

Implications of a Psychological Approach to Collective Remembering: Social Representations as Cultural Ground for Interpreting Survey and Experimental Results

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Abstract

Psychology has become connected to the “memory boom” in research, that highlights the concept of social representations, defined as a shared system of knowledge and belief that facilitates communication about social objects where culture is conceptualized as a meta-system of social representations mediated by language, symbols, and their institutional carriers. Six articles on collective remembering, including survey results, text analysis, and experiments, are summarized in this introduction. All rely on content-rich meanings, embedded in sociocultural contexts that influence the results of the surveys and experiments. In the cases of Germany and China, the “historical charter” of the states in the late 19th century was ruptured, resulting in substantially different expressions of nationalism and national identity (in Germany) and filial piety and nationalism (in China) today. Surveys on the organization of living historical memory in Hungary and Finland found that the European Union formed an enduring social context for the formation of memory groups regarding recent history. Finally, in experiments, historical reminders are likely to be anchored in existing networks of meaning, and prime people about what they already believe, rather than exert independent causal effects. This anchoring of historical memory in communicating societies explains why the experimental results in this area are so inconsistent.

Keywords

collective memory, social representations of history, nationalism, historical charters, European Union

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The past few decades have witnessed a “memory boom” (Olick et al., 2011), where scholars across the disciplines of sociology, history, psychology, education, English, and cultural studies have become interested in research on collective remembering. Hirst et al. (2018) observe that collective memory encompasses two forms: “one that treats collective memories as consisting of publicly available symbols maintained by society, and another that defines collective memory as individual memories shared by members of a community that bear on the collective identity of that community” (p. 439). The former, more widely accepted form is more qualitative than quantitative, and analyses center around publicly shared symbols, such as a statue, an educational curriculum, a classic text, a

commemoration, a museum, a cathedral, a public square, or a constitutional change (for classic research in this area, see Nora, 1996; Zerubavel, 1995). By contrast, Hirst et al. (2009) draw on (quantitative) experimental methods in psychology to combine insights from the laboratory study of memory with a wider examination of how social processes configure

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individual memory. Most of the research in this special issue on collective remembering, and its sister issue in the *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, takes the middle course between these two major currents of research, frequently focusing on aggregates of individuals, but eschewing classic memory tests where there is a learning phase and then a recall test of the discrete information learned.

The approach to most of the research reported here is strongly influenced by social representations theory (Moscovici, 1988; for a review, see Wagner & Hayes, 2005)—a more bottom-up approach to the phenomenon of collective memory first articulated by Halbwachs (1992). All of the research here—some of it experimental, some of it text analysis, some using survey data—centers on some manner of representing history, both ancient and contemporary (for theory about the differences between the two, see Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995). A social representation is the collective elaboration “of a social object by the community for the purpose of behaving and communicating” (Moscovici, 1963, p. 251). It is concrete and holistic content about the past that is meaningfully shared across an aggregate of individuals, often organized by groups (Sibley & Liu, 2013). Jodelet (1991) expands on this definition by writing:

social representations are images that condense manifold meanings that allow people to interpret what is happening; categories which serve to classify circumstances, phenomena and individuals with whom we deal, theories which permit us to establish facts about them. When we consider social representations embedded in the concrete reality of our social life, they are all the above together. (p. 14)

Social representations of history are complex configurations of symbolic meaning rather than discrete (independent) bits of information that can be memorized, recalled, or forgotten, as in the classic experimental paradigms for memory research in experimental psychology. They may be considered as interconnected elements of culture, where “social representations are defined as a shared system of knowledge and belief that facilitates communication about social objects, and culture is conceptualized as a meta-system of social representations mediated by language, symbols, and their institutional carriers” (Liu & Sibley, 2009, p. 22). The research articles in this special issue are concerned with the form (i.e., the organization), content, context, and functions of social representations of history as collective remembering. While all the research presented here is quantitative, all of it is also mediated by rich and complex content anchored to a specific context—that is, research on social representations of history does

not employ a content-free and context-free process model, as does much of psychology, especially in its more extreme experimental forms. The social and psychological processes analyzed here depend on content and context. They are realized by specific content that operates in a national or local context. The problem is that this attachment to content and context is a two-edged sword. Sometimes it brings insights; sometimes it brings connotations; and, especially for scholars using experimental methods, sometimes it brings a too-hurried rush to overgeneralization.

As the editors of this special issue, it would seem necessary for us to go beyond these specificities and articulate some higher-level factors in society and culture that are responsible for the phenomena described in these articles, which originate in eight different national contexts. Too often, although research on social representations of history uses content-rich methods, its theorizing is naively universalistic, as opposed to identifying the dependencies between content, context, and process outcomes in research on collective remembering.

The purpose of this introduction is to conceptualize the research in this special issue on collective remembering as describing contingent social processes where a particular phenomenon emerges as the consequence of a particular time, place, and content. Although many of the authors in this special issue are reaching toward nomothetic (or universal) hypotheses, they fall short of this in predictable ways, which can be illuminated by locating this research in the broader tradition of collective memory pioneered by Halbwachs (1992). Significant advances made in this tradition by cross-cultural psychology and social representations theory are reported in Liu and Páez (2019) and by Liu, Fisher-Onar, and Woodward (2014). Although not all of the articles in this special issue make this explicit, in many ways, psychological research on collective remembering provides a bridge between research in the humanities and social sciences that is effectively case studies on the public memory of material things encountered in social life and research in experimental psychology that focuses on the content-free recall of discrete (and predominantly artificial and/or inconsequential) bits of information (for a more in-depth discussion of these issues, see Neisser & Winograd, 1988). Kansteiner (2002) famously called for more research on the reception side of collective memory—that is, to actually test how people receive top-down directives from the powers that be, such as state-sponsored commemorations (e.g., independence days or memorial days), and whether these impact on national identities in the way they are theorized to do (e.g., see Liu et al., 2021). Several of the articles in this special issue test these theories and predictably report mixed results, which

we will attempt to interpret through a more comprehensive theoretical lens than those used within the individual articles.

Most of the representations of history in this special issue involve content that is of consequence. What is unclear is exactly *how* consequential these representations are. A more detailed description and theorizing of the overall content and context of the object of research would seem to us to be essential to being able to produce better explanations and predictions of the phenomena involved in collective remembering.

Context Anchors Content and These Influence Process

Rupture in the Historical Charters of Germany and China

Germany and World War II. Rees et al.'s (2021, this issue) study on “prevalence and correlates of representations of victims, helpers, and perpetrators during the time of National Socialism in German families” found that Germans most frequently recalled the time of National Socialism (the Nazis) and reunification (the fall of the Berlin Wall), as the two events in German history that Germans should remember most. This accords with previous research on social representations of history, which showed that World War II was the most important event in world history according to free-recall data from university students around the world (Liu et al., 2005, 2009); the fall of the Berlin Wall was especially salient globally in the late 1990s, but less so in the late 2000s. Refutation of the time of National Socialism is central to the state of Germany today, German national identity, and Germany's position in the democracies of Europe (Buruma, 1994; Olick, 2016; see also Steinmeyer, 2020). The context for configuring the historical period of Nazism is not just the strong democratic institutions of Germany today that break with that past (Roth et al., 2017), but also Germany's consensually accepted role in Europe as the archvillain of that conflict (Giner-Sorolla et al., 2020). This is not only part of the social context of Germany today, but also part of the content required for the elite-driven creation of the European Union (EU), centered in a firm postwar alliance of Germany and France (e.g., see Rosoux, 2001; Sakki et al., 2020). Germany has been impressive in owning up to its World War II war crimes and expressing genuine remorse for Hitler and the Nazis after the war (Hein & Selden, 2000). However, Rees et al. (2021, this issue) still report “an overemphasis of positive and underemphasis of negative behaviors—that is, representations of victims and helpers as compared to

perpetrators on the levels of both the overall German population during the Nazi era and family representations in Germany today” (p. 8)—and, moreover, that the two are interconnected. Those who reported war-crime perpetrators in their own family also reported higher estimates of perpetrators in the general population. These estimates in the general population correlated with more sympathetic attitudes toward refugees.

The significance of these findings is that even in the context of a consensual history that is used to define national identity, configured in the context of Germany's current relationships with neighbors that requires acknowledgment of historical wrongdoing (see Olick, 2016), there is still in-group favoritism. It is subtle and it involves some degree of subterfuge and excuse-making (for a postcolonial version of this phenomenon, see Sibley et al., 2008). It expresses itself by making excuses for individuals while accepting the evil of the Nazi state. But the danger is that the two are interconnected in social societal processes of meaning-making. This danger is recognized in Section 130, Paragraph 4 of the German Criminal Code, which details a limitation to the general law of freedom of speech and criminalizes “disturb[ing] the public peace in a manner that violates the dignity of the victims [of the Nazi regime] by approving of, glorifying, or justifying the National Socialist rule of arbitrary force.” (Kaiser, 2017, p. 297).

In accord with social identity theory and evolutionary theory, some degree of in-group favoritism is nearly universal (Romano et al., 2017), but social context shapes, influences, and limits its expression. The legacy of the collective remembering of the Nazis around the world (and especially in Germany) limits (constitutionally, in laws on the deployment of the German military abroad and in the aforementioned law on restrictions to free speech) the expression of aggressive, warlike nationalism in Germany today (Hein & Selden, 2000; Olick, 2016). Prejudice cannot be expressed in Germany today as it was under National Socialism, and the social processes through which the social hierarchy was maintained are different now than they were then. Context influences the content and process of observable phenomena in Germany involving the collective remembering of the Nazi era. These together qualify such phenomena as the expression of in-group favoritism in social attitudes and actions in Germany today.

China and Confucianism. Other Great Powers have experienced a substantial reshaping of the form and content of their national identity and nationalism as a consequence of the upheavals around the time of the World Wars. Xie et al.'s (2021, this issue) content analysis of Chinese-language teaching textbooks over the 70-year history of the People's Republic of China, “Collective remembering of Confucianism in Chinese-language

textbooks: Official historical representations from 1949–2019,” illustrates how dramatically time can change the content of an educational curriculum. In the China of 100 years ago, education would have revolved almost entirely around the content provided by Confucianism, which over the course of 2,000 years of imperial dynasties had often played the role of official state ideology (Liu, 2021; Yao, 2000). This system collapsed between 1839 and 1949, as China endured a century of calamity, punctuated regularly by foreign invasions and civil war.¹ In their analysis of 84 editions of Chinese-language teaching textbooks published by the officially sanctioned People’s Education Press from 1949 to 2019, Xie et al. report that, Confucianism represented on average about 1%–4% of the content of the Chinese-language teaching textbooks, even though today the Ministry of Education is officially supposed “to recognize the richness and vastness of Chinese culture and to draw on the wisdom of national culture” (p. 2). This increased to a peak of 6% in 2016, as China’s current leader, Xi Jinping, has placed an increasing emphasis on reinscribing Chinese traditions as consistent with the country’s ruling ideology. This illustrates how political entrepreneurs around the world draw on the symbolic resources provided by history to accomplish their political agendas. In Xi’s case, part of this agenda is to mobilize indigenous religions and philosophy to reduce or resist the impact of overseas religions and ideology, especially those imported from the West or the Middle East. Powerful political leaders such as Xi and India’s Narendra Modi (see Kinnvall, 2019) have mobilized indigenous philosophies and religion as bulwarks of their muscular forms of nationalism, which function as symbolic declarations of independence from western and Middle Eastern ideology and religion. This type of new nationalism is characteristic of how the symbolic resources provided by history can be employed by political elites to construct identities in a postcolonial era (for analyses of Indian history and identity, see Khan et al., 2017; Liu & Khan, 2014; for more on China, see Liu et al., 2010).

Many countries today are young states, layered on the foundations of ancient or older cultures. However, acts by identity entrepreneurs (Reicher et al., 2005) determine the specific historical trajectories that each country takes through decolonization (see Fisher Onar et al., 2014). Understanding this pattern of how specific national trajectories are contained within culture-general patterns is essential to improving scientific understanding of collective remembering and cultural change (Liu et al., 2014; Liu & Pratto, 2018). From the beginning, all the major players in India’s various factions of the decolonization movement that led to the formation of the Republic of India were committed to valuing Indian culture and religion as equal or superior to

western culture and ideology (Liu & Khan, 2014). In contrast, the foundational leader of the People’s Republic of China, Mao Zedong, was an avowed Marxist, and launched the Cultural Revolution late in his career, which strongly degraded Chinese traditions as antithetical to the national ideology of Marxism. The specifics of this historical trajectory are easily visible from the textbook analysis by Xie et al. in this special issue, where a rise in Confucian content can be seen in textbooks after the Cultural Revolution. Marxist doctrine has little use for cultural traditions, as Marx declared religion to be the “opium of the masses.” So, this ideological position set the bar very low for the inclusion of content from a cultural tradition such as Confucianism in the national education curriculum. Xie et al. report that the representation of Confucianism in official Chinese-language teaching textbooks is distant, apolitical, abstract, and decontextualized. It is presented as an ossified tradition, stripped of knowledge of any of the changes that made Confucianism relevant to Chinese culture in the last 2,000 years. The only references to Confucianism in these texts are to classics and figures who lived long before the time of Christ (e.g., Confucius and Mencius). While Chairman Xi and the Chinese central government would like to reinscribe Confucianism as a symbolic resource for Chinese identity (see Xi, 2014), this is not reflected in official textbooks in China today. A sister research project by Xie et al. (2021) confirms that top-down education and bottom-up reception go hand in glove. As anticipated by Kansteiner (2002), a similarly distant, abstract, decontextualized representation was found in interviews about Confucianism among young educated Chinese. There was an added detail in these conversations—that Confucianism was accepted as a source of foundational values (especially for filial piety and politeness), but rejected as a political philosophy because it is associated with the rampant inequalities of feudalism.

In the cases of Germany (Rees et al.) and China (Xie et al.), the historical charters (Hilton & Liu, 2008) of the states prior to the 20th century were completely overturned by the cataclysmic events of revolution and the World Wars. The transition between the old states and the new states that were rebuilt on the ruins of the massively traumatic first half of the century for these two countries is described by Liu and Pratto (2018) as “rupture.” In rupture, much of the apparatus of a society is dismantled (e.g., radically new constitutions are formed). The system of meaning that goes with it is similarly detached from the new state. Confucianism and Bismarck’s Prussian constitution (see Pflanze, 1963) have been dismantled as the core of the present-day incarnations of China and Germany, respectively. The process model influencing

behaviors associated with Confucian ideology, such as filial piety (e.g., mourning for the deceased and obedience to one's parents), has changed, just as the content of these beliefs (e.g., distant, abstract, decontextualized, apolitical) has changed. Old people in China today are not respected as old people were in the China of the Qing dynasty, which perished in 1911. Intergenerational behavior cannot be analyzed in the same way as it would have been 100 years ago (for elder-blaming discourses that would have been inconceivable, or at least invisible, in dynastic China, see Gao & Bischooping, 2018). Expressions of anti-Semitism, which would have been "normal" in 19th-century Germany, are prosecutable today. These studies illustrate how the content of collective remembering has changed in specific contexts and can be used as an indicator of changes to the political culture of a nation. They moderate the expression of observed phenomena, as hypothesized by Bhaskar (2008) and Archer (1995).

Hungary, Finland, and the Organization of Living Historical Memory

Even after societies suffer through a calamitous "rupture" (Liu & Pratto, 2018), they still abound with potent psychological afterimages, especially if the society today vividly remembers (or nostalgically imagines) that of yesterday. This is particularly the case in Hungary. Scott (2020) describes Hungary as a conservative Christian state where vigorous border control against Middle Eastern refugees symbolizes defense of the national identity against Muslim invasion. He claims that Hungary has a historical view of itself as a "defender of Europe's borders, a 'bastion' of the West against attacks from the East and a fortress (*védőbástya*) of European Christianity" (Scott, 2020, pp. 667–668). In national surveys, "75% of the respondents agreed with the statement that: 'for a thousand years, Hungary was the bulwark of the West, but we, even today, have never been thanked for this'" (p. 668). Selective mobilization of history, anchored in collective memories of the Ottoman Empire's occupation of central Europe (which ended 300 years ago), still had a persuasive meaning today in several studies in this special issue. But these meanings are negotiated, not static—engineered, not naturalistic (Fisher-Onar et al., 2014).

Vincze et al.'s (2021, this issue) study of the communicative memories of a small ($N = 337$) sample of adult Hungarians found that only a minority held what they describe as a "victimhood-based historical profile," centered around the events of the World Wars and the failed Revolution of 1956 (against Soviet occupation), whereas a larger majority in their latent class analysis held an "EU-oriented progressive historical profile," where the 1989 political system change (i.e.,

the collapse of the Soviet bloc) and EU accession were the most representative historical events. Given their small sample that was more liberal than the general population, we cannot ascertain how prevalent the "canonical view" of Hungarian historical victimhood is. But we can say that, typically, bottom-up empirical studies of collective remembering using mathematical techniques like latent class analysis fail to find a single dominant view that most of the population adheres to; rather, competing classes of memories appear, held by different groups. This would be in accord with freedom of speech in contemporary western societies (Sibley & Liu, 2013), but has also been found in contemporary China (Liu et al., in press).

According to Scott (2020), Hungary adheres to both a strong form of defensive nationalism and a strong form of European membership. Vincze et al. (2021, this issue) found that these points of view are bolstered by somewhat different events in communicative (or living historical) memory held by different people. The victimhood historical memory profile is correlated with greater support for conspiracy theories, but not with higher levels of system-justifying beliefs or national identity than the EU progressive profile.

Drawing from the same multinational data set, the overall results of which are reported in Liu et al. (2021) and Choi et al. (2021), is a study from Finland, another European country that had a difficult relationship with the Soviet Union for significant parts of the 20th century. But as a Scandinavian country, Finland did not experience the same level of overall historical trauma over the course of recent centuries as Hungary. Using cluster analysis, a similar but somewhat different statistical technique than latent class analysis, Hakoköngäs et al. (2021, this issue) analyzes the same type of collective memory survey data based on the question "Please name a maximum of three historical events, occurring during the lifetime of people you know (or have known), that have had the greatest impact on your country" (pp. 2-3). While Hakoköngäs et al. report a much more complex solution involving five clusters, their substantive interpretation of the results is similar to that of Vincze et al.: that the collective remembering of historical events related to the formation and growth of the EU produces a divided political psychology. From these results, we may infer that, in addition to national context, for European societies the EU forms the supranational context wherein survey and experimental results are configured as acts of meaning (Bruner, 1990). The presence of the institution of the EU configures social relations in Europe in a context-specific manner that is distinctly different from how they would manifest if the EU did not exist (for the philosophy of science on this, see Bhaskar, 2008).

Events surrounding the World Wars were also controversial (Hakoköngäs et al., 2021, this issue). For the Finns, there were three commonly remembered events describing different meanings and phases of World War II and its impact on Finland: the Winter War (when the Soviets invaded Finland in 1939 and were repelled), the Continuation War (when the Finns joined the Nazis and attacked the Soviet Union in 1941, and were defeated in 1944), and World War II as a whole. Similar to the Hungarian authors, Hakoköngäs et al. divide EU memories into positive and negative, with the introduction of the euro currency also being important. Because of its complexity, the five-cluster solution is difficult to summarize, but we can say that the Winter War and Continuation War anchored a Finnish nationalist position that is against the EU, whereas mentioning the euro anchored a pro-EU set of collective memories. In analyses such as these, where demarcations between “variables” are somewhat arbitrary, what researchers are investigating is patterns of meaning-making. They are not strictly independent, which is the ideal in statistics and experimental work. They involve shared meaning and, as such, are always approximate rather than exact (see Bruner, 1990).

In several countries, there is a single event that is freely recalled far more often than others as the most important event in the country’s history—for example, New Zealand (Liu et al., 1999) and the Philippines (Liu & Gastardo-Conaco, 2011). But even when this is the case, there is often dispute about the meaning of the event for contemporary society (see Sibley et al., 2008) or the way that event is configured or flanked by meaning (as is the case for these two articles in this special issue). Only when there is a significant external driver that unites the people in society, as in the case of Taiwan (Huang et al., 2004), does a historical charter—defined “as a widely shared and iconic representation where selective elements of group history, its causes, and consequences have been elaborated into a quasi-legal form that gives moral and sometimes legal implications for group action” (Hilton & Liu, 2008, p. 351)—appear to have strong and consistent meaning across society in reference to a given situation. Otherwise, as in the case of Vincze et al.’s and Hakoköngäs et al.’s studies, the pattern that seems most common is that there is no one dominant pattern of historical recall, but rather different people form different communities of memory and use a selective pattern of recall and interpretation to use history to support points of view dominant in their community (for details, see Sibley & Liu, 2013; see also Hakoköngäs et al.’s study), which are subject to rhetorical manipulation by political leaders (Liu & Khan, 2014). Moscovič’s (1988) brief description of a hegemonic social representation seems insufficient to

describe the contestation and rhetorical dynamics surrounding the most freely recalled events in various nations’ social representations of history. The differential roles of cultural memories (typically of a nation’s foundation) and communicative (or living historical) memories in this process are only beginning to be understood, and should be a subject for future research (for an overview, see Choi et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021). The relationship of historical charters to schematic narrative templates (see Vincze et al.’s article) also needs to be elaborated.

Experimental Manipulations (or Historical Reminders) in France, Cyprus, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina

It is important to consider the extent to which the experimental manipulations reported in the final three articles in this special issue touch on existing historical charters, or schematic narrative templates. As theorized by Liu, Sibley, and Huang (2014), historical reminders are likely to be anchored in existing networks of meaning, and remind people of what they already know and believe rather than exerting independent causal effects. Kashima (2014) further describes cultural representations as the ground on which meanings in specific situations are constructed. In a given social situation (which might appear familiar to the experiment’s participants), the experimental manipulation might function as a historical reminder and bring to mind knowledge, stories, or beliefs that are already familiar to the experimental participants and “resonant” with their collective imagination. They are therefore not strictly independent variables, but manipulations that, for some society members, build on the content and context of what is already known. The content of the story (or historical reminder) may have therefore already been configured in their current system of belief, rather than exerting independent, new, and “causal” effects. Wagner and Hayes (2005), in their comprehensive review of social representations theory, sharply question whether social representations can properly be theorized as “independent variables” that work in naïve causal chains, when they are, in fact, interconnected networks of meaning. They might function as chains of reasoning rather than chains of cause and effect. This helps to explain the lack of consistent results in accord with hypotheses for the articles in this issue that report experiments using historical reminders.

Maoulida et al. (2021, this issue) made an attempt to manipulate perceived collective continuity between the past and present with respect to an aspect of World War II that is quite important to the identity of French people: whether they displayed resistance or collaboration while France was occupied by the

Nazis. Maoulida et al. theorize that the motivation to maintain a positive social identity interacts with the positivity or negativity of a historical reminder to impact in-group defensive attitudes and intentions. Their experiments generally showed slight effects—sometimes in the predicted directions but more often not. In one study, a positive historical reminder of heroism in France's past (i.e., a historical reminder of resistance against the Nazis) was found to interact with national identity to produce greater intentions to engage in moderate collective action. But this was not replicated in a second study, where the historical reminder was changed to focus more on Resistance fighters than the Resistance. Maoulida et al. found a result opposite to their predictions in their second experiment, when people who read the Resistance fighters story showed *more* (rather than less, as predicted) opposition to immigration compared to the collaborationists condition. Their third experiment, focusing on a collective break with the past, also produced results that did not confirm their predictions. Their purposeful selection of a challenging two-sided memory (collaboration versus resistance) for the French made their hypotheses quite difficult to confirm, as there would have been people interpreting these historical issues in different ways in the French media and popular discussion. Very little could be assumed to be "canonical" (see Vincze et al.'s article), or at the level of a historical charter (Hilton & Liu, 2008) or a cognitive narrative template (Wertsch, 2002). This suggests that when there is a clear representational consensus about what the "duty to remember" ought to be, historical reminders might work better. In the case of France, it might require a powerful identity entrepreneur (Reicher et al., 2005) at the societal level to engineer a more consensual interpretation of such a controversial period in history. Small experimental nudges from social psychologists might be insufficient to produce such a major shift in meaning, because the people who care about such things have already argued about them with others and are set in their ways (Liu et al., 2014). At the opposite end of engagement, others might not care and remain unmoved by history.

Ivanovic et al. (2021, this issue), present an experimental study of historical reminders in the countries of Serbia and Cyprus, where disputes over historical conflict are very much present today and take a more volatile form than in France. As Halbwachs (1992) asserted, the present weighs on the past as much as the past weighs on the present. One might wonder to what extent stories of the Resistance versus collaboration are still salient and meaningful among ordinary people in France today (given the general paucity of the effects of Maoulida et al.'s manipulations). But in

both Serbia and Cyprus, intergroup threat is present in the here and now, within the land participants are living in (whereas the Nazi threat is in the past) and in the presence of out-group members with whom the in-group has warred against in recent lifetimes. This context is very important, and we enjoin authors of future research to pay more attention to theorizing about the intergroup context if they want to experimentally manipulate stories of the past. Ivanović et al. found that in-group heroes, both of the distant foundational past in Serbia and in the more recent past of Cyprus, were immune to the "black sheep effect," where "in-group transgressors are derogated more than out-group transgressors, as villainous exceptions to the high moral standing of the in-group" (p. 3). Strong forms of in-group favoritism in the evaluation of historical figures were found in both these post-conflict societies. But the effect was less extreme in Serbia, where even a foundational in-group villain (a historical "traitor" who withheld his troops from fighting in the Battle of Kosovo in the 14th century) was perceived more positively than an out-group fictional character. These effects were stronger for people with a stronger in-group identity (measured as in-group superiority). It should be noted that these events are salient in Serbian collective memory because the Battle of Kosovo was invoked by Serbian leaders as a rhetorical justification for war in the context of the civil war during the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. The more recent (and probably less canonical) in-group villain in the Greek Cypriot community (during the 1950s liberation struggle) was judged more harshly than the in-group hero, and on a level with the out-group fictional character. In both Serbia and Cyprus, the participants legitimized historical transgressions, and did not morally disengage themselves from the ethnic in-group heroes who were attributed to historical misdeeds. It should be noted that, in contrast with Maoulida et al.'s study, the dependent variables in this study were all about evaluations of historical figures, and did not involve judgments of the present.

To counter the apparent immunity of in-group heroes from tainting due to misdeeds, Ivanović et al. suggest that

the power of heroes can also be employed for prosocial purposes—for example, by raising awareness of their deeds and traits with the aim of bettering intergroup relations or fostering reconciliation. One can also think of the reverse path—finding heroes among those who helped out-group members during times of conflict (p. 13).

This is exactly what was done in the final experimental study in this special issue, involving the Serbian minority in Sarajevo (Jankovic & Cehajic-Clancy, 2021, this

issue). Rather than tell a story of the past, Janković and Čehajić-Clancy experimentally manipulated stereotypical (immoral behavior) versus counter-stereotypical (moral behavior) media representations of Bosniaks—a historical enemy group—in a fictitious news story, and examined their implications for intergroup emotions and behavioral intentions among Serbian minority group members in the present. In the good-deeds version of the news story, when an ethnic Serbian volleyball team in a Bosniak neighborhood of Sarajevo was verbally harassed, local Bosniaks stood up to the attackers, defended the team, and called the police. In the bad-deeds manipulation, some of the Bosniak onlookers did nothing and others joined in the harassment. Janković and Čehajić-Clancy found that general impressions of intentions to cooperate, willingness to initiate interactions across the group divide, and emotions to the out-group were all more favorable after the participants had read the moral versus immoral behavior news article. Overall, the mean scores in the moral-deeds condition were still toward the midpoint of the scales for intentions to cooperate and interact, and far below the midpoint on positive emotions like warmth, closeness, and trust of the out-group. Nevertheless, the study and its findings highlight the function that media representations can play in reinforcing or undermining collective memories.

Conclusion

History is not a passive thing. It lives through content that is connected to context. These together configure and condition the results of surveys and experiments in the here and now. History is responsive to the present, as acts by political leaders and the mass media can influence social representations of history and perceptions of historical relationships to out-groups. The articles in this collection remind us to carefully consider the historical context for research and the content of research (vis-à-vis historical charters and cognitive narrative templates central to society). The “memory boom” has prompted many researchers to make progress toward a science of collective remembering. This clearly has to be a human science, a science of shared meanings, which is reflexive of the context in which observations are being made, and is contingent on content that is widely known and believed (Liu, 2017). Collective remembering operates as an open system, where some things are coming into being (e.g., the EU), others are going out of being (e.g., the Qing dynasty, Prussian Germany), and others, like World War II, have remained enduringly central. Living historical memories “coming into being” and perhaps being used to reinterpret the past provide a chance for a people to reform their self-concept of national

identity. If a group reconceptualizes its past in accordance with present identity needs, it would be an interesting question for future research to examine what we could say about groups’ identity orientation from the organization, contents, and correlates of living historical memory. Human science must become more able to model and interpret such a human-made environment, where social behavior is manifested and, over a long duration, changes.

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Note

1. Liu et al. (2009) report that Chinese people still widely remember the Opium War of 1839–1842, when the British Navy acted as the military wing of a global mafia to enforce British traders’ “right” to peddle a harmful drug that had been ruled illegal in their own country.

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