

# Remembrance as remaking: memories of the nation revisited

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**ABSTRACT.** This article revisits Anthony Smith's landmark collection *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (1999) from the perspective of recent developments in cultural memory studies. It argues for a more clearly demarcated distinction between myths and memories which acknowledges cultural memory as a site of new experiential perspectives that often work against the authority of myths, seen as the unquestioned truths about the collective past. Drawing on studies of modern memory cultures, it presents a dynamic and generative model that construes memory in terms of cultural practices of remembrance. It shows that memory is not an unchanging legacy but rather a malleable resource for making shared stories about the past. Where Halbwachs (1925) presumed that social frameworks precede and shape memory, remembrance is presented here as a cultural force that helps to redefine social frameworks and to create links between hitherto unconnected imagined communities.

**KEYWORDS:** Cultural memory, national myths, social frameworks of memory, cultural dynamics, mediation, multiscalarity, articulation, multidirectionality

In *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, Anthony Smith put a strong case for the importance of 'the role of the past in the creation of the present' (Smith 1999: 180). 'Ethno-history', meaning both shared history and the representation of that shared history, was for Smith a key element in the construction of national identity. He argued powerfully that a sense of continuity with the past, linked to the sense of shared origins, was the foundation of ethnic identities and the most important generator of collective loyalty and the belief in shared distinctiveness. Towards the end of the chapter entitled 'Ethnic Nationalism and the Plight of Minorities' Smith nevertheless expressed the hope that we could 'move beyond a world of nations' and the exclusionary mechanisms they entail:

even if we cannot begin to move beyond a world of nations — and that may remain a dream for some time to come — we may perhaps be able to construct a series of more polyethnic nations held together by cultural, territorial, economic and legal bonds, which can accommodate many of the world's refugees and asylum seekers — with adequate safeguards for ethnic minorities. If this turns out to be a vain hope, then we shall be witnessing many more refugee tragedies in the next millennium.(p. 201)

Smith's recognition of the difficulty of 'moving beyond a world of nations' has only grown in relevance in the twenty years since the publication of his book. Against the background of faltering European integration, the rise of ethno-populism, and difficulties in assimilating migrants, ethnohistory is no longer just a marker of national identity: it has become a bulwark against change. The crux of the problem, as Smith saw it, is in the 'exclusive' character of ethnohistory that hermetically seals off one group from another. While particular ethnies may debate about their shared past and reinterpret it from time to time (pp. 9, 17), ethnohistory is essentially non-transferable. Being based on the shared ancestry of a particular group and by definition already constituted in the past, it cannot be extended to newcomers. The best one could hope for in today's entangled societies, he concluded, was mutual tolerance and the creation of peaceful coexistence through the bracketing of historical differences.

In what follows, I aim to mitigate the grounds for Smith's pessimism, or at least to reframe the terms of his analysis, by revisiting his notions of myth and memory. Key terms in his title, they are the lynchpins of his approach to ethnohistory. Smith's understanding of myth seems relatively uncontroversial. Myths are deeply rooted identity narratives, which can be reactivated over and over again in the interpretation of new situations; they are associated with 'timeless truths' and because their truth is unquestioned they have an enormous power to mobilize affect and the sense of an immutable identity; indeed they are often about the origin of the *ethnie* itself. They are not changed easily, both because they are central to identity and because they are often inherently unfalsifiable since they are rooted in deep time; critical studies of particular cases are needed to reveal the actual changes that occur in collective perceptions and values over time (p.227). The myth of the confederate 'Lost Cause' in the USA, to take an example not covered by Smith but in keeping with his argument, is thus experienced by its proponents as an unalienable and immutable truth, whereas research has shown that it was produced in particular circumstances and inspired by particular cultural models (Rigney 2012a: 106–26).

In contrast to his treatment of myth, Smith's concept of memory is elusive – especially when considering the huge body of work on the topic that has been produced since his book was published. The word 'memory' keeps showing up across his different essays, but it usually does so in conjunction with related terms – with myths, of course, but also ethnohistory, heritage, beliefs, traditions and so on – as part of a broader semantic field whose topography is left sketchy. In retrospect, Smith's use of this cluster of terms placed him, together with David Lowenthal (1985) and Patrick Hutton (1993), at the forefront of what would later become a surge of interest in the varieties of historical experience and the multiple ways in which people relate to their past. Twenty years later, a more precise mapping of this semantic field has become possible. Memory, in particular, can be distinguished from myth.

For a reader in 2017, it is striking that the only literature on memory that Smith refers to in any detail is Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's classic study *Zakhor* (1982) about the importance of the cultivation of memory to Jewish identity.

Although there are brief references to key works from the early 1980s, such as Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983), Hobsbawm and Rangers' *Invented Tradition* (1983) and Nora's *Sites of Memory* (1984–92), Smith's analysis does not draw significantly on the rich body of literature about memory that had been appearing since the early 1990s. Moreover, it makes only the briefest of references to twentieth-century history and to the living memory of recent historical events. Where the Holocaust is referred to, this is to explain the resonance of Mazada in Jewish ethnohistory rather than to engage with memory cultures and practices of the last decades.

While the term memory is everywhere in *Myths and Memories* then, the phenomenon referred to remains curiously diffuse. Luckily, the concept can now be given greater analytical traction with the help of scholarship in the interdisciplinary field of memory studies. The emergence of this field in the last twenty years has been closely linked to the Holocaust and its legacy, although it is not confined to its study (Olick et al. 2011: 29–36). Memory studies brings scholars in the Humanities and Social Sciences together around the question how societies remember and how this impacts on social relations. The guiding concept of those approaching this field from the social sciences is 'collective memory' – the term introduced by Maurice Halbwachs in the 1920s. The guiding concept of those in the Humanities, including myself, is 'cultural memory' – the term introduced by Jan and Aleida Assmann in the 1990s (1999; 1997; 1995), and further developed in the decades since (Erll 2011a; Erll and Nünning 2008). As the name suggests, cultural memory research is specifically concerned with the role of narrative in shaping the understanding of the past, the role of media in transmitting and distributing those narratives and the power of stories to mobilize affect and loyalty. As the field has continued to develop, it is clear that studies of 'collective' and 'cultural' memory are two sides of the same coin and that cultural and social processes feed into each other.

In what follows, I draw on cultural memory studies in order to theorize memory in its difference from myth. I propose a dynamic and generative model that sees memory as the reiterated impulse to remember the past from changing perspectives in the present. It is constituted by the operation of what Stephen Greenblatt (1988) has called 'social energy', an energy that is expressed in the production, reproduction, circulation and transformation of stories about the collective past. Memory is, thus, the continuously emerging outcome of 'acts of memory' (Bal et al. 1999), 'mnemonic practices' (Olick and Robbins 1998) or, what in the rest of this essay, will simply be called 'remembrance' in order to indicate its character as an act of meaning-making in the present. Remembrance weaves together current matters of concern with narratives about and from the past. Paul Ricoeur has argued for the existence of a dialectic between the force of repetition and the force of critical reflection in collective remembrance (Ricoeur 2006). This dialectic can be usefully mapped onto the distinction between myth, the locus of identity narratives reproduced over and again because held to be immutably true, and memory, the site of engagement with the past. Seen in this way, remembrance is the active principle whereby myths

are not just reproduced but also slowly reconfigured. Memory – especially the memory of recent events – can work against the power that myths have acquired over much longer periods of time. The distinction between myth and memory often correlates to a difference in temporal scale (with myths being deeply rooted in time and memory relating to the more recent past), but the crucial distinction here lies in the issue of malleability.

### The cultural dynamics of remembrance

The common sense understanding of collective memory sees it in terms of a family heirloom that is passed on unchanged from generation to generation, as if it was a fixed object with a definitive shape. As the term ‘remembrance’ indicates, cultural memory studies take a different approach. It sees memory not as a set of things to be preserved intact but as a selective praxis, where the orientation towards the ‘space of experience’ is fed by the current ‘horizon of expectations’ (Koselleck 1985) and vice versa. As a result, the ‘working memory’ of a society as opposed to the potential memory that is latent in the archive is always selective, never coinciding with the totality of everything that might have been recalled (Assmann 2008). The selective transformation of the archive into memory is not just a one-way process, however; things that have been overlooked may later become relevant, while conversely, things that used to be important become forgotten (Olick and Robbins 1998).

Mediation is key to these dynamics. Memory *becomes* collective when it is shared, and for it to be shared it must be mediated.<sup>1</sup> By mediation is meant both the channels of transmission and the very cultural forms that are used to make sense of events. One of the major insights yielded by the study of Holocaust remembrance is that there are limits to our capacity to make sense of history: in the case of traumatic events, the cultural and cognitive schemata for registering what has happened and for conveying it to others fall short (Friedlander 1992; Caruth 1996; Craps 2013). Memorability is not a feature of events themselves, in other words, but depends on people’s ability to articulate their experiences and convert them into a transferable form. Language, images, monuments and performances are the props used in shaping, transferring and disseminating narratives about the past. If millennials share certain ideas about World War I, for example, this is because of their common exposure to stories and images embedded in key cultural texts.<sup>2</sup> This begs the question how particular media (print, television, theatre and internet) and particular cultural forms (epic, melodrama, testimony and so on) help to shape memory while involving heads and hearts in distinctive ways.<sup>3</sup> Think here of the difference between Lutyens’ monument to the missing at Thiepval (1932), Erich Maria Remarque’s novel *Im Westen nichts neues* (1928), its cinematic adaptation by Louis Milestone as *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) and the *In Flanders Fields Museum* in Ypres (founded in 1998): each medium recalls World War I and, in so doing, engages the senses, knowledge,

imagination and emotions of the public in a different way. In memory as elsewhere, the medium is the message. This means that some events become more memorable than others simply because they can be captured more easily in the available cultural carriers. Remarkably, Smith says almost nothing about the modes of transmission of memory and how different individuals and different generations can nevertheless develop a shared frame of reference.

As the examples relating to World War I also indicate, media rarely function by themselves. Memory is carried not just by one medium alone but is continuously 'remediated' (Erl and Rigney 2009) as it circulates across 'plurimedial networks' (Erl 2011a) in the form of journalism, the arts, scholarship, museums, public rituals and so on. It is constituted in the very act of reiteration. Memory is always 'on the move' (Rigney 2012a), 'travelling' (Erl 2011b) across different platforms, evolving cultural forms and changing social contexts. Without reiteration, it becomes inert (Olick and Robbins 1998). Thanks to reiteration, it continues to reach new publics at the same time as it regularly undergoes small changes. The social energy driving this activity is arguably generated as much by dissensus as by consensus (Rigney 2007), with the desire to assert something in face of its possible denial an important motivator behind acts of remembrance (see also White 1987). In line with this, 'agonism' has recently been proposed as a structural feature of memory making: disagreements ensure it remains an active force in society (Bull and Hansen 2015).

Reiterations of memory occur against the background of changes within the 'culture of memory' or what in German is called *Erinnerungskultur* (Erl 2011a; Assmann 1997). The concept 'culture of memory' implies that commemoration, being a cultural practice, is itself subject to historical variation. Narrative and aesthetic forms and media technologies change over time in tune with broader cultural transformations; so too does the very importance attached to memory as a marker of collective identity. Since the rise of historicism in the early nineteenth century, there has been a massive expansion of the range of cultural activities devoted to public acts of remembrance. As David Lowenthal has put it: societies became 'possessed by the past' (1996). The modern obsession with memory in the form of memorials and museums has further intensified since World War II. Andreas Huyssen (2000) has explained this as a reaction to the continuing fallout of the Holocaust, the pace of change in contemporary society and the post-1989 demise of future-oriented grand narratives. By now, the post-war memory wave is arguably waning. But that in itself supports the basic principle: that a collective preoccupation with memory is itself historically variable and that at some periods in history it has been more important than in others as a key to identity.

This variability affects not just the intensity with which memory is cultivated but also its moral register and the cultural forms appropriate to its expression. Smith writes at length about the importance of 'myths of courage', of 'regeneration' and of a 'national golden age' as key models for ethnic identity (Smith 1999: 61–62) and notes how these have fed into the interpretation of more recent events such as Dunkirk (pp. 72–73). Memory cultures until World War I were indeed dominated by an emphasis on triumphs and victories, and the

heroic individuals deemed responsible for them – witness the large monuments to great artists and writers that adorn many city squares across Europe and that are designed to mobilize civic and national pride by recalling ‘great men’ (Leerssen and Rigney 2014). Since World War I, as is shown in Jay Winter’s path-breaking work *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (1995), there has been a shift, beginning in Western Europe, to an emphasis on suffering, victimhood and mourning as the primary constituents of memorability. A traumatic model of remembrance and what Jeffrey Olick has called a ‘politics of regret’ (2007) has since governed what is considered appropriate for commemoration and memorialization: history nowadays is where it hurts.

This paradigm shift has gone hand in glove with a minimalist aesthetic in public monuments: where the Waterloo Lion (erected *in situ* 1820–26) reaches upwards and outwards with a confident look towards the future, Maya Lin’s iconic Vietnam Veterans memorial in Washington (1982) is dark and downward-moving, a site for the intimate but also the public mourning of the dead Americans whose names are individually listed on the black marble. This aesthetics of mourning has been replicated in multiple memorials across the world, including most recently the new Holocaust memorial planned for Amsterdam (also designed by Daniel Libeskind, architect both of the Berlin Jewish museum and of the 9/11 Ground Zero memorial in New York).<sup>4</sup> The meta-language of commemoration has shifted too along with these changing practices, with the term ‘monument’ largely replaced by the term ‘memorial’. Like the nineteenth-century monumentalism that preceded it, the recent aesthetics of mourning enhances the memorability of certain moments and filters out others. Crucially, in both cases, the languages of public commemoration is transnational even when used for the purposes of enhancing national and local singularities.

### The socio-cultural dynamics of remembrance

The preceding section has outlined a generative and dynamic model of memory as a cultural practice, showing how memorability is culturally produced in changing contexts. One of the key challenges, still facing memory studies, is to explain how the cultural constituents of memory feed into and are fed by social mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Studies of the history of commemorative cultures have shown how ‘mnemonic communities’ (Zerubavel 2003) come into being, based on the sense of a common belonging because of a shared past. In his pioneering work from the 1920s, Maurice Halbwachs (1994) claimed that ‘social frameworks’ shape what people remember by filtering narratives according to their collective significance: only those things are transferred that are deemed relevant to the collectives within which people position themselves. It follows from this (though not explored by Halbwachs himself) that when ideas about ‘who matters’ change so too does memory.

Theorizations of the relationship between remembering and forgetting provide a fruitful lens on this dynamic. In his classic lecture ‘Qu’est-ce qu’une

nation?' (1882), Ernest Renan had already flagged the importance of forgetting as the ineluctable counterpart of memory (1947–61). Members of a nation have to remember the things they have in common, Renan famously wrote, but they also need to have forgotten those things that divide them, such as the St. Bartholomew massacre or the anti-Albigensian crusade in the French case. In line with this argument, scholars have argued for the inextricability of memory and forgetting and the importance of considering their mutual interaction (Connerton 2008; Assmann 2016). The result has been an expansion of the repertoire of concepts available for analysing collective amnesia in its multiple forms. These range from 'active forms of forgetting' (Ricoeur 2006, 2000) through the erasure of archival traces and 'pacts of silence' (Passerini 2003; Ben-Ze'Ev et al., 2010), to more passive forms of forgetting that involve ignoring or failing to grasp the import of certain traces or voices. In this regard, cultural remembrance can be seen by way of analogy with personal memory (Schacter 1996) as in effect a matter of *anamnesis*, literally: an unforgetting. Oblivion rather than recollection is the default condition.

The dynamics between unforgetting, remembering and forgetting is never straightforward, especially not in the aftermath of conflict. 'Memory wars' (Blanchard and Veyrat-Masson 2008) can be seen as a continuation of political conflict through other means (see also Hodgkin and Radstone 2003; Olick 2003). The debates still raging in Spain about the legacy of the Civil War offer a case in point. On the one hand, these involve attempts to undo the 'active forgetting' of Republican memory, for example, by exhuming and identifying the 'disappeared' (Ferrándiz 2014). On the other hand, they involve attempts to undo the memory policies of the Francoist regime, including highly debated moves to decommission the huge monument at the Valley of the Fallen (Aguilar and Payne 2016; Richards 2013; Aguilar 2002). Similar struggles to uncover forgotten histories while over-writing earlier forms of remembrance have also been observed in post-Communist East-Central Europe (Tornquist-Plewa 2016; Bernhard and Kubik 2014). It is through such acts of counter remembrance at different sites and across plurimedial networks that memory is re-made, step by step. Yaël Zerubavel (1995) has referred to 'turning points in memory' when a dominant narrative ceases to sustain identities in a changing society and gives way to an alternative. That turning points do not occur easily or in one go is illustrated by Spain. That they can and do occur, however, has been illustrated in recent decades in Ireland. There, the passively forgotten memory of the Irishmen who served in the British Army in World War I has been slowly integrated into the official commemorative cycle of the Irish Republic (Beiner 2007; Rigney 2007). It is worth noting that 'memory wars' usually bear on relatively recent events for which there is an extensive archive and are less frequent in the case of distant myths about ethnic origins, such as those discussed by Smith. This is arguably because there is no comparable repository of alternative stories with which to replace existing ones.

Remaking memory is not only the result of overt clashes between opposing parties. Sometimes, it is indifference that has to be overcome rather than conscious antagonism. But indifference is no less powerful for being apparently

benign. Ann Laura Stoler has written in an illuminating way of the European failure to remember colonialism, describing this as a particular form of passive forgetting that she calls 'aphasia'. By colonial aphasia is meant the incapacity to connect the dots between different events in a way that would make sense of colonial violence and its contemporary legacies by seeing it as structural rather than incidental. Aphasia 'disables' certain events (in the terms used here; it reduces their memorability) by disconnecting them from the main narratives that inform identity (Stoler 2011). Overcoming aphasia requires both new frames of understanding and strategies to overcome resistance to the assault on identity such a reframing would entail. As long as such a breakthrough does not occur, aphasia forecloses memory despite the existence of archival evidence with the potential to generate alternative narratives. Aphasia has been illustrated very well in Paulus Bijl's study of photographs of Dutch atrocities in Atjeh in 1904 (Bijl 2015). These photographs are shown to have been continuously in circulation since 1904 but without being integrated into a larger narrative; as a result, every generation has discovered them as if for the first time. Bijl shows how the capacity to 'see' the photographs is linked to the shifting narrative schemata and the expanding social frameworks used in the Dutch public arena to make sense of the past and present. An incapacity to remember is in essence a failure to imagine other scenarios than the ingrained myths.<sup>5</sup>

Other studies have shown that remaking memory and undoing forgetting nevertheless occur, albeit slowly. Acts of remembrance relating to hitherto overlooked groups often piggyback on existing ones in order to get a hearing; hence the use of Black Poppies on a recent work on the participation of Caribbean soldiers in the British Army in World War I (Bourne 2014). It has been established by now that multidirectionality is a structural feature of memory dynamics, allowing new narratives to be articulated by analogy to more familiar ones. Rothberg (2009) has shown through the comparison of a large corpus of writings, how the memory of the Holocaust has helped provide a model for articulating the memory of colonialism; and vice versa, how colonialism also helped furnish a language with which to talk about the Holocaust. By mapping one narrative onto another, remembrance *produces* linkages between geographically dispersed sites of suffering. Memory work is thus 'connective' and not merely reproductive of existing relations, facilitating acts of 'affiliation across lines of difference' (Hirsch 2012: 21).

The gradual emergence into visibility of the colonial photographs studied by Bijl illustrates the ways in which mediated practices of remembrance can end up changing what is deemed relevant: recent years have seen a veritable explosion of public and academic interest in the victims of Dutch military action, and in the question how systemic was the violence in Dutch-controlled Indonesia.<sup>7</sup> Conversely, there has also been a growing public recognition of the participation of millions of colonial soldiers in the European armies in the two world wars, something that for decades had been overlooked (Das 2014). Their role as historical subjects is slowly being retrieved from oblivion through histories, novels, movies and memorials that, by resonating with each other as part of transnational

plurimedial networks, have gradually acquired a measure of public visibility in Europe. Repeated acts of recollection, fed by imagination and by evidence, are thus slowly reconfiguring dominant stories and who belongs in them.

These examples are from recent history. But such memory work was arguably already at the very heart of nation-building itself, seen as a 'new way of linking fraternity, power, and time meaningfully together' (Anderson 1991: 36). It involved the 'naturalization' (p.145) of an imagined kinship through storytelling. Anderson's point of reference was print culture, with newspapers and novels as the most important genres. Had *Imagined Communities* been conceived a few decades later, it would undoubtedly also have entailed a much larger awareness of the role of visuality and audiovisual media, not to mention the internet, in producing imagined communities and, over time, in helping to redefine their membership. Moreover, where Anderson emphasized the role of mediation in creating the sense of a 'bounded' (p.7) community, recent scholarship has paid attention to the equally important role of mediation in pushing back those boundaries. Certainly in today's world of globalized communication (but arguably already in the print era), culture is like the weather: it doesn't stop at the national border.<sup>8</sup>

A key theme in cultural memory studies has accordingly been the role of the arts in creating the imaginative and affective conditions for public receptivity to new narratives and lines of affiliation. Immersive modes of narration, such as films and novels, produce 'prosthetic memory' (Landsberg 2004), that is, the conditions for people to empathize with the experiences and aspirations of hitherto unknown actors. Immersive representation is a means par excellence for transferring memory across cultural divides. Landsberg's model of mnemonic transfer was developed with specific reference to the role of cinema in creating shared memory among immigrants to the United States who had to leave behind their inherited ethnohistories and work their way into a new mnemonic community. However, her point about the role of the arts in mnemonic transfer across cultural borders is more widely applicable. To take one example among many: Rachid Bouchareb's Oscar-winning movie *Indigènes* (2006) about the role of North African soldiers in the liberation of France in World War II served as a catalyst of public awareness in France about this hitherto overlooked group and contributed to the belated granting of pensions to the veterans.<sup>6</sup> The fact that films like *Indigènes* and *All's Quiet on the Western Front*, novels like Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1865–69) and Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008) and plays like Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell* (1804) and Brecht's *Tage der Kommune* (1949) circulated transnationally as well as in their country of origin exemplifies the power of art to generate interest in 'other people's' stories.

### Remaking frameworks of memory

In setting out his account of the social frameworks of memory, Halbwachs recognized that people produced memory within multiple frameworks

differing in human scale and in geographical and temporal reach. Principal among these were the family, class, religion and, somewhat more distantly in his model because less connected to embodied experience, the nation. While class and religion have not figured prominently in later discussions, the resilient importance of the family as a social framework of memory has been confirmed in studies of Holocaust-related cultural practices, most notably in Marianne Hirsch's study of the transmission of traumatic 'postmemory' to later generations (2012). While ethnicity may always involve memory, then, not all collective memory entails ethnicity.

Nevertheless, the nation has undeniably provided the dominant frame for large-scale *public* acts of remembrance in the last 200 years. Joep Leerssen's work on the 'cultivation of culture' as an integral part of Romantic nationalism (Leerssen 2006) has shown in fascinating detail the degree to which collective memory became *nationalized* in the course of the nineteenth century; and how bounded and cohesive nations emerged in tandem with a distinctive cultural memory in the form of foundational narratives, literary and artistic canons and material heritage.

Not surprisingly, the nation has also been an important research focus within the field of memory studies, exemplified by Pierre Nora's monumental multi-volume work on *Les Lieux de mémoire* (1984–92) which was emulated in various countries across Europe. While Nora's work has been criticized for ignoring France's colonial history (Stoler 2011; Rothberg 2010), its role in denaturalizing the nation as the default framework for thinking about memory and identity is undisputed. It resonated with Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983) and Hobsbawm and Ranger's *Invention of Tradition* (1983), both published just a year earlier, which also highlighted the constructed character of nations and the importance of memory in their creation. As these various works showed, the shared past on which different nations have drawn in order to define their identity in fact amounts to an imaginative overcoming of historical differences through selective unforgetting. Renan already pointed to the fact that, since European nations were nearly all the outcome of the integration of two different ethnic groups (what he called 'races'), a shared memory represented the overcoming of historical cleavages by knitting together distinct, and often opposing groups into a bounded nation.<sup>9</sup> A shared national memory has always been a matter of forgetting the historical differences *within* the bounded nation in order to reinforce lines of fictive kinship and imagined fraternity.

Memory research has thus had a critical relation to the primacy of the national even as it long concentrated on the national framework in order to prove this point. In recent years, there has been a concerted effort to go beyond methodological nationalism and explore alternative social frameworks for memory. Many of these initiatives have involved upscaling to frameworks that are larger than that of the nation with an emphasis on 'transcultural' processes that transcend the boundaries of languages and national cultures (Erl 2011b). Behind this upscaling is the realization that the communication networks involved in the production and transmission of memory are now increasingly

globalized (Assmann and Conrad 2010), as is illustrated by the spread of the Holocaust as memory site across and beyond Europe (Levy and Sznajder 2006). Thanks to its status as a 'travelling schema' (Erl 2011b), the Holocaust most notably has helped in the articulation of other cases of genocide at multiple locations across the world, powering a dynamic between transnational convergence and local divergence in the evolution of memory cultures.

In recognition of the interplay between global and local forces, multiscalarity has been proposed as an analytic lens (De Cesari and Rigney 2014) that accounts better than mere upscaling for the unevenness with which memory moves across the world. Multiscalarity recognizes the existence of multiple, partly overlapping frameworks of memory including the intimate and local as well as the regional and global. Multiscalarity thus acknowledges the continued relevance of the national in today's entangled world even as it relativizes its importance in relation to alternatives operating at scales below that of the nation (the family, the city and the region) or at scales larger than the nation (diasporic, European, planetary). Where the concept of the transcultural tends to emphasize the 'unbounded' character (Bond et al. 2017) of memory production, multiscalar approaches emphasize instead the continued, if not increased importance of boundaries and borders as a result of increased entanglements (De Cesari and Rigney 2014: 4; Rigney 2012b; see also Graziano 2018).

The key challenge from a multiscalar perspective is to understand how the borders between the familial, the local, the national, the macro-regional and so on are maintained but also crossed and renegotiated in the multidirectional dynamic outlined above. Articulation in the double sense of 'bringing to expression' and 'connecting' (De Cesari and Rigney 2014; see also Grossberg 1986) is key to this process. Cultural practices that 'bring to expression' narratives about the past may, in circulating, help to link up hitherto unconnected parties; mention has been made earlier of the role of the arts in this regard. Voluntary affiliation through storytelling, invoked by Anderson as defining for nationalism, also occurs at other scales. The national framework for memory is proving to be very resilient thanks to the weight of habit and of institutions, but it is under pressure.

This is not least because mass migration provides a daily challenge to a 'container' thinking that would neatly line up ethnicities, national borders and public cultures of remembrance. For this very reason, migration has also generated the most vigorous defences of the myth of the undivided and historically immutable nation. The examples of divided memories mentioned earlier bore on the legacy of antagonism between historical opponents or on the structural exploitation characteristic of colonialism. What makes migration such a huge challenge to traditional understandings of collective identity is that, at first sight, there seems to be no common basis at all from which to negotiate a shared memory and a fictive kinship based on the long-term occupation of the same territory. Is it ever possible to 'migrate' into another group's memory (Huysen 2003)? And does the integration of newcomers also lead to change in the dominant memory? If change is not possible, what happens to the future of nations with large immigrant populations, given the centrality of sharing a memory to the very notion

of nationality as this has been defined over the last 200 years? As research by Michael Rothberg and Yasemin Yildiz has shown, Turkish-German citizens find themselves in a double bind (Rothberg 2014; Rothberg and Yildiz 2011): they are considered by the majority population not to be 'German' enough to be stakeholders in commemorations where the Holocaust plays a central role; but as long as they remain uninvolved in the national commemorations, they are not really German. Is there a way beyond this apparent impasse?

Halbwachs supposed that the most important frameworks of memory, including the national, were given once and for all. The dynamic model presented here suggests instead a feedback mechanism whereby cultural remembrance and social frameworks emerge in tandem. Changing social realities (for example, migration) can undermine the plausibility of existing narratives as representations of 'our' past, while the production of new narratives (for example, about colonial troops in the European theatres of war) in turn helps to extend social horizons. Social frameworks and shared memory are thus co-produced as part of an ongoing dynamic whereby the boundaries of what constitutes 'our' history are reaffirmed and periodically revised. Seen in this way, memory is a site for negotiations and debate rather than merely a set of unchanging precepts or myths. To be sure, the latter are regularly invoked as immutable truths anchoring the present, but they operate alongside, and often in tension with, these other ways of engaging with past legacies, especially ones bearing on more recent history.<sup>10</sup>

In line with this, Jan Assmann (1995) has written of cultural memory in terms of the 'reusable texts, images and rituals' whose 'cultivation' serves to 'stabilize and convey' a society's 'self-image' (p.132). The operative word here is 'stabilize' since it supposes that identities are subject to shifts and readjustments and that public remembrance calibrates existing narratives to emergent social realities. Crucially, then, debates about the past are obstacles to cohesion, but also resources for negotiating new social relations in the present. They are sites of resistance, but also potential starting points for critical recollection.

### **Migration and memory**

These social-cultural dynamics can be illustrated with the case of the Moroccan-Dutch minority within the Netherlands and the history of their complicated relations to the national commemoration of World War II. This takes place every year on 4 May with, as its central point, two minutes of silence across the country at 8 pm. More than any other site of memory (Nora 1997), 4 May elicits a collective performance of Dutchness. It annually reinforces the idea of an 'imagined community' through the simultaneous commemoration of a shared history that, as witnesses die out, is by now known above all through hearsay.<sup>11</sup> In the last decade, however, concerns have been voiced about how to 'integrate' first and second-generation migrants into this annual event. The Moroccan minority rather than other significant minorities

such as the Turks or the Surinamese has become the particular focus of attention. This is because anxieties about immigration have crystallized in populist discourses around this particular group (as evidenced for example in discriminatory references to 'the Moroccan problem' on the part of politician Geert Wilders<sup>12</sup>). In the case of the annual war commemorations, anxieties were fed by several incidents in 2003 when some Moroccan youths used 4 May for public displays of dissociation from the national consensus, including expressions of anti-Semitism.<sup>13</sup> For all parties, then, the commemoration has been used both for bonding and for exclusion or dissociation.

By now, initiatives have led to a greater involvement of Dutch-Moroccan citizens in the 4 May rituals. These include educational policies designed to combat perceived anti-Semitism among Moroccan youths, whereby recognition of the Holocaust and its Dutch victims are assumed as conditions for true citizenship.<sup>14</sup> More interesting in the present context has been the pursuit of 'naturalization' through memory. Key in this regard has been a number of graves in the war cemetery in Kapelle in the province of Zeeland, containing the remains of nine Moroccan soldiers washed up on Dutch beaches in 1940.<sup>15</sup> Overlooked for many decades, the graves have been adopted by immigrant organizations and have gradually become a central point of reference in public debates on the relationship of first and second-generation immigrants to the memory of the liberation of the Netherlands in the 1940s. In recent years, buses carry Moroccan-Dutch from the main cities to this remote spot in the provinces to pay their respects on 4 May to their countrymen and their role in World War II.<sup>16</sup>

The logic is that the material presence of Moroccan bones on Dutch territory provides grounds for seeing Moroccans as having always been part of the Dutch story. The reliance on graves as 'proof' of a common history feeds into an implicit biologism which assumes that nations are derived from direct genetic descent rather than from a fictive kinship based on affiliation. In fact, of course, the people who identify collectively with these mortal remains are not actually connected by familial ties but rather through a voluntary affiliation with fellow-Moroccans who are now imagined as also having fought for the liberation of the Netherlands.<sup>17</sup> With these complexities overlooked, the graves reinforce the idea of a 'bounded' community that coincides with Dutch national territory. They provide a symbolic and very material bridge between the majority Dutch and minority immigrant community, enhancing mutual recognition as stakeholders in the commemoration. The ceremonies at the war cemetery, attended both by locals and those who have travelled from the cities, have fed back into celebrations in the main cities and to discussions in the media. Much to the anger of some ethno-populists, Moroccan flags have recently been deployed alongside the Dutch one on 4 May in cities with significant immigrant-populations.<sup>18</sup>

While these flags mark a recently acquired stakeholdership in the national commemoration, they simultaneously undermine that national frame by reasserting the links to North Africa and contemporary Morocco. A measure of integration has been achieved in the sense that all groups commemorate the dead on 4 May, but this has been at the cost of reinstating ethnic differences

within the very notion of a national commemoration. This is integration of a minimal sort. It is also at the cost of passively forgetting some significant differences, including the fact that the Moroccan soldiers in question belonged to the French colonial army, and that their fighting was part of a broader European, and not just Dutch struggle. However, as time passes, the broader context for the soldiers' participation in World War II is slowly, if piecemeal, being unforgettably. As evidenced on social media, Bouchareb's movie *Indigènes* has provided additional grounds for emphasizing the participation of Moroccan soldiers in the liberation of Europe and for making common cause with counterparts in France. As the story of the participation of colonial troops across Europe continues to emerge at different sites and travel along plurimedial networks, a larger narrative about Europe, European colonialism and its legacies is on the cusp of emerging. This is a story that the mainstream Dutch public may not yet be capable of hearing. But at the very least the telling and retelling of stories, and the expansion of the archive on the basis of which future stories can be told, gives this larger framework the chance to emerge in the future. The last word has never been said about the ongoing dynamic that is cultural remembrance.

### **In conclusion**

Smith's sober predictions about the difficulty of 'moving beyond a world of nations' and the concomitant lack of safeguards for refugees were prescient. The crux of the problem, as he noted in that chapter on minorities, is in the 'exclusive' character of ethnohistory that hermetically seals off one group from another. The more Smith insisted on the importance of the past to the present, the greater the difficulty he had in envisaging how people can change their past or how ethnic groups might somehow merge and integrate so as to form new constellations. This is something called for by the transnational entanglements of today's world; but something that was also arguably always a feature of nation-building. To be sure, Smith himself recognized that change was possible, if slow (1999: 19) and that it would take place in competition with existing identities and communities.

As I have been arguing here, memory indeed works slowly. It moves sideways rather than in a straight line. But remembrance is not just about repeating the same story over and over again. As a communicative practice, it is fundamentally transferable and this means that remembrance is also a resource for redefining the borders between 'them' and 'us'. This does not mean that things change easily or lightly; after all, memory also carries dead weight and old habits sometimes die very hard indeed. But rather than seeing Myths and Memories as an inseparable pair, we should rethink them as opposing forces. Smith has powerfully thematized the importance of myths for nation-building and their power to mobilize people. I hope to have shown that cultural memory studies can offer a more refined toolkit to help researchers

in the field of nationalism to understand, not just how the past is remembered, but also how its meaning is changed, over-written and challenged. Memories are used not only for making the nation but also for remaking it.

## Endnotes

1 The use of 'collective' here is based on Jeffrey Olick's (1999) distinction between collected memory (individual memory as affected by cultural context) and collective memory (memory that is shared and held in common by a group).

2 On the role of the documentary *Shoah* as a catalyst of Holocaust memory, see Hirsch 2012: 8–10; on the impact of the US television series *Holocaust* in Germany, see Kansteiner 2006. The role of media in providing common points of reference is a structural feature of modern memory culture and not just a recent phenomenon, with ample evidence showing the importance of popular fiction in producing ethnohistory from the early nineteenth century on (Rigney 2012a).

3 See for example Erll and Nünning (2008), Section V (Literature and Cultural Memory) and VI (Media and Cultural Memory); Erll and Rigney (2009); Hajek et al. 2016.

4 [www.holocaustnamenmonument.nl](http://www.holocaustnamenmonument.nl). The style of the monuments carries an implicit comparison between 9/11 and the Holocaust; this 'memory transference' has not gone unchallenged; Akcan (2010).

5 For a rare discussion of the importance of imagination to cultural memory, see Keightley and Pickering 2012.

6 <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indig%C3%A8nes>. On fiction as a catalyst of public debate, see Rigney 2008.

7 In December 2016, the Dutch government commissioned large-scale research into violence committed by Dutch military in the Indonesian war of Independence, 1945–1949; this was partly in response to the extensive evidence presented in Limpach 2016.

8 With thanks to Joep Leerssen for this analogy.

9 Elsewhere I have argued for the important role played by historical fictions such as Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819) in providing the imaginative conditions for 'articulating' different ethnic groups together into a common narrative (Rigney 2012a).

10 It is generally accepted that the span of three generations is crucial in this process since it still involves the embodied memory of eyewitnesses; after that, later generations become increasingly reliant on cultural artefacts as carriers of memory; see Assmann 1997: 48–66.

11 A National Committee is charged with organizing the commemoration and the liberation festival that follows on 5 May; there is a high incidence of the term 'Dutch' [Nederlander] in all their communications; <https://4en5mei.nl/>.

12 For an example, see <https://www.pvv.nl/index.php/component/content/article/36-geert-wilders/6382-wilders-roept-fractievoorzitters-op-marokkanenprobleem-te-bespreken.html>. Wilders was found guilty by a Dutch court for discriminatory speech in December 2016; <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2016/12/09/volg-hier-het-vonnis-in-minder-minder-zaak-tegen-wilders-a1535780>

13 <https://www.volkskrant.nl/binnenland/marokkanen-respectloos-op-4-mei~a726846/>.

14 <https://www.4en5meiamsterdam.nl/nl/page/3060/herdenking-bij-het-homonument>.

15 <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2003/05/05/marokkanen-ontdekken-4-mei-7637594-a710223>; while these graves were apparently a focus of attention since 1985 on the part of Moroccan civil society organizations, their importance has grown as a publicly recognized memory site since the incidents of 2003. The soldiers have been presented as 'fighting for the Netherlands': <http://www.denkraam.info/blog/marokkaanse-soldaten-vochten-voor-nederland-tegen-de-duitse-overheersing-in-de-tweede-wereld-oorlog/>.

16 For detailed background, see <http://bevrijdingintercultureel.nl/bi/marokko.html>. There have also been attempts to debunk the significance of the graves: <http://www.hpdetijd.nl/2010-05-05/marokkanen-vochten-niet-in-zeeland/>.

- 17 The distinction between filiation and affiliation evoked here is based on Said 1984.  
 18 [http://kudtkoekiewet.nl/?t=https://www.geenstijl.nl/3946771/willen\\_julie\\_meer\\_of\\_minder\\_marokkaanse\\_vlaggen\\_op\\_vier\\_mei/](http://kudtkoekiewet.nl/?t=https://www.geenstijl.nl/3946771/willen_julie_meer_of_minder_marokkaanse_vlaggen_op_vier_mei/)

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