



Literature Review:

The role of nation states in managing memories of disputed territories

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Part 2 of 8: Collective Memory and the State: An Introduction

– Ryan Brasher

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Contents

ABSTRACT

Collective Memory and the State: An Introduction – Ryan Brasher

Borders, Ethnic Groups, ‘Tribes’, and Memory - Vahe Boyajian

State education systems: memory, identity, nationalism - Agnieszka Nowakowska

The Politics of Remembering – Ammar Ali Jan

Nations, Gender and Memory - Sophie Whiting

The role of diaspora in fostering the memory of the Armenian genocide abroad - Philippe Lecrivain

Collective Memory: The Politics of ‘Remembering’ and ‘Reminding’ - M. Usman Farooq

Collective Memory and the State: An Introduction – Ryan Brasher

In this first section, Ryan Brasher introduces debates concerning the relationship between collective memory and state building projects. Through empirical research touching on a diverse range of case studies Ryan explores the literature on how memory is utilized across different regime types (liberal democracies to authoritarian) and state structures (centralized to federal systems) to ask where space exists for agonistic practices.

In his celebrated essay “What is a Nation?”, Ernest Renan set down the key linkage between national identity and collective memory: a nation is not constituted by objective material factors, but by historical amnesia. A sense of togetherness develops by forgetting, as well as re-remembering the past. Complex events and inconvenient facts are ignored in favor of the mythical past. This past is constructed either as an impossibly idyllic time and space, or rooted in a traumatic but nevertheless glorified defeat, portraying the national forefathers as brave heroes in the face of impossible odds. The goal of this literature review is to ascertain how the state shapes collective memories that serve as the source through which national identity is constructed, and also how in turn memory can shape the state. This means linking the growing field of memory studies, heretofore rooted in cultural studies, with empirical political science research on the state. The field of memory studies is vast, and so is the literature on the state, so I make no attempt to develop a comprehensive survey of the literature. Rather, I seek to develop a thematic overview that points out major areas of current research and suggests potentially fruitful avenues for further study.

A lot of work has gone into establishing the link between the state and political identity, rooted in the sprawling constructivist literature on nationalism. Benedict Anderson, for instance, devotes a chapter in his “Imagined Communities” (1991) to the colonial state’s use of the museum, the census, and maps to instill single unambiguous political identities in their subject populations along racial or religious lines. But while often referenced, the crucial role of collective memory in this process is not explained or theorized, as authors often remain unaware of the relatively new memory studies research program. Research explicitly based in memory studies, on the other hand, tends to ignore formal state

structures, often viewing the state in Foucauldian terms as an intangible system of power and hegemony – an understandable perspective given the culturalist and more post-modern roots of this research. Before moving forward, therefore, I briefly discuss and define what is meant by collective identity on one hand, and the state on the other.

The idea of collective memory derives from Maurice Halbwachs' classical work on the subject, distinguishing social memory or external memory from personal or inward memory. Both are interlinked with each other and shape each other, but collective memory does not operate according to the same processes, it has no consciousness (1980: 51). This is an important point: subsequent work has often used psychological terminology to argue for the existence of collective trauma that, if not effectively and openly dealt with, will result in adverse social outcomes, not unlike repression of trauma leads to mental health breakdown in individuals. Kansteiner makes the point that this improperly extends individual memory to the group and ignores the social and political processes that help create collective memory in the first place. Collective memory, instead, is a result of the interaction between underlying social traditions, and interest-driven elite memory-makers, and the mass of memory-consumers. Traumatic events are repressed primarily for political, not psychological reasons, and their repression does not result in any mental health disorder of the collective. Collective memory is not rooted in some kind of vague communal psyche, but in what Kansteiner refers to as the "material", social practices, symbols, and institutions (Kansteiner 2002: 185-188).

Assmann refers to this material institutionalized memory as cultural memory, to distinguish it from another form of collective memory, communicative memory, which lives on in everyday social interaction between eye-witnesses and the 2nd and 3rd generation. Cultural memory, on the other hand, is embodied in textbooks and monuments of literate societies, and in formalized songs and myths of oral societies. These items do not embody memory themselves, but trigger them in those who see or hear them. Consequently, the process of selecting which material items to focus on, and how to display them, is an intensely political one (Assmann 2008: 109-113). Even though states try to convey the image of a unified

collective memory, it is clear that multiple and often competing memories across different social groups and classes exist. The more powerful a group, the more likely it will be able to broadcast its own representation of memory. Consequently, the formation of collective, or cultural, memory, is not simply an aggregation of individual memories in society, but is an elite project, featuring not only politicians but also journalists, academics, educators, and journalists, which involves contestation over who gets to construct the overarching historical narrative, and how they do it (Langenbacher 2010: 30-31, 33-34).

Before discussing how collective memory shapes, and is shaped, by state structures, we also have to briefly define what we mean by the state. To begin with, in this literature review, I primarily focus on three aspects of the state. First, I look at the process through which the state as a tangible organizational structure and set of political institutions is formed, or conversely, may fail or fall apart. This also encompasses a discussion of relative state strength or weakness. Secondly, I examine the political “software” of the state: how these political institutions are operated by regime type, and particularly how collective memory is affected by a change from authoritarian to democratic regime type (see O’Neill 2012 for an introductory discussion of the state and regime). Formally structured center-periphery relations, the relative centralization or decentralization of state institutions, represents the third aspect of the state I seek to look at. More specifically, how do federal and unitary state structures shape collective memory, and vice versa. I do not discuss how specific areas of public policy, like education, shape and are shaped, by collective memory, as these issue areas are covered in other project participants’ review of the nation-state and memory. I close by suggesting that the literature on collective memory, as well as that on politics and state structures, heretofore existing in largely separate universes, would benefit from a more explicit interaction with one another.

Regime Type, Democratization, and Transitional Justice:

When it comes to collective memory and the state, a majority of research has focused on democratization, transitional justice and “Vergangenheitsbewältigung”, how to do deal with

traumatic events perpetrated by previous authoritarian regimes (Meyer 2008). Here the experience of post-World War II Germany generally serves as a benchmark. This literature generally carries the normative assumption that full democratic consolidation is best coupled with collective acknowledgement, and rectification, of past injustices. This, however, has to be balanced with the immediate need to integrate previous rulers, who could potentially spoil the transition. Overall, an inability or unwillingness to move away from a uniform collective memory glorifying the past is detrimental to stable democracy, as previously victimized groups will inevitably feel ignored and excluded from the national community (Langenohl 2008).

But the collective endeavor to honestly deal with the problems of the past may not automatically lead to a more inclusive national identity. The political theorist W. James Booth, the only scholar focusing on collective memory to be published in the *American Political Science Review*, ties these themes together in his investigation of how the 5th French republic, and particularly President Mitterand, dealt with the moral culpability of the Vichy regime (Booth 1999). Many French liberals and socialists, including Mitterand, eschewed taking responsibility for Vichy collaboration with the German drive to round up and eliminate the Jewish population in France during World War II, by arguing that French political identity was rooted in a community of will grounded in constitutional patriotism and open to anyone with these shared political values. For many critics of Mitterand, this smacked of an easy way out of admitting culpability. However, admitting to French guilt today in past Vichy crimes, would be to suggest a homogenous cultural primordial French identity, irrespective of regime type, with a collective memory, even if shameful, that some people share in, but others cannot. The principle of justice, therefore, can be in tension with the principles of constitutional liberal identity. Collective memory, and thus ownership, of past atrocities can lead to repentance and redemption, but also holds potential for exclusive nationalism. But this dilemma for inclusive democracy may be primarily theoretical, as a pure “Willensgemeinschaft” probably does not exist, leaving the American or French rhetoric of civic nationalism aside (Grant 2006).

In her comparative analysis of collective memory and democratization in the Ukraine and Spain, Shevel points to an empirical, not theoretical, tension between democracy and justice (Shevel 2011). Franco's successor's in Spain agreed to legalize all political parties, including the communists, and hold free and fair elections in response for opposition guarantees that officials of the ancien regime would not be prosecuted, and that a veil of silence would be cast over the Spanish civil war. In practice, this pact meant that the old nationalist narrative that Franco had saved Spain from the disorder and corruption of the Spanish Republic remained unchallenged. In public imagination, the Spanish Civil War was an act of madness, and its guilt rested on the Spanish people as a whole. The causes of the war, Franco's toppling of a democratically elected government, and the detrimental effect of military rule on the working class, were ignored. The Spanish pact of silence, did not result in social reconciliation or justice for Franco's victims, but it did allow Spanish democracy to develop unchallenged. Only 30 years after democratization, in 2007, with a new generation of leadership, was the pact of silence overturned in the law on historical memory. Republican victims of the civil war were now officially recognized, and the abuses of Franco's regime officially condemned. Furthermore, it now became illegal to conduct political activities in the Valley of the Fallen, a Francoist monument. The goal of the law, however, was not justice and retribution, with prosecution of authoritarian officials still not allowed. It also did not replace the old authoritarian narrative of Spanish disorder with one based on Republican and leftist grievances. Instead, it aimed for a pluralist imagination of the past, in order to avoid replacing one set of grievances with another. Instead of a unified memory of the controversial past, the goal of the law was to instill broad popular pride in the peaceful and orderly Spanish transition to democracy, which had been considered improbable by defenders of dictatorship.

Shevel argues that the struggle to impose a homogenous collective memory, rather than leave space for a pluralist one, has made democratization in the Ukraine more difficult. Nationalists and pro-Europeans insisted on rehabilitation of anti-Soviet fighters during World War II, whereas Russophiles and committed Communists could only view them as Nazi collaborators. Centrists in government had no desire to solve this dilemma, but played

off both sides in order to remain in power. And because of the modernist legacy the Soviet education system, all sides believed in the existence of one true national narrative, rendering unacceptable the recommendation by Ukrainian historians to focus on the multiplicity of individual social history, like in Spain. According to Shevel, collective memory is not a pre-requisite for stable democracy – rather, democratic practice helps create the conditions for various memories to exist with one another. And it may suggest that rather than attempting to deal with justice and truth right away, silence and compromise may be necessary, at least initially, for democracy to flourish, particularly in polarized societies. This underscores the idea that in democratic transitions, the main consideration ought not to be the adverse psychological consequences brought about by collective repression of memory, but rather elite agreement, across political divides, on the unhindered functioning of democratic institutions and moratorium on public discussion of the controversial past. Inevitably, in these conditions, it appears, the problematic past will resurface over time, and can then be dealt with in a more constructive, and less conflictual manner. It is, of course, unclear, in how far this scenario is realistic outside of Spain, and other Southern European and Latin American countries that experienced pact-based transitions to democracy, particularly when political actors are unwilling to make basic compromises.

Shevel's findings based on her qualitative comparison of Spain and the Ukraine comparisons also find resonance in Forrest & Johnson's quantitative analysis of public monument creation, alteration, and destruction, across different regime types in post-Communist Eastern Europe. The authors have created a database of over 2500 incidents of state and non-state activity in regard to monuments, one important way in which collective memory is constructed and represented by memory-makers to the mass public (Forrest & Johnson 2011). Their methodology, and particularly the plethora of cases, does not allow them to dig into the details of each monument. However, the overall pattern indicates that in consolidated Eastern European democracies, there is a significantly greater proportion of private monument-based activity, as compared to authoritarian and hybrid regimes. One can surmise, therefore, that in democracies, the state allows for great citizen involvement in the construction of collective memory, and does not put as much effort into projecting a

particular kind of homogenous vision of the nation. Forrest and Johnson do acknowledge that greater private monument activity in democracies may also indicate more instances of monument vandalism, particularly of a xenophobic right-wing kind. However, overall, democracies seem to allow for a plural, diverse, and non-uniform collective memory.

This would also indicate that democracies have greater potential to solve problems associated with ethnic diversity and ideological polarization. They also provide the space to allow for an honest engagement between people, and groups of people, with very different, and sometimes mutually conflictual, collective memories – what Bull and Hansen (2016) refer to as “agonistic” memory-making.

Rather than an analytical scaffolding to understand state-memory interaction, advocates of agonistic memory propose a normative framework that states ought to pursue in order to forestall domestic conflict as well as give a voice to oppressed social groups. For instance, in the context of indigenous grievances against the Australian settler state, Maddison (2019) argues that attempts at reconciliation and closure, doomed to failure, should be avoided. Instead, rigorous historical debate ought to be institutionalized. Rather than agreeing on a particular narrative of events, the process of contentious dialogue between very different perspectives would, over time, lead to a common frame of reference. Therefore, the critical indigenous voice dissatisfied with reconciliation proposals should not be viewed as a policy failure, but should be encouraged and brought into the political sphere. At the same time, the voice of settlers, fearful that giving up on the myth of the egalitarian Australian farmer would lose their legitimacy as landowners and their status as “sons of the soil”, should also be given a hearing, since repression may lead to its reemergence in a more radical populist and antagonistic frame of reference that might increase political polarization and lessen the chance of agonistic dialogue. It should be kept in mind, however, that Maddison’s proposal occurs in the context of a democratic state where there is space for agonistic interaction, or at least the possibility thereof. But what about agonistic memory-making in hybrid or authoritarian regimes, particularly at the official state level? More work needs to be done to develop proposals in these contexts, where government pressure to create a uniform national narrative, based on a homogenous collective memory, is much greater.

State-Building and Collective Memory

In addition to the literature that focuses on collective memory, regime type, and democratic transitions, collective memory has been studied in the context of state creation and state development over time. While not nearly as plentiful as the transitional justice literature, I take a brief look at a number of case studies and case comparisons delving into these issues. They have particular significance in the context of our project on disputed territories, as the formation of internal state structures within a fixed set of boundaries will lead to contestation of collective identity within the nation-state, as well as across its boundaries.

Greenberg's paired comparative analysis of partition in Israel and Palestine versus India and Pakistan is a useful starting point to examine how state creation and the conflict over borders helps shape collective memory across several generations. Greenberg (2005), blissfully unaware of Kansteiner's critique of the psychological framework, argues that post-partition states repress the memory of the horrors of partition, downplay atrocities committed by one's own founding fathers, and exalt the horrendous suffering of victims, particularly women, as heroic, in order to construct a homogenous national identity. The wounds of partition, not unlike "phantom limbs" of amputees, are recreated in collective memory to keep up a sense of grievance against the perceived enemy. The new states of India, Israel, and Pakistan, in particular, ignored the horrific and senseless violence of partition, preferring to focus on a triumphant narrative of independence in the face of overwhelming odds against a powerful external aggressor, whether British colonialists, aggressive neighboring Arab states, or the dangerous Hindu majority. Stateless Palestinians, however, have woven their national identity around the collective memory of defeat and loss of homeland at the hands of technologically superior and Western-supported Jewish colonialists.

According to Greenberg, collective memory faces a turning point when the second or "hinge" generation, with no personal memory of partition, begins to construct its own

memory of partition in a formalized manner. This is akin to Assmann's "floating gap" between communicative and cultural memory, when material objects and institutions replace everyday social interaction as the primary repository of collective memory. Although many in this generation simply accept the given narratives, there are many who question it, because the glorification of the founding fathers no longer seems such a pressing necessity, as statehood has been achieved and consolidated. For example, across all four countries the more secularist national narrative has faced challenges from the religious right-wing. Another form of rebellion, albeit limited to academia, has been revisionist historians who seek to dispel uncritical nationalist accounts of partition. This process has been more pronounced in Israel and India, whose political and constitutional framework allow for more critical engagement with the state. Israeli academics, for instance, after opening official archives, were able to show that the state narrative ignored wide-spread violence and ethnic-cleansing against the Arab population as the major cause of their exodus – and not simply inept leaders or overblown hysteria in the Palestinian community. In India, the subaltern studies approach, in addition to problematizing colonial history, has highlighted the continued oppression of religious and ethnic minorities. Even among Palestinians, whose intense sense of loss and grievance would not seem like fertile ground for critical engagement with the past, revisionist historians have started questioning the competence and democratic legitimacy of Palestinian leaders before 1948. Their goal has been to develop a reality-based history, without giving up on the community's moral claims or grievances.

In Greenberg's account, collective memory, while important in creating a sense of national identity, is primarily an outcome of the large structural forces of state formation. In a comparative historical analysis of colonial and post-colonial Nicaragua and Costa Rica, Consuelo Cruz (2000), on the other hand, argues that collective memory itself can help determine the trajectory of state development. She asks how Costa Rica has been able to develop stable state institutions, consolidate liberal democracy, and feature relatively robust economic growth, particularly since 1948, while Nicaragua has faced considerable social conflict, dictatorship, revolutions, and economic scarcity. Because structural

conditions in and surrounding the two countries have historically been fairly similar, Cruz eschews typical socio-economic and geopolitical arguments. Instead, divergent, what Cruz calls “declarative” identities, rooted in distinct collective memories, have been the main drivers of divergent state development. Costa Ricans have historically identified themselves as both diligent and peaceable people who are able to solve conflicts through compromise and cooperation. Nicaraguans, on the other hand, have a self-image of unruly people whose leaders are not above bending the rules for their own benefit, and who fare best under strong authoritarian rulers. According to Cruz, these images are not based in historical fact, but instead reflect a selective collective memory perpetuated since the time of the Spanish conquistadores.

The roots of this memory stem from the slightly different timing in the creation of the founding of these two colonies. Nicaragua was established somewhat earlier, and quickly experienced conflict between creole (local Spanish-origin) population and clerical officials, who criticized their treatment of the indigenous population. After murdering the bishop and rebelling against the Spanish crown, creole elites were punished, governance was taken over by officials in Guatemala, and an official history created that denounced the greedy, oppressive, and disorderly conduct of Nicaraguans. The Costa Rican conquest was interrupted by an indigenous uprising and not consolidated until 20 years later, with colonial officials fully aware of the opprobrium that the Nicaraguans had faced in consequence of their behavior. As a result, reports sent to Madrid stressed local harmony among creole elites and the church, and model treatment of the native population. Although not reflecting the harsh reality of life, colonial officials used this narrative to elicit funds and special privileges, including local autonomy, from the Spanish crown. Because the official history was not updated, these two narratives remained unchallenged for over 200 years, until the time of independence.

Drawing on this repertoire of compromise and hard work, post-independence politicians in Costa Rica set about developing a power-sharing agreement, the “Pact of Harmony”, between competing elites, overcame intermittent violent factional disputes, and created an

itinerant government that was obliged to rotate between the four major regional centers. In the wake of an early financial crisis, the opposition did not resort to violence and civil war, but formed a commission advocating land reform and developmental policies that would empower citizens to seek their own prosperity. By the mid-19th Century, long before the establishment of democracy, the imagination of Costa Rican exceptionalism as a haven of peace and harmony in a dangerous Central American neighborhood had become entrenched. In Nicaragua, on the other hand, post-independence leaders did not have the same access to a collective memory of compromise. Just as in colonial times, political rivals engaged in mutual demonization. Even though a form of democracy was able to hold on for three decades in the late 19th Century, the head of state, the president, was obliged to abstain from political remarks in order to avoid inflaming social conflict again. This, in turn, led to a foreclosure of any possibility of altering the rhetorical repertoire leaders might draw on. This democratic interlude was therefore viewed as an anomaly, and in the public imagination, Nicaragua's binary choice between either anarchy or autocracy became entrenched. In Costa Rica, on the other hand, even the bloody civil war of 1948 following a disputed presidential election was not able to alter confidence that the country would return to democratic normalcy.

From the accounts above it is clear that collective memory serves as a key mechanism that helps connect communal identity and formal political structures. Collective memory functions as a resource that elites can draw from to construct a particular kind of political identity. Political structures help determine the formation of collective memory, which in turn may affect all kinds of other political outcomes. Based on very recent research in post-Arab spring Tunisia, Marcusa (2019) argues that divergent state-building experiences of two small towns has shaped the extent to which international jihadist organizations, including ISIS, have been able to recruit fighters for conflict in Syria and Iraq. Because these two towns were incorporated into the colonial Tunisian state in very different ways, local actors, drawing on very distinct collective memories, have engaged in communal economic and political life very differently. Shortly after the uprising that toppled Tunisia's long-time dictator in 2011, the local mosque in Sidi Bouzid, the home of the street vendor Mohamed

Bouazizi, whose self-immolation set off the Tunisian Revolution, was taken over by a radical Salafi organization that has since supplied 23 fighters to various jihadi hotspots. Radical Islamists tried to do the same in the town of Metlaoui, but were repelled by local residents.

According to Marcusa, susceptibility toward jihadi ideology, cannot be explained by relying on socio-economic causes. Poverty, unemployment and disillusionment with Tunisian politics have been pervasive in both towns. The difference, however, is that collective action in Metlaoui is based on a collective memory of formal unionized protest politics, often directed against the state. Across Tunisia, the French colonial state quickly worked to disband traditional tribal society in the late 19th Century. In many parts of the country, including Sidi Bouzid, resistance to the state came in the form of disorganized banditry. In Metlaoui, however, the discovery of phosphate resources in the 1890s led to the development of a state-owned mine. Adverse working conditions in the mine, in turn, led to union activity. Over many decades, therefore, working class men in the town became accustomed to negotiations with and strikes against the authorities running the mine. The experience, and then memory, of receiving material concessions in response helped institutionalize a collective memory of organized, but peaceful, resistance to the state, even when the economic importance of the mine decreased over time. When Jihadists came to recruit young men in Metlaoui, the memory of concrete benefits in response to engagement with, and not withdrawal from, formal political structures, led them to eschew the symbolic future benefits as well as communal acceptance and cohesion offered to them. In Sidi Bouzid, however, young men disaffected by the prolonged experience of unemployment and lack of hope, and without the same memory resources to draw on, became ready recruits. The same formal political institutions, in this case the French colonial state and its successor in Tunisia, can thus help develop very divergent collective memories in different localities within the same territorial space – of course, in conjunction with some different antecedent conditions – the existence of natural resources and the development of the mine.

Federalism, the Unitary State, and Collective Memory

Very little work has been done on the intersection between collective memory and the formal territorial distribution of power within a state. Here I examine two interesting case studies, where the authors, tellingly none of them political scientists, examine the effect of institutional structures on collective memory and political identity in Sri Lanka and Belgium respectively. Although both of these articles are not primarily interested in the question of federal and unitary states as such, they almost inadvertently examine these as causal variables that shape the collective identity of the two countries over time. According to Seoighe (2016), the British-bequeathed centralized unitary state in Sri Lanka has shaped a collective identity over time that is intolerant of regional diversity and autonomy. In Belgium, on the other hand, Rimé et al (2015) argue that the introduction of federalism and regional autonomy has created a generational collective memory divide, with older Flemish-speakers much more adamant about the need for autonomy and even secession, whereas younger Flemish-speakers are much more comfortable with their Belgian identity.

While Seoighe (2016) is primarily concerned with nationalist discourse by the government in Sri Lanka after the defeat of the LTTE-insurgency in 2009, her work also sheds light on how constitutional choices might shape the development of collective memory over time. The unitary state structure of Sri Lanka, according to Seoighe (2016), was the product of British imperialism. It was a novel intervention on an island that had historically been politically decentralized and governed by a variety of kingdoms with little interest in developing a homogenous political identity based on religion or language. When post-independence elections brought leaders from the Buddhist and Sinhalese-speaking majority to power for the first time, their collective memory, shaped by over a century of British rule and colonial discourse, interacted with the centralized state structure to envision a homogenous Buddhist-Sinhalese nation constructed in response to the threat of the “other”, primarily Tamil Hindus, but later on all communities outside of the Buddhist-Sinhalese imagined community. This majority collective memory left no space for political or cultural autonomy of minorities, and almost invariably led to the development of a violent counter-hegemonic movement among Tamil-speakers concentrated in the northern part of the country.

This nationalist collective memory came into sharp relief after the military victory over the LTTE in 2009, which the Rajapaksa government constructed as a continuation of the mythology surrounding ancient Sinhala kings defeating invading Tamil forces from mainland India. The largely Tamil-speaking north-east of Sri Lanka has since been subjected to colonial-style rule, with Buddhist religious sites restored or constructed on former Hindu or Christian sites, a plan to change the ethnic composition of the area by re-settling Sinhalese populations from other parts of the country, disenfranchising and disadvantaging Tamils in the economic reconstruction after the conflict, and above all the military occupation of former LTTE strongholds as symbolic of the consolidation of Sinhala identity in the country. War monuments commemorating the heroes of the largely Sinhala military have been set up everywhere, and archeological teams have been sent to uncover ancient Buddhist sites in order to undermine the notion of an ancient Tamil homeland and to signal complete domination over Tamil identity, with no monuments to LTTE fighters allowed.

In an interesting corollary, Rimé et al. (2015) describe how evolving federal state structures in Belgium in the last 50 years, along with changing socio-economic regional fortunes, have shaped the collective memory of different generations of Flemish and French speaking Belgians. They are particularly interested in how regional grievances have shifted from one generational cohort to the next. Based on extensive survey research they find that cohorts whose formative childhood experiences developed before Belgium made a decisive shift toward federalism and regional autonomy harbored considerably stronger grievances toward the central government compared to later cohorts. The institutional change also coincided with a gradual re-balancing of economic vitality from the traditional industrial hub in French-speaking Wallonia to Flemish-speaking Flanders. The generational effect was particularly strong among Flemish speakers as compared to French-speakers. Older Flemish speakers grew up with a sense both cultural grievance due to the historically privileged status of French, as well as economic grievance at the rural north being neglected vis-a-vis the industrialized south. These grievances in turn fueled the rise of Flemish populist politics, both within established political parties, and the more strident nationalist party. In turn, younger Flemish-speaking Belgians do not feel the same urgency to push for greater

autonomy and secession. In fact, their identification with the Belgian state is considerably higher compared to older cohorts, while their regional identification is lower. While the authors, all psychologists, are more interested in the effects of social and political conditions on individuals, one can conclude that institutional structures also have long-term macro-political consequences as well.

The findings support the idea that ethno-federal structures, combined with improved economic conditions, can help alleviate contentious politics in multi-ethnic societies. Alternatively, centralized political structures can help exacerbate, and even create ethnic minority grievances in the first place, which feed into minority collective memory and can then fuel secessionist political movements with the potential to turn violent. The articles also implicitly raise the question whether federal political structures might serve as the basis through which agonistic memory-making, the honest interaction between victim and oppressor, the powerless and the powerful, the periphery and the center, is formally institutionalized into the political process.

Conclusion:

Although a burgeoning field, memory studies has so far elicited a limited response from political science as a discipline. There has been some work by constructivist international relations scholars and political philosophers (Langenbacher 2010, Goertsch 2008), but particularly when it comes to the empirical analysis of the internal political dynamics of societies, comparative politics in other words, there is a bit of a lacuna in the literature. A perusal of the leading journals in the field, including the American Political Science Review, Comparative Politics, and World Politics, for the term “collective memory” and its main theorist, “Halbwachs” reveal at most 1 or 2 research articles across all their years of publication. There has been a very recent attempt to begin connecting political and memory studies more explicitly, particularly in the field of political culture (McQuaid and Gensburger 2019), although many of the contributors do not themselves come from the political science discipline.

How might this literature interact with the agonistic memory approach by Bull and Hansen? From one perspective, at the nation-state level, it is clear that only democratic regime types, or at least those with significant protections of the freedoms of expression and academic research, offer the possibility of honest assessment of the past without a pre-determined top-down narrative. And even there, it often takes decades of democratic practice before the space for honest discussion can open up, as Shevel argues in her comparative study of Spain and Ukraine. At an official level, engaging in agonistic memory-making depends on the political will to resist the temptation of imposing a uniform collective memory, and to open up discussion from a variety of perspectives and individual experiences. According to Greenberg, revisionist historians might also be said to prepare the framework for an agonistic memory approach by questioning official narratives, even in less liberal societies. Nevertheless, research by Cruz and Marcusa also shows that collective memory often does not develop as a result of conscious policy choices, but as unforeseen by-products of other political developments.

What may be potential further avenues of research for political scientists in the field of comparative politics interested in memory studies, and particularly the agonistic memory approach? One suggestion would be to move beyond discussions of transitional justice to start analyzing specific institutional arrangements and their effects on memory-making. In how far, for instance, do unitary, federal, consociational, or ethno-federal structures, and their particular versions, provide space for agonistic memory-making? Furthermore, how does agonistic memory function in the context of authoritarian regimes, who do not have political incentives to encourage honest and open dialogue between groups and individuals, and are fundamentally opposed to giving space to multiple contending collective memories. In this context, agonistic memory-making will have difficulty finding the space it needs to bring about the necessary contentious dialogue.

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