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The past has never been as relevant for the present as it is in today's Post-truth world. Not just because many of our political leaders are promising to bring us back to a past that never existed – the Great America of Trump, the Lost Empire of Farage or the French Resistance of Le Pen – but because it seems more and more likely that they are bringing us back to the past as it actually happened – a past where populism successfully brought nationalist leaders to power. In this context, it seems particularly crucial to understand how we relate to our history, how we learn from it and the consequences it may have for the world we live in. These are the questions this special issue explores by adopting a cultural psychological perspective on collective memory – the lay representations of history – and proposing both theoretical and empirical contributions.

In this editorial, we will try to first make the case for the political and social importance of collective memory. Second, we will argue why theoretical discussions – not just empirical research – are necessary to tackle these issues. Third, we will discuss the role we believe, cultural psychology should play in the current context and the dangers of turning it into a field disconnected from social and political realities. Finally, we will present the contents of this issue and how we hope it tackles some of the problems raised in this editorial.

The social and political importance of collective memory

Stating that collective memory studies particularly matter in today's post-truth world could be seen as a mere rhetorical move – after all, doesn't all expertise

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matter most when its relevance is denied? Indeed, we have seen in the last decade or so a turn towards what has been called 'Post-truth politics', a period where 'objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief' (Oxford Dictionary, 2016). In such a context, it is crucial that scientists 'keep reminding society of the importance of the social mission of science – to provide the best information possible as the basis for public policy' (Higgins, 2016, p. 9). Although the term might appear to be just a journalistic fad following Donald Trump's presidential campaign, it is neither new nor a media creation. In 1992 already, the philosopher Jeff Malpas was discussing the complex relation between modernity and truth, and how he believed post-modernism would bring a post-truth era (Malpas, 1992). In 2004, the social scientist Ralph Keyes published the first book entirely devoted to the idea, arguing that we had entered a period where lying had become the norm (Keyes, 2004). The term then slowly gained traction and was propelled to fame during Donald Trump's presidential campaign.

In this context, however, what is specific to collective memory is that it has always enjoyed a complicated relation with truth, as it is often on the basis of its subjectivity that it is opposed to history.[1] Moreover, its construction is not merely based on the transformation of historical knowledge but also on people's actual experience of the past. As such, it is a particularly interesting field of study in a world where personal experiences and emotions are taking precedence over expertise. Indeed, the relation between historical knowledge and collective memory necessarily changes as the relation between expertise and lay representations is transformed, as has been the case in the past few years.

Collective memory is also an important political tool that has long been used by politicians to justify their positions, to transform how we see the world and to impose a certain vision of the future. At a time when politicians are not punished – whether by law or in their popularity ratings – for their lies, they have full latitude to invent the past that suits them most – a tendency that is not new, but certainly affected by the current context. It is thus with no surprise that the most recent and successful post-truth campaigns have used slogans that make more or less explicit references to history, with Trump promising to 'Make America Great Again' and Farage's cry to 'Take [Their] Country back'. Collective memory has become an important part of the post-truth rhetoric, where it has been used in multiple ways.

First, references to the collective past have proven a powerful resource to create new images of the present. By calling on Americans to 'Make America Great Again', Trump was not just criticising those he accused of destroying it – the Liberals – and embracing a convenient nostalgia for the past, but he was also implying that periods where African Americans, women, LGBT, and most minorities had limited rights and limited access to the public sphere are to be considered a sort of Golden Age that the country should go back to. As a result, a new interpretation of the present is proposed where minorities are not fighting for legitimate equal rights, but for privileges that are threatening the fabric of society. Using nostalgia for Golden Ages that never existed is not a new political strategy, of course. What is interesting here, however, is that Trump did not exploit the

romantic vision Americans may have of specific historical periods but drummed up a general nostalgia for an undefined and unspecified past. One may argue, then, that master narratives – here the Golden Age-Decline-Rebirth narrative (see Brescó de Luna, 2017) – have become such an important part of today's collective memory that they do not need anymore refer to specific historical events.

Second, collective memory has been a useful tool to defend certain visions of the future. UKIP's Brexit campaign, for instance, promising British people to take back control, used a certain representation of UK's past – the Great British Empire – to argue that a future without the rest of Europe was not only possible but also desirable. The use of collective memory in the Brexit campaign was not limited to the glorification of Great Britain's colonial empire: it also included many comparisons between the EU and past expansionist Empires, notwithstanding the irony of doing so while indirectly praising British colonialism. Boris Johnson, for instance, likened the EU to the Nazis, following the line of argumentation used by pro-Brexit newspapers, and on Internet forums before that. What is surprising here is how caricatured the comparison was, and how it used a generic representation of the 'evil state' – analogies were made elsewhere with the USSR, Napoleon, the Austro-Hungarian empire, etc. (de Saint-Laurent, 2016). The other specificity of this use of collective memory is that it did not stem from the politicians who then abused it, but spread first on Internet forums and comments.

Third, collective memory has been mobilised to change the image of politicians themselves. In France, for instance, Marine Le Pen has frequently compared her party to the World War II French Resistance, and implied that the incoming immigrants and refugees were the invaders who needed to be fought. Comparing oneself to glorious figures of the past is not a new tactic for politicians (e.g. de Saint-Laurent, 2014), but two things are striking here. First, the comparison is more than historically dubious, as the early members of Le Pen's National Front included more Nazis collaborators than Resistance fighters. As with the previous examples, the use of collective memory is almost caricatural. Second, collective memory is here used to cast the National Front in a new role: the Underdog, fighting a corrupt system – as the French state collaborated with the Nazis, it is one of the implicit arguments of the comparison. This double position, as a hero fighting the system and a victim of an oppressive regime, fits quite well with the current rhetoric of victimhood, and has been similarly employed by Trump.

What is, for us, particularly interesting in these three examples is that they fit an almost textbook definition of collective memory: glorification of the past, identification with national heroes, use of master narratives, and reducing actors to their assumed motivations and not their actions. But they do so in an almost caricatured propaganda manner, not bothering with the details of any specific narrative or with historical analogies where there is some pretence of similarity. In the post-truth era, collective memory seems to have lost touch with historical facts. And maybe, if the consequences were not so dire, we ought to be celebrating how collective memory research got it all right, describing so well the biases and limits of our representations of history. The truth, if the word has not yet lost all its meaning, might

however paint a quite different picture: have we, by focusing primarily on the negative, nationalist, essentialising, and exclusionist aspects of collective memory, not only made ourselves sensitive only to those, but more importantly endorsed these aspects as perfectly 'normal' and 'natural' psychological biases?

In every day life, however, people do not use the past only to defend their own interests but also to question the present, imagine alternative futures, or develop new ideas (de Saint-Laurent, 2017). At times where the truth is threatened, remembering what happened can be an act of resistance (Awad, 2017), and even in conflicts collective memory has the potential to create bridges (Nicholson, 2017). Why, then, has collective memory research globally overlooked these aspects? And if psychology is to play a role in this context, how can it study such phenomena that have a critical social and political impact?

Pragmatism and the social relevance of cultural psychology

Pragmatism, with its focus on the consequences of theories, could provide a useful framework to answer these questions. Indeed, for pragmatists, the validity of a theory is evaluated through the consequences it has for action: does the theory 'work' to satisfy our needs? (James, 1922). As a result, ultimately, all of knowledge serves a purpose, and different methods and theories tend to fit better the interests of different groups (Cornish & Gillespie, 2009). This is not to say that knowledge is necessarily interested or biased, but that if its aim is to facilitate human action in one form or another, then these actions are bound to be more adapted or favourable to the aims or needs of some people than others. Playing a social and political role is thus unavoidable for psychology, and it is therefore fundamental to question the social consequences of the research we are doing, and whose interest it is we are serving.

In the case of collective memory, three sets of interests served by 'classical' memory studies can be identified. First, it serves the interests of policy makers, who need to understand how museum exhibits, memorials, history classes, and other public displays of collective memory are received by the public and could be improved. As a result, research on collective memory has shown little interest in individual differences and has mainly focused on how groups represent the past or on how history is presented in the public space. Second, collective memory has been used to produce social critique. It puts into question how people represent the past of their group in comparison with the consensus of historians, shedding new light on the status quo. Although it has proven a quite efficient concept in doing so, especially in time of conflict or rising nationalism, it has also overemphasised the biases and dangers of lay representations of history.

Third, as in any other field, collective memory research also serves the interests of the researchers themselves. As most academics are pressured to publish, to produce frequent results, to have interesting findings, and to acquire new funding, reproducing existing studies in a new context is often an economic solution.

Analysing the collective memory biases and their consequences in public discourses, in various social groups or in pan-national surveys is often the easiest strategy. As with other 'soft' sciences, the economic constraints do not encourage creativity and innovative work, but the quasi-identical reproduction of existing successful studies.

How, then, to foster new avenues for research, to produce new insights not just to understand the world as it is but also how it may be changed, to be a socially relevant science? The duty of psychology to be a truly social science does not mean that we should solely focus on social case studies, quite the contrary. It means that we have an obligation to be innovative in response to pressing social issues. This can only be done by opening a theoretical, epistemological and methodological debate that allows us to question our assumptions about collective memory, how it is conceptualised, where it is to be found, how it is to be studied and what are its actual consequences. In doing so, we can, for instance, rethink the dynamic between individual and collective memory (Brockmeier, 2017), what we consider to be true or false about the past (Brown & Reavey, 2017) or how the concept of constructive memory has been used and transformed over time (Wagoner, 2017). It also opens up the possibility for cross-domain fertilisation, using theories built to explain other aspects of human life to shed new light on collective memory. Theories of creativity, for instance, can make us sensitive to the interplay of change and continuity in memory (Glăveanu, 2017), while dynamic theories of human development can help us rethink collective memory as a semiotic process (Zittoun, 2017).

Theoretical constructions and discussions are necessary for two reasons. First, research needs to be adaptable to the changing phenomenon we face and the new challenges that arise, with a close sensitivity to contexts, rather than applying existing formulas to confirm already perceived biases. Theories and debates allow just that, while the quantitative reproduction of existing findings allows neither flexibility nor reflexivity (Cornish & Gillespie, 2009). Second, preferring empirical research above all else – for instance by refusing to publish theoretical papers, as many journals do – is not only sterilising the field but also insuring that the mistakes of the past are reproduced unquestioned, as long as the resulting paper can be published. It also reserves theorisation to the privileged few who have reached a sufficient status to publish their theories in books or in journals that will make an exception for them. Journals like *Culture & Psychology*, that offer the space for theoretical, methodological and epistemological debates, offer a rare chance and should be valued as such.

Encouraging theoretical construction does not mean, however, that we should overlook empirical studies. Doing so would make us blind to the reality we seek to explain, and in particular to issues of power (Obradović, 2017). If we lose sight of the 'real world' in our escape from positivism, we run the risk of falling into a rationalism that would not be much better. The danger here is building theories that 'sound', 'look' or 'feel' nice to us or to those we wish to convince and yet do not bear any kind of resemblance with the world out there and the societies for

whom we work. More importantly, from a pragmatist point of view, such knowledge would be useless for the human beings whose very perspective cultural psychology seeks to understand and respect. What is needed, we believe, is a theoretical debate fed by and based on empirical data. This is what we attempted to start in this issue by bringing together theoretical and empirical papers.

New developments in collective remembering

This issue is structured in three sections, each followed by a commentary. The first section comprised three theoretical articles on the construction of memory ('Constructing Memory'). First, Jens Brockmeier considers what characterises the sociocultural perspective on remembering and argues that individual and collective memory are deeply interwoven, using the example of Picasso's painting 'Les Demoiselles d'Avignon'. Second, Steven Brown and Paula Reavey explore the limits of the opposition between 'truth' and 'falsity' in the debate on false memories, analysing the role memory research has played in how the concept is understood in the social and justice systems. Third, Brady Wagoner traces psychologists' evolving collective memory for Bartlett's theory of reconstructive remembering from his time to the present day. Using Bartlett's own social-cultural approach, he shows how Bartlett's concepts and methods were transformed to fit different groups of researchers' understanding of memory. The section is concluded by a commentary by Sandra Obradović, who argues for the importance of considering the power dynamics when studying memory, encouraging researchers to question the specific context within which the person remembers.

In the second section, focusing on 'Remembering and Social Dynamics', Cathy Nicholson and Sarah Awad explore the role of memory in two complex social situations. In the first paper, Nicholson analyses the representations of history in the Israel-Palestine conflict. She explores not only how they contribute to the intractability of the conflict, but also how they can be resisted and how they can open up the potential for reconciliation. In the second paper, Awad presents her study of how the 2011 Egyptian Revolution is remembered by activists and authorities, as manifested on the walls of Cairo through graffiti, billboards, monuments and other symbols. Vlad Glaveanu's commentary concludes the section with a discussion of the relation between continuity and change in collective memory, using the works of Nicholson and Awad to argue that change in memory is a multidirectional process.

In the third section, on 'Remembering and Trajectories of Living', Ignacio Brescó de Luna and Constance de Saint-Laurent explore the relation between collective memory and time. First, Brescó de Luna discusses the notion of prolepsis, offering insights into the relation between collective memory, the representation of the present and the imagination of the future. Second, de Saint-Laurent proposes to adopt a developmental perspective on collective memory, and analyses the life trajectory of a journalist and activist. This section concludes with a commentary by Tania Zittoun, who examines the contribution a dynamic theory of human develop can make to the study of collective memory.

This special issue is the result of a workshop organised in Neuchâtel in June 2015 conjointly by the Institute of Psychology and Education of the University of Neuchâtel and the Niels Bohr Center for Cultural Psychology of Aalborg University. Our hope is that the debate started there and reflected in this special issue will generate further discussion of the cultural psychology of collective memory, a topic now timelier than ever.

Note

1. Collective memory is usually considered to be the memory of the group while history is the systematic study of the past. However, in practice, what often distinguishes them is that collective memory does not follow the 'regime of truth' (Foucault, 1993) created by history as a discipline (e.g. use of reliable sources, historical evidences and documents).

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