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**Integration after Totalitarianism:  
Arendt and Habermas on the Postwar Imperatives of Memory\***

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ABSTRACT Collective memories of totalitarianism and the industrialized slaughter of the Holocaust have exerted a profound influence on postwar European politics and philosophy. Two of the most prominent political theorists and public intellectuals to take up the legacy of total war are Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas. However, their prescriptions seem to pull in opposite directions. While Arendt draws on remembrance to recover politics on a smaller scale, advocating for the creation of local councils, Habermas draws on the past to justify his search for postnational forms of political community that can overcome the bloody legacy of nationalism. My argument brings these two perspectives together by examining their mutual support for European integration as a way of preserving the lessons of total war. I argue that both Habermas and Arendt reject the technocratic nature of the EU while maintaining hope that it can develop a truly supranational form of politics.

KEYWORDS Hannah Arendt, Collective Memory, European Union, Jürgen Habermas, Political Community, Totalitarianism

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*The Second World War...[is] a war we forget at our own peril. Anyone who thinks that fascism in one guise or another is dead and gone ought to think again.*  
- Judith Shklar (1998: 4).

### *Introduction*

Collective memories of Europe's "age of total war" (Black, 2006) – spanning two global conflicts, the economic hardship of the Great Depression, the rise of totalitarianism and the industrialized slaughter of the Holocaust – defined European politics and society in the postwar era (1945-89). The unprecedented record of death and destruction in the first half of the twentieth century has been the dominant imperative for change since the end of the Second World War. This motivation has been a particularly powerful force in global affairs, as anti-fascism defined domestic and international politics on both sides of the Iron Curtain throughout the Cold War (see Lebow et al., 2006).

The most notable product of this political agenda from the perspective of international political theory is the project of European integration. From its humble beginnings as the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the European Union (EU) has become the greatest experiment in political, social, economic and monetary integration "beyond the nation-state" (Haas, 1964). As such, it raises fundamental questions about many of the basic concepts of politics and international relations, including nationalism, citizenship, sovereignty and democracy (see Verovšek, 2017a: 398). Despite its ongoing crises at the beginning of the second millennium, looking back on the Schuman Declaration of 9 May 1950, a "united Europe" has indeed proven "indispensable to the preservation of peace" by helping overcome the "age old opposition between France and Germany" (Committee on Institutional Affairs, 1982: 47).

The postwar imperative for change cannot, of course, reconcile the atrocities of the past once and for all. In the words of Max Horkheimer, “Past injustice has occurred and is completed. The slain are really slain” (in Benjamin, 1999: 471) and cannot be brought back to life. While those killed by totalitarianism cannot be redeemed, the survivors of past on the European continent have sought to give these deaths meaning by drawing on their memories of the past to prevent the recurrence of such events in the future.

Although World War II left painful and divisive memories across Europe, this historical legacy is especially powerful in the Federal Republic. The intellectual challenge of the Holocaust for Germany’s relationship to its cultural tradition is perhaps most symbolically obvious in Buchenwald. In the middle of this concentration camp (*Konzentrationslager*), where many Jews, Poles, Slavs and other “social degenerates” had labored and died, stood the famous “Goethe Oak” (*Goethe-Eiche*), where Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote the “Wanderer’s Nightsong” (*Wanderers Nachtlied*) and parts of *Faust*. However, this legacy was tarnished by the fact that the Nazis used the oak for torture and hangings before it was destroyed by an allied bomb in 1944 (Häftling Nr. 4935 [Prisoner #4935], 2006).

This example is emblematic of the postwar German struggle to approach its past. Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas stand out as two of the most prominent public intellectuals to take up this problem and its political implications. Although Arendt’s (2006) condemnation of Adolf Eichmann for overseeing the deportation of the Jews by the Nazis is her most (in)famous intervention in these debates, she also took strong positions on the issue of Germany’s collective guilt and responsibility (see Alweiss, 2003: 307-18), as well as on the important role that history plays in constructing the

common world that all individuals share. Similarly, the meaning of the past has been a constant theme in all of Habermas's writings, culminating in his defense of the Holocaust's central place in postwar German identity during the *Historikerstreit* (Historians' Debate) of the mid-1980s (see Baldwin, 1990; Habermas, 1989).

There is much that unites the views of these two theorists regarding the role that this unmastered – or perhaps even unmasterable (Maier, 1988) – past ought to play in postwar social and political life. For instance, even though Arendt tends to speak of remembrance while Habermas uses the term collective memory (which he adopts from the French social theorist Maurice Halbwachs), both are committed to social contestation through dialogue as a way of recovering and learning from the experienced past.<sup>1</sup> Arendt and Habermas also agree that shared historical imaginaries are crucial in linking disparate individuals together within the common, globalized world world that has developed with the onset of modernity and the technological revolutions it has brought with it (see Marcuse, 1977).

However, in addition to these similarities there are a number of substantive differences between their positions as well. Most notably, unlike Arendt, whose theoretical ideals are drawn from her analysis of the Greek city-state – prompting one unsympathetic commentator to accuse her of “*polis* envy” (Wolin, 2001) – Habermas' engagement with the importance of collective memory stretches far beyond the city. He calls instead for the formation of a new “postnational constellation” (2001) where states relate to each other not through international politics, but through a global domestic policy mediated by supranational institutions.

From this perspective their prescriptions for political life in the aftermath of the Second World War seem to go in opposite directions. While Arendt seeks to recover politics on a smaller scale, where local councils debate issues directly, Habermas explicitly searches for new, more globalized forms of political community as the way to overcome the debilitating power of nationalism. Although Arendt seeks to “scale down” to the local level while Habermas wants to “scale up” beyond the nation-state, my basic thesis is that their work can be brought together in their shared desire to root a new postwar politics of memory in the European project of integration.

In mobilizing support for the postwar European movement, Arendt and Habermas both frame the problem of dealing with the Nazi past not only as one of German intellectual history, but also as a key issue for international political theory in the wake of total war. However, whereas Habermas focuses almost exclusively on the legacy of the Holocaust, Arendt tends to speak of the remembrance of totalitarianism more broadly. At a time when divisions between the “old” founding states and the “new,” postcommunist members from East-Central Europe is increasingly dividing the EU (see Verovšek, 2015: 542-6), I conclude by suggesting that Arendt’s more holistic vision, which allows for memories of both fascism and communism to drive the *projet européen*, may have certain advantages.

The argument is organized as follows. In the first section, I demonstrate the importance of remembrance in Arendt’s theoretical system, focusing in particular on the influence of the *polis* and the importance of storytelling (see also Verovšek 2014b). Even though the concentration camp symbolizes the danger of the loss of memory, Arendt does not focus exclusively on its application by the Nazis in the west, but also on its

deployment by the communist regimes of the east. In part two I then show why Habermas thinks that the memories of World War II – contained in the paradigmatic example of Auschwitz – should form the basis for a federated, supranational community that exists both above and alongside existing European states.

In the third section I bring these reflections together by examining how these two seemingly opposed perspectives can be brought together. In so doing, I highlight their surprising agreement on the potential of the “new regionalism” (Telò, 2001) of the European project as meso-level of politics that can preserve the lessons of the past. I conclude by noting that both Arendt and Habermas reject the technocratic nature of the EU – which has become particularly visible in the aftermath of the so-called Great Recession (2008-13) – while maintaining hope that it could develop a truly postnational form of political debate and decision-making. I also suggest that Arendt’s more holistic focus on the memories of totalitarianism may have certain advantages over Habermas’s more narrow emphasis on the centrality of the Holocaust at a time when the EU is expanding into areas of Europe whose memory cultures are defined more by their experience of communism than fascism.

#### *Arendt on the Polis and the Council System*

Born in 1906 to a Jewish-German family, Arendt experienced the rise of Hitler and the horrors of World War II as an adult. Arendt’s flight from Germany without papers in 1933 forced her to confront important political issues of citizenship, statelessness and belonging – as well as of the legacy of totalitarianism more generally – on both a personal and a theoretical level (Young-Bruehl, 1982: 115-63). Her memories of the Third Reich caused her to question much of the history of political thought, which she

argued was tainted by the events of 1914-1945. As a political theorist – not a political philosopher, a label she rejected due to its connection with the philosophical tradition – she sought a new grounding for politics in the postwar world.

Arendt builds her conception of the political on a reinterpretation of the Greek *polis* (city-state) as the first site of politics, understood literally as referring to “the affairs of the *polis*.” She argues that rethinking the concepts of ancient philosophy is crucial in a world that has experienced totalitarianism. Revisiting the past with new eyes has the potential to dismiss “the mindless peace of complacency” (Arendt, 1977a: 38) that made the radical but simultaneously banal, bureaucratized evil of Nazism possible.

Based on her reconstruction of ancient Greek political thought, Arendt argues that “words and deeds” are the key feature of “the human condition,” the title of her major theoretical work on politics. Words and deeds are crucial because distinguish individuals both from each other and from the rest of the living world: “In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal[ing] actively their unique personal identities” (Arendt, 1998: 179). Although everybody labors to take care of their physical needs and works to produce tools and other artifacts, the separation of unique individuals from the masses of human beings is possible only as a result of “words and deeds,” action in Arendt’s terminology. Through “action in concert” individuals cease to be defined by work or labor, and become political beings, living and defining themselves *vis-à-vis* others.<sup>2</sup>

The importance of words and deeds in the creation of unique identities highlights the crucial role of storytelling in preserving these markers of individuality beyond those that witnessed them directly. On one level, storytelling is necessary to spread the effects of action horizontally throughout the entire community. On a deeper level, however, it is



the function of history to take words and deeds out of the recurring cycle of the natural world in order to preserve these achievements for posterity. Storytelling makes memory tangible and reveals the meaning of the past. However, it remains dependent on the presence of others. Political communities, where individuals live together and pursue common goals as citizens, therefore assume a central role in preserving the past and endowing it with meaning.

Arendt argues that it is only through the shared human capacity for speech that individuals are able to build common worlds together. Words and deeds transform a group into a *communitas*, a “union with.” This unity of individuals bound together by a common fellow feeling is the basis for political life. She traces the creation of the political realm back to the Greek city-state. Arendt (1998: 194-5) notes, “Before men began to act, a definite space had to be secured and a structure built where all subsequent actions could take place, the space being the public realm of the *polis*.”

The *polis* and other political communities serve the dual function of making remembrance possible in the present and of reifying these memories into more permanent, tangible structures. They create a safe haven for individuals that protects them from both internal and external violence; they provide a stable home for action. By ensuring the safety of its members, the polity guarantees that witnesses will be present to testify to the great words and deeds of unique individuals. In this way, “The *polis* was supposed to multiply the occasions to win ‘immortal fame,’ that is, to multiply the chances for everyone to distinguish himself, to show in deed and word who he was in his unique distinctness” (Arendt, 1998: 197).

The community not only provides witnesses; it also “fabricates memory” (Arendt, 1977b: 64) so words and deeds can outlive their authors and the original witnesses. Its laws and institutions concretize past acts and make them immortal: “What saves the affairs of mortal men from their inherent futility is nothing but this incessant talk about them, which in its turn remains futile unless certain concepts, certain guideposts for future remembrance, and even for sheer reference, arise out of it” (Arendt, 1990: 220). The *polis* is the structure that provides these guideposts; it creates what Arendt calls “the common world” that gives action meaning. In both its physical structure and its political legacy – reflected in laws, statutes and records – the polity “is a kind of organized remembrance” (Arendt, 1998: 198).

Through storytelling and political communities such as the *polis*, men assure that their great words and deeds do not die. By reifying memory into concrete, tangible objects that range from physical monuments and memorials to words on a page, the storyteller and the community give acts a durability that is not possible otherwise. While those outside the *polis* depend on poets to gain immortality, the political community guarantees that action will endure without depending on bards to sing and listeners to hear the stories chronicling their deeds. Although storytelling is a powerful ability, the narrative and the memories it preserves would not have the same longevity without the ultimate “situs of memory” (Kohn, 2000: 125), the *polis*.

What Arendt found most frightening about the rise of totalitarianism in both its communist and its fascist variants is its embrace of a conception of society where everyone is unified into a single body politic that thinks and acts as one (Lederman, 2016). The plurality of unique persons living within a given territory is reduced to one

man, *das Volk* (“the people,” a singular noun in German), i.e. the individual is subsumed within the corporate state. In order to achieve this goal, Arendt argues that totalitarianism seeks to destroy the preconditions of action: plurality and “the gift of memory so dangerous to totalitarian rule” (1951: 434). In contrast to the “words and deeds” of the *polis*, the administrative approach adopted by totalitarianism “substitutes for the boundaries and channels of communication between individual men a band of iron which holds them so tightly together that it is as though their plurality had disappeared into One man of gigantic dimensions” (Arendt, 1951: 465-6). The spontaneity of human action is replaced by mechanistic conceptions of nature and history.

The attempts of the totalitarian state to eliminate plurality, memory and action is most visible in the operations of the extermination or death camps (*Vernichtungslager*). These institutions are unprecedented because they not only try to rid the world of certain individuals and classes within society, but do so in a way that “miraculously sees to it that the victim never existed at all” (Arendt, 1951: 434-5). In order to do so, the camps “mak[e] death itself anonymous” (Ibid: 452) by taking away the individual’s unique identity. The person’s name (contained on official documents) and personal belongings are replaced by a number and a uniform; the unique individual ceases to be a person and becomes one more thing among many, a number on a document, a part of the homogenized collective.

This approach is not restricted to the West or to the Nazi regime. On the contrary, it is shared by totalitarianism in both its fascist and its communist forms. The Soviet *gulag* thus serves the same purpose as the Nazi concentration camp, both of which sought to take advantage of anonymous inmates as sources of inexpensive labor power, while also

sharing some features of the death camps. Most notably, all of these totalitarian institutions seek to destroy individuality, making the victim disappear both as a physical body on the earth and from the memories of others in the shared human world. Much like purged members of the Communist Party who later disappeared from photographs under Stalin, the victim seems never to have existed at all. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* Arendt quotes two victims of the Great Purge (1937-38) in the Soviet Union, who report that “if it is true that elephants never forget, Russians seem to us to be the very opposite of elephants.... Soviet Russian psychology seems to make forgetfulness really possible” (in Beck and Godin, 1951: 234, 127).

Building on Arendt, Timothy Snyder (2016) argues, “In order to kill a person, you have to kill the juridical person first – you need to remove the law from the person you are killing.” Once the person ceases to exist on paper – i.e. in the eyes of the law and the gaze of the state – killing the physical individual is easy. The “mere” or “bare” human being that remains when the juridical person has been disposed of can disappear without a trace within an “organized oblivion that... extends even to the families and friends of the victim” (Arendt, 1951: 452). In contrast to the “organized remembrance” of the political community, totalitarianism seeks “organized oblivion.”

Despite Arendt’s status as the “thinker of the polis” (Sternberger, 1980), Christian Volk (2017: 172) points out that in addition to this theoretical resource, her thought also draws on her memories of “the downfall of a European order based on the nation-state, the collapse of the Weimar Republic, and the rise of National Socialism.” In order to respond to the horrors of totalitarianism, Arendt had to find a way to reassert plurality. However, she could not do so without “the saving power of remembrance, which helps us

preserve what would otherwise be lost to time” (Beiner, 1982: 155). Although words and deeds lie at the root of human existence, they would be meaningless and futile without the gift of memory. If people could not preserve their past interactions with other human beings, they would be doomed to appear in the world for a fleeting moment, only to disappear again in a never-ending cycle. Individuals would have neither a past nor a future: “Without remembrance...the living activities of action, speech, and thought would lose their reality at the end of each process and disappear as though they never had been” (Arendt, 1998: 95).

However, while Arendt needed to find a way to reassert memory, in the aftermath of the crimes of totalitarianism and the atrocities of the Holocaust she also knew that it was impossible to simply go back to the *status quo ante*. As a result, Arendt interpreted totalitarianism and the events of the late 1930s and early 1940s as a crucial break in history that made a simplistic reliance on time-honored forms of authority untenable. Unlike some survivors, who sought relief from the horrors of the past in forgetting, Arendt maintains a belief in the importance remembrance and the dangers of oblivion (see Benhabib, 2003: 91). Even though “we have ceased to live in a common world where the words we have in common possess an unquestionable meaningfulness” (Arendt, 1977b: 95), she argues that this does not mean that the past is no longer important or that there is no long any meaning to be found in history. On the contrary, Arendt repeatedly warns of the dangers of destroying memory.

Arendt argues that preserving “the pre-existence of a common world” (1998: 465) through remembrance is crucial not only for the formal legal communities of the modern state system, but also for the creation of a broader sense of community that encompasses

the entire globe. Although the progress of natural science has resulted in “the decisive shrinkage of the earth,” Arendt worries that these gains have been won at “the price of putting a decisive distance between man and earth, of alienating man from his immediate earthly surroundings” (Arendt, 1998: 251). This alienation from the physical earth itself is dangerous in an age when humanity has the ability to destroy its environment both through the use of the atom bomb and environmental destruction on a global scale. In Arendt’s analysis this “*earth* alienation” is accompanied by a “*world* alienation” of individuals from each other. Thus, instead of becoming “citizens of the world” who can confront global problems, “the eclipse of the common world” has instead led to “the formation of the lonely mass man” incapable of action to preserve either the common *world* of the common *earth* (Arendt, 1998: 257).<sup>3</sup>

In order to combat these trends – which both helped to produce totalitarianism and were exacerbated by it – Arendt maintains that individuals re-establishing bonds that cut across social and generational boundaries. Instead of leaving the past behind, she encouraged the survivors of Europe’s age of total war to rethink the relationship between the past and the present. While the past usually limits the range of possible plotlines, during moments of crisis memory can also provide the resources needed to think political action anew (see Verovšek, 2020).

This approach builds on Arendt’s reading of Walter Benjamin.<sup>4</sup> In his “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (1940), Benjamin argues that violent historical ruptures destroy existing narrative, leaving only fragments of the past behind. Arendt builds on this point, arguing that the aftermath of “Benjaminian moments” (Benhabib, 2012: 31-3) of crisis that tear the existing narratives of history asunder, the survivors must imitate the

actions of a pearl diver, who searches the depths for bits of the past that have “‘undergone a sea-change’ and survive in new crystallized forms and shapes that remain immune to the elements, as though they waited only for the pearl diver...[to] bring them up into the world of the living” (1977a: 51). Even through totalitarianism had broken “the continuity of Occidental history” (1977b: 26), Arendt argues that in its aftermath individuals must search for bits and pieces of the past that can use to make politics meaningful for the present.

This fragmentary historical methodology allows Arendt to convert memory into something applicable to the present. Unlike the organic stories and myths of German nationalism that had fueled the onset of two World Wars, this Benjaminian relationship to the past is reflexive and contested. Such a historical imaginary would have to be non-violent, drawing its power from “the human ability not just to act but to act in concert” (Arendt, 1970: 41) – an ability made possible by the power of words to convince individuals to cooperate of their own free will.

This fragmentary, “pearl-diving” methodology necessitated by the experience of totalitarianism leads her to argue in favor of a new localized politics in the form of a council system, which was until recently “a relatively neglected theme in the scholarly literature on Arendt” (Lederman, 2016: 504). She is highly critical of the liberal-democratic and Marxist conceptions of the state, both of which crush popular participation either through the operation of a strong party system or the domination of the public sphere by the Communist Party. Instead of following either of these traditions, Arendt develops her own understanding of the importance of direct citizen participation in revolutionary moments by drawing on a number of disparate resources. These include

Thomas Jefferson's ideas for the development of a ward system, the American Revolution, the Paris Commune of 1789, the creation of *soviets* in the first days of the Russian Revolution in 1917, the 1919 Spartacist Uprising (*Spartakusaufstand*) led by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht she experienced as a child in Germany, the Jewish *kibbutzim* she saw during her trip to Palestine in 1935, and the councils formed during the short-lived Hungarian Revolution of 1956.

In all of these cases, Arendt argues that local councils "concerned with the reorganization of the political and economic life of the country and the establishment of a new world order" were not planned, but instead "sprang from the people as spontaneous organs of action and of order" (Arendt, 1990: 263). Although the dominance of the Party or of the party system inevitably doomed these local institutions, they are "pearls" with the potential to create a new mode of networked politics. These small "spaces of freedom," in which every citizen is able to take part, have the potential preserve politics and action in communities larger than the *polis*, at least in principle.

The fact that revolutionary councils were best preserved in America's federal system of self-government explains why the US remained a beacon of hope for Arendt throughout her life (see Arendt, 1990: 156-70). In reflecting on the legacy and imperatives of totalitarianism, she concludes that humanity must return to a fully participatory, localized politics in councils that mirror the human potential for action most clearly revealed in the *polis*. Much as the *kibbutzim* could form the nucleus for the new Jewish homeland of Arendt's (2007: 349-50, 395, 400) unorthodox Zionist vision, so the model of councils more broadly could form the backbone for a new politics for the postwar world.



*Habermas's Move Beyond the Nation-State*

Although he is 23 years Arendt's junior, Habermas also experienced Nazism first hand, even getting called up to deploy in order to defend the homeland with the Hitler Youth in the final days of World War II. Surveying the physical, moral and political ruin of Germany in its *Stunde null* – the “zero hour” of utter destruction – Habermas knew that his country would have to learn from this tragedy in order to reclaim its intellectual tradition and its place in global society. Looking back on this crucial moment, he notes that “the rhythm of my personal development intersected with the great historical events of the time.... These experiences undoubtedly helped develop motifs which then further determined my thinking” (1992: 77).

Much like Arendt, Habermas's project also starts with “words and deeds,” although he prefers to speak of “linguistically mediated communication.” He agrees with Arendt that political power is not drawn from force or violence, but is a product of our ability to speak and persuade each other – our “ability not just to act but to act in concert” (Arendt, 1970: 41). However, he (Habermas, 1983: 178) rejects her “rigid conceptual dichotomies between ‘public’ and ‘private,’ state and economy, liberty and welfare.” Instead of limiting the space of politics, he expands it outward to encompass new forms of political community after World War II.

Habermas' core philosophical insight is that the essential feature of language is communication, which raises us out of nature and makes us conscious moral agents. This is the basis of social interaction. Language as “communicative action” cannot only be used objectively to refer to states of the world and subjectively to reflect personal experiences, but also intersubjectively to establish mutual understanding and

interpersonal relationships between individuals. The ultimate arbiter of the validity of these claims is the ability of the participants to defend their claims with reasons, i.e. “in terms of the capacity of responsible participants in interaction to orient themselves in relation to validity claims geared to intersubjective recognition” (Habermas, 1987: 314). The space and reach of this communicative politics is not limited as in Arendt, nor is it as agonistic and rhetorical. Instead, Habermas (1995: 129) argues for a “shifting boundary between the private and public spheres” legitimized by discourse within the political community.

By framing his social theory in universal terms, Habermas retains the ability – indeed the responsibility – of combating relativism. Grounding a substantive, non-instrumental form reason in universal rules of discourse allows Habermas to criticize and struggle against totalitarian policies and authoritarian forms of government, which restrict intersubjective action and argumentation. Since arguments are deployed to persuade others, speakers inevitably are forced to tacitly acknowledge that these norms are valid for everyone. Communicative action, the discursive process of criticizing and giving reasons for particular claims, can lead rational individuals to universal norms. Instead of the friends and enemies created in Europe’s experience of total war (see Schmitt, 2007), Habermas’s “talk centric” rather than “vote centric” (Scudder, 2016: 524) approach to politics is supposed to bring individuals together across borders and without regard for the status of the individual (unlike voting, which is only open to citizens, participation in the public sphere is usually open to all).

The ability of participants in discourse to come to “mutual understanding” (*Verständigung*) about their goals and desires is crucial for any political community. It is

this ability and the shared “we-perspective” it encourages that allows individuals form communities bound by ties of solidarity, without which “intelligent action [remains] permanently foundationless and inconsequential” (Habermas, 1994: 96). Traditionally, these ties dissipated fairly quickly, not extending much beyond the village or the *polis*. With the advent of nationalism in the nineteenth century, combined with the empowering of the state through railroads and schools, however, nation-states were able to extend the circle of solidarity to include their co-nationals, who shared linguistic, cultural and historical bonds (see Weber, 1976). The creation of the *demos* was thus requires the creation of a “state-constituting people” (Habermas, 2006b: 305), a process that is achieved in large part through the narratives of collective memory that are contained within “stories of peoplehood” (Smith, 2003). In this way – much like Arendt – Habermas also seeks to link his communicative theory of politics to the remembrance of a concrete political community.

While extending the ties of solidarity to the state certainly had its advantages, it is also exclusionary and dangerous. Habermas (1998: 142) observes, “The formation of nation-states under the banner of ethnonationalism has almost always been accompanied by bloody purification rituals.” A brief glance at the history of European nationalism before 1945 shows how the desire for ethnic purity resulted in repeated rounds of forced emigration, expulsion, disenfranchisement and extermination culminating in genocide. Arendt (1951: ch. 9) argues that the existence of stateless persons, refugees, and those deprived of their “right to have rights” is crucial to understanding the origins of totalitarianism in Europe. Habermas (1996: 508) agrees, noting that her diagnosis has “proved frighteningly accurate.” Although he concurs with Arendt’s analysis of the

concentration camp as the key institution of totalitarianism, Habermas focuses almost exclusively on the crimes committed by the Nazis in the Holocaust (see Baldwin, 1990).

Much like Arendt, Habermas sees power (*Macht*) as rooted in the human ability to use reason and arguments to create bonds of solidarity.<sup>5</sup> This kind of societal dialogue is especially important if we are to “learn from catastrophe” (Habermas, 2001: 26-37) by building on the collective memories of the Holocaust. Habermas personally experienced and played a role in the transformation of German identity that took place after the fall of the Third Reich. For him, postwar West Germany proves that identity can be reformed and rebuilt by taking a reflexive distance from the past. After the horrors of National Socialism, he argues that “our patriotism cannot hide the fact that in Germany democracy has taken root in the motives and hearts of the citizens... after Auschwitz – and in a way only through the shock of the moral catastrophe” (Habermas, 1990: 152). The desire to learn from the past while avoiding the pitfalls of the organic conceptions of history and peoplehood propagated by the Nazi regime is what led Habermas to seek an “active remembrance – working through [*aufarbeiten*] the past and hoping for a better future” (Matušík, 2001: 10).

The problems caused by overlaying the *demos* onto the *ethnos*, of the fellow citizen onto the fellow national – of the fact that “the nation conquered the state,” as Arendt (1951: 275) famously puts it – are clearly visible in German history. In the nineteenth century, many leading German intellectuals, including Jakob Grimm, Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel, Friedrich Schleiermacher and Alexander von Humboldt, all sought a ground for German identity. The possible borders of the state were particularly problematic. Germany’s unification under Prussia in 1871 proved unsatisfactory, as many

groups perceived to be part of *das deutsche Volk* were still stranded in areas beyond the borders of the *Reich*. It was the desire to unify the whole German people within the German state that drove the expansionist drive that defined period of total war in Europe.

The post-World War I democratic experiment of the Weimar Republic failed. It was not until after the even greater disaster of the Third Reich that Germany, at least its Western half, was able to embrace a less nationalistic mode of politics. With the tragedy of Nazism and World War II, Habermas observes, “Germans have lost the possibility of grounding their political identity on anything else than the universalistic principles of state citizenship...national traditions cannot be appropriated unreflectively, but only critically and self-critically” (in Matušík, 2001: 173).

Habermas personally experienced the transformation of German identity that took place after the fall of Hitler. Reflecting back on “the experience of 1945 and after,” he (1992: 126) notes that in addition to his rejection of nationalism and violence, he retained something else, “namely that things got better. Things really got rather better. One must use that as a starting-point too.” Post-World War II West Germany proves that identity can be reformed and rebuilt by reflecting on “the better traditions of our history, a history that is not unexamined but instead appropriated critically” (Habermas, 1989: 234). This kind of learning process (*Lernprozeß*) requires full engagement with the tragedies and traumas of the past, not their silencing or repression.

Although his commitment to “constitutional patriotism” (*Verfassungspatriotismus*) is often criticized for being too abstract and formalistic, it is rooted in the particular historical experiences of different peoples, who have to reflect upon and critically “filter” their traditions through the negative reference points of their past communal crimes

(2000: 93-8; Müller, 2007). Instead of homogenizing identity, this form of patriotism binds specific communities together through their “anamnestic solidarity” (Habermas, 2002: 129-38) – i.e., through their collective task of remembering the dead and ensuring that they do not repeat their past crimes – not through pre-political characteristics like birth, nationality or ethnicity.

Habermas (1976: 115) argues that the history of nineteenth and twentieth century Europe shows us that these “pre-established identities have become obsolete.” It is not just Germany that needs to learn from its past – all of Europe and the world as a whole does as well. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of communism in Europe, Habermas (2005: 12) has sought to ground the lessons of a “bellicose past [that] entangled all European nations in bloody conflicts” in political communities beyond the nation-state, most notably in the EU.

Since its start in the 1950s, the European project has built on the desire to secure peace in Europe after the horrors of World War II and the divisions wrought by the Cold War. “It is memory of the moral abyss into which the excesses of nationalism led us that lends our current commitment [to peace and unification] the status of an accomplishment,” Habermas (2006c: 105) notes. “This historical background could serve to smooth the transition to a postnational democracy founded on mutual recognition of the differences between proud national cultures.” Instead of building on differences, a common European identity can be formed through a narrative of learning from history to respect human rights, abide by the rule of law and refrain from violence. Only in this way can the tragedies of the past can serve as the foundation for a new, post-totalitarian politics.

With the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, this project is no longer limited to the west, but can and should be shared by all of Europe. This is a moral and political imperative, since it alone can prevent future wars and aggression on the continent, as well as in the world more generally. Habermas therefore argues, “The twentieth century puts at risk its future by not learning from – by badly forgetting – its own disaster” (in Matušík, 2001: 139). Unfortunately, in making this argument Habermas makes no mention of the *gulag* or the Soviet Union, focusing instead on the Holocaust and the actions of the National Socialist regime. Although this position makes sense from his position within the postwar Federal Republic, it weakens its appeal in the new, postcommunist member-states of East-Central Europe (see Verovšek, 2015: 542-6).

This oversight in his application of his ideas, however, does not mean that Habermas’s argument is wrong. It just means that it is too narrowly applied. Although he agrees that more needs to be done to create a European identity strong enough to empower the EU, he sees clear signs of its existence in the world today. He notes, “[F]eatures of a common political mentality have taken shape, so that others often recognize us as Europeans, rather than as Germans or French – and that happens not just in Hong Kong, but even in Tel Aviv” (Habermas, 2005: 9). He identifies a number of markers of this nascent European identity, most importantly an aversion to the use of force and desire for multi-lateral diplomacy conducted through the United Nations. While this kind of identity would clearly be a construction, this is not a problem as long as Europeans themselves actively endorse it. The appropriation of the common experience of the horrors of nationalism is hardly arbitrary – on the contrary, it is completely necessary.

Despite the fact that Habermas focuses on the collective memories of Western Europeans in constructing this argument, its implications are not limited to Europe. Habermas contends that the legacy of violence and nationalism on this continent can serve as an example to the rest of the world. This explains his recent forays into international political theory (Lundestad and Kjartan, 2011). Building on Kant's famous essay "Towards Perpetual Peace" (1795) – which is also a core touchstone for Arendt – Habermas (2006b: 503) argues for the creation of "regionally comprehensive regimes like the European Community" around the world. By encouraging the creation of broad, non-nationalist identities, these continental regimes could help safeguard peace and prevent atrocities within their borders and externally by cooperating in peacekeeping and protecting human rights through the United Nations. This is the key step he takes using the memory of war and atrocity in Europe to push politics "up" beyond the traditional political boundaries of the Westphalian state. The EU does so – aspirationally at least – both institutionally and through the creation of a transnational European public sphere (Abbott, 2016).

*Compatible Forms of Postwar Global Federalism*

Despite their broad agreements about the communicative basis of politics, the importance of "action in concert," the dangers of the nation-state, the threat of totalitarianism, and the importance of the collective memory of these historical events, Arendt and Habermas seem to draw conflicting lessons from the interwar crisis and the experience of two World Wars. Although both argue that the concrete experience of the concentration camp – contained either in the paradigmatic image of Auschwitz (Habermas) or within the broader phenomenon of totalitarianism (Arendt) – require a



rethinking of political life, they move in opposite directions. In particular, Arendt mobilizes the memory of European history to move towards local politics, i.e. towards institutions, organizations and associations that promoted direct participation of the people and “whose units might be both horizontally and vertically connected, related to or dependent on one another” (Wellmer, 2000: 224). By contrast, Habermas seeks to address the problems of world politics by placing the nation-state within regional “continental regimes,” of which the EU is the example *par excellence*. He (Habermas, 2006a: 136) argues that regimes at this transnational, meso-level will be able to promote an “actively rebalanced world order” that would prevent the horrors of totalitarianism from recurring.

Despite these differences, I argue that it is possible to bring these divergent stands of thought together by examining the support both of these thinkers offer for the European project as part of a broader reorganization and reconceptualization of international politics in the wake of the Second World War. Although Habermas criticizes Arendt of over-ontologizing and of creating political categories that are too rigid, he does not take issue in principle with her call for more direct, inclusive forms of politics. On the contrary, he favors and encourages direct participation in democratic life through processes of deliberation. While he has argued that citizens can and should be involved in the governing of larger units, he would welcome a renewed, localized politics, as long as it was able to function meaningfully under conditions of globalization and was able to combat the disastrous consequences of nationalism.

Habermas’s own proposals for a “constitutionalization of international law” based on a “democratically constituted world society without a world government” retain an

important role for existing communities. This system depends on universal norms, which are determined at the global level through both formal international law and informal customary norms. However, formal enforcement is carried out by legitimate systems of coercion that are “closely linked in the historical form of the constitutional state” (Habermas, 2008c: 445). In many cases, these mechanisms are further devolved to local authorities, which decide which laws to enforce and how to institutionalize them (for more, see Verovšek, 2017b).

In addition to taking advantage of local institutions, Habermas also seeks to build on the historical reservoirs of civic solidarity contained within existing polities. He fears that scrapping local politics in favor of a globalized system will leave individuals in a state of Durkheimian *anomie* where they lack the communal ties necessary for socialization and the development of meaningful identities. Without the social bonds created by politics at the community level, Habermas argues that citizens will lose the collective power to combat the rise of the powerful forces of the neoliberal economic system. His endorsement of the importance of local politics, even within an increasingly globalized and constitutionalized postnational constellation, already brings his thought closer to Arendt’s.

In between these two levels, he (Habermas, 2008a: 324-5) argues that “*regional or continental regimes*” can help to set institutional frameworks for norm implementation at the meso-level. These structures are meant to fill the political and legal gap between the local and the global. Since regions often share a historical experiences and other shared cultural markers, such continental regimes could ensure that global debates about the implementation of basic international norms were carried out in “the intermediate arena

[that] is populated by a manageable number of global players.” These actors would help to ensure that international norms agreed upon at the global level received historically and culturally sensitive and enforceable interpretations at the transnational level.

The EU is the prototype of a continental regime. The common identity and shared legal structures Europeans have forged since 1945 as a result of their shared experience of total war is a model for other regions. The fact that the EU often acts in the name of all its members in global negotiations on issues as diverse as trade and climate change shows how such institutions can act as a stepping stone towards a Kantian global domestic policy (*Weltinnenpolitik*). For Habermas, the European “transition from classical international law to what Kant saw as the ‘cosmopolitan condition’” (2006a: 19) builds directly on the “negative point of reference” (2008b: 21) represented by the Holocaust.

In contrast to Habermas, Arendt never set out an institutional design or structure for world federalism. In fact, she was notoriously suspicious of such frameworks, noting, “Nobody can be a citizen of the world as he is a citizen of his country” (Arendt, 1968: 81). Given the emphasis she places on “plurality, diversity and mutual limitations,” Arendt was also suspicious of attempts to globalize politics or to create an international public sphere. However, despite her wariness, Patricia Owens (2007: 146) points out, “A federated political structure more akin to Kant’s ‘republic of republics’ is certainly compatible with her views.” In fact, something along these lines might be precisely what she had in mind when she endorsed the “framework of universal agreements” (Arendt, 1968: 93) laid out in the writings of Karl Jaspers, her doctoral supervisor and friend.

Arendt’s support of a loose global federalism is somewhat unexpected given her commitment to local politics. It is hard to draw firm conclusions about her thought on this

topic, as she “never clearly and systematically set out her thought in this area” (Owens, 2010: 73). However, the fact that she felt compelled to move in this direction is understandable given the increasing globalization of a world in which humans walk on the moon and humanity has developed the ability to destroy itself. It may be that her moves towards a form of global federalism are an attempt to bring a much-needed dose of realism into the basic insights of her council model, which otherwise “seems to fly in the face of the realities of the modern world” (Benhabib, 2003: 165).

On my reading, Arendt’s concessions to the need for international cooperation in the postwar world do not negate her support for the council model. However, they do show that she recognizes that the local cannot and should not be the only level of political life given the dangers of both world- and earth-alienation in the postwar world. On the contrary, councils are but one level in a broader system linking individuals around the world to each other both horizontally and vertically. As James Muldoon (2016: 789) points out, “The councils are the only new form of government of the twentieth century that provides Arendt with hope for the stabilization of political freedom within a lasting political regime.”

It is difficult to know exactly what Arendt would have thought of the EU. At the time of her death in 1975, the EU was still known as the EEC (European Economic Communities), a relatively circumscribed organization that sought to preserve peace in Europe by creating a common market for the crucial resources necessary for war. Arendt never mentions the EEC in her published work. However, it is clear from her correspondence that she did support the creation of its earlier incarnation, the ECSC. In a letter to Jaspers from May 1958, Arendt wrote, “I can’t write about Europe yet. [...] This

is a totally god forsaken place except for the presence of the Coal and Steel Community” (in Kohler and Saner, 1993: 351).

Although these statements are somewhat ambiguous, they suggest that Arendt thought that a certain degree of integration in Europe was a step in the right direction after 1945. Lars Rensmann (2006: 160, 146) argues that her optimism is based on her belief that the creation of the ECSC was a “genuinely political [act] of foundation and cooperation” based on “the idea of freedom and public deliberation.” Similarly, Owens (2009: 39) suggests that Arendt saw the early steps toward integration as the first steps towards “a modest cosmopolitanism of inter-republic law.” Both commentators note that regional integration is compatible with Arendt support for local councils that break down existing political boundaries within “a post-national democratic-republican model of interlinked polities” (Owens, 2010: 97).

Arendt’s (1994a: 416-7) endorsement of the “very healthy and necessary efforts to federate the European nations” also fits with her broader desire to undermine ideas of absolute state sovereignty. Writing after the war, she notes, “If men wish to be free, it is precisely sovereignty they must renounce” (Arendt, 1977b: 165). Although there is much debate about how to classify the EU and over how much power it actually wields, it is clear that it has indeed succeeded “shak[ing] the state concept and its sovereignty” (Arendt, 1969: 231). From this perspective, it is not the contents or actual operations of the EU that are crucial, but the mere fact that the European movement sought to take up the past as a resource to generate a “new beginning,” a new form of “action in concert” that has the potential to give birth to a new form of politics that preserving plurality and natality in the postwar world.

Interestingly, Arendt's fragmentary writings even include something similar to the existing European system of subsidiarity, where problems are addressed at the level most suitable on a case-by-case basis. In her proposals, Arendt (2007: 400) notes that within federalist structures, whether at the state or interstate levels, issues should "be resolved on the lowest and most promising level of proximity and neighborliness." This proposal also bears a striking resemblance to Habermas's own more rigid and systematized proposals for a postnational constellation based on a political division of labor between the state, regional and global levels.

Moving towards a networked council system of the kind supported by Arendt is compatible with the transnational integration of nation-states into continental regimes that Habermas recommends. This can be seen in the rise of the "new regionalism" visible in Europe today, where the Basques, Scots and other stateless peoples are gaining influence while formally remaining part of their host state (at least for the time being). In this sense, the existence of the EU and the framework it provides means that these regions can play a role in affairs beyond their own borders without the formal trappings of traditional Westphalian sovereignty. Integration therefore does not only mean that powers are being delegated "up" to transnational organizations like the EU – they are also frequently being devolved "down" to more local levels, where a more direct, council-like politics is possible.

These considerations show the benefit of placing Arendt and Habermas in dialogue on the issues of memory and political community after World War II. Although they approach the problem quite differently, they end up with compatible suggestions for a new, pluralist political life based on the power of individuals acting together through

communication, not violence. My basic thesis is that this mutual support is the result of Arendt and Habermas's respective reflections on the meaning of Germany's "unmasterable past" (Maier, 1988) and Europe's broader legacy of war and atrocity.

### *Concluding Remarks*

In considering the continued imperative for change emanating from Europe's experience of total war, I have examined the reflections of two of Germany's leading postwar political theorists and public intellectuals, Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas. Focusing on so much on Germany may seem narrow, but is justifiable given its central place in the violence of atrocities of the twentieth century and the indispensable role it has played in the origins and development of the EU since 1945. More than any other country, the Federal Republic has sought to memorialize and atone for its past.

West Germany's intellectual, political and societal confrontation with its history is even reflected in its language. Since 1945 the German language has developed two distinct words to describe the process of dealing with a less than glorious past. The first, *Geschichtsaufarbeitung*, refers to the attempt to "come to terms with history." The second, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, emphasizes the need to master or overcome the past (McCarthy, 2002). This term can even be read as "fighting" the past, as the verb *bewältigen* comes from the Middle High German word for violence (*Gewalt*).

The need to confront its own history has taken on such importance in postwar West Germany that even these terms have become politicized. Theodor Adorno (1986), Habermas's mentor at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, provided his views on these concepts in an influential public lecture in 1959. He criticized the term *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* for its implication that history can be "mastered," since this

implies that the past can be dealt with, one and for all. By contrast, he approved of the notion of *Aufarbeitung*, since it introduces the idea of “working through” and reprocessing old materials into something new and beneficial, instead of merely repressing them. As this terminological debate indicates, the events of World War II – symbolized by the fact that Auschwitz has become the paradigmatic transnational *lieu de mémoire* (Nora, 1984) – have placed a particular burden on Germany, as demonstrated by its profound influence on both Arendt and Habermas. Politically, it has led the Federal Republic to commit itself fully to the European project as a way of putting its history of bloody nationalism firmly into the past.

At the start of the second millennium, the imperative for change arising from the events of the first half of the twentieth century has started to wane. There are two main reasons for this decline in the motivational power of memory as an imperative for change. The first has to do with the important challenge that the fall of communism in 1989 and the integration of the new member-states from East-Central Europe has posed for European memory culture. Whereas Western Europe has followed Germany in treating the Holocaust as “the European entry ticket” (Judt, 2005: 803), collective memories on the eastern side of the iron curtain emphasize the experience of communism “as the main evil by way of duration and intensity” (Kattago, 2009: 382). Instead of emphasizing the Holocaust as unique, the populations of postcommunist Europe have sought to place the liberation of 1945 on a par with 1989 based on an interpretation of the past that sees “Nazism and Stalinism as equally evil” (Littoz-Monnet, 2012: 1184).

Internal European divisions over memory signal the EU’s failure to develop a coherent, critical “culture of remembering” that allows for diversity within a shared,



European commitment to confront and learn from the past (see Prutsch, 2013). However, this lack of unity is only part of the problem. Perhaps even more important is the fact that the generations that experienced and carried personal memories of Europe's age of total war have started to pass away (see Verovšek, 2014a). Although the EU and its member-states (both in the east and west) have created countless memorials to both the crimes of fascism and of communism, the shared experience of war and of opposition to totalitarianism as a unified phenomenon that sought to make the individual "superfluous" (Arendt, 2006: 273) has started to fade away.

Insofar as the integration project sprung "directly from [Europe's] unique historical experience" (Kagan, 2004: 55), the fact that the generations that can directly remember the war are no longer active in public life has become more and more problematic. As the collective memories of Europe's age of total war have faded, so has support for the EU. This is true even in Germany. Given the concurrent economic, monetary, fiscal and political crises that have plagued Europe since 2010, giving rise to a new wave of populism and Euroscepticism, it is increasingly clear that justifications based on the past have lost their appeal. As Paul Scheffer (2012) notes, "Nightmare images of a possible return to previous violent conflicts serve only as a distraction. [...] Beyond 'never again,' there is a need for a renewed justification for European integration."

From a certain perspective, this is understandable. However, it is also unfortunate. As a political reality, the EU often falls short of its own goals and the aspirations of its most ardent supporters. However, its shortcomings should not make us forget how revolutionary the attempt to create a postnational "community of memory" (Assmann, 2007) out of the horrors of war actually was. As I have shown, both Arendt and

Habermas base their support for the European movement on their experience of the war.

As Arendt points out:

Those who emerged to wage war fought against fascism and nothing else. And this is not surprising; what is surprising precisely because of its strict, almost logical consequence is, rather, that all of these movements at once found a positive political slogan which plainly indicated the non-national though very popular character of the new struggle. That slogan was simply EUROPE (Arendt, 1994b: 112).

Habermas would surely second this sentiment. Like many survivors of the war, both Arendt and Habermas saw the European project as a possible solution to the political problems that had led Europe into two World Wars within the span of 30 years. Both of them also wanted to “fabricate a memory,” to institutionalize the lessons of the war, placing them at the center of a new historical consciousness that no longer relied on the exclusivist, dangerous ideas of nationalism. This realization is at the root of their mutual emphasis on the importance of collective memory and of their support for the European project. However, given the recent divides between the East-Central Europe and the West over the priority the EU has traditionally given to the Holocaust over the crimes of communism, it may well be that Arendt’s focus the broader remembrance of totalitarianism may serve as a better model than Habermas’s emphasis on the Holocaust as the center of modern European political consciousness (König et al., 2008).

This is not to say that either of them would wholeheartedly support what the EU has in fact become at the start of the third millennium. Habermas has written extensively on the EU in recent years, arguing that the peoples of Europe must take a greater role in the organization’s functions to combat the organizations growing democratic deficit (see Verovšek, 2012). He (Habermas, 2012) has even proposed outlines for a new, bicameral

legislature, in which one house of a revised European Parliament would represent the peoples of Europe directly, whereas the other would represent the member-states.

Much like Habermas, Arendt would surely welcome the development of European law as a “stabilizing factor” (1969: 79) that protects the rights and liberties that political freedom, i.e. the individual’s capacity for “acting with one another” (1998: 180), depends on. However, again similar to Habermas, she would also most likely reject the institutional form this freedom has taken the actual institutional architecture of the EU. In this sense, both thinkers emphasize that the “internal connection between law and politics must be acknowledged” (Volk, 2017: 7). As a result, in addition to drawing on collective memory to bolster support for *European integration as an ideal*, Arendt and Habermas also draw on the legacy of total war to criticize the EU *as an actually existing institution* for its reliance on strict legal rules and technocratic arguments.

This Arendt-Habermasian reading of the EU is especially important in light of the ongoing crisis of the Eurozone and the new surge of populism that has followed in its wake. Habermas and Arendt would reject the calls from the nationalist right to dismantling or disembowelment of the EU. If anything, the increasing salience of fascist symbols from the 1930s makes the preservation of the EU as a community of memory that preserves the lessons of Europe’s experience of total war all the more necessary and urgent. After all, if Europe abandons the EU, the world’s most important “theoretical proving-ground of contemporary liberalism” (Anderson, 2009: 133), it may once again end up with a decidedly illiberal form of politics on a continent that ought to remember the dangerous consequences of embracing nationalistic populism.

However, Habermas and Arendt would also surely use this crisis as an opportunity to reaffirm the importance of politics and democratic engagement over a technocratic reliance on rules to solve what are essentially political problems, such as the legal regulations governing the European Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). From this perspective, the economic, monetary and sovereign debt crisis may already have had some positive consequences in bringing about a much-needed politicization of debate and decision-making at the European level. For example, Luuk van Middelaar (2016: 496, 501) observes that over the course of these interlocking crises, the vocabulary at the European level has shifted. He argues that the leaders and citizens of the EU have increasingly realized that it “works through power as well as through values and rules – and it is therefore rediscovering ‘government’ alongside ‘governance.’” This puts him on what he calls “the trail of the ‘return to politics.’” Insofar as the EU is indeed shifting from being an organization of legal rules and regulations and becoming one of political debate and shared decision-making, this would only bolster its appeal to Habermas and Arendt, reaffirming its status as what she called “the pardon and the promise” (in Tietze and Bielefeld, 2011) of the postwar world.

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<sup>1</sup> Habermas's understanding of the past draws most directly on the work of Adorno, Benjamin and Freud, particularly the latter's argument for the necessity of the patient to work through their past in order to deal fully with the present. However, Maurice Halbwachs, who was a student of Émile Durkheim, is always in the background as well. Although Habermas cites him only once to my knowledge (see Habermas, 1984: 418), Halbwachs had direct personal and intellectual connections to the Frankfurt School. In the interwar period, for instance, he helped the Frankfurt Circle to move the Institute of Social Research (*Institut für Sozialforschung*) to Geneva in 1933, where it was reincorporated as the *Société Internationale de Recherches Sociales* (the International Society of Social Research). He also intervened to ensure Walter Benjamin's release from the Vichy internment camp at Nevers in 1940 (see Jay, 1973: 30, 38, 197-8). In his correspondence, Benjamin even asks Horkheimer twice to relate his gratitude to Halbwachs for this assistance (see Letter #323 dated 30 November 1939 and Letter #325 dated 15 December in Scholem & Adorno, 1994: 618, 623). This indicates that he knew of Halbwachs and his role in ensuring his release, but that they most likely were not personally acquainted. Although it is impossible to say for certain, it is possible that Halbwachs influenced both Benjamin's and Adorno's understandings of memory, as well that of Habermas, both through the work of his predecessors and his own reading. In contrast to Habermas, however, it is unlikely that Arendt would have been familiar with Halbwachs's work, as it was only taken up and rediscovered during the "memory boom" of the 1980s after Halbwachs's early death of dysentery in Buchenwald in 1945.

<sup>2</sup> For Arendt, *zōon politikon* (ζῷον πολιτικόν in Aristotle) describes man as a political being (*ein politisches Lebewesen*). She objects strongly to St. Thomas Aquinas' translation of this concept as *animal socialis*, because "this unconscious substitution of the social for the political betrays the extent to which the original Greek understanding of politics has been lost" (Arendt, 1998: 23).

<sup>3</sup> This focus on the importance of the common world explains why Arendt originally wanted to give *The Human Condition* (1958) the title *Amor Mundi* ("for love of the world"). This focus on the construction of a common world that we all share is also at the center of Arendt's interpretation of Immanuel Kant and of her importance to her work. Although I am unable to go into these points in detail due to constraints of space, I would like to thank one of the reviewers from this journal for calling my attention to these important points.

<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, I do not have the space to expand on this point here. For more on Benjamin's understanding of history and memory, as well as Arendt's interpretation and her reflections on his work, see (Benjamin, 1977).

<sup>5</sup> Habermas admits this connection in his essay on Arendt, in (Habermas, 1983: 171-88).

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