"Collective memory is not an inert and passive thing, but a field of activity in which past events are selected, reconstructed, maintained, modified, and endowed with political meaning" ('Inventing, memory, and place', Said, 2000). Discuss Said's account of memory using two case study examples.

Group identity, whether that be a group as small as a family, or as large as a nation, is constructed and perpetuated through passed down narratives, traditions, commemorations and monuments, creating a sense of community and unity for its members. These inherited traditions and narratives would be termed 'collective memory' by philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (Halbwachs, 1992). Halbwachs developed his concept of collective memory in his book *'La Mémoire collective'*, published in 1950, and translated into English as '*The collective memory'*, which would later become the foundation for studies of societal remembering (Halbwachs, 1992). Inspired by this discourse, Edward Said, the father of postcolonial studies and Palestinian academic, states in his work *"Inventing, Memory and Place"* that collective memory is an active field of remembering, constantly being modified and maintained (Said, 2000). This essay sets out to explore Said's account on collective memory, as well as understanding collective memory's relationship with history and discussing some critiques. Every group has their unique collective memory; however, this essay will explore Said's claim through discussing the creation and reconstruction of German nationalist collective memory. This analysis will be in national term, since Said's writings were within a national context and national identity has been the dominant way people identify themselves since the 19th century. Additionally, since the global pre-eminence of nationalism, most collective memory has been co-opted for nationalistic purposes. The case study of German nationalism was chosen since German national memory has been drastically and purposefully reconstructed for political purposes. This essay will focus on two momentous periods for German nationalism; 1871, when the German state was created, and 1990, the year of German reunification. Within these two periods, the fluidity of collective memory and its reconstruction for political means will be demonstrated through the study of the shifting meaning of two national monuments; the Kyffhäuser monument and the Brandenburg Gate.

Theoretical background and approaches to collective memory

Before discussing the evolution of German collective memory, Halbwachs's concept of collective memory must be understood since it is his definition that will

be used throughout this essay. Discourse surrounding social remembering began with Émile Durkheim and Henri Bergson in 19th century France, both of whom were mentors to Halbwachs (Halbwachs, 1992). Only Durkheim's work on memory will be discussed here since Halbwachs's distanced himself from Bergeson's views in much of his work on memory. Although Durkheim never directly used the term collective memory, his work explored the notion that every societal group requires and exhibits a sense of continuity with the past, and that this perception of continuity confers onto groups and its memebers a sense of identity (Misztal, 2003). This continuity and connection with the past are essential to coherence and unity within societies. These societal bonds are reinforced by shared rituals, often through religious traditions, which create a sense of "*collective effervescence*" (Misztal, 2003, p. 127), further deepening participants loyalty and attachment to the beliefs, values and norms being celebrated. Durkheim held a presentist approach, believing that these values and norms adapt *"to society's changing needs and tendencies"* (Misztal, 2003, p. 128). This collective effervescence, according to Durkheim, can only be attained through the physical participation of a group in a shared experience, emphasising the dependence of collective remembrance upon individual memory (Elam, 1996).

In *'The Social Frameworks of Memory'*, Halbwachs discusses how "*no memory is possible outside"* (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 43) of a framework of collective memory. Without this framework providing social context, a memory would hold no meaning. These collective memories are created and passed down through the commemoration and celebrations of meaningful events or people. Halbwachs, like Durkheim, held a presentist approach to collective memory, therefore, like Said, Halbwachs believed that these reconstructions of the past were not static, but active, ever-changing fields of remembering (Halbwachs, 1992). This belief in the fluidity and ability of memory to change was a view Halbwachs adopted from Bergson (Olick, 2008). Veering away from Dukheim's individualistic view of collective memory, Halbwachs understood collective memory as something remembered by individuals, but that exists independently of them and of time, encompassing individual memory while remaining distinct (Halbwachs, 1992). This aspect of Halbwachs's theory of collective memory has come under scrutiny for disconnecting collective memory from *"the actual thought process of any particular individual"* (Misztal, 2003, p. 139) however this criticism can be countered through examining Halbwachs's understanding of how the individual participates in memory. For him, there is individual memory; remembrance one's personal life that differentiates oneself from others. Then there is collective memory, evoking and maintaining "*impersonal remembrances of interest to the group*" (Halbwachs, 1980, p. 50). Despite being distinct, these two types of memory often intermingled, with individual memory especially depending on

collective memory to relocate itself and *"to cover the gaps in its remembrances"* (Halbwachs, 1980, p. 51).

Despite Halbwachs's account disagreeing with Pierre Nora's claim that we no longer have *"real memory"* (Nora, 1989, p. 8) due to our departure from primitive and archaic societies, many of Nora's concepts surrounding collective memory and history are worth discussing. Nora blamed our departure from authentic memory on our increasingly artificial way of life and history's incessant attack on memory. To Nora, memory is an emotive lived phenomenon, experienced by individuals that connects us to our past, while history is a critical, defensive and always incomplete representation of the past (Nora, 1989). Since nationalism's global ideological domination, nationalists have accelerated history's chipping away of memory, using history for its own means and silencing memories that challenge nationalist narratives (Said, 2000). History became a way of legitimising a nations' past, and consequently legitimising its future. During the fabrication of national history, many traditions and commemorations are created surrounding deliberately selected *lieux de mémoire* (Nora, 1989). These *lieux de mémoire* are sites created by history, lacking 'real' memory, with their meanings being constantly recycled and with *"no referent in reality"* (Nora, 1989, p. 23).

Theories of collective memory are often criticised by traditional historians for lacking a *"firm empirical base"* (Hildreth, 1995, p. 65), however, as we have discussed, history and collective memory have different roles despite being interlinked. In '*The Collective Memory',* Halbwachs dedicates a chapter to his concept of historical memory. Historical memory is understood as external memory, solely dependent on external account (Halbwachs, 1980). Knowledge of historical memory can be obtained and increased through the study of these accounts and it covers a much broader time scale, representing the past in a general, apathetic and schematic way (Halbwachs, 1980). Historians' demands for empirical evidence has been criticised by Nora as well as Marxists for producing a singular and distorted account of the past, only representing the past of the rich and powerful since only they could afford to have their stories and interests documented in 'official' ways (Said, 2000). Said's most famous work, *'Orientalism'* is an example of how 'legitimate' history is used to silence other narratives for the benefit of the powerful (Said, 2003).

<u>German collective memory in the age of nationalism</u>

Constructivists, such as Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm, Edward Said and other postcolonialists, understand nations not as inherent, but imagined, and in

order to be viable political systems they require the loyalty of their populations (Hobsbawm, 1983). With industrialism dissolving small communities like villages and large families, national authorities began to create new traditions, *"using collective memory selectively by manipulating certain bits of the national past, suppressing others"* (Said, 2000, p. 179) to create a national identity and loyalty. Nationalist restructuring of collective memory was to happen in the *Erinnerungslandschaft* (memory landscape) of the German people, as well as in the mnemonic restructuring of monuments, architectural landmarks and public spaces (Koshar, 2000). To maintain the semblance of continuity many of these new nationalistic traditions and narratives were based off of traditions and narratives of the previous identities that nationalism was replacing (Hobsbawm, 1983).

Since its creation in 1871, Germany has had a turbulent history, experiencing a constant cycle of reconstruction, maintenance and modification of their past (Levinger, 2002). Before unification in 1871, the area that is now Germany was made up of 39 independent states that were being fought over by the Protestant Kingdom of Prussia, and the Catholic Austrian Empire (Koshar, 2000). Once Prussia proved to be the dominant power through its considerable victory in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1871, the Germanic states were unified under Prussia (Koshar, 2000). The nation of Germany was dominated by Prussia, with Prussian King, Wilhelm I, instated as German Emperor, and Otto Von Bismarck, the Prussian minister president, placed as head of the new state and made responsible for the creation and maintenance of German loyalties (Tönnies, 2001). With Prussian pre-eminence in mind, Bismarck's approach to creating German loyalty was "*to emphasize pre-existing attachments"* (Koshar, 2000, p. 23) to the Prussian identities already present and glorifying collective medieval Germanic heroes. During this time, German nationalism was based on the concept of the 'heimat' (the homeland); a community based on the pillars of *"blood, soil and spirit (or kinship)"* (Tönnies, 2001, p. 204). This concept was particularly useful to promoting German nationalism, as it broke down differences between the individual Germanic states, unifying them behind shared collective memories of the whole Germanic region. An example of this would be the shared theme of *"bloody resistance"* (Koshar, 2000, p. 39) to foreigners, a theme that had been present in Germany since the Roman inability to conquer Germania, and that all the Germanic states held, specifically against the French. The French were not the only ones however, with anyone outside of the heimat being labelled an 'other' (Said, 2003).

<u>The Kyffhäuser monument</u>

The French also represented Catholicism and Prussia used this Franco-Germanic rift to other the German Catholic minority, turning them into traitors of the German identity within dominant collective memory (Koshar, 2000). The Kyffhäuser monument of Wilhelm I embodied, in part, this opposition to France and Catholicism (Koshar, 2000). The monument was built in the mountains of Thüringen upon the ruins of medieval King Friedrich Barbarossa's imperial castle (Levinger, 2002). Barbarossa, as well as the region of Thüringen, are deeply intrenched in Germanic collective memory through folklore (Levinger, 2002). German mythology claimed that Barbarossa was *"sleeping below the mountain as he awaited the renewal of German glory after the nation's fall from grace in the late Middle Ages"* (Koshar, 2000, p. 40). His slumber was also a reminder of Catholic treason since the Church was *"responsible for the degradation of the dynasty represented by Friedrich"* (Koshar, 2000, p. 40) as well as French betrayal, who had chosen to side with the papacy instead of their ally Barbarossa. The Franco-Prussia War was promoted by the Prussian narrative to be the end of the German fall from grace, and revenge for the French betrayal. The Wilhelm I monument was made to embody this sentiment, as well as creating continuity within the collective memory between medieval mythology and modern nationalism, all while favouring the Prussian narrative (Koshar, 2000).

<u>The Brandenburg Gate</u>

As a nation based upon a shared heimat, the Prussian elite chose to reconstruct and commemorate monuments that would represent the unity and accomplishments of the Germanic people. A monument that embodied Germanic continuity and military might while also supporting the Prussian narrative was the Brandenburg Gate (Traxler, 2019). The Brandenburg Gate is an extremely important *lieux de mémoire* within German collective memory, with the quadriga being of particular significance. The quadriga was captured by Napoleon in 1806 and the *"empty space on the Brandenburg Gate remained an unmistakable sign of Prussian humiliation"* (Traxler, 2019, p. 159) furthering the animosity between Germany and France. In 1813 the quadriga was reclaimed in a triumph march, starting in Paris and ending in Berlin in a mass celebration (Koshar, 2000). The return of the quadriga represented liberation from foreign oppressors, the might of the unified German people led by Prussia and peace, the *"natural result of victory"* (Traxler, 2019, p. 159). The Prussians understood the power of this moment, and wanted "*to extend that moment, to make it a part of every German body and mind, so that it would resonate in public festivals, classroom lessons, commercial exchanges, commemorations, monument dedications, and myriad institutions"* (Koshar, 2000, p. 18). With repeated commemoration, this site became etched into the collective memory, and when in 1871 the creation of the

German state was celebrated by a victorious march at this site, the Brandenburg Gate became drenched in memories of national pride (Traxler, 2019).

The reconstruction of German collective memory

On November 9th 1989 the Berlin Wall fell, and on October 3rd 1990, after 45 years of being divided, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) were officially reunified, creating for the second time, the nation state of Germany (Jarausch, 1997). This reunification posed a significant challenge to German history and collective memory, now tasked with reuniting a people whose identity and country had been split in two. Just as the trauma from the Nazi regime had begun to fade, Germany was faced with another failed dictatorship, that of the GDR (Jarausch, 1997). During separation, the FRG and the GDR had different ways of dealing with the memory of the Nazi regime. The narrative of the FRG had concentrated almost uniquely on the horrors of the Holocaust, emphasising the guilt and burden that Germany must bear through constant public remembrance (Langenbacher, 2010). Contrastingly, the GDR had a brief period of *"honest confrontation in the immediate postwar period—exemplified by DEFA film productions such as Die Morder sind unter uns (The Murderers Are among Us, 1946)"* (Langenbacher, 2010, p. 54) however, after this period, the GDR considered the history of Nazism dealt with. From a communist perspective, capitalism that had caused fascism, and in a communist state, fascism could not exist (Langenbacher, 2010).

With the FRG being much stronger economically and more ideologically appealing after the failure of the Soviet Union, it prevailed as the dominant narrative, both for the newly unified German people and for the international community however it was constantly challenged. The second unification led to a resurgence of many previously stifled subaltern narratives within Germany such as that of the Sudeten Germans, Germans exiled in the Czech Republic (Langenbacher, 2010). The Sudeten voice were part of a growing movement within Germany challenging the dominant narrative to recognise the collective memories of the Germans and non-Jewish minorities who had suffered during the Nazi regime and under Communism who had been ignored by the FRG. During this reconstruction of the German identity, the FRG had one goal in mind, to *"get things right"* (Langenbacher, 2010, p. 54), and to prove to the world and themselves that Germany could be redeemed. In the years directly after reunification, there rose two main competing narratives to that of the FRG. The narrative most at odds with the FRG was that of the populist right, claiming that the failure of the GDR and the Nazis were "*just bird shit in more than 1,000 years of successful German history"* (Schmidtke, 2019) and that focusing so intently on these events was degrading to the rich German collective memory. Then there

was the more future-centred approach, acknowledging the deep failures of the Nazis and the GDR but asking for German history to be rewritten in a more nuanced way, avoiding *"negative or positive myth-making"* (Jarausch, 1997, p. 40). This third narrative wished to focus on Germany's bright, European future, emphasising unity and a collective European identity (Schmidtke, 2019). This European/future focused narrative became increasingly included in the dominant narrative in response to the discontent that was felt towards the FRG's guilt ridden and Nazi-focused narrative. This shift in narrative could be observed in the newly reconstructed collective memories of national monuments.

The Kyffhäuser monument

Despite the Allies and the Soviets having differing ideas on how to deal with Germany's national monuments, they could agree on one thing; that militaristic and aggressively nationalist commemorations had to be erased (Niven, 2010). The GDR's approach to this erasure was to demolish many German monuments. This was not the fate of the Kyffhäuser monument however, with the then prime minister of the GDR, Otto Grotewohl, personally intervening to prevent the its destruction (Niven, 2010). This was in part due to the pure grandeur of the monument, being the third- biggest monument in Europe, but also due to the monument's connection with German folklore (Saunders, 2018). In an attempt to forget their more recent past, German memory had retreated deep into their past, clinging on to their mythology and medieval tails (Langenbacher, 2010). Whilst under GDR control the Kyffhäuser's hall was stripped of any sign of the Nazis and replaced with murals representing *"the plight of workers and farmers through the ages, their suffering in war, and their 'liberation' through the Soviet Army"* (Niven, 2010, p. 401). Oxymoronically, the Kyffhäuser was outwardly a symbol for German imperialism, while within it was the portrayal of the horrible consequences of such imperialism. With reunification, the meaning of the monument was returned to its former role, representing national unity, however this time celebrating the unity of East and West Germany. There was also a continued focus on the monument's connection to Germanic folklore and its Prussian history, with the FRG trying to "*usher in a new phase of 'positive memorialization'*" (Niven, 2010, p. 406) after decades of focusing on Germany's dark past.

The Brandenburg Gate

The Brandenburg Gate continued to be a site of great collective memory and political action after 1871 and its continued significance was apparent through the FRG and the GDR agreeing to a joint restauration in 1956 (Ayyash, 2012). A significant reason why it was saved was because neither *"the Brandenburg Gate itself nor the design of its iconic representations offers any information about the*

historical complexity" (Traxler, 2019, p. 158) of the monument and could be interpreted simply as a passageway. Once Berlin was reinstated as the capital, the whole city, as well as the Brandenburg Gate, was completely remoulded in international and German collective memory. When the Berlin wall fell the entire association with the Brandenburg Gate switched from being a reminder of divide, to a symbol of freedom and unity (Saunders, 2018). Imagery of "*the people standing atop the Wall"* (Traxler, 2019) in front the gate and flooding through its archways became intrenched in collective memory. Berlin became a growing tourist attraction and these notions of freedom and unity became one of its prime tourist slogans (Light, 2000). Tourism led to a sort of 'Disneyfication' of the city, leading to the Brandenburg Gate becoming an "*urban icon"* (Traxler, 2019, p. 162). The term 'urban icon' is a concept from postindustrial urbanism, viewing the city *"less as a place of production than as a place of consumption"* (Traxler, 2019, p. 162). This transformation of the Brandenburg Gate into an international icon of freedom and unity pushed much of its history into the background, with memories of Prussian military glory almost forgotten. The 'Disneyfication' of the city and its monuments are a perfect example of the activity of collective memory, and demonstrates how it isn't only political meaning that is endowed upon it, but also economic value.

Critiques

This essay has explored Said's claim on collective memory through a postcolonial and constructivist lens. Therefore, we can discuss the limitations of this analysis by looking at the critiques of postcolonialism and its use of collective memory as a whole. The most fervent critiques come from traditional historians, claiming that postcolonial narratives and their use of collective memory and unofficial historical narratives, such as novels or art, are illegitimate accounts of the past (Mackenzie, 1994). Historians have also criticised Durkheim and Halbwachs's concepts of collective memory, claiming it is too vague and hard to operationalise (Elam, 1996). A strong proponent of this criticism, and a critique of Said in general, is British historian John MacKenzie, claiming that Orientalism is *"strikingly ahistorical"* (Mackenzie, 1994, p. 21). Saidians would object to this critique, protesting that this demand for empirical evidence is yet another Western attempt to supress subaltern narratives. Additionally, the insistence for empirical evidence has increasingly come under scrutiny, with binaries and totalitarian views being challenged by relativist philosophy, denying objectivity and the idea of absolute truths (Hildreth, 1995). Postcolonialists side with relativists, understanding history as "*nothing more than a text, a 'grand narrative'"* (Kennedy, 1996, p. 350) perpetuating the dominant narrative. Postcolonialists wish to represent the voices of all subalterns in a way that is true to their collective memories however it is here where postcolonialism finds one of its strongest criticisms.

Halbwachs states that every group has their own unique collective memory, therefore how can we represent all of them equally? This ties into a critique of Gayatri Spivak's work. In her essay *"Can the Subaltern Speak?"* (Spivak, 2012), Spivak claims that the voice of the subaltern can never be recovered, and that even those who try to represent them are simultaneously silencing them (Kennedy, 1996). This paralyses scholars, restricting them to discuss solely their personal experiences. This criticism is used by historians such as MacKenzie to disregard the whole academic field however this would be a profound discredit. Despite their flaws, postcolonialism and studies of collective memory have raised provocative and fundamental questions about epistemological power structures, *"the construction of group identities in the context of state formation, even about the nature and uses of historical evidence itself"* (Kennedy, 1996, p. 356), allowing for the growth and diversification of our knowledge which should be the goal of all academic fields.

Conclusion

This essay has explored Said's statement on the malleable nature of collective memory (Said, 2000, p. 185), using Halbwachs understanding of collective memory through a postcolonial and constructivist lens. It has explored the fluidity of collective memory by examining the reconstruction of German national memory at two critical points in German history; its first unification in 1871 and its reunification in 1990. The co-opting of collective memory by nationalist ideology was further demonstrated through the modification and reconstruction of German collective memory of two national monuments; Kyffhäuser monument and the Brandenburg Gate, in 1871 and 1990. Some subaltern narratives within Germany, such as the Catholics or the Sudeten Germans, were discussed however the dominant national narrative was focused on as it is the most successful at reconstructing collective memory for its political benefit. The critiques that were discussed were from traditional historians and the dominant, document-demanding narrative of the West. The first critique was for the lack of empirical evidence. The second critique was on the use of collective memory by postcolonialists, claiming that their aim to represent the subaltern is futile. Despite both of these critiques being somewhat valid, they are not constructive, and instead of providing solutions, they discourage discussion of the unprovable all together, further demonstrating traditional history's commitment to the dominant narrative and keeping it unchallenged.

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