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1900-1945

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# A COMPANION TO EUROPE 1900–1945

*Edited by*

Gordon Martel

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## GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

- Omer Bartov, *Mirrors of Destruction: War, Genocide, and Modern Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). A highly original analysis placing the Holocaust within the context of modern warfare and mass violence.
- Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2001). Empirical studies and essays summarizing four decades of research by an architect of the field of Holocaust studies.
- Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993). Pathbreaking study of German soldiers who perpetrated mass shooting operations.
- Christopher R. Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939–March 1942* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004). Comprehensive analysis and evaluation of the latest research concerning the decision to begin systematic mass killing (with contributions by Jürgen Matthäus).
- Inga Clendinnen, *Reading the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Thought-provoking reflections of an anthropologist confronting research and memoir literature on perpetrators and victims.
- David Engel, *The Holocaust: The Third Reich and the Jews* (Harlow: Longman, 2000). Short, concise introduction to Holocaust history, including 28 key documents.
- Barbara Engelking, *Holocaust and Memory* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2001). Incisive study by a Polish social psychologist of how Jewish survivors still living in Poland lived through the war and came to grips with their experience afterwards.
- Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995). Detailed, well-documented discussion of the connections between Nazi killings of Jews, Sinti and Roma, and the disabled.
- Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, vol. 1: *The Years of Persecution, 1933–1939* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997). First of a planned two volumes synthesizing the experiences of Germans and Jews during the Nazi years through a highly original narrative style.
- François Furet, ed., *Unanswered Questions: Nazi Germany and the Genocide of the Jews* (New York: Schocken Books, 1989). Fifteen articles by leading scholars; still unsurpassed for its comprehensive scope and the fundamental issues it treats.
- Israel Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw: Ghetto, Underground, Revolt* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982). The standard history of the fate of Europe's largest Jewish community under Nazi rule.
- Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 3rd edn (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2003). Originally published in 1961, still the standard work detailing how the Nazi state organized the systematic mass killing of Jews.
- Michael R. Marrus, *The Holocaust in History* (Hanover NH: University Press of New England, 1987). Survey of the development of historical thinking about the Holocaust to the mid-1980s.
- Dan Michman, *Holocaust Historiography: A Jewish Perspective* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2003). Stimulating essays critically examining the fundamental vocabulary of Holocaust research, emphasizing the experiences of Jewish victims.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

## Memories of World War II and the Holocaust in Europe

HAROLD MARCUSE

Since the late 1980s the study of “memory,” of individual and group ideas about past events, has been a rapidly growing subfield of history. While the literature on memory is large and studies of specific events abound, there is still no common terminology or methods.<sup>1</sup> This essay thus begins by defining key concepts, and then reviews developments across Europe that illustrate key principles of the workings of memory.

“World War II,” “the Holocaust,” and “memory” may seem to be relatively clear concepts, but closer examination reveals a broad range of different meanings. Although September 1, 1939 is the official starting date of the war, in retrospect – especially for the affected populations – the Japanese invasion of China in 1937, the German occupation of the Sudetenland in 1938, or of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 might all be remembered as part of the war. Similarly, we must ask when “the war” ended in countries that either collaborated or were quickly conquered and then allied themselves with the conquerors, such as Vichy France, Norway, and Hungary. Do opposing groups within such countries, such as collaborators and persecutees, experience different terminal dates of war? Also, to what extent can memories of World War II include events during the global dates of the war, but before or after the cessation of military hostilities in a given place? For example, do US memories of the war include events before the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, and do European memories of the war include events between VE-Day in May 1945 and the Japanese surrender in August? Such questions show that memories of an event, especially of a complex event, depend to a large extent on who is doing the remembering. This insight applies not only to individuals but also to national and regional communities, and to different groups within those communities. Civilians, soldiers, collaborators, labor conscripts, prisoners of war, deserters, victims of persecution, and members of resistance organizations will all have different referents for their memories of “the war.”

Since an analysis of memories of wartime requires a definition of “war” that goes beyond open military conflict, we should include the vast numbers of non-military persecutees and deaths, both intentional and unintentional. As David Engel’s essay in this collection shows (chapter 30), the term “Holocaust” emerged during the



decades after 1945 to denote the German attempt to systematically murder all Jews within its sphere of influence. It is thus itself a product of the ways individuals, groups, and societies have tried to express and share their mental images of the World War II era. Understandings of "Holocaust" range from narrower definitions encompassing the period of murder with exterminatory intent, from 1941 to 1945, to broader conceptions that include the period of isolation and persecution that led up to genocide, which are variously dated from 1933, 1935, or 1938. There is also a range of opinion about which groups should be included: whether only Jews (and perhaps Gypsies), or also groups with less fixed defining characteristics, such as political affiliation, religion, employment status, and sexual orientation. In this essay, "memories of World War II" includes events we now see as precursors of war, as well as experiences of occupation, and programs of persecution and genocide.

Just as "war" covers a range of events, "memory" is also a very elastic concept. It can denote what individuals remember about events they personally experienced, or what they recall to mind about events they learned about "secondhand" from eyewitnesses or news media, or through photographs, films, memoirs, scholarly histories, and historical novels. And, whether experienced firsthand or learned, individual memories are reinforced and modified by communication within and between social groups. Maurice Halbwachs, an early twentieth-century theorist of "collective memory," went so far as to argue that every individual memory exists only within the social context that shapes it. The dependence of individual memory on group context raises the question of how groups remember – be they smaller, more personally connected associations such as families and social networks, or larger social groups sharing little more than a common language or access to institutions of information such as schools, museums, and the same news and entertainment media.

Since analysis requires that we distinguish between individual, group, and collective memory processes, I offer the following conventions. *Remember* will denote the recalling to mind of lived and learned experiences by individuals, *memory work* the individual and group efforts to acquire and disseminate information about the past, and *recollect* the social process of sharing information about the past among members of a collectivity. Thus we can distinguish between more personal *memories* (experienced and learned), and more general *recollections*. While recollections are explicit and public, *collective memories* are more general feelings and attitudes about the past that may remain unarticulated. They usually originate in lived experience, but can shift according to subsequent experiences, including interpretations provided by public recollection. Discerning collective memories requires careful interpretations of a range of sources.

Collective memories are held in common by members of *memory groups*. A given individual is exposed to the recollective activities of multiple memory groups. These range from the people who experienced an event, to intimate groups including their family and friends, to closed private groups such as veterans' organizations, to open public associations and groups such as history workshops or political parties, to local, regional, and national governments, all the way to national and international publics that utilize the same information and entertainment media. Thus, collective memories arise from the interaction between individual experiences (some related to the events in question, others not), inchoate feelings about the past, accounts of historical events shared privately within memory groups, and the public circulation – recollection – of

historical interpretations. Terms such as "official" and "public" commemoration and recollection indicate that such interpretations of the past are intentionally manufactured by governments, elites, and institutions to suit their goals.

When examining how past events influence people's thoughts and behaviors, we often find that unacknowledged and unarticulated feelings are important. In contrast to collective memories, such deeper feelings about historical events may be common across multiple memory groups, even though they are not explicitly shared. *Historical consciousness* can denote this hypothetical substrate of awareness about the past. It is useful when discussing the "return" of "repressed" or denied memories. In contrast to collective memories, historical consciousness can imply a hypothetical "truer" knowledge about the past that persists despite psychological needs and recollective attempts to change it. I say hypothetical because we do not know whether a more accurate version of any given past exists (either in the historical record or in individual or group consciousness), nor whether that version will ultimately emerge in the public sphere. However, some scholars of memory use psychological terms such as anamnesis (the recovery of buried memories) to describe situations where long-accepted recollections of the past are challenged by newer, presumably more accurate ones. Ultimately, this is a philosophical question of the existence of a single absolute truth, as opposed to multiple coexisting perceptions of reality. An examination of collective memories indicates that, with regard to the past, multiple perspectives coexist, although over time they may converge on common images.

How do individual remembering, group memory work, and public recollection interact? The public dissemination of visions of the past occurs through many channels: the mass media (television, radio, the internet, newspapers and magazines), films, memoirs, novels, scholarly works, textbooks, classroom instruction, museums, laws, and compensation schemes, as well as a host of explicitly commemorative activities such as the establishment of monuments and memorials, and the marking of anniversary dates with speeches and holidays. These disseminated visions both derive from and shape group memories. They provide the primary source material historians use to discern broadly shared collective memories. The relative importance of these different "vectors" of memory (a term coined by historian Henry Rousso) varies both over time and from country to country. For instance, in Soviet-bloc countries such as Poland and East Germany, some memory groups were quickly repressed so that government-organized commemorative activity would not be challenged. In contrast, private associations of former resistance fighters and concentration camp survivors necessitated compromises in Belgium and France. Commercially produced films and other media events were more important in West Germany, where the public activity of memory groups, from former persecutees to army and SS veterans, was monitored and often inhibited by governmental agencies.

The following country-by-country survey illustrates some of the important principles of collective remembering. West and East Germany, Austria, and Italy show how governments were able to reverse historical causality, as well as how memory events helped to precipitate change. The formerly German-occupied countries of western Europe show how the postwar goal of national unity shaped their recollection of the past, while Poland illustrates how memories repressed by Soviet control resurfaced decades later to challenge and change governmental recollective paradigms. In Britain and the Soviet Union, victorious powers with fewer uncomfortable



events to exclude from recollection, the trajectory of recollection has been smoother. Ultimately, as time passes, across Europe we see a convergence of recollection around common meanings.

### West and East Germany

The successor states of the obvious instigator of World War II had the most at stake in what events would be recollected.<sup>2</sup> After the war, the claims to compensation or political recognition of the many groups that had been repressed under Nazi rule depended upon clear memories of what had happened under Nazism. Conversely, those who had enjoyed wealth and power under Nazism knew that their continued status was predicated on the repression of those memories. At first, the victorious Allies exercised complete control of the public sphere, and they were determined to break the elite status of former Nazis. The International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg was to facilitate that break by establishing a common understanding of the causes and crimes of World War II. However, the Allies' competing visions of the postwar world order soon mushroomed into the Cold War, and the Soviet Union withdrew from the tribunal. Successor trials were conducted with diminishing public presence, and were wrapped up by 1949, when the two German states were established.

The western Allies were interested in a strong, autonomous West German state. The United States provided financial assistance to rebuild the economy, and yielded to German pressure to rehabilitate compromised elites to run it. In contrast, the Soviet Union was interested only in a loyal and subservient satellite state in the east. It forced East Germany to elevate the recollection of communist resisters far above all others. In both cases, after 1949 spontaneous early manifestations of group memories were excluded from public life. The western use of compromised Nazi elites to create a West German army and civil service necessitated the silencing of surviving persecutees' voices. To highlight the Cold War legitimization of this restoration, western recollection focused on the sufferings of POWs still being held by the Soviet Union. In East Germany the government's recollective efforts highlighted communist resistance against Nazism, while ignoring German suffering and pointing to West Germany as the home of all German perpetrators. Over the following decades each government pursued a different recollective strategy: the West worked indirectly by bestowing or withholding support from memory groups, while the East took direct control and created institutions of memory that explicitly pursued its formulated goals.

Within a decade of war's end in West Germany, the government strategy had succeeded. Nazi perpetrators, their victims, and even resistance against Nazism had disappeared from the public recollection of that era, leaving primarily long-suffering civilians as objects of commemoration. This situation did not last long, however. In the late 1950s and early 1960s the recollection of Germans as victims (of Nazi and then of postwar Soviet oppression) was challenged by the public reception of memory events from abroad that featured graphic evidence of German crimes. The West German release of the French concentration camp film *Night and Fog* in 1956 (which the West German government at first attempted to suppress), and prominent trials of Nazi perpetrators in the early 1960s, are examples of such events. The magnitude

of the change in public interest is, however, most visible in the reception of Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl*. The first German publication of 4,500 copies in 1950 did not reach a large audience. Then a new German paperback edition in 1955 immediately found a huge audience, selling 700,000 copies in 18 printings over the next five years. That was followed by the huge success of the German stage adaptation in 1957, with 2,150 performances for 1.75 million viewers by 1960. A 1959 film version of the play was seen by more than 4 million viewers in Germany within a year.

The *Diary*, featuring a presumptively non-German victim (Anne had emigrated from Germany at age four), in turn stimulated demand for recollective attention to aspects of the past that had been excluded from official recollection. By the early 1960s there was widespread interest in stories about Hitler's intended victims during the war, as the German and international success of publications by Bruno Apitz, Primo Levi, Leon Poliakov, and William Shirer attest.

Still, official West German recollection did not change until the student unrest of the late 1960s explicitly rejected this myth of Germans as victims. In 1969 Willy Brandt, who had opposed the Nazis since the early 1930s and agitated against them from exile in Scandinavia, was elected West German chancellor. One of his most famous actions, when international attention was focused on him for receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, was to kneel in front of the Warsaw ghetto memorial during a state visit to Poland in December 1970. This recognition of Nazi Germany's primary victims implicitly acknowledged German perpetration. Polls showed that the German public was evenly split over this symbolic act.

During the 1970s scholarly works and commemorative confessions, such as Chancellor Schmidt's 1978 admission that he had witnessed the anti-Jewish *Kristallnacht* rampages in 1938, undermined the basis of another West German recollective myth, namely that Germans had been ignorant of the persecution going on around them. It also challenged the myth of the victimization of "Aryan" German civilians. In 1979 the national broadcast of the US television miniseries *Holocaust* introduced a recollective paradigm in which Germans as victimizers figured prominently. Seen by almost half of the entire West German populace over 14 years of age, the broadcast catalyzed the formation of many local history workshops that researched the Nazi period, and prompted a series of Nazi-era themed history day competitions in West German schools. However, there was also a "boomerang effect" with renewed clamoring to view "Aryan" German civilians as the primary victims of World War II. A noteworthy example of this persistence was the 1983 West German television miniseries *Heimat* (Homeland), which was created explicitly as a response to *Holocaust*. It portrayed a German village with no victims of persecution, while sympathetically evoking the sufferings of the local populace. Such opposing responses are typical of memory events. They are attributable to divisions along generational and political lines, and work themselves out as generational shifts in powerholding elites take place.<sup>3</sup>

The ultimate demise of the myth of victimization in West German recollection began in 1985. Chancellor Kohl's attempt to have US President Reagan acknowledge German soldiers as victims at a military cemetery on the 40th anniversary of the end of the war backfired when the US and German publics responded with outrage. Additionally, in 1986-7, apologist agitation from members of the war-participant

and subsequent "white" (too young to have been drafted) generations fueled what became known as the Historians' Debate. In that memory event most West German daily and weekly newspapers and many German and international historical journals published essays by prominent historians debating the pros and cons of Germany's ongoing obligation to conduct its politics in the shadow of World War II. This give-and-take had ended by 1988, when the leader of the West German parliament had to resign after he invoked it during an official ceremony commemorating the November 9, 1938 pogroms. With the unification of Germany in 1990 the present-day basis for feelings of victimization – the postwar division of the country – disappeared, taking with it the utility of using recollection to shore them up. Although the mythic victimization is still apparent in German popular culture, it is no longer a part of official West German recollection.

Under the auspices of the Soviet Union in the tightly controlled public sphere of East Germany, feelings of victimization were given no space and did not appear until after the demise of the government in 1989. Instead, "anti-fascist" (namely communist) resistance was given center stage in public recollection from the early 1950s on. Although the persecution of and even resistance by Jews did figure in official East German recollection until the early 1950s, it was marginalized thereafter. Government control of recollection was cemented after the 1953 uprisings, when the two major associations of persecutees were brought firmly into line with the perceived needs of state commemoration. Soon thereafter the ruling SED party began the construction of national memorial sites, which were dedicated at Buchenwald in 1957, Ravensbrück in 1959, and Sachsenhausen in 1961. From 1962 and 1968 a World War I memorial in the center of Berlin was redesigned as a central "monument to the victims of fascism and the two world wars." It featured side-by-side graves of an unknown "anti-fascist resistance fighter" and an unknown soldier. The central sculpture in Buchenwald also illustrates the state's recollective emphasis on resistance: it is a larger-than-life sculpture depicting the heroic struggle and solidarity of camp inmates, but not their persecution at the hands of fellow Germans.

Although there were some indications that East German recollection was becoming more pluralistic in the 1980s, there were no major challenges to the dominant paradigm as in West Germany until the demise of the SED government in 1989. After that, as elsewhere in the former eastern bloc, recollections of the Nazi period were overshadowed by more immediate memories of the Soviet repression that followed it. In contrast to other countries in the former eastern bloc, however, East Germany's 1990 annexation by West Germany placed it in a recollective sphere where such recollection was inhibited. East Germans were forced to accept the recollective agenda that had developed in the West. While individual memories of victimization in the post-1945 period remain a strong element of historical consciousness in the former East, they are excluded from public recollective activity, which is controlled by the West.

Since 1990 recollection in Germany has been punctuated by a succession of memory events, many of them focused on how the nation should balance recollections of the Nazi past between Germans as resisters, Germans as perpetrators, and commemorations of the victims of Nazism. Vigorous public discussions of the 1993 Holocaust film *Schindler's List* (the story of a German businessman who rescued Jews), Daniel Goldhagen's graphic indictment of Germans as vicious antisemites in

his 1995 book *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, and the 1995 publication of the diaries of Victor Klemperer, a German Jew who survived in Dresden, provide examples for each group.<sup>4</sup> Those discussions were less about the historical facts *per se*, than about the utility or detriment of certain interpretations of those facts for the present.

### Austria and Italy

Since Austria had become part of Hitler's Germany with its overwhelming vote for annexation in March 1938, and Mussolini's Italy had been part of the Berlin-Rome "Axis" since 1936 and a full military ally since May 1939, once might expect that they would have faced the same Allied sanctions and existential memory questions after the war. However, before the war ended both managed to position themselves on the side of the victors, burying memories of their governments' and people's participation in war and genocide. While the recollective road in Italy has remained essentially uncontested until the present, Austria experienced vigorous memory events in the mid-1960s and 1970s before a radically new paradigm began to form in the 1980s.<sup>5</sup>

Although the historical record shows that Austrians overwhelmingly favored annexation by Nazi Germany, a recollective consensus quickly emerged among Austrian adherents and opponents of Nazism that Austria had been "Hitler's first victim." This view was endorsed by the Allies in their 1943 Moscow declaration and subsequently enshrined in the provisional government's April 1945 declaration of independence, which made the outlandish claim that Hitler's government

had used the complete political, economic and cultural annexation of the country to lead the people of Austria, which had been rendered powerless and without its own will, into a senseless and hopeless war of conquest that no Austrian had ever wanted, nor had ever been able to anticipate or approve, in order to wage war on peoples against whom no true Austrian ever held feelings of enmity or hate.<sup>6</sup>

This historically one-sided but mutually beneficial recollective arrangement allowed both former opponents and former Nazis to participate in public life without coming to terms with the past. In spite of acrimonious public discussions when the Nazi allegiances of highly visible public figures were exposed in 1965 (when Nazi-friendly remarks by a professor triggered the lynching of a former anti-Nazi) and 1975 (when Chancellor Kreisky, a Jew, defended his coalition partner Friedrich Peter, a former SS man), the recollection of national victimization persisted essentially unchanged from the end of the Allied denazification program in 1948 to the international furor over former German army officer and UN secretary general Kurt Waldheim's presidential candidacy in 1986 (when he was elected and served out his six-year term). Although evidence about the extent of Waldheim's participation in a massacre perpetrated by his unit was not conclusive, the international outrage about it was sufficient to spark a national movement towards reexamining Austria's role as a perpetrator in World War II and the Holocaust. This historical reexamination was boosted by a number of publications at the time of the fiftieth anniversary of the annexation in 1988. Finally, under Chancellor Vranitzky in 1991, the Austrian government officially acknowledged Austria's role in the Holocaust.<sup>7</sup>

The late appearance in public recollection of the substantial Austrian participation in genocide illustrates what one might call the "time-lag principle" of recollection, namely that when significant historical experiences are excluded from public recollection, recollection may still be revised decades later to include them. This depends on the goals of those doing the remembering. As the generation of participants and eyewitnesses retires from the public arena, their grandchildren often develop an interest in reexamining inconsistencies in recollected history. This third generation's awareness of the past comes both from memories acquired in the private family sphere, and from information transmitted in schools and through other channels of public recollection. Thus the grandchildren are most apt to feel a need to reconcile discrepancies. Some evidence suggests that there is a "disparity principle" of recollection, whereby the magnitude of the gap between actual events and public recollections determines the virulence of the recovery of unrecollected experiences. The more measured discussion and relatively static forms of recollection in Italy, where wartime support for Nazism and genocide was more ambivalent, bears out this view.

In Italy as in Austria, public recollection of World War II has avoided an examination of Italy's alliance with Germany and its own role in genocide until recent years.<sup>8</sup> However, in contrast to Austria's unwavering participation in war and genocide, Italy's role in the unrecollected events was more ambivalent. On the one hand, Mussolini's Fascist Party inspired Hitler's organization of the Nazi Party, and, as noted, Italy was Germany's first military ally. Beginning already in 1938, Mussolini supported Hitler by passing discriminatory laws against Jews and interning non-Italian Jews in camps. On the other hand, Mussolini had shown clear hostility to Hitler's expansionist designs on Austria prior to their mutual support of Franco in the Spanish Civil War in 1936. Italians had never supported Mussolini as massively as Germans and Austrians followed Hitler, and even under Mussolini during the war Italy had been a relative haven for Jews fleeing from German-occupied countries. In July 1943, after numerous debacles in the war, including the Allied landing in Sicily, Mussolini's own government deposed and arrested him. Rescued by the Germans and reinstalled in German-occupied northern Italy, he was finally captured and executed by Italian partisans as the German occupation fell apart in April 1945. In the end, about 8,000 of Italy's 40,000 Jews were deported to Hitler's camps, most of them during the German occupation. This 80 percent survival rate was far higher than in most other European countries.

After the war the historical evidence of the Italian rejection of Mussolini was used to obscure Italy's own expansionist aspirations and collusion in genocide. In 1946 Minister of Justice Palmiro Togliatti, who was also head of the Italian Communist Party, decreed a general amnesty for wartime crimes. His reasoning, as outlandish as the Austrian declaration, neatly excised fascist collaboration from the national historical record: since fascism was not part of the "Italian cultural tradition," bureaucrats who served the fascist government bore no responsibility for its crimes. In the wake of such pronouncements Italian recollection focused exclusively on the partisan resistance against Italian fascism and German occupation, leaving all responsibility for war and genocide to the Germans. During the 1960s, especially after 1968, this interpretation of the past was challenged by a younger generation organized partially in Italy's communist party PCI, which opposed the ruling Christian Democrats in 1960,

when they formed a coalition with the Mussolini-nostalgist *Movimento Sociale Italiano* party. However, the PCI's focus on war-era "red resistance" was delegitimized by the left-wing terrorism of the 1970s, and met its final demise with the fall of the Soviet bloc at the end of the 1980s. Since then Italian recollection has paid slightly more attention both to indigenous participation in war and genocide and to the experiences of Italians deported into the German extermination, concentration, and labor camp systems. With the passage of time, recollection of the war era in Italy seems to have lost both its unifying and dividing power. In recent years Italy has moved to a more Europeanized memory of the Holocaust. In 2001 Italy introduced January 27, the day of the liberation of Auschwitz, as a national holiday.

As the cases above show, the "objective" range of historical events and behaviors does not form the primary referent of recollection. The gap between the range of historical events and the spectrum of recollected events highlights that what is recollected depends on the goals of those who control recollection, not on what actually transpired. This principle is also illustrated by recollection in countries that had been occupied by Nazi Germany, where images of national resistance and suffering were invoked and memories of support for Nazism generally remained dormant.

### Netherlands, Belgium, France, and Denmark

While memories of Nazism were potentially extremely detrimental for the governments of Nazi Germany's successor states and main ally, countries that had collaborated only after they had been conquered militarily had much more flexibility in choosing which memories they wished to foster, and which they wished to suppress. The Netherlands, Belgium, and France were all quickly conquered and occupied in May and June 1940. There was no experience of sustained military combat *per se*, and each country suffered a more or less harsh and humiliating occupation. Although there were also significant differences in the official and popular responses to German occupation in each country, these had little to do with the recollective strategies they pursued after the war. All three wished to rebuild a unifying national identity.

Occupied Belgium had been marked by a split between a vigorous left-wing (communist) resistance, and collaboration among both the Flemish, who, feeling excluded from power after World War I, were generally more supportive of the German occupiers, and the francophone Wallonian government, which with King Leopold III agreed to a "strategic" collaboration that would ostensibly preserve some Belgian autonomy.<sup>9</sup> In order to bridge the postwar division between these groups, Belgian recollection did not differentiate between underground resistance and collaborationist "patriotism," but focused instead on anyone who had suffered because of their patriotic goals. In 1946–7 a difficult compromise was reached regarding the compensation and recognition of survivors who had been arrested or deported from Belgium. Designed by a leader of the communist resistance who had become a government minister, it made persecution the only criterion for social aid, but vaguely defined "patriotic activity" the standard for honorary recognition. The ultimate effect was to exclude surviving Jews from the latter category. It took some time for this homogenizing paradigm to be established, as the controversy over the reinstatement of King Leopold shows. The public debate about whether he had been a traitor or a martyr came to a head with a referendum in March 1950, in which over 57 percent



of the populace supported Leopold's return. This result belied deep internal divisions, however, with large majorities in the Flemish regions in favor of his patriotic position on collaboration, but only a minority in Brussels and Wallonia supporting his return. Public outcry – manifested in bloody riots and strikes – was so strong that within days Leopold transferred his royal powers to his son. The legacies of this delicate compromise are still evident today, in that the Jewish Holocaust is largely absent from Belgian recollection.

The Dutch government had refused to work with the Germans and gone into exile, so in spite of extensive popular collaboration there was no political split to be bridged as there was in Belgium. Rather, the belated liberation of the country had caused widespread starvation and devastation – while the Allies had liberated Belgium by October 1944, the Dutch suffered through the “hunger winter” of 1944–5 before the Germans were driven out in the spring. In this situation of postwar chaos the government discouraged the formation of groups of various kinds of resisters and persecutees, recollecting instead the solidarity and suffering of the entire nation. This was expressed in the iconic sculptures “Dockworker” (1952), which commemorates the February 1941 strike of Amsterdam municipal workers, and “Destroyed City” (1953) in Rotterdam.

In contrast to the decades of relatively static recollection in Belgium, the 1960s saw a shift in the Netherlands, whereby memories of the Jewish Holocaust came to play a major role. This change was heralded by the popularity of the television series *The Occupation*, broadcast in 21 installments from 1960 to 1965, and the success of Jacques Presser's comprehensive portrayal of the murder of Holland's Jews, *Downfall* (1965), which sold 100,000 copies within a year. It was at this time that the iconic figure of Anne Frank, reimported to Holland after her meteoric success abroad, established itself as the premier symbol of the Jewish Holocaust in the Netherlands.

In France the political division apparent in the low countries was expressed territorially: Germany occupied the northern part of the country, while a collaborationist government under Marshal Pétain was installed in Vichy to administer the southern part.<sup>10</sup> Those opposed to collaboration set up a government-in-exile in London under Charles de Gaulle. After the war a bloody purification (*épuration*) of collaborators swept the country, after which an uneasy truce between leftist-underground and conservative-exile resistance was formed. A national recollection not dissimilar to Belgium's emerged, forgetting collaboration, emphasizing resistance, equating the different groups that had been deported, and ignoring the Holocaust. As in Belgium, much commemorative ritual was based on forms developed for the veterans of World War I.

In contrast to Belgium, however, a major change in recollection took place a few years after de Gaulle's 1969 resignation in France. It was initiated by Marcel Ophüls' film *The Sorrow and the Pity* (1971), and Robert Paxton's book *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order* (1972, France 1973), which sparked a reexamination of France's collaborationist past similar to what happened in West Germany after Brandt's election in 1969. In the 1970s France, like West Germany, embarked on an odyssey of historical reexamination that filled in numerous historical “white spots” and abandoned some of the distorting myths about popular and governmental resistance to Germany during the war. The arrests and trials of French collaborators Klaus Barbie

(1983–7), Paul Touvier (1989–1994), and Maurice Papon (1998) were further memory events that closed gaps in French recollection and continued this trend towards historical accuracy. In this case, as in West Germany, a generational shift coinciding with a major change of government transformed the dominant recollective paradigm.

## Poland

In contrast to the Nazi-occupied countries of western and northern Europe, in Poland, due to the low status of Slavs in the Nazi racist worldview, there was little opportunity for collaboration. The two-year Soviet occupation of eastern Poland and the resulting political schism between nationalist and communist Poles prior to the German conquest resulted in Polish governments-in-exile in both London and Moscow. The majority nationalist Catholic populace experienced World War II as a victimization of the Polish Home Army by both the Soviets and the Germans. However, the postwar settlement that put Poland in the Soviet sphere of influence ensured that memories of persecution of Catholic Poles were subordinated to a government-dictated recollection in which communist anti-fascists (and initially also Jews) had resisted the German invaders. As Michael Steinlauf's 1997 book *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* makes clear, this has made the history of recollection in Poland quite complex.

Steinlauf uses two side-by-side posters in Warsaw in April 1945 to show how the communist leadership excluded the Polish army from public recollection. One read “Shame to the Fascist Flunkies of the Home Army,” while the other declared “Glory to the Heroic Defenders of the Ghetto.” In fact, it was widely known in Poland that the Soviet army had not only perpetrated a massacre of over 4,000 Polish Home Army officers at Katyn in 1941, but had also stood by while the German army decimated the civilian population of Warsaw during the city's uprising in the summer of 1944.

This disjuncture between popular memories and official public recollection reinforced a strong undercurrent of antisemitic prejudices among the overwhelmingly Catholic populace, which identified the repressive communist leadership as Jewish or Jewish controlled. By 1947 Catholic Poles had murdered some 1,500–2,000 of the surviving Jewish Poles who had returned to their homes after the war. An uneasy truce of silence about the extent of popular antisemitism emerged that held through destalinization after 1956 until a younger, postwar generation of students challenged the government in 1968.

In this case the government bureaucracy, which had become more attuned to Polish historical consciousness, used recollection to deflect criticism away from itself. The government identified the student intelligentsia as Zionists, thereby unleashing a wave of popular violence that drove 20,000 of the remaining Jewish Poles out of the country. The communist Polish government's willingness to abandon its Jewish citizens in order to stymie a challenge from younger constituents indicates that its recollective policies were making expedient use of the historical consciousness of the antisemitic older populace.

Steinlauf titles the subsequent years from 1970 to 1989 as a new period of “memory reconstructed,” although the evidence he presents instead demonstrates continuity with past views, punctuated in the 1980s by a scattering of historically



reflective, anti-antisemitic publications, speeches, and films. These memory events were vehemently rejected by the populace at large. The most notable were the Polish television broadcast of Claude Lanzmann's nine hour documentary *Shoah* in 1985, and a 1987 article by literary critic Jan Błński. These were followed in 1989 by a controversy about whether Carmelite nuns should be allowed to maintain a convent on the Auschwitz concentration camp grounds. The Catholic primate of Poland, Cardinal Glemp, concluded his defense of the nuns by blaming Jews for the international disapproval of the Polish Catholic recollective agenda: "If there is no antipolism, there will be no antisemitism in us." It took a personal letter from the Vatican in 1993 to move the nuns to vacate the premises, on which they nevertheless left a 20-foot cross that still stands today, a monument to memory's disregard of history.

Still, these memory events did create an awareness of an alternative way of viewing the past, even if no group yet held it as their collective memory. Steinlauf adds a tentative question mark to his final period, 1989 to 1995: "Memory regained?" At the time of his book's publication in 1997, support for recollection of the brutal decimation of Poland's Jewish population was increasing, as evidenced by late 1990s pronouncements by prominent politicians, the staging of international commemorative anniversaries, and attempts to resurrect Jewish cultural life. However, a memory event beginning in 2000 offers more conclusive evidence: the Polish publication of Polish-US scholar Jan Gross's book *Neighbors*, about an especially horrific massacre perpetrated in 1941 by Polish villagers in Jedwabne on the village's Jewish population.<sup>11</sup> While rejection of the evidence that Jews were victims and some Poles perpetrators was still vehement among some memory groups, public recollection in Poland now clearly includes both prewar Jewish culture and its destruction during World War II. In the anniversary years 1995 and 2005, Poland hosted huge international commemorative ceremonies at Auschwitz.

### Britain and the Soviet Union

If neither willing nor forced collaboration with Nazi Germany necessarily spawned memory events that changed the course of postwar recollection, the clear anti-German positions of Britain and the Soviet Union were all the more likely to experience smooth and celebratory recollective paths, and indeed they did (in the Soviet Union until the regime change of the 1980s). Although some emphases have shifted over the years, the basic icons of public and private memory have remained unchanged until the present.

In Britain World War II provided a series of unifying motifs: the Blitz on London, the home front, the BBC war reporting, cracking the Enigma code, the D-Day landing in Normandy, and the wartime conferences of the "big three" (Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin), in which Britain had again appeared as a premier world power.<sup>12</sup> An image of aristocrats and workers weathering the air raids side-by-side in underground shelters represented cross-class solidarity. Although historical research since the 1970s has called such images into question, they still dominate public recollection. Their functions have evolved from supporting economic pragmatism in the 1950s, to critiquing affluent society in the 1960s and 1970s, to supplying icons for the heritage industry of the Thatcherite 1980s. Since the 1990s memories of World War II in Britain have taken on a less heroic and more reflective "multicultural"

character, with some attention paid to the contributions of women and soldiers from British colonies, and to the genocide of the Jews, with which Britain had little to do. The latter found its most potent expression in the June 2000 opening of a permanent "Holocaust exhibition" in the Imperial War Museum. Only since the turn of the millennium have some limited challenges arisen, such as questions regarding the unrestricted bombing of civilian targets in the later phase of the war, and the failure to act on intelligence about the mass slaughter of Jews in eastern Europe, but these issues show no sign of tarnishing the power of the established images.

In the Soviet Union the recollection of the "Great Patriotic War," as World War II is known there, was one of unabashed national heroism under Stalin's leadership.<sup>13</sup> Stalin excluded some events from public recollection, most notably his 1939 alliance with Germany and co-invasion of Poland, as well as his staggering military defeats, many of which were due to his own unpreparedness and misguided strategy. The trenchant defense of Moscow in the winter of 1941–2, the bitter "900-day" (a recollected, not an actual number) siege of Leningrad, and the heroic defense of Stalingrad in 1942–3 were given center stage in public recollection of the war. These leitmotifs of unitary Soviet recollection persisted unchallenged until the loosening of government control of the public sphere under Gorbachev's glasnost policy after 1985. The only notable shift prior to the 1980s came after Stalin's death in 1953, when his "cult of the Great Patriotic War," as Nina Tumarkin has called it, was destalinized. In his 1956 speech denouncing Stalin, Nikita Khrushchev shifted the recollective emphasis away from Stalin's leadership to the party and the people: "The main role and the main credit for the victorious ending of the war belongs to our Communist Party, to the armed forces of the Soviet Union, and to the tens of millions of Soviet people raised by the party." When this recollective paradigm was in turn "desacralized" under perestroika during the late 1980s, it was also displaced by more urgent memories of Stalinist repression both before and after World War II.

Since the May 9, 1985 celebration had been planned under Gorbachev's predecessor, it was not affected by Gorbachev's new course. In the following years a number of repressed films and literary works, such as Kuznezov's *Babi Yar*, were published. On May 8, 1990, the eve of the "Day of Victory," Gorbachev laid out the new paradigm of recollection in a speech he titled "Lessons of War and Victory."<sup>14</sup> He praised the "brotherhood of nations" that had made victory possible, and criticized Stalin for having punished some of those nations. He also mentioned for the first time the role of the western Allies and the extended illegal imprisonment of German POWs in the Soviet Union after the war.

When the Soviet Union broke apart in December 1991, Soviet recollection became Russian recollection (which has not changed significantly, although it has diminished in importance), and the various member states developed recollections according to their own needs and experiences, which deviated from those of Russia. In the Ukraine, for instance, memories of wartime atrocities committed under Stalin's policies are taking center stage.<sup>15</sup>

### Conclusion

What general principles can we derive from this survey of countries? Most obvious is the lack of connection between the past events and the versions of them that come

to be recollected. In case after case, those who controlled public discourse recollected interpretations of the past that bore little resemblance to what had actually transpired. In some cases these visions were contested by memory groups fighting for social recognition, but governments were able to meet their demands without yielding control of the past. Substantive change in recollection usually requires several factors. First would be a "memory event," some contested historical issue intruding on the present, such as a commemorative anniversary or other media event (a book publication, film release, or television broadcast), or a trial or revelations about the tainted past of a public figure. Rarely could such memory events alone change the course of recollection, however. Usually, a radical change in governmental orientation would have to coincide with one or more memory events before a major shift in popular consciousness began. And in most cases the passage of sufficient time to allow for changes in the generational composition of society was necessary as well.

The dynamics of governmental and generational change give rise to some commonalities with regard to periodization. In keeping with recollection's dependence on those who control remembrance in the present rather than what happened in the past, western and eastern Europe exhibit distinct temporal patterns. In western Europe the more open public sphere allowed private and semi-public memory groups to challenge official tropes of recollection. In eastern Europe ruling parties kept tight control of the public sphere and determined the acceptable images of the past. Thus while Western bloc countries' collective memories changed qualitatively several times from the mid-1950s to the late 1970s, in the eastern bloc the main emphases of recollection varied little until radical political change began in the 1980s.

In both west and east, from the immediate aftermath of the war until political stabilization was achieved five to ten years later, there was a period of indeterminacy, during which different memory groups competed to establish or repress recollection of certain aspects of the past. After political stability had been restored, a phase of what one might call expedient recollection emerged across Europe. Sometimes so far from the truth that they are referred to as myths, these recollective tropes focused on events and interpretations that served the purposes of governments and ruling parties. They stressed victimization or heroism, but not perpetration; they emphasized national unity and solidarity, not internal divisions. Expedient recollection magnified historically marginal phenomena, ignored huge collective traumas, distorted power relations, and even reversed the direction of causality. While these self-serving recollections persisted basically unchanged and unchallenged in eastern Europe until the political transitions of the late 1980s, in western Europe in the late 1950s and 1960s memory events gradually destabilized the established expedient paradigms. When coupled with governmental or generational changes, new paradigms emerged.

Since the late 1980s we can observe movement towards an international consensus in the recollection of World War II. In some countries (Germany, Austria, Italy, France) there has been a tendency towards the inclusion of memories of perpetration and collaboration in public recollection, and overall there is greater attention to the diverse groups of victims. One indication of this development was the January 2000 "Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust," which was attended by more than a dozen heads of state and many prominent scholars and survivors from around the world.<sup>16</sup> The recent establishment of national Holocaust museums and exhibi-

tions in Washington, London, and Berlin offers additional evidence of this trend, as does the creation of national memorial days on January 27 (the day the Soviet army entered the Auschwitz concentration camp) or some other nationally significant day (e.g., October 9 in Romania, the day in 1941 when deportations of Jews began) in Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. This internationalization of recollection both decontextualizes and universalizes the experience of World War II and the Holocaust. Decontextualization means that less attention is paid to unique features of historical developments in different countries. Universalization indicates that across many countries common understandings of the meanings of World War II are emerging. For instance, "the Holocaust" has come to stand for the ultimate crime against humanity, to serve as a referent for other genocides and state-implemented abuses of human rights occurring around the globe.

## NOTES

- 1 In addition to the shorter discussions in most of the books listed in the guide to further reading, I recommend John Gillis's introduction to a collection of essays he edited: "Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship," in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 3–24. An excellent overview of relevant social science research, which is little known among historians, is collected in James Pennebaker, Dario Paez, and Bernard Rimé, eds, *Collective Memory of Political Events: Social Psychological Perspectives* (Mahwah NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1997). Finally, an excellent meta-discussion can be found in the contributions to a forum on "History and Memory" in the *American Historical Review* 102/5 (1997): 1372–403 – Susan Crane, "Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory," and Alon Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method." Although I disagree with some of its definitions and contentions, I nonetheless find extremely useful the historical and conceptual overview offered in the introductory chapter of Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, eds, *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 6–39.
- 2 This section is based on the works by Marcuse and Herf, cited in the guide to further reading that follows.
- 3 For a detailed discussion of this dynamic, see Harold Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau: The Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp, 1933–2001* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 290–6.
- 4 See Yosefa Loshitzky, ed., *Spielberg's Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler's List* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); and Geoff Eley, ed., *The "Goldhagen Effect": History, Memory, Nazism – Facing the German Past* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).
- 5 On Austria, see Peter Utgaard, *Remembering and Forgetting Nazism: Education, National Identity, and the Victim Myth in Postwar Austria* (New York: Berghahn, 2003).
- 6 See Utgaard, *Remembering*, p. 29. The original text is available at: [www.nationalsozialismus.at/Themen/Umgang/opfermyt.htm](http://www.nationalsozialismus.at/Themen/Umgang/opfermyt.htm).
- 7 The journalistic account by Hella Pick, *Guilty Victim: Austria from the Holocaust to Haider* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000) discusses at length the inclusion of Nazi apologist Jörg Haider in the governing coalition in 2000.
- 8 Italian recollections of the war have received little scholarly attention. See Donald Sassoon, "Italy after Fascism: The Predicament of Dominant Narratives," in *Life after Death*:



- Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe during the 1940s and 1950s*, Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann, eds (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 259–90. See also Pierluca Azzaro, “Italien: Kampf der Erinnerungen,” in *Mythen der Nationen: 1945, Arena der Erinnerungen*, Monika Flacke, ed. (Berlin: DHM, 2004), vol. 1, pp. 343–72.
- 9 See Pieter Lagrou, “Victims of Genocide and National Memory: Belgium, France and the Netherlands, 1945–1965,” in *The World War Two Reader*, Gordon Martel, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 389–421; also the essays on Belgium and the Netherlands in Flacke, *Mythen der Nationen*, vol. 1.
  - 10 On France, see Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).
  - 11 For the reactions to Gross’s publication, see Antony Polonsky and Joanna Michlic, eds, *The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004). Another indication of a changing climate is the Polish publication of Art Spiegelman’s Holocaust memoir *Maus* in 2001.
  - 12 See Athena Syriatou, “Grossbritannien: ‘Der Krieg wird uns zusammenhalten,’” in Flacke, *Mythen der Nationen*, vol. 1, pp. 285–307.
  - 13 See Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York: Basic Books, 1994). The Khrushchev quotation below is from page 109.
  - 14 Jutta Scherber, “Sowjetunion/Russland” in Flacke, *Mythen der Nationen*, vol. 2, esp. pp. 646ff.
  - 15 See Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).
  - 16 See the official website: [www.holocaustforum.gov.se](http://www.holocaustforum.gov.se).

### GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

- Ian Buruma, *The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1994). This well-researched and perceptive but non-scholarly comparison of recollection in Germany and Japan provides historical context but focuses on the 1980s.
- Geoff Eley, ed., *The “Goldhagen Effect”: History, Memory, Nazism – Facing the German Past* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000). Essays that examine the national responses to the publication of a scathing indictment of German antisemitism published in 1996.
- Monika Flacke, ed., *Mythen der Nationen: 1945, Arena der Erinnerungen* (Berlin: DHM, 2004). This two-volume collection contains lavishly illustrated in-depth essays on memories of World War II in each of 30 European countries.
- Norbert Frei, *Adenauer’s Germany and the Nazi Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). Detailed account of how recollections of the Nazi period were used for political ends in 1950s West Germany.
- Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1997). An in-depth analysis of the 1945–65 period in East Germany based upon archival research.
- Yosefa Loshitzky, ed., *Spielberg’s Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler’s List* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997). Essays that examine how this 1993 film affected recollection in various countries.
- Harold Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau: The Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp, 1933–2001* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Based on a case study of the postwar history

- of Dachau, this monograph offers an explanation for the shifting emphases of recollection in West Germany since 1945.
- Judith Miller, *One, by One, by One: Facing the Holocaust* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990). Well-referenced analysis by a journalist offers a pan-European comparison of Holocaust recollection, focusing on the 1980s.
- Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1999). Sophisticated analysis of the reception of the Holocaust in the United States.
- Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1991). Pathbreaking account of memories of World War II in France.
- Michael Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997). Excellent account of the Polish recollection of World War II.
- Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York: Basic Books, 1994). Insightful account of the recollection of World War II in Russia which combines personal and scholarly perspectives.
- Peter Utgaard, *Remembering and Forgetting Nazism: Education, National Identity, and the Victim Myth in Postwar Austria* (New York: Berghahn, 2003). Although focusing on education, this dissertation offers an excellent overview of Austrian memory of the war years.
- James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1993). Collection of case studies of specific memorials in five countries, by a literary scholar.

# A COMPANION TO EUROPE 1900-1945

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The companion opens with a section on "continuity and change" addressing overarching themes and movements. The remaining five parts are organised chronologically, each one focusing on a particular period in time. In each of these chronological sections, scholars consider a range of social, economic, cultural, and political issues, paying particular attention to those questions which have attracted most debate. The approach throughout is pan-European, highlighting similarities and differences across nations and regions.

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