

The Phenomenon of Memory from a Sociological Standpoint: An Ontological Approach in the Light of Maurice Halbwachs' Work

Veridiana Domingos Cordeiro

How to cite

Domingos Cordeiro, V. (2021). The Phenomenon of Memory from a Sociological Standpoint: An Ontological Approach in the Light of Maurice Halbwachs' Work. [Italian Sociological Review, 11 (3), 761-779]

Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.13136/isr.v11i3.490>

[DOI: 10.13136/isr.v11i3.490]

1. Author information

Veridiana Domingos Cordeiro

Department of Sociology, University of São Paulo, *São Paulo, Brazil*

2. Author e-mail address

Veridiana Domingos Cordeiro

E-mail: veridiana@uchicago.edu

3. Article accepted for publication

Date: March 2021

Additional information about
Italian Sociological Review
can be found at:

About ISR-Editorial Board-Manuscript submission

*The Phenomenon of Memory from a Sociological Standpoint:
An Ontological Approach in the Light of Maurice Halbwachs’
Work*

Veridiana Domingos Cordeiro*

Corresponding author:
Veridiana Domingos Cordeiro
E-mail: veridiana@uchicago.edu

Abstract

The article explores the main concepts and ontological status of memory within Social Sciences. Firstly, we highlight the main insights and contributions of Maurice Halbwachs’ theory of collective memory and, secondly, we draw the further developments by the Memory Studies. We point out some conceptual issues within these works regarding memory’s ontological status. Finally, we suggest a new avenue of interpretation for the phenomenon of memory from a sociological standpoint by (i) considering Cognitive Sciences contributions on the definition of “memory” and (ii) devising a proper social ontology for this kind of definition.

Keywords: social theory, Maurice Halbwachs, social ontology, sociology of memory.

1. Introduction

Humanities have debated the phenomenon of “memory” over the past centuries, and subjectivist approaches had prevailed until the 1920s. Actually, this debate has been active outside Humanities, where bio-chemic-physical approaches also conceived an entirely subjectivist/internalist ontological status for memory. However, the work of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs was pathbreaking. He disrupted the lengthy subjectivist tradition by introducing an alternative avenue for comprehending the phenomenon of “memory” based on a *social ontology of memory*. According to the philosopher of science, Larry Laudan (1977), science advances with the accumulation of evidence and the

* Department of Sociology, University of São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil.

solution of conceptual anomalies of previous theories. In this case, Halbwachs' emphasis on the social dimension of memory was "an anomaly" (Laudan, 1977) for the subjectivist tradition because it could not explain the social dimension from a sheer internalist ground. This way, the internalist (or subjectivist) and the externalist (or collectivist) approaches started to co-exist as possible avenues of inquiring for the phenomenon of memory from that moment and on. From a philosophical standpoint, the response for the social dimension of memory just emerged later, in the 1990s, when the *hypothesis of extended mind* (Clark, Chalmers, 1998) started to advocate for an externalist approach to cognitive processes¹.

In an intellectual *milieu* where the first externalist grounds for memory were being cultivated, Halbwachs debated hotly with the French historian Marc Bloch, the French social psychologist Charles Blondel, and the English psychologist Frederic Bartlett.² Amid these debates, during the 1920s and 1930s, Halbwachs developed many reflections on memory and society that can be found in three books, *Les Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire* (1925)³, *La Topographie Légendaire des Évangiles en Terre Sainte* (1941), and *La Mémoire Collective* (1950⁴). These texts founded what we know as "Sociology of Memory." However, his legacy was not enough to establish a sociological subarea because he likely remained unknown by the broader sociological audience over the years since most of his texts have been lately (or never) translated to English. Aside from that, after World War II (when Halbwachs died in a concentration camp), Sociology was concerned with comprehending the immediate social consequences of the war. Still, his legacy reborn strongly in the 1980s, when

¹ Up to that moment, the prevailing philosophical arguments were based on John Locke's (1996 [1689]) "evidence of memory". Lockean and neolockean arguments on the relation between *memory* and *self* focuses on an answer for the centenary problem of "the persistence of the identity over time". The idea is that the assurance of identity over time is only possible when one remembers enough of her past over time. In other words, the continuity of consciousness requires that the *present* "I" remembers experiences of the *past* "I."

² Bloch (1925), Bartlett (1932), and Blondel (1928) also wrote important studies on the social aspects of memory. For this reason, they mutually read their works. An example of this interchange is Blondel's *Revue Critique: M. Halbwachs Les Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire* (1926) and Bloch's text *Mémoire collective, tradition et coutume: À propos d'un livre récent* (1925).

³ The first chapter of this book, *Le rêve et les images-souvenirs: contribution à une théorie sociologique de la mémoire*, was earlier published in 1923, on the *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*.

⁴ Halbwachs wrote most of the texts of this book in 1939. Texts such as *La Mémoire Collective* is a posthumous book that engulfs articles on this matter.

Memory Studies emerged as an interdisciplinary area. Since then, *Memory Studies* have been discussing the phenomenon of memory from different theoretical approaches and empirical objects.

Besides the lengthy period of silence around Halbwachs' work, he has been a significant reference for *Memory Studies* and Sociology since the 1980s. Every piece of literature on Memory Studies or the Sociology of Memory cannot overlook his relevance and theory. Nevertheless, he has been mostly a totemic reference once the *Memory Studies* literature cites him but does not sharply work on his theoretical concepts⁵.

As we will see, the polysemy of Halbwachs back-bone concept ("collective memory") and his to-and-fro movement around the individual-society schism impacts on the theoretical positions within the *Memory Studies*. Two main approaches devise different ontological status for memory and, consequently, the social world. In this sense, this article explores and debates (i) the main concepts of Halbwachs and its ontological status and (ii) the two Memory Studies' approaches stemmed from Halbwachs' work. Finally, we suggest a new avenue of interpretation for the phenomenon of memory from a sociological standpoint by (i) considering Cognitive Sciences contributions on the definition of "memory" and (ii) devising a proper social ontology for this kind of definition.

2. Memory" in Maurice Halbwachs work: a conceptual approach

We find a manifold of reflections and positions on memory's definition and how memory functions throughout Halbwachs' works. Although he employs different terms to refer to "memory," he privileges the concept of "collective memory." By attentively reading his work, we realized that he employs "collective memory" in various senses; thus, there is a "semantic slippage." It is comprehensive that this kind of "misunderstanding" happens. If we list the verbs related to "memory," we come to face many different practices and actions involved: to remember, to remind, to recollect, to (co)mmemorate, and to memorize. These verbs engulf various practices, actions, and processes that range from collective practices to mental processes.

⁵ Although the (broad but) shallow relationship between Memory Studies' literature with Halbwachs' work, there are some valuable literatures (mainly in French) on Halbwachs' biography, such as Becker (2003), Craig (1979), Mucchielli (1999), Toplav (2006) and Wetzel (2009), and some few good works focused on his "theory of collective" e memory, such as Marcel (1999) and Namer (2000, 2007). Also, there is literature on other parts of his academic work that embraces topics, such as demography, social classes, and law (Baudelot, Jaisson, 2007).

Halbwachs tried to embrace all phenomena related to the past under the term “memory” and its derivations. As he lacks other concepts, he fails to understand that he deals with phenomena ontologically different. Foremost, Halbwachs differentiates “individual memory,” “collective memory,” and “historical memory.” In the text *Mémoire Individuelle et Mémoire Collective* (Halbwachs 1950), he means by “historical memory” or “history”⁶ a set of chronologically organized facts. These facts provide temporal and geographical hallmarks that work as impersonal references for entire groups. However, the idea of “historical memory,” for instance, is a contradiction. Even though both memory and history relate to the past, each one concerns different contents, as we will see further.

The distinction between *individual memory* and *collective memory* has a different purpose. As we will further debate, both do not have ontological distinctions. Instead, they emerged to solve a theoretical approach inherited by Halbwachs. Both refer to a “process of remembering,” the act of reconstructing a significant past experience. This conceptual duality is an outcome of contradictory influences Halbwachs had in his philosophical and sociological training. In his early career, the French Philosopher Henri Bergson had influenced Halbwachs considerably. Later, he approached the French sociologist Émile Durkheim and L'École des Annales. On the one hand, Halbwachs received a Bergsonian phenomenological influence⁷ that focused on subjective perception; on the other hand, the Durkheimian sociological approach emphasized society's role. Although Halbwachs draw from Bergson's work some concepts (such as *durée* and *image-souvenir*) and the main theme of investigation (memory), he become a Durkheimian over the years. In the text *La Doctrine de la Doctrine d'Émile Durkheim* (1918), Halbwachs says: “I have never been more at the centre of his ‘doctrine’ than at the moment. It's very beautiful, but there are many gaps, some misunderstandings. In any case, it is a superb unilinear push, and I may be wrong, but it will go further than Bergson” (*apud* Hirsch, 2012: 227). Somehow, Halbwachs, restores Durkheim's thought on knowledge by articulating the collective representations and the mental functions in his theory of collective memory.

⁶ According to Namer (2004), “historical memory” only appears in the posthumous book *The Collective Memory* (1950). In his first writings, he adopts “history.”

⁷ Halbwachs was Bergson's student for a long time. Since his high school's years at the *Lycée Henry IV* up to his undergraduate studies at *Collège de France* and *École Normale Supérieure*. Later, Halbwachs' mother wrote to him commenting about *Les Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire*: “this book is amazing and it is very clear even for a lay person as me [...] I am touched to see you so close to Bergson who was he “evil’ of your youth” (*apud* Namer, 1994: 306).

Thus, he tries to accommodate the concepts of “individual memory” and “collective memory” the subjective perception within social conditions. Somehow, the distinction and mutual articulation between “individual memory” and “collective memory” try to deal with the subjective realm (emphasized by Bergson) and the objective realm (emphasized by Durkheim). Bergson’s influence on Halbwachs’ work clarifies that the origin of memory rests on the individual perception. Even though memory is only possible because someone perceived something at some point in the past, it is not a perception because it refers to events that are not happening at the present moment.

Halbwachs goes further. For him, perception is not free from social constraints, and this is the expression of his Durkheimian vein. Perception is oriented by previous “schemes of perception” socially weaved. In this light, memory does not have the same ontological status as imagination or a dream because something external assures its sense of “truth”⁸ since the original moment of perceiving some event. Later, the “social frameworks of memory” beacons and ensures the reconstruction of this past event coherently and persistently (Halbwachs 1997 [1925]). By “social frameworks of memory,” Halbwachs means sets of social categories (regarding social temporality, social spatiality, and language) that organize and order one’s process of remembering. The “social frameworks of memory” are always conceived within a “group” - another crucial concept for Halbwachs. In this sense, “memory” is “social” or “collective,” once its conditions of perception and reconstruction are given by the social representations of a group(s).

“Group” is the central concept in *La Mémoire Collective* (1950). It is an abstract idea for characterizing persons with convergent interests, opinions, social representations, and remembrances. Halbwachs is not clear if “group” is just an abstract idea with heuristic purposes or a graspable, real, and observable entity. In some of his writings, he characterizes “group” in the first sense and, in other parts, in the second sense. Even so, in both cases, although “individual memory” is partly shaped by the “group,” it is directly related to the “collective memory”. Somehow, the “collective memory” contours group’s boundaries because it regards the intersection of convergent individual memories in a given moment. The sharing of memories within a group provides cohesion for it. The materialization and sharing of memories may surpass generations keeping the group coherent over time. Thus, “collective memory” is the process of

⁸ By “truth”, we mean something close to “truth by correspondence” (regarding the original event) or, at least, “truth by consensus” (regarding the social constraints) (Lakatos, 1978).

remembering collaboratively with others aligned to a convergent string of thoughts.

Halbwachs has a circular argument: the “individual memory” is shaped by the “collective memory,” and the “collective memory is composed of individual memory.” In other words, the “collective memory” is simultaneously a memory constituted by a group and the constitutive element of a group (Santos, 2013). He slips between the individual and the collective realms by keeping both concepts, “individual memory” and “collective memory.” Over his work, we may observe an approach between macro and microanalysis of the collective representations. In the first half of *Les Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire* (1925), he focuses on the mental process of remembering, which is scaffolded by external references (“social frameworks of memory”); therefore, here, he deals with memory from a micro-level approach. However, in the same book, some chapters further, and in *La Mémoire Collective* (1950), he focuses on the idea of “groups” that hold collective memories conveyed across generations (such as the “religious group” and the “family group”). Also, in *La Topographie Légendaire des Évangiles en Terre Sainte* (1941), he investigates how the Christian collective memory is scattered over Palestine, and the landscape is built and manipulated to validate a specific collective memory. In both cases, he deals with real and graspable “groups.” Halbwachs slips into the macro-level approach in these passages by emphasizing how collective consciousness acts over individual consciousness. Aside from that, regarding *La Topographie* (1941), Rober Bastide (197) criticizes Halbwachs for merging “collective memory” and “religious thought” under the same banner.

Still, in the text, *La Mémoire Collective chez les Musiciens* (1939; 1950), Halbwachs works with musicians’ collective memory. In this text that later integrated the book *La Mémoire Collective* (1950), Halbwachs discusses material support (scores) musicians use to play music. He argues that they rely on external symbols that are shared among a group to perform their activities. Nevertheless, again, Halbwachs conflates “memorization” and “procedural memory” into the “collective memory” banner. When he says that the group of musicians shares a collective memory, he means that a group of people who have shared interest and knowledge is prone to memorize certain symbols and, this task is supported by external supports (scores).

Yet, in *La Mémoire Collective* (1950), he argues for the idea of an interplay between the “individual memory” and the “collective memory” with the mediation of the “group.” In this case, he works with a meso-level solution once he does not assume a finite and real set of individuals (such as the “family group” or the “religious group”). Instead, he conceives “group” as a sort of intermediate entity that filters and frames the social world for the individual perception and remembering. He has a classic example regarding this idea. A

Veridiana Domingos Cordeiro

The Phenomenon of Memory from a Sociological Standpoint: An Ontological Approach in the Light of Maurice Halbwachs' Work

person is walking around London, paying attention and remembering things related to architecture because she belongs to a broader group (or category) of architects. In this sense, an individual can belong to many different groups at the same time. Here, the concept of “group” intermediates the “individual memory” and the “collective memory”; it is not a holist entity, neither a graspable entity, but a meso heuristic shortcut for characterizing more stable relations and common understandings among some interconnected individuals. In this case, there are no fixed and external outlined groups, just a convergence among individuals concerning opinions, beliefs, and values.

In sum, on the one hand, if one is apart from the social environment, there is no possibility to remember. On the other hand, collective memory does not exist without individual minds because “groups” do not hold a mind. Therefore, Halbwachs keeps a co-determinism. The phenomenon of memory is torn apart between two ontologically distinct realms: (i) the individual realm and (ii) the collective realm. Of course, it was not Halbwachs' intentions and concerns to willfully keep the individual-structure schism. He lived Sociology's outset amid the Durkheimian wave, and the concerns their concerns focused on establishing the discipline. From thinking from today dilemmas, it is easier to verify this co-determinism in Halbwachs' theory of collective memory *a posteriori*. The point is that the conceptual imprecision enabled, years later, different interpretations of memory's social explanation. In any case, Halbwachs left an enormous contribution, mostly because he changed the perspective of thinking about memory. At odds with previous subjective accounts, he shows how memory must rely on the social context.

3. Drawing from Halbwachs' theory: two Memory Studies' branches

In the 1980s, many studies on memory have emerged in Europe, the UK, and the USA. Swiftly, an interdisciplinary field was organized around Humanities and Cognitive Sciences. Especially for Humanities, Halbwachs became a significant reference. Within *Memory Studies*, we have two main theoretical branches grounded on the conceptual duality present in his work.

Collective memory in Halbwachs thus indicates at least two distinct, and not obviously complementary, sorts of phenomena: socially framed individual memories and collective commemorative representations and mnemonic traces. The problem is that Halbwachs does not present us with an integrated paradigm that identifies the unique structures involved in each of these and shows how they are related—though he does provide some useful suggestions on all of these matters. Halbwachs is in this sense still a “nineteenth century” theorist, one who sees individual- and collective-level

problems as problems of different orders. In such a dichotomous worldview, the options are to emphasize one or the other, to present a grand theory of aggregation and translation between the “levels,” or to produce a sometimes productive hodgepodge of insights about a particular range of problems (Ollick, 1999: 336).

Two “branches”/“approaches” from this duality and polysemy emerged: (i) the “collective memory studies” in Jeffrey Ollick’s terminology (1999) or the “strong version” in James Wertsch’s terminology (1998), and (ii) the “collected memory studies” in Ollick’s terminology or the “distributed version” in Wertsch’s terminology (1998).

The “strong” or “collective” branch embraces studies that reify or hypostasize the memory as a long-run phenomenon related to the social structure. There is an emphasis on social organization and its power to materialize, organize, and perpetuate memories. These works are interested in the material organization of memory represented in memorials, museums, historical places, books, among others. This perspective deals with memory as a “thing” disputed and organized by groups over the years. The “strong version” dismisses the mental/subjective (bio-psycho-physical) aspects of memory by focusing on the past’s objective manifestations. This branch likely adopts a macro perspective that Halbwachs underscored in part of his texts.

There is a predominance of empirical works within this branch because the material manifestation of memories is an empirical lens to understand the social shaping of the past’s collective representations. In this sense, the work of Pierre Nora, *Lieux de la Mémoire* (1984, 1986, 1992), is one of the field’s primary references. He understands that “memory places” are symbolic materialization that legitimatizes a version of the past. Barry Schwartz (1997; 2005) has an institutional approach by focusing on symbolic commemorations and politics as collective practices for “remembering” and “disputing” the past. There are other important studies in this field, but most of them lay full stress on an objectified memory linked to a specific group that employs transmission’s practices and instruments for reproducing certain versions of the past. In this sense, the “strong version” or “collective memory studies” focus on the “memory of the group.” Somehow, this branch conflates memory’s production and memory’s reception by dismissing any mental processes involved in re-laborating and comprehending the past.

The “distributed version” or the “collected memory studies” work with the idea of a collaborative remembering grounded on mental processes that need “active agents and instruments that mediate remembering” (Wertsch, 2009: 119). Here, there is no “memory *per se*,” there are only mutually scaffolded remembering processes across people’s minds. The social relations and the

artifacts – such as “calendars, written records, computers, and narratives” (Wertsch, 2009: 119) – are crucial to evoke, beacon, and confirm a remembrance. Remembrances may acquire an objective form through narratives, for instance. This branch doubtlessly scapes from a “misplaced concreteness” (Whitehead 1929; 1997 [1925]) that presupposes a concreteness of memory as the strong version does. Regarding this concreteness, the “distributed version” only considers the support of external artifacts/objects or the objectification of remembrance through a written narrative. This perspective reflects Halbwachs’ first writings (1925; 1923), in which he emphasizes the social constraints and the supports needed for remembering. In that vein, the “distributed version” or the “collected studies” stands for a micro approach that argues for a “memory in the group.” Therefore, memory is the outcome of minds working together.

Of course, some works try to intermingle practices, media, and individual remembering. Jan and Aleda Assmann’s works (1992) differentiate the *reservoir* of symbols and media (“cultural memory”) from stories orally handed down from generation to generation (“communicative memory”) as two different phenomena. They call “cultural memory studies,” the works focused on both the past production and transmission via texts. However, they consider the “cultural dimension” as something apart from the individual psycho-biological apparatus – see the following section. Both “cultural memory studies” and “communicative memory studies” pointed by Assmann do not hold an ontological debate on memory’s nature; both are concerned with the functioning and empirical evidence of memory. Next, we will discuss memory ontologically to define the phenomenon accurately. In the sequence, we propose a third avenue that could solve macro, micro, or meso determinisms we found in both *Memory Studies* and Halbwachs’ works. The intention of proposing a new way of thinking memory from a social standpoint is to circumventing deterministic social ontology that may be poor theoretically.

4. Memory’s ontology and Social Ontology

As we observed, memory is a complex phenomenon that involves both mental processes and social representations. It regards a mental process when we remember a Christmas celebration in our early childhood, about which we could say, for instance, that we have “good or bad memories of it.” However, we also call as “memory centers” places that reunite objects of a specific historical period; for instance, the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem is regarded as the place where Jesus was born. The former would be an individual memory, whereas the latter would be a memory place of memory (*lieu de la mémoire*). The

question is: in which sense both phenomena are similar? Does mental traveling have the same ontological status as a public space that shelters objects and narratives related to the past? As we saw, both phenomena are objects of investigation by the *Memory Studies*. However, these interdisciplinary works have paid little attention to discussing the distinction between them.

If we step back to Halbwachs' work, we notice he employs the word "*souvenir*" for re-elaborating some experience that one has experienced or, at least, is part of one's mass of remembrances. This re-elaboration is widely processed in the social realm, which imprints relevance in what we perceive and recall. Moreover, we express our remembrances in the social realm. The mental acts of producing and interpreting memories are socially ingrained. In this sense, there is no reason for having two different concepts ("individual memory" and "collective memory") for the phenomenon of memory – at least from the sociological standpoint. As we saw, Halbwachs conceived this two-folded conception because of his structuralist and phenomenological influences. However, we know that remembering involves (indistinctly) the biological, psychological, social, and cultural realms, and sheer sociological dilemmas cannot subsume it.

Memory is neither a thing that we grasp and convey nor a cognitive skill that retrieves past images and establishes random connections among them. If memory is to re-elaborate some experience over time according to the present moment and the present social environment, then, it is relational and processual. It is relational because although it is a mental traveling, it hinges upon the interaction with others. Others trigger, change, and influence our memories and vice-versa. It is processual because it lies in the temporal flow. Also, memory likely acquires a material representation through written narratives or other artifacts. However, this materiality means anything *per se*. It will acquire new meanings over time. Dismissing the theoretical dominance that "group" has over Halbwachs' theory, we still stick with the idea of "group" as a way to characterize what makes something significant for someone. In some way, a "group" bounds the horizons of an individual temporally and geographically. An event may become a remembrance and not a fact when it is significant for a group of persons that bounds its conveyance over generations and space. The Cognitive Sciences conceptualize this definition as "episodic memory" (Tulving, 1972).

"Episodic memory" is a sub-definition of the distinction between "procedural memory" and "declarative memory" by Endel Tulving (1972). Ontologically speaking, the procedural memory has a different status because it regards "actions" *instead of* "representations." On the one hand, a procedural memory entails embodied behavior or performances; it is a "know-how." It does not convey any meaning; it just produces previously learned actions, such

as riding a bicycle. On the other hand, declarative memory is a representation that can be re-elaborated across time, it conveys meaning, and it involves a mental traveling. There are two sorts of “declarative memory”: “declarative episodic memory” and “declarative semantic memory.” While the “semantic memory” concerns a general knowledge of the world, the “episodic memory” concerns events someone has experienced throughout her life. Although both “episodic” and “semantic memories” refer to representations of the past socially built and conveyed by specific media, they entail different processes. “Semantic memory” can be learned, memorized, and further interpreted. It is usually conveyed through media with wide public circulation, such as books. Differently, “episodic memory” is remembered as a representation constantly re-elaborated across time. Such re-elaboration depends on the social world, and it is driven by the present moment. Both individuals and artifacts that surround us buttress our remembering process. Even as a mental traveling, remembering is not diving into our private subjective world; contrariwise, it depends on the interplay with others’ minds and mnemonic artifacts. In this manner, memory is the primary “episodic memory” for Sociology, which occasionally is intertwined with “semantic memory.” Considering that, which kind of social ontology would be adequate for this conception of memory?

5. Social Ontology

Biological Sciences and Psychology have produced relevant research on memory; therefore, it would be a mistake to overlook them, even when approaching a sociological standpoint. However, these domains are intertwined with the social domain when we talk about remembering the real and meaningful experience. From the sociological front, discipline's forefathers took for granted the biological domain and treated it as a constant instead of a variable. For example, Émile Durkheim (1898) suggests that the cross-cultural diversity in the sacred and profane concepts might owe its existence to the human species’ unique bio-psychic characteristics. Likewise, Max Weber (2019 [1922]) recognizes that certain ‘meaningless’ (natural or bio-psychic) factors might also influence human actions and can be considered. Also, George Herbert Mead (1934) sees how our biological capacities are social and develop within a social act, and by that, he tries to show meaning as a reflexive output of interaction that is, in fact, “innervated” in our brains. Once the biological factors are constants, the sociological work could labor on the social variables alone and leave the psycho-biological apparatus aside. It means stating that there is a psycho-biological apparatus for human socio interplay that is merely a truism. However, there is a deeper connection between the biological,

psychological, and social domains of memory. In this regard, there might exist an intersection of ontologies.

Even though it seems to be a simple claim, the standard approach to memory from Psychology and Biology is an ontology-based on psychologism. Psychologism is the view that social facts are composed exclusively out of the psychological states of individual people. For example, the Christmas episode is an episodic memory partly caused by the Christmas festivities, but according to internalists, the psychological state is a brain or other internal states matter and does not include the Christmas festivities. According to psychologism, the social world is determined exclusively by these internal psychological states. It differs from Halbwachs' insights on the influence of the groups in our internal states. We cannot pair this approach to the contemporary "group attitudes theorists", such as Raimo Tuomella (2013), Michael Bratman (1993), and Philip Pettit (2003) since they argue that the beliefs, intentions, and other attitudes of a given group depend only on the attitudes of the members of that group. In the memory case, group behavior's collective outcome from individual intentions does not directly impact individual memory. Still, unlike Halbwachs' insights on the artifact's role in supporting our memories, this kind of group attitudes theories and the psychologism approach leave aside everything that is not an individual. As Epstein (2015) argues,

when we speak of the 'individualistic level,' we do not mean the individualistic level. We mean individual-sized things, whatever they are. Or we mean the microscopic level, the level of whatever parts society is made up of. Or we mean anything that causally interacts with individuals (p. 48).

For this reason, we need an intersection from the social standpoint that is an "outward ontology," which takes into account the different objects, not only individuals but living bodies, cognitive processes, minds, social relations, institutions, artifacts, rituals, etc.

Even though this required a not internalist, psychologist ontology, but an outward ontology; it is neither a "self-referential system" (Luhmann, 1995) nor a hierarchical layered conception (Parsons 1951; Popper, Eccles, 1977; Archer, 1980). These are inevitably dualists and hierarchical ontological conceptions and keep the schism between the individual memory and collective memory. An ultimate hierarchical ontology would say that there are layers in reality that ranges from atom-molecules-substances-life-mind-society-culture, and each step is supervenient on the previous step or layer. Supervenience is a relation between two sets of properties, "take property set A to be all the social properties and property set B to be all the individualistic properties. To say A supervenes on B, then, is to say an object cannot change its A-properties

without there being some accompanying change in its B-properties” (Epstein, 2015). Now, if we translate this conception to the issue of memory, we would end up with the weird conception of the existence of a “cultural level” in which memories, remembrances inhabit, and an individual would have access to that. In doing so, these higher-level memories would supervene on the mental states of the individual. So, collective memory would supervene on individual memory. In this approach, there is no interconnection as it is required. The biological and psychological realms remain isolated. We may find it in crossed efforts between Social Sciences and Neurosciences (Anastasio, Ehrenberger, Zhang, 2012) that produced works claiming analogous processes occurring in the individual mind and the collective domain as distinctive domains.

Contrariwise, assuming different ontologies in a non-hierarchical manner implies in the characterization that the mutual interaction impacts in the constitution of each entity leading them to an evolutionary process. Although these entities that populate the world have ontologically different constitutive traits, they are always in an open constitutive process. An intersection of ontologies without hierarchical ontology is known as “flat ontology”. We assume this ontological avenue by adding to that the processual aspect of an endless co-constitution between domains.

There is a set of approaches called “relational.” Across the board, there are main common features that are useful to think about memory. Firstly, a relational sociological approach rejects as a unit of analysis not only the individual but also the social constructs such as systems, organizations, or any other social concept that acquires concreteness. Secondly, a relational approach rejects any hierarchical levels by claiming for a flat ontology. There are “substantial approaches” and “relational approaches.” The first, either in the methodological individualism or holism, focuses on one of the extremities (agency or structure), which supersedes the other. Otherwise, the relational approach focuses on the relations that constitute the social tissue. Although society still is a real entity, its reality consists of a network of relations between individuals. No entity exists behind the relations; no entity supersedes another; society is just the relations between every member. The relational approach assumes that individual behavior and the institutional functioning are structured by social relations existing either at the micro-level of interactions or at a macro level which is irreducible to the former. Here, the “relational” has priority over the constitutive entities of it. Suppose we abstract the varieties of theories deemed “relational” (ranging from Bruno Latour to Norbert Elias). In that case, we can say that they converge around three central tenets: (i) relations are the only elementary units of analysis; (ii) objects and relations constitute individuals; (iii) relations are processes (Depelteau, 2015; 2018; Depelteau, Powell, 2013; Crossley, 2010), it means the social world is not only statically relational. Social

relations themselves are not static, they change over time. Other social phenomena follow this temporal flow and memory is the proof of it. One may remember some past differently in the present and in the future. Memory is dynamic as the social world. In what follows, we advocate for a social ontology not only relational but also processual. Although there is an instantiation of memory in some moments, memory is always remembering – in the verb's sense and in the sense of the noun.

A processual ontology's distinctive feature is the relationship between the internalized and the dynamic terms of a relationship and its interrelated elements. On the one hand, the interrelated elements exist anywhere else than in their interrelations. The elements are no longer external to their relations (as in substantial ontologies). On the other hand, their interrelation is nothing else than its development, so the relationship does not have any ontological priority over the entities (as in some relational ontologies). This way, the idea of process denotes that the interactive activity has the power to modify the properties of the elements and the form of relation that shapes this mutual activity. Over time, the entities can be modified in a non-substantialized becoming flow. A process does not have an outcome:

[...] we do not seek the meaning of events by looking across cases, as we do in variables-based social science. Rather, we look along the cases, finding the meaning of this or that event by its relation to the unfolding of an individual's experience. This is the same whether we take a narrative approach and study an ordered sequence of some variable's values over an individual life course using time methods, sequence analysis, or some other such formal approach. Either way, we are interested in the sequential unfolding of the outcomes of a person's life. This relatively strong focus on outcomes seriously limits the life course approach. The social process doesn't have outcomes (Abbott, 2016: 4).

Thus, according to Abbott (2016), processes are not teleological. If we explain a process *ex post facto*, it is rational construction that does not have to do with social reality. In this sense, by assuming a relational-processual ontology, the interest on memory would rely on the processes of remembering and not "a specific memory" deemed as a thing. Investigating "the memory of... something" would be an ontological mistake. In a social world, we have persons with mental capacities that relate to other persons. Together they put forth remembrances usually interlocked in narratives.

6. Conclusion

This paper acted as a comment on the concept of memory within Humanities, especially Sociology. As mentioned, Halbwachs inaugurates the debate on memory within Human Sciences by disclosing the social aspects involved in it. He has an essential contribution from the theoretical standpoint. However, he lacks conceptual accuracy, especially by coining the term “collective memory.” “Collective memory” is a fruitful concept to shed light on society’s role in producing and transmitting memory.

Nevertheless, “collective memory” is such an encompassing concept to the point it conflates different phenomena. Or, at least, it differentiates other phenomena as ontologically distinct to it. In this sense, Halbwachs keeps the individual domain apart from the collective domain. Also, Halbwachs ignores other concepts frameworks from other areas, mainly because he writes at a time Sociology was trying to establish among other sciences. Moreover, borrowing concepts from other areas would attest its incapacity to deal with the phenomena. Although Halbwachs has a stepping-stone contribution, he is embedded in the 19th Century dilemmas and issues. At that time, he was not concerned with agency-structure schism because he was an heir of Durkheim’s concern on establishing Sociology as a discipline focused on social explanations. In this regard, although he bears, in some sense, some phenomenological perspectives from Bergson, he is not concerned in bridging the social and the subjective realms. Likewise, he loses sight of the bio-cognitive dimension.

Lately, the field of Memory Studies followed this duality by producing works that emphasize either one pole or other. On the one hand, some studies think of collective memory as a multiplicity of media, places, or collective narratives without demonstrating how they are deeply connected to the mental processes of people who are indeed remembering. It means that collective memory ends acquiring a reifying status that does not consider them as just instantiated products of the interplay between people. On the other hand, the *distributed memory* approach holds have a smoother approach by considering memory as an outcome of the interplay between individuals and artifacts. However, it lacks the processual approach and the distinction of what is *memory* and what is a *fact*, for example.

The approach outlined here tried to propose a new conceptualization for memory by lagging behind the dualism between individual and society. We assumed that memory is, in fact, “remembering”. And remembering is the representation of past built in the flow of relations with others that change over the time, a constant process of interpretation of the past according to the present relations. Thus, considering memory as processes of remembering of episodic memories that are significant for individuals bounded around shared

interests, a relational-processual social ontology encompasses in a more comprehensive approach in what memory is and how memory works.

References

- Abbott, A. (2016), *Processual Sociology*, Chicago, University Of Chicago Press.
- Anastasio, T. Et Alli (2012), *Individual And Collective Memory Consolidation: Analogous Processes On Different Levels*, Cambridge, Mit Press.
- Assmann, J. (1992), *Das Kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung Und Politische Identität In Frühen Hochkulturen*, Munich, Verlag C. H. Beck.
- Archer, M. (1980), *Culture And Agency: The Place Of Culture In Social Theory*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Bartlett, F. ([1932] 2003), *Remembering: A Study In Experimental Psychology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Bastide, R. (1970), Mémoire Collective Et Sociologie Du Bricolage, *L'année Sociologique* (1940/1948), V. 21, Pp. 65-108. Available On: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27887760?seq=1>
- Baudelot, C., Jaisson, M. (2007), *Maurice Halbwachs, Sociologie Retrouvée*, Paris, Edition Rue D'ulm.
- Becker, A. (2003), *Maurice Halbwachs: Un Intellectual En Entre Guerres Mondiales 1914-1945*, Paris, Ed. Agnes Viénot.
- Bergson, H. (1990 [1896]), *Matter And Memory*, Cambridge, Ma, Zone Books.
- Bloch, M. (1925), Mémoire Collective, Tradition Et Coutume: À Propos D'un Livre Récent, *Revue De Synthèse Historique Paris*, Available On: <http://visualiseur.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k101609q>
- Blondel, C. (1946), *Introduction À La Psychologie Collective*, Paris, Collection Armand Colin.
- Blondel, C. (2011), Revue Critique: M. Halbwachs Les Cadres Sociaux De La Mémoire [1926], In. Olick, Jeffrey; Vinitzky-seroussi, Vered E Levy, D. *The Collective Memory Reader*, New York, Ed. Oxford.
- Bratman, M. (1993), Shared Intention, *Ethics*, 104(1): 97–113. Doi:10.1086/293577.
- Clark, A., Chalmers, D. (1998) The Extended Mind, *Analysis*, 58 (1), pp. 7-19.
- Craig, J. (1979), Maurice Halbwachs À Strassburg, *Revue Francaise Sociologique*, V. 20, pp. 273- 292.
- Crossley, N. (2010), *Towards Relational Sociology*, Londres, Routledge.
- Depelteau, F. (2008) Relational Thinking: A Critique Of Co-deterministic Theories Of Structure And Agency, *Sociological Theory*, 1:26, March.
- Depelteau, F. (2018), *The Palgrave Handbook Of Relational Sociology*, London, Palgrave Mcmillan.

- Depelteau, F., Powell, C. (2013), *Conceptualizing Relational Sociology: Ontological And Theoretical Issues*, London, Palgrave Mcmillan.
- Depelteau, F., Powell, C. (2015), Relational Sociology, Pragmatism, Transactions And Social Fields, *International Review of Sociology*, Vol. 25, N. 1, Pp. 45–64.
- Wetzell, D. (2009), *Maurice Halbwachs: Klassiker Der Wissenssociologie*. Konstantinos, Uvk Verlgsgessellschaft.
- Durkheim, É. (1898), Représentations Individuelles Et Représentations Collectives, *Revue De Métaphysique Et De Morale*, Tome VI, No. De Mai.
- Epstein, B. (2015), *The Ant Trap Rebuilding The Foundations Of The Social Sciences*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Halbwachs, M. (1918), La Doctrine D'Émile Durkheim, *Revue Philosophique*, 85, Pp. 353–411.
- Halbwachs, M. (1997 [1950]), *La Mémoire Collective*, Paris: Ed. Albin.
- Halbwachs, M. (1997 [1925]), *Les Cadres Sociaux De La Mémoire*, Paris: Ed. Albin Michel.
- Halbwachs, M. (1923), Le Rêve Et Les Images-souvenirs: Contribution À Une Theorie Sociologique De La Mémoire, *Revue Philosophique De La France Et De Le Étranger*, Jan/jun, Pp. 57-97. Available On: [Http://www.jstor.org/discover/41082002?sid=21105071185651&cuid=62&cuid=4](http://www.jstor.org/discover/41082002?sid=21105071185651&cuid=62&cuid=4)
- Halbwachs, M. (1939) La Mémoire Collective Chez Les Musiciens, *Revue Philosophique De La France Et De L'étranger*, T127, N. 3/ 4, Pp. 136-165.
- Halbwachs, M. (1941 [2008]), *La Topographie Légendaire Des Évangiles En Terre Sainte*, Paris: Puf.
- Hirsch, T. (2012), Maurice Halbwachs Et La Sociologie Religieuse: Des Formes Aux Cadres Sociaux De La Mémoire, *Archives De Sciences Sociales Des Religions*, 159, Pp. 225–245.
- Laudan, L. (1977), *Progress And Its Problems: Towards A Theory Of Scientific Growth*, Berkeley, University Of California Press.
- Lakatos, I. (1978), *Falsification And The Methodology Of Scientific Research Programmes, Philosophical Papers*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Locke, J. (1996 [1689]), *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing.
- Luhmann, N. (1995), *Social Systems*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Mead, G.h. (1934), *Mind, Self & Society: From The Standpoint Of A Social Behaviorist*, Chicago, The University Of Chicago Press.
- Marcel, J. (1999), Maurice Halbwachs Ou Les Ambiguités D'un Rationalisme Durkheimine, *Revue D'histoire Des Sciences Humaines*, V. 1, Pp. 47-67.
- Montigny, G. (2005), *Maurice Halbwachs: Vie, Ouvres Et Concepts*, Paris, Ed. Ellipses.

- Mucchielli, L. (1999), Pour Une Psychologie Collective: L'héritage Durkheimien D'halbwachs Et Sa Rivalité Avec Blondel Durant L'entre-deux-guerres, *Revue D'histoire Des Sciences Humaines*, 1999, V. 1, Pp. 103-141.
- Namer, G. (2000), *Halbwachs Et La Mémoire Sociale*, Paris: Ed. Harmattan.
- Namer, G. (2007), Reflexion Sur La Sociologia Du Temps De Maurice Halbwachs. In.: Peguinot, Bruno (Coord), *Maurice Halbwachs: Le Temps, La Mémoire Et L'émotion*, Paris, L'harmattan.
- Nora, P. (1984; 1986; 1992), *Les Lieux De La Mémoire*, 3 Tomes (La République; La Nation; Les France). Paris, Gallimard.
- Nora, P. (1994), Postface, In. Halbwachs, M. *Les Cadres Sociaux De La Mémoire*, Paris, Albin Michel.
- Parsons, T. (1951), *The Social System*, New York: The Free Press.
- Pettit, P. (2003), Groups With Minds Of Their Own, In. *Socializing Metaphysics*, Lanham, Md, Rowman & Littlefield, 167–194.
- Ollick, J. (1999), Collective Memory: The Two Cultures, *Sociological Theory*, 17: 3, November.
- Ollick, J., Vinitzky- Seroussi, V. E Levy, D. (2011), *The Collective Memory Reader*, New York, Ed. Oxford.
- Popper, K.; Eccles, J. (1983), *The Self And The Brain: An Argument For Interactionism*, London, Routledge.
- Santos, M. (2013), *Memória Coletiva, Trauma E Cultura: Um Debate*, *Anais Do 37º Encontro Anual Da Anpocs*, Available On: <https://anpocs.com/index.php/papers-37-encontro/st/st20/8526-memoria-coletiva-trauma-e-memoria-cultural-um-debate/file>
- Schwartz, B. (1997), Collective Memory And History, *Sociological Quarterly*, May, 38 (3), Pp. 469 - 496.
- Schwartz, B., Fukuoka, K.; Takita-ishii, S. (2013), Collective Memory: Why Culture Matters, In. Blackwell *Companion To The Sociology Of Culture*, Oxford, Blackwell.
- Topalov, C. (2006), Maurice Halbwachs And Chicago Sociologists, *Revue Française De Sociologie*, V. 47, 3, Pp. 561-590.
- Tulving, E. (1972), *The Organization Of Memory*, Ann Arbor, Academic Press.
- Weber, M. (2013 [1922]), *Economy And Society*, Vol I And Ii. Berkeley, University Of California Press.
- Tuomela, R. (2013), *Social Ontology: Collective Intentionality And Group Agents*, Oxford, Oxford University Press. Doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199978267.001.0001.
- Weber, M. (2019 [1922]), *Economy And Society*, Cambridge, Ma, Harvard University Press.
- Wertsch, J. (2009), Collective Memory, In.: Wertsch, J., Boyer, P. *Memory In Mind And Culture*, Cambridge, Cambridge Press.

Veridiana Domingos Cordeiro

The Phenomenon of Memory from a Sociological Standpoint: An Ontological Approach in the Light of Maurice Halbwachs' Work

Wertsch, J. (1998), *Mind As Action*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Whitehead, A. (1929), *Process And Reality*, New York: Harper.

Whitehead, A. (1997 [1925]), *Science And The Modern World*, New York: Free Press (Simon & Schuster).