

Konrad H. Jarausch

The Return of History –

The Unification of German Historiographies
and the Search for Master Narratives



WZB Lectures

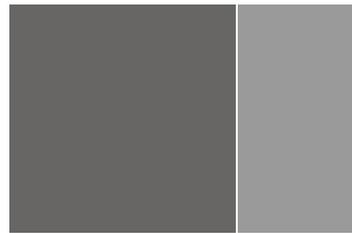
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The Return of History –

The Unification of German Historiographies and the Search for Master Narratives

After decades of Cold War stability, most participants experienced the collapse of communism in 1989/90 as an unforeseen "return of history".¹ The deep freeze of the Cold War made it seem that the East-West division had become permanent and that the best one could hope for was a gradual softening of the Iron Curtain. Repeated suppression of East European revolts by Soviet tanks and the failure of the communist parties in the West appeared to indicate that the domestic order of the competing blocs would remain unchangeable. Since trying to tip the balance meant risking nuclear war, such attempts had become unthinkable, even if there was occasional backsliding from détente into renewed confrontation. But suddenly Gorbachev's perestroika in the Soviet Union and the growth of popular dissidence in East Central Europe upset this established balance. Just when most people had accepted the inevitability of its permanence, the whole post-war order came crashing down.

Since only a few Sovietologists had noticed the rumblings of the coming earthquake, historians were as confused as other commentators about the sudden crumbling of the Eastern Bloc. Busy constructing convergence theories of advanced industrial society, social scientists seemed at a loss to explain a chain-reaction of domestic contingencies – until they discovered the forgotten concept of "exit, voice and legitimacy".² Similarly, social historians who had been studying class formation, social mobility or collective mentalities were not prepared to come to terms with the complex transformation of the international scene. Even if more traditional scholars like Thomas Nipperdey welcomed the restoration of a democratized nation state, leading lights of the left like Jürgen Habermas saw the upheaval as

1 Cees Noteboom, *Berliner Notizen* (Frankfurt, 1991)

2 Karl Ulrich Mayer and others in: Jürgen Friedrichs, ed., *Die Diagnosefähigkeit der Soziologie* (Opladen, 1998) (*Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, Sonderheft Nr. 38)

merely catching up with the agenda of prior revolutions in 1848 or 1918. It is not surprising that the head of the *Wissenschaftskolleg* Wolf Lepenies complained about a "failure of the interpreting class".³

Behind this inability to cope with the rapid changes lay the fear of falling back into the nationalist sins of the past, as if history was going to have to repeat itself. International newspaper columnists like Conor Cruise O'Brien warned against the rise of a "Fourth Reich", implying that unifying the two German states would inevitably lead to another attempt to seize hegemony over Europe. When British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher consulted with historians at Chequers about whether the Germans had changed at all, the advisors who stressed the post-war learning processes barely prevailed over the purveyors of traditional national stereotypes. Leading German intellectuals like Günter Grass also inveighed against the resurrection of a nation state as morally untenable after Auschwitz. Historians like Hans-Ulrich Wehler who supported *Ostpolitik* and favored a Europeanized form of post-nationalism cautioned in dire tones against the resurrection of nationalism as well.⁴

Most historians did not realize how fundamentally their own scholarship would be affected by the sudden disappearance of the post-war order that had been the implicit basis for their own work. It took some months before East German scholars began to understand that the lifting of controls was not just an opportunity for internal renewal, but a severe threat to their privileged existence, which had depended upon the SED-dictatorship. Similarly, their Western colleagues might feel vindicated in their criticisms of the "dictate of consensus" and excited about the new job opportunities for their own students, but they did not understand that they would now have to confront a previously neglected history in order to explain a second German dictatorship.⁵ The intellectual consequences of the political upheaval only gradually began to emerge: What would happen to the Marxist counternarrative after the disappearance of the GDR, which it was designed to legitimize? Similarly, which effects might the restoration of a

3 Udo Wengst, ed., *Historiker betrachten Deutschland* (Bonn 1992). Wolf Lepenies, *Die Folgen einer unerhörten Begebenheit – Die Deutschen nach der Vereinigung* (Berlin, 1992)

4 Harold James and Marla Stone, eds., *When the Wall Came Down: Reactions to German Unification* (New York, 1992)

5 Gerhard A. Ritter, *Der Umbruch von 1989/90 und die Geschichtswissenschaft* (Munich, 1995)

smaller and chastened nation state have on the West German master narrative of modernization, the thesis of German deviation in a *Sonderweg*?

To get beyond the polemics about the destruction of East German scholarship, a more balanced history of science approach to the academic transformation is necessary. Some leading GDR scholars like Kurt Pätzold continue to criticize the "suppression of Marxism" in the enlarged Federal Republic, while international observers like Stefan Berger deplore the development of a "second scholarly culture" outside of the official institutions.⁶

In contrast most leading western scholars, like Jürgen Kocka, might admit some "regrettable mistakes" in excessive dismissals, but they tend to justify the restructuring as necessary and on the whole also benign.⁷ To gain a more dispassionate perspective, the subsequent reflections will instead follow Mitchell Ash's lead by taking into account the over-all transformation of the East German academic system and exploring the close relationship between institutional underpinnings and intellectual interpretations.⁸ They will start by looking at the development of a divided scholarship, proceed to detail major aspects of the transformation and conclude with some comments on the long-range consequences for history in united Germany.⁹

- 6 Kurt Pätzold, "What New Start? The End of Historical Study in the GDR", in: *German History*, 10 (1992), 39 ff.; and "Die Geschichtsschreibung in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (DDR) in der Retrospektive", in: G. Corni and M. Sabrow, eds., *Die Mauern der Geschichte – Historiographie in Europa zwischen Diktatur und Demokratie* (Leipzig, 1996), 187–203; and Christa Beckmann, "Forschung im Schatten", *Berliner Morgenpost*, 12.2.2004
- 7 Jürgen Kocka in: Renate Mayntz, *Deutsche Forschung im Einigungsprozeß: Die Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR 1989 bis 1992* (Frankfurt a.M., 1994)
- 8 Mitchell G. Ash, "Wissenschaftswandel in Zeiten politischer Umwälzungen: Entwicklungen, Verwicklungen, Abwicklungen", in: *Internationale Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Ethik der Naturwissenschaften, Technik und Medizin*, 3 (1995), 1–21; and "Higher Education in the New German States: 'Renewal' or the Importation of Crisis?" in: idem, ed., *German Universities Past and Future: Crisis or Renewal?* (Providence, RI, 1997), 84–123
- 9 For a comparable attempt by a political scientist see Michael Greven, "From 'Scientific Communism' to Political Science: The Collapse of East Germany in 1989/90 and the 'Unification' of the Discipline", in: R. Einfeld et al., *Political Science and Regime Change in 20th Century Germany* (New York, 1996)

1. Divided Historiographies

The contending historiographies in East and West were themselves a result of the eclipse of the national master narrative at the end of the Second World War. The horrors of Nazi warfare and the Holocaust had tarnished the underlying nationalist ideology of German historical scholarship both at home and abroad. Informed by émigrés as well as its own specialists, allied war propaganda had constructed a critical reading of the German past as a national pathology, ranging "From Luther to Hitler", as one of the well-known titles would have it. Trying to come to terms with the "German Catastrophe", bourgeois historians like Friedrich Meinecke, Gerhard Ritter or Ludwig Dehio developed a limited self-criticism that would deplore the lack of culture, excess of militarism or unbridled aggressiveness of German policy. But even the returned émigré Hans Rothfels, who founded the sub-discipline of contemporary history, still wanted to salvage a chastened version of the national tradition out of defeat.¹⁰

The matrix that had produced this nationalist outlook was the *Ordinarienuniversität*, an institution that contributed both to the professionalization of scholarship and to the maintenance of the German state. During much of the 19th century its neohumanist ethos had proven extraordinarily productive in establishing the "research imperative" that manifested itself in the seminar method of teaching, the monograph as form of publication and the scholarly organization as avenue of professional advancement.

Nonetheless, the same institution allowed Heinrich von Treitschke to replace the Rankean universalism with a Prusso-centric interpretation that constructed a historical pedigree for Bismarck's *kleindeutsch* unification project. While it did develop an admirable tradition of "academic freedom", this model vested power in the full professor and reduced his assistants and lecturers (*Privatdozenten*) to impotent acolytes.¹¹ After 1945 both the ideological thrust and the institutional underpinning of German historical scholarship were therefore in need of fundamental change.

10 Christoph Cornelißen, "Der wiedererstandene Historismus – Nationalgeschichte in der Bundesrepublik der fünfziger Jahre", in: Konrad H. Jarausch and Martin Sabrow, eds., *Die historische Meistererzählung – Deutungslinien deutscher Nationalgeschichte nach 1945*, Göttingen 2003, 78 ff.

11 Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought From Herder to the Present* (Middletown, 1983), rev. ed.

East German historiography developed as a self-conscious attempt to repudiate this nationalist tradition and to construct a socialist counter-narrative of the past. Its ideological foundations rested on a Marxist concept of historical materialism that unfolded in stages of human development, modified by Leninist additions in the wake of the October Revolution. It also drew upon a growing tradition of scholarship on the emergence of the labor movement within the leftist parties that had previously been barred from the universities, because it seemed too subversive.

In content, this Marxist approach castigated the national narrative as socially repressive, militaristic in spirit and destructive of German culture – indeed as responsible for the sufferings of the two World Wars. For a more edifying subject, socialist historians instead fastened upon the tireless struggle of workers for emancipation and self-determination in a hostile feudal and later bourgeois environment. In short, East German historiography set out to stand the national tradition on its head, claiming to represent the “better Germany”.¹²

Fortuitously, the victory of the Red Army gave German communists a territory, the core of the former *Reich*, in which to institutionalize their minority view. The first step towards this aim was a thorough purge of Nazis and nationalist collaborators among historians and their replacement with leftist remigrants as well as their students.¹³ A second move was the creation of a central historical museum in the Berlin armory which was supposed to construct a new master narrative of working class struggle and to generate the necessary teaching materials. A third aspect was the creation of an entirely new infrastructure of party research centers, journals like the “*Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*”, and editions of the Marxist classics. A fourth measure was the transfer of most research to well-staffed historical institutes at the Academy of Sciences, which were to cover German history, general, i.e. international history and economic as well as social

12 Konrad H. Jarausch, “The Collapse of the Counter-Narrative: Coping With the Remains of Socialism”, in: idem and Michael Geyer, *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Histories*, Princeton 2003, 81 ff.

13 Mario Kessler, *Exilerfahrung in Wissenschaft und Politik – Remigierte Historiker in der frühen DDR* (Cologne, 2001)

history. And finally, the SED championed the invention of a Marxist-oriented and labor-movement-based memory culture for the GDR that celebrated a new set of heroes such as the resistance fighters of Buchenwald.¹⁴

The West-German distancing from the national master narrative was initially less drastic, but ultimately more successful. Although critical voices, especially from abroad, had been raised before, it took until the Fischer controversy about the responsibility for the outbreak of the First World War, for the national paradigm to lose its hold over views of the past.¹⁵ With the arrival of a new age-cohort and the general ferment of the student revolt, a critical history of society, often somewhat misleadingly called the Bielefeld school, established itself not just in the universities but eventually also in the minds of an increasingly self-critical public. Influenced by Anglo-American critiques, this interpretation drew upon the modernization theories of the social sciences in order to show that German development had deviated from the general Western pattern, i.e. followed a disastrous *Sonderweg*. Though never able to achieve the same degree of dominance in the West as the Marxist counternarrative in the East, this critical social approach eventually became the democratic master narrative of the Federal Republic.¹⁶

The institutional concomitant to the rise of societal history was the expansion and reform of the West German universities. During the early sixties critics like Georg Picht had assailed the lagging educational provision of the Federal Republic with the slogan of a *Bildungsnotstand*, while Ralf Dahrendorf proclaimed education as a human right. As a result about two dozen new institutions were founded, from Constance to Bremen, which

14 Martin Sabrow, *Das Diktat des Konsens – Geschichtswissenschaft in der DDR 1949–1969* (Munich, 2001). Cf. also the dissertation by Jon Berndt Olsen on East German memory culture, Chapel Hill 2004

15 Konrad H. Jarausch, "Der nationale Tabubruch – Wissenschaft, Öffentlichkeit und Politik in der Fischer-Kontroverse", in: Klaus Große Kracht u.a., Hg., *Zeitgeschichte als Streitgeschichte* (Munich, 2003). Cf. Rüdiger Hohls and Konrad Jarausch, eds. *Versäumte Fragen – Deutsche Historiker im Schatten des Nationalsozialismus* (Stuttgart, 2000)

16 Thomas Welskopp, "Identität *ex negativo* – Der 'deutsche Sonderweg' als Metaerzählung in der westdeutschen Geschichtswissenschaft der siebziger und achtziger Jahre", in: *Die historische Meistererzählung*, 109 ff. Cf. also Konrad H. Jarausch, "Modernization, German Exceptionalism and Postmodernity: Transcending the Critical History of Society", in: *Shattered Past*, 85 ff.

also had more liberal internal structures like departments and gave lower ranking faculty and students a larger input into governance.¹⁷

At the same time the establishment of new campuses in Bielefeld or Bochum created faculty openings, allowing a whole cohort, led by Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Jürgen Kocka and Hans as well as Wolfgang J. Mommsen to gain professorships at a comparatively young age. Once ensconced, the societal historians used a systematic strategy of founding new journals like "Geschichte und Gesellschaft", and sponsoring paperback series like the "Neue Historische Bibliothek" with Suhrkamp to promote their views.¹⁸ Continuing controversy with more traditionalist colleagues also kept their findings in the news.

During the Cold War the relationship between the two German historiographies became increasingly contentious and hostile. The East Germans left the *Verband Deutscher Historiker*, the national organization, in 1958 and founded their own association which was eventually accepted as an independent member by the International Congress of Historical Sciences. In the book-reviews of the leading journals, comments on monographs from the other side were generally dismissive and spiced with allusions to "bourgeois reactionaries" or "communist propagandists". The GDR used some of its scarce resources to publish indictments of West German scholarship in order to warn its own students of the evil consequences of Western propaganda in areas where it could not produce its own literature. In contrast, Western scholars mostly just ignored Eastern scholarship as hopelessly ideological and outdated.¹⁹ While some individuals tried to maintain intellectual contacts, in general the two historiographies grew increasingly apart.

By the 1980s some signs of a gradual rapprochement, nonetheless, began to emerge. In the East, the broadening of the "two camps" view to include not just the labor pedigree but parts of the more general past in the concept of *Erbe und Tradition* seemed like a lessening of ideological rigor. The

17 For example, Peter Lundgreen, ed., *Reformuniversität Bielefeld 1969–1994: Zwischen Defensive und Innovation* (Bielefeld, 1994)

18 Georg G. Iggers, *The Social History of Politics in West German Historical Writing since 1945* (Dover, NH, 1985)

19 Gerhard Lozek, ed., *Zeitalter im Widerstreit – Grundprobleme der historischen Epoche seit 1917 in der Auseinandersetzung mit der bürgerlichen Geschichtsschreibung* (Berlin, 1982)

more balanced Bismarck biography of the previous hardliner Ernst Engelberg was therefore favorably received in the West. Moreover the gradual seepage of newer historical methods, including quantification, across the border made Eastern scholarship more interesting in terms of methodology.²⁰

In the West the shift from political to societal history also began to draw attention to questions of labor history for which the works of GDR colleagues might be relevant. Moreover, the accidental location of the domestic national archives in Potsdam at the end of the war also meant that scholars working on internal politics had to consult East German authors who had privileged access to the sources denied to them. As a result of détente, individual contacts intensified and meetings began to discuss topics of common interest. Nonetheless, it would be an exaggeration to claim that both historical camps were already on the path to reunification, so to speak *avant la lettre*.²¹

2. Transforming the East

With the collapse of the GDR the Marxist narrative that had prided itself upon explaining the laws of development became an unexpected casualty of that very history. Confronted with a popular rising in the fall of 1989, most East German historians reacted with shock and disbelief, unable to understand their charges' emancipation from their own teachings. It took until November for the Leipzig social historian Hartmut Zwahr to confess that "the majority of historians has collaborated with the party administrative system of our country and its people's self-destruction, taken on the tasks set before it, and played its role. This truth is rather bitter." In early December Jürgen John, Wolfgang Küttler and Walter Schmidt of the Academy deplored "the reticence of professional historiography" and called for open engagement in the construction of "a democratic socialism." Some scholars who had been disciplined by the party also denounced the "dou-

20 Helmut Meier and Walter Schmidt, eds., *Erbe und Tradition in der DDR – Die Diskussion der Historiker* (Berlin, 1988); and Georg Iggers, ed., *Ein anderer historischer Blick – Beispiele ostdeutscher Sozialgeschichte* (Frankfurt, 1991)

21 Lutz Niethammer, *Ego-histoire? Und andere Erinnerungs-Versuche*, Wien 2003. Cf. Herrman Brinks, *Die DDR-Geschichtswissenschaft auf dem Weg zur deutschen Einheit – Luther, Friedrich II. und Bismarck als Paradigmen politischen Wandels* (Frankfurt, 1992)

ble drug of Stalinism" as responsible for the self-censorship.²² Since only a minority of liberal Communists was willing to examine its own complicity, all efforts to save the counternarrative by reforming the discipline from above were doomed, because they were too belated and timid.

Impatient with the silence of leading scholars, Eastern dissenters and Western critics attacked "the failure of the historians." In January 1990 some younger and independent historians leveled the massive charge: "In the humanities the situation is deplorable. For decades an unpalatable stew of lies and half-truths smothered any free intellectual impulse. Ridiculous scholasticism and staid clichés were handed out as 'sole scientific *Weltanschauung*.'"²³ Conservative FRG commentators who had long denounced Marxist historiography as pseudoscholarship were delighted to join in this indictment and even liberal observers were appalled by the extent of "crude partisanship, loss of reality, and neglect of sources" which indicated the need for a "radical cure."²⁴ This rising chorus of criticism stressed "the moral and political degeneration" of Eastern historical writing, and emphasized the responsibility of leading individuals for collaboration with the secret police. Based on a Neo-Rankean understanding of scholarly objectivity, these attacks sought to discredit the Marxist alternative by a thorough uncovering of its many forms of academic duplicity.²⁵

Disturbed by such assaults on their lifework, some established East German historians fought back in order to preserve the Marxist counternarrative in a united Germany. Claiming "there was not only opportunism and stagna-

22 Hartmut Zwahr, "Zu einer beginnenden Diskussion – Administratives System und Gesellschaft, administratives System und Schule, Geschichtsschreibung usw.;" Jürgen John, Wolfgang Küttler and Walter Schmidt, "Für eine Erneuerung des Geschichtsverständnisses in der DDR;" Wolfgang Ruge, "Die Doppeldroge – Zu den Wurzeln des Stalinismus," and other texts reprinted in: Rainer Eckert, Wolfgang Küttler, and Gustav Seeber, eds., *Krise – Umbruch – Neubeginn. Eine kritische und selbstkritische Dokumentation der DDR-Geschichtswissenschaft 1989/90* (Stuttgart, 1992), 24 ff., 33 ff., 152 ff.

23 Armin Mitter and Stefan Wolle, "Aufruf zur Bildung einer Arbeitsgruppe unabhängiger Historiker in der DDR," in the extensive documentation, ed. Rainer Eckert, Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk and Isolde Stark, *Hure oder Muse? Klio in der DDR – Dokumente und Materialien des Unabhängigen Historiker-Verbandes* (Berlin, 1994), 22 ff.

24 Winfried Schulze, "Das traurigste Los aber traf die Geschichtswissenschaft – Die DDR-Geschichtswissenschaft nach der 'deutschen Revolution'," and Christian Meier, "Im Zweifel lieber abwickeln," in: *Krise – Umbruch – Neubeginn*, 213 ff., 258 ff.

25 Konrad H. Jarausch, Matthias Middell and Martin Sabrow, "Störfall DDR-Geschichtswissenschaft," *DDR-Geschichtswissenschaft*, 1–50

tion," Kurt Pätzold emphasized "the considerable progress" of Marxist scholarship rather than dwelling on its "serious deficits."²⁶ This defensive perspective sought to differentiate between particularly deformed areas close to politics and other subjects less influenced by ideology.

Apologists stressed the existence of lively internal debates that did not usually make their way into print, and pointed to an evident process of professionalization in published works towards closer observance of universal standards that had brought them growing international recognition during the 1980s. They also argued that the influence of the SED on the writing of history was not always negative, because the party had initially inspired new topics for investigation that turned out to be fruitful. Finally, the defenders of East German scholarship warned against repeating the Nazi purge of Marxist historiography from the universities.²⁷

Within individual East German institutions the spring of 1990 was a moment of extraordinary freedom and multiple possibilities for the future. During the interval between the collapse of the SED-dictatorship and the arrival of the FRG-system, engaged minorities attempted to democratize the socialist universities so as to find a "third way" between the East and the West. While party, FDJ and trade union controls evaporated, an alliance of critical instructors and activist students transformed the authoritarian university structures to allow more participation from below.

Within disciplines such as history, they threw the dead weight of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy overboard in order to explore dissident socialist voices for the first time. Moreover, there was a run on Western libraries and bookshops so as to catch up with international scholarship that had been inaccessible before. In the spirit of a new academic freedom, the school-like study plans and other regulations melted away. During the summer of 1990 the first Western visitors appeared on campus, encouraging internal

26 Kurt Pätzold, "Sich totstellen oder wehren? – Das ist die entscheidende Frage," *Neues Deutschland*, December 30, 1990; and "Die Geschichtsschreibung in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik," in: *Mauern der Geschichte*, 187 ff.

27 Walter Schmidt, "Geschichte zwischen Professionalität und Politik – Zu zentralen Leitungsstrukturen und -mechanismen in der DDR," in: *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 40 (1992), 1013 ff.; and Wolfgang Küttler, "Geschichtstheorie und -methodologie in der DDR," *ibid.* 42 (1994), 8–20

reform efforts and bringing along a different style of individualistic scholarship.²⁸

This window of self-reform from below closed abruptly with the German unification treaty which mandated the transfer of established Western patterns of scholarship to the new states. During the summer of 1990 the first freely elected Science Minister Hans-Joachim Meyer decreed the restoration of university autonomy in self-government, competence-based hiring and forms of instruction so as to ease the transition. Then the unification treaty decreed the wholesale transformation of the East German system into the Western structure.

While recognizing all academic titles of the GDR, it returned the authority over cultural matters to the individual member states and it abolished the East German Academy: The break-up of the huge research enterprise with over 20.000 individuals meant that its component institutes might either join existing organizations such as the Max Planck Gesellschaft or be shut down (*abgewickelt*), with some of their members returning to the universities. To make the process less arbitrary the National Science Council (*Wissenschaftsrat*) recommended that all decisions be based on scholarly evaluations of individuals and institutions.²⁹

For an individual discipline like history that found itself half-way between the apolitical sciences and the ideological humanities like Marxism-Leninism the consequences were drastic. To begin with, the various historical party centers were shut down. More seriously, all three academy institutes were closed as well. Of the several hundred members, only several dozen most positively evaluated scholars found new homes in the universities or in the newly founded *Forschungsschwerpunkt Zeithistorische Studien* in Potsdam.³⁰ Finally, within the universities, the most tarnished subjects like

28 See the interviews collected by Ines Glaubke, "Von der Pädagogischen Hochschule 'Karl Liebknecht' zur Universität Potsdam", M.A. thesis (Potsdam, 2004)

29 Hans-Joachim Meyer, "Zwischen Kaderschmiede und Hochschulrecht", *Hochschule Ost*, 1996, Nr. 6; and Renate Mayntz, *Deutsche Forschung im Einigungsprozess – Die Transformation der Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR 1989 bis 1992* (Frankfurt, 1994)

30 Christoph Klessmann and Martin Sabrow, "Zeitgeschichte in Deutschland nach 1945," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* (1996) Nr. 36: 3–14 and Anna Sabine Ernst, "Between 'Investigative History' and Solid Research: The Reorganization of Historical Studies about the Former German Democratic Republic", *Central European History* 28 (1995), 373–95

“the socialist world system” were eliminated from the prior sections, now refounded as western style departments.

At the same time the West German structure of topics with chairs in ancient, medieval, early modern and modern history was revived and largely centered on German history, eliminating some of the international subjects. Moreover, power was generally returned to the full professors and mid-level staff positions were transformed into temporary slots for aspiring junior scholars. These changes eliminated much ideological distortion, but also restored a system that had itself become somewhat antiquated by international comparison.³¹

Even more controversial was the exchange of personnel, because it deeply touched individual life-patterns. The first reason for dismissal was political involvement in the SED-dictatorship, such as party activism or membership in the secret service, the infamous *Stasi*. If they were close to retirement age, some of the most objectionable zealots left on their own and some of the worst secret service members had already been fired during the final phase of the GDR. But the large number of informers were only caught by bureaucratic screening, since the civic movement had succeeded in preserving most of the *Stasi* documents which were then archived and catalogued.

Just like in 1945, each university member was compelled to fill out a lengthy questionnaire on her or his political and other activities. This document was then carefully checked against the surviving material in the *Stasi* Archives (BStU), commonly known as *Gauck-Behörde* after its head. If membership could be established, informers were summarily fired. While this onerous procedure was necessary to restore the credibility of academics, it also caught some minor collaborators and let convinced Communist off the hook, if they were not formally implicated.³²

A second form of screening was the evaluation of professional competence. This process seemed necessary, because some East German historians like Hanna Wolf had based their career more on propaganda than on scholarship while others, especially in the middle ranks, were more univer-

31 Luise Schorn-Schütte, ed., *Ideologie und wissenschaftliche Verantwortung – Zielsetzungen und Praxis von Forschung, Lehre und Studium der Geschichtswissenschaft an der PH Karl Liebknecht Potsdam und am Historischen Institut der Universität Potsdam* (Potsdam, 1996)

32 For example Fritz Klein, *Drinnen und Draußen – Ein Historiker in der DDR* (Frankfurt, 2000)

sity teachers than researchers. Evaluation committees usually consisted of five persons, three from the West and two from the East. Conflicting academic cultures rendered personnel judgments difficult, since individual publication was prized in the West, but less necessary in the East where the pattern of collective authorship made it hard to determine the share of one person in the product.

Moreover, some dissidents had not been permitted to publish, while hard-liners often had enjoyed travel privileges, which allowed them to invoke their Western support networks. Nonetheless, most committees managed to make fair decisions in identifying superior scholars whose work lived up to international standards of scholarship.³³ Even for successful historians who had never experienced evaluation, the procedure left a trail of resentment, not to mention the disappointment of the rejected.

The vacated positions which remained after fiscally induced downsizing were generally filled by Western scholars, since they had the attributes prized by search committees. Initially retired researchers like Gerhard A. Ritter at the Humboldt University served as advisors for the restructuring of departments and the hiring of new personnel. So-called "founding professors" like Julius H. Schoeps in Potsdam headed search committees, staffed again by a mixture of external Western and internal Eastern colleagues. They tended to choose from the ranks of West German *Privatdozenten*, eagerly waiting for appointments, since their own age cohort had been stalled by the stagnation of Western hiring.

Some of the appointments brought first rate historians to the East like Heinrich August Winkler to Berlin, Christoph Klessmann to Potsdam or Lutz Niethammer to Jena. But there were also some lesser lights that finally got a chance to become professor and then acted accordingly. Nonetheless the media charge of "carpet-bagging" seems overdrawn, because transforming scholarship also required appointing new people with new ideas.³⁴

33 Jürgen Kocka and Renate Mayntz, *Wissenschaft und Wiedervereinigung – Disziplinen im Umbruch* (Berlin, 1998)

34 Gerhard. A. Ritter, "Der Neuaufbau der Geschichtswissenschaft an der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin: Ein Erfahrungsbericht", in: *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, 44 (1993), 226 ff., Julius H. Schoeps, *Mein Weg als deutscher Jude – Autobiographische Notizen* (Zürich, 2003)

This large-scale turnover of elites created multiple conflicts between the departing scholars and the new arrivals. One bone of contention was the fairness of the decision-making, when left-leaning labor courts overturned many dismissals on technical grounds. A second source of conflict was the practice of bringing young assistants along from the West, which blocked the possibilities of advancement for local East Germans. A third cause of friction was the difference in style between the collectivist mind-set of the existing researchers and the more individualistic Westerners, especially when the latter displayed their newfound authority as chairs in an authoritarian manner.

A final reason for the clashes was the different conception of historical methods that pitted practitioners of political labor history against representatives of social, everyday and cultural history. To overcome these multiple differences various foundations like the DAAD started special programs for young East German scholars. While the charge of "academic colonization" expressed the Eastern resentment at being overwhelmed, over time these tensions lessened as the new arrivals began to go native.

The reorientation of departmental curricula proved equally difficult, since these reforms had to be undertaken while courses were being taught and exams administered. To end the regimentation (*Verschulung*) of the GDR system, the number of credit-hours had to be drastically reduced from the mid-twenties to the mid-teens. At the same time old subjects like the rise of the Communist Party or the Glorious October Revolution were replaced with new topics such as the origins of the Basic Law or perspectives of gender history and so on.

Similarly the tight study groups in which a couple of dozen students took all subjects together had to be broken up so as to create space for choice among courses in order to develop an individual profile. Moreover, the continual testing system of the GDR needed to be loosened in favor of intermittent proof of achievement in a *Zwischenprüfung* or a *Seminarschein* that would then culminate in a Western-style *Staatsexamen* or an M.A. with thesis. Finally entire new library holdings had to be added to reflect

the advancement of international scholarship and modern PCs introduced so as to offer even students access to the internet.³⁵

The process of transforming East German historiography was therefore highly conflicted and contradictory. Since most GDR historians favored some reforms, the process was self-induced, even if it soon went much further than the self-reformers had intended. The rapidity of the changes, which was driven by the general "rush to German unity", overwhelmed many participants after the first excitement of greater liberties had worn off. No doubt, dismissal was difficult for those who did not survive the evaluations, since it generally meant a premature end to their academic career. Nonetheless, fundamental changes were necessary, because historical scholarship in the East had many "blank spots", generally served to legitimize the SED-dictatorship, and was also outmoded in its methodological approach.³⁶ In a united country, Eastern students deserved a freer, more pluralized encounter with the past that would not indoctrinate them with a single ideology, but sharpen their critical faculties, necessary for active citizenship. That meant that the entire system, which had been too closely tied to the SED, had to be removed – even if this drastic restructuring ran the risk of destroying some positive elements that might better have been saved.

3. United Historiographies?

Half a decade after the collapse of Communism, the external unification of historiographies was largely completed, even if it turned out to be rather one-sided in practice. Once the Eastern universities had been reconstructed, historians everywhere had the same field-structures, taught the same courses and held the same examinations. By hiring largely new faculty some departments, like that of the Humboldt University in Berlin, were better than most of their western competitors. As long as the money lasted, Eastern institutions bought the newest equipment and were therefore sometimes more up to date than their peers in the old states.

35 Konrad H. Jarausch, "Destruction créatrice – Transformer le système universitaire est-allemand: le cas de l'histoire," *Sociétés contemporaines* (2000), No. 39: 39–60

36 Hermann Weber, "'Weiße Flecken' in der DDR-Geschichtsschreibung", *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 1990, Nr. 11, 3–15. Cf. Rainer Eppelmann, Bernd Faulenbach and Ulrich Mähler, eds., *Bilanz und Perspektiven der DDR-Forschung* (Paderborn, 2003)

Moreover, there was a kind of frontier mentality in the early years of struggling under adverse circumstances to bring the benefits of Western scholarship to areas of the country that had previously been isolated intellectually. But the refurbished seminar libraries revealed upon closer inspection a continuing tension between their old GDR stock and a new layer of Western literature superimposed upon this unlikely base. How would this rapid and enforced Westernization work out in the long run?

One important debate continues to revolve around the issue of innovation. Western scholars could point to the gains in access to international literature, public debates on memory culture, new research methods and technical infrastructure such as the availability of PCs and the internet. Eastern historians would counter by stressing the loss of team work, the worsening of student advising, the lengthening of time before graduation, and the harder competitive climate as unnecessary deterioration. With the benefit of hindsight most participants now agree that the hope for innovation in teaching or research was probably misplaced, since these could not be put on hold for several years until the new ideas were finally worked out. However beneficial initially, the modernization of personnel and institutions in the East was accomplished by imposing a system that itself had become somewhat questionable. With Westernization complete, the united universities now face the challenge of delayed modernization through the Bologna process by introducing B.A.'s and making their structures more compatible on a European level.³⁷

A solely negative picture would, however, be inaccurate, since the unification process has produced some institutional innovations of its own. With the BStU, commonly called the Gauck- or Birthler-*Behörde*, the civic movement has succeeded in establishing a sizable bureaucracy to administer the *Stasi* records and to promote public awareness of SED-repression. A second new foundation is the *Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung* in Potsdam, which combines positively evaluated members of the East German Academy with new Western scholars to work initially on GDR history.

Yet another postunification institution is the Hannah Arendt Institute in Dresden, dedicated to research on totalitarian governments, i.e. the NS- and SED-dictatorships. The former opposition groups have also created ar-

³⁷ Glaubke, "Von der Pädagogischen Hochschule", 49 ff., 64 ff.

chives to preserve the record of resistance against the communist regime, the most important of which is the Havemann-Domaschk-Archiv. Much of the critical work on GDR history is supported by a new foundation, called "Stiftung Aufarbeitung" that was created by the German *Bundestag*.³⁸ These new departures have enriched the infrastructure of the historical discipline.

A second bone of contention has been the displacement of East German historians and the resulting imbalance of personnel. Because of their involvement in legitimizing the SED-regime, most senior historians were fired after unification. In contrast to the wholesale dismissal of instructors in Marxism-Leninism, socialist economics or law, only specialists in overt ideological subjects like the evolution of the communist world system were removed summarily. Among the rest, the evaluation committees, composed of Western colleagues and Eastern dissidents, discovered a mixture of considerable competence coupled with appalling collaboration, though only a few individuals were outed as *Stasi* informants. The restructuring of curricula along Western lines eliminated some favorite GDR fields and promoted neglected areas like ancient history, while the lack of financial resources compelled the dismissal of much mid-level teaching staff, now considered superfluous. Consequently, only about a handful of prominent Easterners like Helmut Harnisch, Hartmut Zwahr, Jürgen John, or Helga Schultz managed to survive, thereby rupturing the Marxist tradition.³⁹

With the help of PDS resources, some fired but still active scholars therefore created an "alternative academic culture" outside of the universities, where they could carry on in a manner of speaking. Many previous channels of communication, such as the lead journal "Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft", have altered ideological direction through changing editorship. However, the postcommunist PDS has sponsored a historical commission of its own; created a foundation, called the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung;

38 For a survey see Ulrich Mähler, ed., *Vademecum DDR-Forschung – Ein Leitfaden zu Archiven, Forschungseinrichtungen, Bibliotheken, Einrichtungen der politischen Bildung, Vereinen, Museen und Gedenkstätten* (Berlin, 2002). Cf. Konrad H. Jarausch, "The GDR as History in United Germany: Reflections on Public Debate and Academic Controversy," *German Politics and Society* 15 (1997): 33 ff.

39 Peer Pasternack, *Geisteswissenschaften in Ostdeutschland – Eine Inventur* (Leipzig, 1996), 242–287; and Jarausch, "Destruction créatrice", 39–60

established a quasi-academy in the Leibniz Sozietät; and organized various discussion fora such as the *Helle Panke*.

Moreover, the party continues to offer publication outlets, used especially by the cohort of retired scholars, some of whom are trying to reflect on the reasons for the defeat of their glorious experiment.⁴⁰ In contrast, younger but independent Marxists have founded a few new organs of debate such as *Berliner Debatte – Initial* or the historical journal *Comparativ* to discuss the intellectual implications of the collapse of East Germany for emancipatory views.⁴¹ Behind such frequent complaints about “squandering intellectual capital” lies also resentment against Western dominance in interpreting the German past.⁴²

Only the younger generation of Eastern scholars and history students seems to be fully arriving in the united German academic environment. Many of the aspiring historians have benefited from special fellowship opportunities, but have then had to face the same difficulties as their Western competitors in a clogged system that is extremely selective. Among the student cohorts the differences have virtually disappeared so that Westerners are working on Eastern topics and vice versa.

While young faculty members from the East still show a lingering Marxist orientation, the incoming students appear to have tossed this ideological baggage and they seem indistinguishable, except for an occasional regional accent, from their peers. It is therefore likely to take an entire generation until the personnel issues will work themselves out, especially if the structural and curricular reforms such as the introduction of the “junior professor” or of modularized B.A.’s will also result in a higher demand for academics.⁴³

40 Term used by Stefan Berger, “Die Geschichtswissenschaft der DDR als alternative historische Subkultur”, *Leibniz-Intern*, 15.1.2003, 13–14

41 See the special issue on “Die DDR denken” of *Berliner Debatte – Initial*, 4–5 (1995); the section on “Wissenschaft in der DDR” in: *Utopie kreativ*, 11–12 (1996); and the journal *Comparativ*, appearing in Leipzig.

42 “Fahrlässiger Umgang mit der Ressource Geist”, *Freitag*, 2004, Nr. 8

43 Konrad H. Jarausch, “Amerika – Alptraum oder Vorbild? Transatlantische Bemerkungen zum Problem der Universitätsreform”, in: Philipp Gassert, ed., *Festschrift für Detlev Junker* (Heidelberg, 2004), 572–589

A third area of controversy is the self-reflection of the historical discipline about the interpretative implications of academic collaboration with the SED-dictatorship. Along with displacement from the academy, Marxist historians experienced an ideological crisis that led to a loss of confidence and external appeal. A series of questions arose that were difficult to answer convincingly: Had the claims of scientific certainty of historical materialism that predicted a socialist victory not been found wanting with the collapse of Communism? Had the critical impulse that exposed the weaknesses of capitalist democracy not curiously stopped short of condemning the dictatorial practices of the SED? Had the humanist basis of the ideology that rested on Enlightenment principles and stressed social equality not neglected to insist on the implementation of human rights that were supposedly guaranteed in the constitution? While most members of the older generation and some of the younger cohorts clung to their ideology as a kind of secular faith, they now had to explain what had gone wrong in its implementation during real existing socialism.⁴⁴

At the other end of the ideological spectrum, the totalitarian paradigm made a surprising comeback, because it provided a stern indictment of academic complicity. Developed during the 1940s by German émigrés in the US like Hannah Arendt and Carl Friedrich, this theory focused on the similarities in repressive structures between the fascist and communist dictatorships. From this perspective the primary function of history in the GDR was the legitimization of minority rule through scholarly means – a view propounded by former Western cold warriors and Eastern dissidents.

Drawing on the records of the Central Committee, the Ministry for Higher Education and the university archives, scholars like Ilko-Sascha Kowalczuk have accused East German historians of craven ideological bias, factual errors and omissions, and of methodological provincialism.⁴⁵ This approach has focused on the ideological messages but tended to ignore its intrinsic argumentation and claims of scholarly validity, thereby reducing historical

⁴⁴ See for example the texts in Rainer Eckert and Bernd Faulenbach, eds., *Halbherziger Revisio-nismus – Zum Postkommunistischen Geschichtsbild* (Munich 1996)

⁴⁵ Eckhard Jesse, Hg., *Totalitarismus im 20. Jahrhundert – Eine Bilanz der internationalen Forschung* (Baden-Baden, 1999); Alfons Söllner, Hg., *Totalitarismus – Eine Ideengeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1997). Cf. Ilko-Sascha Kowalczuk, *Legitimation eines neuen Staates – Parteiarbeiter an der historischen Front. Geschichtswissenschaft in der SBZ/DDR 1945 bis 1961* (Berlin, 1997)

writing to its political function. These attacks were part of an effort to turn the intellectual outlook of historians in a more conservative direction.

Between these extremes, it has proved difficult to establish a more differentiated view of the tension between partisanship and professionalism which characterized GDR writing. As advocated by Jürgen Kocka, a comparison between the two dictatorships (*Diktaturvergleich*) sought to establish not just similarities, but also differences in ideological thrust and murderous consequences between the Nazis and the SED.⁴⁶ More nuanced work on the reality of socialism began to uncover a series of paradoxes: Marxist scholarship was caught between preaching an emancipatory ethos and a justification of repressive practice; the celebration of antifascist resistance clashed with the rationalization of communist complicity; the elaboration of anticapitalist criticism collided with support for socialist exploitation. Instead of being either scientific truth or purely ideological propaganda, GDR historiography continued to oscillate between these two poles, with individual books and authors tending more in one or in the other direction. Martin Sabrow therefore claims that instead of being merely a bad copy of Western scholarly practice, GDR historiography represented a different discourse with rules of its own.⁴⁷ Intellectual unification will therefore take some further time.

4. Searching for Master Narratives

The collapse of communism, German unification and the transformation of Europe have dramatized the fundamental dependence of historical scholarship on its social context. Research and publication require the observance of human rights so they can be free to produce results that might be considered subversive by those in power. Writing and teaching also need institutional infrastructure as well as financial support, which are vulnerable to political manipulation.

Moreover, the definition of relevant questions and the reception of plausible answers are colored by changes in ideological climate that has to be

⁴⁶ Jürgen Kocka, "Nationalsozialismus und SED-Diktatur in vergleichender Perspektive," *Potsdamer Bulletin für Zeithistorische Studien* (Postdam, 1994), 2: 9–27; idem and Martin Sabrow, eds., *Die DDR als Geschichte* (Berlin, 1994)

⁴⁷ Martin Sabrow, *Das Diktat des Konsens – Geschichtswissenschaft in der DDR 1949–1969* (Munich, 2001)

permissive enough, not just to expect an uncritical affirmation. Finally, the methods of inquiry and modes of presentation are heavily influenced by the present situation, which circumscribes what is considered worth knowing, such as the outbreak of wars or the patterns of social mobility. By calling for explanations for two dictatorships, the upheaval of 1989/90 scrambled all these arrangements and doubled the burden of the past.⁴⁸

Not surprisingly, the first casualty of the overthrow of the SED-regime was the communist counter-narrative in the East. With the dissolution of the GDR, East German historians lost not only their political mandate of legitimizing the other Germany, but also their political protection. The result was a rapid collapse of the institutional infrastructure in the Party institutes, Academy of Sciences, university departments, schools, museums, publishing houses, and so on. Equally devastating was the evaporation of the intellectual credibility of the Marxist perspective on the past due to its reduction to a set of orthodox formulas rather than an open-ended principle of critical inquiry. The evident failure of real existing socialism to succeed in competition with a Western social market economy and to deliver on its utopian promises of a more fulfilling life had devastating consequences. Only the subsequent "unification crisis" seemed to return some validity to leftist critiques of "casino capitalism", but by then the Marxist perspective had largely been reduced to a marginal counter-voice outside of academe.⁴⁹

Ironically, the Western *Sonderweg*-narrative had little reason for self-congratulation, because it was shaken by the unforeseen return of history as well. Conservative historians were only too happy to seize upon the occasion to charge the liberal camp with complicity with the SED and with intellectual unpreparedness for 1989/90.⁵⁰ At the same time the Eley-Blackbourn critique of the exaggeration of German deviation and the attack of everyday-historians on the rigidity of the generalizations of *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* began to take their toll.

48 Konrad H. Jarausch, "A Double Burden: The Politics of the Past and German Identity," in: Jörn Leonhard, Lothar Funk, eds., *Ten Years of German Unification: Transfer, Transformation, Incorporation?* (Birmingham, 2002), 98–114

49 Jürgen Kocka, *Vereinigungskrise – Zur Geschichte der Gegenwart* (Göttingen, 1995). Cf. Jarausch, "The Collapse of the Counter-Narrative", 81 ff.

50 Jens Hacker, *Deutsche Irrtümer – Schönfärber und Helfershelfer der SED-Diktatur im Westen* (Berlin, 1992)

Moreover the claims of new cultural historians, steeped in postmodernism, grew more insistent that the Bielefeld school was ignoring gender as well as experience and memory. Finally, younger scholars, especially open to a new kind of Holocaust-sensibility, charged that the structuralism of societal historians was obliterating individual guilt and personal agency.⁵¹ Even if prominent Bielefelders like Hans-Ulrich Wehler were ready to admit that unification had finished the *Sonderweg*, they could not entirely allay the suspicion that the utility of their own approach might have ended with it as well.⁵²

The beneficiary of the difficulties of the Eastern and Western alternatives was the traditional national master narrative. Moderate scholars like Hans-Peter Schwarz, indeed welcomed that "the nation has returned to itself", hoping to reassert what they considered a normal perspective in other Western countries. More aggressive, a number of right-wing historians, led by Rainer Zitelmann, wanted to use the opportunity finally to "renationalize" historical scholarship. Concretely their program involved a set of conceptual shifts: The nation ought once again to become the central interpretative reference-point; Germans should throw off their guilt-complex for the crimes of the Second World War; scholars ought to return to questions of war and diplomacy; and research should resume its tried and true method of political rather than social or cultural history.

Only the loud outcry of liberal intellectuals such as Jürgen Habermas or Peter Glotz against such a "false normalization" was able to stop the renationalization campaign.⁵³ More modest but still controversial remains the effort by Richard Schröder or Peter Graf Kielmansegg to develop a democratic and patriotic narrative as a historical basis for the enlarged Federal Republic.⁵⁴

51 Konrad H. Jarausch, "German Exceptionalism, Modernization and Postmodernity", 91 ff.

52 Hans-Ulrich Wehler, "Endlich im Westen," *ZEIT Punkte* (Hamburg, 1999), 1: 64 ff.; and Kocka, "Nach dem Ende des Sonderwegs – Zur Tragfähigkeit eines Konzepts," in: Arnd Bauerkämper et al., eds., *Doppelte Zeitgeschichte – Deutsch-deutsche Beziehungen 1945–1990* (Bonn, 1998), 364 ff.

53 Material in Konrad H. Jarausch, "Normalization or Re-Nationalization: On the Reinterpretation of the German Past," in: Reinhard Alter and Peter Monteath, eds., *Rewriting the German Past: History and Identity in the New Germany* (Atlantic Highlands, 1997), 23–39

54 Richard Schröder, *Deutschland, schwierig Vaterland – Für eine neue politische Kultur* (Freiburg, 1993). Cf. also Heinrich August Winkler, "Demokratie und Nation in der deutschen Geschichte," in: Fraunhofer Gesellschaft, ed., *Reden und Ansprachen – Jahrestagung 1994* (Munich, 1994), 34–56

By discrediting the rivaling postwar narratives, the upheaval of 1989/90 has created a moment of extraordinary openness – and interpretative uncertainty. Within the debris of the Marxist and modernization paradigms, a number of new pretenders to the status of general explanations of the German past are staking their claims: Many scholars who fear the nationalist implications of a national orientation are simply shifting their allegiance to the continent as a whole, hoping to construct a broader, Europeanized history. Others who find such a Eurocentric perspective too confining plead instead, in accordance with post-colonialist criticism, for a globalized view, even if the brief history of German colonialism makes that difficult.

Yet others prefer a more tightly focused approach that highlights the discrimination of women in a committed feminist version of gender history. Finally, a rising moral sensitivity to the Holocaust sees the entire past as leading to and away from Nazi crimes.⁵⁵ The above reflections therefore suggest that the return of history has had a drastic impact on German historiography; it is to be hoped that instead of returning to a single dominant interpretation, this experience will reinforce the tendency to multivocal, de-centered narratives of the past.

55 Konrad H. Jarausch, "Die Krise der nationalen Meistererzählungen"; Dirk van Laak, "Der Platz des Holocaust im deutschen Geschichtsbild"; Hanna Schissler, "Hält die Geschlechtergeschichte, was sie versprochen hat?" and Matthias Middell, "Europäische Geschichte oder *global history* – *master narratives* oder Fragmentierung?" in: *Historische Meistererzählungen*, 140–252

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WZB-Vorlesungen

1

Lord Ralf Dahrendorf, *Öffentliche Sozialwissenschaft – Nützlich? Lehrreich? Unterhaltsam?*, 9. September 2001, WZB 2001, 15 S.

2

Neil J. Smelser, *Social Sciences as Learning Systems*, 16. November 2001, WZB 2002, 22 S.

3

Friedhelm Neidhardt, *Wissenschaft als öffentliche Angelegenheit*, 26. November 2002, WZB 2002, 39 S.

4

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5

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6

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7

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8

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9

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10

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