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The Future of Memory
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The author compares and contrasts the public discourse over memory in Western Europe and North America. The greater awareness in continental Europe of memory as a political resource and site of contestation has profound implications for elite behavior and mass responses. It also has the potential to alter the dynamics by which collective and institutional memory is created, recalled, and altered.

**Keywords:** memory; future of memory; institutional memory; collective memory

In this article, I speculate about some of the ways in which greater public awareness of memory as a political resource and source of contestation is likely to influence elite and mass behavior. Changes of behavior in turn have the potential to affect the dynamics by which memory is created, recalled, and altered. If knowledge of memory influences the practice of memory, which in turn negates, at least in part, the validity of any understanding of the interaction between institutional, collective, and individual memories, we are talking about an infinite regress—something that would surely put a smile on Max Weber’s face.

My inquiry is premised on three related assumptions. The first, an empirical one, is that elite and public opinion in at least some countries has become increasingly aware of memory as something that is problematic and often a source of contestation. My second assumption,
theoretical in nature, is that elite and public opinion in at least some countries has become more receptive to the implications of this information. My third assumption, also empirical, is that growing awareness by the elite and the ordinary public of both the malleability and politicization of memory will have important consequences for future efforts to influence and control memory at institutional, collective, and individual levels.

My first assumption has two components: awareness of memory as something that is not necessarily accurate, unchanging, and recallable; and recognition that groups with competing agendas often struggle to shape and control memory on at least the institutional level. What evidence is there to support this claim? This is not an easy question to answer in the absence of good survey data. A simple poll could provide useful data about how the public regards memory along several relevant dimensions.

A follow-on and more elaborate study would devise measures to determine the degree of public exposure to discourses that problematize memory and treat it as a source of contestation (the independent variable) and would then survey the public in a sample of countries that score high and low on the independent variable to see the percentage of people in each who acknowledge memory to be problematic and contested (the dependent variable). A high correlation between greater public exposure to conflicts over memory and greater public awareness of memory as a source of contestation, and a lower correlation in countries where public exposure was less, would help establish this claim. In the absence of such studies, I must fall back on less scientific, impressionistic arguments.

The discourse on memory takes place in the scholarly literature and more popular media. In the historical profession, in North America and Europe, there is undeniably a “memory boom” under way. Searches on Amazon under the heading of “memory politics” or “politics of memory” get almost four thousand results of publications in English alone. A cursory examination of major historical journals over the past two decades also indicates a growing interest in the subject. Jay Winter (2000) went so far as to claim that memory is the new paradigm of history, overpowering and restructuring other frames of reference like class and gender. In the United States, academic debates take place in a rarefied atmosphere and, with few exceptions, have little impact on wider publics. In Western Europe, especially in Germany and Italy, the media cover controversial political issues, and in Europe these have not infrequently concerned questions of historical memory and memorialization. Examples include the Touvier and Papon trials in France, the Waldheim affair in Austria, U.S. pressures on Swiss banks, official recognition of the Jedwabne massacre in Poland, and the design and location of the Holocaust memorial in Berlin (Golsan 1996; Bloxham 2001; Lebow, Kansteiner, and Fogu 2006). All of these issues brought up past events, often crimes in which the state was complicit and that official versions of institutional memory sought to hide.

Until recently, Eastern Europe had a different trajectory. In the Soviet Union and other communist states there was no open debate about the past and its memorialization, only efforts to impose official interpretations of history through
the educational system and the media. The heavy-handed nature of such socialization, and the extent to which it was so much at odds with more national representations of the past, made people more aware than they would have been otherwise of the importance of memory and the extent to which it was a political resource. The fall of communism has had the same effect, although for the opposite reason. The “right to memory” has been asserted by peoples everywhere east of the former Oder-Neisse Line and has served as a catalyst for the revival of national histories, but also for efforts to confront the past in ways inimical to those propagating or supporting self-congratulatory national histories (Brossat 1990; Judt 1992; Wyrd 2007, 227-30). In the past decade, debates about the past, and about the politics of memory itself, have been at least as prominent in Eastern Europe as in the West (Orla-Bukowska 2006). During this period, the countries of Eastern Europe have at times been under pressure from both Russia and the West to approach memory in particular ways. Applications for entry into the European Community provided some leverage to the West in this regard, and there were pressures on Eastern European countries in the 1990s to consider their past more openly and honestly, pressures that strengthened the hand of indigenous intellectuals and politicians who were similarly inclined. Moscow was exerting its influence in the direction of retaining and respecting Soviet war memorials that were present throughout the region. More recently, the destruction of a Soviet war memorial in Tallinn, Estonia, provoked riots by ethnic Russians, a conflict with Russia, and a growing public debate in Estonia (BBC News 2007; Mälksoo 2007).

The United States is something of an outlier here, as it is on so many issues. As a victor in World War II, it had little incentive to reconsider its past. This arose initially from the internment of Americans of Japanese descent, which was declared unconstitutional after the war was over and widely recognized as morally reprehensible some decades later (Ng 2002). Attempts to problematize World War II outside of the scholarly realm have not been noticeably successful. The controversy over the cancellation of Martin Harwit’s planned Enola Gay exhibit at the National Air and Space Museum in April 1995 indicates that service organizations, the military, and conservative congressmen remain unwilling to reconsider the ethics of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Harwich 1996; Kohn 1996). Although a loser in Indochina, the United States was still powerful enough to shrug off its defeat, and there was very little effort outside of the academic community to rethink the country’s national security policy on the basis of this experience. The Persian Gulf War of 1990 to 1991 and the invasion of Iraq in 2003 evoked memories of the Vietnam War and of the trauma arising from the American defeat. It produced a display of yellow ribbons on cars, houses, and trees, many of them with the motto “support our troops.” In 2007, in keeping with their commitment to “stay the course” in Iraq, right-wing revisionists began publicizing the myth that America would have won the Vietnam War if public opinion had supported the forces engaged in combat (Lembcke 1998; Turner 1996; Hixon 2000).

That memory has become at all problematic in the United States has more to do with the phenomenon of “repressed” or “recovered” memory. The concept
was originated by Freud, later rejected by him, and remains one of the controversial subjects in psychiatry (Freud 1896/1923, 187-221). A repressed memory, usually associated with trauma, is one that is not available to the conscious mind. Some therapists contend that memories of this kind recur in dreams and may be recovered years after the event. Other health professionals deny their existence. Repressed memory was popularized in the 1980s and 1990s by the media, some feminist groups, and a small number of psychologists. It featured in numerous criminal and civil trials, many of them involving alleged sexual abuse of children. In some states, the presumed existence of repressed memories provided the grounds for extending the statute of limitations in child abuse cases (for research skeptical of recovered memory, see Whitfield 1995; Brandon et al. 1998). Many of these trials have been widely discussed in the media, including those where recovered memory has been discredited, as in the case of Cardinal Joseph Bernadin, who was charged with sexual abuse by a former seminarian who subsequently withdrew his allegation (on the Bernadin case and related cases, see Simmons 1994).

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During this period, repressed memories became the subject of popular books and a frequent talk show topic (Bass 1988). They have long provided plot lines for feature films, including Spellbound (1945), Tommy (1975), The Butterfly Effect (2004), and Serenity (2005), as well as for video games and comic books. In the movie Serenity, the lead character’s mental health is restored once he is made aware of a repressed traumatic memory. In the video game Final Fantasy VII, the protagonist has false memories of his military service because his “real” memories have been suppressed by brainwashing. Alien abduction is another major theme that features repressed memories of encounters, often aboard spaceships, which cause nightmares and other problems until they are recovered (Matheson 1998; for a true believer, see Mack 1994).

This foregrounding of repressed memory can reasonably be expected to have sensitized the American public to the importance of memory, but in a very different way than in Europe. The discourse of memory in the United States has
been comparatively apolitical as it is focused largely on personal trauma. While the phenomenon of recovered memory has been extremely controversial, I have not found any data on how credible it is in the eyes of the American public. I surmise that it is high given the state-level legislation for which it is responsible. As for alien abduction, it is estimated that 3.7 million Americans claim to have been abducted by aliens, and a 2002 Roper poll indicates that one in five Americans believe in alien abduction (cited in Wilson 2007). For those who reject recovered memory, the concept of memory itself cannot help but become more problematic. Just the reverse is true for those who give credence to recovered memory because it suggests that memories can be repressed but are “real” and remain remarkably resistant to efforts to reshape their content.

My second assumption is that elite and public opinion in at least some countries has become more receptive to evidence indicating the malleability of memory. In other words, many people not only recognize memory as a resource that groups in their society attempt to exploit, but believe in the feasibility of this enterprise. This understanding of memory could profitably be examined in many different countries, but I will restrict myself to Europe, where the memory boom—in scholarly literature and popular media—has arguably been the most pronounced.

Earlier, I noted the connection between memory and identity. As memory is considered by most people to make them who they are, they are most likely to safeguard and defend their memories—individual, collective, and official—when they are confident about and content with their identities. They will defend their memories with a particular vengeance if they feel beleaguered. A dramatic case in point was the Protestant commitment during the so-called “troubles” in Northern Ireland to march through Catholic neighborhoods on Orange Day to commemorate the Protestant victory over Catholics at the Battle of the Boyne in July 1690. The march reaffirmed Protestant identity and political power and was accordingly resisted, often violently, by Catholics, for whom the Battle of the Boyne was a marker of subjection. When identity becomes problematic, which it can for many reasons, people are likely to be less committed to memories and commemorations on which existing identities are based or from which they derive justification. Some of those memories and commemorations may become inconvenient if they stand in the way of changing or reformulating identities. For reasons that are widespread and idiosyncratic, identity was problematic in much of Europe after World War II, and it is so again in the aftermath of the cold war and collapse of the Soviet Union.

The paradigmatic case in postwar Europe was the Federal Republic of Germany. National identity, previously strong, became uncomfortable for many Germans by reason of the country’s Nazi past and the postwar division (on identity, memory, and the two memories, see Herf 1997; the best work on the Federal Republic is Kansteiner 2006). Few Germans wanted to identify with Nazi Germany, but many found it difficult to define their identities in terms of either successor state. Some citizens of the Federal Republic sought to strengthen their
attachments to the regions or to develop a new, or at least supplemental, identity as Europeans. In Germany, Heimat (referring to the territory, people, and customs of a region) had historically preceded Vaterland (the national state) as an identity and had remained a viable and respected secondary identification. Germans also had some earlier experience with transstate identities. In the nineteenth century, Deutschland and Deutschtum referred to the community of Germans and German speakers regardless of their political unit (e.g., Prussia, Austria, Bavaria). These preexisting identities made postwar substate and suprastate identities more accessible and acceptable.

Regional and European identities for Germans were also welcomed by their neighbors and Americans. Regional identities—Prussia aside, and that was in the German Democratic Republic—appeared to them relatively benign and raised the prospect of centrifugal tendencies that might restrain the still not trusted federal government. Supranational identities were built around European integration, of which the Franco-German alliance was the core, and were encouraged as a means of integrating Germany more fully into the Western community. Both kinds of identity—and they are by no means exclusive—had to be built on memories. In June 2004, Germany was invited for the first time to the D-Day commemoration at the invasion beaches in France. German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder used the opportunity to align Germany with the allies, telling his audience that D-Day was not a “victory over Germany, but a victory for Germany” that led to its liberation from Nazi rule. Schroeder’s speech raised some eyebrows at home but was very favorably received by other European leaders and public opinion (BBC News 2004). This unprecedented move toward a common, celebratory understanding of a former battle stands in sharp contrast to the continuing division in Northern Ireland over the Battle of the Boyne, or in Poland, the Baltic countries, and Russia over Russia’s “liberation” of Eastern Europe in 1944 and 1945.

Another indication of receptivity to the idea that memory is malleable is the burgeoning of counterfactual history, academic and popular. In North America and Europe, it is no coincidence that the rise of counterfactual history has paralleled the memory boom. Popular counterfactual history is based on the premise that the present is highly contingent and that with only surgical interventions in the tissue of history—what Max Weber called “minimal rewrites”—different presents can readily be conjured up. Counterfactual novels often address the outcome of wars, like the American Civil War and World War II, that are central to contemporary problems of identity and memory. They highlight, even call into question, the connection between identity and history by revealing the contingent nature of both. More scholarly efforts at counterfactual history have sought to undermine essentialist narratives and counteract the certainty of hindsight bias. They have also sought to expose the generally unspoken assumptions on which historical interpretations are based and, by extension, the identities they support (Tetlock and Lebow 2001, 829-43; Tetlock, Lebow, and Parker 2006; Lebow forthcoming).
Implications

My third assumption is that growing awareness of memory as malleable and as a source of political contestation will have serious longer-term implications for the practice of memory. It will affect the importance of memory for identity, the ease by which memory is reshaped or renegotiated, the means by which this is accomplished, and ultimately, the shape and membership of communities. In this connection, I offer a series of observations, some of them in the form of hypotheses. All refer to developments that have not occurred, if indeed they ever will. They cannot yet be evaluated empirically but are intended to serve as guides for future research. Some of the propositions may appear contradictory because they predict opposing developments. However, change not infrequently transforms normal distributions into highly skewed ones.

1. *Increased resistance to institutional memory.* To the extent that people become conscious of any socialization process, they have greater potential to free themselves from it. This is more likely to happen in circumstances in which socialization is vocally contested by others. It not only makes people aware of a process that might otherwise have gone unnoticed but also provides alternative perspectives and choices. It can also shed light on the possible motives of those advancing the competing perspectives. This has happened in the course of the so-called culture wars in the United States and in the extensive debates in many European countries over their responsibility for and roles in World War II. Resistance can take the form of aloofness to all narratives that encode institutional memories, that is, awareness of them but not acceptance. Such resistance will inevitably have consequences for identity, making it more problematic at the national and supranational levels where it relies so heavily on institutional memories. If so, subnational and other forms of identity (e.g., professional, generational, religious, or family identities that cut across national boundaries) will become correspondingly more important, as will the collective memories on which they rest.

2. *Increased receptivity to self-congratulatory national narratives.* In mechanics, every action provokes an equal and opposite reaction. In politics, reactions are also inevitable, but not necessarily equal. Vocal and largely successful challenges of traditional narratives of American history that present it as unalloyed progress toward wealth and freedom; ignore or gloss over the brutal treatment of Native Americans and slaves; and downplay, or downright exclude, the contributions of Blacks, women, and ethnic minorities to America’s democracy and economic and cultural development provoked a strong backlash from conservatives. In Europe, attempts to rewrite history to acknowledge imperialism and its consequences; root fascist or Nazi regimes in their countries’ pasts; and acknowledge collaboration, ethnic cleansing, and complicity in the Holocaust elicited similar reactions from nationalists committed to uncritical historical narratives that generally define the nation, if not explicitly in genetic terms, then with reference to those
who lived on its territory for countless generations—what Germans formerly called *blut* and *boden* (blood and land).

3. *The shaping and contestation of institutional memory.* National narratives are subsumed under the category of institutional memory because they have traditionally been the prerogative of the state exercised through its control of the educational system and other vehicles for shaping mass opinion. These narratives are frequently challenged by individual groups who oppose the current government or regime. In the West, these conflicts have drawn in a wider segment of the national community when they have been featured in the media. Newspapers, films, and television can propagate officially sanctioned narratives but can also offer versions of the past at odds with institutional memory. This can occur even in countries where governments retain considerable control, or at least influence, over the media, as in Poland when the Lanzmann documentary *Shoah* was televised (Orla-Bukowska 2006).

4. *International influences on institutional memory.* The post-1945 period was distinguished by efforts of states and groups of states to shape the construction of official and collective memory in other states. American occupation policies in Germany and Japan had this as one of their avowed goals. In Germany, local populations were compelled to visit recently liberated concentration camps, while the Nuremberg Trials, and the evidence they unearthed concerning Nazi crimes, were widely disseminated in German-language newsreels and newspapers (Tent 1982; Smith 1996). More recently, Washington has put pressure on Switzerland and its banks to acknowledge their theft of assets deposited by subsequent victims of the Holocaust and make efforts to locate and compensate their families (Ludi 2006). Members of the European Union have individually and collectively encouraged the countries of Eastern Europe to confront their past more honestly; and China, Korea, and the Philippines have called upon Japan to acknowledge its war crimes, including the Rape of Nanjing, medical experimentation on prisoners of war and civilians, and the pressing of young women into involuntary service as sexual servants for Japanese troops. Outside pressures of this kind always meet resistance, but they have succeeded to a surprising degree in Europe. Change of the desired kind in official narratives appears to hinge on the leverage of outside parties; the existence of groups within the target countries whose agendas are served by responding positively to external pressures; and the ability of these groups to convince the wider public, or at least key officials, that they must respond because of overriding political or national interests.

International involvement can take the more benign form of foreign aid and other assistance to countries to aid in historical revision and reconstruction. These activities can take the form of research, seminars, training of scholars, and collaborative projects that range from textbooks to documentation of atrocities. China and Japan have a joint textbook project under way and, despite the various difficulties that have arisen, hope to produce a companion volume for school curricula. The Venice Peace Foundation (Fondazione della Pace Venezia), with
the support of Venice International University, the city of Venice, and several banks, is organizing a joint exploration of memory of World War II and its aftermath by Italy and other countries along the Adriatic littoral. Collaborative projects of this kind are likely to become increasingly common and, if successful, have the potential to serve as useful catalysts for national reconciliation.

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5. Institutional memory as a form of reassurance. In April 2005, the College of Cardinals elected a German pope—Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger—who had been a member of the Hitlerjugend and briefly served in the Wehrmacht. The new pope is controversial in Europe—but for his ultraconservative religious views, not for his German past. As the College of Cardinals was deliberating, Chinese demonstrators, egged on by their government, were throwing stones at the Japanese embassy in Peking and consulates elsewhere in China, attacking Japanese businesses, and generally protesting Japan’s efforts to obtain a permanent seat on the United Nation’s Security Council. The demonstrators, and the Chinese government, were doubly enraged by the nearly simultaneous publication of a Japanese textbook that sought to downplay or discredit the atrocities that Japanese occupation forces had committed in China and elsewhere in Asia. The textbook, like most in Japan, also put a favorable gloss on Japan’s invasions of China and Southeast Asia, describing them as acts of anticolonialism and as economically beneficial for those who were occupied (Onishi 2005a, 2005b; Kahn 2005c; Young 2005; French and Kahn 2005).
These two events in two different regions of the world were closely related, even if diametrically opposed in their symbolic value. The election of a German pope, and one, moreover, who had worn a military uniform, would have been hard to imagine in the absence of a serious effort over the decades of successive German governments to come to terms with the past and accept their responsibility for the horrendous suffering the Nazis inflicted on Europe. The Chinese government was not shy about making this counterfactual argument. Chinese officials praised Germany for acknowledging its Nazi past, for paying billions of dollars in reparations to victims or their families, and for the forthright approach of its school curriculum. They noted the visits of Prime Minister Willy Brandt and President Richard Weizsäcker to Auschwitz and the seemingly heartfelt apologies they made for Germany's crimes. If the Japanese had behaved this way, one official said, China would view them and their claims for a Security Council seat differently (Kahn 2005a, 2005b). The March 2007 public apology of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe for the suffering of women exploited for sex during World War II only appears to have added oil to the fire because senior members of his administration continue to deny that the Japanese military organized a brothel system that pressed foreign women into service (Wallace 2007). Abe himself has stonewalled U.S. congressional efforts to encourage Japan to own up to and apologize for these actions (McCurry 2007).

Germany has set a precedent, which the Germans themselves realize. In the 1990s, they took the lead in encouraging the countries of Eastern Europe who sought membership in NATO and the EU to address their pasts more openly and honestly, and Germany has invested heavily in civic education projects in the region. The German media were openly critical of the Kaczynski government in Poland for backsliding in this regard (Die Tageszeitung 2006 triggered a diplomatic incident between the two countries). Russia has been noticeably reluctant to address its past; the efforts Gorbachev initiated with his policy of glasnost have stalled under President Vladimir Putin. Putin’s return to nationalism and more authoritarian rule and Russia’s recent cyberwar against Estonia have been taken by many as evidence that it is unpredictable and possibly hegemonic in its ambitions (The Economist 2007; Traynor 2007). German Chancellor Angela Merkel has been much more outspoken in her criticism than her predecessor, publicly rebuking the Russian government on multiple occasions for its perceived violation of democratic norms (for a recent instance, see Penketh 2007, 30). To reassure the West, Russia would not only have to alter its policies but also confront its past. It is not far-fetched to predict that post-Bush and post–Iraq War efforts by the United States to regain the trust of its Western allies will depend not only on its resumption of more multilateral policies but also efforts to acknowledge its responsibility for bringing chaos and widespread death and destruction to the Middle East.

6. Shared remembrance. The Napoleonic Wars and World War I were remembered separately by victors and losers for many decades, if not longer in the case of the Napoleonic Wars. It was only in 2005 that France joined Britain at
ceremonies led by the Queen commemorating the British naval victory at Trafalgar (Wyatt 2005). World War II repeated this pattern. Periodic celebrations of the D-Day landings in June 1944 were limited to the allies who had landed soldiers on the beach (the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and France) and the occasional Soviet observer until 2004, when Germany was invited to participate. A public opinion poll in France revealed widespread support for the move—fully 86 percent of the respondents thought it a good idea, a figure, moreover, that did not vary significantly by age (Le Figaro 2004, 1). Just as remarkable were the joint commemorations of the Battle of Gettysburg (July 1863), generally described as a turning point in the American Civil War and the well-known site of Lincoln’s eponymous address. On two anniversaries of the battle, in 1913 and 1938, the Grand Army of the Republic and the United Confederate Veterans held a joint reunion where they camped out together and shared reminiscences of the battle. These reunions were a symbol of and catalyst for the rapprochement of North and South.

Events of this kind are a sign not only that hostile relations and the enmity they generate have been overcome, but that unilateral commemoration is now perceived as dissonant with the current state of amicable relations. Joint celebrations allow former enemies to recast their meaning in a manner that reduces dissonance and sustains the partially common identities former adversaries have come to develop. They require interpretations of the past that somehow turn the battles in question, if not into some kind of victory for both sides, as Chancellor Schroeder attempted to do with the Normandy landings, then into an event with positive associations for all participants. To the extent that relations improve between Russia and the West; Russia and the countries of Eastern Europe; Japan, Korea, and China; the United States and Mexico; or any other long-standing historical division—and I am not predicting that they will—joint commemorations of past battles, or of other events previously characterized by clashing national narratives, are likely to symbolize and further facilitate such reconciliation.

7. The proliferation of collective memory communities. Institutional memory helps to shape the identities of citizens who identify with their state, but few states are coterminous with nationalities. In these countries—Japan and Iceland are the great exemplars—collective memories are nested within the state, and the permeability of collective to institutional memory, and vice versa, should be reasonably high. As both political systems have high legitimacy, institutional and collective memory are likely to be more mutually reinforcing than elsewhere. In states that include multiple nationalities or ethnic groups, institutional and some collective memories are more likely to clash to the extent that institutional memory excludes or deprecates these other nationalities or ethnic groups. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, much of domestic and foreign policy revolved around ethnic conflicts, which were the major source of intrastate and interstate violence and war.

Such conflicts continue to disrupt the peace, but other forms of community have also become prominent. They include communities that are international in
membership and organized around religious, confessional, or professional affiliations. Since 9/11, the former has received growing attention, and there is widespread recognition that religious identities frequently compete with national ones and are sustained by their own historical narratives. This is true for many Muslims in the Middle East, India, and Indonesia; Hindus in India; and various Christian sects, primarily in North America. At the secular end of the spectrum, business, professional, and academic communities are increasingly international in their membership and identification. In Europe, and to a lesser extent in North America and the Pacific Rim, executives, professors, and businesspeople are multilingual, work, or have spent time in countries other than those in which they grew up. For all these reasons, they often tend to identify with their peers more than they do with their fellow nationals. With globalization, cross-cutting identities of this kind are almost certain to become a more widespread phenomenon. Such communities also need collective memories to sustain themselves, and it will be interesting to see the extent to which they form and on what they are based.

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In eighteenth-century Europe, communities and the memories that sustained them were hierarchal. Continental elites spoke French, intermarried, and on the whole identified with one another more than they did with the nonaristocratic inhabitants of the lands in which they resided. Nationalism largely did away with this hierarchical community; aristocrats learned local languages and increasingly came to identify with national communities. Memory construction at the official and collective levels facilitated and justified this shift in identification. Globalization has the potential of creating not one but multiple hierarchical communities and of bringing about another great shift in the structure of collective memory. As before, such a shift will have profound implications for social and political behavior. One way of tracking any progress in this direction is by observing the emergence of new communities of collective memory and their understanding of identity.
8. The penetration of local collective memory by corporations and nonprofit organizations. Collective memory has always been to some extent penetrated by institutional memory, and this has been part and parcel of efforts by political authorities who have sought to build national states. Today, collective memory is increasingly molded by institutions that are to varying degrees independent of the state. The film and television industries may be the most important nonstate influences on collective memory, and both readily cross national and linguistic barriers. For the most part, state control over the entertainment industry takes the form of the veto. State bureaucracies can exercise censorship of all kinds, a common practice in almost all authoritarian regimes. Democratic states play this game as well. In a clear effort to defend institutional memory, the French government sought to prevent Le Chagrin et la pitié (The Sorrow and the Pity) from being produced, first for television, and then as a film. When French director Marcel Ophüls raised money abroad for a film production, the French government kept it from being shown in French theaters even after it was released in West Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and the United States. Negotiations with French television to show the film in France were blocked in accordance with what Ophüls labeled “censorship through inertia.” Finally released in April 1971 in a small movie house in the Latin Quarter, and later in a larger theatre on the Champs Élysées, the film in the end attracted more than six hundred thousand viewers, in part because of the notoriety it had achieved by virtue of its censorship (Golsan 2006).

Like institutional memory, collective memory often has physical sites associated with it. They include religious shrines, ruins, museums, buildings, and other locations associated with memorable events. In the developed world, ownership of these sites is occasionally contested, although more often contestation concerns how they are used to represent the past and the cultures to which they refer. The Musée de l'histoire de Judiasme—the Jewish Museum of Paris—offers a nice example of the latter kind of conflict. Its rooms and exhibits tell the story of Jews in France and display an impressive collection of religious objects and other memorabilia. A state museum, whose exhibits and accompanying narratives are the product of the relevant ministry, it reflects an officially sponsored narrative that emphasizes France’s openness and assimilation of its Jewish inhabitants and their historical willingness in turn to become French. Only minimal space is devoted to the fate of Jews in the Vichy regime and occupied France, and when I toured the museum a few years ago, there was no mention of French collaboration in the deportations of Jews to death camps. The bookstore on the ground floor, run by the Parisian Jewish community, is filled with books and other materials on wartime France. The contrast between the display space and the books, and their respective messages, could not be more striking.

In less wealthy countries, the sites of collective memory have increasingly become contested. Local groups have been losing control to states and corporations. In part, this is a response to tourism and the money that is to be made from it. It also reflects efforts by UNESCO and like-minded organizations with the well-intentioned goal of preserving major cultural sites, especially those threatened by
commercial or other kinds of development. At the same time, new technologies and changes in the politics of representation have encouraged individuals and groups to see themselves as the most legitimate curators of their own memory. This claim often pits groups against their own governments and international nonprofit organizations. These conflicts are likely to intensify and over time become part of and possibly strengthen collective memories, even if the groups in question lose control over the sites they are seeking to retain.

In the developed world, official memories are fragmenting, and in less developed countries, collective memories are under siege. We need to track how memory struggles in these two worlds evolve and the degree to which globalization will affect them by creating ever more links between them and the still largely separate arenas in which they currently take place.

9. Collective versus institutional memory. For reasons I have noted, institutional memory can be expected to become less monolithic and more problematic. This is already evident in democratic countries and is likely to become more apparent in authoritarian regimes as it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain a monopoly over the flow of information. Collective memory communities proliferate when states lose the ability to impose institutional memories on their populations. They also become more important when they sustain multiple identities that have the potential to reduce the overall importance of national identity to populations. In Europe, multiple identities have proliferated and increased in importance, although national identities have not undergone a significant decline (on this subject, see Cederman 2001; Herrmann, Risse, and Brewer 2004). We need to know more about this relationship and the circumstances under which multiple identities make national ones less important. Regardless of this relationship, the very proliferation of identities and their increasing importance for individuals should make the collective memories that create and sustain these identities an increasingly important source of contestation.

The ability to influence memories at the collective versus the institutional level requires a different set of resources and strategies. As one size does not fit all, governments that want to influence collective memory must direct their efforts at specific memory communities. They must become more like businesses and political movements that use large databanks and sophisticated algorithms to identify and target selected groups of consumers and voters. Nongovernmental keepers of collective memories will develop their own methods—cultural spam filters—to protect themselves from unwanted outside messages. We might also expect to see more informal and formal cooperation among collective memory communities to advance their respective interests and to protect themselves. Under the right conditions, they might also work with governments, corporations, and international organizations to advance their goals. Given the proliferation of multiple identities, individuals are likely to belong to multiple memory communities, making contact and cooperation across these communities more feasible. The next decade may accordingly witness alliances among different memory communities, strengthening their collective power.
Conclusion

In *Through the Looking Glass*, Alice complains that she cannot remember things before they happen, provoking the Queen to respond that “it’s a poor sort of memory that only works backwards” (Carroll 1872/1982, 171; for this quote I am indebted to Bell 2006). We know, of course, that memory works forward as well in the sense that our individual behavior and many governmental policies are based on memories of what worked or failed in the past. The ability to influence these memories and, thus, their putative behavioral and policy implications, is one means of achieving influence in the present over the future. As Alice recognizes, we have no memories of the future, but we do have imagined memories of the future. We routinely build scenarios with good or bad outcomes based on the lessons we think we have learned from the past and use them to work our way through life and policy choices or, rhetorically, to try to sell our preferences to others. Future “memories” of this kind are just as important for building and sustaining identities as memories of the past—and many of the latter are, of course, also imaginary. Proselytizers of religion and nationalism have painted equally rosy and grim pictures of the future allegedly dependent on the success of their missions. Artists and writers have depicted these outcomes as if they had already come to pass, or were in the process of happening. Hieronymus Bosch’s *Last Judgment* triptych and Dante’s *Inferno* are cases in point. Both encourage viewers or readers to come away with memories of the future.

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The scholarship on memory has focused almost entirely on reconstruction of the past. There are undoubtedly two reasons for this: it largely mirrors the conduct of the actual politics of memory, and it is a field dominated by historians.
There is no particular reason to think that future memory politics may be more future-oriented than in the past, but it is a possibility worth exploring. Either way, future memory is an important and neglected component, especially of individual and collective memory, and one worthy of serious investigation. For Alice’s queen and philosophers, past and future are logically equivalent. This stands in sharp contrast to conventional understandings, which is why we find the Queen’s comment so amusing. Perhaps it is time for scholars and practitioners alike to take her majesty more seriously.

References


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