

‘GROUPS’ AS A PRODUCT OF INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY: THE HARDCORE OF MAURICE HALBWACHS’ THEORY OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY

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Abstract

This paper reconstructs the theoretical framework of the Maurice Halbwachs’ theory of collective memory, demonstrating that the hardcore of his theory relies on the conceptualization of ‘groups’ because of individual memory and collective memory. We show how this relation is entailed by the epistemic objective status attribute to remembrances, and what is the place for the individual remembrance itself. At the end, we show how every content related to the past could be framed by his theoretical assumptions.

I Introduction

This paper is a reconstruction of the sociological theory of memory of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. The hardcore of his work on memory is contained in two major books, *Les Cadres Sociaux de la Memoire* (1925), and *La Memoire Collective*, a posthumous collection of texts ranging from 1925 to 1941. A major claim of this paper is that the concept of ‘group’ is necessary to give unity to his theory of memory. Halbwachs sets a dependence relationship between what he calls the ‘phenomenon of memory’ and the ‘groups’ within a society. Initially, we shall comprehend the ‘phenomenon of memory’ through two major concepts:

- a) the individual memory (IM), which comprises remembrances supported by individuals and reconstructed due to their interaction and determination with certain group(s). The remembrances would be constituted by experiences lived by the individual himself;
- b) the collective memory (CM), which comprises remembrances supported in a collectivity, is mostly the result of common IM. CM has two degrees: collective memories that are consolidated and perpetuated far beyond the existence of the members of that group are called institutionalized collective memory (CMi) and collective memories which are not consolidated and perpetuated are called non-institutionalized collective memory (CMn).

The concepts of IM, CM and groups are strongly related in the hardcore of his theory of memory. We start presenting his concept of group and how it can be defined in terms of memory. We then show what is IM, how IM occurs, and how IM needs CM. After the explanation about the concept of CM, we shall explore the ideas of CMi and CMn.

2 The concept of group

Roughly, ‘group’ is an indefinite concept in Halbwachs’ writings because it may present both a) an empirical role of delimitating a collectivity and b) a theoretical role of chaining other concepts, such as ‘individual’, ‘memory’ and ‘society’. Before exploring further this concept, let us see what groups are not, since he always mentions two other terms also related to collective states: *milieu* and *société*. Both terms appear sparsely in Halbwachs’ writings exceeding the books related to memory. One can find them, for instance, in the text *Morphologie Sociale* (1938) and *Conscience Individuelle et Esprit Collectif* (1939). Although all of them are related somehow to IM and the CM, they cannot be used interchangeably because they have different functions¹. *Milieu* is the individual social environment – “that is the *milieu* that surrounds us” (Halbwachs 1939, p.4) – with some spatial boundaries. What really differentiates the *milieu* from the group is that the former does not produce any collective content². Therefore, *milieu* is a socially ordered spatial environment that surrounds the individual and where the material and social relations are established. *Société* is an even more amorphous concept than *milieu* and group; however, they are interdependent. We know that society is formed by different groups, but it could not be reduced or be identical to them. Halbwachs argues that a society includes different groups: “In any case, it could be also said that the faculty to enter into relationships with groups that compose the society was attained” (Halbwachs, 1997, p. 60). Even in a hypothetical society composed by a single group (such as the Horde, which appears in the Durkheimian writings),

- 1 See for example Halbwachs on the issue: “[I]n order to some uncertain and incomplete remembrance reappear, it is necessary that the society where the individual is in the present moment shows it, at least some images, which reconstruct the group and the milieu from where the individual was pulled out” (Halbwachs, 2004, p. 8).
- 2 For instance, Halbwachs states that, “Sometimes it is just necessary that we change place or profession; or that we pass from a family to another; or that an event like a war or a revolution deeply transform the milieu social which surrounds us, so that whole period of our past does not leave us more than a few remembrances” (Halbwachs, 1925, p. 23).

society cannot be reduced to a group. While the group is defined by a common representational content production related to the past, the society can be delimited as a social structure that has a spatial form, which allows subdivisions in functional groups. As a result, it is possible to say that society gives the form, while the group provides the content related to the representational dimension. It means that it would never be possible to say that a “society has memory” but only that “the groups have memories”. When a collective memory is associated to a society (“society’s memory”) it means that there is an identification of a memory of a single predominant group (a CMn or a CMi) within a society. Differently from *milieu* and *société*, groups are formed when there is an intersection of common representational content related to the past. Nevertheless, what sort of things would be part of the content related to the past of a group?

2.1 Supporting concepts

The remembrance always refers to representations of past events or experiences. Halbwachs develops his argument as a counteract to the pure psychological theory of memory. He claims that memory is not exclusively epistemologically subjective, but epistemologically objective³. Consequently, all remembrances are in some degree accessible by other individuals. This accessibility is guaranteed because remembrances are supported by a ‘stream of collective thinking’ (SCT). SCT would be the intersection of representations, opinions and concerns, which together would become collective, since they transcend the individuals. The SCT embraces broader social representations and viewpoints than only the content related to the past.

When we say that a group can be identified by the intersection of remembrances, we are not saying that there is necessarily a physical intersection of individuals sharing these content. Therefore, what defines the concept of group is not only the relationship to its spatial-temporal boundaries, but the possibility that an individual participates in two or more groups simultaneously. As Halbwachs states: “[...] each individual is immersed at the same time or successively into several groups. Each group could fragment and contract in time and space” (Halbwachs, 1997, p. 167). Although the juxtaposition of individuals in space is an obvious way to identify a possible group, it is not a necessary defining condition:

If the inhabitants of a city or a neighborhood form a small society, it is because

3 See Searle (2004).

they congregate within a spatial region. It is not possible to say that this is a condition of existence of this group, though it is a quite apparent condition. That is not what happens with other social formations. We can even say that most of them tend to detach the men from the space, since they commonly ignore their occupied place and consider qualities of another order (Halbwachs, 1997, p. 203).

In this sense, we can say that belonging to a group does not mean excluding oneself from another group. An individual can join many groups and put himself under the point of view of one of them to evoke remembrances. Any element inserted into a group that shifts the orbit of its concerns and representations subdivides this group, turning it into a new one. If a new element introduced into a group is not compatible with the representation of its past, a new group is born with their own memory; a memory that does not overlap the memory that preceded its crisis (Halbwachs, 1937, p. 139). If the group can be defined through the intersection of individual remembrances, it is bigger than a juxtaposition of individuals, because it is a new being, a collective being with specific features.

2.2 Remembrances

If the convergence of remembrances forms the group unit, it is possible to say that they are also responsible for its stability (or not) over the time. Among these remembrances, there is a variation in degrees (and not in nature) between its states: we call them strong remembrances and weak remembrances - both epistemic and accessible. The weak remembrances could be, roughly speaking, verified by the mere assent of the existence of a content, which is cognitively apprehensible and shared by more than one individual. To exemplify it, we can think of promises among members of a group; the use in a specific sense of some words by group members; the belief in the existence of a specific event in each perspective or an oath. This way, they are more ephemeral, floating content, and dependent on the existence of individuals to exist. The lack of these content shared by an individual can undermine the group unit and their shared remembrances. The weak remembrances are those that are produced in common by the individuals from the group, meaning that they are the remembrances in the group and not of the group. If we take these weak contents to define the groups, the task will certainly be very hard, since the belonging (or not) to a group is given by the concordance (or not) between an individual and the SCT guides the group. Only the individual himself can tell if he shares the

same set of remembrances of the group. Because of this, within a long period, the individual can sometimes join the group and sometimes not. The involvement with the group is determined by an affective approximation and an approximation to the core of the group's concerns⁴. Halbwachs gives us a very interesting example of a classroom to show how an individual does not share the same remembrances, despite having participated in the events of a group,

It is necessary that, after some time, we have not lost the habit, nor the power to think and remember as a member of the group, we were witness and part, through its point of view, and using the notions that are common among its members. For example, a teacher, who taught for ten or fifteen years in a school. He meets one of his former students and barely recognizes him. The student speaks of that time, remembers his colleagues, the places they occupied in the tables of the classroom [...] it is possible that the teacher has not retained any memories of that time. However, his student is not deceived: he is sure that that year, during all the days of that year, the teacher was present [...] The group is essentially an ephemeral class, at least when we consider that the class embraces the teacher and the students and it is not the same anymore when the students – possibly the same students, go to another class and meet each other in the other class and tables. In the end of the year, the students disperse and this defined and particular class is not going to recover anymore. It is necessary to make a distinction. For students, the class will live for a while, at least they are going to have a chance to remember and think of it. Since students have the same age and belong to the same social environments, they will not forget that one day approached this teacher [...] (Halbwachs, 1997, p. 55-56).

The group mentioned in the quote above does not exist in an absolute way nor possesses common objectified content that allow us to identify it. The group exists in the minds of individuals, ergo it does not need the physical presence to exist once what delineates it are the shared remembrances and consequently its SCT.

The strong remembrances are those that are objectified in order to have a physical implementation, allowing them to exist apart from the existence of individuals. The strong remembrances are based on the objectification of a given content on a physical mean (such as writing, imaging representations, buildings), providing continuity beyond one generation. With the strong remembrances, it is possible to observe a broader temporal existence, which is not directly linked to the individuals who originally objectified such content. This kind of content can be pointed as a social fact in the Durkheimian meaning,

4 See for example, “the one who loved more will later remind the other of his statements, his promises, which the latter did not retain [...] because he/she was less engaged than the other in this society where an unequally shared sentiment rested on” (Halbwachs, 1997, p. 58).

imposing constraints to the individual entering a group. Moreover, this kind of content is observable, allowing us to externally delineate a group, from the delimitation of its own content. The strong remembrances have been widely worked by Halbwachs regarding their spatial materialization. In *La memoire et l'espace* (part of the book *La Memoire Collective and Morphologie Sociale*), Halbwachs develops the idea that space always represents the psychic life of the group and always shapes the space.

When inserted into a portion of the space, the group shapes itself according to its own image, but at the same time it bends and adapts itself to the material things it resists to. The group closes itself in the context it built. The image of the external environment and stable relationships they have with the space goes to the first plan of the idea that the group has from itself. This image, perpetrates in all elements of your consciousness, getting slower and regulating its evolution. It is not the isolated individual, but the individual as a member of the group, i.e. is the group itself that, in this way, remains subject to the influence of material nature and participates in its balance (Halbwachs, 1997, p. 195).

Although Halbwachs gives a strongly weight the space in the reflections about group in *La Memoire Collective*, in *Morphologie Sociale* (1938), he develops well the idea of independence between group and space, or at least it seems to be not a necessary condition⁵. The strong link, at least at first sight, between space and group occurs because Halbwachs writes in an epoch when the communication was mostly done face to face. Therefore, he cannot develop the idea of a space (occupied by the group) purely symbolic. Even though space establishes an important relationship with the strong remembrances, they do not limit themselves to the first, because they can express themselves in books or in pure symbolical systems, which are not necessarily connected to space. This is the case of the musicians group, illustrated by Halbwachs. Musicians would be a group that almost does not objectify their remembrances in space, but do so in a system of universal musical symbols, which “does not contain any floating and should be reproduced or apprehended in its entire correctness” (Halbwachs, 1997, p. 40). Religious groups, for instance, objectify their content both spatially (e.g., churches) and purely materially (as sacred writings or

5 “Although the space brings stability to the group and its image, the space is not a required condition for its stability. In addition, as the group changes, the space also changes (...) The facts of the spatial structure do not represent all, but only the condition and the physical substrate of certain communities. The activity of these [communities], in this case, has a particular and specific content that should not be confused with the changes and spatial distribution of soil. In other words, with the renewal and entry of particular social frameworks, the material forms of societies reflect their entire order of concerns” (Halbwachs 1938, p. 12).

images), giving them a more complex range of remembrances. This way, as we have seen, the same group can produce both weak and strong remembrances, both supported by a SCT. This general trait allows the identification of the group. In short, those remembrances we call weak, even though supported in the SCT of the group, can dissolve themselves in the moment in which the concerns of the group no longer gravitate around a common center. Moreover, those we call strong remembrances have a strong relationship with the material world and sometimes with space, creating a bigger possibility to assure the existence (in a wide temporal extension) of remembrances beyond the existence of the individuals. This way, any group can produce two types of content, and the weak may turn into strong, depending on the level of objectification process it suffers.

2.3 The permanence of group over the time

There are two ways to perpetuate the group over time and for that, we should consider two “kinds” of time: an extended historical time and a time that lasts some few generations. As we saw, there are groups that become ephemeral, because they only share weak remembrances, fading away after the death of the individuals who compose it. This happens because what ensures the existence of the group was the common STC shared by the individuals. The detachment of the individuals from STC implicates in a dispersion or complete extinction of the group. The element that maintains the groups in that case is the ‘social solidarity’. Although Halbwachs does not further develop this Durkheimian concept, it is possible to find it in some passages regarding the group cohesion and the group unit. Let us consider a group of traders. Whether one finds them in markets, behind counters, or close to the cities, they are physically dispersed. However, they are linked to one another by, as Halbwachs claims, a kind of common consciousness,

[...] However, even without a direct communication point among them, they do not cease to be agents of the same collective function. Among them, circulates the same spirit, they are the same type of witness, obey the same professional moral. Although they are concurrent, they feel solidarity; indeed, they maintain and impose the price to the buyers (Halbwachs, 1997, p. 224).

Solidarity is here understood in the sense of a wide social link which is the reflect of convergent opinions and concerns among group members. On one hand, it is the social solidarity of the group that allows its cohesion and the

vivacity of the remembrances; allows that remembrances continue to be remembered and the memory of the group continue to exist. On the other hand, it most likely that groups who produce more strong remembrances (but not exclusively) will maintain their form and content in a wider temporal extension. At this point, we still have to investigate what enables the constant objectification of the remembrances, what gives a stability status to the group and a status to its memory as CMi. In our view, the constant objectification of a group is enabled by what we are calling as ‘institutionalization’, which seeks to establish this strong content in the material world, especially in space. It is the institutionalization that allows an objectification work in a wide temporal extension.

Let us closely explore how happens the remembrances objectification and a possible institutionalization of a group. The group (G) is a product of the intersection of its members G_1, G_2, G_3, G_n . This group now has a new condition and can objectify its content (C). What ensures a long existence of C is a certain degree of independence from the group members. When the members leave the group, some content objectified in the writings (or in other objects) can resist. Thus, in the future, it is possible to re-access, even partially, those past contents.⁶ Depending on the historical epoch and the magnitude of the group, the process of institutionalization can be bigger or smaller.

3 Individual memory (IM)

3.1 Perception

The relation between the individual and the group enables two kinds of memory: an individual memory⁷ and a collective memory⁸. The individual is com-

⁶ It is over this aspect that the Archeology builds itself.

⁷ The individual memory was largely developed in the first three chapters of *Les Cadres Sociaux de la Memoire* (1925) and in text *Memoire Individuelle et Memoire Collective* (1939, contained in the book *La Memoire Collective*). Most of the attention given to the individual memory is an answer to British social psychologist Frederic Bartlett, who criticizes Halbwachs for “denying the individual, being loyal to Durkheim” (Becker, 2003, p. 224). Unlike what states Bartlett, if not even Durkheim denies the individual, even less does Halbwachs, who can be considered as an “heterodox Durkheimian”. The particularities of the studied object (the memory) guide Halbwachs to the subjective universe, being necessary to consider factors as emotion and the individual perception.

⁸ Referring to the nature of his main term, ‘collective memory’, Halbwachs does not formulate it in an accurate way. According to Gerard Namer, the term collective memory suffers from a

posed by a sensitive being, who perceives the world and is the eye-witness of the events, and an interpretative being, who understands what was perceived. Although many elements of our remembrances come from social thinking, he recognizes that individual perception⁹ is at the base of any remembrance, ensuring a minimum strictly subjective core to the remembrance. This idea of real perceptions at the core of any remembrance is extracted from Charles Blondel and restated by him¹⁰. The witnessing of the events depends invariably on the individual's life path, marked by the different relations and positions that he/she had *with* and *in* the group. In addition, if the perception is guided by the affective engagement with the world, the part of the reality perceived of the individual is the result of his alignment with the group. The comprehension or explanation of this perception is an interpretative being function. Therefore, the remembrance is not the product only of a psychophysics apparatus.

For better explain that point, let us take the famous example of the solitary walk through London mentioned by Halbwachs in *The Collective Memory* (1950),

In these moments, in all of these circumstances, I cannot say that I was alone, that I reflect alone, once I put myself in thought in this or that group, which I composed with the architect and with people whom it served as an interpreter with me, or with a painter (and his group), with the geometer who drew this map or with a novelist – i.e., other men who had these remembrances with me. More than that, they helped me to evocate them: in order to better remember, I turn myself to them, I adopt, for a moment, their point of view, I reenter the group, from which I continue to be part of it because I still suffer its influence in me and its ideas and manners of thinking to which I have never reached alone and through which I keep in touch with them (Halbwachs, 1997, p. 53).

This transition through groups does not need to be face-to-face, once the definition of group ignores the physical presence. It can be done having the thought as a mean. The individual already participates in a group when he/she enters

“semantic slippage” (Namer, 1987), once it is used in contexts which seems to refer to distinct phenomena. Other Halbwachs commentator, the American Jeffrey Olick (1999), point this ambiguity. His explication to this semantic slippage embraces the idea that the term collective memory indicates both “individual memories socially shaped” and “commemorations and collective representations” (Olick, 1999, p. 336).

⁹ Called by him as “sensitive intuition”.

¹⁰ “Eliminating, or almost, any reflection of remembrances of this sensitive intuition, which is not all perception, but in the same is, obviously, the indispensable preamble and the sine qua non-condition... Lest to confuse the reconstitution of our own past with the reconstitution we can make out of our neighbor past, (...), it is necessary that, at least in some parts, there should exist something beyond the reconstruction made by loan substances” (Blondel, 1925 apud Halbwachs, 1997, p. 67).

in the group STC. From a collective perspective, perceiving has to do with the manner that the individual relates himself to the world and in which position of the world he/she is located. In a nutshell, the origin conditions of memory are set in the original perception by the individual of an event. The perspectives of a group, in which the individuals are inserted, shape the perception and the repertory of these individuals. In this sense, we can say that the individual memory, since its original moment, is supported in the group, once the individual perceptions support themselves in the schemes of perception of some group. Once perceived, how would these events reappear, if now they belong to the past? What would stimulate the evocation of a memory by an individual?

3.2 Evocation

The evocation of remembrances depended on social conditions. Unlike his tutor, Henri Bergson, Halbwachs does not comprehend the past as something that is preserved entirely in the human spirit, which can be evoked by the present through the pure remembrances or the experiences in an unconscious state. This idea of reconstruction of the past from the present seeks to overthrow the use of the unconscious as a kind of trunk, which conserves the remembrances in a pure state. In a different way, Halbwachs would be thinking memory as something close to LEGO, which can acquire different forms.

These forms are shaped according to the position/situation of the individual in the moment he/she is recalling. As every remembrance is reconstructed from the present perception, the linkages we keep in the present moment are decisive in the reconstruction process of memory.

[...] when we remember, we take the present of the general ideas system as a starting point, which is always tangible, the language system and the reference point adopted by the society, i.e., of all the expression means which are available to us. We combine them in a way to find again a detail or a hue of figures or past events, and our former consciousness states. This reconstruction is nothing but an approximation (Halbwachs, 2004, p. 40-1).

Thereby, we should analyze how the individual is engaged with the world not only in the moment of perception of an event, but also (if not mainly) in the moment of its evocation and reconstruction. In the same way, we should analyze both instances of the relation of the individual with the group(s): 1.) when the group shapes the individual perception in the original moment of an event witness and 2.) when the group shapes the remembrances when evoked. When the evocation process starts, the remembrances present themselves in a “raw

state, isolated and incomplete” (Halbwachs, 2004, p. 45), requiring that the individual start to recognize them. Recognizing and reconstructing are the two actions that compose the recalling action. To help the process, the individual resort to instruments called by Halbwachs as ‘social frameworks of memory’, whose function is to shape all the course of remembrances reconstruction. The social frameworks of memory are systems of dates and places or collective organizations of space and time which come to us when we desire to find or recover something in the past (Halbwachs, 1925):

They are landmark points in the space and time, historical, geographical, biographical, and political notions, data of current experiences and familiar points of views; everything that was only empty scheme of past events and that we are in condition to determine with increasing accuracy (Halbwachs, 2004, p. 55-56).

Therefore, every reconstruction of a remembrance would be guided by present concerns of the group to which the individual is linked to. The objects and events would be found in our mind by the chronological order of appearance, by the names given to them and/or by the sense that our group gives to them. The social frameworks of memory do not have random characteristics because they are always characterized by the demands and the organization of the group that produces them. The same applies to the perceptive logic. The individual, when perceives the world and when remembers, contacts the group where he/she is placed. From this point, the individual perceives in a perspective way and reconstructs the remembrances guided by the group. In this sense, we can approximate the social framework of the memory with the schemes of perception: both are collective references provided by the group to the individual... We can identify three main moments in the individual memory that the group is involved in some way: the original moment of the perception of a given event (Mo1), an evocation moment of a past event (Mo2) and the moment of recognition and reconstruction of the event (Mo3). In Mo1, the apprehended reality by the individual is shaped by the schemes of perception provided by the group. From this moment, the image apprehended by the sensitive being is retained. In the Mo2, some objective construction (an object or an idea evoked during a talk) is responsible to call a past event. In the Mo3, the individual structures his remembrances with the social frameworks provided by the present group to which the individual is linked to. These social frameworks of memory facilitate the localization of a past event. Therefore, the Mo3 prints out his marks more strongly, once the remembrance is always a representation of the past from the present demands and interests. This way, the content of this remembrance has necessarily two influences: the reminiscences brought by

the original apprehension of an event by the sensitive being and the perspective interpretation brought by the group, which orbit around this original seed. Our remembrances remain collective and are reminded to us by the others, even if just we saw the events (Halbwachs, 1997, p. 52). Therefore, a remembrance can only be reconstructed if a) the elements and b) the form given by the group are consonant with the perceptive scheme of the former group.

There are individual and collective memories and the individual participates in both. The testimonies of the others are suitable to our remembrances. In order to reinforce our memory and the memory of the others, it is necessary that the remembrances still have relations with events of the past. The remembrances change, renew, and complete themselves when one feels more involved in the groups. The individual aggregates and suits the collective memory. On the contrary, if there is a deformation of the social frameworks of memory, which changed from a period to another according to the change of the social convention of the society (Halbwachs, 1925), there is a partial and disordered reconstruction of the remembrances. There would be no reconstruction –and therefore forgetting– when there is a deformation of the social frameworks of the memory or a loss of contact with those that surrounded us. The example provided by Halbwachs is the forgetting of a foreign language: “forgetting a foreign language means not to be able to comprehend those that used to address to us in this foreign language, whether those people were alive and around or those whose works we read” (Halbwachs, 1997, p. 61). The boundary among groups (the enclave) entails the sensation into the individual that some thoughts, intuitions, and feelings that he or she has been purely individual; when in fact they are not.

The more the groups touch or distance from each other, or the more numerous they are, the more they weaken the influence over each other. [...] To evoke such memories, it is necessary that we place ourselves, at once, in various groups that have only rare and accidental relationships among themselves or simultaneously in many public premises. It can be said that we do it by exception and the result of meetings that we attribute to chance, because we do not seek them in the deliberate way. Hence, it seems that we can remember them and its reappearance is explained by the invisible game of unconscious psychological forces. [...] If causes that determine the evocation of these evocations do not depend (or depend even partially of us) is not because they are unconscious, it is because they are in part out of us and we only have a reduced influence (Halbwachs, 1997, p. 81-82).

It is clear that individual memory (which is the memory of the individual perceptions) is, since the beginning, marked by social constraints. Now, we

have to better understand how the social constraints expressed in the collective memory are constructed and perpetuated.

4 Collective Memory (CM)

There is a clear difference between the IM and CM. IM is a memory of testimonies, whereas CM is a product of an intersection of the individual remembrances, i.e., an aggregate that is not passive or reconstitution of an individual mind. A remembrance is always a part of the collective memory, which is composed by a set of common individual remembrances. The individual always resumes a part of the collective memory, which is not possible to be apprehended as a whole. Thus, it is possible to say that the individual always establishes two attitudes facing the collective memory: sometimes operates its individual remembrances as a part of the collective memory and sometimes the individual is just a member of a group, operating with other members' part of this mass of common remembrances¹¹. These two movements are not isolated, but simultaneous and permeable. In other words, the individual memory only exists once it mobilizes a big part of the remembrances mass of the collective memory of the group from which he/she is aligned. Thus, the individual memory places and builds itself with a context of broader memories that are shared and built by others. The collective memory is composed from these convergent individual memories; the collective memory fixes itself as a mass of common remembrances that gain consistency as their members remember it vividly.

For that, it is necessary that CM be more coherent, increasingly aligned to the common stream of collective thinking of the group. Although there are these two-way movement, it is possible to identify CM as being different from IM. Although CM is supported by IMs to be put in movement, it would never exist in the isolated individual mind because it just reaches the status of CM when it embraces the set of the major part of the common memories of the individuals that cannot be apprehended by a single individual mind. Halbwachs also claims that CM in specific conditions can achieve certain autonomy from the

11 See Halbwachs, "On the one hand, the remembrances take place in contexts within his/her individual personality or personal life: they are common to the others, they will only be seen by the individual in the aspect that interests him, distinguishing from the others. On the other hand, the individual can simply behave as a member of a group, contributing to evoke and keep the individual memories, in a way that they interest the group (Halbwachs, 1997, p.98)."

individual consciousness, “[CM] often evolves from its own laws and some individual remembrances sometimes penetrate it, they change when placed in a set, which does not correspond to a personal conscious anymore (Halbwachs, 1997, p. 98)”. CM has a closer relation with a group than the relation establishes with the IM. CM builds itself from SCT, it reconstructs a representation of the past that is consonant with the concerns and interests of the group. Hence, not every collective memory sticks to the object that it represents, rather to the “social opinions that are suspended in the group thinking” (Halbwachs, 1997, p. 221). When IM does not have the certitude of something in the past, it resorts to the CM that is a mass of common remembrances constructed in parallel to a SCT. This mass of remembrances is constituted, above all, of remembrances of events and experiences that are related to a big part of the members of the group, it does not mean that a CM cannot embrace events related to a single member of a group that had some relevance to the group. However, the remembrances related to the major part of the group are on a first plan, because they were more alive. It happens due to the coherence they present. The coherence is the result of the solidarity among the members of a group. The more members of a group share their remembrances, the greater will the solidarity among these members be, and automatically the higher will the coherence and vividness of that mass of remembrances be. If the rest of the CM takes its strength and duration from the set of individuals’ support, it is because as a member of a group the individuals are whom remember. When there is a dispersion of the members of a group or an alteration of the collective concerns, interests, and values, then there are no more means to reconstruct CM, nor IMs, which were supported on CM. Considering CM as a memory that is necessarily supported in the individuals does not mean that it is reducible to the time of existence of a group or the lifetime of the individuals. Thus, “the duration of a memory of this kind was limited by the duration of a group” (Halbwachs, 1997, p. 58). That is because, “all the remembrances that emerge within a class rely on each other and not on exterior remembrances” (Halbwachs, 1997, p. 58). What are these exterior remembrances?

5 Institutionalized (CMi) and Non-Institutionalized Collective Memory (CMn)

We know that every reconstructed remembrance is epistemologically objective. However, the idea of collectiveness that we reconstructed so far relied on a CMn that produces only the weak remembrances. This kind of memory is not able to perpetuate itself beyond the existence of the members of the group. Remembrances that are capable of perpetuation are ‘strong remembrances’ in his writings, Halbwachs tackles this concept in an empirically way then CM gets a new status. He handles with the following four cases, in which groups transcends the life of its members, a) a Christian religious group; b) the workers group; c) the traders group, and; d) the musicians group. All of them obey the characteristic inherent of a group that was previously highlighted in our text: a.) the lack of mandatory face to face interactions; b.) they are not delimited by time-space references; and c.) they identify themselves by the alignment they have with the group’s SCT. They are different from ephemeral groups as the class, because they are groups that last during the time. However, Halbwachs keep using the term collective memory for both kinds of groups: the ephemeral groups and the long-lasting groups. As they intend to be universal and transcendent to a short period (the religious group is probably the highest expression of that), none of these groups can have a collective memory that is only supported by the individual memories of its members. Hence, we must differentiate the memory conceived by this kind of group from the ephemeral groups, calling it as institutionalized collective memory (CMi). CMi are memories that mostly produce strong remembrances. As we have seen, this kind of content has its production potentiated when the group suffers some degree of institutionalization. The institutionalization would potentiate a process of spatialization and materialization that a CMn operates in a smaller degree. When these remembrances are materialized, they become objects that can be reinforcing elements for memory evocation. In other words, it is a double way movement: once the collective memory is objectified, it provides elements for the individuals to renew it, revive it.

The space is a lasting reality: our impression succeeded one after the other, nothing remains in our spirit, we would not understand that is possible to resume the past if it were not conserved in a material that surrounds us. It is to space, to our space – the space that we occupy, through where we pass many times, to which we will always have access to and anyhow our imagination and our thoughts every moment is able to rebuild – we must turn our

attention to, our thought must be fixed in order to make this or that category of remembrances reappear [...] it is possible to say that there is no group of collective activity that has no relations with a place, i.e. , with some part of the space, but does not explain that, representing the image of a place, we are led to think of the action of the group that to which it was associated (Halbwachs, 1997, p. 209).

Having much of its remembrances in a materialized way (in objects or writings, for example), the CMi gains an autonomy from those who first witnessed the remembered events. With the objectification of remembrances, CM can exceed the life of the original individuals. That does not mean that the CMi can perpetuate without the individuals. They must exist, but can be other than the original ones. The further individuals put the CMi into operation in a constant movement of interpretation of it. The individuals that contact this CMi in a later time are not randomly chosen, but are the ones aligned to the STC of the group that keeps this memory. Thus, the new individuals (the “new generation” of individuals) of the same group interact with this CMi in its materialized condition, in its institutionalized condition:

A part of their remembrances is conserved only under this form, (...) in a society of those who are interested in music. But, even the remembrances that are in them, remembrances of musical notes, of signals, of rules are in the brain and in the spirit only because they are part of this society that allows them to acquire the remembrances. They exist only in relation to the group of musicians, and they are conserved only in them because they were part of them (Halbwachs, 1997, p. 48).

What would the musical system and all its content related to the memory of the musicians be if there were not the own musicians to put them in course, perpetuate them and turn them into a ground for their own memory? They would be a set of lost remembrances, which would float without social realization, without interpretation, even if they were materialized somewhere. How about the religious beliefs? They need the rites so the individuals can collectively remember their content. These individuals are not the ones that first witnesses the original events, thus they activate this memory through a CMi that was materialized and could transmit these content.

Each of these CMi given as examples above will work in a particular way, meeting the group’s specific demands. However, likewise the IM and CMn, the CMi also refers to a representation that results from a reconstruction guided by the social frameworks of memory related to the present time. Thinking about the materialized condition of the CMi and how organized and consolidated it can be, we might question: what would be the differences between History and

the CMi. CMi is not simply a historical organization that provides dates, places and time divisions that support the individual memory reconstruction. History (or historical memory, as called by Halbwachs) corresponds to a set of temporal and spatially organized data. If collective memory and historical memory would correspond to the same phenomenon, both should be clearly distinct from the individual, who would take them only as a base for the reconstruction of his memory. However, while the historical memory is an ordered, unique, and rational organization of past events, the collective memory corresponds to the memory of groups composed by individuals and animated by a SCT, which is in constant interaction with the IMs. In sum, the historical memory, on the one hand, provides tools for IM, especially regarding dates and specific locations that can be taken by a group as social frameworks of memory that help to mark out the memory reconstruction. Still, it will not have any other role except that total impersonal constraint. On the other hand, the CM is kept by the group, which “grips” the individual memories, giving them support. More than support their own reminiscences, vague impressions of individual memory leak through the collective representations of the past. CM is a living history, is the social context on which our individual memory can be supported. Understanding the CM as a phenomenon external to individuals does not mean it is autonomous, since the faculty of remembering would always be connected to a psychophysical apparatus. The historical memory would be autonomous toward the individual, something already built that is presented to the individual so that there is no possibility of change for the individual who remembers the historical facts; they can only provide a couple of social frameworks of memory. History is steady and CM “[...] is a continuous SCT, a continuity that has nothing artificial, because it does not retain the past but what is still alive and is able to live in the consciousness of the group that maintains it” (Halbwachs, 1997, p. 131). CM are numerous, while history is single. CM is fluid, is not marked by deep division. The past is made always present by the CM, while for history the past and present moments are distinct and equally “real” (Halbwachs, 1997, p. 134).

Conclusion

The reconstruction of Halbwachs’ writings, which have often no theoretical, was important to completely understand the construction of his theoretical argument as a whole. The recapture of his main concepts provided us an op-

portunity to understand the theory of collective memory as a theory that has continuity and coherence -, though this is not evident due to the incompleteness of the writings (because of Halbwachs' premature death) and to the features of the writings that are composed by scattered reflections. Moreover, the reconstruction is a step taken toward a possible instrumentalization of some methodological tools from his writings that enable a consistent empirical work. We put Halbwachs' ideas into a scientific organization by highlighting the fundamental role of the concept of group. For that, we have demonstrated that it is necessary to understand how the group and its status is directly dependent to the kind of remembrances that the group itself produces. Therefore, we saw that two derivations of remembrances were required (strong and weak remembrances), which characterize degrees of past representation. Both are products of individual cognitive operations, meaning that the memory (at least in a first moment) necessarily depends on the individuals to be created. The weak remembrances are those produced more often and easily, while the production of strong remembrances depends on a process of institutionalization for materializing these content. This is the single way to have a memory which is not produced by the individual, although he/she continues to be the key for the perpetuation and movement of this collective memory, which is always been reconstructing according to the present conditions.

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