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## Switzerland and the Holocaust: teaching contested history

BERNHARD C. SCHÄR and VERA SPERISEN

This study is about a history textbook which introduces the new transnational master-narrative of Holocaust memory into the classrooms of the German-speaking part of Switzerland. The script of the book entails a replacement of the formerly dominant view of Switzerland as a neutral nation resisting evil in favour of an image that aligns Switzerland with other nations that accept the Holocaust as part of their national history, and combine their efforts to prevent such crimes in the future. However, this process cannot be seen as hegemonic or total since it is fragmented at various levels. On the level of state power, there is no uniform vision of the nation's history. Therefore, the book needed to accommodate its critics to a certain extent. Furthermore, there are institutional rules of history education that restrict a direct transmission of knowledge and promote teaching youths to develop their own views. And then there are the teachers, who have their part in shaping history.

Keywords: textbook research; history education; Holocaust studies; Switzerland; teacher thinking

Hilberg (1992: 256–259) described Switzerland's position during 'the Jewish catastrophe' of the Second World War as that of a 'bystander'. After France surrendered to Nazi Germany in June 1940, neutral Switzerland was practically surrounded by fascist powers. As a result, Switzerland's political, military, and economic leaders were confronted with two major challenges in dealing with the Axis: the fascist powers constituted a military threat to the nation's sovereignty, and the Nazis' systematic persecution and murder of European Jews and other victims posed a moral challenge to anyone who had to deal with the criminal regime. Despite these challenges, the country managed to keep its economy relatively stable, cling to democracy, and maintain its sovereignty throughout the war. There is a broad consensus among historians today that this was achieved through a mixture of armed neutrality, economic collaboration, political accommodation, and a good deal of luck.<sup>1</sup> In contemporary politics and society, however, Switzerland's war history remains contested.

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This paper examines the ways in which this controversial history is taught in schools. For this purpose, we shall first elaborate on the controversy concerning Switzerland's wartime actions and policies, a contentious debate that emerged very soon after the end of the war and was reconfigured in important ways in the 1990s. The second part of this paper investigates how these conflicting views shaped the publication of a 2006 history textbook. The third section provides insight into the way history teachers apply this book to their history classes. We close with a discussion of our findings and a conclusion.

### **Switzerland and the Holocaust: reconfiguring of a contested history**

Since the Second World War, there have been, broadly speaking, two ways of remembering Swiss war history. One way focuses primarily on the military threat, concluding that the Swiss army and government succeeded in preventing Nazi invasion, and the Swiss people endured hardships to secure democracy and freedom. Switzerland is, thus, viewed as a nation of resistance. This view was promoted after the war by the country's political élite in order to direct the myth of resistance towards a new threat in the Cold War, the 'Bolshevik enemy'. To prevent critical investigation into the nation's war history, the Swiss government and leading archivists destroyed historical documents and blocked the release of the remaining ones for decades. Furthermore, authorities sought to impede Swiss and foreign scholars' access to sources in archives in the US and elsewhere. At the same time, Swiss authorities published a number of reports that contained a state-controlled 'official' version of the war period. Consequently, a self-righteous view of the nation's war history dominated Switzerland's collective memory for decades.<sup>2</sup> However, beginning in the 1960s an oppositional war-memory began to take shape among leftist activists, journalists, intellectuals, and (eventually) a new generation of historians. This was made possible by the appearance of new sources in foreign archives. State authorities were no longer able to control the production of historical knowledge (Zala 2003). This new view focused on the moral challenges that the Nazi regime posed for the country's leaders. It stressed the importance of Switzerland's arms industry and transport and financial sectors for the Nazis, as well as the country's policy of rejecting Jewish asylum-seekers at the border until 1944. This view thus highlighted Switzerland's economic collaboration with the Nazis and the political adaptation to the regime's goals (Kreis 1997, Maissen 2005: 97–106, Jost 2007: 166–170).

Although these two views oppose each other, they share one important characteristic. They are both chiefly concerned with the nation: how it dealt with a historical challenge, either military or moral, and what this tells us about 'who we are as a nation'. Although there have been some new ways of looking at the history of Switzerland during World War II—namely by micro- and gender-historians (see, e.g. Burghartz 1998, Stadelmann and Krause 1998, Dejung and Stämpfli 2003, Ziegler 2007, Dejung 2009)—the two aforementioned ways of looking at the problem still dominate much of

the scholarly and public debate. However, due to changes in the global discourse on the Holocaust, as well as shifts in domestic power relations, the two views have been reconfigured in important ways since the end of the Cold War.

On the level of global public memory, the military history of the Second World War has become less important while the Holocaust has come to the fore. Accepting a certain degree of involvement and shared responsibility for the Holocaust and keeping the memory of the Holocaust alive has thus become a necessary condition for nation-states in Europe, the Americas, and elsewhere (Levy and Sznajder 2001, Judt 2005: 803–831, Maissen 2005: 140, Zimmermann 2006, Eckel and Moisel 2008). This global process, which was also supported by NGOs and the media, came to Switzerland in the middle of the 1990s, leading to significant turmoil. In 1995, the World Jewish Congress, US lawyers, and US policy-makers accused Swiss banks of still holding assets of Holocaust victims—the so-called ‘dormant accounts’. Both Swiss and international media<sup>3</sup> picked up the story, increasing public pressure. Other accusations included claims that Switzerland’s arms industry and financial sector prolonged the war through collaboration with the Nazis. Furthermore, Switzerland’s refugee policy was criticized for its turning back of Jewish asylum-seekers during the war years (Maissen 2005: 149–600).

This controversy constituted a foreign policy crisis. In response, the Swiss government and parliament adopted several measures. The most important one for the purposes of this paper was the creation of the so-called ‘Independent Commission of Experts Switzerland—Second World War’ (ICE). It consisted of several distinguished historians from Switzerland and abroad, as well as jurists and economists. At the end of 1996 the Commission was given a broad mandate to investigate ‘the role of Switzerland, particularly that of the Swiss financial centre, as well as ... the manner in which Switzerland dealt with this period [World War II] of its history’.<sup>4</sup> By special federal decree, the Commission had access not only to public archives, but also to all relevant private archives (e.g. in banks, insurance companies) in Switzerland. It received a budget of 22 million Swiss francs (~ US\$15 million at the time) and employed about 120 researchers during the course of its existence (Maissen 2005: 258–270). It had research teams in the US, Poland, Germany, and a number of other countries. The Commission published its findings on various aspects of its mandate in 25 volumes, culminating in a summarizing ‘final report’ in 2002 (ICE 2002). In total, Switzerland’s economic and financial entanglement with the Nazi regime, as well as various aspects of its refugee policy, are laid out on some 11,100 pages. Thus, it is fair to say that the war period constitutes by far the most thoroughly investigated part of Switzerland’s national history. No other subject matter has received financial or personal resources or legal privileges (access to private archives) that are in any way comparable to the ICE’s.<sup>5</sup>

On a domestic level, however, Switzerland’s war history remains the most contested period of the nation’s past. This has to do with a significant shift in political power relations that took place during the course of the historical investigation. Formerly the smallest of the four governing coalition

parties, the national conservative Swiss People's Party, grew to become the strongest party. During the controversy of the 1990s, the party's charismatic leader, Christoph Blocher, gave a speech entitled 'Clarification' (in German: *Klarstellung*) in which he presented his view of Switzerland's record during World War II (Blocher 1997). He argued that the 'critical' aspects of the nation's war history were well known, and that, with some deplorable exceptions, the country's leaders were not to be blamed; they had done a good job in difficult times. Blocher and other party members thus rejected the attacks from abroad and—together with an organized group of historical eyewitnesses—defended Switzerland's role during World War II. They criticized the ICE members for being too young (the logic being that since they had not lived through war time, they did not know what they were talking about), incompetent, and moralistic. One of the party's Members of Parliament (MPs) even suggested the ICE members 'ought to be given a proper beating'.<sup>6</sup> The party also rejected the ICE findings as too one-sided, ideological, and flawed in certain factual aspects (such as the exact number of expelled refugees). One of the party's MPs published several pamphlets in which he accused the ICE of intentionally and purposefully discrediting Switzerland's reputation in the world (Stamm 2003a, b, 2007). This engagement in memory politics was one of the means by which the party managed to double its share of voters from roughly 15 to 30% of the Swiss electorate between 1995 and 2007.

In summary, the 1990s saw a significant reconfiguration of Switzerland's conflicted war-memory. The Holocaust became a common reference point for European and other nation-states to publicly reassure each other that they shared the same values rooted in human rights. In accordance with this new discourse of the late 1990s, several Swiss government members apologized for the country's shortcomings during the Second World War and affirmed the need to face Switzerland's involvement in the Holocaust.<sup>7</sup> This stance was more or less supported by the liberal, Christian, and social democratic parties within the government coalition. The right-wing populist Swiss People's Party was against it. Thus, the formerly oppositional view of the minority became the official view of the majority, and vice versa. With regard to the next section of this paper, it is important to highlight that this conflict does not divide academic historiography. On the contrary, Swiss historians are united in their understanding of this central topic of their nation's history (Zala 2003: 320). In fact, as Kreis (1997) points out, there has never been much dissent among them.<sup>8</sup> So the conflict of memory in Switzerland is also a conflict that separates academic history from the Swiss People's Party. However, since Switzerland is federally (and frequently cantonally) governed by multi-party coalitions, the minority view is not oppositional in the literal sense. The Swiss People's Party is part of the government coalition on the federal level, and in many of the major Swiss cantons. As a result, the conflict of remembrance runs straight through the governing coalition in power. So while academic historians are united in their understanding of Switzerland's war history, the politicians in power are fiercely divided. It is within this context in 2006 that a school textbook, *Hinschauen und Nachfragen. Die Schweiz und die Zeit des Nationalsozialismus im Licht aktueller Fragen* (Bonhage et al. 2006), dealing with this controversial history

appeared. (The book's title can be translated as 'Looking closely and inquiring: Switzerland and the time of National Socialism in light of current questions'.<sup>9</sup>) The next section examines how academic unity and political power struggles shaped this book.

### **Switzerland and the Holocaust in a moderated school textbook**

*Hinschauen und Nachfragen* (Bonhage *et al.* 2006) was written by two of our colleagues at the School for Teacher Education at the University of Applied Sciences, Northwestern Switzerland. They are specialists in history education, and they were assisted by two historians and former members of the ICE staff.

In Switzerland, education is within the jurisdiction of the cantons, which define the goals and subject matter of curricula. Nine years of schooling are compulsory (usually from ages 7–16). History education usually starts in the fifth school year with lessons that combine history, geography, and social sciences. In school years 7–9 (13–16-year-olds), history constitutes its own subject, usually consisting of two lessons per week. After nine school years most youths start their professional training. A minority go on to gymnasiums or technical colleges where they receive further history education. While curricula often prescribe specific textbooks in subjects such as mathematics and languages, this is not the rule for history classes. For example, Zürich, the biggest canton, 'approves' certain history textbooks, including *Hinschauen und Nachfragen*.<sup>10</sup> However, teachers are not obliged to use any one text.<sup>11</sup> To what extent, then, do Swiss history teachers' instructional planning and students' classroom experiences depend on textbooks? This is an empirical question that cannot be answered due to lack of research. One of the main aims of our research project is to shed light on this question. We shall therefore return to it in the third section of this paper, after we discuss the book.

In the case at hand, the Canton of Zürich's Ministry of Education, which was led by a Social Democrat, decided in 2003 to finance and edit *Hinschauen und Nachfragen*. According to the ministry, the main objective of the textbook was to introduce 14–18-year-old pupils to the ICE's findings as well as to the disputes which accompanied its work.<sup>12</sup> The book was published in 2006 and consists of five chapters, each of which offers a different approach to Switzerland's war history. The first chapter presents short biographies of public officers and everyday people from different walks of life who lived during World War II. The second chapter presents an overview of the ways in which some of the major structural developments in Europe affected Switzerland's economic and social history between the First and Second World Wars. The third chapter discusses how Switzerland dealt with its war history, particularly during the crisis of the 1990s. The fourth chapter is the core chapter, summarizing some of the ICE's main findings. The fifth and last chapter gives an overview of how Switzerland and other countries have dealt with the question of compensation for crimes committed during the Holocaust, and in other contexts (such as during the Apartheid regime



in South Africa, or the war in Yugoslavia during the Milosevic regime). Every chapter includes a variety of historical sources and a number of assignments for students.

In Zurich and other cantons, members of the Swiss People's Party tried to inhibit or at least influence the production and implementation of *Hinschauen und Nachfragen*. In response, the Canton of Zurich created an advisory board that supervised the writing of the book. Four out of five board members represented the ICE and scholarly history. The fifth seat was given to a layman, a former conservative MP who was born in 1923 and was supposed to represent the generation that lived during the war. Although he was not a member of the Swiss People's Party, he shared its critical stance on the ICE (Maissen 2009: 16). This means that the production of the book was not entrusted solely to experts who, as we mentioned above, share a common understanding of the subject. A layperson without scholarly qualifications but with an oppositional point of view was given the chance to join the production and thus shape the book. Clearly, the controversies surrounding the nation's war memory accompanied the production of *Hinschauen und Nachfragen*—not only in the realm of politics, but also within the advisory board. Thus, the question is, in what way did these struggles shape the content of *Hinschauen und Nachfragen*? This point needs some elaboration.

*'Looking closely and inquiring'—the book's pedagogic discourse*

According to French sociologist Bourdieu (1977, 1991, 1997), we need to keep in mind that the 'fields' of science and education are affected by political power struggles, but they are not usually determined by them. Their position is one of 'relative autonomy' towards political power. This autonomy is made visible in the sense that educational institutions function according to their own 'rules', which distinguish them from other fields. 'Fields', according to Bourdieu, constitute 'a world of their own', the members of which are joined in a competitive struggle towards a common goal (e.g. the search for 'truth' in science, the quest for power in politics). Every field is governed by formal and informal norms (i.e. rules) that individuals are both subjected to and which they reproduce in their actions within their fields.<sup>13</sup>

A specific rule of the institution of history education can be seen at work in the book's main title, 'Looking closely and asking additional questions'. The authors did not choose the specific subject matter (i.e. Switzerland's wartime history) as the main title; rather, they chose two activities. A thorough analysis of the book's content reveals that the title corresponds to one of three major discourses that structure the book. This discourse builds on approaches to educational theory and history education that have shaped a specific (although contested) culture of historical learning in Germany and the German-speaking part of Switzerland. The general idea is captured in the slogan '*Geschichte denken statt pauken*',<sup>14</sup> which draws attention to the difference between thinking critically about history and merely learning history by rote. According to these theories, history education's main objective should not be to transmit historical knowledge from one generation to the next.

Rather, it ought to help students develop competencies that enable them both to understand how historical narratives are constructed and how to construct their own histories, developing their own interpretations and judgements of aspects of the past that are relevant to them (Körber *et al.* 2007). In short, the main objective of this discourse is to further the intellectual autonomy and methodological abilities of youths to construct and deconstruct historical narratives. In accordance with this discourse, *Hinschauen und Nachfragen* presents five different approaches to the subject, as mentioned above, and a wide array of historical sources and assignments designed to help students develop historical thinking skills.

However, youths cannot be taught to think about history independently, completely outside of authoritative historical knowledge; this is where we can observe how the previously mentioned power struggles within Swiss society shaped the book.

*‘Switzerland and the time of National Socialism’: the book’s muted historiographical discourse*

The historical content *Hinschauen und Nachfragen* is shaped by two discourses: a historiographical discourse and a moral discourse. We discuss the historiographical discourse first. This discourse consists of a historical narrative and is represented in the first part of the subtitle, ‘Switzerland and the time of National Socialism’. Thus, the narrative’s main subject is the nation, Switzerland. This corresponds to the nation’s struggles with public memory, which are also chiefly concerned with the nation. We came to the conclusion that the title is somewhat vague: the wording ‘time of National Socialism’ is very general. Many different aspects of the nation’s history could be indicated by this title: the country’s military history, diplomatic history, and the history of everyday life in Switzerland, to name only a few. However, *Hinschauen und Nachfragen* does not present a plurality of aspects; it focuses on one core issue—the ways in which the nation reacted to the moral challenge of the Holocaust. This is made clear in the Foreword when the authors inform their readers that the book is about the Nazi ‘crimes’, a ‘catastrophe, which is called Holocaust’. They lay out the leading questions of the book as follows:

How did people in Switzerland behave after a friendly neighbouring state turned into a dictatorship, suppressed its political opposition, and discriminated against, expelled, and eventually murdered Jews and other minorities? Could or should government, businesses, or private individuals have acted differently than they did? Who carries which responsibilities and why did decision-makers act as they did? (Bonhage *et al.* 2006: 5; our translation)

These are, in essence, the questions the ICE investigated and answered in more than 11,000 pages of reports. Despite the fact that these are the questions Swiss historiography is most fit to answer, the authors go on to write that they will not deliver ‘ready-made answers’. Rather, the book is meant to ‘encourage and instruct’ its readers to ‘look closely at Switzerland and the time of National Socialism, as well as to inquire into the matter’ (Bonhage



*et al.* 2006: 5; our translation).<sup>15</sup> In other words, readers are supposed to find their own answers to questions that have already been answered by the ICE. To enable their readers to find their ‘own’ answers, the authors present them with what we called a muted version of some of the ICE findings. By that we mean that none of the chapter titles, advanced organizers, or summaries in *Hinschauen und Nachfragen* carry the ICE’s main thesis: in its final report, the ICE clearly states that Switzerland’s state and economic leaders were largely aware of the consequences of their decisions in dealing with the Nazi regime, and that they had room to manoeuvre. Nevertheless, economic leaders often put economic interests over humanitarian considerations, and Swiss refugee policy ‘not only failed to live up to its own standards [of humanitarian tradition], but also violated fundamental humanitarian principles’ (ICE 2002: 499). The Commission presents a wealth of evidence to support its views. The book, however, communicates these findings in a rather oblique manner in less important parts of the text. For instance, one of the most controversial ICE theses, that Switzerland’s restrictive refugee policy can be explained by the authorities’ anti-Semitic attitudes, is articulated only once in the whole book—in a sub-chapter with the title ‘Reasons for expelling refugees’. The chapter first enumerates various justifications for Switzerland’s refugee policy, as they were articulated by the historical authorities. Then—in the last paragraph, on the last page of the last sub-chapter—the authors present the ICE’s explanation (Bonhage *et al.* 2006: 114). Consequently, the ICE’s scholarly explanation is presented on the same level as the ideological justifications of the former policy-makers.

In addition, *Hinschauen und Nachfragen* is reluctant to offer its readers a clear sense of what is at stake. Informed readers of the book will recognize that it tells the story of how Switzerland’s (mostly centre or right-wing) political and economic leaders were, in a complex but nevertheless *de facto* way, entangled with the Nazi regime. As a consequence, many of them were—regardless of their intentions—in some way functioning in accordance with the Nazis’ goals. However, the authors do not offer explicit interpretational concepts, such as ‘entanglement’ or ‘functionality’. The text merely implies such an understanding, which readers are supposed to come up with themselves.

To summarize, the authors did not apply the pedagogical rule of history education to the ICE’s interpretation of history; they applied it to history itself. To put it differently, the starting point for readers is not something that is already ‘known’, namely that, according to the experts, Switzerland *was* entangled with the Nazi regime in various and complex ways. Consequently, the pedagogical questions are not about the experts’ descriptions and explanations of this entanglement, the soundness of their reasoning, or the implications for the future. Rather, the starting point is construed so as to suggest that nothing is ‘known’, and radically open questions are valid points for inquiry. The authors write in their Foreword that Switzerland ought to ask itself, ‘*whether* government, industry, and private individuals were involved in these crimes or benefitted from them’.<sup>16</sup>

From a pedagogical point of view, both ways of writing the book—*why and how* was Switzerland involved versus *was* Switzerland involved—are

sound. Thus, the explanation for why the authors wrote *Hinschauen und Nachfragen* the way they did has to take political power struggles into account. If the authors had written the book in the first way—helping the readers to critically examine the experts’ answers to the why and how questions—they would have had to present their readers with a clear and explicit account of the ICE’s interpretations and its main analytical concepts, judgments, methods of inquiry, and evidence. Because these theses are politically contested, the book does not present the ICE findings head-on. Rather, it pretends to help readers grapple with a supposedly open, uninterpreted history (to work alongside professional historians, so to speak) while surreptitiously delivering a diluted version of the experts’ interpretations of this history.<sup>17</sup>

*‘In light of current questions’—the moral discourse*

A similar pattern can be distinguished in the second discourse that shapes the content of *Hinschauen und Nachfragen*. We called it a moral discourse because it is essentially about the norms and values of human rights and ‘civilized’ society. As Judt (2005: 803) argues, ‘Holocaust recognition’ has become a ‘contemporary European entry ticket’. What he means is that European nations mutually define themselves as being ‘European’ (which is equated with being ‘civilized’) by publicly condemning the Holocaust, accepting a certain amount of responsibility for it, and adopting measures to keep the memory alive (e.g. Holocaust museums and education). The downside of this discourse, according to Judt (2005), is as follows: ‘To deny or belittle the Shoah—the Holocaust—is to place yourself beyond the pale of civilized public discourse’ (p. 804). The authors of *Hinschauen und Nachfragen* reproduce this discourse in an interesting passage in the Foreword:

For a long time the Holocaust was considered a crime committed only by the Germans, a crime which the rest of the world had nothing to do with. Since the 1980s, however, many nation-states have begun to discuss why they did not do more to prevent this crime [i.e. the Holocaust], and whether government, industry, and private individuals were involved in these crimes or benefited from them. As a European country and constitutional state, Switzerland is confronted with the task of asking these questions with regard to its own national history.

In another passage they write: ‘This book is part of the universal debate on the Holocaust’.<sup>18</sup> Essentially the authors argue that, since the 1980s, a new norm for being ‘European’ (civilized) has developed. This norm demands a kind of catharsis with regard to the nation’s share of responsibility for the Holocaust. *Hinschauen und Nachfragen* presents itself as an instrument that lives up to the task of joining the group of other democratic, civilized, European nations that have (supposedly) already gone through this painful process. The need for national catharsis is, of course, contested in Switzerland. In the national conservative view of the nation’s war history, Switzerland’s degree of responsibility for the Holocaust is insignificant, and therefore there is no need for catharsis.

The moral discourse of the book shares a similar pattern to that of the historiographic discourse mentioned above: the book pretends to raise open questions, but these questions can only be answered in one way if the respondent is to stay 'civilized'. The phrasing of the questions is significant, as demonstrated by the book's title. Instead of clearly articulating which moral questions are at stake (should Switzerland accept a degree of responsibility for the Holocaust?), the title reads 'in light of current questions'. Since, by definition, all our questions about history are articulated in the present and are therefore current, the wording is redundant, indicating the structural ambiguity of the book.

To return to our main question, How do the conflicted memories of Switzerland's war history shape the book? We have determined that the book does not indoctrinate its readers with an official view and judgement on the subject matter, but it is also not completely unaffected by state power. Rather, the book is in a position of relative autonomy. The autonomy adheres to the pedagogical rules, according to which students should learn to reach their own conclusions about history. However, this autonomy is only relative because the book serves to promote a version of collective memory, values, and national identity that is shared by a majority within state power. However, it does so in a politically prudent and reserved way. It offers no clear frameworks through which to interpret the core issues, and it portrays a sense of radical openness while offering authoritative interpretations and judgements in an implicit manner. This approach can be seen as a concession to the oppositional yet powerful minority view within state power.

### **Switzerland and the Holocaust in the classroom: performing contested history**

We agree with Crawford (2000: 5) 'that there is a need to be careful about assuming that what is written in textbooks gets either taught or learnt'. Within his empirical framework, Crawford suggests that more research should be done on how teachers 're-select, re-define, and re-interpret textbook knowledge in their teaching' (p. 5). However, as far as the German research literature (with which we are most familiar) is concerned, we also agree with Rüsen (2008: 162): 'There is practically no empirical research on the practical usage of school text books'.<sup>19</sup>

In our view this is not only an empirical problem, but also a theoretical one. To analyse how teachers re-define and re-interpret textbook knowledge in their teaching, we need a theoretical framework to guide the collection of empirical data and its analysis. In this section of the paper we first present the theoretical framework that guided our empirical research, followed by a brief case study from data we are still analysing.

In sociological terms, we believe that textbooks can be understood as 'objectifications' of the rules of the institutional and cultural context (the 'fields') within which they were produced. Textbooks thus reinforce the rules of history education by forcing people who live and work within the institutions of this field to deal with them. In the case at hand, we believe

that *Hinschauen und Nachfragen* reproduces the fundamental (and conflicting) objectives central to education in democratic societies. According to Fend's (1980, 2006) 'Theory of Schools', public education aims (among other things) to secure the continuity and functioning of society by transmitting authoritative 'knowledge' and core values from one generation to the next. As we described above, this function can be seen at play in *Hinschauen und Nachfragen* as it transmits—however delicately—an official 'new' version of Switzerland's wartime history as well as the underlying moral values; and to ensure that schools empower youths to become mature citizens who are able to form their own judgements and opinions—even if those opinions contradict those of the older generations. The book performs this function in its pedagogical discourse.

*Hinschauen und Nachfragen* reproduces the central paradox of teaching history: teachers must provide authoritative knowledge, but they must also allow that such knowledge represents only one viewpoint among many. This paradox is characteristic of all history textbooks. However, *Hinschauen und Nachfragen* is unique in its unusually indirect manner of imparting knowledge. From this we can deduce two sets of challenges facing history teachers who work with this book.

- Teachers need to support their students in developing their own interpretations of Switzerland's wartime history. They also need to support their students' attempts at drawing their own moral and political conclusions from Switzerland's wartime history without leaving the realm of 'civilized discourse'.
- Teachers need to do so with a moderated account of the ICE thesis and a neutral account of the moral standards with which Switzerland's wartime history ought to be judged.

Each teacher deals with these challenges differently. To describe and understand these differences we used another concept from Bourdieu's theory of social practice, the concept of 'habitus', an individual's deeply incorporated schemes of perception, thinking, feeling, judgement, talking, and acting. These schemes are acquired during a child's primary socialization in families and schools and during secondary socialization (e.g. professional education). Thus, as an analytical concept, habitus connects social structure with individual subjectivity. Habitus gives individuals sociologically typical and explicable 'dispositions' by which to think, act, and feel.

To explain a social practice, e.g. the practice of teaching history in public schools, two concepts need to be combined. First, one needs to understand the rules of a specific 'field'; second, one needs to understand the habitus of the actors in order to explain the similarities and variances in the way they apply these rules to their actions. In short, *Social practice = Field + Habitus*.<sup>20</sup>

In our project we conducted open interviews with 19 history teachers. We asked them to tell us their impressions of *Hinschauen und Nachfragen* and how they would use it in their teaching. We also explored their understandings of history and history education in general, as well as the subject of Switzerland and World War II in particular. We asked them to tell us what they felt were the main tasks and challenges of their profession. From these data we later reconstructed teachers' core beliefs, concepts, and attitudes

towards their profession, the book, and the subject. In comparing different cases, our aim is to reconstruct different habitual dispositions in order to understand why and how teachers 're-select, re-define, and re-interpret text-book knowledge' (Crawford 2000: 5). Six of the teachers we interviewed allowed us to observe them in class while they tested the book for us. We videotaped these classes in order to analyse how different habitual dispositions translate to actual teaching practice. In what follows, we present one example from the research data as a report on work in progress.

*Ms Weber's structuralist understanding of history*

Ms Weber had about 20 years of teaching experience when we first met her. She teaches students at the gymnasium level, which is the highest level of education in Switzerland. What struck us most was her decidedly structuralist understanding of history. She explained to us that, in her view, 'History isn't about how people acted in the past. Rather history is about structures and stuff' (ID04, 318). 'I try to argue my students out of the idea that history is made by great men' (ID04, 930–933). As far as the subject of the Second World War is concerned, she explained:

It is one of the burdens of my job to make them understand that it wasn't simply Hitler who murdered the Jews; it isn't simply Hitler's fault. ... Rather, I try to explain how historical processes can be manipulated by individuals. ... But history isn't made by individuals. (ID 04, 1018–1034)

Ms Weber's understanding of history and the Second World War belongs roughly to an historiographic tradition which is usually related to the French *Annales* School. Ms Weber was introduced to this tradition of scholarly thinking during her university training in the 1980s. This view is supported by many school textbooks in Germany and the UK that claim that the Holocaust is not properly explained by the intentions of the Nazi regime and ordinary Germans, but is better understood as 'the result of socio-economic and political disintegration of society and state coupled with the rise of National Socialism that suspended notions of morality enabling people to lash out with inhumane acts of persecution and violence' (Crawford and Foster 2007: 36).

While such textbooks would probably serve to support and differentiate Ms Weber's structuralistic stance, *Hinschauen und Nachfragen* does not. On the contrary, the book shares an understanding of history that stresses the importance of individual agency. However, Ms Weber does not recognize the discrepancies between her own concepts and the book's concepts. The reason for that seems to be that she sees a strong dichotomy between disciplinary or 'scientific' knowledge and ideological or political views. Although she finds the composition and parts of the content of *Hinschauen und Nachfragen* confusing (namely the first chapter, which presents short biographies of individuals), she affirms that it is a 'serious' book. In particular, the core chapter 4, which is dedicated to the ICE findings, is 'scientific, and we shouldn't treat the ICE as ideological. It is scientific' (ID04, 1082–1091). Thus, it seems that Ms Weber does not believe that there can



be different or competing perspectives within academic ('scientific') scholarship. She acts with the assumption that, since her understanding of history is scholarly and the book's view is scholarly, these understandings must be more or less identical.

When we asked her what were her most important goals in teaching the subject Switzerland and World War II, she explained: 'I want my students to understand what happened in the 1990s'. Thus, her aim is to introduce them to the allegations that Switzerland was confronted with at the time. She then wants to familiarize them with the ICE's 'answers' (ID 04, 2036–2065). In another part of the interview, she explains that she teaches history using the very latest and most topical material and examples. Everything important in everyday life (e.g. the conflict between the US and Iran) can be introduced into history lessons in order to examine the historical reasons for current conflicts. From these and other parts of the interview, we concluded that her professional self-understanding can be formulated as follows: Ms Weber believes it is her job to transmit disciplinary knowledge, or 'answers' to current and critical debates, to her students. Having this knowledge empowers youths to participate more competently and knowledgeably in the debates of the day. Disciplinary knowledge is, in Ms Weber's view, fundamentally different from everyday knowledge. While everyday knowledge holds an intentionalist theory of action, disciplinary knowledge exposes the underlying structures of people's actions, rendering their intentions irrelevant. Getting students to acquire this disciplinary, structuralist understanding is a 'burden' because the everyday intentionalist world-view is difficult to overcome. However, it remained unclear in the interview exactly how a supposedly superior structuralist understanding of history would help students participate in everyday debates, which are carried out in an intentionalist manner.

Thus, Ms Weber's habitual dispositions can be described as structural-modernist. Her understanding of history belongs to the structuralist tradition within western intellectual thinking. Her understanding of her profession is modern in that it is based on the assumption that disciplinary knowledge is fundamentally superior to everyday knowledge, and that teaching it is a form of enlightening. It supposes that transmitting this superior knowledge somehow helps students, and ultimately publics, develop a better, more informed and participatory understanding of the world they live in.

It is important to note that Ms Weber's structuralist understanding of history inhibits a discussion about historical responsibility, which—in a reserved manner—is one of the aims of the book's moral discourse. If history is not made by the people then it makes no sense to talk about historical responsibility and questions of reparations. We were, therefore, very keen to see how Ms Weber would use a book that contradicts her own views in so many ways.

Six months after the interview, we were able to observe a 90-minute lesson in which Ms Weber used *Hinschauen und Nachfragen*. First, she introduced her students to the allegations that Switzerland was confronted with in the 1990s. Then the students were given the assignment to find out which 'answers' the ICE came up with. They formed groups and read different



parts of chapter 4, which summarizes the ICE findings. They were given three leading questions, which are also listed in the book: 'How did Switzerland react [to the Holocaust]? Why did Switzerland react in those particular ways and not others? How is this reaction to be judged?' (Bonhage *et al.* 2006: 82). Each group presented its findings to the class.

The underlying idea of the lesson was, thus, to enable the students to form educated opinions about the controversies of the 1990s by examining the findings of experts. From this we can see that Ms Weber reconfigured the paradoxical 'rules' of the field of history education, which ask teachers to transmit a specific (in this case, liberal) view of history without appearing to indoctrinate. She construed textbook knowledge as 'neutral' and, therefore, non-indoctrinating. Acquiring this knowledge should help students form educated opinions about the political debates of the 1990s. It is on this level that students should be able to develop their own opinions. As she told us in the interview, 'Of course students may hold opinions that are different from my own opinions. The only thing I insist on is that they justify them' (ID04, 1844–1848)—e.g. by using supposedly non-partisan textbook knowledge.

However, the students were not simply introduced to textbook knowledge: after the group presentations, Ms Weber added further comments and questions to the class discussions. As we have shown elsewhere (Schär and Sperisen 2009), these interventions transformed textbook knowledge in two crucial ways. First, Ms Weber transformed the perspective of *Hinschauen und Nachfragen*, which focuses on the agency of Switzerland's decision-makers, into her structuralist perspective. Thus, instead of discussing the 'reactions' of Switzerland, the class conversation shifted towards talking about the impersonal 'structures', 'processes', and 'mechanisms' that led Switzerland to somehow 'automatically' behave the way it did. Second, the question of how to judge Switzerland's history (and a resultant discussion of values) disappeared completely. This omission was enforced by Ms Weber's specific version of structuralism, which does not include the realm of culture in its explanation of historical developments. Thus, the important factor of an anti-Semitic culture in Switzerland during World War II could not be addressed. This omission was also enforced by the fact that, on this particular (and much contested) point, *Hinschauen und Nachfragen* is also understated in its approach.

To summarize, Ms Weber's structuralist-modernist habitual dispositions allow her to dissolve the paradoxical rules of the field of history education by construing expert knowledge as non-partisan, 'scientific', and therefore non-indoctrinating. She aims to transmit this knowledge to her students in order to empower them to form their own opinions with regard to the debates of the 1990s. Without noticing or intending to, however, she incorporates textbook knowledge into her structuralist understanding of history. When combined with the moderated approach of *Hinschauen und Nachfragen* to the questions of historical responsibility, Ms Weber's approach means that these issues cannot be addressed in class. A paradoxical consequence of this is that it construes Switzerland during World War II as an abstract entity that reacts passively to structural necessities and constraints. While this view is not identical to the right-wing view of the

nation's war-history, it shares an important feature: the view that there is no Swiss responsibility for the Holocaust.

### Discussion

In the last section, we would like to situate our findings in the context of relevant scholarship. First, the book *Hinschauen und Nachfragen* seems to be a notable exception in the general development of textbook production in Switzerland. Furrer (2004) has demonstrated that while the nation was the central reference point in school textbooks until the 1970s, it has since disappeared. Ziegler (2009) has confirmed these findings with regard to two recent Swiss textbooks that do not contain national narratives. *Hinschauen und Nachfragen* can, thus, be seen as one of the few recent books that introduce a decidedly national narrative into history classes and offers an opportunity to talk about national identity. In terms of the content of the narrative, the book is similar to World War II textbooks in other countries. In an international comparison of textbooks, Crawford and Foster (2007) found that most books focus on the white male decision-makers in power. Similarly, *Hinschauen und Nachfragen* also subtly identifies the nation with the historical male elite in politics, economy, and society. The voices and historical experiences of women, minorities (in fact there are almost no perspectives of Jews or other victims), and urban working- and middle-classes or rural groups are not given much room. Neither is the question of how differences in religious affiliations (Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish), language-cultures (French, German, Italian, Rhaeto-rumanic), social class, and gender shaped the historical experiences of the different groups involved. Thus, the principles of 'multiple perspectives' and plurality that the authors refer to (Bonhage *et al.* 2006: 7) remain under-developed.

In a summarizing overview of national textbook controversies in Japan, Greece, the US, and elsewhere, Popp (2009) distinguishes between two categories of political expectations. Conservatives want books to introduce young readers to a national history they can be proud of, one that ought to strengthen their sense of a shared identity and guide them through the challenging effects of global migration, social change, and economic globalization. On the other side, liberal parties and movements:

argue that instead of suppressing the past or denying it, one has to take responsibility in the present for the crimes and suffering committed by one's own nation in the past. ... The liberal view is that history textbooks have a duty to enable the younger generation to feel empathy and to change perspective. Above all, textbooks have to show young people their national history in a way that makes them realize their historical responsibility and accept it willingly. (p. 113)

It is these efforts that formulate 'the historical pride of a nation' (p. 113). In spite of the degree of accommodation of *Hinschauen und Nachfragen* to national conservative views (which were reproduced in politics as well as in the advisory board), our case clearly belongs in the liberal category.

However, as we argued by applying Bourdieu's field theory and his notion of relative autonomy, we do not believe that *Hinschauen und Nachfragen* (and

possibly school textbooks in general) can be reduced to their function of serving a particular ideology. A reductionist reading of our textbook would have to ignore its pedagogical discourse, from which the book's title is derived. A thorough analysis has to take this into account. In our case we tried to demonstrate that the pedagogical impulse remains fundamentally ambivalent. It remains uncertain as to which object the critical stance of 'looking closely and inquiring' is referring: (a) Switzerland's history during World War II (playing the role of historians), or (b) the expert interpretation—that is to say, the textbook authors' summary of these interpretations—of the nation's war history (the role of critical readers).

This fundamental ambiguity, together with the indirect manner in which the ICE findings are communicated, constitutes a challenge to history teachers. We presented a case from our ongoing research of a teacher who transformed the textbook's fundamentals in interesting ways. The case can add to the discussion on how teachers' beliefs shape the way they teach history. Wilson and Wineburg (1988) have shown how varying disciplinary backgrounds inform the way teachers approach their jobs. Our case indicates that differences *between* disciplines, as well as different scholarly traditions *within* the discipline of history (e.g. structuralism vs historical agency), need to be taken in to account. Thus, textbook producers cannot naturally assume that all history teachers share the same theory of history.

Boix-Mansilla (2005) looks at how students deal with two conflicting views of the past. She argues that both teachers and students must recognize that what historians do is try to make sense of the past by asking specific questions and selecting and analysing sources that yield potential answers. Our case indicates that in order to support teachers and students, textbooks might include the following:

- (1) An account of why experts (i.e. the ICE) chose the questions they did, how they selected the sources they used, and why they reached their interpretations and conclusions.
- (2) Assignments that help students recognize the historians' particular perspectives (e.g. developing alternative questions, understanding why this perspective [not the results] is politically contested, examining sources used by the experts, and considering why the expert interpretation is deemed authoritative, and so on).

Our study focused on the book and on teachers. We do not know how students perceive the lessons, how *Hinschauen und Nachfragen* shapes their own senses of national identity, or connects their knowledge to their personal situations. Research in Northern Ireland indicates that history lessons that do not explicitly address contentious subject matter fail to reduce societal conflicts; in fact, failing to address current conflicts supplies raw material from which students build partisan narratives (Barton and McCully 2005). Hence, history classes may indirectly enforce ongoing societal conflicts instead of reducing the extent to which history is used to justify ongoing societal disputes. Since we can expect that Switzerland's wartime history will remain the most contested part of the nation's past, further research on how students develop their ideas on this subject is advisable.

## Conclusions

What does this mean in terms of the ways in which contested war memories shape history education? The answer needs to combine different levels of analysis: the realms of historical processes, the institutionalized rules of history education, and the agency of teachers. *Hinschauen und Nachfragen* introduces the new transnational master-narrative of Holocaust memory into the classrooms of the German-speaking part of Switzerland, inquiring into the historical role of the nation during the Holocaust. In doing so, it is part of a general process of collective memory and national identity transformation. The script of this transformation entails a replacement of the formerly dominant view of Switzerland as a neutral nation resisting evil in favour of an image that aligns Switzerland with other nations that accept the Holocaust as part of their national history, and combine their efforts to prevent such crimes in the future. However, this process cannot be seen as hegemonic or total since it is fragmented at various levels. On the level of state power, there is no uniform vision of the nation's history. Therefore, the book needed to accommodate its critics to a certain extent. This led to a relatively reserved account. Furthermore, there are institutional rules of history education that restrict a direct transmission of knowledge and promote teaching youths to develop their own views. And then there are the teachers, who have their part in shaping history.

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## Notes

1. See the *Swiss Historical Dictionary's* entry on the topic 'Weltkrieg, Zweiter' (German), 'Guerre mondiale, deuxième' (French), 'Guerra mondiale, seconda' (Italian) on [www.hls-dhs-dss.ch](http://www.hls-dhs-dss.ch).
2. For example, in 1989 Switzerland was the only nation in the world to officially commemorate the *beginning* of the Second World War in order to honour its army, which was thought to have successfully prevented a Nazi attack during the war (Zala 2003: 315).
3. For example, *Nazi gold*, a BBC documentary by filmmaker Christopher Olgiati, was broadcasted in June 1997; it suggested that, in spite of neutrality, Switzerland had allowed trains carrying Jews and other concentration camp-bound victims to cross its territory. The film received considerable attention in British and US newspapers (see <http://www.olgiati.com>). However, research by the Independent Commission of Experts (ICE) later showed that these allegations were false. The film nevertheless disturbed many Swiss viewers.
4. Among the non-Swiss members were Sibyl Milton, Harold James, Saul Friedländer, and Wladislaw Bartoszewski. For the mandate and for further information on the ICE, see [www.uek.ch/en](http://www.uek.ch/en).

5. The ICE is viewed critically among academic historians. Since the private archives are closed to regular historians, some of the ICE findings cannot be verified. The ICE's main research questions did not arise from academic discourse but from political necessities. Consequently, history as an academic discipline has come to be seen in political terms (e.g. as 'leftist' from a right-wing perspective). This can jeopardize its autonomy. See Jost (2007: 166–170) and Zala (2003: 318–321).
6. In German: 'Eigentlich wären sie so zu behandeln, wie dumme Lausbuben zu behandeln sind: mit einer gehörigen Tracht Prügel!' Schlüer, Ulrich: Frontkommentar, Schweizerzeit, 2. December 1999, see <http://www.schweizerzeit.ch/2699/spalte2699.htm>, accessed February 12, 2010.
7. Federal president Kaspar Villiger (Liberal Democratic Party) apologized on 7 May 1995 in front of the two chambers of Switzerland's parliament; Foreign Minister Flavio Cotti (Christian Democratic Party) apologized on 13 March 1997 in New York; in the same year, federal president Arnold Koller (Christian Democratic Party) expressed the necessity for the present generation 'to bow in awe in front of the unspeakable pain' that Switzerland's refugee policy inflicted on the victims. Federal President Ruth Dreyfuss (Social Democratic Party) used similar wording in 1999 (Zihlmann 2008: 235).
8. The only noteworthy exception is Walther Hofer (Hofer and Reginbogin 2001), an internationally renowned historian of National Socialism. He was formerly professor at the University of Berne, but has been retired for many years.
9. For further information (in German) on the book, see <http://www.hinschauenundnachfragen.ch>, accessed February 12, 2010.
10. The Canton of Zurich applies three categories to textbooks: 'obligatory', 'provisional-obligatory' (obligatory textbooks pending review), and 'approved'. See: <http://www.vsa.zh.ch/internet/bi/vsa/de/Schulbetrieb/Lehrmittel/Kategorien.html>, accessed January 26, 2010.
11. In general, history teachers in Switzerland enjoy considerable freedom to choose from a wide range of textbooks and other teaching materials (Furrer 2004: 59–61, Hodel and Waldis 2007). Since the teaching goals and curricula are formulated in rather general terms, teachers are also relatively free to decide which topics they want to teach, and in what way and how thoroughly to teach them.
12. Auszug aus dem Protokoll des Regierungsrates des Kantons Zürich, Sitzung vom 11. Dezember 2003, 1830. Interpellation (Bergier-Bericht, Einführung als Lehrmittel an Zürcher Schulen); available online at: [http://www.kantonsrat.zh.ch/Geschaefft\\_Details.aspx?ID=f3b43347-654d-4db2-852e-7e7ca11c09dc](http://www.kantonsrat.zh.ch/Geschaefft_Details.aspx?ID=f3b43347-654d-4db2-852e-7e7ca11c09dc), accessed January 26, 2010.
13. For a critical introduction to Bourdieu's thinking in English, see Shusterman (1999); on the concept of rules, see Taylor (1999).
14. The slogan can be translated as 'To scrutinize history instead of just memorizing it'. It has recently been used in many conferences, newspaper articles, and books; see, e.g. Sächsische Akademie für Lehrerfortbildung (2005).
15. In German: 'Das vorliegende Buch hat auf diese Fragen keine vorgefertigten Antworten bereit. Es will vielmehr zum genauen Hinschauen auf die Schweiz und die Zeit des Nationalsozialismus beitragen und zum Nachfragen sowohl anregen als auch anleiten'.
16. In German: 'ob Regierungen, Wirtschaftsunternehmen oder Privatpersonen an den Verbrechen beteiligt waren oder davon profitierten' (Bonhage *et al.* 2006: 5; our emphasis).
17. Note that our explanation is not an intentional one. We do not mean to say the authors intended to write a 'toned-down' book. We believe that this was an unintended outcome that needs to be explained by the influence political power struggles had on the authors.
18. In German: 'Lange Zeit galt der Holocaust als die alleinige Tat der Deutschen, mit der die übrige Welt nichts zu tun hatte. Seit den 1980er Jahren wird jedoch in vielen Staaten vermehrt darüber diskutiert, weshalb man damals nicht mehr unternommen hat, um diese Verbrechen zu verhindern. ... Als europäisches Land und als Rechtsstaat steht auch die Schweiz vor der Aufgabe, ihre Geschichte vor diesem Hintergrund zu befragen. Das Buch ist ... ein Teil der universellen Auseinandersetzung mit dem Holocaust' (Bonhage *et al.* 2006: 5).
19. 'Es gibt so gut wie keine empirische Untersuchungen über den praktischen Gebrauch von Schulbüchern, also über die Rolle, die sie im unterrichtlichen Lernprozess wirklich



spielen, und erst recht nicht darüber, welche Wirkung sie in der Entwicklung des Geschichtsbewusstseins von Kindern und Jugendlichen ausüben' (Rüsen 2008: 162).

20. A further important concept in Bourdieu's theory is social, economic, and symbolic 'capital'. The amount of capital explains the individual's position with relation to other individuals in a hierarchically organized field. The full formula is, thus, *Practice = Field + (Habitus × Capital)*. Since we will not develop the interactions of teachers within the field of education in this paper, we do not need this concept here. For a further discussion of Bourdieu's theory, see Bouveresse (1999).

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