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History, culture and cognition: Towards a dynamic model of social memory

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Abstract
The term social memory refers to the dynamic interplay between history, culture and cognition. At the level of the individual, three sources of knowledge: history, collective memory and individual experience combine to create a subjective view of historical reality, a common sense narrative that is often expressed with identity objectives and within an autobiographical context. This model of social memory, which is informed by social representations theory, makes a distinction between (i) collective memory, which is resistant to change, and (ii) representations of the past discussed and disseminated within a social milieu, which have the potential to evolve into new or altered perspectives, particularly when they are vulnerable to generational shift.

Keywords
collective memory, history, narratives, social memory, social representations

> Our memory is our coherence, our reason, our feeling, even our action. Without it, we are nothing.
>
> (Buñuel, 1994, p. 5)

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The widespread cultural preoccupation with memory and commemoration is an indication of both a fascination with and a psychological need to mark and understand the past. The catalyst for much of this retrospective in recent years has been brought about by political change: a combination of democratization within new states and the liberalization of thought among a post Cold War generation seeking to understand the past, but no longer confined by the hegemonic values of previous generations. Within the social sciences, the significance of social memory has grown in tandem with this cultural phenomenon and important scholarly work has raised its profile (Fentress & Wickham, 1992; Misztal, 2003), highlighted its contentious nature (Hodgkin & Radstone, 2003; Wertsch, 2002) and brought to our attention the political and psychological implications of a constructed past (Wilmer, 2002). Although Halbwachs (1980/1950) published his seminal work on collective memory in the 1920s, the subject has seldom been of interest to social psychologists, except perhaps among a notable few (e.g., Echabe & Castro, 1998; Liu & Hilton, 2005; Middleton & Edwards, 1990; Pennebaker, Paez, & Rime, 1997; Weltzer, 2005); and despite a growing literature in the field (e.g., Hirst & Manier, 2008; Reese & Fivush, 2008; Wertsch & Roediger, 2008), the subject continues to find itself outside of the mainstream.

The reasons for this are political and cultural. After World War II, as the United States developed technology to meet the military demands of the Cold War, the cognitive revolution (the parallel development of cognitive science and computing) significantly shaped intellectual and scientific thought. Social psychologists, engaged in various fields of enquiry, took their cue from cognitive science and worked within a paradigm that emphasised process over content (Moscovici & Markova, 2006). Decades later, changes in the world scene now justify a review of this approach. Content, in the form of collective memory, has long been the basis of conflict in places such as Israel, Northern Ireland and the Balkans (see Bar-Tal, 2000; Roberts, Bećirević & Paul, 2011; Wilmer, 2002), and its psychological significance becomes apparent when we acknowledge the link between historical legacy and identity (Hewer & Kut, 2010). Indeed, whether one's relatives were Nazis or victims of genocide, not only does the past raise deep psychological and moral questions about oneself and others, it continues to affect intergroup relations for subsequent generations (Weissmark, 2002). Therefore, the content of memory is as important, if not more, than the processes that govern it.

For political elites, the content of memory has always been a concern and to focus on *what* people think rather than *how* they think is not something new within psychology. During the Cold War, psychologists and neurologists working alongside Canadian psychiatrist Ewen Cameron, established brainwashing techniques that were designed to eliminate undesirable memory (Harper, 2007). Now, many decades later, memory again emerges as a source of political and social agitation: this time as a collective phenomenon existing among the ranks of formerly repressed cultural and national groups all over the world, and, as discriminatory practices are replaced by policies of equal opportunity, reconciliation and peace within established and developing liberal democracies, there is now cause to review

the past more often and in more detail. When events are scrutinized to this extent, disagreement over their substance and meaning or the presence of a provocative narrative has the potential to threaten and distort identity and disrupt relations: something that holds within families as much as it does between ethnic groups or nations.

Theorizing beyond the individual

The study of shared beliefs and memories in a social psychological context inevitably brings the discipline into a forum with history, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, political science and economics: something that has been advocated for decades (Gergen, 1973), but which has been largely ignored, not least because of the dominance of North American social psychology, which has the individual as it principal focus and liberal humanism and American exceptionalism as foundational philosophical roots (Farr, 1996). The study of the collective also represents a theoretical shift away from the Cartesian notion of the individual as a discrete and separate entity towards a position that contends that individual minds are the product of culture and history (see Purkhardt, 1993). If this is true, the ontological significance of the collective, and the theoretical emphasis it receives in the face of assumptions of individual self-sufficiency, personal agency and autonomy, is likely to be influenced by political and social philosophies operating within the culture. Therefore, where individualism permeates the social, political and intellectual landscape, theorists may be inclined to individualize social phenomena. From Durkheim onwards, sociology and psychology have grappled with the individual-collective dichotomy and particularly within social psychology have there been marked epistemological and ontological differences between North American and European perspectives (Moscovici & Markova, 2006). Despite these difficulties, there remains the task of explicating the dynamics of social memory and what follows is an attempt to outline a conceptual framework that will allow researchers from all disciplines to navigate their way successfully through the intellectual terrain.

Social representations theory

In our attempt to achieve this objective, we argue that social representations theory sheds important light on the dynamics of social beliefs (Moscovici, 1961/1976; Moscovici & Duveen, 2000). The strength of the theory lies in its explanatory power as it describes the processes underlying the social transformation of knowledge and explains how and why specific cultures develop their own peculiar worldview. New concepts or events become embedded into an existing cultural framework; they are named and categorized and thus venture from the realm of ''the unknown'' into ''the known,'' making the unfamiliar familiar and the abstract, concrete (Moscovici, 1981). The precise nature of concepts or events may be altered, simplified, corrupted or resisted as they filter through. For example,

new biotechnology, in the form of genetically modified food, anchored within an existing framework of "what is natural," creates an undesirable image of "*Frankenstein food*" with all the ramifications of fear associated with the unknown consequences of the new technology (Wagner & Hayes 2005, p. 181). As this science is transformed into common sense through institutional (scientific and corporate) lobbying, exposure to mass media and interpersonal communication, it follows that the precise understanding of genetic engineering found within the scientific community is not replicated beyond its boundaries among policy makers or the wider public. When this transformative process is understood and applied to social memory, it raises some provocative questions about the veracity and integrity of our own interpretation of the past.

We might also consider the role of cultural values and beliefs in shaping historic perspective. Whether it is the justification of the bombing of civilians in Dresden, Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War II, or attributing good or evil to the deeds of individuals or national groups, a particular interpretation of events persists in the West; and where values extend beyond the culture and across generations, historical representations start to take on the appearance of unequivocal truth. For example, across many cultures Adolf Hitler currently provides a figural template for the conceptualization of evil (Liu et al., 2005) as indeed the Holocaust continues to frame modern day genocide, which continues to be defined, in some quarters, in terms of the numbers involved rather than the nature and intention of the acts perpetrated (Power, 2003). However, we might soberly reflect, upon what might have been the Nazi narrative of the same period had Germany been victorious in 1945 (see Curtis, 1995, for a consideration of the collective representations of Germany's past prevalent in Germany in the 1930s). This transformative and constructive nature of knowledge is at the heart of our thesis on social memory and we argue that social representations theory conveniently models its contentious nature.

Conceptual distinctions

At this point in the discussion, a number of conceptual distinctions merit consideration not least because of the wide range of expressions available within the English language to describe the past and its shared nature. For example, we speak of history, memory and remembering while memory itself may be described as historic, collective, social, cultural, popular, public, communicative, unofficial, counter or oppositional. This broad lexicon is mirrored within cognitive science where a variety of inferred dichotomies and descriptions are used to model the workings of individual memory, e.g., long-term, short-term, episodic, semantic, procedural, declarative, flashbulb, autobiographical. In both theoretical contexts, subtle distinctions refine our understanding. Wertsch and Roediger (2008), for example, make a distinction between collective memory—a static body of knowledge—and collective remembering, an active reconstruction of the past that takes place in the present. They also draw a clear line between formal history and

collective remembering arguing that history, as an academic discipline, is inclined by intention (whether that intention is successful or not) to provide an objective account of the past. Furthermore, they argue that history is critical, reflective and complex: that it acknowledges ambiguity and is not engaged in any form of identity project. Collective remembering, on the other hand, *is* an identity project; it is "impatient with ambiguity, ignores counterevidence" (p. 321), simplifies the past and is resistant to change. To summarize:

> History is willing to change a narrative in order to be loyal to facts, whereas collective remembering is willing to change information (even facts) in order to be loyal to a narrative. (Wertsch & Roediger, 2008, p. 324)

To illustrate the difference between history and collective remembering, we might consider the recent claim that British Intelligence Services used illegal interrogation techniques during World War II (Thompson, 2009): something that was emphatically denied by Prime Minister Harold Macmillan when the issue was raised in Parliament in 1960. This new information may be regarded as historical knowledge, while the denial was part of an identity project designed to maintain Britain's reputation as an international law-keeper thus promoting a specific narrative for future generations. The Battle of Mers-el-Kébir provides another example. In July 1940, a British Royal Navy task force attacked and destroyed a large proportion of the French fleet off the coast of French Algeria, killing 1,297 French seamen. Britain was at war with Germany, not France, but after the fall of France, Churchill, determined that the fleet should not fall into the hands of the Germans, ordered the attack after the French refused to surrender the fleet. This action, which has slowly emerged as an important detail in our historical understanding of the period, is not, however, something readily found within the British establishment narrative of World War II: it would appear that collective remembering is a selective process.

Paez, Basabe and Gonzalez (1997) also make a distinction between social and collective memory. Collective memory, they argue, is "the memory of society" while social memory refers to the influence of "social factors on individual memory or the memory in society" (p. 148). We concur with this and argue that social memory should be understood as the dynamic interplay between history, culture and cognition, which in the broadest sense includes knowledge, affect and volition. Welzer (2010) reminds us that while individual memory may be located within the neuronal structures of the brain, "social memory has no substrate" or "central organ" (p. 6) and it is therefore something that exists *between* people. Social memory is therefore "social" in the sense that it is a product of the social milieu, which despite the forces and filters of a consensus, can produce idiosyncratic "memories" (beliefs about the past) that are, at least initially, not shared by others, e.g., David Irving's Holocaust denial (see Lipstadt, 1994); Bill Kaysing's denial of the lunar landings (Kaysing, 2002). That being the case, it follows that social memory and social representations of the past are not always

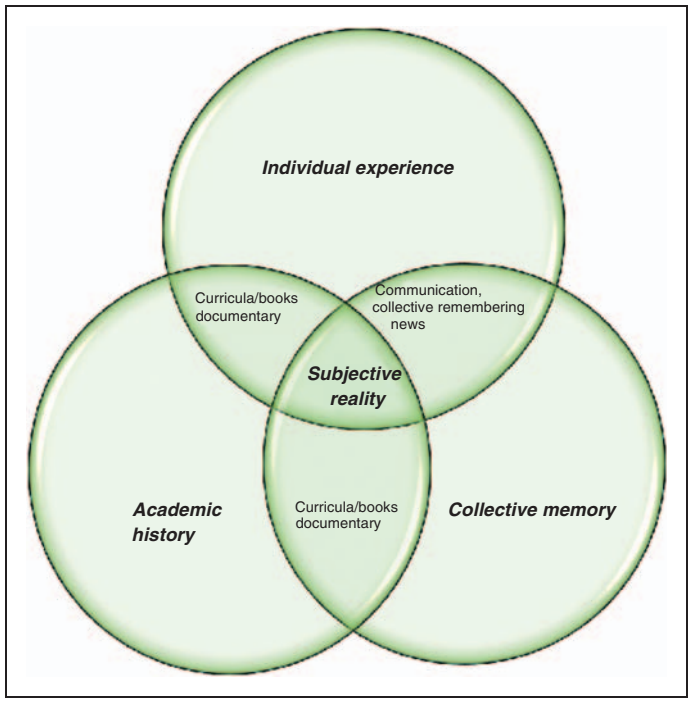

Figure 1. The dynamics of social memory experienced by an individual within a specific culture.

interchangeable terms since the empirical study of social representations is based upon ascertaining common patterns or themes within an *aggregation* of individual narratives. Moreover, where a culture exerts complete control over what must be remembered and what can and cannot be expressed or accessed, the dynamics of social memory become constrained and social representations of the past and collective memory inevitably merge into one.

For the individual, the interaction between three sources of knowledge: academic history, collective memory and individual experience produces a subjective view of reality, i.e., conceptions of past, present and future, identity, values and notions of what is true, false, real and unreal (see Figure 1). The result is a set of historical narratives, limited or otherwise, of variable quality, density and detail, which are often expressed with identity objectives and/or implications and within an autobiographical context, i.e., this account or event has something/nothing to do with my people, my family or me.

The three components of the model, academic history, collective memory and individual experience are each rooted in different epistemic worlds, i.e., science, tradition and empiricism respectively. The combination of these three sources of knowledge produces an interesting and unique interaction for each individual and

the outcome is dependent on the relative weightings placed on each of the components. In the wider debate on the validity of knowledge, some people are more inclined to follow the traditional beliefs of their community rather than rely upon their own experience, exploration or understanding while others place greater emphasis on what they see as new and objective ''scientific'' evidence produced by an elite knowledge class. We will now consider each of these sources in turn.

Academic history

The first is academic history and its close relation, archaeology—the study of the ancient past through the process of excavation. Both are rooted in scientific enquiry and they achieve this status through an approach to knowledge that is systematic, explorative and rigorous. Both strive towards objectivity and are engaged in the pursuit of truth. However, theories about the ancient past are often inferred from fragmentary materials that have been subject to the vicissitudes of time and analysis therefore requires the deployment of a range of interpretative, constructivist and hermeneutic techniques. The result is a partial replication of historical reality supported by an informed narrative description of artefacts or written records presented within a cultural context and told with meaning and intention. (In the study of modern history, this would include photographs and film footage.) Despite these limitations, the root intention of history and archaeology is to provide an accurate representation of the past where the emphasis is on the transformation of knowledge: the revision of former ideas in the light of new evidence.

Collective memory

In contrast to academic history, collective memory is rooted in tradition; it is insular and subjective; it often contains a range of explanations that support ''a single committed perspective'' and it promotes a notion of ''unchanging group essence'' (Wertsch, 2002, p. 44). Collective memory thus speaks with a ''commemorative voice'' (p. 44), invoking stories of mythic archetypes of heroes and martyrs and eventually this political, cultural and identity narrative comes to represent and reflect the foundational ideas, beliefs and values that govern a particular national group or society. Here there is a striking resemblance between Halbwachs' (1980/1950) conception of collective memory and Durkheim's collective representations, and given the structural similarities between the two, the former appears to be a specific case of the latter. Durkheim acknowledged the social constraints of human knowledge and the static worldview such cultural dynamics would create. Indeed, any attempt to structure the past and create a set of foundational beliefs would be both determined and constrained by cultural norms, myths and beliefs. Collective memory thus exhibits all the characteristics of collective representations; not least, that it is informed by tradition and not engaged in the pursuit of truth

(Tekiner, 2002). Interestingly, Moscovici developed his theory of social representations in the 1950s to modify Durkheim's collective representations because he believed that there were few static representations left in the modern world, largely because of the rise of individualism (Farr, 1998). However, despite the unremitting social change evident in late modernity, collective memory appears to be one relatively static body of knowledge that continues to bind communities together. It is, however, a "wolf in sheep's clothing," easily mistaken or misperceived as history. And although conceptually distinct, the difference between history and collective memory can be particularly difficult to detect when the legitimacy of the overarching structure of the narrative is taken for granted and never challenged.

Notwithstanding the widespread use of the term collective memory, we accept that conceptualization is not straightforward. For example, Hirst and Manier (2008) draw our attention to a lack of consensus on definition as well as issues relating to its location, meaning and relationship to individual memory. The issue of location is particularly interesting. On the one hand, it could be argued that collective memory is located within physical and technological spaces marked out by libraries, archives, museums, war memorials, street signs and the internet, sources from which the past is rehearsed and re-narrated in formal and informal social settings. On the other hand, we may think of it as stored within a collection of individual minds: an approach that is akin to the atomistic assumptions underlying public opinion polling. A less conventional but perhaps equally persuasive view is that collective memory is not spatially located at all, but is actualized through collective remembering. This approach, which draws upon the work of Henri Bergson (1913/2001), conceptualizes memory as a process, not a substance or an object requiring location. Bergson's rejection of spatial materialism as an adequate description or explanation of psychological experience is founded on the argument that recourse to three-dimensional location simply reflects the limitations of language (see Burton, 2008; Middleton & Brown, 2005); therefore, to conceptualize memories as "things" is an error of reification.

The idea that collective memory is a disembodied narrative that requires neither storage nor location is perhaps counterintuitive and unfamiliar to the way in which we generally understand and talk about memory—although its counterpart can be found in discussions of computer software as networks of relationships realized in a variety of physical media (see Hofstadter, 1980). Nonetheless, this approach to understanding collective memory is helpful, particularly when an event has moved beyond the bounds of living memory and our understanding is wholly dependent on narratives, sites and artefacts, an example of which is World War I. Collective memory, in this context, is no longer the product of direct experience and therefore it is not memory at all in the conventional sense; the events have not been witnessed directly by those "remembering." Rather, it is a narrative collection of stories and recorded images, which have been reconfigured through constant re-narration over time. And while our own memories may depend on the stories we tell ourselves, collective memories depend on the stories we tell to others.

Individual experience

Individual experience is the third source of knowledge involved in the dynamics of social memory. As knowledge of the past acquired through experience is re-narrated to self and others, it stimulates thought, emotion, desire and volition as we experience the will to act. Sources, however, may be both direct and indirect; for example, autobiographical "memory" may comprise both first-hand experience and "collected stories" acquired through social contact and communication but which subtly masquerade as personal experience (see Schiff, Noy, & Cohler, 2001). This body of knowledge may also owe as much to unconscious experience as it does to conscious recollection and articulation (Laing, 1961) and given the vulnerabilities of autobiography, it is perhaps not surprising, that details offered within personal testimonies are at times erroneous (see Portelli, 2003). Nonetheless, personal accounts remain a popular and persuasive source of knowledge for the public as life histories, autobiographies and memoirs continue to saturate the culture; and when this literature is read by others, this form of indirect knowledge becomes part of the reader's accumulated experience. However, the degree to which individual experience, collective memory and history overlap and interact is unique to the individual since not everyone is affected by historical legacy in the same way or to the same extent.

The transforming power of the social milieu

The result of the interaction between history, collective memory and individual experience is a unique sense of reality and identity: a state that is, nonetheless, vulnerable to change as the individual engages with the social world. Within the social milieu, communication, the "heart and lifeblood" underlying the dynamics of social memory, is informed by both static and dynamic entities. For example, collective memory, a relatively static and foundational set of beliefs, works alongside more dynamic sources of knowledge such as the internet and multi-media broadcasting, the latter of which is responsible for the dissemination of institutional information, i.e., matters related to education, the judiciary, military affairs and the corporate and political world. The result is a continuous and overwhelming flow of information, which either endorses or challenges the status quo.

Within each specific culture, collective memory, collective remembering and commemoration are important reference points for discussion and within this social space truth, lies, science, pseudoscience, rumour, gossip, allegation and unfounded argument create a battleground in which the objective (if one is so inclined) is to establish the validity of knowledge. Mental or intellectual states also vary: some are fixed, some disengaged and others amenable to change as they are immersed in a world of lay (common sense) and specialized or expert knowledge. This daily encounter with knowledge in all forms is a transformative process as people talk in every possible social setting. Reading, watching, thinking and talking about the world thus contributes to the chaos of everyday

conversation, which engages with what is trivial, profound, traditional, ephemeral, sacred and profane. To all intents and purposes, this is the social context in which "communicative memory" operates (Assmann, 2006) and is indicative of a society that "thinks through its mouth" (see Moscovici, 1984).

New positions on past events are also presented through the interpretative framework of books and television documentary. These cultural activities, which filter and refine historical representation, are however largely driven by commercial concerns, i.e., what the public is likely to be interested in and willing to buy. More worrying perhaps is the unselfconscious blurring of history and fiction in films, books and plays; where the use of poetic or dramatic licence makes disentangling the truth from the lie, or identifying polemic exaggeration a very difficult undertaking, particularly when the viewer is either naive or in a state of passive observation. For the public, consumed with unending distractions, reality becomes a shifting and sketchy mosaic of beliefs, truths and myths and given that Hollywood representations may be the only source of information for some, the past may come to be irrevocably distorted for generations.

Journalists also provide social knowledge (see Zeliner, 2008) that is both transformational and traditional in its objectives and outcomes. While some seek to expose the fabrications of an establishment narrative past, (e.g., Thompson, 2009), others continue to endorse foundational historical and cultural beliefs and values in their treatment of the daily news. Journalists from within the culture, who report to the culture, create an unavoidable and undesirable circularity with respect to objectivity that is rarely considered by the audience. This permits news broadcasts to venture beyond the remit of simply providing information, to a position where they become a medium for cultural indoctrination particularly in times of war when journalists are embedded within military units. Indeed, the death of a soldier killed in Afghanistan may be legitimate news to a British audience, whatever one feels about military action abroad. However, daily footage depicting the return of the coffin draped in the national flag is no longer news but cultural commemoration: a ritual to remind the nation of what it is appropriate to think and feel. The impartiality of journalists is routinely compromised by their emotive and empathic narrative in this moment, there is no other permissible point of view and telling the news very subtly becomes part of a ritual act of collective remembering seeking not just to inform but to bind a people into an historic community.

The physical structure of the environment in the form of relics and testaments to the past also plays an important part in what is remembered and the way in which it is commemorated. We might be tempted to think of buildings as static, non-social entities but their use by people, and their construction and destruction are, of course, the result of social and historic processes replete with symbolism and meaning, such that buildings, towns or cities often come to reflect, represent or determine the feelings of the population. The Frauenkirche in Dresden illustrates the point (see Figure 2). The church, which was destroyed in the Allied bombing raids in February 1945, was rebuilt and restored between 1992 and 2005. Prior to its restoration, the remains served as a stark reminder of the brutality of war and its

Figure 2. The Frauenkirche, Dresden (December 1991), shortly before the commencement of its rebuilding and restoration (Photo: C. J. Hewer).

assault on civilization. To observe these huge stone ruins in the midst of what was a drab, post-war, Soviet-style development was a shocking experience. However, the rebuilding of the church, which has now reinstated Canaletto's view of the skyline (originally painted in 1748), and the pedestrianization of the main square have now transformed the social space, affecting both the social milieu, social memory and social representations for future generations. Given the importance of the structure of the environment and its influence on social thought, we might also consider the way in which the organization of modern urban and rural spaces governs the flow of information, goods and people, assessing how it ultimately shapes what is remembered and forgotten (Connerton, 2009).

Generational shift

The nature and focus of collective remembering is also affected by generational shift. The political and psychological significance of this phenomenon is that it permits and facilitates subtle changes and shifts in emphasis within individual narratives across generations over time: something that has been observed in families where older relatives have been involved in questionable war activities (see Welzer, 2005). Similar adjustments may also take place on a wider cultural level; for example, in Britain, Remembrance Sunday, originally conceived for the

"lost generation" of World War I and later extended to the conscripted generation of World War II is also slowly undergoing change. Although post-1945 military campaigns in Korea, Aden, Malaya, Northern Ireland and the Falklands were always acknowledged in the television commentary, these military operations were peripheral to the central mood of the commemoration. Not only were there relatively small numbers involved in these subsequent campaigns, as far as the public was concerned, there was a difference between the sacrifice of those who were conscripted to fight but who never returned and those who choose a career in the armed forces knowing and accepting the risks involved. However, with the passing of the war generations, the ritual act of commemoration, by necessity, now involves younger participants such as those who were child evacuees during World War II, or the children of soldiers who have recently died in Iraq or Afghanistan. What is now being remembered or commemorated is a contentious point as the focus subtly shifts away from the exclusive domain of remembering the dead from two world wars to include others who have suffered, served and died "for their country."

We should also note that the power underlying the dynamics of generational shift increases with time as constraints on what may or may not be said are removed. Such is the speed and power of these dynamics, that, in some parts of Europe, even the memory of cataclysmic events such as the Holocaust has required protection through government legislation. In recent decades in Britain, many have expressed views informally that would previously have been construed as seditious or treasonable, e.g., the notion that Winston Churchill and Arthur "Bomber" Harris (the principal architect of the Dresden bombing) were guilty of war crimes. To express this view would have been unthinkable in the immediate post-war period, but less than five decades later in 1992 when the statue of "Bomber" Harris was unveiled in London by Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother, jeering from the crowd disturbed the proceedings and the following day the statue was drenched in blood red paint.

Generational shift also means that the past is reviewed not only by the public but also by governments in an attempt to reconcile their people to "difficult chapters" in their national history. Administrations all over the world are now apologizing for the crimes and misdemeanours of their forebears, e.g., the pardoning of World War I "deserters" by the British government over 90 years after the event. On face value, these developments seem to be part of progressive politics and there is a temptation to interpret these new perspectives as morally enlightened, attempting to correct the ignorance and misplaced passions of the past in pursuit of truth and justice. We have to remember, however, that these moral arguments only receive little or no resistance in the present day because those responsible, and those who ardently supported them, are now dead. Were they alive today and still in power, they would no doubt provide a robust defence for their actions and when apologies for past crimes are not forthcoming, it is indicative of the manner in which political elites have addressed collective responsibility for past deeds. These

social dynamics, remind us of those underlying the development of scientific theory described by Max Planck:

> A new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it. (cited by Kuhn, 1962, p. 151)

Kuhn (1962) drew on this analysis in his thesis on the history of science calling into question the progressive and cumulative nature of scientific knowledge. Collective memory may be subject to the same process since all social knowledge created and maintained by consensus may eventually be challenged or overturned because of the passing of a generation, the accumulation of contradictory evidence or radical social change. Indeed, the paradigmatic nature of collective memory becomes readily apparent in the wake of social upheaval or political revolution. Furthermore, notions of universal linear progress in both the moral and scientific sphere may be illusory and may say more about the power exerted by enlightenment thinking on our reflective capacities than it does about actual historical progression of ideas (see Chalmers, 1999).

Conclusions

While Assmann's (2006) distinction between communicative and cultural memory was an important development following Halbwachs' original conception of collective memory, this model advances our understanding by providing detailed explication of the components, processes and cultural context within which social memory is constructed. At the core of the model is the interplay between academic history—evidence-based, revisionist and didactic, collective memory—traditional and resistant to change—and individual experience. The model also shows that the dynamics of everyday communication, collective remembering and news that create novel information are always received, assimilated and expressed within the cultural framework of collective memory (see Figure 1) and the idiosyncratic realities that they produce become part of the atomic structure of the social world. This lay epistemology, when common to others, provides the basis for social representations and when these representations are at odds with the traditional content of collective memory, they have the potential to modify collective memory as though they were operating in a feedback loop.

The model also locates the role of the individual within the collective (see Kansteiner, 2010) and draws attention to the varying dynamics at each level, i.e., the *dynamic* nature of social memory existing at the level of the individual and the *relatively static* nature of collective memory existing at a cultural level. Furthermore, because the model is rooted at the level of the individual, it naturally accommodates the notion of personal agency, the idiosyncratic nature of memory, emotion and reality—the freedom to know or not know, to care or not care— within a world of cultural forces. In this world of construction, the nature of historical

narrative inevitably invites an analysis of language (particularly discourse and rhetoric), which brings other forms of social psychological enquiry into the discussion, e.g., discursive psychology (Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Potter 1992), narrative research (László, 2003, 2008) and social constructionism (Gergen, 1999).

The model also provides important theoretical links between social memory, social representations and narrative enquiry as well as critical conceptual delineations between social memory, collective memory, collective remembering and social representations. The theoretical link, of course, lies in the nature of representation since there can be "no communication without representations and no representations without communication" (De Rosa, 2003, p. 77) and these representations, when expressed, often take the form of a personal, cultural or historical narrative, reconstructing "what actually happened" into "*a version* of what actually happened." These features clarify the theoretical landscape for the formal study of historical legacies, which are explicitly identified within the model as a potent source of identity and relevant to our understanding of the roots of conflict. And although this analysis may be rather obvious, up to now, such considerations have been absent in the formulation of social psychological theory.

We conclude that the dynamics of this model of social memory work against any notion of a fixed or absolute conception of the past; and even if we consider an event that is now firmly placed within "global memory" such as the attack on New York on September 11 2001, it remains a "work in progress" for many as it continues to be discussed within a social and political space immersed in truth, lies, subversion, speculation, conspiracy theory and fantasy. The plasticity of social knowledge thus alerts us to an uncomfortable truth; that as the narratives we have assimilated over a lifetime (and their emotional significance) are challenged by generational shift, inter-cultural exchange and new information arriving from the archive, we have to accept that the past is always a story in transition.

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