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The Imaginary Field of the Heroic

On the Contention between Heroes, Martyrs, Victims and Villains in Collective Memory¹

Introduction

Heroes and victims, martyrs and terrorists, champions and losers are to be differentiated from one another. They often explicitly represent opposing sides of the same story and are thereby set apart from each other by the narrative. This statement is not as superficial as it seems if one considers the effects that these oppositions have in determining the functions and interactions of these figures in the processes pertaining to the creation and adaptation of collective memory. In tales of society, it is often explicitly by dint of the interpretation of their interaction in historical or fictitious events that actors are called 'heroes', that the deceased are labelled as 'victims' or awarded with the title 'martyrs' and that their dying is narrated as the result of an unjust act by a 'villain'. Thus, heroes produce victims, one group's martyr is another's perpetrator, champions triumph over losers, the latter considered tragic heroes thereafter, or probably even martyrs if the respective narrative deems their death the unfortunate result of the winner's brutal injustice – the exact same injustice which is considered a righteous act if committed by the opposing group's hero. Accordingly, these figures usually have to be seen as the result of their own fights and contentions with each other on the narrative level and thus they can and must be distinguished from one another. However, in reference to their meaning for a society's collective memory, they are of the same kind: they are figures of boundary work.

In the modes of each society's boundary construction, heroes, martyrs and victims, as well as villains and other dependent relational figures, fulfil similar functions. Their stories and their labelling as *good* or *bad* help to establish certain moral codes and construct the symbolic boundaries that structure society, categorize objects,

people and practices, (Lamont/Molnár 168) and define its cosmology. As such, these boundaries "are tools by which individuals and groups struggle over and come to agree upon definitions of reality" (ibid.). Against this background, if groups struggle over their views on their own state, over their collective identity, over the notions of good and evil, or over moral conduct and ideal behaviour, this may also hold true for the representatives of the respective boundary construction and thus for the role and position of heroes, martyrs, victims and villains in collective memory. Therefore, I argue that in collective memory these figures of boundary work are constructed in a relational framework within which they are perpetually under contention, so that their positions are constantly renegotiated and rearranged. This assessment also holds true in cases of institutionalized heroes and the recognized narratives and catalogues of a society's heroes, manifested and presented in monuments and textbooks. There might be obscure and ambiguous heroes as well as established and stabilized narratives. However, they are always under contention and while the remembrance of some heroes or villains might vanish over years, the monuments of others might be torn down only in the aftermath of greater upheavals.

That said, while following Émile Durkheim's basic distinction of the world into the two domains of 'the profane' and 'the sacred' (Durkheim, *Elementary Forms* 34), I propose the idea of an 'imaginary field of the heroic' in order to determine the construction of social boundaries by dint of the tales of idealized and demonized figures alike. Thus, the imaginary field of the heroic constitutes a model that captures the network of relationships within which heroes, martyrs, victims and villains meet at the level of the collective memory, while they transcend the specific narrative they are embedded in – so that the imaginary field captures not only the relations between the protagonists of a particular mythology, but also their contention with the actors of (all) other narratives of a society's collective memory.

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The assumption of a field is based on the idea that the respective protagonists are given similar functions in the process of constructing collective identities. At the same time, they are juxtaposed in dynamic exchange relationships and dependencies. The appreciation of figures as heroes, their branding as perpetrators or their labelling as victims is therefore bound to the historical and social context and can shift in the process of remembrance. Therefore, the position of historical figures within the field is not fixed but dependent on society's collective memory and on the underlying mechanisms that make them figures of boundary work. By the same token, the idea of an imaginary field of the heroic leaves room for ambiguous figures who are not remembered in an 'either-or' logic but who combine multidimensional discourses in themselves. Therefore, the concept reaches beyond the restraints of ideal type thinking, as will be discussed in this article.

As constructions, the figures under scrutiny compete on a narrative level. Hence, regarding the modes of boundary construction, I follow Pierre Bourdieu on a meta level and "think relationally" (Bourdieu, *Logic of Fields* 96) by proposing the term of the imaginary field of the heroic. If it is true that "the real is relational",² this has to be equally true for the construction of its past and its foundations. Accordingly, the analysis of the imaginary field of the heroic becomes a useful tool for determining the dynamic and competitive dimensions of social relations because it hints at the tension inherent in a society's field of power in Bourdieu's sense. Certainly, if heroes, martyrs, victims and the like are seen as society's boundary construction, they are first and foremost *constructions*. They are no social actors themselves, we cannot speak about their habitus or capital; instead they are mere projections of social actors. That said, while the respective actors certainly have or have had an embodied habitus if they are (as far as living heroized persons are concerned) or have been real-life figures, for the assumption of an imaginary field this is irrelevant. It is important, however, that the corresponding figures are constructed *as if* they have a habitus and *as if* they are dependent on the logics of the forms of capital, regardless of whether they are actual persons or fictitious actors. Accordingly, they *symbolize* these phenomena, and by the same token offer references on the symbolic level to which the actors in the sociological fields can refer. This in return affects these real-life actors' habitus and a group's social capital.³ Hence, the respective figures can never constitute a social field in the Bourdieuan sense – though the way they are labelled and remembered by the living

positions them within an imaginary field. Thus, these figures of boundary work are certainly not capable of acting and competing as social agents, but they are constructed as such by their society. In this way, the emerging imaginary field of the heroic reflects the state of real-life power relations and thus defines the structure of the field of power (Bourdieu, *Some Properties of Fields* 73-74).

In the following, I shall outline the theoretical reflections that lead me to propose the idea of the imaginary field of the heroic. Starting with the Durkheimian perspective, I will introduce the role of the sacred in the construction of collective identities. Linking up with Durkheim's ideas, the sociologist Bernhard Giesen developed the concept of an 'ideal typological field' (Giesen, *Triumph and Trauma* 7) which, on the one hand, provides the intellectual foundation for the imaginary field proposed here, but on the other hand will be criticized due to its theoretical restraints which, among other things, do not leave any space for the ambiguous figure of the martyr in the respective modes of boundary construction. In comparison, in the concluding reflections of this article the theoretical power of the imaginary field of the heroic as a concept will be shown precisely by its capacity of being able to include the martyr.

The Durkheimian perspective

"It is society that speaks through the mouths of those who affirm them in our presence; it is society that we hear when we hear them; and the voice of all itself has a tone that an individual voice cannot have" (Durkheim, *Elementary Forms* 210): With these words, Émile Durkheim expresses the role of the tales and stories of *them*, the "countless individual representations" of those behavioural patterns that have developed in a collective, so "that the intensity with which they are thought in each individual mind finds resonance in all the others, and vice versa" (209). Thus, these representations serve as brokers between society and the individual, and they are capable of eliciting the 'respect' that society demands of the individual. In Durkheim's understanding, this 'respect' is the power of the collective subject that "calls forth or inhibits conduct automatically, *irrespective of any utilitarian calculation of helpful or harmful results*" (209, italics in original). Hence, a society's discourses on good and evil, righteousness and injustice, or virtuous behaviour can be seen as a collective agreement on those moral standards which

demand public, as well as tacit and private consent, by the members of a particular society in the same way a god demands belief, because in effect a “society is to its members what a god is to its faithful” (208).

Although Durkheim’s main argument regarding the specific nature of society as different from our nature as individuals remains a persuasive perspective today, the somewhat pessimistic (*we cannot escape society*) but unanimously egalitarian (*no one can escape society*) reading of a society’s members’ positioning as well as the abovementioned representations is being called into question here. At this point, I will not remark upon, neither will I ignore the discussions about the individual’s autonomy from society in Durkheim’s thought, which can only be understood against the backdrop of his entire oeuvre and the evaluation of its inner development (Alexander, *Inner Development* 136), but I will merely refer to the egalitarian starting point for my approach.⁴ That said, while the main line of Durkheimian thought is appreciated here and constitutes the theoretical basis for the following remarks, I shall propose a modification of his claims on the phenomenon that later came to be called collective memory.⁵ I argue that society’s imaginations of its heroes, martyrs, victims and demonized figures are to be considered sublime within the stratification of the modes of boundary construction since they dominantly constitute and powerfully communicate the collective imaginations and agreements regarding the realm of the sacred. In effect, they appear as embodied examples of culturally idealized or condemned ways of living, and they thus define the social facts in a Durkheimian sense, “which present very special characteristics: they consist of manners of acting, thinking and feeling external to the individual, which are invested with a coercive power by virtue of which they exercise control over him” (Durkheim, *Sociological Method* 52). In this respect, a society’s set of heroes and other remembered figures mediates between the beliefs, tendencies and practices of the group, which collectively constitute social facts (54) so that we hear society speak when we hear ‘their’ stories. This hypothesis does not challenge the statement that the “voice of all itself has a tone that an individual voice cannot have”, rather, it supports this idea strongly. However, compared to the Durkheimian interpretation, it also hints at a more hierarchical reading of modes of boundary construction which has profound effects on the respective societies, since the prominence of the figures in the imaginary field of the heroic reflects and unanimously supports the authority of specific social facts in Durkheim’s sense. In other

words: If a society asks its members to sacrifice their lives for the sake of the social group, the tale of *one* martyr who has a name and a story might powerfully reinforce all those countless individual representations which convey the message that this is a morally good society – a society worth dying for.

The sacred and the construction of collective identity

Durkheim claims that society can achieve its “ends only by working through us, it categorically demands our cooperation” (Durkheim, *Elementary Forms* 209). On the other hand, he states that society „requires us to make ourselves its servants, forgetful of our own interests” (209). The question that is to be debated might be on which basis the dualistic but likewise reciprocal relationship between the individual and society can be founded and maintained. The Durkheimian answer to that question undoubtedly lies in the invocation of the concept of the sacred.

In his *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Émile Durkheim defines religion as “always [assuming] a bipartite division of the universe, known and knowable, into two genera that include all that exists but radically exclude one another” (38). Although this bipartite division into the realm of the profane and the realm of the sacred⁶ has been formulated in respect to religious thinking, its logic as an *absolute* distinction⁷ is of such fundamental importance that it also helps to explain the construction of collective identities and group consciousness. This is an observation Durkheim himself, without using these terms, obviously made when he coined the phrase that a society is to its members what god is to the faithful. Thus, for Durkheim “the sacred is eternal” (Pickering 92), a perspective which led to ample criticism of the concept from different perspectives, with the main argument against the prominence of the sacred as a concept being that “it is so closely associated with religion, [that] religion may be viewed in the same manner as ‘a constant’. Ergo, Durkheim, along with those who follow him, hold that religion is a universal and everlasting phenomenon” (92). In effect, William Pickering argues polemically “[to] argue that all societies are equally religious or have the same amount of religion but under different forms is fallacious if not ridiculous. And the same can be said of the sacred” (92).⁸

However, despite these critiques, as Dmitry Kurakin puts it, contemporary Durkheimian scholarship is changing and “the concept of the

sacred has become one of the flagships of this rediscovery” (Kurakin 379). Most importantly, the works of Jeffery Alexander, Philip Smith⁹ and Alexander Riley¹⁰ have helped to recalibrate the sacred/profane dichotomy in sociological thinking. Thus, if we leave the religio-sociological starting point of Durkheimian thinking aside and try to grasp what holds societies together beyond religion, we may point at the ambiguity of the sacred¹¹ and thus reveal sacred and profane codes that underline the spheres of everyday life (Kurakin 378). Accordingly, what makes the concept of the sacred a useful tool for the analysis of the construction of collective identity is the statement that the “sacred thing is, par excellence, that which the profane must not and cannot touch with impunity” (Durkheim, *Elementary Forms* 209).¹² This statement might help to transfer Durkheim’s notion of the sacred to a generalizable sociological concept, for it is the exact same logic of untouchability that applies to social groups which are bound and defined by *social facts* since they assume a tangible and ontological form: they constitute reality. Following the dictum that the “first and most basic rule is *to consider social facts as things*” (Durkheim, *Sociological Method* 60), while also keeping in mind the observation that the very basis of a certain society’s identity must appear untouchable and unquestionable, we can apply his ideas of the sacred to the construction of collective identities, detached from its religio-sociological core meaning. In effect, the concept of the sacred describes “the signature formations of new and traditional groups”, as William E. Paden puts it. He states:

‘Group’ here does not mean social environments in general, but rather the self-representations of specifically differentiated collective units or subunits. A group is a kind of linguistic construct that functions as an essentialized representation of aggregates of individuals, and thus comes to have the effect of a ‘thing’ or an objectivity. (Paden 36)

The underlying process is described by sociologists Shmuel Eisenstadt and Bernhard Giesen who argue that collective identity can only fulfil its function of offering a relevant benchmark for the individual when the social processes of constructing it are kept latent; and by the same token, they assume that “attempts to question it and to lift the veil of latency are usually rejected by pointing to its naturalness, sacredness or self-evidence” (Eisenstadt/Giesen 73). Therefore, collective identities consistently

stress their primordality, their civic and cultural self-evidence, and thus their ontological situational determination. The underlying social processes thus mark the area in which members of a community can, to a certain extent, perceive themselves as equal. It is this experience of equality which must be understood as a key requirement for the consolidation of collective identities. At the same time, the corresponding boundaries must be continuously confirmed, while the latency of the processes is maintained by detaching them from the realm of ordinary life and instead evoking a connection to the sacral domain.¹³ In effect, it is this construction of the collective identity’s naturalness which subjects us to its rules: “We defer to society’s orders not simply because it is equipped to overcome our resistance but, first and foremost, because it is the object of genuine respect” (Durkheim, *Elementary Forms* 209). Society is that which we do not question. It is sacred. In effect, society

subjects us to all sorts of restraints, privations, and sacrifices without which social life would be impossible. And so, at every instant, we must submit to rules of action and thought that we have neither made nor wanted and that sometimes are contrary to our inclinations and to our most basic instincts. (ibid.)

That said, Durkheim does not seem acutely focused on the hierarchical aspects entwined in this forced submission to society – regarding neither the mortal world and its inhabitants, that is actual power relations, nor the stories of the “countless individual representations” which form and foster the ‘social facts’ that exert external constraints over individuals (Durkheim, *Sociological Method* 59). However, by focussing on “the society that speaks” through an affirmation of the past, Durkheim not only proposes a memory discourse which helps to explain the history of societies, but rather transforms the past into a source of identity for the present (Miszta 124). Additionally, since the opposition of the profane and the sacred has nothing to do with common binary oppositions, the “good and the evil are both parts of the sacred and distinct from merely profane individual (nonsocial) life” (Kurakin 383).

These two observations are where Bernhard Giesen attaches his reflections on collective memory in the construction of collective identities in general and the role of the heroic as well as the demonic in these processes in particular. Based on the assumption that an identity seems absolutely secure to the individual, but at the same time has to remain insuperably inscrut-

able and non-transparent, Giesen argues that, analogously, humans presuppose a continuity of collective identities. It is precisely this continuity which is constructed with reference to the sacred domain and which must be represented in everyday life. Giesen identifies figures who are liminal mediators between the profane and the sacred while simultaneously defining not only the boundary between the everyday and the extraordinary but also the inside and outside of communities. He writes about these cultural imaginations of identity:

They mark the boundaries between the regular and ordinary social life and the realm of the extraordinary beyond it. Heroes, victims and perpetrators are liminal figures that can be imagined only from this side of the boundary, from the point of view of regular social life, from the point of view of a community. We have to refer to their position in the outlands if we want to understand our situation inside the boundary, our social order, our community and history. (*Triumph and Trauma* 1)

Hence, the figures presented here not only define a community's boundary to the sacral domain and thus conceal the social processes of boundary construction in order to maintain collective identities. They also fulfil the second central requirement in the construction of collective identities which Eisenstadt and Giesen identified as necessary, in addition to the latency of the process. These figures link "the constitutive difference between 'us and them' to the difference between the routine and the extraordinary" (Eisenstadt/Giesen 80). As liminal¹⁴ figures that link the sacral area to the everyday world, heroes, perpetrators and victims can be understood as figures of boundary work which "create community and become the foil for collective identities" (Giesen, *Zwischenlagen* 75).

However, Giesen only refers to 'heroes', 'perpetrators' and 'victims' while not including the figure of the martyr in his group of ideal type figures of boundary construction. This omission is bound to irritate, since the martyr in many ways represents a radicalization of boundary work who not only determines the sacred centre of the martyr's society, but also defines entities in terms of polar opposites (Gölz, *Martyrdom* 37). As a paradigmatic figure of boundary work, the martyr not only marks the boundaries between two belief systems, they also become an embodied definition of the nature of their own belief system and communicate the values and virtues of their own society. It is the notion of the 'victim'

which, in the case of martyrdom, accompanies the heroized self-sacrifice and connects the martyr to the moral standards of their society (Gölz, *Struggle for Power* 5). In his remarks on the figure of the victim, Giesen concludes that the act of calling somebody a victim implies that the result of the actions that produced the victim are considered wrong and must even be perceived to be avoidable (Giesen, *Triumph and Trauma* 46). "Thus the discourse about victimization becomes a social construction and is carried by a moral community defining an evil" (46). The exact same assumptions are also true for the figure of the martyr who always and inevitably carry the subliminal semantics of the victim with them, even if the notion of 'sacrifice' is emphasized (Gölz, *Struggle for Power* 5). Consequently, discourses on martyrdom

not only define the demarcation between two belief systems but also the terms of good and evil in a paradigmatic way. Since martyrdom presupposes that the Other is presented as evil, the martyrs themselves have to be constructed in a way that doesn't leave room for doubts about their impunity. (5-6)

In this regard, the martyr unites all levels of meaning that Giesen ascribed to heroes, perpetrators and victims in one figure. So why does he not take the martyr into account? The answer might be found in the theoretical restraints of the concept of the ideal typological field.

Bernhard Giesen's ideal typological field

It is thanks to the ideas of Bernhard Giesen that we may understand the ideal types of heroes, perpetrators and victims as boundary markers "between the regular and ordinary social life and the realm of the extraordinary beyond it" (Giesen, *Triumph and Trauma* 1) and by the same token acknowledge the way they relate to each other. In his work *Triumph and Trauma*, Bernhard Giesen brings his ideal types of boundary work together for the first time while also observing that these protagonists, as brokers between the realms of the sacred and the profane, not only communicate the *social facts* to us. On the contrary, the same also applies in the opposite direction: changing "and crossing social boundaries affect[s] the imagination of the land beyond the horizon – the contour begins to waver, heroes appear as perpetrators, victims as heroes.

What is demonic terrorism for one community is revered as heroic martyrdom by another" (1). Accordingly, Giesen considers the distinction between the archetypes of victorious heroes and tragic heroes, perpetrators and victims (albeit not martyrs, even though he explicitly refers to "heroic martyrdom") an ideal typological field. The positions that historical personalities are assigned in this field are not fixed and immutable, but may change according to the needs of their society so that triumphant heroes "can become tragic ones, heroes can be turned into perpetrators, and victims can, later on, get the sacral aura that before was the mark of heroes" (7).

The four archetypes in Giesen's ideal typological field point to the 'hero' as the bearer of subjectivity and the 'victim' as the one being degraded to the status of an object as their ultimate reference points. They are thus representations of the human constitution manifested in memory.¹⁵ By the same token, they are to be understood as cultural incarnations by means of which fundamental human boundary experiences – such as birth and death – are addressed and processed (cf. Schlechtriemen 18). Giesen details the figures of the 'triumphant hero', the 'victim', the 'tragic hero' and the 'perpetrator' as cultural constructions that represent the reference points of two formative dualisms. He observes that between the perfect and sovereign subjectivity of the hero and the dehumanized victim who is treated as an object, "there is a range of positions denoting a subjectivity that is limited and restricted by the adversity of the world or by its own preservation" (Giesen, *Triumph and Trauma* 6). By using subjectivity and worldly success as axes, he sets up a matrix in which he presents the triumphant hero and the tragic hero as representatives of a preserved subjectivity distinguished by the question of whether they have been able to master the world. The perpetrator and the victim are divided by the same question whilst representing figures with a damaged subjectivity.

However, Giesen designs this concept of ideal types as cultural constructs in a way that goes far beyond simply pointing out the reference points that define the matrix of his typological field. He also enriches his four archetypes with anthropological propositions. In doing so, he calls heroes the triumphant embodiment of collective identity. As singular and individualized figures, they symbolize the connection between the community and its sacred space. They stand for the possibility of one person rising above the banal concerns of everyday life to become part of the sacred order and thus immortal (17).

Heroes represent the extraordinary and charismatic: They overcome the narrow rules

of everyday life, despise routines and break with conventions (18). This statement is less to be understood in reference to historical models that have succeeded in implementing a new order, but more as a reference to the theoretical dimension of the hero: The social order cannot be constituted without recourse to its opposite – the sacred – and the community cannot form a collective identity without imagining subjectivity, embodied in the hero. Heroes, therefore, are imaginations of the highest degree of individuality and collective projections of sovereign subjectivity as well as the sacred, manifested in the memory of individual figures and their lives. Through the construction of heroes, a community not only overcomes the mundane contingencies of everyday life, but also the threat of death. The construction of heroes thus creates a social bond that transcends the limitations of personal life and its prevailing logics (18).

The hero is not only theoretically juxtaposed to the victim in Giesen's matrix, but also immediately dependent on them since the concentration of the sacred in the person of the triumphant hero must come at the price of the de-sacralization of others. Therefore, while there are no natural victims, heroes can produce them at the moment of their triumph (45).¹⁶ This hints at exactly the same phenomenon which leads to the idea of the imaginary field of the heroic: The figures of boundary construction are not only theoretically dependent on each other, they also have an exchange relationship on the narrative level.

As a result, Giesen's logic implies that the victim should be considered a cultural construct to which a specific function of boundary work must be attributed. The archetypal victim represents the faceless subject: "Victims [...] have no face, no voice and no place. Even if they are still alive, they are numbed and muted, displaced and uprooted" (53). Where the hero acts as a mediator to the sacred centre of the community, victims, because of their lost or blurred subjectivity, are liminal figures of the dark edge of human communities where doubts about seemingly clear boundaries dwell. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that subjects can suddenly be degraded to objects, but that objects can also gain a voice (ibid.). However, it also becomes clear that this idea leaves no room for a figure combining elements of the presented ideal types. In other words: What about victims with faces? What about martyrs?

The martyr and the restraints of the ideal typological field

Against the background of the ideal types 'hero' and 'victim', the idea of the ideal typological field certainly provides a convincing heuristic instrument for analyzing the function of the figures placed in this field in constructing collective identities. However, the incorporation of these ideal type considerations with the simultaneous insertion of generalized anthropological statements leads to a double bias.

First, according to Bröckling, typologies are particularly suitable for the investigation of heroisms and processes of heroization since they correspond to the logic of the object itself. However, it is necessary to consider that heroic semantics construct existing or fictional characters based on a model character (Bröckling 43). Typologies do not make reality but

make comparisons between ideal types and therefore are heuristic in nature. They do not describe reality, but suggest how reality could be described and thus provide orientation for further research. They offer an organizational system for a particular field, and to this end they construct abstractions that leave aside the particular qualities of a concrete case. (42)

Giesen's archetypes, however, seem to have lost their ideal character through numerous historical references and anthropological settlements. For example, Schlechtriemen notes that Giesen's reading repeatedly conveys the impression that the types of cultural constructs actually thought to be found 'out there' are fabricated (Schlechtriemen 18).

Second and probably more serious is the reverse effect of the ideal typical view of Giesen's archetypes in relation to the phenomena of the heroic. By focusing on the four reference points that constitute the matrix of the ideal typological field, he naturally constricts his scope; a feature which is inherent in all typologies and can also be intentional. In this case, however, this leads to very important configurations of boundary work not being taken into consideration. In this regard, it is no coincidence that the figure of the martyr finds no place in the matrix of the ideal typological field. The martyr itself is an extreme figure because martyrs are heroes, perpetrators, tragic heroes and victims at the same time – not only in reference to different views from opposing societies (one group's martyr, thus hero, is the other group's terrorist, thus perpetrator), but also regarding their positioning in their community

of admirers. The ambiguity of the martyr, who draws from discourses on strength and on vulnerability at the same time (Gözl, *Struggle for Power* 2), leaves them no place in the matrix of Giesen's ideal typological field, which is closed to tiptoeing, ambiguous protagonists, tragic constellations, and shades of the social world. Thus, the configuration of the martyr finds no place, although they can undoubtedly claim the same status as a liminal figure on the level of collective memory as ascribed to the triumphant hero. The same thing must be true for other ambiguous figures, like Robin-Hood-type bandits or noble villains, although the theory was formulated expressly to explore the phenomenon of shifting meanings. Giesen states:

As is not uncommon in the aftermath of war and defeat, those who had been praised as heroes before, were afterwards considered as victims whose self-sacrifice was devoid of any meaning, or they were regarded as perpetrators, as icons of evil, as embodiments of demonic madness. In death and defeat, heroism exhibits its ambivalences, the fragility of its foundations, the tension between trauma and triumph. (*Triumph and Trauma* 15)

Consequently, following Giesen's theory, ambiguous figures are conceivable only as representatives and phenomena of radical upheavals. The former hero becomes the icon of evil to be reintegrated into the matrix, but this time as a culprit. However, aside from the radical upheavals that are – in line with Durkheim's thinking on heroes¹⁷ – the starting point for Giesen's theses, ambiguous figures *per se* are opposed to the idea of the extreme. They resist being assigned a place in the matrix, as do all victims who have faces, all martyrs and firefighters, and all unknown soldiers who are not to be seen as victims, but who have no face and no voice.

This criticism might be easy to address by pointing out that there is enough space between the reference points for all these examples and constellations, and that ultimately the visibility of these positions would only be obscured by the dominance of the four reference points, but not entirely hidden from view. However, Bröckling's objection remains; typologies over-emphasize differences with respect to relationships, hybrid formations and blurring – and "is a place for everything in the table, but only *one* place" (Bröckling 43). In this regard, the idea of the typological field is trapped in its theoretical restraints: It is either but a mere theoretic construction which hints at the Weberian logic of the ideal

types that explicitly *do not exist* in the real world; or it is a model which oversimplifies social reality and leaves no space for ambiguities.

The imaginary field of the heroic

Therefore, in order to introduce a fruitful theoretical tool to cultural studies, I propose the implementation of an *imaginary field of the heroic* into the theoretical discourse on collective identities and modes of boundary work. While agreeing to the ideas which were presented here that divide the social world into the realm of the profane and the realm of the sacred in a Durkheimian sense, and at the same time appreciating the modifications which point to the prominent role of extraordinary figures in the underlying processes of boundary construction, I propose a different notion regarding the construction of a field. Here, I would like to take the Bourdieuan term of the 'field' into consideration in order to highlight the dynamics which constitute the imaginary field of the heroic. Being fully aware of the fact that heroes, martyrs, victims, villains and other prominent relational figures of boundary work are not social actors themselves and that they do not constitute a social field in the strict sense of the theory, my reflections follow an analogous propagation of Pierre Bourdieu's thoughts.

The starting point for this theoretical transfer lies in the observation that Pierre Bourdieu's model is in line with the basic thinking on the structure of the social world and the modes of boundary construction. He agrees to the basic distinction of the social world into the profane and the sacred, as proposed by Durkheim, who is in fact one of the defining theorists for Bourdieu.¹⁸ In Bourdieu's thinking, "the religious sacred is but a particular case of the more general idea that social distinctions, whether applied to individuals, groups, or institutions, assume a taken-for-granted quality that elicits acceptance and respect" (Swartz 47).¹⁹ Accordingly, he sees reality in the light of the construction of social boundaries and combines this thinking with his ideas on the struggle over legitimate delimitation. Thus, he even interprets seemingly natural boundaries, like those of regions, not as ontologically existent, but rather as social constructions. He states:

Everyone agrees that 'regions' divided up according to the different conceivable criteria (language, habitat, cultural forms, etc.) never coincide perfectly. But that is not all: 'reality', in this case, is social

through and through and the most 'natural' classifications are based on characteristics which are not in the slightest respect natural and which are to a great extent the product of an arbitrary imposition, in other words, of a previous state of the relations of power in the field of struggle over legitimate delimitation. (Bourdieu, *Identity* 224)

In effect, as Bourdieu puts it, 'reality' is nothing but the permanent struggle to *define* 'reality' whereas this specific logic of the social world has to be prevented from being apprehended by the individual (ibid.). Thus, for the construction of social boundaries, Bourdieu points to a logic comparable to that of the notion of latency in the construction of collective identities in Eisenstadt and Giesen's thinking. In this regard, the symbolic representations of the underlying processes come into consideration.

Bourdieu himself did not take recourse to the different types of symbolic representations and the respective memory discourses, but was rather interested in the social world and its power relations. He therefore saw the world as structured through social fields which represent the dynamic power relations between social actors and institutions (Bourdieu, *Some Properties of Fields* 73-74). "[A]gents and groups of agents are thus defined by their relative positions in space" (Bourdieu, *Identity* 226). In effect,

[t]he social field can be described as a multi-dimensional space of positions such that each actual position can be defined in terms of a multi-dimensional system of coordinates whose values correspond to the values of the different pertinent variables. Agents are thus distributed, in the first dimension, according to the overall volume of the capital they possess and, in the second dimension, according to the composition of their capital – in other words, according to the relative weight of the different kinds of capital in the total set of their assets. (ibid.)

Heroes, martyrs, victims and villains are memory constructions. Thus, on the one hand they represent and define the social world as the liminal figures who mediate between the realm of the profane and the realm of the sacred. They thus help to position social agents in their social fields and must be considered powerful tools (or even weapons) for competition in these social fields. Bourdieu states that thinking in terms of the field means "to think relationally" (Bourdieu, *Logic Of Fields* 96). If we position the figures of boundary

work in relation to the social fields of the mundane world, we follow this first condition in order to adapt the term 'field'. At first glance, this seems to contradict the logic of the sacred, which is defined by the fact that it seems untouchable and unchangeable. However, it must be said that the statement of the dynamics of the field is *per se* merely a theoretical-analytical one. The position of the figures in the imaginary field must appear stable to the actors who refer to the reference points in the imaginary field of the heroic. Only in this way can the heroic unfold its social effects at all. Against this background, the imaginary field of the heroic can be seen as the liminal reflection of the field of power in the realm of the profane. In this regard, the position that the figures of boundary work take up in the imaginary field of the heroic follows exactly the same logic as that of the position that social agents take up in the real world except that they are products of those actors' imaginations. Accordingly, as reference points for real-life actors of the social fields, they are used as tools in the struggle over the definition of 'reality' within these fields while preventing that struggle from being apprehended. While pointing precisely at the figures in the imaginary field of the heroic, actors in the sociological field hold certain social capital, perform a specific habitus and position themselves in competition with other actors in their respective field.

Therefore, the imaginary field of the heroic consists of figures who build up a configuration of objective relations and dependencies amongst one another that positions the figures in the field itself (97). They cannot be treated as ideal types in a Weberian sense, for these ideal types are far from real life and accordingly not suitable for the social conditions of the construction of collective identities or explanation patterns for social reality to the individual. However, the field is constituted by the labelling of remembered figures in a way known to the social actors. The respective figures are *called* heroes, martyrs, victims and villains and the specific society's discourse defines the essence of these terms in the first place. Thus, these designations carry an archetypal character in the sense of Gaston Bachelard with them since "they are not static; instead, they are variational, reverberational, valuational, and dynamic" (Hans 317). Methodologically speaking, if a remembered figure is labelled by the society as a prominent figure in an archetypal way – whatever the respective discourse deems important to the concept of the respective archetype or demands of its representatives – they enter the typological field of the heroic. In that moment, they start to compete with each other on a fictitious level.

This holds true even if they transcend their narrative of origin, so that they may be defined as heroes or their victims, as martyrs or suicide attackers, as noble outlaws or vile bandits, as insurgents or freedom fighters. Thus, they help to constitute 'reality' as modes of boundary construction. It is "society that speaks to us" if we hear their stories and it is the field of power which allocates their stories a position in the imaginary field of the heroic. In this regard, the egalitarian notion of Durkheim's reflections on the impact that countless voices have on the structure of society is called into question. The figures of the imaginary field of the heroic – as imagined reflections of the power struggles in the social world – help to construct not only communities and 'the other', but also social boundaries and hierarchies, since they keep these boundaries latent and demand society's 'respect'. In effect:

Only when symbolic boundaries are widely agreed upon can they take on a constraining character and pattern social interaction in important ways. Moreover, only then can they become social boundaries, i.e., translate, for instance, into identifiable patterns of social exclusion or class and racial segregation. (Lamont/Molnár 168)

Thus, if we analyze the contention between heroes, martyrs, victims and villains on the level of collective memory, we can learn much about the society that constructed these figures as well as about the prevalent power relations within this society. While Giesen's ideal typological field might help us to deconstruct specific figures of boundary work and thus to explain their function in transforming societies, only by referring to the idea of the *imaginary field of the heroic* can we learn about subtler changes and shifting processes in power relations. Ambiguous figures are always under contention since they represent (and hint at) power struggles which do not challenge the latency of boundary construction. These figures are in a constant exchange relationship with each other: they attract each other, repel each other, defeat each other, or replace each other – in creeping and incremental processes, without major upheavals. The place of heroes, martyrs, victims and villains within the imaginary field of the heroic is not only a product of these transfers; it also powerfully communicates and translates these effects into social boundaries.

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2 Bourdieu, *Logic of Fields* 96-97: “To think in terms of field is to think relationally. [...] I could twist Hegel’s famous formula and say that the real is the relational: what exist in the social world are relations – not interactions between agents or intersubjective ties between individuals, but objective relations which exist ‘independently of individual consciousness and will,’ as Marx said.”

3 Bourdieu, *Forms of Capital* 51: “Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word.”

4 For a conclusive statement on this matter, see Alexander, *Inner Development* 153: “From his first day as a sociologist, it had been one of Durkheim’s principal ambitions to create a humanistic alternative to instrumental Marxism. Only after his breakthrough to a symbolic conception of social structure, however, did he feel ready to create a theoretical alternative that could match its generality and scope. This new theory, he insisted, was just as collective, but, because it was also resolutely anti-instrumental, it would avoid the problem of coercion that seemed to correspond to the Marxist understanding of social control. Durkheim finally had differentiated his own theory from Marx’s in a conclusive way. That in doing so he had created a theory whose subjectivity was as exaggerated as the objectivism he despised did not dissuade him.”

5 For the developments regarding the theoretical term ‘collective memory’ and Durkheim’s role in it, see Misztal 123: “Durkheim did not explicitly employ the notion of collective memory, his approach offers a very insightful understanding of the need for historical continuity. Although it was his student, Maurice Halbwachs, who introduced the term ‘collective memory’ to sociology, Durkheim’s input into the debate on the subject is rather worth discussing and preserving, particularly the importance that he attached to the revitalization of a group’s social heritage for the reaffirmation of its bonds and the reinforcement of its solidarity. Such a reconstruction of Durkheim’s approach can also assist recent attempts to rethink the notion of collective memory.”

6 Durkheim, *Elementary Forms* 34: “Whether simple or complex, all known religious beliefs display a common feature: They presuppose a classification of the real or ideal things that men conceive of into two classes – two opposite genera – that are widely designated by two distinct terms, which the words profane and sacred translate fairly well. The division of the world into two domains, one containing all that is sacred and the other all that is profane – such is the distinctive trait of religious thought. Beliefs, myths, dogmas, and legends are either representations or systems of representations that express the nature of sacred things, the virtues and powers attributed to them, their history, and their relationships with one another as well as with profane things.”

7 Durkheim, *Elementary Forms* 36: “[I]f the criterion of a purely hierarchical distinction is at once too general and too imprecise, nothing but their heterogeneity is left to define the relation between the sacred and the profane. But what makes this heterogeneity sufficient to characterize that classification of things and to distinguish it from any other is that it has a very particular feature: It is absolute. In the history of human thought, there is no other example of two categories of things as profoundly differentiated or as radically opposed to one another. The traditional opposition between good and evil is nothing beside this one: Good and evil are two opposed species of the same genus, namely morals, just as health and illness are nothing more than two different aspects of the same order of facts, life; by contrast, the sacred and the profane are always and everywhere conceived by the human intellect as separate genera, as two worlds with nothing in common.”

8 William Pickering refers to the works of Mary Douglas (1970) who, for example, observed in her *Natural Symbols* that amongst some Persian nomad groups there exist no major ritual activities.

9 For an evaluation of the development of the sacred as a useful concept in social thought, see Smith/Alexander 3-10, 25.

10 Cf. Riley 274-301.

11 On this matter, Kurakin writes: “His approach promised to solve the problem of how social order is produced and what its purpose is. However, for most of the twentieth century, the potential of Durkheim’s theory of the sacred for grounding sociological theory and research was not effectively realized. For decades, it was read as interpreted by Talcott Parsons and Lévi-Strauss. Particular aspects of the theory, such as the ‘cult of the individual’ and the sacralization of the person in modernity, became more popular than the overall argument. The important role of the ambiguity of the sacred in the overall argument was almost entirely obscured” (378).

12 Durkheim, *Elementary Forms* 38: “To be sure, this prohibition cannot go so far as to make all communication between the two worlds impossible, for if the profane could in no way enter into relations with the sacred, the sacred would be of no use. This placing in relationship in itself is always a delicate operation that requires precautions and a more or less complex initiation. Yet such an operation is impossible if the profane does not lose its specific traits, and if it does not become sacred itself in some measure and to some degree. The two genera cannot, at the same time, both come close to one another and remain what they were.”

13 Giesen, *Tales of Transcendence* 96: “The thesis that all politics relies upon a hidden transcendental reference can point to well-known philosophical arguments, ranging from German Idealism to more recent varieties of social philosophy: perception of reality presupposes a categorical frame (Kant); the order of objects is constituted by a transcendental subject (Hegel); the exception is constitutive for the rule (Wittgenstein); the profane exists only in distinction to its opposite, the sacred (Durkheim); social order has to be contrasted to some liminal reference (Turner); action cannot be conceived of without reference to an autonomous source of agency (Parsons); constitutions are set by a sovereign (Schmitt); and so forth. All these arguments converge in supporting the idea that social reality is constituted by referring to something that transcends the sheer positivism of the ordinary world of everyday life.”

14 On the transfer of Victor Turner’s concept of liminality in ritual practices to a comparative study on societies, see Eisenstadt 315-38.

15 Giesen, *Triumph and Trauma* 6: “Both the hero as well as the victim are represented as ultimate reference points for the *human constitution* and both are located beyond the profane and mundane everyday activities of the regular social

reality. In this respect, the distinction between the subjects and objects is closely associated with the distinction between the sacred and the profane.”

16 Giesen, *Triumph and Trauma* 45: “Living heroes, in their attempt to rise above the ordinary, disregard mundane reasoning and disdain the voices of caution. Cruel and merciless, their deeds demand sacrifices also from their followers and can even entail the death of those who are not members of the charismatic community. The concentration of the sacred in the person of the triumphant hero comes at the price of desacralizing others. Thus heroes, in the moment of triumph, can, and frequently do, produce victims.”

17 Durkheim, *Elementary Forms* 213: “Under the influence of some great collective shock in certain historical periods, social interactions become much more frequent and active. Individuals seek one another out and come together more. The result is the general effervescence that is characteristic of revolutionary or creative epochs. The result of that heightened activity is a general stimulation of individual energies. People live differently and more intensely than in normal times. The changes are not simply of nuance and degree; man himself becomes something other than what he was. He is stirred by passions so intense that they can be satisfied only by violent and extreme acts: by acts of superhuman heroism or bloody barbarism. This explains the Crusades, for example, as well as so many sublime or savage moments in the French Revolution. We see the most mediocre or harmless bourgeois transformed by the general exaltation into a hero or an executioner.”

18 Wacquant 105: “Far from seeking to reduce Bourdieu’s sociology to a mere variation of the Durkheimian score, I would like to suggest that, while he leans firmly on them, Bourdieu imprints each of its pillar-principles with a particular twist which allows them, ultimately, to support a scientific edifice endowed with an original architecture, at once closely akin to and sharply different from that of the Durkheimian mother-house. This is another way of saying that Pierre Bourdieu is an inheritor who - contrary to Marcel Mauss for example - could and did, in the manner of an intellectual judoka, use the weight of the scientific capital accumulated by Durkheim the better to project himself beyond his august predecessor.”

19 Swartz 47: “Bourdieu extends Durkheim’s sacred/profane opposition to an analysis of contemporary cultural forms. In his sociology of education, Bourdieu sees French schooling as a ‘religious instance’ in the Durkheimian sense for it produces social and mental boundaries that are analogous to the sacred/profane distinction. The elite tracks and institutions in French education function analogously to religious orders, as they set apart as superior and separate a secular elite with quasi-religious properties of public legitimation or symbolic power. [...] More generally, Bourdieu believes that the religious sacred is but a particular case of the more general idea that social distinctions, whether applied to individuals, groups, or institutions, assume a taken-for-granted quality that elicits acceptance and respect.”

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