

## Editors' Introduction

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This thematic issue of the journal was conceived during a symposium at Victoria University of Wellington in November 2018 on the theme of 'The Family as Mnemonic Community'. At the symposium, funded through a New Zealand Marsden grant for the project 'The Missing Link', a group of international and multidisciplinary researchers shared their investigations into family memory and discussed four broad questions:

- what kinds of stories or information do families pass down the generations?
- how are family stories about the past transmitted, remembered, and received?
- why do family memories and stories about the past matter in the present?
- and what are the advantages and disadvantages of different scholarly approaches?

Five out of six of the authors in this issue presented papers at the symposium, and their articles are revised or reconceptualised for publication here. The remaining author was invited to submit a paper once we scoped out the majority of submissions and decided on the shape of the volume.

The study of memory and remembering has exploded internationally over the past decade leading, for example, to the launch of the Memory Studies Association in 2016. Those engaged in memory studies approach the subject from a wide variety of disciplinary perspectives, including psychology, sociology, anthropology, literature and history among others. The authors of the articles in this issue reflect a similar diversity of disciplinary approaches. Most, however, have been influenced by the key theorist in the field, the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, whose seminal study of social memory was published in the 1920s. Subsequently translated into English as 'collective memory', a term he did not use and which is currently under review in a new translation project for Oxford University Press, the terms social memory or the social frameworks of memory are increasingly regarded as more accurate reflections of Halbwachs' conceptualisation of memory.

Halbwachs identified different levels of society in which the processes of social remembering take place, and foremost among these was the family. Yet subsequent research in the field of memory studies largely focused on memory in the public sphere, including the nation state. This imbalance is now in the process of being rectified through a turn to the study of family memory and remembering in many different cultural and social contexts. Refinements to Halbwachs' theory by the German cultural studies theorists Jan and Aleida Assman, and in particular the concept of three-generational 'communicative memory', has given further momentum to the study of the family within memory studies.

Research into the family as a mnemonic community has begun to throw up a range of questions and problems, and we will briefly identify four here. The first concerns the culturally specific scope, meaning and purpose of family narratives. In indigenous societies family may not be distinguished from community, and the family stories are characterised by a narrator who speaks of 'we' and 'our'. In contrast, Anglosphere narrators tend to speak from the first person 'I' or 'my family'. The concept of whānau in Māori society is also a great deal broader and encompasses a wider group of people than does the nuclear family most commonly referenced in Pākehā (New Zealand European) culture. The purpose of family stories and narratives about

the past may also differ, and while the centrality of whakapapa to Māori identity and historical consciousness is widely acknowledged the role of family stories in the narrative identities of Pākehā is less well understood.

Secondly, while the social framework within which family stories are shared and passed down is widely accepted, research methodology or disciplinary preferences may continue to emphasize individual memory. For example, in the discipline of psychology research focuses upon individual remembering, as in the article by Fivush, McAnally and Reese that draws upon qualitative interviews to explore New Zealand European adolescents' stories about their parents' childhood and family secrets. Since qualitative interviews or oral history are the primary methodological tools utilised in most of the essays in this volume, individualising/atomising points of view about families tends to be reinforced. In contrast, an ethnographic approach focuses more upon the cultural context and social exchange, as in the study of family stories shared among adult siblings by the anthropologist Bönisch-Brednich.

Many of the contributions share the common tool of narrative analysis through which they draw attention to a number of specific themes. These include the role of cultural myths in shaping family narratives (Moodie), mnemonic triggers (Bönisch-Brednich), and narrative peripeteia (Green). The impact of trauma, secrets and silences (Fivush, McAnally and Reese, Haenga-Collins and Rogers) upon family narratives and personal identities is another thread running through a number of articles in this issue. These family descendants may seek to create what Haenga-Collins describes as 'counter narratives' or 'narratives of repair'.

In the final point, we draw attention to the different positioning of the researcher in the following articles. Those who view themselves as external to their families of study tend to use the third person. But others, speaking of their own families and pasts use the personal (Bönisch-Brednich, Rogers). It makes for a lively volume: a broad analytical sweep in some cases and on the other hand, the smaller stories - part memoir, part autoethnographic at times when the authors turn the critical researcher's eye upon themselves.

Turning to the 'Reflections' section, historian Miranda Johnson writes about an aspect of her family past. In the context of a visit with her family to Te Pōrere pā, Johnson thinks about the work and perspectives of her grandfather Ormond Wilson who played an instrumental role in restoring the site when chair of the Historic Places Trust between 1958 and 1972. She reflects upon the relationship and tensions between history and memory and proposes that we rethink our approach to 'sites of memory' to better encompass the 'knotted relationship' between past and present.

In conclusion, although this volume has a geographic focus in New Zealand and Australia it makes important contributions to the international field of memory studies research into the family as a mnemonic community.