Political myth: the political uses of history, tradition and memory

Peter Ricketson
University of Wollongong
NOTE

This online version of the thesis may have different page formatting and pagination from the paper copy held in the University of Wollongong Library.

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

COPYRIGHT WARNING

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study. The University does not authorise you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site. You are reminded of the following:

Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright. A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material. Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.
Chapter 3
Collective Memory
1. Introduction

I indicated in the analysis of the Kosovo Myth that I would approach the nature of current political myth in terms of three essential components: collective memory, tradition and commemoration. While each component can be analysed separately, I argue that it is the dynamic interrelationship between memory, tradition and commemoration that is the essence of a political myth. The focus of this chapter will be collective memory and the way a political community consciously uses memory as a potential source of legitimacy. One characteristic of the political myths, such as the Kosovo Myth, that re-emerged towards the close of the twentieth century is that they are constructed around an image of the past. The image is not drawn from the historical past, but from the collective memories of a community. To understand the nature of such an image of the past at the core of political myth it is necessary to analyse collective memory in all its guises.

I argue that, in the process of reconfiguring the past as 'historic truth' to legitimate the present needs of a political community, the distinction between memory and history is blurred. The resulting hybrid, 'remembered history' forms an essential component of modern political myth. I will also argue that one of the keys to conceptualising political myth lies within the changing character of collective memory itself.

For the purposes of analysis my argument will be developed through two distinct but closely related strands. First, the theoretical concept of collective
memory will be developed in terms of its communicative function and its interrelationship with history. The close association between collective memory and memory sites will be explained in the following chapter through an examination of a series of examples that focus on the political uses of monuments, archaeological sites, relics and museums to create, contain and communicate memory. Second, the political dimensions of collective memory will be demonstrated by analysing the way representations of the past are collectively constructed by a political community to legitimate present needs. Included is the way collective memory is framed by identity, a common heritage, nostalgia and the media. Taken together these two strands represent a 'politics of memory' which forms one of the dimensions of political myth.

2. Collective Memory

2.1 Conceptualising Collective Memory

Cassirer argues that political myths are latent in all communities and have a tendency to emerge as potential legitimating or de-legitimating ideologies during periods of social stress or crisis. I have demonstrated through an analysis of the Kosovo Myth that political myths draw their meaning from a 'constructed' idealised past, a 'remembered history' based on the collective memories of a community. However, the analysis of the Kosovo Myth demonstrated that control over the collective memories of a community are often fiercely contested. Collective memory must therefore be conceptualised as part of the political
process. I argue that memory forms the core of a political myth and it is for this reason that the nature of collective memory needs to be closely analysed.

The current conceptualisation of memory or collective memory as a focus for examining the complex and problematical relationship between a political community and its past is thwart with conceptual difficulties. The concept of a modern collective or social memory and its elevation as a "cohesive cultural and social notion, with wide application" is relatively recent. The idea of a collective memory is given a theoretical formulation first with the publication of Maurice Halbwachs's *La Mémoire Collective* in 1950, but as Paul Connerton notes in his 1989 study, *How Societies Remember*, the concept of memory has received no systematic theoretical treatment despite "the pervasiveness of social memory in the conduct of everyday life." Since Connerton's work there has been a rapidly growing literature on collective memory including Pierre Nora's massive study of memory in the construction of the French past and significant

---


2 Michael Kammen notes that, "within less than a decade, beginning late in the 1980's, a distinctive body of writing began to appear that is concerned with aspects of collective memory in the history and culture of the United States. Comparable works have also been generated for France, Germany, Great Britain, Israel, and, to a lesser degree, Russia, Japan, and diverse developing nations or constituent social groups within those nations, such as tribes and sects." Kammen, M. In The Past Lane: Historical Perspectives on American Culture. Oxford University Press, New York, 1997, p.199. From the French perspective Pierre Nora rather flamboyantly notes the burgeoning of interest in memory as a social phenomenon. "Over the past ten or twenty years many countries have in one way or another been subjected to similar tidal waves of memory. Some have witnessed a compulsive return of a repressed past, while others have searched for 'roots' or a 'national heritage.' There has been a bedlam of commemorations, a mushrooming of museums, and a revitalisation of traditions in all its forms. No era has ever been as much a prisoner of its memory, as subject to its empire and its law" Nora, P. (Ed.) [Kritzman, L.D. English Edition Ed.] *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, Vol. 3: Symbols, Columbia University Press, New York, 1998, p.xii.

3 Halbwack's work was long neglected but was revived with the growing current interest in the politics of memory. He was not published in English until 1980 under the title Halbwachs, M. *The Collective Memory*, Harper and Row Publishers, New York, 1980.


5 The publication of *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (1984 - 92) represented a collaborative effort by over one hundred French historians under the direction of Pierre Nora. A three volume English edition edited by
Collective Memory

studies by Michael Kammen, Jacques le Goff, John Bodnar, Patrick Hutton, Robert Gildea, Raphael Samuel, Andreas Huyssen, and Rudy Koshar. All these studies have expanded our understanding of the role memory plays in modern society, but have not necessarily clarified the difficulties associated with conceptualising collective memory. Kammen notes that, "much of this literature emphasises the socially constructed nature of memory and its political or cultural uses," and it is this approach to collective memory that will be further developed in this chapter. However, a systematic conceptualisation of memory is still difficult because of its retrospective, fluid and multifaceted character.

Memory may appear to be essentially retrospective, but as Andreas Huyssen reminds us, "the temporal status of any act of memory is always the


7 Kammen, M. In The Past Lane: Historical Perspectives on American Culture, op cit, p. 199.

8 Andreas Huyssen argues that these difficulties also stem from a conceptualisation of modernity that is generally antagonistic towards the past. "The place of memory in any culture is defined by an extraordinarily complex discursive web of ritual and mythic, historical, political, and psychological factors. Thus, the lament that our postmodern culture suffers from amnesia merely reverses the familiar trope in cultural criticism which suggests that enlightened modernisation liberates us from tradition and superstitions, that modernity
Collective Memory

present and not, as some naive epistemology might have it, the past itself, even though all memory in some ineradicable sense is dependent on some past event or experience.” However, it should be noted that the meaning of memory is not dependent on some past event: meaning is to be found in the interrelationship between past, present and future. Huyssen comments that, “remembrance shapes our links to the past, and the ways we remember define us in the present. As individuals and societies, we need the past to construct and anchor our identities and to nurture a vision of the future.”

David Thelan also emphasises the multifaceted nature of memory and states that,

\[\text{since the memory of past experiences is so profoundly intertwined with the basic identities of individuals, groups, and cultures, the study of memory exists in different forms along a spectrum of experience, from the personal, individual, and private to the collective, cultural, and public.}\]

Past experiences are also passed on from preceding generations. However, “it is not the literal past, the 'facts' of history, that shape us, but images of the past, embodied in language” or image. There is therefore “no pure memory, only recollection”, a recollection that can be selected, manipulated or negotiated over.

and the past are inherently antagonistic to each other ... briefly, that to be radically modern means to sever all links to the past”. Huyssen, A. op cit, p.250.

9 Huyssen, A. op cit, p.3.

10 ibid, p 249.


12 Friel, B. International Herald Tribune, 2/10/1987, Quoted by Butler, T. 'Memory a Mixed Blessing', in Butler, T. [Ed.] op cit, p. 13. Samuel points out that the primacy of language as an aide to memory is only of recent origin and that language is once again giving way before images, this time electronic. See Samuel, R. op. cit., pp. vi, 13-15, 25-39, 267 for a detailed comment on the impact of visual images on memory.


14 See Thelen, D. op cit, p.1123.
A systematic approach to memory must take into account the notion that the "social dimensions of memory are more important than the need to verify (historical) accuracy.... People develop a shared identity by identifying, exploring, and agreeing on memories."^{15} Political communities construct their images or versions of the past through communication. However, conceptualising a collective consciousness raises the question of "how to elaborate a conception of memory which, while doing full justice to the collective side of one's conscious life, does not render the individual a sort of automaton, passively obeying the interiorised collective will".\(^\text{16}\) There is a danger in the personification of a group in terms of drawing analogies between the characteristics of an individual and a group.\(^\text{17}\) Before I examine how such a problem might be overcome, I will draw attention to the fact that the current interest in memory is also a late twentieth century cultural phenomenon which has its own dynamic quite apart from the theoretical status it has been given so far.

In addition to the methodological difficulties of using memory as a concept it is also necessary, as Andreas Huyssen points out, to conceptualise memory in its postmodern context. In his insightful analysis of the current interest in memory as a cultural phenomenon, Huyssen notes that:

\(^{15}\) ibid, p.1122.


\(^{17}\) "Western notions of collectivity are grounded in individualist metaphors. That is, collectivities in Western social theories are imagined as though they are human individuals writ large. The attributes of boundedness, continuity, uniqueness, and homogeneity that are ascribed to human persons are ascribed as well to social groups. Handler, R. 'Is “Identity” a Useful Cross-Cultural Concept?' in Gillis, J.R. [Ed.] op cit, p. 33. As Burke points out "If we use terms like 'social memory' we do risk reifying concepts. On the other hand, if we refuse to use such terms, we are in danger of failing to notice the different ways in which the ideas of individuals are influenced by the groups to which they belong. Burke, P. 'History as Social Memory', in Butler, T. [Ed.] op cit, p. 99."
The undisputed waning of history and historical consciousness, the lament about political, social, and cultural amnesia, and the various discourses, celebratory or apocalyptic, about posthistoire have been accompanied in the past decade and a half by a memory boom of unprecedented proportions. Huyssen argues that the ‘memory boom’ is an expression of “our society’s need for temporal anchoring when in the wake of the information revolution, the relationship between past, present, and future is being transformed.” Huyssen suggests that such a transformation is linked to the loss in confidence in the ideology of progress that envisions, the secular future as dynamic and superior to the past. In such thinking the future has been radically temporalised, and the move from the past to the future has been linked to notions of progress and perfectibility in social and human affairs that characterise the age of modernity as a whole.

Disillusion is born out by what Huyssen refers to as “the specters of the past (which) are now haunting Europe. The twenty-first century looms like a repetition: one of bloody nationalisms and tribalisms. Of religious fundamentalism and intolerance that we thought had been left behind in some darker past.” In this sense, “the future seems to fold itself back into the past.” This trend is clearly seen in the way memory of the past was manipulated in Serbia to legitimate the immediate needs of the Milosevic regime.

As well as potentially re-ordering the modern structure of temporality, Huyssen also suggests that memory functions as an antidote against “the

---

18 Huyssen, A. op cit, p.5.
19 ibid, p.7.
20 ibid, p.8.
21 ibid.
22 ibid.
Collective Memory

accelerating technical processes that are transforming our Lebenswelt (lifeworld) in quite distinct ways.\textsuperscript{23} To Huyssen memory,

represents the attempt to slow down information processing, to resist the dissolution of time in the synchronicity of the archive, to recover a mode of contemplation outside the universe of simulation and fast-speed information and cable networks, to claim some anchoring space in a world of puzzling and often threatening heterogeneity, nonsynchronicity, and information overload.\textsuperscript{24}

While he argues that the current interest in memory is linked to disillusionment with modernity, Huyssen refutes any suggestion that modern memory is merely a symptom of fin de siecle pessimism. Instead, Huyssen sees the shift from history to memory as a “potentially healthy sign of contestation”\textsuperscript{25}, what he refers to as a “welcome critique of compromised teleological notions of history.”\textsuperscript{26} The importance of Huyssen’s work for my study is not so much his image of memory as an active social agent, as his concept of memory as providing a temporal anchoring in the face of faltering beliefs in the ideology of progress and modernity. Huyssen argues that in the world of synchronicity, where the relationship between past, present and future has become blurred and where teleological philosophies of history can no longer map a predictable future, then memory provides the temporal anchoring that frames and structures our life as a community. It is the concept of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{23} ibid, p. 7.
\item \textsuperscript{24} ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{25} ibid, p. 9.
\item \textsuperscript{26} ibid, p. 6.
\end{itemize}
memory as a temporal anchor, of synchronicity where “the future seems to fold itself back into the past”\(^{27}\) that I will develop in Chapter 7 as one strand of modern political myth.

Hyssen’s focus in *Twilight Memories* is on the artistic representation of memory as the medium of communicating the relationship of a community with its past. While the symbolic significance of communicating memory through art and statuary is acknowledged as an important aspect of modern memory,\(^{28}\) it does not offer a broad enough conceptual base for understanding the role memory plays in the construction of modern political myths. David Thelan stresses the social dimensions of memory which are developed along what he refers to as a ‘spectrum of experience’. It is such an aspect of memory as a collective social phenomenon that I will develop further in this chapter.

First I must stress that a political community does not in itself have a collective consciousness but rather provides the framework for interrelated individual memories by framing a common meaning for an event drawn from the past. The framing of a common meaning evolves publicly and it is this public characteristic that leads Michael Kammen to define collective memory in terms of “the publicly presented past.”\(^{29}\) This point is also emphasised by Jay Winter and

\(^{28}\) This will be discussed in chapter 4 on memory sites and also in Chapter 6 under the heading ‘Symbolic Core’.
\(^{29}\) Kammen, M. *In the Past Lane: Historical Perspectives on American Culture*, *op cit*, p. xii.
Emmanuel Sivan in their analysis of *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*.

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.\(^{30}\)

Collective 'public' memories must be differentiated from individual 'private' memories. Winter and Sivan stress that "passive memory – understood as the personal recollections of a silent individual – is not collective memory."\(^{31}\) The division between collective and individual memory is taken further by Maurice Halbwachs.

Collective memory, as a socially constructed discourse, frames and informs individual memory to the extent, Halbwachs argues, that individual memory cannot stand apart from group memory. Halbwachs develops a theory of collective memory that, while acknowledging that it is individuals who remember, emphasises that they do so through membership of a social group. Halbwachs maintains that individual memories are woven into a social context because the memory of other individuals is required to collaborate and validate not only the content of individual memories but its interpretation. As Patrick Hutton states in his detailed analysis of Halbwack's work, the social context is central to understanding the dynamics of collective memory.

Halbwachs's main point was that memory is only able to endure within sustaining social contexts. Individual images of the past are provisional. They are "remembered" only when they are located within conceptual structures that are defined by communities at

---


\(^{31}\) *ibid.*
The 'networks of memory' that are defined and confirmed by a community also modify individual memory by filtering out those memories of public events which are considered memorable from those which are to be forgotten. As collective memories are based on the shared experiences that are important to a community some order and cohesion is imposed upon individual memories. Individual memories are not only modified but 'constructed' in that a community can 'extend' the memory of an individual who has not actually lived through the same experiences as the other members of the community. Halbwachs rejects the concept of individual memory separate from social memory. Hutton states that, “Halbwachs ... was not questioning the existence of individual memories, but rather their meaning apart from the social settings that give them their integrity. Memories are formed out of the imagery of shared experience.”

Winter and Sivan also stress that it is the embedding of collective memory in the social structure that is the characteristic feature of Halbwachs's approach. “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.” However, an individual may be active in a number of

32 Hutton, P.H. *History as an Art of Memory* op cit, p.6.
33 Halbwachs remarks that “I say I ‘remember’, events that I know about only from newspapers or the testimony of those directly involved. These events occupy a place in the memory of the nation, but I myself did not witness them. In recalling them, I must rely entirely upon the memory of others.” Halbwachs, M. op. cit., p. 51.
different social settings, so Halbwachs maintains that “a person remembers only by situating himself within the viewpoint of one or several groups and one or several currents of collective thought.”36 Individuals can have multiple memories, for each memory “is immersed successively or simultaneously in several groups.

Moreover, each group is confined in space and time. Each has its own collective memory.”37 Thus, individual memory is not only multiform, but several conflicting memories ranging from family to national memories can co-exist or be in opposition to one another. Individuals can have multiple memories but communities tend to coalesce around a unifying collective consciousness which is often given representation as an ideal type.38 A community does not itself have a collective conscience, but rather provides a framework for interrelating memories. For Halbwachs, what defines a collective memory is that, “resemblances are paramount. When it considers its own past, the group feels strongly that it has remained the same and becomes conscious of its identity through time.”39

Because there are so many contending communities drawing on different memories, Peter Burke suggests that “it is surely more fruitful to think in

36 Halbwachs, M. op cit, p. 33.
37 ibid, p. 78.
38 Hutton uses Maurice Agulhon's Marianne into Battle: Republican Imagery and Symbolism in France 1789 – 1880, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1981, as a case study of how memories coalesce around an ideal type, in this case the allegorical figure of Marianne, symbol of the French Republic. “In the early days, competing images of Marianne provide evidence of tensions within the republican camp. But as republican solidarity within France grew strong by the late 1870s, the demand was raised for a “lasting effigy” of the republican ideal, a single stately image that would serve as a foundation for its place in the collective imagination. In this way, the image of Marianne passed from the republican cause into the larger national memory.” Hutton, P.H. History as an Art of Memory, op cit, p. 3.
39 Halbwachs, M. op cit, p. 85.
pluralistic terms about the uses of memories to different social groups, who may well have different views about what is significant or 'worthy of memory'."40 Consequently Burke proposes that "it might be useful to think in terms of different 'memory communities' within a given society. It is important to ask the question, who wants whom to remember what, and why? Whose version of the past is recorded and preserved?"41 Burke shifts the focus away from the structure of collective memory as developed by Halbwack towards an analysis of the social formation that gives rise to a collective memory. The analysis of the social formation of memory adds an essential political dimension to collective memory.

The 'politics of memory' will be discussed in more detail in the second part of this chapter. At this point, I need to bring together some of the strands that must constitute any conceptualisation of collective memory. While collective memory has attracted considerable scholarship over the last decade, its use as a conceptual tool in analysing a political community's relationship with the past is still elusive and ill-defined. As Winter and Sivan point out,

The terms 'memory' and 'collective memory' appear with such frequency and ease that readers may be under the impression that there is a scholarly consensus about what these terms mean and how they may be used effectively in historical study .... Furthermore the word 'memory' has profoundly different shades of meaning in different languages. It should not be surprising, therefore, that historians frequently talk at cross purposes or in complete ignorance of each other's position in this field.42

It needs to be noted that collective memory as a subject of theoretical inquiry is not confined to historians but is a focus for anthropology, sociology, political

40 Burke, P. *History as Social Memory*, op cit, p. 107.
41 ibid.
Collective Memory

science and cultural studies. However, what is common to the different approaches to collective memory is its communicative role. Daniel Sherman suggests that the communicative role is the key to conceptualising collective memory because it provides a theoretical framework.

Such a theoretical framework must begin with a conception of collective memory not as something inherent to a group or groups, reflected unproblematically in objects like monuments, but as a socially constructed discourse. In this view, as culturally specific beliefs about a historical event merge with individual memories and take on visible and legible form, collective memory emerges as a construct of the political, social, and economic structures that condition, if they do not determine, the production of those forms. Similarly, what we conventionally call "commemoration" I take to be the practice of representation that enacts and gives social substance to the discourse of collective memory.

Sherman’s approach provides a framework that takes into account the political dimension of memory formation as well as its physical and performative aspects. His approach to collective memory formation also is consistent with the way political myth will be conceptualised in Chapter 7 on Political Myth and Legitimacy. Therefore I will use Sherman’s approach to memory as a socially constructed discourse in order to analyse the ways political communities use the past: history, tradition, heritage and nostalgia, to legitimate the present. Such an approach avoids the problem of conceptualising “collective memory as a reified, separate entity existing above individuals.” Winter and Sivan also conceptualise collective memory in terms of a socially constructed discourse. In using the work of the anthropologist Roger Bastide, Winter and Sivan envisage collective memory as the end product of an exchange relationship, where individual

44 Sherman, D.J. ‘Art, Commerce, and the Production of Memory in France after World War I’ in Gillis, J.R. [Ed.] op cit, p. 186.
memories, values and information are communicated, modified and adjusted by membership of a group.

Individual memories are located in what Bastide refers to as 'networks of complimentarity' which organise and structure the development of a group collective memory. The framing of individual memories in an exchange relationship takes place on two dimensions. First, individual memories only carry relative weight compared to others within the network of complimentarity. The determining factor is the distribution of power and the nature of elites within the group. "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." Winter and Sivan place more emphasis on the informal memory networks within a group. "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." Winter and Sivan are careful not to privilege a 'constructed' collective memory at the expense of individual memory, but in the process, weaken the role of collective memory in framing, structuring and conditioning individual memories.

---

45 Winter, J. & Sivan, E. (Eds), *op cit.*, p. 27. The following discussion on Winter and Sivan's use of Bastide has been paraphrased from *ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

46 *ibid.*, p. 28.

47 *ibid.*

48 Winter and Sivan use the metaphor of the choir to explain collective memory formation. "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
While recognising Winter's and Sivan's concern about reifying collective memory, my study closely follows Sherman's approach, which places more emphasis on the ways political communities consciously use history and memory to legitimate the present. Before analysing the relationship between memory and history however, I intend to bring together the four main points from my argument so far in order to develop a context. First, collective memory is conceptualised as a socially constructed discourse, a culturally specific belief about the past that is framed and informed by political, social and economic structures. Second, individuals have multiple and often conflicting memories while group memories tend to coalesce around unifying, common representations of the past. Third, individual memory is modified and constructed by groups whose collective memories and identity are based on shared experiences. Finally, group identity is grounded in collective memories that convey representations of the past through linguistic, visual or enacted images. The common thread that links these four points together is that collective memory is based on communication and is in fact a socially constructed discourse.

2.2. Memory and History

An analysis of the complex interrelationship between history and memory adds a further dimension to the concept of a collective memory and gives an insight into how political myth draws its meaning from a remembered past.
Collective memory is given coherence and unity by history, but in the process memory infiltrates history and makes it susceptible to political uses. Much of the writing on collective memory follows the theoretical position taken by Maurice Halbwachs and Pierre Nora in drawing a clear distinction between memory and history.

For Halbwachs and Nora, "memory implies a view of the past as an integral part of the present .... History, on the other hand, implies a clear and final boundary between past and present." The distinction between history and memory is succinctly put by Joyce Mushaben who stresses the need "to distinguish between history as a set of objectively definable events and collective memory, the subjective attribution of meaning to these key events." I am not arguing that history is objective, but that its stated goal is objectivity.

The French historian Henry Rousso makes a similar distinction when criticising the 'memorial militancy' generated by memories of Vichy France that accompanied the trial of Maurice Papon in 1998 for complicity in crimes against humanity. "National memory is the result of an extant tension between memorably and commemorable recollections and forms of forgetting that permits the survival of the community and its projection into the future; history is a project of knowledge and elucidation". Henry Rousso draws a clear distinction

between the divergent purposes of memory and history. Such an approach is generally accepted for as Koshar observes, "conceptually, the cumulative impact of much recent research has been to sharpen scholarly analysis of the differences between memory and history." In reality however, the distinction is more problematic.

The nature of the relationship between memory and history is first developed by Halbwachs in *La Mémoire Collective*. Because "Halbwachs's purpose was to expose the distorting element that memory interjects into the past", he draws a sharp distinction between collective memory and history. First, Halbwachs, sees memory as a subjective social construct that inevitably distorted the past to serve the present needs of a community. On the other hand, history is seen as adopting an objective stance towards the past. Second, Halbwachs argues that collective memory reaffirms the continuity between the past and the present. However, Halbwachs's maintains that history establishes a critical distance between past and present and,

"introduce(s) into the flow of events, breaks and periodisations based on criteria which were not those of the men who lived through them. Abstract, all-encompassing history

---

52 Koshar, R. *op cit*, p. 6.
54 However, as Lewis points out, "the purpose of changing the past is not to seek some abstract truth, but to achieve a new vision of the past better suited to their needs in the present and their aspirations for the future." Lewis, B. *History : Remembered, Recovered, Invented*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1975, p. 55. Yael Zerubavel takes a similar approach and stresses that distortion of the past is inherent in the way communities remember. "Collective memory divides the past into major stages, reducing complex historical events to basic plot structures. The power of collective memory does not lie in its accurate, systematic, or sophisticated mapping of the past, but in establishing basic images that articulate and reinforce a particular ideological stance." Zerubavel, Y. *Recovered Roots : Collective Memory and The Making of Israeli National Tradition*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1995, p. 8.
55 Zerubavel in fact argues that periodisation is essential to the structure of collective memory. "Collective memory provides an overall sense of the group's development by offering a system of periodisation that
ignores the plurality of the collective memories that correspond to the many groups constituting society.\textsuperscript{56}

Finally, Halbwachs argues that history can begin only when memory ends. He states that,

general history starts only when tradition ends and the social memory is fading or breaking up. So long as remembrance continues to exist, it is useless to set it down in writing or otherwise fix it in memory. Likewise the need to write the history of a period, a society, or even a person is only aroused when the subject is already too distant in the past to allow for the testimony of those who preserve some remembrance of it.\textsuperscript{57}

History happens when lived first-hand experience of a historical event dies out or becomes irrelevant to new groups. “When this occurs, the only means of preserving such remembrances is to write them down in a coherent narrative.”\textsuperscript{58}

For Halbwachs, memory “retains from the past only what still lives or is capable of living in the consciousness of the groups keeping the memory alive. By definition it does not exceed the boundaries of this group.”\textsuperscript{59} By contrast, history, as Halbwachs sees it, exists outside the memory of groups for, “what is truly the past for history is what is no longer included within the sphere of thought of existing groups.”\textsuperscript{60} Halbwachs argues therefore, that collective memory and history stand in direct opposition as methods of critically evaluating the past.\textsuperscript{61}

\hspace{1cm}

\textsuperscript{56} Wachtel, N. \textit{op cit}, p. 214.
\textsuperscript{57} Halbwachs, M. \textit{op cit}, p. 78 – 79.
\textsuperscript{58} \textit{ibid}, p. 79.
\textsuperscript{59} \textit{ibid}, p. 80.
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{ibid}, p. 106.
\textsuperscript{61} Samuel suggests that “it is perhaps a legacy of Romanticism that memory and history are so often placed in opposite camps” Samuel, R. \textit{op. cit.}, p.x. See also Hutton, P.H. \textit{Collective Memory and Collective Mentalities}, \textit{op cit}, pp. 312 - 317.
However, memory and history cannot be so neatly pigeon-holed as Halbwachs suggests. Patrick Hutton approaches history as an ‘art of memory’ and argues,

that history is an art of memory because it mediates the encounter between two moments of memory: repetition and recollection. Repetition concerns the presence of the past. It is the moment of memory through which we bear forward images of the past that continue to shape our present understanding in unreflective ways....Recollection concerns our present efforts to evoke the past. It is the moment of memory with which we consciously reconstruct images of the past in the selected way that suits the needs of our present situation. It is the opening between these two moments that makes historical thinking possible.62

By situating history between repetition and recollection, Hutton differentiates history from memory and at the same time suggests their interdependence. Paul Connerton is more direct and points out that historical reconstruction is independent of social memory, while “at the same time participating in the formation of a political identity and giving shape to the memory of a particular culture.”63 For Connerton memory and history are thus intertwined, with history shaping memory.

Such a point of view is followed also by Nathan Wachtel who states that, “historical memory constituted in this manner was thus univocal, unitary and unifying: it invited all the members of a society, however diverse their situations and respective points of view, to be united in a collective past.”64 Connerton refers

62 Hutton, P.H. History as an Art of Memory, op cit, pp xx-xxi.
63 Connerton, P. op cit, p. 16.
64 Wachtel, N. op cit, p. 217.
to "a historically tutored memory (as) opposed to an unreflective traditional memory." It can also be argued that the distinction Halbwachs makes between memory and history is overdrawn. Memory and history should not be seen as mutually exclusive, rather their interdependence needs to be acknowledged and emphasised. For example, "Ariès argues that there is no history that is not born of memory," and that most importantly, "memory can infiltrate history by providing access to hidden domains of the past long since obliterated by the official version of history proffered for public consumption."

Memory can act as a corrective and in fact, "challenge the biases, omissions, generalisations, and abstractions of history." Davis and Stam suggest that, "if anything, it is the tension or outright conflict between history and memory that seems necessary and productive. The explosive pertinence of a remembered detail may challenge repressive or merely complacent systems of prescriptive memory or history."

Despite the obvious interdependence, it is necessary to emphasise the differences between history and memory in order to understand how the deliberate

---

65 Connerton, P. op. cit., p. 16.
66 Samuel makes the point "that memory, so far from being merely a passive receptacle or storage system or image bank of the past, is rather an active, shaping force; that it is dynamic - what it contrives symptomatically to forget is as important as what it remembers - and that it is dialectically related to historical thought rather than being some kind of negative other to it." Samuel, R. op. cit., p.x.
68 ibid, p. 318.
69 Davis, N.Z. & Stam R. op cit., p. 5.
70 ibid.
blurring of the distinction gives rise to political myth. Such differences focus on
the present-past relationship. As Davis and Starn point out, “against memory’s
delight in similarity, appeal to the emotions, and arbitrary selectivity, history
would stand for critical distance71 and documented explanation.”72 Pierre Nora
succinctly sums up the differences as, “memory is absolute, while history can
only conceive the relative.”73 Because the stated aim of scholarly history is
concerned with critical analysis, Michael Frisch argues that,

memory has always proven difficult for historians to confront, committed as they are to
notions of objectivity beyond the definitive subjectivity of individual and collective recall.
Usually, the evidence of memory is considered as an information source to be confirmed by
scholarship.74

Historical reconstruction therefore must remain independent from social memory
in order to validate its claims to universal authority.75 As Nora states, “at the heart
of history is a critical discourse that is antithetical to spontaneous memory.
History is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress
and destroy it.”76 However, the historian is also the custodian of social memory77
which increasingly can be seen as a kind of official memory. Wachtel notes that,
“charged with reconstructing the past by collecting materials and archives, and
then with restoring it in a single account, the historian was a kind of delegate or
guarantor of this memory: it was his duty to reconstruct history for the entire

71 However, Huyssen argues that it is the maintenance of this ‘critical distance’ that has contributed to the
so-called ‘memory boom’. “The privileging of memory can be seen as our contemporary version of
Nietzsche’s attack on archival history, a perhaps justified critique of an academic apparatus producing
historical knowledge for its own sake, but often having trouble maintaining its vital links with the
surrounding culture. Memory, it is believed, will bridge that gap”. Huyssen, A. op cit, p.6.
72 Davis, N.Z. & Starn R. op cit, p. 4.
73 Nora, P. Between Memory and History : Les Lieux de Memoire, op cit, p. 9.
75 See Nora, Between Memory and History : Les Lieux de Memoire, op cit, pp. 8-9.
76 ibid, p. 9.
History, in its ideological guise as custodian of the memory of a political community, irretrievably alters memory by giving it a sense of order, continuity and objective authenticity. However, by incorporating memory within history, the past is brought into the present, thus undermining history’s claim to critical objectivity.

The blurring of the distinction between memory and history into what Bernard Lewis terms ‘remembered history’ is an important aspect of what constitutes a modern political myth. In his study of the political uses of history, Lewis categorises three types of history: remembered history, recovered history and invented history. Remembered history “consists of statements about the past, rather than history in the strict sense” and is presented as both reality and symbol. Remembered history, argues Lewis,

embody poetic and symbolic truth as understood by the people, even where it is inaccurate in detail, but it becomes false or is rejected as false when the desired self-image changes and the remembered past no longer corresponds to it or supports it. It is preserved in commemorative ceremonies and monuments, religious and later secular, and in the words and rituals associated with them - in pageantry and drama, song and recitation, chronicle and biography, epic and ballad and their modern equivalents, also in official celebrations, popular entertainment, and elementary education.”

The image of the past communicated by the Kosovo Myth can be characterised as ‘remembered history’ in that ‘poetic and symbolic truth’ is more important than historical objectivity. Lewis uses the words ‘recovered history’ to indicate the

---

77 See Burke, P. ‘History as Social Memory’ op cit, p. 97.
78 Wachtel, N. op cit, p. 217.
79 Lewis, B. op cit, p. 11.
80 ibid, p. 12.
conscious reconstruction of a forgotten past that has been repressed or rejected by communal memory. Reconstructed from archives and archaeological sites, recovered history can be made to serve current political needs. Invented history is fabricated for a political purpose. It is "devised and interpreted from remembered and recovered history where feasible, and fabricated where not."\textsuperscript{81} Lewis' categories of 'remembered', 'reconstructed' and 'invented' history to explain the poetic or symbolic image of the past that is constructed from the conscious incorporation of memory into history, is therefore an important insight into explaining the nature of the past as represented in modern political myths.

Paradoxically, the infusion of memory into history, as suggested by Lewis, is made possible by the virtual extinction of authentic memory by the way modern society perceives the past. The paradoxical relationship between modern memory and history is most fully developed by Pierre Nora. Nora argues that the defining feature of contemporary society is the separation of history from memory.

Memory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition. Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past. Memory, insofar as it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it.\textsuperscript{82}

Nora conceptualises memory in terms of a continual process; a socially

\textsuperscript{81} ibid.
\textsuperscript{82} Nora, P. \textit{Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire, op cit.}, p. 8.
constructed discourse as opposed to history's static and partial representation of the past. In his conceptualisation Nora is in basic agreement with my line of argument so far.

Nora, however, extends the conceptualisation of memory by suggesting that the separation of history from memory has a profound effect on the structure of memory itself. Nora argues that memory can no longer provide a coherent retrospective continuity between past and present. In fact, "the past is severed from the present almost entirely, sealed in a kind of protective wrapping, either of forgetfulness or artificial distance."83 To Nora the disjuncture between history and memory is caused by what he terms the 'acceleration of history', "an increasingly rapid slip of the present into a historical past that is gone for good, a general perception that anything and everything may disappear."84 Nora states that:

The "acceleration of history", then, confronts us with the brutal realisation of the difference between real memory - social and unviolated ... and history, which is how our hopelessly forgetful modern societies, propelled by change, organise the past. On the one hand, we find an integrated, dictatorial memory - unself-conscious, commanding, all-powerful, spontaneously actualising, a memory without a past that ceaselessly reinvents tradition, linking the history of its ancestors to the undifferentiated time of heroes, origins, and myth - and on the other hand, our memory, nothing more in fact than sifted and sorted historical traces. The gulf between the two has deepened in modern times with the growing belief in a right, a capacity, and even a duty to change"85.

It is necessary, Nora argues, to draw a sharp distinction between modern self-

83 Frisch, M. op cit, p. 17.
84 Nora, P. op cit, p. 7.
85 ibid., p. 8.
conscious memory and the *milieux de mémoire* or authentic environments of memory experienced by pre-modern societies.

Kritzman notes that in pre-modern societies memory is reenacted "through traditions and rituals where present and past exist simultaneously in a kind of atemporal space in which act and meaning coalesce." Nora characterises the pre-modern 'lifeworld' as having a 'memorial' rather than 'historical' consciousness in that time was perceived as continuous and memory so saturated all facets of life that it was not necessary for memory to be consciously invoked. However, to invoke memory in a modern historically conscious society where past, present and future are discrete temporalities and memory has been disassociated from traditions, customs and rituals, is to fundamentally transform memory. Memory fundamentally is transformed because it is no longer unselfconsciously experienced: now it is recreated deliberately through the medium of history. "The past is now apprehended as a ransacked storehouse of historical traces, while the present appears as an 'ephemeral film of current events.'" As Nora argues, "we speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left".

---


87 Nora's tendency towards generalisation can be disputed without necessarily undermining the broad thrust of his argument. In this case the degree to which traditions, customs and rituals have been disassociated from 'genuine' memory will vary between and among different political communities. Winter and Sivan correctly point out that Nora extrapolates generalities from specific French examples and that in this he is 'parochial' and displays an essentially French brand of 'cultural pessimism'. See Winter, J. & Sivan, E. (Eds.) *op cit*, p. 2.

What memory is left in modern societies is clustered around what Nora terms *lieux de mémoire*. Nora broadly defines a *lieu de mémoire* in the following terms:

If the expression *lieu de mémoire* must have an official definition, it should be this: a *lieu de mémoire* is any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage in any community.

Nora notes in his introduction to the English translation of *Les lieux de Mémoire* that there is no precise English equivalent to *lieu de mémoire* but accepts that the best possible translation is ‘realms of memory’ where a sense of historical continuity persists.

These (realms of memory) are fundamentally remains, the ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness that has barely survived in a historical age that calls out for memory because it has abandoned it. They make their appearance by virtue of the deritualisation of our world - producing, manifesting, establishing, constructing, decreeing, and maintaining by artifice and by will a society deeply absorbed in its own transformation and renewal, one that inherently values the new over the ancient, the young over the old, the future over the past. Museums, archives, cemeteries, festivals,

---

89 Nora, P. Between Memory and History : *Les Lieux de Mémoire* op cit, p. 7. In such statements, Nora is always implying the loss of genuine memory, that is memory that is 'authentically lived' rather than memory that is 'historically tutored'.


92 Nora, P. Between Memory and History : *Les Lieux de Mémoire* op cit, p. 7.
anniversaries, treaties, depositions, monuments, sanctuaries, fraternal orders - these are the boundary stones of another age, illusions of eternity.\(^{93}\)

For Nora such realms of memory are illusions for two reasons. First, the physical presence of a memory site is only important in that it provides a focus for articulating the cluster of symbolic meanings that define the memory of a political community. Memory sites are quintessentially symbolic, "(realms of memory) have no referent in reality; or, rather, they are their own referent: pure, exclusively self-referential signs."\(^{94}\) Second, realms of memory are consciously created. There must be the will to memorialise for "(realms of memory) originate with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory, that we must deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organise celebrations, pronounce eulogies ... because such activities no longer occur naturally."\(^{95}\) Illusory and contrived as they may be, realms of memory are invested with emotive symbolic significance and can become "'places' where memories converge, condense, conflict, and define relationships between past, present, and future."\(^{96}\)

Realms of memory are the objects of 'commemorative vigilance' for political communities defining their collective identity in the absence of the overarching ideological narratives that once linked past and future in a causal relationship. For Nora it is the severance of the past from the future that is particularly important to the sense of national continuity embodied by the nation state.

\(^{93}\) ibid, p. 12.
\(^{94}\) ibid, p. 23-24.
\(^{95}\) ibid, p. 12.
\(^{96}\) Davis, N.Z. & Stam R. op cit, p. 3.
The 'dissolution of the national myth', according to Nora, has the effect of making past and future into virtually autonomous instances. The future can no longer be predicted on the basis of an assumed historical trajectory and therefore in its very capriciousness becomes all the more menacing and preoccupying. The past, 'detached from the organising coherence of a history,' is rendered wholly patrimonial. It is under the sway of contemporary society's effective dissociation of past and future that Nora identifies memory's promotion to such an elevated social stature - 'as dynamic agent and sole promise of continuity.' 97

National memory and myth will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter: what is of relevance to my argument so far is Nora's conceptualisation of memory as an 'agent of continuity'; of memory clustered and anchored to identifiable realms of memory.

The complex interrelationship between memory and history is therefore a further component of the concept of a modern collective memory. I have argued in this section that memory and history, though apparently inextricably intertwined are essentially different in their relationship to the past. Memory is a subjective social construct that inevitably distorts the past to serve the present needs of a community by selectively establishing a sense of continuity between past and present. History, on the other hand, aims to be more objective in that it presents a unified coherent narrative of the past by establishing a critical distance between the past and present.

However, the need of political communities, particularly nation states, to define themselves in terms of a useable past has blurred the distinction between memory and history. The resulting hybrid, 'remembered history' is a

representation of the past that directly serves a political community's need for *symbolic truth* rather than historical accuracy. In this sense, it is also 'remembered history' that forms the core of modern political myths. Pierre Nora further develops a concept of a historically tutored memory and argues that in a modern historically conscious society there can be no authentic memory at all. For Nora, memory is deliberately recreated through the medium of history; it is invented in the sense that modern memory has no past. Modern memory is therefore an illusion; an illusion that clings to realms of memory that retain an aura of historical continuity and thus authenticity. Realms of memory are invested with overriding symbolic significance as the repositories of collective memories, however illusionary. Realms of memory therefore add a further dimension to the concept of collective memory.

3. Representations of The Past

In conceptualising collective memory to this point I have focused on three aspects: its communicative role; its interrelationship with history and its close association to realms of memory. Each of these components of collective memory is to be found in a political myth. However, it is the way memory is constructed to underpin the legitimacy of a community that gives myth its political meaning. Throughout my discussion the 'politics of memory' has been alluded but not fully developed. The political dimensions of collective memory will focus on a further four aspects. First, the way representations of the past are collectively constructed by a political community to legitimate present needs. Second, how group identity,
especially national identity, is sustained by memory through the construction of a common heritage. Third, how nostalgic yearning can transform and reframe collective memory through the construction of a sentimentalised imagined past. Finally, the role media plays in fashioning and refashioning the collective memories of a community. Taken together, these four aspects of collective memory represent a politics of memory in the form of socially constructed representations of the past to legitimate the present.

3.1. A Useable Past

Political communities evoke images of the past to legitimate the present. For Halbwachs, memory ‘colonised the past’, which was reconfigured and integrated into the present and forced to conform to the current needs of the group. Individually and collectively, “people reshape their recollections of the past to fit their present needs,” so that memory is ‘constructed’ rather than reproduced. Kammen argues that historical objectivity is not the point, for “societies in fact reconstruct their pasts rather than faithfully record them ... they do so with the needs of contemporary culture clearly in mind - manipulating the

---

98 Thelen, D. *op cit.* p.1121.
99 For Halbwachs objectivity was precluded by the very nature of memory. for “a remembrance is in very large measure a reconstruction of the past achieved with data borrowed from the present, a reconstruction prepared, furthermore, by reconstructions of earlier periods wherein past images had already been altered.” Halbwachs, M. *op cit.* p. 69. In his article on *History as Social Memory*, Peter Burke adds that, “his traditional account of the relation between memory and written history, in which memory reflects what actually happened and history reflects memory, now seems rather too simple. Both history and memory are coming to appear increasingly problematic. Remembering the past and writing about it no longer seem the innocent activities they were once taken to be. Neither memories nor histories seem objective any longer. In both cases we are learning to take account of conscious and unconscious selection, interpretation and distortion. In both cases the selection, interpretation and distortion is socially conditioned.” Burke, P. *op cit.* p. 97 - 98.
past in order to mould the present.” 100 While ostensibly evoking the past, memory actually concerns the present. “According to Halbwachs, the work of group memory is to respond to the needs of present action: the latter acting as a filter ... chooses between forgetting and transmitting traditions, so that traditions are modified as groups change”. 101 Memory therefore is relative, not only reflecting the changing needs of the group but reflecting the power of a group to define and frame its own memories and impose them on competing groups.

Memory is about the politics of the present, not the past. The images of the past evoked by memory are powerful because “memory builds an emotional link to the past rather than a critical perspective on it.” 102 Davis and Stam warn that it is because “images of the past commonly legitimate a present social order” 103 and that these images are the conscious product of a socially constructed memory, that the politics of memory must be “relentlessly exposed”. 104 Collective memory is not intrinsically concerned with the past as the past, but in reconfiguring the past to legitimate the present needs of a political community. “Since people’s memories provide security, authority, legitimacy, and finally identity in the present, struggles over the possession and interpretation of memories are deep, frequent, and bitter.” 105

---

100 Kammen, M. Mystic Chords of Memory, op cit, p. 3.
101 Wachtel, N. op cit, p. 212.
102 Hutton, P.H. 'The Role of Memory in the Historiography of the French Revolution,' op cit, pp. p. 58.
103 Connerton, P. op cit, p.3.
104 Davis N.Z & Stam, R. op cit, p. 4.
105 Thelen, D. op cit, p.1126. This point is also made by Michael Kammen. “Memory is, by definition, a term which directs our attention not to the past but to the past-present relation. It is because ‘the past’ has this
In his study, *Politics and Remembrance*, Smith argues that "political memory is the concrete conceptualisation of the experience of a people." However, I have argued that such a conceptualisation is neither fixed, objective or universally accepted. The collective experience of a people is also contested. The ability of a political community to have its interpretation of the past generally accepted is thus an important source of legitimacy. For a start, a political community must define its identity and validate its claim to legitimacy by claiming the sanction of the past. Political communities seek "universal acceptance of their interpretation of the past and ... suppress interpretations which were likely to deprive them of legitimacy." By suppressing the potential delegitimating memories of their opponents a political community is in effect imposing a collective amnesia about specific events and people. Suppressed memories however, have the potential to become the focus of attempts by rival political communities to both legitimate themselves and delegitimate their opponents. The process of privileging one interpretation over another can lead to the construction of widely differing narratives of the same event. Events or experiences are not in themselves fixed for they are used to legitimise present social, political and cultural interests. ‘Fixing’ events or experiences requires a political community to readjust its relationship to the past; to rework the narrative that confers legitimacy.

107 Gildea, R. *op cit*, p. 11. The following discussion on the political struggle to control memory owes much to Gildea’s study of the uses of the past in French History.
In his analysis of *The Past in French History*, Robert Gildea states that his study sets out “to explore the relationship between political culture and collective memory .... What defines a political culture above all is not some sociological factor such as race or class or creed but collective memory, that is, the collective construction of the past by a given community”\(^{109}\). Gildea bases his approach on two assertions, specifically related to French history but generally applicable to other societies. His first assertion is “that there is no single French collective memory but parallel and competing collective memories elaborated by communities which have experienced and handle the past in different ways.”\(^{110}\) Gildea’s second assertion is “that the past is constructed not objectively but as myth, in the sense not of fiction, but of a past constructed collectively by a community in such a way as to serve the political claims of that community.”\(^{111}\)

Gildea argues that the construction and elaboration of collective memories define rival parallel political cultures and frame their claims to legitimacy. Such claims to legitimacy reveal three closely related aspects of the process by which political communities collectively construct the past. The first aspect is the way in which political communities have striven to achieve acceptance of their own particular interpretation of the past as universal and objective, and to suppress other interpretations of events which might deprive them of legitimacy. Those rival interpretations represented a past from which they were anxious to escape, but which their enemies were determined should haunt them.\(^{112}\)

\(^{109}\) Gildea, R. *op cit*, p. 10.
\(^{110}\) *ibid*.
\(^{111}\) *ibid*.
\(^{112}\) *ibid*, p. 340.
The second aspect is "the way in which rival political communities have seized on the same figure or events, and presented them in entirely different fashions in order to establish the legitimacy of their own cause."\textsuperscript{113} The third aspect is "the way in which collective memories have been modified in the light of events, which have either permitted the political communities they served to secure a new legitimacy, or resulted in that legitimacy being eroded."\textsuperscript{114} To Gildea's three aspects of the process by which political communities collectively construct the past must be added Michael Kammen's categories of what is remembered.

Kammen distinguishes between three categories of what is remembered by a community. The first category contains those memories and traditions that have become established over time and generally contain the foundation myth that defines a political community. The second category contains those memories and traditions that are of more recent origin and tend to be more frequently contested. These memories are more partisan and can be regarded as "self-serving rationalisations that sustain the political or economic superiority of one group or the value system of another."\textsuperscript{115} The third category contains pseudo-memories and traditions that are so recent in origin that their invocation "we dismiss as mere nostalgia, as the exploitation of heritage, or as the utilisation of utterly contrived myths."\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{113} \textit{ibid}.
\textsuperscript{114} \textit{ibid}, p. 340.
\textsuperscript{115} Kammen, M. \textit{Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture}, \textit{op cit}, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{116} \textit{ibid}.
Three closely related characteristics of collective memory can be synthesised from the discussion of how the past is used to legitimate the present. The first characteristic is that collective memory reconfigures the past in the form of myth to legitimate the present needs of a political community. The other characteristics stem from the fact that any interpretation of the past is inevitably contested. Therefore, the second characteristic is that the ability of a political community to have its interpretation of the past generally accepted is an important source of legitimacy. Any struggle for legitimacy thus gives rise to the third characteristic which is the emergence of parallel and competing collective memories which are continually readjusted and modified to meet the current legitimacy needs of a political community.

These general characteristics are overlain with a further three categories of collective memory. The categories roughly coincide with: long established and generally accepted collective memories; more recent collective memories which are frequently contested; and contrived pseudo-memories which are either invented outrightly or based on a sentimentalised nostalgia for the past. The categories should not in themselves be seen as indicators of a political community's success in using the past as an important source of legitimacy. Of greater significance to a political community is its ability to form, appropriate and identify with the dominant memories of a whole community. The dominant memories of a society must be examined in relation to subordinate and public memories within the broader context of those memories that are forgotten or repressed.
3.2 Competing Memories

The dominant or ‘official’ memories of a society reflect those of the elite that seeks to present a past, “in such a way as to buttress and legitimise their own authority, and to affirm the rights and merits of the group they lead.” Elite memory “desires to present the past on an abstract basis of timelessness and sacredness.” A seamless continuity is established between a sacred point of origin and the present; an idealised narrative that emphasises social, political and cultural unity. The idealised narrative is supported by what Gillis refers to as “a vast bureaucracy of memory.” Thus, ‘official memory’ is entrenched in the archives and data banks of the political, economic and administrative institutions of the nation-state. Official memory is also sacralised by a historiography that not only charts the rise of the nation but reduces the past to the political history of the national elite. Dominant memories have helped fix national boundaries and define national identity. The dominant memories of the elite are conflated with the collective memories of the nation-state itself. In the name of national unity alternative memories are either subordinated and repressed or, as Thelen points out, subtly undermined. “Faced with people’s tendency to widen and deepen their positive associations with remembered realities when confronted by imposed change,

117 Lewis, B. *op cit*. p. 53.
118 Bodnar, J. ‘Public memory in an American City: Commemoration in Cleveland’ *op cit*. p. 75.
120 For a more detailed analysis of the legitimating function of a national historiography see Lewis, B. *op cit*.
Collective Memory

leaders have invented traditions and myths whose repetition will, they hope, at least weaken the confidence of tradition-minded peoples in their memories."\^122

Dominant memories are further reinforced by elite control over the commemorative process. In his study of modern memory in the United States, Bodnar argues that national elites,

orchestrate commemorative events to calm anxiety about change or political events, eliminate citizen indifference toward official concerns, promote exemplary patterns of citizen behaviour, and stress citizen duties over rights. They feel the need to do this because of the existence of social contradictions, alternative views, and indifference that perpetuates fears of societal dissolution and unregulated political behaviour.\(^\text{123}\)

The need to control the commemorative process becomes particularly urgent during a legitimation crisis. "When a society undergoes rapid developments that shatter its social and political order, its need to restructure the past is as great as its desire to set its future agenda."\(^\text{124}\) The way such a reconstructed past is communicated through rituals, ceremonies and parades performed in appropriate ritual spaces will be the subject of chapter 6 on commemoration.

Dominant memories are rarely hegemonic and must co-exist with a wide variety of subordinate memories. Popular or vernacular memories are subordinate in that they reflect the experiences and needs of minorities or smaller sub-groups. As such, subordinate memories don’t support or correspond necessarily to the ‘official’ memories of the larger ‘imagined community’. In fact, subordinate

\(^{121}\) See Gillis, P. *op cit*, p. 6.
\(^{122}\) Thelen, D. *op cit*, p.1126.
\(^{123}\) Bodnar, J. *op cit*, p.76.
memories are often created in opposition to official memories in order to maintain sub-group identity and resist change. Because subordinate memories are fragmented they have the potential to threaten the unifying nature of 'official' memories.

Subordinate memories are generally not institutionalised in the form of monuments, archives or clearly defined permanent sites of memory. Unlike elite memory that seeks to impose a continuous narrative on the whole community, subordinate memory focuses on events specific to their survival as a group or the maintenance of their values.

Between dominant and subordinate memory there exists what Bodnar refers to as public memory, which "emerges from the intersection of official and vernacular cultural expressions". Bodnar argues that public memory is not just a construction of the past but a "communicative and cognitive process" that:

involves the fundamental issues relating to the entire existence of a society: its organisation, structure of power, and the very meaning of its past and present. Rooted in the quest to interpret reality and connect the past with the present, the ideas and symbols of public memory attempt to mediate the contradictions of a social system: ethnic and national, men and women, young and old, professionals and clients, leaders and followers, soldiers and their commanders. The competing restatements of reality expressed by these antinomies drive the need for reconciliation and the use of symbols, beliefs, and stories that people can use to understand and to dominate others.

125 Bodnar, J. op cit, p. 75.
126 ibid, p. 75 – 76.
Public memory in the sense that Bodnar uses it is, therefore, a socially constructed discourse that draws together and mediates between disparate memories to create a mediated, cohesive collective memory.

Bodnar's concept of a public memory that mediates between dominant and subordinate memories necessarily involves forgetting. However, collective forgetting in the name of a cohesive social memory can also give rise to coercive forgetting that reinforces the dominant memory of a society. What a nation, state or group chooses to forget is often just as important as what is remembered. Burke stresses that it is not just what is left out that is important but the "question of who wants whom to forget what, and why."\(^{127}\) In the name of unity and social cohesion, divisive memories are consciously 'edited out', a process Benedict Anderson refers to as collective amnesia.

Michael Kammen feels that there is a greater tendency towards amnesia in the United States because of the "American inclination to depoliticise the past in order to minimise memories ( and causes ) of conflict."\(^{128}\) The social divisions caused by the Vietnam War for example, were submerged by what Hagopian refers to "as a time of 'amnesia', when the American public wanted to forget the war and ignore the veterans in their midst."\(^{129}\) Collective amnesia can be

\(^{127}\) Burke, P. \textit{op cit}, p. 108.

\(^{128}\) Kammen, M. \textit{Mystic Chords of Memory : The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture}, \textit{op cit}, p.701.

\(^{129}\) Hagopian, P. \textit{Oral Narratives : Secondary Revision and the Memory of the Vietnam War}, \textit{History Workshop}, Issue 32, Autumn 1991, p. 146. Kammen points out that a similar process took place in the two decades that followed the American Civil War. National unity and reconciliation took precedence over sectional memories. "To achieve these goals, amnesia emerged as a bonding agent far preferable to memory. Picking at scabs on old wounds would not advance the paramount goal of reconciliation." Kammen, M. \textit{In the Past Lane : Historical Perspectives on American Culture}, \textit{op cit}, p.204.
understood as part of the social healing process, but it can also be an escape from an unpalatable episode. In a series of rhetorical questions Wallace succinctly asks: "Is amnesia the tribute memory pays to expediency? Can there be a desire not to know? Is not truth unwelcome in certain circumstances?" Such an unpalatable episode would include the holocaust in German collective memory.

The dominant memory of a society can also be imposed through a process of eliminating all subordinate and potentially delegitimizing memories. The systematic drive by totalitarian governments to obliterate memory and impose a state of collective amnesia on its citizens is well evoked in George Orwell's 1984 and in Milan Kundera's Book of Laughter and Forgetting. Kundera makes his point in the introduction with a quote by the Czech historian Milan Hubl. "the first step in liquidating a people is to erase its memory. Destroy its books, its culture, its history ... Before long the nation will forget what it is, and what it was."

Vaclav Havel made a similar point in an open letter in 1975 to President Husak, whom Kundera refers to as 'the president of forgetting.' “One has the impression that for some time there has been no history. Slowly but surely, we are

130 “Memory distortion also occurs commonly in postcolonial situations where the creation of national identity is necessary for functional reasons of political and cultural cohesion.” ibid, p.210.
132 “Powerful creators and imposers of historical change, like George Orwell’s Big Brother, fear that they will fail to win popular approval for their changes so long as people combine their private memories of a warm and unchanged past with the local customs and folkways of community, workplace, and religion. Big Brother could triumph only when he persuaded people that they could no longer trust the authenticity of their memories as a yardstick against which to evaluate his assertions.” Thelen, D. op cit, p.1126.
133 Kundera, M. op cit.
134 Quoted by Butler, T. 'Memory a Mixed Blessing' in Butler, T. [Ed.] op cit, p. 9.
losing the sense of time. We begin to forget what happened when, what came earlier and what later, and the feeling that it really doesn't matter overwhelms us."\(^{135}\). Koonz refers to the process of forced forgetting as "organised oblivion;"\(^{136}\) as an attempt to impose a single narrative by suppressing any alternative memories that have the potential to construct rival and possibly delegitimizing narratives. However, totalitarian attempts to obliterate memory are also met by what Connerton refers to as the 'relentless recorders'; people like Solzhenitsyn and Wiesel whose writings helped preserve the memory of suppressed individuals, social groups or the nation itself.

The recovery of memory can also come from the top down as Hosking shows in his study of Memory in a Totalitarian Society. Gorbachev understood that further progress with Perestroika depended upon the recovery of memory, for "a society without a (tolerably authentic) knowledge of its past is strongly handicapped in its dealing with the future."\(^{137}\) Gorbachev stated that "when we seek the roots of today's difficulties and problems, we do this in order to comprehend their origin and to draw lessons for present-day life from events that go deep into the 1930's"\(^{138}\). One of these recovered memories was to be the massacre of Polish officers at Katyn during World War II which will be discussed in appendix 1.

\(^{135}\) Quoted by Koonz, C. 'Between Memory and Oblivion: Concentration Camps in German Memory', in Gillis, J.R. [Ed.] op cit, p. 258.

\(^{136}\) Ibid.


\(^{138}\) Quoted by Hosking, G.A. ibid, p. 120.
3.3. Memory and Identity

One of the most powerful sources of legitimacy for any political community is the successful identification of itself with the nation, which in turn is largely legitimated by national memory. As Koshar states:

Just as individual identity is considered to be the result of negotiation between past experience, present self-awareness, and anticipation of future action, national identity is seen as a product of contest and negotiation involving the alignment of past, present, and future in some meaningful relationship.¹³⁹

National identity is made up of a cluster of politically potent collective memories¹⁴⁰ that together construct a meaningful relationship and provide a consciousness of national distinctiveness and unity. It is a sense of a common identity that lies at the heart of Benedict Anderson's thesis that modern nations are "imagined political communities"¹⁴¹, that have been constructed and reconstructed. Anderson's approach to nations and nationalism rejects traditional scholarship "that saw nations as inevitable, virtually organic, and universal entities drawing on relatively fixed traditions based on objective characteristics."¹⁴² Instead Anderson stresses the 'discursivity' of the nation as an 'imagined' or 'invented' entity, which is consciously and continuously 'constructed' through the manipulation of memory and tradition. While basically

---

¹³⁹ Koshar, R. op cit, p. 9.
¹⁴⁰ The multi-faceted nature of national memories is emphasised by Koshar. "I consider national memory as a type of collective and public memory, which consists of "narrative-practical modes of discourse" whose goal is to facilitate shared identities by situating collectivities (nations, states, regions, cities, classes, genders, business corporation, religious institutions, or voluntary associations) in meaningful historical sequences. Since historical sequences include the notion of past, present, and future, public memory looks forward as it directs its gaze backward in time." ibid, p. 10.
¹⁴² Koshar, R.. op cit, p. 8.
agreeing with Anderson’s approach to the nation as an imagined construction, Koshar insists that, “the process of imagining the nation is itself not quite as abstract as Anderson and others insist, since it takes place in historically and spatially specific spaces.” Koshar takes Anderson’s insight but balances the degree of ‘inventiveness’ against pre-existing national memories.

Nations may be imagined, but nationalist speech makers, preservers of historic sites, and composers of national anthems do not have unlimited scope to invent and manipulate cultural images inherited from the past because those images exert and unmistakable pull on the present.... The actual scope of social engineering, the degree to which ideologues and state agencies can get populations to imagine or invent the nation, is delimited by historical factors.

The historical context for the process of national identity construction must be taken into account. What is important in the process is that what constitutes the identity of a nation is fluid, dynamic and often contested. However, any political community seeking to make its view of the past the basis of national identity must define and ‘fix’ such an identity to secure its own legitimacy. It is achieved by conceptualising the nation as a mythic, sacred, given entity. Such a construct is underpinned by nationalist ideologies and the idea of a common heritage. In turn, identity construction relies on the symbiotic relationship between identity and memory and the effect it has on the collective memory of the political community.

The effects of such a symbiotic relationship is particularly apparent when

143 ibid.
144 ibid.
the collective memories of a political community are framed within an all-encompassing national identity. For a start, "the notion of identity depends on the idea of memory, and vice versa. The core meaning of any individual or group identity, namely, a sense of sameness over time and space, is sustained by remembering; and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity."145 It is a dynamic process as memory both "preserves the store of knowledge from which a group derives an awareness of its unity and peculiarity" and reconstructs that knowledge "within a contemporary frame of reference."146 A group's awareness of itself as a unity; its self-image and particularity, is preserved in accumulated texts, images and rituals and conveyed by symbols. This self-image or identity is based on a collectively shared knowledge of the past that is expressed within a contemporary context.

Assmann argues, "that a group bases its consciousness of unity and specificity upon such knowledge and derives formative and normative impulses from it, which allows the group to reproduce its identity."147 Identity, like memory, is not fixed, unchanging and naturally given. Englund's proviso to any analysis of the connection between collective memory and national identity is valid to my study. He states, "it follows that when actors speak of (or to) this

145 Gillis, J.R. 'Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship' op cit, p. 3. Davis and Stam accept this nexus between memory and identity but question how function can be separated from content. "We can say, as is often said, that identity depends on memory, whether we mean by that a core self that remembers its earlier state or, poststructurally, the narratives that construct (and deconstruct) identities by comparing "once upon a time" and "here and now". The identity-defining functions of memory are real enough, but can we separate contents from functions? For that matter, if memory is shaped by mythologies, ideologies, and narrative strategies why should we even try to remember what actually happened in the past? And yet if we give up trying, where does that leave history except as a special category of fiction?" Davis, N.Z. & Stam R. op cit, p. 4.


147 ibid, p.128.
Collective Memory

nexus... it has already become a political statement and must be studied as we would study an ideological construct"148. The memory invoked to construct a national past is subjective.149 It is used to restore, recover and reconstruct an imagined collective identity from a largely ill-defined past. Identity, therefore should be seen as a symbolic process that is highly subjective: "inscriptive rather than descriptive, (thus) serving particular interests and ideological positions."150

Gillis' observation that "we are constantly revising our memories to suit our current identities"151 does not sit well with nationalists who "believe profoundly in the uniqueness of their cultural identity."152 However, Gillis points out that, "today, the constructed nature of identities is becoming evident, particularly in the Western world, where the old bases of national identities are being rapidly undermined by economic globalisation and transnational integration."153 Huyssen also argues that globalisation is changing the nature of national memory, for, "in an age of emerging supranational structures, the problem of national identity is increasingly discussed in terms of cultural or collective memory rather than in terms of assumed identity of nation and state."154 It is for such a reason that the state has become increasingly involved in questions of national identity. The plethora of state run commemorations in most nations

149 See Lewis for the connections between the development of nationalist historiographies during the romantic period. Lewis, B. op cit, p.65.
150 Gillis, J.R. op cit, p. 4.
151 ibid, p. 3.
153 Gillis, J.R. Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship, op cit, p. 4.
154 Huyssen, A. op cit, p.5.
testifies to the active role played by the state in the construction and reconstruction of national memory.

The growing involvement of the state as the custodian of national memory is one of the central themes of Michael Kammen's detailed study of the role of memory and tradition in American culture. In the years preceding the New Deal, a powerful presumption lingered on (far longer in the United States than in Europe) that government bore virtually no responsibility for matters of collective memory, not even for the nation’s political memory. That assumption, clearly rooted in the democratic ethos of a people's republic, stood for more than a century as a major impediment to the sustained role of tradition in American culture. If people wished to commemorate an anniversary, celebrate a battle, or save a historic site, they would have to take the initiative.\textsuperscript{155}

However, the social crisis represented by the Great Depression and the need for social cohesion during World War II and the Cold War drew the Federal Government into assuming responsibility for American memory. Kammen points out that the trend followed already established European practice and that even though "the government of the United States is notably non-coercive about national memory,"\textsuperscript{156} its central role is now firmly established.

The central role of the state as the custodian of the national memory has strengthened at the same time as the concept of the nation itself is increasingly challenged. On the one hand nationalist ideology constructs the nation-state as a bounded entity; bounded temporally, spatially and culturally. Temporal

\textsuperscript{155} Kammen, M. \textit{Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture}, \textit{op cit}, p. 54-55.

\textsuperscript{156} \textit{ibid}, p. 700.
Collective Memory

boundaries are either defined by a definite point of origin, usually in the form of a creation myth or by construction of a historical narrative tracing the national entity back into a remote past. Spatial boundaries are also historically determined and encompass a geographical region whose inhabitants share a common nationality. Cultural diversity within the nation-state is usually recognised, accepted and celebrated as long as it does not challenge or threaten the constructed national identity. National identity becomes both a way to unify a people and a way to distinguish them from other national entities. Nationalists "also believe that the boundaries they construct to define that identity are naturally given and not a symbolic construction of their own devising." 158

The sacralisation of the nation through the ritualisation and commemoration of a national past produced the secular equivalent of sacred sites, sacred days and a sacred history, so that "through the nation our memory continued to rest upon a sacred foundation." 159 On the other hand, the sanctity of the nation as the unifying framework of collective identity has been weakened. Historical "narratives of national destiny, which underpinned the political logic of the nation-state" 160 are increasingly irrelevant for, "the reality is that the nation is no longer the site or frame of memory for most people." 161

157 As Lowenthal observes "in celebrating symbols of their histories, societies in fact worship themselves". Lowenthal, D. Identity, Heritage, and History, op cit, p. 46.
158 Handler, R. op cit, p. 30.
159 Nora, P. "Between Memory and History : Les Lieux de Mémoire", op cit, p. 11. This national identity is dependent upon the possession of a unique heritage. Unique, because it is emblematic of a common shared culture while at the same time being unknown and alien to others.
161 Gillis, J.R. op cit, p. 17.
Gillis points out that in desacrilising the nation-state, the task for historians has now become one of “finding useable pasts capable of serving the heterogeneity of new groups.” The task of finding ‘useable pasts’ is the core of Pierre Nora’s project. To Nora the advent of a national memory is a consequence of the dissolution of a national history. Nora states that: Englund, S. ‘The Ghost of Nation Past’, *Journal of Modern History*, 64, June 1992.

The idea of national memory is a recent phenomenon. In the past there was one national history together with various group memories, essentially private in character: a history largely mythological in structure as well as function; unified, even though each of its constituent elements might include matters about which opinions were divided; and primarily dispensed by the school. A vast recitative, sufficiently homogeneous as to its framework, chronology, obligatory turning points, consecrated figures, and hierarchy of events to permit communication between its scholarly version and its elementary version, between the universities and the primary schools, and to allow complete penetration of the social fabric.

Such an overarching historical narrative of national destiny that closely links the known past with an assured future has become fragmented. However, for Nora, it is the fragmentation of a national historical narrative that gives rise to national memory.

National memory cannot come into being until the historical framework of the nation has been shattered. It reflects the abandonment of the traditional channels and modes of transmission of the past and the desacralization of such primary sites of initiation as the school, the family, the museum, and the monument: what was once the responsibility of these institutions has now flowed over into the public domain and been taken over by the media and tourist industry.

162 *ibid*, p. 19.


164 *ibid*, p. 636.
What has been left is a ‘virtual memory’ of the nation and for Nora the concept of
the memory of the nation, the ‘memorial nation’, forms the basis for modern
national consciousness. Englund comments that:

The memory of ‘the Nation’ that anchors the new alliance of state and society is best
conceived not as an overarching, consensual representation of a common national past,
but as the affective investment of a specific set of “lieux de mémoire” which resonate
with social and individual needs for collective belonging. For it is the emotive force of
national memories that has given them their magnetic, contagious and volatile character
in the life of modern nation-states.\(^{165}\)

It is a subtle, yet important distinction, given sharper focus by Englund’s criticism
of Nora’s presentation of the nation as a “revered collective personification.”\(^ {166}\)
Englund argues that instead of conceptualising the nation, or the memory of the
nation, in terms of a ‘given reality’, the nation should be seen in terms of the
political process, what he calls the “politics of nation”\(^ {167}\). The nation is
approached as an “essentially contested concept .... one ideological representation
(among others) of the polity/society nexus.”\(^ {168}\) Koshar takes a similar approach
and argues that, “conflicts over the public memory of the nation - and therefore
over the role of memory in modernity - have produced not the national continuity
of ideologues’ fantasies but a malleable yet consistent discourse about
continuity.”\(^ {169}\)

Approaching the nation, or the memory of the nation, as a contested
ideological construct, as a consistent discourse about continuity, draws attention
to the interrelationship between memory and identity and the importance that

---

\(^{165}\) Wood, N. op cit, p. 131.
\(^{166}\) Englund, S. op cit, pp. 314 - 316.
\(^{167}\) ibid, p. 316.
\(^{168}\) ibid, p. 315.
competing political communities place on symbolically identifying themselves with the ‘national memory’. National memory however, is a contested domain for “memory and tradition...represent not just sources of power for elites but also a potential source of noncompliance or even resistance for the powerless.”170 David Lowenthal observes that “so demanding are national attachments to identity that they often leave little room for individual, local, or regional heritage.”171

In most nations the localised traditions of social, ethnic and cultural groups have been forced to give way before the imposed traditions of an official cohesive and homogeneous national culture. The forced forgetting is important to sustaining national unity however, for as Burke points out, the victors “can afford to forget, while the losers are unable to accept what happened and are condemned to brood over it, relive it, and reflect how different it might have been.”172 Despite what Lowenthal refers to as the “obsessive emphasis on exclusive, unique, and fiercely acquisitive national identities”173 the process has been increasingly contested. Groups define themselves in opposition to ‘official history’ and imposed memory asserted from above. They assert their identity and the uniqueness of their origins through the construction of counter-memories.174

Counter-memories are buttressed by legitimating traditions, whether

169 Koshar, R. *op cit*, p. 11.
170 *ibid*, p. 10.
172 Burke, P. *History as Social Memory*, *op cit*, p. 106. “Bereft of place and power, land and language, they may doubly cherish a glorified past as all they have left”. Lowenthal, D. *op cit*, p. 48.
173 *ibid*, p. 51.
174 See Wachtel, N. *Memory and History: An Introduction*, *op cit*, p. 218.
'recovered', 'invented' or 'reinvented'. Such counter-memories are also not just holding actions against the centralising tendencies of official memories. Often they seek to supplant official memories for, "modern memory was born not just from the sense of a break with the past, but from an intense awareness of the conflicting representations of the past and the effort of each group to make its version the basis of national identity." Competing groups therefore seek to appropriate to themselves the icons of national identity to legitimate their claims to be the guardians of 'official memory'. Icons of identity can become also the focus for international tension and conflict.

3.4. Heritage and Nostalgia

Icons of national identity are symbolic distillations of the cluster of collective memories that underpin national consciousness. Together, icons make up the distinctive heritage of a culture. It is the symbolic quality of heritage that leads David Lowenthal to use the term heritage as,

the term that best denotes our inescapable dependence on the past. What we inherit is integral to our being. Without memory and tradition we could neither function now nor plan ahead. .... heritage distills the past into icons of identity, bonding us with precursors and progenitors, with our own earlier selves, and with our promised successors. Heritage is thus a collective symbol of the past, an assertion of historical continuity that underlines the foundation myth. The uniqueness of a distinctive

175 Gillis, J.R. op cit, p. 8.
177 Lowenthal states that "To serve as a collective symbol heritage must be widely accepted by insiders, yet inaccessible to outsiders. Its data are social, not scientific. Socially binding traditions must be accepted on faith, not on reasoning. Heritage thus defies empirical analysis." Lowenthal, D. Identity, Heritage, and History, op cit, p. 49.
Collective Memory

heritage is therefore what gives a group its separate identity. The formation of a separate identity in turn suggests that the use of identity in cross-cultural comparisons is relatively meaningless. However, Lowenthal argues that the global concern for the construction of identity based on heritage has many common features.

People the world over refer to aspects of their heritage in the same way. Although they stress quite distinctive histories and traditions, these evince similar concerns with precedence, antiquity, continuity, coherence, heroism, sacrifice. Even when exalting unique heroes and virtues, different peoples celebrate success, stability, progress in much the same way.

Political communities wishing to protect or enhance ethnic or national identities must preserve or invent a viable heritage. As Lowenthal comments, “the erosion of viable alternative modes of self-construction may seem regrettable, but it cannot be denied that a personalised Western sense of identity is now adopted and internalised right around the world.” While basically supporting Lowenthal’s argument, Handler states that, “this discourse on identity, though global, is recent. It testifies to the rapid spread of hegemonic ideas about modernity and ethnicity than it does to the universality of collective concerns about identity.” However, it is the global spread of an acceptance of the essential link between identities and heritage that makes cross-cultural analysis of the way groups reconstruct and reimagine themselves possible. Analysis is

178 Despite its current vogue as a scholarly and cultural construct, Handler argues that the concept of identity should be used cautiously in cross-cultural analysis. “We cannot simply appropriate from our own, mid-twentieth-century discourse the term “identity” to use as a cross-cultural analytic operator ... many other people ... do not use the concept of identity as we do, or at all; nor do they understand human personhood and social collectivities in terms of what identity implies. Our examination of these other world views should give us occasion to recognise what is peculiar in our own discourse rather than to discover elsewhere what we imagine to be the universality of our own ways of thinking”. Handler, R. op cit, p. 37.

179 Lowenthal, D. op cit, p. 44.

180 It should be noted that heritage can also present a counterpoint to ‘official history’. Samuel develops this position in Samuel, R. op. cit., pp. 158-165, 205-226
possible because "the growth of concern about identity, and the concomitant pursuit of "heritage" now felt required to sustain it, is ingrained into individual and collective awareness the world over."183

My argument is that a political community must define its identity and validate its claim to legitimacy by claiming the sanction of the past. However, in evoking images of what Frederick Jameson refers to as "a past beyond all but aesthetic retrieval"184 a political community often taps into powerful nostalgic yearnings. These nostalgic yearnings can transform and reframe collective memory through the construction of a sentimentalised imagined past. The relationship between memory and nostalgia is thus an important dimension to conceptualising collective memory. The power of nostalgia to transform memory lies in the emotional links that nostalgia forges with the past. Nostalgia is essentially a structure of feeling that establishes an emotional link with the past which is "tinged frequently with a certain sadness or even melancholy."185 The emotional response stems from a fundamental sense of loss that is experienced in the present and in this respect, "nostalgia (thus) tells us more about present moods than about past realities."186

181 Lowenthal, D. op cit, p. 45
183 Lowenthal, D. op cit, p. 45
186 ibid, p. 10.
Fred Davis's analysis of nostalgia in *Yearning For Yesterday* finds that "the sources of nostalgic sentiment are to be found in felt threats to continuity of identity." 187 The perceived threats to continuity are "most likely to occur in the wake of periods of severe cultural discontinuity." 188 The experience of modernism itself is one source of discontinuity and Michael Kammen describes the ambiguous relationship between future-oriented modernity and past-oriented nostalgia as "perversely symbiotic." 189 "Nostalgia becomes possible at the same time as utopia. The counterpart to the imagined future is the imagined past." 190 The nostalgic past is imagined as a refuge from the experience of modernity, an experience most succinctly described by Marshall Berman in *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*.

To be modern ... is to experience personal and social life as a maelstrom, to find one's world and oneself in perpetual disintegration and renewal, trouble and anguish, ambiguity and contradiction: to be a modernist is to make oneself somehow at home in the maelstrom, to make its rhythms one's own, to move within its currents in search of the forms of reality, of beauty, of freedom, of justice, that its fervid and perilous flow allows. 191

The counterpoint to finding utopia in the maelstrom of modernity is to recreate it in the past. Nostalgia envisages a more unified, coherent and comprehensible past by;

conjuring up a past defined not by painstaking investigation of the historical record but by positing a series of absences, of negatives. ... If our consciousness is fragmented, there must have been a time when it was integrated; if society is now bureaucratised and impersonal, it must previously have been personal and particular. The syntax and

188 *ibid.*, p. 141.
189 Kammen, M. *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*, op cit, p. 300.
structure of these ideas makes them superficially attractive but this appeal is no warrant for their veracity.\textsuperscript{192}

As Berman points out there is no veracity at all in a conjured up ‘golden age’ which denies “the cruelty and brutality of so many of the forms of life that modernisation has wiped out.”\textsuperscript{193} Past realities however, are not the province of nostalgia, which not only constructs the past in terms of perceived deficiencies in the modern world but recreates the past to rectify these deficiencies. The nostalgic response to the experience of discontinuity is to,

(Invoke) a positively evaluated past world in response to a deficient present world. The nostalgic subject turns to the past to find / construct sources of identity, agency, or community, that are felt to be lacking, blocked, subverted, or threatened in the present. The ‘positively evaluated’ past is approached as a source for something now perceived to be missing.\textsuperscript{194}

There is thus a sense of loss, an implicit assumption of decline underlying a nostalgic reaction to widespread social change. The sense of loss is compounded by a feeling that the ‘imagined past’ will not be recovered; that progress and meaningful change is unlikely to be beneficial and that there is no public sense of a viable future.

Nostalgic yearning reconstructs a simple, stable and coherent past as a refuge from the perceived complexity, instability and incoherent present. However, conceptualising nostalgia as merely an escape to the consoling verities of an ‘imagined past’ misses what a number of writers have noted as the role nostalgia plays in linking the growing gap between past and present. David

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{191} Berman, M. All That is Solid Melts Into Air : The Experience of Modernity. Verso, London, 1989, p. 345 - 46.
\item \textsuperscript{192} Chase, M. & Shaw, C. op cit, p. 8.
\item \textsuperscript{193} Berman, M. op cit, p. 60.
\end{itemize}
Lowenthal comments, "yearning for a lost state of being is part of the fabric of modern life the world over." However, 'yearning for a lost state of being' does not imply that "nostalgia necessarily connote(s) despairing rejection of the present." Michael Kammen emphasises that people often looked to the past "because the creative consequences of nostalgia helped them to legitimise new political orders, rationalise the adjustment and perpetuation of old social hierarchies, and construct acceptable new systems of thought and values."

As well as providing a 'psychological anchor' to the past, Fred Davis argues that, "at the societal level nostalgia functions as a kind of safety valve for disappointment and frustration suffered over the loss of prized values." The point is picked up by Tannock who states that "nostalgia, by sanctioning soothing and utopian images of the past, lets people adapt both to rapid social change and to changes in individual life histories." Nostalgia can offer a sense of continuity, however illusory it may be.

The sense of continuity is also fuelled by physical reminders of the past such as buildings, artefacts, texts and pictorial images. Almost any physical object that provides a real or imagined link to the past can become a nostalgic icon, the most persuasive and iconographic being the photograph. As Chase and

---

196 ibid, p. 28.
197 Kammen, M. op cit, p. 295.
198 Davis, F. op cit, p. 99.
199 Tannock, S. op cit, p. 459.
Shaw point out, “we now have a deeply illustrated history”. Rather than endowing the past with a compelling sense of authenticity, photographs can frame our image of the past rather than our understanding of it. “There is an obvious danger that we become indifferent to the significance of the past and hypersensitive to its look: it becomes a multitudinous photographic simulacrum.” It is this nostalgic image of an imagined past that can be so easily manipulated in political myths.

Critiques of the role of nostalgia in contemporary society tend to be critical for three general reasons. First, nostalgia has been made to serve the needs of commercial interests, leaving memory open to corporate manipulation. Commercial interests seek to satisfy nostalgic yearning by converting the past into a commodity that can be nostalgically possessed and consumed. The packaging of history and memory as entertainment drains the past of its authenticity. Such commodification is most apparent in theme parks and in the media where history is reduced to a stimulus to nostalgia. A number of authors have pointed out that the packaging of the past is neither benign nor neutral. The consumer of nostalgia is channelled into an ahistorical world, a “reified

---

200 Chase, M & Shaw, C. p. 10.
201 ibid.
202 The selling of nostalgia as a commodity is explored in detail by Samuel, R. op cit, pp.51 - 135.
fantasy\textsuperscript{204} of "contrived conviviality"\textsuperscript{205} where past and present co-exist without any sense of conflict or ambiguity.

Second, media manipulation of nostalgia compromises any authenticity still possessed by memory. The subject of nostalgic yearning has shifted from the individual to the collective, from specific places and events to media-created illusions and personalities. Even recollection of a recent event is more than likely to be a recollection of an event as framed by the media. Davis comments that, "the popular media have come increasingly to serve as their own repository for the nostalgic use of the past."\textsuperscript{206}

Third, there is a perception that nostalgic longing is manipulated by dominant groups to confer legitimacy to conservative or reactionary political programs. The appropriation of nostalgic yearning by conservative groups on behalf of reactionary politics has led to the "assumption that nostalgia is pathological, regressive, and delusional."\textsuperscript{207} Such a stance has led to a generally hostile critique of nostalgia, which by equating nostalgia with reactionary politics, fails to acknowledge that nostalgia is used by all groups. As Tannock points out; "due to the negative connotations of nostalgia, nostalgic narratives viewed as progressive or enabling tend not to be called nostalgic; they may be considered as

\textsuperscript{204} See Kasson, \textit{op cit.} p. 47.
\textsuperscript{205} See Combs, J. \textit{Celebrations : Rituals of Popular Veneration} \textit{op cit.} p.73.
\textsuperscript{206} Davis, F. \textit{op cit.} p. 131.
\textsuperscript{207} Tannock, S. \textit{op cit.} p. 454-455.
examples of popular memory or historical consciousness instead.”208

While agreeing that the critics “largely misconceive nostalgia and exaggerate its evils.”209 Lowenthal states that nostalgia is “perhaps the most dangerous ... of all the ways of using history.”210 It is dangerous because in times of social stress, nostalgic longing is easily manipulated by dominant groups who invoke a sentimentalised past to legitimate the present. For example, there are numerous studies211 of how the Thatcher government in Britain dressed nostalgia up as national heritage “to justify their control of the present, to palliate its inequities, and to persuade the public that traditional privileges deserve self-denying support.”212 Combs’ study of President Reagan’s use of nostalgia to reposition American memory in order to dismantle the welfare state is also instructive.213 What is common to all three criticisms is that the manipulation of nostalgia inevitably leads to the reframing of collective memory.

3.5. Media and Memory

Film, the electronic media and the availability of advanced technologies of presentation add another dimension to the formation of memory. Televised images of selected national events not only have the capacity to create vicarious

208 ibid, p. 463.
209 Lowenthal, D. Nostalgia Tells it Like it Wasn’t, op cit., P. 27.
210 ibid, P. 20.
212 Lowenthal op cit, p. 25.
collective memories, but the capacity to reframe and reinforce these 'memories' through constant replay. It is not the intention of my study to pursue such a line of thinking. The question of the extent to which television images create collective memory is worthy of a separate study. What my study will focus on is the role of film in collective memory formation. In the Introduction to this study I contended that narrative is a key component of a political myth and that traditionally, narrative was communicated orally through epic poetry and pageantry. The key point is that the narrative was communicated publicly so that collective memory could coalesce around it. I will suggest in this section that the historical or political film plays a similar role in modern society to that played by the oral narratives of traditional society. Again, such a suggestion warrants a study in itself, but in this section I concentrate on an outline of how film can potentially frame and reframe the collective memory of a society.

Raphael Samuel notes that "memory-keeping is a function increasingly assigned to the electronic media, while a new awareness of the artifice of representation casts a cloud of suspicion over the documentation of the past." 214 For example, films that use known historical events to advance their plot while paying close attention to recreating the minutiae of historic detail create a feeling of authenticity that Tribe argues, carries through to the narrative itself.

The question that must be asked is... what function such careful reconstruction plays in the reconstruction of a past. It can be suggested that this veracity of the image is the vehicle for the veracity of the history that it constructs .... This history is however recognised as Truth by the viewer not by virtue of the 'facts' being correct, but because

---

214 Samuel, R. op cit, p.25.
the image looks right. The recognition effect ‘that’s the way it was’ is a product not of
the historicity of the plot but of the manipulation of the image. It is the ‘realism’ of the image of the past rather than the past itself that has the
capacity to frame social memory. Pierre Nora observes that historical images
have such a capacity because “ours is an intensely retinal and powerfully
televisual memory;” a memory that can be induced electronically. Such
memory would be vicarious in that it would be made up of a “repertory of images
whose origins are primarily filmic or televisual.” An example of the process
can be identified in Steven Spielberg’s Holocaust film ‘Schindler’s List’ which
stimulated a revival in Holocaust memory. Spielberg used the revival to establish
the ‘Visual History of the Shoah Foundation’ that through the collection of tens
of thousands of testimonies has become a virtual monument; a multimedia
memorial to the memory of the Holocaust.

Visual media frames collective memory in a number of ways. First, it can
give form and substance to constructing, reconstructing and shaping collective
memory. This characteristic is well analysed by K. Tribe who shows how the
reaction to Orphuls’s film ‘The Sorrow and the Pity’ subjected French ‘popular
memory’ of the resistance to a basic reconstruction. In a similar way Oliver
Stone’s ‘JFK’ tapped into American memory of President Kennedy’s
assassination by giving dramatic voice to numerous conspiracy theories and

216 Nora, P. Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire op cit, p. 17.
218 “Ophuls, by casting doubt on the prevalance of wartime resistance to German occupation, had
demobilised a history of struggle against oppression, in which contemporary struggles were validated by the
fact that they had a heritage. What Ophuls did was effectively to deprive a certain section of a ‘Popular
Memory’ of its heroic past. In particular, it undermined the conception that history was something that was
framing them into a coherent narrative. Sunuko Higashi argues that the significance of 'JFK' is that it represents the transition from print to visual media in shaping national consciousness. Films with a purported political or historical theme have the capacity to construct a "prosthetic memory", one that provides individuals with mediated access to a historical past that has not been directly experienced, but that nevertheless constructs national identity.

The Hollywood-style premieres of 'Rob Roy' and 'Braveheart' were treated in Scotland as great national events and represent such a successful 'prosthetic memory' that the Scottish National Party used images of Braveheart to launch its recruitment drive during 1995. Fintan O'Toole, in a perceptive article comparing features of Irish and Scottish nationalism, even suggests that the overwhelming success of 'Braveheart' is because the film acts as a compensatory mobilising myth for the Scots in the absence of more recent symbols of resistance such as the Easter Uprising does for the Irish.

Second, the way film frames collective memory is by mediating and filtering complex historical experiences through the media to the extent that they...
become ahistorical. M. Frisch shows how American memory of the Vietnam War is filtered through films that effectively decontextualise and depoliticise the war and “portrayed it as a “tragedy” without winners and losers.”223 In this sense Vietnam action movies are “an attempt to give form to an acceptable public memory and consciousness regarding our experience in Southeast Asia.”224 Dionisopoulos argues that, “movies, as narratives, provide a method of helping Americans assimilate Vietnam into experience. They afford a mechanism that allows us to make sense retrospectively by storytelling in the present, drawing on events in the past.”225 However, films such as ‘Uncommon Valor’, ‘Rambo’ and ‘Missing in Action’ go beyond “dramatising societal needs.”226 Dionisopoulos maintains that, film reconstructs memory to the extent that “movies can turn a defeat into victory; you can achieve in fantasy what you didn't achieve in reality.”227

Third, the way media frames collective memory is to tap a nostalgic sentiment and rekindle or create afresh a collective memory. Sumiko Higashi shows how Ken Burns’ ‘The Civil War’ tapped nostalgic sentiment in the post Vietnam War era to re-tell the story of the American Civil War through the use of old photographs that both established authenticity and nostalgia. Higashi refers to the series as an “appealing exercise in selective memory”228 which celebrates the cult

223 Frisch, M. op cit, p. 19.
225 ibid, p. 83.
226 ibid, p. 95.
227 ibid, p. 92.
228 Higashi, S. op cit, p. 90.
of the soldier at the expense of placing the war in its broader social and political context. More importantly, Hagashi notes that "perhaps the most telling lesson of 'The Civil War' is that, contrary to postmodernist critics who stress multiple voices in the construction of national consciousness, American history is still construed as a master narrative." Robert Zemeckis' 'Forrest Gump' is another example of selective memory in constructing a largely imaginary nostalgic master narrative that reconstructs an artificial national memory based on sentiment and historical amnesia.

The final point to be made is that the media can so saturate the present with 'events' that have no historical relationship to one another, that a "self-protective amnesia" is induced rather than memory. In this case the media itself becomes the 'custodian' of public 'memory'. Huyssen argues that the emergence of a new structure of temporality affects the nature of memory itself.

The more memory we store on data banks, the more the past is sucked into the orbit of the present, ready to be called up on the screen. A sense of historical continuity or, for that matter, discontinuity, both of which depend on a before and an after, gives way to the simultaneity of all times and spaces readily accessible in the present. The perception of spatial and temporal distance is being erased. Huyssen uses the term perception because the "immediacy of images, is of course largely imaginary." But imaginary or not, the dissolution of historical time and

229 ibid.
232 ibid.
the primacy of the electronic image in blurring the boundaries between fact, fiction, reality and perception creates a media mediated memory that is a simulation at best. Such a 'prosthetic memory' however, should not be dismissed as insignificant in the creation or reinforcing of collective memories. The use of media mediated images and film played an important role in mobilising a large proportion of the Serbian population behind the Serbian myth of Kosovo.

4. Conclusion.

My analysis of the Kosovo Myth revealed that a key component of modern political myth is collective memory. I have therefore undertaken a more theoretical examination of collective memory in order to better conceptualise its role in the formation of a political myth. I have included a case study of the Katyn Massacre and its importance to the development of Polish collective memory in Appendix 1 to illustrate how collective memory can be conceptualized in a specific historical and political context. I emphasised throughout this chapter that collective memory is not in itself political myth but makes up one of its three components. The other two components, tradition and commemoration will be analysed in chapters 5 and 6. I have argued that collective memory is a key component because one of the characteristics of modern political myths is that they are constructed around an image of the past. This image of the past is not history as such, but a symbolic representation of the past that has been collectively constructed by a political community to legitimate its present needs. This image of the past that lies at the core of political myth is therefore derived
from collective memory. Collective memory has been analysed in this chapter under two broad categories: theoretical concepts of collective memory and the 'politics of memory'. Collective memory adopts many guises and this must be recognised when analysing representation of the past within political myths.

In this chapter I have undertaken a systematic conceptualisation of collective memory and developed four characteristics that are important to the study of the past as represented in political myths. First, I conceptualised collective memory as a socially constructed discourse based on a culturally specific belief about the past that is framed and informed by political, social and economic structures. Second, I argued that while individuals have multiple and often contradictory memories, group memories tend to coalesce around unifying, common representations of the past. My third point was that, individual memory is constructed and modified by groups whose collective memories and identity are based on shared experiences. I argued finally that group identity is grounded in collective memories that convey representations of the past through linguistic, visual or enacted images. I also argued that underlying each of these characteristics there is the idea of memory as providing a sense of temporal anchoring in the face of faltering beliefs in the ideology of progress and modernity. A further characteristic of collective memory is its complex interrelationship with history. I maintained that the blurring of memory with history produces a hybrid 'remembered history'; a representation of the past that directly serves a political community's need for symbolic truth rather than historical accuracy. This blurring of the distinction between memory and history
also has a profound effect on the structure of memory itself, to the extent, Pierre Nora argued, that there is no authentic collective memory left. I concluded this opening section of the conceptualization of collective memory by suggesting that in one of its guises, modern collective memory is in fact an illusion, an illusion that clusters around sites of memory that maintain an aura of historical continuity and thus authenticity. This is not to suggest that collective memory does not exist, but that its 'authenticity' is consciously 'constructed' or 'invented' in the same way that much of tradition is. This is of critical importance to understanding the dynamics of political myths as the question for any analysis of the past in political myth must focus on who wants what to be remembered and why.

The second category under which I developed the concept of collective memory was focused on the political dimensions of memory, what was referred to as the 'politics of memory'. Four aspects of this 'politics of memory' were discussed as being of relevance to political myth. My first argument was that a political community must define its identity and validate its claim to legitimacy by claiming the sanction of the past. The ability of a political community to have its interpretation of the past generally accepted is therefore an important source of legitimacy. It is this collective reworking, reconstructing and readjusting of the past to legitimise present social, political, economic and cultural interests that makes up the core of a political myth. However, control over political myths are also contested when dominant memories are challenged by subordinate or delegitimating memories during a struggle for legitimacy. My second point in discussing the 'politics of memory' was that the creation and maintenance of
national identity is sustained by memory through the construction of a common heritage. I conceptualised heritage as a collective symbol of the past affirming the historical continuity of the nation. I also maintained that the importance of heritage in the construction of national identity has led to the state becoming the ‘official’ custodian of national memory. The ability of a political community to align its own memories with national memories based on a common heritage is therefore a powerful source of legitimacy. It is for this reason that heritage is inextricably intertwined with political myth. The third aspect of the ‘politics of memory’ was the way nostalgia could transform and reframe collective memory through the construction of a sentimentalised imagined past. Of specific importance to the concept of collective memory is the way nostalgic yearning for a simple, stable and coherent past can be manipulated by political elites to mask the perceived complexity, instability and incoherence of the present. The use of a sentimentalised past to legitimate the present is therefore an important aspect of the ‘politics of memory’. My final point made in this section of the chapter was that the media is not just the carrier of modern collective memory, but also its creator. This interrelationship between media images and collective memory formation requires further research, but I suggested that there is a correlation between historical or political films and the framing and reframing of collective memory. Media mediated images of the past must therefore be taken into consideration in any conceptualisation of collective memory.

Through a detailed analysis of the concept of collective memory, this chapter has therefore prepared the theoretical background for analysing the way
the past is represented in political myth. While the past, as represented through collective memory, forms the core of a political myth, this representation is not a political myth in itself. I will argue that it is tradition which invests collective memory with meaning, norms and values, and it is the commemorative process of communicating memory and tradition that has the potential to transform collective memory and tradition into political myth. Before analysing tradition and commemoration as components of political myth, I will discuss the importance of memory sites to the creation and maintenance of collective memory.