

Historical Memories

Rezarta Bilali & Michael Ross

Philosopher George Santayana

- "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

“Remember”

Annals of St. Gall

709 Hard winter. Duke Gottfried died.

710 Hard year and deficient crops.

711 Nothing happened.

712 Flood every where.

.....

723 Charles fought against the Saracens at Poitiers on Saturday.

Different Views

- "What experience and history teach is this—that people and governments never have learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it." **G. W. F. Hegel**
- If you do not like the past, change it.
William L. Burton, (*American Historical Association Newsletter*, 20:2, 1982).
- "Each age tries to form its own conception of the past. Each age writes the history of the past anew with reference to the conditions uppermost in its own time." **Frederick Jackson Turner**
- Search for analogies—Iraq like Bosnia or Vietnam?

Historical Memories Take Many Forms

- Texts, novels, plays, films, monuments
- Shakespeare, Salieri
- Narratives by teachers, group & religious leaders
- Individual memories of insiders & outsiders.

So Why Bother Remembering History ?

Psychological perspective:

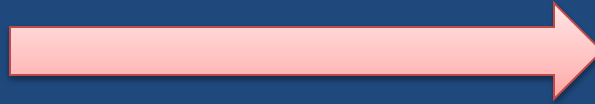
- Group identity (insiders and outsiders)
- Personal identity (insiders and sometimes outsiders)

Parallels Between Group & Personal Identity

- High self/group regard
- Motivation: self/group preservation
- Threaten self/group ID → self/group protective motives
- History → self/group understanding (Who am I/we?)
- Self/group views<--->history
- Insiders consider themselves to be history experts
- History conflicts<---->territorial conflicts

Group & societal level

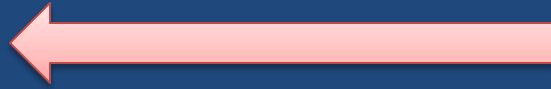
Past



Present

Group & societal level

Past



Present

Magnitude Gap

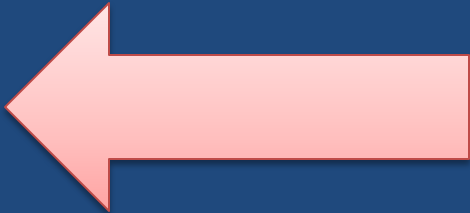
- Severity of harm
- Moral Culpability
- Time Span
- Intentions of Perpetrators

Sources of distortions in interpretations of violent past

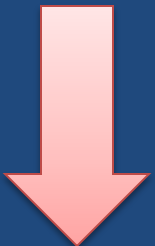
- Selective remembering
 - Fabrication of events
 - Blaming the enemy
 - Blaming the circumstances
 - Minimization of harm
 - Exaggeration of harm
-
- Recollections
- Attributions of responsibility
- Severity of harm

(Baumeister & Hastings, 1997)

Shared
representations
of the past



Present



Historical
memories

Individual-
level

Antecedents

Group
membership

Ingroup
identification

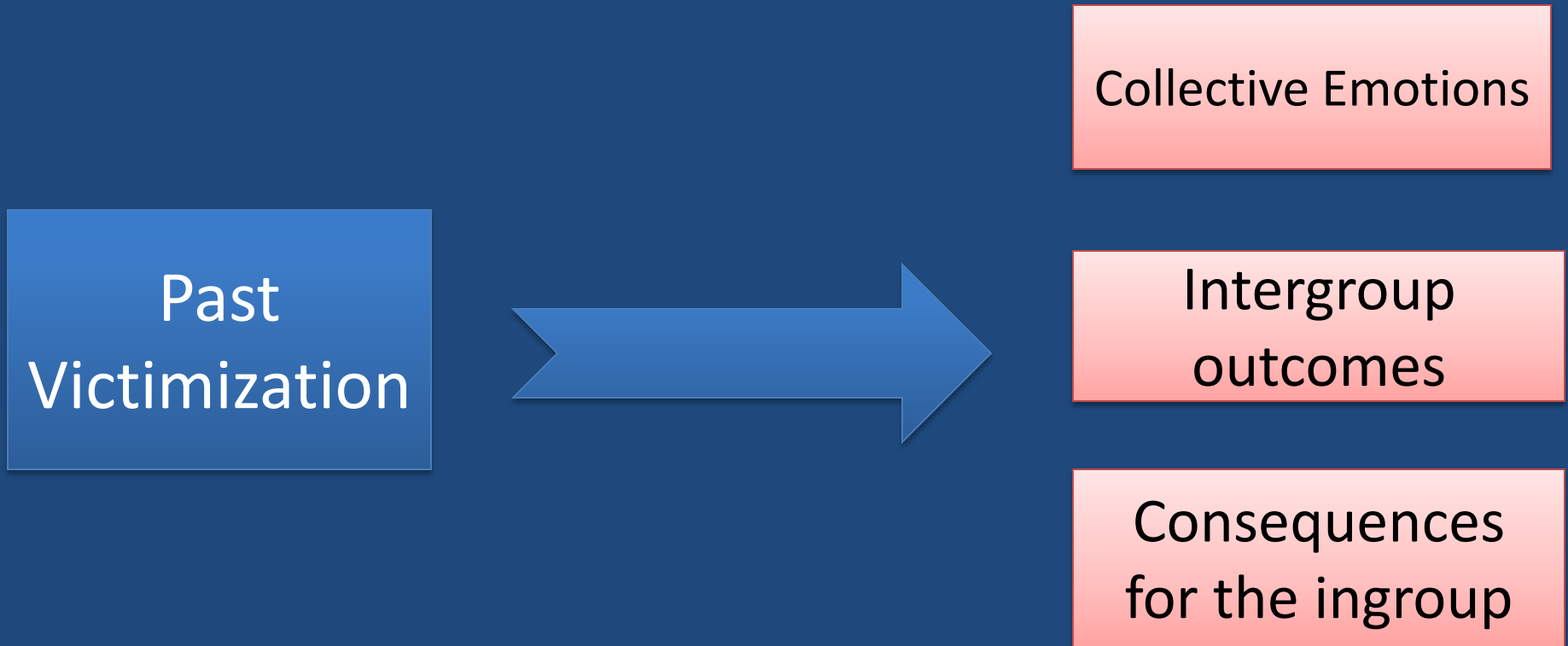
Group status,
Ideology, SDO



The type of
events

Interpretation of
events

Consequences



Consequences

Reminders of
Ingroup
Wrongdoing



Collective
Emotions:
Guilt, Shame,



Intergroup
outcomes
(e.g., reparations,
apologies)



Level of
categorization

Philosopher George Santayana

- "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

Palestinian prime minister, Salam Fayyad

“Let us not allow ourselves the luxury of acting as victims forever. This is a case of two opposed historical narratives. And if this is going to direct traffic in the future, we are not going too far. It’s time to get on with it and end this conflict. Let’s move on. Let’s really look forward.”

Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi in 2000), called for clarification of “the entire history of Burundi, going as far back as possible in order to inform Burundi about their past. The purpose of this clarification shall be to rewrite Burundi’s history, so that all Burundians can interpret it in the same way” (Protocol 1, Article 8, c).

Reconciliation



Historical
memories

TRCs

Memorials

History education

etc...

Process vs. content

The normative and moral framework

What kind of historical truth?

- Establishing accountability & responsibility;
- Delegitimizing the institutional frameworks of the past;
- Breaking the past patterns of behavior;
- Focusing on the lessons learned

Single truth vs. multiple truths

THANK YOU!