

Remembering in frames – a sketch of a framework for using cinema in studying collective memory¹

It is no controversy to say that film can be a useful tool in political science education (Engert and Spencer 2009), or perhaps even an expansion to the way political scientists do research (Germano 2014). Yet usage of moving images as political science data is still relatively rare, including studies in collective memory (with some exceptions - mostly, notably, in IR or American politics: de Carvalho 2006; Weldes 1999; Giglio 2005). Theoretical debates of the role film can have in shaping political realities are also not abundant, and debates concerning in particular collective memory and film – a topic of interest to me here - appear to be rather scarce. This makes film usage as data even harder, as theoretical guidelines are not on offer – especially in case of fiction film, explicitly denouncing aspiration towards ‘truth’ or ‘reality’.

In this paper I try to position (fiction) films within the broader context of memory studies, asking one – to an extent familiar (Fluck, 2003) - question: what does cinema ‘do’ in terms of contributing to collective memories of communities, and nations in particular? Furthermore, does film (only) write history (Rosenstone 2006), and if not, where is the demarcation between history and memory in the way cinema works – if such a demarcation can be made at all? Using examples from my own research into films of two relatively young (national) film industries – those of Croatia and Serbia, I try to sketch a framework for interpreting the role cinema plays in shaping collective memory. The result is a messy draft that opens up more questions than it resolves, more a collection of observations than a theoretical framework (as the theoretical backbone is still missing). Yet it is also a necessary first step to take towards such a framework, and a precondition for using films as data in studying collective memory.

Keywords: collective memory, film as data, film and memory;

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This paper is a working draft, or more fairly, a collection of ideas gathered in a very short time period on a complex topic. The author thus kindly asks the well-meaning reader to not quote or distribute it, and if possible, to not judge the author's potential by its often incoherent pages.