

Tracing the Social Dynamics of Peace and Conflict

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Social representations provide an underlying structure to the dynamics of peace and conflict. Culturally and temporally specific beliefs about the appropriate deployment of cultural and institutional power determine social and political action. Post-conflict, lay representations of people of other nations persist long after formal hostilities have ended and intra and inter-personal hostility maintained on the basis of collective memory and collective remembering is fuelled by the attribution of cause, agency and essentialism. To investigate their nature and composition, it may be useful to look beyond the mainstream political and cultural sphere and investigate the populist world of comedy, humour, sport and children's play.

Social psychology and conflict have a long association! The atrocities committed across Europe that came to light at the end of the Second World War provided a strong impetus for social psychological enquiry. Indeed, the combined work of Adorno et al., Asch, Milgram, Zimbardo and Tajfel arguably comprised an intellectual and emotional response to the events of the Nazi period: each an expression of a desire to understand the psychological roots of the Holocaust. From these studies, a number of social and psychological factors were implicated: the authoritarian personality (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson & Sanford, 1950), social pressure

(Asch, 1951, 1952), coercive power relationships (Milgram, 1963, 1974), roles, uniforms, a state of deindividuation of either perpetrator or victim or both (Zimbardo, 1969; see also La Fontaine, 1974), and the ever-present tendency towards cognitive categorisation and differentiation: a process that can lead to out-group hostility (Tajfel, Flament, Billig & Bundy, 1971; Tajfel, 1974). Much of this research sought to establish the origins of conflict and the underlying principles that make genocide possible and this paper treads a similar path insofar that it attempts to trace the social dynamics of peace and conflict and identify some of the social and cognitive processes involved in the maintenance of intergroup hostility. Peace and conflict, of course, can be conceived in a number of ways: for example, there are critical distinctions between positive and negative peace, structural and direct violence, keeping, making and building peace (see Galtung, 1969, 1975, 1985). In this discussion, however, peace is largely conceived as the absence of war although it will be demonstrated that the absence of war does not necessarily mean the end of psychological hostility.

THE DUAL NATURE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH

We might ask at the outset, who precisely is involved in the dynamics of peace and conflict? The role of political elites is self-evident, but on closer inspection, it becomes apparent that all who willingly lend support to the political and military complex become components in the machinery. Psychology is not innocent in this respect. Even academic psychologists, who we might assume to have liberal inclinations, have advanced conflict through research funded by the military (see Moscovici & Markova, 2006). What is more, the military sector has always been a significant employer for psychologists in the US (Richards, 2002) and many working in the field of artificial intelligence (AI) have been involved in the development of smart weapons such as the cruise missile (Curtis, 1995b). Social psychological research has to be understood in its social context: Allied victory in WWII did not bring world peace and the needs of the culture, which largely determine the nature and objectives of funded projects (Richards, 1994), drove the science in a particular direction. Therefore, while some sought to understand the Holocaust, others embarked upon projects spawned by the imperatives of the Cold War.

All the while research findings maintained the status quo and were consistent with cultural objectives, social disjunction was kept to a minimum. For example, Adorno et al.'s work on the authoritarian personality conveniently confirmed that the enemy were not like us, whether on the extreme right or left of the political spectrum. Milgram's studies, however, were not so reassuring since they raised some uncomfortable questions about our own power structures in the social, political and military sphere (see La Fontaine, 1974). Although Milgram is now famous in psychological circles, he nonetheless failed to secure tenure at Yale, the venue of his controversial research, and despite its thought provoking nature and disturbing implications, his work remains, to a large degree, historically and culturally embedded in explanations of Nazi Germany. Decades of psychological research therefore present a clear and consistent picture that the political agenda within psychological science has been constrained: that the work carried out to reduce prejudice and discrimination, for example, has never been matched by attempts to limit conventional warfare or to explain its dynamics so that it might be minimised, curtailed or eradicated. War remains a requisite tool in contemporary international relations - psychology has played a significant part in its development - and notwithstanding a growing body of relevant literature (see Vollhardt & Bilali, 2008) and attempts to establish itself as a specific area of psychological enquiry (see Christie, Tint, Wagner & Du Nann Winter, 2008), peace psychology as part of a scientific agenda has remained on the fringes of the discipline (see Harper, Roberts & Sloboda, 2007).

THE POWER DYNAMICS OF PEACE AND CONFLICT

While the work of Adorno et al., Asch, Milgram, Zimbardo and Tajfel casts light on the social dynamics of *intra and interpersonal power*, persuasion and persecution, social representations theory (Moscovici, 1961/1976) goes further and broadens our understanding by explicating the structural dynamics of *cultural and institutional power*. The way in which power, in all its manifestations, operates within a culture and the manner in which it is deployed towards others through help or harm is the product of cultural beliefs that may, for example, encourage patriotism, a siege mentality and a commitment to security (see Bar-Tal, 2000). Given the relationship between knowledge and the structures of power (see Foucault, 1969), the theory thus

explicates the processes by which an appropriate use of power becomes common sense: for example, the assumptions underlying a belief in democracy and human rights, an abhorrence of torture and totalitarianism, the meaning of justice and retribution and the rationale for going to war. These are not universal truths, but moral positions founded upon knowledge, values and beliefs, all of which are linked to power. The dynamics of institutional power thus become central to our understanding of peace and conflict as political elites, scientists, academics, historians, journalists, writers, entrepreneurs, film makers and broadcasters determine what constitutes knowledge, what has value, what is true, false, acceptable and unacceptable within the culture and on the world scene. Indeed, their main endeavour is *to shape reality for others* and their arguments, founded upon knowledge, beliefs, values, practices and memories are a consequence of a self-perpetuating ideology. Representations generated by the culture thus serve to endorse the culture so that they are both source and recipient; and the circular nature of the process largely shields foundational assumptions and beliefs from test or challenge from within. This is the point at which the connection between ideology, representations, power and hegemony becomes apparent (see Augoustinos, 1998). Therefore, when disputes arise over politics, economics, values, territory or religion, disagreement is not simply a difference of opinion that can be shifted by rational argument; rather, such differences are founded upon different versions of reality apprehended and constructed through existing social and cultural structures. Therefore, what is familiar and rational to one culture is not necessarily understood by another.

To illustrate, consider the example of the Third Reich, which is widely understood to refer to Nazi political objectives in Germany from 1933-45. Its tertiary status, however, which suggests the existence of a first and second Reich, is a detail that often escapes notice. In Britain, for example, the historical and political significance of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation (962-1806) with its capital in Germany and the Hohenzollern Empire (1871-1918) has never been at the forefront of public consciousness nor has the public ever been significantly exposed to historical, legal or cultural arguments to justify the establishment and expansion of a Third German Reich. Social representations constructed within these two different cultural worlds thus propose two very different versions of reality but the matter does not end there. Time and generational shift increases divergence to the point that a chasm eventually develops between social representations experienced in the present in one culture and representations of that same

culture constructed post-hoc across subsequent decades by another culture. Therefore, it becomes difficult for people born after the Second World War in Britain to comprehend the mindset of those who lived in Germany through the Nazi period. Furthermore, the desire to analyse Hitler's speeches or assess his political arguments in, for example, the context of the Versailles Treaty or claims to the Sudetenland, has never been a priority in Britain, added to which, a widespread inability to understand that German language ensures that representations are apprehended exclusively in the visual modality, but with translation where appropriate and interpretative commentary. What then persists is an image of Hitler as a ranting foreign dictator with the ability to drive audiences into high emotion in a language we cannot comprehend about matters we assume we now understand. The third constraint is emotional and invokes our sense of morality. Quite appropriately, our post-hoc knowledge of the regime determines that we see it as amoral rather than rational even though Hitler's analysis of the arbitrary restructuring of central Europe by the victorious powers in 1918 eventually became political reality. For example, Hitler had argued that the creation of Czechoslovakia had simply been an opportunity for the Czechs to annex Slovakia when, in reality, they wanted little to do with each other. In 1993, after the fall of communism, both countries separated peacefully.

SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF PEACE AND CONFLICT

The study of peace and conflict is indeed a complex task because any conception of peace is bound up within a temporal web of social, political and psychological issues that include sovereignty, self-determination, political and personal autonomy, the salience and sensitivity of national identity and religious affiliation, collective memory, territorial boundaries, access to resources, fair trade, social mobility, social justice and human rights. This is the point at which social psychology and political psychology converge but with its emphasis on shared knowledge, social representations theory provides an analytical framework that avoids the pitfalls of individualism, reductionism and reification. Moreover, because it exposes, at least in principle, all cultural representations to scrutiny *including our own*, it prevents cross-cultural analysis simply becoming a comparative measure that subtly or overtly elevates one set of beliefs or values over another. As Elcheroth, Doise & Reicher (2011) point out, "We do not search for

political psychology by measuring the populace against our own representations of the political field. We become political psychologists by interrogating the processes by which people achieve their own representations” (p. 733).

This is indeed the key issue and we cannot ignore the way in which twentieth century conflict has bequeathed a legacy of significant identity throughout Europe. For example, it is difficult to disentangle Britain’s approach to Europe and the European Union from the aftermath of allied victory in WWII, the dismantling of a world empire and a will to maintain sovereignty over the British Isles, after two generations had sacrificed much in war. While Britain’s position and policy towards Europe has always been to maintain a balance of power between European states (Jackson, 2003), France, for example, finds itself in a very different geopolitical position. A legacy of war with Germany moved both governments in association with others to pursue closer economic ties after WWII through the constitution of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) principally as a means to avoid further conflict. These developments eventually led to the formation of the European Union, a political entity that means different things to different countries because each has a perspective that is the product of a unique set of historical and political circumstances. Indeed, peace in Europe has arguably been conceptualised in a context in which social representations of war have dominated the minds of millions of people.

This is no surprise given that, by conservative estimates, approximately 15 million people died between 1914 and 1918 in World War I and 60 million in World War II. To put these figures into some sort of comprehensible form, it is like visiting a country the size of France searching every house in every street in every village, town and city and finding nobody there! In desperation, you then cross the border into Switzerland only to encounter the same situation. The numbers are huge mostly because the scale of human conflict in the 20th century was accelerated by technological advancement. Up until 1916, warfare had been conducted with pistol, rifle, bayonet and cannon accompanied by sabre charge on horseback. World War I, however, saw these traditional methods transformed by the military industrial complex through the systemised production of tanks, aircraft and chemical weapons: developments that continued long after the ‘war to end all wars’ had ended. By 1945, less than 30 years after the first British tank was used in battle (a mobile metal box with cannon), advanced knowledge of theoretical physics eventually

led to the atomic annihilation of Nagasaki and Hiroshima in Japan; and by the height of the Cold War, the US and USSR had enough nuclear missiles to destroy everyone on earth. This is the historical and political context of peace and conflict in the modern world and at its root lies the nation state.

THE NATION STATE

In Europe, the nation state has been a primary source of salient identity and has provided a framework for the construction of social and political reality. A move towards separatism away from a position within a federal arrangement or towards national unity after a period of enforced separation indicates a psychological drive for ethnic or national identity and the process, once established, proceeds with remarkable simplicity. Reicher and Hopkins (2001) describe the symbiotic and circular relationship between love or primacy of nation (nationalism) and the reified structures of 'nation' that exist in people's minds such that one becomes the life force of the other. Simply put, "Nationalism makes nations as much as nations make nationalism" (p. 37). Political change in Europe since the nineteenth century has meant that maps have been redrawn resulting in the construction of new states, for example, Belgium (1830), Germany (1871) and Italy (1861). After the Risorgimento in Italy, Italian Statesman Massimo d'Azeglio expressed the importance and inevitability of an identity project in these circumstances when in his memoirs he wrote, "*L'Italia è fatta. Restano da fare gli italiani*", "We have made Italy. Now we must make Italians." Since then, history as an academic discipline has played a significant part in providing founding myths, narratives of national origin, along with examples of heroic cultural genius and valiant and defiant defenders of the nation: something that Lorenz (2010) describes as "the fusion of romantic ethnic nationalism and historicism" (p. 73), a process that has inevitably led to distortions of history for political purposes (see Baumeister & Hastings, 1997; Carretero, 2011). For example, Hitler's demands to British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain at Munich in 1938 that "three million Germans in Czechoslovakia must 'return' to the Reich" (Shirer, 1964, p. 471) were subtly spurious given that the Sudeten Germans had never been part of the German Reich but rather had belonged to Austria.

Of course, nationhood may not always manifest itself with grandiose aspirations, but its benign quality, even after many years of peace, can never be taken for granted. In April 1982, when Argentine forces occupied the Malvinas (known in Britain as the Falklands Islands) the British government led by Margaret Thatcher sent a task force to regain the islands located off the coast of Argentina. Despite having enjoyed the benefits of 37 years of peace in Western Europe, without discussion or debate and almost overnight, Britain was at war; the Argentine was now the enemy and the public was exhorted to muster hostility towards a nation with whom they had no previous argument. Many were bemused by these developments, which were perhaps best explained by Margaret Thatcher's forte to mythologize national identity in such a way that it could move others to embark upon political projects (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). Indeed, the invocation of myth is part of the fabric of social representations: rich in historical and cultural meaning and motivational power that it can mobilise a nation to war. According to former aide, Patrick Cosgrave, Margaret Thatcher's image of Britain and British sovereignty was largely derived from Churchill's mythic image of Britain, which had been roused during WWII to bring the nation together in the face of adversity (Curtis, 1995a). The crisis also led to some unusual developments in the workplace. I recall my employer at the time formally announcing in very reassuring and earnest tones that the company was no longer buying materials from the Argentine. We had no idea that the company did business with Argentina and few cared: most had never heard of the Falkland Islands and were unaware that Britain still held sovereign territory beyond the British Isles. This, however, was a salutary lesson: the common-sense desire for peace expressed by most ordinary people was swiftly overwhelmed by a desire for war at a political and national level and political elites and citizens alike, who had been alive during WWII, were acting out the present by drawing upon the past.

These events demonstrate the sudden and persuasive force of social representations and such is their effect that they filter down to ordinary people very quickly so that they too come to support military action and even become willing and enthusiastic participants in conflict. Indeed, 'love of nation' and the glorification of war (not to be confused with the glorification of its consequences) continues to be the most pervasive tool for political elites. What does glorification of war involve? Who are the main participants in the process? US President John F. Kennedy once said that 'war lies in the hearts of men', but we might add that it also lies in the hearts of

women. During both world wars, British women sent white feathers to men not in uniform as a sign that their 'cowardice' had been noted. The situation became so intense during WWI that the British government eventually issued the Silver War Badge to all men who had been invalided out of the army, which was to be worn on the lapel of civilian clothing in public so that beatings or abuse and harassment from women could be avoided. This describes a reality that is difficult to imagine but it was one that endorsed a particular type of masculinity that was inextricably linked to war. In effect, war becomes sexualised: a manifestation of desirable masculine strength while peace or attempts to appease are often seen as weakness. Within the British narrative, the difference is as stark as 'chalk and cheese' or indeed 'Churchill and Chamberlain'.

Representations of war have also saturated popular culture. Since the development of television in the 1950s, war has been a constant feature, whether as world news or popular entertainment, such that the public has become exposed to a range of messages about peace and conflict. During this period, the culture has failed to generate peaceful role models; instead, there has been a proliferation of real and fictitious war heroes publicly admired for their aptitude for violence. Consider an example from the 1950s: *The Rifleman* was a story of a widowed cowboy Lucus McCain (played by Chuck Connors) and his young son. In the opening credits, McCain fires his 'state of the art' Winchester rifle from the hip. He is 'a peace loving man' living in a 'peace loving town' and only because of adverse circumstances is he routinely compelled to kill. This is not cold-blooded murder: when people refuse to conform to the 'rule of law', peace has to be kept by force! For McCain, action was always the consequence of righteous indignation, motivated by a desire to defend what is right: something that could only be achieved if the one holding the weapon is rational and good. Whatever peace meant to McCain, it certainly did not entail giving up his rifle.

ESSENTIALISM

The paradoxical nature of a 'peace loving man' engaging in unabated slaughter, displaying tender family emotions in one scene and killing in the next did not confuse the audience. In the simple world of cowboy morality, there are only two groups - 'goodies' and 'baddies' – and post WWII this provided a framework for all conflict. For the 'goodies', killing was always motivated by

‘good’ and the loving disposition of McCain presented no contradiction, because he was good in essence. What was later confusing, however, was the depiction of Nazi SS in television drama (see Green, 1978) showing affection to family members in the same manner as McCain. What remained unresolved, and a source of discomfort for the viewer, was how the Nazis could be capable of such emotion if they were inherently evil. One has to bear in mind that essentialist assumptions about the German people had dominated public and private discourse in Britain since WWI and particularly since the British Army liberated Bergen-Belsen in 1945. The Allies had killed because they were good but the Germans had killed because they were bad. Although the My Lai massacre, carpet-bombing and the use of napalm by the Americans in Vietnam did much to undermine this post WWII morality narrative, in Britain, there was still a widespread belief in the essence of the German people, and it was difficult for many to accept that they were not inherently ‘power hungry’ or predisposed to behave in ways that others were not. Indeed, Hitler’s ideology of German essence - *the Volk*, Aryan blood and racial superiority, would be something that would hinder psychological reconciliation for decades.

Wilmer (2002), however, provokes us to think more critically and more reflexively about these matters. In her analysis of the wars in the Former Yugoslavia, she argues that “the structure of the human psyche is such that all human beings are capable of empathy and caring as well as hostility and harm-doing towards others” (p. 260). This, in her view, is the first lesson of war: the need to recognise the duality of human existence and our own capacity to harm others. Moreover, once we accept that inherent evil is less common than we imagine, that evil acts are what they are but that the people perpetrating them are capable of behaviour on a moral continuum, separating good from bad becomes more difficult and the criterion for demarcation between good and bad then becomes, not so much a matter of biology or DNA, but culture, politics and the structural permissions granted for the use and abuse of power.

We might then ask, what causes one part of the human psyche (the desire to do what is bad) to dominate the other (the desire to do what is good)? An inappropriate desire for personal power over others and a culture that validates this desire seems to be at the forefront of persuasive explanation. Indeed, the relationship between power, evil and political structures was raised in the aftermath of the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961. Eichmann, who had been responsible for the deportation of Jews during WWII, denied being a monster but admitted

that he had been obedient to a malevolent regime (see Arendt, 1964). His defence, though unconvincing, nonetheless raised questions about the moral responsibility of those who deny being a source of power but who act as a conduit in the system and later claim that they were unable to resist its flow. We should bear in mind, however, that Eichmann's defence – a position of bureaucratic detachment from political objectives - is not an alien concept even in a democracy. In democratic countries, the principle simply operates in reverse. Individual electors may only hold a molecule of elective power, but it is nonetheless *a source of power* and therefore each individual voter bears a measure of responsibility for the actions of the government they elect, including death through military intervention, although such considered reflections are probably rare. Eichmann denied moral responsibility from the top-down, individual voters in democratic elections deny moral responsibility from the bottom-up. The power dynamics in the hierarchical structure appear to be vastly different but the principle remains the same.

So where does this leave Arendt's 'banality of evil' thesis? Banality may indeed describe the everyday nature of activities that made genocide possible, or indeed Eichmann's ordinary and avuncular disposition, but it nonetheless falls short in terms of providing adequate explanation for killing on an industrial scale. The power to act within an authoritarian regime may be assisted by other less obtrusive sources of power working in other directions. In Nazi Germany, the power to govern was, initially, drawn from democratic elections in 1932 in which 37% of the electorate (13.7 million Germans) voted for the National Socialists (Shirer, 1964). Once the dictatorship had taken hold, top-down power determined the nature of policy, but its implementation was arguably achieved through cultural power in the form of (i) shared beliefs about the nation and its membership and (ii) the relationships between people, which created cleavages of conformity to cultural principles emphasised by the authorities. Indeed, the role of German history and culture in both determining and validating the anti-Semitic behaviour of Nazi bureaucrats has been cited as a root cause. 'Eliminationist anti-Semitism' (Goldhagen, 1996, p. 80) was arguably a foundational structure in the social representations of European Jewry in Germany that had developed over many centuries.

By indicting the culture and its history, Goldhagen alerts us to the power of cultural beliefs and practices that often account for behaviours that are often inexplicable across cultural divides (see Hewer & Taylor, 2007). Culture also carries the authority of consensus: that if most

others act in a hostile way, the behaviour becomes assimilated within the norms of the culture with little violation of conscience because conscience is largely a product of the social order. This explains why those caught within the operational flow of malevolent political power often experience little sense of wrongdoing at the time, show little remorse when brought to trial and, like Eichmann, reject any notion that they are inherently evil. This is in stark contrast to the perceptions of victims and observers from outside, who often explain events in terms of aberrant personality types, national character or inherent evil; an understandable position given that the tendency to draw inferences about the disposition of self and others from observable behaviour is a basic process in the formation of lay epistemology. The logic is simple; if I go to church, I must be religious (Bem, 1967, 1972), if someone wants to kill me, they must be evil. However, mapping actions onto dispositions, particularly when the actions may be the product of other forces, is problematic and there is an important distinction to be made here between ‘guilt by action’ and essentialism: the two are not the same. Indeed, the tendency to essentialise, creates a longer-term problem in that it becomes difficult to separate the malevolent acts of a regime from a belief in the inherent nature of its people.

That essentialism is particularly difficult to resist in the aftermath of war was also demonstrated by British politician, Nicholas Ridley. Speaking in 1990 on the European Economic Community, the former minister for Trade and Industry paid a high price for political candour. He described the desire for joint monetary policy as ‘a German racket designed to take over the whole of Europe’ (Lawson, 1990, p. 8). While his concerns were largely about the unelected and unaccountable nature of the EEC, there was considerable angst about sovereignty and the rationale for this was his notion of the ‘essential-ised collective’, i.e. German working practices that would ensure that Germany would always remain economically strong. Ridley, who had lived through the war said, “I’m not against giving up sovereignty in principle, but not to this lot. You might just as well give it to Adolf Hitler, frankly” (p. 8). Margaret Thatcher’s views were allegedly “not significantly different” (p. 9); after all, she had publicly expressed her opposition to German reunification. Nonetheless, Ridley was forced to resign, not because he had expressed a view that no one else of his generation shared, but because it was deemed inappropriate, politically incorrect and anachronistic in a political climate that was moving away from the political polarities towards the liberal centre. Since then, anti-German sentiments within

public discourse have more or less disappeared. The events of WWII and the Holocaust are no longer attributed to Germany or the Germans, but to Nazi Germany and the Nazis, which rightly absolves post-war generations from responsibility: a sensible and diplomatic move towards reconciliation, and one that loosens the public grip on immutable national essence.

However, after any conflict, people are left to make sense of their experience seeking an understanding of its cause and the nature of those who carried it out. This raises an important existential question for which there may be no clear answer, namely: who (or what) is (or was) my enemy? Who *was* responsible for WWII? Was it the Germans or Germany? One of the difficulties we face in addressing this question is that we often fail to make a distinction between the nation as a *political and military entity* and the *people* that comprise the nation (see also Condor, 2006) It is perhaps understandable that the two become conflated or are used interchangeably when there has been ‘total war’. However, to assume that political elites and the military at their disposal are ‘the people’ is a grand assumption and one that we might possibly reject in our own case. In these situations, we have a choice; we can attribute war to the political aims of a regime, which are explained by social representations of power existing at the time; or we can blame ‘the people’ and indict the national character – *collective essentialism* – the assumption that a person has undesirable qualities because they are a member of a particular group. This is the paradox; the nation and the people are the same thing and yet they are not. The question remains: to what extent can collective essentialism be applied, how far can it reasonably extend and for how long? Separating out the people from a system or regime is a difficult process and the degree to which regimes can be thought of as existing independently of the people depends on our experience and our understanding of the nation’s politics, history and contemporary culture. However, a general observation can be made here: collective essentialism can be a potent source of prejudice and discrimination (see Haslam & Whelan, 2008), which may transfer across generations particularly when there is political and economic insecurity: something we are beginning to hear in the Eurozone.

To make matters worse, there may also be a tendency in the West to see causality in the disposition of individuals rather than the social field (Noorenzayan & Nisbett, 2000). Taking this cultural feature of social perception to its logical conclusion means that people in the West may be more inclined to objectify the causes of war by attributing blame to a leader, regime or ‘a

people' rather than seeing causal developments within the socio-political field *of which we are part*. The Second World War thus becomes 'Adolf Hitler' and/or 'the Germans' instead of the Treaty of Versailles and the Munich Agreement: crucial developments that led up to the war (see Shirer, 1964). Similarly, the hegemony of the USSR becomes 'Josef Stalin' and/or 'the Soviets', rather than the political complexities and power struggles across its vast territories, and Cambodia and the killing fields become 'Pol Pot' rather than the US bombing campaign of the Ho Chi Minh trail in Vietnam that brought him to power (Sandle, 2012). One could go on; the perceptions of Serbia, Iraq and Libya in recent times have largely become rooted in the dysfunctional personalities of political and military leaders, and one should bear in mind that the two-fold advantage of objectification is that (i) it conveniently absolves observers who are also part of the socio-political field from any kind of responsibility and (ii) that moving perception away from 'the field' - dismissing political complexity - to focus on personality makes military action easier to justify to a democratic public once they are persuaded that the adversary is an embodiment of evil.

HISTORICAL LEGACIES AND THE POLITICS OF MEMORY

WWII ended in 1945, but its effects and symbolic representations continue to be played out on a personal, political and cultural level. Indeed, the enormity of the loss of life during the two world wars is no forgotten relic of the past; the emotional effects on survivors, their children and grandchildren have been profound and sometimes unexpected and disturbing (see Weissmark, 2004; Welzer, 2005). Despite the indirect nature of these 'experiences' on the second and third generation, historical legacies often provoke a particular political and emotional stance towards others (Liu & Hilton, 2005; Hewer & Kut, 2010), which, at times, can disrupt social relations. In 2007, Polish Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski argued that proposals for bloc voting in the EU should take into account the six million Poles killed by the Germans during WWII because had these events not taken place the population would now be around 66 million instead of 38 million. The comments caused much disruption, hurt feelings and embarrassment and Martin Schulz, the leader of the socialist group in the European Parliament, robustly responded, "The EU is an idea aimed at eliminating the specters of the past ... We will not permit the few to bring up

those specters” (“Leading German Politician”, 2007). This is the crux of the matter: that peace as a political objective is bound up in psychological terms with remembering and forgetting and once this is understood, the political fog begins to clear. For example, because the EU is a political institution premised on the notion of forgetting, it explains why some member states often find Britain’s position bewildering since Britain’s implicit difficulties, discontent and opposition are largely based on remembering. This is not to say that countries such as France and Germany have literally forgotten their turbulent past through collective denial or decay. On the contrary, both countries remember only too well the human and economic cost of pursuing three wars within a century and the concomitant psychological effect on their people (see Jackson, 2003; Assmann, 2010, 2012). However, such is the paradox, that their mutual obligation to remember necessarily imposes an obligation to forget. The result is a form of qualified forgetting: an understanding that the past must not be allowed to destabilise the present or the future.

Social representations of cultural and institutional power and the politics of memory are therefore intimately linked. However, historical legacies bequeathed as a narrative to subsequent generations do not always provide a full contextualised version of events (Weissmark, 2004) or indeed a coherent or consistent identity narrative. For Polish nationals, for example, the events of Katyn and Jedwabne (see Gross, 2001) paint a contradictory scene: victims of genocide on the one hand and occasional perpetrators on the other, and in the Netherlands, confrontation with the past provokes a wrestling with themes of both resistance and collaboration (Vos, 2001). Adding to this instability is also our understanding that the nature of the past is relatively fluid because the social processes involved in remembering and forgetting are subject to generational shift (see Hewer & Roberts, 2012) so that as one generation dies off another emerges with the inevitable prospect of having to re-negotiate the substance and meaning of the past. This issue takes on particular importance when former enemies explore the nature and meaning of reconciliation (see Elford, 2011); for example, competing memory narratives continue to be an obstacle to peace and reconciliation in Bosnia (Roberts, Bećirević, & Paul, 2011). However, because social representations are embedded within a specific cultural-historical context, they alert us to the constructive nature and inherent bias (although not necessarily error) in our own versions of the past and once the constructivist argument has been fully grasped on an intellectual and emotional level, it is possible to shift arguments away from entrenched positions. With such theoretical

insight, the battle for absolute truth is suspended and its pursuit surrendered in exchange for mutual understanding; the discomfiting notion that, whatever the event, there will always be other versions contingent on position. We have to accept that even though our position may be legitimate, a true account is still only one version of events and we do not have an exclusive view of social reality.

INFORMAL SOURCES OF REPRESENTATION

To ascertain the nature of social representations of peace and conflict within any culture it may be necessary to look beyond history textbooks and political discourse for sources. Often, representations deemed incompatible with mainstream opinion (not to be confused with mass opinion) are found in less formal locations such as sport, comedy, humour, everyday conversation (particularly in work environments where expression is not constrained by political correctness) and children's play (see Roberts, Becerivic & Tenebaum, 2007). The displacement of unorthodox views to these cultural outposts is also a feature of power relations: what may or may not be said through official channels. For example, in the world of sport, commentators and pundits are unlikely to refer to war or other controversial historical events because of the unwritten rule that sport should not be contaminated by politics. However, sporting encounters often blur the distinction between politics and entertainment and inferences about international relations are easily drawn from, for example, the behaviour of football supporters and their symbols. In England, football matches with Germany continue to be a vicarious re-enactment of WWII. Now supporters, too young to remember the war, but old enough to have assimilated the representations and their meaning, can be seen carrying inflatable spitfires amid the chant to provoke German supporters, 'Two world wars and one world cup'. In this scenario, sport becomes war by other means, and in the semiotic world where reality and myth are bound up within signs (see Barthes, 1993), we might further enquire of the relevance of dressing up as a knight at an England football match: what cultural messages are at work here? What message from the past is being used in the present and for what purpose? Is this merely an attempt at humour? And is a joke just a joke, or does it hide serious intent?

The expression of hostility through humour in the field of sport leads us to a related and much neglected source of representation - scripted comedy - a realm of public communication in which 'the unspeakable' often finds expression. What cannot be said in the workplace or in the political domain may be displaced into an unregulated world of populist opinion, e.g. stand up comedy. Consider an example of situation comedy from the 1970s: John Cleese's portrayal of hotel owner Basil Fawlty (Cleese, Booth & Davies, 1975) became a cultural reference point in Britain for the difficulties presented by post-war Anglo-German relations. Basil Fawlty's exhortation, 'Don't mention the war!' expressed the unspeakable and only an imaginary character - extreme, eccentric and rude - was able to say with clarity, precision and in an appropriate register and demeanour (impolite and with disdain) what people were thinking at the time. Cleese intended this as a joke about British attitudes towards the war: the script was premised on the idea that holding onto the past is risible. However, the writers underestimated the nature of collective remembering and the audience perceived it quite differently (see Graham, 2012). This parody of the Germans resonated with the public because the Second World War had become unmentionable within the political sphere insofar that its consequences were being played out in the present, but not to the advantage of those who had been on the side of Allied victory. At that time, comparisons between the West German 'economic miracle' and the post-war decline of Britain were stark. German prosperity had arguably been built upon the Marshall Plan, consistent hard work and a huge amount of post-war forgetting (see Connerton, 2007) and these developments meant that the British people were being subtly coerced into complicit silence about their own past. John Cleese 'mentioned the war and got away with it': Nicholas Ridley mentioned it 15 years later and was sacked - principally because he was not a comedian. Comedy with all its deliberate distortions designed to reconfigure the evils of the past into absurdities in the present is an act of social remembering and remains a rich source of coded communication and shared meaning about the present.

CONCLUSION

Peace in the modern world is perhaps far removed from our idealised notions of what it could and should be because it largely exists in the form of *realpolitik*. Our understanding of peace in

Europe has been coloured by conflict: events that have resulted in hostile relations, which continue in some form or another long after war has ended. In the aftermath, people are left to make sense of their lives with all the psychological difficulties it entails: injustice, anger and grief all of which can fuel essentialism and recourse to mythic tales of national and ethnic identity. Given the constructivist nature of many of these origins and loyalties, Wilmer (2002) argues that ‘social reality is different from material reality and we need different ways of thinking about and understanding it’ (p. 165). The theory of social representations offers such a way of thinking as it sets apart shared representations from notions of absolute reality; and embedded within these representations are beliefs and structural arrangements involved in the deployment of power, which ultimately determine the way in which citizens and military personnel act for good or for ill.

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