

Afterword: The Multiple Entanglements of Memory and Activism (final version before proofs)

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This volume appears against the background of an increasingly intense dialogue between memory studies and social movement studies. In the last couple of years, the terms ‘memory’ and ‘activism’ seem to have found each other and settled in for a long-term relationship. Witness the appearance in rapid succession of such titles as *The Cultural Memory of Non-Violent Struggles* (Reading and Katriel 2015); *Memory Activism* (Gutman 2017), *Social Movements, Memory, and the Media* (Zamponi 2018), to mention only a few.¹ And now: *Remembering Social Movements*.

The rich array of cases addressed in this collection show in multiple ways how new social movements draw on an inherited repertoire of contention. But they do much more than this. They collectively add to our understanding of the memory-activism nexus (Rigney 2018).² By the memory-activism nexus I mean the mutual entanglements and feedback loops between *memory activism* (contentious action to promote certain memories), the *memory of activism* (acts of remembrance about earlier social movements), and *memory in activism* (the role of memory in new acts of contention). This is a multidimensional dynamic, which the present collection helps bring more sharply into focus at the same time as it adds a new layer of complexity. It does this by factoring in the ways in which movements actively promote the memory of their own activism in tandem with their active promotion of the various causes to which they are committed.

In practice, then, there are multiple crossovers between these memory activism, the memory of activism, and memory in activism. But it remains useful to distinguish analytically between them to better grasp how they feed into each other. Of particular importance is the distinction between contentious action aimed at changing memory and contentious action, informed by memory, that is aimed at changing society. While changing memory may be a step-up towards changing society, this isn’t always the case. On the contrary: action to change dominant narratives may sometimes be deployed to distract attention away from other forms of action. Witness, for example, the fact that public apologies on the part of the Canadian government for the past abuse of indigenous peoples has not fed into systemic changes that would improve the lives of those peoples in the present. In such cases, memory activism forms a substitute for reform rather than becoming a catalyst of change.

A classic example of memory activism is presented here by Lauren Richardson in her analysis of the campaigns for recognition of the Comfort Women in Korea, and how those campaigns have invoked the international discourse on human rights. Where the Korean case is presented as a single-issue campaign that is not entangled with broader issues, other chapters show how memory activism may also converge with other causes and other forms of activism. Jenny Wüstenberg shows with reference to post-war Germany how contentious actions to develop a more inclusive public memory, with due attention to the darker sides of the German past, follow rhythms of claim-making that are comparable to activism in other domains, including the occurrence of ‘moments of madness’ that mark turning points (see also Wüstenberg 2017).³

In certain cases, memory activism works in tandem with efforts to develop a more democratic society. Indeed, a more open memory culture is arguably a precondition for an open society. Sarah

Langwald's analysis of the interplay between memory activism regarding the Nazi past and the trials against communists in the post-war German Federal Republic offers a case in point. However, as W. Fitzhugh Brundage's essay on the memory of the Confederacy shows, memory activism does not necessarily serve inclusivity or openness. That Confederate heritage should be defended as a way of advancing white supremacy makes painfully clear that memory activism as such does not always feed into emancipatory causes.

That being said, activism as such always has a mnemonic dimension. This volume provides vivid illustrations of the different ways in which activism and memory feed into each, involving crossovers, entanglements, and feedback loops. Several essays show how the strategies adopted by social movements are informed by the 'implicit memory' (Zamponi 2018)⁴ of predecessors, which offers models for action and a tactical as well as cultural repertoire. In an interesting variation on the principle that the implicit memory of one movement shapes the actions of later ones, Richard Rohrmoser shows how the memory of people's failure to stand up to national socialism enhanced their later willingness to campaign against nuclear weapons. Similarly invoking a negative form of memory, David Lowe shows how recollections of the destruction called by earlier instances of nuclear testing in Australia helped mobilize new generations of environmentalists. Finally, Iain McIntyre shows with respect to the US how recent activists drew on a radical musical tradition developed in the context of civil rights and labour activism in order to conduct environmentalist campaigns. Memories may cross over between movements and causes, then, linking them intersectionally and transferring their legacy to new generations involved in new campaigns.

Perhaps the biggest surprise in this volume is the importance of what several contributors call 'movement memory.' By this is meant the immense effort that activists themselves invest both in shaping how they themselves will be remembered in the future and in remembering the origins of their own movement. Whereas activism is rightly associated with futurity and with attempts to change the world, it transpires here that many activists are also avid archivists and memorialists. How can one look back and look forward at the same time? The life narratives of Indian feminists, discussed here by Devleena Ghosh and Heather Goodall, provide a fruitful lens through which to capture this process on an individual level. However, it is not only individuals but also movements that are involved in retrospectively shaping their identity while prospectively also signalling the way forward.

As Sean Scalmer shows with respect to the eight-hour day, the annual commemoration of this milestone in labour history helped to underwrite the importance of organized advocacy as well as offer a regular reminder that efforts can be rewarded with success. Stefan Berger's historical survey of the memory of trade unionism shows just how important such reminders are: stories of struggle and the overcoming of defeats ensure that transgenerational connectedness without which a movement may fall apart, its power to mobilize in the present weakened by its failure to remember its own past. Memorials are the material means to renew hope and demonstrate strength of purpose, while well-organized commemorative rituals in public spaces are also a way of displaying the movement's self-discipline and strength to the public at large.

Movement memory is more than just a by-product of its activism. The mnemonic extension of the present back into earlier fights and other generations is an active strategy for enhancing a movement's sense of worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment, to invoke the combination of elements that Charles Tilly saw as being key to the success of contention.⁵ Narratives of resistance and heroism, of defeat and martyrdom, of betrayal, of 'small acts of resistance' (Altinay et al 2019)⁶ all belong to the repertoire of movement memory. Borrowing from Hayden White (1973),⁷ we can argue that activism has its own *metamemory* with which it emplots its own development and

publicly displays its memory. Although the repertoire changes over time, there have also been remarkable continuities in the cultural forms most suitable for shaping movement memory. Martyrdom is one such persistent form, arguably as important as the romance of achievement.

The memory of activism is not always consensual, however. Like other objects of remembrance it is open to debate and re-interpretation. Struggles to re-define the movement's past are part and parcel of present-day movement politics. Memory activism directed towards the movement's past provides a resource for recalibrating their goals and strategies in the present. As Liam Byrne writes here, disputes about the past are not just about 'what has been' but about 'potentialities to come' (p.205). Byrne himself shows how the consensual memory of the campaign against conscription in Australia in 1916 was contested by later activists seeking to re-engage with the hopes and struggles of the earlier generation against the background of peace campaigns against the war in Vietnam. Similarly, Jule Ehms shows how different political movements jostled for the right to appropriate and interpret the memory of the *Märzgefallenen* of 1920, each anxious to claim the murdered demonstrators as 'their own' and use their memory to advance present agendas.

Memory dissensus within a movement would appear to have a positive function. It ensures that the past remains a resource for dealing with the present and prevents commemoration becoming reduced to a petrified annual ritual carried out in a congratulatory comfort zone which makes renewed action in the present seem redundant. Too much memory, or rather too canonical or consensual a memory, can be a recipe for quiescence and sanitization, diminishing the potential of the past to inspire contention and mobilize people to act. For that very reason, counter narratives and critical un-doings of consensus narratives, emphasizing paths once taken but subsequently overlooked, offer a resource for resuscitating more radical claims. More than has hitherto been acknowledged, historiography is part of the repertoire of contention itself. In their survey of feminist historiography, Sophie van den Elzen and Berteke Waaldijk not only demonstrate the importance of history writing within the feminist movement, but also show how that auto-history has been constantly subject to critical revision as new generations of activists have sought to become more inclusive by overcoming the intersectional blind spots relating to class and race that plagued their predecessors.

Taken together, these essays show that we need to elaborate even further on the idea that remembrance is performative (see also Rigney 2005: 17).⁸ The term performative is used here in a general sense, flagging the fact that the acts of recollection constitutive of what is called 'memory' entail forms of action taking place in the present. The term 'performative' can also be used here in the strong sense of speech act theory, that is, to indicate utterances (the so-called 'performatives') that not only represent the world but also change it in some way. We 'do' things with words, as Austin's famous title put it, as well as with meaning-making through other media.⁹ With this strong notion of performativity in mind, it is striking just how often memory has been linked to forms of action in the foregoing pages. Memory presents here as a verb rather than as a noun. Remembrance serves to instigate and legitimate public action (Wicke); to discredit and trivialize certain actions while generating public support for others (Langwald); to provide a warning to the living (Ehms); to police the bounds of loyalty, enhance the mobilizing capacities of the movement in the present, and fuel future struggles (Byrne); to bear testimony to achievements, buttress precarious gains, and display a sense of purpose (Scalmer); to nationalize a movement, restrict its agenda to reform rather than revolution, forge an identity and achieve cohesion (Berger), and so on. The list of verbs could have been extended. Suffice these randomly chosen examples to indicate the thoroughly performative character of memory and the fact that commemoration is itself a form of

action. Within the framework of social movements, the performativity of memory serves to connect members by reference to a common history, but also to shape their goals and allegiances.

If memory and activism are closely entangled in a feedback loop, as these essays show, then where are the edges of movement memory? To put this differently: how are we to understand the interface between the memory work taking place within the framework of social movements and public memory in a broader sense? There's no easy answer to this question, though Red Chidgey's conceptualisation of memory in terms of an 'assemblage' may be helpful in thinking of the interface between movement memory and public memory in an open-ended and interactive way.¹⁰ As Liam Byrne remarks here, movements do not necessarily have "stable boundaries" with broader publics. This means that the ongoing feedback between memory and activism described above also entails a possible feedback into public memory at large whereby the memory of civil resistance and advocacy becomes an integral part of 'collective' identity. There is evidence here to suggest that movement memory sometimes spills over into public memory at large and interacts with it. Why and when this happens, and to what effect, should be the subject of future reflection. So far it would seem that the interaction between memory and activism is played out according to a dynamic that is particular to the movement in question, often in opposition to dominant public narratives and to a public culture of memory long dominated by war and its victims. The emerging interest among memory scholars in the memory-activism nexus, exemplified in this volume, marks a critical shift away from war. It offers new conceptual challenges at the same time as it gives the researcher a new responsibility in helping to bring to light the deep memory of civil life and non-violent contention.

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¹ Anna Reading and Tamar Katriel, eds. *Cultural Memories of Non-Violent Struggles: Powerful Times* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Yifat Gutman, *Memory Activism: Reimagining the Past for the Future in Israel-Palestine* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2017); Lorenzo Zamponi, *Social Movements, Memory and Media: Narrative in Action in the Italian and Spanish Student Movements* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); most recently, Priska Daphi and Lorenzo Zamponi. "Exploring the Movement-Memory Nexus: Insights and Ways Forward," *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 24.4 (2019):399-417.

² Ann Rigney, "Remembering Hope: Transnational Activism Beyond the Traumatic," *Memory Studies* 11, no. 3 (2018): 368-80.

³ Jenny Wüstenberg, *Civil Society and Memory in Post-War Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁴ Lorenzo Zamponi, *Social Movements, Memory and Media: Narrative in Action in the Italian and Spanish Student Movements* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

⁵ Charles Tilly, *Social Movements, 1768–2004* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2004).

⁶ Marianne Hirsch in Ayşe Gül Altınay et al, eds. *Women Mobilizing Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), p.3.

⁷ Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

⁸ Ann Rigney, "Plenitude, Scarcity and the Circulation of Cultural Memory," *Journal of European Studies* 35, no. 1 (2005): 209-26.

⁹ J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962).

¹⁰ Red Chidgey, *Feminist Afterlives: Assemblage Memory in Activist Times* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).