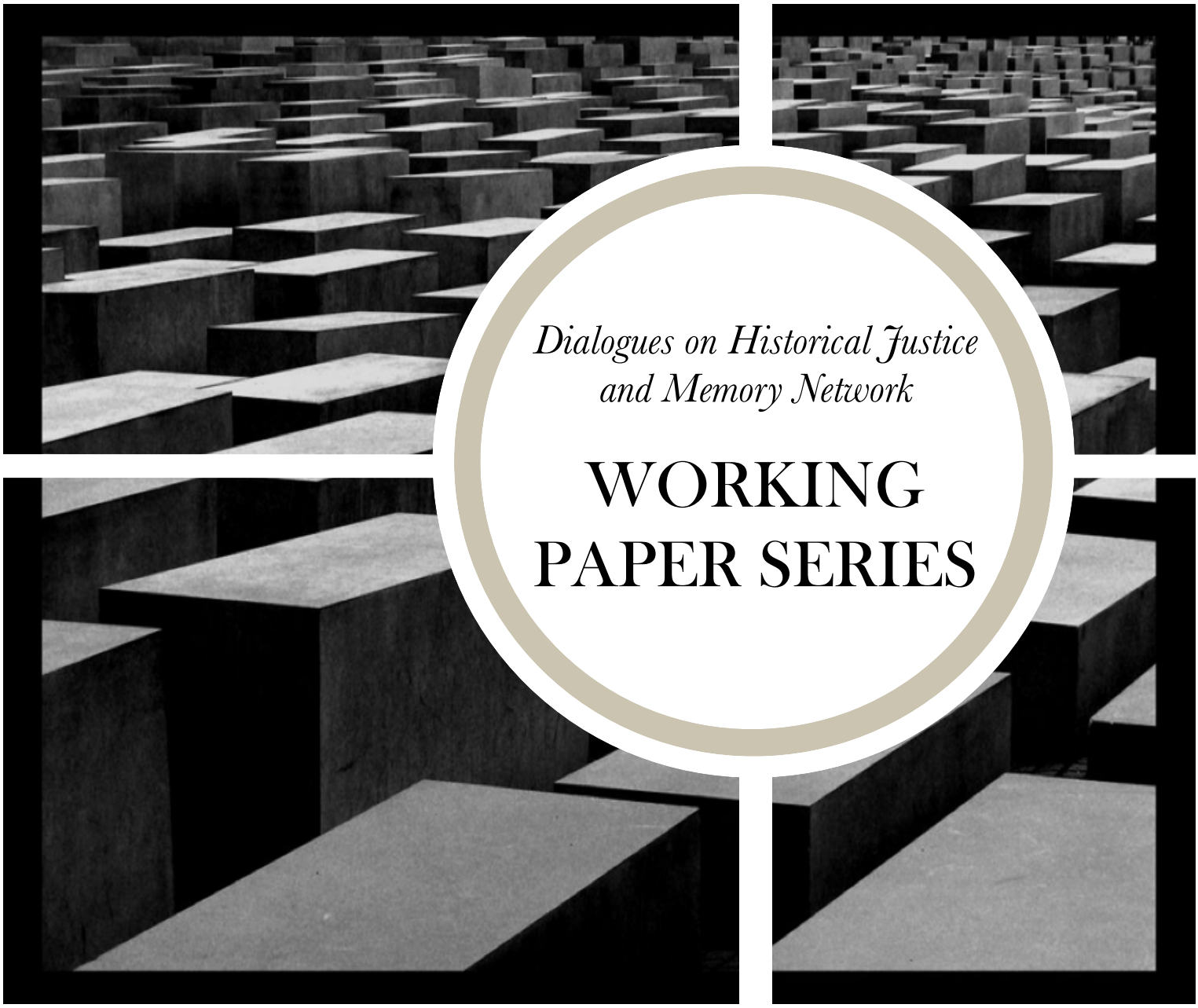

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The Process of Collective Memory Formation:

Bridging the Divide Between Ancient and Modern Societies

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Abstract

Scholars should study collective memory formation as a social process in which individuals encounter bits and pieces of the past as represented in different social artifacts. These artifacts may be a social practice, such as the telling and retelling of epic poetry, or a physical artifact such as a drawing, painting, photograph or film. The individual interprets these artifacts in dialogue with others in a social setting. Collective memory scholarship tends to focus on single case studies, occasionally with a bit of implicit or explicit comparison. But even when comparisons do exist, they tend not to bridge the divide between ancient and modern societies, as distinguished by levels of technological development. By looking at different categories of data, common in collective memory work, the article identifies commonalities that stretch across ancient and modern societies, thus helping scholars to identify universal aspects of collective memory formation.

Key words: Collective Memory, Symbolic Politics, Culture and Politics, Digital Culture, Internet

Introduction: Typology of Representations

The field of collective memory scholarship is and should remain an interdisciplinary field of inquiry. While this is a good thing in terms of the quality and vast diversity of scholarship that researchers have produced, the field's further development may also be hindered for the same reasons. The field tends to be dominated by individual case studies, which sometimes include some implicit and explicit comparisons. Collective memory scholars tend to specialize in one society, culture and time period, which is natural because of the highly qualitative nature of our enterprise. The goal of this article is to draw upon a wide range of the collective memory literature and to look for bridges of understanding that can cross back and forth between how ancient and modern societies deal with their collective pasts. The hope is that collective memory scholars will then be better able to better think about their own projects in more universal terms. Many of us do this already, but the goal here is to help systemize some of our thinking. In this article, the key dividing line between ancient and modern is that of technology, the ways in which societies can store representations and narratives of the past.

I have long suspected that there is less that separates ancient and modern humanity from each other than is often claimed, and the scholarship of the British anthropologist Mary Douglas has certainly provided me with a great deal of inspiration in thinking in this direction. Douglas once lamented, "So little has been done to extend the analysis across modern and primitive cultures that there is still no common vocabulary. Sacraments are one thing, magic another; taboos one thing, sin another. The first thing is to break through the spiky verbal hedges that arbitrarily insulate one set of human experiences (ours) from another set (theirs)" (1996:7). This is not to suggest that we ignore the substantial differences that do exist between ancient communities compared to the development of complex, modern societies. Rather, Douglas is asking for us to reflect on how some basic problems related to human existence are common across the ancient-modern divide, such as issues of distinguishing between good and evil, between purity and danger (1966), and between legitimate and illegitimate political authority. Abner Cohen makes a similar observation,

> Two sources of the obligatory that are common to both 'primitive' and industrial man are discussed. The first is the continuous struggle of man to achieve personal identity, or selfhood. The second is his concern with the perennial problems of human existence, like life and death, fortune and misfortune. On both fronts man resorts to symbolic action, in the course of which he continuously creates and recreates his oneness, and also develops solutions to the big, essentially irresolvable, questions of existence. Man is thus impelled to create symbols and to engage continuously in symbolic activities (1974:14).

Modern humanity hardly seems to have freed itself from the past, in the sense of saying categorically and in all instances, "The past means nothing!" Indeed, as Marc Howard Ross (2007, 2009) and others have shown, many very modern ethnic conflicts are rooted in fierce contests over the proper interpretation of the past. Our analysis of such conflicts is not helped if we try to fence them off by labeling them "ancient" or "primitive." While it is certainly too much to claim that Yugoslavia collapsed because the different national communities disagreed about the proper interpretation of World War II, any careful observer of the conflicts in the 1990s must also readily admit that this was one factor in the country's collapse into civil war (Verdery 2000; Bergholz 2010). Getting the interpretation of the past correct has mattered a great deal to both ancient and modern humanity.

With this proposition in mind, I want in the following sections to work on developing a set of categories for thinking about how we represent the past that can be applied across both ancient and modern societies. Collective memory scholars have, to their credit, worked with a vast array of

data types across many centuries. I want to create some very general categories to help us think about the different types of data we engage. These are not rigid categories with thick walls that separate one from another. Instead, I prefer to use them as a way of sorting through the mounds of data that we encounter as collective memory scholars. We should always remain open to observing how these boundaries can blur, but I find them a useful way to organize my thinking.

The Natural World: Landscape

Let's begin big and start with the universe and make our first categorical division between the natural world that has been modified by human action and that which has remained largely untouched. Let's call that part of the universe not transformed by human action the landscape. For the most part, this will include the landscapes of earth, but we might also want to include the moon, planets and other aspects of the heavens as well. Human culture is then composed of the material and immaterial, the material including the human transformation of the natural world into different objects of material culture. We will deal with human culture in the sections following our discussion of the landscape.

The more or less unmodified landscape plays a role in the collective memory formation in both ancient and modern societies, thus providing our first bridge across the divide. Let's begin with several examples from ancient societies and then look at how the landscape still matters for a modern society as well. Take for example the oral history of the Chippewa Indians and their explanation of the dune in Michigan known as Sleeping Bear Dune, which is now a national park. The national park website recounts the story as follows, "Long ago, along the Wisconsin shoreline, a mother bear and her two cubs were driven into Lake Michigan by a raging forest fire. The bears swam for many hours, but eventually the cubs tried [sic] and lagged behind. Mother bear reached the shore and climbed to the top of a high bluff to watch and wait for her cubs. Too tired to continue, the cubs drowned within sight of the shore. The Great Spirit Manitou created two islands to mark the spot where the cubs disappeared and then created a solitary dune to represent the faithful mother bear" (National Park Service 2012). Consider also how the story relates to tragic death and memory. A mother seeks to save her two children only to lead them unwittingly to their death. What could possibly aid the mother in her grief? The Great Spirit provides an answer by transforming the bodies of the children and the mother into the immortal landscape of Michigan, helping to transcend death by creating meaning and a lasting memory. It is a story designed not only to describe the landscape but also to find meaning in the landscape, through narrative, to help one deal with tragic death. If the Great Spirit Manitou has done this for the bears, will he not do the same for his people as they struggle to find meaning in a tragic death?

Joanne Rappaport provides another example of how the landscape provides a source of power and resistance for the Páez peoples living in Columbia in their efforts to maintain a distinct identity. Through their daily use of the sacred geography that surrounds them, especially the high mountains, the Páez are able to see and experience their deep historical connection to the land around them, which provides them stories of origin and a sense of being historically rooted to a place. "The arrangement of Tierradentro's sacred geography recapitulates the historical migrations of the Páez nation. The individuals who walk from the market town of Belalcázar to Vitoncó via Avirama, Calderas, Tumbichucue and Lame, and continuing on via Mosoco to Pitayó, will pass numerous sites which encode Páez history. The order in which they pass them causes them to relive the historical migration of the Páez to the western slopes of the cordillera. Here again, through practice—this time, walking—temporal structure and history are experienced and enacted" (Rappaport 1990:153).

In his fascinating study of the Ilongot headhunters of the Philippines, anthropologist Renato

Rosaldo offers two important insights with regards to the role of landscape. First, and perhaps most importantly, Rosaldo asks us to dispense with the idea that primitive societies live in a timeless present. "The presumption that so-called primitive societies are timeless, as I think this book shows, reflects less about their basic nature than about a systematic bias in anthropological method that inhibits access to their histories" (1980:27). Since anthropological field studies often involved the anthropologist spending perhaps a year or so amongst a native population without written records, the anthropologist was often left with a static view of the population and little sense of how their society had changed. By learning to understand how the Ilongot used the landscape to remember and recall their history, Rosaldo was able to write a history of headhunting practices across a longer period of time. As Rosaldo notes, rather than living in a timeless present, the Ilongot care a great deal about their history:

> Indeed, as people walk along paths they often tell stories of the past as they point to the various places where a house or garden was located, a deer or wild pig killed, a head taken, or whatever. Ilongots in fact care intensely about the relative sequence of a succession of events, but these excursions into the past are meticulously mapped onto the landscape, not onto a calendar (1980:48).

Landscapes matter for modern societies as well with significant political consequences. Take for example the people living in the Cévennes mountains in the south of France still recall in their oral history and local monuments the resistance of outlawed Protestants who fled to the region when Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes in 1685. The royal forces eventually defeated the Camisards, as the Protestant rebels were known, but in so doing also bestowed upon the region a legendary self-understanding for the "Protestant community's identification of itself as a community of resistance, which is partly backed up by and partly creates a tradition of resistance that has continued to exist in the area until today" (Fentress and Wickham 1992:93). The fact that this community remained largely stable and closely rooted to the surrounding geography has helped to sustain this sense of a community of resistance over 250 years. What challenges have such local narratives of resistance posed to the centralizing French state as well as many other similar modernizing states in many other locations? One can well imagine the deep narratives of local resistance that currently mark the landscape of Afghanistan and the challenges these narratives pose for would-be state-builders in that region.

Human Culture: Immaterial

Let's begin to consider how humans transform and create meaning in terms of both material and immaterial culture. There are numerous aspects of human culture that can serve as a way of representing the past that leave no lasting material trace, although they can be transmitted from generation to generation through ritual reenactment. A great deal of this immaterial culture can now be captured thanks to modern technological advances, so we will want to keep in mind the vastly increased ability of modern societies to record and archive representations of the past. Even before the creation of different audio and visual recording instruments in the twentieth century, some aspects of these different parts of immaterial culture also included material components. For example, while we do not have an audio or visual recording of theater in revolutionary America, we do have the written plays and a fairly good understanding of the context within which theaters produced the plays (Purcell 2002:120). Material and immaterial culture are in a constant interplay with each other.

The Body: Human Movement

If we start with the human body and movement, we can begin to reflect on how everyday gestures as well as highly complex dances can embody a representation of the past. Consider, for example, the tradition among some Christians of crossing themselves in specific instances. The gesture provides a symbolic invocation of the cross upon which Jesus was crucified and may potentially invoke reflections on the centrality of suffering and martyrdom for the Christian.

As we move from everyday gestures to more elaborate performances of dance and theater, the symbolic complexity can increase rapidly. Ritual and choreographed human movements have long played an important role in representing and connecting human communities with their pasts and most importantly the ancestors. It also remains a cultural form that is highly resistant to any successful recording technique. One form of written notation is Labanotation, but even with its incredible complexity, it still provides an imperfect means of recording and thus providing a text for the recreation of dance. Choreographed movement or dance can, nonetheless, provide a very powerful narrative that can link the audience and performer to a narrative of the past, as pain, suffering and death are played out through human movement. One modern example is the Madres (Mothers) de Plaza de Mayo who dance in public by themselves to confront the citizens of Argentine with the otherwise invisible violence of the Argentine military dictatorship (Taylor 2003).

Another dramatic example is the manner in which some Shiite groups commemorate Ashura, which is a day to reflect on the suffering and martyrdom of one of the Prophet Mohammad's grandsons. Some Shiite men flagellate themselves on this day to the point that they bleed, thus creating a very powerful personal and physical bond with the martyr, while also doing so as a spectacle in public and allowing others to participate as well (Waheed and Ellick 2009). In this case, the narrative of suffering and pain is reenacted on the bodies of present day male Shiites, and potentially serves not only as a reflection on the past suffering of the community, but also on their current political plight in many Muslim countries, as they often form the minority population in Muslim countries. That the same day is marked with a very different set of memories by Sunni Muslims as a day of triumph for the true religion makes the symbolism of the day potentially a very explosive flashpoint for communal violence.

Although different in character, the ritual enactment of social hierarchies through the Loyalist marches in Northern Ireland is another example of how human choreographed movement can serve to invoke the past as a triumph for the Loyalists and at the same time a hated reminder of defeat for Irish Republicans (Ross 2007). The marches in Northern Ireland also help to highlight another important factor to keep in mind with regard to the past and that is the centrality of place. Although there have been attempts to defuse the violence that often accompanies the marches, it is important to remember that it is not enough for the Loyalists to simply march, but that they must march along "traditional" routes, which can heighten tensions with Irish Republicans as these routes take them through Republican neighborhoods. In this manner, the marches are similar to short pilgrimages, journeys that take the pilgrim across a symbolically significant route to a specific location tied to key historical events.

While the words pilgrim and pilgrimage are usually associated with a religious practice, it is also worth reflecting upon both the religious and secular movements of people to special places that are tied, in some manner, to the past. And it will be helpful to think of the political economy that helps to sustain pilgrimages, both religious and secular, and think of tourism in the broadest sense (MacCannell 1976). The importance of pilgrimages in human societies helps to bring together a practice that includes human movement and place, while also generating material culture as well. In her wonderful book *Martyrdom and Memory*, Elizabeth Castelli (2004) combines a study of early Christian texts alongside an analysis of material culture, especially with regards to the cult around the

early Christian saint Thecla. Castelli writes, "There have traditionally been strong disciplinary divisions between the students of early Christianity who interpret texts and those who read images and material artifacts" (2004: 159). Again, it is useful to develop areas of specialization, but we need to guard against too much insularity, for what Castelli finds is that the material culture around Thecla came to focus upon a fairly narrow aspect of her overall story. For example, Castelli analyzes examples of Egyptian pilgrimage ampullae, which were mass-produced as souvenirs for the pilgrims. One also needs to reflect on the different social classes that would have been more likely to engage textual sources compared to some of the more common aspects of material culture that circulated with images of Thecla. As Castelli notes, "The importance of these sorts of visual images for conveying memory cannot be underestimated in a world that remained extensively illiterate" (2004:170). Her work helps to illustrate further the central point of this article that each data source with which we work carries with it a potential bias, of which we need to be aware. In the case of Thecla, to focus solely on either texts or images would have led to a bias in the scholar's interpretation of the Thecla narrative and its meaning for different classes of people at the time.

Pilgrimages and the associated tourism economy, ancient and modern, are an important source of data that gives us an example of how human agency and cultural practices are related to the process of collective memory formation. The human search for an authentic connection with the past by traveling to a specific location appears to be a quite compelling activity across human societies. W. Fitzhugh Brundage, writes the following about the attraction of Natchez, Mississippi, for tourists seeking to experience the Old South,

> As in the past, access to resources will dictate which groups in Natchez and elsewhere are able to enshrine their version of history. Well-heeled and well-connected organizations like the Natchez garden clubs remain far more likely than other groups to secure public recognition of their version of the past. The already considerable influence of private organizations is certain to grow at a time when public funding for historical interpretation is tight and the quasi-privatization of public works gathers speed (2005:326).

White domination of the tourism industry relative to the influence of American blacks leads to a representation of the Old South that favors one version of history over another. Some white southerners continue to try and separate slavery from the Confederacy and the Old South, or to continue to draw upon the mythology of the faithful slave, making slavery appear less harmful and dehumanizing than it was.

As with the other data with which collective memory scholars work, tourism and pilgrimages need to be viewed within a given social context and with sensitivity to the power relations in that context. This means that if scholars were to focus solely on what is popular and draws mass crowds, they would miss the competition that exists between different groups in the society to get history right – to get the interpretation of history right. In her moving book, Macarena Gómez-Barris looks specifically at the margins of Chilean society and the exile community for representations of Pinochet's dictatorship. She is skeptical about the willingness of the post-Pinochet state to deal with this authoritarian past, "On the part of the state these are often symbolic strategies that assist in the process of smoothing over painful memories on the path toward national unity, strategies that in the case of Chile have aided the process of legitimizing capitalist restructuring" (2009:5). She wants to focus on the margins, on those that are generating counter-memories that challenge the soothing narratives of the state. Although the military bulldozed many of the original buildings at Villa Grimaldi, which became a center of torture and murder during the Pinochet regime, activists and former prisoners reclaimed the space as a site to memorialize the regime's crimes (Gómez-Barris

2009:43,50). It may become a pilgrimage point for those who wish to resist efforts to minimize or explain away the crimes of the Pinochet regime.

Oral History

There may be a tendency for some to believe that oral history, the stories that we tell each other about our shared past, is more important for ancient, pre-literate societies, than modern day industrialized societies. For those working with oral history, their work spans both the non-industrialized societies of the past and the present (Vansina 1965) as well as modern industrialized societies (Grele 1975; Thompson 1988). In one sense, it is obviously true that oral history mattered more to pre-literate societies, as they had few other means for storing information about the past.

Nonetheless, oral history continues to play a central role in modern societies as well. Indeed, in totalitarian and authoritarian societies, dissidents and those who wish to maintain some form of counter-memory may have to retreat to oral history, although at the height of the Stalinist terror, it is quite possible that in many cases even this means of transmitting the past was also nearly eliminated (Sherbakova 1992). But even when a vast array of other means for storing and archiving the past exists in modern technological societies, oral history remains a critical component for passing on information about the past. For example, a group of German researchers traced discussions about National Socialism within German families and between the generations, and examined how family narratives often worked to de-Nazify family members (Welzer et al 2002). In some of my own work, I looked at how an oral history archival project in Berlin designed to capture the narratives of "prominent Berliners" at first excluded those who had worked to rescue Jews or resist the Nazis. The same archival project then later, in the context of the 1980s West Germany, sought out these individuals and their narratives about the Nazi past (Wolfgram 2011).

Unless there is a means to record oral history, or to capture its echo at a later date, it is a source of data that can be difficult to analyze. But collective memory scholars of both the ancient and modern worlds need to look for clues as to how different groups may have sought to keep stories about the past alive through their telling and retelling in families and other social groups.

Human Culture: Material

In this section I will turn to a discussion of the material culture that human societies use to archive and represent the past. With technological advances, some of what is brought into the material culture is a recording of some component of the immaterial culture discussed above, thus showing how the boundaries of these different categories are fluid. While on the one hand I want to deemphasize the divisions between ancient and modern societies in terms of the relevance of the past for humans living in both settings, there is no question that technological developments have changed what can be stored and represented and how widely these representations can be distributed. I divide the discussion of material culture into three categories: text, image, and object. I then close with some reflections on the consequences of the digital age, in which the cost of generating and distributing representations of the past to between 1 billion or 2 billion internet users is very close to zero.

Text

Undoubtedly one of the most important developments in human history was the creation of a written language and its implications for the exercise of political power. It is not an accident of language that the word "authority" combines notions of texts and power. With the creation of a

written language, human civilization was put on a very different path as the amount of information that could be stored and referenced increased dramatically over what could be achieved in a civilization limited by access only to an oral tradition and ritual.

When scholars study texts as a part of the process of collective memory formation, they need to reflect carefully on the resources that may or may not be available to different groups in a given society to generate the texts and gain access to them. For example, in the ancient world, only a very limited and educated elite was in a position to generate and consume texts, and as Castelli shows, the early Christian church used its control over the texts of the early Christian martyrs as a way of shaping a specific understanding of suffering and redemption. As Alcock comments in her argument for expanding the types of data that scholars work with in dealing with social memory in the ancient world, "Literary and epigraphic evidence has borne the brunt of reconstructing ancient attitudes to the past, and nothing can, or should, dislodge such sources from their place in this analysis. Yet *sole* dependence on them, as remarked earlier, carries with it certain decided hazards. Such texts best illustrate dominant commemorative narratives, and it is rare for them to offer alternative versions or a glimpse into the potential range of counter-memories. . . Male, elite, and urban perspectives, almost inevitably, pronounced upon what was deemed 'worthy of memory'" (2002:23).

With the development and improvement of moveable type by Johannes Gutenberg in Germany around 1440, a great leap forward was made in dramatically reducing the costs of reproducing texts while also improving their standardization, with which scribes often struggled. With the development of the printing press and then other means of generating texts and circulating them in an ever-wider fashion, a revolution in communication was underway (Anderson 2006:33-46). And as literacy spread with the increased number of books, the authority contained in any given text was now open to wider interpretation. Not only could more individuals record their own observations and recollections, they could also turn these into a book and distribute them over ever wider geographical expanses. As the production and circulation of texts increased, it became increasingly possible for dissidents inside and outside the Catholic Church to challenge Church authority and its control the interpretation of the Bible. It is difficult to imagine the Protestant Reformation without this revolution in communication.

What the scholar of collective memory needs to keep in focus are the power relations that develop as a result of these changes. Which individuals or groups in a given society will have more or less access to generating texts and then having those texts published and distributed? With the development of simple writing instruments and paper, and then the typewriter and computer, the cost of generating a text has become minimal, while the printing and distribution could remain a significant barrier. The internet and the digital age of the text are now having profound impacts on the production and circulation of texts, a point I will return to below.

In democratic, capitalist societies, publishers served as a key gatekeeper in determining how much access any given narrative of the past would have to the broader marketplace. The ideology of profit and pursuing mass markets became the primary factor in shaping how many texts were published and how widely they were distributed. Over time the reduced costs of producing books has allowed for numerous very small presses to continue to function, thus providing for a means of keeping counter-memories in circulation as well.

Within authoritarian and communist societies, it is useful to think about the relationship of texts and books to other ways of representing the past, such as film and television. Think for a moment about the different cost structures that exist between the generation and distribution of books compared to television programs and movies. The fact that books were much less expensive helps us to understand why dissidents were first able to express themselves through writing and then, in some cases, in theater, film and television. For example, the so-called samizdat presses,

literally self-published press, became an important way for dissidents within the Soviet Union and throughout central and eastern Europe to challenge the authority of the Communist party. Most important for our discussion here, some of those samizdat publications included challenges to the ruling Communist party by recording the party's past crimes. Given the extremely repressive nature of some of these states, which varied over time, the "press" was sometimes nothing more than hand-copied texts that circulated within small networks of trust. The Communist state was, from time to time, able to push the dissidents back into the technological era prior to 1440.

But there were significant differences between the different Communist regimes, and even the regimes themselves differed significantly over time. Both the Soviet Union, during the early Khrushchev years, and Yugoslavia, during the 1960s, experienced periods of growing freedom. It was toward the end of the 1960s that Dragoslav Mihailović managed to publish his book *Kad su cvetale tikve* (1968) [*When Pumpkins Blossomed* (1971)]. The central character is Ljuban, who grows up amongst gang violence in one of Belgrade's poor districts. He also has to deal with the family's history and the fact that his brother and father were taken to Goli otok, a brutal prison camp, during the anti-Stalinist purges after 1948. His father returns a broken man, while his brother never returns. When he tries to find out more information about his brother, he is blocked and warned not to ask more questions. The book was a huge success in Yugoslavia and was turned into a theater play. But by the time the play was ready to be performed in Belgrade, Communist party officials blocked the performances, realizing their mistake in allowing this piece of the party's past to reach a broader public. Mihailović's work was hardly alone at the end of the 1960s, a time during which artists, filmmakers, theater producers and writers were challenging many different aspects of Yugoslav society, including the state's preferred interpretation of the recent past.

The 1970s saw a return to more repression, but after Tito's death in 1980 there was an explosion of material that found its way to the general public and challenged the behavior of the party during the anti-Stalinist purges. Antonije Isaković's two-volume novel *Tren* (1982) [Moment] was completed in 1979, but publication was delayed until after Tito's death. Most significantly for our discussions here, Isaković based his novel on interviews with survivors from Goli otok, an example of oral history transformed to text and then published as a widely distributed book. There are numerous examples that followed immediately after Tito's death, first taking the form of plays and books and then only a couple years later Emir Kusturica's international film success with *When Father Was Away on Business* [*Otac na službenom putu*] (1985).

Images

In thinking about images, it is important to realize that these different categories have rather fluid boundaries and that texts, images and objects often are combined in different presentations of the past. For example, one clue to aid our interpretation of Thecla's representation on some of the ampullae on which she appears is the fact that there is sometimes some accompanying text as well. In terms of recording human history and providing a window onto the past, the image came before written language. And no sooner was written language developed then we began to design pictures to accompany the text. Texts and images have long interacted with each other.

For non-literate societies, images became an import way of referencing the past, as with the images of Thecla on the sides of the pilgrimage ampullae souvenirs. Although the early Christian Church had reservations about the use of images, the Church soon became the chief sponsor of generating images to place on altars and on the walls of churches to tell the stories of the martyrs and Christ to the illiterate populations. The wealthy and powerful not only had their portraits painted, but battle scenes were imagined and recorded as well as many other subjects, with the

content of painting become more popularized over time. More secular themes began to appear and representations of commoners and ordinary life become more prevalent.

The discovery and rearranging of images has played a critical role in how the past is captured and represented, but we have to be careful with how we use photographic data. The Nazis certainly liked to have themselves and their victims photographed, as long as they were in control of the editing and selection process. There is no shortage of official Nazi images that apparently show the strict order and discipline of the movement, which actually, still today, exaggerates how disciplined the Nazis actually were. Indeed, early filming of highly choreographed Nazi marches in Nuremburg showed German soldiers bumping into each other awkwardly. These clips survive in the archive, but not in the popular imagination. With more rehearsals, the Nazis achieved the precision and efficiency that Leni Riefenstahl celebrated in her propaganda film, *Triumph of the Will* (Müller 1993).

Consider also the photographs that we have of the so-called Kristallnacht, November 9, 1938, when the Nazis organized the destruction of Jewish shops, residences and synagogues. We have pictures of Kristallnacht that the Nazis approved, and not surprisingly when combined with the term Kristallnacht – "The Night of the Broken Glass" – we are by and large left with images *and* texts that focus on the material destruction of that night. What is almost completely absent from postwar West German newspaper commentaries and reflections back on Kristallnacht is the realization that Jews were beaten to death, that some Jews fought back and tried to defend their property and lives, and that in the following days Jews and others were marched through the streets, in front of the public, on their way to the first concentration camps in Germany. One reason these other narratives are missing or marginal is not that there were no pictures taken, but that the Nazis tried to destroy all of the pictures that did not fit their preferred narrative. The Nazis had no use for images of Jews fighting back against impossible odds and had these pictures destroyed. Through their control over the images of their regime, the Nazis still have quite a powerful hold over today's public in terms of having themselves and their victims seen as they wished to be seen. The French police did the same after their massacre of Algerian protesters in the streets of Paris in October 1961 as they systematically sought out those with cameras and seized their film. In the absence of these photographs, the 1961 massacre is not well remembered in France today (Gelber 2001).

But the Nazis could not control everything. In a development that presaged the era of the ubiquitous cell phone, its digital camera, and the images that eventually surfaced from Abu Ghraib, the US prison in occupied Iraq, where US soldiers abused and humiliated Iraqi prisoners, German soldiers went to war with some of the first inexpensive and mass produced cameras. The military command was unsuccessful in eliminating the use of the cameras by the troops, and what the soldiers recorded and then brought home with them has led to a significant upheaval in German society. Like the US soldiers at Abu Ghraib, the German soldiers recorded their own war crimes. Postwar West German society developed a mythology about the "clean Wehrmacht" as many aspects of official as well as popular culture tried to build a clear narrative barrier between the "Germans" and the "Nazis." In this mythology, the Wehrmacht was on the side of "the Germans" and not Hitler. But the photographs that the Wehrmacht soldiers took, once they were pulled from the shoebox archives of the nation, organized, and put on public display, had the potential to explode this narrative barrier between Germans and Nazis. What began as a rather simple exhibit of these photographs in Hamburg in 1995 led to a major controversy about the nature of the Wehrmacht during WWII (Hamburger Institute for Social Research 1999).

What is significant for our discussion here is to again reflect upon questions of who had the resources to produce images at different points in time. And then, also to reflect upon the consequences of moving into an era in which the mass reproduction of these images has spread from books to the internet. The speed of the reproduction and the ability to alter images has increased dramatically with the prevalence of digital formats.

Objects

The material culture that can serve as a reference point for the past is perhaps limitless, but scholars of collective memory have rightly focused their attention in specific areas. Some of these objects may be created with the explicit intention of creating a referential point with the past, such as monuments and memorial markers (Ladd 1997), while others may have meaning assigned to them later, such as buildings that take on specific memorial like significance later, such as the Athenian Acropolis (Alcock 2002:5). In thinking about the built environment, we will want to give attention to the ways these objects are incorporated into the practice of human culture.

But this does not mean that the monument that has been removed, destroyed or overgrown with weeds is without importance to our studies. Consider for example the transformation of the post-Soviet symbolic landscape as hundreds of monuments were attacked by the local populations or taken down by municipal authorities (Lewis and Mulvey 1993; Forest and Johnson 2002). To the extent that our studies are diachronic, the multiple uses, discarding and rediscovery of different monuments or locations will be of great interest for collective memory scholarship. How often throughout history did conquerors build their religious houses on top of the ruins of the now subject population's houses of worship? In the 1460s, the conquering Turkish troops built a mosque inside the Greek Parthenon, but this was then later destroyed (Alcock 2002:5). In 1680, the Pueblo Revolt in the American Southwest saw the indigenous population destroying the church of the Spanish conquerors and then building their own sacred kiva on the site of the Spanish church (Alcock 2002:13).

The Internet and the Digital Age

We are in the midst of another revolution in communication technology, and the impact of this revolution on how human collectives reflect on their shared sense of the past is still largely unknown. First, we need to realize that only between 1 to 2 billion people use the internet on a regular basis. The old patterns that structure the production and distribution of representations of the past remain largely unchanged for the vast majority of humanity. One central point is the virtual elimination of some costs for gaining access to the marketplace. The costs of internet-wide distribution are basically zero, and the costs of producing texts and images have also become incredibly inexpensive. One clear indicator of this is that the production of information is currently outstripping the available storage capacity. Within two years, it is projected that twice as much information will be generated compared to the available storage (*The Economist* 2010). So rather than moving into a world in which everything can be saved, the digital world, for the foreseeable future, will be one in which ever more information is generated but even larger amounts of that information will not make it into some form of storage.

Although we do not yet fully understand the consequences of the digital revolution and its potential impact on the process of collective memory formation, it does not seem that power and material resources are going to disappear from the equation, but they will be transformed. For example, state ideology will still play a critical role. China has used the digital revolution to block the ability of the Chinese population to learn about their government's massacre of their fellow citizens at Tiananmen Square in 1989 (Thomas 2006).

And the capacity of any of us to find useful information on the internet is almost wholly dependent upon the search engines that help us find what we think we are looking for. A recent study of Google, the most popular search engine in English, shows that search results are driven by Google's drive for profits by helping advertisers and that Google does not find everything

(Vaidhyanathan 2011). Indeed, the ranking of search results, controlled by Google, but also manipulated by those practicing search engine optimization, is critical to directing the user's attention. Capitalist market pressures are being brought to bear on these search engines to marginalize, potentially, content that some might want to locate.

While the digital revolution will have some as yet largely unknown impact, we should not forget that a great deal of what has been discussed in this article remains largely unchanged. I do not foresee the digital revolution leading to sacred places losing their draw on pilgrims, or landscapes becoming meaningless. The ability to download images of Mecca or Jerusalem will not substitute our need to go there with others that share our beliefs. I cannot imagine that oral history will disappear, although face-to-face transmission may become less frequent or moved into digital forums on the internet. I do not foresee that we will stop building monuments or naming places and that the promised authenticity of place will lose its magical appeal. The digital revolution will transform the nature of power relations; it will not negate them, as some cyber utopians have argued (Lanier 2010; Morozov 2011).

Conclusion

The very broad and general categories I used in this article are designed to help us see certain similarities across ancient and modern societies, and to help us think about the implications of the digital revolution. Each data source brings with it potential biases, as each type of data has been produced and consumed within social relations governed by power.

The digital revolution is, potentially, most disruptive here. Although the material costs of distribution go toward zero, production costs of high quality digital material will remain in place. The power of the archivist, Google or otherwise, to store and catalogue will remain substantial and perhaps increase. The authority of the editor or source of publication may also increase, as we struggle to understand what is important and relevant in a world filled with massive digital data flows. And the digital world has dramatically enhanced the ability of Google, credit card companies, and other corporations as well as democratic and authoritarian states to monitor the behavior of citizens as consumers and potential dissidents. The challenges of surveillance and censorship have not disappeared in the digital world. But through it all, we will remain rooted in the past as we look to the future.

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