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Generations of Memory: Elements of a Conceptual Framework

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THRESHOLDS OF EXPERIENCE

Ever since Maurice Halbwachs' classical work on collective memory (1950), horizons of the past in complex societies have not been considered as an individual's "natural view" of the world. Collective memory has been seen as a product of social frames that enable individuals to remember by means of language, symbols, and spatial-temporal markers. Reflecting on the 1968 generation in France, Pierre Nora gave the idea of social frames a generational twist (1992: 937). He described generations as communities of remembrance that perpetuate a foundational event, which created a self-conscious generation in the first place. The becoming conscious of being a generation would, without exception, be made out of the despair in front of a history that frustrates because of its greatness and tragedy (ibid.: 958). Here, collective memory evoked the dependence of individual memories on a reference system of generational unity. Seeing generation as "pure memory," Nora's view of generational memory would discard historical time and its causal relations for the priority of fabricating a present without history (ibid.: 959).

Even if, as Nora argued, generational identity may draw on people's need to identify with a community of equals in democratic society, it is obvious that generations are not collective subjects capable of remembering. In reality, much like class, state, or nations, generations are subjects of reference created by language. As Reinhart Koselleck put it, "There is no collective memory but there are collective conditions of potential memories" (2010: 257). This paper

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elaborates on such collective conditions of potential memories by arguing that generations of memory bind the past to the future and vice versa. Although the formation of generational consciousness may constitute an important common frame of reference, generations cannot discard historical time and thus cause the forgetting of the past. Halbwachs' and Nora's primary concern for the role collectives play in identity and societal stability cemented what Astrid Erll calls "the unfruitful opposition of memory versus history," which "has hindered research more than it has helped" (2011: 17). My proposition is to retrieve the historicity of generational backgrounds and illustrate their key role for the emergence of memories. If there are patterns in which generations "remember" collectively, they emerge because generational belonging mediates access to memory. Generations are not ruptures with the past, but their impact on memory requires understanding them, to follow Koselleck's terminology, as "thresholds of experience" (*Erfahrungsschwellen*) (2003: 34–40). Thresholds of experience are understood as hinges around which generations transmit stories and narratives, which are recollected and thus form the basis of remembering. Thresholds mediate and connect across differences in biological age, fractures in historical time, and aspirations to future life. Extending over several layers of experiences in historical time, they cannot be fixed in time but in their fluidity accomplish changes of consciousness.[1] This paper aims to do justice to such fluidity by examining generativity as the potential of permanent beginning, the reciprocity between different generations, and the recollection of memory as the assembly of fractured lives. The concept of threshold therefore implies that generations depend on meanings of the past as much as they project new meanings into the future.

As Koselleck has suggested, historical experience is specifically generational and the mediation of such experiences is always indirect (ibid.: 34–40). He distinguished three modalities of gaining experiences. One is unique, unrepeatable, and often surprising. This type of experience is based on surprises and makes up any biography or history. It will always be lived through or suffered by individual persons, consciously or unconsciously. A further possibility concerns very long-term changes of experience, which include the transformations of entire social systems. Examples here are the dissolution of empires or the emergence of the global economic system. Such long-term processes transcend generationally specific experiences. The third and most interesting possibility concerns unique experiences that are collected, repeated, and accumulated. Beyond personal experiences of a unique kind and the very long-term, meta-historical forms of experience, there are

[1] Writing about necessary changes of consciousness that result from war events, Koselleck (2003: 273) recognized that the factors of consciousness formation are impossible to identify with one threshold. There is a fluidity in diachronic time, including different layers belonging to the prewar era, wartime events, and the war's consequences.

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generationally specific experienced periods of time (*Erfahrungsfristen*) and thresholds of experience. Societies do not remember because they cognitively know "beginnings" or "origins"; such "beginnings" emerge as meaningful, and as potentially foundational historical reference points, because each generation is confronted with different moral-political locations of experience, which create specific problem spaces. Such problem spaces are articulated in discourse and performance; they are documented by a high number of witness accounts, rich symbolic narratives, as well in institutional and ideological legacies. If one is on the threshold of war, persecution, or annihilation, the problem space may be such that the task of the generation is one of saving one's soul. If formative experiences are about coming to terms with economic hardship, aborted life opportunities, or forced migration, new generations may adapt their life course by connecting with older generations. Across fractures and discontinuities generational consciousness connects experienced problem spaces to posterity by recollecting narratives, texts, and collective rituals as mnemonic forms.

Following Karl Mannheim's classical study on the problem of generations, the rise of a generation means that different age groups become contemporaries because socially transformative events intersect with formative experiences in their biological life (1928). Such formative experiences (*Schlüsselerlebnisse*) during adolescence and early adulthood thus become "the historically oldest stratum of consciousness, which tends to stabilize itself as the natural view of the world" (ibid.: 182). Beyond the individual dimension of personal lives, such formative experiences can coincide with major transformations of the social and political fabric such as during revolutions, (civil) wars, or the collapse of state structures. This crucial insight from Mannheim's work has been corroborated in a variety of settings. The "meaning of the event … will be different for different cohorts" (Schuman and Scott 1989: 361). In the United States, older generations were significantly more likely to mention World War II as one of the major events in the last fifty years than younger people, who did not personally experience it (ibid.). For example, many in the Vietnam War generation, who experienced the distrust and divisions of American society of the 1960s, remembered World War II, which they did not personally experience, as the "good war."

Recognizing the role of generations as carriers of memorial activity, a substantial body of literature has argued that generational group experiences can be formative for cultural and political identities (Mannheim 1928; Wohl 1979; Kansteiner 2002; Jureit 2005; Marino 2006; Greenberg 2005; Hirsch 2008; Schuman and Corning 2015; Wulf 2016). The imaginaries of such "founding" moments can travel across distance in time and space and thus shape narrative commitments. Social communities commemorate such thresholds of experience by enacting cults, encoding gestures, or by using semantic symbols in order to remind the community of its identity (Connerton 1989: 7–9).

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Following the lead of these approaches, generations are liminal entities where transitions to adulthood of individuals cannot be adapted more gradually to existing conventions by means of established rituals and the leadership of recognized authorities. If liminality in the social fabric and political regime becomes dominant, generational experience may mean that "once previous certainties are removed and one enters a delicate, uncertain, malleable state, something might happen to one that alters the very core of one's being" (Szakolczai 2015: 18). Generations are "like a magnetic field at the center of which lies an experience or a series of experiences.… The chronological center of this experiential field need not be stable; it may shift with time" (Wohl 1979: 210).

Focusing on three lines of enquiry, threshold experiences require that we engage with generativity, in-betweenness, and the recollection of memories. First, generativity is an inexorable process of the arrival of new carriers of culture and meaning. These new carriers of memory enable time-bound horizons of historical beginnings. Such beginnings often make reference to founding generations who can retrospectively code an experience as a marker of collective identity. Second, generational divisions are liminal phenomena, driven by contingency and cultural hybridity. Generations therefore are confronted with in-betweenness, which they work to transcend through mediation, binding, and the appropriation of pasts. Precisely because generations emerge in weak moments of the social they need to transcend such uncertainty in order to enable continuity. Generational thresholds should therefore be thought of as connecting experiences and memories beyond the lifetimes of individuals. Third, particular narrative commitments do not become part of cultural memory because of the coherence and solidity of generational identity or the causal descent of a generational line. Instead, meanings need to be hermeneutically found by understanding how generational divisions work like hinges: they close the past and swing open to the future. Generations are capable of making transfers of meaning through activities of remembering, which are the experiences that shape memory and collective identity. Narrative commitments are often recollected across fragmented meanings and different temporalities. Even forgetting and incommensurability between generations can be social forces that select what will be remembered or not.

Remembering in common, therefore, is not reducible to group identity. Remembering is anchored in meanings of the past as well as projected toward frameworks of anticipation in the future. Different perspectives in memory studies have recently highlighted the cumulative character of memory. Michael Rothberg (2011) suggested that public memory works productively and is multidirectional. Memories of suffering, such as in cases of slavery, colonialism, or genocide, are extended to other cases of disaster or trauma by means of transcultural borrowing or adaptation. Defending the primacy of "entangled memories," Feindt and his co-authors suggest that the wider the spatial frames become, the more we need to draw attention to

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complexity and alterity (2014: 43). Heterogeneity is not a flaw, but a constitutive feature of the ways in which processes of remembering form social bonds. Echoing this turn toward memories of transnational cultures, Jeffrey Olick argued that theorizations of memory should consider how collective memory is founded on relations between past and present, where "images, contexts, traditions, and interests come together in fluid, though not necessarily harmonious ways, rather than to measure collective memory as an independent or dependent variable, a thing determined and determining" (2007: 91). Similarly, Erll advocated moving from "sites" of memory toward the "travels" or movements of memory (2011: 11). Due to the quick translation of historical novels, the diffusion of films and television series worldwide, and the participation in memorable events such as 9/11, transcultural memory can be described as the "incessant wandering of carriers, media, contents, forms, and practices of memory, their continual 'travels' and ongoing transformations through time and space, across social, linguistic, and political borders" (ibid.: 11).

My argument is not focused on understanding generations as self-conscious social formations that respond to a formative event. The aim here is not to identify specific generational cohorts as carriers of traumatic memories. If generational belonging is a consequence of formative experiences, then memories must be historically contingent and radically plural (Echternkamp and Martens 2013). The fundamental task at hand is therefore to explore how divisions and incommensurability between generations across time enable connections. Divisions between generations are not ruptures with the past but instead constitute threshold experiences. We can problematize such threshold experiences as the backgrounds for the creation of meanings, which connect beyond the life-times of contemporaries. This paper therefore understands generations of memory as a hermeneutic process in which fluid threshold experiences are the magnetic center around which meanings are recollected.

Rather than claiming causality in concrete empirical settings, I will propose a typology of experiential bases of generations of meaning. Any type is only a measure that may become adequate for the explanation of a concrete empirical case. The empirical examples in this paper are illustrations, not proofs. They draw mainly on material from Europe in the twentieth century, notably generational experiences related to war, revolution, and genocide. I shall provide illustrations from Holocaust memory as well as from the coming to terms with collaboration, war, and postwar in Germany and other European countries. I will also illustrate some of my claims with examples from postcolonial settings. The goal is to understand connectivity through the bonds that generational groups make in order to transcend divisions.

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GENERATIVITY

In Maurice Halbwachs' conception of time, collective groups possess a collective consciousness in which a certain image of the past has remained immobilized (1950: 191). Conversely, scholars of the German tradition, such as Wilhelm Dilthey or Karl Mannheim, saw generation as enabling an internal conception of temporality of lived time. Whilst the evolution of historical experience and social memory can be externally measured in months, years, or decades, Dilthey's point is that generational units enable measuring spiritual movements from inside (Mannheim 1928: 163). Whilst social frames undoubtedly provide orientation and meaning, it does not follow that they can immobilize time or immemorialize the past. The principal reason for this is that the awareness of one's existence in life and future death is a dynamic, forward-looking process driven by generativity. Generativity is the concern for establishing and guiding the next generation and thus perpetuating life. As Hannah Arendt wrote with reference to St. Augustine: "*Initium ut esset creatus est homo*"—Man was created in order for things to begin (1951). Such beginnings are a permanent potential. The tension between natality and the certainty of death is vital to the relationships between parents and children, which lead to the succession of generations. Carriers of memory grow old and die while new people are born and enter the social world. (Koselleck 2003: 106–8). This may state an obvious truth but it represents a major challenge for memory.

With the passing away of earlier generations, forgetting is a fundamental necessity for societies to evolve. In order to live, however, social memory and new action are also essential (Mannheim 1928: 177). Generativity emphasizes the forward-oriented need for responsibility and bonding. What later generations may consider "memory" is, from the viewpoint of contemporaries, an obligation, a readiness for action, and eventually, a responsibility. According to Nietzsche, bonding memory (*Bindungsgedächtnis*) concerns the will to remember engagements and promises made (1997: 799–800). Without such bonding memory, there could be no mutual trust, no reliable keeping of promises, and no predictability of human interaction. It is human beings who can promise and develop a sense of responsibility because they have developed an independent will. Some events are, due to their "objective" importance, seen as significant by all generations, including those who were not adolescents at the time. A "'decisive generation' is … neither still a precursor nor any longer bound by the past" (quoted in Marias 1970: 99).

People "learn" and "store" memorial codes not so much as a transparent record of the past; rather memory comes into existence "at a given time and place through a specific kind of memorial activity" (Wood 1999: 2). Decisive generations bind future communities to the memory of an event due to an outburst of testimonies, rituals, and representations. At various junctures in history,

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generations coded their existential community and thus symbolically transmitted the idea of foundation. Jan Assmann's work on the links between religion and memory in Ancient Egypt and Israel argued that bonding memory underpins the generativity of Jewish religion. The founder of monotheism, pharaoh Amenophis IV, Echnaton, had a history but left no memory, whilst Moses has no proven history but has left an indelible memory (Assmann 1997). The key reason for such indelible memory was Judaism's unique ability to create mnemonic techniques in the sense of bonding memory (Assmann 2000: 29–32). Mnemonic techniques central to Jewish identity, for instance, drew on the generativity of threshold situations. The greatest sin and trauma would have been to forget God's teaching. The fifth book of the Bible portrays the end of the forty years in the desert, which saw Moses make the Israelites a memory. This was a threshold situation, which contained a threefold transition. Spatially, it was the passage over the Jordan, from desert to fertile land. Temporally, forty years signify a generational threshold, the end of the generation of witnesses, which will take them from lived and embodied experiences into tradition that will be traded down across generations. Existentially, it was a radical change of lifestyle, from nomadism to settlement. As philosopher Karl Jaspers argued, people have to cope with their finitude by what he called "*Halt"* (support and stability) in the existential uncertainty between birth and death (1960). The Torah transmitted such existential support by instructing believers in several techniques to "remember." Such techniques included learning by heart, embodied signs, storage and publication, feasts and rituals of collective remembering, oral communication, and canonization of the text of the Torah, all of which provided not only political bonds of rule but also a "we-identity" and bonds of community. Whilst their actual context and historical detail might be forgotten, they still are "remembered" in cultural memory.

In modern times, bonding memory plays a crucial role in how cultures and societies remember comprehensive political and social transitions. The gravitational pull of a revolutionary generation, for instance, can become semantically "objectified" and thus form a part of the future social imagination. The Italian term *mezzogiorno*, for instance, is a powerful semantic marker for the widespread idea of a failed nation (*nazione mancata*). It does not derive from an empirical analysis of the alleged structural incapacity of southern Italy in the wake of Italy's political unification in 1861; it was made popular by the very revolutionary generation of exiled Neapolitan liberal intelligentsia who had to make sense of the failed revolution in the Kingdom of Naples in 1848 after it was banned by the Bourbon regime (Petrusewicz 2000). We would hardly talk about "the long nineteenth century" and "the short twentieth century" if the massive social and political changes starting from the French Revolution in 1789, the end of World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917–1918, or the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1989–1991 had not created different levels of generational consciousness. Coining the famous

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term *Ancien Régime*, the French revolutionaries of 1789 turned the historical complexity of politics and society before that year into a mythical space (Nora 1992). They emphatically claimed to make a rupture with ten centuries of history, thereby separating the "old" from the "new beginning." The idea of "founding" is present in the United States, where the Declaration of Independence and the War of Independence coded memorial rituals that came to pervade national consciousness and political identity. "Generation" used to designate life age, the natality and the succession of cohorts (*genere*). The slogan *novus ordo seclorum*, as inscribed in the Great Seal of the United States of 1782, still uses *saeculum* in the meaning of "age" or "generation."

During the twentieth century the concept of generation underwent a profound transformation. The increased number of civil wars, revolutions, international wars, and economic depressions affected an ever-increasing number of people and thus transformed cultures of memory. First, a generational cohort of men and women born between the 1860s and the 1880s had a prominent impact on academic, literary, professional, and public life between approximately 1890 and 1925. The most important generational theories emanated from the "generation of 1914," or the "generation of fire" that lived through a period of war destruction, regime change, and massive social change between 1910 and 1933 (Wohl 1979). The "founding fathers" of generational theories, such as José Ortega y Gasset (1923) or Karl Mannheim (1928), saw the catastrophe of World War I as an opportunity. They argued that generational consciousness could potentially generate new social structures and a new type of leadership. Following the loss of Spain's last overseas colonies such as Cuba and the Philippines in 1898 to the United States, Ortega (born in 1883) became part of the "generation of 1898," a group of young writers and intellectuals who turned their outrage about the failure of Spanish elites into a desire for regeneration. In Ortega's words, "Regeneration is the desire: Europeanisation is the means to satisfy it" (quoted in Jauregui 1999: 275). A second important generational thrust framed cultures of memory between the late 1960s and the mid-1980s by encompassing profound changes in the politics of memory, driven mainly by the witness of the Holocaust (Fogu and Kansteiner 2006). While the first postwar generation came of age, the last prewar generation that had participated actively in World War II or in resistance efforts was passing away. In France and Italy, after decades of resistance-dominated memory, a process of demystification of antifascist mythology began in early 1970s, whilst in Switzerland and Poland intellectuals began to challenge the mythic images of representations of uninterrupted historical continuity.

Events shaping generational consciousness do not have to relate to warfare or genocide, however. Glen Elder's (1974) research on the economic depression, for instance, focused on the generation that came to maturity in the 1930s. This generation was confronted with the effects of World War I, the advent of the Great Depression, and the rise of fascism. Elder's longitudinal

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study showed how biographical time was interlinked with such great events that shaped a generation seemingly born "at the wrong time in the wrong place." His life course analysis centered on how members of this generation linked their lives in social relations and how they sought ways to overcome adversity. Elder's research indicates that, sociologically speaking, generational belonging is an experiential fact.

Mannheim distinguished experiences of passive and active belonging to generations. In analogy with the economic-political rhythms that underlie a class situation in a Marxian sense, Mannheim argued that there is a biological foundation of generational situations (*Generationslagerung*) that applies to everybody (1928: 172–74). We can understand this as a form of passive belonging. The class situation relies upon a constantly changing economic and power structure of society. Similarly, the generational situation is potentially always there but it is passive. It will not become socially significant unless historical events stamp the consciousness of relevant cohorts as a result of a crisis. Beyond local proximity, similar age group, and temporal congruity, generational connectivity (*Generationszusammenhang*) requires the same contemporary-historical configurations of problems. Within this community of fate different generational units can emerge. The common beliefs and aspirations in a generational unit (*Generationseinheit*) depend on a sense of common purpose, reciprocated feelings, or spiritual likeness (ibid.). Active belonging to a generation is contingent on events in historical time. Such active belonging is therefore like an energy field. It attracts precisely because living through the same socially and politically extraordinary times produces a sense of identification with other participants in the same generational situation (*Generationslagerung*).

THE IN-BETWEENNESS OF GENERATIONS

Beyond the "founding" influence of decisive generations, therefore, generational situations are an anthropological constant of generativity, which structures intergenerational succession. For all the focus on synchronicity of generational consciousness, thresholds of experience must be inserted into a diachronic dimension. As new carriers of memory appear and others depart, problem spaces are permanently changing. Generational cohorts make sense of the inexorable passing of social time according to their own experienced periods of time (*Erfahrungsfristen*). In turn, they inspire different frameworks of anticipation. As Mannheim put it, not only does the teacher educate the pupil but the pupil also educates the teacher. There is an inherent and constant reciprocity (*Wechselwirkung*) between generations. "In this process of retrospective balancing (*rückwirkender Ausgleich*) there is initially the opposition not between the oldest and the youngest generation but between the in-between generations (*Zwischengenerationen*) who are closer to each other" (1928: 184–85). Younger generations do not always enter into conflict with older

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generations. In more static conditions the youth tend to adapt to the elderly, trying to appear more established. For example, according to Austrian writer Stefan Zweig, the pre-1914 period was one of complacency in which priority was given to the status quo; even younger people wanted to appear settled, mature, and established (2014). Once social change accelerates, the reflection (*Rückstrahlung*), as Mannheim called it, of the problem spaces of the younger generation on the older one increases. In modern developed nations, for instance, one key element is the relatively recent trend to want to appear youthful, to improve diet and exercise, and thus to adapt to youthfulness.

The conditions of in-between contain deep oppositions, yet they also offer the possibility of transcending them. Koselleck made the case for meta-historical, biological preconditions of history (2006: 38). Biological decline and renewal are the extreme limits that enable meaningful connections between present and past. Yet, such ideas about the life course must include forms of reciprocity, exchange, and mediation between the life-worlds of members of different age groups. Such claims have been made in contexts as different as Europe in the late nineteenth century and Africa in the early twenty-first century, drawing from both literary sources and ethnographic research. For Thomas Mann, one of the literary masters of time, the essence of history was not in ruptures but in transitions between historical configurations. His own life spanned two epochs, which allowed him to experience how the seeds of the new were already alive and spiritually active within the old regime (2002: 8). Born in 1875—in the late period of the liberal epoch—he affirmed that as a member of that generation he had an "advantage" over those born into the contemporary disintegration of order, values, and morality brought by the European civil war between 1914 and 1945. His own experiential background allowed him to understand what equilibrium, stability, and a long-lasting system of values actually meant. Mann's time was of course not more "stable" than any other. Rather, his point suggests that there are several intersecting planes of temporality: biographical time (the time of a person's life), historical time (the time of events), and generational time (the time of contemporaries). Recent comparative ethnographic work on generations in Africa has mapped how disruptions and fractures in the life-worlds of people create new relational positions of social belonging, morality, and responsibility that occur through new and often unexpected connections between generations (Alber, van der Geest, and Reynolds Whyte 2008). Radical economic and political changes led to failures of dialogue, aborted life opportunities, civil wars, emigration, and health emergencies. Even if reciprocity is interrupted, generations nevertheless connect. If many young city dwellers in Burkina Faso fail to make ends meet and thus must depend on their parents' support, or if the AIDS pandemic in Kenya means grandmothers must more frequently assume parental authority and responsibilities, then we see the creation of new connections between generations (ibid.: 47–90). Such reversals of classical social categories

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and roles reminds us of European societies such as Spain, where in the wake of the global financial crisis many unemployed young people depend for their livelihoods on their parents' or grandparents' pensions.

These examples suggest that there is an internal temporal rhythm that organizes a generation's way of living the relation between pasts, presents, and futures—of living the relation between experience, memory, and expectation. It is therefore safe to say that neither historical events nor generational units hold the interpretive key to meanings, and in fact the opposite applies. Separate generational units elaborate on given events according to their own experiences and in different ways (Marias 1970: 100). Generational belonging structures the perception of temporalities. Individuals experience social time according to their own position in the generational sequence. As Zweig (born 1881) reflected back on his generation, in 1941: "We all lived without return, nothing remained from what had been before, nothing came back.… We however who are sixty by now … what have we not seen, not suffered, not lived through?… We have ploughed through all possible catastrophes from one end to the other (and we haven't yet arrived at the last page)" (2014: 10). Conversely, later generational cohorts perceived the acceleration of the interwar period differently. According to Sebastian Haffner, those born between 1900 and 1910 formed the genuine generation of National Socialism (2000: 21–22). This cohort of young German schoolboys absorbed the army reports from the frontlines of World War I on an almost daily basis. For these boys, war was not the experience at the front but a great and exciting adventure. The meanings given to events expose how formative experience (biographical time) coincides with historical event time, and thus can produce generational time.

The initiation of the European integration process illustrates such generational reciprocity. Before the catastrophe of World War II, the older generation appeared to be more flexible than the middle generations who had constituted the political generation of fascism and were unable to change their dispositions. Key leaders of the European integration process after that war had, generationally speaking, undergone formative experiences long before World War I. They shared the formative experience of being from marginal regions where people had long been suspicious of centralized nation-states. The future German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer (born 1876) was from the Rhineland, a western border region, where he had been mayor of Cologne. Robert Schuman (born 1886) was of mixed Luxembourg and Lotharingian origins and had fled the German occupation of Lorraine to Luxembourg. Italian Prime Minister Alcide de Gasperi (born 1881) was from the Trentino, studied in Vienna, and had been a subject of Austria-Habsburg until 1918. This generation of leaders could speak German with each other and came together around the Christian roots of European democracy (Forlenza 2017).

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Such obligation and responsibility across generations comes close to what cultural sociologist Bernhard Giesen conceptualized as "in-betweenness" (*Zwischenlagen*) (2010: 53–56). In-betweenness structures identity and difference through the ambivalent, fragile, equivocal, and liminal world (ibid.). The constant transitions between earlier and later are fundamental to any conception of history as a sequence of occurrences. Because people belonging to different age groups and different generational times always overlap in historical time, generational belongings are incommensurable and meanings are always fragmented. If several social and political upheavals occur during the lifetime of overlapping generations, meanings are fragmented according to their generational time. Koselleck references a letter Friedrich Perthes wrote to philosopher Friedrich Jacobi in the early nineteenth century in which he talked of the unbelievable speed with which his time transformed all thinking: "Our time has combined the incompatible in the three simultaneously living generations; the tremendous oppositions of the years 1750, 1789, and 1815 lack any transition and appear not as a sequence but as being side-by-side within the currently living people, depending on whether they are grandfathers, fathers, or grandchildren" (in Koselleck 2003: 165). It is the chronological co-presence of what is socially and politically non-contemporaneous that causes conflict. In other words, carriers of personal memories attribute different meanings to mnemonic signifiers depending on their position in the generational chain.

This constant fragmentation of meanings must be transcended, and usually is. New generations are ritually introduced into different communities of adults. This may happen through baptism, communism, blessings, rites of initiation, or degrees. As has been argued for changing youth religiosity in Ethiopia, the increasing appeal of Protestant evangelical churches for young people generates tensions with their parents since the youths see allegiance to rigid codes of behavior as empowerment and an opportunity to distance themselves from their parents (Alber, van der Geest, and Reynolds Whyte 2008: 311–32). Yet these tensions suggest that notions of virtue and ethics are not traditionally given but rather actively redefined through the connection between generations. Generational divisions thus work as thresholds and intervals, as the dimensions of the in-between. Each "new access" (*neuer Zugang*) is likely to introduce new expectations because its space of experience will differ from that of the older generation.

Time perceptions are cumulative, not linear. Such cumulative perceptions of time are corroborated by anthropological work on reproduction and aging among Gambian women. Rather than considering contingency of reproductive life as a product of linear chronological time, Caroline Bledsoe argued that woman in West Africa are not subject to a biological clock. Instead, time depends on a cumulative decrement of youth, which must be carefully managed by adjusting the pace of childbearing and carefully protecting bodies from wearing experiences under harsh conditions (2002: 324–25).

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The key insight here is that the pace of ageing is not biologically determined but depends on social forces that shape trajectories of an individual's physical life. Thus, "bodily time bends according to the lines of force in a social universe" (ibid.: 326). Bledsoe's suggestion to connect experiential histories of vital events in individual lives with large population perspectives echoes the need to recognize the cumulative effects of generations of meaning.

As an existential condition, in-betweenness is essential to understanding the periodization of the past. Following Javier Marias (1970: 79), generations are based on "inter-individual" reality. This reality suggests that lives of individuals cannot be separated from their sharing of the wider historical experience of their generation. Individual psychology is therefore part of a wider group existence, and vice versa. As Mann wrote, "One cannot completely remove the autobiographical 'I' from the observation of my time. The overview of it becomes, if I like it or not, the overview of my life" (2002: 6). If a specific generation presents itself by means of literature, artistic expression, or biographical testimony, the goal is to transcend the fractures that underlie its destiny as a generation. Generativity relates to existential destinies (*existentiale Bestimmungen*); transcendental categories, so to speak (Koselleck 2003: 109). Martin Heidegger expressed the transcendental destiny of generations as follows: "Destiny is not something that puts itself together out of individual fates, any more than Being-with-one-another can be conceived as the occurring together of several Subjects. Our fates have already been guided in advance, in our Being with one another in the same world and in our resoluteness for definite possibilities. Only in communicating and in struggling does the power of destiny become free. *Dasein*'s fateful destiny in and with its 'generation' goes to make up the full authentic historicizing of *Dasein*" (1962: 436).

A poignant example of fates guided in advance is given by German Protestant pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was a key founding member of the confessing church, in opposition to the Hitler regime, and who identified the central task of his generation as "saving our souls." His generation had grown up with the experience of their parents and grandparents "that each person can … shape his own life, that there is a life work on which one must decide, and that he can and must pursue this with all his might" (Coetsier 2014: 481). In the face of totalitarianism, however, Bonhoeffer saw the task of "our generation not to 'seek great things,' but to save and preserve our souls of the chaos, and to realise that this is the only thing we can carry as 'booty' out of the burning house.… We shall have to bear our lives more than to shape them, to hope more than to plan, to hold out more than to stride ahead. But for you, the younger, newborn generation, we want to preserve that soul, which will empower you to plan and build up and give shape to a new and better life" (ibid.: 482).

As this example suggests, the generational destiny held in common was not based on an abstract ethical imperative or the collective will of a social

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formation—people created meanings without foundation, intentionality, or justification. Bonhoeffer, for instance, had learned by experience that he could not plan even for the coming day. What a generation had built up was being destroyed overnight. His life, in contrast to those of his forbearers, had become "formless or even fragmentary" (481). The present of a generation can be in a situation "at the limits." Drawing on Karl Jaspers' term "limit situations" (*Grenzsituationen*) (1960: 229), we can argue that thresholds of generational experience involve collisions of values. According to Jaspers, there are decisive situations in which our human existence will lead us to the limits of our being, where there is no absolute certainty (*Festes, Halt*) that would resist any experience or any thought. Life is driven by antinomies—inevitable oppositions—that depend on each other. Specific limit situations are death, suffering, struggle, or guilt. Life is bound with death, struggle is bound to mutual help, suffering to meaning, and guilt to the consciousness of purification of sins (*Entsündigungsbewusstsein*). Claims of emancipation are always linked to generational change, but they can never be final or universal. Desires for emancipation and freedom, for instance, can be aligned with the influence older generations have over younger ones. The saying made popular by the student movement, "Don't trust anybody over thirty," is only genuine if it can be turned against those same students ten years later. The desire of generations for emancipation therefore needs to be retrieved from inside the problem spaces that characterize fragile thresholds of experience.

Following Max Weber, subjective meaning is a crucial element in the translation of historical experience into what can become memory frames. The experiential backgrounds of generational belonging are always multiple but they are related to each other like a melody. Contemplating how the background shapes the melody of a thing, Rainer Maria Rilke considered it an insight of "nearly religious importance that once one finds the melody of the background, one is no longer clueless … there is a quiet certainty (*sorglose Sicherheit*) in the simple conviction that one is part of a melody, that is, in possessing a given space in one's own right and to have a certain obligation within a broader work in which the smallest part is as valuable as the greatest" (1993: xxxvi). As Rilke suggests, the melody is part of a greater whole. That said, the melody always changes tune because the production of meaning is an inexorable process of cultural creativity.

The collision of values between generations confronted with a liminal event such as a world war can produce generational connectivity with the effect of radical axial reorientations. Drawing on the case of the foundation of the Italian republic in 1946, Giuseppe Carlo Marino argued that this second Italian *Risorgimento* derived its moral force significantly from the generational experiences of the resistance movement. The *Resistenza* was a formative experience for those young Italians born just on the eve of fascism's ascent to power in the early 1920s (2006: 814–22). Until Mussolini's fall in September

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of 1943, these cohorts had been quite indifferent to Italy's internal political situation. The unprecedented limit situation between his fall and May 1945 was a civil war. While after Mussolini the fascist regime continued to exist, at Hitler's mercy in the Republic of Salò, the German occupation and the allied invasion in southern Italy forced many young Italians to take sides and make existential choices of the most fundamental kind. The republican consensus in postwar Italy emerged, so to say, in the liminal fragmentation of the confusion of the civil war. The need to cope with the simultaneity of chaos and the promise of a golden age exemplifies well the generational experience "at the limit." The Italian national holiday on 25 April, celebrated since 1946, therefore commemorates the *Resistenza* as "chaos" and "golden age" simultaneously (Cenci 1999).

The generational conflict between younger outsider groups and older established groups can become particularly polarized, such as occurred in West Germany in the two decades following World War II (Elias 1996: 251–77). The father's generation, which had held responsibility during the Nazi regime and experienced the immediate aftermath of the war as adults, had to cope with the charge of collective guilt leveled at Germany by both the outside world and the next generation. In his commentary on German guilt after 1945, Jaspers (1996 [1946]) suggested that purification is the condition of political liberty. Only through the conscience of guilt could the consciousness of solidarity and co-responsibility emerge. Without purification of the soul, there would be no hope for political liberty. It was, however, only the second generation, those born just before or during the war and who would grow up during the 1950s and 1960s, who developed a greater sensitivity to the total defeat of 1945. They therefore fought most fiercely against national greatness and patriotic glory, which had been most sacred and meaningful to their parents and grandparents. At a time when the economic miracle had given West Germany new confidence, the younger generation promoted initially latent but progressively more insistent and even "rebellious" claims against the establishment. Material security and prosperity may not satisfy a generation's desire to realize a meaningful, personally fulfilling purpose (Elias 1996: 237). They engaged critically with recent German history and became the pillars of the 1968 student revolt. The polarization of value conflicts meant that new generations sought meaning not in forgetting but in remembering.

The collision of values and the creation of new values are therefore dependent on the subjective meanings that thresholds of generational experience create. As Victor Turner observed in reference to Wilhelm Dilthey, "The category of meaning arises in memory, in cognition of the past" (1987: 96). Yet such cognition is always fragmentary and in-between. Generational thresholds of experience create meaning as they cope with a double structure of void, something that is expressed in the German term *Grundlosigkeit*, which refers

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to the bottomless nature of existence, but also to its unfoundedness. Such experience lacks normative justification or a "reason." This *Grundlosigkeit* needs to be reversed into forms of justification, turning chaos into order (Giesen 2010: 31). Precisely because social relations and political structures are fragile and full of uncertainty, some non-contingent realm of identity needs to be hypothesized or imagined. Generational experiences transcend traditional frames of collective identity because they retrieve meanings from the historical past and connect them to new frameworks of anticipation in an attempt to cope (Wydra 2015). Although generations cannot be collective subjects of action we can consider them as magnetic centers around which people make sense of the brokenness of thresholds of experience.

RECOLLECTING MEMORY THROUGH GENERATIONS OF MEANING

Carriers of political power or knowledge production are themselves products of generational belonging. Yet, we must abstain from attributing a given memory to a specific generation as a social formation. The appropriation of the past by people who did not themselves make experiences may exonerate their own generation. Conversely, it may burden different generations with the responsibility for crimes, repressions, or defeats. As this paper has argued so far, the transmission of memories through generations is not a relationship of causality. In Paul Connerton's words, "To remember … is precisely not to recall events as isolated; it is to become capable of forming meaningful narrative sequences. In the name of a particular narrative commitment, an attempt is being made to integrate isolated or alien phenomena into a single unified process" (1989: 26). This integration of isolated or alien phenomena does not occur either as an outcome of historical events or through the outburst of a generational unit. The reason for this is that transmission of memory depends on the subjective meanings of generational belonging and how problem spaces translate into new frameworks of anticipation. Drawing on Ludwig Wittgenstein's suggestion that our perception of the world is grounded in inherited background, Connerton referred to "habit memory" as those activities that we perform although we cannot remember them in personal or cognitive memory (ibid.: 23). By performing activities such as riding a bike, mowing a lawn, or speaking our native language, we relate meaningfully to the past. This past memory guides many actions in daily life, but it is based on forgetting and cannot be consulted like a manual or scrutinized for information.

A critic could, of course, argue that precisely because of the inexorable dynamic of forgetting, different generational belongings are incommensurable. Let us take Nora's claim that generational consciousness can create a massive rupture with the past up to "immemorialising the past in order to better memorise the present" (1992: 958). He paid tribute to the sheer outpouring of performance and testimonies produced by the "generation of 1968." Nora was well aware that the fabrication of the sacrosanct generation of 1968 did not start with

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the "events" but came about with the rhythm of anniversaries in 1978 and 1988, and thus in profoundly different historical contexts (ibid.: 931). Still, he held that the generational experience of 1968 would establish memory frames that would discard earlier memories. In reality, though, this outburst of generational consciousness was a catalyst for the revival of memories of the occupation and the Vichy regime. As Henry Rousso argued, such incommensurability is the cornerstone for reshaping meanings, for obliging not to forget, for connecting meanings of earlier generational experiences to the present. Rousso called this the "broken mirror" and the "forties revival" (1991: 98–131). The year 1968 marked a turning point in French thinking about the occupation of France between 1940 and 1944. New images of the past, conveyed by documentaries such as *The Sorrow and the Pity*, directed by Marcel Ophüls (born 1927), or novels such as Patrick Modiano's (born 1945) *la place de l'étoile*, would explode the "cultural time bomb" constituted by memory. Ophüls' documentary exposed the inner contradictions of the Vichy regime and attacked the resistancialist myth. Modiano explored the internal contradictions and shadowy ambiguities of the occupation period. The example of the forties revival in France suggests that memory is not always based on an attempt to conserve something under threat of being lost or forgotten; it is also a force that fights against the desire to forget and repress. Such force is not based on the identity or the agency of well-articulated social formations. It has to be retrieved from divisions, forgetting, and incommensurability. The forties revival between 1971 and 1974 occurred primarily because a whole generation—the sons of collaborators and deportees alike—had to cope with the bloody legacy (ibid.: 130).

The broken mirror evoked by Rousso suggests that the threshold of experience of 1968 mobilized memories from earlier generational backgrounds. In generational succession there is never a tabula rasa. For all the chronological distance between incommensurable and fragmentary generational experiences, generational backgrounds also contain the possibility of ordering and responsibility. As Zweig wrote in his 1942 autobiography: "I do not consider our memory as one element which simply and accidentally retains one thing and loses another one, but as a force that knowingly orders and wisely neutralizes.… Only what I myself want to preserve has the right to be preserved for others" (2014: 13). The intergenerational search for meaning exercises this force of "knowingly ordering" as an unconscious process. Such ordering cannot derive from social frames, strong identities, or determined memory agents. It emerges through relational connectivity that is driven by generativity, in-betweenness, and generational backgrounds.

Such connectivity is mediated through the co-presence of different temporalities and incommensurable generational belongings. "Generation" is, as Rosenstock-Huessy argued, always inside a sequence (1953: 15). Generations are preceded by generations and are followed by generations to come. They

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fulfill a hinge function. Generations of meaning "order" and "categorize" people's positions because they emerge in a tension between two fronts, reinterpreting the past and projecting future horizons. To take up a proposition by Norbert Elias (1997: 387–90), such identity formation is engaged on two fronts. Elias' concept of "dual front strata" (*Zweifrontenschicht*) goes beyond static conceptions of class. Here, the tension between a stratum above and a stratum below is an elemental aspect of class consciousness. The research on "Holocaust" memory highlighted a similar dual front strata regarding hinge generations. Two cultures of memory coexisted in post-World War II West Germany: one public culture characterized by the paradigm of guilt, and the other, hidden culture of silence marked by the paradigm of shame. The necessities of daily life such as the country's reconstruction required this "vital oblivion" in the collective self (Meier 2010: 55). This vital oblivion was challenged by new carriers of culture. The Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1961 and the Auschwitz trial in Frankfurt between 1963 and early 1965 attracted a sizeable international audience. Beyond these nation-wide events, hinge generations mediated the passage from internalized forms of oblivion to a more open confrontation with the legacy of National-Socialism (Hoffmann 2004). Whilst survivors of the Shoah were too traumatized to begin the work of mourning, the second generation—the children of survivors—had the chance to proceed toward a new understanding. The communication between witnesses and their offspring provides a corrective to the symbolic reductionism of "founding" generations. Hinge generations could then enter into a critical relationship, often rejecting the interpretive frameworks established by the previous generation. Memories become meaningful at a distance because the second generation embodies them in speech, art, and images. As Marianne Hirsch argued, post-memory is a generational structure of transmission deeply embedded in forms of mediation drawing on "family life, even in its most intimate moments" (2008). It is "entrenched in a collective imaginary shaped by public, generational structures of fantasy and projection and by a shared archive of stories and images" (ibid.: 114). In Hirsch's words, the "second generation is one of post-memory." It does not recall traumatic experience but is invested through imagination, projection, and creation. Post-memory appropriates the past with a view to coping with a loss of meaning and a structure of void. The coexistence of different temporalities is therefore not only divisive; they also interact and therefore connect. Post-memorial work strives to "reactivate and re-embody" otherwise lost embodied connections with the past by reinvesting them with "resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression" (ibid.: 111).

The cumulative effects of hinge generations and their post-memory were forcefully illustrated regarding the partitions of Indian and Pakistan in 1947 and the creation of Israel in 1948 (Greenberg 2005). Whilst the parental generation saw these events as politically unifying and socially liberating, many of their

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children increasingly came to think of such narratives as stifling and corrosive. Whilst the generation of the founder of Pakistan Jinnah, and Zionist Ben-Gurion in Israel, claimed to lead a heroic struggle for freedom and the people's self-determination, the hinge generation developed counter-narratives to these official transcripts of national glory. In both cases, the traumatic component of the nation's establishment could no longer be repressed for patriotic goals.

For instance, against the official collective memory of the foundation of the Israeli state a new generation of historians in Israel has pointed to the colonial exploitation and ethnic cleansing involved in the occupation of Palestine. In turn, Palestinians born around 1948 are burdened with the crushing defeat and failure of their parents and grandparents. Unable to throw off the burden of the catastrophe (*nakba*), they rebelled first against Israel. But the on-going intergenerational struggles within Palestinian communities brought intra-familial rebellion as well, against the older generation's weakness. The hinge generation of respected academics inside and outside the Palestinian territories integrated the moral failures of the 1947–1948 leadership and the experiences of trauma and suffering into the originally nationalized and heroic narratives of the partition's formative events. Still, both the first and second generations promoted ideas of social change that had characterized previous rebellions against the past. Ben-Gurion's idea had been to overcome diaspora existence and the sterility of Zionism, whilst Nehru in India and Jinnah in Pakistan both positioned themselves against colonial repression. Whilst selective forgetting may dominate in some cases, generational time can have the opposite effect.

We have established so far that generations of meaning contain manifold possibilities of establishing connections with the past. Meaning-formation is a relational and cumulative process. Theorizations of generational memory must therefore go beyond presentist or functionalist understandings of collective memory. As Olick observed, "Notions of collective memory as objective symbols or deep structures that transcend the individual risk slipping into a metaphysics of group mind" (2007: 23). One needs to ascertain how memories are collected over time and space. Since only people have lives, shared symbols and deep structures are only real insofar as individuals, sometimes organized as members in groups, treat them as such or instantiate them in practice (ibid.: 24). Memory is not made by events, generational units, or outstanding individuals, but relies upon networks of connectivity. Collected memory is an aggregate of individual memories where the plurality of individual experiences across temporal and spatial distance shapes memory. Memory is not a means for any collective structure or agent but an end in itself. It is "not a vessel of truth but a crucible of meaning" (ibid.: 97).

Meaning is not limited to one aspect of experience—an event, generational unit, or founding generation. It pervades the whole. Meaning is not a relationship of causation but is the center that attracts connections from

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different backgrounds of generational belonging. This is because the ontological foundations of memory are based on recollection. The phrase "to recollect oneself" suggests that recollection is the basis of remembering. Recollection works to collect oneself as a unity. This process of recollection cannot achieve full identity or being in the sense of presence. Such processes are about not just concentration but also retrieval and renewal. Such retrieval often occurs through assembling fractured lives, accepting forgetting, and distorting memories.

Writing on modalities of transmission of knowledge and generations of memory in indigenous communities, anthropologist Tim Ingold argued that intergenerational transmission does not follow a genealogical model, in which essential, substantive components of a descent line are handed down to future generations (2000). Instead of thinking of generations of memory as forming tree-like structures, Ingold proposed a relational model in which life proceeds, rhizome-like, by generating through fluid and constantly developing relationships that are connected by situated experiences (ibid.: 132–51). In a relational model, persons are continuously coming into being; they are not generated through biological or cultural specifications inherited from predecessors. If knowledge is not received from predecessors in advance of being applied in the world, then objects of memory cannot exist before acts of remembering.

A critic might suggest that this relational approach to the recollection of memory advocates a naturalization of memory. Such a criticism overlooks that the emergence of narratives of commitment has an experiential basis, which is fluid and movable. It centers on sites and activities of remembering. Generations do not immemorialize the past. Multiple problem spaces produce multiple frameworks of anticipation. There is therefore a potentially boundless plurality of cultural memory. A large part of our memories, in a Proustian twist, "sleeps" within our bodies, libraries, museums, or archives until it is awakened or triggered by some external, often haphazard stimulus (Assmann 1999: 130–45). Adapting Astrid Erll's proposition regarding the travels of transcultural memory, we can safely state that generations are transmission belts for the travels of memory (2011). Drawing on Aby Warburg's insights that the afterlife of classical antiquity in European art forces us to imagine the movement and travel of symbols across time and space, Erll argued that "all cultural memory must 'travel' and be kept in motion, in order to 'stay alive,'" to have an impact both on individual minds and social formations. On a more fundamental level, therefore, it is the on-going exchange of information between individuals and the motion between minds and media that first generates what Halbwachs termed "collective memory" (ibid.: 12). Memories are generated along the paths of movements that each person lays down in the course of his or her life. Expressing the cyclical dimension of generational succession, Ingold refers to a Cree man from the James Bay region

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who testifies to generativity by saying that "life is a process of 'continuous birth'" (2000: 142).

It may be asked whether generations do not instead produce cultural forgetting. Generations of memory might indeed underscore Nietzsche's famous formulation according to which forgetting is stronger than memory: "I have done this," my memory says. "I cannot have done this," says my pride, and remains relentless. "Eventually, memory gives in." According to Connerton, forgetting is built into the capitalist process of production itself (2009). The growing separation of social life from locality and human dimensions, as well as the destruction of the built environment, suggest that the increasing reliance on memorial culture is not a sign of more memory, but exposes a fear of amnesia. "The threat of forgetting begets memorials and the construction of memorials begets forgetting" (ibid.: 29). As Rainer Maria Rilke once wrote, "When no heavy pain silences people in a similar way, one hears more, the other one less of the powerful melody of the background. Many don't hear it any longer. They are like trees who have forgotten their roots and now deem that the rustling of their branches would be their strength and life. Many don't have time to listen to it. They tolerate no hour around them. These are poor people without homeland, who have lost purpose of being. They hammer on the key of days and always play the same monotonous sound" (1993: xx).

Across the generations, however, memory does not give in. We are not only the past we can remember but also the past that we have forgotten. Generational consciousness is not determined only by reminiscence bumps in adolescence and early adulthood. Quite conversely, the meaning of memories of a traumatic past may lie in producing a pact of forgetting, which helps collective groups to cope with present existential uncertainty. Fragile political transitions may require forgetting precisely because the memories of earlier generational units are dominated by fratricidal civil war. Spain's transition to democracy in the mid-1970s, for instance, was initially based on a pact of forgetting (*pacto de olvido*), an active "forgetting" of the 1936–1939 civil war. The primacy of national reconciliation after Franco's death in November 1975 suspended the polarization between the successor government recruited mainly from the former government camp and opposition parties such as the formerly outlawed communists. That said, forgetting did not mean social amnesia. Before the first democratic elections in June 1977, memories of the fratricidal civil war commanded a pervasive, if latent and "invisible," fear and anxiety. People were well aware of the brutality and self-destruction of the civil war, especially the generation whose formative experiences coincided with the civil war and who made up the political elites (aged roughly between fifty-five and sixty-five) of the transition after 1975. They saw healing the wounds from the past as key to imagining a common future. Their generational time therefore inspired meaning in forgetting.

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It is more common for forgotten memories to be mobilized, thus keeping generational memory alive. Regarding the convulsion of Stalinism in Soviet society, Anna Akhmatova's long witness elegy, *Requiem* (written between 1935 and 1961 and eventually published in 1987 in the USSR), testified to her own ordeal of queuing daily for long hours trying to learn the fate of her son who had been arrested during Stalin's Great Terror. In two lines of the poem, she mobilized memory by expressing her solidarity with thousands of other mothers: "I should like to call you all by name, but they have lost the lists…," which were adopted by the Russian human rights association Memorial in 1988 in an effort to give a name to the unnamed victims of Stalinism. As Orlando Figes put it, this poem became the people's voice, based on an intimately private experience but shaped into the "mouth through which a hundred million scream" (2003: 487).

We can also draw on material from a postcolonial setting. The autobiography of Australian Aboriginal painter Sally Morgan includes stories of her great-uncle, her parents, and her grandmother (Seran 2015). Morgan's book collects her mother's and her grandmother's traumatic stories and incorporates disjointed, incomplete accounts of her relatives, embracing them as a form of "we-identity." Morgan reconnects with the ancestral land as a way to possibly heal the trauma of double removal, since her grandmother Daisy was lost, and Morgan herself lost her eldest daughter as a consequence of what is commonly known as "stolen generations." "Stolen Generations" refers to the widespread child-removal policies enforced by the Australian authorities between the late nineteenth century and the 1970s, which took mixed-race children from their Aboriginal mothers to raise them as white. Here transgenerational dialogue anchored in Australian history is presented as a form of healing of individual and collective trauma. Thus, in contexts where colonization disrupted intergenerational transmission, "It befalls the younger generations to relieve the older ones of the wrongs inflicted by colonialism by helping them re-live their life-stories to bridge the gap between the past and the present" (ibid.: 672).

It must be conceded that the recollection of memories across generations hinges on a central paradox of our age, which is one of liminality and cultural hybridity. Large-scale traumatic events such as forced mass migrations are undoubtedly modern production sites of forgetting. Before 1914, nearly fifteen million people arrived in the United States, but the two world wars produced enormous numbers of refugees: between four and five million in the decade after 1914 and more than forty million after 1945. As displaced refugees reached unprecedented numbers in 2016, the forced uprooting of migrants has generated cultural forgetting on a large scale. Generational thrusts are resonating more powerfully in a global age (Edmunds and Turner 2002: 5). Transnational networks, borderless communications, and higher mobility through different forms of migration all increase the hybridity of stories and identities. As Homi Bhabha suggested, cultural hybridity is fundamental to postcolonial

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identities, since it signifies the "construction of cultural authority within conditions of political antagonism" (1996: 58). Postcolonial subjects have assimilated cultural traits and languages of former oppressors into their own identities.

The building of national identities in postcolonial societies, such as in Jamaica, illustrates how conflict between generational belonging and time perceptions underpin narrative commitments to the nation (Scott 2014). The generation that achieved national liberation from colonial rule in the aftermath of the great labor upheaval of 1938 formulated its goal of independence as a horizon of expectation. The next generation conceived the new nation as an existing reality, which could appear constraining bureaucratic, and static. Rex Nettleford, a distinguished Jamaican intellectual, emphasized the difference between his own generation and the second generation, the first to have never experienced colonialism. For Nettleford, the emerging project of the "new" Jamaica was not narrowly political. For him, new Jamaica was a more diffuse experience of *Bildung*, articulated through a variety of affective, aesthetic, and cognitive registers. As he wrote, "The future was a wide open space.… I was very conscious that you could make your way, because … Jamaica was opening up." It was about a sense of possibility and a sense of destiny for which one had to prepare. Nationalism as a liberation from colonialism required that one personally perform a "disciplining moral labor" in order to cultivate responsible readiness for political freedom. Conversely, for the next generation nationalism is not an imagined ideological horizon, but the construction of an ideological political contest between parties.

Similarly, members of the radical generation of 1968 inherited independence not as something for which they had made sacrifices but as an assumption of entitlement. Being from relatively well-educated, middle-class, urban backgrounds, this generation lived political independence in 1962 as a betrayal and the nation-state as a constraining political reality. It therefore rejected the older generation and refused to recognize its relationship to, and therefore dependence on, what the latter had made possible.

The cultural hybridity of memory is a result of recollection across different temporalities and a collision of values. Such recollection of national identity occurs also across spatial and temporal distance. Drawing on three generations of Cuban migrants to Spain, Mette Berg has argued that generational cohorts of migrants recreate narratives of the nation from afar (2011). Diasporic generations recollect cultural memory across experiences of their pre-migration background, the migration trajectory, and the challenges they face within the host nation. The émigré exiles that arrived in Spain between 1959 and the late 1970s were largely anti-communist and nationalist. They fled from a revolution that had made life impossible. The second generation was the children of the revolution who arrived in Spain from the mid-1970s onward. They were disillusioned with the revolution and their poor career prospects. University-educated, white, and critical of both the government and exile

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nationalism, some of them continue to travel back to Cuba. Finally, the third cohort, the migrants, arrived in Spain from 1990 onwards, aspiring to a better life and not politically motivated. Different diasporic subjectivities are grounded in hybrid identities, which illustrates how forgetting and memory intersect.

As Connerton suggests, the virtually interminable production of books, articles, and intensified archiving may lead to an excess of cultural memory, resulting in a culture of hypermnesia (2009: 146). Conversely, the temporalities of consumption, working careers, and information production, and the production of modern spaces, support the argument for a post-mnemonic, forgetful culture. Connerton attributes hypermnesia to cultural manifestations, and amnesia and post-mnemonic cultures to the structures of the political economy. If modernity forgets, the succession of generations may indeed lose relevance for the transmission of traditional symbols and practices. Modern lifestyles have fundamentally changed patterns of learning, education, and perceptions of the social world.

And yet, backward reflection continues to increase. Why have master narratives of patriotic pride, glory, or patriotism given way to a focus on victimhood, trauma, atonement, or regret (Giesen 2004; Olick 2007)? In Spain, for instance, the grandchildren of the civil war generation, those born in the late 1960s and early 1970s, challenged many of the achievements of the transition (Bernecker and Brinkmann 2008). The recent upsurge of memory politics was exemplified in the exhumation of mass graves, claims to retributive justice by challenging the amnesty law of 1977, and an opposition to the pact of silence in the aftermath of the Franco regime, all of which called into question the sacred roots of the transition. Even national identity can be expressed in terms of victim identity, as witnessed recently in the slogan "*je suis Charlie*" as a response to the killing of several *Charlie Hebdo* journalists in Paris in January 2015.

As the West German example suggests, such shifts toward cultures of victimhood can be linked to generational recollection. When the central memorial of the Federal Republic of Germany at the Neue Wache in Berlin was dedicated to the "victims of war and tyranny," the "truth" was bent in at least two accounts (Koselleck 2006: 232–33). Most of German soldiers in World War II fought for their nation in pursuit of a meaningful active sacrifice. In the memorial, this active *Opfer* (sacrifice) is merged with the passive *Opfer* (victim) of Jews and other victims of Nazi persecution and genocide. This risks conflating those who fought in the ranks of the German army and potentially also supported the Nazi regime with innocent victims of the war effort and genocidal action. The effects on the third and fourth generation illustrate cumulative connections within the intergenerational search for meaning. Only beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s did public discourse come to focus on West German responsibility for the Holocaust. For many West Germans of the first and

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second postwar generations, therefore, their own Germanness constituted a challenge. Dealing with perpetrator trauma became equivalent to being exposed to a stigma of "inherited" or "original sin" (Moses 2007). West Germany sought international recognition, but Germans also desired national innocence and the end of stigma.

One way of transforming collective identity was to develop elements of a "non-German German identity," based on atonement and the politics of regret. Similarly, sacrifice has become central to the German subjectivity of the fourth generation. As Dirk Moses argued, murdered Jews of Europe are cast as sacrificial victims (2007). Remembering the Holocaust redeems those Germans prepared to identify with the victims rather than the perpetrators. By seeking forgiveness from the world public sphere and demonstrating that they have atoned for the Holocaust and changed for the better, these Germans cast Jews in the role of the sacrificed Jesus in a secularized *christomimesis*, only now Christ's killers are not the Jews but the Nazis. The imitation of victims by the descendants of the perpetrators is not simply forgetting, however. It also "remembers" the foundational meaning of 1945. As Christian Meier has argued, the success of Daniel Goldhagen's book *Hitler's Willing Executioners* in the mid-1990s can be explained not only by Germany's post-national identity (2010: 75); the idea that 1945 was a definite end to a collective mentality of racism allowed younger generations to offload guilt on the elder generation. The worse the accusations against Hitler's contemporaries were, the clearer the conscience of younger generations would become.

Reflecting on the unity of life and the concept of a tradition, Alasdair MacIntyre argued that the story of a person's life is always embedded in the stories of those communities from which they derive their identity: "Practices always have histories and … at any given moment what a practice is depends on a mode of understanding it which has been transmitted often through many generations" (2007: 221). With the death of carriers of memory, the past is no longer "lived reality," but instead becomes appropriation *as past*. When we consult the past, we follow not how we have learned it, but how the past relates to the practices, values, and norms we have in the present. In the *longue durée*, therefore, the forward movement of generativity will seek new reassurances from what Assmann called "vertical anchorage" (*vertikale Verankerung*) in the past (2000). Beyond conceptions of time that regard it as chronological and irreversible, generational *Rückstrahlung* links back to the mythical time of "foundations." Mnemonic relationships harking back to the treasure of suffering (*Leidschatz*) of humanity underpin cultural memory. Warburg's idea of "image memory" (*mnemosyne*) suggested that the presence of the old in the new was not primarily based on material sources such as monuments or texts, but more on spiritual appropriations and translations. Mnemonic waves translate human experiences that become objectified in culture and recollect the narrative commitments that are identified as traditions or memory.

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In a recent study of generations of collective memory in post-Soviet Estonia, Meike Wulf demonstrated the cumulative connections between otherwise incommensurable generational belongings throughout four different generational contexts (2016). Based on oral history, she argued that professional historians are carriers of meaning whose formative generational experiences are key to understanding the shaping of various post-Soviet identities. Wulf distinguished the war generation (born in the 1920s, it witnessed the double Soviet occupation of Estonia in the 1940s and the end of Estonian independence); the postwar children (born in the 1930s); the transitional generation (born in the 1960s, and witnesses to the Afghan war and the Polish Solidarity movement); and the freedom children (born in the 1970s). In the wake of Estonian independence in 1991, the formative experiences of both the war generation and the transitional generation formed an intergenerational alliance, which made them partners in the engineering of the independence movement. Conversely, the postwar children were less inclined to perceive Soviet rule as having been an occupation and they developed a double consciousness and a sense of accommodation within Soviet society.

As this example suggests, intergenerational meaning-making diffuses the notion of "agency," transforming it into a long-term process across temporal and spatial distance. It challenges voluntarist and structuralist approaches to memory. Generational post-memory eludes ethical judgments and the responsibility of clearly identifiable actors. Taking an analogy from Bruno Latour's work on eighteenth-century scientific innovation, distant formative experiences may be mobilized in specific contingent conditions (1987). Explorers translated their experiences in distant islands by organizing and channeling information such as maps, drawings, and readings of the movements of tides and stars into "centers of calculation" at home. In the diachronic perspective, such agency will progressively lose its quality of something based on human subjectivity or a collective will. The cumulative effects of meanings point to the effect of what Assmann called the "stretched-out situation" (*zerdehnte Situation*) (2000: 128). In his analysis of how memory is communicated in written texts and by means of rituals, Assmann seeks to understand how memory is stored and how it is translated. In most cases, there is no immediacy of a situation of co-presence, but instead "stretched-out situation" in which texts are communicated over long distances across time and space.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper has argued that generational belonging mediates access to memory as thresholds of experience create problem spaces, different temporalities, and frameworks of anticipation. If memory and historical identity often appear as socially and culturally framed, it is because people need to order an otherwise chaotic and broken world. Generativity and in-betweenness create the experiential conditions for the recollection of memories. Thresholds of experience

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produce forgetting and incommensurability, but they can also transcend such conditions because they are hinges that mediate divisions and fractures.

A critic might argue that the lives of many people are not punctuated by formative experiences in communities of fate. When "nothing happens" there is only passive, not active, belonging. And yet, the will to belong to a generation is there, evidenced in proliferations of attributes, whether "Generation Golf" or "Generation X." Fashions or movements are credited with a generational spirit, although there is no time or distance to certify active belonging. Writers and politicians have made it clear that they want to belong to a "generation." It may be that the search for generational identity has taken on its almost desperate character due to the absence since 1945 of any universal event that might unify the memory of humanity (Kriegel and Hirsch 1978: 32). Even in "normal times" we orientate our lives in collective groups by means of vanishing points. Cultural frames, such as the nation, democracy, or class, exert their emotional strength through such appropriations of the past. They transcend logical, rational, or empirical enquiry.

Why do generations of possessive individualists or materialists still identify with collectives such as nations, classes, or universal values? Why do young people in a post-heroic age still want to be heroes? There is hardly any social group that has not been labeled a "lost generation." The will to actively belong to a generation ultimately lacks rational justification. It challenges generational specificity and thus may leave the concept banal. As Nora rightly recognized, however, such an outcome "by no means limits its sacralization, radicalization, and its transgressive tendency" (1992: 941).

The intergenerational search for meaning connects memories, beyond the lifetime of individuals, with the wider cultural existence of social communities. This connection, however, is not manifest in a positive correlation of a direct continuity of generations as social formations that would immemorialize the past or immobilize time. In order to understand the power of generations of memory, we must engage with the historicity of experience and people's search for meaning when they are coping with the unfoundedness of existence. Before memories are framed in the social and cultural world, the sites of remembering are in the weak moments of the social, where generativity, in-betweenness, and recollection are the experiential background of our activities of remembering. It is through such recollection and acts of remembering that memories are forged. From this perspective, generational memory is not a product of cultural or social frames—generations of meaning produce narrative commitments and cultural memory in the first place.

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Abstract: This paper links memory to generations of meaning and argues that generational belonging mediates access to memory. Generations of meaning create memories because they connect experiences, beyond the lifetime of individuals, with the wider cultural existence of social communities. Such connections can be understood as a hermeneutic and relational process. Meaning is not a factor of causation, but is cumulative, as meanings are recollected across generational thresholds of experience. This paper conceptualizes such thresholds of experience through three lines of enquiry. First, generativity produces new carriers of culture and memory, which sustain perceptions of historical beginnings. Second, generational change is a condition of liminality and in-betweenness, which people work to transcend by mediating fractures and thus connecting past problem spaces to frameworks of anticipation. Third, narrative commitments emerge as memories are recollected across different temporalities, incommensurability, and forgetting. Memory is not the product of one determining generation, but relational, cumulative, and stretched out in time.

Key words: generations, meaning, memory, generativity, in-betweenness, experiential background, recollection

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