

Constructing Social Memory

Identities, Conflicts, Communities

Edited by:

Mariano Longo, Marta Vignola, Stefano Bory

Constructing Social Memory: Identities, Conflicts, Communities

Edited by: Mariano Longo, Marta Vignola, Stefano Bory

This book first published 2025

Ethics International Press Ltd, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2025 by the Editors and Contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

Print Book ISBN: 978-1-80441-782-9

eBook ISBN: 978-1-80441-783-6

Table of Contents

Introduction	vii
---------------------------	------------

<i>Mariano Longo, Marta Vignola, Stefano Bory</i>	<i>vii</i>
---	------------

Part 1

Chapter 1: Collective memory: The social foundations of remembering

<i>Teresa Grande, Lorenzo Migliorati</i>	<i>1</i>
--	----------

Chapter 2: Biographical events: Laboratories of literature?

<i>Michèle Leclerc-Olive</i>	<i>23</i>
------------------------------------	-----------

Chapter 3: Individual and collective memories as narratives of identities

<i>Mariano Longo</i>	<i>42</i>
----------------------------	-----------

Chapter 4: Watching Memory: The cinematic construction of collective memories

<i>Stefano Bory</i>	<i>62</i>
---------------------------	-----------

Chapter 5: Notes from webground: Memory of the future and future of memory

<i>Corrado Punzi</i>	<i>74</i>
----------------------------	-----------

Part 2

Chapter 6: Narratology of daily life: The role of images in the structuration of memory

<i>Fabio La Rocca, Matthijs Gardenier</i>	<i>92</i>
---	-----------

Chapter 7: Places of traumatic memories: The ruins of the Bolzano lager in the core of neighborhood life

<i>Monica Musolino</i>	<i>108</i>
------------------------------	------------

**Chapter 8: The power of traces in “Nostalgia for the Light”:
Memory, oblivion, and historical legibility**

Daniel Melo Ribeiro, Leticia Xavier de Lemos Capanema.....127

**Chapter 9: The (non) right to a voice: To learn about the past, can a
perpetrator speak?**

James A. Dettleff.....138

**Chapter 10: Archaeology & Social Studies: An interweaving to
understand shared memory**

Carlo De Mitri.....154

**Chapter 11: Stories of an amnesiac country: Memory and identity in
Almudena Grande’s journalistic and narrative writing**

Valeria Cavazzino.....166

**Chapter 12: Private grief, justice, and political memory: The mothers
and grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina**

Marta Vignola.....179

**Chapter 13: Memory, body and politics: Weavings of the feminine
between art and psychoanalysis**

*Ana Lúcia Mandelli de Marsillac, Anelise Hauschild Mondardo, Gerusa
Morgana Bloss*.....197

About the authors217

Introduction

Mariano Longo, Marta Vignola, Stefano Bory

The essays presented in this volume explore the concept of memory, not only with the aim of specifying its theoretical or empirical relevance, but also of testing its usefulness as a conceptual tool. The interdisciplinary organization of the volume seeks to enhance reflection, research, and analysis on memory within the broad field of the human and social sciences. The authors draw upon various disciplinary fields—including sociology, archaeology, anthropology, and psychoanalysis—and, from their distinct perspectives, they emphasize the role of memory as a cognitive tool for interpreting and understanding, from new angles, specific aspects of their investigations.

The fact that memory should not be confined solely to the field of psychology has long been widely accepted. Indeed, the theoretical and empirical use of the concept of memory in the various fields of the human and social sciences has grown significantly throughout the twentieth century. Nowadays, the reference to memory is highly diversified, with disciplines employing and operationalizing the concept in their own way. Within this broad field, the concept of collective memory occupies a central space. Sociology, for example, has engaged with this topic for a long time, particularly since Halbwachs (1997 [1950]) established collective memory as a sociological object of study. Moreover, we owe a theoretical variation of collective memory, namely the concept of cultural memory, to an Egyptologist, Jan Assmann (2010). History has engaged with the concept notably since memory became an object of historical study, particularly under the influence of Jacques Le Goff (1988) and Pierre Nora (1989).

It may sound evident that history has played a pivotal role in advancing the academic discussion on memory, largely due to its intrinsic relationship with narrating the past. Moreover, historical memory holds significant political relevance (Vivian, 2010; Wertsch, 2004), since the act of narrating the past allows societies to make sense of their histories, construct collective identities, and confront the ideological tensions tied to modernity. In Western contexts, for example, frameworks grounded in values such as

equality, freedom, and life have emerged as dominant. However, these values also highlight the contested nature of the past.

History—as the mnemonic reconstruction of events—becomes a site of debate, where values are affirmed, denied, or reinterpreted. Thus, while the obligation to remember is a key social expectation of modernity, it opens up complex possibilities. On the one hand, it enables critical engagement with the past, allowing for nuanced reconstructions. On the other hand, it fosters competing interpretations of events, leading to contested versions of history that reflect differing ideological stances. The ambiguity of the relationship between history and memory is part of the multilayered meanings related to the two concepts. There are many definitions of history, but as Ricoeur has aptly pointed out, it always deals with the past. Historical knowledge is always dependent on temporality, yet the content of historical narratives is, by necessity, delimited by sources, methods, and hypotheses. This relativity of historical knowledge means that history is always a partial account of past realities—a representation of the past that is inherently problematic and temporally conditioned by the context in which it is produced (Ricoeur 2004 [2000]).

Although the relationship between memory and history is, as it were, intrinsic, memory has been dealt with by other academic disciplines, starting from sociology. Halbwachs (1997[1950]) attempted to distinguish history from collective memory, conceiving the latter as the output of communicative processes within social groups. The interrelations, differences, and connections between individual, collective, historical and cultural memory will, in various forms, be addressed in the essays that make up this volume. Following Marie-Claire Lavabre's suggestion (2007), it is necessary to distinguish between a "sociology of memories," which traces the social conditions underpinning the emergence, evocation, and formulation of memories, and a "sociology of memory," which examines the practices and actors that appropriate memory and shape it as a political resource.

Asking what the purpose of memory is and how effective—or ineffective—memory policies are, may be answered from different disciplinary perspectives, some of which form the theoretical background of the chapters in this volume, each of which takes the relevance of memory in contemporary human and social sciences seriously.

In the first part of this edited book, we present a number of theoretical perspectives on memory from different disciplinary fields: sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and cultural studies. This part aims to outline the wide variety of approaches to a topic that foster specific research methods and has been central to human and social sciences since the beginning of the 20th century.

The second part of the text entrusts the empirical application of the concept of memory to scholars from different geographical contexts and cultural areas. By drawing on interdisciplinary approaches, the use of case studies and empirical research, the authors give voice to the victims of authoritarian regimes, indigenous communities, migrants, women, and communities that have suffered environmental disasters. By adopting a multitude of languages, communicative and artistic artifacts as empirical sources, they accurately define the processes of social construction of memory.

The first part of the volume opens with a substantial theoretical chapter ("Collective memory: The social foundation of remembering") written by Teresa Grande and Lorenzo Miglioni. The authors trace the historical evolution of the concept of collective memory, beginning with Émile Durkheim and Maurice Halbwachs, who established memory's relevance as a subject of sociological investigation. Since Durkheim and Halbwachs, memory has remained a focus of both theoretical reflection and empirical inquiry. The essay's primary aim is to demonstrate the significance of the concept of memory, particularly in relation to the predominance of social structure over individual experience.

In her chapter, "Biographic events' memory: Literary laboratories?" Michèle Leclerc-Olive engages with the topic of narratives and memory by referencing literary material. The author adopts literary materials (including Soazig Aaron, Miguel de Cervantes, Zvi Kolitz, Georges Perec, Richard Wright) in order to explore the blurred boundary between personal experience, episodic memories, and the narratives of the self. Literature allows the author to transmit an experience while protecting oneself, with fiction being understood as a way "not to be silent about what cannot be said" (Wittgenstein).

Mariano Longo ("Individual and collective memories as narratives of identities") also explores the interconnection between narratives (understood as a reconstruction of the past) and memory. This interconnection

is examined both at the level of individual memories (which are primarily constructed narratively) and at the macro level, where narratives are used to define collective memories as the foundation of politically constructed collective identities.

Stefano Bory's chapter (*Watching memory*) explores the relationship between film and memory, presenting cinema as a ritualistic form. Films create memorial logics where the connection between fiction and historical truth is more complex and persuasive than in written texts. Cinema serves as a ritual, re-enacting and reinterpreting narratives, much like mythical stories. The ritualized act of repeatedly watching films, especially those focused on historical events, allows audiences to influence what is remembered or forgotten. As Dayan and Kats argue, filmmakers and television directors are the architects of modern monuments, with the media serving as powerful monumental ceremonies.

Corrado Punzi (*Notes from the webground: Memory of the future and the future of Memory*) closes the first part of the volume. In his chapter, Punzi explores how both the form and functions of memory are deeply connected to societal structures and available means of communication. After briefly reviewing the evolution of memory and memory-storage technologies, the author focuses on the memory of the network society. He examines how algorithms and big data are radically transforming the construction of memory and identities, while also significantly expanding the possibilities for social control.

The second part of the book (*Empirical memories*) starts with a chapter by Fabio Larocca and Matthijs Gardenier (*Narratology of daily life: The role of images in the structuration of memory*) on the role of images in mnemonic and identity processes, with a specific focus on migrants. The contemporary world is increasingly shaped by images, which play a key role in defining experience. As digital technologies advance, social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok rely heavily on photographs and videos, altering how individuals narrate their lives. Once rare, photographs now serve to share immediate, public images. This shift significantly impacts self-narratives, especially for migrants, who use images to construct their identities and memory in the world. Through fieldwork and visual sociological analysis, the authors explore how the production of images, espe-

cially via smartphones, influences migratory trajectories and the formation of social identity

Monica Musolino's chapter (Places of traumatic memories. The ruins of the Bolzano lager in the core of neighborhood life) investigates the political features of memory, by exploring the history and memory of the Bolzano lager and its ruins. After the war, the site underwent various transformations, from a heliotherapy camp to housing for poor families, before being demolished in 1966. Unlike German concentration camps, which became sites of "memory tourism," the traumatic history of the Bolzano lager was concealed. In recent years, local institutions and associations have worked to restore its memory, reconstructing the perimeter wall and creating the "Passage of Memory" artwork. Musolino's analysis examines the evolving memories of this site, shaped by different stakeholders.

Letícia Xavier de Lemos Capanema ("Nostalgia of the light" and the power of vestiges: memory and historical legibility) proposes an analysis of "Nostalgia for the light" (*Nostalgia de la luz*, Patricio Guzmán, 2010), a documentary film about memory and researches for historical vestiges in the Atacama Desert, among them, the remains of political prisoners murdered during the Chilean dictatorship (1973–1990). The analysis relates the film to Walter Benjamin's discussions about history, as well as Georges Didi-Huberman's ideas on images and montage, respectively, as support and method for memory. In particular, the power of the vestiges in the documentary is articulated with concepts such as "dialectical images" (W. Benjamin) and "remontage of the suffered time" (Didi-Huberman). Through the studies of documentary cinema, this paper aims to contribute to the discussions on the historical processes of remembrance and oblivion related to dictatorial regimes in Latin America.

James A. Dettleff (The (non) right to a voice. To learn about the past, can a perpetrator speak?) with traumatic events as a field for conflict memory. More than two decades after the Peruvian Armed Conflict, the official narrative of the events is still under attack, with conservative forces rejecting the country's memory sites, labeling them as terrorist memorials. This divisive debate hinders necessary dialogue. The official story mainly represents one of the three main actors in the conflict, denying the other two the opportunity to share their perspective. This work questions whether

perpetrators should be allowed to speak on the traumatic events that led to the loss of nearly 69,000 lives in Peru.

Carlo De Mitri (*Archaeology and social studies: An interweaving to understand shared memory*) proposes an original attempt to combine archaeology and the social sciences by referencing the concept of memory. The author argues that knowledge and skills are often embedded in the cultural heritage of populations from different geographical areas, and archaeology, with the help of tools and methodologies borrowed from the social sciences, can contribute to the discovery and historicization of such cultural phenomena that now belong to collective memory. The first part of the article reviews existing literature on this type of study while the second part presents specific projects carried out in different areas of Italy

Valeria Cavazzino (*"Stories of an amnesiac country: Memory and identity in Almudena Grandes' journalistic and narrative writing"*) explores the relationship between fictional narratives, history, and collective identities, focusing on post-Francoist Spain. She examines the ongoing process of uncovering hidden stories from the Francoist past to reconstruct collective memory and national identity. The chapter examines Almudena Grandes' writing, which portrays Spain's complex reality from a personal perspective. Following J. M. Izquierdo's view of "official forgetting" and its manipulation, Cavazzino analyzes how Grandes addresses the conflict between "forgetting" and "amnesia," recovering historical memory through her literary and journalistic work.

Marta Vignola (*Private grief, justice, and political memory: The mothers and grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina*) combines theoretically driven empirical analysis to investigate the social and political relevance of memory and its retrieval in present-day Argentina. In an attempt to demonstrate how social memory can be used as a political tool, the actions of the Madres (Mothers) and Abuelas (Grandmothers) of the Plaza de Mayo are explored. According to Vignola, these two human rights movements, active in Argentina since 1976, have creatively transformed memory and the past into political weapons to reclaim the social memory that the regime had rewritten.

According to Ana Lúcia Mandelli de Marsillac, Anelise Hauschild Mondardo, Ms. Gerusa Morgana Bloss (*Shaping memories and inscribing femi-*

nine politics: articulations between contemporary art and psychoanalysis) recovering and reconstructing memories involves a political dimension in such a way that it makes it possible to create new traces in the weave of time, articulated to culture and to the social bond. In their chapter, the authors highlight the work of three contemporary artists: Letícia Parente (BR), Doris Salcedo (CO) e Sophie Calle (FR), and their know-how in the field of the topic of memory. The authors reflect on their works through Freudo-Lacanian psychoanalytic readings, focusing on origins, transmission, losses, and mourning. These works inscribe cultural ways to recover memories, positioning themselves within a “politics of the feminine.” From a psychoanalytic perspective, one must embrace femininity, linked to such concepts as “dephallization” and *jouissance*, fundamental to psychoanalytic theory. Memory work, analyzed psychoanalytically, involves both remembering and producing memory, where loss is essential. This process entails recovering fragmented memories, re-reading, and re-linking them to shape transmission and politics in an incomplete condition.

Works cited

- Assmann, J. (2010). Communicative and Cultural Memory. In Erll, A. & Nünning, A. (Eds.). *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 109–118.
- Halbwachs, M. (1997 [1950]). *La mémoire collective*. Paris: Albin Michel.
- Le Goff, J. (1988). *Histoire et Mémoire*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Nora, P., Le Goff, J. (1974). *Faire de l'Histoire*. Tome 1. Paris: Gallimard.
- Nora, P. (1989). Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire. *Representations*, 26, 7–24. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520>
- Vivian, B. (2010). *Public Forgetting: The Rhetoric and Politics of Beginning Again*. University Park, PA: Penn University Press.
- Wertsch, J. V. (2004). *Voices of Collective Remembering*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Lavabre, M. C. (2007). Memory Paradigms. *Transcontinentals*, 5, 139–147.
- Ricoeur, P. (2004 [2000]). *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Part 1

Chapter 1

Collective memory: The social foundations of remembering

Teresa Grande, Lorenzo Migliorati

Maurice Halbwachs and the idea of collective memory

To discuss the social foundations of remembering, it is essential to refer to the sociological theories of memory developed in the first half of the twentieth century by the Durkheimian sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. The studies in which Halbwachs outlines the social origins of memory cover a large part of his intellectual life and show a consistent methodological and epistemological reference to Émile Durkheim, in continuity with the sociological theory of knowledge proposed in *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, and with the notion of *collective representation*.¹

These studies developed particularly in the years following World War I, mainly during Halbwachs' teaching at the University of Strasbourg, where he worked between 1919 and 1935, succeeding the chair of sociology and pedagogy that had been Georg Simmel's from 1914 to 1918 (Craig, 1979). In Strasbourg, Halbwachs experienced years of intense intellectual activity and established fruitful ties with psychologist Charles Blondel and with the founders of the *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*, Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre. During these years, under the influence of the particularly rich and stimulating intellectual and cultural climate—Strasbourg was an important meeting place for German and French sociologists where new and cross-cutting issues were being generated (Guth, Pfefferkon, 2019)—Halbwachs would engage in the project of studying memory, understood as a collective mental fact; it was a project that had already been emerging in

¹ As Gérard Namer explains in the "Postfaction" to *Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, "we are thus dealing in *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, in the chapter devoted to the sociology of knowledge, with the idea of a structural memory: science and its categories preserve and transmit in a symbolic way the memory of the categories of the original religious: space, time, cause" (Namer, 1994: 304).

a form that was not entirely explicit in several writings prior to the years of his stay in Strasbourg. Indeed, his first reflections on the role the past plays in social life appear in a number of articles from 1905, specifically *La psychologie de l'ouvrier moderne d'après Bernstein* (Halbwachs, 1905a) and *Remarques sur la position du problème sociologique des classes* (Halbwachs, 1905b), as well as in his work *La classe ouvrière et les niveaux de vie* (Halbwachs, 1912).

Thus, Halbwachs had been devoting himself to the theme of memory for a long time, up until his death in the Buchenwald concentration camp in 1945. On the topic, he left in particular three dense volumes written over a period of more than two decades: *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, from 1925; *La topographie légendaire des évangiles en Terre Sainte* (2008 [1941]); and finally, the collection *La mémoire collective*, published posthumously in 1950 at the behest of Halbwachs' sister, Jeanne Alexandre.

These volumes are now unanimously recognized as the first texts in sociology explicitly devoted to the study of the relationship between memory and society, and they contributed greatly to shaping the "sociology of memory" as it has developed in the international sociological debate, especially since the last three decades of the twentieth century. After all, Halbwachs is best known to the international public as a sociologist of memory, the thinker who opened up a field of sociological reflection on a topic that, until then, had been the domain of philosophers, psychologists, and novelists.

Halbwachs' three volumes on the sociology of memory are among the most widely translated and disseminated of his entire production. At the international level, there is now a flourishing of books on memory, conferences, cognitive approaches, and empirical research. In fact, the term "Memory Studies" has firmly established itself in Anglo-Saxon scientific terminology, defining an integrated field of research toward which various disciplines converge. This reflects an awareness that, in exploring the social across its various dimensions (political, cultural, everyday relations), memory itself has become a social framework, taking on the dual roles of "resource" and "stake." Today, more than ever, memory serves as the context within which processes and relationships between collective and institutional subjects unfold.²

² For more on the international debate on memory issues, please refer to the following two volumes for all: Leccardi C., Jedlowski P., Cavalli A., *Exploring New*

The social meaning of memory

To highlight the social origins of the mental facts that constitute memory, Halbwachs resorts in his texts to historical and psychological information, placing himself, from a theoretical point of view, in continuity with the sociological theory of knowledge proposed by Durkheim. According to Durkheim, the categories of knowledge—i.e., the permanent frameworks and tools of our mental life, such as notions of time and space—have a social origin. In other words, they are products of a history that is socially constructed over centuries, and across societies and generations. Assuming Durkheim's perspective, Halbwachs' intent is to analyze collective representations also in terms of memory, so as to lay the foundation for a sociological theory of memory. He achieves this by overcoming the traditional philosophical opposition between spirit and matter and introducing a third term: the social. As Jedlowski³ (1987: 26) explains:

“the subject of memory constitutes, in the late 1800s and early 1900s, one of the privileged sites of the clash that pits ‘spiritualist’ and ‘materialist’ conceptions of human action and consciousness: bypassing both solutions, Halbwachs, between spiritualism and materialism, proposes a third way, which in his opinion constitutes the correct solution to the problems posed by the study of memory: this does not lie *in* the spirit, nor in the brain, but rather *in society*, or rather in the collective consciousness of concrete human groups.”

Memory, according to Halbwachs (1925), is thus neither spirit in the metaphysical sense of the term, nor matter in the sense in which biologists or neuropsychologists understand it. Instead, it has to do with collective representations; in this sense, it is an institution that is the result of a complex operation: No memory is possible outside the reference points that society and the groups to which the individual belongs, or has belonged in the past, offer to fix individual memories and allow subsequent recognition, examples of which are the language, dates, places, major historical events,

Temporal Horizons. A Conversation between Memories and Futures, Bristol University Press, 2023; Tota A. L., Hagen T. (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Memory Studies*, Routledge, 2015.

³ Here and elsewhere, the English translation is ours and is intended in vehicular form. Quotations refer to the original works given in the bibliography.

and family and professional events that mark each person's life. This means that, to belong to an ethnic, professional, or religious collectivity, one must possess in common with other components a set of beliefs, traditions, norms, ideas, and language transmitted over generations. Halbwachs calls these reference points provided by society "social frameworks of memory"; they give memory a social character, i.e., its preservation, reemergence, and communicability. In this sense, memory is directly related to our social life: It is not an individual phenomenon and does not consist of content that remains unchanged. To explain his approach, Halbwachs opposes, in the volume *Les cadres*, the idea of memory formulated by Henri Bergson in his work, *Matière et mémoire* (1896). The spiritualist philosopher (who, by the way, had been Halbwachs' teacher at the Henri IV Lycée in Paris) regarded memory as the virtual repository in which the traces of all past events are stored forever. According to Bergson, memories stored by the spirit in the unconscious state would be re-proposed from time to time to consciousness (i.e., they would be re-actualized in their pure state) in relation to reflection and to what happens in practical life. Beginning with the rejection of the idea of memory as a "repository" of all images of the past, which treats memory essentially as an individual fact, Halbwachs aims to show how it is instead the result of a social construction. He thus points out that, if one avoids thinking of the isolated individual, one realizes that there are no purely internal memories, but that memory is a collective function that manifests itself in "pictures" that the social context makes available to its members: Only these reference points (such as language, dates, and places) allow memories to survive.

Halbwachs thus thinks of the activity of remembering as a *reconstructive process*: The past presents itself from time to time in different forms depending on our current interests and affections and our place in the present. This means that the consciousness we have of the past is the result of an always partial reconstruction, one which selects and interprets the past and is accomplished from the reference points and questions provided to us by society. In Halbwachs' view, in fact, no one is ever perfectly alone; even in the most intimate manifestations of our psychic life, society is within us and acts so that our thoughts, memories, and feelings are formulated in ways that would remain inexplicable without considering the social contexts within which we have been embedded in the past and are embedded now.

These general theses expounded in *Les cadres* later return in the 1941 study *La topographie des évangiles en Terre Sainte*, where Halbwachs deals with the tradition of the Gospels so as to demonstrate how remembering concretely means to locate events in the context of a specific history and a social geography: The question of time and space turn out to be crucial in this work, just as their relationship is crucial in the evolution of the Halbwachsian theory of memory. In reasoning about the contemporary memory of the Holy Land, which Halbwachs had visited twice, in 1927 and 1939, he brings into play the idea of a material and symbolic space that stands as a condition of possibility for a permanent framework of remembrance. As he writes:

“But for them [Christians], Jerusalem is not primarily the heavenly Jerusalem, suspended between heaven and earth. It is a city built with stones; it is houses and streets whose appearance is familiar to them. It is the stability of these things that explains how their memories endure.” (Halbwachs, 2008 [1941]: 129)

Halbwachs thus highlights, as Jaisson (2008: 95–96) suggests, that, in order to convey the idea of permanence, religious collective memory is inscribed in places as a function of the worldview carried, retrospectively, by different groups, each characterized by its degree of concrete proximity to those places. It is, therefore, the task of the religious group to establish, through a play of representations, a topographical and legendary continuity that consolidates a symbolic unity:

“As for the members of the group who have moved away from these places, who have not seen them again, who have not witnessed all the stages of their transformation, they soon make a symbolic representation of them. The image they evoke of these places derives its content, no doubt, first of all, from these places themselves [...], but symbolic reflection detaches these places from their material entourage and relates them to the beliefs of the group, to them alone.” (Halbwachs, 2008 [1941]: 129)

After *Les cadres* and the study of the memory of holy places, in the texts that would later make up the posthumous collection *La mémoire collective*, Halbwachs' goal is no longer to show that memory is a social phenomenon, but instead to explain how individual memory is in a field of interaction of multiple collective memories. Responding to the criticisms made by Blon-

del (1926) in a review of *Les cadres*, Halbwachs (1950) justifies the dimension of collective memory by excluding any individualistic approach and showing that collective memory is capable of accounting for the individual plane of recollection without the need, as Blondel claimed, for an individual psychology. Thus, if Blondel defended the uniqueness of individual memory as affectivity, personal warmth in contrast to the supposedly abstract character of collective memory, Halbwachs points out that, in reality, this warmth, this affectivity, this “never being alone,” corresponds to the action exerted on the individual by what he calls the “memory current,” and which he understands broadly as a social thought current made up of cultural values and meanings. The introduction of the notion of “memory current” qualifies individual memory as open and dynamic, placed at the crossroads of multiple solidarities in which individuals are immersed (Marcel, 2001: 190).

In fact, as Halbwachs also explains in his article “Expression of Emotions” (1947), belonging to a collectivity exposes the individual to currents of social thought that regulate and direct his actions, memories, and passions: Even in isolation, we behave as if others are watching and supervising us.

The originality of the perspective Halbwachs proposes rests on the idea that memory is not simply the custodian of an immutable past; rather, it functions as a generator of past events, which, instead of being faithfully reproduced in the act of recollection, are subject to a reconstructive process. The starting point of this process is, as we have explained, present society, with its interests, tendencies, and social needs. This idea redefines the problem of memory as it had been addressed by philosophers and psychologists until the 1920s.⁴

⁴ In particular, Halbwachs’ idea was confirmed in those years by the results of memory experiments that Frederic Bartlett (1932) conducted during World War I as part of his experimental and social psychology. The starting point of Bartlett’s study was a critique of the *quantitative* direction opened up by Hermann Ebbinghaus, and prevalent in Anglo-Saxon psychology, for the study of mnemonic processes, bringing to the study of memory a *qualitative* interest because of the

The reception of collective memory theory in the humanities

In the aftermath of its complex formulation, which will find full form only after *La mémoire collective*, but which was already expressed *in nuce* after 1924 and the publication of *Les cadres*, the Durkheimian matrix theory of memory enters fully into the theoretical framework of the social sciences. Its appearance does not go unnoticed, and there are many different authors who incorporate it.⁵ In this section, we will focus on three of these, each from a different disciplinary perspective: the historian Marc Bloch, the psychologist Charles Blondel, and the cultural anthropologist Roger Bastide. Albeit incomplete, this selection refers to the most celebrated interpretations of Halbwachs' proposal.

Marc Bloch, memory as an act of communication between history and remembrance

A few months after the publication of *Les cadres* in December 1925, Bloch published a review of the work for the *Revue de synthèse historique*. The two authors were then colleagues at the University of Strasbourg: Bloch as a historian, and Halbwachs as a sociologist and pedagogue. These were the years when the project of the École des Annales was maturing, culminating in 1929 with the inaugural publication of the journal *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*. Consequently, the theme of memory—considered not so much in its individual aspects as in its social dimensions and determinants—inevitably captured the interest of the historian, who reviewed *Les cadres* in the *Revue de synthèse*, an interdisciplinary laboratory that, in some ways, served as a precursor to the *Annales*. Testifying to this interdisciplinary vocation, in the conclusion to the review, Bloch would write:

importance attributed to motivational factors in the organization of “patterns” and the affective significance attributed to the “attitude” (individual or group) that begins to direct the process of remembering.

⁵ We cannot, here, go into the complex process concerning the reception of Maurice Halbwachs in the Anglo-Saxon sociological literature. For the sake of space, we merely note that the first English translation of *The Collective Memory* was in 1980, edited by F-J. Ditter Jr. and V-Y. Ditter. The reader will find references to available English translations in the bibliography.

“there would be no greater danger than a dogmatic closure, which would lead ‘sociologists’ and ‘historians’ to ignore or dislike each other. That is why I hope to have done something useful by pointing out and discussing this remarkable book” (Bloch, 1925: 218).

Let us, therefore, consider this intervention in brief. The first point of definite interest posed by Bloch concerns the ontological status of the notion of memory in Halbwachs’ approach. “Collective memory” is an undoubtedly disruptive concept because it shifts the plane of analysis from the individual to the collective and also because it locates the social as the pivot of the processes of memory construction. Bloch writes, “If Halbwachs [...] had remained on the ground of individual psychology, the historian writing these lines would have limited his ambitions to reading the book [...]. But Halbwachs is [...] a sociologist” (Bloch, 1925: 210), and this led him to construct a theory of memory that moves from the standpoint of collective psychology. Bloch does not interpret Halbwachs’ approach as presenting a sociological datum but rather as a datum of collective psychology, implying that the act of remembering remains fundamentally individual. Halbwachs’ theory does not suggest the existence of a social memory understood as the group’s faculty to perceive, recognize, and locate memories as collective rather than individual. Instead, the individual datum remains the starting point of the process of remembering. However, the significance and possibility of individual memories emerge only when they are situated within the framework of shared memories specific to the social groups to which the individual belongs or has belonged.

It is in this perspective that we must read Bloch’s remarks when he notes the basic ambivalence of Halbwachs’ proposal: On the one hand, it intends to “highlight everything social that penetrates into individual memories; on the other hand, it studies collective memory in the proper sense of the term, that is, [in the sense of] the preservation of memories common to an entire human group and their influence on the life of society” (Bloch, 1925: 210), or when he paraphrases the concept of social frameworks of memory by understanding them as *aides-mémoire collectifs*. The collective dimension of memory lies in the possibility of preserving within group common memories that, although individual in nature, are supported by structures external to individuals that “help” their composition. In Bloch’s view, the subject of recollection is always the individual, who relies on society as a

foothold to anchor and retrieve memories. This is a basic ambivalence that, while it detects a new social character of memory, does not mark a clear distance from the subjectivist approach of Bergsonian psychology. In this sense, as Alessandro Cavalli has effectively noted, “more than a sociology of memory, Halbwachs’ appears [...] a social psychology of remembering, or rather of remembering oneself” (Cavalli, 1995: 600).

In this regard, Halbwachs proposes in *The Collective Memory* a solution related to the process of negotiation of different individual memories within the group. However, the fact remains firm that, in the French sociologist’s approach, memory is still an individual fact, certainly socially conditioned, but in which the subject of memory still remains the individual.

A second element of analysis proposed by Bloch in his review of *Les cadres* concerns the function of memory in society. According to Halbwachs, this is to be ascribed to the construction and maintenance of the spiritual unity of the group that derives from traditions—that is, from the material proper to the collective representations of the present that inform the interpretation of the past. Between traditions and representations of the present, i.e., between memory and the work of interpretation operated by the framework, there is a reciprocal relationship such that “society does not interpret or even know the past except through the present, and on the other hand the present has no concrete meaning and emotional value for it except because a certain duration is glimpsed behind it” (Bloch, 1925: 213). In this sense, the work of memory is properly a work of reconstruction of the past and not of preservation, a reconstruction not continually strained in the present: “all memory is an effort” (Bloch, 1925: 213).

Bloch argues that this conception represents a general framework for understanding how memory works. But how does the reconciliation of past and present actually take place? That is, how is memory transmitted between social groups, from one generation to the next? In plain words, how does collective memory “work”?

It is here that Bloch’s critique becomes biting. In this specific regard, Halbwachs has only touched on the issue “limiting himself in most cases [...] to formulas of a finalism [...] and a somewhat vague anthropomorphism.” (Bloch, 1925: 214). To argue that society tends to discard from memory

everything that divides individuals or that it changes its landscape of values and traditions according to the demands of the present would, according to Bloch, be a legacy of the Durkheimian approach, which, however, is not sufficient to support Halbwachs' brilliant idea of memory as a process of reconstructing the past. The explanation for a process of this nature must lie elsewhere.

Certainly, the French historian argues, in order for the memory of the past to be preserved in a social group beyond the limited lifespan of the individuals who comprise it, it is necessary that the collective representations that inform the memory be preserved in turn; but it is also necessary that some active form of transmission of the memory be given, in particular,

"it is necessary that the older members do not forget to transmit these representations to the younger ones" (Bloch, 1925: 215). In this sense, memory is also, and above all, a form of communication between individuals: "free us to pronounce the word 'collective memory,' but it is convenient not to forget that a part at least of the phenomena we so designate are very simply acts of communication between individuals" (Bloch, 1925: 215).

Charles Blondel and sociological imperialism beyond social psychology

Let us briefly turn our attention to another review of *Les cadres*, one that appeared in 1926 in the *Revue philosophique* and was signed by Charles Blondel, who, at that time, was teaching in Strasbourg, like Bloch and Halbwachs.

Even more than Bloch, Blondel notes how Halbwachs' considerations of the notions of social framework and memory lie on an epistemological foundation of collective psychology because "whatever relationship runs between individual memory and collective memory, it is in the former that the latter is founded" (Blondel, 1926: 292). The social framework is the operational, socially derived tool that enables individual memory to find the complete and detailed recollection of the events of the individual past in the complexity of the circumstances in which it was produced. In this sense, the most basic and, at the same time, most stable framework of memory is language—the collective form of thought par excellence—that enables the objects of memory to be communicated, distinguished, found, and recognized. Moreover, memory would not be possible without homo-

geneous and shared conceptions of space and time that allow, for example, the spatial and chronological ordering of the succession of memories. Nor would it be possible without a collectively elaborated and instituted world of experience, since every fact of reality and every happening that is given to experience by being in a group constitutes an analytical prop of orientation with respect to the past. Without these frameworks, according to Blondel, it would not be possible to remember in the full sense of the term.

So, there is in memory an irreducibly social datum whose primary function is, however, to support and complement the individual effort of recollection that is exercised through the intellectual action of perception. Blondel writes, "there can be no memory without an at least partially alert perception." (Blondel, 1926: 293) No recollection is possible without accurate perception. Just as the act of perception involves giving form, through the ordering action of the intelligence mediated by collective representations, to the data of reality so that they can be recognized, so too is memory nothing but an ordering function of prior perceptions mediated by social frameworks. Memory is thus a form of organization of past experience, and collective memory is a form of social organization of the past capable of conferring social meaning on it. In Blondel's reading, the ordering action of social frameworks stands to the memory of the past, as the ordering function of intelligence stands to the perception of the present. In both cases, what we are dealing with is a form of organization of experience: past in the case of memory, present in the case of perception.

One of the central themes, to which we will return later with the help of Goffman's *frame analysis*, concerns precisely the relationship between memory and experience and the function of the social framework of memory in the social organization of past experience.

According to Blondel, the most critical point in Halbwachs' framework concerns the concept of memory as a reconstruction of the past, rather than the preservation of some prior reality buried in the depths of consciousness. This perspective offers Halbwachs two undeniable advantages: First, it enables him to draw an intriguing and suggestive parallel between the functioning of individual memory and the way collectivities represent their past; second, it allows him to move beyond Bergson's notion of pure

memory, conceived as a subjective repository inaccessible to consciousness where all past experiences are stored.

This is important, since pure memory and collective memory are mutually exclusive: The existence of an entirely intimate and individual instance presiding over the preservation of memories implies the futility of the collective enterprise of reconstructing collective memory. And vice versa. According to Blondel, however, it seems difficult to be able to eliminate *d'emblé* any reflection of the sensitive intuition that presides over recollection and constitutes the necessary prerequisite for the perception of recollection. In short, it is impossible to hold that some form of individual recollection does not exist. In order for the reconstruction of our own past to not be confused with the reconstruction we can make of that of our neighbor, it is necessary for memory to be more than just the reconstruction of the past realized through relational and social materials. In this sense, Blondel proposes to rethink memory frameworks as mere external reference points (*points de repère*) of a memory that, like Bergson's pure memory, would still remain individual. In Halbwachs' hypothesis, on the other hand, there is certainly an individual memory that, however, remains meaningless if it is not supported by social frameworks and if, therefore, it does not resolve into collective memory. In this way, the psychologist Blondel can claim that "sociology does not aspire to clarify, complete and define psychology, but to absorb it completely" (Blondel, 1926: 297). The sociological perspective tends to replace and absorb entirely the field of psychology with respect to memory. From here to the accusation of "sociological imperialism or pan-sociologism" (Blondel, 1926: 298), the step is indeed a short one. And this is, after all, the major reservation that Blondel—analyzing from his own point of view as a social psychologist the relationship between individual and collective memory—expresses about Halbwachs' first formulation of collective memory.

Roger Bastide and the idea of memory beyond the Durkheimian "collective consciousness"

The pioneering studies on the relations between memory and society proposed by Halbwachs constitute for Roger Bastide the starting point for talking about memory within the framework of his socio-anthropol-

ogy. Commenting on and criticizing these studies, but never in a polemical manner, Bastide elaborates his theory of memory in several contributions, mainly in the chapter “Les problèmes de la mémoire collective” contained in his most famous work, *Les religions africaines au Brésil* (1960), and in the article *Mémoire collective et sociologie du bricolage* (1970). Other reflections are also found in the article *Groupes sociaux et transmission des légendes* (1949), in the volumes *Sociologie et psychanalyse* (1950) and *Les Amériques noires* (1967), and, finally, in the collection of essays *Le sacré sauvage et autres essais* (1975).

Research on the myths and rituals of African origin still present, albeit repurposed, in the communities of descendants of ancient slaves in Brazil provides Bastide with an opportunity to shed new light on Halbwachs’ theory, especially in order to specify what the memory *collective* is. In particular, in his article, *Mémoire collective et sociologie du bricolage*, Bastide traces in Halbwachs’ texts an advance over Durkheimian sociology, although not always clearly explicated. Bastide’s careful reading of Halbwachs brings out the possibility of an interpenetration of individual consciousnesses against the idea of impermeable consciousnesses. That is, in *La mémoire collective*, Halbwachs argues at times for the idea that for the collective memory of a certain social group to endure, the current presence of its members is necessary—that is, the habit and faculty of thinking and remembering as members of the group to which we belong. Nevertheless, Bastide points out, Halbwachs does not turn out to be capable of valuing this perspective of the permeability of consciousnesses and of breaking away from the Durkheimian conception of a collective consciousness that is superior and external to individuals. Taking this point into account—of which Halbwachs gives a recurrent sketch, but without reaching a definitive development—Bastide points out that the Halbwachsian theory of memory oscillates between a conception that emphasizes the group as a group (and which corresponds to the one predominantly recognized and taken up by Halbwachs scholars) and another that, on the contrary, emphasizes the individuals that make up the group, who, in the course of their interactions, preserve, reconstruct, and transmit what we call collective memory. It is this second perspective that Bastide allows us to recognize in Halbwachs’ theory an idea of memory as a mere fact of communication between individuals.

Moreover, more generally, Bastide's theory of memory is fundamentally aimed at showing how, in the encounter between two different cultures, where we are in the habit of simply seeing the relationship between them, it would be good to also look at the relationship that each of them, and especially the marginalized or dominated culture, has with its own past. This reasoning is articulated, in particular, around one of the first original concepts elaborated by Bastide and which has become a key concept in his entire oeuvre: the "*coupure* principle," which we can translate with the terms "fracture" or "cut" (Bastide, 1955). In his idea, if, in the encounter between different cultures, the social marginality of individuals does not turn into psychological marginality, it is precisely thanks to the conceptual operation represented by the "principle of *coupure*" that allows the individual, deprived of a single identity, to experience two different worlds simultaneously and without particular drama. More precisely, it is not the individual who is "cut" in two, but it is he who carves reality into multiple realms within which he realizes different forms of participation that are experienced as non-contradictory. For example, Bastide (1955: 9) writes as follows: "The Afro-Brazilian escapes through the *coupure* principle the misfortune of marginality. What is sometimes denounced as Black's duplicity is the sign of his greatest sincerity; if he plays within two pictures, it is because there are two pictures." It is in this sense that the Afro-Brazilian studied by Bastide:

"realizes all these holes that have been dug and slowly enlarged in the myth and strives to fill them. But since he has changed places, he can only fill them with new elements, heterogeneous from African culture, borrowed from the Western society in which he lives."
(Bastide, 1960: 359)

On this basis, Bastide arrives at the formulation of a general theory of collective memory, which he develops from the notion of *bricolage*, taken up by Claude Lévi-Strauss and investigated with strong references to Marcel Mauss, the first to have glimpsed the theory of *bricolage* starting precisely from African-American phenomena (Bastide, 1970). To this notion, and starting essentially from *bricolage* as a practice, as it is defined by Lévi-Strauss, Bastide devotes an extensive reflection to explain of what a "sociology of *bricolage*" might consist (Bastide, 1970: 60–75).

Reasoning around the cults of syncretic religions, Bastide thinks of a kind of creation through *bricolage* and, following Lévi-Strauss, observes how the character of mythical thinking, as well as, on the practical level, of *bricolage*, is to elaborate structured sets by relating them not directly to other structured sets, but by making use of residues and traces of specific events, more precisely memories detached from any chronology. *Bricolage* thus brings memory into play in a work of reorganization. However, the operation of *bricolage* does not extend or renew what is taken from the past, but merely obtains the group from its transformations.

“This paramount importance of collective memory appears even more when we move from the phenomena of the permanence of Africanisms to the phenomena of the creation of an African American culture [...] by Black men or, conversely, of the maintenance of a destructive memory by Whites” (Bastide, 1970: 68).

On this basis, Bastide opens up a perspective that, reinforcing Halbwachs’ theoretical proposal, allows us to think about the reciprocity of viewpoints and the interaction between the group as a group and the individuals who comprise it, bearers of experiences and memories. This is in the idea that collective memory can exist only on the condition that centers of continuity and social conversation are materially recreated, and that the group functions through communication between its members, not only by their fellowship, adding also that it must be considered that it is not only the individual who is the meeting place of the groups to which he or she is attached, but that the group is also a place of exchanges between people (Bastide, 1970: 54). Bastide points out with this that memory exists only to the extent that it is articulated among the members of the group and that it is therefore made up of “interpenetration of consciousnesses”; this means that it is, in the end, always individuals who remember. In essence, in a kind of rehabilitation of the interpersonal over the collective, for Bastide, memory is *collective* not because it is *of the* group as a group—transcendent, that is, with respect to the individuals who comprise it—but because the collective is the condition within which individuals exist, cooperating and relating to one another. Bastide thus advances a new conception of collective memory based not so much on the group as such, but on its organization and structure: That is to say, the structure of the group provides the domains of collective memory, understood no longer as collective

consciousness, but as a system of interrelationships of individual memories. If, then, as Halbwachs thinks, others are necessary to remember, it is not because “I” and “others” are immersed in the same social thought, but rather because “our personal memories are articulated with the memories of other people in a well-regulated interplay of reciprocal and complementary images” (Bastide, 1970: 57), and these images can re-emerge whenever the community rediscovers its structure. Bastide, in fact, shows in this regard that the African memories that can subsist in the communities of descendants of ancient slaves in Brazil are those that are most adaptable and functional to Brazilian global society, articulated in a mechanism in which the “collective memory of Black people is linked to the collective memory of global society” (Bastide, 1970: 70). This is because:

“every memory is manipulated by society, or by a group in that society; the White (while hypocritically arguing for their assimilation into Western values), does not want them to lose the set of memories, even unstructured ones, that the slaves were able to retain in the New World, because if they lost them there would now be equality between the Black man and the white man. To diminish the Black, one must therefore destroy the symmetry of behaviors and mentalities between the two competing groups.” (Bastide, 1970: 68)

Another element that, according to Bastide, Halbwachs overlooked (because he was interested in the phenomenon of memory retention, but not in the processes of forgetting) is the “consciousness of the holes in collective memory. [...] I have shown,” continuing, “that, certain threads of communication having been cut by slavery, the scenario of African ceremonies cannot always reconstitute itself in its organic wholeness, which certainly reconstructs itself, but in a more or less lacunar way” (Bastide, 1970: 58).

In fact, Bastide argues that it is wrong to define oblivion as a lack; instead, it should be understood as a “full void” of something. African-American culture, he explains, is constituted by borrowing its materials in the White past to fill the gaps in the collective memory of slavery. This filling of an absence makes sense to the group, which, in the terms of a *bricolage* work, undertakes to organize a new memorial configuration, carrying

first and foremost a future from the point of view of the interests of the group under consideration. In fact, Bastide seems to suggest, one should not speak of oblivion by referring to a culture, but should more simply study the forms of content substitution. Oblivion is a form of censorship, but through this work of content substitution it can at the same time be a tool that allows the individual or group to construct or reestablish a globally satisfactory self-image.

In sum, in the approach to memory that Bastide proposes, the idea emerges that there is neither strictly individual memory nor strictly collective memory, and that what the group preserves is the structure of connections between different individual memories. Halbwachs himself, he notes (Bastide, 1970: 54), was very close to this idea of a structure or system of communication in his study of the collective memory of musicians contained in the collection *La mémoire collective* (Halbwachs, 1950), where he explains, precisely, how, in an orchestra, each musician has his own role—that is, the pieces of the score that he has to play according to a predetermined sequence. This means that the entire score is not simply an amalgamation of sounds, but the exhibition of a system in which each musician holds a place in relation to the other musicians, within a well-structured whole. For Bastide, this structure corresponds to a fabric of images and languages that serve as social transmitters and within which memory can be reactivated. Collective memory thus presents itself as the memory of a structure of memorization, and the voids that can open up there are felt to be “full voids” of something functional to the new sense that orients the considered community (Bastide, 1970).

A point of convergence between Bastide and Halbwachs is then found regarding the relationship between memory and space. Halbwachs had dealt specifically with this relationship in his last book on memory, *La topographie légendaires en Terre Sainte*.

So writes Bastide in *Les religions africaines au Brésil*:

“The *Candomblés*, with their temples, their *pegi*, their groves of sacred trees, their houses of the dead, the fountain of *Oshalá*, constitute the sacred topographical reconstruction of lost Africa, adding that the first sacred stones were brought from Africa, still

drenched in the supernatural force of the *orisha*, a force that, by mystical participation, passed to the whole of the surrounding space." (Bastide, 1960: 345)

In tune with Halbwachs (1941)—who had analyzed the religious memory linked to the sites of the Gospels in the Holy Land to explain the process by which material space moves from material to symbolic space—Bastide thus highlights the transition from the physical place of rootedness of a community to an imagined spatial reference of a collective identity, transfigured by the myth of origins. In this way, he highlights how the re-modeling of space in the *elsewhere* in which the individual finds himself living provides the material anchors that allow memories to resurface from the depths of what we call collective memory. This is a perspective in which time and space concur in an open dialogue in the unfolding of the dynamic process of memory formation.

Taking up Halbwachs, therefore, among the classic studies on memory, Bastide's work is one of the first to have offered interesting theoretical and methodological insights to analyze the role of memory in the relationship with the *Other* within complex and heterogeneous societies, and particularly within the phenomena of social change produced by the encounter between different cultures. The idea of memory as *bricolage*, in fact, as a profound work between the individual and the institutional, between the psychic and the social, seems to configure itself as a useful point of view from which to read and interpret the incessant confrontation with the *Other*, the *elsewhere*, and the related memories to which the phenomena of mobility and exchange favored by the process of globalization place us today.

Through his research, Bastide suggests, for example, that migration is not simply displacement in space, but is also an operation that leads toward a complex transformation of individuals, thus proposing a study of their specific psychological attitudes resulting from their migratory projects and their reactions to the living and working conditions with which they are confronted. He also recommends, as he shows in *Les religions africaines au Brésil*, never to lose sight of the fact that relationships always take place "within a certain global structure" (Bastide, 1960: 14).