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Ludmila Isurin
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Introduction

My broad academic interests inherently have been united by one major theme – memory. Since my application to graduate school in the United States, where I indicated my interest in first-language forgetting, and since I took a class on "Memory and Forgetting" taught by a cognitive psychologist, Professor Janet McDonald (who later became my academic advisor and mentor), human memory has been an integral part of my research. I have studied language loss and language change from a cognitive perspective, using experimental and behavioral techniques, and I have analyzed narratives of autobiographical memory elicited from immigrants. However, this is the first project where I bring in a different type of memory – the one that so far has remained outside of my scholarly inquiry – collective memory. Moreover, I am attempting to merge two types of memory as they relate to a group (collective memory) and the individual (autobiographical memory).

This endeavor largely was triggered in 2012 by reading a volume that presents an excellent selection of works addressing both autobiographical and collective memory (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009). Even more importantly, the authors consistently have built a case for bridging the two disciplines. Rarely does any academic book make me read all of its contents from cover to cover, and then return in order to read some parts in more depth, but it was the case with this one. My journey started with this book, and the idea of writing a monograph on collective memory gradually was born. Over recent years, especially during my daily morning power walks in our residential neighborhood, as well as along the Mexican beach during our vacations, I have nourished this idea by reading more and more literature on both types of memory, taking notes in a small black notebook (which became my "black box" in more than one sense, tinted with spilled coffee and retaining grains of sand from the beach), thereby conceiving the preliminary outline for my new book. Although I had a good grip on autobiographical memory, which is one of the topics in my graduate seminars, I was entering the territory of collective memory, which had remained largely uncharted by me; this required me to

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overcome numerous moments of hesitation, when I would feel a lack of confidence and belief in my ability to tackle this major issue by trespassing in "foreign" terrain. However, this foreign terrain was fascinating, and somehow did not feel totally foreign. The words of Boyer and Wertsch, scholars whose work has been tremendously inspiring on this journey – "[T]o understand those phenomena [collective and autobiographical memory], one should not be 'interdisciplinary,' if that means concocting a witches' brew of disparate results. Rather, one should ignore disciplines altogether and forge ahead" (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 1) – encouraged me to persist with this project. I am sharing my work, my ideas, and my memories with readers in the hope of keeping enough of their attention throughout this book, if not making them accept my approach and methodology.

The book is the culmination of a large project on collective memory as it is presented by *producers* (official textbooks and media) and as it is reflected by *consumers* (group members). My study attempts to look at the fluidity of collective memory from two major perspectives: how the transformation of collective memory is reflected in and formed by major texts, such as textbooks and media sources (in the case of Russia: the difference between Soviet and contemporary sources); and how collective memory is remembered by in-group members versus those people who have left the group (e.g., Russians who live in Russia versus Russian immigrants who reside in the United States and might be exposed to different interpretations of Russian political events). Moreover, the project also aims to show how autobiographical memory is an essential component of collective memory, and how individual memory, while unique to each person, contributes to the formation of collective memory.

Through the in-depth analysis of the state of the art of these fields (collective and autobiographical memory), I propose a new framework that incorporates both of them, and I test the framework on a case study of Russian collective memory.

The book consists of three logically connected parts. The two theoretical chapters on collective and autobiographical memory lead to the conceptualization of a new framework (Chapters 1–3). The framework is tested on a case study of Russian collective memory (Chapters 4–8). The final part (Chapter 9) provides a general discussion, where findings from the case study are discussed within the proposed framework and implications are extended beyond the single case study.

The first chapter begins by introducing the reader to the complexity of the phenomenon of collective memory. After providing a historical backdrop to the study of collective memory, I bring up the important debate concerning the difference between history and collective memory that has

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been one of the central questions in studies on collective memory. Halbwachs's (1980) formulation of how collective memory is different from formal history continues to be debated by contemporary scholars, and the chapter provides a brief overview of different stances on this issue. The discussion then moves on to the key points defining collective memory: the inherent link between collective memory and group identity; memory reconstruction and forgetting; generational differences in the way collective memory is formed; the way collective memory is reflected in cultural templates; and memory of political events. Near the end of this opening chapter, I introduce the debate surrounding the very definition of collective memory. If collective memory is not history, and if it exists in people's minds as well as in the world, how can we define this complex concept?

As in the preceding chapter on collective memory, I begin Chapter 2 with a brief introduction to the phenomenon of autobiographical memory by differentiating it from semantic memory – a distinction which is important for the present book. After a discussion on the historical background of the study of autobiographical memory, and a definition of it, I discuss important issues surrounding the scholarly research of individual memory, particularly those issues that are especially relevant for the present project (e.g., accuracy of individual memories, memory and identity, socio-cultural aspects of autobiographical memory, generational differences, immigration and memory).

If the first two chapters present the state of the art of the two fields of study – collective memory and autobiographical memory – Chapter 3 provides the major argument for integrating the two areas of research. The chapter starts by emphasizing the inherent link between individual and collective memory, reminding the reader that bringing individual memory into the domain of collective memory research may evoke a heated argument from social scientists and historians, who seemingly have appropriated the field of study despite its true interdisciplinary spirit. I formulate the research questions pursued by the present project (i.e., memory and immigration, the role of autobiographical memory in the construction of collective memory, and the incorporation of two methodologies exploring memory in the *world* and memory in the *mind*). The chapter proceeds by summarizing similarities and differences in the study of the two types of memory (the similarities far exceed the differences) and introduces a new framework that incorporates collective memory, autobiographical memory, and immigration. I then propose a methodology that can be used within the above framework. The proposed methodology considers two different types of study: the one that includes the immigration component, and the one that does not.

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The second part of the book is devoted to the results of the case study based on Russian collective memory, which tested the proposed framework. Chapter 4 introduces the methodology used in the present study. It starts with discussing the reasons behind the choice of Russia as a case study in the current project, and addresses the challenges posed by the data collection during one of the most politically difficult times in the relationship between Russia and the West. It then describes the methodology of the study. First, it describes the way texts were selected and analyzed; then, it gives a detailed explanation of the participants' recruitment, their background, the sampling used in the study, the materials used, and the procedure.

Chapter 5 presents the results of the first part of the project – content analysis of the texts related to the nine political events in the Russian collective past that were selected for the study: historical figures (Stalin, Gagarin, Gorbachev); wars (World War II [WWII], Afghanistan, Chechnya); and crises (the Cuban missile crisis, the Chernobyl disaster, the collapse of the USSR). More than one hundred texts (Soviet, post-Soviet, and American) provided a glimpse into how collective memory is presented by the *producers* of memory/official history and media. While this chapter provides detailed analysis of each of the selected political events through texts published in the USSR, post-Soviet Russia, and the United States, Chapter 6 offers a discussion of the main findings by looking at clusters of the selected events from different angles. First, I discuss how wars feature in Russian collective memory and what makes one war more important for the national memory than another. Then, I apply the same approach to the discussion of political figures and crises. After that, I bring up the issue of historical distance separating Russians from the event in question and how that may affect the formation of collective memory, as well as examining the issue of national identity and its role in the way collective memory is being transformed. Finally, I show how political events that constitute the collective memory of the nation become a forum to discuss present events. The content analysis of texts related to the above political events provides the starting point for the next step – the design of the survey that was used to elicit memory accounts relevant to those events from Russians in Russia and Russians in the United States. The questions targeted by the survey originated from the above analysis of texts, and are discussed in depth in the next chapter.

The subsequent two chapters (7 and 8) report the results of the empirical part of the project. The empirical evidence gathered through the comprehensive survey distributed among Russians in Russia and Russian immigrants in the United States shows how collective memory

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of the past is transformed among in-group members and those who have left the group. If the previous two chapters discussed collective memory in the *world*, Chapters 7 and 8 focus on the *minds* of Russian participants, with Chapter 7 looking at how collective memory pertaining to each political event under investigation is retained in people's minds, and Chapter 8 looking at how individual autobiographical memories may affect the construction of collective memory.

The final part of the book aims to connect all the dots and discuss the major findings of the case study of Russian collective memory in light of the new framework, and to extend the findings in order to propose new research directions in the field of collective memory.

I hope my humble, yet bold attempt to propose a new framework and test it on the case study of Russian collective memory will ignite interest in the academic community and beyond. It is through a continuous dialogue across disciplines, and through sharing different opinions expressed both by supporters and opponents, that we can challenge existing ideas and create new ones. Memory and remembrance will remain the most fascinating and elusive phenomena in human lives, no matter how convincing or erroneous our arguments. If the reader closes this book and simply thinks more about personal memories or those shared with the entire nation, my goal, as the author, was accomplished.

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Part I

Theoretical Background

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1 Collective Memory

> [A] remembrance is in very large measure a reconstruction of the past achieved with data borrowed from the present, a reconstruction prepared, furthermore, by reconstructions of earlier periods wherein past images had already been altered. (Halbwachs, 1980, p. 69)

I start this chapter with a quote from the work of Maurice Halbwachs, a French scholar and philosopher of the early twentieth century, who undeniably is considered the father of studies on collective memory. As many scholars educated and trained in Western academia of the late twentieth–early twenty-first centuries, I have become increasingly used to reading the most recent publications in my field of inquiry whereas going back to the early original scholarship almost always is reserved for very special names. The name of Maurice Halbwachs has become inescapable during my reading of recent publications on collective memory. When eventually I had a chance to read *The Collective Memory*, I was in for a big surprise: What was supposed to be another scholarly book on memory turned out to be an extremely intimate and engaging conversation about human memory. The author seems quite effortlessly to be taking the reader on the exciting journey of discovering and rediscovering the essence of what we all can relate to – the memory of our past. The reader becomes an engaged companion on the exciting ride, a listener and a participant in the process of negotiating what will form the fundamental ideas behind the concept of collective memory. The absence of well-established frameworks on which the author is *supposed* to build her/his argument and the absence of any references to those who came before make one realize that the task of pioneering a field of scientific inquiry can be daunting, exciting, and quite liberating.

When reading Halbwachs's (1980) early essays on memory one is struck by the clear merger of collective and individual memory in his conceptualization of human memory. The social environment in which such memories are constructed, their dynamic nature, and their tendency to be constantly reconstructed bring them closer to each other than they

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appear in the study of collective and autobiographical memories over the last half-century, in which each category is clearly compartmentalized. For Halbwachs, collective and individual memories seem to represent unity rather than disparity; the remembrance of personal memories is viewed from the perspective of a group whose presence is essential for triggering and validating such instances of remembrance; and the removal of an individual from a group results in forgetting or distortion of shared memories. Later I will be coming back to Maurice Halbwachs, whose original ideas still resonate strongly half a century later.

However, historically, the study of memory underwent compartmentalization, with autobiographical memory studied by cognitive psychologists and collective memory falling in the domain of historians and anthropologists. Despite recent calls from both sides to bring the two fields together and the assertion that autobiographical memory is an integral part of collective memory, the demarcation line dividing the territory has not been trespassed. Half a century after Halbwachs had conceptualized the main tenets of collective memory, Boyer and Wertsch (2009), in a groundbreaking volume *Memory in Mind and Culture*, took an interdisciplinary stance on the entire phenomenon of human memory. As the authors state,

> it makes little sense to think of memory as "individual" (for psychologists) or "cultural" (for historians and anthropologists), as the most fascinating phenomena occur in the individual creation of cultural and historical representations. To understand those phenomena, one should not be "interdisciplinary," if that means concocting a witches' brew of disparate results. Rather, one should ignore disciplines altogether and forge ahead. (Boyer & Wertsch, 2009, p. 1)

The authors' call for breaking the boundaries of disciplines and my great interest in human memory have encouraged me to enter territory that, for me, remains largely uncharted. Through reading and discussing works by leading scholars in the field of collective memory, I hope to obtain my own voice and vision in the quest for one of the most abstract yet omnipresent phenomenon: our remembrance of the past.

In this chapter, I will discuss major issues related to the study of collective memory as it developed over the last half a century, such as history versus collective memory, memory distortion and forgetting, collective memory and identity, language and memory, generational differences in remembering the collective past, and collective memory of political events.

Collective Memory: Historical Background

Memory is an inherently vital faculty that is present in humans and animals. But only humans have the ability to remember personal events throughout

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their lifetimes and to share memories with a larger group, whether it be their family, circle of friends, colleagues, or an entire nation. Every nation and every group of people with a shared past have certain memories that are unique, important, and often central to the group's identity. The importance of such memories can shift with time; some memories can become less important and fade away whereas others can be reinforced due to numerous socio-cultural, political, and psychological factors.

The very terminology used in the field of collective memory may evoke mixed feelings: Why, in Western scholarship, do we talk so much about the concept of a *collective* in regard to this type of memory if *collective* is, in general, such a foreign concept for individualist societies? In contrast, being raised in the collectivist society of Russia, I was exposed to such concepts on a daily basis. The idea of building a strong collective in school or at a workplace was considered very important. My prior research involving the idea of collectivism and individualism construct (Isurin, 2011), first promoted by Hofstede (2001) and later developed by a few scholars in cross-cultural psychology (e.g., Triandis, 1989, 1990), has made me wonder: Do collectivist societies tend to form stronger collective memories as a result of their inherent orientation on group norms and because they value the relationship with the group much higher than do individualist societies, where a group or collective does not play such a defining role? Although this question will remain outside the scope of my current inquiry, it shows that breaking the rules and entering a new field from a different discipline or perspective indeed may raise questions never before considered.

Another issue concerns the difference between the concept of memory and that of remembering. As in the field of cognitive psychology – where memory is studied from the perspective of its construct whereas remembering, access, and retrieval are considered cognitive processes – the field of collective memory has undergone the same search for the right terminology, with the words "remembrance" and "remembering" being used to reflect the dynamic nature of the memory process. In this book, I will be using the two words interchangeably, as I am fully aware that my study of collective memory in Russians is one of remembrance, as fluid, dynamic, and inconsistent within the group as it might be.

If we go back to the fundamentals in the field of collective memory, we have to refer again to Maurice Halbwachs, who promoted the idea of remembrance as a collective process that requires the individual to belong to a group. He asserts that

> from the moment when we and . . . other witnesses belong to the same group and think in common about . . . matters, we maintain contact with this group and

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remain capable of identifying ourselves with it and merging our past with it. Putting it another way, we must from this moment on never have lost the habit and capacity to think and remember as a member of the group to which we all belonged, to place ourselves in its viewpoint and employ the conceptions shared by its members. (Halbwachs, 1980, pp. 25–26)

The original idea of Maurice Halbwachs – namely, that groups form their own memories – has been criticized by Frederic Bartlett, the founder of modern memory studies in psychology. Bartlett (1967) argues that a group cannot have a memory of its own and that we should talk about memory *in* the group rather than memory *of* the group. This became the foundation on which the two interpretations of collective memory were formed: The former is known as a *strong version* of collective memory; the latter constitutes a *distributed version* of collective memory. Despite being critical of Halbwachs's conceptualization of group memory, Bartlett recognizes the role of the social environment that is crucial for any individual and group recall:

Social organization gives a persistent framework into which all detailed recall must fit, and it very powerfully influences both the manner and the matter of recall. Moreover, this persistent framework helps to provide those "schemata" which are a basis for the imaginative reconstruction called memory. It is equally probable that the social creation and clash of interests aid in the development of the specific images which . . . may be present in individual recall. But we need to go far beyond this if we are to show that the social group itself possesses a capacity to retain and recall its own past. (Bartlett, 1967, p. 296)

Although collective memory should not be likened to individual memory, whereby a group of people is presented as a large abstract entity having a mind and memory of its own, such as America's memory of 9/11 or Russia's memory of WWII, the role of individual participants in the process of collective remembrance should not be downplayed either. The individual memories unique to each member of the group ultimately contribute to the collective memory shared by the group. Even as a person who was born well after WWII, I still carry the enormous weight of the war's consequences in my personal memory and the collective memory passed down to my entire generation. Having lost a grandfather and an uncle to starvation during the siege of Leningrad, having another grandfather wounded in battle, and being raised by parents who as children happened to live in Nazi-occupied territory, I was well exposed to family stories going back to those times. Also, every child born after WWII in Leningrad had to live with the almost inescapable sense of guilt of having food on the table while knowing that more than a million people had died of starvation during the 900-day blockade. My dislike of pasta

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