Performing the Past

Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe

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Amsterdam University Press

Cover: Lewes Bonfire Night, procession of the Martyr's Crosses. Part of the Bonfire Night celebrations on the 5th November in Lewes, Sussex. The burning crosses commemorate the 17 Protestant martyrs who were burnt at the stake in the town during the Marian persecutions of 1555–1557.

Coverillustration: Andrew Dunn, Cambridge, United Kingdom
Cover: Studio Jan de Boer, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
Design: Paul Boyer, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

ISBN 978 90 8964 205 9
e-ISBN 978 90 4851 202 7
NUR 686

CHAPTER 2

Re-framing memory. Between individual and collective forms of constructing the past

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Over the last decade, memory has been acknowledged as a 'leading concept' of cultural studies.[1] The number of books and essays that have appeared on the subject already fill whole libraries. The memory discourse is quickly expanding. There is a growing number of different approaches to cultural memory which exist side by side without taking much notice of one another, let alone engage in a discussion of their various underlying axioms and goals. What the memory discourse still lacks is theoretical rigour, an integral as well as differentiated view of the enterprise, and a self-critical investigation of its central concepts. In my contribution I will examine one of these leading concepts, namely 'collective memory' more closely, before, in a second step, introducing some terminological distinctions and, in a third step, testing them by looking at a concrete case.

1. Collective memory – a spurious notion?

There is no need to convince anybody that there is such a thing as an individual memory. Memory attaches to people in the singular, but does it attach to them in the plural? Although, in the meantime, a whole new discourse has been built around the term 'collective memory' that fills extended library shelves, there are still inveterate sceptics who tenaciously deny that the word has any meaning. It is easy to create a new term, but can

we be sure that there is anything in reality to correspond to it? Susan Sontag, for instance, belongs to those who deny the meaning of such a term. 'Photographs that everyone recognizes', she writes in her new book *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 'are now a constituent part of what a society chooses to think about, or declares that it has chosen to think about. It calls these ideas "memories", and that is, over the long run, a fiction. Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as collective memory (...)'. And she insists: 'All memory is individual, unreproducible – it dies with each person. What is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating: that this is important, and this is the story about how it happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds. Ideologies create substantiating archives of images, representative images, which encapsulate common ideas of significance and trigger predictable thoughts, feelings.'[2]

According to Sontag, a society is able to choose, to think and to speak, but not to remember. It can choose without a will, it can think without the capacity of reason, it can speak without a tongue, but it cannot remember without a memory. With the term memory, her license for figurative speech reaches its limit. For her, memory cannot be thought of independently of an organ and organism. Being part of a physical structure, it is tied to individual lives and dies with each person. This common sense argument has its irrefutable evidence. The statement is certainly true, but, I would argue, it is incomplete. To stress the experiential positivism and solipsism of individual memory is to disregard two important dimensions of memory. One concerns the many ways in which memories are linked between individuals. Once verbalized, the individual's memories are fused with the inter-subjective symbolic system of language and are, strictly speaking, no longer a purely exclusive and unalienable property. By encoding them in the common medium of language, they can be exchanged, shared, corroborated, confirmed, corrected, disputed – and, last but not least, written down, which preserves them and makes them potentially accessible to those who do not live within spatial and temporal reach. This brings me to the other dimension of memory: its externalization. Individual memories are not only inseparably fused with language and texts, but also with material images. Photographs are important props of memory which not only trigger specific individual recollections but also tend to represent them. In these cases, the boundary between individual memory and shared material documents is often not easy to draw.

Sontag would probably concede all of this, were we speaking not of memory but of the mind in general. The mind is that part of the brain in which general concepts are built up, in which external knowledge,

processed from texts and images, is assimilated and reconstructed. 'There is collective instruction', Sontag affirms.[3] Psychologists have offered the distinction between 'semantic' and 'episodic' memory, which can help us to further elucidate the problem. The semantic memory is related to the mind, which also has a memory dimension via learning and memorizing. Semantic memory is indeed acquired by collective instruction, it is the site of continuous learning and acquisition of both general and specialized knowledge which connects us with others and the surrounding world. Episodic memory, on the other hand, enshrines purely personal and autobiographical incidents; though it can be communicated and exchanged, it differs from (general) knowledge in that it remains embodied knowledge that cannot be *transferred* from one individual to another. It is what distinguishes us from others. A person may be said to *share* but never to *own* another person's memories.

When Maurice Halbwachs (one of the acknowledged patrons of the memory discourse) introduced the term 'collective memory' in 1925, he was well aware of potential misunderstandings. He was careful and self-critical enough to couch his sentences in a tentative and hypothetical form and to link the term, from the start, to another one of his own making, which is 'social frame'. For Halbwachs, one term cannot be explained without the other. Not only collective memory depends on social frames, the memories of individuals are also supported and defined by them. He insists that no memory is possible outside shared social frames and that the shifting or crumbling of these frames induces changes in personal memory and even forgetting.[4]

To define collective memory not in terms of essence and metaphysics (like Herder's *Volksgeist* or the nineteenth century's *Zeitgeist* – the 'spirit of the time') but in terms of individual participation in social frames is to sever it from the class of 'spurious notions' and to transform it into an innovating and groundbreaking term that – as has been proven 60-70 years later – opened up a new field of research. In spite of our sound skepticism of collective mystifications and the political abuse of such notions in racist and nationalist discourse, we must not forget, however, that human beings do not only live in the first person singular, but also in various formats of the first person plural. They become part of different groups whose 'we' they adopt together with the respective 'social frames' that imply an implicit structure of shared concerns, values, experiences, and narratives. The family, the neighbourhood, the peer group, the generation, the nation, the culture – each of these are larger groups to which individuals refer as 'we'. Each 'we' is constructed through specific discourses that mark certain

boundary lines and define the principles of inclusion and exclusion. To be part of the identity of such a group is to participate in the group's history which often exceeds the boundaries of one's individual life span. To participate in the group's vision of its past, then, means that one has to learn about it. One cannot remember it, one has to memorize it. Though it is acquired as semantic memory, it differs from general knowledge in that it has an identity index – just like episodic memory; it is knowledge that backs up (not an 'I' but) a 'we'.

What is called collective memory, writes Sontag, is not a remembering but a stipulating: groups indeed define themselves by agreeing upon what they hold to be important, to which story they accord eminence, which anxieties and values they share. According to Sontag, the term 'collective memory' is just another name for 'ideology'. The grand historian Reinhart Koselleck shares this opinion. He distinguishes between two forms of truth, one subjective, one objective. Subjective truth can be claimed by the individual who owns his specific distinctive and authentic memories. The truth of these memories arises from the indisputable evidence of unmediated experience. Objective truth, on the other hand, can be claimed by the professional historian who reconstructs past experience in an impartial way. He compares sources, weighs arguments and engages in an open-ended discourse of experts who in continuously correcting each other aspire to come closer and closer to the truth. The wide space between subjective and objective truth is filled by what Koselleck also calls 'ideologies'.

It is interesting to note that the term 'ideology' has dropped from contemporary discourse after a period of heavy usage in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. As the use of this term disappeared, 'collective memory' rose and eventually took its place. This was not only a matter of linguistic substitution but also of a decisive shift in theoretical orientation. The term 'ideology' is clearly derogatory; it is never used for our own way of thinking but always for how others misunderstand or distort what we hold to be true. It denounces a mental frame as false, fake, manipulated, constructed, insincere, or harmful because it presupposes a truth that is as clear as it is indisputable. 'Ideology' is the flip side of the coin of an implicit and self-assured sense of truth. Such assumptions have been eroded since the 1990s under the influence of constructivist thinking. We have come to learn that many of the qualities that we had assigned to ideology in fact also adhere to what we had cherished as subjective or objective truth. It is in particular the insight in the irreducible constructedness of both our memories and the work of the historian that has taught us to discard the

term ideology as a descriptive term and to recognize it as a purely polemical tool. Individual remembering, as psychologists tell us, does not preserve an original stimulus in a pure and fixed form but is a process of continuous re-inscription and reconstruction in an ever-changing present; historiography, as theoreticians tell us, involves a rhetorical use of language and, in spite of all claims to impartiality, a specific vantage point, an unacknowledged agenda, a hidden bias. In addition to this, we have come to accept that we live in a world that is mediated by texts and images, a recognition that has an impact both on individual remembering and the work of the historian. The historian has lost his monopoly over defining and presenting the past. What is called the 'memory boom' is the immediate effect of this loss of the historian's singular and unrivalled authority.

Whether we are in favour of or against these changes in our mental and cultural framework, we cannot disregard them but may have to guard against some of their effects. One problematic effect is the high potential for manipulation by the media which may restage the past according to marketing strategies or the demands of specific groups. Feelings very often are indulged in and exploited in the media market at the expense of cognitive functions. The voice of the professional historian is indispensable when it comes to judging evidence, probing the truth of representations, discovering sources and interpreting them in a new light. But to concede memories, both individual and collective, a legitimate access to the past in the mediated democratic society, is to acknowledge the multiple and diverse impact of the past, and in particular a traumatic past, on its citizens. The memory boom reflects a general desire to reclaim the past as an indispensable part of the present, and to reconsider, to revalue and to reassess it as an important dimension of individual biographies and historical consciousness. It also provides a repository for group affinities, loyalties, and identity formations in a post-individualist age. The fact that the term 'memory' has ousted 'ideology' cannot mean that the functions of criticism, discrimination, and ethical evaluation have become obsolete. On the contrary, the memory discourse has to develop its own stance of critical vigilance. It has to provide criteria for probing the quality of memory constructions, for distinguishing between uses and abuses of the past, between memories that perpetuate resentment, separatism, and violence on the one hand and those that further inter-group relations and have a therapeutic or ethical value on the other.

2. Four memory formats

In the second part of this chapter, I want to sketch the outlines of some of the 'wes' with which the individual identifies and to comment on the different memory formats in which they are packaged. This short sketch of four formats of memory will map various areas of memory research, showing how different disciplines have divided their labour. My working hypothesis is that our personal memories include much more than what we, as individuals, have ourselves experienced. We have our share in the larger and more encompassing memory of the family, the neighbourhood, the generation, the society, the state, and the culture we live in. These dimensions of memory, differing in scope and range, overlap and intersect within the individual who shares and incorporates those memories in various ways. Humans acquire these memories not only via lived experience, but also via interacting, communicating, identifying, learning, and participating. It is true that the borderlines that I am going to discuss are rather fuzzy. It is often not easy to clearly determine where one memory format ends and another begins as they cross over, overlap, interact, and even jar within the individual person. My criteria for distinguishing different frames or dimensions of memory will be threefold: extension in space and time, size of group, and volatility or stability.

Individual memory

The memory of individuals is studied by neurologists and cognitive psychologists, who have a rather poor view of human memory capacity. According to these scientists, human memory is not designed for accurate representations of past experiences but is notoriously distorting and cannot be trusted in any way. The German neuroscientist Wolf Singer has defined memories as 'data-based inventions' and Daniel Schacter, the Harvard psychologist, has specified no less than 'seven sins of memory'.[5] Whatever our memories may be worth from a scientific point of view, as human beings we have to rely on them, because they are what makes human beings human. Without this capacity and at least a sense of its reliability, we could not construct a self nor could we communicate with others. Personal memory is the dynamic medium for processing subjective experience and building up a social identity.

Though tied to subjective experience and an unalterable stance, personal memories already have a social quality in that they are interactively constructed, and, therefore, always connected with the

memories of others. Unless they are integrated into a narrative, which invests them with shape, significance, and meaning, they are fragmented, presenting only isolated scenes without temporal or spatial continuity. Even if they are anecdotalized and regularly rehearsed or stabilized by material objects, writing, or photographs, they remain volatile and subject to change and fading. Some episodic memories become part of a family memory; however, this also sets clear limits to their temporal duration. Even within that cycle of oral interaction they, as a rule, do not transcend the temporal range of three generations, a span amounting to at most a hundred years.

Social memory

Although I do not consider 'collective memory' a spurious notion, I dislike the term because of its vagueness. To circumvent its vagueness, I prefer to replace it with three different terms: social, political, and cultural memory. The first of these, social memory, refers to the past as experienced and communicated (or repressed) within a given society. It is continuously changing as it disappears with the death of individuals. The memory of a society is by no means homogenous but is instead divided into generational memories, the importance of which is being (re-)discovered by social psychologists.[6] As groups of people who are more or less the same age that have witnessed the same incisive historical events, generations share a common frame of beliefs, values, habits, and attitudes. The members of a generation tend to see themselves as different from preceding and succeeding generations. In the communication between different generations, writes a sociologist, 'mutual understanding is impeded by an invisible borderline which has to do with the temporality of experience. Age separates in an existential way because one cannot escape one's time.'[7] Avowed or un-avowed, this shared generational memory is an important element in the constitution of personal memories, because, as another sociologist has provocatively put it, 'once formed, generational identity cannot change'.[8]

While familial generations are indistinguishable on the social level, social generations acquire a distinct profile through shared experience of incisive events as well as through an ongoing discourse of self-thematization. The invisible frame of shared experiences, hopes, values, and obsessions becomes more tangible when it shifts. We then feel that stances and habits that were once normative and representative have gradually moved from centre to periphery. Social memory does not change gradually but undergoes a perceptible shift after periods of around 30 years

when a new generation enters into offices and takes over public responsibility. Together with its public presence, the new generation will authorize its own vision of history. The change of generations is paramount for the reconstruction of societal memory and the renewal of cultural creativity.

Political memory

The most important difference between individual and social memory on the one hand and political and cultural memory on the other lies in their temporal range. Individual and social memory is embodied; both formats cling to and abide with human beings and their embodied interaction. Political and cultural memory, on the other hand, are mediated and, in order to become a kind of memory, they both need to be re-embodied; both are founded on durable carriers of symbols and material representations. Irrespective of whether they succeed in this goal or not, both political and cultural memory aim at a permanence of memory. While the social format of memory is built on *inter-generational* communication, political and cultural forms of memory are designed for *trans-generational* communication, involving not only libraries, museums, and monuments, but also providing various modes of education and repeated occasions for participation. As we cross the shadow-line from short-term to long-term durability, an embodied, implicit, and fuzzy *bottom-up memory* is transformed into an institutionalized *top-down memory*. However overlapping and intertwined social and political memory may be, they have become the objects of different academic disciplines. The bottom-up social memory is studied by social psychologists who are interested in the ways in which historical events are perceived and remembered by individuals and generations within their own life span. The top-down political memory is investigated by political scientists, who discuss the role of memory for the formation of national identities and political action. The first approach focuses on how memories are communicated in private and public space; the second asks how memories are constructed, staged, used, and abused for political action and the formation of group identities.

It must be emphasized that the step from individual or social to political memory does not afford an easy analogy. Institutions and groups do not possess a memory like individuals; there is, of course, no equivalent to the neurological system or the anthropological disposition. Institutions and larger social groups, such as nations, states, the church, or a business firm do not 'have' a memory, they 'make' one for themselves with the aid of memorial signs such as monuments, museums, commemoration rites, and

ceremonies. Together with such a memory, these groups and institutions 'construct' an identity. A memory that is intentionally and symbolically constructed is based on acts of selection and exclusion, neatly separating useful from not useful, relevant from irrelevant memories.

In three aspects, the political constructions of memory differ clearly from personal and social memory. First, they are not connected to other memories and the memories of others but tend towards homogeneous unity and self-contained closure. Second, political memory is not fragmentary and diverse but emplotted in a narrative that is emotionally charged and conveys a clear and invigorating message. And, third, it is not something volatile and transient, but is anchored in material and visual signs such as sites and monuments as well as in performative action such as commemoration rites, which periodically reactivate individual memories and enhance collective participation. In this way, a political memory is stabilized and can be transmitted from generation to generation.

Cultural memory

Cultures may be defined as systematic and highly elaborate strategies against the primary experience of ongoing decay and general oblivion. As interventions against the inexorable laws of natural decay and human forgetting, it is their perennial business (to use a phrase formulated by Zygmunt Baumann) to translate the transient into the permanent, that is, to invent techniques of transmitting and storing information deemed vital for the constitution and continuation of a specific group.

Cultures that rely on writing systems for long-term storage of information develop a distinction between what I call a 'canon' and an 'archive'. This division draws a line between what is (or ought to be) remembered by the group (in terms of repeated performances, readings, citations, and references) and what in the long run has been neglected, forgotten, excluded, or discarded but is still deemed worthy and important enough to be preserved in material form. The active memory of the canon perpetuates what a society has consciously selected and maintains as salient and vital for a common orientation and a shared remembering; its institutions are the literary and visual canon, the school curricula, the museum, and the stage, along with with holidays, shared customs, and remembrance days.

Compared to these active forms of recreating and maintaining a cultural memory, the contents of the archive may be said to linger in a state of latency. The archival memory is accessible only to specialists. This part of materially retrievable and professionally interpretable information does

not circulate as common knowledge. It has not passed the filters of social selection nor is it transformed into a living memory supported by public awareness and validation by cultural institutions and the public media. It is important to note, however, that the borderline between the archival and the canon's active memory is permeable in both directions. Some things may recede into the background and fade out of common interest and awareness while others may be recovered from the periphery and move into the centre of social interest and esteem. Thanks to this double-layered structure and the interaction between the active and the archival dimension, cultural memory has an inbuilt potential for ongoing changes, innovations, transformations, and reconfigurations.

Compared to the symbolic signs of political memory which are homogenizing and charged with a clear message, the symbolic signs of cultural memory have a more complex structure that calls for more individual forms of participation such as reading, writing, learning, scrutinizing, criticizing, and appreciating. The fact that both are designed as long-term memory does not mean that their structure is permanently fixed. Both are permanently challenged and contested, and it is, to a large part, this very contestation that keeps this memory alive.

3. Reframing memory – German memories of suffering

In order to illustrate and thereby to test the heuristic value of these four formats of memory I will now turn to an empirical case. A remarkable shift happened in German post-war memory in the new millennium. During a lecture on individual and collective forms of memory in October 2000 in Vilnius, Günter Grass reflected on the lack of attention that has been paid to the suffering of Germans during the Second World War. He called it strange and disquieting how late and reluctantly these memories were surfacing in German consciousness: 'The expulsion, the plight of 12 million East German fugitives, was a topic only in the background. One iniquity displaced the other.'[9] Three years later, the situation in Germany had dramatically changed. The country was suddenly flooded by memories of German suffering during and shortly after the war that returned with an unprecedented emotional impact. New themes suddenly attracted public attention such as the forced migration of the German population from Eastern European countries, the carpet bombing of German cities, and the organized mass rape of German women as carried out by soldiers of the

Red Army. These events were presented in the mass media via images and films, books and interviews, talk shows, and memoirs, and were discussed on the internet by members of all generations with high emotional intensity. How were these individual memories transformed into a social memory? This transformation occurred in terms of various social and political reframings.

1. *Individual memories of flight and bombings that had been contained for more than half a century in the 'social private' frame now entered the 'social public' frame.*

The experience of expulsion and of burning cities lent itself better to intergenerational family communication than the shameful experience of rape which was covered up by social and familial taboos. The social frame of the memories of expulsion and firestorm had been that of the family; it was a shared memory, but one that remained on a purely private level. Counting by numbers of book editions, by frequency of articles in major journals and newspapers and by numbers of spectators of television documentaries and prime-time shows, we may infer that these individual memories were transferred after 2001 from the private and unofficial frame of the family to that of the society at large. In this shift, they underwent a considerable metamorphosis: they became mediated and mediatized. Books, films, and videos create representations that become generally accessible. In a newspaper article in 2003, Ulrich Raulff complained that that these memories, which resurfaced 58 years after the war, did not have the 'decency' to wait for another two years for their formal commemoration date in 2005.[10] The fact that the arousal of memories happened in an informal bottom-up way and rather than being triggered from the top down may be a sign that they were still to some extent embodied memories of experiences charged with strong personal emotions.

2. *Materialized individual memories that had been part of archival memory were reclaimed as part of public social memory.*

Individual memories persevere not only by oral communication and continuous rehearsal in the social frame, but also by their material fixation in texts and images, first of all in diaries and letters, written in the wake of the events described, but also later on, in forms of memoirs and novels, creating a more permanent shape for individual memories and making

them available to others. Written documents, however, have to be published and to find an interested audience before they can aspire to contribute to a social memory. If they do not (or no longer) meet with general interest, they are relegated to the archive, that is, the inert or virtual memory of historical material traces. In 1990, the German filmmaker Helke Sander wanted to recover the tabooed memory of the mass rape of 1945 by making a film which was based on her research on the textual and visual archives and an extensive oral history project. Her work won considerable attention but remained contained within a particular segment of society, mainly that of scholars and feminists. Another example of a work of art that did not immediately strike a chord with the public social memory is the trilogy by Dieter Forte, also published at the beginning of the 1990s, who described his own traumatizing childhood memory of the bombing of Düsseldorf within an extended family saga. Not only did it not meet with public interest, it even escaped the attention of W.G. Sebald who searched German literature for texts on the subject only a few years later. A third example: the sinking of the ship *Wilhelm Gustloff*, carrying thousands of German fugitives who drowned in the incident at the end of the war, was recalled to public memory by a short novel by Günter Grass, published in 2002. This incident had already been described in numerous publications, and even a film without meeting with general interest and resonance. These presentations had spoken only to a small segment of the society, namely the particular generation whose own experience related to the event, and they had been quickly passed over and stowed away in the archival memory. After 2000, when the incident was being reclaimed by the society as a whole, we could witness a transfer from particular experience to general interest, from expert knowledge to public response, from an archival to a social memory.

3. *In the 1950s and 1960s, what had been claimed as a political memory was reclaimed as a social public memory*

The memory of expulsion had already been claimed as a public political memory in the 1950s. After the war, the League of the Expellees (*Bund der Vertriebenen*) acted as a custodian of these personal memories, representing and instrumentalizing them in a political context. The memory was shaped by this lobby so as to fit a common narrative and to serve a revisionist political agenda. As the members of this league represented a sizeble portion of voters in West Germany, it also received considerable governmental support. In the 1950s, the ministry for the expelled had

endowed the league with generous funds for museums and other educational institutions. It even commissioned a large oral history project which documented the experience of expulsion and was carried out by the most renowned historians of the time. Over the decades, however, this memory lost much of its social impact. Their museums were visited less and less by members of the younger generation, and their ritualized folkloristic events were marginalized more and more. Fifty years later, this particular and waning political memory returned and rocked the whole society. In its new frame, it is no longer necessarily politicized but mainly is being reconstructed in its humane and social dimension and invested with emotional significance by the society as a whole.

4. *A particular political memory was reclaimed as a national political memory*

Although there is such a thing as a human right to one's individual memory, there is not necessarily a right to the expression of any kind of a collective memory within the public sphere. While heterogeneous private memories coexist quietly side by side in a society, they easily can become conflictual and incompatible if they are invested with political claims which clash in the public arena. If we ask why public acclaim had been withheld from these memories for so long, we may find an answer in Grass' statement. When he wrote: 'One iniquity displaced the other', he condensed a problematic 'psycho-logic' of German postwar memory into a palpable formula. Indeed: immediately after the war it was the pathetic self-image of the Germans as a suffering nation that blocked their perception of guilt and an awareness of the suffering of others, in particular of the Jewish victims. After the establishing of a worldwide memory of the Holocaust, it was in turn Jewish suffering that displaced the suffering of non-Jewish Germans, and with the shift after 2000 it was feared that the memory of German suffering would once again displace the Holocaust and blunt the consciousness of German guilt.

At this point we have to add that the political differs from the social frame in that it introduces norms into the frame of memory. Conflict and clashes do not evolve from mere stories but from arguments, values, aims, projects, intentions, claims, and decisions, all of which imply a normative dimension. While stories may be compatible, normative orientations may not be. The normative orientation of the politicized memory of the expelled had been contained within the larger political frame of German Holocaust memory as established on the national and state levels. After 2000, this particular memory of German suffering strove to be elevated to the

national level. Some felt that a pompous memory of German suffering could even serve as a convenient master narrative that would bind together East and West German experience, forging an emotional link of national unity after so many experiences of inner German dissent, estrangement and rupture.

It is remarkable that this reframing of a particular memory as a national memory coincides with a generational shift. Memory dies with each person, writes Susan Sontag. This case, however, is slightly more complicated. At a time when many of the members of the first generation have passed away, a succeeding generation is stepping into their shoes. We are witnessing the shift from a 'generation of experience' to a 'generation of confession' who identifies with the experience of their parents and grandparents and tries to transform it into a lasting and respected memory. The present spokeswoman for the league of the expellees, Erika Steinbach (born 1940), was clearly trying to elevate the memory of her family to a national symbolic level during the years after 2000. After the harsh confrontation of the generation of '68 with the guilt of their parents, we are witnessing a new willingness to identify with them and to inherit their suffering. Steinbach's aim was to establish a Centre against Expulsion in Berlin, which would be designed as an institutional stronghold of a German national memory of suffering. The Jewish community feared that as a symbolic site, it would become a rival to and challenge the Holocaust Monument; it has already deeply irritated Germany's Polish neighbours. The political reframing of German memory of suffering by the league of the expellees was not confined to the dimension of space. The Bundesrat proposed 5 August, the day of the signing of the charter of the expelled in 1950, as a new date for national commemoration. This proposal, however, has not found the support of the government.

The considerable turmoil caused by Steinbach is an unmistakable sign that her intentions are challenging the normative frame of German national memory. It also shows that the composition of national memories is a highly politicized issue that, in a democracy, is open to negotiations. So far, German national memory remains defined by the frame of German guilt of the Holocaust, even if other memories of German suffering are admitted by its side. This normative frame allows for heterogeneous memories on the social level, provided that they do not challenge this hierarchy of norms. 'One iniquity displaced the other', wrote Grass. He obviously overlooked this hierarchy of frames and the normative power of the national memory. We have therefore reason to hope that this mutual eclipse of German guilt and suffering will not go on forever. It is no longer one iniquity displacing

the other, but the acknowledgement of German guilt and responsibility that also makes place for the acknowledgment of German suffering.

Conclusion

Let me conclude with a few observations.

The first point concerns the externalization of personal memories. Individual memories, Sontag insisted, are irreproducible, while ideologies are supported by archives of texts and images. The distinction, I fear, cannot be made quite as neatly. As individuals live in societies which produce texts, images, and films relating to what they themselves remember, their individual memories necessarily always interact to some extent with externalized representations. What individuals remember are repeated representations which are rarely preserved over the years in a state of fixed stability and uncontaminated purity.

The second point concerns the discontinuity and continuity of individual memories. Individual memories die with the person, Sontag wrote. While this statement can hardly be contested in its literal sense, it disregards the ways in which parts of these memories may be reconstructed and represented on a social level by those who succeed them in time. The family, the political unit, the nation, can create ties, loyalties, and obligations which call for a continuation of memories.

The third point concerns the transformation from individual to public memory. This transformation has a double effect: it creates public visibility and audibility on the one hand, and it homogenizes and reduces experience by creating representations on the other; these latter are always in danger of becoming standard references, icons, stereotypes, or even screen memories.

The fourth point concerns the normative character of political memory. Not all collective memories exist on the same level; some are part of a hierarchical structure. While in both the private and public dimensions of social memory we meet with a multiplicity of voices and opinions, on the political level memories acquire the quality of normative symbols. While there is much room for variation and heterogeneity on the social level, there is very little to no space on the level of national memory construction that provides the framework to personal and social memories.

Halbwachs' brilliant observation that memories depend on social frames is an important clue to the complex problems of current memory issues. His concept of 'frame' has drawn our attention to the subtle ways in which individual memories partake of social memories and are

transformed into collective memories. These frames determine the validity and relevance of individual memories and shape their forms of articulation. Halbwachs' hints, however, need further elaboration and differentiation. In my contribution I wanted to show that 'collective memory' is not necessarily a spurious notion but one that needs to be theoretically differentiated and elaborated as social, political, and cultural memory. If we multiply the respective memory frames, Halbwachs' concept of framing and re-framing can become an important tool to analyse complex cases of memory formation and transformation in the past, present, and future.

Notes

1. In order to provide some minimal terminological consistency, I shall try to use the distinction between the terms 'memory' and 'memories' very much in the way the linguists distinguish between langue and parole. Memory will generally refer to the level of langue and hint at the organizational frame, while memories will refer to the level of parole, pointing at discrete and realized entities.
2. Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, New York 2003, 85-86.
3. *Ibidem* 85.
4. Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*. Edited and translated by L.A. Coser, Chicago 1992.
5. Daniel Schacter (ed.), *Memory Distortion. How Minds, Brains, and Societies Reconstruct the Past*, Cambridge MA 1995, see also: by Schacter: "The Seven Sins of Memory. Insights From Psychology and Cognitive Neuroscience", in: *American Psychologist* 54/3 (March 1999) 182-203.
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