

Table ronde 1

"Réflexions sur les méthodes en science politique des deux côtés de l'Atlantique"

Session 2

La prise en compte du temps

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Cohorts, biographic life-stories, historical time and research dispositions : How does time influence research results ?

Introduction

This paper is based on research on the pedagogic transmission of the nazi past in Germany. I worked on ways in which teachers try to transmit the history of nazism to their students, process by which they also tend to develop the "democratic capacities" of the latter. The students appropriate the nazi past in ways not always anticipated by teachers.

During three years I have combined interviews with participant observation of history classes in four schools in the cities of Hamburg and Leipzig. A few particularities of my research will interest us here.

First, a methodological aspect: the influence of "time" on social science research. The ways of collecting data are linked to the time spent doing it. We could establish a certain time-hierarchy according to the time spend with the object of investigation, which would put opinion polls, where the questionnaire is filled in during a time-span from 5 minutes to half an hour at the bottom of the hierarchy, single interviews, that take between 1 and 3 hours in the middle, then reconducted interviews, panels and simple observation, taking several month, to finish with participant ethnographic observation and socio-analytical approaches, which can take several years¹. Time equals money, therefore long-term investigations are rarely a reality, except for doctoral students who have the time to "invest" in long-term research. Thinking about the time it takes and how this "invested time" influences research results is also an opportunity to reflect upon the limits of interviews or the opinion polls as a method of

¹ On panels as an interview technique see Jadot, Cautrès, 2004.

collecting data. This aspect of the role of time in research is well known but nevertheless needs to be recalled: the more time you spend with your object of study, the more you let it speak, the less you are inclined to let your imagination speak instead of the “reality” you try to understand. Even if this might not always be the case, it can be a working hypothesis.

The second aspect consists in the different concepts of time used to describe the research data collected. From the event, which leads to conceptions of generation, to the evolution, which leads to conceptions of biography and life stories, the way we appreciate the time lived by the interviewees will also influence research results. These two aspects, the strictly methodological one of the time spent to collect “data” and the more conceptual one of the time “lived” or “experienced” by the interviewees are linked. To be somewhat caricaturist, we have difficulties appreciating biographical time in one single opinion poll, but will be much more easily able to differentiate between generations with such a method. We will much more easily be able to take into account evolutions if we follow a population over a specific period of time, and – maybe somewhat contradictory – we need to invest a very long period of time in order to understand the codes used in a complex situation, that can be observed in a classroom, for example, taking only minutes. Paradoxally, the short-time is not always the time which needs the less investigation time, just as the long-period, the biography does not always need the method investing most time. But concepts and investigation are linked, and we have to ask ourselves how our research results are influenced by the time (and thus the money) spent to do it.

In the research I have conducted between 2002 and 2005, I have used different “time-spans”. I have conducted long term and short term, formal and informal interviews, I have done participant observation and I have reconducted interviews with the same people. The way I have set up my research has had a profound influence on the results. The development of my hypotheses and ways of succinctly (re-)formulating my research topic and the questions linked to it can serve as an illustration of the link between the time of investigation (time of research) and the ways I have changed my conceptualisation of time within my research.

I have interviewed over a hundred students before they treated nazism at school, at 14 years, while they treated it in history, at 15, and after they had finished, with 16 – 18. I have also conducted series of interviews with 37 teachers in different situations: very formal ones, registered on tape recorder in their offices, less formal ones, taking notes after lessons, and very informal ones, at home or during lunchtime in the school restaurant. Time has thus played a role all along my research: as biographical time, within the development of life-stories; as situational time, spent with me, the interviewer, influencing changing perceptions and presentation of the self; as historical time, the time of historical “events”, such as nazism, “1968”, “1989”, reinterpreted by teachers and students and as generational time, opposing not only teachers and students, but also teachers among themselves, especially those who have “lived” “1968” and those who have not, teachers from Leipzig and teachers from Hamburg.

This last aspect is very well known in the study of transmission of the nazi past (Kohlstruck 1997 ; Welzer et al. 2002 et 1997 ; Jensen 2004 ; Leonhard 2002, Moller 2003). I therefore started my research focussing on this generational aspect. Studies on the influence of generational belonging, based on the theories of K. Mannheim (1928), have known a renewed interest in the last years in Germany (Jureit/Wild 2005, Schüle et al. 2006; Schulz/Grebner 2003, Lüscher/Liegle 2003).

The different perceptions of the nazi past by teachers and students, and between Hamburg and Leipzig seemed to need explanation. It was only in a second step that I realised that the generational approach kept me blind to mechanisms apt to explain the student’s contradictory relations to the past. I will thus try and explain these different levels of analysis. First, I shall explain how the generational approach is useful to understand differences between East and West, but also between teachers and students. I will then analyse the limits of a generational approach, and, using three examples from my fieldwork, propose different ways of combining

the generational analysis with other “times”, such as biographical, historical and situational time. We shall see how these different aspects influence each other and interact in the research – as a methodological obstacle, but also as a chance – and how they will change research results.

A generational approach: K. Mannheim and the presuppositions of my research

We cannot understand differences between Hamburg and Leipzig, and the way the teaching of the nazi past works in Germany without taking into account the very specific socialisation of two generations in the Mannheimien sense (*Generationszusammenhänge*). I do not have time here to go into the theory of Mannheim. But let us remember that the three levels of generation (*Lagerung/Zusammenhang/Einheit*) can be found in the Ex-FRG especially within the generation having lived through “1968”, born in the 1940’s (Bude 1997; 1998; 2005; Kraushaar, 2005) and predominant in the Hamburg schools as well as in the ex-GDR, in the “first FDJ-Generation” the one that is born in the 1950’s, during the dawn of the new “socialist” state, that has profited from social welfare measurements (especially the women) (Wierling 1999, 2002; Fulbrook 2006) and that is predominant in the Leipzig schools.

These two populations have lived a very different socialisation; they have confronted each other during the cold war and seen each other mutually as enemies. The nazi past has been interpreted differently by each of them. We can resume it in referring to the theory of R. M. Lepsius (1993), even though criticised today, who differentiated the way the two countries developed their politics of memory of the nazi past: the federal republic *internalising* it by concentrating on the guilt scheme of the population, the GDR *externalising* it, concentrating on the anti-fascist official doctrine. Even if this differentiation is very schematic, and cannot apply to the way the population perceived the nazi past, it can partly explain official versions of presenting the past, relevant to educational politics. The Hamburg teachers, for example, insist very much on the subject of guilt, especially through the teaching of the genocide, trying to make students identify to victims and thus reject nazism as a doctrine. Leipzig teachers had to relearn the way of presenting the nazi past after 1989, just as you learn a new language. The focus on the genocide was particularly helpful to them, since it represented a common denominator between the “former” ways of presenting the past, and the new ones. One Leipzig teachers thus told me: “Finally, it’s all the same: before, we thought nazism in order to present communism as the only viable political alternative, now we teach nazism in order to present democracy as the only viable alternative”. Concentrating on the nazi past and its rejection, through the teaching of the genocide, allows thus to combine old and new perspectives and find a common denominator between eastern and western generations of teachers. Past time is always revisited by the present.

But not only East-West differences can be appreciated through the use of generational concepts. The differences between teachers and students can also be understood using the generation as explanatory concept. If teachers insist on the importance of the nazi past for the democratic formation of the future German citizens, students seem to have a more distanced relation to the past, at least when they intervene in public debates such as at the occasion of the “Walser-Bubis” debate in 1998 (Tambarin 1999, Kirsch 1999) on the “convenient” use of the nazi past. In the context of the death of eye-witnesses, the teacher’s generation feared a “forgetting of the past” by the “youth” (Silbermann/Stoffers 1999). The same “youth” defended itself, claiming their “right to develop their own relation to the past, different from that of the previous generation”. The fear of oblivion, or at least of different priorities in the next generation also explains the increasing insistence on the nazi past in the public sphere, sometimes qualified as an “obsession with the past” (Assmann/Frevert 1999). Some of this research, reasoning on “possession” or “lack” of “knowledge” is exclusively based on opinion

polls. Appreciating knowledge through opinion polls does not allow to investigate in alternative uses of the past, and certainly cannot answer the question with is nevertheless at the basis of this discussion: what role does the past play in the lives of the younger generation? What time and importance does it take? How can we understand their appropriations of the past? The present of the past, historically speaking a relatively recent question, needs to be investigated otherwise.

Reasoning in terms of generational confrontation is not sufficient to explain the complex relations to the nazi past of teachers and students. In fact, if we stay within the generational framework, we miss a whole panoply of developments in the relation between teachers and students and theirs ways of appropriating the past.

Three examples can illustrate how time can be conceptualised in a more complex and interactive way if we take the time to observe it.

Biographical, generational and historical time in interaction

Annick Perechroon (1981) has argued at a roundtable of the AFSP on generations and politics, more than 25 years ago now, that in the generational analysis we have to take into account horizontal appreciations of generation, in terms of cohorts and age, as well as vertical appreciations of pairs of parents and children, and that the two are not mutually exclusive. Just as this is true for an analysis in terms of generation, we can also combine this analysis with one in terms of biographical time. An analysis in terms of biographies and life-stories takes into account the evolutionary perspective, more than the structural approach of generations. It focuses more on individual developments than on group determination. The two interact and influence the ways we can appreciate our research.

In my thesis, trying to understand the ways in which students appropriate the nazi past needed first of all a detachment from the generational approach. The latter tended indeed to exaggerate differences between teachers and students, and also to apply the criteria of teachers for student's ways of using the past. Reasoning in terms of generational differences led me to determine student's uses of the past as either legitimate, corresponding to teacher's uses of the past, or illegitimate, differing from the latter. I was neither able to understand specific student's uses of the past not foreseen by teachers, nor to appreciate developments of students appropriations. These two aspects needed an evolutionary and a situational, not a generational approach.

One of the reasons why the debates between "pro-" and "anti-" nazi public memory, the camp defending "more memory" in order to counter the "danger to forget" and the one defending "less memory" in order to counter the "danger of abuse" are so stable seems to be linked to the fact that both are right². There are signs that can be interpreted as a "reaction to abuse" from one generation towards another, that I have called "saturation" in my thesis, children's expression of "I can't hear it anymore". They can also be interpreted as a "lack of interest" in the subject by a specific "generation". But opinion polls, which capture the "I can't hear it anymore" of the children can only speculate on reasons for it. In my research, this is one example for which the opinion poll constitutes an inappropriate methodological tool. Taking into account the development of children's positions over a longer period of time (over 3 years) enables us to observe evolutions and enlarge the exclusive generational perspective, leaving behind the alternative between "too much" and "too little" memory, between a "generation that refuses" or a "generation that follows" their parents and teachers. If we take the specific population of children that express a form of contest against a "permanent confrontation with the nazi past" we can observe that not only these are children coming from

² For a discussion of the debate in France between «devoir de mémoire» and «abus de mémoire» see Gensburger/Lavabre, 2005.

upper class, Hamburg families with an intellectual background (which indicates the necessity to combine analytical factors such as time (generational, historical or situational) with those of social class, national or territorial belonging, but also gender, as we shall see below) but also that they pass through different kinds of relationships to the nazi past. Generally, between 10 and 14 years old, they develop some kind of passion for the past. Even outside school they read all the books they can get on the subject, they play war or nazi games inside and outside school, they watch documentaries and fictions about it and they visit concentration camps with their families. Comes a period, around 16 years old, when they get “fed up” with the subject, they don’t want to “hear it anymore”. Here, a twofold generational opposition (with their families, their parents and also grand-parents on the one hand, their teachers on the other hand) goes hand in hand with adolescence, the necessity to create themselves a political opinion, and a frustration of the “best students” with a very emotional approach of the topic in school, that does not lead to understanding the past. Those who have the chance, against their own will, to have imposed onto them the topic in High school will rediscover a more differentiated treatment of the past, just at a moment when they reach adult life. Some of them even develop a new passion for German history, defined, for the first time, beyond the nazi past, the latter losing its overwhelming exclusiveness. Their relation to the past is no longer only defined by the 12 years of nazism, but, in a more flexible, but also more evolutionary way, by all sorts of different “pasts”. Past time and present time, historical time and biographical time interact. The “looking-glasses” of the “event” (defined, with Bensa and Fassin (2002) as a rupture of intelligibility) of nazism and its successive “reinterpretations” through public memory debates, the short-term time, cedes a more evolutionary and overall more historical perspective of longer-term developments in students uses of the past. Their biographic, but also situational, school and classroom situation influences their reinterpretations of the past and their relations to past-time.

Short-term events and long-term history, biographical time and interview situations

This is also the case for teachers. To take the example of the “pro-1968” generational unit, those teachers who have lived positively the “1968” student revolt and who have (or would have liked to have) participated in it, see the nazi past through the looking glasses of their interpretation of “1968”, but also through the looking glasses of the interview situation and the necessity to create their own biographical coherence (Bourdieu 1986).

The example of M. Schulze, born in 1941, history teacher and director of a Hamburg High School can be useful to analyse the permanent interactions of different historical short-term “events”, biographical time of life-stories, and situational time in the relation between interviewee and interviewer. M. Schulze, according to his own account, has studied history because he “wanted to understand nazism”. In the early sixties he accused some of his teachers at high-school, together with other students to be “nazis”. In the late sixties he admired his history professor for his engagement in the anti-nazi resistance, and involved in certain student activities such as the “critical university”, courses organised by students for students on Marx, Marcuse, Adorno and critical philosophy. In the first hours of the long series of interviews, he presents himself as “belonging to the 1968 generation”, a “generational situation” which with he explains not only his own biography, but also his interpretation of the importance of the nazi past, his professional career and his interaction with students. He paints “1968” as the roots of the present political situation with its specific education system, the two giving sense to his own professional activity of educating future democratic citizens.

Later in the interview – after a couple month of me being present in his history classes, we speak about authority in school. He explains the importance of authority for the children, and cites a case where he, as the director of the school, had to impose his authority in a fight with

a “neo-nazi” student. In the following passage he observes different “cohorts” of teachers. The “young, dynamic, scientific female teachers”, who are “not afraid to install a relation of authority with the students”, also due to their “superior knowledge”, and the “old, anti-authoritarian 1968ers”, who have difficulties with their students, not only due to a lack of knowledge, but also because “they have exaggerated” the “anti-authoritarian trend”. He then pursues:

“Those are the real 1968ers. Not like me. I am really too old for 1968”. This is the first time he presents himself as “too old” for 1968. He also considers that he did not really belong to the “1968ers” because he was at the “centre right” of the student parliament and disapproved of their “excesses”, such as, for example, pushing a professor to commit suicide by accusing him of being a nazi. It is the interview situation which determines the interpretation of the double past, the “1968” biographical past, and the reinterpretation of the nazi past through the new looking glasses of “1968”. M. Schulze presents himself as a judge, outside (and maybe, as the director of the institution, above) two groups, the young, female teachers, valorised group in which he includes me, and the “old 68ers”, he criticises. The present, the interview situation and the relation with me as the interviewer influence the presentation and the reinterpretation of the double past, the historical and the biographical one. Different time-spans and different “events” (such as the 1968 past) are relived, reinterpreted and presented differently according to the present situation. They then change the perception of other periods of time, such as the nazi past.

Historical time and situational time: A classroom interaction

Certain student uses of the past made little sense looked upon only in differentiating teachers and students. Students paint swastikas, for example, and they make “jewish jokes” in the classroom or outside, in the schoolyard. At first sight, these are illegitimate uses of the past, they stand in firm contradiction with teachers’ intentions, they are tolerated only in the margin and sometimes they are punished. A single observation of a classroom interaction can lead (or must lead?) to a false interpretation of local events. The codes necessary to decode the event and every single interaction, even the most ordinary one, needs a lot of time, long-term observation and participation (Geertz 1973).

But once this time is invested, understanding the interaction within the classroom needs taking into account the parallel existence of several spaces and times within the scholarly institution, decoded through long-term observation, which makes readable short-term events and interactions. Looking at a classroom scene and its interpretation by a teacher can serve as an illustration.

A student comes into the room and raises his arm, saying “Heil Hitler” to his teacher. The teacher reacts calmly, telling the student to regain his seat and advising him that he hopes once he has treated the subject in history, he will no longer continue to make such jokes. We could interpret this situation as a classical generational opposition: the “1968” teacher, who is convinced of the seriousness of the subject, and the necessity to convince the students of it, and the latter, playing around, a younger generation, that does not attach the same symbolism to a history “far away” for them. The teacher calls it the “youngsters bizarre ways”, their “youth-culture”. The generational approach, defining these moments as “youth culture” different from “adult” and especially “teacher’s culture” excludes the students symbolically from the institution. It redefines their acts, in order to avoid a durable perturbation of the institutional order and hierarchy.

But we can also try and take into account the moment of the interaction and its symbolic interruption of a long-term relationship. The student coming into the classroom represents an “event”, an acceleration of time, which changes momentarily the rules of functioning in a classroom. The teacher knows very well, that the student does not seriously provoke him. He

only makes a joke in order to release tensions accumulated during long and boring hours on school benches. These jokes, the creation, during a very short moment of time, of “joyful happiness” between the students, can have a beneficial effect on teaching over a longer period of time, just as the moments of jokes and horseplay can have beneficial effects on the functioning of factory life (Lüdtke 1986a, 1986b; Certeau 1980). They are useful for the functioning of production, in this case production of knowledge. Taking into account the present, the “short time” in opposition to the “long-term”, the moment, the event, the acceleration of time, in opposition to the life histories and the “normal”, that is long-term functioning of an institution is essential in order to understand the different levels of interaction and the different stakes at stake. What the teacher calls “youth culture” in a generational, static point of view, is also the active creation of a moment of time, within which the rules of the scholarly institution are suspended, the students take an offensive role and the teacher has to defend himself. It corresponds to a momentary inversion of the hierarchy, which helps to accept power relations over a longer period of time. Taking into account the different time-spans, momentary “opposition” or “escape” in a hierarchical situation and longer-term domination between teachers and students enables us to analyse the dynamics of power-relations, which are, we know, since Max Weber, but also with Michel Foucault not static but a permanent battle that lives and reaffirms itself in the longer term through the short-term battles and micro-resistances. The model which can make us understand these power relationships is the “permanent battle rather than the contract” (Foucault, 1975 : 35), only observable in thinking the short-term and the long-term in their mutual interaction.

Gender dynamics: the interpenetration of biographical time, classroom interaction (situational time) and reinterpretations of the past (historical time).

The example of Gender dynamics in the transmission process of the history of nazism in school can exemplify the interpenetration of different times that influence research results. The investigation of a situation over several years, before, during and after the teaching of the history of nazism allows the observation of evolutions, and of the impact teaching can have – even though the latter is not always the one anticipated. Taking the example of the evolution of Gender differences in teaching history can serve as an example.

Gender differences with the 14 year olds are obvious in the fieldwork. Boys and girls do not talk the same way about the nazi past, and they neither have the same scholarly practices, nor the same hobbies. Boys are interested in battles, in military and international history, in politics in their classical version and in nazi personae. They play military battles, they create their own tanks and they watch war-movies, but they also read newsmagazines such as the *Spiegel*. Girls are interested in victims, especially Jewish ones, in stories of bombing cities and flights from grandparents, in histories of hiding away and saving lives, but also of hunger and family difficulties, in short, everyday history. They read fictions such as *Anne Frank* about it and exchange them between groups of girls. They also watch films, but not the same ones as the boys: for example, they are really interested in Hitler’s women and private life. These differences might, among other reasons, be linked to the fact that girls talk more often to their grandmothers, boys to their grandfathers and that both do not tell the same stories about the war, since they did not live the same “past”. The “everyday life” of grandmothers and that of grandfathers differ particularly in wartime, when front experiences overshadow all other ones for the grandfathers, hunger, flight, and bombings are the everyday of grandmothers. Here, a generational transmission from grandparents to grandchildren has to be thought as gendered. But generational mechanisms go hand in hand with biographical evolutions.

In fact, these differences are reduced and almost disappear when we observe older children. The girls of 18 year's old have had enough of victims and suffering, they start to be interested in other topics. The boys, on the contrary, with 15/16 start to be more interested in "girls subjects" such as the suffering of Jewish victims. The influence of school and the criteria of teachers, who encourage the identification with victims during history lessons, and discourage war games and passions for tanks and other military armament, might have an influence here. The capacity of the boys to adapt their interests over time will ensure their success in school. The classroom criteria will (momentarily, but also in more lasting ways) influence the development of the boys, but will not entirely alter their interests. If they adapt and even internalise certain of the school criteria, such as the interest for victims, they continue to study more enthusiastically international and military history, which they also study in groups of boys at home, or discuss in their free time, especially when they are politically engaged, than local and everyday history. Generational and family interaction, school requirements and peer-group interests combine, short-term and long-term influences interact. The nazi past is reinterpreted according to different factors: the personal development, as a life-history, the different interrelations between grand-parents, parents but also friends, in a generational or group setting and the momentary school necessities but also the teacher's influence.

Conclusion:

Time influences research in several ways. Only some examples from my research have opened up some ways in which we can continue to reflect upon time. We not only need to be attentive to ways in which we have spend time in the field (how much, where, in what ways we have "invested" time) since this investment influences our relationship with the object of study, and thus our research result. I have not have time to talk about the influence of trust in research results, but it is evident that we will not have the same information if we spend an hour or several years with the person we investigate (Schwartz 1990 has finely argued the role of trust on research and the (sometimes very little ethical) ways in which we obtain trust as a researcher, notably by investing time).

Apart from the methodological time, the investment of time will enable us to observe different levels of time that play *within* the research area we are investigating. This is the time relevant to the objects investigated. Long-term and short-term have to be understood jointly. We cannot understand situations, such as a classroom scene, without understanding its exceptional character and the long-term, that is day to day functioning. In order to appreciate short-term, accelerated events as such, we have to identify them as such, which is only possible if we are familiar with the usual ways of long-term developments, observable only through long-term observation. Differentiating between the two also helps to rightly interpret the signification of each moment, it's importance – as essential, or just as a short interruption which helps continuing the everyday. Finally, biographic evolutions and generational oppositions have to be thought jointly, understanding individual developments together with historical situations. Past and present interact constantly and it is this very interaction which shapes social situations.

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