

Memory Politics

Ethnicity

→ Subjective belief in common descent of group members

Subjective = belief construction (identity), a perception but still real

Common descent = memory → shared common history

Group = category (name)

Attributes = (markers)

Ethnicity and Politics

Political Contestation

Name (category), marker (attribute)

- Subjective determination can be within or outside a group, constant give + take within or outside a group on name + recognition
- Ex. Kurdish people reside in Iran, Turkey, and Syria → Kurds have been in Turkey but there is debate over their names, some believe they are Turks and not Kurds

Ethnic Boundaries

Othering, equality, internal/external

- Constructed boundaries, boundaries make you distinct from others
- Others = excluding → some groups excluded from politics, etc.
- Boundaries don't suggest unequal groups, just 'lines' of division (ex. A vs B, neither is superior or inferior, they are just different)
- Ex. Kurds → some argue on what is 'their' language → contestation can be within or outside the group

Ethnic Groups VS Nation

Dual meaning, territory, self-rule

- Dual meaning cultural definition = Distinct ethnic group can form a nation → self-determination as a nation (culturally, through their culture)
- Dual meaning political definition = ethnic distinctiveness → belief that this makes for self-rule, and right to govern themselves
- Combining all 3 things (dual meaning, territory, self-rule) = a nation

Ethnic Conflict

Territory

→ Prior settlement

- Claims over prior settlement, subjective construction/belief
- Ex. Israel → Palestinians VS Israelis (Jews) both make claims over land → a battle between ancestral links and recent links

Grievances

→ Discrimination, threat

- Minority group discriminates against the majority group
- Belief that immigrants discriminate over people who were already on the land

- Ex. Trump drawing the line between immigrants → belief that there should not be immigrants because they take away from Americans → belief in the wall for security
- Threat could be threats against security

Group as a human being

→ Reification, organicism, groupism

- Groups are only a construction, don't have the kind of traits individuals have (ex. Personality, skills, attitudes, etc.)
- There is a problem of making groups like humans, giving them human characteristics →
- Reification = idea of groups having inherent attributes
- Organicism = people try to make groups seem like organisms
- Groupism

→ Movement, organization, state

→ Collective responsibility

- Kurds, Turks don't actually exist, can't say they all believe, act the same or have a collective responsibility → because it is just a social construction → subjective
- Ex. some illegal immigrants commit crimes and now people have associated those individuals with all illegal immigrants, they identify them as a 'group', making assumptions that all illegal immigrants commit crimes are threats
- The group is only a construction, one cannot say the group is all the same, or has collective responsibility

Memory: The Case of Auschwitz

Holocaust (Shoah)

→ Genocide of Jews

- This view or political memory was officially recognized (despite objective reality it is still a subjective memory) by the UN in the 1940s, prior it was not remembered or recognized as the genocide of Jews

→ Concentration camps

- Germany came to occupy Poland, this is where the greatest number of concentration camps were
- They involved removing people from social + political life, not judicially done
- There were hundreds of camps, with a 20-50% death rate, day to day experience was atrocious, inhumane conditions
- There were laws which if broken would lead to death, the Germans made the laws so be easily broken so they could kill off the Jews → ex. They had laws against stealing food but starved them so they would be tempted
- The first concentration camps in history were created by GB as opposition control
- They were created to break any alleged resistance to Hitler's regime → fascism

→ Death camps

- Auschwitz was the first of 4-5 death camps and was the largest
- Constructed in 1942 for the sole purpose of killing people (Jews), 99% death rate → the other 1% were workers which had to organize the killings
- A new phenomena in history

- It came to symbolize the site of the greatest evil
- Introduction of industrial killing → the use of gas chambers to kill large amounts of people
- All other death camps were burnt to the ground to cover up what had happened there but the Germans did not have time to burn Auschwitz, they had to get away quickly

Holocaust - A Different Narrative

Auschwitz-Birkenau

Concentration VS death camps

- Auschwitz was both a concentration and death camp
- Auschwitz 2 which was much smaller than the death camp was a concentration camp → it was located in Birkenau
- Birkenau is a small polish town which still exists today

Communist Poland Narrative

- Post WWII Poland became a communist state and authorities decided to keep Auschwitz as a museum → Oświęcim → the Polish town's actual name
- For Poland the meaning of Auschwitz was the site of the Polish anti-fascism resistance → there was no mention of Jews rather they were trying to present the political memory that they were the 'good' people for being anti-fascist and trying to fight against Hitler's regime
- The death camps were made to kill Jews but the Polish never mentioned them, they also exaggerated the number of victims

→ a site where something significant happened is given meaning → political memory

→ these are the two main meanings of Auschwitz, one belonging to the UN/Jews and one belonging to the Polish

Memory and Politics

Legitimacy

→ Anti-fascist state

- Shows the heroic struggle
- Communist Poland defined themselves as the heroes during the occupation of the Germans in Auschwitz when their home army (Polish army) was eliminated
- The Polish were sent to Auschwitz because they were fighting fascism
- People accept to be ruled by a regime (the Polish communist regime) because of the legitimacy for fighting against fascism
- Auschwitz seen as a site of memory
- On the right side of politics

→ Responsibility for crimes of genocide

Collaboration

→ Local participation

- Different acknowledgement of who participated affects the plurality of memories
- There was a lot of involvement in Auschwitz, not just one group

- Some Polish did terrible things to Jews, but this is rarely recalled because of the political memories held

Hegemony

→ Polish arrested VS Jews killed are the two competing meaning of Auschwitz

- One narrative pushing out the other → polish memory was dominant until the communist regime in Poland fell apart in the 1980s, now Auschwitz symbolizes the site of the destruction of the Jews and Jewish faith
- Plurality of memories = opposite of hegemony
- Polish used to be dominant, now Jewish memory is more dominant
- Difficult for two narratives to co-exist
- Politically + socially difficult to acknowledge everything (all views) without the fear of de-legitimizing another

Conceptualizing Memory

Identity

→ Belief in common descent

- Can be extremely contested
- What did 'our' ancestors actually do? Contested parts of history
- Memory wars ex. Charlottesville → violence over the statue → anti-slave groups who recognize the terrible act of slavery versus white supremacist groups

Forgetting

→ Selective narrative of past events

- Memory is all about forgetting
- Selective memory → better to forget some things
- Ex. Polish anti-fascism to be remembered but not the Polish involvement in the killing of Jews

→ Narrative of political legitimacy

- "Blank pages" → things you don't talk about
- French man said → states need a story to legitimize them themselves including forgetting so a nation is built on the notion of heroism → don't want people to question

→ The role of the state

Coping with Contestation

Replacement

→ official narrative

- Can't contest the state's narrative

Pluralism

→ parallel narratives

- One may be pushed under another
- States give space to competing narratives → site of memory
- Ex. Spain civil war 1930s → couldn't speak of the death of republicans until the 1970s → logic was to consolidate democracy through forgetting in order to keep the peace
- State allows for different interpretations, state must be open for contestation

Reconciliation

→ shared narratives

- Truth + reconciliation
- Idea that one must recognize everything, one cannot forget the dark sides of history
- Do not judge, but rather try to bring sides together to discuss history, come to terms with what has happened + reconcile