

The Rise of Research on Collective Remembering

“In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue. He had three ships and left from Spain; He sailed through sunshine, wind and rain.” In the 1960s, Columbus Day was a national holiday in the United States of America (USA), commemorating the “discovery” of the Americas. Today, I put that word discovery in quotes, because in only twenty-one states do workers get a day off in commemoration of 1492, and in three states and the District of Columbia, people get a holiday on that day, but in celebration of Native Americans’ Day (or Indigenous Peoples’ Day). Eleven states have renamed Columbus Day to honor indigenous peoples instead. One state (Oklahoma) celebrates Columbus Day and Native American Day together.¹

The reason for this is the argument today over what Columbus achieved. Some say he did not discover an empty land, but began the taking of the Americas from Native Americans in a process tantamount to genocide (Thornton, 1987). The word holocaust has been used by others (Stannard, 1993). Furthermore, to the horror of Italian American groups at the forefront of creating and celebrating Columbus Day, there is now substantial evidence that Columbus as governor and viceroy of the West Indies was so brutal and avaricious (even by sixteenth-century standards) that he caused a decline in the native population so drastic he had to be recalled to Spain.² This killing off of the locals led to the large-scale importation of slaves from Africa to run the sugar cane plantations that exported this precious delicacy to Europe (Castro, 2007). Commemoration of Christopher Columbus is now contentious, with different groups producing different narratives of how he should be remembered (Hitchmough, 2013; Kubal, 2008). Recent research by Eason et al. (2021) suggests that

¹ www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/10/10/working-on-columbus-day-it-depends-on-where-you-live/.

² www.theguardian.com/world/2006/aug/07/books.spain#:~:text=As%20governor%20and%20viceroy%20of,Caribbean%20country%20of%20Dominican%20Republic.&text=A%20woman%20who%20dared%20to,also%20travelled%20to%20the%20Caribbean.

national identity in the form of in-group glorification, and negative stereotypes of Native Americans are two major factors maintaining support for Columbus Day as a national holiday in the USA.

The metaphorical takedown of Columbus has in recent years been accompanied by the physical takedown of statues commemorating Civil War figures representing the Confederacy, as monuments to racism. The legends I grew up with in America in the 1960s, from the brave explorer Columbus, to George Washington who cut down his father's cherry tree and would not tell a lie to save himself, to Robert E. Lee, noble warrior of the Confederacy, have all been challenged as mythology. It has become more difficult to tell a story about the making of the USA without controversy. Identity demands are coming from a plurality of directions, and from a range of groups, some of whom were previously silent, or silenced (Rothberg, 2011).

Substantial continuity remains. Part of the complexity in narrating American identity and American history is that much has changed in the past 250 years, but certain foundations, like the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and its Federal system of states, are still inscribed in American hearts, minds, and institutions. For every point made in the name of multiculturalism or decolonization, there is a counterpoint in terms of nationalism or patriotism. This speaks of continuity in the midst of change, a common pattern in the evolution of a national political culture (Liu & Pratto, 2018; Zerubavel, 2003).

Americans are not alone in their continuing quest for a narrative that tells a better story of who they are, where they came from, and where they should be going. Every people that seeks immortality as a collective claims history as a warrant of legitimacy (Malinowski, 1926). History provides not only explanation, but justification of who we are, how we came to be, why we have a rightful claim to the land and the way we live on that land (Liu & Hilton, 2005). In recent years, scholars from a variety of disciplines have increasingly come to realize that history is not simply a record of facts, but the representation of identity for a people (Olick et al., 2011), and the basis for legitimacy in their claims to sovereignty over a land (Zerubavel, 2003).

In the context of this "memory boom," the work of Maurice Halbwachs (1925/1992) on collective memory is of central importance. In contrast to a psychological approach to memory focusing on the physiological memory of the individual, Halbwachs (1925/1992) centered his attention on how memory is structured by the social frameworks required for people to

live together in society. In their overview, Hirst et al. (2018) observe that collective memory encompasses two forms: “one that treats collective memories as consisting of publicly available symbols maintained by society, and another that defines collective memory as individual memories shared by members of a community that bear on the collective identity of that community” (p. 439). This book will discuss how top-down and bottom-up forms of collective remembering work together as actions, of societies, institutions, as well as individuals and the groups they belong to. By examining collective remembering as actions at the interface between the individual and the collectives they belong to, I hope to author a deeper understanding of how the political culture of a society is formed, maintained, and how and why it changes.

Collective remembering is a fantastic forum for such an investigation, because it is what Bhaskar (1975/2008) describes as an open system. This is a theoretical frame where the objects of analysis enter into and depart from analysis. New events are always entering into the frame of collective memory as society encounters new “history-making” challenges, and older events and people are sometimes forgotten. As this happens, the political culture of that society changes. Collective memories are indicators of political culture: “the political system as internalized in the cognitions, feelings, and evaluations of its population” (Almond & Verba, 1963, p. 14). The person who thinks of 9-11 as the most important recent event in American history is representing America differently than the person who recalls World War II (WWII) as more important. Who “we” are, what “we” choose to remember from history, and how “we” interpret these collective memories are indicative of national identity. The memories of the nation as a collective are furthermore contingent on what groups are positioned as part of the nation, and what groups are considered as allies or enemies. Social identities like nationality are thus dynamic, and shaped by the social context surrounding the group (Turner et al., 1987). Given this dynamism, defining the content and the boundaries of group identity, and acting the part of the “group paragon” is a performative aspect of leadership (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). Political leaders can act as “identity entrepreneurs,” providing interpretations of history to define meaning for a group and mobilize a political agenda.

Political leaders draw upon “schematic narrative templates” (Wertsch, 2002) and historical charters (Liu & Hilton, 2005) that organize knowledge and beliefs about the past to direct future group activity. These story templates “grasp together” facts and bind them in a system of meaning that

is implicitly shared by members of a group. Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, in a speech commemorating the Nazi surrender on the seventy-fifth anniversary of VE Day, says the following of his country Germany³:

8 May 1945 was indeed a day of liberation. But at the time people did not perceive it as such.

The liberation of 1945 was imposed from outside. It had to come from outside – this country had descended too far into the evil, the guilt, it had brought upon itself. Likewise the economic reconstruction and democratic renewal in the western part of Germany were only made possible by the generosity, far-sightedness and readiness for reconciliation of our former foes.

But we, too, played a part in the liberation. In our internal liberation. This did not take place on 8 May 1945, and not on a single day. Rather it was a long and painful process which involved facing up to the past, investigating what people knew and what they had colluded in. Raising painful questions within families and between the generations. Fighting to stop silence and denial from prevailing.

It took decades – decades in which many Germans of my generation gradually found their peace with this country. These were also decades in which our neighbours came to trust us again, decades that allowed a cautious resumption of relations, from ever closer union within the European Communities to the treaties concluded in the course of West Germany's Ostpolitik. It was in these decades that the people of Eastern Europe's courage and desire for freedom grew until they could no longer be kept behind walls – leading to that gladdest moment of liberation: Germany's peaceful revolution and reunification. These decades of struggling with our history were decades that allowed democracy to mature in Germany.

And the struggle continues to this day. Remembrance never ends. There can be no deliverance from our past. For without remembrance we lose our future.

It is only because we Germans look our past in the face and because we accept our historic responsibility that the peoples of the world have come to trust our country once more. And this is why we, too, can have confidence in this Germany. This is the core of an enlightened, democratic spirit of patriotism. No German patriotism can come without its cracks. Without light and shadow; without joy and sorrow, gratitude and shame.

Rabbi Nachman once said: "No heart is as whole as a broken heart." Germany's past is a fractured past – with responsibility for the murdering of millions and the suffering of millions. That breaks our hearts to this day. And that is why I say that this country can only be loved with a broken heart.

I quote President Steinmeier's speech at length not only because it resonates with me emotionally, but because it illustrates so beautifully

³ www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/EN/Frank-Walter-Steinmeier/Reden/2020/05/200508-75th-anniversary-World-War-II.html.

principles associated with collective remembering: as a public act using culturally mediated tools (see Wertsch, 2002, chapter 2). Steinmeier's speech was occasioned top-down, to commemorate the end of WWII (in Europe), according to the political and cultural agenda of the German state. Commemorations are often used by states to construct (or reconstruct) national identity (Schwartz, 1982). This speech is but an instance of a narrative articulated by not only President Steinmeier, but his predecessor Gauck, and Chancellor Merkel when addressing the Middle Eastern refugee crisis from 2015 to 2018 (Lienen & Cohrs, 2021). Germany is presented as a country that has learned from a negative past to become a respected advocate for a free and united Europe that offers a safe haven for refugees on humanitarian grounds. In terms of the thematic content of his speech, Steinmeier acts as an identity entrepreneur (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001) who offers a fresh articulation of who the German people are in light of how they remember WWII. The "beacon of humanitarianism" discourse that he and other leaders of Germany have adopted (Lienen & Cohrs, 2021) is a socially creative way (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) to reconfigure a negative past for German identity.

In contrast to the reconciliatory tone used by President Steinmeier, sometimes a state uses commemorations to celebrate a victory in its history that causes pain for another group they defeated, or claims victimization by an enemy, thus reminding people of group differences (McAuley & Tonge, 2007). Steinmeier's interpretive action stands in sharp contrast to Chancellor Adolf Hitler of the Third Reich, who attributed Germany's defeat in World War I (WWI) to a "stab in the back" by traitors in his autobiography *Mein Kampf*. President Steinmeier narrates Germany's defeat in WWII as liberation from Nazi tyranny, and as the basis for Germany to be a moral nation (Olick, 2016). He says "We live in a vigorous and well-established democracy, in the thirtieth year of a reunified Germany, at the heart of a peaceful and united Europe. We are a trusted member of the international community and we reap the fruits of cooperation and partnership around the world. We Germans can definitely now say that the day of liberation is a day of thanksgiving!" In this articulation, the German people are free, enlightened, democratic, and grateful to be allied to others who uphold the same values. They are committed to the institutions established after the war to realize these values. Germans have a duty to remember to love their country in a "broken hearted way," that opens them up to a future as part of a peaceful Europe and a democratic free world.

However, not everyone in Germany will resonate with Steinmeier's vision. As in much of Europe, there is a rising faction of the disgruntled in

Germany, who oppose the European Union. They oppose the vision of a united Europe with a single currency, shared regulations, and free movement between countries. They appear nostalgic for a simpler and more nationalistic vision of themselves standing alone, or in opposition to others (Mudde, 2007). Steinmeier's representation of history is relevant to the present because even after many years of European integration, most people still identify much more with their individual states than with the European Union (Petithomme, 2008). Thus, his attempt at identity entrepreneurship may not be well-received by everyone in the state he represents. Understanding how people receive attempts by their political leaders to mobilize history to support their political positions is a crucial area of scientific inquiry into the making and changing of political cultures.

The Germany of today is decidedly a different state than the Germany of the late nineteenth century, which was forged as a unity in the blood and iron of three wars engineered by Prussian Chancellor Otto von Bismarck (Pflanze, 1963). Today Bismarck and Kaiser Wilhelm I cannot be celebrated as founding figures for Germany in the same way that George Washington and Thomas Jefferson are inscribed in Mount Rushmore for the USA (Iggers, 2002). Too much has changed: The constitution of Bismarck was scrapped, and the German monarchy was abolished after defeat in WWI. After that, Hitler's defeat in WWII was narrated by some as ground zero, a new beginning, where memories of the Holocaust are foundational and cannot be denied (Levy & Sznajder, 2002). Germany's pattern is substantial discontinuity (or rupture) in political culture, while retaining aspects of the deep structure of language, customs, and the arts; so that unlike Bismarck and Kaiser Wilhelm I, Beethoven and Goethe are still alive in the cultural memory of German people. Such larger concerns are described as cultural continuity according to Sani et al. (2007), whereas the focus of this book is on perceived historical continuity that relates more specifically to political culture rather than to a general notion of culture at large.

A Representational Approach to Understanding Political Culture and Societal Change

America and Germany are both wealthy Western democracies, and political allies that share much in common. But differences in their pasts and how these are collectively remembered set them up for massively different foreign policies, and vastly different reactions to incoming historical events (Liu & Hilton, 2005). From the end of WWII to 1994, Wikipedia lists the USA as

having been involved in more than twenty military conflicts abroad, including three major wars. It lists Germany as having been involved in none.⁴ The first time the Germans became involved in military conflict after WWII was 1995 in Bosnia, and this triggered a constitutional crisis. Germany was persuaded by its NATO allies to bomb Serbia only in the wake of strong evidence that ethnic cleansing was taking place, and under fears that lightly armed UN peacekeepers would be overwhelmed. Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, a founding member of the German Green party and avowed pacifist, agonized about his decision to agree to send Germans to war, saying,⁵ “[w]hen you are confronted by genocide and mass human suffering, you cannot sit passively with your hands folded and ignore the killing of innocent civilians. I believe there are certain human values that are more important than pacifism, and those are rooted deeply in my conscience.” His words seem to echo Steinmeier’s passion for loving Germany with “a broken heart,” a sharp contrast to the more aggressive nationalism evident in much of contemporary American political discourse, especially its militancy in facing and triumphing over its rival the Soviet Union after WWII (e.g., Fukuyama, 1992). Reciprocity, redemption, and taking responsibility are discursive strategies useful in dealing with a negative history (Lienen & Cohrs, 2021; Obradović & Bowe, 2021) whereas resonance, continuity, and a concern for posterity are characteristic discourses for leveraging a positive history (Kirkwood, 2019).

Representations of history are thus influential in shaping political culture. Victory in WWII for the USA and defeat for Germany sent the two countries on completely different historical trajectories. Collective memories of this embed representations of continuity versus change. Theoretically, political continuity amidst general culture change, and political discontinuity distinct from general cultural change are two important patterns among a number of possible historical trajectories (Liu & Pratto, 2018). This can be investigated from the perspective of social representations theory (Moscovici, 1988), where “social representations are defined as a shared system of knowledge and belief that facilitates communication about social objects, and culture is conceptualized as a meta-system of social representations mediated by language, symbols, and their institutional carriers” (Liu & Sibley, 2009). The approach to conceptualize political aspects of societal change through representations and

⁴ Germany in 1990 had the third largest military budget in the world, trailing only the USA and the Soviet Union.

⁵ www.deseret.com/1999/4/4/19438247/support-for-nato-bombing-is-spreading-across-europe.

representational change is a purposeful limitation to solve a wicked problem. Culture change is really complicated and multi-determined. There is much in culture change that is not visible in people's subjective perceptions: Free recall of the most important events in world history, for example, were dominated by politics, warfare, and terrorism (Liu et al., 2005, 2009). The impacts of economics, technological advances, and disease were underestimated, apparently forgotten. But to develop a scientific theory of culture change, even in a mere subset like political culture change, simplification is required. The cause of general culture change comes from many directions, and across too many different time scales for any theoretical system to manage parsimoniously. Erll (2011b) provides an admirable and taxonomic literature review, vaster than what is undertaken here, but also more difficult to grasp in its entirety because of its range and diversity. Restricting attention to collective memories as central representations in the making of political culture is a tractable simplification because such a formulation carries with it the force of self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton, 1948). In this sense, the past weighs on the present in guiding collective action (Liu & Hilton, 2005), maintaining political continuity through shared memory and belief, regardless of how accurately these depict actual history.⁶

This issue of representation trumping factuality is not a minor point. Because they believe that representations of the past influence the present, identity entrepreneurs often attempt to engineer a representation of the past that can be shown to be fictional. Malinowski (1926) writes about the "warrant of antiquity" as a claim to legitimate power that is manufactured by a story of continuity between the present, and the ingroup's origins in the past. Classic research by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) on the invention of tradition theorizes that states and factions within them manufacture legitimacy through constructing a "suitable past" (p. 1). They describe three forms of invention: "(a) those establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or the *membership* of groups . . . (b) those establishing or legitimizing *institutions* . . . and (c) those whose main purpose was socialization, the inculcation of *beliefs, value systems, and conventions*" (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p. 9). All three imply that states, and subgroups within them, seek to manufacture accounts of history and historical continuity that justify their own version of the social order. English historian Hugh Trevor-Roper (1983) memorably aroused the ire

⁶ See Levitt, 2004, for graphic illustration of its limitations in identifying the causes of crime in the USA.

of Scottish nationalists when he debunked the “myth of Highlander antiquity” by showing that the current form of the kilt (or tartan, putatively the ancient dress of the Picts) was invented by an eighteenth-century Englishman, Thomas Rawlinson. A small academic industry has arisen in response to this moral outrage (see Brown, 2010), all the more irritating because the facts behind it are hard to refute.

The literature thus theorizes a mutually reinforcing and reciprocal relationship between the past and the present. However, it is unclear what precise form this “reciprocity” between past and present should take. Contemporary historiography (Iggers, 2005) teaches us that any form of history is a product of human choices in selecting materials, even histories lacking in narrative, like medieval chronicles. While it is honorable to seek the truth about the past, and offer fact-based interpretations about what happened, awareness that narrative choices influence what is considered history undoubtedly has contributed to the “memory boom” (Olick et al., 2011). Scholars are increasingly aware that even histories written by excellent scholars are underpinned by narrative choices (László, 2008; Nora, 1989). Narratives are representations that translate the past into a form that communicates meaning to the present. They shape the past so that it is useable. But in the process, we lose something of its factuality, and gain something from the present that projects itself into our representation of the past. On the larger canvass of political action, political leaders act as identity entrepreneurs, where their present-day agendas weigh on our constructions of past. This phenomenon of the present weighing on the past may be as likely or more likely than the past weighing on the present.

Much has been written about how narrative structures the writing of history by professionals (Iggers, 2005; White, 1987). But it is less well known to what extent collective memories for ordinary people are also structured as coherent narratives (and hence stable), and to what extent they are more fragmentary and jumbled, and thus more unstable and open to manipulation.

Top-Down Approaches to Collective Remembering

The landmark publication that put forward the concept of collective memory as the lynchpin for understanding the reciprocal relationship between past and present was French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs’ (1925/1992) *Social Frameworks of Memory*. Following from the theory of collective representations pioneered by his teacher Emile Durkheim, Halbwachs argued for the primacy of social structures over individual

physiology or experiences in determining the contents of memory. The social frameworks of family, religion, and class were theorized by Halbwachs to act as organizational templates that determined the memory of individuals, who were treated as interchangeable units within these groups. For example, “the framework of family memory is made up of notions – notions of persons and of facts – that are singular and historic in this sense but otherwise have all the characteristics of thoughts common to a whole group” (p. 83). Personal memory according to Halbwachs is fragmentary. He claimed that “[w]e change memories along with our points of view, our principles, and our judgements when we pass from one group to another” (p. 81). In this way, he presages the contemporary theory of self-categorization (Turner et al., 1987) in psychology, where each level of group identity is separate and autonomous from others, as each is anchored to different ecological contexts (Neisser, 1997) that make one aspect of identity salient while suppressing the others.

Memory’s job according to Halbwachs is to reproduce the dominant social structures of society. The individual is seen to move from one field of social influence to another, shifting their memories in accord with group memberships that determine their place in society. In accord with Durkheim’s sociology, Halbwachs conceptualizes society as an organic whole that is both impersonal but is also capable of agency as a superorganism: “[W]hen a society transforms its religion, it advances somewhat into unknown territory . . . it does not foresee the consequences of the new principles that it asserts” (p. 86).

Few contemporary scholars would be so extreme as to completely deny the relevance of the individual, and write about society as though it was an active agent to the extent of Halbwachs or Durkheim. Rather, the enduring contribution of collective memory is as a starting point for theorizing about how memory is influenced by collectives. The memory of individuals is configured by their membership in groups, and the ecological contexts for memory that groups produce. Society has a life of its own, that cannot be reduced to aggregate thoughts, feelings or beliefs of individuals. Scholars in this top-down tradition, typically from the disciplines of sociology, or history/historiography, examine how socially shared rituals like commemorations, or practices like education, imbue things like museums, monuments, and textbooks with meanings that help produce and maintain individual memories as part of a societally functioning whole (Olick & Robbins, 1998).

Social frameworks remind us that *what* is remembered can be just as important as *how* it is remembered: content inflects process.

The decontextualized *process* of remembering so valued by experimental researchers cannot be effectively applied to reality without knowledge of the *content and context* of memory, especially if this memory is sacred. Classic research by Yael Zerubavel (1995) on *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* illustrates this. Zerubavel provides an account of how a skirmish resulting in the deaths of eight Jewish settlers and the loss of a small village at the hands of armed Arabs in 1920 came to be remembered as “a new beginning” for Jewish Zionist settlers in Palestine. The words spoken by Yosef Trumpeldor, on receiving fatal wounds in defence of the village of Tel Hai, became transformed into a nationalist slogan: “Tov lamut be’ad ha’aretz” (it is good to die for our country). At the time, there were 57,000 Jews in British-occupied Palestine, which was also home to 700,000 Arabs. Zionism, whose goal was to establish Israel as a Jewish state in the Middle East, was only one of several schools of thought on how to secure the future for a people that had been without a state for nearly 2,000 years. A Hebrew language newspaper proclaimed a few days after the skirmish that “now a holy place has been created. Every year, on the eleventh of Adar, teachers and students all over the free country will flock to the Upper Galilee, to Tel Hai” (as cited in Zerubavel, 1995, p. 42). Commemoration of Tel Hai as holy ground began shortly thereafter with interment of six of the fallen defenders at a nearby cemetery, where a Roaring Lion (inspired by Babylonian statuary) was erected. Regular pilgrimage and annual commemoration began to take place. Tel Hai and Trumpeldor became “social facts,” placeholders of meaning for a collective, not isolated individual memories, in accord with Halbwachs’ theory (1950/1980).

According to Zerubavel (1995), “Tel Hai provided Israeli society with a myth of origin, a point in time that symbolized the rebirth of the nation and the beginning of a new era” (p. 43). It mobilized the incipient settler society with the idea that sacrificing one’s life in violent defense of the land was a sacred value (Atran & Ginges, 2012). This was antithesis to the idea of a homeless “Jewish Exile,” who was willing to flee to keep the peace. Transforming a historical event and figure into a public symbol capable of uniting and mobilizing masses of people as a group with purpose is central to the force of collective memory as a maker of political culture. This particular public memory would provide the minority Jewish settlers with invaluable social cohesion and group purpose in the face of future conflict with the far more numerous but less cohesive Arab population of Palestine in decades to follow. It overturned centuries of “turning the other cheek” as a means to the survival of the exile, and replaced it with a new symbol of

aggressive defense of the ancestral homeland. Trumpeldor was eulogized as “the great-grandson of the ancient heroes of Israel” (Zerubavel, 1995, p. 26), thus drawing continuity between a past separated in objective time from the present by more than 1,800 years, but in subjective time, made available as an analogy for the here and now.

Public symbols can be thought of as social representations. The entirety of all available public symbols together form an ecological context for memory that orients a person toward the groups and institutions required for social life, just as the specific public symbol activated in a given situation provides content. The individual himself or herself is less visible in this view of collective memory, compared to the salience of the objects (or public symbols) to be remembered.

Mass Media Studies of Collective Remembering

Sociologist Barry Schwartz has been a pioneer in studying the representation of public symbols in history through systematic analysis of mass media. Mass media, as a popular form of representation, has both top-down and bottom-up elements: top-down because traditional forms of mass media require capital investment and therefore are bottlenecks of elite control over communications; bottom-up because in capitalism, mass media are required to make money, and so they have to present stories that attract customers, who thus contribute to deciding what becomes news (for classic research, see Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1966).

Schwartz’s (1997, 2014) seminal studies of newspaper accounts and biographies show that the meaning of Abraham Lincoln as a public symbol was transformed from Defender of the Union in the late 1800s to Great Emancipator in the early 1900s, and later symbol of equality between Blacks and Whites by the Civil Rights movement. Prior to his assassination, Lincoln was one of the most controversial, and to some, the most despised Presidents in American history. As in Israel, the sacrifice of his life for the nation was the sacred altar upon which his reputation has grown. In the nineteenth century, not one of his biographers depicted him as in favor of racial equality (Schwartz, 1997). Early commemorations of Lincoln “reinforced the public record of his commitment to a racially divided society” (Schwartz, 1997, p. 482). Lincoln’s deployment as a symbol for equality began during the Great Depression, where analogies were drawn between Roosevelt’s New Deal and Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation; as “slavery symbolized economic want, emancipation became a precedent for state activism” (Schwartz, 1997, p. 484). Social justice as a value arrived

on the American national agenda in the 1930s, and this would grow stronger during WWII, as Lincoln was invoked to propagandize America's late entry into the war as a sacred mission against fascism (Schwartz, 1996). During the Civil Rights movement, the Lincoln Memorial, with its elegiac white marble Lincoln seated under Greek columns, became inscribed as a symbol of not only equality, but equality as a sacred historical mission in major speeches by Martin Luther King Jr. and President Lyndon Johnson in Washington DC. They employed Lincoln as a symbolic resource to call America to account for its failure to live up to its foundational ideals.

The Lincoln memorial has become a "lieu de mémoire" (Nora, 1989), a site of memory where Americans enact their historically warranted contestations over racial equality, under the gaze of a public symbol into which generations have invested layers of meaning. In the ecological approach outlined by Ulric Neisser (1997), collective memory is subject to multiple constraints. Following Nora (1996) it revolves around *loci memoriae* (sites of remembrance⁷), some of which are consensual and others that are contested. Ecologically, these sites are jointly located in human physiology and motivations, in social networks, communities, mass media and shared beliefs, in language structures and story conventions, in monuments, rituals, national holidays, commemorations, in the architecture of cities and the design of constitutions. Pennebaker et al.'s (1997) edited volume was a groundbreaking work attempting to join up sociological and psychological traditions, especially through the experience of trauma.

Bottom-Up Approaches to Collective Remembering

Serial Reproduction and Social Representations

Memory is essential to the study of psychology, but until recently, psychology played little part in research on collective remembering. This has not been helpful either to the study of individual or collective memory. Psychology, by privileging experimental data from the laboratory as its primary source of evidence for developing causal theories, is a discipline committed to methodological individualism. This tendency was particularly blinding in the USA of the 1920s, which embraced behaviorism just as Halbwachs released his

⁷ As an empiricist, I will tend to use this translation of lieu de mémoire, rather than the more complex and multidimensional "realms of memory" that emerged in the final volumes of Nora's *magnus opus*.

seminal text on *Social Frameworks of Memory*. But even as this mainstream tendency was (and remains) in ascendance, there have been (and are) outstanding individuals that have used experimental methods to investigate social processes in remembering. The most influential among these, contemporary to Halbwachs, was Frederick Bartlett (1932), who invented the method of serial reproduction. Known colloquially as “Chinese Whispers,” after a children’s game where you whisper a sentence in the ear of the person next to you and see what becomes of it through a chain of whispers from ear to ear. The serial reproduction paradigm is a controlled simulation of memory transmission in small groups. Bartlett’s paradigm has inspired many replications, but the rich implications of his work for integrating top-down and bottom-up approaches to memory have often been forgotten. Individuals will project their own theories onto this work (e.g., Edwards & Middleton, 1987; Wagoner, 2017; see Kashima, 2008 for an integration through culture). The utility of this approach lies in the precision of its methods, allowing for “a direct study of social facts,” which according to Bartlett (1932) is more convincing than “speculations based upon analogy” (as cited in Olick et al., 2011, p. 116). Bartlett accepts that Halbwachs’ social frameworks provide schemata (a loose form of organization) for structuring memory *in a group*, but argues that more precise methods are needed to show how this affects the content of memories *of a group*.

In keeping with the methodological individualism of psychology, the person is much more visible as a source of information about social facts in Bartlett’s serial reproduction paradigm. But contrary to the standard practices of experimental psychology, Bartlett did not give his participants artificial word lists, but materials closer to real life: unfamiliar folk stories and images that could be transformed into cultural symbols, or at least, capture shifts in meaning in the process of communicating something new to be learned and remembered. This allows the study of reproduction (gist and meaning) rather than just recall (correct or incorrect). Bartlett could detail how social transmission affects the translation of symbols from one culture to another (one of his iconic transmission chains was for a Native American folk tale). He and subsequent researchers found that in general, more alien elements of the folk story difficult to assimilate into twentieth-century American representations tended to be omitted or transformed into more familiar concepts toward the end of a transmission chain. He termed this process of taking the unfamiliar and making it familiar “conventionalization.” For example, a canoe became a boat, a black thing that came out of a deceased warrior’s mouth became a spirit, and “Once upon a time” was added to make the whole thing seem more like a fairy tale.

Moscovici (1988) took this idea as one of the two pillars of his theory of social representations, and called it anchoring. Kashima (2008), in articulating a more general approach to cultural dynamics, modified the idea to the broader and more multi-directional concept of grounding. This idea is what I consider to be the first important conceptual interface between top-down and bottom-up forms of collective remembering. According to the principle of anchoring or conventionalization, culture is conservative. It does not change easily, but neither is it unchanging.

Social representations theory (SRT) was devised by Serge Moscovici (2001) as a mid-level theory to bridge the gap between Durkheim's top-down sociology and psychology's bottom-up methodological individualism. A social representation can be defined as a shared system of knowledge and belief that facilitates communication about a social object (see Wagner & Hayes, 2005 for a comprehensive review). Public symbols could be considered as a special kind of social representation that exists not only in the hearts and minds of people, but also as a material or institutional structure. Abric's (1993) refinement to SRT posited that social representations consist of a central core system, and peripheral elements. The central core is stable, cognitively connecting emotionally meaningful elements that together have the property of resisting change. Peripheral elements, on the other hand, connect the enduring central core to current functional aspects of society, so the representation can act to guide specific actions. Peripheral elements are far more likely to change than the central core; according to Abric, they protect the central core from change while anchoring cognition and action. For example, the Revolutionary War, the signing of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence are likely to be part of the unchanging central core of American social representations of history (Yamashiro et al., 2019). Likewise, most countries emphasize a positive narrative of national origins (Choi et al., 2021; Schwartz, 1982) as central to their social representations of history. But around these, peripheral memories like the Vietnam War, and 9-11 accrete, and adapt the central core to the changing circumstances of contemporary society.

Where the top-down approach can augment Abric's theory is to add material and institutional considerations to the central core representing public symbols. That is, the central core of the social representation of American history might be theorized to include not only socially shared attitudes and beliefs about the Declaration of Independence and Constitution, but also something about normative commitments to the material structures associated with these. The Constitution in particular is

inscribed into many institutions of American government. Its workings have been embedded into human role relationships that do the work of the Constitution in everyday life. Statuary like the Lincoln Monument remind people of these commitments, through his words inscribed in marble. The enactment of a constitution is not so far away from the group agency imagined by Halbwachs and Durkheim. But contemporary theorists can be more scientifically precise in describing this as a complicated dynamic between people and material elements playing roles within a system, rather than describing it simply as an organic whole.

Around this institutionally inscribed central core, there evolves a changing array of peripheral elements that functionally embed the central core in practices of everyday social life. These may be era-specific. Samuel Huntington (1981) described this process of democratizing the USA through time as *The Promise of Disharmony*. Huntington characterized American politics as beginning with high-minded ideals that fell short of reality. Only through difficult processes of contestation over successive generations did these ideals become more culturally grounded as social facts. Foremost among the core ideals of American democracy, initially lacking in peripheral elements required for functioning in everyday social life, is the notion of equality. The reality on the ground in 1789s USA was that there was no equality between Whites, Blacks, and Native Americans, scant equality between men and women, and some equality in principle between white men of property and white men without property. The reality on the ground in 2020 is that there is equality between these groups sometimes. Simultaneously, almost all Americans today resonate to the statement: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

The idea of a stable and emotionally resonant central core of social representation flanked by peripheral elements that function to regulate and adapt the central core to meet external realities/constraints is an important one for theorizing about the evolution of political culture. It is easy to see that equality and freedom (Rokeach, 1979/2008) are enduring core aspects of the representation of American democracy and its history. It is also apparent that the idea that America should act as “Defender of the Free World” is an extension to its historical mission that became salient only after WWII (see Liu et al., 2005, 2009). It is likely this peripheral element became more and more deeply connected into the central core through successive wars abroad after WWII, with steady increases to the military budget, the need to use available military hardware, and increasing

executive freedom to prosecute warfare abroad without an official declaration of war with Congressional approval.

Cross-sectional studies of American public opinion have shown differences in the content of collective memory for different age groups, with greater recall of events that took place during the critical period of late adolescence and early adulthood for each generation (Schuman & Corning, 2012). Clearly, events enter into and out of collective memory as generations come and go. But it is less clear what meaning these events hold. Do they cohere together as a systematic narrative of publicly shared symbols, or are they merely fragmentary memories of societal events attached to a personal narrative? WWII and Vietnam seemed to be narrated according to a national conversation on the meaning of American identity, according to Schuman and Scott (1989). But the assassination of President Kennedy was narrated more in terms of personal meaning. Following Kansteiner (2002), measuring social representations of history should enable better understanding of how ordinary people receive attempts by political and civic elites to manufacture historical narratives intended to bolster their soft power. What is socially shared, rather than what is merely autobiographical, is central to the study of collective memory; but intersections between the two are worth exploring (Brown & Reavey, 2015; Hirst et al., 2018).

Retrieval Inhibition and Forgetting: Cognitive and Social Principles of Collective Remembering

Experimental psychology can provide further micro-level mechanisms on which to ground linkages between individual-level memory and that of larger collectives. The science of biological memory tells us that remembering and forgetting are interconnected processes. A memory is not located in some “engram” bound to a specific location in the brain. Rather, it is bits and pieces of information, neurally networked in a vast array of interconnections. The spread of activation in certain neural networks and the inhibition of others is now how we understand the physiology of memory. Repeatedly retrieving a certain memory will inhibit retrieval of other memories functionally competing with it (Anderson et al., 1994).

A good example of this is your home address and phone number. Most of us can remember our current address and phone number. But how many of your street addresses and phone numbers over the course of your lifetime can you remember? If your brain was a computer and had to search through every context you ever lived in and activate all the neural

networks associated with these just to retrieve your current phone number, it would not be very efficient. Therefore, retrieval-based inhibition is one very important mechanism that determines forgetting. This inhibition requires categorization, based on some form of meaning. Your brain must categorize different home addresses (and/or phone numbers) as similar in kind so as to entrain functional competition between them so they are mutually inhibitory. That makes it easy for you to remember your current address. But this memory system also needs to allow you to recall an old address when pressed. For this, you might use mnemonic aids, like recalling old friends you went to school with, or picturing your old neighbourhood: context re-instantiation can bring back lost memories. Sophisticated theoretical and computational models have been developed to model such forms of recall and forgetting (Rubin & Wenzel, 1996).

Roediger and DeSoto (2014) showed consistent patterns in the remembering and forgetting of presidents in American history across three generations of students tested in 1974, 1991, and 2009, and corresponding generations of adults collected in 2014. All three generations showed strong serial position effects: the first American president was recalled about as well as the most recent American president (regardless of who he was), and there was a U-shaped pattern of recall in between. Nineteenth-century presidents in the middle, from Stephen van Buren to William McKinley were almost completely forgotten. The major exception to this serial position rule was Abraham Lincoln (1861–1865), who was recalled as often as recent twentieth-century presidents. A minor exception was Teddy Roosevelt (1901–1909), also regarded as an exceptional president.

According to Roediger and DeSoto (2014), their data are characterized by two mathematical forgetting functions: “[M]emory for the order of presidents who served in office during the individual’s lifetime (or a few years before) declines linearly. Second, forgetting of presidents across generations follows a power function until an asymptote is reached, in line with data from many other domains” (p. 1109). The data suggest that each new incoming president inhibits recall of the presidents that came just before him. Additionally, to account for the exceptionally high remembrance of Washington, Lincoln and a few others from the otherwise forgotten roll of eighteenth- to nineteenth-century American presidents, historical importance (i.e., meaning) plus serial position effects are required (e.g., John Adams, the second president is recalled better than #3 Thomas Jefferson, who was more important historically). This study shows that individual-level memory models can be applied to collective remembering, at least for simple information like remembering the names of American presidents.

More complex forms of collective remembering have been investigated experimentally by William Hirst and colleagues, who developed a paradigm for investigating socially shared retrieval-induced forgetting (Coman et al., 2009; Cuc et al., 2007). In the original experimental paradigm, individuals studied artificial information (e.g., word-pairs, or stories), and then engaged in a controlled conversation about it. When only one of them spoke, and the other just listened, both the speaker and the listener exhibited retrieval-induced forgetting (e.g., delayed reaction times, and more errors) about specific parts of the story not talked about, but were related to what *was* talked about, to a greater extent than parts of the story not talked about and unrelated to what was talked about/retrieved. The mechanism underlying this effect, according to Cuc et al. (2007) is that listeners covertly retrieved their own memories concurrently with the speaker, and hence experienced the same retrieval-induced forgetting (or more properly, inhibition, since the main dependent variables were reaction time delays in recalling information). Coman et al. (2009) developed an applied version of this paradigm where they asked university students who were resident in New York city on September 11, 2001, to recall details what they did on the day of the terrorist attacks as the “study phase” of the experiment (where they were at what time of day, who they talked to about the attacks, what they did, etc.). Then two of them were brought together to talk about memories of 9-11 in a free-flowing conversation, guided by the experimenter only if the talk veered too far away from codable features of memory. Finally, their recall was again tested. It was found that either 9-11 memories they talked about themselves, or heard their lab partner talk about, delayed their reaction time in responding to test prompts for related memories of 9-11 not talked about. For example, when a New Yorker heard about what someone else did at 9 am on 9-11, this delayed their reaction time in recalling what they themselves did at 9 am. This is firm evidence of retrieval-based inhibition of memory through social sharing of a real event of high salience.

Results from this dyadic experimental paradigm can be extended to small groups, and to larger collectives. Coman et al. (2016) created different social networks in a lab where people inhabiting nodes in the computer network were allowed to communicate with one another about new information they had learned. Over several rounds of information exchange, Coman et al. (2016) found that memory converged toward those members of the social network who were in communication with one another, and away from other clusters with whom they had few communication links. This is consistent with Nowak et al.’s (1990) theory

of dynamic (or mutual) social impact, where computer simulations show a homogenization of attitudes within influence clusters, and each cluster is heterogeneous versus other clusters. Retrieval/rehearsal-based inhibition of individual memory is one pathway through which consensual forms of collective memory are produced in small groups.

Thus, the second great avenue for integration of top-down and bottom-up approaches is to consider various lieux de mémoire as ecological constraints for the rehearsal and inhibition of collective memories that unify society, or that polarize certain groups within society against one another. An individual does not remember in isolation, but society engineers occasions, like commemorations, where a collective memory is rehearsed. That was the missing element in Coman et al. (2016) and Nowak et al.'s (1990) simulations: mass communication. Cognitive science has now demonstrated that the retrieval of memories on these occasions may inhibit alternative accounts. The individual who attends D-Day commemorations or VE commemorations year after year is likely to develop a different memory of WWII than the person who ignores such commemorations, even if they started with the same memory. If a substantial proportion of society participates in a commemoration, this becomes a lieu de mémoire capable of supporting or producing national unity. It is the stuff legends are made of. Identity entrepreneurs do not employ rhetoric and action to unify or divide public opinion in a vacuum. They do so by articulating and refining symbolic resources widely available in society.

Summary

Relatively new, bottom-up research in psychology has identified mechanisms that detail the workings of collective remembering for individuals, and how individual-level processes might extend toward the level of small groups, and even societies. It also enables theorists to conceptualize political culture and social change as a consequence of *both* systemic features *and* individual agency.

On the other hand, tried and true top-down research in sociology and history provide an ecological system of constraint that allows psychological models to be applied in real-life settings. Nowak et al. (1990) were unable to produce larger clusters of people that could represent nations. This was because their simulation lacked top-down constraints – it had no institutional mechanisms, no sites of remembrance that could serve to unite people in stable, larger-scale communities. Each unit in their simulation was “a sovereign individual.” Without a theory of higher-level constraints,

there is no way for psychologists to generate a theory of political culture and social change that can predict, model, or explain changes in an actual society. The best psychologists can do is provide a cognitive-motivational theory of social identity that is able to predict individual beliefs in, and willingness to participate in actions related to social change and other intergroup actions (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987). Evidence for this theory is based on predominantly artificial situations (i.e., laboratory experiments). It is an article of faith that these can be used to make predictions about actual political situations.

It requires top-down processes, like those involved in collective memory, to theorize how the content of what is shared among individuals can stabilize rules of normative behavior operating in collectives; and vice versa, how social networks and institutional rules shape individual tendencies. Psychology's methodological individualism has prevented it from incorporating enduring content, like values sacred to institutions, and institutional power structures and rules, as core features for its models of social behavior. This leaves it relatively powerless to explain why there should be such manifest differences in the behavior of human beings across cultures, as they make history in different social locations.

Consider, for example, actions in the People's Republic of China, the largest human collective on earth, during the recent COVID-19 pandemic. First, the voices of whistle blowers like Dr. Wenliang Li,⁸ medical practitioners who had early knowledge of how dangerous the virus could be, were silenced by local officials who charged him and others with spreading rumors that disturbed public peace. In an interview with *The New York Times*, he said, “[i]f the officials had disclosed information about the epidemic earlier I think it would have been a lot better. There should be more openness and transparency.” Dr. Li, who lost his life to the virus, was later officially declared a martyr by China's central government, together with seven other whistle blowers. To frame this as individual attitudes and behavior would be seriously missing the point of what social representations of free speech are in China. This is a society with more than 2,000 years of statehood underpinned by Confucian theories of benevolent authority (Liu et al., 2010), no history of democracy, and no constitutional commitment to human rights. For Chinese people, Dr. Li was acting as a Confucian scholar, speaking truth to those in power as a historically inscribed role.

⁸ [www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)30382-2/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)30382-2/fulltext).

Once the central government understood the magnitude of the problem, it moved with the kind of force that only a Communist dictatorship that brooks no dissent, layered on top of a nation with deep-rooted beliefs in benevolent authority, can marshal. The government drastically restricted travel, effectively canceling Spring Festival (Chinese New Year), the largest annual mass migration of people in the world (normally *a half billion* rail and air trips!). The biggest holiday on the Chinese calendar disappeared, largely without protest, even as the city of Wuhan and the entire province of Hubei was locked down to prevent virus spread. Civil servants from around the nation were mobilized to manage the lockdown, workplaces were made responsible for compliant behavior by workers, and citizens were required to download a cell-phone APP that allowed comprehensive contact tracing (and significant potential for violation of privacy). Despite having allowed a massive outbreak of the virus in Hubei through local government inaction, the national government of China was able to command 1.4 billion people to shut down community spread of COVID-19 within two months (Liu et al., 2020a). As of August 28, 2020, there were 85,004 recorded cases of COVID-19 in China, and 4,634 deaths. By comparison, despite having had an extra month (or two) to prepare, there were more than 6,027,959 cases in the USA, and 184,271 deaths in late 2020. The per capita death rate for Coronavirus in the USA⁹ is a little lower than that of five democracies in Europe (Belgium, the UK, Spain, Italy, and Sweden), but according to official statistics, *the American mortality rate was two orders of magnitude higher than the rate in China.*

In China, there is not the separation of state and civil society as in Western societies. The Chinese Communist Party rules by policy, and does not have to constrain its policy decisions according to the rule of law. When it wants to move fast, it surges unconstrained by checks and balances, and with huge support from most citizens. It does this assisted by hegemonic control of mass media, and with computer technology that has not only helped to develop China economically (it has become a predominantly cash-free society), but also provides surveillance. This is a different basis for political culture than in Western democracy. I argue that such a present is made possible by a collectively remembered past where deference to centralized authority is morally inscribed as normative (Liu et al., 2010). This is China's self-fulfilling prophecy for its own development.

⁹ As of late August 2020.

These and other arguments for the existence of historical trajectories stand in stark contrast to the prevailing ideology of universal social development promoted by most Western political and economic theorists. These are imposed on the majority world by post-WWII institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (Stiglitz, 2002). From the perspective of a theory of collective remembering, the development of political culture is state-dependent and constrained by what went before, not *tabula rasa* (Fisher Onar et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2014a). Nor is it preordained that the end point of humanity's ideological evolution is the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government, as theorized by Francis Fukuyama (1992). Fukuyama's optimism (or hubris?) about humankind's universal desire for a form of government that recognizes their human dignity as individuals does not seem as persuasive in 2020. After 9-11, two costly wars that accomplished little more than to stimulate a massive refugee crisis in the Middle East, Brexit, and the popular nationalism of a Trump Presidency, a planetary political culture of liberal democracy seems less likely now than it appeared in the early 1990s (when Soviet-style communism imploded). Resurgent nationalism in Russia, and the rise of Communist China make a multi-polar world order, with power surges criss-crossing the planet appear more likely in our near future than the universal democratization predicted by Fukuyama. Given this situation, how should we all get along?

Because collective memory connects past and present, it represents a view of people's subjective perceptions of the possibility space for future development. It is rooted in *lieux de mémoire* that are symbolic resources for both innovation and conservative forces of restraint. These provide the basis for a more scientific theory of the making of political cultures than Fukuyama's combination of philosophy, political theory, and hope. Hope for a better future for humanity is never misplaced, but it should be properly situated. Every theorist who has come before has fallen short of developing a scientific theory of the making and changing of political cultures. So perhaps it's best to close this introductory chapter by quoting Oswald Spengler (1918/1991), whose *Decline of the West* was an influential attempt at theoretical synthesis one century ago: "Nature is the shape in which the man of higher Cultures synthesizes and interprets the immediate impressions of his senses. History is that from which his imagination seeks comprehension of the living existence of the world in relation to his own life, which he thereby invests with a deeper reality." This book will probe into these deeper realities, focusing on the activity of collective remembering, and its *lieux*

de mémoire. By constructing this endeavor on the basis of a philosophy of human, rather than natural science (Liu & Macdonald, 2016; Liu, 2017), I hope these efforts will make a contribution to theorizing about relations between past, present, and future as an open system, wherein the proper state of mind for making contributions is humility.