

Between Memory and Mythology

Between Memory and Mythology:
The Construction of Memory of Modern Wars

Edited by

Natalia Starostina

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

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This book first published 2015

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-6132-4, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-6132-8

To Natalia Starostina's family:
Tatiana Vasil'evna,
Anatoliy Alekseevich,
Elena Anatol'evna Trubitsyni,
and to Matthew Matteson

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many individuals helped me in finishing this project. First, I am very grateful to my advisors at graduate schools I attended. I was privileged to work with Dr. Kathryn Amdur, my advisor at the History department of Emory University. Her knowledge of French history is outstanding. Dr. Amdur was a very attentive and encouraging reader of my dissertation. Her support and encouragement were exemplary, and I could not wish for a better advisor and mentor in my Ph.D. program. My gratitude also goes to Dr. Lewis Siegelbaum with whom I started my graduate studies at Michigan State University. To this day I am inspired by Dr. Siegelbaum's vision of history, his passion for research, his commitment to mentoring graduate students, and his patience with students.

Second, I am very grateful to my colleagues at Young Harris College, especially from the Office of the Academic Affairs, Drs. Gary Myers and Keith DeFoor, and my Dean Dr. Lee March; in addition, Dr. Cathy Cox, the President of the College, has supported this initiative. Because of their support, it became possible to organize an international conference *Remembrances: Constructing Narratives of Wars of the 19th and 20th centuries* which had taken place on March 18-19, 2011, at Young Harris College in Young Harris, GA.

Finally, my gratitude goes to my family, the Troubitsyn family, whose love guides me through my life in many ways. My mother, Tatiana Vasil'evna Troubitsyna, is the most loving, kind, generous, and wise person who is taking care of my family and bringing it altogether. My father, Anatoliy Alekseevich, has instilled a great love to education and ambition in me and my sister, and together with my mother always ensured that my sister and I would always not lack anything to focus on our studies. My father's passion for history, politics, his compassion for the plight of common men, his kindness and integrity are my moral compass in life. My sister, Elena Anatolyevna, is one of my very best friends: her love, support, encouragement, and determination are simply outstanding. My two nephews, Maxim and Michael, bring a lot of sunshine and love to my life. And, lastly, my gratitude goes to my husband, Matthew Matteson, whose love and faith in me are truly priceless.

I dedicate this project to my family and to my husband.

PREFACE

PIONEERING SCHOLARSHIP ON THE USES OF MYTHOLOGY IN THE REMEMBRANCE OF MODERN WARS

PATRICK H. HUTTON

Remembrance of war, for its mythologies as much as for its realities, is the matrix out of which memory studies in the scholarly literature of our times have emerged. Research on commemorations, their modes and their politics, played a major role in defining the field, beginning in the late 1970s. Though such inquiries have expanded and diversified over the past generation, the interest in war remains at the heart of this enterprise, an exploration of the deep disillusionments that dashed the hopes and dampened the enthusiasms of nations at war in the twentieth century. The world wars of the first half of the twentieth century especially were crucibles of memory for the emotions they generated concerning the loss of millions of lives, the destruction of cities, and most enduring, the psychological scars carried by survivors, soldiers and their families alike. As historian Jay Winter has remarked, memories of the world wars of the twentieth century cast long shadows. The effects of war remain deeply ingrained in the imaginations of those touched by the experience.

As a preface to the new directions of scholarship in this field pursued in this rich and informative collection of scholarly articles assembled and edited by historian Natalia Starostina, I review some classic studies that first shaped our understanding of the ways of remembrance as a legacy of war. Their interest in memory is closely allied with the study of nationalism in whose names the world wars of the early twentieth century were fought. I have chosen five authors whose interpretations center on the crossroads where nationalism, myth, and memory converge.

I begin with two accidental historians of memory, Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm. Both wrote books about the workings of nationalism as a modern ideology. In the process, both coined sententious phrases that

caught the eye of scholars embarking on projects dealing with the study of collective memory: Anderson the idea of the “imagined community”; Hobsbawm the concept of the “invented tradition.” Both of their books appeared in 1983 and both would soon become required reading for scholars entering the field of memory studies. Anderson claims that his book was translated into twenty-nine different languages.¹ Terence Ranger, Hobsbawm’s co-editor, notes that *The Invention of Tradition* was cited in the bibliography of every application to granting agencies in the social sciences in the United States over the decade following its publication.² Beyond their expectations, these authors prepared the way for a shift in scholarly interest from ideologies that anticipated the future toward collective memories that mourned the past. The shift served as a basis for rethinking cultural history in the late twentieth century.

Anderson’s study is significant for explaining the preconditions that made possible the idea of the modern nation-state as an imagined community. The key, he explains, lies in the transition from dynastic monarchies to nation-states over the course of the early modern era. The dynastic state represented a late expression of government conceived as a politics of families. The king was father of his subjects, and his power over his realm was contained in that notion. Bloodlines were important; kinship mattered in defining the echelons of the political and social hierarchy. The people over whom the king reigned often hailed from unrelated places, a patchwork of heterogeneous communities loyal to his person. This congeries of communities of different sorts shared an allegiance to the king as sovereign, and not much else.

The regicide of France’s Bourbon family ruler in the French Revolution signaled the death knell of the politics of families, while simultaneously a new political ideal of the general will of the people, given philosophical expression by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, was affirmed in the civic festivals of a new republic. The king’s subjects were reborn as the nation’s citizens.³ The transition marked by this radical upheaval may have appeared dramatic. But it was made possible, Anderson contends, by the slow but sure democratization of print literacy, which provided a widening public with the intellectual tools needed to participate in a newly imagined,

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, rev. ed. (1983; London: Verso, 2006), 207.

² Terence Ranger, “*The Invention of Tradition Revisited*,” in *Legitimacy and the State in Africa*, ed. Terence Ranger and Megan Vaughn (London: Palgrave, 1993), 62-63.

³ See also Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 1-16.

far more abstract conception of community. The new nationalism was a mythic idea, localized in holidays and festivals, and inculcated in primary school pedagogy. It permitted citizens to adopt a new civic identity and to participate in projects advanced in its name. The nation so conceived came to be grounded in its commemorations.

Anderson's interest in this topic came via his analysis of nationalism's relationship to Marxism. For Marxists, Anderson explains, nationalism was a problematic anomaly on the way to the proletarian revolution that would usher in a classless society. Here, Anderson contends, Marxists failed to grasp the power of nationalism, especially from the vantage point of the realities of the twentieth century. In the midst of the uncertainties of a rapidly modernizing civilization, nationalism surged. If it could not fulfill the promise of social perfection, it could at least provide collective security as a consolation. Accordingly, Anderson argues, the appeal of nationalism lay in its claim to profound origins. Hence the importance he attributes to heritage as the sustaining sinew of nationalist sentiment. Modern nationalism batted on a new conception of historical time, or one might say of a consciousness that transcends it. The nation was thought to embody a kind of consciousness shared by the living and the dead. In this way, heritage implied continuity between past and present in a common social ideal, conceived not as a linear sequencing of time but rather as a belief in the simultaneity of past and present. The nationalist ideal conjured up visions of shared landscapes and shared heritage. These imagined settings in space and time tended to employ stereotypical images. The heroes of national liberation likewise acquired iconic form as they assumed mythic stature in popular recollection. Modern nationalism was powerful, Anderson concludes, by virtue of its appeal to collective memory.

Similarly, Eric Hobsbawm's notion of an invented tradition was taken up by scholars in ways that quickly outran his intended use of the concept. Hobsbawm had wanted to show how nation-states of the late nineteenth century, in the pride of their expanding governmental role at home and their imperialist ventures abroad, publicized the deep roots of their national identity in immemorial tradition, when in fact these roots were shallow where they existed at all. He took pains to distinguish newly invented traditions from older authentic ones hewn out of custom through centuries of practical improvisation. The invented tradition, he argues, was not based on precedent but rather on a selective and idealized representation of the past conjured up to serve the present-minded purposes of the nation-state. These invented traditions provided much needed cultural cohesion for a civilization in rapid transformation. The

cultural props of the old ways were fading fast. Church and monarchy no longer inspired faithful allegiance in the way they once had. Political power was increasingly centralized, government administrations grew in their outreach, and mass electorates came into being to demand a participatory role in the selection of their leaders. Newly invented traditions fostering patriotism played a crucial role in building allegiance to the new national centers of power. The conscious appeal to tradition strengthened emotional bonds between elected officials and their constituencies. Expanding public systems of primary education were enlisted in the project of inculcating civic pride and the responsibilities of citizenship in the young. National holidays were instituted or refurbished to punctuate the calendar of what was in effect a new secular religion of nationalism. National flags became sacred emblems. Imposing monuments to epic historical events became salient commemorative reminders of the nation-state reconceived as the community of primary allegiance. The format and content of these practices varied from country to country, but the instruments for fabricating and sustaining the new cultures of nationalism were everywhere much the same.⁴

Hobsbawm's thesis was meant to be provocative. But the scholars' uses of the concept soon ranged beyond the scope of his interpretation. By the late 1980s, the new realities of an age of economic and cultural globalization had displaced the old ones that had given nationalism its considerable appeal a century before. Nationalism as an ideology, moreover, had become suspect in light of the devastating wars of the twentieth century carried out in its name. The concept of the invented tradition exercised a compelling appeal to scholars, I would argue, because traditions invented to buttress the authority of the nation-state no longer spoke to the needs of the present age. Scholarly interest, therefore, shifted from tradition's ideological appeal to the politics underpinning its construction. In these newfound circumstances, many readers were willing to believe that any and all traditions were invented to serve tendentious political ends, lending a cynical cast to the idea of tradition itself. The autopsy of tradition, therefore, became the working model for scholars taken with Hobsbawm's stimulating study.

⁴ Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," and "Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1-14, 263-307.

George Mosse in his long and distinguished career as cultural historian studied the trajectory of nationalism from ideology to commemoration over the course of modern German history. Emigrating from Germany to the United States as a young man, he had an ongoing interest from the late 1950s in the ideological roots of National Socialism, which he traced to a populist conception of nationalism grounded in an imagined German rural landscape and a mythologized past. German nationalism assumed an idealist cast, he argues, because of the historic heterogeneity of the myriad German-speaking states and principalities of central Europe, and the long and halting task of German unification under Prussian auspices over the course of the nineteenth century. Put more succinctly, Germany was an idea long before it became a nation-state. Its mythological conceptualization by writers and philosophers harked back to a deep cultural heritage identified with the attitudes and beliefs of the German people (*volk*) in a highly idealized representation of their past. This myth of Germany as a people who from antiquity shared a common consciousness took on new political meaning in the modernizing campaigns of Prussian statesman during the Wars of Liberation (1813-14). German nationalism came to be identified closely with these campaigns. The victory over Napoleonic forces came to anchor a legendary history, harking back to the victory of the Germanic chieftain Hermann (Arminius) and his horde of warriors in their campaigns against the Roman legions during the first century CE. Because German claims to a national identity were so ethereal, bound more to the cultural mainstays of language, ethnicity, and mores than to political institutions, nationalist statesmen portrayed soldiers in these modern wars as heroes re-enacting the struggles of their ancestors in defence of their native land.⁵

Like Anderson, Mosse contends that the rise of nationalism at the turn of the nineteenth century was a response to the decay of senescent social and political institutions dating from the Middle Ages. Nationalism filled a need for a broadly conceived idea of community that refashioned the old notion about a German collective unconscious in a new ideological guise. In principle, the new nationalism championed a kind of egalitarianism, not of means but of mindset, or as sometimes professed in loftier terms, a collective soul. In this respect, German nationalism also drew upon Christian religious sentiment, notably notions about an inner voice of the

⁵ George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology; Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964); idem, *The Nationalization of the Masses; Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars Through the Third Reich* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1975).

sort associated with Pietism. This suggests why the new nationalism may be interpreted as a civic religion.

At the same time, Mosse explains, nationalism was an ideology of considerable ambiguity. It was at once radical and conservative – radical for the activism it sought to generate, conservative in its emphasis on cultural rootedness in homeland and in heritage. The new nationalism had its high priests: professors and writers such as Johann von Fichte and Ernst Arndt, and activists such as Friedrich Jahn, famous for his role in the formation of athletic and fraternal youth societies. They idealized the vitality of youth, for youth movements were essential to the image of the new nationalism. Gymnastic societies, male choirs, and sharpshooters were mainstays of nationalist ventures throughout the nineteenth century. Such fraternal societies appealed to the idealism of the young themselves. They fostered camaraderie, shared activism in the service of a cause, emotional bonding, an outlet for youthful energies, particularly in sporting activities. They also offered an escape from the routines of daily life in the promise of adventure in defence of the fatherland.

As Mosse remarks, so abstract a notion of nationalism sustained its appeal through the aesthetic design of its commemorative practices. These were fashioned to reinforce remembrance through images that glorified the nation in both space and time. The sacred space of German remembrance was the landscape, the fields and forests in which its people had drawn emotional sustenance since time immemorial. In a world of urbanization and industrialization, nationalists found solace in nostalgia for a vanishing rural way of life. Writers and artists from an emerging middle class idealized the common man who tilled the soil of German farmland in the manner of their forefathers. The new nationalism had its sacred time as well. Nationalists proclaimed the primordial origins of their cause. They showcased German heroism, notably in war. Ancient military battles were juxtaposed to modern ones. A newly constructed monument to the victory of Hermann over the Roman legions (9 CE) was venerated as a place of memory as important as that commemorating the battle of Leipzig (1813) that capped the Wars of Liberation in the early nineteenth century. The creation of commemorative statuary remained a mania anchoring the cult of remembrance throughout the nineteenth century.

Mosse's perspective on German nationalism evolved over the course of his scholarly career. His last, and perhaps best written work, concerned the formation of the cult of the fallen soldier during World War I.⁶ Here the rhetoric of German patriotism once voiced by enthusiasts for war took on a

⁶ George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers; Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

mournful tone in coming to terms with military defeat and the fall of the German Empire. The exaltation of heroic youth gave way to subdued meditation on soldiers who had sacrificed their lives for the fatherland. The image of Germany as an untamed forest was domesticated in the pastoral settings of the military cemeteries constructed to house the war dead. Spare, uniform, elegant in their simplicity, these places of memory re-rooted the nationalist ideal in this hallowed ground. Mosse labelled such elegy the Myth of the War Experience.

Despite the postwar zeal for commemorations, the cult of the fallen soldier could not sustain the emotions roused by war indefinitely. In time, memories of the sacrifices of combat veterans were transmogrified in two ways. First, remembrance of the war came to be trivialized in the sentimentality of war souvenirs. Such kitsch included postcards, toy soldiers, parlour games, and battlefield tourism in a comfort that contrasted dramatically with the hardships of those who had gone to war. Second, and more disturbing, was the corruption of the myth of nationalism, turned to extremist political ends. Nationalism during the 1920s and 1930s regressed into crude aggressiveness with the appearance of a new kind of “volunteer.” He was no longer the idealistic youth who had signed up for service at the outbreak of hostilities, but rather a war veteran hardened by its brutalizing and senseless campaigns, now frustrated by defeat, numbed and coarsened by its violence. At loose ends, some veterans formed Free Corps, the prototype of the extremist paramilitary organizations that set out to intimidate the leaders of the Weimar Republic. Apologists such as Ernst Jünger portrayed them as exemplars of a new race of men, warriors emboldened by the realities of war to revive a defeated nation through vigilante action.

It was in this political climate, Mosse argues, that National Socialism found fertile ground. Hitler took advantage of the resentment of a defeated nation, and turned it toward his racist political ends. Hatred of an imagined enemy – the Gypsy, the homosexual, and especially the Jew – played into popular emotions in visceral ways. Vitiating by the Nazi crimes of genocide, the Myth of the War Experience after World War II was enshrouded in shame and so could not resuscitate the cult of the fallen soldier as it had been venerated in the immediate aftermath of World War I. The memory cycle of the myth sustaining the new nationalism in Germany had run its course.

Intriguing as a comparison with Mosse is the book by the Israeli-American sociologist Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots* (1995), a study of

the revision of Jewish collective memory by leaders of the Zionist movement in the early twentieth century.⁷ Zionists proposed to return to the land of their Jewish ancestors, from which they had been expelled nearly two thousand years before. There they planned to rebuild that ancient nation anew. The comparison of German and Zionist nationalism is not without irony. It was in response to anti-Semitism in central Europe during the late nineteenth century that Jewish leaders took initiatives to form a nation of their own. The Zionist movement out of which the Republic of Israel would emerge after World War II is especially interesting because of the nationalist zeal of its activists and the speed with which it succeeded in establishing a Jewish political presence in Palestine during the first half of the twentieth century. As they staked their claim to what had long since become a strange and alien land, Zionist poets, writers and political activists of the early twentieth century turned to the task of constructing an imagined community fashioned in remembrance of an ancient heritage.

Zerubavel takes seriously Hobsbawm's idea of the invented tradition. Zionism was a vision of a new nation that longed for oldness. Her study traces the way a newly founded state builds a cultural identity. She reviews its fortunes from the settlements of Zionist pioneers of the pre-state period through the wars in which Israel established and then defended its identity as a nation-state. In many ways, Zionism was a nationalist movement not unlike its European counterparts, though its beginnings date only from the late nineteenth century. The Zionist movement inspired much enthusiasm among Jewish youth in Europe, and migration to Palestine proceeded apace during the early decades of the twentieth century. But Zionists were establishing a homeland in territory to which they had only the most tenuous modern claim. More than European nationalists, therefore, they depended heavily on the construction of a historical tradition to justify their cause. This was not an easy task, for it required gathering together scattered memories of heroic actions in a distant past and weaving them into a new narrative of Jewish history. In the myth of nationhood so devised, modernity and antiquity were perceived to be allied as corresponding phases within a broadly conceived historical continuum. A nationalist movement with virtually no modern roots revitalized events out of the depths of its Jewish heritage. These recovered roots became the historic places of memory of modern Israel's identity.

Zionists, Zerubavel explains, embarked upon their cause of nation-making with uncompromising conviction. They repudiated the attitudes

⁷ Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

that had shaped the religious culture of the Jewish diaspora. They looked down upon the Exilic Jews of Europe who for two thousand years had yielded in the face of discrimination against them and who were unwilling or unable to resist the persecution to which they were subjected in twentieth-century Europe. Indeed, Zionists defined their identity against what they perceived to be the passivity of Jews in Exile. Even after World War II, Zionists were slow to find compassion for victims of the Holocaust in Hitler's Germany. Only decades after that war did Israeli statesmen seek to integrate its memory into their own conception of national identity.

In formulating a myth of national origins, Zerubavel explains, Zionists of the pre-state era radically revised the sacred history of Jews in exile. They repudiated what had been the theological cast of Jewish history conceived as a religious heritage. Exilic Jews had maintained their culture in widely scattered communities through the binding ties of commemorative religious practices that served as the foundation of their collective identity. The defeat and dispersion of their forbearers in antiquity was interpreted as a tragedy, and the wisdom of their prophets and teachers a consolation. Zionism offered a secular alternative, revising Jewish history so as to represent the Exile as an interim period between the nation of Israel in Antiquity and its modern Zionist revival. As a reinterpretation of Jewish history, the Zionist narrative was highly selective, and it replaced one tradition of collective memory with another to advance its cause. The notion that modern Zionist pioneers in Palestine in the early twentieth century were recapturing the energy of their ancestors was essential to the myth of the new Jewish state in the making. Zionists sought to reaffirm their symbolic connections with the courageous deeds of that ancient nation, recalling their fight to the end as they faced obliteration by the Roman legions. They taught that the present age was witnessing the rebirth of that heroic confidence. The passivity of Jews in the long exile would be displaced by the active engagement of their descendants in the new tasks of rebuilding their ancestral homeland. Reframing the collective memory of that heritage, therefore, was vital to the meaning of the Zionist cause. They celebrated their leaders now as avatars of leaders back then.

In an explanation not unlike that of Mosse for German nationalism, Zerubavel shows how Zionist intellectuals and statesmen juxtaposed remembrance of ancient and modern military actions as key elements in their construction of a new national memory: the battle of Tel Hai in 1920, the revolt of Bar Kokhba in 132 CE, and the last stand at Masada in 73 CE. In the pioneer pre-state days of the early twentieth century, Tel Hai was a much celebrated historical event for the courage and spirit of self-

sacrifice early settlers displayed in their skirmishes with neighbouring Arabs. For this event, Zionist commemoration focused on the death of Josef Trumpeldor, a charismatic veteran from the campaigns of the Russo-Japanese War, who in Palestine became a commander of the Mule Brigade under British supervision during World War I. Dying in a shootout while defending his settlement in Upper Galilee, Trumpeldor was reputed to have uttered the edifying last words: "Never mind, it is good to die for the country."

In commemorating the life of Trumpeldor, his memorialists could point to living witnesses to his dying declaration. Memory of the events that transpired at Bar Kokhba and Masada, by contrast, was beclouded by suspect evidence retrieved out of a nebulous past. Neither had figured positively in Exilic tradition, for both were remembered as episodes of failure in defeat. They would nonetheless find a restored place in Zionist collective memory because they exemplified the spirit of active resistance against all odds that Zionist leaders wanted to instill within their youth as a strategy for deepening their commitment to the present cause: Bar Kokhba as a heroic revolt in the face of inevitable defeat by vastly superior Roman legions; mass suicide at Masada as a courageous alternative to abject surrender to the Romans. Zionists telescoped these events into a mentality shared across the reaches of time.

The stance of intransigent defiance that characterized all three episodes, Zerubavel explains, would become the lore around which the Israeli nation would fashion its culture of remembrance through highly effective commemorative practices. The sacrifices they recalled were integrated into the rituals of a holiday cycle of annual observance. The stories about the heroism they had exhibited became exemplary models for Israeli school children. The historic sites of Bar Kokhba and Masada became places of pilgrimage. The heights of Masada especially, by virtue of their remoteness, served as sacred ground for visitation, first for treks by intrepid youth, eventually for tourism by the public at large. The glue that held these commemorative practices together was the revival of ancient Hebrew as the language of instruction in public schools.

Zerubavel makes a persuasive case for the construction of a collective memory to which nearly all Jewish settlers could subscribe during the pre-state period of nation-building. For the most part uncritically accepted, the Zionist myth of origins was essential for promoting a sense of shared identity. The interest of her account, however, also lies in her explanation of the way these tales of death-defying heroism were in time challenged and subverted, ironically because the task of nation-building had been so successfully accomplished. As a nation-state from 1948, the Republic of

Israel would continue to see itself as a nation besieged by hostile neighbours, and the myths of origins would never be officially abandoned. But the passage from pre-state Zionism into Israeli statehood soon revealed the limits of an ideology that relied so heavily on enthusiasm for martial zeal whatever the cost in soldiers and resources.

Zerubavel goes on to show how the unity inspired by reverence for a legendary past dissipated in the decades following nationhood, roughed up by ongoing tensions with hostile neighbours. The bane of nationalism, she points out, is its need for constant reinvigoration. The Zionist myth of origins was periodically resuscitated, as Israel went to war with its Arab neighbours in 1967 and again in 1973. Victories notwithstanding, the wars exposed Israel's vulnerability, and incited parliamentary debate about the best policies to insure the well-being of the nation. Uncompromising defiance in the manner prescribed in the episodes of historic remembrance could no longer command blind faith. Statesmen debated whether it was not wiser to seek accommodation with Palestinian Arab neighbours by making concessions to their demands to share this tiny land. Given the realities of survival in the midst of present tensions, sceptics asked, was not temporizing statesmanship a better plan for national security than activism in the name of stubborn national pride? The wars of 1967 and 1973 may have been stunning Israeli victories, but they left a legacy of worry about how vulnerable this fledgling nation remained. Collective memory unravelled into collective memories in controversies over public policy as Israel faced its ever precarious situation.

On the intellectual plane, the myth of the Republic of Israel's profound origins, once naively accepted in Zionist collective memory, was deflated by sobering historical doubts about how little one could know about what actually transpired in those places in those ancient times. The veracity of the legends about them was challenged, as historians got into the act. In the process, sacred memories were subverted in these profane re-assessments, as the patriotic narratives about these events were subjected to close examination. Historians pointed out the bias of ancient historians, notably the Roman Dio Cassius and the Jew Flavius Josephus, on whose accounts memory of these events was based. Shimon Bar Kokhba, leader of the revolt that bears his name, was exposed as a shadowy figure whose identity could not be confirmed in a reliable way. Was mass suicide at Masada, critics asked, the only solution for Jews facing the Roman legions? Even testimony about the exact words in which Trumpeldor issued his dying declaration was questioned, and his words became the butt of subtle humor. Still, the authority of patriotic remembrance of these

legendary origins was disputed only in fits and starts, and only to some degree.

I close with a few remarks about the work of historian Jay Winter on the commemoration of World War I. He is among its foremost authorities, given the range and complexity of his analysis and the insight with which he relates his findings to the larger topic of the relationship between memory and history. Like Zerubavel, he is sensitive to the ways in which memory and history draw upon shared resources, even as they pursue separate and distinct approaches to understanding the meaning of the past. Reflecting on work on war, myth and memory (including his own), he implicitly tests the limits of the heuristic concepts of the “imagined community” and the “invented tradition” out of which so much scholarship on collective memory has been drawn. Here I comment only on his most recent book, *Remembering War* (2006), which places all the work on collective memory in relation to historical understanding in a comprehensive historiographical perspective.⁸

Winter is suspicious of the notion of collective memory for its vagueness about who it includes and how it operates. He argues that discussion of the collective memory of a nation is a dubious proposition, tendentious and even mythological in its formulations. As an imagined community, the nation is a flimsy and evanescent structure for remembrance. There are times and places in which shared sentiments of patriotism and national identity may be evoked, he allows. But in recollecting the experience of war, there are many communities of remembrance, and it is in these that memories of war are most deeply implanted. He therefore goes in search of a middle ground between memory and history. Each has its resources for evoking the past. Memory and history as modes of understanding the past are different in nature. But in many ways they overlap.

To explain how, Winter invokes the concept of “historical remembrance.” The study of historical remembrance takes place in that space in which memory and history encounter one another. Collective memory implies passive reflection; historical remembrance calls upon active engagement in the projects of remembering. Following the critic

⁸ Jay Winter, *Remembering War; The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006). See also his detailed earlier study, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning; the Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Walter Benjamin, he proposes that we look upon collective memory as a theatre in which the past is re-enacted. The task is to understand the many and varied practices through which memory is portrayed on that stage. Such practices may be studied concretely. In the case of World War I, these include letters, diaries, plays, novels, movies, even the proceedings of courts of law. All are media through which the experience of the past is given expression. Memory, he explains, is twice filtered. Experience can only be communicated through its representation, and all such representation is selective. It cues what and how experience is remembered. At this point of memory's reception, however, the notion of a collective memory breaks down into collected memories. Some people may share common attitudes and images. But as individuals they will never interpret representation of the past in exactly the same way. Memories are too subjective, too much shaped by the varied perspectives of those called upon to remember, to be aggregated into a unified conception. In most instances, collective memory is no more than a useful fiction.

Winter contends that the bonds linking individuals in their evocation of the past are more easily recognized in the activities of memorialists, the agents of commemorative practices. A few of them built imposing monuments of national commemoration. But far greater numbers erected more modest memorial structures in small towns and villages. Local committees saw to commemorations by choreographing ritual ceremonies. In such settings, memories of those dear to the community were held fast for personal reflection. Winter, therefore, would have us understand the degree to which commemorative practices are best appreciated for the specific communities to which they appealed. In looking for evidence, one most often finds it on the local level.

Winter also shifts attention from war's heroes to its victims. Following literary critic Paul Fussell, he points out that the primary trope of literary remembrance of World War I is irony.⁹ The outbreak of the war had engendered great expectations among young men for the experience of valor in combat. In the trench warfare that followed, however, such a notion was completely dispelled. The rally around the initial call to duty fell apart in suffering on an unprecedented scale. Nearly ten million soldiers died in World War I, and some twenty million more were wounded. Most extensive but least visible among these wounds was the psychological damage, as survivors were permanently impaired by the shell shock of battle. Combat veterans lived with unrequited memories

⁹ Paul Fussell, *The Great War in Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 3-35.

they could never completely assimilate. Nor were soldiers the only ones who suffered. Mothers, wives, and families were victims as well. All would carry the scars of war as long as they lived. Over the long run, Winter explains, such memories are more likely to be carried most profoundly within families. World War I is best appreciated today as the setting in which the devastating psychological trauma of warfare was first acknowledged. That may be why this war remains so prominent in modern memory. From the perspective of cultural history, World War I is significant for the way posterity would mourn its losses rather than celebrate its campaigns, a precedent for understanding wars yet to come.

Winter therefore questions whether the scholarly focus on the nation is the best venue for understanding the historical remembrance of World War I. Its battles may have been fought in the name of nation-states, and its first memorialists paid most of their attention to soldiers fallen in battle. But the experience of the war was felt in searing ways by combatants and non-combatants alike. The remembrance of World War I, he argues, was enacted on a wider stage, drawing in the many communities touched by its violence and displacements, each in a different way. For Winter, time itself dissolves the coherence of national remembrance, as one traces its fortunes over the long run. While nations in their ideological faith may proclaim long-term continuities between past and present, they change demographically and politically over time and the meaning of national remembrance evolves with them. Living memory is dynamic. It defies the best commemorative efforts to hold its values in place. Even as commemorative practices survive, their meaning undergoes transformative change. Referring to France, Great Britain, and Germany as examples, he notes that the composition of their populations today is far more diverse than it was a century ago. Vast numbers of people migrated in and out of these combatant nations over the course of the following century. Nations changed policies in the face of new realities. The issues that had provoked the outbreak of World War I vanished. Meanwhile, memories of the war lived on among families with considerable staying power. The families who remembered the war and meditated on its losses, Winter speculates, may be thought of as an imagined community spread around the globe. Today, the memory of World War I continues to be culled in a myriad of reflective ways in a variety of settings. For those who meditate on its meaning, its remembrance provides edifying reminders of the wages of warfare.

Winter proposes that the many modes of remembrance in today's world pose a challenge to the historian. The interest in memory as a topic for scholarship encourages historians to use their skills not only to establish a

critical perspective on memory's workings, but also to rethink the way they themselves work as scholars. Gone are the days in which professional historians can research and write in splendid isolation, should they hope to reach an audience beyond colleagues in their field. The old days of print culture in which historians jealously guarded their individual autonomy has led to their marginalization. They are read by one another, sometimes by their students, but not often beyond the groves of academe. Media is the mode of popular communication today. Television and film reach enormous audiences. The new media of television and film, Winter counsels, should be embraced for the possibilities they offer to renew public interest in the past. In these new modes of communication, the line between memory and history may sometimes blur. But historians would be wise to become engaged in the production of media presentations of history if they wish to exercise their influence on the public at large. Should they fail to do so, those with other agendas will be sure to take up the task.

The interpretations offered by these scholars concerning the role of myths among nations at war enable us to understand how collective memory is at once powerful and fragile. It is powerful in the imagination it can quicken and the convictions it can inspire. But collective memory is constructed on unstable foundations. However far it may reach into the past, it conforms to present needs. Highly selective in the imagery it imports out of the past, it is easily bent as these needs change. Collective memory flourishes and weakens in accord with the vicissitudes of changing realities. The imaginative designs of collective memory operate in dialectical interplay with critical analysis, and can never withstand its subversions, at least in the pristine images in which they had first been called into being. That is why memory can never substitute for history based on solid evidence. The enthusiasm of collective memory cannot be sustained. At the crux of the dynamics of collective memory, though, is the notion of the eternal return. If memory is easily distorted, it resists forgetfulness. Its echoes continue to reverberate despite changing times and circumstances.

In a way, our work in this time in which memory has surfaced in the realm of scholarship with such force and persistence suggests that we find ourselves at the end of a cycle of historiography. History is linear and privileges past and future; memory is cyclical and favours the present. Ironically, historiographical fashions tend to follow memory's cycle, for historical knowledge is not a simple aggregation of increasing information

about the past. Topics of interest to historians emerge in light of present dilemmas, burgeon as they stimulate research, settle into narratives, grow stale in overspecialization, and in time are abandoned for new ones germane to the changing interests of a new generation of scholars coming of age. Such a historiographical perspective draws attention to the topic under review in this volume. Framing modern history as the saga of the building of the modern state no longer speaks to the needs of our times. In my view, the memory phenomenon in contemporary historical scholarship is a response to the dissolution of the realities that the ideologies of the modern age addressed. The preoccupation with memory in our times has permitted us to understand the imagination that inspired the commemorative projects of the modern era – what was valued in that era and how its passing was mourned. In a modest way, such is the task undertaken by contributors to this project.

INTRODUCTION

NATALIA STAROSTINA

In her book *Suffer and Grow Strong: The Life of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, 1834-1907*, historian Carolyn Curry analyses the detailed diary of Gertrude Thomas, a wealthy Southern lady whose life resembles the life of Scarlett O'Hara from Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*.¹ Curry describes the husband of Gertrude: with the beginning of the civil war, he became enlisted in the Confederate army. However, after several months of being in a camp and not seeing any of the real war, he became bitter that he had not received a promotion and hired a substitute; his hasty return from the battlefields did nothing but embarrass his wife. In the aftermath of the civil war, he tried several failed businesses that resulted in the catastrophic bankruptcy of his family. The more time that passed from his service in the Confederate army, the more important this episode became for him. He was often seen wearing a grey Confederate uniform, sleeping in a tent, and was considered one of the most picturesque Confederate veterans in late nineteenth-century Atlanta. By this time the precise details of his brief encounter with the war were forgotten. And his own mythology of the Civil War had acquired a status of the public memory of the war. Remembering the war became a life-long performance for him, a performance which amused the public and, to an extent, satisfied their desire for colourful and heroic images of the civil war.

On the contrary, in the memoir *Good-Bye to All That*, a British writer and veteran of the Great War, Robert Graves (1895–1985), described his growing alienation from the representation of the war in a British public discourse.² At the very beginning of his service on the Western front, Graves became aware of how little people in Great Britain knew, and further, wanted to know about the war. During his leave in London, when a conversation touched upon bombardment, Robert had mentioned that the house in which he was stationed in France was under artillery fire. As soon

¹ Carolyn Newton Curry, *Suffer and Grow Strong: The Life of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, 1834-1907* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2014.)

² Robert Graves, *Good-bye to All That*, intr. Paul Fussell (New York: Anchor Books, 1998.)

as his companion learned what happened to Robert in France, a look of interest faded from the companion's face. Robert's stories of his experiences in the trenches fell on the deaf ears of his father who, instead of trusting the stories of his son, a first-hand witness of the war, preferred propagandist and misleading newspaper accounts. After the war, his family was proud of the fact that Robert gallantly fought in the war. In a way, Robert's service in the war became a family status symbol that elevated their social position. On the contrary, the post-war lifestyle of Robert received only disapproval from his parents. His parents, who were proud of their upper-middle class position, their tea soirees at which cucumber sandwiches were served on fine china and Shakespearian plays were read, had found disturbing, if not appalling the simplicity of Robert's lifestyle. Robert and his wife Nancy had a cottage on the countryside and ran a village store; Nancy, becoming an ardent feminist, distributed literature on birth control among villagers, wore pants and cut her hair. Robert himself admitted that the army taught him to commandeer any unattached property, to talk to strangers, and to be satisfied with basic necessities of life. Robert's postwar existence contradicted his parents' expectations of how the life of an officer and war veteran needed to be: they wanted the war to increase the social status of their son and were disappointed to see the opposite. His parents wanted Robert to play a hero of the war, and Robert's refusal to perform this role and to become a legend was a subject of regret for them. Robert's lifestyle shattered the mythology of the war, a mythology which his father wanted to believe, and it generated a great deal of tension between Robert and his father.

Graves also described the profound effect of the war on his consciousness: years after the war, he would wake up in the middle of night because of his recurrent nightmares, i.e. shells bursting on his bed.³ Strangers on a street would take the appearance of his fallen comrades. Another British poet and a war memoir writer, Siegfried Sassoon, when passing by lawns, would see not grass, but corpse-strewn battlefields. War has a deep impact on social memory. War shapes society through a myriad of ways by redefining class, gender, and race identities, by inserting the traumatic memories of conflicts at the core of its language, consciousness, and sub-consciousness, and by generating persistent mythologies. The construction of the memory of the war and its relationship with mythology is the uniting theme that scholars examine in this volume.

Memory is an important category of an inquiry, and it has become an important subject after historians looked closely at the work of French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945). Halbwachs studied how

³ *Ibid.*, 287.

society remembers events and how collective memory works.⁴ He argued that in order to legitimize the relationships of power, society constantly redefines memories of the past.⁵ Halbwachs also suggested that collective memories serve an important goal to ensure the cohesion of a group and the continuity of its traditions.⁶ The works by literary critiques and historians such as Paul Fussell, George Mosse, Pierre Nora, Antoin Prost, Jay Winter, Daniel Sherman, and Patrick Hutton highlight complex ways in which a society became engaged in the construction of memory and in finding common narratives to comprehend the war.⁷ In his seminal work Paul Fussell investigates how the memory of the Great War changed new sensibility in interwar British society: only irony deemed to be appropriate in the aftermath of a brutal war which thinned out the British youth. Pierre Nora highlights the importance of symbols for making the French identity: the symbols and the events of the Great War played a significant role in shaping national memory in twentieth-century France.

Historians investigate many ways in which post-war societies became engaged in the construction of the memory of war. Scholars analyze battlefield tourism and ways such tours make the tourists the engaged participants in making war memory.⁸ Those who lost their loved ones during the Great War wanted to pay a last homage to their husbands,

⁴ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁵ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 46-51 and 134-5. In the introduction, Halbwachs had given a definition of collective memory: "Yet it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories. ... It is in this sense that there exists a collective memory and social frameworks for memory; it is to the degree that our individual thought places itself in these frameworks and participates in this memory that it is capable of the act of recollection." *Ibid.*, 38.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁷ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Antoin Prost, "Verdun," in *Les Lieux de Memoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, vol. 2 (Paris, 1984); *idem.*, *In the wake of war: les anciens combattants and French Society*; trans. Helen McPhail (Providence: Berg, 1992); Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Daniel J. Sherman, *The Construction of Memory in Interwar France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Patrick H. Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory* (Burlington: University of Vermont, 1993.)

⁸ David W. Lloyd, *Battlefield Tourism: Pilgrimage and the Commemoration of the Great War in Britain, Australia, and Canada, 1919-1939* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1998).

brothers, and sons; as Jay Winter portrays in his study, many rail tickets were given to family members of the fallen soldiers and officers to visit these last resting places.⁹ (At the same time, some scholars define such tours through the lenses of spectatorship.) Winter argues that the broad strata of French society became engaged in the construction of the memory of the Great War and, in a process, the meaning of the military conflict was redefined.¹⁰ Daniel Sherman highlights the connection between the construction of the memory of the war and the strength of Republicanism in interwar France: remembering the victims of the war could revive a strong religious sentiment. Sherman's nuanced interpretation of symbols incorporated in monuments to the fallen soldiers shows the significance of material culture and artifacts in remembering the war. George Mosse analyzed the commemoration of fallen soldiers in Germany and underscored the importance of ceremonies for romanticizing and glorifying the Great War, also defined as mutual annihilation.¹¹ Mosse showed how German fascists used any opportunity to commemorate the Great War as the greatest moment in the history and as the expression of vitality of a nation.

This brief bibliography cannot possibly address all excellent works that have been done in the field of memory studies. There are several directions which are essential for further investigation. First, the relationship between mythology and memory in the construction of the memory of the war was not analyzed by historians in depth. The historians of antiquity, sociologists, psychologists, and anthropologists emphasize mythology as the central mechanism of preserving social memory and for making a society coherent.¹² Myths guard the common memory for society and also serve as a magical mirror: this mirror tends to romanticize the past and to portray historical choices as driven by only noble intentions. Myths negotiate contesting narratives of the past: Reality and fantasy intertwine in the space of myth. In Roland Barthes's *Mythologies*, the French philosopher emphasized the importance of myths for the epoch of

⁹ Winter, 15-54.

¹⁰ Sherman.

¹¹ Mosse.

¹² See Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. and intr. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books; 1969), especially his essays "The Storyteller" and "Theses on the Philosophy of History"; L.S. Vygotskiii, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, ed. Michael Cole (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978); Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New York: Free Press, 1965), and others.