Memory and Power in Post-War Europe

How has memory – collective and individual – influenced European politics after the Second World War and after 1989 in particular? How has the past been used in domestic struggles for power, and how have ‘historical lessons’ been applied in foreign policy? While there is now a burgeoning field of social and cultural memory studies, mostly focused on commemorations and monuments, this volume is the first to examine the connection between memory and politics directly. It investigates how memory is officially recast, personally reworked and often violently re-instilled after wars, and above all, the ways in which memory shapes present power constellations.

The chapters combine theoretical innovation in their approach to the study of memory with deeply historical, empirically based case studies of major European countries. The point of stressing memory is not to deny that interests shape policy, but, with Max Weber, to analyse the historically and ideologically conditioned formation and legitimation of these interests. The volume concludes with reflections on the ethics of memory, and the politics of truth, justice and forgetting after 1945 and 1989.

This ground-breaking book should be of interest to historians of contemporary Europe, political scientists, sociologists and anyone interested in how the political uses of the past have shaped – and continue to shape – the Europe in which we live now.

Jan-Werner Müller is a fellow of All Souls College, Oxford. He is the author of Another Country: German Intellectuals, Unification and National Identity (2000).
Memory and Power in Post-War Europe

Studies in the Presence of the Past

Edited by

Jan-Werner Müller

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For as at a great distance of place, that which wee look at, appears dimme, and without distinction of the smaller parts; and as Voyces grow weak, and inarticulate: so also after great distance of time, our imagination of the Past is weak; and wee lose (for example) of Cities wee have seen, many particular Streets; and of Actions, many particular Circumstances. This decaying sense, when wee would express the thing itself, (I mean fancy itselfe,.) wee call Imagination, as I said before: But when we would express the decay, and signifie that the Sense is fading, old, and past, it is called Memory. So that Imagination and Memory, are but one thing . . .

Hobbes, Leviathan
Contents

List of contributors  ix
Acknowledgements  xii

Introduction: the power of memory, the memory of power and the power over memory  1
JAN-WERNER MÜLLER

Part 1 Myth, memory and analogy in foreign policy

1 Memory of sovereignty and sovereignty over memory: Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine, 1939–1999  39
TIMOTHY SNYDER

2 Myth, memory and policy in France since 1945  59
ROBERT GILDEA

3 The power of memory and memories of power: the cultural parameters of German foreign policy-making since 1945  76
THOMAS BERGER

4 The past in the present: British imperial memories and the European question  100
ANNE DEIGHTON

5 Europe’s post-Cold War remembrance of Russia: cui bono?  121
IVER B. NEUMANN

6 Memory, the media and NATO: information intervention in Bosnia-Hercegovina  137
MONROE E. PRICE

vii
Part 2 Memory and power in domestic affairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The past is another country: myth and memory in post-war Europe</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TONY JUDT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The emergence and legacies of divided memory: Germany and the Holocaust after 1945</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>JEFFREY HERF</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Unimagined communities: the power of memory and the conflict in the former Yugoslavia</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ILANA R. BET-EL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Translating memories of war and co-belligerency into politics: the Italian post-war experience</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ILARIA POGGIOLINI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Institutionalising the past: shifting memories of nationhood in German education and immigration legislation</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DANIEL LEVY AND JULIAN B. DIERKES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Trials, purges and history lessons: treating a difficult past in post-communist Europe</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TIMOTHY GARTON ASH</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Index 283
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European memories remain long and deep, even as European power has retracted and reconfigured itself after the transformative ruptures of 1945 and 1989. For all its spatial and temporal sweep, this impressive work is coherently organized and tightly argued. Two larger halves — concerned, respectively, with collective memory in foreign policy and public memory in domestic affairs — feature articles on Eastern Europe (Timothy Snyder), Germany (Thomas Berger, Jeffrey Herf, Daniel Levy, and Julian Dierkes), France (Robert Gildea), Soviet and post-Soviet Russia (Iver Neumann), Italy (Ilaria Poggiolini)