

# **Chronotopes of Apartheid. Transmitted memory as reflective work among the 'born-free' generation of South Africa.**

**Julia Sonnleitner**

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## 1. Introduction

The democratic transition in South Africa between 1990 and 1994 caused a shift in political power, institutional change and the reinterpretation of history. Measures for coming to terms with the past were initiated and one of the most prominent among them being the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. These measures generated new public discourses about South Africa's history that are expressed in popular genres as well as in academia and history textbooks. At the same time, a long legacy of inequality has persisted the change. More than 20 years after the first democratic elections, a new generation has grown up with a revised history curriculum, new memorials, and democratic institutions. They are referred to as *born-frees* and increasingly come into focus of public and academic attention. This generation knows about apartheid only from transmitted memory, that is, socially selected discourses about the past. If we concur with Foucault (2003/1982) that changes in power relations go hand in hand with changes in discourse and knowledge production, how do representatives of this generation construe the past?

My data for analysis are semi-structured, narrative interviews with 16-19-year old students of heterogeneous backgrounds from six different schools in Cape Town and its surroundings. My choice of these schools was based on the expectation that research in historically segregated districts would provide me with the greatest range of heterogeneity in standpoints about the past. I do not assume, however, that – because of the legacy of apartheid – race forms a kind of community of memory. My research design was purposely chosen in a way that my interview partners were not addressed as representatives of a certain racial category but as representatives of the born-free generation. Being aware that the statement of a distinct generation is a social construct as well, I see it as still more open to subjects' self-identifications. My point of departure is to analyse the way interviewees position themselves and thus create alignments with social groups these stances index.

Do interview partners align or distance themselves from specific discursive stances and how do they evaluate the sources of knowledge that they weave into their accounts of the past? I analyse how classical sociological categories like class, race or ethnicity gain relevance for social distinction by the speakers themselves by employing the concepts of *stance in discourse* (e.g. Du Bois 2007) and the *chronotope* by Mikhail Bakhtin (Bachtin 2008/1975).

## 2. Theoretical framework: social memory studies and the interpretation of history

The object of this study is transmitted memory, and not autobiographical memory, which means that knowledge about the past can only be obtained by individuals via public and private discourses. This distinction has been termed *historical memory* as opposed to *autobiographical memory* by Maurice Halbwachs (1985/1939). According to Halbwachs, the selection of what is being remembered is not a problem of the cognitive capability of individuals but a question of social selection. Historical anthropology and oral history have tried to capture the construction of the past and the social logic of memory as it is being made and remade by individuals embedded in social institutions and processes. Elizabeth Tonkin (1992) has introduced the distinction between *history-as-lived* and *history-as-recorded*, meaning that every account of the past is a *representation of pastness* and a purposeful social action. Furthermore, what is being remembered, according to Alessandro Portelli (1991) and Luisa Passerini (2003), is as much a product of phantasies and desires of individuals and reveals the significance of the past in the present situation of a subject. Memory – and in this case transmitted memory – can be approached as a narrative making sense of past processes and events, incorporating various socially available discourses about the past from a particular standpoint in the present.

Studies of social memory have tended to explain the way the past is interpreted and transmitted with theoretical frameworks of tradition and social coherence (cf. Antze/Lambek 1996, Kansteiner 2002, Hodgkin/Radstone 2003, Berliner 2005). In German academic discourse, notions like “Erinnerungsgemeinschaft” (community of memory) or “Erinnerungskultur” (memory culture) which *culturalise* or *ethnicise* memory have been prominent in the discussion. Especially the work of Jan and Alaida Assmann (e.g. Assmann 1992) has been influential in this discussion on memory. On the contrary, authors like Arjun Appadurai have pointed out that the past is not equally accessible to everybody in a community but is an arena of competition and contestation rather than coherence and social agreement (cf. Appadurai 1981). As a theoretical framework of memory, I employ the notion of the *archive* by Michel Foucault. The archive, historically specific and socially

embedded in power relations, delineates the conditions of the reactivation of a body of knowledge in a certain epoch. Which repositories of memory are obtainable, which ones are being pursued, which ones make it into public discourses of memory? If we furthermore agree with Foucault that power constellations produce certain forms of knowledge and discourses, the question emerges how the political transformation in the democratic South Africa has facilitated new discourses on memory.

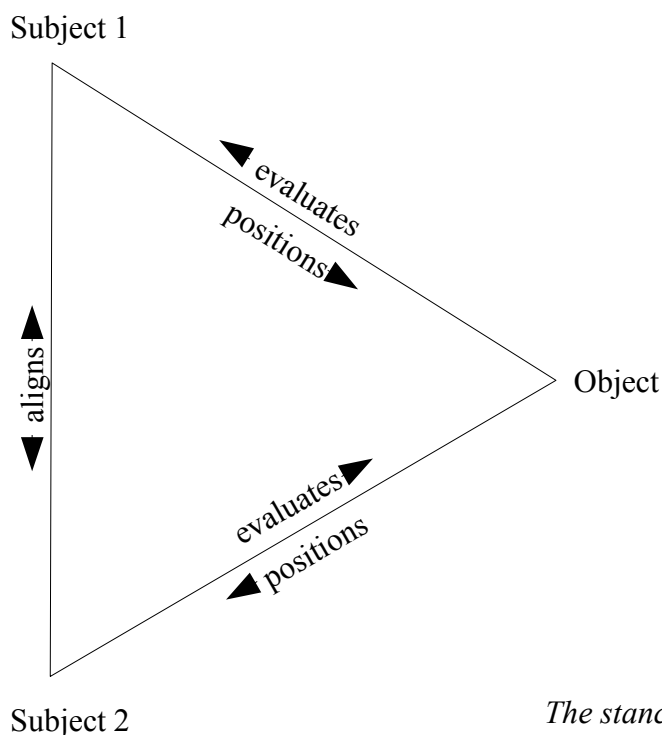
Regarding the transmission of memory, I take an actor-centred perspective as a point of departure. As Bettina Völter (2008) remarks, the term 'transmission' is unfortunate as it puts emphasis on the act of transmitting and less on the part of recipients. She points out the underlying assumptions of the term transmission and comes to the conclusion that acts of transmission are in fact a two-sided or even multi-sided process in which recipients play an equally important role in what is being remembered. Recipients can, for example, initiate acts of remembering that would otherwise be silenced, and they pick up certain elements of a narration and appropriate it for their own means. They are active agents in the process with their own interests and shape discourses about the past in their own manner. The concept of learning by Lave/Wenger (1991) is equally illuminating in this regard. For example, learning about the past happens in many small and casual situations that are mostly not designated as learning situations.

„Indeed this viewpoint makes a fundamental distinction between learning and intentional instruction. Such decoupling does not deny that learning can take place where there is teaching, but does not take intentional instruction to be in itself the source or cause of learning, and thus does not blunt the claim that what gets learned is problematic with respect to what is taught.“ (Lave/Wenger 1991: 40f.)

In this perspective, the focus of attention shifts from what is being taught, and by whom, to the learners as the ones who actively appropriate knowledge. Furthermore, learning does not primarily happen between master and apprentice but also in interaction with various other groups, such as peers, and sources. For that reason, I do not give one particular context of knowledge transmission a privileged status in my research but analyse which sources my interview partners activate for their accounts and how they relate to them.

### 3. Methodology: stance in discourse

Central to a discourse-oriented study like this is the question of how interview partners align with discourses about the past. In sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, alignment has been discussed under the term *stance in discourse* (cf. Englebretson 2007, Jaffe 2009). Applying stance in discourse allows a nuanced analysis of the ways subjects relate to transmitted memory. It investigates speakers' various positioning in relation to discourses and the social groups they index (Spitzmüller 2013). By positioning themselves in discourse, subjects can align with or distance themselves from ideological stances about the past. For the analysis of my interviews, I employ the stance triangle by Du Bois (2007). According to this model, positioning is a relational process between two subjects (subject 1, subject 2) and an object. The process can be split into three interrelated steps: a) a speaker evaluates an object (evaluation), b) she thus positions herself within a discourse about this object (positioning), c) by positioning herself, she aligns with other speakers, present or imagined (alignment). In short, „I evaluate something, and thereby position myself, and thereby align with you.“ (Du Bois 2007: 163)



This model of stance in discourse understands positioning as a relational act. Thus, speakers' standpoints in relation to discourses about the past can be approached as situated alignments rather than the expression of cultural, traditional, ethnic or racial manifestations. Furthermore, it has the benefit of including the aspect of ideology in the analysis of stance-taking.

## 4.1 Chronotopes of apartheid

In the first instance, to explain the relevance of space for the interpretation of the past in South Africa, we have to understand the politics of space in colonial Africa. Africa, and especially inland Africa, was colonised relatively late in colonial history. After the abolition of slavery, workforce was not as mobile and easily available to the colonial regimes. Therefore, a different strategy to bind and oblige the workforce of natives had to be found. Only from this time on were colonial powers interested in the territorial occupation of inland Africa. As Mahmood Mamdani (1996) has analysed, in 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial discourse two main strategies concerning the governance of natives prevailed. One is *direct*, the other one *indirect rule*. The underlying philosophy of direct rule was a so-called 'civilising mission', i.e. the destruction of African political systems and the political integration of natives under colonial authorities with a European understanding of right and state. With indirect rule, rural Africa was imagined as a container with the label *tradition* on it. The people living in this container, the natives, were imagined as tribal subjects with *custom*, an eternal, static, and never-changing culture and a lack of history and development. Never mind that custom was defined by the British authorities, that complex African political systems of checks and balances were deprived in favour of a chief who was implemented by the authorities and that culture was moulded in a way that it served colonial interests. Indirect rule meant the government of natives by the pretence of their own authorities. Ethnically diverse polities were administratively homogenised as *the Xhosa*, *the Sotho*, and *the Zulu*. This way, the colonial government implemented the strategy of divide and rule in rural parts of South Africa by a politics of separate political institutions.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the colonial government no longer feared the tribally organised native but 'de-tribalised' natives who were now moving to the city as labourers, professionals, traders and intellectuals. These products of a civilizing mission came to be perceived as a threat rather than a promise. This is why at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, direct and indirect rule were gradually integrated in a way that indirect rule was applied to rural South Africa (i.e. the native as an ethnic subject under the rule of a native authority) and direct rule was applied to the city (i.e. racialised subjects under direct rule of the colonial government) (cf. Mamdani 1996). Prominent features of apartheid's rule, like the difference between the rural and the urban, ethnicised vs. racialised subjects, between direct and indirect rule had already existed. The linking of specifically defined subjects with territories and times (i.e. stages of development) was an extreme form of an already existing colonialism. During apartheid, the Group Areas Act legalised the spatial segregation of people

according to race and the Population Registration Act divided the population into the three main categories of white, black and coloured.

Since apartheid meant the spatial and institutional segregation of citizens according to a racialised scale that had its foundational antecedents in the colonial regime of indirect rule, it is not surprising that space plays such a significant role in the way young people construe the past. What I found striking about my material was the fact that in some interviews, families seem to have lived in a space *outside* of apartheid. When I asked the interviewees if they could tell me how members of their families had experienced the time of apartheid, some explained to me that their parents never witnessed it. What was salient in all accounts were the spatial metaphors and terms in which interview partners construed the past. The space which is inhabited by the family is in some interviews imagined as an enclave. In other interviews, however, a specific place fundamentally determines people's lives. Here, racial classification regulates people's radius of action, their possible movements and their social relations in racially restricted spaces. This specific relation of time, space, and subjects I grasped with the concept of the chronotope by Mikhail Bakhtin (Bachtin 2008/1975). It provided me with a means to come to terms analytically with the postulate of the spatial turn to integrate these dimensions in the analysis of social life.

It has been argued that the dimension of time has been prioritised in social theory. Therefore, the focus of analysis is to be shifted from the primacy of time to the interplay of time and space (cf. Massey 1994, Soja 1989, Munn 1992). As Doreen Massey has pointed out,

„space must be conceptualized integrally with time; indeed [...] the aim should be to think always in terms of space-time. That argument emerged out of an earlier insistence on thinking of space, not as some absolute independent dimension, but as constructed out of social relations: that what is at issue is not social phenomena in space but both social phenomena and space as constituted out of social relations, that the spatial is social relations 'stretched out'.“ (Massey 1994: 2)

The integration of space in social analysis should however not create a new dichotomy between time and space, this time prioritizing space as opposed to time. On the contrary, as Edward Soja writes, there should be an 'interpretive balance' (1989: 23) of space, time and the subject. But how can we methodologically grasp these three dimensions in our analysis of the social world?

Confronted with the significance of space in the interviewees' accounts of the past, I have sought an adequate model for this 'interpretive balance' that Soja suggests. The concept of the chronotope by

Mikhail Bakhtin provided a point of departure. Bakhtin's concept has been relatively rarely applied in anthropology, possibly due to its opaqueness<sup>1</sup>. The chronotope is more often used as a catchword without a profound debate of its source. Bakhtin's essay *The chronotope* does not offer a stringent, workable definition of the chronotope and equips the reader by no means with an instruction for analysis. A definition of the chronotope can only be carefully reconstructed from the way Bakhtin applied it for the analysis of literary genres. I have adapted Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope for the ends of my analysis, as it has the benefit of linking the dimensions of time, space, and subject. This analysis of the students' narratives has resulted in the distinction of two different modes in their accounts of the past: the *abstract* and the *concrete chronotope*.

According to Bakhtin, time and space are not linear, separated entities but have to be imagined as interdependent. In the relation of time and space lies the creative work of the chronotope for a narrative. The characters inhabiting a chronotope have to act under its conditions. The question of analysis is: Can they actively change the course of what happens or are they bound to react to what happens to them? The way subjects are able to act is central to the creation of a chronotope. Furthermore, only by the relation of bodies to time and space can the chronotope be expressed to recipients. This is achieved 1) by the actual movement of bodies in space or 2) by relating the spaces by means of the senses, such as sight and audition, or by any means of communication. Only by corporal and sensory references can the time and space in a chronotope be communicated. Time and space can be concrete, that is, time a historical time and place a specific place. Or people can move in an abstract space that has no direct impact on them. The concept of the chronotope has the benefit of bringing the aspect of space into the analysis of narrative. The chronotope gives us the opportunity to recede from the primacy of time and analyse the past as an interplay of the three entities of time, space, and subject.

#### 4.2 Apartheid distant and close: the *abstract* and *concrete chronotope*

In the following section, I will explain the chronotope by means of two examples. I conducted these interviews in a school in Mitchell's Plain<sup>2</sup>. The school I visited is attended both by students from

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1 One exception is Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993) where the concept of the chronotope is however being employed in an equally blurry manner as with Bakhtin.

2 Mitchell's Plain was built under apartheid specifically for people classified *coloured* who were evicted from the central districts of Cape Town. It was built on low-quality, sandy land, had insufficient infrastructure and public transport and was much further away from the workplaces and facilities of the inner city where most of the people were employed. The people who were forced to live in Mitchell's Plain are the generation of my interviewees' grandparents.

Mitchell's Plain and by students who travel to school from township<sup>3</sup> areas, such as Khayelitsha or Gugulethu. The two interviews I have chosen were conducted with a female student of 18 years, CK, whose family was classified coloured during apartheid and a male student, WH, also 18 years old, whose family was classified Indian. Both speak a variety of English at home and other languages, like Afrikaans and Urdu, play a role in family communication as well. I have chosen these examples because the two interviewees come from a similar background concerning the historical experience of their families but the way they construe the past differs as we will see. The first example is from a passage in the interview with CK, where I ask her about family stories during the time of apartheid.

CK

*[My] mother always / my mother told me that • because um • • where they were living, her parents never exposed her • to • the • ah • • / < ((faster)) they wouldn't / they / she / my mother told me she was never exposed to apartheid because > • ((inhaling)) < ((rising intonation)) my grandfather > // S: Mhm //, her < father ((falling intonation)) > // S: Mhm //, like / < ((smiling)) he was always / wanted to stand on the right side of the law. So if there was a sign that, • No Coloureds, then they didn't go there. // S: < ((rising intonation)) Okay > // So my mother told me that she was never actually exposed to apartheid. (CK: 19)*

In this example, apartheid seems to be unevenly distributed: there were places of apartheid and other places that were not touched by apartheid. CK says that if her family stayed within the confinement of the place that wasn't touched by apartheid, they were not exposed to it. That is, the way she constructs the past is in spatial-temporal terms. This sequence is an example of what I have called the *abstract chronotope* (in contrast to *the concrete chronotope* that I will discuss later). The characteristics of the *abstract chronotope* is the distinction between two spaces: one is the time-space of apartheid and the other one the time-space of the enclave.

The family of CK inhabits the enclave. These two time-spaces are divided by a border that is

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3 During Apartheid, townships were designated urban residential areas for people classified *black* who were either evicted from inner city districts now reserved for *whites* or *coloureds* or who had migrated from rural parts of South Africa to the city. Because of apartheid's restrictive and exclusive planning regime called influx control, it was tried to keep the population classified *black* outside of the space of the city as rigidly as possible. After the suspension of influx control, these areas experienced a massive population growth and are in the new South Africa also increasingly inhabited by migrants and refugees from other parts of Africa.



expressed in the *no-coloured-signs*. The enclave represents *the right side of the law*, which means the restricted places where coloureds were permitted. The law is the dividing line between the familiar, inner space of the enclave and the alien, outer space of apartheid. The logic of this sequence is that if the family stayed within the confinement of those places and positions that were reserved for coloureds, they could stay away from apartheid. Apartheid is depicted as something avoidable if people did not cross the line of the apartheid law. Thus it is possible for the grandfather to protect the family from apartheid because he made sure the family stayed within the confinement of its borders. The enclave is their space of possible action and movement. To stay away from apartheid is expressed as a decision the family makes, as an effort or achievement. The alternative to staying in the enclave is to defy the law. If people defy the law, they are in the apartheid space, if they live according to the apartheid law, they do not come into contact with apartheid. The transgression of the border from the enclave to the time-space of apartheid lies in the act of defying the apartheid law. If the past is constructed in such a way, the question arises: what actually *is* apartheid then? It is imagined as a time-space outside of the life-world of the family. Apartheid *happens* at the same time but in a quasi-distant land. It is a parallel world that has no connection to the life-time of the family. Apartheid does not impinge on people's lives. In this way, a construct comes into existence where the history of the family, who were evicted from another part of Cape Town and forced to live in Mitchell's Plain, is not touched by apartheid.

WH

The second example is taken from the interview with WH, a student at the same school, who I asked about family stories of the time of apartheid. Here, he talks about the eviction of his family from District Six which his grandmother told him about.

*So she used to like say they came • with a / with the • um • the machines // S: Mhm. // and stuff and they came down and people had to • / were for-cib-ly removed from their houses, their valuables and everything was just thrown around • and • was just removed like roughly and then they pulled out the stuff, they had to move to places like • ah • they came to Mitchell's Plain and they came to • • ah, • what's the other place, • they were all moved to Heideveld and all that places. // S: Ah. // They were all spread out. // S: Mh. // To be in different • sectors. (WH: 23)*

This is an example of what I have termed the *concrete chronotope*. Here, apartheid is not imagined as something outside of people's lives but something that conditions people's lives and possibilities

fundamentally. Within this chronotope, people cannot escape apartheid but it is the all-pervasive condition for action and being acted upon. The narrators achieve this perspective by means of subjectivization. They lead us into the narrative by a corporal reference. As recipients, we are directed to understand apartheid from the experience of those who lived under its rule. Within this chronotope, places are not empty, arbitrary spaces but they are concrete in the sense that they are the basis for the possibility of action. This sequence tells about the exclusion of a family classified as Indian from the inner-city area of Cape Town that was declared a whites-only area. We can see that apartheid in this narrative is an authority that forces people out of their previous, closely knit neighbourhoods into distant and alien surroundings. The violence of the removal is depicted in all clarity. Movements in this chronotope are almost always forced by the violence of the apartheid executive. In the narratives, this is achieved by the use of passive voice, the object case and auxiliary verbs like *can/can't*, *have to*, *should*. These forced movements always lead out of zones declared for whites and put people into other places according to their racial classification. The effect of these forced movements is an alienation of the social relations people had: they are ripped out of their previous neighbourhoods and are divided from friends, neighbours and family. The interviewee phrases this fragmentation of social relationships as *they were all spread out*. With this phrase he also means the conditions under which the family had to live from this moment on: far distances between members of previous social networks, far distances to workplaces and a poorly developed infrastructure.

##### 5. The act of positioning: evaluating standpoints about the past

Applying stance in discourse to the exploration of transmitted memory allows to recede from culturalised notions of memory and to take a closer look at the way interviewees position themselves in relation to public and private discourses about the past. By aligning with or distancing themselves from standpoints, speakers can identify with social groups these stances index. In that way, accounts of the past also demonstrate, as Silverstein puts it, how speakers are 'ideologically informed' (Silverstein 2003: 227)<sup>4</sup>. The following two examples show how two interview partners, both male and attending a former white school, distance themselves from discursive stances held in their families. I have chosen these two examples because they firstly employ an ironising tone in the way they represent the voice of their family members and secondly, because they index these stances as ideological representations of a certain group. These segments are taken from passages of the interviews that have the experience of the interviewees' families as a

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<sup>4</sup> For an overview of the connection between language and ideology see Busch (2013).

discursive topic.

SKo

*So, you normally turn to a black person, they are like, <((aspirated)) Ja, we fought, we struggled, you must appreciate!> // <((smiling)) S: Yes.> // So those look down at • my generation, our generation and say that, • You guys are now the way forward. // S: Aha. // <((quieter)) Say, You must appreciate because back / they always say, Back in our times it was tough.> We had this and that. You guys have everything given to • / to them, our generation has everything. // S: Aha! // Ja. // S: I see. // You know what I mean, so we got all the privileges. (SKo: 31f.)*

AR

*S: [...] are there any stories they tell about apartheid, <((quieter)) for example? Your parents.>*

*R: You actually have to probe them. // S: Ja. // You have to ask them to talk about apartheid. Mh, it, it's • because I'm from a white side, it's probably / they feel like • • [inhaling] they were • [exhaling] in the wrong, I suppose. They didn't do anything. My mom always talks about <((higher pitch, softer tone)) But we didn't know any better. Couldn't do anything.> // S: Ja. // Mh, both of my parents, my aunts, everybody say, they couldn't do anything, they didn't know better. (AR: 20)*

Both SKo and AR represent the speech of a third person in their accounts. This speech is represented by a different tonal quality: AR rises the pitch and SKo whispers the statement of the person he wants to represent. In other words, they disguise their voices as they integrate alien stances about the past that they want to contrast with their own speech. This disguising of the voice has an ironic effect for these discourse positions. If we recall the stance triangle of Du Bois and the three steps in the process of positioning, SKo and AR evaluate an object – in this case a certain standpoint in relation to the past. The act of alignment with a certain group is in this case the act of distancing themselves from a certain discourse position and the social group they indicate with it. The group they wish to represent is in both cases indexed by a racial and generational definition of the other: by saying *So, you normally turn to a black person, they are like* (SKo) and *because I'm from a white side* (AR) the speakers connect these stances to a certain racial category which the interviewees align with and from which they distance themselves at the same time. Furthermore, the representation of a discursive stance is linked to a generational category – it is the older generation

SKo and AR wish to represent. In the account of SKo, a distinction between *us* and *them* is being stated: *those vs. my generation, our generation*. By representing the speech of members of an older generation, SKo and AR connect these stances to a broader social framework. In this very dialogical sense, they give another ideological standpoint about the past a stage in their own speech. By distancing themselves from this standpoint by means of irony, the interviewees reveal something of their own stance without committing themselves too much to a certain standpoint. The act of ironic speech has the advantage of keeping one's own opinion open and at the same time to disassociate oneself from a certain stance. Throughout the interviews I conducted, the indexing of race occurred only in cases when interviewees wished to distance themselves from representatives of the older generation. At no point did interviewees index a standpoint as that of another race in their accounts. In the context of South Africa, with its long history of spatial and institutional segregation of the population according to categories of race, it is tempting to assume that similarities and differences in the interpretation of history are primarily linked to race, culture or tradition, as for example in Trotter (2006). In some studies, the category of race is analytically employed as an explanation for social action, as in Teeger (2014). By contrast, employing stance in discourse equipped me with a means to explore my interview partners' alignments with social types that are indexed when they present the voice of others in their speech. Thus it was possible to leave self-identifications open to acts of the speakers themselves.

## 6. Conclusion

In this paper, I argue that the way people construct the past and align with discourses about the past can better be explained by a reflexive approach which takes their past socially networked interactions, current ideological identifications and images of the future into account.

The relation between accounts of the past and subjectivity can thus be approached differently: instead of relating a particular way of narrating the past to one facet of identity (such as culture, race, class, ethnicity etc.) which forms an alleged community of memory (*Erinnerungsgemeinschaft* or *Erinnerungskultur*), the act of taking a historical stance is seen as an active social alignment.

The concept of the chronotope was employed to grasp the dimension of time-space that featured prominently in the young people's accounts of the past. The chronotope analytically links the dimensions of space, time and subject for the analysis of narrative. In that it illustrates space and time by means of the human body and senses, it is crucial for the creation of personhood in narrative. Applying *stance in discourse* and the *chronotope* provided me with instruments for 1) the study of the students' positioning in relation to transmitted memory and 2) the integration of the

spatial dimension into the analysis of their constructions of the past. I could thus work out some prominent features of how representatives of the *born-free* generation interpret the past and how this is linked to the social dynamics of identification.

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