Learning from the past: continuity as a dimension of transformation

Tetyana Hoggan-Kloubert

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Abstract

The article discusses (the restoration of a sense of) continuity as a necessary part of transformative learning. Using the lenses of rhythm theory, biographical learning, and memory studies, it highlights both the individual and social dimensions for making sense of the past after a period of change. Discussing the example of an individual transformation and the social transition of Eastern Europe in the 1980s–1990s, it explores two aspects of the transformation process: the need for stability and the selective and altering nature of our process of remembrance. It advocates for developing the capacity to reflect on how we relate to our past and how we narrate the course of our lives.

Introduction

Our biographies are embedded in the social environments in which we live. The collective memories of a given area impact the personal narratives of those within it. Indeed, (big) history is reflected in (small) stories. Even if modern identities are becoming less and less connected to specific geographical places and traditions due to ongoing globalization, shared media, and increased homogenization (Hall, 1990), the need for identification and (a sense of) continuity is certainly not lost—neither on the societal nor individual level.

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In my research on societal transitions (in postcommunist Poland, Russia, and Ukraine (Kloubert, 2014)), I observed that the historical upheaval reinforced people's need to connect different parts of their history into a new whole, reestablishing the recently lost continuity between past, present, and future. The societal turnover in Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s gave birth to a "historical boom": an obsession with history and the search for new or forgotten national narratives. The past was radically "changed" within a decade; histories were rewritten; connections between past, present, and future were reestablished; and new narratives were created.

This observation is partly applicable to our own biographical narratives: we unavoidably make connections between our past, present, and imagined future. The need for continuity is particularly urgent; however, after a major personal transition, the feeling of disorientation and the loss of familiar patterns of being make us feel "foreign" in the world. The literature on transformative education has touched upon this feeling (Hoggan & Browning, 2019; Hoggan et al., 2017), but this article addresses continuity as a dimension of transformation in more detail: the process of reimagining personal biographies, finding new meanings in the past, and reconnecting these biographies to the (transformed) present and imagined future.

The Former and Emerging "I"

To approach this theoretical contribution, I begin with the story of Frank (a pseudonym) that he told me during a discussion about transformative learning.[1] Frank and I shared the conviction that people feel the need to maintain a feeling of personal identity and consistency—even after a major transformation. The feeling of becoming uprooted from one's own self and staying without an anchor in one's own past would be unbearable. To develop our discussion further, Frank shared the following example from his life.

When Frank's first son was born, he changed in a dramatic way through the process of becoming a father; he became a different person in the world. This transformation affected other contexts of his life as well. For instance, it changed him as a son (see Michalek, 2015). He became less critical and more patient and sympathetic toward his own parents. While reflecting on his change as a son, Frank reminisced about his childhood and youth. In his memory, he had always been a thoughtful and respectful son, trying not to worry his parents and to be polite to them. This memory of himself as a polite and thoughtful boy in the past made him think that although his current change was a transformative experience, it was *also* a continuation of his identity. In recognizing this, he was able to connect two points of his life: the memory of how he was as a young son and the perception of how he is as a grown-up son. This connection gave him a feeling of continuity of his identity after a period of transformation. The new memory also provided a sort of justification for the newly transformed "I."

Reflecting on Frank's story can help us to better understand how transformation involves disruptions and necessary reconnections in the ways we perceive and make sense of our past. To start, we must acknowledge that transformation, by its very

nature, elicits new ways of being and behaving. These developments might feel foreign; being, thinking, or behaving in new ways can feel unnatural. (Even after some experience with them, these new ways still cannot be compared to the routine patterns reinforced over years or even decades of use.) Cranton (2006) notes that some experiences disrupt the narrative coherence of one's life story, creating a sense of discontinuity and fragmentation. The feelings of uneasiness in new ways of being, thinking, and behaving that emerge during and after the process of transformation contribute to our need to search for a new (coherent) self.

Transformative learning, as defined by Mezirow (1991), passes through different stages, starting with a disorienting dilemma and ending with reintegration and habitualization of new perspectives, including their manifestation in action. And we can add: the new perspectives need to form a more or less coherent structure within the larger framework of one's own life, on the diachronic (past, present, and anticipated future) as well as on the synchronic (different parts of one's world- and self-view in a concrete given moment of time) levels. Nohl (2015) reconstructed Mezirow's phases of transformative learning (based on biographical narrative interviews with 80 persons), condensing them into five phases: (1) non-determining start, (2) experimental and undirected inquiry, (3) social testing and mirroring, (4) shifting of relevance, and, finally, (5) social consolidation and the reinterpretation of biography. The transformation process in Nohl's model also ends with the consolidation of perspectives, but, additionally, it includes a necessary revision of one's own biography. This revision requires learners to "distance themselves from their prior biographies and open up new biographical horizons" (p. 45).

The idea of a coherence-seeking process as a final consolidating phase of transformative learning deserves more attention. The stabilization of new perspectives is, surely, dependent on the (new) interpretation of one's own biography, as Nohl (2015) described. I argue that this does not necessarily imply "distancing" from one's own past but rather a changing of foci, rehierarchization of past events, and redefinition of their significance. This sometimes requires identifying more closely with some parts of one's biographical narration that previously were marginal. Again, for transformation to reach the point of irreversibility or stability, which Hoggan (2016) characterizes as being essential for transformative learning, there is a need for becoming more familiar with the changes that have occurred, overcoming feelings of estrangement. This familiarizing develops through the sense of continuity on a larger scale of our lives. As Hoggan et al. (2017) point out, the juxtaposition of continuity and transformative learning is false; continuity is an essential part of transformative learning. "The outcomes of transformative learning are inseparable from the learner's previous experiences, existing meaning structures, and processes of learning" (p. 52). Formenti and West (2018) ask similarly, "What remains, in transformation, of earlier identities and selves?" (p. 2). How new is the "new" (transformed) habit of mind? As Hoggan et al. (2017) put it: "Although some parts of a meaning perspective might undergo significant change, all of one's meaning perspectives would of course not simultaneously transform" (p. 50).

In his story, Frank seems to overcome the feeling of estrangement or "alienation from one's self" (English, 2013, p. 99) by linking his "current self" to his "past self." In his case, the disruption caused by transformation was alleviated by finding connections with, and thereby creating a new narrative for, his biography. For Frank, the new perspectives became sustainable and stable—probably because they were reinforced through his revised perception of his past self. To put it differently, as the number of bridges that a person builds for themselves to the past expands, they internalizes the new ways of being in the world—the new self becomes saturated with already familiar meanings; a degree of familiarity, consistency, and continuity grows. In connecting the dots between past and present, the new perspectives *made sense* to Frank—they became familiar and more firmly established through the overall consistency with his sense of self. Frank's story illustrates Mezirow's and Nohl's final stages of perspective transformation—the "reintegration of new perspectives" or "reinterpretation of biography"—which can include the ability to gain distance from certain parts of our biography, to reflexively acquire new components of one's identity, and in some cases even to recreate our identity but also to reevaluate what are considered essential parts of our identity (emphasizing some memories, diminishing others). In any case, one's narrative of the past is a central force in shaping identity; the present is always in constant negotiation with the past.

Frank's example highlights two important aspects of the transformation process: that it requires a reconstruction of stability and that our biographical narratives are a selection from many possible memories of our lives. However, it is important to recognize that this process can be extremely challenging, for example, for individuals who have experienced dysfunctional family dynamics, wrenching separations, or other deeply painful experiences. These experiences can create emotional wounds that are difficult to heal and can lead to a sense of disconnection from oneself and others for a long period of time. The ideas presented by Boyd and Myers (1988) about the importance of discernment in transformative learning are highly relevant to the process of creating continuity in one's life story. They argue that receptivity, recognition, and grieving are all essential components of the transformative process and that each of these elements can become a potential block to transformative processes if not acknowledged.

This article explores these aspects while being aware of the fact that biographical work must deal with a highly complex entanglement of narratives full of contradictions, paradoxes, and discontinuities. In the German research on education, the term used to talk about discontinuities is "negativity of experience" (*Negativität der Erfahrung*), based on ideas developed by Husserl (1939), Gadamer (1975), Heidegger (1993), and others. Negativity of experience occurs in our encounters with differences, highlighting discontinuities and disruptures as constant moments of learning (English, 2013). The development of new narrative connections after a major interruption does not emerge immediately; it needs to be sought out. The person involved might stay for a longer period of time in the process of discontinuity or accept ambivalences and even dissonance as parts of their life. Nevertheless, there is often a strong urge to make sense of our new and old (as yet troubling) experiences by

creating (a feeling of) continuity. Bron (2007) coined the term "floating" to describe this navigation through ambivalences and uncertainty while going through personal change. Floating can last several years; it is a highly emotional but also cognitive process of changing and exchanging identities in adulthood (p. 122). Bron describes it as a feeling of "being paralyzed" by events or experiences, "being stuck and unable to move either backwards or forwards" (p. 121). However, different stages of floating also include the search for one's own place within circumstances and new ways of sense-making and patterns of conduct.

Theories Helpful to Understand (Dis-)Continuity

To further reflect on continuity as an important aspect of transformative learning, I will use several theoretical lenses, two from the field of adult education and the third from memory and culture studies. In combining these approaches, I seek insights into how the process of striving for continuity and compatibility of different stories of oneself "rounds out" the individual and collective experiences of transformative learning.

Rhythms of Transformative Learning

The first theoretical lens through which to explore (dis-)continuity is the rhythmic theory of education as developed by Alhadeff-Jones (2019b). According to this theory, transformative learning is not a linear process but instead is better understood as "circular dynamics" (e.g., retroactive or recursive loops). Accordingly, it is characterized by both discontinuity and continuity.

Applying the theory of *rhythmanalysis* by Lefebre (2004) to adult education, Alhadeff-Jones (2019b) speaks about arrhythmia, polyrhythmia, and eurhythmia in order to conceptualize the perception of time in learning processes. In general, *arrhythmia* is "characterized by the provisional or permanent lack of synchronization between rhythms," (p. 173); *polyrhythmia* refers to the parallel existence of diverse rhythms; and *eurhythmia* assumes the (harmonic) connection between different rhythms. Alhadeff-Jones sees arrhythmia appearing "whenever and wherever people are confronted with phenomena that display asynchronous patterns, frequencies or periods of activity that appear disconnected and eventually irreconcilable with each other" (p. 173). Those situations may, however, trigger learning and transformation and "stimulate the need to adjust or adapt" (p. 173).

Using this categorization, I see *eurhythmia* as an ideal (harmonic) state of synchronizing the perception of time and rhythms in different parts of our lives. Arrhythmia might be experienced as a disruption after a big change that intensifies the need to synchronize the past and the present, which in turn results in seeking congruence. Polyrhythmia, however, points to a more or less trouble-free coexistence of heterogeneous rhythms; a person learns to switch between different spaces and feel at peace with heterogeneous phenomena. Alhadeff-Jones (2019b) emphasizes that a person can develop a capacity to cope with polyrhythmia without losing their sense of coherence, but without this capacity, the risk of dissonance emerges. And finally,

eurhythmia, a feeling of harmony, implies the capacity to synchronize rhythms. "Eurhythmia evokes an experience of resonance, as it may involve the reinforcement and the amplification of rhythmic phenomena within a specific space and time" (p. 175). I use the taxonomy of rhythm as suggested by Alhadeff-Jones to think about the coherence, not on the horizontal lifeline (synchrony) but on the vertical lifeline (diachrony). Diachronic coherence is about the relation between the current "I" (after a process of transformation) and the past "I" (lived and remembered).

In another publication, Alhadeff-Jones (2019) reflects explicitly on the element of continuity/discontinuity in transformative learning. He sees discontinuity as an essential part of transformative learning because disruption, disorientation, and reorientation are axiomatically the components of change. This change can take different shapes and have various implications. Alhadeff-Jones exemplifies discontinuity through the concepts of *épiphany* (a great revelation and catalyst of personal growth) and *épreuve* (a revelation and disruption of values and characteristics in a concrete given moment). *Épiphany*, understood broadly, means a manifestation of what was hidden; it refers to the experience of an awareness that catalyzes a process of personal growth. "It changes the way a person interprets their life experience. *Épiphany* can thus be seen as a catalyst for the perception of a new identity" (Alhadeff-Jones, 2018, p. 47, translation mine). *Épreuve*, on the other hand, refers to situations of conflict that punctuate the normal course of events and daily routines, challenging the values a person lives by. The outcome of *épreuve* is uncertain. Alhadeff-Jones emphasizes that *épreuve* contains a process of selection (*une opération de selection*) and has a social dimension: it unveils social and historical contexts in which the person is "tested and assessed." (Those contexts could be passing final exams, divorce, or, as in Frank's example, the experience of becoming a parent).

Alhadeff-Jones (2019a) argues, however, to consider both aspects of transformative learning—discontinuity and continuity—as being in a dialectical relationship. Continuity is maintained through the repetition of patterns of activity (e.g., interpreting, questioning, dialoging)—and, I would add, in the process of reinterpreting the past. If the activity (e.g., self-reflection or "connecting the dots") has been performed several times, it becomes a habitual practice of the individual and creates therefore a form of continuity. Furthermore, continuity is maintained for Alhadeff-Jones during transformative learning due to the sequential nature of the different phases. The sequential organization of the process helps, he argues, to develop "a sense of coherence" (p. 98). In interpreting these thoughts, I would add that a habit of reflecting on the past "I" and the current "I" creates continuity, not only in the form of an outcome but also in the process of putting the past and present in (ideally a eurhythmic) relationship, and can symbolize the continuity of one's patterns of behaviors.

Biographicity and Narration

The second lens through which to reflect on (dis-)continuity between the past and the present is biographical learning. This can be understood as the process of making sense of one's life course (Alheit & Dasien, 2002; Bron, 2002) or as a process of "reclaiming

and reconsidering the past in order to cope with challenges of the present" (Hallqvist & Hydén, 2013, p. 2). In living our lives, we are biographical narrators:

> Humans always asked themselves questions about who they are and why there are, how they become and what they are and what their future is, mostly or especially in situations which were seriously important, dangerous or strange, in times of crisis, suffering, in flux and changes. (Bron, 2002, p. 4)

We create stories of our lives, which change over time as they are reinterpreted, reshaped, and retold. We strive to tell our life stories in a way that makes sense for us—to order and evaluate singular events into a narrative whole (Hallqvist & Hydén, 2013, p. 1). This requires the ability to place oneself in relation to one's own sense of self (in the present and in the past) and to narrate a biographical identity. Through these stories, we seek a feeling of continuity, consistency, and connectedness between our different chronological selves. Moreover, the way we tell these stories of our life is dependent on the concrete present challenge we are going through. Our remembering is determined by the things that are important for us in this given moment.

Telling the stories about our life is, therefore, a process of selection; our remembering is a selective tool to grasp parts of the past that suit our current experience. Biography, thus, can be understood as a stock of knowledge based on one's lived experience and also as the "(Hallqvist & Hydén, 2013, p. 2) outcome of the learning process when the focus is on new knowledge that is produced" by biographical learning. Exactly the same experience is often remembered in a completely different way 20 years after the event than it is at 5 years after the event. The life experience gained in the course of 20 years plays into the memory of this event and enriches it with new interpretations. Those interpretations may be based on capacities and patterns of thinking that were not even available at the time of the actual event.

Alheit (1994) used the term "biographicity" to describe an individual's capacity to design and redesign the shapes and structures of one's life (within certain restraints; our interpretations of the past are not utterly arbitrary). While exercising this capacity, we learn to experience the structures of our lives as alterable and designable. For Alheit, this is a process of networking, of making new connections between things that have not yet been connected or considered connectable. Ultimately, biographical learning is an activity in which learners "reflexively 'organize' their experiences in such a way that they also generate personal coherence, identity, a meaning to their life history and a communicable, socially viable lifeworld perspective for guiding their actions" (Alheit & Dausien, 2002, p. 17). Following this line of thought, I argue that after a major transformation, we engage in the process of (re)narration of our biographies, and sometimes, we reach out to the storage of the "unlived life" (i.e., experiences and new interpretations of experiences that hitherto have not played a major role in the personal narrative of one's life) to "decipher" (Alheit, 1994, p. 290) the surplus meanings and to "appropriate them."

As an outcome of this organizing process, individuals develop new ways of viewing their lives and develop a sense of personal coherence. Alheit (1994) argues further that in modern societies, individuals are used to change. As a result, fluidity and life transitions often do not evoke feelings of panic (Alheit, 1994, p. 75). Alheit sees individuals develop a sustainable capacity to rebuild their own biographies, spaces of action, and "self- and world-referentiality." Biographies can therefore be considered not only a result of lived events but also a product of sense-making and narrations. With this understanding, the transformation of perspectives, even if radical, is also characterized by continuity.

Alheit (1994) developed the term "unlived lives" to describe latent implicit opportunities, interpretations, possibilities, or ideas about one's life that have not been expressed explicitly or practiced. "Within the framework of a restricted modification potential, we have more opportunities than we will ever put into practice. Our biography therefore contains a sizeable potential of 'unlived life'" (p. 288). Frank's story provides a useful example. He went into his thoughts and selected from the past a memory—him being a polite and thoughtful boy toward his parents. This memory was perfectly able to be integrated into his new present self that had changed through becoming a father but at the same time stayed loyal to his core "self." Could he have chosen another memory from his past? Perhaps. Were there times, for instance, when he had been rebellious toward his parents? Of course. But these were not memories that he selected for his current life narration.

Rhythm theory and biographical learning are approaches to understanding the formation of time consciousness and are necessarily connected to identity formation. Mead (1964) described time perspective as a typical feature of identity formation while linking past and future in the current present—transmitted in an intersubjective praxis. The constituting elements of time experience are so-called "unique events" (p. 338)—they first break the continuity and then trigger the search for reinterpretation and reintegration of the different narrations into a continuous overall context of our life. According to this, the past can be reshaped again and again in its relationship to the present and in our expectations for the future. The past is therefore always subject to present assessment.

Similar to Frank's story, when I became a mother, I underwent a process of transformation—as a person in the new role of mother but also in my old role as a daughter. The difference between my story and Frank's is that I became more critical toward my parents or at least toward their restrictive parenting styles. I looked at my daughter with the feelings of complete admiration, asking myself how a mother could possibly be authoritative and restrictive toward her own child. I tried to make sense of my experiences, too, as Frank did. I went back in my memories and analyzed myself. What did I find there? A piece of memory wherein I saw myself as a freedom-seeking and independent creature who could not endure the restrictions imposed by my mother and never wanted to similarly restrain someone about whom I cared. Smiling at my youthful naiveté, this piece of memory nevertheless helped me to restore a sense of continuity in my biography. And, after having reconciled my present self with my past self,

I walked more happily through the world, taking pride in my unshakeable, stable "inner nucleus."

I would make a tentative generalization: in most cases, we are able to bring our life events—even if they are transformational—into harmony with the events that preceded them. However, the line between past and present that we create is not necessarily the only one possible. The memory that we choose is different depending on the transformed perspectives; the connection to the past varies depending on our present needs. To make this connection seems to be an essential human need for feeling or constructing a sense of continuity and consistency in our lives, even during, and perhaps especially after, a profound individual transformation. As a result of biographical work, based on the process of reflecting on our past selves, we bring our experience of temporal change into an order that makes sense to us, and we strive to restore harmony between our different diachronic selves.[2]

Social Collective Memory

The third lens through which to analyze (dis-)continuity comes from memory and cultural studies. This lens highlights the social nature of our collective memory, as originally described by French sociologist Halbwachs (1967). While using this concept, I offer a bridge of analogy between the individual and social dimensions of transformational learning. If we speak about the social nature of memory, we mean two things: the fact that an individual's remembering is influenced by the social context and that social groups can also have a sort of memory.

Halbwachs (1967) claims that what and how a person (or a group of people) remembers depend on the "social framework" ("*cadres sociaux*"): the frames of reference consisting of temporal, spatial, linguistic, and social aspects of the given society and situation. Since these social frameworks evolve over time, memories also change: we always remember starting from a concrete present moment. Halbwachs describes our collective memory as always selective and constructive. The "we" that remembers speaks more about our present-day needs and situation than about our actual past; what is remembered in the present situation is only what seems relevant (to the current society) to remember. What is considered "useless" for the present-day requirements is simply forgotten.

Halbwachs asserts that social groups also have a memory. He implies that a social group also shares certain patterns of thought and interpretation that refer to the past of this group and on which their cohesion is based. This collective memory can be used to understand the process of societal transition—for instance, we can look at societies that have experienced totalitarian or authoritarian regimes and transitioned (or, at least, are still striving to transition) to democratic societies (see Kloubert, 2014, 2020, for examples from Ukraine, Poland, and Russia). The process of building collective memory sheds light on the ways that these *freshly baked* democratic societies deal with their totalitarian past. What stories do they tell when it comes to the past of their nation, their country? While going through the process of deep societal transformation, those societies experienced an existential upheaval. In addition to economic and

political changes, there was a deeply felt uncertainty about the new images of "who we are and where we are going." This time of crucial transformations was characterized by the presence of existentially threatening crises, dangers, and catastrophes beyond the usual uncertainties of life. The societal transformation led to a fragility of identities (Dunn, 1998). One of the most significant challenges in this context was the need to confront and process the legacies of the communist past, including the trauma, repression, and social dislocation that many individuals and communities had experienced under communist rule. This process of confronting the past was often highly contested and involved difficult and painful debates about the nature and extent of communist-era crimes as well as efforts to reconcile different visions of the past and the future.

The process of remembering ties *yesterday* to *today* by shaping past experiences in a way that seems relevant to the present, including stories and parts of self-identity from a transformed present horizon. Thereby, it creates feelings of reconciliation, stability, and hope. It allows the collective us to use the pronoun *we/us* to refer to the current (transformed) *us*, as well as to the "old" *us*. What binds different historical "us's" to each other is the connective memory structure that we create. This connective line is not arbitrary, but neither is it the only one possible. The restoration of continuity after a transformation also reveals current norms, values, wishes, and expectations that have been (consciously or not) petrified into new "truths" (after a transformation). For Assmann (1992), therefore, "remembrance is the act of semioticization" (p. 77). The construction of the past can be understood as the result of a search for and creation of meaning.

Helpful in this regard might be a differentiation made by Assmann (2004) between storage memory (*Speichergedächtnis*) and functional memory (*Funktionsgedächtnis*). Storage memory refers to memory as a storage of information and knowledge about our past. This might be similar to what Alheit meant by "unlived lives" (see above). Past events can be retrieved from this storage (*Speicher*). A storage memory includes "the sheer collection, conservation and cataloging" (Assmann, 2004, p. 24). The term "functional memory" is used to describe a remembering process that accesses the information contained in the storage memory but which depends on the needs of the current situation. This memory fulfills a certain function toward the present needs.

Hall (1990) directly links the process of remembrance to the construction of (collective or cultural) identity; the latter is described by him as an act of positioning oneself to one's own past:

> Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialist past, [cultural identities] are subject to the continuous "play" of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere "recovery" of the past, which is waiting to be found … identities are the names we give to different ways we are positioned by, and positioned ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (p. 225)

Our meanings and practices arise from ongoing and changing contexts of place, time, culture, power, and history. Speaking about the countries that experienced colonization, Hall (1990) points to the phenomenon of bringing to light the "hidden"

(p. 224) continuities that were suppressed. Such a rediscovery has an emancipatory power: the reconnection to hidden histories can nourish some of the important societal movements (e.g., feminist, anticolonial); it links the present moment to previous ideas, concepts, and deeds.

To illustrate the analogy with personal remembering (as described in Frank's case), I present some examples from the societies that I have studied in my scholarly life. In Ukraine, Poland, and Russia, the years 1989–1991 meant a huge societal transformation. This change also created a great need for legitimation. The legitimacy of the "new" order was in all three countries often derived from the illegitimacy of the "old" order, but the new order was also linked to the rediscovered (real or mythologized) "hidden" traditions of the past. If, after the transition, the society felt the need to foster the democratic spirit of the "nation," then it remembered the periods of democracy that it had experienced in the past or the efforts for establishing democracy in previous epochs.[3] Concretely, when Poland wants to promote the spirit of freedom and patriotism, the story it tells is about the periods of their fights for independence. The present state will be put in the perceived "historical continuum"; the link is made so that its history is presented as a teleological path toward this "ideal." The totalitarian period is presented as a temporal "interruption" of this historical continuity.

In the interviews that I conducted with Polish adult educators in 2009, the topic of belonging culturally to Europe was crucial. Poland entered the European Union (EU) in the year 2004, after a long period of being considered by its Western neighbors as a part of the "Eastern bloc," a country behind the Iron Curtain, as opposed to its counterparts in Western (i.e., also democratic, capitalist, free) Europe. In the conversations with these adult educators, the matter of Polish participation in European cultural heritage was an important point of reference. They mentioned the Polish past in the context of the Western European past; they emphasized Polish collective values as those shared with the EU. For instance, the recognition of democratic principles—in the past as in the present—was presented as legitimation for participation in European cultural heritage. "We look to the past … to be a full citizen, and not just a citizen of my own country, but also a citizen of Europe … We belong to Europe because our ancestors already felt they belonged there" (Kloubert, 2014, p. 165, translated by the author).

The connection between the reinterpretation of the totalitarian communist past and the identity formation in the present moment is best expressed by the Polish historian, Krasnodębski (2000), as "a dispute over communism is not only a dispute about the past, but a dispute about the present, a dispute about the form of democracy, the shape of the state, and the collective identity of Poles" (p. 181). Remarkable is the fact that the demand for dealing with the past was particularly high during the first years of transition in Poland. This was followed by a pragmatic turnaround, as one adult educator called it: "It was recognized that historical knowledge is not what a young person needs to live" (Kloubert, 2014, p. 163). The longing, yearning for fixed points in the past, can be understood as a balancing of the still unstable novelty of the new democracy. Once it is done, the act of remembrance loses its "obsessiveness."

The interest in turning to the past in order to provide meaning for the present was also a crucial development in Russia in the 1990s. In 1996, Boris Yeltsin sponsored a competition through the newspaper *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* for the best "Idea for Russia" (as cited in Scherrer, 2002). The questions posed were: Where are we going? and Who are we? Yeltsin explained the project: "There have been many periods in the history of Russia: monarchy, communism, perestroika. Each period had its ideology. Only today we have no ideology" (p. 10). With this, Yeltsin made it clear that he was interested in a state idea for post-Soviet Russia, which he wanted to serve as a basis to unite and mobilize society. The idea of "today's Russia" should, however, have a reference to the past—but to which past? The winner of the competition, Gurij Sudakov from Tula, presented the "Six principles of the Russian character" ("*russkost*"), which are based, among other things, on the demarcation of the Russian way of being from the West through their whole history: the Russian sense of community vs. the Western individualism, the Russian Orthodox faith (with emphasis on spiritual values) vs. Western materialism, etc. Russia was represented as a unique organism with its own laws of development, as a special type of civilization with its own cultural, historical, and ethical traditions.[4] This idea was underlined also in some of my interviews with the adult educators in the year 2009: "The history of the Russian man has never been linked to freedom … The Russian people hardly had time to learn democracy. Unfortunately, to this day, democracy has not become a spiritual need" (Kloubert, 2014, p. 401). We see this narrative from the past deeply intertwined with the current Russian patterns of collective self-understanding— the memory culture is characterized by the rebirth of patriotism and statism. It presents the history of Russia as a chain of glorious achievements and a series of self-sacrificing heroes. After 2014, namely after the annexation of Crimea, the collective memory in Russia is becoming not only antiliberal and anti-Western but also nationalistic (Miller, 2014).[5]

These few examples illustrate the point made at the beginning of the article: remembering the past after a substantial change is a process of selecting, interpreting, and evaluating experience. It reveals which memories are seen as connectable for the present and expected future. On the societal level, memory has a political dimension: through constructing the validity of past experience, it produces a (ideally collectively shared) narrative for the present decision-making process (in the form of, e.g., created institutions, perceived values, and choices in the international arena).

The postsocialist societies undergoing a process of transformation "learnt" (English, 2013, p. 75) to renegotiate and reconstitute their "old experience" (English, 2013, p. 75) in light of the newly emerged ones. For transformative learning to culminate, the newly emergent discontinuity was transformed into a solvable problem. One could say that the object of the transformation was not only the learner himself, in the case of Frank (as a person), or Poland or Russia (as a society in transition), but also memory and experience itself having undergone the process of reframing and reconstitution.

Discussion and Conclusion

After dramatic changes, there is a need to reconstruct one's life story—to fortify our new perspectives through *connecting the dots* and to find a new positioning of our

historical "self" in the new life story. In this process, reflective remembering (that seeks understanding of the present and the past) leads to accepting and justifying one's own existence in one's own present. The creation of this relationality—"connecting the dots"—is an important part of the process of transformation.

Using the lenses of rhythmic theory, biographical learning, and memory studies, I have intended to highlight both the individual and social dimensions for making sense of the past after a period of substantial change. In his early work, Alheit (1994) pointed out that our memories are based on the mixture of both lived and socially mediated experiences. Consequently, our memories reflect the stories, norms, and values existing within a social group/society or in a certain social milieu. Through our choice of what to remember and what to forget or ignore (consciously or not), we can either support the collective social memory or contradict it. In any case, these choices mirror what is important in the present. The example that Frank offered does not contain evidence of melding his individual narrative with the collective narrative— referring to Halbwachs (1967)' argument that individual memories are dependent on the social memories around the individual. I am wondering, however, if certain roles—of parents, especially the role of father—underwent a process of deep change in recent decades and if the present conception of fatherhood plays a retrospective role in Frank's memories. In my own personal history—becoming a mother and evolving into a "critical" daughter toward my own mother—the social context certainly plays a role. Being influenced by the approaches of antiauthoritarian and democratic parenting in my studies, my memory of how I was raised *directs* me to see a contrast between the way I parent and the way my mother did. Selecting particular moments from my past to make sense of my present parenting style surely mirrors the collective interpretations of the present moment (within the "cadres sociaux"). My memory was *positioned* (Hall, 1990) in particular social and cultural contexts (being immersed in pedagogical research and living in a more open democratic society). Taylor and Cranton (2013) also pointed out: "Not only is the interpretation of an experience mediated by context, but also the personal and historical context is significant to the evolution and outcome of a transformative experience" (p. 36).

To reiterate, our memory is more closely linked to our present situation and perceived needs than to our past. Especially after the process of deep transformation, we seem to engage in the process of "imaginative rediscovery" (Hall, 1990) or the retelling of our pasts—"imaginative" does not imply that the past is fabricated but rather the creation of new ties with past moments. Remembering is basically reconstructive; it always starts from the present, and this inevitably leads to a shift, deformation, distortion, revaluation, and renewal of what is remembered at the time of its recall. It can be conceptualized as *épiphany* or as *épreuve* (Alhadeff-Jones, 2019a). It consists of a mixture of lived and socially communicated experiences. Accordingly, our memories and our biographies are not constant or fixed; they also undergo transformation and belong not only to our pasts but (probably even more) to our presents and futures. Referring again to Hall (1990), what we call "identity" is an ongoing process of "becoming" as well as of "being"; our past lives on but in new configurations based on our contemporary situations.

Our remembrance is an active process that can be both liberating and debilitating. This might raise the question of the quality of the restored continuity or to put it differently of more accurate perspectives evolved from the process. Some theories of transformative learning do indeed claim that there is some "truth" to which transformative processes lead. Famously, Mezirow (1991) posits that transformation leads to a more accurate and complete understanding of reality. This debate about truth or of evaluative criteria is particularly relevant in the context of Eastern Europe, where the interpretation of history is heavily contested. As mentioned earlier, various groups compete for recognition of their own past and refuse to acknowledge the right of other groups' pasts to coexist in the same memory space. This results in the creation of conflicting narratives and difficulty in creating a shared understanding of history. In this context, the role of critical evaluation—while restoring continuity—becomes essential, as it allows for the assessment of the validity and reliability of historical interpretations.

Recognizing the creative nature of the process of connecting our past to our present during and after a transformation helps us to understand several things:

1. our need for stability and continuity, throughout a transformation but also certainly as part of the reintegration (what I would call the *integrative potential* of remembering);
2. the plurality of life concepts and perspectives/memories that can be applicable to our own biography (what I would call the *inclusive potential* of remembering);
3. the nature of humans as plastic, adaptable, and in various ways transformable, even diachronically (what I would call the *agentic potential* of remembering); and
4. our ability to free ourselves from the chain of a "determinative" power of life and biography (what I would call the *emancipatory potential* of remembering) and to embrace natality, the possibility for something completely new.

While it is certainly possible to work through some of the conflicts and challenges involved in reconciling past, present, and future experiences, it is important to acknowledge that there will always be some degree of ambiguity, uncertainty, and unresolved tensions in this process. In this sense, the process of creating continuity in one's life story is less about applying specific techniques or models for managing internal disorientation and more about engaging in an ongoing search for processes that can support periods of transformations—whether of self and/or of society. The restoration of continuity might seem easier in the example of Frank and more complicated in the case of "memory battles" in Eastern Europe—because the latter has experienced some of the worst political violence in human history, including the Holocaust, the two World Wars, widespread repression of human rights, mass deportations, and ethnic cleansing. As a result, there are many social, institutional, and ideological battles over the recognition of different groups' traumas and histories. Etkind (2013) pointed out that the Soviet terror during the Stalinist era targeted various ethnic and social groups, blurring the lines between victims and perpetrators. This adds an

additional layer of complexity to the process of reinterpreting the past and creating a sense of continuity in the present and future.

The conception of remembrance as a process of construction, selection, inclusion, reflexivity, and social identification also highlights the necessity to think about our memories critically, to "use" them consciously to saturate new world- and self-views, but also with an awareness of the plurality of perspectives and therefore nonimperativeness of the connections we make between the past and the present. Generally, this critical reflection promotes the capacity to interpret and eventually influence how we relate to our past and to the drawn line that we use to organize and narrate the course of our lives.

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Notes

1. This story is purely illustrative.
2. I do not ignore the crisis where such a connection does not seem possible without therapeutic help (if it is possible at all). Those crises can be called traumas: a traumatic experience cannot easily be integrated into the context of our interpretation. It basically does not make any sense. On the contrary, it destroys the effective concepts of meaning as practical orientation systems. A trauma has the effect of a serious disruption of practical life.
3. It would be naïve to speak in a generalizing way about Russia, Poland, and Ukraine because their differences are significant. Each country in Central and Eastern Europe has its own political and historical culture. Nevertheless, being personally (on a family level) connected with all three countries and having lived in all of them, I allow myself to make a cautious generalization and, yes, selective narration, however, without pretending to offer an exhaustive picture.
4. This tendency is opposed to the emphasis of connection with European heritage as was the case in Poland. Although Russia certainly has a shared European past, this past was not "chosen" to be part of the new Russian identity.
5. The article was written before the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. The current politics of memory in Russia is not the subject of this article. However, it is remarkable that Putin uses the same tool—creation of continuity—to justify his military aggression against Ukraine. Putin presents this war as a late phase of the Second World War and ties in with the glorious and sacrificial struggle of the Soviet Union against the National Socialists, claiming Ukrainians are nationalistic, and thus why there is a need to eliminate them.

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