

Pre-Workshop comment

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Cultural Memory Studies is an interdisciplinary field that draws on diverse methodologies to analyse the ways in which human societies and individuals construct, revise, and make operational social and personal identities. Even if one can trace back the origins of such a field to the work of social historians such as Maurice Halbwachs and Pierre Nora, or point to the attempts at theorization undertaken by literary scholars such as Aleida Assmann and others, what perhaps most characterizes the field at the moment is its state of flux. This is clearly argued and illustrated in the recent volume edited by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (de Gruyter, 2008). Such a lack of rigid definition – even conflictual definitions – of the field is a positive, rather than a problematic aspect, as the possibility to transcend narrow disciplinary confines is fundamental to its further development. One key aspect concerns the relationship between remembering and forgetting. More work is needed precisely on processes of forgetting, voluntary as well as imposed – such as *damnatio memoriae* – in relation to structures of power. One area that seems to have been largely ignored, except in brief references, is the relationship between cultural memory and postcolonial studies, a gap that needs to be addressed as one thinks of the construction of a European identity and the roles cultural memory plays in such a process. Literary Cultural Studies, whether in terms of canon formation or of specific readings of particular texts, historical and contemporary, can play a significant role in highlighting the ways in which representations of imperial and colonial Europe interact with newer ones and how one may come to formulate post-imperial – transnational or even post-national – European identities.

The opposition between cultural memory and history is the least productive – even counterproductive – attempt to define cultural memory. Likewise, questions about truth and falsity as regards cultural memory are not very productive. The notion that one could refer to history as more objective than memory has been largely abandoned by all. Dominick LaCapra's teasing 'Memory is both more and less than history, and vice-versa' adequately reminds us about the futility of such divisions. In reference to so-called 'ego-documents' for instance, that is clearly demonstrated. A recent example that could be used to highlight that problematic is Coetzee's *Summertime* (2009), which plays exactly on the tensions between fact and fiction. Aleida Assmann recently made a useful distinction between memory as archive and as canon (in Erll, 2008) that, although needing problematization, serves to abandon the pernicious dichotomy between fact and fiction. Memory can be crucial in a search for truth, especially when documents have been purposely obliterated, but it should not be fetishized.

Even if literary scholars often tend to privilege texts in their analysis, these must always be placed in contexts. The study of spaces and objects, whether conceived in Nora's terms as 'lieux de mémoire' or otherwise, play a crucial role as well in terms of cultural memory studies. Certain spaces and objects have long been the object of study, principally by historians, such as museums and monuments. Nonetheless, there are other strategies that can be used in relation to those spaces and objects (Assmann's division between canon and archive for instance is useful to rethink the role of museums in the production of cultural memory). Likewise, attention given to non-institutionalized spaces and objects can also yield significant results, especially in terms of a counter-memory or resistance to institutionalized memory discourses. Photographs and films can play a key role in such studies. Although some studies of photography and film already advance cultural memory studies (Hirsch, Lury, Zelizer for instance), much remains to be done. Studies of the body are another area central to cultural memory studies even if this is not always recognized. Like postcolonial studies, studies of the body in relation to memory developed in parallel to cultural memory studies without their affinity necessarily having been recognized. Yet it should be obvious that many studies of body regimes have direct implications for cultural memory studies. Erll (2008) gladly remarks on the possibilities for integrating the hard sciences, social sciences and humanities when considering disciplines such as neuroscience in relation to memory studies, but it should be obvious that the inscription of memory on the body is equally important – and here I think of diverse regimes from torture to beauty standards that contribute to the formation of individual and social identities.

Wulf Kansteiner (2002) alerted us to the pitfalls inherent in transferring concepts from the individual to the collective realm in relation to trauma and cultural memory studies. Certainly one of the great

impulses in cultural memory studies has been related to questions posed by the Holocaust and inevitably a slippage from individual to collective takes place, so that even though Kansteiner's methodological critique should be heeded, the category of trauma must be seen as one of the key areas for developing cultural memory studies. More recent events, from the wars of independence and liberation from colonial powers to 9/11, amply and tragically demonstrate the need to consider trauma studies as essential for any understanding of collective identities. This is also an area that calls for a merger between postcolonial and cultural memory studies as the violence of colonialism has shaped not only the colonized peoples but the colonizers as well. As Edward Said remarked from the beginning, colonization, for all its imbalance of power, was always a two-way process. And this is not by any means restricted to the past, as issues of migration to and within Europe, with the creation of new categories of non-citizens, or of individuals completely excluded from society, is a pressing problem. Thus it seems to me urgent to consider effects of colonial violence and trauma as central to questions of remembering and forgetting in relation to the construction of European identities.

The project of cultural memory studies has been political from the start even when its politics might not have been clearly stated or assumed. In relation to ethics the situation is less clear. Obviously, ethics does relate to cultural memory and vice-versa, that is, ethics depends on certain remembered principles as much as there can be said to be an ethics of cultural memory, especially in relation to issues of truth. Margalit (2002) has explored *The Ethics of Memory* from a philosophical perspective that addresses individual as well as collective issues and that is also closely related to politics. Even leaving aside the involvement of early cultural memory studies in a political project of national imagery and identity, it is obvious that cultural memory studies has a significant role to play in the fashioning of possible new European identities and as such is inexorably enmeshed in the political. But this involvement can be complex and contradictory. The notion of cultural heritage is a loaded concept, claimed and coopted for the most part by conservative, indeed extremely right-wing, constituencies: see for example the *Heritage Foundation* in the US, or the appeals made to essentializing notions of cultural identity so much in favour with neo-con and populist forces in Europe. One possible function of cultural memory studies in conjunction with postcolonial studies might be to work against such forces that would encase European identity in mythical ethnic, theological and teleological constructs and point out the way to a multiplicity of European identities that would remain in flux and hospitable to cultural transfers, recognizing how much Europe also has always been a set of ideas and cultural constructs aiming for increased freedom.

Position paper

Notes on Cultural Memory and Postcolonial Studies

Cultural Memory Studies is an interdisciplinary field that draws on diverse methodologies to analyse the ways in which human societies and individuals construct, revise, and make operational social and personal identities. Even if one can trace back the origins of such a field to the work of social historians such as Maurice Halbwachs and Pierre Nora, or point to the attempts at theorization undertaken by literary scholars such as Aleida Assmann and others, what perhaps most characterizes the field at the moment is its state of flux. This is clearly argued and illustrated in the recent volume edited by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (de Gruyter, 2008). Such a lack of rigid definition – even conflictual definitions – of the field is a positive, rather than problematic aspect, as the possibility of transcending narrow disciplinary confines is fundamental to its further development. One key aspect concerns the relationship between remembering and forgetting. More work is needed precisely on processes of forgetting, both voluntary and imposed – such as *damnatio memoriae* – in relation to structures of power. One area that seems to have been largely ignored, except in brief references, is the relationship between cultural memory and postcolonial studies, a gap that needs to be addressed as one thinks of the construction of a European identity and the roles cultural memory plays in such a process. Literary Cultural Studies, whether in terms of canon formation or of specific readings of particular texts, historical and contemporary, can play a significant role in highlighting the ways in which representations of imperial and colonial Europe interact with newer ones and how one may come to formulate post-imperial – transnational or even post-national – European identities.

One recent work that offers to bridge the gap between Cultural Memory Studies and Postcolonial Studies is Michael Rothberg's *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford UP, 2009). In it Rothberg makes a strong case for changing the way Cultural Memory Studies has been conceived by relating it to events related to the history of imperialism and colonialism and seeing those as crucial for an understanding of European identity as the devastating consequences of WW2 are. One of Rothberg's strong points, furthermore, is that he does not limit his analysis to Europe but consistently focuses on a larger, European and North American context, certainly crucial in terms of exploring racism and emancipatory movements. The extended exploration of the arguments expounded by Hannah Arendt linking imperialism and genocide in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* show how important the bridge proposed by Rothberg can be for a further conceptualization of a European polity, just as his focus on France and Algiers also indicates how important it is to consider the aftermath of colonialism in order to think critically about a European future. Nonetheless, one could say that as important as Rothberg's study is, not least because of its move away from a strictly Anglophone context, it is still only a beginning and that much further work is needed, especially in relation to other, less hegemonic forms of colonialism.

Perhaps it no longer needs to be repeated, but the opposition between cultural memory and history is the least productive – even counterproductive – attempt to define cultural memory. Likewise, questions about truth and falsity as regards cultural memory are not very productive. The notion that one could refer to history as more objective than memory has been largely abandoned by all. Dominick LaCapra's teasing 'Memory is both more and less than history, and vice versa' (*History and Memory after Auschwitz*, Cornell UP, 1988) adequately reminds us of the futility of such divisions. In reference to so-called 'ego-documents', for instance, this is clearly demonstrated. A recent example that could be used to highlight this problematic is Coetzee's *Summertime* (Harvill Secker, 2009), which plays exactly on the tensions between fact and fiction. Aleida Assmann recently made a useful distinction between memory as archive and as canon (in Erll, 2008) that, although needing problematization, serves to abandon the pernicious dichotomy between fact and fiction. Memory can be crucial in a search for truth, especially when documents have been purposely obliterated, but it should not be fetishized.

Even if literary scholars often tend to privilege texts in their analysis, these must always be placed in contexts. The study of spaces and objects, whether conceived in Nora's terms as *lieux de mémoire* or otherwise, also plays a crucial role in terms of cultural memory studies. Certain spaces and objects

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Wulf Kansteiner ('Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies', *History and Theory*, 41: 2002, 179-197) alerted us to the pitfalls inherent in transferring concepts from the individual to the collective realm in relation to trauma and cultural memory studies. Certainly one of the great impulses in cultural memory studies has been related to questions posed by the Holocaust and inevitably a slippage from individual to collective occurs there, so that even though Kansteiner's methodological critique should be heeded, the category of trauma must be seen as one of the key areas for developing cultural memory studies. More recent events, from the wars of independence and liberation from colonial powers to 9/11, amply and tragically demonstrate the need to consider trauma studies as essential for any understanding of collective identities. This is also an area that calls for a merger between postcolonial and cultural memory studies, as the violence of colonialism has shaped not only the colonized peoples but the colonizers as well. As Edward Said remarked from the beginning, colonization, for all its imbalance of power, was always a two-way process. And this is not by any means restricted to the past, as issues of migration to and within Europe, with the creation of new categories of non-citizens, or of individuals completely excluded from society, is a pressing problem. Thus it seems to me urgent to consider effects of colonial violence and trauma as central to questions of remembering and forgetting in relation to the construction of European identities in a continuation of the work initiated by Michael Rothberg.

Without wanting to claim any primacy for any particular situation, I would argue that attention to cases considered peripheral or extreme could prove very valuable in order to attempt a new conceptualization of Europe. Clearly, if one engages with the formation of European identity in a way that does not simply replicate the traditional concept of central states, say, France, Germany and Great Britain, but takes into account other areas of Europe and their different historical trajectories, one may aim to achieve not only a more balanced but a different image of European identity. For that reason I would like to suggest a brief look at the Portuguese situation, even though in doing so I realize that this is but a small example and that many other different perspectives would be necessary. This should not be limited to other assumed peripheral colonial histories (think of the Belgian, the Dutch, the Danish for instance) but, and with equal urgency, should refer to the breakdown of imperialism in Eastern Europe as well. In a way Portugal offers a strong test case as it can be said both to represent a periphery of Europe as well as an extreme Europe, given its early imperial past and its anachronistic hanging on precisely to that as its essential definition long after all other European countries had abandoned theirs. To avoid any confusion I hasten to add that I do not claim any special or exclusive importance for the Portuguese situation: claims of exceptionality are always suspect and in the case of Portugal it is clear how they were always made in order to try to support and maintain a fiction of the nation at odds with European reality and serving to justify the long drawn-out survival of a fascist-like state. But, even leaving aside most of Portugal's imperial history, the fact that up to 1974 Portugal still defined itself precisely in those anachronistic terms, not only fully embracing a teleology adorned with Christian elements that would see empire as destiny, makes it an interesting case study. Furthermore, since after the revolution of 1974 and subsequent decolonization, Portugal had to reinvent itself as a European nation (leaving aside short-lived utopian

attempts to place it, on an ideological plane at least, in a mythical third-world), the case of how this has been reflected in literature, and how that literature relates to memory, merits attention.

One of the key analysis made of the particularity of the Portuguese situation in relation to a broader postcolonial frame was offered by Boaventura de Sousa Santos when he adopted Wallerstein's world-system theory to classify Portugal as a semi-peripheral society, serving primarily the role of intermediary – at least since its apogee and decline in the early modern period – between central, hegemonic imperial nations such as England and France, and the colonized parts of the world (see for instance, 'Between Prospero and Caliban: Colonialism, Postcolonialism, and Inter-identity', *Luso-Brazilian Review* 39:2 (2002), 9-43). As important as such analysis still is, it does not take into account processes of remembering and forgetting that are equally crucial, nor does it venture into any observation of how Portuguese and European identities are being constructed in contemporary literature. But, if one looks at a large number of the novels published in the last two decades in Portugal one can see that precisely those processes have occupied centre stage. Whether one considers the crucial role literature had in providing basically the only means for some sort of public reflection on the traumas of the colonial wars – here let it suffice to mention the two key novels, Lobo Antunes's *South of Nowhere* (1979) and Lídia Jorge's *The Murmuring Coast* (1988) – or whether one were to look at the later flood of romanticized and nostalgic novels focusing on Africa, it is inescapable how postcolonial the process of identity formation has been in Portugal for the last two or three decades. More recent novels by Lobo Antunes and Lídia Jorge – arguably two of the most important writers that emerged after 1974 – have moved on to consider and problematize the conditions of migrants in Portugal and have done so in a way that always invokes questions of cultural memory, both what is remembered and, more often than not, what is forgotten. Indeed, one could say that even their above- mentioned earlier works were works that established important links between memory and postcoloniality, especially in the case of Lídia Jorge, who strongly problematized the relations between history and memory.

At the moment I would like to single out one very recent work, Lobo Antunes' as yet untranslated novel *O Arquipélago da Insónia* (D. Quixote, 2008) because in that novel not only is memory crucial, both as remembering and as forgetting, but it is inseparable from a postcolonial condition that is as much Portuguese as European. Lobo Antunes provides a horrific narrative of dispossession in which, I would argue, he exposes the void at the centre of Portuguese heritage. Indeed, perhaps even more than that, what Lobo Antunes reveals is a certain negative inheritance of the nation in which what is remembered is always false and what is forgotten, or would be forgotten, is a devastating history of cruelty. And even though the novel and the events it focuses on are specifically Portuguese I would argue that they should also be seen as crucial for Europe as a whole. Just as the novel uses the family as a synecdoche for the nation and the family history of depravity as a mirror to the entire polity, the post-imperial condition of abjection the novel claims for Portugal is not so different from a more generalized European situation. If one is to engage seriously with such a narrative then one must confront the political and ethical questions it poses in relation to the possibility of imagining a European future. One could say that it is a novel about imperial hauntings but perhaps it is exactly the need to deal with those ghosts that – in a sense not unlike the work Rothberg has done linking Holocaust studies with postcolonial studies – is urgent for imagining a different Europe.

The project of cultural memory studies has been political from the start even when its politics may not have been clearly stated or assumed. In relation to ethics the situation is less clear. Obviously, ethics does relate to cultural memory and vice versa, that is, ethics depends on certain remembered principles as much as there can be said to be an ethics of cultural memory, especially in relation to issues of truth. Margalit has explored *The Ethics of Memory* (Harvard UP, 2002) from a philosophical perspective that addresses both individual and collective issues and is also closely related to politics. Even leaving aside the involvement of early cultural memory studies in a political project of national imagery and identity, it is obvious that cultural memory studies has a significant role to play in the fashioning of possible new European identities and as such it is inexorably enmeshed in the political. But this involvement can be complex and contradictory. The notion of cultural heritage is a loaded concept, claimed and coopted for the most part by conservative, indeed extremely right-wing, constituencies: see for example the *Heritage Foundation* in the US, or the appeals made to essentializing notions of cultural identity so much in favour with neo-con and populist forces in

Europe. One possible function of cultural memory studies in conjunction with postcolonial studies might be to work against such forces that would encase European identity in mythical ethnic, theological and teleological constructs, and point out the way to a multiplicity of European identities that would remain in flux and hospitable to cultural transfers, recognizing how much Europe also has always been a set of ideas and cultural constructs aiming for increased freedom.