on the model of personal identity (although we always must be very careful not to attribute the properties of individuals to collectives). The identity of a subject consists of the set of characteristics, which the subject develops over time in interaction with its environment and that set it apart from similar subjects. This set of characteristics is not a random set, if we are talking about *historical* and *personal* identity, but must relate to *important* characteristics. It is also possible in principle to identify individuals through their fingerprints or iris, but we would not associate personal identity with properties of that kind.

The same holds for the concept of historical identity. In both cases identity does not just mean telling individuals apart from each other(i.e., describing *numerical* identity), but it means a *characterisation* of individuality (i.e., describing a *qualitative*

identity). It is no accident, therefore, that the biography, in which an individual develops a personal identity in time, has often been regarded as the paradigm of doing history (by Dilthey, for instance).

Historical identity thus has a paradoxical quality, because it is *identity through change in time*. When we are referring to the historical identity of Canada, we are thus referring to a collective, which *retained* a particular identity over time in its interactions with its environment - although Canada *changed* at the same time. *Historical identity* is therefore essentially *persistence through change* or the *identity of identity and non-identity*, to quote the apt Hegelian formulation of Odo Marquard[14].

Historical identity between particularism and universalism

The fact that individuals and collectives can be described in terms of particular characteristics, constituting *unique* identities, of course, does not mean that collective identities can be described in just *one* way. The mode of description is always dependent on the frame of reference that is used by the historian. Through the frame of reference the historian constructs implicit or explicit relations between his case and others. Within the framework of Canada, for instance, Quebec can be described as its province with a French-speaking majority, or as the only province with a formal status as a 'distinct society' - thus constructing a relation between Quebec and the other provinces of Canada's. Within the framework of the New Nations, however, Quebec can simultaneously be described as the *only* New Nation in the New World that did *not* attain political sovereignty (as Gérard Bouchard recently argued[15]). Bouchard thus constructs a relation between Quebec and nations like New Zealand and Australia. History *itself* does not force a historian to use the first or the second frame of reference. It is rather the other way around: what history looks like is more or less *defined* by its representations (although, of course, history in turn defines the range of *plausible* representations). The frame of reference in representations is entirely dependent on the *choice* of the historian (although the choice may be an

unconscious one, when the historian lacks the imagination to see the past differently from the way he or she does)[16].

The fact that individuals and collectives can be described in terms of unique identities does neither imply that they cannot be described as *similar*. Actually, this emphasis on similarity instead of on particularity was dominant in the Enlightenment historiography, when the diversity of so-called 'national characters' was basically seen as the variety of a common human species. The variety of 'national characters' was basically interpreted as the variety of their location on the developmental path of 'civilisation'. Only *after* the Enlightenment, under the influence of Romanticism, the particularity of each 'national character' was anchored in a particular language and this particular language was next transformed into a nation's *essence.* What the various 'national characters' had in common - their common humanity - then faded into the background (only making its come back in our 'post-national' rediscovery of universal human rights). The politically emancipatory contents of the idea of the nation also evaporated after 1815; after all, the idea of the nation had been the justification of modern representative democracy and was criticised by the conservatives precisely because of that reason. Only in the second half of the 19th century, nationalism was discovered by conservatism as an effective ideology in its struggle against universalism and democracy.

To all appearances the opposition between the universalist outlook of the Enlightenment and the particularistic outlook of Romanticism is still with us in historiography today. This opposition may be located in the various weights a historian attributes to the factor of ethnicity within the nation. Civic representations of nationhood are a direct offspring of Enlightenment universalism while ethnic representations owe more to the particularism of Romanticism[17]. The same tension can be located in the debate about so called post-national identities (like the 'European identity' and perhaps even a 'NAFTA identity').

When we stick to the representation of national identity, the case of Canada offers an example. One can write a history of Canada as the history of *the* Canadian nation - the only legitimate way to write Canadian history according to historians like Granatstein. By contrast, many Quebec historians seem to prefer to write the history of Canada as the history of a federation originating in *two* nations - the British and the French. According to others this representation of Canada is inadequate, because the First Nations were here long before the French and the British arrived. Therefore, the history of Canada is the history of a multitude of ethnic groups and can better be written as the *History of the Canadian Peoples* - in the *plural*[18].

Canada's past can thus be represented from a national, a bi-national and a multi-ethnic perspective or frame of reference, each with its own blend of universalism and particularism. Therefore, in historiography we are faced with the problem of how to *integrate* the different perspectives, if we are not satisfied with the observation that historical narratives just look different. As a ground rule, I think, that representations, which integrate *more* relevant perspectives than competing representations in a coherent and balanced manner, are to be preferred. The more distinct voices of relevant 'Others' are included in a collective identity, the better is the quality of its representation. For the moment I can only indicate my view on multiple perspectives in historiography in a few words:

First, the fundamental fact that historians are faced with a choice between different perspectives does *not* mean that this choice is free from *empirical considerations*, i.e. free from the evidence. It only means that although historical evidence does not *determine* the choice of perspective in history, the evidence *restricts* the choices. Second, the role of empirical considerations does not mean that the choice of perspective is free from *normative considerations*. This would be very implausible *a priori*, because representations of identity offer an *orientation in time* (as Rüsen rightly emphasises) and time implies past, present and the future. The choice between perspectives can therefore usually be connected to the identity politics of the historian (and neither the so called 'end of ideology' nor 'the end of history' has

changed this fundamental fact of historiography. Historical identity, therefore, is both a matter of factual and of normative arguments *at the same time*.

The choice between multiple perspectives, therefore, is not *arbitrary*; nor does the possibility of choice mean that one perspective is as *good as another*. The 'underdetermination' of the perspectives by the evidence and the role of normative considerations only implies that historians are forced to *justify* their perspectives explicitly by arguments. This, again, can only be done by arguing for a perspective in relation to *others*. Since history has lost what we could call its 'epistemological innocence' – that is the idea that historians are capable of 'just telling like it really was' - historians are forced to become self-reflective, whether they like it or not. 'Doing history' has become more 'philosophical' in this sense, because representing history implies presenting a debate, that is: presenting the various ways in which the past has been represented in time. The borderlines between 'plain' history and historiography have therefore become more porous than before. Third, and last, respect for the evidence (and for the methodological rules) remains paramount as long as historical representations claim to be scientific, that is: are presented as claims to knowledge with a *universal* validity[19]. This claim to universal validity is the basis of all scientific historical debates. Although history is about identity, therefore, "identity history is not enough", to quote Eric Hobsbawm[20]. So much for the problem of multiple perspectives in historiography for the moment.

Bouchard's description of Quebec as the only New Nation that did *not* attain statehood, by the way, offers a concrete illustration of what I have said earlier on about the role of *negation* in the construction of collective identity. Bouchard's description of Quebec is a clear example of a collective that is characterised in terms of a *negative* property, that is: in terms of what a collective is *lacking* in comparison to others, in Bouchard's case: statehood. Here there is a remarkable parallel between Quebec and German historiography, because Germany has long been characterised by historians like Hans-Ulrich Wehler as the *only* modern society in the West that did *not* develop some kind of parliamentary democracy on its own. In this sense

Germany contrasted with other 'modern' countries, like France, England and the US. Instead of a democracy Germany developed aggressive authoritarian regimes, like the German Empire of 1871 and last but not least the Third Reich[21].

This comparison between the historiography of Quebec and Germany suggests that when a collective identity is explicitly characterised in terms of a 'missing' property, this is a property that is highly valued by the historian - statehood in Bouchard's history of Quebec and parliamentary democracy in Wehler's history of modern Germany. In both cases the 'missing' property is represented as a consequence of a 'false' development in comparison with 'good 'developments elsewhere. So both cases show nicely how the construction of a collective identity is *negatively* related to other collective identities and is thus based on comparisons - implicit or explicit. Both cases illustrate that history writing may be comparative, even when it is concerned with one particular case.

Historical identity: ingredients for the comparison of historiographies

Now I come to the second part of my contribution that concerns the empirical forms *of historical identity*, as we confront them in historiography. In this part I want to address the question how we can bring some order in the multiplicity of historical representation. This order, however, is not easy to produce and I can only suggest some dimensions and problems, which might be useful in comparing historiographies – which is the only way to establish what is specific and what is general of individual national historiographies.[22] In order to do so we have to develop some framework in which historiographies can be 'marked' and compared to each other. For this task we need some ways to classify historiographies and thus some kind of conceptual matrix. My aim is to suggest some dimensions for such a matrix and to identify some of the problems we are likely to face. Alas, we shall soon discover that there are quite a few of those.

For reasons of efficiency I shall take national historiographies - history writing in the frame of the nation state - as a general point of reference, because that is the

most usual point of departure in professional historiography. I shall propose to use the *axes of space and time* as the first and most general dimensions for ordering the different sorts of historiography. Because history implies a location in space and time, all objects of historical representation have spatial and temporal characteristics, which can in principle be used as a basis for comparison. Next to space and time I shall propose some other non-spatial dimensions, like religion, class, race and gender. At the end of my contribution I'll deal with some aspects of the dimension of time.

The spatial classification of historiographies: problems with the nation.

When we take the historiography of the nation-state as our point of spatial reference, we can differentiate between historiographies on a *sub-national* level - like villages, cities and regions - and units on a *supra-national* level - like multi-national empires, particular subsets of nations (like the New Nations), continents, cultures, civilisations and last but not least: the world. So we can construct an orderly scheme containing a sub-national, a national and a supra-national level. Applied to concrete forms of historiography, however, we confront at least three kinds of problems, which complicate this scheme in practice. The first problem is the problem of the ideological load of various spatial concepts; the second problem is the problem of the double meaning of some spatial concepts and the third and last problem is the problem of the essentially contested nature of some spatial concepts, the nation in particular. I'll deal with these problems in this order.

The *first* problem, that of the *ideological load of some spatial concepts*, has been put on the agenda by Edward Said in his analysis of the notion of the 'Orient'. He showed that although most spatial concepts look quite neutral and innocent at first sight, they often have carried important ideological and political implications. As politics has traditionally contained a very important spatial dimension, this political dimension of spatial orderings was perhaps to be expected. Like 'the Orient', the

notion of 'the primitive', 'the savage' and the 'barbarian' have fulfilled similar ideological functions in the colonial encounter, because - like 'the Orient' - they were used as the justification of the domination of 'the primitive' by its supposed opposite: the 'civilised' part of the world ('the Occident'). In European history of the 20th century spatial concepts like ‚Mitteleuropa' and 'Asia' have fulfilled similar ideological functions, implying claims of political hegemony. Perhaps the spatial notion of 'the wilderness' versus 'civilisation' has played a similar role in North-American history.

The *second* problem with the spatial scheme refers to the fact that the spatial scope of an historical work is not always what it seems. This problem is important when, for instance, we would like to assess the relationship between regional and national historiographies in, for instance, Canada. What makes such an assessment complicated is the fact that historians may cloak the history of a region as the history of a nation. In that case the micro-cosmos of the region functions as a stand in for the macro-cosmos of the nation. For instance, a history of Holland - the western province of the Netherlands – has been presented as the history of the whole Netherlands. In a similar manner the history of Prussia has been presented as the history of Germany. And may be there are histories of Ontario parading as histories of Canada. The spatial unit therefore may thus function as a *pars pro toto*. This problem may complicate the classification of historiographies on basis of spatial marks seriously.

The *third* and perhaps most troubling problem in our spatial scheme is the essentially contested character of its central concept: the nation. The nation belongs to the same category as notions like 'freedom' and 'democracy' that also refuse unambiguous definition. Therefore, I can only signal the problem here. The fundamental *problem* in the discourse on the nation is that *the nation does not necessarily coincide with the state or even with the nation-state*. Sometimes spatial units at a sub-state level, like provinces (Quebec, for instance) or tribal areas (the 'First Nations', for instance) are represented as nations. And sometimes nations (like the British or the German nation in the 19th and the first half of the 20th century or the

Albanian and the Kurdish nation in the present) are represented as supra-national units, that is: units exceeding the borders of a nation-state. The nation therefore has a very fuzzy extension.

To make the definitional problems of the nation still worse, there are a few collectives identified as nations *without* a ' place of their own', that is: without an identifiable spatial anchor. The Jews and the Sinti and Roma are well-known examples in European history. So although the rule is that nations are usually associated with some spatial location, there are also exceptions to this rule.

These definitional issues could perhaps be regarded as only annoying, if there were no serious practical problems attached to them. This happens to be the case, because the issue of *collective identity* – and especially of national identity - is firmly connected to the issue of *collective rights*. Since collective identity is regarded as the *basis* and as the *justification* of collective rights – including political autonomy - issues of collective identity may have serious political implications. The history of nationalism presents a clear case (and therefore there is an intimate historical relationship between the rise of the historical profession and the rise of the nation-state). Because representations of collective identity usually are anchored in the past, the representation of historical identity may have serious political implications too. This is, of course, evident in Canada, where the claim to political autonomy of the Quebecois has always been based on the representation of the French-speaking majority as a nation[23]. By implication, according to this view, Canada *is* not a nation, but only *contains* nations - in the plural[24].

The 'First Nations' offer another clear example of the political implications linked to the representation of collective identity: the Nisga'a Treaty of 1998, that restored the collective rights of this First Nation to its former heartland, offers a clear example[25]. I cannot enter into this example here in greater detail, but I trust that my remarks suffice to underscore the practical dimension of historical representation.

Of course it is not the task of professional historians to *solve* these practical issues - this is a matter of politics - but I do think that it is a task of professional historians to clarify the different historical representations in case - again in the plural. Historians do not have a special task in *solving* political problems, but as professional specialists of the past they have the task of *clarifying* the historical roots of political problems. I do not say this is their *only* task, only that it is a very important one. In practice this amounts to the identification and the integration of the different and often conflicting perspectives pertaining to present day issues. This identification and combination of perspectives is the most practical meaning of striving for *objectivity* in history that I know of. Striving after objectivity in this sense is even a necessary condition for scientific history, because striving after truth is not enough[26]. This, by the way, would at the same time be my interpretation of *furthering* the cause of 'historical consciousness', because 'objective' history in this sense furthers the understanding of the historical origins of present day problems.

The attempt to classify historiographies on bases of the spatial dimension has thus led us to and through the swamps of the nation into the battlefields of historiography. We can conclude that up to a degree the battles for space in the past are still continued in their present-day historiographical representations. This circumstance suggests that it is neither realistic nor reasonable to expect consensus in historiography; as in politics, the most we can strive for is a sound knowledge of the different points of view, leading to a maximum of empathy and to mutual understanding of past and present positions. This can only be achieved, as I argued earlier on, by presenting history in the form of a debate between different and often conflicting representations. This mode of presentation is not only fit for university classes, but also for history education in school. I must admit that to me this was a real surprise, because often I have heard the argument that young children first must get *one* picture of the past before raising the problem of alternative pictures.

The battle for space, however, is far from the only serious battlefield in historiography. The multiple representations of what constitutes a nation are just one instance of the general phenomenon of *overlapping* and *competing identities* in historiography. This phenomenon was to be expected because, as I have argued earlier, historical identity can be represented in various (though not arbitrary) ways. Now national identities usually overlap and sometimes compete with *other* spatial identities - such as regional identities (as Buckner recently argued for the case of Canada[27]) or they may compete with other national identities (especially in borderlands). However, they may also compete with *non-spatial* types of collective identity, such as religious, racial, class- and gender identities. And, to complicate this complex situation still further, different representations of the same collective identity may compete and conflict with one another - as in the cases of conflicting ethnic and civic definitions of the nation[28].

Since the Reformation and the separation of Protestantism from Catholicism, there often has been a close relationship between *religious* and national collective identities. Especially since the 19th century among nations with a problematic existence as a political entity, like the Poles, the Irish, the Italians and the Hungars, this relationship between nationality and religion has been especially close. Quebec is far from unique seen in this frame of reference.

In the context of an analysis of 'historical consciousness' in the *broad* sense, the interrelations between national and religious identity may require further attention, because they have more in common than is usually assumed. Recently it has been argued that nationalism and religion are basically comparable phenomena, fulfilling similar cultural functions and using similar cultural mechanisms. The cult of the nation bears a clear resemblance to religious cults: both are centred on a sacred dogma and a sacred object - God and The Nation. Both have sacred symbols and

both have a fixed calendar and fixed places for their cult-rituals - the churches and the national monuments. Besides both cults worship special persons, who are regarded as a kind of 'mediator' between the world of the sacred and the profane world - in the religious cults these special persons are the saints and martyrs and in national cults these special persons are national heroes, especially the ones who founded The Nation and those who sacrificed their lives for The Nation. In both cults violent death in defence of the Sacred Cause is represented as worthy and meaningful - as a sacrifice - because it helps the community in case to continue its cult and its existence[29]. In both cults we therefore usually encounter a cult of the dead. Both cults essentially define *moral* communities, that define the borders of human solidarity. The concept of *character* can thus be regarded as the secularised version of the concept of the *soul* and this also applies to the idea of 'national character'. The relation and competition between national and religious identity therefore is an important one from a comparative perspective.

The *competition of national and ethnic identity with class-, racial and gender identities* are of more recent date than its competition with religious identity. Racial identity has been a competitor of national identity in all colonial encounters (outside and inside Europe) and whenever national identity was conceived of in biological terms, as in the nazi-period. Class-identity has only been a competitor of national identity in the 19th century and under 20th century communism. Gender-identity is quite another case: gender has not been so much a collective identity in competition with the nation, as it has been an analytical category used to determine the gendered nature of representations of the nation (mind the notion of the Fatherland!).

So, collective identity can be defined both in terms of spatial marks and in terms of non-spatial marks and also in terms of combinations of spatial and non-spatial marks. And although pure geographic determinism nowadays finds few defenders, we should not forget that 'national characters' have for a long time been *explained* in terms of geography (and its correlate, the climate), implying a *reduction* of the non-spatial marks to the spatial ones[30]. We still confront echoes of geographic determinism in the discourses on national identity and Montesquieu was certainly

not the last thinker along these lines. For instance, the Dutch national identity has sometimes been located in the struggle of the Dutch against the surrounding waters and Swiss national identity was sometimes located in the Alps[31]. The spatial location of Canada's national identity in the construction of Canadian Pacific Railway is thus not unique and its mythical role may even be compared to that of the construction of the famous Dutch dikes (although the last achievement was never claimed by one company).

Openness and closure of national identity

Next to the characterisation of collective identities in terms of spatial and non-spatial marks, it seems meaningful to analyse representations of national identity on the continuum between '*openness*' and '*closure*' in relation to other nations. In the first part of my contribution I mentioned the fact that some nations have defined their identity as mediators of other cultures, emphasising its openness to *other* national identities. The representation of Canada's national identity as a 'mosaic' is probably the clearest example of this fascinating phenomenon, but seen in a comparative perspective Canada is – again - far from unique.

It is probably significant that the national identity of Belgium, Switzerland and the Netherlands (not a federal state!) have also at times been represented as mediating between various other cultures. In all these cases the nations that represent themselves as 'mediators', are nations with powerful neighbour-states. Therefore the emphasis on the mediating functions and on the relative 'openness' of a nation is probably connected to its relative political weakness. The emphasis on nations absorbing qualities and its international mediating functions may therefore be interpreted as a sublimation of its relative political impotence. This, at least, can plausibly be argued for the history of several small European nations and this interpretation is also backed up by the theory of international relations. This sublimation even may lead to a redefinition of a nation's armed forces into a corps of

UN-peacekeepers (as is exemplified by the Netherlands, the Scandinavian countries and Canada). However this may be, it seems worthwhile to test this hypothesis in an international comparison.

Historical identity and temporal marks

Now I have indicated some spatial and non-spatial marks of collective identity and also the relevance of openness and closure for comparative historiography, I - at last! - want to say a few words about the role of the axis of time. Since historical identity was defined as identity through change in time, at least some clarification of the role of time in comparative historiography is needed. I shall touch on only two issues of historiography connected to time. The first issue is the issue of origins; and the second issue concerns the relationship between time and space. For efficiency reasons I again shall take the historiography of the nation as point of departure.

First the issue of *origins*. Because all representations of historical identity deal with changes in time, all historical representations are faced with the temporal problem of origins. Before the *changes* of national identity can be investigated, its *existence* and thus its *genesis* must be clarified - unless we presuppose that collective identities are naturally given and that their existence does not require explanation. In that case, however, we are by definition no longer dealing with history, so I can leave this possibility aside. Therefore, we expect that a history of a collective identity - say of the Canadian nation - will inform us about its origins in time. However, the question 'where did the Canadian nation come from?', already presupposes what must be clarified, that is: the *existence* of a Canadian nation. But as we have observed, the existence of the Canadian nation is essentially contested, and therefore we can expect the same contest concerning its origins. The two sorts of contests always go together and for good reasons. Canada shares this problem of contested origins with most of the other New Nations (including the new nations in the Old World, which belonged to former multi-national empires, like the nations of the former Habsburg

Empire). Other nations probably have less contested origins, but this too is still a matter of empirical investigation.

The second and last temporal problem I want to signal is the *relation of time and space* in historiography. Although most histories are written within a national frame of reference - without *explicit* comparison to other nations - they usually contain many *implicit* temporal references to other nations. This temporal reference to other histories is contained in notions like being 'late' or being 'modern' or in notions of 'retardation' or of being 'ahead' and so on. In this way the time axes of different histories are often connected to each other and transformed into *one* time axis - that of *worldtime*. Sometimes this can be done in an explicit way, as is done by all sorts of developmental schemes and theories. Modernisation-theory is probably the best known example. The Enlightenment-conception of ongoing 'civilisation' and the Marxist theories of ongoing 'class struggle' provide other examples of the construction of one time axis for the whole world.

Now the construction of one worldtime leads to a direct connection between space and time by transforming *spatial relations into temporal relations,* as Sebastian Conrad has pointed out in his ingenuous comparison of German and Japanese historiography[32]. Through the introduction of worldtime historians have interpreted the *spatial variety* of nations, economies etc. in terms of *different positions on the axis* of time, that is: in terms of *different phases of the same development* (similar to the Enlightenment). Differences in geography are thus transformed into differences in time: being culturally or economically different - say, for example, China in relation to the US –is thus transformed into being 'late' or being 'early'. The result is a so-called '*temporalisation of space*', as Conrad has called this phenomenon. So much for the temporal marks of historical identity.

Summary

In this contribution I have proposed some concepts that may be useful when we are comparing historiographies. The question why to compare historiographies is not addressed in this contribution, because I have dealt with this question elsewhere[33].

I have introduced some important general problems of comparative historiography by the example of Quebec-historiography as analysed by Ronald Rudin. The first general theme concerns the relationship between historiography and historical consciousness in a broader, societal sense. The second and related general theme concerns the practical functions of historiographical discourse. I have argued that the debates among Quebec-historians centred on the difference and/or the normality of Quebec-society, exemplified the identity-construing dimensions of historiography. Next I suggested that both general themes can best be elucidated through the notion of historical identity. Thus, I have proposed to take the concept of historical identity as the bridge between historiography and society; thus it is introduced as the central notion for the matrix of comparative historiography.

Next I defined the concept of historical identity in order to highlight some its fundamental features. I proposed to define historical identity basically as identity through change in time. Further I elucidated the fundamental relational nature of identity. The fundamental multiplicity of historical identity is a consequence of this relational nature.

Next to multiplicity I elaborated on the 'exclusive' nature of identity, leading to its so called 'negative bond' to other identities. Last but not least I pointed at the circumstance that although identity implies particularity, the weighting and evaluation of particular and general characteristics is a completely different matter.

The Enlightenment-tradition tends to emphasise the general features while the tradition rooted in Romanticism tends to put value the particular features of identity.

In the second part of my contribution I identified some fundamental dimensions for a matrix that can be used for classifying types of historiography. I suggested that the dimension of space and time can be taken as the most general marks of historiography, although both types of marks show problems when applied. In theory the spatial dimension can be neatly differentiated into a sub-national, a national and a supra-national level, but this order is threatened in practice by the essentially contested nature of its central level, that of the nation. I argued that representations of the nation are so contested because they are used as justifications of collective rights. Moreover, the spatial scope of historiography appears not always to be what it seems.

Next to the spatial marks of historiography I identified non-spatial marks, like religion, race, class- and gender identities. By this route we confronted the phenomenon of overlapping and competing identities. Religious identity appeared especially to have more in common with national identity than is usually assumed.

The dimension of openness and closure of identities also turned out to be important in history. Nations with powerful neighbours especially may cultivate openness instead of closure and I suggested that this may be interpreted as a sublimation of their relative political weakness.

The last two marks I addressed are related to the temporal dimension. First, I elucidated that all representations of historical identity are faced with the problem of their origins. As a consequence thereof, debates about historical identity always shade off into the debate of its origins. Second, I showed that spatial relations sometimes are transformed into temporal relations through the construction of worldtime. In that case spatial differences are explained as different locations on one time axis. A matrix for comparing historiographies should therefore be aware of this eventual 'temporalisation of space'.

Notes:

[1] Ronald Rudin, *Making History in Twentieth-Century Quebec*, Toronto 1997.

[2] Here I shall not go into the reception of and debate on Rudin's book. See for references to reviews Rudin's answer to his critics in: ' On difference and national identity in Quebec historical writing: a response to Jean-Marie Fecteau', in: *Canadian Historical Review* 80 (2000), .666-676. See also the quite different evaluations of Rudin by Ramsay Cook in *Histoire sociale/ social History* 33 (1999), 120-123 and by Jan Noel in *The University of Toronto Quarterly* 68 (1998-99), nr.1, 523-5.

[3] See for comparative historiography my ' Comparative historiography: problems and perspectives', in: *History and Theory* 38 (1999), 1, 25-39.

[4] For the problematic aspects of the idea of 'collective memory ' see K.L. Klein's fundamental critique in his ' On the emergence of memory in historical discourse', in: *Representations* no.69 (2000), 127-150.

[5] In a research project of the university of Hannover concerning the representations of the Nazi-period, it has been established that the family-versions of the Nazi- past often show very little similarity with the findings of professional history.

[6] Granatstein's *The killing of Canadian history* is matched in Australia by Keith Windschuttle's *The killing of history. How literary critics and social theorists are murdering our past*, New York 1997. In England Richard Evans, *In defence of history*, London 1997, is a better balanced critique of the textualistic approaches of cultural studies. Evans book also lacks the nostalgia for good old national history that characterises both Granatstein and Windschuttle.

[7] See e.g. H. Berding (ed.), *Nationales Bewußtsein und kollektive Identität. Studien zur Entwicklung des kollektiven Bewußtsein in der Neuzeit*, Frankfurt a.M. 1996; A. Assmann and H. Friese (eds.), *Identitäten. Erinnerung, Geschichte, Identität*, Frankfurt a.M. 1998; Lutz Niethammer, *Kollektive Identität. Heimliche Quellen einer unheimlichen Konjunktur*, Hamburg 200. I have dealt with this issue in my book *Konstruktion der Vergangenheit*, Cologne 1997, 400-437.

[8] For the discussion see: P. A. Buckner, ' "Limited identities" revisited. Regionalism and Nationalism in Canadian History', in: *Acadiensis* 30 (2000), 1, 4-16

[9] I have developed this argument in' Comparative historiography'.

[10] See Steve Galt Crowell, 'There *is* no Other. Notes on the logical place of a concept', in: *Paideuma* 44 (1998), 13-29.

[11] Simmel's sociology of the stranger is relevant in this context.

[12] The Belgian historian Jo Tollebeek (Leuven) has identified this phenomenon in an unpublished paper 'National identity, 'international eclecticism and comparative historiography', presented in June 2000 in Oslo, Norway.

[13] I have dealt with the functions and justification of history in my article 'History, forms of representation and functions', in: Neil Smelser and Paul Baltus (eds.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* volume 10, p. 6835 –6842 , Oxford 2001.

[14] Odo Marquard, *Apologie des Zufälligen*, Stuttgart 1986, 361.

[15] Gérard Bouchard, *Genèse des nations et cultures du Nouveau Monde. Essai d'histoire comparée*, Montreal 2000.

[16] I have developed this argument at greater length in' Historical knowledge and historical reality. A plea for "internal realism" ', in: B.Fay a/o. (eds.), *History and Theory: Contemporary readings*, Cambridge 1998, 342-377.

[17] Roger Brubakers sharp dichotomy between (French) civic nationalism and (German) ethnic nationalism has, however, recently been under attack as too schematic . See Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*, Cambridge/Mass. 1992, and Dieter Gosewinkel, 'Staatsangehörigkeit in Deutschland und Frankreich im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert', in: J. Kocka and C. Conrad (eds..), *Staatsbürgerschaft in Europa. Historische Erfahrungen und aktuelle Debatten*, Hamburg 2001, 48-62.

[18] Margaret Conrad, Alvin Finkel and Cornelius Jaenen, *History of the Canadian peoples*, 2 volumes, Toronto 1993.

[19] See Jörn Rüsen, *Grundzüge einer Historik* (3 vols.), Göttingen 1983-9, and my *Konstruktion der Vergangenheit*, Cologne 1997.

[20] Eric Hobsbawm, 'Identity history is not enough', in: idem, *On history*, London 1997, 351-367.

[21] For an overview of this German debate see my article: ' Beyond good and evil? The German Empire of 1871 and modern German historiography', in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 30 (1995), 729-767.

[22] For a recent inventory see Stefan Berger's unpublished paper ' Construction and deconstruction of national historiographies', Strasbourg 2001, and: Lex Heerma van Voss and Marcel van der Linden (eds), *Class and other Identities. Entries to West European Labour Historiography,* Cambridge 2002..

[23] See for instance: Lawrence McFalls, 'Getrennt sind wir stark: Der kanadische Föderalismus als Modell?', in: *Komparativ* 8 (1998), nr.4, 15-31.

[24] See Hamish Telford, *The Federal Spending Power in Canada: Nation-Building or Nation-Destroying?*, Kingston 1998 (Institute of Intergovernmental Relations. Working Paper Series 1999, 4), 12: "Canadians outside Québec seem blissfully unaware that the federal bargain with Québec may have been broken. The majority of Canadians outside Québec have an identity that corresponds to the Canadian state. Indeed, they rather presumptuously regard Canada as *the* nation, much to the consternation of the Québécois. As nationalists, many Canadians outside Québec believe that sovereignty should be vested with the federal government. Many Canadians outside Québec have been highly suspicious of the federal principle and the concomitant notion of shared sovereignty, and they are strong supporters of federal social programs, especially Medicare. Indeed, health insurance seems to have become a part of the Canadian identity outside Québec".

[25] See the special issue on the Nisga'a Treaty of *BC Studies. The British Columbian Quarterly* nr. 120 (winter 1998/99).

[26] The basic argument is that truth is only a necessary but not a sufficient condition for objectivity. See my article: '"You got your history, I got mine". Some reflections on truth and objectivity in history', in: *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* 10 (1999), nr.4, 563-585.

[27] P. A. Buckner, ' "Limited identities" revisited. Regionalism and Nationalism in Canadian History', in: *Acadiensis* 30 (2000), 1, 4-16.

[28] In this context the fact that Germany only changed its ethnic definition of nationhood into a civic one four years ago illustrates the actuality of this issue.

[29] The often vehement reaction towards those who cast doubt on this dogma of ‚meaningful death' – e.g. by authors of anti-war novels – is telling and similar to the reaction towards those who cast doubt on religious dogma's.

[30] See for instance Jacques Bos' recent analysis of the concept ‚national character' in his book *Reading the soul. The transformation of the classical discourse on character 1550 – 1750*, Leiden 2003.

[31] For the debate on Dutch identity see: Rob van Ginkel, *Op zoek naar eigenheid: denkbeelden en discussies over cultuur en identiteit in Nederland*, The Hague 1999. For Swiss identity see Oliver Zimmer, 'In Search of Natural Identity: Alpine Landscape and the Reconstruction of the Swiss Nation', in: *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40 (1998), 637-665.

[32] Sebastian Conrad, *Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Nation. Geschichtsschreibung in Westdeutschland und Japan 1945 - 1960*, Göttingen 1999.