Something is sacred *because* it is written down. Whereas the successful cultic priest is judged by his skill in *performing* sacred knowledge, the monotheistic priest is judged by his skill in *interpreting* 'the Word'. Ritual reproduction gives way to the production of the unfamiliar, the profound. Theatrics, Assmann says, gives way to hermeneutics. However, as a result of the increased emphasis on hermeneutic innovation, religions must develop techniques by which they can 'rein in' the urge to push the boundaries of knowledge. This is canonization. With the canon, Assmann shows that written memory paradoxically creates more opportunities for forgetting than ritual memory does. Canons create vast archives of stored memory, some of which will inevitably become lost. 'It is only through the interplay between these processes of making visible and canonization', Assmann concludes, 'that culture can become an island in the ocean of forgetting that can ensure continuity for centuries and even millennia' (p. 84).

Other essays in the book tackle a range of topics within the theme of religion and memory. Assmann presents a five stage theory of canonization using the case of early Judaism; he summarizes his influential work on Freud's peculiar book *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), and using the work of Thomas Mann, he engages in a fascinating meditation on myth. Also, adapting Thomas Luckmann's 'invisible religion' thesis to the theory of cultural memory, Assmann reveals some remarkable continuities between the religious cosmos of ancient Egypt and that of the contemporary world. Each of these chapters reveals yet another nuance of Assmann's thinking on religion and memory, giving these essays more coherence than their titles might suggest.

Religion and Cultural Memory lies at the critical juncture between studies of culture, memory, religion and media. Assmann weaves these seemingly disparate fields into a profound synthesis that extends the foundational work on memory of Halbwachs, Nietzsche, and Freud. Assmann's theory of cultural memory is monumental not just for memory studies but for social theory in general. With this volume, Anglo-American readers can now join the discourse.

Reference

Freud, Sigmund (1939) *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. Katherine Jones. New York: A.A. Knopf.

The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility

Jeffrey Olick
New York: Routledge, 2007. 240 pp. US$32.95. ISBN 9780415956833.

Reviewed by Danielle Celermajer, The University of Sydney, Australia

In the prefatory remarks to his new book on collective memory and the politics of regret, Olick both asks (tactically), and answers (skilfully), the question any reviewer or reader is likely to pose about usefulness of a compilation of otherwise accessible

essays. The answer he suggests, and delivers, is that placed together, these essays provide a multi-dimensional elaboration of a new, robust and distinctly sociological conceptualization of both collective memory itself (as a process or practice) and of the conditions of its emergence as a key social and political trope in the latter part of the 20th century. Olick masterfully weaves together these two theoretical tasks in a manner that simultaneously deepens conceptualizations of the notoriously difficult concept of collective memory, provides a bridge into the sociological contribution to the field for researchers in other disciplines and lays the foundation for a new and highly innovative research project into the historical dimension of memory.

The first set of four essays in this book, taken together, trace the path of Olick's own intellectual journey of carving out a way of speaking about collective memory in a manner that transcends the barren dichotomies that have dogged much thinking not only on memory, but more generally about a range of conceptual phenomena that demand a dual focus on the individual subjects of experience and the broader framework or context (such as culture, identity, responsibility). Intelligently drawing on a body of theoretical work not explicitly concerned with memory itself (specifically Elias, Bakhtin and Bordieu), Olick gleans the insights necessary to think structure without functionalism, to move beyond particular individuals without transcendentalism *and* to translate this more complex ontology into a methodology for examining the processes of collective memory. The essays on mnemonic practices in post-Second World War Germany in particular, where Olick's principal empirical knowledge is grounded, exemplify how a reconfigured, process-oriented conceptual scheme of collective memory can enrich our ability to make sense of the persistence and transformation of memories across time and how narratives of the past both shape and are shaped by current concerns and social contexts. The book not only helps us to think beyond the individual/collective, agency/structure or determinism/presentism dichotomies, but also provides methodological tools for studying collective memory without recourse to the traditional methodologies dictated by one or other approach, and is thus a rich resource with application well beyond its own borders. With a capacious view to the range of phenomena that have been placed under the collective memory rubric (from aggregated individual recollections to public memorials to discursive frames), Olick navigates a path between a type of crude synchronism and giving up the objective of thematization altogether to provide an internally complex conceptualization that justifies their continuing association by showing us what the concept of collective memory uniquely sensitizes us to.

If the book did no more than this, and did it with a clarity rare among theorists inviting us to move beyond entrenched ontological assumptions, it would be worth the attention of scholars interested in the links between memory, society, politics, identity and history. To the extent that theorists across disciplines continue to fall back on reified conceptualizations (memory as an object in internal, social or material space), Olick provides a signposted road out, compelling arguments and accessible intellectual tools for thinking memory as figuration or process. Importantly, by pointing to the parallels in the new conceptual directions in the sociological, psychological and neurological

approaches to memory, he also starts to open a conversation between those disciplines that can transcend the individual/social divide.

It is the second half of the book, however, that delivers the most original, intellectually far-reaching and also challenging contribution. Here, Olick goes beyond an interrogation of the phenomena themselves (collective memory and the politics of regret), to reflect on their movement through history and on their epochal significance. In the first instance, this leads to his suggesting that our contemporary experiences of trauma and political regret only become possible in the context of modernity's progressive temporality, and its breakdown through the 20th century; in simple terms, it is only when we expect time to move forward towards an unanticipated (and better) future that we can feel its stagnation in the past as disruption. In the second instance, and stepping back from the immediacy of the *fin de siècle* obsession with our troubled pasts (and their redemption), he seeks to situate the present within a far broader sweep of *great time* (a phrase he borrows from Bahktin), in which different understandings or formations in the history of trauma and collective memory reappear as 'moments in an overall process' (p. 169).

The final two chapters of the book map this process along two dimensions of the history of ideas, each presented not as abstract theory moving along an independent ideal trajectory, but always grounded in sociological processes – technological change, urbanization, the development of print media, shifts in the form of political organization. The first dimension concerns how human beings make sense of suffering, thus moving through theodicy, the loss of theodicy, *ressentiment*, the politics of pity right up to the politics of regret; or, as he pithily puts it, borrowing from Odo Marquand (1998), from God sitting judgment on human, to human sitting judgment on God, to human sitting judgment on human, and there condemning ourselves. The second dimension is more directly concerned with the shape of time, or chronotypes, moving from eschatology, where the future was already set in the past, to human beings' radical detachment from inherited narrative or nature into progressive temporality and historicity, and finally to what he diagnoses as our current stage, where a multiplicity historicities contend and we are left negotiating multiple temporal frames that are often in conflict with each other.

This part of the book, where Olick draws links between trauma, regret and modernity, principally through the medium of temporality and the historical transformation of temporality, will certainly be the most challenging, particularly for those unfamiliar with the idea that we can understand different historical periods not only in terms of say social organization or technology, but also in terms of its understanding of time. Nevertheless, and despite the enormous and multidisciplinary literature on which Olick draws (from Nietzsche to Koselleck to Amery and Levinas), the last two essays of the book in particular provide an alluring invitation into (and abundant theoretical resources to pursue) a genuinely historical way of thinking about memory. If nothing else, all readers are bound to be captivated by the notion that both trauma, understood individually or socially and the political turn to a politics that looks back at our collective failures (truth commissions, apologies, memorial processes) involve a

certain distortion in the linear trajectory of time, where we are unable or unwilling to march in the direction of modernity's promised progress. Olick of course goes much further than this, and the reader willing to work with his complex theorizing will be deeply rewarded. Given that Olick presents this part of his theorizing as schematic and tentative, one can (at risk of falling back on an outmoded chronotype!) look forward with eager anticipation to the next moment of his thinking memory.

Reference

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Remembering the Year of the French: Irish Folk History and Social Memory

Guy Beiner

Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007. 488 pp. US$49.95.
ISBN 9780299218201.

Reviewed by Tara L. Tober, University of Virginia, USA

In this case study of Irish folk memory, Guy Beiner argues that the analysis of folklore is an essential component of the study of social memory. *Remembering the Year of the French* investigates how the people of Connaught remembered the events of 1798, the year the French arrived to aid the Irish in their fight for independence. Using a grass-roots (folklore) approach to the study of memory, this book reveals alternate versions of Irish history that Beiner argues have been largely ignored by historians.

Beiner analyzes Irish folk history pertaining to the Great Irish Rebellion of 1798, employing a variety of sources. Part 1 of the book describes the types of folklore available for study in Ireland. For example, the Irish Folklore Commission documented and recorded oral narratives about Irish historical events from 1935 until 1970. The 'Schools' Scheme' (1937–38) involved 11- to 14-year-old children recording information about historical traditions they learned from elderly people in their community. Beiner also mines the work of historian Richard Hayes. In 1935, Hayes followed the path of the French and Irish troops, collecting folk history from the people he interviewed along the way. Finally, Beiner surveyed sources from Irish popular culture over the past 200 years such as political pamphlets, journals and newspapers to chart the construction and reconstruction of Irish social memory over time. Beiner's purpose in collecting this data is to argue that the study of folk history calls our attention to vernacular historical discourses that play a central role in the provincial communities of Ireland.

In Part 2 of *Remembering the Year of the French*, Beiner classifies various expressions of folklore into genres (e.g. stories, songs, rhymes, toasts) and discusses the