

**The Politics of Memory:**  
**A Conceptual Approach to the Study of Memory in Politics**

*Introduction*

Politicians frequently make references to the events of the past, or rather to myths created within memory, to justify their decisions and standpoints on a variety of issues, both foreign and domestic. They seek to gain political advantage by monumentalizing group-specific understandings of the past in order to legitimize their actions in the present to gain an advantage in the future. Though these debates are usually based on domestic cleavages or on national and sub-national interpretations of history, they frequently spill into international politics, as differing and seemingly irreconcilable collective understandings of events come into contact and clash politically.<sup>1</sup> In this way, politicians activate memory as a weapon both against domestic opponents and in international affairs.

Political problems associated with the events of World War II are globally significant and affect all of the countries that were involved in the war. In recent years Japan's Prime Ministers have been unable to avoid disputes over the past. Chinese leaders refused to meet with Junichiro Koizumi due to his visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, which honors Japan's wartime dead, including 12 convicted and two suspected Class A war criminals. His successor, Shinzo Abe, also sparked protests by denying that Japanese soldiers had forced so-called "comfort women" into sexual slavery during their wartime occupation of Manchuria.<sup>2</sup> Memories of the war and the ancient antagonism between

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<sup>1</sup> P. Finney, "On Memory, Identity and War," *Rethinking History* 6, no. 1 (Spring, 2002), 1-13.

<sup>2</sup> Jim Yardley, "China Urges Japan to Confront Wartime Sexual Slavery," *International Herald Tribune*, March 6, 2007, <http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/03/06/news/china.php> (accessed 6 March 2007).

Japan and China also sparked violent demonstrations in Beijing opposing Japan's bid for a seat on the United Nation's Security Council.<sup>3</sup> In Europe, the Estonian government's decision to move a statue of a Red Army soldier honoring the sacrifices of the Soviet Union in "liberating" the country from the Nazis caused a diplomatic confrontation with Russia, which included a cyber attack by Russian hackers on the web pages and computers of the government in Tallinn.<sup>4</sup>

The Second World War "retains its grip on memory and myth" very powerfully in Europe, where the war first broke out and the postwar settlement divided the continent into two opposing political camps.<sup>5</sup> During the Cold War, differing understandings of the past were papered over and limited to the domestic sphere, as the international politics was dominated almost by the struggles of a polarized Europe split between the communist East and the capitalist West. International Relations scholar Richard Ned Lebow observes, "The Cold War froze the possibility of bottom up politics in the East [... while] Western countries likewise took advantage of [it] to shelve uncomfortable discussions of the past."<sup>6</sup> After the fall of the Iron Curtain and the unification of Europe under the banner of representative democracy and capitalism, many unresolved issues concerning the meaning of the past, often associated with ethnicity, identity, and

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<sup>3</sup> See Richard Ned Lebow, "The Memory of Politics in Postwar Europe" in *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, eds. Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner and Claudio Fogu (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Gary Peach, "Eastern Europe Confronts its Communist Past: Russia Warns of Souring Relations if Statues Removed," *The Boston Globe*, 24 April, 2007, [http://www.boston.com/news/world/europe/articles/2007/04/24/eastern\\_europe\\_confronts\\_its\\_communist\\_past?mode=PF](http://www.boston.com/news/world/europe/articles/2007/04/24/eastern_europe_confronts_its_communist_past?mode=PF) (accessed 24 April 2007).

<sup>5</sup> David Reynolds, "World War II and Modern Meanings," *Diplomatic History* 25 (winter, 2001), 457–72, 469.

<sup>6</sup> Lebow, "The Memory of Politics in Postwar Europe," 25.

nationalism, rose up and became politically salient once more.<sup>7</sup> This is understandable, since in the new, open, post-Cold War atmosphere “narratives are formidable instruments of politics.”<sup>8</sup>

Examples of disputes over the meaning and significance of the Second World War abound in contemporary Europe, spanning East and West, as well as internal and external politics. These discussions frequently grab headlines in major newspapers and are an important part of political discourse. For instance, the nationalist government of Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski and his twin brother, President Lech Kaczynski, has sparked contentious internal debates in Poland regarding the communist era. It abandoned the post-1989 consensus to break peacefully with the past in favor of a hard line against ex-Communists, collaborators, secular liberals, businessmen and Russians, who they accused of engaging in a historical cover-up.<sup>9</sup> These domestic disagreements spilled into European politics and international affairs, as the PM argued that his country should receive more votes in the European Union’s parliament, since “If Poland had not had to live through the years of 1939-45, Poland would today be looking at the demographics of

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<sup>7</sup> Paradigmatic works of nationalism generally all maintain that a shared past is a necessary precondition for any form of nationality. See Carlton Joseph Huntley Hayes, *Essays on Nationalism* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926); Hans Kohn, *Prophets and Peoples; Studies in Nineteenth Century Nationalism* (New York: The Macmillan company, 1946); Karl Wolfgang Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication; an Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953). For a more recent treatment of these same issues, see Rogers M. Smith, *Stories of Peoplehood: The Politics and Morals of Political Membership* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Kotkin, "1991 and the Russian Revolution: Sources, Conceptual Categories, Analytical Frameworks," *The Journal of Modern History* 70, no. 2 (June, 1998), 384-425, 403.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Gati and Heather Conley, "Backsliding in Central Europe," *International Herald Tribune*, 3 April, 2007, <http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/04/03/opinion/edgati.php?page=2> (accessed 3 April 2007). This campaign also recently resulted in the resignation of newly appointed archbishop of Warsaw, Stanislaw Wielgus, moments before he was to sit on the archbishop’s throne at the cathedral for the first time, after he had admitted that he had worked with the Communist secret police. See, Craig S. Smith, "Warsaw Archbishop Resigns," *International Herald Tribune*, 7 January, 2007, <http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/01/07/news/poland.php> (accessed 7 January 2007).

a country of 66 million.”<sup>10</sup> Debates about the past affect international military and security affairs involving the US as well. In my specific area of interest, NATO was forced to suspend routine over-flights of Slovenia for a time due to intense diplomatic protest, since the Italian squadron assigned to the task had carried out bombing operations over the Slovenian capital of Ljubljana during World War II.<sup>11</sup>

The current obsession with the past seems to confirm Friedrich Nietzsche’s appraisal that “we are all suffering from a malignant historical fever....”<sup>12</sup> In a similar vein, Jacques Derrida notes that recent events signify “a *universal urgency* of memory.”<sup>13</sup> Though the use and abuse of history in European domestic and international politics has increased greatly since 1989, it is still not well understood. These debates are contentious and difficult to arbitrate. The meanings attributed to the past are a key component of identities, and as such are usually not an easily divisible and negotiable good.<sup>14</sup> Memory studies scholars Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone note, “to contest the past is also, of course, to pose questions about the present, and what the past means in the present. Our understanding of the past has strategic, political, and ethical consequences. Contests over the meaning of the past are also contests over the meaning of the present and over ways of taking the past forward.”<sup>15</sup> Though the content of the politics of memory is rooted in past events, the illocutionary meaning, the desired communicative

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<sup>10</sup> Stephen Mulvey, "Poles in War of Words Over Voting," *BBC News*, 21 June, 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6227834.stm> (accessed 19 November 2007).

<sup>11</sup> US Ambassador to Slovenia from 2004-07, Thomas B. Robertson, personal communication, 4 July 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The use and Abuse of History*, trans. Adrian Collins (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1985), 4.

<sup>13</sup> Emphasis in original, Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes (New York: Routledge, 2001), 28. For more on Derrida’s views on the international politics of memory and forgiveness, see, Michael Janover, "The Limits of Forgiveness and the Ends of Politics," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 26, no. 3 (2005), 221-235.

<sup>14</sup> Joan B. Wolf, *Harnessing the Holocaust: The Politics of Memory in France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 8; Lebow, *The Memory of Politics in Postwar Europe*, 1-39, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 1.

effect of this discourse, is clearly directed and motivated by contemporary politics.<sup>16</sup> As such, political memory is an important area of research for many disciplines, particularly political science.

To date, little work has been done to understand why certain events retain political salience or the process through which they become important in domestic and inter-state politics. Within politics, memory exerts effects both from the bottom up, as interpretations of the past affect the identities and understandings of political elites, and the top down, as public figures place certain events into the national consciousness while ignoring others. The relationship between the domestic and international effects of memory is also murky, as domestic politics can bring past events into the international sphere, while the international atmosphere provides the conditions for past events to become salient at others.<sup>17</sup>

Though the paradigm of memory is a growing area of research in many disciplines, it remains a slippery concept that cannot easily be bounded.<sup>18</sup> The increasing trend towards the study of memory has even spawned a literature of “anti-memory,” which attacks these new approaches, particularly in the most developed area of Holocaust memory studies.<sup>19</sup>

German professor and cultural memory scholar Andreas Huyssen remarks, “[M]emory is one of those elusive topics we all think we have a handle on. But as soon as we try to

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<sup>16</sup> For more on the illocutionary meaning of statements, see J. L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words*, Vol. 1955 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962); John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

<sup>17</sup> For a good discussion of the connection of the domestic and international spheres within the politics of memory, see Lebow, “The Memory of Politics in Postwar Europe,” 24-6.

<sup>18</sup> See footnote 1, Claudio Fogu and Wulf Kansteiner, “The Politics of Memory and the Poetics of History” in *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 304-5.

<sup>19</sup> For examples of this trend of meta-criticism, see, Omer Bartov, *Mirrors of Destruction: War, Genocide, and Modern Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler: How History is Bought, Packaged, and Sold* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Norman G. Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflection on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (New York: Verso, 2000).

define it, it starts slipping and sliding, eluding attempts to grasp it either culturally, sociologically, or scientifically.”<sup>20</sup> One of the greatest problems faced by scholars interested in “memory studies” – in so far as such a unified research program even exists, given the disciplinary fragmentation of the study of memory – is that there is little agreement about what memory is and how it should be approached. In this paper, I address this problem and lay the foundations for a broader research agenda by developing a concept of political memory that is rigorous and consistent.

My definition of political memory does not examine all events that have had an impact on politics in the past or may have in the future. Trying to address every notion of memory in all of its possible interactions with political factors is an impossible task. I bound my definition of political memory by placing my analytic focus on to the level of political elites, parties and governmental institutions. I only consider disputes and narratives as “data points” if they are explicitly addressed by political actors. This limits the cases that are “fair game” and prevents the politics of memory from becoming a grab bag of obscure factors, biased by underspecified selection and measurement criteria.

I am sympathetic to cultural memory studies, and I agree with comparative literature professor Joan Roman Resina that, “in these narratives the ‘poetic’ confronts the political.”<sup>21</sup> I draw on social and cultural approaches liberally in my theory building, as these areas have been engaged with memory studies much longer than political science. However, though I consider literary and aesthetic factors as evidence of political memory as well, I argue that it is only appropriate to do so if politicians claim to have

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<sup>20</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>21</sup> Joan Ramon Resina, *Disremembering the Dictatorship: The Politics of Memory in the Spanish Transition to Democracy*, Vol. 8 (Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 2000), 9.

been influenced by them or they enter into political discourse in parliament, press releases, quotes given to newspapers, internal documents, etc.

I proceed in three basic steps. First, I examine the broader research in memory studies to see how scholars across disciplines have used this concept and to situate the politics of memory within the literature. I then narrow my focus and look at how memory has been studied in the context of politics and how the concept political memory has been defined in past work. With this foundation in place, I propose a definition of political memory that can be used consistently by scholars interested in the effect of past events on contemporary politics, focusing particularly on the scope of the concept and appropriate measurement criteria. I set out a broader research program in the politics of memory, which builds on the conceptual framework developed in this paper. Though my work in this paper is primarily theoretical and conceptual, I draw on some examples from my empirical research, which examines the effects of postwar political memory within Italy and Slovenia, as well as in their relations with each other.

### *The State of the Study of Memory*

The study of memory has become very popular in recent years, as political and socially significant incidents have made it relevant to scholars both as concerned citizens who take part in these crises, and as intellectuals responding to postmodern critics of representation.<sup>22</sup> This interest in memory builds on the work of Maurice Halbwachs, a French Sociologist and student of Emile Durkheim from the interwar period.<sup>23</sup> Unlike

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<sup>22</sup> See Kerwin Lee Klein, "On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse," *Representations*, no. 69 (Winter, 2000), 127-55.

<sup>23</sup> For more on Halbwachs, see the posthumously published work, Maurice Halbwachs and Lewis A. Coser, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). For more on this intellectual

Henri Bergson and Sigmund Freud, Halbwachs argued that collective memory is socially constructed, and that “the idea of an individual memory absolutely separate from social memory, is an abstraction almost devoid of meaning.”<sup>24</sup> This assumption has since been backed up by evidence from a variety of fields and is usually taken for granted in contemporary memory studies.<sup>25</sup>

Despite these early foundations, there was little interest in Halbwachs and his work until after he died at Auschwitz in 1944, and it was not until late in the twentieth century that memory became an important topic of interest in European society and among academics.<sup>26</sup> The ground for this interest was prepared by the events of May 1968, the rise of anti-colonial struggles, and “the resurfacing of suppressed national concerns among subjugated European peoples on both sides of the Iron Curtain.”<sup>27</sup> This change was also driven by a ground swell of interest in family trees, autobiographies and museums, as well as the publication of Pierre Nora’s *Lieux de mémoire* and other socially and culturally significant works such as Yosef Yerushalmi’s *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, which identified memory as a more primitive and even sacred form of

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progression, see Lebow, “The Memory of Politics in Postwar Europe,” 8. For a good summary of the work on collective memory, see Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, “Social Memory Studies: From ‘Collective Memory’ to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998), 105-140.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 37.

<sup>25</sup> For more information on this consensus, see J. M. Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, Vol. 5 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 10-9; Daniel L. Schacter, Joseph T. Coyle and Harvard Center for the Study of Mind, Brain, and Behavior, *Memory Distortion: How Minds, Brains, and Societies Reconstruct the Past* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995). Some authors have criticized this assumption despite the evidence presented, arguing that it encourages unconscious selection biases and socially conditioned interpretations. See, A. Megill, “History, Memory, Identity,” *History of the Human Sciences* 11, no. 3 (Aug, 1998), 37-62; David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>26</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, “Shared Memories, Private Recollections,” 9, no. 1-2 (1997), 353-363, 353.

<sup>27</sup> Resina, *Disremembering the Dictatorship: The Politics of Memory in the Spanish Transition to Democracy*, 1.

remembrance different from the modern historical consciousness.<sup>28</sup> This movement signaled a turn towards memory as a crucial paradigm for understanding the world. However, as German Holocaust, Judaic studies and media historian Wulf Kansteiner observes, “though memory has obviously become a central concept in the humanities and the social sciences, it remains unclear to what extent this convergence reflects actual common intellectual and methodological interests.”<sup>29</sup>

While psychologists and neuroscientists have made progress in understanding how memory is encoded in the brain, the difficulties surrounding the study of memory as a social issue abound.<sup>30</sup> Memory subsumes many larger categories, as it is a foundation both of our personal identities and our public allegiances and affiliations. Thus, it comes to be connected with ethnicity, nationalism, linguistic groups, minorities and other social phenomena, which build on common understandings of the self or Ego over and against the other or Alter. Social constructivist and international relations scholar Alexander Wendt draws out the similarities in the role played by memory in individuals and collectives. He notes, “People are distinct entities in virtue of biology, but without consciousness and memory – a sense of ‘I’ – they are not agents, maybe even not human. This is still more true of states, which do not even have ‘bodies’ if their members have no

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<sup>28</sup> Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux De Mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984); Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982). For more on the significance of this text, see Klein, “On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse,” 127-8.

<sup>29</sup> Wulf Kansteiner, *In Pursuit of German Memory: History, Television, and Politics After Auschwitz*, 1st ed. (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2006), 11. See also citations therein.

<sup>30</sup> For a good summary of the psychological advances in the study of memory, see Daniel L. Schacter, *The Seven Sins of Memory: How the Mind Forgets and Remembers* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001); Daniel L. Schacter, *Searching for Memory: The Brain, the Mind, and the Past*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: BasicBooks, 1996).

joint narrative of themselves....”<sup>31</sup> This observation about states can be fruitfully expanded to encompass any self-conscious group of individuals.<sup>32</sup>

The proliferation of memory studies indicates the potential that many scholars see in memory as a way of overcoming the difficulties of narrative accounts and dealing with the crisis of historicism. Memory has only recently come to be seen as distinct from history, and not all historians agree about the utility of this distinction.<sup>33</sup> However, despite these internal disagreements, the difference between memory and history is generally accepted, and is even recognized outside of academic historiographical debates. For example, in the book *Los funerals de la Mamá Grande*, Columbian novelist Gabriel García Márquez declares that he must tell his story of remembrance “before the historians have time to arrive.”<sup>34</sup>

Though memory is conceptually and functionally distinct from history, the line between the two is slippery. Italian cultural historian Claudio Fogu and coauthor Kansteiner note, “[Memory] is not history, least of all in the academic sense, but it is sometimes made from similar material.”<sup>35</sup> Unlike history, collective memory is not about objective facts, but how events of the past are understood.<sup>36</sup> As such, it is always

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<sup>31</sup> Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 225.

<sup>32</sup> As Wendt’s colleague, Ted Hopf notes, “[T]he international relations literature investigates the Self and Other as if the only Other for a state were another state. But there is no a priori theoretical or, indeed, empirical reason to believe so,” Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities & Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 9.

<sup>33</sup> For instance, Peter Burke argues, “neither memories nor histories seem objective any longer. In both cases we are learning to take account of conscious or unconscious selection, interpretation and distortion. In both cases this selection, interpretation and distortion is socially conditioned.” In Thomas Butler, *Memory: History, Culture, and the Mind*, Vol. 1988 (Oxford, UK ; New York, NY, USA: B. Blackwell, 1989), 98.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Joanne Rappaport, *The Politics of Memory: Native Historical Interpretation in the Colombian Andes* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1.

<sup>35</sup> Fogu and Kansteiner, “The Politics of Memory and the Poetics of History,” 285.

<sup>36</sup> Anthropologist Pamela Ballinger notes that academics with interests in this area “study the operation of memory, rather than produce an ‘objective’ history of events....” Pamela Ballinger, *History in Exile: Memory and Identity at the Borders of the Balkans* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 5. See

mediated through complex mechanisms of conscious manipulation by elites and unconscious absorption by members of society, including the very elites who sought to manipulate remembrance in the first place. It cannot be observed directly and quantified meaningfully, but can only be examined in ways that are once or more removed, through its effects rather than its characteristics. Historian John Dower remarks that memory studies within the humanities and social sciences thus becomes the latest approach to “that most elusive of phenomena, ‘popular consciousness.’”<sup>37</sup>

As if the term were not difficult and vague enough in and of itself, the study of memory has also been fragmented to a great degree. These divisions are reflected in the many adjectives that have been attached to memory in various contexts. A perusal of recent work on memory or an examination of its index reveals a plethora of approaches, divided based on various factors, such as levels of analysis (individual or personal, collective, local, regional, institutional, national, global), origin (official, oral, commercial), status (contested, consensual, shared, selective) and substance (historical, cultural, social, political), to name just a few.<sup>38</sup> This pluralism of prefixes is a result of the appropriation of memory by different disciplines, including history, literature, area studies, sociology, political science, anthropology psychology and neuroscience. Each of these fields treats and approaches memory in different ways, based on its analytic tools and traditions. Despite its growing popularity, the concept is difficult to define, as terminology, methods and interests differ.

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also James L. Gibson, *Overcoming Apartheid: Can Truth Reconcile a Divided Nation?* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004), 70-1.

<sup>37</sup> John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company/The New Press, 1999), 25.

<sup>38</sup> For example, see Hodgkin and Radstone, *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*; Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, 177.

These methodological difficulties and the fragmentation of the study of memory raise important questions about the utility of memory as a paradigm for understanding the effect of the past on the present. Some, such as American historian Martin Duberman are even skeptical of the attempt to examine the influence of the past on the present, since, “the past will always remain ‘uncompleted’: we will never grasp its meaning whole, never understand its influence over our lives to the extent we might like, nor be able to free ourselves from that influence to the degree many might wish.”<sup>39</sup> Some have even abandoned the project altogether, in favor of the older more traditional concept of “myth.”<sup>40</sup>

However, despite these many difficulties, memory studies still has great potential and is an important avenue for further research in the future. It is still “an ingenious intellectual hybrid that integrates seemingly contradictory epistemologies from classical hermeneutics to postmodern theory....”<sup>41</sup> However, in order to live up to its possibilities, it will have to overcome some of the difficulties that have plagued it until now. Up to this point, the term memory has been used as a catch all, to describe new movements in academia, broadly reacting to the rise of postmodernism and the linguistic turn. Most importantly, Kansteiner argues that students of memory have to, “focus more aggressively on identifying sources and developing methods that allow us to describe with more precision how [memories] emerge....”<sup>42</sup> Additionally, scholars must identify the interactions by which memory is mediated through intellectual and cultural

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<sup>39</sup> Martin B. Duberman, *The Uncompleted Past* (New York: Random House, 1969), xii.

<sup>40</sup> For example, see, Noa Gedi and Yigal Elam, "Collective Memory - what is it?" *History and Memory* 8, no. 1 (1996), 30-50.

<sup>41</sup> Fogu and Kansteiner, “The Politics of Memory and the Poetics of History,” 293.

<sup>42</sup> Kansteiner, *In Pursuit of German Memory: History, Television, and Politics After Auschwitz*, 11. Kansteiner sees the future of memory studies in the adoption of tools used to analyze media use, consumption and reception, p. 12.

background or frames, to elites who assume, “forget” and manipulate traditions about the past, and finally to “memory consumers,” who adopt, reject or ignore the traditions that appear in discourse.<sup>43</sup> The use of clear and replicable selection criteria for which phenomena and processes are included under the rubric of memory and which are to be left out is crucial.

In this paper, I begin to develop the tools necessary to overcome at some of the most important problems of the study of memory, at least within political science. Though I believe strongly in interdisciplinary research, especially in fields that deal with broad social factors such as memory, this kind of research can only be fruitful if each discipline has a clear conception of the object of study before it begins to adjust and loosen understandings to make cooperative work possible. In the next section, I therefore examine the way the terms “politics of memory” and “political memory” have been used in the past. Against that background, I then develop my own understanding of political memory to overcome past conceptual difficulties in future research.

### *The Politics of Memory: An Overview*

The rise of memory studies since the late 1970s and early 1980s has resulted in a proliferation of works examining political memory or the politics of memory. Interest in the intersection of memories and politics is waxing and is one of the areas of memory studies drawing the most interest. However, despite this seeming convergence, these studies are not really part of a common research program, as they vary considerably in how they define the interaction between memory and politics and how they go about interpreting and explaining it.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 12.

The phrase “politics of memory” is often used as a catch phrase in the titles of recent scholarly works, even though it is often not a central concept or paradigm in the text.<sup>44</sup> This bandwagoning effect not only indicates the growing interest in this area, but also its lack of definition and unity. As a result, texts which at first glance appear to be about political memory actually revolve around concepts such as public discourse, cultural trauma, historical consciousness, narratives, and contested pasts, to name a few of the most prominent.<sup>45</sup>

For example, German public historian Harold Marcuse claims to be dealing with political memory in his paper, “Politics of Memory: Nazi Crimes and Identity in West Germany, 1945-1990.” However, he then replaces it with the idea of, “*Public* memory...[denoting] an image of the past which dominates the public sphere, whether by its use in the mass and print media, or in representative official commemorative ceremonies.”<sup>46</sup> Similarly, George Egerton equates the politics of memory with political memoir, “where history and politics are narrated in personalized form.”<sup>47</sup> The new wave of democratization has also spawned a whole literature of political memory addressing

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<sup>44</sup> For an example of this, see, Rappaport, *The Politics of Memory: Native Historical Interpretation in the Colombian Andes*. Though her study of the historical consciousness and memory of the Páez and the people of Tierradentro is very interesting, the title is somewhat misleading, as she does not use the concept of political memory at all. For an example from the field of German Studies, see Adrian Del Caro and Janet Ward, *German Studies in the Post-Holocaust Age: The Politics of Memory, Identity, and Ethnicity* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2000). In some cases, the word memory does not even appear in the index of a book, even though the phrase is used in the title. See Julie Des Jardins, *Women and the Historical Enterprise in America: Gender, Race, and the Politics of Memory, 1880-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

<sup>45</sup> For examples of this, see, Wolf, *Harnessing the Holocaust: The Politics of Memory in France*; Keith Brown, *Macedonia's Child-Grandfathers: The Transnational Politics of Memory, Exile, and Return, 1948-1998*, Vol. 38 (Seattle, WA: Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, University of Washington, 2003); Michael J. Lazzara, *Chile in Transition: The Poetics and Politics of Memory* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006); Hodgkin and Radstone, *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*; Resina, *Disremembering the Dictatorship: The Politics of Memory in the Spanish Transition to Democracy*.

<sup>46</sup> Emphasis in original, Harold Marcuse, *Politics of Memory: Nazi Crimes and Identity in West Germany, 1945-1990* (Cambridge, MA: Center for European Studies, 1993), 1.

<sup>47</sup> George W. Egerton, *Political Memoir: Essays on the Politics of Memory* (London, England: F. Cass, 1994), xi.

issues of transitional justice, which examine the effectiveness of institutions such as truth commissions, trials, amnesties and apologies as a way of dealing with authoritarian legacies of repression and violence.<sup>48</sup>

Though all of these studies are interesting in their own right and deal with some common themes and motifs, they are not part of a unified program of study, since they all explore different phenomena with different tools under different rubrics. To a certain extent this is understandable. As Lebow points out, “[T]he politics of memory, democratization, relations with neighbors and European integration are all integrally connected and best analyzed as components of a larger interactive system.”<sup>49</sup>

While this is true, political memory still requires greater conceptual definition, so that the term can be used consistently and with clarity. The current confusion makes direct comparison of different works in the politics of memory and their findings difficult, since it requires conceptual translation and methodological comparisons and evaluations, which are often very difficult. In many ways, these different studies are not speaking the same language and are not in dialogue with each other. To make matters worse, while some authors prominently display the phrase “the politics of memory” even though they do not actually make use of it conceptually, other works that deal extensively with the intersection of memory and politics do not use the phrase at all.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> For example, see Alexandra Barahona de Brito and others, *The Politics of Memory and Democratization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Ifi Amadiume and Abdullahi Ahmad Naim, *The Politics of Memory: Truth, Healing, and Social Justice* (New York: Zed Books, 2000). Also, see international relations scholar Jennifer Lind’s work on the effectiveness of apologies in interstate relations, “Apologies in International Politics” (Paper presented at the Yale University International Relations Workshop, March 27, 2007), [http://www.yale.edu/polisci/info/Workshops/International\\_Relations\\_2007.htm](http://www.yale.edu/polisci/info/Workshops/International_Relations_2007.htm) (accessed 8 November 2007)..

<sup>49</sup> Lebow, “The Memory of Politics in Postwar Europe,” 5.

<sup>50</sup> A good example of this is, Ballinger, *History in Exile: Memory and Identity at the Borders of the Balkans*.

Often, political memory is defined in such a broad sense that it can encompass almost any event or phenomenon within society. Political scientist Herbert Hirsch argues, “[T]he control of memory is a type of political power. Persons in a position to manipulate memory, and with it the valued symbols of a society or group, hold, by my definition, political power.”<sup>51</sup> I find this definition to be too broad and not very helpful, as it can encompass too many factors and does not meaningfully delimit the boundaries of the politics of memory. Though control of memory is clearly a form of power, it is not necessarily used in political contexts. Literary and cultural figures often have the ability to influence memory, even though they have no political designs. Sometimes their narratives are taken up by political actors and enter the political realm; often they lie dormant and are primarily significant in cultural areas only. A narrower definition, which gives more guidance about what kinds of evidence can be used to support arguments about the influence of political memory is needed.<sup>52</sup>

Perhaps the best definition and application of the concept of political memory is found in *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe* (2006), edited by Lebow, Kansteiner and Fogu.<sup>53</sup> The book includes seven country case studies of the operation of memory since 1945, bookended by a conceptual introduction, which sets the stage for the comparative analysis, and a conclusion, which draws out findings common to all the cases, and their implication for memory studies as a whole. The editors of this volume had to deal with many of the problems discussed above, as the country specialists and

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<sup>51</sup> Herbert Hirsch, *Genocide and the Politics of Memory: Studying Death to Preserve Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 23.

<sup>52</sup> Though I draw on Hirsch’s study in my own research, it is also problematic, as he shifts his focus from political memory to the politics of genocide in the body of the text. See *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>53</sup> Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner and Claudio Fogu, *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

editors were drawn from diverse disciplinary backgrounds. In order to provide unity and give the book some cohesion despite the different pens and approaches at work, the study is grounded in a series of research questions that all of the authors address, based on the assumptions that postwar elites attempted to frame the Second World War and their state's role in it in ways, "that were self-justifying and supportive of their domestic- and foreign-policy goals."<sup>54</sup>

With this comparative framework in place, the editors and contributors agreed on a common definition of memory, which deals simultaneously both with what individuals think they remember about the past, and with efforts by various actors to affect interpretations of the wartime past.<sup>55</sup> They place their common analytic focus on the level of what they refer to as institutional memory. This label is somewhat misleading, since it implies that institutions think and remember. Clearly, they do not. People do. However, individuals and groups think and remember in certain contexts, which affect images they conjure up in memory.<sup>56</sup> This is especially true of remembrance in the political arena. The concept of institutional memory seeks to capture the Gramscian assumption that discourses shape the way people think and the role that leaders play in these debates. Thus, "*Institutional memory* describes efforts by political elites, their supporters, and their opponents to construct meaning of the past and propagate them more widely or impose them on other members of society."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Lebow, "The Memory of Politics in Postwar Europe," 6.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>56</sup> For more on the importance of context and triggers in the retrieval process, see Schacter, *Searching for Memory: The Brain, the Mind, and the Past*; Schacter, *The Seven Sins of Memory: How the Mind Forgets and Remembers*.

<sup>57</sup> Emphasis in original, Lebow, "The Memory of Politics in Postwar Europe," 13.

Unlike many other works, this definition of political memory is at once helpful and well defined. While I follow the path set by *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe* in many respects, there are parts of its conceptual framework that I find unsatisfactory and which I adjust in my own definition of political memory. Though the concentration on institutional memory is not absolute and is understandable in light of the book's comparative structure, I find this narrow focus too limiting. A definition of political memory that will open a research program cannot be limited to the institutional plane, but should encompass work at all levels of analysis within one framework or understanding of what political memory is. It should allow for a variety of research designs where the various levels of analyses to interact and address similar questions about the same subject matter, especially given the permeability of the thresholds between levels.<sup>58</sup> Lebow recognizes this need and notes, "Scholars must ultimately find more systematic ways of integrating studies of memory across levels of analysis and relating them to identities at these same levels."<sup>59</sup>

Additionally, the selection criteria for sources and the kinds of evidence that can be mustered under the concept of memory are somewhat vague. In the introduction, Lebow notes that agents of political memory "act in a political and cultural setting where other influences, many of them unpredictable or unforeseen, help shape the consequences of their behavior and the ways in which debates evolve."<sup>60</sup> Clearly, politics pervades many – one could even argue all – areas of society, and as such, influences on political

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<sup>58</sup> For more, see, Fogu and Kansteiner, "The Politics of Memory and the Poetics of History," 289.

<sup>59</sup> Lebow, "The Memory of Politics in Postwar Europe," 28.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 26

remembrance can come from many different quarters.<sup>61</sup> However, if every possible influence on politics, politicians and the general public is included, then the concept of political memory becomes meaningless, just as it does for Hirsch. If limits are set in an *ad hoc* manner or on a case-to-case basis, then it becomes inconsistent and subject to various biases common in social science, such as that of selection. Ideally, a definition of political memory should set clear boundaries, leaving out possible factors whose influence is difficult to prove. A good conceptualization of the politics of memory cannot and should not include everything; certain factors must remain exogenous *ex ante* if it is to have any analytic rigor.

Another disappointing aspect of *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, at least from the perspective of a social scientist, is the relatively weak patterns and generalizations that emerge in the conclusion. Historians Fogu and Kansteiner admit that this is a difficulty, especially for them as “historians, whose suspicion of generalizing statements has been reinforced by their scholarly focus on a subject... which is highly contested both theoretically and historiographically.”<sup>62</sup>

Despite this disciplinary reluctance, Fogu and Kansteiner do provide some important insights and uncover some interesting patterns. For instance, they identify the period from 1960-1980 as crucial in shaping memory debates across all of Europe, they show that generational dynamics have an important impact, and they find that the changes brought on by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 were actually set in motion in the mid-1980s.<sup>63</sup> However, they also retain the historian’s sense of contingency and belief

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<sup>61</sup> For more on this, see Resina, *Disremembering the Dictatorship: The Politics of Memory in the Spanish Transition to Democracy*, 9.

<sup>62</sup> Fogu and Kansteiner, “The Politics of Memory and the Poetics of History,” 284.

<sup>63</sup> For more, see the “Comparative Analysis” section of the conclusion, *Ibid.*, 293-8.

in the specificity of cases, or what they refer to as “the poetics of history.” They highlight, “the *dominant* relevance of the national – as opposed to the international or role-dependent – framing of politics of memory.”<sup>64</sup>

Social scientists must always be wary of trying to force cases into general boxes they do fit in and imposing universal causal mechanisms on processes they do not accurately describe. An appreciation for the importance of contingency, especially at high levels of analysis and aggregation is unfortunately also often lacking. However, a well designed, well researched, well bounded and well defined study should reveal general patterns, which can at least be translated into informed speculation on preliminary mechanisms. The goal of the narrower conceptual definition of political memory I advance in the next section is to achieve greater rigor and go beyond the findings of other works such as *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe* to identify more general patterns and discover some general mechanisms driving political remembrance.

### *Defining and Measuring Political Memory*

Clear definition of concepts is one of the most important initial tasks in any academic project. Though specialized discourses and terms exist in every discipline, scholars frequently make use of concepts that exist in colloquial language as well. There are many valid reasons for this, including clarity of writing and broad accessibility of content to individuals interested in the area of research, regardless of disciplinary boundaries. However, terms in natural language are often very loosely defined and contested. This is especially true when it comes to politics, since expressions and phrases are “used by analysts and observers in multiple, often contradictory, ways,” and where,

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 294.

“The very use of the term is part of the conflict itself.”<sup>65</sup> This is especially true of political memory, as half the political battle is about having an event and a specific interpretation of it recognized as history, rather than mere memory or even myth.

The task of a good definition is to identify the analytical limits of crucial concepts, so that they may be studied consistently. Though this conceptual narrowing inevitably involves leaving out factors that may actually be important, it is necessary to make problems amenable to study in the first place. It both helps to set the boundary conditions on the project as a whole, and in doing so, defines the limits of what kind of sources will be accepted as valid evidence for the phenomenon under study. This process can be thought of using the metaphor of a judicial court, where the criteria for valid evidence must always precede substantive arguments about the case itself.<sup>66</sup> There must always be good reasons for setting these limits in a certain way and they must always be defended by arguments, though of course there is inevitably some slippage at the limits of any definition.<sup>67</sup>

As with any other concept, it is impossible to address every notion of memory in all of its possible interactions with political factors. Invariably, lines must be drawn. Though this is unfortunate on one hand, tight conceptual definitions are also enabling, as they allow for the analysis to proceed in greater depth. I am interested in *political* memory, which I define as the use of contested interpretations of the past by political actors. I

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<sup>65</sup> Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 16, 17.

<sup>66</sup> This point and the court metaphor are made by, Friedrich V. Kratochwil, "Evidence, Inference, and Truth as Problems of Theory Building in the Social Sciences" in *Theory and Evidence in Comparative Politics and International Relations*, eds. Richard Ned Lebow and Mark Irving Lichback (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 42-3.

<sup>67</sup> This point is made very powerfully by Derrida with his concept of deconstruction. For example, see Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

argue that political memory only deals with different views of the past as they are expressed by politicians, parties, governmental institutions and other non-governmental yet clearly political actors in indisputably political contexts. This definition bounds the kind of evidence that can legitimately be mustered in support of arguments within the politics of memory to those clearly belonging to political discourse, as expressed in parliamentary debates, press releases, quotes given to newspapers, internal documents, memoirs, etc. It limits the cases that are “fair game” and prevents the politics of memory from becoming a grab bag of obscure factors, biased by underspecified selection criteria.

Of course, the exact boundaries between clearly political factors and social/cultural factors writ large are blurry at the edges. The strictly political definition of political memory I espouse does not exclude all literary and aesthetic factors *ex ante*. However, it does require that they enter explicitly into political discourse before becoming valid evidence. Though I am aware that certain factors from the broader social context of a society may exercise an influence on politics and politicians at an unspoken, sub-conscious or even pre-conscious level, these connections are too speculative to be used as evidence. If a certain piece of literature or other socio-cultural artifact is of any significant importance to the memory discourse of a political group, it is safe to assume that it will enter this discourse explicitly, where its influence can clearly be seen and substantiated without the need for overly psychoanalytic conjecture.

A good example of a cultural factor I consider to be part of the politics of memory is the two-part film *Cuore nel pozzo* (Heart in the Well), which appeared on the national Italian television network RAI in February of 2005.<sup>68</sup> The film portrays the end of World

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<sup>68</sup> Alberto Negrin, *Il Cuore Nel Pozzo*, Television Film (Rome, Italy: RAI, 2005).

War II along the Italo-Slovenian border, when the Yugoslavian partisans pushed the Italian army out of Slovenia, and the ethnically Slovenian lands Italy received as a result of the Treaty of London (1915). In the process, the partisans retaliated against the Italians for oppressing the Slovenian population, its language and its culture through the fascist interwar period and its wartime occupation. In the process, they killed a number of ethnic Italians who had lived in Istria for generations by throwing them into fissures or holes, known locally as *foibe* in Italian (*fojbe* in Croatian and Slovenian).<sup>69</sup> The film highlights the dramatic murders in the *foibe* (the “wells”) to portray the Slavs as merciless killers, exaggerating the death toll according to historians on both sides.<sup>70</sup>

This film intersects with politics in a number of respects.<sup>71</sup> Not only was it produced by and broadcast on the Italian state television network, whose board was appointed by the government of then Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, a subtitled version also appeared on Slovenian state television within a week. In Slovenia, this showing was followed with two weeks worth of commentaries, roundtable discussions, and documentaries that claimed to portray only the “historical facts.”<sup>72</sup> The right-wing

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<sup>69</sup> For a brief summary of the importance of the *foibe* for Italian nationalists and the right wing parties, see Claudio Fogu, "Italiani Brava Gente: The Legacy of Fascist Historical Culture on Italian Politics of Memory" in *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, eds. Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner and Claudio Fogu (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 166. For a longer discussion, see Arrigo Petacco, *A Tragedy Revealed: The Story of the Italian Population of Istria, Dalmatia, and Venezia Giulia, 1943-1956* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

<sup>70</sup> Aleš Doktorič, "Čustvena Podkrepitev Apriornega Védenja," *Delo*, sreda, 9. februarja, 2005. See also the numbers published by the Slovene-Italian Historical and Cultural Commission, *Slovene-Italian Relations 1880-1956: Report of the Slovene-Italian Historical and Cultural Commission, Koper-Capodistria, July 25th, 2000* (Trst-Trieste: Krožek PREMİK, with permission of Nova Revija,[2004]), <http://www.kozina.com/premik/poreng.pdf> (accessed 4 January 2007).

<sup>71</sup> The film was deeply political, despite the protests of the director, Alberto Negrin. See the interview with him, Patricija Maličev, "Srce v Vodnjaku Ni Film o Fojbah," *Delo*, sec. Sobotna priloga, 22. januarja, 2005.

<sup>72</sup> Boris Šuligoj, "S Fojbami so Začeli Fašisti," *Delo*, ponedeljek, 14. februarja, 2005; Tone Hočevar, "Film, Ki Je Italijo Zavzel v Naskoku," *Delo*, sreda, 9. februarja, 2005; Raoul Pupo, "Fojbe - Najprej Leta Molka Potem Pa Spektakel," *Delo*, ponedeljek, 14. februarja, 2005.

Slovenian government elected a year before the film came out tried to downplay the problem, calling it “an Italian internal matter,” “that does not affect relations between Slovenia and Italy.”<sup>73</sup> However, this statement was clearly false, given the reactions of many Italian nationalists and neo-fascists to the screening, especially in the border area around Trieste.<sup>74</sup> The public upheavals on both sides of the border made it hard to ignore the film, as well as the underlying problems of historical memory that it raised. Unlike the myriad of fictional books and obscure accounts of the war that have appeared within the communities on the Italo-Slovenian border since World War II, this film is clearly a part of the politics of memory at the border of the Balkans, as it entered into Slovenian and Italian domestic politics, as well as their relations with each other.

My definition of the politics of memory aims to limit the types of factors that may be mustered as evidence in studies of political memory. It does not and should not limit the sources and inspirations for the development of theory and the positing of possible mechanism for the transmission or activation of political memory. On the contrary, I believe that on social and cultural approaches to memory are valuable starting points and sources of insight in theory building, as scholarship within these areas has been engaged with memory studies much longer and at a deeper level than political science. Though a clear definition of what constitutes the politics of memory does allow political memory to develop its own sphere as a separate branch in the study of memory, it does not separate

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<sup>73</sup> Lojze Kante, "Pieteta Ali Politika?" *Delo*, sreda, 9. februarja, 2005; Saša Vidmajer, "Smrt Fašizma," *Delo*, sec. Sobotna priloga, 29. januarja, 2005.

<sup>74</sup> For more on the mobilizing power of these events in certain segments of Italian society, see, Petacco, *A Tragedy Revealed: The Story of the Italian Population of Istria, Dalmatia, and Venezia Giulia, 1943-1956*, 155.

that branch from the broader field or cut it off from the “tree” of memory studies as a whole.

Though my purely political bounding of the definition of political memory may seem narrow at first, it still allows for the development of a broad field, which approaches memory from a variety of different perspectives and viewpoints, while remaining part of the same broader research program. It allows the politics of memory to be studied both as a process and a phenomenon at all levels of analysis, from the individual all the way up to its effects on international politics and interstate relations. Despite its strictly political limits, it still leaves many different “texts” or data sources open to the researcher.

There is a lot of interesting research in political memory that can be done at the individual level of analysis. In many ways, this completely disaggregated sphere is the most logical place to start, since the individual is the building block for research done at any higher level of analysis.<sup>75</sup> Studies focusing on individual political actors and their changing views of the past over time using memoirs, internal documents and bibliographic accounts would be invaluable in showing exactly how memory is transmitted to and used by politicians, as well as how it can change over time. Though some preliminary work has been done in this area by examining how political memory has shaped important actors over time, there has been little comprehensive study in this area, and few useful mechanisms have been identified to date.

The dynamics of political memory at the sub-national level are also crucial, since group movements within society are the foundation for political movements at the

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<sup>75</sup> For a good discussion and a convincing argument for focusing on the individual level of analysis, see Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), 14-9.

national level, as they are often incorporated into the platforms of political parties.

Though some work has been done on how individual memories are aggregated into collective accounts of the past, these processes are still not well understood and there is still much more that needs to be done.<sup>76</sup> Additionally, how and why political parties take up certain accounts of the past over others and the role these narratives play in political decision-making requires further study.

Though this kind of comparative research into the views of the past endorsed by different political organizations within one state would confirm the presence of left-right cleavages, it would be interesting in a number of different ways. cursory examination of when and how historical events are broached in politics shows that these debates tend to cluster around elections and important dates, memorialized by certain groups.<sup>77</sup> In addition to investigating the origins of these narratives of the past and how they came to be accepted by certain parties, it would also be interesting to see how effective the use of group-specific accounts of events within political memory are at mobilizing voters. The similarities in accounts accepted by similar groups on an interstate comparative level are also an important area that needs to be examined, especially in light of the recent debates

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<sup>76</sup> For example, see, Barbara A. Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering* (Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press, 2003); Connerton, *How Societies Remember*.

<sup>77</sup> This is especially true in Slovenia, where debates about the past figure prominently in electoral debates. See Saša Vidmajer, "Slovenija Je Orodje Italije," *Delo*, sec. Sobotna priloga, 26. februarja, 2005. In a parliamentary debate on the legacy of the victims of wartime and postwar executions, professor of contemporary historian and prominent public intellectual Božo Repe testified, "Taken as a whole, the period of the Second World War and the events immediately following it remains an important political topic, which divides and separates people and is abused by political parties to gain political points. Despite the predictions of political analysts, the past was one of the central pre-election topics of all the democratic multiparty elections in Slovenia (1990, 1992, 1996 and 2000)" (translation mine). Božo Repe, "Povojna Represija v Nacionalni Identiteti in Kolektivnem Spominu Slovencev" in *Zbornik: □rtve Vojne in Revolucije*, eds. Janvit Golob and others (Ljubljana: Državni svet Republike Slovenije, 2005), 56.

in the European parliament regarding the banning of totalitarian symbols, which caused right and left wing parties from around Europe to rally together and support each other.<sup>78</sup>

Lastly, the international dynamics of political memory are seriously under-investigated. This is understandable, as research at this highest level of aggregation is the most difficult. To a certain extent, the effect of memory in interstate relations and foreign policy is the cumulative effect of political memory at all of the other levels of analysis, from the individual up to the dynamics of domestic politics and internal debates. As if the complexity of these bottom-up processes and their aggregate properties were not difficult enough to deal with, international politics and the international atmosphere also exerts their own, independent, top-down effects. In this sense, international relations is more than simply the sum of its parts.<sup>79</sup> As Fogu and Kansteiner point out, major turning points in national political memory tend to cluster temporally around key international events and the general patterns in international politics.<sup>80</sup> Though there is some preliminary evidence showing that international dynamics such as Stalin's death, the advent of détente and the end of the Cold War play an important role in national politics of memory, the mechanisms and processes driving these international effects on domestic politics are just as impressionistically understood as way domestic memory factors aggregate into foreign policy and international affairs.

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<sup>78</sup> See BBC, "Call for Europe-Wide Swastika Ban," *BBC News*, January 17, 2005, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/4178643.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/4178643.stm) (accessed 15 September 2006); BBC, "EU Ban Urged on Communist Symbols," *BBC News*, February 3, 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4234335.stm> (accessed 15 September 2006); Oana Lungescu, "EU Rejects Communist Symbol Ban," *BBC News*, February 8, 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4248425.stm> (accessed 15 September 2006). In Slovenia, world renowned philosopher and leftist thinker Slavoj Žižek chimed into this debate, defending the difference between Nazi and Communist symbols, based on the essential redemptive power and potential of Communism. Slavoj Žižek, "Kazen Mora Biti Stroga, a Pravična," *Delo*, sec. Sobotna priloga, 12. februarja, 2005.

<sup>79</sup> See "Domestic vs. International" in Lebow, "The Memory of Politics in Postwar Europe," 24-6.

<sup>80</sup> Fogu and Kansteiner, "The Politics of Memory and the Poetics of History," 296.

Work at these different levels of analysis necessarily deals with different dynamics and approaches them through different texts and sources of evidence. However, accepting a common definition of political memory and limiting itself to clearly and indisputably political factors can still unify this work into a common research program, where findings are cumulative because they approach the problems of the politics of memory with a common understanding of what they are dealing with and what kinds of evidence will be accepted in support of their findings. Of course, even with one definition of political memory, there is still an interpretive aspect to this work, both in drawing the line between political and non-political factors at the boundaries and in assessing what the collected evidence actually means. Though this is a problem, it is an aspect of scholarship on any topic and is one of the costs of doing business. As interpretivist Ted Hopf points out, it is ameliorated by the expectation of the scholar that “other researchers using the same theoretical apparatus and collection of texts [would] reproduce their results, at least in principle.”<sup>81</sup> A common definition of political memory and the hope of replicable findings it brings, will allow research into the politics of memory to overcome some of its problems and begin to produce cumulative results within the same paradigm.

### *Conclusion*

Despite the growing interest in memory in general and the proliferation of studies dealing with the politics of memory in particular, our understanding of how and why some events from the past retain political salience while others do not remains sketchy and inconclusive. Considering the growing political discourse around contested

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<sup>81</sup> Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities & Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999*, 29.

interpretations of crucial past events, particularly those stemming out of World War II, and the development of separate, collective group identities based on these new cleavages, scholars must find better ways explain the dynamics of political memory and deal with its increasing importance since the end of the Cold War.

In this paper, I argue that one of the difficulties within the politics of memory, and memory studies as a whole, is a lack of conceptual clarity about what kinds of phenomena fall under the rubric of political memory and what kinds of evidence can legitimately be mustered in support of these works. I believe that political memory should narrow its focus to the operation of politicians, and deal with competing narratives and contested events only insofar as they are raised in clearly political contexts. Though this excludes many cultural factors that are important aspects of collective memory as a whole, I believe that studies of both cultural and political memory will benefit from a narrower, conceptually distinct focus. This decoupling does not preclude their synthesis in later interdisciplinary work, but it does express my belief that both would benefit from a narrower, more manageable and consistent focus, at least initially.

Of course, conceptual clarity and a narrower focus will not solve all the problems facing memory studies today. The effect of past events on politics and politically salient identities are very difficult to isolate and discern, since they are often endogenous to other processes within society. Though disaggregating memory and placing a clear focus on its political effects and implications will help ease some of the difficulties, scholars in the field also need to find better ways to isolate the effects of past events on politics in the present. One way to do this is to move to a lower, more local level of analysis, since this will allow researchers to better isolate treatments and track the effects of their variables.

Additionally, scholars should identify cases where crucial events in memory act as an exogenous shock and do not merely build on previous narratives or fall into pre-established collective identities. By examining the effects of certain contested events from the moment they affect a homogeneous population and tracing the development of cleavages and different collective understandings and the identities that evolve based on these salient events, will allow scholars to better isolate the political memory and its influence on politics. Greater conceptual clarity and research designs that approach political memory in new and ingenious ways to isolate its effects on politics will bring the politics of memory into the forefront of research on politics and allow it to live up to its promises as one of the most exiting new areas of scholarship in the decades to come.

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