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Genocide and Memory

Introduction

We live in a memory-obsessed age. Western culture is suffused with autobiographies, especially with traumatic life narratives about the legacies of abusive childhoods. Tourism consists to a large extent of the consumption of 'heritage' such as castles and stately homes; memorials and museums increasingly dot the landscape, and commemorative events seem to occur with increasing frequency. The history of genocide is also affected by these broad cultural trends; indeed, in some respects it exemplifies them. The perpetration of genocide requires the mobilisation of collective memories, as does the commemoration of it. For the individual victims of genocide, traumatic memories cannot be escaped; for societies, genocide has profound effects that are immediately felt and that people are exhorted (and willingly choose) never to forget. 'Dark tourism' – visits to death camps or other sites of mass murder – is fully integrated into the tourist trail.[1] Although thinkers as diverse as Friedrich Nietzsche, Ernest Renan, Paul Ricoeur and Marc Augé might be right to suggest that forgetting is essential for the health of society, genocide is less amenable to willed oblivion than most events because of the deep wounds it creates; thus, in the memory politics that surround it, genocide can scar societies long before and long after its actual occurrence. This chapter shows how genocide is bound up with memory, on an individual level of trauma and on a collective level, in terms of the creation of stereotypes, prejudice and post-genocide politics.

Before demonstrating the validity of these claims, it is necessary to say something about 'memory studies'. The basic premise of the study of 'collective memory' is not a quasi-mystical belief in the existence of a social mind, or that societies can be treated as organic wholes (in the manner supposed by many genocide perpetrators); rather, it is the claim that, in order to live meaningfully as a human being, that is, in order to have memories (for, as neurologists increasingly show, memory and selfhood are intrinsically linked), one has to exist in a social setting. This claim, which has its origin

in the work of French sociologists Emile Durkheim and Maurice Halbwachs, and perhaps reaches its zenith in Ricoeur's last major work, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2000), overturns the intuitively appealing 'methodological individualism' of much twentieth-century thought, installing in its stead a 'methodological holism'. Whilst groups do not have memories in the neurological sense and thus there is no organic basis to the term 'collective memory', nevertheless, 'Collective memories originate from shared communications about the meaning of the past that are anchored in the life-worlds of individuals who partake in the communal life of the respective collective.'[2]

Thus collective memory becomes something that the historian or other scholar can study; memory can be a subject for critical historiography in the same way as gender or class. Historians can think theoretically about what collective memory is, how it is constructed and what it excludes, and they can provide detailed case studies, for example, in examining Italians' memories of fascism or the ways in which the My Lai massacre has been domesticated in American collective memory. Most often historians have focused on what Pierre Nora calls '*lieux de mémoire*', sites such as memorials, museums or significant buildings (like the Panthéon in Paris, the Neue Wache in Berlin or the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC), showing how a group's (usually a nation's) self-identity is anchored in these sites of memory. What such sites exclude becomes as relevant for understanding collective memory as the narratives they promote.

More recently, some historians have criticised this model for studying collective memory.[3] It is too easy to do, they say, because it is focused on material objects or aesthetic representations whose meaning can be shown to change over time as people interact with them differently under changed circumstances. For example, the meaning of Auschwitz to Catholic Poles living under communism before 1989 was different from the meanings that the camp acquired after the end of the Cold War once the site became internationalised. From being a site that acted for Poles as a metaphor for the evils of foreign occupation, Auschwitz became a key site in the Europeanisation of Holocaust consciousness when, after the collapse of communism, its overwhelmingly Jewish victims were increasingly recognised. Far more meaningful than studying sites of memory, according to the critics, would be to trace the ways in which conflicts over memory affect social relations. In other words, we need to show how memory is linked with power. Doing so, argues Wulf Kansteiner, requires scholars of memory to think more carefully about their methodology. The scholarship, in his opinion, needs to delineate more clearly the distinctions between individual and collective memory and to think more about reception than about representation. It would benefit from adopting some of the vocabulary and methodology of media studies, with the result that collective memory would be understood as the result of the interaction of three 'types of historical factors:

the intellectual and cultural traditions that frame all our representations of the past, the memory makers who selectively adopt and manipulate these traditions, and the memory consumers who use, ignore, or transform such artefacts according to their own interests'.[4]

But for historians memory is more than just a research topic.[5] Historians are also part of the broader culture, one that already 15 years ago was diagnosed as suffering from a 'surfeit of memory'.[6] Critics of the memory culture argue that, like 'heritage', memory is exclusionary, reactionary and nostalgic; at its worst, it can be accused in its quest for authenticity and 're-enchantment' of 'projecting "psychoneurotic jargon" onto the memory of various national or (more often) ethnoracial groups'.[7] Memory is, in fine, one of the more dangerous tools of identity politics. Thus, scholars need to consider their own investments in memory politics, especially when writing about subjects like genocide. Interventions in, for example, debates about commemorative practices in Rwanda, cannot be made on a whim. But finally, memory is inseparable from history, so that even when the current 'memory obsession' has passed, when the piles of confessional literature have been pulped and the commemorative ceremonies are unattended, still, as Ricoeur notes, memory will be the 'bedrock' of history. The fact that people can say that 'this has happened' remains the starting point for historiography.[8] Studying the links between genocide and memory means, then, examining the ways in which collective memories of past humiliations or victories are mobilised in the present, showing how individuals and societies are traumatised by genocide, and analysing the ways in which post-genocidal commemorative practices sustain collective memories.

In 1950, Champetier de Ribes, the French Prosecutor, stated that Nazi crimes 'were so monstrous, so undreamt of in history throughout the Christian era up to the birth of Hitlerism, that the term "genocide" has had to be coined to define it'. As the legal scholar Alexander Greenawalt, who cites de Ribes, notes, the United Nations Genocide Convention (UNGC) was not merely a way of codifying individual guilt. The concept of genocide 'is as much about questions of history and collective memory'.[9] The background to the UNGC and questions of the definition of genocide have been explored elsewhere; here I wish only to develop the point that genocide and memory are inseparable, for reasons of the cultural freight that the term contains as well as, more obviously, the enormity of the crime itself. In what follows, I will analyse the nature of this relationship.

Memory as mobilization

It is tempting, when trying to understand perpetrators of genocide, to assume that they are convinced of their own superiority, that they are the arrogant bearers of an ideology that requires the merciless elimination of the weak. For example, one interpretation of the Holocaust suggests that behind

the murder of the Jews lay a deeper desire to overthrow the moral law – represented by the Ten Commandments, the basis of Judeo-Christian civilisation – and reinstate the right to commit genocide, as in the virile, martial societies of ancient Greece.[10] Such rhetoric is not hard to find, especially in colonial settings where the social Darwinist notion of superior races 'superseding' the inferior was common. Yet, in fact, most genocides result from processes of worsening national or imperial crisis that give rise to a feeling of massive insecurity or existential threat among the perpetrators. A curious, paradoxical logic is at work: genocide perpetrators commit the most horrific crimes in the belief – always exaggerated and sometimes outright fantastical – that they are defensive acts to ensure that they will not suffer the same fate. In other words, barbaric actions are justified for fear of being subjected to barbaric actions. Germans in Southwest Africa (Namibia) 'did not commit massacres in the colonies because they were in a strong position and had the power to decide on life or death of the indigenous population. On the contrary, German settlers felt unsafe and were afraid to lose their existence.'[11] In some cases, as in Rwanda, a history of Hutu-Tutsi conflict from at least 1959 provided the background to genocide. In the Ottoman Empire, small numbers of Armenians joined revolutionary movements that defied the state.[12] Yet in none of these cases was it necessary for the perpetrators to respond by seeking to slaughter the targeted population. What mobilised them to do so, what exacerbated the sense of threat to the point at which genocide became a viable and acceptable option, was fear underpinned by memory: of former oppression or supposed treason. Specifically, collective memories of past suffering are almost always brought to bear on current crises, lending them cultural meaning – the weight of dead ancestors weighing on the minds of the living – and imbuing them with added ferocity. Memory fuels genocide.[13]

Stalin's Soviet Union and Pol Pot's Cambodia both illustrate the point. In the former, the construction of the 'Kulak', which began with Stolypin's reforms before 1917, revived fears of starvation and social conflict. Belief that peasants were hoarding food, which would lead to death on a massive scale for urban dwellers, then permitted massive oppression.[14] And in the latter, Khmer Rouge support was massively boosted by the effects of American bombing in the early 1970s. The response to this attack does not explain the ferocity of the 'auto-genocide' between 1975 and 1979, but memories of French colonial wars, Prince Norodom Sihanouk's contempt for the majority rural population and the age-old fear of the Vietnamese certainly drove many ordinary Cambodians into the arms of the Khmer Rouge, as did the regime's revival of the grandeur of the Angkorian dynasty. As Ben Kiernan notes, 'The total reshaping of Cambodia under Pol Pot may be said to demonstrate the power of a myth.'[15]

The Rwandan example is equally full of such fears and fantasies, based on the memory of Hutu-Tutsi conflict from at least the Hutu Revolution of

1959 if not from the period of colonial rule (first German, then Belgian) from the late nineteenth century. Tutsi refugees and their children actively kept alive the memory of the land they had left (like Hutu refugees from Burundi in Tanzania[16]), so that even those young members of the RPF who had been born in Uganda and had never seen Rwanda felt that they were 'returning home' in 1994. And the memory of the colonial period, in which minority Tutsi domination was established according to the warped racial logic of the colonisers, was mobilised by Hutu extremists in the run-up to the genocide, especially as the framework for peace established by the Arusha Accords started collapsing.[17] Here the point about memory not as an organic phenomenon but as a key component of political power is especially clear. For although there had always been tensions between Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda since the colonial period, when the Belgian authorities institutionalised the distinction as 'racial',[18] there was nothing like a permanent state of war between the two 'communities', which were, after the post-revolutionary violence of the early 1960s, in fact thoroughly mixed. Only with the threat of war did Hutu extremists revitalise the memory of pre-1959 Rwandan society, dominated by the Tutsi minority, and whip up fear among the Hutu population that they should eliminate the Tutsis because otherwise this same fate would be reserved for them. Indeed, as recent research shows, the speed with which certain parts of the country threw themselves into participating in genocide was determined less by the reception of infamous propaganda such as the 'Hutu Ten Commandments', *Kangura* magazine or Radio Télévision Libres des Milles Collines, than affinity to the ruling MRND party, proximity to the front line and fear of the approaching RPF.[19] And, indeed, the RPF made equally effective use of collective memories of expulsion and exile, with violent results both during and after the genocide. Since the RPF took power, the government has come under increasing scrutiny by Western scholars who have grown suspicious of its 'harmonising perspective on pre-colonial society and history'. The fear that Rwandan memories of both the pre-colonial period and the 1994 genocide are being instrumentalised – for example, by labelling all Hutu refugees as génocidaires or by employing guilt discourses in the international arena – not only maintains RPF power but 'perpetuates violence in the Great Lakes'.[20]

Perhaps the most infamous example of such memory mobilisation is the speech given by Slobodan Milošević in 1989 at the site of the Battle of Kosovo Polje that took place 600 years earlier on 28 June 1389. That battle (and that date – also the day of Gavrilo Princip's shooting of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914) is ingrained into Serbian memory as a moment of military defeat at the hands of the Turks, but a moment of moral victory, on the basis of Knez Lazar choosing a heavenly instead of an earthly kingdom for the Serbs. As well as confirming the Serb nation's place in the divine realm, the myth established the continuity of the Serb nation

across the centuries and confirmed Serbia's right to its ancestral lands in Kosovo.[21] It was also the source of the 'betrayal syndrome' – Serb allegations that Muslims in Yugoslavia are 'that part of themselves which betrayed the "faith of their forefathers" '.[22] Milošević's speech is regularly cited as one of the key moments in his rise to power; his use of the legend of the battle became a central component in his ethno-nationalist arsenal and in the building of a nationalist consensus in Serbia. Although its significance can be overstated, this manipulation of Serbian national memory – which of course required grassroots activity to operationalise it, not Milošević alone – is key to understanding the 'ethnic cleansing' that accompanied the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s and, especially, the violent efforts to expel ethnic Albanians from Kosovo at a point when Serbia was already isolated as a pariah state in the eyes of the 'international community'. Extremists prevailed over moderates in Serbia because they persuaded a large enough constituency that 'the powerful can fear the weak'.[23]

More important even than the myth of Kosovo, which represents Serbian 'deep memory', was the memory of what had happened in World War II. In the 1990s, the self-identification of Serbian and Croatian paramilitaries as Chetniks and Ustashe respectively was a conscious echo of the war, when 'Independent Croatia' – which was more than just a Nazi puppet state under the leadership of the clerico-fascist collaborator Ante Pavelić – was responsible for the murder of tens of thousands of Serbs, Jews and Romanies. No serious historian doubts that Serbs were subjected to a genocidal onslaught under the rule of Nazi-protected Croatia, but the manipulation of the figures of the dead in the 1980s and 1990s was a key contributor to the worsening of relations between the two major components of the Yugoslav federation. Croatia's neo-fascist president, Franjo Tudjman, was not only a Holocaust denier but a belittler of Serb suffering during World War II, and Serbian historians and politicians regularly exaggerated the numbers killed at Jasenovac and elsewhere in order to spread fear throughout the Serbian population (especially outside of the borders of Serbia) as Yugoslavia was breaking apart. A figure of 700,000 Serb deaths at Jasenovac was commonly heard in the 1980s, when the true figure is likely to have been about 100,000. This strategy was highly effective, as fear of becoming victims of genocide divided previously mixed communities into ethnically separate groups: 'Everyone was traumatized by all the talk of World War Two atrocities', wrote Bogdan Denitch, 'even those who had seemed immune to nationalism.'[24] Reliable figures of the dead are still hard to come by, though the work of Tomislav Dulić, Robert M. Hayden and others has done much to bring clarity to this fraught issue – but scholarship alone is of course insufficient to quell ultra-nationalist ideologies.[25]

The Holocaust can also to some extent be seen through this lens. Dirk Moses argues that the Holocaust should be understood using a framework in which genocide is seen as a combination of colonial expansion, security

fears and subaltern revenge. Hitler drew on the overseas colonial experience, especially in India and North America, for inspiration for his own vision of a colonised Europe. The treatment of Ukrainians, Poles and other conquered nations certainly conforms to this colonial pattern, in which the 'natives' were to become a reservoir of slave labour. And the murder of the Jews, according to Moses, was in part a subaltern genocide, through which Hitler aimed to 'emancipate' Germany from perceived 'foreign occupation', that is, Jewish rule. Thus, whilst Slavic populations were regarded as *Untermenschen* (subhumans), suitable for enslavement, the Jews were a source of fear, for they sought to take over the world, and their elimination was a project of 'national liberation'.[26] Genocide, in Moses' formulation, 'is as much an act of security as it is racial hatred'.[27] It is worth noting that this stress on Nazi fears of Jews – as opposed to the standard narrative that stresses Nazi racial theory and the need to rid the world of inferior 'non-Aryans' – provides common ground between scholars who incorporate the Holocaust into the new comparative genocide framework and those who argue that the racial paradigm at the heart of the Nazi *Weltanschauung* ultimately owed less to race science than to a paranoid political conspiracy theory. This view suggests that the Nazis were not so much driven by their sense of superiority as by their fear of the power of 'the Jew'. Hence the lengths to which Goebbels went in his propaganda output to convince the German public that 'The Jews are guilty of everything!'[28] The source of this sense of existential threat was the 'stab-in-the-back' legend from 1918, the belief that Germany lost the Great War because the Jews had betrayed the country. Michael Geyer notes that 'The rhetoric of *Endkampf* [final battle] found its most potent enemy in the figure of the Jew.'[29] Indeed, the feeding through of the memory of 1918 into Nazi ideology is a textbook example of the power of traumatic memory, of what Mark Levene calls 'the perpetrator's "never again" syndrome'. 'They should not have staged 9 November 1918 with impunity', fumed Hitler to the Czech foreign minister in 1939, 'That day shall be avenged... The Jews shall be annihilated in our land.'[30]

Post-genocidal traumatic memory

What happens after genocide? When communities are devastated, often all that is left is memory, and that a 'memory shot through with holes'.[31] Thus survivors turn inwards, and focus on themselves and the need for familial and community repair. This process is intrinsically related to memory, in the production of memorial books and monuments and, in interacting with the wider world, in attempts to bring what happened to general notice and to bring perpetrators to justice. If collective memory is essential for mobilising perpetrators, it also underpins attempts to commemorate genocide in its immediate aftermath and to advocate on behalf of survivors in their quest for justice.

A large literature now exists on reparations, compensation, restitution, war crimes trials, truth commissions and the developing international law on genocide since the founding of the International Criminal Court in 1999. In numerous contexts, from Guatemala to Poland, national commissions of enquiry have been set up to enquire into genocidal pasts. Austria's amnesia as regards its Nazi past was only an extreme example of a common phenomenon, and most European states have now 'discovered' the fact that Nazism and the Holocaust were part of their histories too. Since the Stockholm Forum in 2000, many European states have commissioned official investigations into their experience of and, often, collaboration with Nazi occupation and genocide. For example, the question of the extent of Nazi looting and of restitution for victims of the Holocaust has been an area of remarkable scholarly activity since the end of the Cold War.[32] Dan Diner has highlighted the relationship between memory and restitution in the light of the move to incorporate Holocaust Memorial Day into the European calendar and European cultural identity: 'a basic anthropological assumption' exists, thinks Diner, that presumes an 'organic interconnection between restituted property rights and the evocation of past memories, or vice versa: Restitution of property as the result of recovered memory'.[33] As he rightly notes, this link between memory and property is both plausible and problematic.

The issue of property and restitution provides a link between issues of memory that are victim community-focused and those that are aimed at the wider world. Perhaps post-genocide trials represent the purest form of the latter. The image of the 22 leading Nazis in the dock at Nuremberg is one of the most memorable of the twentieth century, and the memory of Nuremberg informs the currently developing international law on genocide and human rights.[34] Issues of compensatory and/or corrective justice, as well as penal/retributive justice, are in evidence in different sorts of trials, depending on whether these deal with reparations or punishments. The Eichmann Trial exemplifies a deliberately orchestrated attempt to bring Holocaust memory into the centre of Israeli public (as opposed to private) consciousness, and the significance of post-genocide trials for memory work is not to be underestimated. Even though it is widely acknowledged that the punishment in such cases can never fit the crime – 'The Nazi crimes, it seems, to me, explode the limits of the law; and that is precisely what constitutes their monstrousness'[35] – the impact of such trials explains why they have been avoided in so many instances, from France to Cambodia, by the use of delaying tactics. Numerous scholars identify shortcomings in the UNGC, and some assert that these shortcomings have negative consequences for the establishment of collective memories of genocide[36]; but there is a good reason why the authorities often resist and place obstacles in the way of post-genocide trials.

When memory is the subject, the focus of attention is usually on commemorative practices, monuments and museums. An enormous body of research now exists on Holocaust memorials and museums, of which there are many throughout the world.[37] But it is not only the Holocaust that provides material to test James E. Young's claim that monuments propagate an 'illusion of common memory'. The desire to memorialise traumatic events such as the Holocaust 'may actually spring from an opposite and equal desire to forget them', since the assumption that the monument is always there tends to encourage a lack of engagement with the issues.[38] A casual stroll through any major city, most of whose monuments remain unnoticed and, for the inhabitants, unidentifiable, suggests that Young has a point.

Apart from the question of whether genocide memorials too readily take their cue from representations of the Holocaust,[39] it is worth considering what forms of memory genocide memorials and museums are meant to encourage. One scholar suggests that 'fear of denial and scarcity of resources has resulted in the most graphic genocide memorial in history: that of Murambi' in Rwanda.[40] At the school where the massacre of several thousand Tutsis took place, the remains of the dead were left as the monument, giving rise to a 'traumatic silence' amongst visitors. The same is true of the bones that function as memorials at Nyamata, Nyarabuye and Ntarama, where 'the function of the memorials is not to obtain scientific evidence, but rather to produce an experience of memory'.[41] In Cambodia, the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crimes and the Choeung Ek 'killing fields' site serve a similar function. They also aim to preserve the memory of genocide, but do so by shocking visitors (mostly Western tourists), partly by deliberately borrowing a Holocaust-inspired form of representation, and partly by instilling a new national narrative.[42] And given that most of the Khmer Rouge leaders have escaped the trials that belatedly began in November 2007 with the trial of Kaing Guek Eav (the head of Tuol Sleng, known as Comrade Duch), their memorial function is somewhat soured. In both countries, however, the significance of the genocides means that the public display of body parts has been permitted, contrary to usual custom, although one should bear in mind that 'the maintenance of a site to communicate its cursedness or ruination is itself a sustained act of intervention'.[43] The sheer mass of bones in these monuments provokes the shock and horror that are appropriate responses to genocide, but their anonymity means that they also recapitulate the logic of genocide: the reduction of individual human beings to representatives of a (perpetrator-defined) group. Hence the importance of local memorials and commemorative festivals in Cambodia.[44] And hence the great significance of naming in general, as seen in many memorial practices, from the post-Holocaust *yizker-bikher* (memorial books) to the recovery of names in Spain's *Todos los nombres* project.[45]

Remembering genocide, however, is only one side of the coin of responding to such traumatic events. The other is willed amnesia. The conscious turn to memory tends – though this is not always true – to require the passage of time, for in the immediate aftermath of genocide the scars are still too deep. Especially in instances where former perpetrators and surviving victims have to live together in close proximity, closing off memory, or at least trying to do so, is a meaningful way of dealing with the past. In Rwanda, for example, what is striking about Susanne Buckley-Zistel's interviews with people from across the country's diverse population is that, whilst they often referred to the 1994 genocide, 'the causes of the genocide and the decades of tension between Hutu and Tutsi were ignored'.[46] Precisely the years of tension from 1959 onwards that saw the mobilization of memory in the early 1990s were the years that had to be 'forgotten' (that is to say, left undiscussed), rather than the events of the genocide itself. Gacaca trials can address issues of who did what in the context of the genocide, but leaves the underlying causes unaddressed. Only time will tell whether the Rwandan government's attempt to switch the country from a Francophone to an Anglophone position, to remove ethnic markers from ID cards, to rewrite Rwandan history and to advocate local as well as international forms of justice will help Rwandans to overcome these conflict-ridden memories.

In Bosnia, Cornelia Sorabji shows that memories of traumatic events continue 'to affect the social fabric', possibly sustaining the sort of hostility that fuelled conflict in the first place.[47] Sorabji correctly notes that the risk of analysing memory as a carrier of conflict is that it serves to perpetuate 'ancient hatreds' style arguments, which suggest that war in the Balkans is a more or less natural condition. Thus, she proposes to situate individuals and their memories – 'real' or 'transmitted' – into the context of the politics of memory, that is, the broader framework of competing narratives at group or state level that seek to 'channel' people's memories in certain ways. For since 'collective memory' is not an organic process (there is no group mind), it follows that the interrelationship between individuals ('memory users') and the group ('memory makers') needs to be analysed. One should not assume 'that human minds are endlessly manipulable and that schooling or the broadcasting of nationalistic commemorative ceremonies can fundamentally alter personal memories of strongly emotional, life-changing events such as violent bereavement'.[48]

Of course, one of the characteristics of traumatic memory is that it cannot be suppressed at will. It is by its very nature a memory that returns unexpectedly and uncontrollably to haunt individual victims and post-genocide societies. There is no need for memories of genocide to be 'recovered' – in the dubious manner of childhood abuse cases of the 1980s – since it has never gone away in the first place. Many scholars are now rightly critical of the view, fashionable in the 1990s especially in literary studies, that 'traumatic memory' is a widely applicable concept. The idea that whole societies

can be traumatised has been subjected to serious criticism, so that what we are generally left with is a more or less appropriate metaphor, not a concept that carries any of the precise, clinical meaning that it does when applied to individuals (when used carefully, and not just in the vernacular, as in 'what a traumatic day that was'). As Kansteiner notes, 'none of the existing concepts of Holocaust trauma is well suited to explain the effects of Holocaust representations on individuals or collectives who encounter the Final Solution only as a media event for educational or entertainment purposes'.[49] Still, in the case of societies that have experienced genocide, we are facing a situation where the concept of traumatic memory, if it has any use at all, is about as applicable as one can expect. This is why I noted at the outset that genocide is less amenable to willed amnesia than other events. What one actually sees, for example, in the cases of Bosnia or Rwanda mentioned above, is a form of repression, rather than a 'healthy forgetting' in the manner of Nietzsche. And what is repressed sooner or later returns, as we currently see with the memory of the post-Civil War 'repression' – a somewhat coy term for what some historians actually consider a genocidal onslaught – of the Nationalists' enemies in Spain.[50] The current tension in Bosnia and the desperate situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where estimates are that more than 5 million people have died in the post-1994 regional war, indicate that the politics of post-genocidal memories are matters of life and death.

Commemoration and memory conflicts

In February 2008, Kevin Rudd, the new Australian Prime Minister, made a decisive break with the politics of John Howard's conservative administration by making a public apology to the country's Indigenous people for the suffering endured by the 'stolen children' and their families. This policy, which began in the early twentieth century and lasted until the 1960s, removed 'half-caste' children from Aboriginal communities, bringing them up in separated institutions with the explicit aim of assimilating Aborigines to 'white' culture. This was a change from the early twentieth-century approach of biological absorption, or 'breeding out the black', which aimed to prevent white Australia from being threatened – so the fear went – by 'a large black population which may drive out the white'.[51] But whilst the official programme of biological absorption came to an end around 1940, the policy of child removal continued for several decades, devastating Aboriginal communities and leading Sir Ronald Wilson to proclaim in his 1997 *Bringing Them Home* report that the policy constituted genocide under article IIe of the UNGC. Whether or not this was an appropriate designation is in this context not the point (Rudd, incidentally, denies that it was genocide), so much as the fact that the subsequent furore revealed the way in which controversy about genocidal origins haunts 'national memory' generations after the cessation of frontier conflict.

The perpetration of genocide requires the mobilisation of memory, as does its punishment, though in the latter case there is a prima facie argument that 'memory mobilises itself'. Post-genocidal conflicts over memory, especially national memory, reveal another aspect of the question: memory can intervene in national politics in unexpected ways and present challenges to long-held and cherished national narratives. This is particularly true of settler societies and is best illustrated by the Australian case. With the emergence of what its opponents pejoratively called 'black armband history', debates over Australian history overshadowed contemporary political debates concerning how best to deal with troubled Aboriginal communities. Conservative historians, most notably Keith Windschuttle, charged 'politically correct' historians not only with failing to appreciate the true nature of frontier conflict, in which mutual incomprehension rather than genocidal intent was at work, but also with deliberately exaggerating the numbers of Aborigines killed in massacres.[52] Even official efforts at reconciliation were 'framed in nation-building language which implicitly refused to accommodate indigenous aspirations of difference'.[53] The 'history wars' that followed the publication of Windschuttle's revisionist book have been described as an 'Australian *Historikerstreit*', a designation that is revealing, since the West German debate about the uniqueness of the Holocaust that took place in the 1980s broke no new historical ground but was fundamental to the self-image of the Federal Republic. So in Australia, debates about how best to describe the past go to the heart of national narratives. The challenge to the Australian story of mates pulling together to create the 'lucky country' is one that did not sit well with the cultural politics of the Howard government, which was not open to the fact that historians of early Australia were not arguing that the colonisation of Australia was the same as the Holocaust, only that the similarities of the perpetrators' discourses of race and security in both cases ought to offer food for thought, particularly where current-day policies towards Aborigines are concerned.[54] But whilst debate rages in Australia – unlike in Germany – as to whether the country should be understood as a 'post-genocidal society', the fact that the colonisation process was 'objectively lethal' for the Aborigines continues to be overlooked.[55] Irrespective of the statistics and other facts being debated by historians (and here the comparison with the *Historikerstreit* is unconvincing, for in West Germany no historians questioned whether genocide had occurred), the bigger point is that Australian collective memory was being deconstructed and reconstructed anew or, for conservative historians, being undermined by subversives bent on ridiculing national heritage.

Even long after genocide has taken place, memory wars can erupt when group narratives are felt to be under threat. The history of nation-building is inseparable from the 'memories' that nations create, in the shape of the narratives or monuments they construct. Indeed, collective memory does

not emerge after the process has come to an end but is an essential part of the process whereby a group constitutes itself as a group; as Jens Bartelson notes, 'the coincidence of state and nation that we normally take to be the very culmination of a successful process of state formation had virtually been *remembered* into existence'.[56] The motives of memory, as James Young reminds us, are never pure.[57]

It is hardly surprising, then, that especially in societies founded on colonial settlement, challenges to positive national narratives are considered problematic. In Australia, whilst the official discourse has changed since the Rudd administration took office, historians such as Tony Barta fear that the 'public conversation' will remain dominated by a 'decent disposal' of the difficult questions. Nevertheless, by comparison with the United States, where the genocide question is still almost wholly ignored, even by prominent scholars of genocide, or Israel, where the memory of the Holocaust continues to poison relations with the Palestinians with devastating consequences, at least in Australia these memory conflicts are being articulated in the public sphere.[58] 'Memory wars' have characterised the whole world since the end of the Cold War, from Romania to Argentina, South Africa to France. In post-genocidal societies, as we see in Bosnia or the DRC, such conflicts are potentially destabilising and certainly have the power not only to inspire a cosmopolitan culture of human rights but also new outbursts of resentment and revanchism. The only sure conclusion is that memory cannot be ignored and that engagement with the issues – if not resolution of them – remains essential.

Conclusion

In a key article on the historical study of memory, Alon Confino asks: 'if the study of memory focuses creatively on how people construct a past through a process of appropriation and contestation, is the real problem not, perhaps, that people construct the past by using the term "memory" at all?'[59] There is, in other words, a danger of studying a phenomenon ('memory') by taking it as its own explanation. This problem, however, is not merely a methodological one of memory studies but a reflection of the complex place that 'memory' holds in contemporary societies. For memory is not simply synonymous with the way in which the past is represented in the present; it is itself constitutive of the present. Memory and identity go hand in hand.

Thus, irrespective of methodological problems, issues connected with memory will continue to resonate. Exclusivist, exclusionary memories remain powerful in many contexts; the generation of genocidal ideologies through the manipulation of memory is as much a possibility as it ever was. Indeed, memory wars by no means guarantee a peaceful resolution or mutually agreeable arbitration between competing versions of the past. As Peter Fritzsche notes, the reason that national memories 'remain so resonant'

is 'not because they are more true, but because the narratives of collective guilt and collective victimisation that they generate have the effect of recognising and commemorating individual suffering in socially meaningful, if tendentious, ways'.[60] 'Memory studies' is not an academic game but an investigation into a phenomenon that can be as dangerous as playing with fire. For this reason, memory cannot be avoided or swept aside. Despite the risks of perpetuating old divisions or reopening unhealed wounds, grappling with memory, especially after traumatic events like genocide, remains essential in order to remind the victims that they are not the worthless or less than human beings that their tormentors have portrayed them as. For nothing is more human, and thus more geared towards the generation of meaning where meaning is otherwise absent (or at least to 'keeping watch over absent meaning'[61]), than the broad spectrum of practices that come under the heading of 'memory'.

70. Jules Monnerot, 'Politique en connaissance de cause', in Groupe de la 'Nation Française' (ed.), *Tribunes Libre 29: Écrits pour une renaissance* (Paris: Plon, 1958), 3–73, here 8–9.
71. Monnerot, 'Politique en connaissance de cause', 11, 27–28, 38, 72–73.
72. Jules Monnerot, 'La constitution du mythe "fascisme" en France et l'institution politique de ce mythe', in Club de L'Horloge (ed.), *Socialisme et fascisme: une même famille?* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1984), 61–72, here 63. Monnerot developed these thoughts on 'the myth of fascism in France' in his short book, *Désintox*, which was dedicated to the members of the Club de L'Horloge.
73. Monnerot, *Sociologie de la révolution*, 499–500, 592; cf. *Sociology of Communism*, 159.
74. Monnerot, *Sociology of Communism*, 235.
75. Monnerot, *Sociologie de la révolution*, 592; cf. 545–47.
76. Ibid., 633. This claim was quite correct; for a recent assessment of big business's relationship with Nazism, see Christopher Kobrak and Andrea H. Schneider, 'Big Business and the Third Reich: An Appraisal of the Historical Arguments', in Dan Stone (ed.),*The Historiography of the Holocaust* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 141–72.
77. Denis Hollier, 'A Farewell to the Pen', in Zeev Sternhell (ed.), *The Intellectual Revolt Against Liberal Democracy 1870–1945* (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1996), 223–24. As Hollier notes, 'calls for authority' such as Monnerot's, including those made by Caillois, Bataille and Jean Paulhan, were 'conceived and perceived as being in keeping with the values of the extreme left' (224). On *Volontés* and Monnerot's survey, see Vincent Giroud, 'Transition to Vichy: The Case of Georges Pelorson', *Modernism/Modernity*, 7, 2 (2000), 221–48, esp. 227–31.
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83. Heimonet, *Politique de l'écriture*, 127–28.
84. Monnerot, 'La fièvre de G. Bataille', cited in Heimonet, *La politique de l'écriture*, 163. See also Monnerot, *Sociology of Communism*, 154–55.
85. Monnerot, *Sociology of Communism*, 288–89.
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10 Genocide and Memory

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11 Beyond the Mnemosyne Institute: The Future of Memory after the Age of Commemoration

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