

# Laws of Motion for Political Manipulation of Public Memory<sup>¶</sup>

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Draft for discussion only, thank you.

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<sup>¶</sup> The concepts presented in this paper are motivated by the Globalization and the Politics of Memory seminar conducted by Elzbieta Matynia as part of the New School for Social Research's Krakow Program, July 2007. The mathematical model is based on an idea presented by Ana Blanco during the seminar. The author wishes to thank both as well as the other participants in the seminar.

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## I. Introduction

This paper presents an analogical model describing the theory that manipulation of national memory for political purposes creates a “thinning” of the public memory, reducing the diversity and depth of the public memory and creating a more shallow, less diverse and rich, national consciousness.

For example, totalitarian regimes will “rewrite history” in an attempt to legitimize unjust and violent rises to power. Over time official history replaces the memories of those suppressed by the regime and of the stories of those who actually lived through the event. The diversity of thought and memory as it relates to a national consciousness, to the *sense of being* of peoples, is reduced by this political manipulation of history.

Political manipulation can take many forms; from the controlling of media, to the way history is documented in scholarly work and in the subject matter of textbooks used in the education of the youth, to the creation of public holidays and works of art, and the building of and content contained in national monuments and museums. The suppression and denial of countervailing or alternative views<sup>1</sup> of history are lost over time creating a more shallow national consciousness through the loss of the depth of public memory.

## II. The Analogical Model of Public Memory

The analogical model is used to present ideas conceptually; in this case a mathematical model is used to show graphically how the depth of public memory “thins” over time with political manipulation. The greater the degree of the political manipulation of history, the more rapid the decline in the depth of public memory.

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<sup>1</sup> Alternative views of history can be from minority groups be they political, ethnic, or religious, or from anyone excluded from political power, not necessarily from a minority group.

$$\text{Depth of Public Memory} = e^{-nt} \quad (1)$$

Where  $n$  is equal to the degree of political manipulation of history, and where  $n = 0$  means there is no political manipulation and the public memory remains “normal and ideal”.<sup>2</sup> The greater “ $n$ ”, the greater the degree of political manipulation. ( $n \in \mathfrak{R}$ ).

And where  $t = \text{time}$ .

### Illustration 1

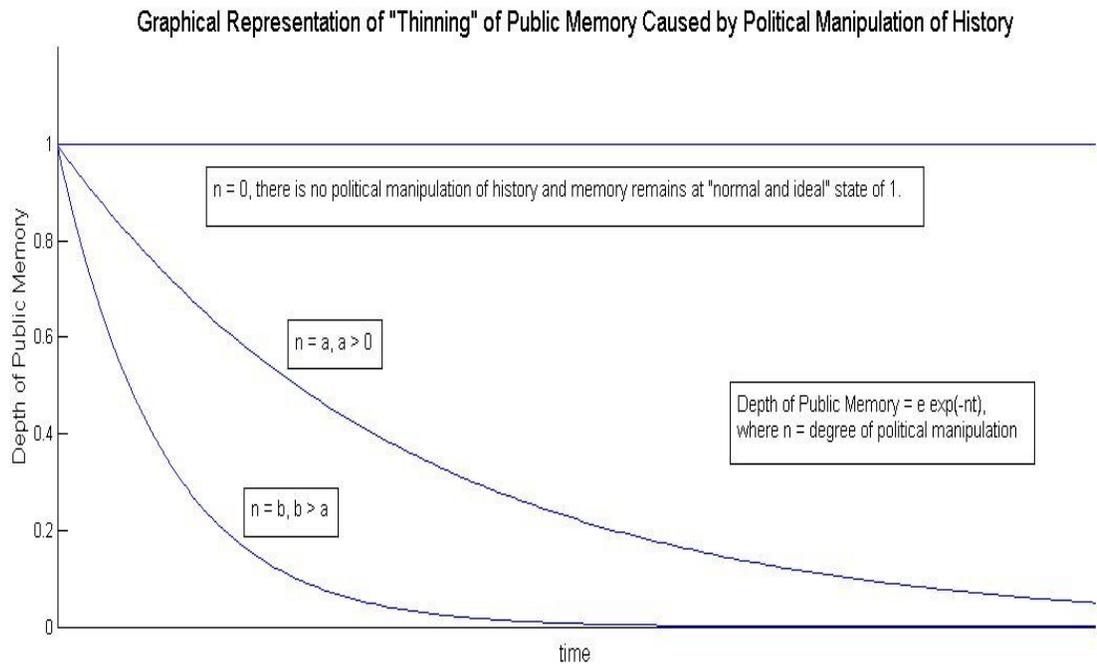


Illustration I. shows that when  $n = 0$  (there is no political manipulation of history), the Depth of Public Memory remains at its normal and ideal state, which is 1, throughout time. When the level of manipulation is greater than 0,

<sup>2</sup> We are using the term “normal and ideal” to represent unmanipulated history. This concept is borrowed from classical political economy, see the “*normal and ideal conditions of the economic system*” (Kurz 1990, p. 35, emphasis in the original).

for example at a level “a” which is greater than 0, we see that the Depth of Public Memory decreases over time from its normal and ideal state. Then when the degree of manipulation is even larger, some level “b”, which is greater than the level “a”, we see that the Depth of Public Memory decreases, “thins-out”, even more rapidly.

### III. Conclusion

Political systems in a nation are the result of that nation’s unique history, culture and political economy. Where there are politics it is perhaps inevitable that there will be political manipulation of history. Philosophers have been aware of, and have addressed, this notion for millennia. For example, Aristotle wrote in *Nichomachean Ethics* of the ideal life as an ethical or virtuous one and Adam Smith argued for a limited role for government in society – for a Society of Perfect Liberty – in *Wealth of Nations*. The concept of the “thinning-out” of a people’s sense of being through the political manipulation of history perhaps reinforces these philosophical precepts. It can also be noted that globalization<sup>3</sup> may provide a countervailing tendency against political manipulation of history because goods and ideas trade in a more decentralized manner, meaning that government is less able to control people’s day-to-day lives.

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<sup>3</sup> It is commonly understood that we are in the second era of globalization, the first being the liberalization of trade and political systems in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Globalization is defined in many ways but the most basic way to define globalization is that goods and cultures are transmitted across space more freely than in prior periods. Globalization can be technology driven, in our current period not least by the improvements in communication (i.e., the internet) and transportation (i.e., container shipping and larger ships) technologies.

This concept of technology as the driving force of a historical period in human development is found in Karl Marx’s concept of Historical Materialism, where, “In short, at the bottom of the base is technology, which in turn constitutes or determines [what follows is the what Marx calls the Superstructure, note added by author] modes of production, which in turn determines relations of production, or institutions of law and property, which finally determines ideas, religious values, art, etc.” (Rothbard, p. 373).

This can be formalized:

$$T_n \rightarrow S_n$$

$$T_{n+1} \rightarrow S_{n+1}$$

Where Technology in period “n” determines the Superstructure in period “n”, with period “n + 1” representing a new Technology and a new Superstructure (the latter in the this case, it is proposed, being Globalization).

## References

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