Historical Memories

Rezarta Bilali & Michael Ross
Philosopher George Santayana

• "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."
“Remember”

Annals of St. Gall

709  Hard winter. Duke Gottfried died.
710  Hard year and deficient crops.
711  Nothing happened.
712  Flood every where.

.....

723  Charles fought against the Saracens at Poitiers on Saturday.
Different Views

• "What experience and history teach is this—that people and governments never have learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it." **G. W. F. Hegel**

• If you do not like the past, change it. **William L. Burton**, *(American Historical Association Newsletter, 20:2, 1982)*.

• "Each age tries to form its own conception of the past. Each age writes the history of the past anew with reference to the conditions uppermost in its own time." **Frederick Jackson Turner**

• Search for analogies—Iraq like Bosnia or Vietnam?
Historical Memories Take Many Forms

- Texts, novels, plays, films, monuments
- Shakespeare, Salieri
- Narratives by teachers, group & religious leaders
- Individual memories of insiders & outsiders.
So Why Bother Remembering History?

Psychological perspective:

• Group identity (insiders and outsiders)
• Personal identity (insiders and sometimes outsiders)
Parallels Between Group & Personal Identity

- High self/group regard
- Motivation: self/group preservation
- Threaten self/group ID → self/group protective motives
- History → self/group understanding (Who am I/we?)
- Self/group views<---history
- Insiders consider themselves to be history experts
- History conflicts<----territorial conflicts
Group & societal level

Past    Present
Group & societal level

Past ⟷ Present
Magnitude Gap

- Severity of harm
- Moral Culpability
- Time Span
- Intentions of Perpetrators

Baumeister & Catanese, 1999
Sources of distortions in interpretations of violent past

- Selective remembering
- Fabrication of events
- Blaming the enemy
- Blaming the circumstances
- Minimization of harm
- Exaggeration of harm

(Baumeister & Hastings, 1997)
Shared representations of the past

Individual-level

Historical memories

Present
Antecedents

- Group membership
- Ingroup identification
- Group status, Ideology, SDO

The type of events

Interpretation of events

Bilali, 2009; Cairns et al., 1998; McKeever et al., 1993; Sahdra & Ross, 2007; Sibley et al., 2007
Past Victimization

Consequences for the ingroup

Collective Emotions

Intergroup outcomes

Kaiser et al., 2004; Mack, 1983; Vollhardt, 2009; Wohl & Branscombe, 2008
Consequences

Reminders of Ingroup Wrongdoing

Collective Emotions: Guilt, Shame,

Intergroup outcomes (e.g., reparations, apologies)

Level of categorization
Philosopher George Santayana

• "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."
Palestinian prime minister, Salam Fayyad

“Let us not allow ourselves the luxury of acting as victims forever. This is a case of two opposed historical narratives. And if this is going to direct traffic in the future, we are not going too far. It’s time to get on with it and end this conflict. Let’s move on. Let’s really look forward.”
Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi in 2000), called for clarification of “the entire history of Burundi, going as far back as possible in order to inform Burundi about their past. The purpose of this clarification shall be to rewrite Burundi’s history, so that all Burundians can interpret it in the same way” (Protocol 1, Article 8, c).
Reconciliation

Historical memories

TRCs
Memorials
History education
etc...
Process vs. content
The normative and moral framework
What kind of historical truth?
  -- Establishing accountability & responsibility;
  -- Delegitimizing the institutional frameworks of the past;
  -- Breaking the past patterns of behavior;
  -- Focusing on the lessons learned

Single truth vs. multiple truths
THANK YOU!