# War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century

No scholarly consensus exists about how the terms 'memory' and 'collective memory' may most fruitfully inform historical study. Hence there is still much room for reflection and clarification in this branch of cultural history. How war has been remembered collectively is the central question in this volume. War in the twentieth century is a vivid and traumatic phenomenon which left behind it survivors who engage time and time again in acts of remembrance. Thus this volume, which contains essays by outstanding scholars of twentieth-century history, focuses on the issues raised by the shadow of war in this century. Drawing on material from countries in Europe, and from Israel and the United States, the contributors have adopted a 'social agency' approach which highlights the behaviour, not of whole societies or of ruling groups alone, but of the individuals who do the work of remembrance, who feel they have a duty to remember, and who want to preserve a piece of the past. More specifically, the traumatic collective memory resulting from the horors of the First World War, the Spanish Civil War, the Second World War, and the Algerian War is examined through studies of public forms of remembrance, such as museums and exhibitions, literature and film, thus demonstrating that a popular kind of collective memory is still very much alive.

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# War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century

*Edited by*

Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan

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# Contents

# Preface

There is a rough common denominator in this book, fashioned through discussion among contributors. We all refer in different ways to what may be termed a 'social agency' approach, which highlights the behaviour not of whole societies or of ruling groups alone, but rather of those groups and individuals, frequently but not always obscure, who do the work of remembrance. This interpretation is set out by the editors in the first chapter, in which many of the conceptual problems in the study of 'collective memory' are addressed. We hasten to add that the contributors to this volume have adopted very different approaches to the problem of 'social agency', collective memory, and victimhood. These differences are discussed in the introduction. Our intention is simply to introduce a rich field of historical inquiry – that of collective memory – and to clarify its topography by reference to the experience of war in this century. No orthodoxy arises here, though a number of questions in common recur throughout this volume.

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*Emmanuel Sivan*
*Jay Winter*

# 1 Setting the framework

*Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan*

## Collective remembrance

Collective remembrance is public recollection. It is the act of gathering bits and pieces of the past, and joining them together in public. The 'public' is the group that produces, expresses, and consumes it. What they create is not a cluster of individual memories; the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Collective memory is constructed through the action of groups and individuals in the light of day. Passive memory – understood as the personal recollections of a silent individual – is not collective memory, though the way we talk about our own memories is socially bounded. When people enter the public domain, and comment about the past – their own personal past, their family past, their national past, and so on – they bring with them images and gestures derived from their broader social experience. As Maurice Halbwachs put it, their memory is 'socially framed'.[1] When people come together to remember, they enter a domain beyond that of individual memory.

The upheavals of this century have tended to separate individual memories from politically and socially sanctioned official versions of the past. All political leaders massage the past for their own benefit, but over the last ninety years many of those in power have done more: they have massacred it. Milan Kundera tells the story of a photograph of the political leadership of the Czech socialist republic in 1948. One man in the photo was later purged. That individual had been removed from the photograph; all that remained was his hat, in the hands of a surviving colleague.[2] The snapshot – an image of a past event – had been

[1] Maurice Halbwachs, *On collective memory*, trans. by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). For recent elaborations, see Iwona Irwin-Zarecki, *Frames of remembrance: the dynamics of collective memory* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1994); and Peter Burke, 'History as social memory,' in *Memory: history, culture and the mind*, edited by Thomas Butler (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), pp. 97–113.

[2] Milan Kundera, *The book of laughter and forgetting* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), p. 3.

reconfigured; those who 'remembered' that the hat had once had a man under it, had to think again.

In many other ways, private and public modes of remembering were severed in the Soviet period. The lies and distortions were terribly visible.[3] To be sure, there were counter-trends. In some authoritarian societies, popular theatre and ceremony played a critical role, especially in bringing women's voices into the chorus of public comment on the past. Because memory can be gendered, women's testimony arises in different places than that of men.[4] But this distinction should not be drawn too sharply. The poetry that Nadezdha Mandelstam memorized, written by her husband Osip Mandelstam, was their joint and precious possession. She stayed alive, she said, to ensure that his voice was not silenced.[5] Others were not so fortunate.

The circulation of fiction was similarly significant in the dark days of dictatorship.[6] Literature played a critical role in keeping collective memory alive in a society where the writing of history was a routine operation dedicated to the glorification of the regime. Not only history, but the names of towns, roads, and the like became mythologized. New toponyms, inspired by the Russian revolution, tended to abolish all diversity, whether regional or cultural. They homogenized the country, shaping it all in the image of the all-powerful centre. In a word, ideology replaced memory by imposing the imaginary notion of a uniform Soviet people. Literature taught otherwise.[7]

Under Fascism or other repressive regimes, the invasion of everyday private life by political agents contaminated memories of mundane events; how to write about family life under such circumstances was a profound challenge. Where 'normality' ended and the monstrous began is a question which may never be answered fully. A similar divide between recollections of the rhythms of daily life under the Nazis – private memories – and 'amnesia' about the disappearance of the Jews has spawned a huge interpretive literature. As Saul Friedlander has observed, 'the Nazi past is too massive to be forgotten, and too repellent to be integrated into the "normal" narrative of memory'.[8] This dilemma

[3] See the discussion in Alain Brossat, Sonia Combe, Jean-Yves Potel, and Jean-Charles Szurek (ed.), *À l'Est la mémoire retrouvée* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1990).

[4] Elizabeth F. Loftus, Mahzarin R. Banaji, and Rachel A. Foster, 'Who remembers what?: gender differences in memory' *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 1 (1987), pp. 26, 64–85.

[5] Nadezhda Mandelstam, *Hope against hope*, trans. by Max Hayward (New York: Athenaeum, 1974).

[6] Andrei Plesu, 'Intellectual life under dictatorship' *Representations*, 49 (1996), pp. 61–71.

[7] Luisa Passerini (ed.), *Memory and totalitarianism*, *International yearbook of oral history and life stories*, vol. I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 'Introduction', p. 13.

[8] Saul Friedlander, *Memory, history, and the extermination of the Jews of Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 2.

has been the subject of entire libraries; it has also informed painting, sculpture, architecture, and other facets of the visual arts.

It would be idle to assume that these problems are restricted to authoritarian regimes. Even the democratic West has had trouble in reconciling its official versions of the past with the memories of millions of ordinary people. This is especially true in the case of that other collective trauma of the twentieth century, that of the two world wars. Of course, the two histories – that of Fascism and communism on the one hand, and of warfare on the other – are inextricably mixed. The shape of 'the short twentieth century'[9] emerged from the catastrophe of the First World War. It is only now in the 1990s, after the collapse of communism, and at a time when the European state system created in 1919 is being reconfigured, that we are able to see clearly some of the fundamental features of this brutal century.

Historians have contributed to public conversations about the recent past. They have helped to organize exhibitions, create museums, and write both for their colleagues and students, as well as for a wider public. But it is important to separate any notion of 'collective memory' from historical knowledge. Collective memory is not what historians say about the past. These professionals try to provide a documentary record of events, but in doing so they almost always depart from private memories. Anyone who has conducted interviews with participants in public events can attest to that. Collective memory is not historical memory, though the two usually overlap at many points. Professional history matters, to be sure, but only to a small population. Collective remembrance is a set of acts which go beyond the limits of the professionals. These acts may draw from professional history, but they do not depend on it.

This is apparent in the uproar that greets some public exhibitions, presenting a narrative which varies from individual recollection, from the official version of events, or offends some particular sensibilities. Collective remembrance is apparently too important a subject to be left to the historians.

This is evident in the way wars have been remembered in public. In all combatant countries there has been a proliferation of monuments, understood as literary, visual, or physical reminders of twentieth-century warfare. Many are self-serving tributes; most go beyond state-sponsored triumphalism to the familial and existential levels where many of the effects of war on the lives of ordinary people reside.

Here too the dialectic between remembering and forgetting is visible,

[9] E. J. Hobsbawm, *The age of extremes* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994), p. 4.

and is especially salient in non-official forms of collective remembrance. This book is intended as a contribution to the history of collective remembrance in the twentieth century. Its focus is on wars, soldiers, and victims of wars in Europe, the Middle East, and North America. Its purpose is to examine collective remembrance as the outcome of agency, as the product of individuals and groups who come together, not at the behest of the state or any of its subsidiary organizations, but because they have to speak out.

Why? Here we are at the intersection of private memories, family memories, and collective memories. The men and women whose activity we explore in this book lived through war as trauma, understood as an overwhelming, sustained, and mass experience. Many were in mourning; most were torn by war from one set of daily rhythms and were in search of another. Their decisions to act in public – by creating associations, by writing memoirs, by producing films, by speaking out in a host of ways – were profoundly personal. But they were not only private matters, since they existed in a social framework, the framework of collective action.

This emphasis on agency, on activity, on creativity, highlights a different approach to the cultural history of this century. We too speak of 'collective memory', but depart from those who define it as the property of dominant forces in the state, or of all survivors of war in the privacy of their lives, or as some facet of the mental furniture of a population – what the French like to call their *mentalités*.

Instead, we privilege the term 'collective remembrance'. The primary advantage of this shift in terminology is the avoidance of generalizations which simply cannot be true. The 'collective memory' of war is not what everybody thinks about war; it is a phrase without purchase when we try to disentangle the behaviour of different groups within the collective. Some act; others – most others – do not. Through the constant interrogation of actors and actions, we separate 'collective memory' from a vague wave of associations which supposedly come over an entire population when a set of past events is mentioned. Given the centrality of the experience of war in this century, we can and must do better than that.

To speak of 'collective remembrance' is to begin that task. Wars, soldiers, and the victims of war have been remembered in ceremony, in ritual, in stone, in film, in verse, in art; in effect in a composite of narratives. All are charged with the weight of the event: twentieth-century warfare is infused with horror as well as honour; the proper balance in representing the two is never obvious.

Those who make the effort to remember collectively bring to the task

their private memories. They also use language and gestures filled with social meaning. But the key mid-point, the linkage that binds their stories and their gestures, between *homo psychologicus* – the man of private memory – and *homo sociologicus* – the man of socially determined memory – is action. *Homo actans* is our subject. He or she acts, not all the time, and not usually through instruction from on high, but as a participant in a social group constructed for the purpose of commemoration. Their efforts are at the heart of this book.

Many different approaches obtain. But one unifying element persists. We stand at a mid-point between two extreme and unacceptable positions in this field: between those who argue that private memories are ineffable and individual, and those who see them as entirely socially determined, and therefore present whether or not anyone acts on them. With Blondel, we urge that such approaches are best located in 'the gallery of useless abstractions'.[10] In between is the palpable, messy activity which produces collective remembrance.

In this as in other areas, agency is arduous. Its opportunity costs – time, money, effort – are substantial. And it rarely lasts. Other tasks take precedence; other issues crowd out the ones leading to public work. And ageing takes its toll: people fade away, either personally or physically. The collective remembrance of past warfare, old soldiers, and the victims of wars is, therefore, a quixotic act. It is both an effort to think publicly about painful issues in the past and one which is bound to decompose over time.

This fading away is inevitable. But the effort to create artefacts or ceremonies in the aftermath of war has been so widespread that it is time to consider them not as reflections of current political authority or a general consensus – although some clearly are one or the other, but rather as a set of profound and evanescent expressions of the force of civil society itself. The history of collective remembrance of wars in this century is infused with both sadness and dignity; an understanding of its contours requires both.

## *Homo psychologicus*

The difficult terrain between individual memories and collective remembrance may be traversed more safely in the light of the findings of two very different communities of scholars. The first studies cognitive psychology; the second, social psychology and patterns of action. Each has much to add to our understanding of remembrance as a social activity.

[10] As cited by Coser in his introduction to Halbwachs, *On collective memory*, p.13.

Many historians use the term 'memory' as if it were unproblematic. But here both scientific and historical disputes abound. Decades of empirical research in cognitive psychology have unearthed sets of terms and pathways which have a direct bearing on the nature of individual memory. And since collective remembrance is an activity of individuals coming together in public to recall the past, historians would do well to reflect on the findings of cognitive psychologists on how memory happens.

These findings are much too complex and varied to be discussed in detail. All we can do here is to provide a stylized and schematic summary of the major lines of interpretation in this vast and growing field.[11] When relevant, we highlight terms in the scientific literature which have a bearing on the historical problem we address below.

### *Social learning*

Cognitive psychologists use the term *social learning*. It is a process to be distinguished from declarative learning, or learning facts about nature (which plant is poison ivy) or the human environment (how to tell the time). Declarative learning is storing away bits of information, such as how many centimetres are in an inch, or when the Battle of Hastings took place. Social learning, in contrast, is the assimilation by an individual of narratives or *scripts* about himself and his exchanges with other people. Given the slow pace of child development, and the care needed at an early age, it is a commonplace to say that we are never the first people to know who we are.

It should be evident why a student of 'social learning' cannot ignore the findings of cognitive psychologists. It is true that their experiments are unavoidably partial and 'unreal', in the sense of being unable to show the overlap and interaction of individuals and groups. But they force us to return to the individual, whose sense of the past is both the beginning and the end of all processes of 'social learning'.

[11] F. Bartlett, *Remembering* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932); A. Baddeley, *Your memory: a user's manual* (London: Penguin, 1992; A. M. Hoffman and H. S. Hoffman, *Archives of memory* (Lexington, Ky.: University of Kentucky Press, 1990), esp. ch. 1; M. Howe, *Introduction to human memory* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970); L.R. Squire, *Memory and brain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Michael Schudson, 'Dynamics of distortion in collective memory', in *Memory distortion: how minds, brains and societies reconstruct the past*, edited by Michael Schudson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 353–73; D. J. Schachter, *Searching for memory* (New York: Basic Books, 1996); Y. Dudai, *The neurobiology of memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

### *Memory traces*

The process of recollection has a biochemical and a neurological dimension, both of which are still the subject of elementary research. Despite the sheer complexity of these processes, a number of rudimentary findings may be identified.

The first is the notion of a *memory trace*. Most experiences leave long-term *memory traces*, recorded in our *episodic memory* system – the system which encodes 'what happened', that is, events. It is to be distinguished from systems which record not 'what' but 'that' – mundane, matter-of-fact events or details about nature or human affairs, grouped under the rubric of *semantic memory*. Long-term memory is defined as the retention for more than one minute of either kind of information. All these traces differ, though, in their density.

They also differ in accessibility for *recognition* or for *recall*. The *density* (or weight of a memory) is shaped to a large extent by the dramatic nature of the experience, its uniqueness, its being reconsidered or reinterpreted after the fact as a turning point. Density is further enhanced by the emotional nature of the experience (quite often dramatic) and its autobiographical nature. *Autobiographical memory* appears to be the most enduring kind of memory. For example, combat experience is particularly dense because it is personal and dramatic. Harrowing moments are denser still.

### *Interference*

There is no convincing evidence so far of the physical decay or disappearance of long-term memory traces. They seem to be deposited in the brain in an archeological manner; that is, they are there, even though other traces are on top of them.

Longitudinal studies have found these traces surviving over six decades. But some are not immediately available for retrieval. Why? Because other memory traces create 'layers' deposited on top of the original one, impeding its direct and immediate recall.

Psychologists refer to this obscuring or eclipsing of a memory trace by the terms *retroactive* or *proactive interference*. An instance of 'retroactive interference' is when newly encoded memory traces reshape, cover, or eclipse older memory traces. Proactive interference occurs when early memories shape our sense of the context or relative importance of later experiences.

### *Recognition and recall*

The nature of interference is not the same with all memory traces. Here psychologists operate a distinction between 'recognition' and 'recall'. *Recognition* is an association, an identification of an issue; *recall* is its evaluation, requiring more active effort. Students may recognize the name 'John Milton', but only some recall the character and significance of *Paradise Lost*. For our purposes, the distinction is important, because recognition of memory traces may survive interference, even when recall doesn't. This is hardly surprising, since the amount of information stored up for purposes of recognition is much less than that needed for recall.

### *Distortion, reinterpretation, interpolation*

Evidence produced so far supports the view that the *distortion* of memory traces does not usually happen after the initial *encoding/reconstruction* of the experience in the memory trace. Distortion precedes encoding.[12]

Another way of putting this point is to note that a memory trace is not an exact replica of an experience, even under the best of circumstances. Memory traces have a *telescoping/selective* nature. That is, a number of events or personalities are contracted into one, or some aspects of an experience are ordered and highlighted. In effect, some reinterpretation has already been made at this initial stage. It may be done through *schemata* or *scripts* which are either personal ('this is the story of my life'; or 'I'm always missing opportunities') or borrowed from the culture or sub-culture of which the individual is a member ('it's hard to be a Jew').

Here we come to an area very familiar to historians. Memory traces may be interfered with even after encoding, by a process of manipulation, or *interpolated learning*. Outside influences can persuade us of the truth of certain notions or the reality of certain events, by advertising, brain-washing, or propaganda.

The distortion and selection of visual memories is easier than in the case of verbal ones. But in both, interference operates either by manipulating major so-called 'facts' and/or by introducing key interpretive terms which have clear-cut resonances for the *semantic memory* of the individual and are, of course, culture-dependent. The result is a new script which integrates pieces of information brought to bear upon the

[12] E. F. Loftus, *Eyewitness testimony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

interpretation of the event. As we all know, such new scripts may vary dramatically from the original memory, let alone the event itself.

### *Rehearsal*

Later access or recall of memories is greatly enhanced by the retelling of these narratives, either by individuals alone or in public. Conversation is a fundamental social act; hence the importance for the memory of war of the oral testimony of survivors. *Rehearsal* is done by the individual not by the society, through story-telling or meditation, though individuals reinforce their personal rehearsals in social events or rituals. Such rituals provide cues which are essential for triggering the process of recall/retrieval. While individuals may have their own cues, ritual provides them with social cues – moments of silence, saluting the flag, and so on.

Some events are sufficiently powerful to be recalled initially without rehearsal. An earthquake is a good case in point. One hit San Francisco in 1994. Virtually everybody in the Bay Area had a recollection of the tremor, and held it passively for a time. This is indeed an exceptional case, in which a 'passive' collective memory exists, unfiltered through anyone's active attempt to make people remember it. What made it more than purely individual was that the media and word of mouth quickly made it just what each resident experienced at the moment of the jolt. Here the exception to the rule that collective memory is not passive memory is accounted for by the fact that the memory trace was so powerful that no rehearsal was needed initially to recall it. Sooner or later, though, these passive memories become formulaic – chants, such as 'where was I when John Kennedy was shot' – or fade away. Then recall requires rehearsal in public.[13]

In the retelling of memories, certain elements of the story are highlighted. Psychologists refer to these facets as *primacy effects*, which enhance recollection. Salient events are more vividly remembered and recalled, especially when they are associated with a specific time and place. This is what is meant by the term 'context dependency'. *Context dependency* may be *extrinsic* or *intrinsic*. On the one hand, memory traces may be associated with certain external or 'extrinsic' features originating outside the individual: smell, colour, sounds. Such memories, on the other hand, may be linked powerfully with 'intrinsic' aspects of our mood or personal situation at the time the memory trace was encoded. A beautiful place may be recalled because of the elation or depression the visitor brought to it: that is an example of 'intrinsic' context

[13] We are grateful to Martin Jay for his comments on this point.

dependency. The evocation of a whole world triggered by a French pastry – Proust's *madeleine* – is an instance of 'extrinsic' context dependency.

Experiments have shown that 'extrinsic contexts' affect recall but not recognition. That is, if a student takes an examination requiring recall rather than simple recognition – interpreting *Paradise Lost* rather than knowing the name 'John Milton' – her grade is likely to be improved if the examination occurs in the room where the class initially studied the text. But when the test is a simple quiz, a test of recognition, no such positive enhancement of performance occurs through the location of the test. This finding may help to explain the importance of ritual in social learning, since rituals help to produce 'extrinsic contexts' which enhance the recall of memories at given moments and places.

### *Trauma*

The encoding and revision of scripts are usually voluntary or deliberate acts; we learn through story-telling and its echoes in our own lives. But some events are harder to introduce into a script than others. There is a threshold of density of experience; when passed, that experience is usually referred to as a *trauma* or *traumatic*.

There are many different usages of this term, but for our purposes it is possibly best to consider the term simply as connoting a serious and enduring shock. Trauma, in this sense, is identified as latent or delayed memory, and is especially marked by its sudden recurrence whatever the individual's will to recall may be. A 'traumatic memory' may be triggered by extrinsic contexts, that is, similarities of ambience, noise, smell, mood. For instance, an individual walking through an American city during a particularly steamy summer may feel the anxiety of jungle combat, though it is only the heat and humidity which the two contexts share. What triggers the memory is the traumatic nature of the encoded experience. Under specific conditions, and occasionally long after the initial set of 'traumatic events', these extrinsic contexts can produce overwhelming recall. At this point the memory crowds out everything else; it is potentially paralytic.[14]

The work of cognitive psychologists here reinforces the findings of psychiatrists and neurologists, who have identified biochemical pathways of 'trauma'.[15] But, for our purposes, the key element of this

[14] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed experience: trauma, narrative and history* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

[15] Steve Southwick of West Haven Veterans Administration Hospital brought this research to our attention in 1995; see the chapter he co-authored in Daniel Schachter,

analysis is that 'traumatic' memories are not a separate category of remembrance, but simply an extreme phenomenon of processes of recollection we all share.

### *Implications for the historical study of memory*

The study of how individuals remember is hard enough. Historians want to go one step further and study how groups of individuals remember together. It is evident that we need all the help we can get. For this reason, let us consider the implications of this body of cognitive psychological research for the history of 'collective memory'.

*Social learning*

Societies do not learn. Individuals in societies learn, but their learning has sufficient overlap for us to be able to speak metaphorically of social learning. It follows that for two or more individuals to hold the same memory, even if they have experienced the same event, means only that there is sufficient overlap between their memory traces. For this overlap to become a social phenomenon, it must be expressed and shared. In this sense, and in this sense alone, can one speak, again metaphorically, of 'collective memory'.

*Shelf-life*

Collective memory has no existence independent of the individual, and in consequence, 'collective memory' has a *shelf-life*, after which individuals cease to share and express it. Memory artefacts are produced by external rehearsal, but they are just that, memory aids. As long as there are individuals using these aids, whether internally or externally in order to rehearse their memories, then the process of remembrance is alive. It may die out or it may be given a new lease on life; at that point, the 'shelf-life' is renewed, but not forever. One example is the way an Israeli monument created by bereaved parents was adopted thirty years later by a municipality which wanted to create a locus for civic pride.[16] The 'shelf-life' of the monument was renewed thereby, but over time this usage will fade away too.

*Ritual and rehearsal*

Latent (and even implicit, fleeting, or overlapping) memories become active ('flash-bulbs lighting up') in specific times and places. Time is

(ed.), *Memory distortion: how minds, brains and societies reconstruct the past* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).

[16] I. Shamir, *Israeli war memorials*, PhD thesis,Tel Aviv University, 1995, p. 150.

especially connected with 'ritual', which is a series of stylized and repetitive actions. Spatial memory – which is to be distinguished from visual memory – is the transformation of latent into active memory when an individual occupies a site associated with an event or a ritual. After the passing of these encounters in a particular place and at these particular moments of social action, most individuals depart and store the experience as individual memory. Then collective memory ceases, though it can be revived through a return to the initial framework of action.

*Agency, 'brain-washing', and manipulation*

Much attention has been paid to manipulation/reinterpretation of memory by elites, particularly political/cultural ones, whether at the moment of the events, or much later. It is important, though, to note that much 'memory work' goes on spontaneously within civil society, especially after salient or dramatic events. This work goes on through exchanges among members of social networks, either those pre-existing the events or created as a result of them. Agency in the constitution of social learning about the past is crucial, but it operates from below, not only from above.

### *War and remembrance*

So far we have considered the implications of this area of research for the study of historical remembrance in general. But the test of interdisciplinary work is in the concrete results of research in one field, informed by the insights of another.

Our focus is on a particular problem in a particular time and place: twentieth-century warfare in Europe, North America, and the Middle East. Here it is evident that there is much of value to be derived from the work of colleagues working in allied disciplines. Let us consider a number of these implications, in the terminology described above.

Warfare is no doubt a time of dramatic, unique experiences, which leave dense memory traces, individual and social. This is particularly true in the twentieth century, with mass industrial warfare of conscript armies. Obviously, because this is contemporary history, many living witnesses are still around after each and every war and make a particular contribution to social learning about the past. Hypotheses about agency can thus be tested with greater accuracy and variety due to the presence of these living witnesses.

These witnesses may be defined as agents, whether surviving soldiers, members of families of those killed or wounded, surviving civil

victims or their relatives, and even people peripherally affected by the war far from the front lines. Those people are involved in memory work, that is, public rehearsal of memories, quite often *not* in order to create social scripts or schemata for the interpretation of the war. They act in order to struggle with grief, to fill in the silence, to offer something symbolically to the dead, for political reasons. In most of their immediate concerns, they tend to fail. The dead are forgotten; peace does not last; memorials fade into the landscape. It is a moot question, at the very least, as to whether healing at the personal level follows.

This intense activity, in family, survivor, or other networks, rehearses the memory traces in the case of the agents involved and also transmits information and scripts about the war to other contemporaries, and beyond them, to generations born after the war. The scripts are based upon autobiographical memory, depict dramatic events, are ritualized in ceremonies, and thus impart many elements of social learning.

Other agents join in. Their activity has other objectives (profit or other gain, artistic expression), but their efforts overlap with the work of survivor networks. The difference, though, is that audiences (of a television series, a play, a book) cannot really be considered a network; it is extremely difficult to judge the variegated reactions of these consumers. The advantage of survivor networks is that their 'social learning' may be passed on to later generations. These younger people, uninitiated into the actual experience, carry emotion-laden stories very effectively. For some, carrying a survivor's narrative can approximate survivorship itself.

We must be reticent, though, before concluding that most wartime experience is remembered socially in this way. Much is forgotten, and necessarily so. The dialectic between the need to remember and the need to forget and to go on to a less harrowing phase of life has been and remains an ongoing one.

Different approaches to the question of agency and victimhood are evident in this book, for the question of who is a victim of war is a vigorously contested one. At one end is Samuel Hynes, writing about soldiers' narratives. 'Every narrator', he writes of soldier-writers, 'believes himself to have been to some degree an agent in his personal war, and agents aren't victims' (p. 219). In the middle are Aguilhar, telling the story of associations of disabled men, women, and children in post-Civil War Spain, for example, the Comisión de Madres de Soldados Muertos or Association of Mothers of Dead Soldiers; Winter, introducing the history of associations of disfigured men after the 1914–18 war; or Prost – like Hynes, an historian who has served in

combat – who surveys Frenchmen who fought in the Second World War, and notes that 'The most legitimate victims, at the very end of the war, were the *résistants*, especially those who had been deported by the Nazis to the concentration camps' (p. 173). Here agency and victimhood cohabit. At the other end is Wieviorka, writing of the survivors of Auschwitz, men like Leon Weliczker-Wells, who opened the mass graves, extracting anything of value from the corpses. Wieviorka speaks of his testimony at the Eichmann trial (p. 136). His victimhood is self-evident. But was he an agent? Certainly at the trial; before then, perhaps, but by telling the story in 1962, he retained a recognizable human voice. Hynes himself takes a more nuanced view in an extended discussion of these issues elsewhere. Referring to the concentration camps, he notes that 'in this brutal world of powerless suffering it was possible, just possible, to be an agent – by small assertions of the will in opposting actions and, afterward, by telling. Because remembering is an action: to bear witness is to oppose.'[17] Victimhood and agency have always been and remain in problematic juxtaposition; they form a duality with different meanings in different historical settings.

### *Homo sociologicus*

In these introductory remarks, we offer some suggestions as to how historians can learn from the neighbours. Our fundamental premise is that the subject of remembrance is so vast that no discipline can claim absolute authority in this field. For that reason, we turn to sociological and anthropological reflections on this subject, once again in search of allies.

Interdisciplinary work requires a clear notion of the limits of each discipline. For the historian, the insights of cognitive psychology are striking and suggestive. The problem remains, though, that *homo psychologicus* lives in isolation from his social setting. No man goes to war alone. However the conflict develops, it is always a social activity. It is necessary, therefore, to look beyond cognitive psychology to fully understand processes of remembrance in the aftermath of war.

One way forward is to explore sociological and anthropological thought on the subject of collective memory. Such work proliferated from the late nineteenth century. Many of these developments followed choices made about the carriers of memory, however defined. These carriers had different origins and functions. First came notions of racial

[17] Samuel Hynes, *The soldiers' tale. Bearing witness to modern war* (London: Allen Lane, 1997), p. 269.

memory, in which the 'race' is the carrier and memory is in the 'blood' or genetic equipment of a social group. Linked to this position, but distinct from it, were concepts of *Geistesgeschichte*, or the history of the spirit of an age, drawn out by elite interpreters of art, philosophy, or literature.

Against these two positions, a new point of view emerged associated with Emile Durkheim. His school located memory in the social structure, which provided individuals with the conceptual tools to remember the past. In the work of Maurice Halbwachs we can see the most elaborate development of this position.

More recently, historians of *mentalités*, or the mental furniture of a social group, have drawn from earlier notions of *Geistesgeschichte*. These scholars describe forms of thought and behaviour which are general within a population, usually a national population. But they abjure the study of elites, to concentrate on ordinary people. They are the carriers of a society's unspoken assumptions about time, modes of comportment, and emotion. The carriers of collective memory, thus defined, are the common people.

Anthropologists, following Roger Bastide, to whom we will return below, have accepted this position, with some qualifications. Their contribution is to specify the character of groups in which the people are organized and the pivotal positions of their leaders, the secondary and tertiary elites within those societies.

### *Racial memory*

Before proximity to Nazi notions of racial identity contaminated and discredited concepts of racial memory, there were many scholars and public figures who developed notions of collective memory understood as racial inheritance. Some were anti-Semites or anti-immigrants, defending the supposed purity of the host population and its way of life against an alien wave. But others were simply carriers of nineteenth-century notions of collective heredity, in which talent or deviance were traits passed on from generation to generation.

### *Cultural memory*

Some observers flirted with such hereditary notions as the source of cultural continuities. This kind of cultural genetics was evident in the writings of people of very different political outlooks. The German racialist Moeller van den Bruck took it that exotic elements in Botticelli's art came from the eruption of 'an Asiatic *karma*' which brought to

the surface 'primeval Italian forms . . . Not only styles but also life, not only movement but also people come back.'[18]

The racial message was embedded in works of art, and those who could detect the charge therein, those (as it were) with Geiger counters to register the radioactivity of the object, were poets, philosophers, and historians. They were men who could take the pulse of their times. These scientific metaphors were common at the turn of the twentieth century, especially among the proponents of the school of collective memory known as *Geistesgeschichte*, through its outstanding cultural forms.

How the *Geist* moves over time was a subject for philosophical, not biological, inquiry. Conducting it were scholars or artists who could tease out the living presence of the past in artefacts or writings of a vanished age. Jacob Burckhardt's comments on classical elements in Donatello's 'David' are a case in point. Classical influences moved from ancient to Renaissance Italy, Burkhardt argued, 'by way of an invisible force, or through inheritance. Indeed one must never wholly forget . . . that the people of central Italy stem from the ancient population.'[19] The poet Rainer Maria Rilke returned time and again to the theme of blood inheritance in modes of thought and expression. 'And yet', he wrote in 1903, 'these long-forgotten [*sic*], dwell within us as disposition, as a burden on our fate, as blood that courses and as gesture that arises from the depths of time.'[20]

The German art historian Aby Warburg went beyond *Geistesgeschichte* in a theory of social memory directly concerned with the transmission of ancient forms and motifs to Renaissance art. The 'task of social memory', he noted, is 'through renewed contact with the monuments of the past', to enable 'the sap . . . to rise directly from the subsoil of the past'.[21] The charge is in the object; it is encountered and transmitted through the creative work of the artist or scholar. Thus the sensitivity of members of an elite liberates a message embedded in artefacts; then it becomes accessible to the world at large.

Note the scientistic metaphors: elsewhere Warburg spoke of his work as that of a '"seismograph" responding to the tremors of distant earthquakes, or the antenna picking up the wave from distant cultures'.[22] He set up a library as a laboratory of memory. That collection, removed to London after the Nazi accession to power in 1933, still operates today.

[18] E. H. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg. An intellectual biography. With a memoir on the history of the library by F. Saxl* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1970), p. 240.

[19] As cited in Gombrich, *Warburg*, p. 239.

[20] Ibid. p. 240; see also his *Duino elegies*, written between 1912 and 1922. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duineser Elegien* (London: Hogarth Press, 1963).

[21] As cited in Gombrich, *Warburg*, p. 250. [22] Ibid. p. 254.

Its purpose, to Warburg, was to serve as 'a collection of documents relating to the psychology of human expression'. Its aim was to investigate how 'human and pictorial expressions originate; what are the feelings or points of view, conscious or unconscious, under which they are stored in the archives of memory? Are there laws to govern their formation or re-emergence?'[23] To this end, all disciplines must be tapped. This is the essence of *Kulturwissenschaft*, part positivist, part romantic meditation on the explosive power of works of art.

The memory of images is social memory to Warburg, in that a work of art 'derives from a collaboration among individuals and thus is a symbol that does not allow for the separation of form and content'.[24] To Warburg, art history is the study of style and meaning of creative works located in specific historical periods. Art described a world view, an expression of *Geistespolitik*, or the politics of the spirit of an age.[25]

Warburg's library covered many fields, but the specific focus of his own work was on the 'significance of the influence of heathen antiquity on the European mentality'. He believed that art was 'an inventory of the emotions of a given epoch'; artists in the Renaissance confronted Classical art and were stunned by 'the heritage of passionate [that is, sensual] experience stored in memory-form'. That encounter – frequently laden with fear – was controlled and transformed in the process of creation. The result is visible to us now as an efflorescence of images in various media.

This cultural historian of imagery explored 'the historical sum of all efforts made by man to overcome his fear'[26] of primitive emotion. The scholar registered both the charge released by antique art and the challenge accepted by later artists to master it. Cultural memory – or what he termed social memory – is the record of that confrontation between past and present, that profound dialectic between emotion and creativity.[27]

To be sure, Warburg was too sensitive a scholar to ignore the range of symbols to be found in popular art. He did not limit his gaze to the works of elite artists alone, but on occasion drew on the art of the Pueblo Indians, astrological pamphlets, and postage stamps. His interest extended as well to the iconography of First World War propaganda. The symbolic language of art was ubiquitous; sometimes lesser artists disclosed the codes of an age more transparently than did

[23] Ibid. p. 222.

[24] Leopold Ettlinger, 'Kunstgeschichte als Geschichte', *Jahrbuch der Hamburger Kunstsammlungen*, 16 (1971), pp. 7–19.

[25] As cited in Jan. Assmann, 'Collective memory and cultural identity', *New German Critique*, 65 (1995), p. 130.

[26] Ibid. p. 139. [27] Assmann, 'Collective memory', p. 130.

the greater.[28] Teasing out the meaning of these codes and comparing cultural differences between groups were the primary tasks of the student of 'social memory'.

### *Collective memory*

So far we have moved from racial memory to social memory. The first adopted biological images, which have had little residue in recent years. The second explored an idealist universe in which the history of ideas and creativity over centuries naturally privileged the elites which produced and sponsored art.

Warburg's collection was not limited to great works of art, but the initial direction of his project was towards the study of cultural history through masterpieces of what he understood as 'the spirit of the age' in which they were created. This inevitably elitist approach was challenged in the period in which Warburg was writing – he died in 1929 – by another, more populist school of cultural studies. Primarily (but not exclusively) in France, the focus shifted away from racial memory and the analysis of great works or art as the embodiment of historical memory to broader and more inclusive issues and evidence.

Here the work of Emile Durkheim and his school was fundamental. They located social memory not in race or in works of art but in the social structure itself. Contrary to the position developed contemporaneously by Henri Bergson, Durkheimians held tenaciously that individual memory was entirely socially determined.[29] Durkheim gathered a group of like-minded scholars around the journal *Année sociologique*, where from 1898 there appeared learned discussions of a decidedly interdisciplinary kind. Social psychology, demography, geography, history, and political economy were all invoked as elements of sociological analysis, which in Durkheim's system, superseded them all.

In this system, social facts are external to the individual's mind. The theory of their organization, institutionalization, and operation is what Durkheimian sociology was all about. Durkheim offered an analysis of collective memory diametrically opposed to notions of racial memory and remote from the elitism of much of the study of great art as the repository of cultural memory.

The implications of his work for collective memory were elaborated in

[28] Aby Warburg, 'Italian art and international astrology in the Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara', in Gert Schiff (ed.), *German essays on art history* (New York: Continuum, 1988), p. 33. Thanks are due to Mark Russell and Peter Burke for drawing this reference to our attention, and for critical comments on these points.

[29] Terry N. Clark, *Prophets and patrons: the French University and the emergence of the social sciences* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 168–70.

the inter-war years by a number of scholars, most notably Maurice Halbwachs (1877–1945).[30] Some of this work was done at Strasbourg, where he joined a remarkable group of intellectuals committed to interdisciplinary research.[31] Among them were the historians Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, co-founders of the journal *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*, on whose editorial board Halbwachs sat. We shall return below to the historical approach to collective memory which emerged from this collaboration, but first we need to survey Halbwachs's own contribution.

Halbwachs's work is a critique of individualism in approaches to memory. Contrary to Bergson, he argued that all individual memory is socially framed. Collective memory is the sound of voices once heard by groups of people, afterwards echoing in an individual who was or is part of that group. It is a form of individual memory, socially constructed and maintained.[32] The duration of collective memory is the duration of the group(s) producing it. In words echoing the concept of shelf-life discussed above, he wrote:

> Forgetting is explained by the disappearance of these frameworks or a part of them, either because our attention is no longer able to focus on them or because it is focused somewhere else . . . But forgetting, or the deformation of certain recollections, is also explained by the fact that these frameworks change from one period to another.[33]

This is a critical element in Halbwachs's approach. Collective memory is not inscribed in the genes; it is not located in great works of art; it is imbedded in the social structure, and changes when social bonds weaken or dissolve, or when new bonds replace them.

Halbwachs held that 'a person remembers only by situating himself with the viewpoint of one or several groups and one or several currents of collective thought'. To recollect an event is to recall 'the viewpoint' of the social group through whose eyes we see the event.[34] Collective memory is thus the matrix of socially positioned individual memories. This is critical: memory does not exist outside of individuals, but it is never individual in character.

> The collective memory, for its part, encompasses the individual memories while remaining distinct from them. It evolves according to its own laws, and any

[30] Ibid. p. 199.

[31] John E. Craig, 'Maurice Halbwachs à Strasbourg', *Revue française de sociologie*, 20 (1979), pp. 273–92.

[32] Maurice Halbwachs, *The collective memory*, translated by F. I. and V. Y. Ditter (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), p. 24. A new and completely revised edition of *La mémoire collective* has been published recently, in which Gerard Namer has restored some material left out of the earlier edition. See Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1997). These changes do not affect our interpretation.

[33] Halbwachs, *On collective memory*, p. 172.

[34] Halbwachs, *The collective memory*, p. 33.

individual remembrances that may penetrate are transformed within a totality having no personal consciousness.[35]

*La mémoire collective* is not the reified memory of the collective – a notion filled with nationalist and racialist echoes. It is rather the individual's memory, fashioned by the social bonds of that individual's life. 'I need only carry in mind', Halbwachs asserted, 'whatever enables me to gain the group viewpoint, plunge into its milieu and time, and feel in its midst.'[36] Indeed, such 'social frameworks for memory' are essential prerequisites for individual remembering, since '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'.[37]

## Annales *and the history of* mentalités

The influence of Halbwachs on subsequent studies in cultural history has been real, but muted by another facet of his work. In his rejection of Bergsonian subjectivity, he returned to the positivist side of Durkheimian sociology in positing an impossibly strict distinction between history (objective) and memory (subjective).[38] This bifurcation corresponded as well to a certain cavalier attitude of Durkheimian sociology to the study of history, relegated to a subordinate position rather than a true partnership in the development of the social sciences.[39]

That partnership was the foundation stone of a group of historians and social scientists who came together in the University of Strasbourg around the journal *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*.[40] For our purposes, the major concept produced by this school is *histoire des mentalités*, which may be translated loosely as the history of implicit

[35] Ibid. p. 51.
[36] Ibid. p. 118; for an earlier formulation, see *On collective memory*, p. 53.
[37] Halbwachs, *On collective memory*, p. 38.
[38] Halbwachs, *The collective memory*, ch. 2. For a critique of Halbwachs's position, and the entire notion of 'collective memory', see Noa Gedi and Yigal Elam, 'Collective memory – what is it?', *History & Memory*, 8, 1 (1996), pp. 30–50.
[39] John E. Craig, 'Sociology and related disciplines between the wars: Maurice Halbwachs and the imperialism of the Durkheimians', in *The sociological domain: the Durkheimians, and the founding of French sociology*, edited by Philippe Besnard, pp. 263–89 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Jacques Revel, 'Histoire et sciences sociales: les paradigmes des *Annales*', *Annales. Economies, sociétés, civilisations*, 34, 6 (1979), p. 1364.
[40] Carole Fink, *Marc Bloch: a life in history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), ch. 5. See also André Burguière, 'Histoire d'une histoire: la naissance des *Annales*', *Annales. Economies, sociétés, civilisations*, 34, 6 (1979) pp. 1347–59.

collective assumptions, attitudes, and emotions.[41] A culture, Salman Rushdie tells us, is described by its untranslatable words.[42] This is one of them.

In 1941, one of the founders of the *Annales*, Lucien Febvre, offered this clarion call for the history of collective emotions:

> The historian cannot understand or make others understand the functioning of the institutions in a given period or the ideas of that period or any other unless he has that basic standpoint, which I for my part call the psychological standpoint, which implies the concern to link up all the conditions of existence of the men of any given period with the meanings the same men gave to their own ideas.

Febvre complained that we have 'No history of love, just remember that. We have no history of death. We have no history of pity, or of cruelty. We have no history of joy.' The research agenda was clear: 'I am asking for a vast collective investigation to be opened on the fundamental sentiments of man and the forms they take'; in short, on the history of *mentalités*.[43]

The sweep, the daring, the profound desire to destroy the boundaries between the private and public realms are obvious here.[44] But the precise nature of the subject was (and is) still puzzling. The Frenchness of both the terms and the enterprise has been a mystery to many non-French scholars. Alphonse Dupront, one of the finest practitioners of the history of *mentalités*,[45] offered this discussion as a way into defining the subject:

> I prefer to use the term 'the history of collective psychology'. It is not satisfactory, since it is equivocal: even in French it has the air of only one discipline, 'collective psychology' . . . and to foreign ears . . . it appears to be a Gallic secret . . . If we accept the Greek with its indefinite perfection, the term 'the history of the collective *psyché*' approaches what it entails. And in place of our strange but necessary expression about 'the analysis of the collective

[41] For a classic formulation, see Marc Bloch, 'Mémoire collective, traditions et coutumes', *Revue de synthèse historique*, 118–20 (1925), pp. 70–90.

[42] Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (London: Pan Books, 1992), p. 12.

[43] Peter Burke (ed.), *A new kind of history: from the writings of Lucien Febvre*, translated by K. Folka (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 24. For a recent and lucid discussion of the position, see Roger Chartier, *Cultural history: between practices and representations*, translated by Lydia G. Cochrane (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988).

[44] For an *apéritif* of this heady approach, see Jacques Le Goff, 'Mentalities: a history of ambiguities', in *Constructing the past. Essays in historical methodology*, edited by Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). For an appreciation of the implications of Halbwachs's approach for one maverick historian of *mentalités*, see Patrick H. Hutton, 'Collective memory and collective mentalities: the Halbwachs-Ariès connection', *Historical reflections/Réflexions historiques*, 15, 2 (1988), pp. 311–22.

[45] Alphonse Dupront, *Du Sacré. Croisades et pèlerinages. Images et langages* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988).

mentality', perhaps a procession of terms will do: the history of values, of mentalities, of forms, of symbols, of myths, be it in general, or in a particular civilization.[46]

### *Anthropological approaches*

For our purposes, the history of the *mentalités* concept has limitations. The emphasis on the common people homogenizes them, and also exaggerates their margin of manoeuvre, which may be shaped by elites whether primary or secondary. It also blurs the borderline between the individual and the collective, a problem we have encountered in Durkheim's and Halbwachs's work as well.

A response to this set of issues may be found in the anthropological work of Roger Bastide, derived from his comparative study of African populations in Haiti and Brazil from slavery to the present.[47] Bastide accepts that man remembers as part of a social group: individual memories are rehearsed and located in the past in reference to the individual memories of other people, that is, those persons who are significant at different levels for that individual. The intermeshing of individual memories creates collective remembrance, feeds it, and maintains its continuity. It is through this remembrance that human societies develop consciousness as to their identity, as located in time. A social group is composed of individuals who enter into an exchange relationship at the level of consciousness. This is what Bastide calls *networks of complimentarity.*

Bastide rejects the notion of collective memory as a reified, separate entity existing above individuals. Collective memory is the end product of that exchange relationship – exchange of information, memories, values – between the individuals who compose the group. Each individual contributes his own memories. The weight of various memories in this process is by no means equal. The contribution of elites carries greater weight. Priests in a historically based cult, elders who tell the history of the tribe are examples of these elite groups. Whoever expresses

[46] Alphonse Dupront, 'Problèmes et méthodes d'une histoire de la psychologie collective', *Annales. Économies, sociétés, civilisations*, 16, 1 (1961), p. 3, n. 2.

[47] Roger Bastide, *The African religions of Brazil. Towards a sociology of the interpenetration of civilizations*, translated by Helen Sebba (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1960); Roger Bastide, 'Mémoire collective et sociologie de bricolage', *Année sociologique* 21 (1970), pp. 65–108; Roger Bastide, *Applied anthropology*, translated by Alice L. Morton (London: Croom Helm, 1971). See also, Nathan Wachtel, 'Remember and never forget', *History and Anthropology*, 2 (1986), and L. Valensi, 'From sacred history to historical memory and back', *History and Anthropology*, 2 (1986).

his memories in the public space leaves a deeper impact than those who keep (or who are kept) silent.

It follows that the social group locates this exchange relationship between individual memories in two dimensions. The first is *organization*: that is, the relative weight of certain individual memories as compared to others within this network of complimentarity. Organization is shaped by the nature of the group, and particularly by its power structure. The second dimension is *structure*, a kind of interpretive code which endows individual memories with meaning according to the *living tradition* of remembrance of that specific group. This tradition may be passed on through rituals which give it an emotional, behavioural expression, but it may also be transmitted in a manner both emotional and rational through school textbooks, stories passed from father to son or mother to daughter, fiction, poetry, popular legends, and the like. This interpretive code fits in well with the notion of social scripts/ schemata suggested by cognitive psychologists.

Collective memory here is a matrix of interwoven individual memories. It has no existence without them, but the components of individual memory intersect and create a kind of pattern with an existence of its own. Strong colours or a salient location within the pattern represent the 'organizational dimension', while the overall layout represents 'structure', or the cultural interpretation. To change metaphors, it is possible to speak of collective memory, à la Bastide, as a sort of choir singing, or better still, a sing-along. This is a kind of event which is not very regimented, and in which each participant begins singing at a different time and using a somewhat different text or melody which he himself has composed or developed. But he does it according to norms – musical, linguistic, literary – accepted by other members of that informal choir. Moreover, when each sings, he hears himself in his inner ear, but he also hears the collective choir in his external ear. That is, he hears the product of the collective effort. Certainly, this collective product may modify or even slant his own singing, almost in spite of himself.

Bastide emphasizes that the end product is in a state of constant flux, due to the changing relationships between members of the group. Hence his use of the term *bricolage*, borrowed from his colleague, Claude Lévi-Strauss, who meant by it the eclectic and ever-changing composition of cultural forms.[48]

Bastide leads us inevitably to the study of civil society. This term describes the domain between family and the state. It is composed of

[48] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes tropiques* (Paris: Plon, 1955).

voluntary social groups, led by secondary elites. These elites help shape the process of remembrance, though their freedom of action is limited by the contribution of individual members of this group. Overall, they may be as important as the state in the overall processes of remembrance constantly ongoing in society as a whole.[49]

### *Homo agens*

The literature we have surveyed is both necessary and incomplete as a guide to social processes of remembrance with respect to twentieth-century warfare. What is missing in cognitive psychology is the sense that experience is intrinsically social; what is missing in the sociological approach is the appreciation of remembrance as a process, dependent upon groups of people who act over time. It is this collective enterprise through which *homo agens* creates and maintains. If rehearsal is the key to remembrance, agents count. Among these agents, we have chosen to concentrate upon those coming from civil society because state agency and manipulation have been sufficiently well documented. Even in totalitarian situations, however, state agency does not control individual or group memory completely.

Civil society, as we have noted, links the family and the state apparatus. It includes the market place as well as private or corporate associations. Businessmen, entrepreneurs, filmmakers, producers, distributors, painters, sculptors, photographers all satisfy demands; they present versions of the past, and do so for a fee. Some times *homo actans* is in it for the money; sometimes not.

Artistic expression for the purposes of collective remembrance exists both within the market place and beyond it. The works of poets, novelists, painters, and sculptors about war, soldiers, and the victims of war are well documented. Their work constitutes points of reference for many social scripts, and have enduring intrinsic qualities. Still, as some of our essays will show, for example on Europe after the Great War and Israel during its half-century of warfare, their vision is not imposed on voluntary groups in society, but tends to be in tune with the sensibilities many groups develop on their own. It is the activity of these groups, important but neglected, as major agents of remembrance, which we study in this book.

We have selected remembrance of war not only because industrialized war is a central fact of the twentieth century. War is trauma, a situation

[49] For a fuller discussion of these and other issues arising from Bastide's work see Noelle Bourguet, Lucette Valensi, and Nathan Wachtel (eds.), *Between memory and history* (Chur: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1990).

of overwhelming, extreme, and violent pressure with enduring impacts. It disrupts equilibria and requires an effort to restore them. That effort (intentionally or not) contributes to processes of remembrance, a point to which we shall return below.

As the empirical evidence presented in the chapters which follow shows, that process has four central features.

### *Multi-faceted negotiation*

The state is ever-present, but it is neither ubiquitous nor omnipotent. Civil society is where many groups try to work out their own strategies of remembrance alongside the state, sometimes against it. The fact that such groups do succeed in attracting individuals who after a war may feel a strong urge to resume their individual lives, is something which requires explanation.

Remembrance consists of negotiations between a multiplicity of groups, including the state. Obviously, the partners are not equal. Repression happens, but counter-voices may be heard. If some voices are weaker than others, at least in the context of a pluralistic society, this is not only because they lack resources – or to return to the metaphor of the choir – they are too far from the microphone. They may also be weak because of self-censorship due to lack of moral status in the eyes of others, or due to a low self-image.

### *Inconsequent intentions; unintended consequences*

Groups do not necessarily raise their voice in the choir with the intent of shaping historical consciousness. They may do so for their own private reasons: in order to cope with grief, to create a powerful lobby so as to achieve material gain, for revenge or exoneration. They may or may not achieve these aims; in fact, some of these aims are beyond reach from the start: this may be called the 'law of non-consequent intentions', which is to say, the unlikelihood of the realization of a programme of action, such as keeping alive the memory of an individual son. The main unintended consequence of even a quixotic endeavour of this kind is its contribution to the overall process of remembrance.

### *The trajectory of shelf-life*

Remembrance is by its very nature vulnerable to decay, and hence has shelf-life. Even under the delayed impact of the extreme conditions of war, memories do not necessarily endure, if only because there is

interference from new memory traces. Constant rehearsal, group action, ingenuity in mobilizing resources are elements which keep memory traces alive: that is, they create a relatively more successful process of remembrance.

Groups of war victims deal with a particularly dense memory trace, that of autobiographical memory. But even their efforts are not always successful. Certainly the passage from the generation of victims contemporaneous with the event to the next generation is a very difficult one, given the inevitable change in social priorities.

Certain memories of war endure, while most others do not. Endurance and persistence require explanation. Forgetting and fade-out are usually the rule. To advance this argument is to go against the grain of the idealistic vision of representations as disconnected from social contexts, from interactions, and material conditions.

The notion of trauma suggests another dimension of 'shelf-life'. Some studies of war victims have adopted a notion of delayed impact to describe those so overwhelmed by war experiences as to be entirely unable to register them at the time.[50] This numbing is not a full protection from these injuries to the mind; later on, and involuntarily, these earlier events may be vividly recalled or re-enacted by sufferers of what is now known as 'post-traumatic stress disorder'.[51] The notion of shelf-life is perfectly compatible with this topology of recurrent memories. They may flare up at any time, even among those unafflicted with pathological conditions. A resurgence of memory work after the Eichmann trial in 1961 is a case in point among Jews all over the world (see chapter 6). The second generation of Japanese Americans gave the memory of their parents' internment (see chapter 7) not only a new lease of life but also a vigour lacking in the muted public expression of these members of the older generation.

It is not only rekindled interest among second or third generations of the victims which may help prolong shelf-life. As the case of the descendants of Holocaust survivors in Europe and North America proves, the availability of new techniques of information technology – the video-cassette recorder – enables testimony expressing 'authentic' autobiographical memory available to large audiences. These are reached in an audio-visual fashion, which can be revived decades after the original imprint of the testimony of war victims.

[50] See Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: explorations in memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

[51] For full references see: Daniel Schachter, (ed.), *Memory distortion: how minds, brains and societies reconstruct the past* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).

*The ambiguity of the healing effects*

Mourning is an essential part of the story of remembrance of war, but there is much evidence that it is problematic to consider remembrance in Freudian terms, as the work of mourning, leading to healing, reconciliation, and separation of the living from the lost loved-one. Our story is less optimistic and much less redemptive, as Walter Benjamin has argued (see chapter 11). Even when some healing occurs, it is at best healing for a while, and when old age sets in, healing may cease altogether and wounds reopen. Mourning may never end, and even when it seems to be completed, it may re-emerge. This form of mourning is usually termed 'melancholia'.[52] One case in point is the suicide forty years after the Second World War – and decades after the publication of his apparently healing memoirs – of the Italian writer Primo Levi. Another case is the suicide in old age of fathers of Israeli war dead, sometimes using their service revolver to end their lives at the grave of their sons.

The above generalizations represent what we can say in an introductory fashion about what our groups of researchers have found in their empirical work. Future research on *homo agens* may modify these findings, but these very palpable situations point out a number of mechanisms and processes involved. Given the limited number of cases we present, whatever we learn from them is indicative rather than conclusive.

In light of the chapters in this book, what are the mechanisms and processes of remembrance?

*Scale*

First, activity is above all *small scale*. Groups of individuals, usually victimized by war in some way, carrying autobiographic memory, meet face to face. Even if these individuals are part of a larger whole, they also have face-to-face points of encounter – as in veterans' organizations. They constitute 'networks of complimentarity'. Their vision is of necessity narrow even though their implicit concerns – for example, war as disaster – may be much wider. This brings us back to the two laws of 'unintended consequences' and of 'non-consequent intentions', referred to above. The groups may wish to do something which concerns their immediate circle – assistance for traumatized individuals, for example – but perforce they may wish to operate on a wider scale. This is evident

[52] Jay Winter, *Sites of memory, sites of mourning: the Great War in European cultural history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 113–14.

in many of the cases discussed below, and in particular with regard to the Japanese American case, and the French–Jewish groups (see chapters 6 and 7).

In the aftermath of the First World War, a huge bureaucracy handled legitimate claims for compensation for war injury or loss. These bulky, rationalized, and hierarchical institutions exasperated survivors, by their inefficiency and their insensitivity to the personal dimensions of loss. To fill in that empty space, small-scale groups appeared. They provided the assistance in mourning and mutual help which no state apparatus offered. The scale of the local action of these groups was small, giving free range to the expression of sentiments of loss, and involving essentially egalitarian structures as a sort of counter-image of the state. The fact that this situation (see chapter 2) recurs in a much longer conflict, yet in a much smaller society – that of Israel (see chapter 9) indicates why such mechanisms proliferate in the twentieth century, with its centralized state and industrial warfare.

This is not to idealize civil society. Weak social groups may not have a voice at all; consider the case of the Muslim Harkis in France after the Algerian War, who lacked both articulation and a capacity for organization. As we have mentioned above, the low self-esteem of conscript soldiers made their voice somewhat faint. Interpolated social learning – also known as distortion – occurs vigorously in state-produced commemoration. But small groups do not have a more balanced view. In any civil society, there are contested views, diverging more or less radically about what happened in the past. Each group highlights elements close to its own traumatized members. German war veterans obscured the sacrifices of Jewish soldiers in the First World War; Israeli-born veterans highlighted the losses of their cohort in 1948, while disregarding the huge sacrifices made by new immigrants during the same war (see chapter 9). In both cases, it is the nature of the audience of the small group involved which determines the kind of telescoping or selection in the process of encoding memory traces. Here is a classic instance of the social framing of individual memory through reference to what the group shares.

But silences are not just a matter of who you highlight but also what you highlight and what you obscure or sanitize. Soldiers' memoirs recognize degradation but rarely dwell on it. The crimes committed by comrades are known by all; why elaborate if those for whom the account was written – namely, fellow soldiers – know this all along? Instead (see chapter 10), soldiers' stories reinforce the decencies that survive the indecencies of combat.

*The nature of warfare*

The nature of warfare is a critical determinant of the activity of remembrance. A succession of wars or other kinds of violent disruptions presents a different challenge to remembrance in the case of one single war, however large. The Russian and Israeli instances (chapters 3, 9) represent such limiting cases of decades of conflict, producing 'retroactive interference' which impinges upon memory traces of earlier decades of violence. The Russian case is particularly poignant because many of the upheavals were self-inflicted: civil war, famine, forced collectivization, purges. Israeli society coped better, perhaps because the range of options for remembrance was broader in a democratic setting. But even here the 'primacy effect' of the 1948 war – so powerful in the 1950s and 1960s – is on the wane under the retroactive interference of memory traces of more recent and more controversial conflicts.

*Constraints within civil society*

But *civil society* itself is a limiting factor in the work of remembrance. Civil society is defined by its position with respect to the state. A dictatorship or an authoritarian regime may set severe limits to civil freedom of expression and action, even in the realm of small-scale remembrance activity, let alone in full-scale action. In Russia (see chapter 3) even communication within families with regard to their experience of war and repression was greatly curbed; it could be done only in a haphazard manner, and in one-on-one situations. Still this case also shows the inventiveness of a heavily damaged civil society. For instance, despite the weakness of the Church, which had been the custodian of the traditions mediating existential issues, like death, civil society found ways of marshalling these resources. But let us not exaggerate what civil society can do under such conditions. To a great extent, the regime won; many memory traces vanished with the physical disappearance of the victims. Recall today of some aspects of that past may be well nigh impossible.

In Spain in the 1960s, before the demise of the dictatorship, another limiting feature of remembrance appeared. This multi-faceted negotiation between social groups arrived at a kind of implicit pact to avoid confronting the trauma of the Civil War and the repression which followed. The fear of a return to the polarization of Spanish society in the 1930s was the core around which the consensus emerged (see chapter 4). Here silence was a condition of the transition to democracy, and to its stabilization in the 1980s and 1990s under the Socialists.

Not everyone concurred. Those who wish to break the silence go against the tide. Some Spanish anarchists insist on doing so anyway.

Another instance not examined in this book reinforces the contested nature of such arrangements to limit open discussion even under conditions of democracy. In South Africa in the 1990s, a 'Truth and Reconciliation Commission' took evidence from people who had engaged in violent acts of repression during the apartheid era. An open admission of guilt is a ticket to amnesty. Families of victims, as well as political groups such as the Pan African Congress challenged this arrangement, but did not generate widespread public support.

We return here to the question raised by Walter Benjamin, of how healing occurs, if at all. Benjamin's complaint was against a kind of pseudo-healing that screens us off from confronting the deeper trauma beneath the apparent wound. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a member of the Commission, argues that public repentance and forgiveness are essential for healing, both personal and social. Others suspend judgment, or reject this claim altogether. It is critical to note that these arrangements are not just imposed from on high. Both in Spain and in South Africa negotiation at all levels occurred, and is still ongoing.

*Representations of war*

Most of these groups tend to generate *representations of war* as primarily traumatic: overwhelming, nasty, and disruptive over a relatively long period. It is not the case that the evidence we present is selected to show this outcome. Mixed and dense memory traces appear in many war narratives and in the ways survivors speak of the event. Elements of elation, of pride, of camaraderie persist, but negative, disruptive memory traces exist too. The latter tend to motivate individuals to repeated rehearsal of memories in order to restore the equilibrium disrupted by war. In post-1918 Germany, the humiliation of defeat was the subject of reiteration as the centrepiece of a political movement dedicated to restoring Germany's national pride. The celebration of the 'war experience', the baptism of fire of a whole generation, took on sombre and defiant tones since its price was the humiliation of the Fatherland.

In the case of the more 'positive' memory traces, in victorious wars, such activity is not as urgently called for. This is why, over time, the voice of those who rehearse through lamentation is likely to dominate the chorus of small-scale remembrance more than the voice of those who celebrate moments of glory or valour. Lamentation, however, is not at all the same as a critique of war, because the blame can be put elsewhere: on fate, on the shoulders of the enemy, or of some alien domestic group, for instance, the 'stab in the back legend' of the 1920s in Germany.

Writers and poets codify images of war while the fighting is still on. Thereby they enlarge the interpretive codes available in the culture for the small groups engaged in their separate acts of remembrance. Later on, these words, verses, stories, may be appropriated by official organizations or by the state, but their origin is within civil society itself. One instance is the poem 'The silver platter', written in a premonitory mode by the Israeli writer Nathan Alterman during the mobilization of December 1947. Fighting had just begun, but Alterman was already visualizing the disappearance of a whole cohort of young men and women. Their ethereal bodies, in his vision, would constitute the 'silver platter' upon which the then unborn state of Israel would be presented to the Jewish people. Over the next year, while the war continued, the poem was used by families and comrades of those who were killed. Only later was it incorporated into the official liturgical code of the Israeli Memorial Day.[53]

Representations may be created for entirely commercial reasons. When Robert Graves wrote *Goodbye to all that*, a Great War novel/memoir, he was trying (as he himself said) to cash in on the commercial success of another war novel/memoir, *All quiet on the Western Front*, by Erich Maria Remarque. So did many of the European post-1945 filmmakers discussed in chapter 5.

The success of these filmic efforts is partly a function of their catching/exploiting the mood of the audiences who viewed them. Still, an unintended consequence of their work was to provide a set of codes about war and victimhood. These codes were not passed directly to individual members of the audience, but were mediated through families, yet another case of a small group. Film-going was still a family affair in the 1950s. Decades later, some of these films, for instance Rossellini's, may still appeal to new audiences on video because of their intrinsic artistic value, while renewing the initial message about survivors of the Second World War.

Soldiers' tales, as described in chapter 10, are expressions of codes shared by soldiers and reinforced in the telling. The positive, intriguing, or piquant stories repeated time and again are useful as a counter-weight against darker images. The result is neither the domination of one rhetoric nor another: at least in soldiers' stories, told by soldiers and for soldiers, and made available to others through publication, the outcome is never certain, but the conflict is not resolved.

Each of these groups presents war through a particular interpretive code – or 'structure', in Bastide's terms. But these are more often than

[53] Dan Meron, *Mul Ha'ach Ha'shotek* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1992).

not selected from a range available in the culture. Complete departure from conventional forms is very rare, as in the case of the second-generation Japanese Americans who try to introduce concentration camp symbols into American history. As such they face heavy odds and their chances of integration into the American interpretive code remain in doubt. The case of French soldiers after the Algerian War shows how difficult it is to innovate. On the contrary, these men had two prior sets of representations of war – two social 'scripts' – standing in the way of their own story. The first was the moral crusade of French veterans of 1914 to 1918, whose representation of war was as a crime that must never be repeated; the second was the image of the *maquisard* of the Second World War, disturbingly similar to their enemies in Algeria (see chapter 8). Because their experience could not be located within either interpretive network, the range of social action available to them was severely limited. The Algerian War was not a 'good war'; neither was it (especially in the countryside) heroic; it was altogether desultory warfare.

*Spatial memory*

Artefacts matter: to state that process is crucial is not to deny this point. They are at one and the same time the product of such processes as well as 'memory aids' for its later trajectory. Artefacts are what the French designate as *les lieux de mémoire*.[54] In their absence, as not only in Russia but also in revolutionary China, memory work is much more arduous. Artefacts related to place enable the retrieval of dense memory traces, because they create 'extrinsic context dependency'. It should be noted that such 'extrinsic contexts', according to experimental psychology, help 'recall/access', but not 'recognition'. The case of the concentration camp exhibit in Los Angeles (see chapter 7) is apposite here. The organizers intended to re-trigger such memories among second generation Japanese Americans. Yet success is not guaranteed.

The history of family pilgrimage after the First World War to the battlefields is well known (see chapter 2). But other less obvious linkages are powerful. The French songwriter/performer, Marc Ogeret, offered a glimpse of this process in his *chanson*, entitled 'Verdun', written in the 1970s.

> I have seen Verdun
> I have seen Verdun
> I have seen Verdun in the rain . . .
> And I, who do not really like

[54] Pierre Nora, 'Between memory and history: *Les lieux de mémoire*', *Representations*, 26 (1989), pp. 7–25.

That old veterans' line;
Now, I understand it,
I understand it.

Another instance in which spatial memory operates is the tangible character of war memorials. Those in mourning used them not only for ceremony, but also for a ritual of separation, wherein touching a name indicates not only what has been lost, but also what has not been lost. Visitors to such memorials frequently leave flowers, notes, objects, which serve as a focus of a ritual exchange. The dead have given everything; the living, symbolically or tangibly, offer something in return. The Museum of American History in Washington's Smithsonian Institution has a large store of such objects left at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.[55]

This is hardly surprising, since the dead aren't present: hence the need to re-present them. The names are there, and so are the survivors, whose acts of exchange can only be symbolic at best. But the power of objects, as well as the power of place, cannot be denied.

### *The role of the state*

The thrust of analysis in this book is towards highlighting the role of second- and third-order elites within civil society. The social organization of remembrance tends to be decentralized. This claim shifts the emphasis in this field away from the central organizations of the state, both from the top downward and sideways. That is to say, away from state central institutions, and towards civil society groupings, their leaders and activists.

Nevertheless, the state remains relevant both as the carrier of the brunt of warfare, whether conventional or counter-insurgency, and as a major producer and choreographer of commemoration. The key issue is the tension between these two foci of remembrance.[56]

Since the Second World War, and the end of decolonization, the character of military conflict has shifted away from interstate collisions towards violent contests, usually within the borders of one nation, for

[55] On the multiplicity of types of artefacts, see Maya Lin, Andrew Barshay, Stephen Greenblatt, Tom Laqueur, and Stanley Saitowitz, *Grounds for remembering. Monuments, memorials, texts*, Occasional papers of the Doreen B. Townsend Center for the Humanities, no. 3 (Berkeley, California: Doreen B. Townsend Center for the Humanities, 1995); and Marita Sturken, 'The Wall, the screen and the image: the Vietnam Veterans Memorial', *Representations*, 35 (1991), pp. 118–42.

[56] On state versus local affiliations, see Jay Winter, and Jean-Louis Robert, *Capital cities at war: Paris, London, Berlin, 1914–1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), ch. 1.

state power.[57] The process of remembrance following such conflicts is unlikely to vary in character from that associated with public recollection of earlier conflicts. This is already clear from the comparative study of conflict instigated by Fundamentalist movements in Shi'ite and Sunni Islam, in Hinduism and among Sikhs, in Judaism, as well as in Protestantism and Catholicism.[58]

We may suggest that the dialogue between agents working within civil society and state institutions, an ongoing process of contestation, is and is likely to remain one of the permanent features of remembrance. It is not the geographic location or level of economic development which is decisive here, but the nature of that complex and enduring social activity, remembrance.

[57] Martin van Creveld, *The transformation of war* (New York: Free Press, *c.* 1991).

[58] E. Sivan, 'The enclave culture', in M. M. Marty and R. S. Appleby (eds.), *Fundamentalism comprehended* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 11–63; see also chapters 16–19 in the same volume, written jointly by G. Almond, E. Sivan, and R.S. Appleby.