

THE HIROSHIMA MEMORY COMPLEX

The detonation of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 is one of the most powerful memories on a global scale. While the literature on global memories has greatly expanded in recent decades, Hiroshima remains surprisingly understudied. In addressing this lacuna, this paper offers a new theoretical prism for the study of global memories. It argues that the Hiroshima memory cannot be understood in isolation, but rather as the hub in a broader memory complex that includes a range of different events, situations, and memories. The paper demonstrates how these symbolic dialogues have been forged, often in the context of substantial controversy. In the last couple of decades it has become commonplace and uncontroversial to speak of global or transnational memories (e.g. Alexander, 2004; author, 2012; Assmann and Conrad, 2010; Levy and Sznajder, 2006; Rothberg, 2009). Three major strands of theorization have crystallized in the last 15 years: In one current, the emergence and identification of global memories is pegged to a vision of new *cosmopolitan* identities and values (e.g. Beck and Levy, 2013; Levy and Sznajder, 2002, 2006, 2010; Misztal, 2010); cultural sociologists (e.g. Alexander, 2004, 2012; Eyerman et al., 2013) discuss global memories in relation to *cultural trauma*; and in the interface between communication studies and sociology, scholars analyze how global memories are created and represented in and by *media events* (e.g. Dayan and Katz, 1992; Kyriakidou, 2017; Volkmer, 2006). In none of these approaches do we find more than passing reference to Hiroshima. While this is striking and puzzling in itself, more problematic is the absence of a systematic theoretical vocabulary for addressing memory complexes in which several interpretive lineages and appropriations intersect, communicate, and co-produce each other. To pursue this ambition I take important inspiration from outside the fields of sociology and communication studies. In general, work on memories within literature, culture, and historical studies display a stronger sensitivity towards this dialogical aspect. In particular, authors such as Jan Assmann, Astrid Erll, Michael Rothberg, and, going deeper into intellectual history, Aby Warburg and Mikhael Bakhtin, offer powerful bridgeheads for exploring memory complexes as dialogically constituted. I begin by briefly outlining a theoretical framework. I then offer three analytical discussions of some of the most important nodes in the Hiroshima memory complex: Nanjing and Korea; Pearl Harbor and 9/11; and anti-nuclear movements during the Cold War and in the present. The analysis closes with a figure that maps the main nodes of the complex.