PART I

Introduction to Collective Remembering
"In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue. He had three ships and left from Spain; He sailed through sunshine, wind and rain. In the 1960s, Columbus Day was a national holiday in the United States of America (USA), commemorating the “discovery” of the Americas. Today, I put that word discovery in quotes, because in only twenty-one states do workers get a day off in commemoration of 1492, and in three states and the District of Columbia, people get a holiday on that day, but in celebration of Native Americans’ Day (or Indigenous Peoples’ Day). Eleven states have renamed Columbus Day to honor indigenous peoples instead. One state (Oklahoma) celebrates Columbus Day and Native American Day together.¹

The reason for this is the argument today over what Columbus achieved. Some say he did not discover an empty land, but began the taking of the Americas from Native Americans in a process tantamount to genocide (Thornton, 1993). The word holocaust has been used by others (Stannard, 1993). Furthermore, to the horror of Italian American groups at the forefront of creating and celebrating Columbus Day, there is now substantial evidence that Columbus as governor and viceroy of the West Indies was so brutal and avaricious (even by sixteenth-century standards) that he caused a decline in the native population so drastic he had to be recalled to Spain.² This killing off of the locals led to the large-scale importation of slaves from Africa to run the sugar cane plantations that exported this precious delicacy to Europe (Castro, 2007). Commemoration of Christopher Columbus is now contentious, with different groups producing different narratives of how he should be remembered (Hitchmough, 2013; Kubal, 2008). Recent research by Eason et al. (2021) suggests that

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¹ www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/10/10/working-on-columbus-day-it-depends-on-where-you-live/

² www.theguardian.com/world/2006/aug/07/books.spain?__text=As%20governor%20and%20viceroy%20of%20Caribbean%20country%20Dominican%20Republic.&text=A%20woman%20who%20dared%20also%20travelled%20to%20other%20Caribbean.
The Rise of Research on Collective Remembering

national identity in the form of in-group glorification, and negative stereotypes of Native Americans are two major factors maintaining support for Columbus Day as a national holiday in the USA.

The metaphorical takedown of Columbus has in recent years been accompanied by the physical takedown of statues commemorating Civil War figures representing the Confederacy, as monuments to racism. The legends I grew up with in America in the 1960s, from the brave explorer Columbus, to George Washington who cut down his father’s cherry tree and would not tell a lie to save himself, to Robert E. Lee, noble warrior of the Confederacy, have all been challenged as mythology. It has become more difficult to tell a story about the making of the USA without controversy. Identity demands are coming from a plurality of directions, and from a range of groups, some of whom were previously silent, or silenced (Rothberg, 2011).

Substantial continuity remains. Part of the complexity in narrating American identity and American history is that much has changed in the past 250 years, but certain foundations, like the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and its Federal system of states, are still inscribed in American hearts, minds, and institutions. For every point made in the name of multiculturalism or decolonization, there is a counterpoint in terms of nationalism or patriotism. This speaks of continuity in the midst of change, a common pattern in the evolution of a national political culture (Liu & Pratto, 2011; Zerubavel, 2003).

Americans are not alone in their continuing quest for a narrative that tells a better story of who they are, where they came from, and where they should be going. Every people that seeks immortality as a collective claims history as a warrant of legitimacy (Malinowski, 1926). History provides not only explanation, but justification of who we are, how we came to be, why we have a rightful claim to the land and the way we live on that land (Liu & Hilton, 2005). In recent years, scholars from a variety of disciplines have increasingly come to realize that history is not simply a record of facts, but the representation of identity for a people (Olick et al., 2011), and the basis for legitimacy in their claims to sovereignty over a land (Zerubavel, 2003).

In the context of this “memory boom,” the work of Maurice Halbwachs (1925/1992) on collective memory is of central importance. In contrast to a psychological approach to memory focusing on the physiological memory of the individual, Halbwachs (1925/1992) centered his attention on how memory is structured by the social frameworks required for people to
live together in society. In their overview, Hirst et al. (2018) observe that collective memory encompasses two forms: “one that treats collective memories as consisting of publicly available symbols maintained by society, and another that defines collective memory as individual memories shared by members of a community that bear on the collective identity of that community” (p. 439). This book will discuss how top-down and bottom-up forms of collective remembering work together as actions, of societies, institutions, as well as individuals and the groups they belong to. By examining collective remembering as actions at the interface between the individual and the collectives they belong to, I hope to author a deeper understanding of how the political culture of a society is formed, maintained, and how and why it changes.

Collective remembering is a fantastic forum for such an investigation, because it is what Bhaskar (1975/2008) describes as an open system. This is a theoretical frame where the objects of analysis enter into and depart from analysis. New events are always entering into the frame of collective memory as society encounters new “history-making” challenges, and older events and people are sometimes forgotten. As this happens, the political culture of that society changes. Collective memories are indicators of political culture: “the political system as internalized in the cognitions, feelings, and evaluations of its population” (Almond & Verba, 1963, p. 14). The person who thinks of 9-11 as the most important recent event in American history is representing America differently than the person who recalls World War II (WWII) as more important. Who “we” are, what “we” choose to remember from history, and how “we” interpret these collective memories are indicative of national identity. The memories of the nation as a collective are furthermore contingent on what groups are positioned as part of the nation, and what groups are considered as allies or enemies. Social identities like nationality are thus dynamic, and shaped by the social context surrounding the group (Turner et al., 1987). Given this dynamism, defining the content and the boundaries of group identity, and acting the part of the “group paragon” is a performative aspect of leadership (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). Political leaders can act as “identity entrepreneurs,” providing interpretations of history to define meaning for a group and mobilize a political agenda.

Political leaders draw upon “schematic narrative templates” (Wertsch, 2002) and historical charters (Liu & Hilton, 2005) that organize knowledge and beliefs about the past to direct future group activity. These story templates “grasp together” facts and bind them in a system of meaning that
is implicitly shared by members of a group. Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, in a speech commemorating the Nazi surrender on the seventy-fifth anniversary of VE Day, says the following of his country Germany:\footnote{www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/EN/Frank-Walter-Steinmeier/Reden/2020/05/200508-75th-anniversary-World-War-II.html.}:

8 May 1945 was indeed a day of liberation. But at the time people did not perceive it as such.

The liberation of 1945 was imposed from outside. It had to come from outside – this country had descended too far into the evil, the guilt, it had brought upon itself. Likewise the economic reconstruction and democratic renewal in the western part of Germany were only made possible by the generosity, far-sightedness and readiness for reconciliation of our former foes.

But we, too, played a part in the liberation. In our internal liberation. This did not take place on 8 May 1945, and not on a single day. Rather it was a long and painful process which involved facing up to the past, investigating what people knew and what they had colluded in. Raising painful questions within families and between the generations. Fighting to stop silence and denial from prevailing.

It took decades – decades in which many Germans of my generation gradually found their peace with this country. These were also decades in which our neighbours came to trust us again, decades that allowed a cautious resumption of relations, from ever closer union within the European Communities to the treaties concluded in the course of West Germany’s Ostpolitik. It was in these decades that the people of Eastern Europe’s courage and desire for freedom grew until they could no longer be kept behind walls – leading to that gladdest moment of liberation: Germany’s peaceful revolution and reunification. These decades of struggling with our history were decades that allowed democracy to mature in Germany.

And the struggle continues to this day. Remembrance never ends. There can be no deliverance from our past. For without remembrance we lose our future.

It is only because we Germans look our past in the face and because we accept our historic responsibility that the peoples of the world have come to trust our country once more. And this is why we, too, can have confidence in this Germany. This is the core of an enlightened, democratic spirit of patriotism. No German patriotism can come without its cracks. Without light and shadow; without joy and sorrow, gratitude and shame.

Rabbi Nachman once said: “No heart is as whole as a broken heart.” Germany’s past is a fractured past – with responsibility for the murdering of millions and the suffering of millions. That breaks our hearts to this day. And that is why I say that this country can only be loved with a broken heart.

I quote President Steinmeier’s speech at length not only because it resonates with me emotionally, but because it illustrates so beautifully...
principles associated with collective remembering: as a public act using culturally mediated tools (see Wertsch, 2002, chapter 2). Steinmeier’s speech was occasioned top-down, to commemorate the end of WWII (in Europe), according to the political and cultural agenda of the German state. Commemorations are often used by states to construct (or reconstruct) national identity (Schwartz, 1982). This speech is but an instance of a narrative articulated by not only President Steinmeier, but his predecessor Gauck, and Chancellor Merkel when addressing the Middle Eastern refugee crisis from 2015 to 2018 (Lienen & Cohrs, 2021). Germany is presented as a country that has learned from a negative past to become a respected advocate for a free and united Europe that offers a safe haven for refugees on humanitarian grounds. In terms of the thematic content of his speech, Steinmeier acts as an identity entrepreneur (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001) who offers a fresh articulation of who the German people are in light of how they remember WWII. The “beacon of humanitarianism” discourse that he and other leaders of Germany have adopted (Lienen & Cohrs, 2021) is a socially creative way (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) to reconfigure a negative past for German identity.

In contrast to the reconciliatory tone used by President Steinmeier, sometimes a state uses commemorations to celebrate a victory in its history that causes pain for another group they defeated, or claims victimization by an enemy, thus reminding people of group differences (McAuley & Tonge, 2007). Steinmeier’s interpretive action stands in sharp contrast to Chancellor Adolf Hitler of the Third Reich, who attributed Germany’s defeat in World War I (WWI) to a “stab in the back” by traitors in his autobiography Mein Kampf. President Steinmeier narrates Germany’s defeat in WWII as liberation from Nazi tyranny, and as the basis for Germany to be a moral nation (Olick, 2016). He says “We live in a vigorous and well-established democracy, in the thirtieth year of a reunified Germany, at the heart of a peaceful and united Europe. We are a trusted member of the international community and we reap the fruits of cooperation and partnership around the world. We Germans can definitely now say that the day of liberation is a day of thanksgiving!” In this articulation, the German people are free, enlightened, democratic, and grateful to be allied to others who uphold the same values. They are committed to the institutions established after the war to realize these values. Germans have a duty to remember to love their country in a “broken hearted way,” that opens them up to a future as part of a peaceful Europe and a democratic free world.

However, not everyone in Germany will resonate with Steinmeier’s vision. As in much of Europe, there is a rising faction of the disgruntled in
Germany, who oppose the European Union. They oppose the vision of a united Europe with a single currency, shared regulations, and free movement between countries. They appear nostalgic for a simpler and more nationalistic vision of themselves standing alone, or in opposition to others (Mudde, 2007). Steinmeier’s representation of history is relevant to the present because even after many years of European integration, most people still identify much more with their individual states than with the European Union (Petithomme, 2008). Thus, his attempt at identity entrepreneurship may not be well-received by everyone in the state he represents. Understanding how people receive attempts by their political leaders to mobilize history to support their political positions is a crucial area of scientific inquiry into the making and changing of political cultures.

The Germany of today is decidedly a different state than the Germany of the late nineteenth century, which was forged as a unity in the blood and iron of three wars engineered by Prussian Chancellor Otto von Bismarck (Pflanze, 1963). Today Bismarck and Kaiser Wilhelm I cannot be celebrated as founding figures for Germany in the same way that George Washington and Thomas Jefferson are inscribed in Mount Rushmore for the USA (Iggers, 2002). Too much has changed: The constitution of Bismarck was scrapped, and the German monarchy was abolished after defeat in WWI. After that, Hitler’s defeat in WWII was narrated by some as ground zero, a new beginning, where memories of the Holocaust are foundational and cannot be denied (Levy & Sznaider, 2004). Germany’s pattern is substantial discontinuity (or rupture) in political culture, while retaining aspects of the deep structure of language, customs, and the arts; so that unlike Bismarck and Kaiser Wilhelm I, Beethoven and Goethe are still alive in the cultural memory of German people. Such larger concerns are described as cultural continuity according to Sani et al. (2007), whereas the focus of this book is on perceived historical continuity that relates more specifically to political culture rather than to a general notion of culture at large.

A Representational Approach to Understanding Political Culture and Societal Change

America and Germany are both wealthy Western democracies, and political allies that share much in common. But differences in their pasts and how these are collectively remembered set them up for massively different foreign policies, and vastly different reactions to incoming historical events (Liu & Hilton, 2005). From the end of WWII to 1994, Wikipedia lists the USA as
having been involved in more than twenty military conflicts abroad, including three major wars. It lists Germany as having been involved in none. The first time the Germans became involved in military conflict after WWII was 1995 in Bosnia, and this triggered a constitutional crisis. Germany was persuaded by its NATO allies to bomb Serbia only in the wake of strong evidence that ethnic cleansing was taking place, and under fears that lightly armed UN peacekeepers would be overwhelmed. Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, a founding member of the German Green party and avowed pacifist, agonized about his decision to agree to send Germans to war, saying, “[w]hen you are confronted by genocide and mass human suffering, you cannot sit passively with your hands folded and ignore the killing of innocent civilians. I believe there are certain human values that are more important than pacifism, and those are rooted deeply in my conscience.” His words seem to echo Steinmeier’s passion for loving Germany with “a broken heart,” a sharp contrast to the more aggressive nationalism evident in much of contemporary American political discourse, especially its militancy in facing and triumphing over its rival the Soviet Union after WWII (e.g., Fukuyama, 1992). Reciprocity, redemption, and taking responsibility are discursive strategies useful in dealing with a negative history (Lienen & Cohrs, 2021; Obradović & Bowe, 2021) whereas resonance, continuity, and a concern for posterity are characteristic discourses for leveraging a positive history (Kirkwood, 2019).

Representations of history are thus influential in shaping political culture. Victory in WWII for the USA and defeat for Germany sent the two countries on completely different historical trajectories. Collective memories of this embed representations of continuity versus change. Theoretically, political continuity amidst general culture change, and political discontinuity distinct from general cultural change are two important patterns among a number of possible historical trajectories (Liu & Pratto, 2018). This can be investigated from the perspective of social representations theory (Moscovici, 1988), where “social representations are defined as a shared system of knowledge and belief that facilitates communication about social objects, and culture is conceptualized as a meta-system of social representations mediated by language, symbols, and their institutional carriers” (Liu & Sibley, 2009). The approach to conceptualize political aspects of societal change through representations and
representational change is a purposeful limitation to solve a wicked problem. Culture change is really complicated and multi-determined. There is much in culture change that is not visible in people’s subjective perceptions: Free recall of the most important events in world history, for example, were dominated by politics, warfare, and terrorism (Liu et al., 2005, 2009). The impacts of economics, technological advances, and disease were underestimated, apparently forgotten. But to develop a scientific theory of culture change, even in a mere subset like political culture change, simplification is required. The cause of general culture change comes from many directions, and across too many different time scales for any theoretical system to manage parsimoniously. Erll (2011b) provides an admirable and taxonomic literature review, vaster than what is undertaken here, but also more difficult to grasp in its entirety because of its range and diversity. Restricting attention to collective memories as central representations in the making of political culture is a tractable simplification because such a formulation carries with it the force of self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton, 1948). In this sense, the past weighs on the present in guiding collective action (Liu & Hilton, 2005), maintaining political continuity through shared memory and belief, regardless of how accurately these depict actual history.6

This issue of representation trumping factuality is not a minor point. Because they believe that representations of the past influence the present, identity entrepreneurs often attempt to engineer a representation of the past that can be shown to be fictional. Malinowski (1926) writes about the “warrant of antiquity” as a claim to legitimate power that is manufactured by a story of continuity between the present, and the ingroup’s origins in the past. Classic research by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) on the invention of tradition theorizes that states and factions within them manufacture legitimacy through constructing a “suitable past” (p. 1). They describe three forms of invention: “(a) those establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or the membership of groups . . . (b) those establishing or legitimizing institutions . . . and (c) those whose main purpose was socialization, the inculcation of beliefs, value systems, and conventions” (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p. 9). All three imply that states, and subgroups within them, seek to manufacture accounts of history and historical continuity that justify their own version of the social order. English historian Hugh Trevor-Roper (1983) memorably aroused the ire

6 See Levitt, 2004, for graphic illustration of its limitations in identifying the causes of crime in the USA.