Introduction: Violence and Memory

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Memory is a defining feature of the human condition. But the vectors and social dynamics of memory, the linkages between the individual and the collective, and the roles that traces of the past play in constituting identities and in shaping political life are complex, varied and contested. So too are the ethical demands that memory makes on us. What is clear, though, is that violence – its grim modalities, its diffuse consequences, its representation and comprehension – must stand at the centre of any understanding of memory and politics. The articles in forum explore some of the intersections between memory, politics and violence. In this introduction I set the scene for them, examining some of the relevant issues at stake and outlining some of the key positions in the scholarly literature.

Keywords: history, memory, violence, war

Introduction

Memory is a defining feature of the human condition. It is, as Jeffrey Olick writes, ‘the central faculty of our being in time; it is the negotiation of past and present through which we define our individual and collective selves’. But the vectors and social dynamics of memory, the linkages between the individual and the collective, and the roles that traces of the past play in constituting identities and in shaping political life are complex, varied and contested. So too are the ethical demands that memory makes on us. What is clear, though, is that violence – its grim modalities, its diffuse consequences, its representation and comprehension – must stand at the centre of any understanding of memory and politics.

The study of memory has assumed a pivotal place in the humanities, especially history, and has also risen to prominence in some of the social sciences, most notably sociology and anthropology. The last couple of decades have witnessed the ‘metastatic growth’ of scholarly literature

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on the subject. As with all successful academic ventures, this growth has generated forms of institutionalisation. For example, a new multi-disciplinary ‘Centre for Memory Studies’ has recently been established at the University of Warwick. The journal Memory Studies is published under its auspices, joining the long-established History & Memory as an outlet for the latest research. Courses on the subject proliferate. Textbooks, handbooks and readers abound. Indeed, one scholar has recently enquired whether ‘the recent memory boom may have peaked and may soon be abating’. This seems unlikely, at least until contemporary societies exhaust their fascination with the past, and there seems to be no sign of that. The articles in forum help to show why memory is an illuminating prism through which to analyse the social and political world. They reflect the transdisciplinary character of scholarship on memory, drawing on a wide range of resources from history, political theory, comparative literature and sociology. All, though, focus on questions of political power and violence. In this brief introduction, I will draw out some of the key issues at stake, and offer some ways of framing discussion about memory and violence.

The live presence of the past haunts the contemporary imagination. It is frequently claimed that we are living through a ‘memory boom’, a time in which the past plays an unprecedented role in shaping the present. Susan Suleiman, for example, argues that the present is an ‘era of memory’. It is also often asserted that this is a novel departure, an unprecedented obsession. According to Aleida Assmann, a ‘new concern with the past is expressed by a new wave of memoirs, testimonies, films with historical themes, museums, and monuments. This orientation to


3. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/rs/w/research_centres/memorystudies/


the past is a recent phenomenon. It started only in the late 1980s and developed fully in the 1990s. This claim to radical novelty needs to be treated with caution. There is both something new and something very old in the connections drawn between memory and politics. As W. James Booth reminds us in his article, Homer and Sophocles were fully attuned to the powers of memory, and to its dangers. So too was Shakespeare. Western cultural history is full of searching reflections on the linkages between memory, identity and violence. What is most novel are the particular modulations and mechanisms of mnemonic politics, the forms it has taken in a post-Holocaust world.

It is traumatic memories, signalling the absent presence of violence, suffering, death and destruction, that have dominated scholarly discussion, and which also form the kernel of the articles that follow. (The focus on affective dimensions of traumatic memory connects with the burgeoning scholarship on the emotions and world politics.) The major drivers for the emergence of traumatic memory as a category of social analysis, and also a cultural obsession, were some of the darkest episodes of the 20th century: the two world wars, the Holocaust and Vietnam. Jay Winter focuses attention on the multifarious legacies of the First World War, suggesting that it set the mnemonic template for much of what followed, at least in the Euro-American world. ‘The images, languages, and practices which appeared during and in the aftermath of the Great War shaped the ways in which future conflicts were imagined

and remembered. The long shadow of the Holocaust, meanwhile, has influenced much of the theorising on the subject. For some scholars the Holocaust even spawned a crisis of representation itself.

The fugitive traces of memory long outlast the sound of the guns. In a multitude of ways, omnipresent and incidental, British culture is still permeated by the legacies of empire and the world wars (note, for example, the recent burst of attention paid to the deaths of the last surviving combatants from 1914–18). Questions of memory – and above all of Vergangenheitsbewältigung (‘coming to terms with the past’) – have played a vital, erratic and deeply controversial role in Germany since 1945. American society and politics are still burdened by the mnemonic legacies of the Vietnam War; so too, of course, is Vietnam. Similar – but also very different – stories could be told about most political communities around the world.

Memory politics is a truly global phenomenon. Heated arguments about how to commemorate the dead of war and revolution, or to bring to justice perpetrators of political violence, controversies over textbooks and monuments, calls for reparations and apologies for past crimes: all proliferate throughout the world. In some cases a mimetic logic can be discerned – truth and reconciliation commissions, for example, often borrow from one another, drawing on existing practices (and pools of expertise) in other parts of the world – but they are always adapted to, and reshaped by, local circumstances. In an important sense, these are transnational, even cosmopolitan, phenomena. Other mnemonic practices – such as the way in which the ghostly presence of the war dead in Vietnam are treated, to give just one example – are more circumscribed, less accessible as a motile, transnational form.

16. Heonik Kwon, Ghosts of War in Vietnam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). This is not to say that the role of ghosts in Vietnam is unique, however. For a Taiwanese illustration, see Stephan Feuchtwang, ‘Memorials to Injustice’, in Memory, Trauma, and World Politics, ed. Bell, 176–95.
Historians, anthropologists, sociologists and many others have analysed the ways in which memory has structured social and political life in a wide variety of different geocultural contexts. Attempting to survey this literature ‘would dissuade even the most megalomaniacal bibliographer’.¹⁷ Within the disciplinary confines of academic International Relations (IR), however, memory politics has not received much sustained attention.¹⁸ In part, this is not surprising. The mainstream of the discipline is not equipped theoretically to deal with the types of issues raised by the study of memory. (The partial exception here is the American-based subfield of political psychology.) Models of utility maximisation and instrumental rationality are incapable of grappling with the cultural density and fluid textures of historical consciousness, or the radical ambiguity, indeterminacy and fragility of memory. Perhaps more surprising is the lack of explicit or sustained reflection found amongst constructivist scholars. After all, some account of historical memory is presupposed in constructivist arguments about the constitution and reproduction of collective identities.¹⁹ The IR scholars who have focused most on questions of memory tend to be those writing in a critical idiom.²⁰ This work is extremely valuable, but the study of memory need not be confined to critical theorists. There is much scope for extending the study of memory into other areas of scholarship.

Memory and Scale: Local, National, Global

One of the most challenging aspects of working on the politics of memory is to map the interactions between different scales of social analysis. Some scholars treat memory as if it were fractal in character – as if, that

¹⁷. Olick, ‘“Collective Memory”’, 22.
²⁰. See, for example, Jenny Edkins, Trauma and the Memory of Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Maja Zehfuss, ‘Forget September 11’, Third World Quarterly 24 (2003): 513–28; Zehfuss, Wounds of Memory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Roland Bleiker, Pablo Neruda and the Struggle
is, it assumes the same structure at different levels of resolution. From this perspective memory exhibits the property of self-similarity: the ‘collective memories’ of large groups of people operate in ways analogous to those of small groups, and even (in a problematic psychologisation of the political) individual minds. This perspective can be illuminating, but it is also misleading in important respects. It is illuminating insofar as it identifies the ways in which memory functions to constitute identity at multiple scales of analysis. We are the products of our pasts, even if we are not fully determined by them. But the scalar differences are as important as the similarities, and treating memory as if it operated in similar ways across diverse scales and contexts has significant analytical costs.

An illustrative example of this fractal account of memory can be found in Avishai Margalit’s influential book The Ethics of Memory. Margalit defends a communitarian account of memory-politics, in which members of communities are obligated to remember their predecessors in various ways. In order to make this argument, he models national memories on much smaller units: the family or the neighbourhood. They are treated as analogous. On this account, the scope of the extended family connotes a sense of inclusion within a community of ‘neighbours’. In the ‘context of ethics’, he writes, ‘a neighbour is someone with whom we have a history of a meaningful, positive, personal relationship, or a history that can be mediated through some imagined community, such as the community of my fellow Jews, most of whom I have never encountered in my life’. These thick relations, he maintains, ‘are anchored in a shared past or moored in a shared memory’, and they bind ‘natural communities of memory’, including ‘families, clans, tribes, religious communities, and nations’. For Margalit, this familial metaphor is ‘non-deceptive’. Yet it is problematic. Families or neighbours make very poor templates for nations. This is mainly because the size and institutional structures of the nation (or other large communities) render the metaphor misleading. The differences in the mechanics of mediation are vast. Memory is not, in this sense, fractal. Yet Margalit suggests that most communities of memory are chiefly the product of spontaneity: ‘In talking about natural candidates for

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21. A. Margalit, The Ethics of Memory (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 103 and 76. ‘What do we imagine when we imagine a community with whom we are supposed to have thick relations? My answer is that we imagine an extension of family relations that would include relatives we have not met’ (p. 75). I challenge Margalit’s analysis in Bell, ‘Agnostic Democracy and the Politics of Memory’, Constellations 15, no. 1 (2008): 148–66.

22. Margalit, The Ethics of Memory, 45.

23. Margalit, The Ethics of Memory, 7, 46 and 95.
communities of memory [including nations] I mentioned groups that, left on their own, are very likely to become communities of memory, usually quite spontaneously and sometimes with the help of manipulation. This is an implausible picture of modern politics. Although the construction of myths is not an exclusively top-down instrumental process, far more than a little ‘help’ is usually provided by (at least elements of) the state, as is demonstrated in the articles that follow.

Olick argues that much work on memory, and especially on the ‘memory–nation nexus’, is marred by ‘misleading substantialism’. It too often assumes that which it is supposed to explain. Following Rogers Brubaker, he contends that ‘nations are not entities that develop; they are practices that occur, institutional arrangements that are continually enacted and re-enacted’. They have an important performative dimension. He notes that the same danger stalks accounts of memory, ‘where the very term substantializes what is in fact a fluid process’. Memory is the product of conflicts, power struggles and social contestation, always fragile and provisional. It is for this reason, among others, that some scholars have suggested that the very language of memory is itself problematic, for it misdescribes, or simply collapses together, diverse modes of historical representation and consciousness. This is a line of argument I have pursued elsewhere. Others go further. For Kerwin Lee Klein the scholarly discourse of memory – and also of its related terms, trauma, mourning, testimony – is a reduction of politics to theology, a return to forms of sacred history. As such, and inadvertently, it neuters the critical potential of secular historical writing. But there are other ways to conceptualise how the past shapes the present. Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, for example, suggest that we should talk of remembrance rather than memory, in order to reassert the role of agency, of humans acting individually and in concert to bring the past to life.

‘To privilege “remembrance” is to insist on specifying agency, on answering the question who remembers, when, where, and how?’ And, they maintain, it also draws attention to ‘the transience of remembrance, so dependent on the frailties and commitments of the men and women who take the time and effort to engage in it’.\(^{29}\)

The articles in this section address the scalar qualities of memory in different ways. Cath Collins and Katherine Hite analyse the multiple, conflictual ways in which political violence is commemorated in post-Pinochet Chile. The linkages between commemoration and political identity have been a central theme in the scholarship on memory.\(^{30}\) In dissecting the ‘multi-actor commemoration field’ populated by government agencies and civil society groups, Collins and Hite highlight the diffuse character of commemoration, its multiple possibilities, its ethical imperatives and ultimately its limitations. They focus on two examples. The first is Villa Grimaldi, a former centre where political prisoners were tortured and killed, and now the site of a Peace Park, inaugurated in 1997. Among other things they note that Villa Grimaldi, though familiar in human rights circles, is barely acknowledged in the wider society. While successful in some respects, it plays only a small role in the national memory-scape. They go on to examine the commemorative practices in the rural community of Paine, just outside Santiago, which was also a site of atrocities. While it can be judged a success, it struggles for funding and recognition. Apart from these fixed sites of commemoration, Collins and Hite highlight a range of ‘counter-memorial’ practices, which seek to challenge what some see as an ‘unduly museological approach to commemoration’. The members of ‘Colectivo 119’, for example, ‘carried larger than life-size cardboard cutouts of disappeared comrades or relatives through the streets and then installed them in the main square in front of the presidential palace’. Their article, a study of the micro-politics of commemoration, brings into focus a range of issues that are often sidelined or ignored. They insert political economy back into the picture, identifying the vital role of financial constraints in determining how commemoration is enacted. And they also highlight the significance (and the difficulty) of deploying innovative aesthetic and representational commemorative


practices. The pedagogy of memory – the ways in which monuments, exhibits and museums are designed and how memory is communicated in material-cultural terms – is a subject of vital importance. Maja Zehfuss draws on, and extends, Judith Butler’s recent analysis of ‘frames of war’. Butler argues that war is in part enabled by the production of distinctions between those who should be protected from violence and those who should not be. This in turn relies upon a distinction between persons who are grievable – whose lives are seen to matter, and to be worthy of grief after death – and those who are not. On this account, the Western person is a grievable human being, somebody whose death is mourned, and thus somebody who has a claim on protection. She also argues that non-Western lives are typically seen in the West as ungrievable, and thus, in an important sense, as non-human. As Butler argues, ‘grievability is a presupposition for the life that matters’. This framing enables conflict by dehumanising the people living in the geo-cultural zones in which Western military force is projected. Zehfuss complicates this bifurcated picture by focusing on a category missing from Butler’s analysis: the Western soldier. In Butler’s terms, the soldier is something of a paradox: he or she is somebody who is both grievable and who is sent into danger, a body from which protection is withdrawn. As Zehfuss observes, while ‘their deaths are not only publicly acknowledged but mourned’, they are simultaneously ‘accepted as a matter of course’. Drawing on the example of British military deaths in Operation TELIC in Iraq, she analyses how soldiers are represented in obituary notices produced by the Ministry of Defence. Among other things these stylised documents serve to erase the violence of death and reproduce narratives about Western soldiers as humanitarians, acting in the name of the common good. Their deaths are recorded as tragedies, and they are figured as the victims not the perpetrators of violence. The obituaries, Zehfuss argues, constitute ‘a significant part of the production of the frame that makes war possible’.

John Hutchinson focuses on the macro-scale, offering the outline of a historical sociology of national memory politics. He places the commemoration – indeed the sacralisation – of the war dead at the centre of modern national identity construction. ‘There are few nations for

31. For a commentary by one of the curators of a museum designed to commemorate the First World War, see Jay Winter, ‘War Museums: The Historial and Historical Scholarship’, in Winter, Remembering War, 222–38.


33. Butler, Frames of War, 14.
whom wars do not have a sacred significance: sacred because they are connected with the foundations of their communities, or they are viewed as decisively moulding them and their sense of destiny.’ Defending an ethno-symbolist account of nationalism – a position which stresses ‘the endurance of many myths of premodernity’ and emphasises historical continuity where others stress radical novelty34 – Hutchinson argues that instrumentalist accounts of the deployment of memory for the purposes of the state are overly simplistic. War myths, he contends, ‘serve multiple functions including the creation of meaning out of suffering’. There are limits to how often and how easily they can be manipulated.

A theme that emerges in Hutchinson’s article, and which is common in the wider literature, is the interlinking of memory and the nation, the architectonic political community of the modern world. On this view, memory is central to modern nationalism. Anthony Smith puts the point succinctly: ‘one might almost say: no memory, no identity; no identity, no nation’.35 Nations require memory, but, on this account at least, it seems that memory requires the nation. A consequence of linking memory so closely to nationality is that forms of transnational politics are automatically seen as lacking key attributes of identity, and perhaps as somehow less authentic. In this vein, Smith argues that globalisation is essentially ‘memoryless’ and as such that it will never generate strong emotional or political bonds. This partly explains, he suggests, the residual power of nationalism and other particularistic attachments in a world defined by increasing economic and technological interdependence. [W]e can discern no global identity-in-the-making, nor aspirations for one, nor any collective amnesia to replace existing “deep” cultures with a cosmopolitan “flat” culture.36 This is a common theme in communitarian accounts of politics. A similar argument is elaborated by Margalit.37 Michael Walzer, meanwhile, contends that memory is a


37. Margalit, The Ethics of Memory.
constitutive feature of collective (national) identity, but that humanity has ‘no memory ... no history and no culture, no customary practices, no familiar life-ways, no festivals, no shared understanding of social goods’.38 This empirical claim generates a different, more minimal, set of ethical relations from those pertaining within mnemonic-communities.

But is this an adequate empirical (or normative) account? Some scholars, after all, have argued that we can discern the shadowy outlines, the embryonic shape, of a cosmopolitan (or at least transnational) memory. In an extraordinary article, Jeffrey Alexander traces how the Holocaust became ‘the dominant symbolic representation of evil’ during the second half of the 20th century, and he suggests that this historical process underpins the development of a supranational moral universalism that might reduce the probability of such events occurring again.39 Decoupling the traditional link between the nation and collective memory, Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider likewise argue that the global spread of Holocaust discourse provides the foundations for a ‘cosmopolitan memory’.40 This ‘symbol of transnational solidarity’ has emerged as a major force following the collapse of the Cold War ideological blocs that dominated the preceding decades; it is something about which all (or at least most) people can agree, a ‘global icon’ of suffering. The Holocaust, on this account, has become ‘a measure stick for international politics and a transnational value system’.41 Such a global ‘memory-scape’, they claim, can provide the basis for an emergent universal human rights regime.

The consequences of this form of memory politics are certainly pronounced. Zehfuss, for example, has traced, in a German context, how the repeated invocation of the Holocaust has been employed to mobilise support for the use of military force, most notably humanitarian intervention operations.42 Yet caution about the universality of this mnemonic discourse is required. While pervasive in the Euro-Atlantic world, the memory of the Holocaust does not resonate with the same intensity, or to the same effect, everywhere. Indeed, it is feasible to imagine the

42. Zehfuss, Wounds of Memory. See also Hans Kundnani, Utopia or Auschwitz: Germany’s 1968 Generation and the Holocaust (London: Hurst, 2009).
emergence of forms of transnational counter-memory, based on the images of suffering in Afghanistan, Iraq or Palestine. For many people around the world, Abu Ghraib and Lebanon present more resonant icons of suffering and humiliation than do Auschwitz and the World Trade Centre. A singular global memory-scape seems unlikely.

Jens Bartelson offers a longer-term perspective. He argues that memory (and forgetting) played a central role in the very foundation and subsequent stabilisation of the modern state and international system, and that only through understanding the manner in which this occurred can we attempt to forge a more cosmopolitan world. Yet there is at least a chance of future transformation, of escaping the prison house of the mnemonic-nation: once we apprehend the historical contingency of this constellation of political forces, then one of the key conceptual preconditions for moving into a post-national world could be realised.

**Apologia: On the Politics of Regret**

Perhaps too much value is assigned to memory, not enough to thinking. Remembering is an ethical act, has ethical value in and of itself. Memory is, achingly, the only relation we can have with the dead ... Heartlessness and amnesia seem to go together ... But history gives contradictory signals about the value of remembering in the much longer span of a collective history. There is simply too much injustice in the world. And too much remembering ... embitters. To make peace is to forget. To reconcile, it is necessary that memory be faulty and limited.

One of the most prominent features of the ‘era of memory’ is the interest in establishing the right kind of ethical relationship between the past, present and future. This is what Olick, in one of the most penetrating accounts of the phenomenon, terms the ‘politics of regret’. It covers a wide variety of developments, including official apologies, demands for reparations and, perhaps most prominently, the emergence of assorted truth and

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reconciliation commissions, most famously in South Africa. All of them are tied to arguments about the legitimacy of political regimes.

The normative significance of memory is highly complex and ultimately ambiguous. Do we have a duty to remember the past? If so, who are the ‘we’ and which ‘past(s)?’ W. James Booth focuses attention on the intertwining of memory, identity and justice. In his book *Communities of Memory*, he writes that:

Memory has fueled merciless, violent strife, and it has been at the core of reconciliation and reconstruction. It has been used to justify great crimes, and yet it is central to the pursuit of justice. In these and more everyday ways, we live surrounded by memory, individual and social: in our habits, our names, the places where we live, street names, libraries, archives, and our citizenship, institutions, and laws. Still, we wonder what to make of memory and its gifts, though sometimes we are hardly even certain that they are gifts.

His article in this section probes some of these conflicting features of memory. It does so through analysing some of the ways in which the ambivalent ‘gifts’ of memory infuse life in the Kashmir Road, Clonard/Falls neighbourhood of Belfast. This is itself a telling example of the historical calcification, the mnemonic density, of naming. It marks a story about the long and tumultuous history of the British empire. ‘[T]he making present of the past, which is memory’s special and defining work, can also be done in stone, in monuments and in what we call the streets where we live.’ But the Kashmir Road is also the site of more recent violence. It was a flashpoint in the violence that beset Northern Ireland throughout the ‘Troubles’, the site of killings by the British army, and subsequent commemorative practices by the IRA and other paramilitary


organisations. In particular, Booth highlights how the dead are, through specific remembrance rituals, transformed into the ‘patriot dead’, martyrs to a cause whose death must be given meaning. ‘Memorialisation seems both to do this movement’s duty to its dead and to help mobilise the wider community by transforming the memory of violence into one of sacrifice and patriotism.’ It helps to legitimate retributive violence. (This is a version of the sacralisation discussed by Hutchinson.) Yet memory alone is incapable of inciting violence; other factors are necessary, and these will vary from case to case. But it serves as ‘kindling’ for the fire. A recent example of this kindling effect can be seen in the way in which memories of the Second World War – crystallised into debates over the memorialisation of dead soldiers – have sparked a bitter confrontation between Estonia and Russia.

The ethical impulse of memory flows from the idea that something is owed to the dead, and perhaps especially to the victims of past injustice. For Booth, memory, which is central to the enduring existence of communities, ‘thereby seeks to ensure that historic injustices will not vanish into the oblivion of forgetting’. The result is that ‘justice and violence dwell in close proximity to one another’. Memory can bind people as well as driving them apart, catalyse and sustain the search for justice as well as motivating violence.

Olick asks a vital question about the historicity of the politics of regret: what circumstances produced it? Under what conditions did it emerge, and how and why did it reach its contemporary status? Ultimately, he locates the story at the heart of modernity, and argues that the rise of a politics of regret is linked to the decline and fragmentation of the nation state. ‘Memory and regret are not the result of the integration of the collectivity but of the impossibility of this in an age of competing claims, multiple histories, and plural perceptions.’ Given the historical specificity of the politics of regret, we might ask about the costs as well as the (undoubted) benefits, the lacunae as well as the new issues that have been brought to light. Like many others, John Torpey, in his account of reparations politics, argues that this turn to the past is a novel phenomenon. ‘This past-orientated outlook is new and it is a major shift in the way we think and talk about politics.’ And he is highly sceptical about many aspects of the new orientation. Widespread ‘efforts to rectify past wrongs’, he argues, have ‘arisen in part as a substitute for expansive visions of an alternative human future of the kind that animated the socialist movements.

52. Booth, in this section.
of the preceding century, which have been overwhelmingly discredited since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989’. In this account, memory politics often (although certainly not always) represents the abandonment or betrayal of progressive politics; it is a nostalgic repudiation of the emancipatory promise of modernity. Charles Maier concurs, arguing that the cultural obsession with memory is depoliticising; it distracts attention from engaging with the problems of the present, replacing it instead with ‘a wallowing in bathetic memory’. Barbara Misztal, meanwhile, suggests that memory is often seen as a ‘surrogate of the soul’, and she goes on to argue that an overemphasis on memory is dangerous for democracy, as it hampers cooperation, increases fragmentation and causes ‘moral damage’ to civil society by conflating political and ethnic/cultural boundaries.

Enter Nietzsche, for whom it is at least as essential to forget as to remember. To live life actively and creatively, he argues, individuals need to be able to escape the chains of the past: ‘Forgetting is essential to action of any kind, just as not only light but darkness too is essential for the life of everything organic.’ Otherwise the past becomes the ‘gravedigger of the present’. But why? Ross Poole provides a convincing answer: ‘This is partly because the past is insatiable, and an attempt to meet all its demands would be endless. Anything but a selective response to the past will swallow up all concern for the future. There is also the problem that in the attempt to overcome the past, one reproduces it.’

While there is something to these powerful criticisms, it is also important to recognise that memory politics need not assume a reactionary form, serving only nostalgic purposes or state power, while dimming, even erasing, the utopian impulse. The relationship between past, present and future is more dynamic, more fluid than that. As Edkins has argued, for example, traumatic memories (and the commemorative practices associated with them) can challenge the status quo:

The way in which events such as wars, genocides and famines are remembered is fundamental to the production and reproduction of centralized political power. However, memory is central not only to the production of these forms of power but also to their contestation: certain types of memory,

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58. Ross Poole, ‘Two Ghosts and an Angel’, 144.
the memory of catastrophic events, for example, provide specific openings for resistance to centralized political power.59

Memory, then, is a site for contesting the meaning of the past and its manifold traces. The articles in this section focus on different aspects of this contest – on the ways in which memory is implicated in the emergence, evolution and persistence of nationalism, on how fraught and fragile the process of memorialisation is in post-conflict situations, on how commemoration feeds into the framing of war, and on how the micro-dynamics of memory can make and remake political life in particular conflict-ridden locales. In combination, they highlight the multivalency of memory, the ways in which it can both generate violence and act as a vehicle, albeit imperfect, for moving beyond it.

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59. Edkins, ‘Remembering Relationality: Trauma Time and Politics’, in Memory, Trauma, and World Politics, ed. Bell, 101; Edkins, Trauma and the Memory of Politics.