

## Communities of Memory

The term "collective memory" accommodates a great variety of territorial claims. At times, it is used to describe the heritage of the whole of humanity, at times, it becomes a national property, at still other times it is said to bond generations. For students of local and regional traditions, the "collective" designates relatively small groups of people; for students of the media, the "collective" could encompass a multinational audience. Such vagueness, while understandable considering how open the concept is, does pose analytical challenges. At issue is not only a methodological confusion inherent in mixing different levels and types of inquiry; more importantly, the apparent adaptability of "collective memory" to whatever research circumstances may lead to glossing over some key empirical questions about the relationship between private and public remembrance. Thus as we justifiably pay more attention to how the past is mediated, framed, represented, we may be assuming too much as to the relevance of both that past and that mediation. In other words, as we learn more about the practices and principles of memory work, we may be leaving behind ordinary individuals who rather selectively attend to the now rapidly growing and diversifying storehouse of public memories.

In an effort to remedy the situation, let us take the opposite path for a while, and reflect on how the actors themselves come to draw boundaries of sharing in remembrance of times past. *What are the **communities of memory** and how do they come into being? How do they matter, for those within as well as on the outside?*

In its most direct meaning, a community of memory is one created by that very memory. For people to feel a sense of bonding with others solely because of a shared experience, the experience itself would often be of extraordinary if not traumatic quality. Soldiers who came back from the

trenches of World War I, veterans of the war in Vietnam, survivors of the atomic bomb, escapees from Pol Pot's Cambodia, survivors of the Holocaust—all these groups remained apart in their visceral, often untranslatable memory of horror. The experience they shared could not be truly shared with others, at least not at the same level of understanding. And a sense of recognition, immediately apparent when survivors meet each other is too of exceptional quality.

Viewers of Oliver Stone's *Born on the Fourth of July*, a film capturing for the wide public what going to Vietnam and coming back were about, would be very much made aware of the divide between "us" and "them." In Japan, the language and social practice separated out those "tainted" by the bomb.<sup>1</sup> Holocaust survivors, as their numbers are now declining, express great anxiety about the approaching disappearance of authentic witness, again stressing the abyss between those who were there and those who were not.

What is "there," though? In the case of Holocaust survivors in particular, the community of memory appears to have *constantly shifting boundaries*. For the very term "survivor," while in principle applicable to any Jew who stayed alive until liberation, in the practice of remembrance tends to focus, at times exclusively, on those who came back from "*L'univers concentrationnaire*."<sup>2</sup> Within memory of the Holocaust, Auschwitz, Majdanek, Treblinka stand apart, as if in clear recognition that the experience in the camps was unique among the unique. At the same time, as more writers and artists of the "second generation" work through the meanings of living with the memory of the Holocaust, the community bonded by *that memory grows to include all the empathetic witnesses as well*. The direct connection between experience and remembrance is now not severed, rather, it is redrawn to capture the complexity of effects of that experience beyond individual memories.<sup>3</sup>

The shifting of community boundaries proceeds even further, though. For as the Holocaust assumes a centrality in the reflections of some prominent Christians, they too may be said to belong to that community of memory. In a sense, the bonding initially created by living through a trauma extends, with time, to those for whom remembrance of that trauma acts as a key orienting force for their lives and public actions. What underlies that bonding, though, or what defines the community through its many transitions, is a shared, if not always explicated,

meaning given to the experience itself. Thus if the invisible divide around the survivors can never be fully bridged, remembrance which retains this divide as one of its important structuring principles can allow for survivors to join others.<sup>4</sup> ***Personal relevance of the traumatic memory, and not personal witness to the trauma, here defines the community.***

That it is the meaning given to the event, rather than the event itself which may create a community of memory is very much in evidence when we consider the absence of remembrance on the part of key witnesses to the destruction of European Jewry—the Poles. In theory, people who lived around Auschwitz or Treblinka during their years of operation, who could forever smell the stench of burning bodies, who saw the trains return from the camps empty, in short, people who came a lot closer to the abyss than anyone but the victims themselves, ought to have had traumatic memories of what happened. Some do. But by and large, the Polish witnesses and later, the Polish memory workers affecting the public domain, never produced bonds of remembrance that would reflect their experience of the Holocaust. Two reasons may account for this, I think. First, for the majority of Poles, it is their own victimization during the Nazi occupation that represented a formative trauma; indeed, the prominent place accorded to both private and public remembrance of the war's Polish victims and heroes continues to focalize national sentiments, now that the memory of Soviet occupations is reconstructed as well. Secondly, the disappearance of the Jews, did *not* constitute a trauma for Polish society, either at the time or in the decades that followed, however abhorred were the means to achieve it.<sup>5</sup> If the Holocaust first figured prominently within the Communist canon of public commemoration, then to be appropriated as a Polish loss, none of this manipulatory work held much relevance for the public at large. It is only recently that Poland's opinion makers of various political persuasions, together with a group of concerned youth, began to speak of the fate of Polish Jewry as a *loss*. And this belated mourning, as it were, still preserves (with a few exceptions) the nontraumatic quality of being witness by clearly separating the "Final Solution" from the experience of the Poles. Defining the Holocaust as something that did not implicate the Poles themselves makes the event important, but not relevant.

That a community of memory cannot be artificially created by imposing an "objectively" traumatic meaning on events subjectively experienced otherwise is perhaps best illustrated by the vicissitudes of

German memory of the Nazi era. The "unmasterable past" is only unmasterable to those morally challenged by it, and feeling so challenged by no means reflects the actual "weight" of one's actions.<sup>6</sup> As scholars increasingly turn their attention to the role of specific sectors of society in the overall success of the Nazi project, it also becomes increasingly clear that remorse or even regret are rare among the direct participants. The unanticipated depth and scope of reaction to the American series *Holocaust*, shown on West German television in 1979,<sup>7</sup> was a sharp reminder of the failures of a long, concerted educational effort at exposing the Nazi crimes. And the popularity of *Heimat*, a sixteen-hour German series on memory of the past, produced in direct response to *Holocaust* and excluding any traces of Auschwitz from its vision of the past, is quite indicative of what the public would like privately to remember.<sup>8</sup>

At this point, it could be argued that perhaps expecting a community of memory to form around a *moral* trauma is expecting too much from ordinary humans. Indeed, it is often the victims of traumas who most immediately and most "naturally" bond together. And yet, even within the generally grim picture of normalizing Nazism, there are significant counterforces to reckon with. The children of the Nazis, both literally and metaphorically, often *did* ask questions. German filmmakers, writers, and artists did produce works that troubled the national conscience. The effort to reformulate German identity, especially as the West and East unite, has been challenged by those keen on not burying the past. A minority, yes, and quite unlike a community, the people of conscience cannot be altogether ignored.

The even more convincing evidence to the potential of moral trauma as a source of bonding comes from the United States. The experience of soldiers in Vietnam as it is transmitted and translated for the public by some of the most outspoken veterans cannot be reduced to its morally troubling dimension. Yet neither can it bypass the moral terrain, both in remembrance of actions in Vietnam and that of coming home. Based on the life story of one veteran and made into a widely popular film by another, the saga of the man "born on the Fourth of July" is a clear illustration of how the two moral questions combine in the merging public memory. The man was haunted by what he did in Vietnam; the film is haunting in its presentation of the return to a rat-infested veterans' hospital and to widespread hostility from the neighbours. It is true that

the "healing of America" that many see as having begun with the unveiling of the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington is more about what Americans inflicted on each other rather than their actions in Vietnam, but one ought to consider here the other image superimposing itself on the memories of the war, the image of "boat people." With time, in other words, the moral charge of remembrance has not disappeared, it acquired a great deal more complexity. With time, too, it is the second generation which increasingly enters the community of memory while searching for its own ethical answers.

As memory of this century's other great trauma—the Soviet *gulag*—is gradually reconstructed, it becomes apparent that the communities of memory emerging from "there" are varied and often distanced from each other.<sup>9</sup> Being a Ukrainian, a Pole, a Jew, a Russian—all victims—was important during the life in the *gulag* and continues to be so in remembrance. Bonds of solidarity that cut across ethnic lines have not completely disappeared, but they have become exceptions to the general rule of identifying with one's kin, then and later. At the same time, writings from and about the *gulag* testify to the insidious dynamics of totalitarianism rather than further inspiring a sense of national belonging; remembrance is both a local project and a universal one, with clearly defined political aims. Those who came back from the *gulag*, then, are naturally reentering their old communities of memory, all the while testifying to what is now openly acknowledged as centrally relevant to the victim nations. In this way, *the gulag* experience finds its place within collective memory of already bounded and bonded ethnic communities. What still remains to be seen is how the moral challenge of the *gulag* and Soviet-style rule in general can find its place in those memories without radically disrupting the vision of unified civil society.

Such communities of memory bonded by traumatic experience do often become absorbed by the wider national or ethnic collectivity. In the process, their very presence might be enough to secure remembrance or to redefine collective identity. Much more likely, though, it is through a transition from unspoken bonding to outspoken (and frequently institutionalized) activity that the community of memory acquires public resonance. Many Holocaust survivors or Vietnam war veterans lead strictly private lives, coping alone with their memories. But others, especially as the years go by, find it essential to record their experience, to create memorial markers for those who had died, to talk to the young,

to join groups or associations. In effect, they then create communities *tout court*, engaged mainly (but not exclusively) in the work of remembrance. Another form that this community involvement may take—and equally important from the point of view of contributing to public memory—is one of cooperation with established *local* organizations. If the spectacular success of veterans' efforts can be seen in the impact of the Wall in Washington, the less nationally visible initiatives count as well; the "small town America" is, after all, where healing may be needed the most.

Survivors of the Holocaust are in an unique position in this regard, since their local communities no longer exist. Faced with the impossibility of return, survivors would join in with others who had emigrated earlier from their towns and villages to create "Memorial Books." Over 500 of these books now exist, in North America, France, Argentina, and Israel. Recalling the life as well as death of Jewish communities across Eastern Europe, "Memorial Books" vary in their scholarly sophistication or historical scope; they all serve as memory markers, a substitute for the nearly nonexistent graves.<sup>10</sup>

Recently, with the greater hospitality to Western (Jewish) visitors throughout Eastern Europe, the work of remembrance has returned to its more traditional forms, always, though, on a scale unable to match the scope of destruction. Jewish graves are being found and restored, memorial plaques attached to what once were thriving communal centers, synagogues-turned-warehouses become historical landmarks. The sacred grounds, even if only in small proportion, are rendered sacred again. It remains to be seen, of course, whether such efforts translate into remembrance on the part of the *now* locals; they have already, though, helped in the grieving of the Jews themselves."

If traumas pose a special challenge to remembrance—and create special bonds among those who were there—they are definitely not unique in their power to generate a community of memory. Indeed, what these tragic experiences share may be found in a variety of events devoid of the ultimate encounters with death and evil, but still carrying enough "formative force" to become the base for collective self-definition. There is the element of great adversity, both to the human spirit and human ingenuity; there are moral choices to be made, challenges to traditional ways, often fear of the unknown. There is, in short, the intensity of human drama in its many dimensions, the out-of-ordinariness of experience.

And it does appear that such are indeed characteristics of those historical events we have come to see as *generational* markers: great world wars, the Depression, 1960s.

Generations too are communities of memory, even though theirs may be a much more heterogeneous relation to the past, reflecting the diversity of individual experience of key events. Numerically larger than any of the survivor communities (indeed, often inclusive of those), generations sharing in formative memory are also not "phenomenologically separate" from others; however different their values and attitudes may become from those of people coming after, full empathy is a possibility.

Generations so understood, it should be stressed, are not just "age cohorts" sharing in the similar social circumstances at different stages of their lives. Rather, they are comprised of people whose age may vary widely, but who would all be strongly affected in their outlook by a particular time in history. Children who grew up in the communes are as much a part of the 1960s' generation as their then-young parents and not-so-young college professors who took the side of rebellious youth. With time, of course, what was once a formative experience may be superseded by another or rendered irrelevant by individual life choices; generations may grow, split up, shrink in size. For a community of memory in flux, as it were, generation is an anchor, not a trap for self-definition.

If traumatic, tragic experiences by their very nature engender a great deal of memory work, both on the part of those who were there and those concerned with securing remembrance, the formative drama that begets a generation may live on by sheer force of the effect it had on individual lives. This is not to say that public remembrance will not result—or not matter—but only that even without articulation, through commemorative ceremonies, for example, *private* memories acquire public relevance. People who grew up during the Depression do not ordinarily set up monuments to the hardships they had gone through. Rather, they tell stories, and perhaps even more importantly, act on their then-acquired view of life, work, and money.

Much has been written on the profound effect World War I had on European cultures and mores.<sup>12</sup> To see that effect as confined to public remembrance of the war itself would be to miss most of it. Precisely because it was such a formative time, memory of the war did not have to be directly evoked for it to remain relevant. The very strength of that

memory lies in its multifaceted "translation" into discourse about present and future.

Generations, then, are not primarily communities of remembrance. Shared memories are shared reference points, often not actively attended to yet retaining their formative quality. Generations leave us more than records of their experience or monuments to their heroes. They leave changes in the cultural landscape.

Generations as communities of memory rarely become communities *tout court*. Their size, internal diversity and often great geographical spread, when added to the fact that the past informs but does not define individuals' lives, make "generational institutionalization" highly unlikely. When some form of group formation occurs, it would be on a much smaller than generational scale, often springing from a sense of camaraderie with people one became close to during the dramatic times. Veterans of specific army formations or underground units active in World War II did create an organizational framework for remembering. Civilians did not.

Within their local communities, though, members of the same generation may indeed become socially separate even when not organized. The notion of a "generation gap" aptly reflects what often happens when values and attitudes clash. And the fact that intrageneration communication is frequently a great deal easier points again to the importance of sharing tacit understandings of the past and present.

To complete this picture of communities of memory formed by individuals with not only common experience but a shared sense of its meaning and relevance, let us now consider the opposite end of the sociological scale, as it were. A great deal of our daily interaction takes place within various communities of memory allowing us the comfort of feeling at home with people we are with. And even when we are not actively attending to the shared memories, their very existence provides for a sense of belonging we all seem to need. Indeed, without the sharing of memories, it is difficult, if not impossible to conceive of social bonding, on whatever a scale.

If collective memory is understood as we understand it here, not as a collection of individual memories or some magically constructed reservoir of ideas and images, but rather as a socially articulated and socially maintained "reality of the past," then it also makes sense to look at the most basic and accessible means for memory articulation and main-

tenance—talk.<sup>13</sup> Family dinners and gatherings for special occasions are a prime time for the construction, reconstruction, and repair of familial memory; a guest who is a stranger, no matter how welcome would he be made to feel, ends up left out. And if that guest is not to remain a guest, he needs to patiently sit through the old stories until he too can be a part of the new ones. A new worker joining a company team will too be immediately treated to institutional tales, but cannot join the "community" until there be tales involving his own mishaps and successes.

These communities of memory often outlive the actual sharing of experience; one need only think of class reunions. Living separate lives, the once-friends may no longer share anything but their memories, and there are times when this proves insufficient to counter the differences of the present. Often enough, though, a brief exchange of favorite old stories brings back the bonds, however altered by the passage of time. Photographs, home movies and songs from the past all help in the process, as would a return to the original physical environment.

Class reunions or visits with friends from times long gone can be very disappointing, of course. Bonds of shared experience, when such experience is ordinary, are often fragile. People's priorities and ways of making sense of the past change, so that talking may become a confirmation of separation rather than a maintenance job. Not validated, individual memory recedes, if not disappears altogether.

Do such small and fragile communities of memory matter in the overall picture of the dynamics of remembrance? Would not their immersion in the ordinary, everyday happenings make them potentially irrelevant to the realm of public discourse? After all, families, school buddies or work colleagues rarely go public with their stories, unless they already are public with their lives. And yet, precisely because theirs are private memories, with high degree of significance for the everyday living, these memories can and often do preempt the publicly articulated ones.<sup>14</sup> In Germany, for example, it is very much on the home front that a positive, even nostalgic picture of the Nazi era could be preserved. At the very least and most common, the "reality of the past" constructed in the individual's immediate circles would be providing the key base line for the reception of, indeed, receptivity to the socially sanctioned offerings. At its strongest, the private maintenance of remembrance may directly counter the officially given version of the past; the now explosive "recovery of memory" in the once-Communist countries is but one

testimony to how familial stories can successfully resist ideological encroachments.<sup>15</sup>

The significance of such small communities of memory is not limited, one should add, to the realm of recent, directly experienced past. Although stories told by participants and witnesses to the events may carry more vibrancy and detail, families especially are also actively preserving memories of times and people long gone. In Poland, for example, the longing for independence survived, despite all the official manipulation, largely because so many families could talk about and remember struggles going back to the nineteenth, if not the eighteenth century.

Added to such direct ways that the *contents* of privately constructed memory may have an impact on the receiving of public offerings should be now the more subtle and pervasive influences on the individual's value system in general. Just as the members of a generational group need not actively attend to their formative past for that past to "live on," families or friends too may act on the principles embedded in their shared stories without constantly re-telling them. And these principles ("do not trust the government" being but one example) contribute a great deal to how people attend to and interpret public discourse, that about the past included.

Not enough is empirically known about the dialectics of mediated, framed remembrance and that maintained in the relatively private spheres. And just as students of popular culture argue vehemently about its impact on people, it may take a long time before there develops an analytical agreement on the dynamics of collective memory. What the work already done shows is that neither "the past" nor remembrance of it can be deduced from public discourse alone. The "realities of the past" as they pertain to individuals are not carbon copies of publicly available accounts. They are often worked out within smaller and larger communities of memory, their shape and texture reflecting a complex mixture of history and biography. In other words, how people attend to the past, if at all, and how they make sense of it is very much grounded in their experience. At the same time, and allowing for this, the public framing of remembrance does matter. Beyond providing resources to work with, public discourse may validate (or discourage) particular ways of seeing the past.<sup>16</sup> It may also create an altogether new community of memory, where bonding extends well beyond individuals' own experience.

All the communities of memory we discussed so far are natural, in a sense that they come into existence through people's sharing in living through events as well as the telling. Collective memory, though, is not reducible to such immediacy of links with the past. Often, it is the telling itself, the ongoing articulation of the "reality of the past" that forms and informs a community. For that matter, the past so told need not be real at all to offer the basis for communal solidarity. All that is needed is active remembrance, communally shared and deemed important for the community's self-definition. Rituals and the structuring of a yearly cycle serve that function very well.

In both the Jewish and the Christian tradition, collective memory of the key "events" of religious significance is built into the observance of festivals, into the prayers, into the calendar itself. The Jews are indeed often referred to as a "people of memory,"<sup>17</sup> since virtually all of their holidays are commemorative ones, referring to events at very different historical distance in a unified yearly series of ritual (and stories). It was only in the nineteenth century that "Jewish history" as such became a legitimate subject of inquiry for Jews. And even at its most modern and secular, Jewish self-definition is heavily referenced by remembrance—of the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel.<sup>18</sup> Some of what is yearly commemorated did happen (for example, the destruction of Jerusalem Temple), some has to be accepted on faith by believers. But to its very core, this is a community of memory which has managed to survive for centuries because of it.

Both the perennial modern debate around the question of "who is a Jew?" and the varied answers offered by Jews reflecting on their identity point to an increasing importance of sharing in memory obligations, if not in memory itself. The displacement of religious observance from the center of the Jews' lives often results in granting remembrance an ever more sacred status. Seen in this light, the outrage felt by some Jews at other Jews' "betrayal" that follows breaking the community ranks (especially in North America) is perhaps the best indication of sentiments involved in what may appear as ideological squabbles. And the ease with which the past comes to be invoked as justification for problematic decisions in the present (especially in Israel) testifies to the continuing significance of memory for the community.

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mythical structure needed when remembrance is to sustain a people. There is the "myth of the origin," something that anthropologists have uncovered in virtually all human societies. There are heroes, who provide the essential exemplars of core moral beliefs. There is the highly selective memory of outside forces affecting the people's fate. And, perhaps most importantly, there is the narrative of shared suffering, greatly strengthening the sense of moral obligation to the communal past.

Collective identity does not have to rest on a narrative of victimization, of course. The "glorious past," when such exists, carries its own appeal. Yet history supplies us with some very convincing examples of the rallying power inherent in a shared memory of oppression, power not matched by that of success stories. Indeed, for remembrance of victories and progress to be meaningful at all, it must contain its own "dark" reference points. A mixed narrative, then, is needed even under the best of circumstances.

If we look at this century's two most cruel regimes—Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia—for all the differences between them, we may be struck by the parallels in their uses of publicly manufactured memory. At the very center, there are stories of extreme victimization: Germany's losses in World War I and the injustice of the Versailles Treaty,<sup>19</sup> the post-Revolutionary war in Russia and then, the Great War's tremendous hardships. Both employ the figure of a savior: Hitler and Stalin. Where they part is at the point of introducing elements of glory; for the Nazis, references to the mythical past structured the mythical future; in the Stalinist vision, the bright future had to hold on its ideological own. The key similarity, though, is in how these narratives actually worked in social practice. Beyond "true believers" who might have indeed adopted the whole package, ordinary men and women identified primarily with the victimization story, all the more so for the strong biographical connection.<sup>20</sup> There is a troubling lesson here, a lesson well learned by those mobilizing small and large communities for action: nothing may serve the purpose of solidarity better than living memory of suffering at the hands of. . . . And how this ". . ." is filled depends more often than not on politically and ideologically driven choices, where mythmaking can be at its strongest; one need only to think of the Nazi image of the Jew.

Once the suffering recedes further into the past, beyond the immediate experience of community members, the need for active memory work clearly increases. But whether sustained by privately told stories or solely

by public remembrance, the narrative of victimization has to be first plausible to the individuals called upon. That this is not always easily attainable, especially when the community of memory is being created anew, as it were, may best be seen in the history of large and international social movements in this century: the workers' and women's. Again, for all the differences between them—and for the great ideological diversity *within* both—they have shared the broad promise of liberation from oppression, and the considerable difficulties of making the promise appealing to their constituents. The challenge has been twofold; first, people need to accept that their lives are indeed defined by their being workers or women, and then, they need to adopt the narrative of oppression and liberation as their own. On both counts, individuals' loyalty to other, more natural communities may prevent their accommodation of the movement's claims. And on both counts, efforts must be made, through inquiring, writing, and telling, to provide the prospective members with varied and moving stories, exemplifying the struggle. Beyond that, there is the needed work on remembrance proper: the choice of rallying dates for ceremonial observance of the movement's values and goals, the attending to one's heroic figures, commemorating of key victories and defeats. (The appropriation of this symbolic activity by the "workers' state" should not obscure its more natural dynamics here.)

In neither case, producing a stock of shared memories is in and of itself sufficient to secure members' loyalty; the vision of liberation and equality carries its own heavy responsibility. Yet without an articulation of the past, first of oppression, then of the struggle, full identification with the movement would be impossible to achieve. That it is often so difficult to achieve, beyond the relatively small core of activists, need not reflect the weaknesses of the constructed narratives. Rather, it is reflective of the strengths inherent in the smaller, older, and personally relevant communities of memory.

Framing an experience as that of oppression is, of course, greatly helped if there already exists a shared sense of trauma or suffering. Indeed, when we think of the notion of "victimization," the two elements appear inseparable. A closer look, though, allows for recognition that two quite different dynamics of remembrance are at work here. Japanese Canadians, interned, relocated, and stripped of property during World War II, shared for many years a near silent memory of their suffering. It took the efforts of their children and grandchildren, imbued with the very

Canadian (and recent) ideas about citizens' rights, to define the war experience as one of injustice and government-sanctioned oppression, and to demand apology and retribution.<sup>21</sup> It is as if suffering itself survives as a visceral memory, while its explanation, still deeply felt, is more a result of ideological work, the work of framing remembrance in categories of victim/oppressor. For the people involved, what they went through is all too real, but it is also open to changes in definition.

We have already seen how such openness can be exploited for vicious political purposes (the Nazi idea of the Jew); we should perhaps accept that even in its benign forms, designating the oppressor carries exploitive potential. There is indeed only a fine line, often crossed in political arguments, between sombre remembrance of the victims and capitalizing on the emotional charge of memory for immediate communal returns. Across Central Europe and in the former Soviet Union, it might be impossible for some time to come to separate commemoration of the regimes' victims from the ongoing political manoeuvring. Memory of the Holocaust, for all its inherent resistance to simplification (as this is an event many see as defying explanation), has been used and is likely to continue being used to score smaller and larger political points. As morally troubling as this exploitation of human suffering is, it also attests to the awesome powers of memory in the maintenance of communal solidarity as well as spear-heading communal action.

If the memory of victimization can so well serve the cause of communal unity, it is not only because of its particular emotional strength. Structurally as well, the self-definition as a victim clearly marks the boundary between "us" and "them" in ways only matched by ties of kinship. To construct a sense of community, one almost inevitably needs the presence of the Other; the oppressor serves this role very well indeed. It is no coincidence that the radical segment of the feminist movement is the one most resembling a community *tout court*, for it is also the one clearly identifying men as the (enemy) Other. In many parts of the world, intensification of ethnic warfare follows a redrawing of boundaries according to narratives of victimization;<sup>22</sup> there the two bonding forces cross and combine in politically complex scenarios. It is certainly sad-denying, if not tragic, that we humans persist in acutely dividing "us" from "them"; for students of collective memory, it is also imperative that we understand the resources drawn upon in this process.

In most countries today, the state borders do *not* define the boundaries between "us" and "them." Ethnically and culturally homogeneous states are a rarity, and even when few minorities are present, regional divisions still matter. Nationalist dreams notwithstanding, the citizens' loyalty to the state cannot thus rely on their membership in a community of memory; indeed, such membership often poses a challenge to state unity. At the same time, without some form of a common historical narrative (together with all the patriotic symbolism it entails), the state cannot achieve legitimacy as a political entity.<sup>23</sup> Added to that is the challenge of accommodation to the historical shifts in the country's borders and thus also power and population. In the Western world, recent decades have further complicated the situation with the continuous influx of immigrants (and illegals) from Asia, Africa, South and Central America, all putting into question the established visions of society.

Drawing on the experience in Canada, a relatively young country, but also one where the increasing diversity translated into state policies of multiculturalism (back in 1971), can be instructive here.<sup>24</sup> Canadians, so it seems, have had a permanent "identity crisis." French Canadians, most of whom live in Quebec, have progressively moved toward a self-definition as "Quebecois," a distinct society within both Canada and North America, bounded by language and history. English Canadians, on the other hand, tend to articulate their difference in terms of the Other—the United States—and in narratives of social values rather than historical experience. Often referred to as "two solitudes," English and French Canada struggle politically as well as symbolically to maintain a unified front.

The official policy of bilingualism, often challenged on both sides, was to reflect the idea of different-but-equal Canadians, or rather the presence of two founding peoples. But then, shortly after that vision was put into administrative practice, another one emerged—that of *multiculturalism*. Now all the ethnic groups within Canada were to be respected, if not encouraged, in their differences. Advocated as both a necessity (in face of increasingly non-European immigration) and a form of "enrichment program" for the country, multiculturalism gradually earned in political stature. At the end of the 1980s, the idea was indeed accepted by the majority of Canadians. Constitutional debates of that period showed, though, that the practice of multiculturalism may be another matter altogether. First, its incompatibility with the older French-plus-

English formula became rather apparent, especially in Quebec which was not yet ready to dilute its hard-won Frenchness. Then, more and more questions were publicly raised about the limits to tolerance, be it of bullfighting or of traditional Sikh garb. Finally, the policy came under much sharper scrutiny from social scientists, recognizing the immense conflict potential built into the vague definition of "cultural."

As long as multiculturalism appeared contained in colorful ethnic festivals and culinary delights of Toronto or Vancouver, the idea of "Canada" appeared safe. But when it began to be taken politically seriously by various ethnic communities of memory and translated into claims of historical justice, both vis-a-vis Canada and the old world Other (by Ukrainians and Jews, for example), the frail base for future Canadian unity emerged in sharp outline.

It is true that many of the ethnic groups in Canada today have had no contact with each other prior to their arrival there; when disputes arise, these are then rooted in cultural differences alone. But a significant portion of the "Canadian mosaic" is made up of peoples who did have (some still do) turbulent experience together, where mutual hostility and apprehension became interwoven in the fabric of their collective memories.<sup>25</sup> And if the vision of equality to which they are now asked to adhere provides a theoretical end to animosities, the encouragement to retain ethnic culture may be spelling the exact opposite. An unhyphenated Canadian historical narrative may simply prove too weak in competition with communal traditions (especially, once again, when these rest on a vision of victimization).

If Canada can be seen as an unique social laboratory for working out the balance between the useful and the damaging<sup>26</sup> collective memory, it is also an illuminating example of the more universal trends in the formation of communities of memory, away from strictly ethnic ties. Canada is a vast country, but like many smaller ones, it is a country of regions. Some of these regions are certified political entities, with considerable powers (the provinces), others retain separate character both physically, sociologically and symbolically (Northern Ontario, for example). Regional identity, as any dispute shows, is strong. It reflects differences in the landscape, way of life and, yes, the ethnic composition as well. As such, it has more of an everyday relevance to people. It is a heritage of manageable size, as it were. And the symbolic fabric of that regional heritage is much closer at hand than "Canadianism." Historical

landmarks (which in the Canadian context means dating back fifty years or more) are now increasingly recognized as needing preservation; urban planners are asked to respect the original character of spaces. The days of unfettered growth appear to be gone. Artifacts from the past find their place in local museums—and living rooms. Local traditions are being revived, at times reinvented. The emphasis is on tangible reminders of the past and their integration into the rapidly changing present.<sup>27</sup> In short, in the wake of modernization, with all the accompanying uprootedness, there is a concerted effort to restore and maintain both local (of a town) and regional traditions. In the process, new inhabitants are welcome to share in—but not transform—the older community of memory.

Whether the Canadian experiment at accommodating the whole broad range of loyalties and cultural anchors succeeds, it is too early to tell. On the one hand, if we were to draw lessons from many centuries of European history, a locally based communal identity appears not only sustainable but also open to multiethnic membership. Not to idealize the picture, since tensions and conflicts along religious and ethnic lines were indeed common, the pre-1918 "middle Europe" in particular exemplifies how the attachments to geographically small and culturally mixed "home"—be it Vienna or Vilno—can be a viable option. On the other hand, though, what we have seen in many corners of Europe in recent years points to a tremendous rallying force of arguments for ethnic purity. The violence in ex-Yugoslavia, the disenfranchisement of minorities in the Baltic republics, and the calls for redrawing of borders issued by Hungarian nationalists are but some testimony to the fragility of local communal bonds. And the fact that so many of the advocates for a new order of solidarity evoke what might be called "racial" memories, often jointly with stories of victimization, sadly confirms our earlier observations as to the power inherent in such appeals. When seen from Sarajevo, the challenges facing Canadians obviously pale in comparison. Yet both here and there, and, one might add, in the United States as well as Western Europe, the stakes may be remarkably similar—and high. Will the peoples' sense of a shared past be used to create inclusive and manageable political entities? Or, will the varied communities of memory become exclusionary, strife generating, and ultimately irreconcilable detractors from any possibility of societal peace?

These are, admittedly, "big" questions. As students of the dynamics of collective memory, we may be best advised to stay with the smaller

ones. The very complexity of the patterns we have found within the experience/community/identity nexus, the great variation in ways in which communities of memory are constructed and maintained, and finally, the different weight these processes carry in social and political life, all point to the need for scaling down the inquiry. And yet, it is those 'big' questions which remind us of the priorities on the analytical agenda. The bonds that collective memory can create as well as those it can destroy are more than a matter of definitions.

### Notes

1. In part, the reaction was guided by the very human fear of the unknown effects of radiation; see Robert Lifton, *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima* (New York: Basic Books, 1968).
2. For a further discussion of this problematic, see Emanuel Tanay, "On Being a Survivor," in Alan L. Berger, ed., *Bearing Witness To The Holocaust 1939-1989* (Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991), 17-31.
3. See, especially, Alan L. Berger, "Bearing Witness: Second Generation Literature of the Shoah" in *Modern Judaism* 10, 1 (Feb. 1990):43-63.
4. A compelling account of this dynamic may be found in Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991).
5. On this point, see also Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, "Poland, After the Holocaust," in *Remembering for the Future: Jews and Christians During and After the Holocaust* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1988), 143-55.
6. See, for example, Peter Sichrovsky, *Born Guilty: Children of Nazi Families*, translated from German by Jean Steinberg (New York: Basic Books, 1988).
7. See Anson Rabinbach and Jack Zipes, eds., *Germans & Jews Since the Holocaust: The Changing Situation in West Germany* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1986).
8. For a study of *Heimat* in the broader context of West German cinema, see Anton Kaes, *From Hitler to Heimat: The Return of History as Film* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).
9. The following section relies on materials found in several Polish periodicals. I am also indebted to John Jaworsky for sharing his findings on the national identification among prisoners of the *gulag*.
10. See Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin, eds. and trans., *From a Ruined Garden: The Memorial Books of Polish Jewry* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983); Annette Wieviorka and Itzhok Niborski, *Les livres du souvenir: Me'moriauxjuifs de Pologne* (Paris: Editions Gallimard/Julliard, 1983).
11. From my discussions with a number of survivors who had visited Poland in the last few years, often bringing along their children, it seems the very voyage has a sacred quality. This theme also appears in Jack Kugelmass, "The Rites of the Tribe: American Jewish Tourism in Poland," in Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kramer, and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992).

12. See, especially, Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1975) and Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1989).
13. For a good discussion of the dynamics of reminiscing, see Edward S. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987).
14. Empirically rich studies of the private/public interplay may be found in Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson, eds., *The Myths We Live By* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990).
15. Not all stories here are of success. See Alain Brossat, Sonia Combe, Jean-Yves Potel, Jean-Charles Szurek, eds., *A l'Est, la memoire retrouve'e* (Paris: Editions la Decouverte, 1990).
16. For an interesting (autobiographical) analysis of the complexities at play, see Alain Finkelkraut, *Le Juif imaginaire* (Paris: Seuil, 1980).
17. See, especially, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982).
18. For a critical view, see Jacob Neusner, 5frangerat/ome: *"The Holocaust, "Zionism and American Judaism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981).
19. For in-depth discussion see George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).
20. See Bronislaw Baczko, *Les Imaginaires Sociaux: Memoirs et espoirs collectifs* (Paris: Payot, 1984).
21. H. David Kirk, "Acculturation and Protest among Canadians and Americans of Japanese Ancestry: A Note on the 'Loyalty of Disloyalty,'" paper presented at CS AA meetings, Winnipeg, June 1986.
22. See Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985).
23. See, especially, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1983).
24. The following section draws on a senior seminar on multiculturalism, held in 1991/92; I thank my students for their valuable input. A research project in this area, although not carried on to completion, provided me with insights as to the "politics of science."
25. To take but one example: among the most recent immigrants who settled in Toronto, there are large numbers of Caribbean blacks, Southeast Asians, and Poles. For the latter, this is their first real exposure to people of different skin color (Poland being a racially homogeneous country). Yet when the same Poles encounter Toronto's Jews or Ukrainians, the past matters.
26. At stake, as well, is the very definition of "useful" versus "damaging"—a highly politicized terrain.
27. On this dynamic in the United States, see Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).