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Introduction: Transnational Memory and Traumatic Histories

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Memory studies has moved from the cultural collective, rooted within the bounds of the nation state, to the transnational or transcultural, which in recent years has come to account for the circulation of “memory cultures” in an increasingly complex, globalised and violent world. In what follows, the essays in this special issue on Transnational Memory and Traumatic Histories are briefly introduced and contextualised within this transcultural framework.

Memory studies has moved from the collective, as defined by Maurice Halbwachs in the 1920s to the placed “cultural” memory of Pierre Nora’s *Lieux de mémoire* (published between 1984-92). From this, Astrid Erll more recently welcomes transcultural or transnational memory to take account both of the shift beyond the reductive bounds of the nation state, within which previous conceptions of the “memory culture” had been based, and as a means of dealing with the increasingly “global” circulation of memory across cultures and nations. As Erll puts it in relation to contemporary events:

If we want to get our heads around current wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and on the African continent, the rise of China and India, global warming [...] then we have to acknowledge that many of the ‘hard facts’ of what we encounter as ‘economy’, ‘power politics’ or ‘environmental issues’ are at least partly the result of ‘soft factors’, of cultural processes grounded in cultural memory (5).

Of course, Erll will go on to identify the problem of “cultural memory” in its singular and potentially pre-determined nature within what she calls a “national memory studies” for which Nora was a key arbiter. Whether intended or not, cultural “sites of memory” became sites of “national memory” (7). Not only is Nora’s idea of memory contained within the arbitrary borders of the nation state, but it is drawn ultimately along lines of ethnicity and race, ignoring the multicultural realities in France and the colonial legacies which give rise to this. In short, Erll sees this view of culture as (erroneously) “contained” (7). Hence, the transnational or transcultural conceives cultures as themselves “entangled” (8) outside a previously fixed state. With the help of Paul Gilroy, Erll points us towards the study of “routes” over “roots” and, in a return to the work of Aby Warburg, she sketches transcultural memory in the movement, migration and travel “of symbols across time and space.” (11) Transnational or transcultural memory means “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.” Indeed, this is said to be the very nature of memory as a process, “to be constituted first of all through movement.” (11)

The stability of the nation, which Nora's work comes to assume as a principal locus for memory, has come under increasing scrutiny. As Benedict Anderson has shown the nation as an "imagined community" is continually produced and reproduced in a political act done by individuals and groups. Indeed, the imagined community of the nation is itself often transnational in that contemporary migrations of people have brought together a plethora of memories, which constitute a fluid and ever-changing imagined nation space. Transnational memory is then not just about interrogating the possibility of the local (the perceivably fixed) and the global (what is perceived to be unfixed) memories of individuals and (imagined) communities. The articulation of memory through the idea of the transnational or the transcultural underlines the fact that the perceived division between the local and the global, between the particular and the universal, is itself unstable – often a product of the prevailing imagined order – and this instability is often embodied in moving, migrating and travelling memory cultures.

As the essays in this special issue of *Forum* on Transnational Memory and Traumatic Histories demonstrate, conceiving of memory as unfixed and subject to multiple and entangled narratives of trauma has allowed for a proliferation of scholarly work which has engaged in a wide-ranging, and quite transnational, manner with structures which are mnemonic in nature: most recently Max Silverman's *Palimpsestic Memory*, following Michael Rothberg's *Multidirectional Memory*, Marianne Hirsch's "The Generation of Postmemory" and Alison Landsberg's *Prosthetic Memory*. In Silverman and in Rothberg's account, it is the stability of Holocaust memory which is challenged, placed in dialogue with colonialism and decolonisation. All of the works deal with the production of what Erll calls "mnemonic communities" in an increasingly globalised world (9). And if as Erll claims, "[l]anguages of memory and commemoration seem to travel faster and faster in the current globalising age" (13), then these theoretical works go some way to check and to critically assess their various itineraries. The essays in this special issue both employ and complement these emerging developments in memory studies in an eclectic manner, applying the theory to a number of different historical and literary case studies.

If transnational or transcultural memory brings multiple disparate histories together under one critical umbrella, it does so not only across geographical space, but time too. While four of the essays in the issue deal with questions of traumatic histories during the 20th century, Juliette Reboul's contribution takes us back to the very foundations of the nation in the French Revolution of 1789, considering the transnational phenomenon of the writing and publication of self-narratives by counter-revolutionary migrants to Britain. By investigating the publishing contexts of these self-narratives, Reboul introduces the possibility that a transnational exchange present in migration has over the years led to scholars and publishers creating a "common European cultural and historical identity" around counter-revolutionary ideologies. While subsequent editions of the self-narratives have been used (and modified) for the creation of national sites of memory, the author brings to the fore the transnational moment of their creation in the travelling and migratory space of memory which has been largely overlooked in other historical studies of the period.

From the founding of the republic in France to its defeat in the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), the focus of the issue remains on literature as the principal form through which questions of trauma and memory are interrogated. Lasse-Emil Paulsen uses the 2003 novel *Sepharad* by the Spanish writer Antonio Muñoz Molina to think through the question of multi-directionality as a challenge to the notion of memory as fixed in national contexts. Calling on Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman's work on the figure of the "concentrationary", the essay moves towards questioning what could be seen as a problematic cosmopolitan memory discourse, challenging the situatedness of Holocaust memory in general and applying its transnational structures (namely the "concentrationary image") to a reading of the traumas of the Spanish Civil War. If anything, the cosmopolitan project is an ongoing work, and Paulsen shows Molina's novel to be an intervention into ongoing debates of what he calls "a shared transnational responsibility for history." Again, literature is a space which allows traumatic histories to retain their particularity while being critically interrogated at the level of the transnational. Hence, literature can be seen as the transnational form *par excellence*.

The "sinister trains" which both invoke the "concentrationary image" and act as a metaphor for multidirectional memory in Molina's novel takes us to the train as the site of killing in Ahmed Kalouaz's novel, *Point Kilométrique 190* (1986), which recounts the 1983 murder by French soldiers of an Algerian Habib Grimzi. Beatrice Ivey argues that in using the voice of a French woman (a journalist covering the story of Grimzi's murder) not only is the memory of the victim reconstructed, but it is done so without easily reproducing binaries associated with French colonialism, the highly troped feminine Algeria and masculine France – what the author refers to as "gendered colonial national identities". The transnational here is about collapsing binary narratives – in colonialism, gender, race – and reaching out beyond social and memorial practices based on nation, race and gender. Ivey argues that Kalouaz's novel avoids reproducing such binary formations by transcending the binary in a narrative that refuses to merely reproduce "a single 'true' version of the past".

In a return to the self-narrative form, and remaining with Algeria, Christina Brennan makes the case for transnational memory in the work of two women writers who have charted the traumatic crisis of 1990s Algeria – the so-called Black Decade. Employing Silverman's multidirectional figure of the palimpsest, Brennan argues that the work of Malika Mokeddem and Leila Marouane should be read outside the limits of a body of literature which has been accused of being a simplistic and grotesque reproduction of the violent events of the 1990s. The body of literature marketed in France as "écriture d'urgence" (a writing of urgency/an urgent writing), has led some Algerians to accuse their fellow citizens of exploiting the crisis in a literature which innovates little in terms of style and, worse, creates a space of desensitisation to the violence lived by Algerians through this period. In re-reading the work of Marouane and Mokeddem in turn, Brennan contends that the transnational and transcultural models of commemoration, exhibited here through the figure of a mother-daughter relationship, offer a path away from conceiving trauma as rooted in the place it occurred. We are reminded of Gilroy's "routes" over "roots" (Erl 11) and, of course, of Hirsch's cross-generational concept of "postmemory". In layering the experience of violence on top of previous periods of violence (notably that of the war of decolonisation with France fought between 1954 and 1962), Brennan demonstrates the existence of a dialogue, figured here as palimpsest – something perhaps overlooked

in quick denunciations of the works. Here again, the transnational is about taking a shared responsibility for a violent past. In this case, it is the French *métropole* – now the home of these exiled women writers – which becomes tied up the dark spaces of its Algerian colonial past and postcolonial present.

Sticking with the self-narrative in fiction, Jessica Ortner's guest contribution to the special issue focuses on the question of locating a transcultural aesthetic in the autofictional works of German-Jewish author Barabra Honingmann. After problematising the photographic and nostalgic aesthetics of postmemory, Ortner is able to uncover a more nuanced, transcultural, work of postmemory in Honingmann's novels, which understands diaspora (alongside Stuart Hall) as the "transcultural blending and mixing of identities." Like in the other contributions to this issue, this represents a turn away from the fixed or the territorial to a transnational or transcultural aesthetics which moves beyond both nostalgia and, central to Ortner's argument, the melancholy associated with Hirsch's photographic conception of "postmemory". Honingmann's work, the author argues, captures the duality of displacement in both its literal and figurate nature and repositions the quest for home as constantly in motion, rejecting the idea of any "final return". Again, the study of "routes" in memory is privileged over "roots"; and it is this critical imperative of situating an analysis both within and beyond the text that allows all of the contributing authors to unveil the irreducibly transnational nature of memory and of trauma.

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