



L2 Journal

An electronic refereed journal
for foreign and second language educators



Peer Reviewed

Title:

Texts of Memory and Texts of History

Journal Issue:

[L2 Journal, 4\(1\)](#)

Author:

[Wertsch, James V.](#), Washington University, St. Louis

Publication Date:

2012

Publication Info:

L2 Journal, UC Consortium for Language Learning & Teaching, UC Davis

Permalink:

<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/44h4w2mr>

Local Identifier:

ucclt_l2_9125

Abstract:

Starting with the observation that the terms “memory” and “history” are used almost interchangeably in everyday discourse and professional academic discussion, I argue that they can and should be distinguished. Drawing on longstanding debates about nations and nationalism, it is possible to trace the roots of this distinction and see how it has taken on new significance in contemporary memory studies. I outline a few assumptions about humans as meaning makers, users of cultural tools, and “cognitive misers” and then turn to oppositions that have been drawn between collective memory and formal history. These concern the degree of subjectivity or objectivity involved, the source of authority for narrative tools, and the willingness to sacrifice evidence to preserve a narrative account about the past or vice versa. In order to translate these oppositions into more concrete means for discussing memory and history, I introduce a distinction between “specific narratives” and “narrative templates,” and I examine the source of “ethnocentric narcissism” that characterizes memory to a greater degree than history. Insight into this issue can be derived from drawing out William James’s comments on the “me-ness” of individual human memory to examine the “us-ness” of collective memory.



eScholarship
University of California

eScholarship provides open access, scholarly publishing services to the University of California and delivers a dynamic research platform to scholars worldwide.

Texts of Memory and Texts of History

JAMES V. WERTSCH

Washington University in St Louis

E-mail: jwertsch@wustl.edu

The terms “memory” and “history” are used in various ways throughout the social sciences and humanities. Drawing on longstanding debates about nations and nationalism, I trace the roots of this distinction and see how they have taken on new significance in contemporary memory studies. I outline a few assumptions about humans as meaning makers, users of cultural tools, and “cognitive misers” and then turn to oppositions that have been drawn between collective memory and formal history. These concern the degree of subjectivity or objectivity involved, the source of authority for narrative tools, and the willingness to sacrifice evidence to preserve a narrative account about the past or vice versa. In order to translate these oppositions into more concrete means for discussing memory and history, I invoke a distinction between “specific narratives” and “narrative templates,” and I examine the source of “ethnocentric narcissism” that characterizes memory to a greater degree than history. Insight into this issue can be derived from drawing out William James’s comments on the “me-ness” of individual human memory to examine the “us-ness” of collective memory.

INTRODUCTION

The terms “history” and “memory” have long been part of discussions in the humanities and social sciences, but their precise meaning and differences continue to be debated. Views on the matter range from seeing little difference between memory and history to asserting that it is essential to distinguish them not only for analytic, but for ethical reasons. This state of affairs is perhaps to be expected, given the dynamic nature of contemporary memory studies (Roediger & Wertsch, 2008), and we can expect to see yet more perspectives on the issue as this interdisciplinary effort continues to evolve.

In what follows the focus will be on national histories and memories, where we can find constant reminders that the discussion goes far beyond being the merely “academic.” When the past of nations is at issue, strong feelings, animosity, and even armed conflict can erupt. It is not unusual, for example, for members of one national collective to insist that their account of the past is the genuine history of what really happened, whereas those on the other side of the divide are perpetrators of biased, if not simply false memory. Such confrontations all too often lead to non-negotiable “mnemonic standoffs” (Wertsch, 2008b), a short list of which includes Indians and Pakistanis over the 1947 Partition, Israelis and Palestinians over the formation of Israel in 1948, and Azerbaijanis and Armenians over the Nagorno Karabakh conflict of the 1990s.

Reflections on the nature of memory and history are a mainstay in contemporary studies of nations and nationalism, something that can be seen in widely used expressions such as “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1991) and “invented traditions” (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). Anthony Smith (2009) in particular has provided a more elaborated perspective on it in

his analyses of “ethno-symbolism.” This is a debate that can be traced back at least to Ernest Renan’s classic 1882 lecture “What Is a Nation?”, where he asserted, “Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle of] nationality” (1990, p. 11). It is clear from this passage as well as others that Renan envisioned a basic opposition between memory (and forgetting), on the one hand, and history, on the other. More recently, the French historian Pierre Nora has made even stronger claims of this sort in arguing, “Memory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition . . . History is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it” (1989, pp. 8-9).

For figures like Renan and Nora, then, memory and history are not merely different; they stand in opposition. And the notion of memory implied in their accounts also suggests an opposition between one “mnemonic community” (Zerubavel, 2003) and another, which sometimes takes the form of mnemonic standoffs or “history wars” (Tulviste, 2011). One of the most striking aspects of such confrontations is that seemingly well informed, rational people can insist on an account of the past that differs starkly with what other well informed, rational people believe. We often wonder—at least about *other* groups—how people can go on believing something about the past in the face of what appears to *us* to be strong disconfirming evidence. It is all too common to hear someone from another mnemonic community confidently assert something about the past and catch ourselves thinking, “She can’t really believe that, can she?” Perhaps the most striking point to keep in mind, however, is that the other person is likely thinking the same about us.

As a preliminary attempt to sort this out, let me outline a few assumptions. The first of these is that humans routinely engage in an “effort after meaning” of the sort that Frederic Bartlett outlined in his classic 1932 volume *Remembering*. But I take this one step further by drawing on figures like L.S. Vygotsky (1981, 1987) and M.M. Bakhtin (1986) to bring the importance of “mediation” into human meaning making. From this perspective rather than acting as some sort of atomistic agents (Taylor, 1985) who engage in meaning making in isolation, humans are viewed in terms of how they interact with other individuals and how they employ the “cultural tools” (Wertsch, 1998) provided by the sociocultural settings in which they function.

The cultural tools of particular concern for my account of memory and history are language in general and narratives in particular. Borrowing from figures such as Jerome Bruner (1990) and Alisdair MacIntyre (1984), my interest is in the “stock of stories” mentioned by the latter to make sense of the social world and our place in it. The moral philosopher MacIntyre made the point that:

I can only answer the question ‘What am I do to?’ if I can answer the prior question ‘Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’ We enter human society, that is, with one or more imputed characters—roles into which we have been drafted—and we have to learn what they are in order to understand how others respond to us and how our responses to them are apt to be construed. (p. 216)

Building on the ideas of MacIntyre, along with those of Vygotsky and Bakhtin, the point is that the narrative tools provided by our sociocultural setting provide the stock of stories we employ on any particular occasion of meaning making. The actual use of an item from this stock to

make sense of a particular situation involves an “irreducible tension” between an active agent and narrative tool, a claim that allows us to avoid the temptation to see all of the meaning making as coming from the agent in some sort of atomistic conceptualization, on the one hand, or from the cultural tool, as if agents are mindless vehicles for these tools, on the other. What bears emphasizing, however, is that especially in an analytic culture heavily influenced by “methodological individualism” (Wertsch, 1998), narrative tools can play such an active role that there is a sense in which they do some of our thinking, speaking, and remembering for us.

A second general assumption that guides my argument is that humans are “cognitive misers.” As outlined by Susan Fiske and Shelley Taylor (1984) the point is that we typically employ cognitive shortcuts and general algorithms when thinking or making decisions, a point that applies to memory as well. Instead of employing all of the rich information typically available in a setting, we use other means to go “beyond the information given” (Bruner, 1973), in some cases almost ignoring the information altogether. Combining these claims with ideas about narrative tools suggests that we routinely employ some sort of simplified, generic narrative forms for making sense of complex information. Ideas of this sort have been discussed in psychology under the heading of “schemas” that shape human memory (Bartlett, 1932), and in folklore and semiotic analyses similar claims have surfaced in writings about narrative “functions” at least since the writings of Vladimir Propp (1968, originally published in 1928) on the morphology of folktales.

A third assumption behind my line of reasoning is that in addition to being simplified and generic in form, the narrative tools we employ to make sense of the past introduce a particular perspective, an element of what Jan Assmann (2006) calls “ethnocentric narcissism” into the picture. It is a commonplace that we look at the past of our group in a biased way, and as I shall argue below this is particularly so in the case of memory, as opposed to history. But it is often assumed that this bias is instrumental in some self-serving way and that this is understood and sometimes consciously manipulated by members of a mnemonic community. The real power of cultural tools to shape our thinking and remembering, however, often operates in a much more subtle, and for that very reason, more powerful way than ideas about a self serving bias would suggest. By putting mediation and narrative tools front and center, we can gain new insight into the ethnocentric narcissism that wends its way into memory in quite nonconscious ways and is for this reason all the more frustrating of a barrier in mnemonic standoffs.

With these assumptions as background, let me turn back to the similarities and differences between memory and history. For the kinds of national memory and history I shall be considering, it is worth noting that both employ narrative tools and in that sense they are alike. The sort of perspective and bias introduced by narrative tools is widely recognized in the case of memory, but it has also been the focus of analysis in what Maurice Halbwachs (1980) called “formal history.” Critical analyses of history writing by figures such as Louis Mink (1978) and Hayden White (1981) come to mind in this respect. A second similarity between memory and history is in their assertion of truth claims; both seek to tell “what really happened” in the past. This is worth emphasizing because collective memory is often assumed to be the handmaiden of a group’s identity project and hence little concerned with truth conditions. To be sure, there are tendencies in collective memory that bear this out, but when members of mnemonic communities talk about the past, they remain very much committed to the truth of what they say. In this sense they are going well beyond engaging in self-serving myth making, instead relying on modern assumptions about truth claims that lie at the foundation of historical analysis. It is precisely this assumption that often makes talking about the past, even in the most obvious cases of collective memory, such a frustrating exercise. If we, who assume we are

telling the real truth about the past, encounter others who have a conflicting account, we are left with few options other than accusing the other of lying or being brainwashed—precisely the unproductive choices given to them.

Whereas national memories and histories may be similar in the ways just outlined, the real focus of what I shall have to say is how they differ. There are many points that have been made in this regard, but I shall limit myself to three general contrasts and then explore their implications on ideas about the sort of texts used in memory and history.

Subjective versus Objective

The first contrast I would highlight is that memory is subjective in that it operates from what Robert Novick (1999) calls a “single committed perspective,” whereas history aspires to provide an objective account of the past. Continuing with Novick’s account of the difference, it is often the case that collective memory is “impatient with ambiguity, especially moral ambiguity” (p.4), whereas formal history aspires to recognize complexity and ambiguity.

My use of the term “aspires” here is motivated by concerns that have long been debated by practitioners and critics of history writing. The point is not that formal history always succeeds in being objective or in recognizing complexity and ambiguity. Indeed, philosophers have made the point that it does not, and some argue that there may be principled reasons for why it *cannot*. Instead, the point is that professional historians are engaged in an enterprise that has institutionalized procedures committed to pursuing truth. Disregarding rules for collecting and interpreting archives or failing to consider conflicting evidence or interpretations of the past is something that historians do at their own peril. The checks and balances provided by the profession are far from perfect and indeed have been blatantly disregarded on all too many occasions, but the continuing aspiration to follow agreed upon procedures is something that distinguishes much of history writing from collective remembering.

Authority based on Identity Project versus Authority based on Evidence and Analysis

The second contrast I would draw between memory and history has to do with their sources of authority. National narratives and memories are typically closely tied to a collective identity project, and for this reason critiques of these narratives and memories are often taken to be attacks on the identity project itself. For an Indian to question the Pakistani account of the 1947 Partition is to question something more basic than the factual accuracy of an account of the past. It is to question something about who one is and the group to which one belongs. When collective memory and a mnemonic community’s identity are at stake, we tend to assume an account of the past is true because it *must* be true, and acknowledging that it is not would jeopardize who we are. In contrast, an account provided by formal history is taken to be authoritative to the degree that it is grounded in objective evidence and analysis and can withstand critiques grounded in competing objective evidence and analysis.

The distinction here must be understood as a matter of degree, not only because the standards of historical research are sometimes not observed in practice, but because it is possible to find cases in formal history in which two legitimate accounts based on solid evidence and objective analysis come up with competing, even conflicting accounts of the same event. David Cronon (1992) struggled with this point in his review of two competing histories

of the American Dust Bowl. Each was produced by a distinguished academic historian, and each was based on solid empirical evidence, but the story of the Dust Bowl was quite different in the two cases. Cronon reflected on just how this could be, coming up with an analysis of “the place for stories” in history writing.

But even in cases such as the one he has dissected, the process of adjudicating between conflicting accounts for historians is different than that used by members of mnemonic communities who are committed to conflicting views of the past. These differences are reflected in how Cronon and others go about teaching students to conduct historical research that lives up to the standards of the discipline. In a webpage devoted to “Learning Historical Research,” for example, Jacquelyn Gill and Stephen Laubach¹ focus on issues like gathering reliable evidence, evaluating primary sources, and respectfully considering alternative viewpoints.

In contrast to such practices, the authority for defending and challenging national memories is grounded in identity commitments, and the discussion all too often is more emotional than rational. As Rogers Smith (2003) notes in his account of “stories of peoplehood,” this leads to national collectives’ being very resistant to giving up an account of the past, and in the rare cases where they do, it takes a massive cultural shock such as the undeniable failure of a state project or military campaign to make this happen.

Loyalty to a Narrative versus Loyalty to Evidence

The third contrast I draw between memory and history can be stated as: Collective memory tends to be loyal to a narrative at the expense of evidence, whereas formal history tends to be loyal to evidence at the expense of a narrative. In some respects this contrast restates issues made in the first two, but it gives emphasis to a somewhat different set of points.

One of the most striking aspects of collective memory is its commitment to a deep-seated story line, a commitment that extends to being willing to ignore or to reject other narratives or any information that conflicts with it. Competing stories or information may cause a temporary “narrative rift” (Wertsch, 2008a) for a mnemonic community, but there is a strong “elasticity” to the underlying national narratives that allows these narratives to bounce back to their original form even if they do undergo temporary disruption.

I have outlined this in connection with the response of the Russian mnemonic community to “discoveries” and revelations about the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939 (Wertsch, 2008a), revelations that Soviet and Russian authorities had previously denied for decades. This provides a particularly striking example because Poles, Estonians, and other national groups in and around the Soviet Union had assumed that if Russia acknowledged this act of duplicity and aggression, it could no longer portray itself as a victim of unprovoked attack by Germany in World War II. As I have outlined elsewhere, however, incorporating this disturbing information into official state accounts of the event, specifically post-Soviet Russian history textbooks, caused only a temporary rift in the basic narrative of the role of Soviet forces in World War II. Instead of being irrefutable counterevidence that would devastate the existing story of the Russian mnemonic community, it turned out to be a temporary disruption that could be accounted for within a slightly reconfigured story line.

In contrast, when engaging in the practice of formal history, participants are encouraged to

¹ <http://www.williamcronon.net/researching/arguing.htm>

discover and use new evidence to challenge existing story lines. This practice is carried out within the institutional confines of the history profession as outlined earlier, where the recognition of success and achievement is often measured in terms of how existing accounts and narrative are changed in response to new evidence and arguments. In contrast to the orthodoxy and conformity that is part of mnemonic communities, contestation and heterodoxy drive the practice of formal history. Indeed, contestation and heterodoxy are viewed as driving progress in the discipline, and those engaged in historical inquiry are encouraged to engage in these practices. This is precisely the sort of difference between memory and history that led Renan to assert that “progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle of] nationality” (1990, p.11).

TEXTS OF MEMORY AND TEXTS OF HISTORY

My comments so far provide a general outline for how memory and history differ. In order to see how the oppositions are created in concrete practice, I turn to some observations about the narrative tools involved and how speakers and writers use them; that is, I return to the issue of texts of memory and texts of history. This will involve distinguishing between different notions of narrative and also between ways that narrative texts can be employed.

So far I have spoken about narrative tools in a fairly undifferentiated way, as if there is just one general category that covers all of the items in the stock of stories we use to make sense of the past. A useful distinction can be made, however, between “specific narratives” and “schematic narrative templates” (Wertsch, 2002, 2009). The former are specific in the sense that they include concrete information about places, dates, actors, and so forth. As an example of a specific narrative, consider the following:

On June 22, 1941 the German forces invaded the USSR brutally and without warning. After huge losses in the fall of 1941, the Soviet Army stopped the Germans in Moscow, and they went on to defeat the Hitlerite invaders in Stalingrad, Kursk, and other major battles leading up to the March to Berlin and total defeat of Germany in 1945.

In contrast, a narrative template is schematic in the sense that: a) it includes abstract, generalized functions of the sort that Propp mentioned or that Bartlett discussed under the heading of schema-like knowledge structures; b) the organizing schema is narrative in form, meaning that it involves temporality of events and some sort of plot (the “horizontal” and “vertical” dimensions of Paul Ricoeur, 1984-86); and c) it is template-like in that its schematic structure can underlie an entire set of specific narratives, each of which has a particular setting, cast of characters, dates, and so forth. In accordance with the writings of Propp and Bartlett, the narrative templates I have in mind are not some sort of universal archetypes. Instead, they belong to particular mnemonic communities and hence can be expected to differ from each other. Indeed, they are key to understanding Halbwachs’s maxim that there are as many collective memories as groups.

As an example of a narrative template I shall outline a particular case concerned with the Russian mnemonic community. The points I raise in this case, however, should be taken as illustrations of what goes on in virtually any modern nation, and in this sense there is nothing unique or extreme in the Russian case. The narrative template I shall examine in this case can be called the “Expulsion-of-Alien-Enemies” story line (Wertsch, 2002).

1. An “initial situation” in which Russia is peaceful and does not interfere with others
2. “Trouble,” in which a foreign enemy viciously attacks Russia without provocation
3. Russia nearly loses everything in total defeat as it suffers from the enemy’s attempts to destroy it as a civilization
4. Through heroism and exceptionalism, against all odds, and acting alone, Russia triumphs and succeeds in expelling the foreign enemy

This narrative template is often involved in the Russian mnemonic community’s effort to make sense of events, both past and present, and as such it provides a plot line for specific narratives such that they take the shape of the same story told over and over with different characters. One indication of its potency in this mnemonic community is that it is often invoked by the political leadership when mobilizing political opinion about national security and national honor (Wertsch, 2008a). All this is not to say that the Expulsion-of-Alien-Enemies narrative template is some sort of fabrication or a figment of the imagination of the Russian mnemonic community. Russia obviously *has* suffered at the hands of foreign enemies on numerous occasions. However, I am suggesting that the narrative template provides an interpretive framework that heavily shapes the thinking and speaking of the members of this community. It does so to such an extent that their interpretations of some events may be quite surprising to those coming from other collectives, reflecting how differences between mnemonic communities are organized around distinct underlying codes.

The power of this Russian narrative template is evidenced in the interpretation of events in the present as well as the distant past. Consider, for example, Russian accounts of the August 2008 war with Georgia that emerged in its immediate aftermath. These accounts frame the conflict in a way that ignores or rebuts Georgian claims that the Russian action was aggressive expansionism. They also dismiss claims that Georgia is some kind of laboratory for democracy as naïve, if not transparently dishonest. Instead, the Expulsion-of-Alien-Enemies narrative template was harnessed to present a picture in which the real agenda in Georgia was to create a NATO outpost that could eventually serve as a site for launching aggression against Russia. From this perspective, the Russian incursion into the breakaway Georgian enclave of South Ossetia was an act of legitimate pre-emption against an aggressor—and also liberation for the Ossetian population, many of which indeed did side with Russia.

This perspective comes through loud and clear in statements made by Russian leaders and the media at the time of the August 2008 war, statements that were motivated in part by attempts to provide “spin” that would shape the way the conflict will be remembered in the future. As is often true in such cases, one effort at spin was in competition with another, in this case an effort by Georgian leaders and media, and these competing campaigns resulted in such different versions of the war that it is sometimes difficult to appreciate that the two sides are talking about the same event (Wertsch & Karumidze, 2009).

For example, consider a comment by Vitali Churkin, the Russian ambassador to the UN at the time of the conflict. In a U.S. television news interview on August 12, 2008 while the conflict was still raging he stated that “of course Russia was the victim,”² something that would surprise Georgians and most Western observers, given the massive invasion of Georgian territory by Russian armed forces. Churkin, however, viewed the bombardment by the

²http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/europe/july-dec08/georgiadeal_08-12.html

Georgian army of Tskhinvali on the opening night of the conflict as another instance in which a Russia that had been living peacefully and with no intention of interfering in the affairs of others was attacked without provocation. Indeed, Russian President Vladimir Putin later drew concrete parallels between the opening bombardment of Georgian forces on August 7 with the opening of the German attack in the Great Fatherland War in 1941 (Wertsch & Karumidze, 2009).

Perhaps an even more striking example of the power of the Russian national narrative template to shape interpretation of contemporary events can be found in an episode that occurred a few weeks after the August 2008 war with Georgia. The internationally acclaimed orchestral conductor Valery Gergiev, a Russian citizen of Ossetian descent and director of the Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg, organized a performance in Tskhinvali, the bombed out capital of South Ossetia. The centerpiece of the performance was Dmitri Shostakovich's Seventh "Leningrad" Symphony, which premiered in December 1941, a few months after the German siege of Leningrad began. For Russians and many others this somber and triumphal work remains one of the sacred instruments for commemorating both the darkest hours and eventual victory in the Great Fatherland War. The Leningrad Blockade lasted until January 1943 and resulted in the death of over one million Soviet citizens. Not surprisingly it remains a major chapter in the heroic story of the Soviet victory in that titanic struggle and one of the most important modern instantiations of the Expulsion-of-Alien-Enemies narrative template.

Of course the 2008 conflict between Russia and Georgia was much less momentous. Indeed, it is referred to as the "Five-Day War" because of its short duration, and the total Russian and Georgian deaths numbered somewhere around 700. Presumably, Gergiev's intent was not to suggest that the scale of the Five-Day War was equal to that of the Siege of Leningrad; others have noted that his performance echoed the "exaggerated claims of Russian leaders that the Georgian shelling [on the first evening of the conflict] was a genocidal war crime" (Lubow, p.34). Nonetheless, the fact remains that Gergiev and others saw Shostakovich's Leningrad Symphony as a legitimate lens through which to view the Five-Day War with Georgia, a comparison that reflects the workings of a narrative template that encourages members of a mnemonic community to see the same story play out again and again with different characters.

What I have said so far addresses some issues of how narrative templates can serve as "cognitive instruments" (Mink, 1978) in the hands of cognitive misers. These narrative tools play a powerful role in shaping the views of the past and present that bind the members of a mnemonic community together. But saying this does not emphasize other forces that are equally important in distinguishing memory from history, and it is in this connection that I would focus on the *use* of narrative tools as well as their structure and content. The dimension of use that I have in mind concerns the distinction between the subjective orientation of memory and the objective orientation of formal history outlined earlier. The basic difference at issue is whether a narrative template is somehow about our past or about some distanced other in a time and place that has little to do with us. If people take a story line to be about events that they have experienced, they are using this narrative tool in the service of memory, whereas if they take it to be about "them and then," they are using it in a way that suggests historical objectivity. In principle, it would be possible to use one and the same narrative tool in each of these two distinct ways, engaging in memory in one case and the practice of history in the other.

Well over a century ago, the philosopher and psychologist William James (1890) wrote about the "me-ness" of memory in a way that is relevant to this distinction. He pointed out

that an act of memory “requires more than mere dating of a fact in the past. It must be dated in *my* past . . . I must think that I directly experienced its occurrence” (p.650). The kind of complex dual representation that takes into account both the past and the individual’s relation to the past was such that James concluded that memory is not a single psychological faculty like attention or conception. Instead:

A general feeling of the past direction in time, . . . a particular date conceived as lying along that direction, and defined by its name or phenomenal contents, an event imagined as located therein, and owned as part of my experience—such are the elements of every act of memory . . . What memory goes with is . . . a very complex representation, that of the fact to be recalled *plus* its associates, the whole forming one ‘object’ . . . known in one integral pulse of consciousness. (pp.650-651)

The importance of what James termed the peculiar “feeling relation” between self and past event is one that continues to surface in psychological studies of memory today (Kihlstrom, 1997). Perhaps the most important contemporary reflection of the insight raised by James is in Endel Tulving’s (1984) classic idea of “episodic memory,” which presupposes a notion of self. Tulving’s description of episodic memory as mental time travel entails the notion that this travel is undertaken by one and the same self, thereby putting me-ness squarely in the picture.

Insights by figures such as James, Tulving, and Kihlstrom play a central role in the study of memory in the individual, but invoking them in an analysis of collective phenomena seems to break one of the cardinal rules for scholars of memory studies. This rule warns against drawing unmotivated parallels between individual and collective processes. Loose metaphors and parallels of this sort are precisely what Bartlett warned against when he resisted the idea of memory *of* the group, a vague notion pointing to some sort of ephemeral group mind or consciousness. This suggests the need for great caution when thinking about how observations by psychologists about me-ness might apply to collective processes in mnemonic communities.

But there is reason for making precisely such a connection when it comes to what members of a mnemonic community (as opposed to those analysts concerned with their practices) actually do. This stems from a sort of projection that a mnemonic community’s members routinely employ when remembering their group’s past. Indeed, it is difficult to account for the highly emotional nature of collective memory without recognizing this projection. To some extent the emotional charge of mnemonic standoffs derives from cognitive forces such as the nonfalsifiability of narrative templates outlined earlier. This can make it difficult for members of a mnemonic community to accept that what others take to be conflicting evidence presents a fundamental challenge to a national narrative they have long accepted. But the depth of such differences over national narratives often suggests emotional defensiveness that goes further and includes an involvement of self and a deep emotional attachment to a national narrative.

What seems to be particularly difficult to account for in such cases is that the emotions often are tied to events that occurred well before the lived experience of those in a mnemonic community. In the case of a mnemonic standoff I have examined elsewhere, young Russians who became very upset with an Estonian revision of the account of the 1940s were not born until decades after the events actually occurred, raising questions such as: In what sense is it *their* past that haunts the present? How is *their* self involved? In this case, Estonians had suggested that the arrival of Soviet forces in 1944 was an act of occupation rather than liberation, and this was taken to be deeply insulting by the young Russians who came out in the

streets in 2007—as well as by the larger Russian community in Estonia and Russia. They took the Estonians' claims to be an attack on their group or even on them personally.

The spontaneous and incendiary emotions involved in such cases point again to the idea that something beyond the cognitive limitations of narrative templates or instrumentally calculated self-interest is involved. Namely, it suggests that a version of James's me-ness of memory lies at the heart of the feeling of personal outrage when others question the account of the past held by one's group. In James's account, remembering involves the feeling that "I must think that I directly experienced [an event's] occurrence" (1890, p. 650), the implication being that to question a memory is to question one's trustworthiness or authority as a witness in some way. Doing so in the case of an event that happened before one's lifetime may indeed involve the kind of conflation of individual and collective memory that is so suspect in memory studies (Wertsch, 2002), but it appears to be a conflation that we have a hard time avoiding when acting as members of mnemonic communities. It involves a projection of the me-ness that is a natural and inherent part of individual memory onto the collective plane to create a sort of "us-ness."

In his account of memory in the individual, James did not go into detail on the origins of me-ness or how it might be influenced by practices of a mnemonic community, instead arguing that individual memory presupposes some such notion. At the collective level, what appears to be the case is that rather than simply *presupposing* the existence of a community, remembering plays a role in *constituting* and recreating it. Remembering what "we" did or what others did to "us" is a sort of invitation to create an image of who "we" are in the first place. In contrast to analytic history, which aspires to keep the identity of the narrator distanced from narratives about the past (Wertsch, 2002), what William James called the "integral pulse of consciousness," when applied to collective memory, not only may assume, but help create and reinforce an imagined group, with all the ideas of continuity, agency, and authority of witnessing that go along with it.

CONCLUSION

The distinction between memory and history has long been a part of scholarship on nations and nationalism and needs to be the focus of discussion in contemporary memory studies. In outlining a set of claims on these issues I have harnessed a conceptual approach that begins with the assumptions that: a) humans are meaning makers who employ cultural (especially narrative) tools; b) humans are cognitive misers, leading them to use schematic forms of narrative tools; and c) the use of narrative tools introduces an element of subjectivity and perspective into our understanding of the past.

Building on these assumptions, I outlined a set of oppositions between collective memory and formal history that led to two basic claims about the sort of textual means employed in them. The first is that collective memory relies heavily on narrative templates, as opposed to specific narratives. Using a narrative template of the Russian mnemonic community as an example, this argument reflects claims about humans as cognitive misers. This part of my argument focuses on the cognitive dimensions of collective memory and can provide some insight into why mnemonic communities are so adept at ignoring or recasting evidence in the service of preserving a national narrative, but it leaves unanswered other questions about the strong emotional commitment members of such communities have to their account of the past. Answering these requires us to go beyond the structure and content of narrative templates and reflect on their function, on how they are employed by agents on particular occasions.

This is an issue that leads to the question of whether a narrative text is employed as a cultural tool for collective memory or formal history. When taken in the former capacity, the emphasis is on how an account of the past is an account of *our* past, reflecting the “us-ness” of collective memory. When treated as a cultural tool for history, narratives are assumed to be about events in a past that concerns others who are typically distant in time and identity from those providing the account of this past. One implication of this line of reasoning is that practices of collective remembering not only reflect, but in fact help constitute mnemonic communities.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Assmann, J. (2006). Culture memories and national narratives: With some relation to the case of Georgia. In J. Wertsch & Z. Karumidze (Eds.), *White paper report prepared for the Georgian Ministry of Education*. Based on the working meeting “Negotiating a new national narrative in Georgia,” Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Conference Center, Bellagio, Italy, August 1-5, 2005.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1986). The problem of the text in linguistics, philology, and the human sciences: An experiment in philosophical analysis (V. W. McGee, Trans.). In C. Emerson & M. Holquist (Eds.), *Speech genres & other late essays* (pp. 103-131). Austin: University Texas Press.
- Bartlett, F. C. (1932). *Remembering: A study in experimental and social psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bruner, J. S. (1973). *Beyond the information given: Studies in the psychology of knowing*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Bruner, J. S. (1990). *Acts of meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Cronon, W. (1992). A place for stories: Nature, history, and narrative. *Journal of American History* 78(4), 1347-1376
- Fiske, S. T. & Taylor, S. E. (1984). *Social cognition*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Halbwachs, M. (1980). *The Collective Memory* (F. J. Diddier, Jr. & V. Y. Ditter, Trans.). New York: Harper and Row.
- Hobsbawm, E. & Ranger, T. (1983). *The invention of tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- James, W. (1890). *The principles of psychology*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc.
- Kihlstrom, J. F. (1997). Consciousness and me-ness. In J.D. Cohen & J.W. Schooler (Eds.), *Scientific approaches to consciousness* (pp. 451-468). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Lubow, A. (2009, March 12). The loyalist. *New York Times Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/15/magazine/15gergiev-t.html?pagewanted=all>
- MacIntyre, A. (1984). *After virtue: A study in moral philosophy* (2nd ed.). Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Mink, L. O. (1978). Narrative form as a cognitive instrument. In R.H. Canary & H. Kozicki (Eds.), *The writing of history: Literary form and historical understanding* (pp. 129-149). Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Nora, P. (1989). Between memory and history: Les lieux de memoire. *Representations, Spring 26*, 7-25.
- Novick, P. (1999). *The Holocaust in American life*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Propp, V. (1968). *Morphology of the folktale* (L. Scott, Trans.). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Renan, E. (1990). What is a nation? In H.K. Bhabha (Ed.), *Nation and narration*. London: Routledge.
- Ricoeur, P. (1984-86). *Time and narrative* (K. McLaughlin & D. Pellauer, Trans.). (Vols. 1-2). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Roediger, H. L. & Wertsch, J. V. (2008). Creating a new discipline of memory studies. *Memory Studies*, 1(1), 9-22.
- Smith, A. D. (2009). *Ethno-symbolism and nationalism: A cultural approach*. New York: Routledge.
- Smith, R. (2003). *Stories of peoplehood. The politics and morals of political membership*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Taylor, C. (1985). Atomism. In C. Taylor (Ed.), *Philosophy and the human sciences: Philosophical papers 2* (pp. 187-211). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tulving, E. (1984). Precis of elements of episodic memory. *Behavioural and Brain Sciences*, 7, 223-68.
- Tulviste, P. (2011). Tailoring identities. *Culture and Psychology*, 17, 217-221.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1981). The instrumental method in psychology. In J.V. Wertsch (Ed.), *The concept of activity in Soviet psychology* (pp. 134-143). Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1987). In N. Minick (Ed), *The collected works of L.S. Vygotsky. Volume 1. Problems of general psychology. Including the volume Thinking and speech* (N. Minick, Trans.). New York: Plenum.
- Wertsch, J. V. (1998). *Mind as action*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Wertsch, J. V. (2002). *Voices of collective remembering*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Wertsch, J. V. (2006). Generalized collective dialogue and advanced foreign language capacities. In H. Byrnes (Ed.), *Advanced language learning: The contributions of Halliday and Vygotsky* (pp. 58-71). London: Continuum.
- Wertsch, J. (2008a). Blank spots in collective memory. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 617(1), 58-71.
- Wertsch, J. V. (2008b). A clash of deep memories. *Profession*, pp. 46–53. New York: Modern Language Association.
- Wertsch, J. V. (2009). Collective memory. In P. Boyer & J.V. Wertsch (Eds.), *Memory in mind and culture* (pp. 117-137). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wertsch, J. V. & Karumidze, Z. (2009). Spinning the past: Russian and Georgian accounts of the war of August 2008. *Memory Studies*, 2(3), 377-392.
- White, H. (1981). The value of narrativity in the representation of reality. In W.J.T. Mitchell (Ed.), *On narrative* (pp. 1-23). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Zerubavel, E. (2003). *Time maps: Collective memory and the social shape of the past*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.