

---

## Regime Types, Cultural Traditions, and Difficult Histories

---

MARK A. WOLFGRAM

Oklahoma State University – Stillwater

### *Summary*

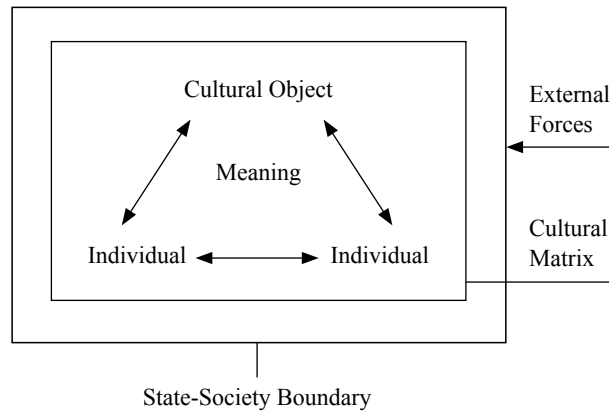
Collective memory research examines how the process of individual memory formation is a social and collective experience, rather than one that is wholly psychological and individual. The stories that societies tell about themselves are an important part of this process, as they seek to socialize new members into the national community. But sometimes that national history is very difficult to deal with. Most collective memory research is based on a single case study approach. What is lacking in collective memory research, although not absent, are broader comparative studies.

This article develops a general model for the process of collective memory formation, which I can then use in my ongoing empirical research into how several different authoritarian and democratic societies with Eastern and Western cultural traditions have dealt with their violent histories. The cases include Germany (East and West), Japan, Turkey, Yugoslavia and Spain. In this article, I develop a general model of collective memory formation while drawing upon these five cases to illustrate different points. While democratic societies have a greater potential for dealing more fully with their difficult histories, it is far from guaranteed that they will do so.

*Keywords:* Collective Memory, Germany, Japan, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Spain

### **The Process of Collective Memory Formation: A Model**

The primary goal of this article is to outline a social scientific model of the process of collective memory formation, which can be used as a general framework to aid our comparison of different cases. My own particular interests are concerned with comparing how authoritarian and democratic societies deal with their violent histories in the cases of postwar East and West Germany, Japan, and Yugoslavia, post-civil war Spain, during both the Franco regime and the transition to democratic go-

**Figure 1:** A Basic Model for Collective Memory Formation

vernance, and the Republic of Turkey. The article draws upon examples from these cases and others to aid the reader's understanding of the model.

Let's use the model sketched in Figure 1 as a basis for looking at the different components involved in the process of collective memory formation and how the process evolves over time. To start in as simple a manner as possible, let's begin with a synchronic analysis and then build up to how the model changes over time.

At the core of the model is a rather standard way of thinking about cultural production, and the generation of meaning and shared understandings (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Two individuals encounter a cultural object that is in some way a representation of the past. They may have just seen a film or visited a museum exhibition. They engage in a discussion with each other about their understanding of the object and either succeed or fail in achieving some shared understanding of what they have experienced, but whatever the result, some meaning or understanding about the object has been created. They can then share this with still others. All of this has taken place within some context or cultural matrix, which has already had some effect on each individual's interpretation of the object and the means by which they have attempted to communicate this with the other individual. This cultural matrix will differ significantly depending upon the level of overall freedom in the society, the distinction between authoritarian and democratic societies. And we will want to take into consideration the extent to which this case is more open or closed to external influence.

At the center of our model we have meaning, and this is what our two individuals are interested in creating. There is a broad consensus within the collective memory literature as well as the broad social science literature that this is the prima-

ry human activity. Within the field of collective memory studies, Frederic Bartlett writes about the “effort after meaning” (Bartlett 1932), or as the psychoanalyst Robert Prince writes about the children of Holocaust survivors, “From the perspective of this finding, the pursuit of knowledge of the Holocaust represents less a search for understanding than an attempt to impose meaning and order on the present” (Prince 1985a: 53). The psychoanalyst Viktor E. Frankl, himself a survivor of the German death camps, also puts “the will to meaning” at the center of his understanding of how humans deal with all sorts of difficulty in life, the primary one being the knowledge of one’s own mortality (Frankl 2006). The neuroscientist Antonio Damasio locates this quest for meaning in the arts as part of our process of evolution and the creation of the conscious mind, “In brief, the arts prevailed in evolution because they had survival value and contributed to the development of the notion of well-being. They helped cement social groups and promote social organization...” (Damasio 2010: 296). Damasio then links this to memory as well, “Memory is responsible for ceaselessly placing the self in an evanescent here and now, between a thoroughly lived past and an anticipated future, perpetually buffeted between the spent yesterdays and the tomorrows that are nothing but possibilities. The future pulls us forward, from a distant vanishing point, and gives us the will to continue the voyage in the *present*” (Damasio 2010: 297).

To aid our discussion with an example, let’s imagine that our two individuals are non-Jewish German friends living in Berlin, Germany, in 1948, and that they have just watched the film *Lang ist der Weg* [*Long Is the Way*, 1947] at the Marmorhaus cinema on the Kurfürstendamm. The film has just presented them with a challenging narrative about their country’s recent past from the perspective of Jewish characters, who fight against the German occupation of Poland, die in the German death camps, and eventually move to Palestine to help found the new state of Israel.

In order to generate this meaning, individuals create art, as Damasio notes, and engage in discussions about the nature of the world in which they live. While some psychologists continue to study individual memory in the laboratory, a growing number of psychologists and cognitive psychologists have embraced the importance of studying human memory as a creative process shaped by social interaction (Neisser 1982; Neisser and Winograd 1988). Their current research, along with the research of social psychologists, has aided our understanding about the micro-foundations of collective memory formation. In a recent and very helpful review of the literature in psychology, William Hirst and Gerald Echterhoff point to several key mechanisms that shape the nature of this conversation about the film in our example: (1) social contagion, (2) reinforcement, and (3) retrieval-induced forgetting (RIF) (Hirst and Echterhoff 2012: 63). Social contagion is the spread of a particular

memory from one person to another as a result of conversations and a search for shared meaning. For example, a major film release about the Holocaust could well spur discussion amongst Germans about this event, its meaning, its relationship to themselves and their history. The fact that *Long Is the Way* never found a German distributor and quickly closed after its premiere in Berlin meant that the social contagion effect was minimal.

This brings us to the next mechanism, reinforcement. Just because *Long Is the Way* failed to find a distributor does not mean that discussion of the Holocaust might not be reinforced from other sources of information, but in the context of early postwar West Germany, this material was rather rare, especially compared to the 1980s. If we look at Chart 1 and Chart 2 (see below), we can see how West German popular culture helped to reinforce discussion of the Holocaust in the 1980s in a way that was largely absent in all the preceding decades.

As for the last mechanism, retrieval-induced forgetting, Hirst and Echterhoff write, “When people selectively remember in conversation, they are not only reinforcing existing memories, but, by not mentioning other memories, they are setting up conditions conducive for forgetting” (Hirst and Echterhoff 2012: 66). In a separate article, Hirst and others elaborate further on this idea of retrieval-induced forgetting by giving it a clearer social dimension and calling it socially shared retrieval-induced forgetting (SS-RIF). They provide the following example, which has significant implications for the argument I am making in this article: “The findings of SS-RIF suggest that if, for instance, going back to our earlier example about the Armenian genocide, the Turkish government wanted Turks to collectively forget the Armenian genocide, it would be better for them to discuss publicly the history of Armenians in Turkey, while remaining silent about the genocide than to avoid discussing the Armenian issue altogether” (Stone et al. 2012: 47). Now, the issue is more complicated than this because there is the possibility of covert memory for someone that already knows about the genocide and decides, after hearing the government-favored message about the history of Armenians in the country, to maintain this covert memory. But unless this covert memory is already widespread, the government’s strategy will result in further erosion of memory about the genocide. Another example of this is Franco’s legacy in Spain, still today, in which Spaniards are well aware of the civil war, which the regime used to legitimize itself, but they are relatively ignorant of the extent of the regime’s brutal repression of Republicans *after* the war, something that the regime kept hidden. Only because of the extensive exhumation of mass graves since 2000, which has recovered approximately 4,000 bodies, has the extent of the regime’s violence become better known. But this new public knowledge is still resisted by many, because it does not fit with their worldview of Franco as the liberator of Spain from the Communists.

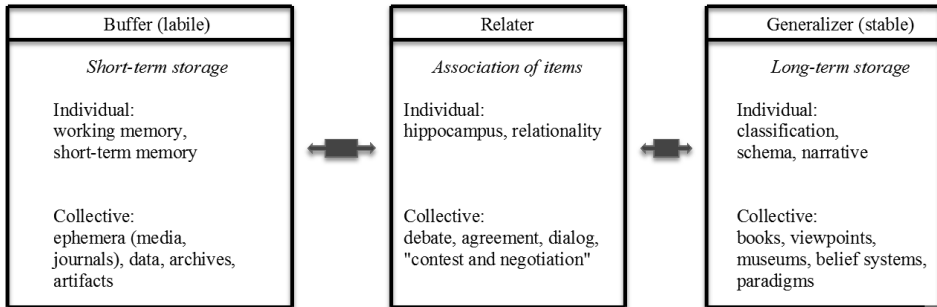
## Figure 2: The Similarities between Individual and Collective Memory Formation

### Entity

*The entire being*

Individual: person, self

Collective: family, tribe, group, community, state, corporation, nation



Another set of interdisciplinary scholars has also looked for analogies between how individual and collective memory formation processes are similar. If we look at Figure 2 (Anastasio et al. 2012: 72), we have a psychological model of how individuals process memories and how the same sort of model can help us reflect on the process of collective memory formation.

Going back to our two German friends and their viewing of the film *Long Is the Way*, they have encountered something in the social or collective memory buffer, and have also engaged the relater in that they have debated the meaning of the film and decided whether or not this fits with their individual and collective generalizer. Let's say that they both simply find the film too incredible. Although neither of them were enthusiastic supporters of the Nazi regime, they simply cannot believe the scale of mass murder of Jews that some are claiming happened in the east, in Poland and elsewhere. It simply does not fit their worldview, schema or paradigm. "As bad as the Nazi regime was, have we not also suffered immensely as a result of the war?" they might well ask themselves. They may begin to engage in *tu quoque* reasoning, asking why the allies feel they deserve to sit in judgment of Germans at the Nuremberg trials, given their ruthless bombing of civilian populations in the cities, which our two friends did experience personally in Berlin. "What about the senseless and barbaric destruction of Dresden? And who was ultimately responsible for the war anyhow? Look at the context that the western powers put Germany in after the First World War", they might reason.

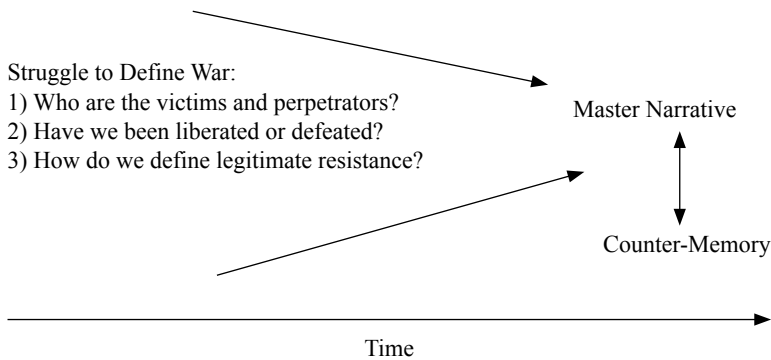
As we will see later, these patterns of relativizing crimes, of defending the in-group, and of externalizing responsibility are very common reactions, universal

reactions, when confronted with difficult pieces of information. The end result is that *Long Is the Way* and its narrative about the Holocaust is set aside and, for the moment, does not become part of the German collective generalizer, worldview, schema or paradigm. It does not serve as a source of contagion. It does not help to reinforce the image of the Nazi regime as a criminal regime.

Let's now begin to make our model more dynamic and diachronic. How can we account for change over time? There are five factors or variables that will be useful to keep in mind regarding our model of collective memory formation. A first analytic distinction to make is to divide our analysis between internal and external factors. The internal factors are: (1) the memory-market dictum, (2) state-society relations, (3) the cultural matrix and (4) generational turnover. For this article the external pressures will simply be handled as a unified whole. At the same time that German, Spanish, Yugoslav, Japanese and Turkish societies are evolving with regards to their relationship with their past, there will also be increasing or decreasing pressure from outside the country to either engage with or disengage from parts of that history. For example, during the periods of postwar occupation in Germany and Japan, the external pressures were extreme and came to dominate the society. After the occupations ended, West Germany began to face more pressure from its neighbors to deal with the Nazi legacy than Japan did to deal with its imperial legacy. One reason for this is that during the initial postwar and post-occupation years, West Germany was encouraged to integrate with its neighbors, while Japan remained largely isolated from the countries that it had occupied during its empire-building years. Japan developed an external relationship almost exclusively with the United States.

Before going over each of the internal factors named above, consider Figure 3 as a general picture of how things developed after the end of the violent conflict, whether that be the Second World War, in the case of Germany and Japan, a more clearly defined civil war in the case of Spain, or a hybrid of civil war and a foreign invasion in Yugoslavia and Turkey. After the end of the conflict, there is an immediate drive by the society, state and, in the case of Japan and Germany, an external occupier, to begin to define the conflict. What explains and justifies this mass death and destruction? Why did it happen? Who are the victims and the perpetrators? Who engaged in resistance or collaboration? How do different actors label the end of the conflict, either as a liberation or a defeat? How wide-ranging the discussion of these questions is will largely be determined by two factors: (1) are state structures moving in a democratic or authoritarian direction, and (2) how broad a consensus is there in the society about the previous period of violence. If the movement is in a democratic direction, even under occupation authority, then a plurality of views is more likely to occur, while the establishment of authoritarian state structures will begin to restrict pluralism, although in each of the authoritarian cases the

**Figure 3:** The Narrowing of Historical Understanding over Time Followed by Counter-Memory Challenges



rate at which discussion was closed off varied. For example, the East German state at first allowed and encouraged discussion of the Holocaust, but then later silenced this discussion, while the Francoist state was far more brutal than the Yugoslav communist state in imposing a near totalitarian silence on the society. The Turkish Republic of Atatürk moved quickly to delegitimize the entire Ottoman period, when the Armenian genocide occurred in 1915, and to focus on the heroic period of the War of Independence. Thus, depending upon how much public space the different forces in the society have to express themselves, these different groups will begin to argue about the appropriate schema, worldview, paradigm or master narrative of the conflict by trying to address the questions I have suggested above. If there is a fairly broad consensus in the society about these questions, the society and state will begin to establish a clear master narrative and the range of future discussion will begin to narrow. But, as we will see in four of our cases, some combination of the internal and external factors will lead to serious challenges of this master narrative at some point in each country's postwar history. The exception here is Turkey, in which case discussion of the Armenian genocide remains almost wholly absent within Turkey today.

Let's now turn to the four internal factors mentioned above: (1) the memory-market dictum, (2) state-society relations, (3) the cultural matrix and (4) generational change. The memory-market dictum is a simple formulation that I have proposed to help us think about how we can analyze the different cultural objects that are being created in each society. I state it at a high level of abstraction so as to maximize its generalizability as the following: "As memory makers need access to 'capital' to reach the market, the more market dependent and capital intensive a given mode of

representation is, the more likely one is to find it in tune with the times, either with mass attitudes (democratic regimes) or state ideology (authoritarian regimes). The ‘capital’ will take primarily a financial form in a democratic-capitalist system, and primarily a political one in an authoritarian-command economy system” (Wolfgram 2011: 21-22). Let me use a couple of examples to help illustrate the implications of this dictum. In my study of East and West Germany, I noticed a pattern in the 1950s and 1960s of West German public television programs being much more confrontational and challenging with their audiences than the mass distributed movies at the same time. The television programs clearly sought to provoke deeper and more troubling reflections on the legacy of National Socialism while the films produced at the same time tended to reinforce the established master narrative of good Germans and evil Nazis. Indeed, some of the more controversial films, such as *Das Haus in der Karpfengasse* [*The House in Carp Street*, 1964], failed to find a general release in the movie theaters, but public television producers then picked it up and showed it on TV. Another example from the West German case is Carl Zuckmayer’s play *Des Teufels General* [*The Devil’s General*, 1954], which was also produced as a movie. In the play, first shown in Switzerland, a key German figure is shown engaged in an act of resistance against the war effort that leads to the death of German fighter pilots, thus starkly forcing the audience to confront the costs of violent resistance in wartime. This was an extremely controversial topic, and it was one reason why many Germans did not support the actions taken by the Stauffenberg group in their attempt to assassinate Hitler on 20 July 1944. Thus, in the film version, the fighter pilots are transformed into test pilots who can parachute to safety after their sabotaged planes begin to fail.

The same dynamic can be seen in authoritarian societies as well. In both Francoist Spain and communist Yugoslavia, authors were allowed to publish novels that challenged the master narratives of the state, but when these works were later moved to film or a theater play the authorities stepped in to either ban the release of the movie or stop the theater production. For example, Ramón J. Sender published a novel in 1953 that showed the role that the Catholic Church played in the regime’s repression of the countryside, but the novel was only turned into the film, *Réquiem por un campesino español* [*Requiem for a Spanish Peasant*] in 1985, a decade after Franco’s death (Gubern 1991).

It was toward the end of the middle liberal period in Yugoslavia that Dragoslav Mihailović managed to publish his book *Kad su cvetale tikve* (1968) [*When Pumpkins Blossomed* (1971)]. The central character is Ljuban, who grows up amongst gang violence in one of Belgrade’s poor districts. He also has to deal with the family’s history and the fact that his brother and father were taken to Goli otok, a brutal prison camp, during the anti-Stalinist purges after 1948. His father returns a broken



man, while his brother never returns. When he tries to find out more information about his brother, he is blocked by the authorities, and warned not to ask more questions. The book was a huge success in Yugoslavia and was turned into a theater play. But by the time the play was ready to be performed in Belgrade, Communist Party officials blocked the performances, realizing their mistake in allowing this piece of the party's past to reach a broader public. Mihailović's work was hardly alone at the end of the 1960s, a time during which artists, filmmakers, theater producers and writers were challenging many different aspects of Yugoslav society, including the state's preferred interpretation of the recent past.

In contrast to the Spanish and Yugoslav examples, Turkey has remained completely closed to discussions of the Armenian genocide while also engaging in officially sanctioned denials of the same. While the Armenian genocide remains a completely taboo subject in Turkey, state and social violence against Greek and Kurdish minorities has begun to appear in Turkish cinema since roughly 2000 (Suner 2010; Dönmez-Colin 2008).

Going back to our example of *Long Is the Way*, we can see how the promise of openness and pluralism in a democratic and capitalist society allowed for the production of the film, but that the hostility of the broader public led to the film not being available through a general release in the cinemas. By studying the changing nature of the cultural objects that represent the past over time, we can see how the cultural matrix and the master narrative are also being transformed. At the same time, the conversations between individuals at the micro-level will also potentially be altered as the boundaries of the cultural matrix shift (Wolfgram 2006).

State-society relations will obviously have a profound impact on the overall changes that develop or fail to develop in each case. While I use just two categories in most of this article, I want to emphasize that the categories of democracy and authoritarianism are not neat and discrete categories. I would prefer the reader to think of a continuum running from democratic through authoritarian to totalitarian. Each of the cases in this article has seen the state-society relations change over time. There are, of course, clear moments where the governing institutions of a society shift from authoritarian to democratic, in Japan and West Germany after 1945, in Spain after 1975, and in Yugoslavia and the successor states throughout the 1990s. The case of Turkey is more complex, with military coups in 1960, 1971, 1980, and 1997. Or, the reverse is true, when Spain moved from a democratic republic to an authoritarian dictatorship in 1939. But it is important to view each of these cases as dynamic, even during the periods of relatively stable state-institutional development. While clearly authoritarian in 1939, the Francoist regime began with a near totalitarian rule of terror, but then later in the 1960s permitted some greater openness. The communist Yugoslav state also went through an initial totalitarian peri-

od immediately following the war. But the later decades saw a shifting balance of power between the state and different social forces. The general point that I want to make at this stage is to note that while it is obvious that democratic societies have the potential for greater plurality and open debate, the memory-market dictum reminds us that when a fairly broad social consensus exists, minority views can be easily silenced and marginalized. This is particularly true if the state does not take an active role in encouraging a particular memory culture to challenge existing “truths” about the past.

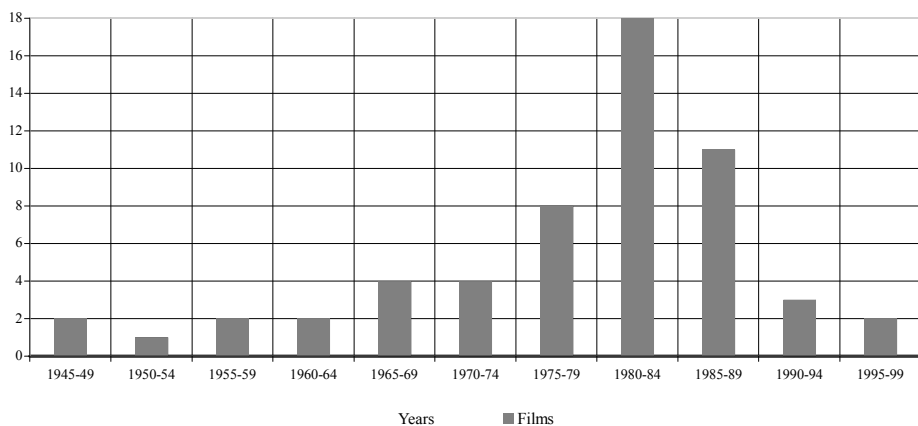
When the authoritarian states want to, they certainly have the capacity to reassert control over the public discussions about the past at the macro- or societal-level, but both in the case of Spain and Yugoslavia, when the dictatorship entered a transitional phase in Spain after Franco’s death in 1975 and the increasing loss of central control in Yugoslavia after the death of Tito in May 1980, the push for more memory clearly came from the side of the civil society rather than the state. Because the dictatorships weakened the ability of a civil society to develop, it took time for interest groups to form, so it was largely within the realm of the arts that serious attacks on the established master narrative were launched. And even in the case of Japan and Germany, challenges to the master narrative were launched from the civil society side, with the state largely falling into a reactive role. In the case of Germany, the state came to support the reevaluation of the master narrative, whereas in Japan the conservative nature of the state and the governing parties continued to marginalize the forces in the civil society that demanded more accountability toward the victims of the aggressive Japanese war and empire until the 1990s.

I like to use the idea of a cultural matrix to talk about the context within which these debates occur. It will be important at this point to emphasize that I conceive of power in both a material and immaterial manner. The material basis of power is all too familiar for political scientists, so I will not dwell on this here other than to say that access to financial resources and coercive power are clear manifestations of power. But in addition to the material nature of power, I take the symbolic or cultural roots of power as a serious point of investigation as well, and in this regard I see myself working in the culturalist tradition in comparative politics (Ross 2009). Cultural and symbolic power is not epiphenomenal; it is not wholly determined by the material roots of power.

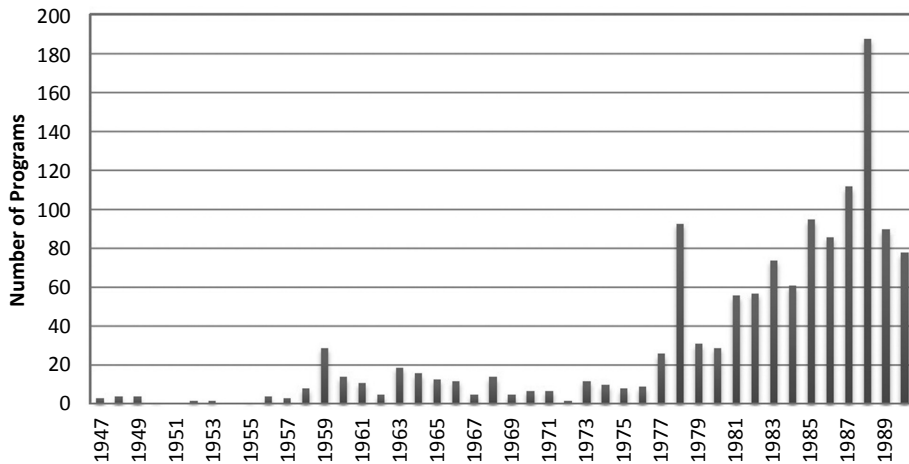
Let me illustrate the importance of this perspective with the following example from my research on East and West Germany. How can we account for the increasing prevalence and importance of Jewish voices in West German society over the course of the postwar period? I would suggest that a political scientist who can only appeal to the changing balance of material power in West German society can only offer an incomplete explanation for this important phenomenon. Jews living in

West Germany remain less than 1 per cent of the population and hardly control any financial resources that could account for this change. Instead, what has happened is a shift in the symbolic power of being Jewish in West German society, as a result of the changing boundaries of the cultural matrix. As discussions about the Holocaust exploded from the mid-1970s through the 1980s (see Chart 1 and Chart 2 below), Jewish voices, opinions and statements became very relevant to West German society. They had a far greater legitimacy to speak and to be heard than had been the case in all of the previous decades. Therefore, as the boundaries of the cultural matrix shifted, the symbolic power of different actors in West German society increased or decreased. At the beginning of the 1970s, Jewish voices remained largely marginalized and Hans Filbinger, the then Minister President of Baden-Württemberg, was able to dismiss charges against him of having been too close to the Nazi regime. He remained in office. Indeed, Filbinger was able to claim, through a prior court case, that he had actually been a victim, not a perpetrator, of the regime. By the end of 1978, Filbinger was forced to resign from his political position, although the conservative CDU party continued to defend him. In the same year, Helmut Schmidt, the then German Federal Chancellor of the left-of-center SPD, attended a memorial service in a Jewish synagogue, not a German Church, to mark the fortieth anniversary of *Kristallnacht*, when the Nazis had organized anti-Jewish attacks throughout Germany on the evening of 8-9 November 1938. The rapidly increasing discussion of the Holocaust in German society was changing the balance of symbolic power between different groups within the cultural matrix. Former Nazis were being removed from office, and the Jewish perspectives about German history began to matter a great deal more.

**Chart 1:** Jewish Themes in West German Film



Source: Wolfgram 2011: 223.

**Chart 2:** West German Radio Programs about the Nazi Persecution of the Jews

Source: Wolfgram 2014: 290.

Generational change is the last internal factor to introduce at this point. Going back to our model in Figure 1, it is important to realize that the discussions between our two individuals, even if they remain the same two individuals, will shift over the course of a lifetime as the boundaries of the cultural matrix shift, external pressures increase or decrease, and the types of cultural objects that represent the past change over time. But there is another way in which generational change matters and that is as the intergenerational dialogue that develops in the society and within the family, especially between those that experienced the war and those that grew up in the postwar society.

We can think about generations as two distinct categories: (1) a biological generation and a specific age cohort, and (2) a social generation, marked by a specific historical event. Thus, one can talk about a war generation as a social generation, but this generation will have experienced the war at a wide range of ages, from childhood through old age.

There are a couple of lessons to take away from the extensive literature on generations and generational change. First, autobiographical memory matters a great deal in terms of how individuals relate to their sense of history, although it is important to again emphasize that this is not a purely psychological and individual experience – social relations have a decided impact on autobiographical memory. The social psychological literature suggests that the personal experiences of young adulthood leave a lasting impact on one's worldview (Pennebaker et al. 1997).

Second, related to the first point, is that there are often statistically significant differences in what different social generations and age cohorts think about past events. These are never homogenous groups, but one can see how different age cohorts have a range of feelings and sentiments about past events. For example, Germans that experienced the end of the war as young adults remained more likely to view the end of the war as a defeat, whereas the younger age cohorts were more likely to view the end of the Second World War as a liberation (Wolfgram 2011: 204).

Third, the transference of information about the past, especially the family's place in the national sweep of history, is critical to the overall social process of collective memory formation. There have been a number of studies about the transference of historical consciousness within families and between generations that deserve some detailed discussion at this point. The most developed literature on this dynamic exists in the case of Germany, in terms of both ordinary German families and families that include perpetrators of serious crimes, and then Jewish victim families. One common point that is true for each of these categories is a strong bias amongst family members for maintaining the family as a unit of solidarity and stability. There is a very powerful bias, stronger than in the society at large, toward conformity and avoiding confrontation. There is every reason to believe that this general dynamic is a universal human trait, although there may indeed be some cultural variation, with Western countries allowing for greater contention compared to Eastern countries. For example, Japanese families and society place a very high premium on family solidarity, loyalty to parents, and social harmony. Turkish families also demonstrate a very strong pro-family bias through the high value placed on honoring the father and established sources of authority.

Before looking at the specific literature related to German, Austrian and Jewish families, it is important to reflect on some more or less universal traits of how families function. I have just mentioned the pressures for conformity within the family, the reasons for which Antonio Ferreria, a psychiatrist, wrote about in 1963 while trying to understand how the family worked actively to prevent the treatment of mental illness experienced by some family members. Ferreria observes, "Like any other homeostatic mechanism, the myth prevents the family system from damaging, perhaps destroying, itself. It has therefore the qualities of any 'safety valve', that is, a *survival value*. This is undoubtedly an enormously important function of the family myth and one which must not be overlooked in the course of any form of psychotherapeutic intrusion. For *the family myth is to the relationship what the defense is to the individual*. The myth, like the defense, protects the system against the threat of disintegration and chaos" (Ferreria 1963: 462). The powerful bias in each family is to sustain the family, and that means silencing or ignoring informa-

tion that could damage the family bonds. The clear bias is against the disclosure of damaging information.

There are now a series of studies that have looked at how intergenerational discussions about National Socialism take place within German and Austrian families, including both ordinary families, which were not particularly deeply implicated in the crimes of the regime, as well as families in which family members were implicated in the worst crimes of the National Socialist regime (Sichrovsky 1988; Bar-On 1989; Rosenthal 1998a; Welzer et al. 2002; Reiter 2006; Welzer 2006; Fulbrook 2011). One important distinction between German and Austrian families is that Austrian families often used the postwar national master narrative of Austria being one of the “first victims” of German National Socialism as a way to minimize not only the national enthusiasm for joining the German National Socialist project but also the family’s own responsibility for, perhaps, helping to bring that about and working with the regime. This shows how the broader cultural matrix can shape family and individual narratives about the past.

One of the most important conclusions that one can draw from this body of research is that much of the societal transformation that scholars have remarked on in terms of German and Austrian society taking greater responsibility for the crimes of the National Socialist regime are largely absent within the setting of the family. While both societies have come to identify a perpetrator group, “the Nazis”, at the societal level, the identity of the perpetrators remains highly abstracted and non-specific. At the same time, the narratives about the victims have become clearer, as members of the society are encouraged to identify with the Jewish, and occasionally, non-Jewish victims. The “vanishing perpetrator” phenomenon is very widespread just as is “victim identification”. In the context of the United States, think of how specific American knowledge has become about black victims during the civil rights struggle, while the white perpetrators and their institutions remain largely indistinct and rarely discussed. Even in examples that are often labeled as successes with regards to coming to terms with the past, in democratic societies, there are clear patterns of engagement and disengagement designed to protect the goodness of the family, community and society.

The importance of maintaining family solidarity drives family members to actively ignore or reinterpret pieces of family history so as to erase or minimize the role that grandparents and parents played in the Nazi regime. This is true for both families and family members that had marginal activity with the crimes of the regime as well as for families that have grandparents and parents who were deeply implicated in the worst crimes of the regime. Rosenthal writes in her study of family dialogues, “However, even when such intimations and hints [of NS crimes] are quite clear, there is very little risk of further exposure in inter- and intragenera-

tional dialog in Germany, as intimations of involvement in Nazi crimes are often passed over or blocked out by the listeners because of their own fears. That we ourselves as non-Jewish German interviewers are not free from this is something my colleagues and I experience time and again, even though in our conscious judgment we are so interested in exposing implications of this kind. We, too, are members of the children's and grandchildren's generation and have vague fears about exposing the past of people we encounter who despite their pleasant personalities may have done terrible things. We were socialized in our families and in German daily life in milieux where taboos about addressing certain themes, prohibitions against asking further questions and certain exonerating depictions were and continue to be operative" (Rosenthal 1998b: 241). Here is yet another excellent example of the socially shared retrieval-induced forgetting (SS-RIF).

At the same time, all of these authors are clear to point out that the reaction of the children and grandchildren toward parents that could be labeled as "perpetrators" in some sense is far from predictable and the responses do vary. Reiter's classification of six different responses in Austrian families that had "perpetrator" grandparents or parents is helpful here: (1) the children declare disinterest or indifference toward the topic, (2) they take strong defensive positions to protect the family, (3) they express hatred and rage and leave the family, (4) they turn the family into an intellectual project while remaining emotionally disengaged, (5) they become politically active in the present to fight against what they perceive their parents had supported but remain emotionally attached to the family by trying to understand their parent's behavior in the context of their time, and (6) they distance themselves from the family, but come to see themselves, by extension, as victims of National Socialism (Reiter 2006: 283-287). Because of the qualitative nature of the data and the difficulty of defining a set of families as "families of perpetrators", it is impossible to provide a precise measurement of these different groups in Austrian society, but Reiter's impression is that the third category is the smallest and that the first group is the largest. More importantly, all of the categories except for three and six try to hold the family together as a unit. Ferreria's observation from his clinical practice appears to be verified when looking at these studies of intergenerational dialogues within families.

Even families that lack perpetrators in any clear sense but feel themselves to be part of an in-group that is viewed as having been responsible for massive crimes are likely to engage in a collective defense of the in-group, which will again minimize damage to the family, in the most intimate sense, as well as the larger "national family". Two powerful forces are at work in both an individual and a collective sense: (1) the externalization of blame for whatever has gone wrong, and (2) the focus on one's own status as a victim rather than a perpetrator or as a member of a perceived

perpetrator group. Doosje and Branscombe, two social psychologists, have demonstrated this in-group bias and process of externalizing responsibility, concluding, "We found that the more people identified with their national group, the more likely they were to explain their group's negative historical treatment of another group in terms of situational factors, and the more likely they were to point to internal or dispositional factors when they explain similar negative behavior on the part of an outgroup" (Doosje and Branscombe 2003: 246).

As to focusing on one's own suffering, this appears, again, to be a universal human trait, which often can serve to block one's empathy with others. Rosenthal notes in her comparison of Nazi perpetrator families with Jewish survivor families the following, "A comparison of survivor and perpetrator families also illustrates structural differences with regard to the content of family myths. In survivor families, the construction of and identification with such myths focus on the themes of 'strength' and 'resistance' (such as a fantasy that the grandfather boxed an SS officer). In families with a Nazi past, this takes on the form of emphasizing the victimhood of the family members" (Rosenthal 1998c: 13). Fulbrook offers the following in her conclusion, tying together the process of externalizing blame and focusing on one's own suffering, "Thus in large numbers of post-war defence statements, memoirs and other accounts of past lives, Germans who had been deeply implicated in the Nazi system engaged in a self-distancing from the SS as the chief purveyor of evil, constructed 'Auschwitz' as a principal locus of murder ignoring all everyday sites of inhumanity, and reverted to the topos of the honourable army, service in which constituted justifiable patriotism or 'love of the Fatherland'" (Fulbrook 2011: 485). James Orr argues that one of the key reasons that Japanese society has tended to minimize its own culpability in the crimes of the militarist regime is the focus on Japanese victimhood, in which the reasons for the war and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are explained as something like a natural disaster (Orr 2001). And just one more example from a very rural village in Madagascar, in which Jennifer Cole, in writing about how the villagers have dealt with the memory of the massive repression unleashed by the French colonial forces against an anti-colonial uprising in 1947-48, during which the French executed 100,000 Malagasy: "Like the trope of internal goodness despite violence, the externalization of blame allowed people to ignore the violence they had done to each other, to act as if it were entirely the fault of external forces" (Cole 2001: 269).

What about the other side of the victim-perpetrator equation? How have Jewish families dealt with the intergenerational transfer of information and experiences from the Holocaust? Again, the past several decades have begun to yield a useful body of research in both the social sciences and the humanities. For both fields, key authors note the middle of the 1970s as a turning point when members of the second



generation began to write novels, produce and direct films, and also were beginning their careers in the social sciences and medical fields. As a generation, they began to realize that as a group they and their families faced special challenges in dealing with the past, challenges that were much more acute than for other families. Two important works were published in 1979: Helen Epstein's work, *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors*, and Eva Fogelman's *A Bibliography: Survivors and Their Children: Psychosocial Impact of the Holocaust* (Epstein 1979; Fogelman 1979).

That we can locate a specific timeframe within which these changes took place is significant because it tells us that generational turnover, after massive, traumatic events, can be an important mechanism in the process of collective memory formation. It was in the context of the 1970s that Art Spiegelman began to struggle with the fact that both of his parents had been Holocaust survivors and how this created a very difficult family life for himself. Spiegelman went on to write and draw *Maus*, an illustrated history of the Holocaust and his family after the Holocaust, one of the most celebrated works of the second generation (Spiegelman 1986; Spiegelman 1992; Spiegelman 2011). Berger notes that the 1980s saw a major change in the arts: "Creative responses by children of survivors began appearing with some regularity in the decade of the eighties. Strongly personal in nature, these works tended to be first novels, films, poems, and so on" (Berger 1997: 19; Sicher 1998; Berger and Berger 2001).

As with the perpetrator families, the psychological and emotional responses in survivor families and amongst the children of survivors have been wide-ranging. Although it is not possible to make many generalizations, one point that bears special mention, even if it appears obvious, is that this history matters a great deal to the parents and their children. They cannot escape it even if some wish they could. Danieli notes that there is a pervasive sense of guilt amongst the children of survivors and that they feel a strong sense of loyalty and responsibility toward both their parents and those who died in the Holocaust (Danieli 1981: 9). She also names four categories of family types: (1) victim families, (2) numb families, (3) fighter families, and (4) those who made it, meaning financial success or fame (Danieli 1981: 7). She also wants to argue against the study of a "survivor syndrome" (Niederland 1968) by again emphasizing that the individual responses to the trauma of the Holocaust in the second generation vary a great deal (Danieli 1981: 35).

Robert M. Prince echoes this observation in his work noting, "in fact the range of symptomatology is so broad that it encompasses nearly the entire *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*" (Prince 1985b: 12). Moreover, Prince argues for a psychoanalytic approach that is very similar to the process of collective memory formation argued for in this article: "Thus, the methodological problem is to develop a means

in investigation that generates data about both human subject and historical context and permits examination of the meaning of the context for the person” (Prince 1985a: 51). Memory needs to be studied in its social context. And that context includes a family in which the parents, almost without fail, communicate something about the Holocaust and their experiences, although the amount of specific information varies widely. But the desire of the parents to share something about their lives is inevitable, even if highly censored. In this manner, the experiences of the parents and the Holocaust shape the second generation by becoming part of their worldview, schema or paradigm. Prince calls it an “imagery of the past” and a metaphor through which daily lived experience is filtered (Prince 1985b: 23).

What all of this work on intergenerational family dialogues shows us, for both perpetrator and survivor families, is that there is not a simple stimulus and response. There is not a single “syndrome” that defines how these families and individuals react to their family and national history. A key component is how they decide, collectively, to define and give meaning to that history. This is an open-ended process in which we need to recognize, as Jeffrey Alexander has argued, that the trauma is not in the event, but in how the society comes to a collective sense of trauma after the fact. The naturalistic fallacy, as Alexander shows, is to argue that there is something inherently traumatic in the event, but this simply is not the case, for both individuals and societies (Alexander 2012). For example, the US atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 eventually came to be seen as a traumatic event for nearly all Japanese, but this was not the case immediately after the war. During that time the US occupation forces imposed official censorship on discussion of the bombings, thus blocking the contagion effect. But even after the lifting of censorship and the end of the occupation, the bombings were not widely discussed or seen as traumatic for “the Japanese”. Rather, the trauma appeared limited to the citizens of those two cities. What changed this was the so-called Lucky Dragon incident of 1955, when a Japanese fishing ship was hit by atomic fallout from the US testing of a nuclear bomb at the Bikini atoll in the Pacific Ocean, even though the fishing ship was well outside the official exclusion zone. When the fishermen began to show signs of radiation sickness and one of the members died, the Japanese, as a people, began to empathize much more extensively with the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and a wide-ranging debate about atomic bombs and what had happened at the end of the Second World War began. Films, novels, public debates and a ban the bomb social movement took off as the Japanese came to see and feel that they all had been affected by the atomic bombings at the end of the war. Alexander writes, “Insofar as they identify the cause of trauma in a manner that assumes such moral responsibility, members of collectivities define their solidarity relationships in ways that, in principle, allow them to share the suffering of others. Is the suffering of others also our own? In thinking that it might in fact be so, societies expand the circle

of the 'we'. By the same token, social groups can, and often do, refuse to recognize the existence of others' trauma, or place responsibility for it on people other than themselves. Because of their failure they cannot achieve a moral stance. Refusing to participate in the process of trauma creation, social groups restrict solidarity, leaving others to suffer alone" (Alexander 2012: 6).

Although we clearly cannot know for certain, it seems reasonable to assume that empathy has played an important role in the evolution of humanity. Unable to survive on our own, threatened by both the natural world and other human beings, in-group empathy, within the family and then within larger tribal groups certainly has been essential for human survival. Moreover, recent scholarship suggests that our ability and willingness to empathize with others has, perhaps, increased over time. While Jeremy Rifkin makes more of a normative appeal for the greater realization of this in the modern world, the cognitive scientist Steven Pinker argues that this indeed has been the case (Rifkin 2009; Pinker 2011). Karen Armstrong, the writer of popular comparative religion, draws upon the work of the German philosopher Karl Jaspers and has written about a period in human history that Jaspers called the Axial Age, which ran from 900 to 200 BCE, and transformed human spirituality (Jaspers 1953; Armstrong 2006). It was during this area, Armstrong argues, that spiritual thinkers in China, India, Palestine and Greece began to develop schools of religious thought and placed greater emphasis on empathy with others beyond one's immediate family or tribe, to see humanity and the human experience as a greater whole.

Armstrong relates one story from ancient Greece, which struck me as quite remarkable and closely related to the process of collective memory formation, but with a remarkable amount of empathy. In 480 BCE, the Persian king Xerxes sailed his far more powerful fleet against Athens as a result of a foreign policy blunder on the part of the Athenian government. The end result of the conflict, which is remarkable in its own right, was a stunning triumph for Athens against a far more powerful enemy. What is significant for the current argument is how the Greeks responded to this amazing victory. Armstrong writes, "At the Great Dionysia in 476 [BCE], the playwright Phrynichus presented a trilogy about the Persian wars. *The Fall of Miletus* has not survived, but the historian Herodotus (485-425) remembered the effect it had on the audience. 'The whole theater broke into weeping and they fined Phrynichus a thousand drachmas for bringing national calamities to mind that touched them so nearly and forbade forever the acting of that play'" (Armstrong 2006: 227). But the story does not end there. Four years later in 472, another play about the Persian wars was presented with a different perspective and a different outcome. Armstrong continues: "Catharsis was achieved by the experience of sympathy and compassion, because the ability to feel with the other was crucial to the tragic expe-

rience. This was especially clear in Aeschylus's *The Persians*, which was presented at the City Dionysia in 472." In *The Persians*, the point of view shifts to that of the Persians and how much they had suffered as a result of their massive military debacle in the war against Athens. Armstrong credits the play's success with its distancing the Athenians from the traumatic experience of the war and the sacking of their city. Instead of focusing attention on their own suffering, the Athenian audience was encouraged, in the spirit of the Axial Age, to identify with the universal nature of suffering in life, which was the primary theme in Greek tragic drama.

This example from ancient Greece helps to remind us that the process of collective memory formation and dealing with traumatic and violent histories is hardly anything that is unique to the modern world. Indeed, we see a growing willingness to restrain violent impulses, warn against the dangers of cycles of revenge, and to show a greater willingness to empathize with others. At the same time, as the preceding discussion has shown, there are numerous barriers that continue to exist that restrict our attempts to empathize with others and take responsibility for our violent and destructive histories. With this general model in mind and some key variables identified, we can now begin to look at what comparative lessons we can draw from several different cases of how societies have engaged with their violent histories.

Returning to the main theme of this article and the role that democratic and authoritarian states play in this whole process, both can act to enhance as well as block the process of creating greater empathy and dealing with difficult histories. In the case of East Germany, the state did a great deal to downplay and marginalize Jews as a specific victim group of National Socialism. In this manner, the state worked against the possibility of helping Germans to gain an empathetic identification with the Jewish victims of the Holocaust while also avoiding a deeper investigation of Germans as perpetrators during the Nazi years. At the same time, the official state relationship with the Soviet Union led the East German state and by extension its citizens to have a greater empathetic identification with the suffering of Russians during the war. In the case of American society, the recent example of the debates about the proposed Enola Gay exhibit at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington DC clearly demonstrated that American society is not yet ready for its own version of Aeschylus's play *The Persians*. The proposal that the exhibit provide some recognition of the Japanese experience of the bombing was met with fierce opposition from American Veterans groups and was eventually cancelled (Miyamoto 2012: 16-21). *The Persians* does not demand that the Athenians reject the defense that they took of their own city, but rather to recognize that the defense imposed immense suffering on others and to recognize that suffering. It is a challenge that remains with us today, and one that, when met, offers a greater hope for the future.

## REFERENCES

- Alexander, Jeffrey C. 2012. Cultural Trauma: A Social Theory, in: Jeffrey C. Alexander, (ed.), *Trauma: A Social Theory*. Polity. Malden, MA.
- Anastasio, Thomas J., Kristen Ann Ehrenberger, Patrick Watson, and Wenyi Zhang. 2012. *Individual and Collective Memory Consolidation: Analogous Processes on Different Levels*. MIT Press. Cambridge.
- Armstrong, Karen. 2006. *The Great Transformation: The Beginnings of our Religious Traditions*. Alfred A. Knopf. New York.
- Bar-On, Dan. 1989. *Legacy of Silence: Encounters with Children of the Third Reich*. Harvard University Press. Cambridge.
- Bartlett, Frederic C. 1995 (1932). *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.
- Berger, Alan L. 1997. *Children of Job: American Second-Generation Witnesses to the Holocaust*. State University of New York Press. Albany.
- Berger, Alan L. and Naomi Berger. 2001. *Second Generation Voices: Reflections by Children of Holocaust Survivors and Perpetrators*. Syracuse University Press. Syracuse.
- Berger, Peter L. and Thomas Luckmann. 1966. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Doubleday. New York.
- Cole, Jennifer. 2001. *Forget Colonialism? Sacrifice and the Art of Memory in Madagascar*. University of California Press. Berkeley.
- Damasio, Antonio. 2010. *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain*. Pantheon Books. New York.
- Danieli, Yael. 1981. Differing Adaptational Styles in Families of Survivors of the Nazi Holocaust. *Children Today*, (10), 5: 6-10, 34-35.
- Dönmez-Colin, Gönül. 2008. *Turkish Cinema: Identity, Distance and Belonging*. Reaktion Books. London.
- Doosje, Bertjan and Nyla R. Branscombe. 2003. Attributions for the Negative Historical Actions of a Group. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, (33): 235-248.
- Epstein, Helen. 1979. *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors*. Putnam. New York.
- Ferreria, Antonio J. 1963. Family Myth and Homeostasis. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, (9): 457-462.
- Fogelman, Eva. 1979. *A Bibliography: Survivors and Their Children: Psychosocial Impact of the Holocaust*. Zachor. New York.
- Frankl, Viktor E. 2006. *Man's Search for Meaning*, 4th ed. Translated by Ilse Lasch. Beacon Press. Boston.

- Fulbrook, Mary. 2011. *Dissonant Lives: Generations and Violence through the German Dictatorships*. Oxford University Press. Oxford.
- Gubern, Román. 1991. The Civil War: Inquest or Exorcism? *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, (13), 4: 103-112.
- Hirst, William and Gerald Echterhoff. 2012. Remembering in Conversations: The Social Sharing and Reshaping of Memories. *Annual Review of Psychology*, (63): 55-79.
- Jaspers, Karl. 1953. *The Origin and Goal of History*. Translated by Michael Bullock. Yale University Press. New Haven.
- Miyamoto, Yuki. 2012. *Beyond the Mushroom Cloud: Commemoration, Religion, and Responsibility after Hiroshima*. Fordham University Press. New York.
- Neisser, Ulric. 1982. *Memory Observed: Remembering in Natural Contexts*. W.H. Freeman. San Francisco.
- Neisser, Ulric and Eugene Winograd (eds.). 1988. *Remembering Reconsidered: Ecological and Traditional Approaches to the Study of Memory*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.
- Niederland, W. 1968. Clinical Observations on the Survivor Syndrome. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, (49): 313-315.
- Orr, James J. 2001. *The Victim as Hero: Ideologies of Peace and National Identity in Postwar Japan*. University of Hawai'i Press. Honolulu.
- Pennebaker, James W., Dario Paez, and Bernard Rimé (eds.). 1997. *Collective Memory of Political Events: Social Psychological Perspectives*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers. Mahwah, NJ.
- Pinker, Steven. 2011. *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence has Declined*. Viking. New York.
- Prince, Robert M. 1985a. Knowing the Holocaust. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, (5), 1: 51-61.
- Prince, Robert M. 1985b. Second Generation Effects of Historical Trauma. *Psychoanalytic Review*, (72), 1: 9-29.
- Rifkin, Jeremy. 2009. *The Empathic Civilization: The Race to Global Consciousness in a World in Crisis*. Penguin. New York.
- Reiter, Margit. 2006. *Die Generation danach: Der Nationalsozialismus im Familiengedächtnis*. Studien Verlag. Innsbruck.
- Rosenthal, Gabriele (ed.). 1998a. *The Holocaust in Three Generations: Families of Victims and Perpetrators of the Nazi Regime*. Cassell. London.
- Rosenthal, Gabriele. 1998b. National Socialism and Antisemitism in Intergenerational Dialogue, in: Gabriele Rosenthal (ed.), *The Holocaust in Three Generations: Families of Victims and Perpetrators of the Nazi Regime*. Cassell. London.
- Rosenthal, Gabriele. 1998c. Similarities and Differences in Family Dialog, in: Gabriele Rosenthal (ed.), *The Holocaust in Three Generations: Families of Victims and Perpetrators of the Nazi Regime*. Cassell. London.

- Ross, Marc Howard. 2009. Culture in Comparative Political Analysis, in: Mark Irving Lichbach and Alan S. Zuckerman (eds.) *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure*, 2nd ed. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.
- Sicher, Efraim. 1998. *Breaking Crystal: Writing and Memory after Auschwitz*. University of Illinois Press. Urbana.
- Sichrovsky, Peter. 1988. *Born Guilty: Children of Nazi Families*. Translated by Jean Steinberg. Basic Books. New York.
- Spiegelman, Art. 1986. *Maus I: A Survivor's Tale – My Father Bleeds History*. Pantheon Books. New York.
- Spiegelman, Art. 1992. *Maus II: A Survivor's Tale – And Here My Troubles Began*. Pantheon Books. New York.
- Spiegelman, Art. 2011. *MetaMaus: A Look Inside a Modern Classic, Maus*. Pantheon Books. New York.
- Stone, Charles B., Alin Coman, Adam D. Brown, Jonathan Koppel and William Hirst. 2012. Toward a Science of Silence: The Consequences of Leaving a Memory Un-said. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, (7), 1: 39-53.
- Suner, Asuman. 2010. *New Turkish Cinema: Belonging, Identity and Memory*. I.B. Tauris. London.
- Welzer, Harald. 2006. The Collateral Damage of Enlightenment: How Grandchildren Understand the History of National Socialist Crimes and their Grandfathers' Past. Translated by Laurel Cohen-Pfister, in: Laurel Cohen-Pfister and Dagmar Wienroeder-Skinner (eds.), *Victims and Perpetrators: 1933-1945: (Re)Presenting the Past in Post-Unification Culture*. Walter de Gruyter. Berlin.
- Welzer, Harald, Sabine Moller and Karoline Tschuggnall. 2002. "Opa war kein Nazi": *Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis*. Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag. Frankfurt am Main.
- Wolfgang, Mark A. 2006. Rediscovering Narratives of German Resistance: Opposing the Nazi 'Terror-State'. *Rethinking History*, (10), 2 (June): 201-219.
- Wolfgang, Mark A. 2011. "Getting History Right": *East and West German Collective Memories of the Holocaust and War*. Bucknell University Press. Lewisburg.
- Wolfgang, Mark A. 2014. Didactic War Crimes Trials and External Legal Culture: The Cases of the Nuremberg, Frankfurt Auschwitz and Majdanek Trials in West Germany. *Global Change, Peace & Security*, (26), 3: 281-297.

*Mailing Address:* **Mark A. Wolfgang**, Oklahoma State University – Stillwater, Department of Political Science, 207 Murray Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078, USA.  
*E-mail:* mark.wolfgang@okstate.edu