

Collective memories as a vehicle of fantasy and identification: Founding stories retold

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Abstract:

This paper builds on recent calls for a polyphonic approach to study rhetorical uses of the past, to account for multiple and diverse voices that take part in the construction of collective memories. To this end, I explore (multiple) collective memories of a charity's founding story by tracing how this story was retold in the organization. My findings demonstrate that these recollected stories were localised and embellished within two specific mnemonic communities. I show that two different renditions of the founding story projected social fantasies shared by members of respective mnemonic communities, who used the telling of the story to reaffirm what they think is the core purpose of the organization and their role. This finding is used to discuss how multiple collective memories sustain different identities in the organization. The research further discusses the mutual role of social fantasies in maintaining collective memories in the organization and vice versa.

Keywords: collective memory, founding story, social fantasy, identity, charity.

Introduction

Recently, organisational scholars have started to shed light on the various ways in which organizations strategically use historical narratives to influence internal and/or external stakeholders (Rowlinson et al., 2010; Foster, et al., 2011; Anteby & Molnar, 2012; Decker, 2014; Hatch & Schultz, 2016; Mena et al., 2016; Wadhvani et al., 2018). This stream of literature has advanced our understanding of the different purposes for which organizations use such historical narratives, e.g. to make sense of organizational trajectories to persuade stakeholders about a new future and legitimate strategic decisions (e.g. Strangleman, 1999; Nissely & Casey, 2002), to help shape organizational identity, influence culture and organizational reputation (e.g. Foster et al., 2011; Anteby & Molnar, 2012; Hatch & Schultz, 2016).

These studies, by and large, attend to management's strategic use of rhetorical history. In most cases, the research overlooks the voices and agencies of other actors and their contribution to memory constructions in organisations (Smith & Russell, 2016). This narrow focus on the use of the past by managers means that this literature rarely explores how other actors, such as employees, respond to the version of the past that is disseminated by senior managers (for rare exceptions, see Linde, 2009; Ybema, 2014).

In this paper, I aim to explore collective memories that emerge from a multi-authored and multi-vocal process. I do so by studying how an organizational founding story is retold and reconstructed in different worker's communities. I decided to study founding stories because previous research in management and organization studies has shown they are an important element in institutional memory (Casey, 1997; Linde, 2009). Founding stories are regularly used to influence an organisational

identity formation and maintenance (Basque & Langley, 2018) as they answer a principal question for any social group: ‘where did we/the organisation come from?’ (Boje, 2008, p. 101). They help individual members understand ‘who they are/or what they stand for as an organisation’ (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). Founding stories could act as an important inspiration for the organisation members (Audia & Rider, 2005; Schein, 2006; Boje & Rosile, 2008) in aligning individuals with organisational values and in regulating workers’ identities (Zwack et al., 2016; Martin, 2016). They can, therefore, act as a means of social control that prescribe or reinforce managerially preferred behaviours and values (McConkie & Boss 1986; Rhodes & Brown, 2005).

The organizational storytelling literature includes a tradition of critical scholarship which engages with the diversity of voices in organizations (Gabriel, 2000; Boje, 2008; Brown, 2006). But the stream of research that focuses on founding stories (and more broadly leadership stories), much like the rhetorical history literature, rarely analyses the reception of founding stories among its target audience group in the organizational context. In particular, little research has explored how stories get re-told by organizational members (Linde, 2009). Retold stories are of significance in that they can be regarded as stores of collective memory communicated and institutionalized through repetition (Ibid.), and as such, influence the ability of founding stories in the management of meaning. Given the malleability and multiplicity of stories—in particular when they are retold by narrators other than the original protagonist (usually the founder)—it is prudent to question firstly, *whether group-level identities influence how founding stories are remembered across an organisation* and secondly, *how can retellings of founding stories influence the way workers identify with the organisation, its values and ideologies?*

To address these questions, I traced how the founding story of Save the Youth (STY), a European non-profit organization, is remembered across this organisation. Building on Halbwachs' (1992) seminal work on collective memory, I argue that individual re-enactments of STY's founding story are nourished and sustained in different 'mnemonic communities' - that is, groups of people who coalesce around a certain understanding of a past event (Aksu, 2009; Halbwachs, 1950/1997; Misztal, 2003). In my research at STY, I found that various renditions of the founding story were 'localized' in the framework of two salient identity groups, 'new-school' and 'old-school' staff members (cf. section case-study). These two communities held two different fantasies about the organisation and their roles. Fantasies –as emotionally significant (unconscious) wishes for fulfilment or gratification (Brown, 1997, p. 646)- can sets up an illusion, sustaining the idea of an imaginary self (Fotaki, 2009) or an idealized scenario promising an imaginary fullness or wholeness (Glynos, 2008: 10). Building on this analysis, I explicate the link between social fantasies shared in each workers' group ('new-school' and 'old-school') and how founding stories were retold in respective communities

This paper makes three important contributions to organization studies literature. First, this study provides key insights regarding the reconstruction of collective memories in organizations (for a review, see Rowlinson, et al., 2010). Responding to Smith and Russell's (2016) call for a polyphonic approach to perceptions of the past, I explore multiple and diverse voices taking part in the reconstruction of an organization's myth of origin. I show that collective memories are the result of collective work, which is not only shaped by the strategic rhetorical work of managers but also by other actors' consequent interpretations and modifications over time. While this process in principle could result in many

renditions, I found that the retellings of founding story at STY were confined to two set of stories, which were shared and retold among two groups of staff members. In particular, I show the role of social fantasies in the way founding stories are refashioned in respective groups.

This analysis leads to the second contribution of the research that concerns the link between identity construction and collective memories. The previous work in this area has shown the significance of this link but discussed this only at macro (firm) level, and without paying sufficient attention to the coexistence of multiple vernacular identities in an organisation (e.g. Anteby & Molnar, 2012). This paper advances this literature by showing how multiple identity narratives could be reproduced and sustained by multiple collective memories. Furthermore, my research reveals the importance of fantasmatic processes in mediating the relationship between vernacular memories and identities.

Finally, the findings of this paper makes important contributions to the study of storytelling in organizations. While previous research in organizational storytelling discuss its malleability and multiplicity (Boje, 2008; Brown, 2006), this literature rarely analysed retold stories. I show how Halbwachs' theory of collective memory can be used to analyse retold stories as a part of an organizational collective memories.

The arguments of this paper are contained in five parts. First, I provide a review of the literature on rhetorical history and leadership storytelling to highlight the existing gaps in the literature, before discussing how social memory studies can help advance our understanding of the founding story as an instrument of memory work. Second, I discuss the research methods used for data collection and data analysis. Third, I outline the organisational context of STY, the charity organisation in which the fieldwork was

conducted. I then describe the social fantasies that were held by STY's workers in relation to their organisation and informed vernacular identities of two workers' communities in the organisation ('old-school' and 'new-school'). Fourth, I describe alternative renditions of STY's founding stories that percolated within different groups in this organization, followed by a psychoanalytically informed analysis of these localized founding stories. Finally, I discuss the contribution of this paper to the research on collective memory, identity and leadership storytelling.

Uses of the past and rhetorical history

In recent years, organizational scholars have devoted increasing attention to historical narratives, and its application. An emerging stream of literature on "rhetorical history" explores the use of historical narratives as a persuasive strategy to manage key stakeholders (Foster et al., 2011; Anteby & Molnar, 2012; Hatch & Schultz, 2016). This is evident in several special themed journal issues such as a recent special issue of *Organization Studies* on "Uses of the Past: History and Memory in Organizations and Organizing" (Wadhvani et al., 2018).

This literature has explored the rhetorical use of past in different forms, from corporate museums, to corporate official publications and to leaders' speeches. For instance, Rowlinson and Hassard (1993) show how managers of Cadbury, most famous for its Quaker tradition, used the corporate historiography to 'reinvent' its history and accentuate its adherence to the Quaker tradition. Similarly, Strangleman (1999) demonstrates how British Rail managers recreated a different image of the organisation, either in a positive (nostalgic) or negative (nostophobic) light, to legitimise their strategic decisions in different periods of history. More recently, Foster, Suddaby, Minkus and Wiebe (2011) show how Tim Horton, a Canadian coffee

store chain, attempted to use its founder's association with hockey to strengthen its connection to the nostalgic presentation of Canadian hockey and bolster its brand identity. Ravasi and Philips (2011), similarly, discuss how managers of an electronics company attempted to 'refocus' the organizational identity by recovering past referents and increasing their salience in the organization.

This literature can shed some light on how founding stories, as particular historical narratives which are often crafted by management, can shape a certain interpretation of the past and work up certain organizational identities. Yet these studies attend to the rhetorical strategies of managers, while largely ignoring the voices and agencies of other groups of actors (Smith & Russel, 2016). The existing none-polyphonic approach to study collective memories rarely account for the coexistence of multiple collective memories and collective identities in an organisation. For instance, Anteby and Molnar's (2012) otherwise remarkable study of the link between rhetorical use of the past in a French aeronautical firm and its organisational identity ends precisely when the link between the multiplicity of vernacular memories and vernacular identities could have been considered. In my study, I explore the relationship between multiple coexisting identity groups in an organization and different memories of the founding of the organization. I will show how this approach shed light on the micro-processes that can facilitate the relationship between collective memories and collective identities.

Leadership narrative and storytelling

The literature on 'narrative leadership and storytelling' has advanced our understanding of *what* types of narratives and stories are told about leaders or by leaders about the organizations—such as the tragedy, romance, comedy or satire (Aaltio-Marjosola &

Takala, 2000; Gabriel, 2000; Hatch, Kostera & Kozminski, 2009), what rhetorical techniques and principles are used in leaders' narration—such as application of metaphors, drama and emotional appeal, defamiliarization, negation and inclusion (e.g. Emrich, Brower, Feldman & Garland, 2001; Parry & Hansen, 2006; Seyranian & Bligh, 2008; Denning, 2011) and how these narratives are delivered in different situations—such as moving between rhetorical strategies and stage management (e.g. Sharma & Gant, 2011; Heracleous & Klaering, 2014).

There is also a tradition of critical research in narrative and storytelling research in management which highlights narrative as a domain of political domination and struggle (e.g. Boje, 2008; Brown & Humphreys, 2006; Gabriel, 2000; Rhodes & Brown, 2005; Reissner & Pagan, 2013). This research mostly either discusses the use of narrative and storytelling as an instrument of power and exercising control (Wilkins, 1983) or as a way to challenge and resist 'dominant narrative' by developing 'counter-narrative' (Brown & Humphreys, 2006; Gabriel, 2008). For instance, this body of research uses psychoanalytical theory to explain how organisational narratives could work as a subjective control mechanism by evoking corporate fantasies to offer workers surrogate narcissistic gratifications (Carr, 1998; Schwartz, 1987). Similarly, this literature explores how fantastic and wish-fulfilling narratives, such as nostalgic narratives, can represent attempts to resist or escape management control (Brown & Humphreys, 2006; Gabriel, 1995, 2008).

This critical research on narrative is vast and has explored a wide range of issues in relation to power and politics of organisational storytelling, but rarely it has explored how specific leadership stories (e.g. founding stories) are appropriated in the organisations as they are recalled and retold within different communities in an organisation (For an exception, see Linde, 2009). These retellings and the way they

are circulated and remembered in organisations have an impact on the political implications of leadership stories.

By founding (leadership) stories, here, I mean accounts of imaginary or real people and events or an epoch in time which depicts an encounter involving organisational founders (leaders). I draw on Gabriel's (2000) definition of story: 'proper narratives, with beginnings and ends, held together by actions and plots'. He reserves the notion of story for a specific type of discourse that draws on particular poetic and literary genres, follows certain theatrical styles and is often delivered with entertainment and spectacle in mind (Gabriel, 2000: 9–10). This is not the view that shared by many other narrative scholars who use narrative and story interchangeably (e.g. Auvinen, & Aaltio, 2013; see also Polkinghorne, 1991).

I adopt Gabriel's specific notion of story in this paper for two reasons. Firstly, this particular form of narrative is less studied in both 'narrative leadership' literature as well as organisational memory studies (or for that matter, in rhetorical history). Secondly, the type of stories depicted and studied by Gabriel, have a particular characteristic which makes them a potent mnemonic instrument. They can rapidly permeate worker communities as gives ideas about the lived experiences in the organization (Gabriel, 2000; Linde, 2009). Such stories are the ones that are likely to be the type of narratives that are communicated and institutionalized through repetition across time and across tellers (Orr, 1990), and as such, form an important part of the way organisations remember their past (Linde, 2009: 73). I now turn to social memory studies to briefly explain how this scholarship can help with studying founding stories and their retellings.

Organizational stories as localised collective memories

Social memory studies is a field of research that discusses how the past is remembered and continues to influence the present. This literature often builds on the concept of collective memory developed by the French sociologist, Maurice Halbwachs (1992[1925]). In contrast with earlier studies of history and memory, Halbwachs encourages us to see memory not as the authentic residue of the past, but as a malleable construction in the present (see also: Conway, 2003; Olick & Robbins, 1998, Schwartz, 1991). Collective memories are shaped and sustained by various cultural practices or mnemonic products, such as stories, monuments and memorials (Olick, 2008). These mnemonic products provide the raw material that mnemonic communities use to help sustain the collective memory of the event and, in doing so, maintain a particular version of the past (Mena et al., 2016:17).

Oral tradition and storytelling constitute an important form of mnemonic products. Despite suggestions that oral traditions may play a less vital role in modern societies, they are still the primary mechanism for transmitting memory across members of a community (Middleton & Brown, 2005). Memories are frequently shared, transmitted, and reconstructed via different forms of oral tradition including folktales, sayings, ballads, songs, or chants, some of which could be remarkably durable.

The key contribution of memory studies to this study of founding stories is that it encourages us to look for a pattern in individual narrations. Individual recollections (e.g. retold stories) as Halbwachs (1992) put it are not as isolated individual stories but narratives that reflect certain groups' perspectives. While the act of remembering is individual, actors often draw on shared narratives of a past event to frame and inform how and what they remember (Halbwachs, 1992; Middleton & Brown, 2005). In this sense, retold stories are 'shared, extra-individual representations of the past that

resonate with members of a community at a certain point in time' (Mena et al., 2014:9). Halbwachs further explains this by suggesting that individual reminiscences (e.g. stories) are 'localized' in a totality of thoughts common to a group. As individuals remember an incident, they 'place' themselves in the perspective of that group (often unconsciously), and adopt its interests and follow the slant of its direction (ibid.52). During this process, the collective frameworks pattern and organize individual and group recounts, confining and binding individuals' 'most intimate remembrance to each other' (ibid.53).

Stories of the past are socially reconstructed in the light of current beliefs and norms to serve the present purposes of a community (Gross, 2000; Olick & Robbins, 1998). Storytelling from this perspective can be seen as an attempt to 'jointly remember' the past during which group members create a shared understanding regarding the past (Middleton & Brown, 2005). Stories are developed, nurtured and rehearsed over time in 'mnemonic communities', that is, groups of people who coalesce around a definite understanding of a past event (Aksu, 2009; Misztal, 2003). In the same way, 'joint remembering' creates a possibility for group members to reconfirm their membership in a group by recalling memories that are associated with the common experience of that group (Middleton & Brown, 2005), the collective memories and mnemonic communities mutually reinforce and sustain each other.

Research design

My analysis is based on empirical material collected during fieldwork in 'Save the Youth' (STY) for 12 months. I followed everyday social interactions and conversations between staff, participated in internal meetings and interviewed staff members. I had the opportunity to engage in numerous informal conversations with a wide range of staff members. An intensive and long immersion in the field helped

gain some understanding of ‘the language, concepts, categories, practices, rules, beliefs, and so forth’ used by subjects in the field (van Maanen, 1988:1201). The original research aimed to study the discursive (linguistic) dynamics of collective memory from a storytelling approach (Gabriel, 2000). During the fieldwork, I was attentive to a wide range of retrospective stories that organizational participants shared with me or with each other. As the research progressed, I became interested in the founding story of the organization as a story that was repeated by staff members without being prompted. This story- not surprisingly- had acquired a ‘retold tale’ status- defined by Linde (2009) as stories that are retold by narrators other than the original protagonist. The founding story was elicited in most interviews and all respondents signalled that this story is commonly known in the organization.

The empirical material gathered from the fieldwork included 5 video files, containing STY's founder speeches in different occasions, 20 handbooks and magazines, 28 semi-structured interviews with staff members and managers- on average 45 minutes each, and hand-written fieldnotes kept in three handbooks. Except for interviews, no other data was audio recorded. Extensive fieldnotes were taken during the day and then later written in full at the end of the day or earlier if the researcher had the opportunity. The interviews were conducted in an informal setting, often either in the lunch break or after work. Most interviews were conducted after the researcher had spent 4 months in the organization and staff members got to know him. The staff got to know the researcher reasonably well as he worked at the centre as a volunteer and interacted with staff members in various capacities, such as accompanying them in clients’ home-visits and joining team activities. It was expected that this familiarity can facilitate staff members’ willingness to share their views with the researcher. All participants were approached directly by the researcher and agreed with the interview voluntarily. Throughout the

research, and in particular before the interviews, staff were made aware of the research and its broad objectives. The interviews were semi-structured and the content of the interviews varied. However, all interviews included questions about: i) participants' understanding of the organization and their role in it. ii) Sources of their motivations and frustrations iii) organisational past and aspects that were most remembered/discussed.

The data was analysed over several steps in an iterative process of interaction and integration of theory and empirical data (Putnam, 1983). The aim of this abductive iterations was to the construction of an ethnographic account that is firmly grounded in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and closely linked to theory (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). In the first step, this dataset was systematically analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to examine the content that captured how workers described their organisation and their role in the organisation. This analysis yielded an understanding of social fantasies that were common in the respective worker communities, captured in the section entitled 'social fantasies at STY'.

In parallel to this, all stories that were related to the founding events of STY were compiled in one document. Analysing the content of the stories and the profile of storyteller revealed a clear pattern in the data; it showed recounted founding stories were followed two different plots, and contained different resolutions, depending on which group the member of staff was attributed. This was consistent with Halbwachs'(1992) theory of collective memory which posits that individual recollections of past events (e.g. retold stories) are not isolated individual stories but narratives that reflect certain groups' perspectives.

Finally, these stories were analysed as discursive resources through which employees constructed meanings, cultural spaces, ethical and political constraints and

a sense of agency (Polkinghorne, 1991); hence stories were analysed for potential deviation from the original story (Boje, 2008). Given the idealised nature of these stories, they were analysed as ‘poetic elaborations of actual events, as wish-fulfilling fantasies built on everyday experience and as expressions of deeper organizational and personal realities’ (Gabriel & Griffiths, 2004:124). I traced the symbolic content of these stories by paying attention to different patterns in the recounted narratives and the social groups in which the reminiscence had occurred.

In the next section, I provide a brief overview of the case-study organization. All names are replaced by pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the organization and its staff members.

Case study: Organizational setting

STY, a youth services charity based in Leidenhead, was founded by Ellen Johnson, a charismatic leader who continued to operate as the head of the charity when the research was conducted. STY had started a restructuring programme four years before I started my research there. As a result of these changes, a more rigid work structure, with a clear division of labour, roles and job specifications was developed. STY also had developed structures and the necessary space required to provide specialized services to its clients who were from various age groups, ethnicities and backgrounds, and had a range of different problems and needs. The specialization of the organization is reflected in the proportion of recruits with specialized professional and educational certificates. The majority of the post-2008 new recruits were university graduates in disciplines related to child care, such as psychology, psychotherapy, social work, and counselling.

While STY's workforce was from a diverse background, two distinct categories—'old-school' versus 'New-school'- were formed discursively (categories used by staff members) to highlight a salient contrast between workers background and their approach to work at STY. A general pattern was that staff members who joined the organization in the last 3–4 years were mostly white, young university graduates in their 20s who came from a privileged background, while staff members who worked in the company for a longer period were mostly local workers in their late 30s or 40s without relevant university qualifications who grew up in Leidenhead's impoverished neighbourhoods.

As typical old-school staff members were 'long-standing, unqualified, local members of staff from underprivileged backgrounds', whereas typical new-school' staff members were 'new, qualified, white members of staff from privileged backgrounds'. However, the disparity between the privileged and underprivileged staff was not limited to the colour of their skin, their education level, or experience in the organization. There were white staff members from deprived backgrounds or without university qualifications, and black staff members from middle-class families, who had university qualifications. Although criteria such as ethnicity, education, and economic background could signal the positioning of staff members, the old-school/new-school distinction was beyond these objective denominators. Old-school/new-school categories were used by staff members to draw attention to a contrast between different ways of doing work at STY. In the crudest sense of the word, the old-school identity category was associated with a mode of working which was mostly informed by employees' life experiences, while new-school implied a mode of working informed largely by academic training (e.g. modern psychology). In particular, studying the working practices of a number of staff members revealed a contrast between the

working practices of STY staff members. Employees who were labelled new-school emphasized keeping a professional distance, providing therapeutic and professional support, and following professional procedures. At the other end of the spectrum, staff members who were identified as old-school often emphasized building an informal (friendly) relationship with clients and providing practical support, and showed a willingness to undermine the cumbersome bureaucratic procedures.

Table 1: New-school versus old-school: discursive categories used by staff members

New-school	↔	Old-school
Keeping a professional distance from clients		Building an informal (friendly) relationship with clients
Providing therapeutic and professional support		Providing practical support
Following professional procedures		Willingness to undermine bureaucratic procedures

The rivalry between old-school and new-school staff members was an issue that appeared in many conversations. Although both groups enjoyed comparable influence in the early years of the foundation of STY, it was commonly perceived that old-school staff members had lost their prominent position as the charity started to professionalize. Nonetheless, a history of bitterness between the two groups contributed to a conflictual relationship between them, which showed itself from time to time and was apparent in the cliques formed in staff meetings.

Social fantasies at STY

The psychoanalytic theory gives us tools to examine the workplace dynamics and identity formation as the products of social fantasies (Fotaki, 2009; Glynos, 2008). Workers in social care, like other professions, hold fantasmatic narratives about their identities (Vitus, 2017). These fantasmatic narratives can provide workers with necessary drive and impetus for pursuing organisational goals and social projects to which they inscribed (Fotaki, 2009). STY was also ripe with such fantasmatic

narratives about the organisation. My research indicated two different fantasies were prevalent among old-school and new-school group of staff members.

Old-school staff members depicted their organisation as a genuine grassroots community organisation. As such, they maintained that people who worked in the organisation should be seen as members of the community who are helping other fellow community members. Their work identities were predicated on sustaining a fantasy that the clients and staff are all part of a community whose exchange should be governed primarily according to the norms one expect to see in a family or a small knit community. This is, for instance, how Sam, a staff members, who identified as an old-school staff member described her work ethos:

People are here for different reasons. My reason is that I believe that it takes a village to raise a child. It has been my actual life ethos, even before I joined here. Working with the youth, it's not only for their empowerment. It's not only to help them to contribute to [the] society, but it helps me because they [will] look after me when I'm old.

Sam, and other old-school staff members, frequently evoked an idealised image of the organization as a 'big family' and referred to clients as 'our children'. When it came to their role in 'the family', many old-school staff members thought of their role as a substitute parent or an 'authority figure' for the children. Particularly, the male majority of old-school staff saw their role as a father figure for the children which they argued is what the clients are missing.

New-school staff members typically evoked a different fantasy of the organization. In their account, the organisation was as a place for professional intervention whose ethics of care is shaped by relevant disciplines, such as psychology and psychotherapy. Their professional identities were crafted on the basis of a social-interventionist paradigm where specific professional and institutional tasks

(containment, normalisation, protection) are performed to address particular problems. For example, dangerous children need to be contained, neglected children need to be protected. STY, for this groups of staff members, was seen as a space in which they could heal their clients' damages/wounds by providing professional services. The fantasmatic narrative about the professional's ability to eliminate the deficiencies of the service users and break down barriers that exist for them constituted a powerful imaginary that provided the impetus for new-school staff members.

Both of these fantasies, however, often faced limitations in the day to day work of the organization. Old-school staff members' fantasy of the organisation as a family or an extension of the community was constantly challenged by an increasing tightened performance management system and professional regulations adopted by STY. This left old-school staff members increasing dissatisfied with such measurements and regulations. Within the course of interviews, they acknowledged the failure of the 'family' fantasy, but they were often quick to remind me about the good old days when the charity had a family atmosphere.

The damage-healing/deficit- compensating fantasy also failed as problem categories and associated solutions were inevitably incomplete, and continually disrupted. Staff members were frustrated to see their clients fall back and forth between different problem categories. Workers' frustration with the failure of damage-healing / deficit- compensating narrative surfaced both during the work meetings and the interviews. For instance, Jess, a therapist who joined STY in the last two years, told me how her illusions about the therapy work shattered as she started working at the STY- which left her at times frustrated and powerless:

‘I think a lot of the time the emotion I felt, or what people are stuck with, is a lack of power. Sometimes, I wish I had some sort of magical power to change things for my clients, but the most difficult thing is to admit that actually, you can’t. It sounds like each way there is a blockage that makes sure you are unable to change things for that person, even if you spend days trying to change something. Then I get a sense that some people just cannot change.’

STY’s founding story

STY’s official founding story was disseminated across the organization in a direct or vicarious manner in both oral and textual forms. Ellen frequently had told her own story in speeches that she gave both inside and outside the organization. In these speeches, she provided a vivid description of the challenges she faced in setting up the organization. There were no significant variations in the way Ellen told her story in different events (as far as the empirical resources that I had access to which dated back to 8 years before I start my research). The excerpt below is taken from one of her speeches:

“As a psychotherapist, I had come across many vulnerable children and saw their struggles to get the support they need from the statutory services. When I was 30, I finally decided to set up a provision in an impoverished part of Leidenhead. I got hold of an unused warehouse which I decorated it with the help of a colleague. The day we opened the centre, we were so excited to start our work with the youth. [...] but we soon found that working there was actually quite tough. Every evening, a group of adolescent boys would turn up at the place, smashing the glasses, throwing rubbish everywhere and threatening to destroy it. I simply was not equipped to deal with them; frankly, I was terrified, not knowing what to do. Every night I used to go home feeling utter desperation. But I kept the place open.” (Transcribed from a video- some changes were made for anonymising)

She then continued to describe how she finally was able to overcome this hurdle by learning from the neighbourhood youth about their problems as well as getting support from members of the local community [later known as old-school staff members] who helped her contain the physical clashes and gain the trust of the youth in the community.

This founding story was appealing to employees, many of whom reported how this story encouraged them to work for the charity. It presented a vocational (almost evangelical) picture of the organization and its founder and helped to establish the charity's reputation among the donors as well as the public.

Most staff mentioned STY's founding story as one of the most memorable events in its history. Not all accounts, however, contained an elaborate account of how things unfolded. Workers often described the story in a terse format.

'One of the things I would say people remember is the original centre and things that would have been happening there, and Ellen's perseverance in dealing with the street kids.' (Jane)

'Everyone knows how STY was set up by Ellen and the events surrounding it. I mean that she had to face those angry mobs and' (Astrid)

While these terse stories do not show how accurately people remembered the founding story, it does demonstrate that the founding story was generally taken for granted by staff members. There was no evidence of a 'counter-memory' or a 'counter-story' (Boje, 2008) to reject the authority of the founder by offering memories which contradicted or undermined the dominant narrative.

As the research continued to elicit stories about the founding story, several staff members provided more prototypical stories, with a clear plot and characters. These re-enactments of founding story, as I will show, do not contradict Ellen's story, yet they are different in terms of the facets that are excluded from the story, the parts that are embellished and the way the audience is invited to interpret them.

Further analysis helped to identify a pattern in the way founding stories were retold by staff members. More interestingly, when the content of the stories and the narrators' profiles were analysed, it was evident that two alternative renditions of the founding story were evoked by different groups within the organization. This accords

with Halbwachs' proposition that social memories are localized in the totality of thoughts common to a group and adopts its interests and follow the slant of its direction (1992: 52).

The first rendition, which I designate as 'epic tale', gave the story some sense of 'religious fervour' and was only recounted by new-school staff members. The second rendition, distinguished by its 'comic' plot, was retold specifically by old-school staff members. In the next section, I will discuss the content of each category in turn and will demonstrate how these narratives constitute localized memories of specified mnemonic communities.

Emplotment and localization of memories

Epic Tale

Frequent reference to the founding story in the interviews and its occasional re-emergence in staff conversation without being prompted indicated that those stories were part of the collective memories or the lived history of the organisation (Linde, 2009). One of these stories was told by Dave, a psychologist in his late 20s after I asked him about the organization history.

In the early days, STY was mobbed by a group of aggressive youth. You could not have a more challenging group of youth. But Ellen did not give up, she managed to talk them through it and convinced them to become STY's first group of clients. All of them went on to have a normal life. Some of them worked with us in the past to help restore other youth in the neighbourhood (Dave)

In terms of the content, the story is similar to the one recounted by Ellen, but it subtly diverges from the official founding story. In contrast to the official founding story in which the founder divulges her frustration and fear, Dave portrays Ellen confident and fully in control of the situation. In this rendition, she appears to possess

an extraordinary power to reform the malevolent youth in one single interaction. It accentuates the heroic character of the organization, especially of the founder. This epic retelling seemed to be particularly seductive to younger middle-class university educated staff members who desired, without achieving, Ellen's ability to face difficult youths. A very similar recount of the founding story was retold in conversation among three new-school staff members, when Amy, a psychology graduate who had joined just recently, expressed her frustration with slow progress with one of her clients:

A: I do not know what the end goal is. I am doing different activities with one of my clients, but he is not really responding. Some days he engages with me and I feel better about it, but then all of a sudden, he has disappeared since last week. What is the end goal?

K: what is the end goal for anything?

A & J: laughing!

K: my take is that [we can] get them some stable living environment, from then you cannot always control what happens; [when evaluating our work] we should focus on what does not happen, rather than what should be happening.

J: Sometimes, the most important thing is changing the attitudes of the clients. To get them seeing an alternative way of living, that despite their troubles, they can have a normal life, like others. I guess this is something we have been always good at [...] *When Ellen started STY, she was faced by 100 young guys, threatening to burn the place down. While others [staff] left the place, she stood there, saying "Come on in, this is your space". She convinced them not to burn the place, and turned them around to be the STY's first clients.'*

The excerpt above shows how the founding story is used to help overcome the frustrations staff felt in the face of obstacles preventing the realization of their ideal of social work. As shown in the excerpt above, when staff faced obstacles that challenged the social fantasies underpinning their professional identity, they became increasingly frustrated (cf. section on social fantasies). The appeal of the epic tale among new-school workers can be attributed to such prevalent feelings of frustration among these staff members. In a work environment where news of failure prevails

over that of achievements, it is tempting to find other ways to keep aspiring to one's ideals.

Further examination of the aspects of the story that are modified in the epic recount of the story shows additional intricacies of collective remembering and its association with organisational politics. The epic tale emphasizes that Ellen single-handedly stopped the physical sabotage of STY's premises, but also implies that other staff members, including local staff members, could not handle the situation.

‘..... [...] While others [staff] left the place [...].’

By emphasizing this inability of staff members to deal with the situation, this epic tale simultaneously denies the old-school employee a heroic place in the history of STY. This suggests that the rivalry between local (old-school) and professional (new-school) staff members could provide another pretext for the way the founding story is refashioned among professional staff members. An emphasis on the founder's ability to solve the problems overshadows the essential role of old-school staff members in safeguarding the charity.

This (meaningful) elimination of part of the story is also evident in another recount of the epic story told by Anna, a therapist in her thirties who had worked at the centre for 5 years:

‘Ellen once had to stop the guys from burning the Den. Some young people came with petrol to burn the place. Apparently, Ellen was not around, so one of the staff members had to call her. Fortunately, she arrived just in time before they could do any damage and managed to talk them out of destroying the place.’

Anna's story clearly marginalises the role of older staff members in containing the youth, by inferring that other staff members were unable to control the situation, and thus a staff member had to call Ellen. On the contrary, when I asked Audell, a staff

member without professional credentials who grew up in a deprived neighbourhood in Birmingham inner city, his disapproval of the STY's epic tale was clear.

'There is a whole kind of discourse, approach, history around how STY was developed, how it was set up, which appeals to the donors and middle class; a lot of them are a 'white middle class' how things have happened.[...]. Ellen is great, but let's not forget that things were really wild back then. You know people were trying to run Ellen down in the street. In one case, Jo barely managed to save her.'

While Audell did not share a contrasting narrative with me, his response clearly supports the idea that stories that glorified Ellen's role (such as in the epic refashioning of the founding story) resonate mostly with new-school staff members. This rendition of the founding story is aligned with the instrumental wishes of new-school staff members to de-emphasize the role of old-school staff members in the success of the charity and by so doing, to deny their 'claim to antiquity'.

Comic Tale

The analysis of the recounted founding stories showed a second variation of STY's founding story which was structured somewhat differently and prompted different emotions in participants (than admiration as in the case of the epic tale). These renditions described a similar 'complicating action' (attack by belligerent youth), however, they narrated a completely different 'resolution' (Labov & Waletzky, 1996), in favour of generating pleasure from the comical aspect of the retold story. One example of such renditions was told by Sam, a prototypical old-school staff member staff member in her late 30s who joined HCH 7 years ago. During the interview, Sam described STY as an unconventional grassroots organisation.

We are an organization known for our unconventional approach. Although they are professionals among us, we are not a professional organization.

When I asked her to tell me more about the organization and its past, Sam shared a somewhat different rendition of the founding story:

‘Most staff [members] probably know the kind of intense issues that STY was dealing with when it was first set up. I know some of the people who came to trash the place when it was started. But she (the founder) kept the place open. Apparently, relatively early on, when some young boys came to the Den to destroy the place, Ellen sat on [the back of] one of them, (laughs) telling them, I’m not getting off until you stop! Imagine how much pressure the boy would have had to tolerate by the big woman (laughs).’

The story is a typical example of what Gabriel (2000) calls fantasized stories which could be a source of pleasure, entertainment, and wish fulfilment. Sam was filled with euphoria as she recalled the story. The story was a source of pleasure even when it was told in a terse format (which was often the case) by other staff members. For instance, when I asked Kalinda, a staff member without a university education who joined STY four years ago, about the memorable events in the history of STY, she briefly referred to the story:

‘There are some urban myths about Ellen. My favourite one is that once she sat on [the back of] an aggressive young person to stop the violent behaviour! (Laugh)’

In these accounts, there is not much emphasis on Ellen’s extraordinary abilities, for example, in communicating with or influencing the youth. In contrast to the new-school rendition of the story (and the official founding story), which emphasized Ellen’s courtesy, Sam’s account suggested that Ellen retaliated by using force against the offending youth. So, this rendition of the story implies that it was not the magical quality of her words and reasoning or her therapeutic approach, but her force and boldness that stopped the youth.

Sam further clarifies that in her view what made STY successful in the past was Ellen's particular way of exerting her authority. When I asked Sam if she thinks that the organisation is still a grassroots community organization, she responded:

We may not encourage people to contain the youth like that, but we are still relying on our street-wise image. The reason that although they [the youth] were really hardcore, they could identify with Ellen [is that] they could see that there was something rootless about her.

This is also clear in Mierra's account of the story, another local staff member who worked at STY for about 10 years:

What distinguishes us from other organisations [in the sector] is that we take personal and organisational risk to protect the youth in our care. [...]On one occasion, some youths came with a car to take a young person who had broken their drug deal. They made a lot of noise and threatened to burn the place down. When they came through the gate, they were stopped by a couple of old members of staff. In the meantime, Ellen took one of the guys out of the car and sat on his back (laugh).'

Mierra depicts a scene in which Ellen is actively combating the youth with force, while being supported by other members of staff who, in contrast to Jess's story, did not appear to leave the place unattended. While emphasizing the unusual character of Ellen, this rendition of the story does not undermine the role of the old-school members of staff. The presence of the old-school staff members in the story is an additional signal indicating that this rendition of the story was embellished among the old-school members of staff who wanted to honour their role in the establishment of the charity.

Analysis: Founding story, localization and social fantasies

In the previous section, I showed how a fairly subtle appropriations of the founding story – in the description of protagonist character and the resolution action pursued –

had led to a significant change in the meanings constructed by these stories and evoked significantly different emotions. It is often challenging to establish one single explanation for the way a particular story is told as stories often have multiple functions at the same time (Cooper 2009). For instance, it is shown that fantasized stories can help workers cope with anxiety at work (Gabriel, 2000), as well as providing a mechanism to show and reinforce workers shared identity against that of other groups (Collinson, 1988).

From a collective memory perspective, however, it is important to analyse why a certain story remains in memory repertoire of a mnemonic community while others dissipate (Mena et al., 2016; Halbwachs, 1992). This shifts the attention away from particularities of the situation in which a story is evoked to a more structural analysis of existing patterns in the re-enactments and retelling of a story. Retold stories are often reflections of memories that are shared and nourished within a mnemonic community and reflect the perspective of that group (Cf. Theoretical Framework). As such, rather than questioning why a particular person narrated a story in a certain way, I aimed to understand why a certain group of staff members shared a particular rendition of STY's founding story and found it appealing and worthy of recalling.

Previous research showed that memories will continue to be salient in a community's memory repertoire only until they are relevant and usable (Connerton, 2008). Given the existence of a clear pattern in the way founding stories were remembered among old-school versus new-school staff members, I sought to find out what makes these renditions relevant, useful and desirable in those communities.

In the previous section, I discussed that omissions made in each rendition contained symbolic and instrumental significance for the respective group. For

instance, the rendition of the story narrated by new-school staff members excluded aspects, such as physical restraint by the founder or old staff members, which could point to the limitation of professional therapeutic discourse.

It is, of course, possible that professional staff members at some point may have heard the alternative version, but disregard it as an unprofessional and fantastic recreation of the reality. The points remain that the version of the story that they share and circulate within their community of workers resembles in form to the epic tale discussed earlier, which help construct a fairly uniform collective memory of the founding story among this group of staff members.

Besides the instrumental value of the story for each group, these renditions of the past accommodate details which shows these stories are highly idealised. As previous research on nostalgia showed the past could be highly idealised, ripe with fantasy and myth, which mostly reflect discontent with today rather than the glories of the past (Brown & Humphries, 2006; Gabriel, 2016: 213).

My contention is that STY's founding stories similar to nostalgic narratives reconstructed the past in a way that projected the fantastic narratives each group held about the organization and its purpose. As the imaginaries that both groups of staff members had of the organisation was constantly disrupted; the appropriated founding stories allow them to reconstruct a past in a way that projects these fantasies and reaffirm the possibility of their realisation.

The epic tale reaffirms the fantasmatic narrative about the professional staff member's ability to eliminate their clients' deficiencies and heal their damages and to break down barriers that exist for them, in order to enable them to become normal youth who can be integrated into the larger society. In so doing, the epic tale help restore

workers self-esteem, “as the degree of correspondence between an individual's ideal and actual concepts of him [her]self” (Cohen, 1959, p. 103). This interpretation accords with earlier psychoanalytic research which has shown that a collective myth can enhance individual self-esteem by offering explanations for events that flatter them (Brown 1997, Schwartz 1987). In this context, it seems that the epic rendition of the founding story could assure new-school staff that, despite various obstacles that govern the work of care workers, it is possible to have an impact and normalise the damaged youth.

For old-school staff members, refashioned founding story projected different fantasies of the organisation. This comic tale depicts a past sharply different from the present organisation in which workers were expected to follow the organisational professional code of conducts. Old-school staff members thought many of the professional codes are redundant, and perhaps contradictory to what they imagined a good community organisation should do to work alongside community and respect its cultural norms. For example, organizational regulation on physical contact came up in the discussions of how the professionalization of the organisation can damage the idea of the organisation as an extension of the community. For instance, Peter, who grew up in an impoverished part of Birmingham City expressed his frustration with an obsession with regulations in the organisation, which he thought, could be against the norms in the community.

“I think we are sometimes too obsessed with following the procedures. I like to think that we are still a community organisation. If we are working in a community, we have to respect its norms, but not everyone gets this. It frustrates me to see that we are getting away from this. For example, it's quite common to read in a report that, let's say John Smith grew up in an ethnics family, and he is disciplined by getting beaten. You see that the professional key worker has filed a “cause for concern” for that. Go to any households in the neighbourhood, 99% of their children get beaten. Does it mean that

all of their parents should go to prison?! You cannot change a culture. Respect is a big thing in these cultures”

The fantasmatic narrative of the organisation as a family (an extension of the grassroots community) and workers as a figure of authority for the youth was often disrupted when old-school workers faced a highly regulated system of work at STY. The reconstructed founding story allowed old-school workers to imagine an alternative organisation where workers were not bound by these professional codes. They could act according to norms accepted within the local community, rather than norms imposed on them from the government or a professional body. In this past, the founder is indistinguishable from other old-hand staff members and work with them- rather than constraining them- in protecting the youth and combatting the belligerent gang members.

This provides a refreshing image of the past which contradicts the present in which old-school staff members found themselves constrained by bureaucratic procedures. They complained about the increasing bureaucratisation of the organisation; while some suggested that this will bring STY- or at-least their idea of what the organisation should be- to its death. For instance, a meeting in which old-school staff members were discussing a new reporting system triggered a debate about the future of the organisation:

B: I do not understand why we should do this. We are a charity, right, a community organisation; not part of the government.

A: Well, at the rate we are going, there will be no STY in the future. I think in 10 years, STY is going to be taken over by the government.

The refashioned founding story- occasionally along with other similar memories- allowed old-school staff members to recreate a past with which they could

identify and emotionally and imaginatively engage. Such memories, allowed them to re-affirm their fantasy of STY, as a family or an extension of the grassroots community, a proof that such organisation once existed, even though it might be declining.

The comic rendition of the founding story clearly contradicted and ridiculed organizational policies which sought to eliminate ‘unprofessional’ behaviour. As such the comic take was a source of pleasure among old-hand staff members, a saving in psychic cost associated with lifting inhibitions (Freud, 1989[1905]:138). While this symbolic refashioning of official organizational story did not amount to an act of open resistance, it allowed a temporary supremacy of emotion over rationality and of uncontrol over control (see also, Gabriel, 1995).

Discussion

Organizational stories as polyphonic and localised collective memories

This paper has important implications for the study of organisational memory studies and the research stream that examines the currency of historical narratives as a symbolic resource (Anteby & Molnar, 2012; Foster, et al. 2011; Wadhvani et al., 2018). Much of the existing literature on how the past is used in organizations is non-polyphonic, in the sense that the historical ideas of only a small number of actors are considered (e.g. Nisely & Casey, 2002; Foster, et al. 2011; Basque & Langley, 2018). This is partly because this literature has primarily explored historical narratives by studying museums, corporate archives and leaders’ speeches, all of which commonly give us access to the official organisational narratives of the past (see Ybema, 2014 and Adoriso, 2014 for two exceptions). The storytelling approach provides an additional perspective from which to study collective memories that could be useful

for exploring vernacular collective memories. This is exactly where other approaches, such as the historical approach to memories studies, have not had much success (Smith & Russell, 2016).

My research demonstrates that studying organizational collective memories as a polyphonic construct yields interesting insights into the making, mutation and maintenance of memory narratives. Building on Halbwachs' (1992) concept of 'localisation' of collective memories, I show that besides the official founding story, other renditions can coexist that feed and project multiple "vernacular" identities (see Brown, 2006). My findings underscore two principles according to which the 'localized' renditions of STY's founding story were nurtured in different mnemonic communities: firstly, they served a mnemonic community's instrumental interests, for example by excluding details which showed the important role of competing groups in establishing the organization; secondly, they reflected fantasies shared among respective group members. Particular retellings of the founding story reaffirmed what each group thought the core purpose of the organization was and restored the fantastic narrative underpinning their preferred organizational identities.

This finding challenges the idea that an organizational 'narrative ecology' (see Gabriel, 2016) could be managed to produce the desired outcome in terms of manufacturing workers' identities (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Thornborrow & Brown, 2009) and/or aligning their values with the organization (Zwack et al., 2016; Martin, 2016). STY's founding story could well have been promoted by managers to encourage employees to identify with the organization and its values, but two different versions of the 'correct' and 'proper' organizational values developed over time. In contrast to what is suggested in the above cited studies, the founding story did not seem to "influence" how employees identified with the organization (and it's

values and ideologies), rather it was their different identifications and views/positions on the new managerial control regime that influenced how they remembered the founding story. I now further discuss the significance of my findings for the studies which investigate the link between collective memories and organizational identification.

Collective memories, collective identities and social fantasies

Previous research highlighted how editing historical narratives could help maintain a collective identity, for instance, by the structural omission of past traces which were deemed contradictory to an existing organisational identity narrative (Anteby & Mulnar, 2012; Walsh & Glynn, 2008). Research also examined how organizations may try to invoke history to promote change in organizational identity (Ravasi & Phillips, 2011; Basque & Langley, 2018), for instance by rediscovering, re-contextualising and re-embedding a forgotten past (Hatch & Schutz, 2017). These studies discuss organizational identity work by management and focus on the link between a curated (formal) remembering and organizational identity. Yet, historical resources, such as founding stories, may be contested, with different stakeholders using their memory in different ways (Basque & Langley, 2018: 1706).

My research extends this work by showing how historical resources can play into organizational identification processes beyond the managerial level. In particular, I showed that vernacular collective identities (see Brown, 2006). —i.e. different versions of the ‘correct’ and ‘proper’ identities that the organization should uphold— were reaffirmed through unplanned (emergent) remembering of the founding story at the group level. These retold stories did not reject the official founding story, but

nonetheless, presented different pictures of the organizational past in line with how different groups of workers perceived the identity of the organization.

More specifically, I show how the interaction of multiple emergent memories, as well as curated (official) memory narratives, are at play in the construction of organizational identities. This provides an alternative explanation for how historical narratives and stories influence the maintenance of organizational identities. Curated historical narratives can directly influence organizational identities by exhibiting an explicit 'identity claim' (e.g. Anteby & Mulnar, 2012; Ravasi & Phillips 2011). The emergent memory narratives (e.g. retold founding stories) that I studied, however, do not necessarily make an explicit 'identity claim', instead they sustain collective identities by re-affirming social fantasies underpinning existing group identities. This shows the importance of social fantasies, as a potential mediator between collective memories and collective identities. As social fantasies remain unfulfilled, they cause frustration and disillusionment. Idealised and fantastically imbued memories of a distant past can transform this impossibility to 'a practical hindrance, a temporary disruption' (Zizek, 1989, p.173), creating the impression that its realization is at least potentially possible (Glynos, 2008). Doing so, collective memories that reinforce social fantasies can help the continuation of affiliated collective identities.

Conclusion

This paper has employed the rich literature on organizational storytelling to analyse some aspects of collective memories, specially its link with collective identities and social fantasies. My main concern has been to outline a view of organizations that are composed of multiple 'mnemonic communities' with distinct identities and collective memories. Building on theories of social memory (Halbwachs, 1992), I argue that

‘retold stories’ (Linde, 2009) are memory narratives localised within the frameworks of particular ‘mnemonic communities’. In contrast with the existing rhetorical historical approach which focuses only on the managerial and strategic layer of remembering, i.e. stories that are told by management, a focus on retold stories at different levels within an organisation offers a more complex picture of collective memories. This approach allows scrutiny of remembering processes and their links with identity construction from the perspective of all social actors.

Furthermore, my empirical material directed me to the role of social fantasies in shaping collective memories and vice versa. Strongly held fantasies tend to provide rigid templates (Glendon, 2008) which could inform collective memories as well as collective identities. At the same time, memories which reflect social fantasies can help sustain these fantasies by creating the impression that their realization is at least potentially possible. One implication of this is that historical narratives that reflect certain mnemonic groups’ social fantasies will be willingly reproduced by group members and are more likely to be remembered. It will be thus easier to propagate and maintain—and conversely more difficult to change—those historical narratives that are grounded on deeply seated fantasies even when their veracity is questionable.

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