

FRAMING, CLAIMING AND BLAMING: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF
COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND VICTIMHOOD IN CONTEMPORARY
NORTH AMERICAN HOLOCAUST NARRATIVES

by

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Abstract

North American Holocaust narratives have undergone a number of temporal phases in collective representation, shifting from an initial widespread silence, to the current state of mass Americanization. The processes of how the Holocaust is recast, retold and socially reconstructed over time are examined in this essay. While many disciplines have attempted to study the Holocaust from a variety of theoretical perspectives, this essay is located at the intersection of two divergent areas of study. The combined studies of collective memory and victimology are applied to contemporary Holocaust narratives, in order to show how certain narratives gain primacy over others. Also illustrated is the manner in which particular groups lay claim to these narratives. Finally, conclusions relating to the purposes served by the domination of Holocaust narratives within the North American cultural context are highlighted, and future work is described.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgments	ii
Table of Contents	iv
Chapter I: Introduction	1
Chapter II: Collective Memory and Public History	4
The Contemporary Study of Memory.....	4
Social Constructionism and the Sociological Foundations of Collective Memory	7
Halbwachs' Legacy.....	8
Schwartz's Critiques	10
Historical Approaches and Debates	11
The Intersection of Sociology and History	14
Remembering and Forgetting	16
Summary	20
Chapter III: Victimology, Victim Status and Victim Blaming	21
Victimology: The Study of Victimization	21
The Social Construction of Victim Status	22
Terminologies and Typologies	24
The Cultural Meanings of Victimhood.....	27
Media Discourse	27
The Ideal Victim	28
The Phenomenon of Victim Blaming	30
The Politics of Victim Status	34
Anti-Victimism	34
Victim vs. Survivor.....	37
Summary	39
Chapter IV: Contemporary North American Holocaust Narratives	40
Points of Clarification	41
Shifts in North American Holocaust Consciousness	42
Formation and Public Exposure to Holocaust Narratives.....	46
Reactions to the Americanization of the Holocaust.....	51
Holocaust Victims/Survivors, Perpetrators and Bystanders	53
Uniqueness of the Holocaust, Hierarchies and Classification Systems.....	58
Summary	60
Chapter V: Jewish Resistance Narratives	61
“Like Sheep”: The Question of Jewish Resistance.....	62
Acts of Jewish Resistance.....	64
The Purpose of Resistance Narratives	67
The Purpose of Dominant “Passive” Narratives	68
Summary	69
Chapter VI: Conclusion	71
References	74

Chapter I: Introduction

The planned and deliberate murder of six million Jews during World War II has become a significant historical event within contemporary North American culture and collective memory, and many disciplines have attempted to uncover and come to terms with the mass atrocities that occurred under the Nazi regime, and which are commonly referred to as the Holocaust. This essay draws predominantly on two disciplines, sociology and history, in an effort to understand the multidimensional aspects of the Holocaust narratives that have come to dominate the North American cultural context. The theoretical perspective of social constructionism, in combination with concepts drawn from the sub-disciplines of collective memory, public history and victimology, are combined in ways that emphasize the importance of multidisciplinary contributions to the study of the Holocaust.

Chapter 2 discusses the socio-historical study of collective memory and public history, with the aim to provide a foundational overview and to address some of the central questions and complexities present within this field of study. Of interest are the instances in which the sociological study of collective memory and the historical approaches of public memory intersect. These intersections are discussed via the theoretical perspective of social constructionism, with topics such as the cultural processes of remembering and forgetting, and the importance of claimsmaking in the framing of socio-historical memories being considered. Therefore, it is the culturally-based rhetorical constructions of historical events and collective memories that comprise the focus of this chapter.

Chapter 3 introduces another prominent sociological area of study: victimology. After contextualizing the field of victimology and the rise of victim-related social movements and consciousness, this chapter addresses the social construction and cultural meanings that have

come to be associated with the terms “victim,” “survivor,” and the status of victimhood. Key concepts such as Christie’s “ideal victim” (1986) and Ryan’s “victim blaming” (1971) are explored, as well as, some of the social and political implications relating to the claiming or denial of victim status.

Next, Chapter 4 considers the Holocaust as an historical event that has undergone a number of temporal shifts in collective memory and social representation. Using the theoretical foundations and concepts presented in Chapters 2 and 3, Chapter 4 addresses the characteristics of various Holocaust narratives that have become dominant in North American popular culture and collective memory. Given that the geographic location of WWII and the Holocaust was in Europe, the increasing attention and significance of the Holocaust within the North American cultural context forms an interesting point of inquiry. In this light, the goal of this chapter is to draw out the manner in which themes of Jewish victimhood are constructed and circulated within these narratives, and the ways in which these narratives have been, and continue to be, promoted and disseminated throughout society. Focus is placed on the embedded cultural symbolism that characterizes processes of interpretation and reinterpretation, and the phenomenon of the “Americanization” of the Holocaust is discussed as a primary contributor to the dissemination of the narrative of the Jews as “ideal victims” over other narratives (Christie, 1986). Additionally, debates pertaining to the “universalization” and “uniqueness” of the Holocaust are addressed, with direct linkages to the process of attaining victim status in collective memory.

Finally, and in response to pertinent questions raised in Chapter 4 concerning the dominance of certain Holocaust narratives, Chapter 5 addresses the literature concerning Jewish resistance and agency during the Holocaust. This field of study arose in response to accusations of Jewish passivity under the Nazi regime, and to arguments that, in some sense, the Jews were

responsible for their own plight. It is argued that the manner in which Holocaust resistance narratives are constructed, as individual feats of strength rather than group level resistance, leaves the dominant narrative of Jews as “ideal victims” uncontested.

In sum, by using insights derived from the literature on collective memory and victimology, this essay aims to understand how and why certain Holocaust narratives take precedence over others, and the purposes they serve within the contemporary North American context.

Chapter II: Collective Memory and Public History

This chapter outlines the discourse relating to the socio-historical study of collective memory and public history. It begins by providing a general overview of the study of memory, focusing on the numerous disciplines and contemporary scholarly literature that have contributed to the study of this phenomenon. A number of complexities that have arisen within this field of study are also noted. Next, the sociological foundations of collective memory are discussed and situated within the theoretical perspective of social constructionism. This is followed by a consideration of the historical contributions to the study of public memory, including questions relating to the “problem of scale” and the “public/private divide,” the aim of which is to underscore the fundamental link and interrelation between the sociological formulations of “collective memory” and the historical conceptions of “public history.” Finally, the processes of remembering and forgetting and the importance of claimsmaking in the framing of socio-historical memories are considered, again using social constructionism as a conceptual framework. In sum, the overall objective of this chapter is to provide the reader with a foundational knowledge of the literature concerning the study of collective memory and public history.

The Contemporary Study of Memory

Since the 1980s an increase in popular and scholarly interest in the study of memory has taken place within North America, with this phenomenon being referred to as the “memory industry” (Klein, 2000) or the “memory boom” (Blight, 2009). An acknowledgement of how “the past surrounds and saturates us; [and] every scene, every statement, every action retains residual content from earlier times” contributes to the widespread increase in attention (Lowenthal, 1985: 185). Additionally, reasons for the burgeoning discipline include “the rise of

multiculturalism, the fall of Communism, and a politics of victimization and regret” (Olick and Robbins, 1998: 107). On a similar note, “the bloody history of the twentieth century [has] made us more concerned with how nations organize their pasts, how they forge creation stories, invent traditions, and how and why great violence can be committed in the name of memory” (Blight, 2009: 241). In other words, violence, victimization and the concept of nationhood are key themes that have been studied within the memory literature. Schwartz (1996a: 277-278) shows how within the academic literature it is widely acknowledged that,

three related aspects of 1960s – 1970s intellectual culture...gave rise to interest in the social construction of the past. First, multiculturalists identify historiography as a source of cultural domination and challenge dominant historical narratives in the name of repressed groups. Second, postmodernists attack the conceptual underpinnings of linear historicity, truth, and identity, thereby raising interest in the relations linking history, memory, and power. Finally, hegemony theorists provide a class-based account of the politics of memory, highlighting memory contestation, popular memory, and the instrumentalization of the past (as summarized by Olick and Robbins, 1998: 108).

Thus, due to an increase in political and social movements during the 1960s, issues of power, knowledge, struggle and contestation became central within many disciplines, especially within the study of memory. While a discussion of the theoretical perspectives and associated social movements lie beyond the scope of this paper, the quote serves the purpose of contextualizing some of the reasons for a widespread expansion in memory studies within the socio-historical literature.

The study of memory has largely been situated within the fields of history, philosophy, geography, psychology and sociology. The vast diversity of approaches has contributed to an immense depth and breadth of knowledge, as each field has established particular standpoints with respect to how to best to study and understand “collective memory.” However, such diverse perspectives have also contributed to a rising number of complexities within the study of

memory. For instance, one of the biggest points of contention focuses on terminology. As many theorists are quick to point out in the opening paragraphs of their publications, given the range of disciplines that have made claims to the study of memory, the meaning of “collective memory” has ironically become increasingly elusive (Hamilton, 2010; Irwin-Zarecka, 1994; Olick, 2007; Olick and Robbins, 1998; Roediger III, Zaremb and Butler, 2009; Wertsch, 2009). Adding to this complexity are, “a plethora of terms” that are used interchangeably, including, “collective,” “cultural,” “popular,” “group,” and “social” memory (Glassberg, 1996: 8; Wertsch 2009: 117). With that said, “collective memory” in its current, popular usage has come to imply a dominant, widely agreed upon narrative that focuses on defining historical events and culturally significant social practices (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994: 67; Middleton and Edwards, 1990: 3). Therefore, “collective memories...provide the common landmarks of everyday life” (Blight, 2009: 239).

Olick reiterates this sentiment when he says,

Collective memory has been used to refer to aggregated individual recollections, to official commemorations, to collective representations, and to disembodied constitutive features of shared identities; it is said to be located in dreamy reminiscence, personal testimony, oral history, tradition, myth, style, language, art, popular culture, and the built world (2007: 21, italics in original).

Thus, Olick is able to capture the tangible, yet ephemeral spirit of collective memory. While collective memories are aggregated social recollections, they are also seemingly located within a realm of subjectivity and emotion, which ultimately proves difficult to identify. As will soon become evident, memory, both individual and collective, poses many challenges to empirical and objective study.

Despite these conceptual complexities, for the purpose of this chapter, and this essay more broadly, I have chosen to employ the terms “collective memory” and “public history.” The defining characteristics of each are discussed shortly, but first it must be noted that this decision

reflects the idea that “collective memory” is a term with sociological lineage, while “public history” is situated within the realm of history.

Social Constructionism and the Sociological Foundations of Collective Memory

Prior to discussing the sociological foundations and key contributors to the study of collective memory, it is important to have a basic understanding of the theoretical position known as social constructionism. Widely credited as the first theorists to discuss social constructionism, Berger and Luckmann explore how knowledge is socially and culturally constructed in their seminal publication *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966). Social constructionism posits that all knowledge, including the norms and values that emerge within social reality are culturally constructed (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Harris, 2008; Pfohl, 2008). As Berger and Luckmann note, “human existence is...an ongoing externalization. As man externalizes himself, he constructs the world *into* which he externalizes himself. In the process of externalization, he projects his own meanings into reality” (1966: 104, italics in original). Here the basic principle of social constructionism is demonstrated: that individuals create meanings and categories to which social phenomena are then assigned through a process of interpretation and negotiation. In fact, it is when these seemingly individual constructions come together and become part of a larger social reality, that collective experiences on a societal, macro level take place. Sideman notes that Berger and Luckmann’s

intent was to frame everyday life as a fluid, precariously negotiated achievement of individuals in interaction...[and] to offer a general theory of the social origins and reproduction of social institutions. Their principle thesis was that individuals in interaction create social worlds through their linguistic, symbolic activity for the purpose of giving coherence and purpose to an essentially open-ended, uniform human existence (2008: 76).

To reiterate, social constructionism provides the theoretical tools that enable the cultural meaning of seemingly “fixed” or “taken for granted” social phenomena to be reconceptualized as

having emerged through complex social processes. Hence, “most constructionist investigations address the question of *how* social reality is assembled” (Gubrium and Holstein, 2008: 6). Hacking’s formulation of “X” is also useful to illustrate the dimensions of social constructionism (1999). He says, “in the present state of affairs, X is taken for granted; X appears to be inevitable. X need not have existed, or need not be at all as it is” (Hacking, 1999: 6). These propositions should be kept in mind, as they provide useful conceptual tools in the following discussions.

Halbwachs’ Legacy

The term “collective memory” has been attributed to French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, first appearing in his posthumously translated work entitled *On Collective Memory* (1992). Indeed, much of the literature across the broad range of previously specified disciplines cite Halbwachs as a key contributor to the establishment of memory studies. Halbwachs’ work is distinctly sociological as the key explanatory paradigm that he employs relates to “social frameworks” of memory. As Olick remarks, “Halbwachs was also unmistakably his teacher’s student: the very term *mémoire collective* was stamped with the memory of Emile Durkheim’s master concept of *conscience collective*” (2007: 6, italics in original). At the risk of oversimplification, Durkheim’s conceptualization of the collective consciousness published in his seminal work *The Division of Labour in Society* (2005 [1893]) focused on the process of ascribing meaning to objects and symbols, the formation of collective representations of memory. Durkheim stated that the *conscience collective* is “diffused throughout the whole of society...[and has] specific characteristics which make it a distinctive reality” (2005[1893]: 24). These sentiments ground Halbwachs’ work, as his central argument is that collective memories

are located within the realm of the social, and are therefore, always socially imbued with meaning. As summarized by Coser,

collective memory, Halbwachs shows, is not a given but rather a socially constructed notion... 'while the collective memory endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is individuals as group members who remember.' It follows that there are as many collective memories as there are groups and institutions in a society (1992: 22).

In other words, collective memories are first and foremost social entities that are collectively constructed and wholly dependant on the lived experiences of the individuals who are actively (or passively) remembering (Apfelbaum, 2010; Olick, 2007). Additionally, collective memories are "a product of a great deal of work by large numbers of people, all securing (mostly) public articulation for the past" (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994: 67). Olick clarifies this by noting that,

collective memory – the property of groups and a sometimes embodied, sometimes disembodied, cultural inheritance – ha[s] an ontological status sui generis. Collective memory... is not identical to the memories of a certain percentage of the population but constitutes a social fact in and of itself (2007: 7).

Linking back to Durkheim's (2005 [1893]) use of the concept "sui generis," Latin for "of its own kind," Olick's point is that collective memory exists external to each individual (2007). It is through complex processes of socialization that societal beliefs, assumptions, mores, attitudes and even emotional responses are impressed upon the individual. Symbolic interactionist Howard Becker's seminal work *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (1963) demonstrates the socialization process that occurs when new members join a drug subculture. Becker shows how participants have to engage in a process of learning so as to attain knowledge of a "collective memory" that enables them to experience drug use as part of a particular group (Becker, 1963, 1967). Therefore, both Olick (2007) and Becker (1963, 1967) highlight the shift from individual to group experiences.

Schwartz's Critiques

Barry Schwartz, another prominent sociological scholar of collective memory has put forth a critique about the ways in which collective memory has been studied. By grounding his critique in examples such as the contemporary cultural depictions of two United States presidents (Schwartz, 1991; 1996b), and a study about Masada in collective memory (Schwartz, Zerubavel and Barnett, 1986), Schwartz is able to clearly identify the two major theoretical stances that have been widely employed in the study of collective memory. He points out their weaknesses.

On the one hand, essentialism assumed that memory and images of the past are to be understood as expressions of historical reality-become-social structure...On the other hand presentism assumes that memory and images of the past are produced in the present for present purposes and hence are indices not of anything that happened in the past and its effects on the present but of the structure of interests and needs of the present (Olick 2007: 7-8, summarizing Schwartz, 1996a).

Schwartz (1996a) argues that both theoretical positions of “essentialism” and “presentism” fail to “provide an adequate depiction of the statics and dynamics of memory, either individual or collective” (Olick 2007: 8). Thus Schwartz draws attention to the lack of acknowledgement in regards to the variable process or formation of collective memories that oscillate between states of being static and dynamic. It is in this way that meanings are constructed and social interpretations occur. However, as Olick suggests, a first stage in coming to terms with the weaknesses of these two theoretical paradigms is to “understand the ways in which, and reasons for which, images of the past change or remain the same rather than to define memory *a priori* as inherently durable or malleable” (2007: 8).

It is here that Olick and Robbins have made an immense contribution to the field of memory studies, as they identify “six ideal types of mnemonic malleability or persistence” (1998: 129). Essentially, they have formulated a table of three types of memory that vary

depending on malleability or persistence. The resulting six types of memory are as follow: instrumental persistence, cultural persistence, inertial persistence, instrumental change, cultural change, inertial change. The defining characteristics of each category are elaborated in Table 1 which is reproduced in the Appendix (Olick and Robbins, 1998). It can therefore be understood that the theoretical standpoint of “presentism,” which sees memory as a product of the present, largely aligns with Halbwachs’ conceptualization of memory (Olick, 2007: 7-8). However, as Olick and Robbins emphasize, within the “presentism” literature, the framing of the past within the present can be divided into two dimensions of memory: “instrumental” or “meaning” (1998: 128). They distinguish how

the former see memory entrepreneurship as a manipulation of the past for particular purposes where the latter see selective memory as an inevitable consequence of the fact that we interpret the world – including the past – on the basis of our own experience and within a cultural framework (Olick and Robbins, 1998: 129).

Notably, Olick and Robbins continue to use the word “instrumental” in the same way as in their table of six mnemonic ideal types. Thus, Halbwachs (1992) in fact combines elements of both “instrumental” and “meaning” memory in his work. The perspective that is taken in the following chapters while discussing contemporary North American Holocaust narratives emphasizes the “instrumental” or “presentism” literature, as it is a macro-level perspective, yet still aims to take into account the micro-level processes of how historical events are given meaning and are subject to interpretation.

Historical Approaches and Debates

The academic study of history, also known as historiography, has traditionally depicted the past in such a way that posits an objective and unbiased formulation of historical events. It is the aim of historiographers to “characterize a single group or institution’s beliefs about its past,”

thus formulating a detached and “true” account of historical events (Glassberg, 1996: 9). Despite an acknowledgement of historical interpretation, claiming an awareness of the complexities of history, and seemingly accepting the ambiguities that occur within these historical moments, a dominant historical narrative tends to emerge and be circulated (Wertsch, 2009: 127).

However, within the discipline of history, a field known as “public history” has emerged. Public history, often framed in opposition to “academic history,” focuses on the study of “collective” or “cultural” memory from an historical perspective (Frish, 1990; Glassberg, 1996; Hamilton, 2010). The key difference is that scholars of public history are interested in “understanding the interrelationship between different versions of history in public...[and] ... studying the minds of the audiences where all these versions of the past converge and are understood” (Glassberg, 1996: 9-10). In other words, the study of public history aims to reach beyond the academic accounts of an historical event and understand the multiplicity of versions that are “competing for influence in public [and] in a particular place and time” (Glassberg, 1996: 9). Again, understanding the nature of temporal shifts in historical representations is essential to this perspective.

Within the study of public history, there are two key interrelated components worthy of mention: scale and the public/private divide. Glassberg discusses what he has termed “the problem of scale,” by questioning the possibility of studying collective memory at a macro level if individuals are constantly engaged in processes of interpretation and understanding history from their own unique standpoints (1996: 10). Likewise, “one of the most difficult theoretical issues confronting the study of memory has been the conceptual problem of group memory and how memories carried by individuals become part of a larger social dynamic” (Hamilton, 2010: 299). In essence, both of these quotes underscore the complication of moving between micro

and macro levels when it comes to studying memory. While these observations play a key focal point in the psychology literature, in the field of public history, they acknowledge the challenges of uniting traditional historiography with the study of memory. Hamilton continues to contribute to this discussion when she addresses how

memory identified as public or collective ... is constituted not only by what people remember of their own experiences but also by a constructed past...[I]n order for personal memories to become part of a wider collective phenomenon, individual experience is necessarily transfigured and is therefore always 'more than' individual. Public memory, in this sense, refers to a past that is both commonly shared and collectively commemorated – these should not be understood as the same activities – though, of course, not one necessarily shared by all people, unambiguously, in any particular collectivity (2010: 300).

In coming to terms with the problem of shifting scale from the micro to macro level, Hamilton suggests that a focus be placed on collective or group communication and the process of repeating and reiterating symbols, practices and traditions. These processes necessarily have a dialectical or cyclical nature, thus linking back to the social construction of collective memory. Finally, Glassberg is also astute in wondering, “with all the possible versions of the past that circulate in society, how do particular accounts of the past get established and disseminated as the public one? [And,] how do these public histories change over time?” (1996: 11). Glassberg’s queries are important to keep in mind while considering the discussions presented throughout this essay, as they form one of the central research questions to be addressed: how and why particular North American Holocaust narratives form and disseminate throughout contemporary society.

In relation into the “problem of scale” is the division between public and private memory, and by extension, history (Frish, 1990; Glassberg, 1996; Hamilton, 2010; Klein, 2000). Reiterating an earlier point, public history and public memory are considered intimately linked, and grounded within the macro level of theoretical explanation. Conversely, private memories

are those of the individual, while academic historians produce “private history” (Glassberg, 1996). It is important to realize that these conceptual boundaries are not as rigid and fixed as they may appear. Rather, the shift from individual to collective, or from private to public is fluid. While a detailed explanation concerning the semantics of this process and the associated debates lie beyond the scope of this essay, this conceptual issue was mentioned to illustrate the added complexities within the study of collective memory and public history.

The Intersection of Sociology and History

As previously alluded, an ongoing debate has formed around the distinction made between the study of “collective memory” and “public history,” with the former referring to the sociological study of memory, while the latter is concerned with historiography and the historical approaches to the remembered past (Glassberg, 1996; Klein, 2000; Wertsch, 2009). This has been termed the “history/memory puzzle” (Blight, 2009: 241). In a chapter about collective memory, Wertsch presents a comparative table that contrasts “collective memory” with “history” (2009: 127). Through this device, it becomes clear that Wertsch associates “collective memory” with a subjective, commemorative voice that aligns with heroic narratives and seeks to link the past with the present (2009: 127). Conversely, “history” is depicted as objective, using an historical voice, subject to ongoing historical interpretation, and finally with a goal of differentiating the past from the present (Wertsch, 2009: 127). Historian Peter Novick contributes to this conceptual dichotomy when he writes,

to understand something historically is to be aware of its complexity, to have sufficient detachment to see it from multiple perspectives, to accept the ambiguities...Collective memory simplifies; sees events from a single, committed perspective; is impatient with ambiguities of any kind; reduces events to mythic archetypes (1999: 3-4).

While these distinctions are clearly posited by historical theorists, in that they claim history is open to interpretation while memory is static and structured by the dispersal of “grand narratives,” it in fact contradicts the sociological perspectives concerning memory and history.

Summarizing Halbwachs, the

contrast between *history* and *collective memory* [is] one based on the relevance of the past to the present... Halbwachs thus alternately refers to *autobiographical memory*, *historical memory*, *history*, and *collective memory*. Autobiographical memory is memory of those events that we ourselves experience (though experiences are shaped by group memberships), whereas historical memory is memory that reaches us only through historical records. History is the remembered past to which we no longer have an ‘organic’ relation – the past that is no longer an important part of our lives – whereas collective memory is the active past that forms our identities (Olick 2007: 20, italics in original).

The summary of Halbwachs’ four distinct terms aims to further clarify the intersecting categories of memory and history. However, it may be the case that memory may elude such rigid categorization.

For the purposes of this essay “collective memory” and “history” are not approached as distinct categories, but rather intertwined or “entangled” (Sturken, 1997: 5). Similarly, “history and memory are two attitudes toward the past, two streams of historical consciousness that must at some point flow into one another” (Blight, 2009: 242). In this light, the past, be it the historical past or the remembered past, is always subjective and “disagreement, change and controversy [are] part of ongoing historical interpretation[s]” (Blight, 2009: 242). Interestingly, Sturken’s work employs the term “‘cultural memory’ to denote [a type of] memory that is shared outside the avenues of formal historical discourse yet is entangled with cultural products and imbued with cultural meaning” (1997: 3). Akin to the use of “collective memory” in this essay, Sturken uses “cultural memory” to examine how popular culture has produced memories of particular historical events. The aim of her study is to understand the interpretive phenomenon

and formation of shifting meanings that take place when “private” memories are publicly shared (Sturken, 2010).

To summarize, “collective memory” and “history” come together in this essay to compose a hybrid field of study, grounded in the theory of social constructionism. Sturken’s *Tangled Memories* (1997) provides a number of case studies on the combining of social memory with public history, noting how, “cultural memory can be distinct from history, yet...it is essential in its construction” (4). Here she is referring to the paradoxical idea that on one hand, history “can be thought of as a narrative that has in some way been sanctioned or valorized by institutional frameworks or publishing enterprises,” yet, as she aptly points out, “many histories are constantly under debate and in conflict with each other” (Sturken, 1997: 5). Sturken’s line of reasoning is that every past event, by nature, has to have a history. She is able to illustrate this by drawing on one of the primary examples used in her book: “The history of the Vietnam War, for instance, consists of conflicting narratives, but there are particular elements within those stories that remain uncontested, such as the war’s divisive effect on the United States” (Sturken, 1997: 5). Notably, while erasing the boundaries between history and memory, one must be mindful not to conflate contested historical narratives with uncontested historical facts.

Remembering and Forgetting

Another key component in the study of the social construction of memory relates to how societies forget either entire historical events, or moments within those events. The field of memory studies argues that the process of forgetting is equally as important to consider as the practice of remembering (Gross, 2000; Halbwachs, 1992; Irwin-Zarecka, 1994; Middleton and Edwards, 1990; Olick and Robbins, 1998). Moreover, throughout the dynamic process of constructing memory narratives, boundaries are drawn around the elements that are remembered,

thus necessarily leaving out certain details, oppositional perspectives and so forth. It is these elements that become “forgotten.” To draw on Halbwachs:

the various groups that compose society are capable at every moment of reconstructing their past. But, as we have seen, they most frequently distort the past in the act of reconstructing it. There are surely many facts, and many details of certain facts, that the individual would forget if others did not keep their memory alive for him. But, on the other hand, society can live only if there is a sufficient unity of outlooks among the individuals and the groups comprising it (1992: 182).

Drawing attention to the precarious balance struck between remembering and forgetting, Halbwachs observes that it is impossible for a society to function if there are countless interpretations (too many memories) of an historical event. Lowenthal suitably notes that, “memories must continually be discarded and conflated; only forgetting enables us to classify and bring chaos into order” (1985: 205). Yet, a complete erasure of the past can be detrimental as well. Bertman (2000) employs the term “cultural amnesia” to refer to the widespread phenomenon of forgetting social memories and collective histories. Situating his study at the macro, national level, Bertman claims that, “cultural amnesia, like Alzheimer’s disease, is an insidiously progressive and destructive illness” and specifically focuses his critique on “the larger forces that conspire to alienate Americans from their past: a materialistic creed that celebrates transience, an electronic faith that worships the present to the exclusion of all other dimensions of time” (2000: 4). While his approach to understanding memory relies heavily on the language of psychology, Bertman is able to provide a useful metaphor for the process of forgetting, and discuss the various causes and social implications of “cultural amnesia.” Relating back to Halbwachs’ quote, in order for societies to maintain a balance between excessive remembering and forgetting, active communication, interpretation and the sharing of collective memories have to take place. As echoed by Lowenthal, “the very process of communication

demands creative change to make the past convincing and intelligible. Like memory, history conflates, compresses, exaggerates; unique moments of the past stand out, uniformities and minutiae fade away” (1985: 218). Ultimately, the “distortion” Halbwachs speaks about occurs during the process of reconstruction and communication of past events.

It has been widely acknowledged that the role claimsmakers play in the process of socially constructing public narratives, and by extension the formation of collective memory, is pivotal (Hamilton, 2010; Irwin-Zarecka, 1994; Lowney, 2008). Frequently discussed in the sociological literature on moral panics, claimsmakers are key actors, stakeholders or advocates that influence and shape how the social problems are publicly received (Becker, 1963; Best, 2008; Cohen, 1973; Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994). As noted by Lowney, “claimsmaking, first and foremost, begins by harnessing passions” (2008: 331). Eventually, the goal of a claimsmaker is to seek control over how the situation is interpreted, and in due course, how policies are implemented. Becker calls claimsmakers “moral entrepreneurs,” underscoring the framework of morality that often becomes attached to the depictions of a social problem (1963). It has also been argued that claimsmaking is “work,” thus reaffirming the notion that collective memories are “not a ‘natural’ result of historical experience” (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994: 67).

Interestingly, the passage of time itself can influence the way past events are perceived, as social groups engaged in the act of remembrance are influenced by current modes of thinking. Simply living in the present impacts the character of the interpretations formulated about the past (Lowenthal, 1985). As illustrated,

hindsight as well as anachronism shapes historical interpretations. To explain the past to the present means coping not only with shifting perceptions, values and languages, but also with developments after the period under review. We are bound to see the Second World War differently in 1985 than in 1950, not merely because masses of new evidence have come to light, but also because the years have unfolded further consequences (Lowenthal, 1985: 217).

Understandably, claimsmakers located at different points in history may argue a diverse range of perspectives and frame the event very differently. In line with the process of claimsmaking, it is logical that collective memory has been conceptualized as a “resource.” As described by Irwin-Zarecka,

collective memory is a precious resource...for maintaining social bonds and claiming authority, for mobilizing action and legitimating it. Indeed, it is one of the most important symbolic resources we have, imbued as it often is with quasi-sacred meanings and capable of evoking very powerful emotions (1994: 67).

In a similar light, Halbwachs comments that, “depending on its circumstances and point in time, society represents the past to itself in different ways: it modifies its conventions. As ...its members accept these conventions, they inflect their recollections in the same direction in which collective memory evolves” (1992: 172-173). Thus, collective memory is a “cultural inheritance” that can be “actively or passively maintained” (Olick, 2007: 6). In this regard, “active or passive maintenance” relates to the various social processes of negotiation, in which the accumulation and transformation of *memory* into *collective memory* takes place. The well-known adage “history is written by the victors” demonstrates the process by which cultural meanings are instilled within certain historical moments, events or people. Furthermore, this axiom demonstrates how these narratives are embedded with power relations, as the victors’ perspective is recalled, while the standpoint of the defeated becomes caricatured during the victors’ retelling. As Hamilton states, “there is always conflict about how an event is remembered and what it means. In becoming public, memory is inevitably steeped in controversy” (2010: 300). A facet to be considered in the following chapters relates to how individuals, each with their own personal stories, are able to come together and create a

seemingly overarching, dominant narrative where the cultural bias is evident and the multiplicity of personal details are subsumed into the larger cultural retelling.

Summary

Gross (2000) succinctly summarizes three prominent dimensions of how society is involved in the study of memory. He writes,

first, [society] plays a powerful role in determining which values, facts, or historical events are worth being recalled and which are not; second, it has a hand in shaping how information from the past is to be recalled; and third, it has a say in deciding the degree of emotional intensity to be attached to memories (Gross, 2000: 77).

Various complexities arise whilst exploring the field of memory studies and reviewing the current literature. This chapter has aimed to provide the reader with a foundational knowledge about the various debates and approaches to the study of collective memory and public history. The central components of memory, as studied from sociological and historical standpoints, form the theoretical basis of the content discussed in the following chapters. Additionally, the theory of social constructionism plays a central role in the upcoming chapters concerning victimology and contemporary Holocaust narratives, as well as the fine balance struck between remembering and forgetting. The next chapter will explore the field of victimology and introduce key concepts such as victim status, the ideal victim, and victim blaming.

Chapter III: Victimology, Victim Status and Victim Blaming

The intent of this chapter is to highlight the social constructions and cultural meanings associated with the status of victimhood. To set the context, a brief discussion concerning the history of victimology is presented. Next, the social and cultural meanings associated with the term “victim,” and the media discourses that contribute to these frames are considered. The political context and implications of claiming or denying victim status are also examined. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a theoretical foundation for the study of contemporary North American Holocaust narratives, and to understanding how various forms of victimhood become embedded within these collective memories.

Victimology: The Study of Victimization

The study of victimology, a sub-discipline of criminology, has often been divided into several areas of interest. These broad categories include: meanings, cultural images and politics relating to victimhood and victim status; research methodologies and theoretical explanations of victimization; and finally, experiences and aftermath pertaining to victimization, including the role of the victim within the criminal justice system. This chapter specifically focuses upon the first of these categories relating to the meanings, cultural images and politics of victimhood¹.

In the United States during the 1960s and 1970s a paradigmatic shift occurred away from offender-centred criminology. Research pertaining to criminal victimization became a significant area of study. The creation and widespread dissemination of victimization surveys in North America has been cited as one of the central developments in the proliferation of victimology (Fattah, 2010; Kennedy and Sacco, 1998; Walklate, 2007a). As noted by Fattah, it was due to this “wealth of data yielded on crime victims and on criminal victimization...[that]

¹ For a more detailed exploration of victimology, consider Karmen (1996); Kennedy and Sacco (1998); Shoham, Knepper and Kerr (2010); Spalek (2006); Walklate (2007a).

the ideological transformation of victimology and the political, social, and legal changes” were able to take place (2010: 46).

Another primary reason for this shift was the social and political climate of the 1960s (English, 2011). During the 1960s there was an observable country-wide increase in predatory crime, thus provoking the creation of victims’ movements and support groups that pressured the government to acknowledge the experiences and rights of victims (Elias, 1986; English, 2011; Kennedy and Sacco, 1998; Spalek, 2006; Wallace, 1998). In this respect, the emergence and growth of the victims’ movement was tied to the rise of other prominent social movements during the 1960s and 1970s (Berns, 2004; English, 2011). For example, issues such as rape and domestic abuse were widely problematized by the women’s movement and civil rights movement, which, for the first time, saw the victims of these crimes as part of a larger social malaise, as opposed to a personal weakness of the individual (Berns, 2004; Elias, 1986; Karmen, 1996: 31; Loseke, 1991; Peterson, 1991). With the growth of the victims’ rights movement, there was a rise in the number of social support programs and resources available to victims of crime. Additionally, there were observable impacts upon the criminal justice system, such as the prominence of victim impact statements during a criminal trial and victims’ roles in restorative justice programs (Goff, 2008; Kennedy and Sacco, 1998; Spalek: 2006; Wallace, 1998).

The Social Construction of Victim Status

It is important to describe what the term “victim” means sociologically. Fattah poses some key questions that draw attention to the complexity of defining and classifying this term.

He asks,

just what does the term [victim], as used in criminology and victimology, mean? Is it a label, a stereotype? Is it a state, a condition? Is it meant to assign a status, a role, to the one so described? Is it a self-perception, a social construction, an expression of sympathy, a legal qualification, a juridical designation? (2010: 49).

As it will become evident, these intricacies permeate all aspects of the study of victimization. However, this chapter and essay as a whole, takes the position that “victim status” is a label imbued with cultural and social meanings. Emphasis is placed on the social designation of victim status, as oppose to self-perceptions of victimhood, although both perspectives are to some extent intertwined. Additionally, it is through these cultural and social meanings that one can understand the value of victimology as a sociological pursuit, and its intersections with issues of power and politics, and collective memory.

Recall that social constructionist scholars posit that social reality is comprised of symbols and meanings rooted in social actions, statuses and behaviours, and these emerge through various processes of interpretation, negotiation, and claimsmaking (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Harris, 2008; Pfohl, 2008). Claimsmakers aim to define a social phenomenon as problematic, and rally support to enact social and often legal reforms (Cohen, 1973). As described by Best, through the use of rhetoric and communication, claimsmakers influence the construction of social problems and engage in a process called “typification” (1995; Kennedy and Sacco, 1998). In the most extreme cases, claimsmaking contributes to the formation of a moral panic, summed up by Goode and Ben-Yehuda’s five distinctive characteristics of: concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality, and volatility (1994). While this chapter does not directly draw on the moral panic literature, it should be pointed out that a large body of moral panic scholarship relies on the social construction of problems, and often makes use of the dichotomous frames of the “victim” and the “offender.” It is through these formulations that claimsmakers problematize a lack of resources and rally support around the minimization of social problems, specifically victimization. This sentiment is exemplified within any of the moral panic literature, although most notably in the discourses concerning pedophilia and sex offending (Flowers, 2006; Jenkins,

1998; Kitzinger, 2004), victimization of the elderly (Fattah and Sacco, 1989; Sacco and Nakhaie, 2001) and domestic violence (Berns, 2004; Loseke, 1991; Peterson, 1991).

Terminologies and Typologies

In the academic community and occasionally in popular culture, there have been significant debates concerning the meanings and uses of the term “victim.” It is highly important to engage with the challenges posed by constraining the definition of “victim” and “victimization,” not only for theoretical reasons, but for practical reasons. For instance, it is essential for organizations conducting victimization surveys to delineate their terms in order to ascertain accurate and reliable data. However, the process of drawing boundaries between included and excluded criteria is always problematic and highly politicized (Bowker and Star, 1999). The status of victimhood is complicated as, “it depends upon wider historical, social and cultural processes and their relationship to human action” (Spalek, 2006: 9). In other words, some characteristics of victimhood are valued, while others are framed in opposition and stigmatized.

According to Bayley there are a number of conditions that need to be met in order to classify an individual as a victim (1991). The conditions include: having suffered a loss due to one’s inability or helplessness to prevent such circumstances, an acknowledgement that the loss endured has an identifiable cause, and finally, that the legal or moral context of the loss entitles one to social concern (Bayley, 1991: 53). Bayley’s criteria underscore the idea that victimization occurs as a result of a weakness and an inability to defend oneself from certain people and encounters. Additionally, this definition takes the perspective that the loss and suffering endured by the victim is unjustified and undeserved.

In another attempt to delineate the boundaries of victimhood, Strobl has put forth a four-part typology that addresses the larger social dynamics and politics present within the attainment or denial of victim status (2010: 6; see Appendix Table 2). The first category, the “actual victim,” is a person who regards himself/herself as a victim and is also considered a victim by relevant others. Second, and located on the opposite side of the spectrum is the “nonvictim,” a person who does not hold himself/herself as a victim, and is not regarded as a victim by others. Third, the “rejected victim,” is a person who considers himself/herself a victim but is not regarded as a victim by relevant others. And fourth, the “designated victim,” is a person who does not think of himself/herself as a victim, yet is regarded as a victim by others. The purpose of presenting Strobl’s typology is to accentuate the complex and socially constructed nature of victimhood and to draw attention to the duality of self-imposed versus socially-imposed formulations of victimhood. Strobl points out that those who are

conceived as a victim or as an offender depends not only on formal rules...but also on informal rules that vary between different cultural and subcultural units. Becoming a victim in a socially relevant sense then means the ascription of a special social status according to such rules (2010: 5).

Therefore, Strobl highlights the variability of socially accepted versions of victim status and the need for victims to align within these frames in order to access the social programs and attain the resources that have been set aside for victims of crime.

Further complicating the social recognition and delineation of victim status, are the processes relating to the shifting meanings and subjective constructions of victim status. The paradox is that on one hand there is an acknowledgement of the pluralities of victimhood, in the sense that different people located in a diverse range of social situations may claim or reject victim status. However, on the other hand, there is the recognition that in order to gain access to victim resources, an individual may have to transform their victimization experiences to fit the

dominant narratives that demarcate what does and does not constitute victim status. As succinctly summarized by Kirchhoff, “victimization must be socially recognized. It is not enough that someone claims victim status without societal approval” (2010: 113). Spalek contributes to this discussion by describing how some individuals, depending on their age, gender, race, and social context may actively seek to avoid the label of “victim” (2006: 9).

If the stereotype of victim as ‘passive’ and ‘helpless’ is perpetuated in dominant representations of victimhood, during a time when individual strength is valued in society, then individuals may not situate themselves in terms of victimhood, despite the harms experienced, due to their distaste for the label ‘victim’ and the kinds of stereotypes that it elicits (Spalek, 2006: 9).

Thus, Spalek references the sets of gendered implications that have been culturally tied to victimhood. As a result, it is more socially acceptable for a woman to claim victim status than for a man, due to the cultural notions of female passivity and helplessness (Elias, 1986; Karmen, 1996; Kearon, and Godfrey, 2007; Meadows, 1998; Walklate, 2007b).

Strobl also draws attention to how victim status is dependent not only on the “successful communication of victimization,” but also, dependent upon the “receiver of the communication” (2010: 5). For instance, the socially constructed meanings and subsequent rights and obligations attached to various conceptualizations of victimhood are central to the process of claimsmaking and the communication of information. Within the context of these claimsmaking debates, questions relating to victim credibility, authenticity, power, and authority arise. These topics are discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Additionally, since this essay largely focuses on the societal, macro-level dynamics of collective memory, emphasis is placed on the social ascription or denial of victim status, rather than the component of self-labelling.

One final point, further adding to the intricacies of delineating victim status, is the acknowledgement that victimization can be experienced indirectly. The previous typologies

presented by Bayley (1991) and Strobl (2010) mainly focus on the attributes and societal responses to personal victimization. However, the effects of criminal victimization can be far-reaching, and are discussed in the literature as “primary,” “secondary” and “tertiary” victimization (Kennedy and Sacco, 1998; Spalek, 2006; Strobl 2010). Spalek clarifies these distinctions by noting that, “primary victims are those who experience the harm directly...secondary victims can be considered to be those individuals who are indirectly harmed [and]...tertiary victims include a wider circle of people who may be affected by a particularly shocking event” (2006: 13). This classification system raises questions about a hierarchy of victimization or victimhood, with direct or primary victims positioned as having experienced the greatest amount of pain and suffering. As Spalek confirms, “it cannot be assumed that secondary and tertiary victims necessarily suffer less trauma than primary victims, since secondary and tertiary victims can also face significant physical, psychological and emotional pain” (2006: 13). Because this essay as a whole focuses on collective memory, victim narratives and the Holocaust, it is recognized that victimization experiences can transcend generations and trauma can be re-lived and re-experienced by those who were not directly victimized.

The Cultural Meanings of Victimhood

Media Discourse

In order to frame a discussion concerning the cultural meanings of victimhood, it is important to first briefly contextualize the broader media discourse relating to crime coverage in North America, as various forms of media make enormous contributions to the images and portrayals of criminal victims and offenders (Elias, 1986; Kennedy and Sacco, 1998; Wortley, 2002). As Kennedy and Sacco point out, “media discourse” is further divided into “forms of media which are intended primarily to inform and...forms which are intended primarily to

entertain” (1998: 24). While arguably the separation between information and entertainment media has become increasingly blurred due to the creation of the 24-hour news cycle, for this discussion the scope is limited to focus on crime reporting within the news media. Since the 1970s there has been an increase in the amount of news coverage in North America, specifically dedicated to crime victims and victimization (Kennedy and Sacco, 1998; Walklate, 2007a). Kennedy and Sacco, among others, have observed how the content of news disproportionately focuses on individual and violent crimes, in that these cases often galvanize the public in feelings of sympathy, loss, and moral outrage (1998: 27; Cohen, 1973; Goode and Ben Yehuda, 1994). As demonstrated by Jiwani, “as an elite institution, the dominant media’s messages and constructions not only inform the public imagination but also influence government policy. The media work in concert with other elite institutions to produce and reproduce a hegemonic view of reality” (2002: 75). Notably, these hegemonic perspectives draw directly upon the culturally constructed stereotypes relating to race, gender, age and class and have direct implication on the ways in which Holocaust victim narratives are constructed.

The Ideal Victim

Within the victimology literature the concept of the “ideal victim” has been widely examined (Christie, 1986; Fattah, 1991; Kennedy and Sacco, 1998; Strobl, 2010). According to Christie, an “ideal victim” is “*a person or a category of individuals who – when hit by a crime – most readily are given the complete and legitimate status of being a victim*” (1986: 18, italics in original). Christie’s use of the word “ideal” must not be conflated with “deserving,” but rather denotes a complete fulfilment of six attributes or criteria that therefore allows the individual or group to attain ideal victim status. The criteria are as follows (Christie, 1986: 19-21; Kennedy and Sacco, 1998: 11-12):

1. The ideal victim should be portrayed as physically weak and vulnerable.
2. The ideal victim should be carrying out a respectable project when victimized.
3. The ideal victim should be in a location where he or she could not possibly be blamed for being.
4. The offender should be perceived as someone who is bad.
5. The ideal victim and the offender must be strangers.
6. The ideal victim must be powerful enough to make his or her case known and successfully claim the status of an ideal victim.

To summarize, an ideal victim is “a weak person of flawless character and behavior” (Strobl, 2010: 11). An ideal victim cannot be blamed for provoking the offender or for being in the wrong place, has done everything they could to prevent the situation from happening, and reports their victimization to the authorities immediately (Strobl, 2010). Notably, the status of an ideal victim is reserved for individuals who meet the specific culturally accepted criteria. As Spalek point out,

factors such as the race, class and gender of victims will influence how closely they [victims] conform the ‘ideal’ victim type...Ideal victims respond to their experiences of victimization in socially accepted ways, and so for those individuals whose survival strategies are less socially acceptable, much controversy is generated about whether these people are ‘real’ victims and whether their responses to victimization should be encouraged (2006: 22).

Not surprisingly, mass media disseminate stereotypes of victims and offenders. A substantial body of research has found that victims are more likely to be portrayed in the media as white, female, either young or elderly, and middle class (Berns, 2004; Chermak, 1995; Elias, 1986; Karmen, 1996; Kennedy and Sacco, 1998; Spalek, 2006). As with the formulation of any dichotomy, the status of an ideal victim becomes contingent or interdependent upon the framing of an ideal offender, wherein “the more ideal the offender, the more ideal is the victim” (Christie, 1986: 25). Also, as pointed out by Kennedy and Sacco,

one of the most pervasive cultural assumptions is that those to whom the label of victim is most appropriately applied are people who share none of the blame for the harm which befalls them. This assumption allows for the recognition of a clear moral division between the victims and those who offend against them. If

victims are completely innocent, then offenders are completely guilty...In a more practical way, most state or other publicly-funded victim-compensation programs require that victims be 'innocent' of wrongdoings in order to be eligible for such compensation (1998: 11).

This emphasizes the distinctions between the victim's purity, innocence and vulnerability in opposition to the offender's guilt, aggression, strength and responsibility for inducing harm to the victim (Bayley, 1991; Berns, 2004). However, while "the boundaries between victim and offender are...far from clear-cut, nonetheless, in the public's imagination the 'ideal' victim is clearly distinct from the offender" (Spalek, 2006: 22).

The Phenomenon of Victim Blaming

When victims do not conform to the widely accepted cultural notions of an "ideal victim" (Christie, 1986) they are more likely to be blamed for their victimization. Victim blaming is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon, further confounded by the various interpretations of victimhood, and the processes of assigning blame. As noted by Alyson Cole, "there is a rich literature in philosophy and the law on the meaning of 'blame,' often in relation to concepts such as 'accountability,' 'culpability,' 'guilt,' 'liability,' 'causality,' and 'responsibility'" (2007: 110). In other words, to assign blame is to negatively judge someone based on an assessment of various situational and personal characteristics. In accordance, Elias contends that, "victim blaming holds victims responsible for some of their inherent characteristics, such as their age or sex" (1986: 86).

The term "victim blaming" was first coined by psychologist William Ryan in his widely cited book, *Blaming the Victim* (1971), in reference to the shifting of responsibility away from the perpetrator of a crime, and onto the victim. Although Ryan does not specifically consider criminal victimization, and rather focuses his work on larger social inequalities such as poverty

and unemployment, his argument can still contextualize the emergence of academic focus on the phenomenon of victim blaming (Karmen, 1991: 389). Ryan argues that,

the new ideology [blaming the victim] attributes defect and inadequacy to the malignant nature of poverty, injustice, slum life, and racial difficulties. The stigma that marks the victim and accounts for his victimization is an acquired stigma...[T]hough derived in the past from environmental forces, is still located *within* the victim, inside his skin. With such an elegant formulation, the humanitarian can...concentrate his charitable interest on the defects of the victim, condemn the vague social and environmental stresses that produced the defect...and ignore the continuing effect of victimizing social forces...It is a brilliant ideology for justifying a perverse form of social action designed to change, not society, as one might expect, but rather, society's victim (1971: 7).

Ryan's key point is that society holds individuals responsible for making changes to their own lifestyles, thus leaving the offender's actions, in this case society's negligence, as unproblematic and unchangeable. This further stresses the idea that by framing the role of the victim as problematic, the solutions to dealing with these problems become solely victim-centred. Consequently, police-run workshops aimed at teaching victimization prevention strategies and social aid programs that provide resources for victims, while on the surface seem useful, if considered critically, in fact blame the individual for their own victimization (Elias, 1986). It is in this way that victim blaming presents itself through the language of empowerment and positivity, yet at the core is premised upon the judgement and blame of the victim.

Additional critiques have raised questions as to the convoluted understandings of "victim blaming," as a practice or as a theory (Cole, 2007). In Cole's reading, Ryan uses "blaming the victim" as a causal attribution and not a moral condemnation (2007: 114-115). She goes on to critique the inconsistency of his use of terminologies, yet concludes that "blaming the victim" has "a potency to it" and has come to connote a moral judgement, even though Ryan's original formulation explicitly does not (Cole, 2007: 114). Cole draws attention to how, "the phrase 'blaming the victim' rings with indignation. It is rhetorically powerful because it conveys,

simply and concisely through the juxtaposition of two seemingly contradictory terms, behavior that is patently wrong – blaming the blameless” (Cole, 2007: 112-113). The dichotomies of innocence and guilt are contrasted against one another. Widely discussed in the domestic violence and sexual assault literature (Berns, 2004; Cole, 2007; Karmen, 1991; Loseke, 1991; Peterson, 1991), victim blaming often takes the form of “‘*victim facilitation*’ (making the criminal’s task easier through negligence about security precautions); ‘*victim precipitation*’ (rash, reckless, and risky behaviour); and ‘*victim provocation*’ (inciting acts that instigate violent responses)” (Karmen, 1991: 397). To quote Berns,

the rhetoric traditionally reserved for offenders of most crimes [as demonized and inherently bad] often falls back onto domestic violence victims in warped ways. Rather than focusing on punishing the offender, media focus on victims’ failure to leave the relationship, how they might have actually participated in the abuse, or how victims can end the abuse (2004: 158).

Thus, through the construction of social problems, such as domestic assaults, which are often perpetrated by familiar people, the demonization of offenders becomes less straightforward. In a sense, it becomes easier to engage with and blame the victim.

The implications of victim blaming, are that they frame the victim as lacking agency, and as a passive individual who is resigned to being victim of a crime. While this is a characteristic of Christie’s “ideal victim” status, passivity is cast in a negative light. Additionally, issues of morality are bound up within these processes, and assumptions are made about the credibility and legitimacy of the victim. As Ryan points out, “blaming the victim depends on a...process of identification (carried out in the most kindly, philanthropic, and intellectual manner) whereby the victim of social problems is identified as strange, different – in other words, as a barbarian, a savage” (1971: 10). Cole also suggests that, “at the core of victim blaming is ascertaining that inequality and the victim’s suffering emanate from the victim’s difference (or Otherness), often

understood in pejorative terms as a malfunction or ineptitude” (2007: 111-112). Therefore, and as alluded to before, the paradox of victim blaming is that on the surface, it is portrayed as a gesture of kindness and concern, yet in fact, it holds the victim, rather than the offender, responsible for the harm and trauma experienced. One of the main reasons for engaging in victim blaming is to create a psychological distance from the victim that further solidifies the distinction between the “non-victim” and “victim” (Kennedy and Sacco, 1998). Because the victim is framed as being in control of the circumstances, he or she must have provoked their own victimization and hence, deserve to be victimized. This neutralization technique also justifies a lack of action or response to the crime, either on an individual, group or societal level. Therefore, society’s failure and negligence to protect its citizens can be explained away through references to the victim’s culpability.

It has been noted that situational or transactional theories of crime are characterized by a “sharing of responsibility” due to the labels of “victim” and “offender” being socially assigned only *after* the criminal event has occurred (Hindelang, Gottfredson and Garofalo, 1978; Luckenbill, 1977; Sacco and Kennedy, 2008; Wolfgang, 1958). Therefore, situational or transactional theories posit a middle ground between victim-blaming and victim-defending perspectives. Karmen (1991) puts forth two critiques of the simplistic practice of situating the “victim” and “offender” as polar opposites.

First, a tendency to be even-handed in parcelling out blame undermines the sense of moral outrage that fuels the pro-victim movement for social reform. Second, the tendency to become fixated on the two central actors in the drama deflects needed attention away from the larger social and cultural context within which they act and react, and the institutional sources of lawlessness that must be addressed and corrected (Karmen, 1991: 405).

He stresses the blurring of the seemingly distinct moral boundaries, and the shift away from the responsibility of society toward the individual, thus losing sight of the larger social context in

which victimization occurs. Karmen continues this argument by saying how victimology scholars and “victim-defending” advocates should also consider the dimensions of “institution-blaming” or “system-blaming” in addition to “offender blaming” (1991: 399). Overall, Karmen argues that, “victim-blaming is never justified” (1991: 405).

The Politics of Victim Status

Anti-Victimism

The final part of this chapter considers the politics of victim status and the anti-victim backlash that has occurred in response to the perceived excess of victim claims (Cole, 2007). In reference to the contemporary United States, Sykes critically points out that, “life is increasingly characterized by the plaintive insistence, *I am a victim*” (1992: 11, italics in original). He indicates what he claims to be an observable phenomenon in contemporary American social life, that anyone can, and is, claiming victim status in order to access designated “victim” resources that under normal circumstances they would not have the right to use (Sykes, 1992; Cole, 2007). As previously discussed, this phenomenon can be explained by the idea that rights to claim victim status can transcend generations, meaning that one’s claim to have been “abused, oppressed, persecuted, discriminated against, exploited, marginalized, or otherwise mistreated” at some point in the immediate or distant history is justified and acknowledged (Sykes, 1992: 11). Sykes’ impression of the “nation of victims” (also the title of his book) sets the context for the rise in what Alyson Cole (2007) has termed “anti-victimism.” According to Cole,

anti-victim discourse shapes victim talk by foregrounding and perpetuating particular and rather new understandings of victims, victimization and victimhood. It is this campaign that associates victimization with weakness, passivity, dependency and effeminacy. Conversely, it also depicts victims as manipulative, aggressive, and even criminal, at times, as actual or potential victimizers, a danger to themselves and society (2007: 3).

Cole emphasizes widespread feelings of resentment toward victims of crime, that are felt by individuals who are either not able to successfully claim victim status or are held responsible for acknowledging a debt and contributing resources. By using the dual, and seemingly contradictory frames of passivity in contrast with manipulation, subscribers to the anti-victim discourse are able to demonize and vilify those claiming victimhood in subtle and covert ways.

Cole further elaborates on what she has termed “the anti-victim line of attack” (Cole, 2007: 27). Anti-victim followers assert that,

1. Many people who claim victim status have not experienced the alleged trauma or discrimination, and are impostors.
2. Those who are disadvantaged in some way use their victim status to achieve gains disproportionate to their actual circumstances.
3. Making victimization a central theme of group or individual identity is ultimately harmful to the victim and society in general.

Embedded within these three criteria, the clash between victim claiming and blaming becomes evident. The first point calls into question the truthfulness and innocence of the individuals claiming victim status, while the second point relates to the proportionality and accuracy of the claims that are made. Finally, the third point overtly condemns victim claiming and blaming, yet as previously mentioned, subtly reinforces acts of victim blaming.

Even more incongruous is that the anti-victim perspective acknowledges that a number of “real” or “true” victims exist, thereby giving rise to the rhetoric of the “True Victim” (Cole, 2007: 5, 28). The criteria of “True Victimhood” includes, “propriety,” where the True Victim is noble, endures suffering with dignity and does not publicly display signs of weakness; “responsibility,” where the True Victim commands their own fate and does not exploit injury to excuse their own failures; and “individuality,” where the True Victim is an individual status even when a group is injured collectively (Cole, 2007: 5). Drawing on Elias,

by taking a very individualized focus, blaming the victim identifies – or even manufactures – traits that differentiate victims from the rest of us...victims suffer because of their differences; if we can change victims and accommodate them to society, their victimization will recede (1986: 85).

It is in this way that the denial of victim status become easier on an individual, rather than group basis. Additionally, Cole argues that individual victimization must be “immediate and concrete,” which, as we have already seen, are both highly contested requirements (2007: 28). The final criterion that must be satisfied, which Cole identifies as the most important, is the complete and uncontested “innocence” of the victim, meaning that the True Victim does not contribute to their victimization, and that the individual is morally upright and pure (2007).

Notably, aspects of Christie’s ideal victim (1986) are present within Cole’s formulation of the True Victim. To reiterate, Christie’s typology differentiates between who does and does not “deserve” the status of an ideal victim (1986). Cole’s formulation also creates explicit criteria pertaining to True Victimhood, with the purpose of drawing rigid boundaries, thus excluding many people who may seek claims to victim status (Bowker and Star, 1999). The result of this, and the underlying purpose of the rhetoric of True Victimhood, is to engage in a widespread denial of victimhood. Cole mentions that, “even as they prop ideal forms of true victimhood...in the final analysis, anti-victimists aim to suppress, negate, and erase most victim claims” (2007: 6). Ultimately, and somewhat ironically, “the truest of True Victims are victims who refuse to be victims” (Cole, 2007: 6). Akin to this, “victims are helpless; if they are not helpless they are not victims” (Bayley 1991: 61). As with any typology, where rigid lines are drawn between those who do and do not fit the criteria, the socially constructed dichotomy between “us and them” becomes further solidified (Walklate, 2007a: 3; see also Bowker and Star, 1999).

Victim vs. Survivor

Up until this point, the term “victim” has been used exclusively to refer to the individuals and groups affected by crime. However, “survivor” is yet another term that requires discussion, as authors have noted a recent shift to using the term “survivor” instead of “victim” (Cole, 2007; Kennedy and Sacco, 1998; Spalek, 2006). The reason for this shift relates directly to the cultural connotations and associations embedded within each word, with the “survivor,” an often self-designated label or identity, imbued with of a sense of agency and power, thus evading conceptions of the “victim” as submissive and weak (Cole, 2007; Spalek, 2006). Therefore, by using the word “survivor,” victims of crime become empowered by highlighting their determination to overcome the negative connotations associated with victimhood, and to stress their agency and positivity (Cole, 2007; Kennedy and Sacco, 1998). Inherently problematic is the “artificial dichotomy” created between the “victim” and “survivor” (Spalek, 2006: 11). Within the distinction of victims and survivors, the latter are framed as heroes who have overcome a trauma, thus setting anyone who is not triumphant or able to portray their victimization experience within the bounds of the specific cultural narratives, as a failure. Nissim-Sabat makes an astute observation when she points out that, “the ideological sense of ‘survival’ depends on an implicit and explicit claim that survival as such is in itself a value” (2009: 165). This is particularly insightful as she challenges the widely accepted notion that “‘survival’ is a meaningful, positive, or desirable outcome of or response to trauma or victimization” (Nissim-Sabat, 2009: 165).

Linking to the previous discussion about the politics and empowerment associated with the claiming of victim or survivor status is an acknowledgement of the centrality of moral judgement within these discussions, in that a moral hierarchy of victimhood is created. As such,

by recognizing that victim and survivor statuses are not equally accessible to every individual or group, a hierarchy is formed (Fattah, 2010). Cole reaffirms this position by stating that,

anti-victimism superimposes a highly rigid juridical model of victimhood on all types of victimization. In doing so, it stifles the majority of victim claims, radically narrows the scope of those who might rightfully seek victim status, and confines redress to retributive actions by the state. When charges of social injustice are recast with notions of blamelessness and guilt that emanate from the courtroom, members of marginal groups must provide the equivalent of forensic evidence to demonstrate that they are in fact disadvantaged (2007: 6).

Evidently, while identical experiences of victimization may occur, depending upon various individual socio-demographic markers and the broader social and political context, victim status may be differentially ascribed or denied. Embedded within cultural stereotypes and systemic acts of racism, sexism, ageism and classism, is the further disenfranchisement and denial of victim status to certain people who do not align with the culturally constructed norms of victimhood. Fattah describes these individuals as “expendable victims” (2010: 72). Recall Christie’s sixth proposition relating to ideal victimhood in that, “the ideal victim must be powerful enough to make his or her case known and successfully claim the status of an ideal victim” (1986: 21). In other words, the ability of an individual or group to marshal resources and deflect opposing standpoints in the process of claiming victimhood is highly important. Thus, socially disenfranchised groups and individuals are more likely to experience blame and be denied access to the resources associated with victimhood.

Another point to consider are the social “costs” of victimization, in relation to victim entitlements and the acknowledgement of a debt, versus the stigma associated with victimhood and the framing of the perpetrator. By recognizing the victim status of a group, one consents to repaying a debt, and by extension, the victims become a burden to history, as they are a constant reminder of the debt that needs to be paid. Aligning with the anti-victim discourse,

the critics...contend that these individuals and groups attempt to benefit from the acknowledgement of their disadvantage, whether in terms of social status, psychological rewards, or more tangible benefits such as government programs or protections, or even by relieving them from certain responsibilities for which they would otherwise be accountable, such as legal liability (Cole, 2007: 26).

Linking back to the conceptualizations of “victim” and “survivor,” the use of the word and identity “victim” may be strategically chosen over “survivor” in order to “benefit from the acknowledgement of their disadvantage” (Cole, 2007: 26). For instance, one form of victimhood may be emphasised in order to receive the benefits of various services and to access certain resources, while another form of victimhood, (or survivorship) may be used in order to avoid being revictimized by the perpetrators (Shoham and Knepper, 2010: xvii; see also Strobl, 2010). This underscores the plurality of victimhood constructions.

Summary

The goal of this chapter has been to describe the various ways in which victims (and survivors) of criminal events are socially, culturally, and politically constructed in the contemporary North American context. Through discussions concerning the cultural meanings of the word “victim,” as well as the media portrayals of “ideal victimhood” and “victim blaming,” a theoretical foundation within the study of victimology was illustrated. To reiterate a pertinent quote mentioned earlier in this chapter, “victimization must be socially recognized. It is not enough that someone claims victim status without societal approval” (Kirchhoff, 2010: 113). Evident throughout this chapter are the diverse range of narratives relating to the increasingly protean concept of the “victim.” Some narratives are complementary, while others are contradictory (Kearon and Godfrey, 2007: 31). Chapter 4 draws on these foundations in order to describe and assess the framing of victims and survivors within collective memory and contemporary North American Holocaust narratives.

Chapter IV: Contemporary North American Holocaust Narratives

This chapter assesses the contemporary Holocaust narratives that have become dominant within North American popular culture and collective memory, and draws out how the themes of Jewish victimhood are constructed and circulated within these narratives. Emphasis is placed on the social construction of these narratives, and focus kept on the embedded cultural symbolism that characterizes processes of interpretation and reinterpretation. Notably, this chapter is concerned with North American collective memory, rather than specifically Jewish collective memory, although, as demonstrated, Jewish collective memory contributes to the narratives as well.

While this chapter is based upon various historical events that transpired during World War II, these historical facts serve only to contextualize current North American Holocaust consciousness. Bearing in mind that, “all history is viewed through prisms imposed after the fact,” (Bloxham and Kushner, 2005: 2) scholars, as well as the general public, play central roles in recasting the Holocaust into a narrative form of collective memory (Schwarz, 1999). To clarify, Langer theorizes about “two planes on which the event we call the Holocaust takes place in human memory – the historical and the rhetorical, the way it was and its verbal reformation, or deformation, by later commentators” (1995: 33). It is the rhetorical constructions that are primarily discussed in this chapter. Collective memory can also be understood as a “socially articulated and socially maintained ‘reality of the past’” (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994: 54). Social constructionism provides an overarching theoretical framework, with concepts drawn from the study of collective memory, victimology, and the construction of knowledge and framing of historical events.

Points of Clarification

Before proceeding, three important points must be clarified. First, the academic study of the Holocaust has become a well-established field, with numerous terms having been used to discuss and describe the mass murder of European Jews under the Nazi regime. These include “Holocaust,” “Shoah,” “Churban,” and “Final Solution” (Berenbaum, 1990; Bloxham and Kushner, 2005; Cole, 2000; Goodman-Thau, 2007; Novick, 1999; Weissman, 2004). While many authors have commented on the etymology of these terms and the problematic nature of each, throughout this chapter the term “Holocaust” is used. The reason for this decision is presented shortly.

Secondly, due to the use of the theory and language of social constructionism, reference is made to the “social construction” or “framing” of Holocaust narratives. It is important that these terms are not interpreted as a refusal or denial of the serious crimes against humanity that occurred under the Nazi regime, but rather as a focus upon the social processes through which meaning is ascribed to various historical events, artefacts and ways of thinking after the historical event has passed. Akin to the acknowledgement presented at the beginning of Tim Cole’s *Selling the Holocaust* (2000), in which his central thesis concerns what he calls the “myth of the Holocaust,” he recognizes that, “by labelling a story a myth we do not mean it is ‘false’.

Rather, a myth is a story that evokes strong sentiments, and transmits and reinforces basic societal values” (4). As demonstrated, he is interested in analyzing the socially constructed historical consciousness that is based within “myths” and “social stories” (Cole, 2000).

A final point relates to one of the pitfalls of using the victimization literature to interpret highly sensitive historical events, such as the Holocaust. The problem, as discussed in the previous chapter, relates to the circumstance in which victimized individuals or groups are not

culturally portrayed as “ideal victims,” and are therefore more likely to be blamed for their victimization (Christie, 1986; Ryan, 1971). In the case of the Holocaust, then, a discourse in which Jews are not portrayed as “ideal victims” may then be interpreted as blaming them for this event. Again, this is not the intention of this essay. Rather, the purpose of this essay is to understand how and why certain contemporary North American Holocaust narratives and collective memories take precedence over others, and to focus upon the shifting meanings and interpretations that have been formed around this momentous historical event.

Shifts in North American Holocaust Consciousness

Numerous scholars have acknowledged that the Holocaust has become one of the most widely “talked about and often represented” historical events of the twentieth century, especially within the North American cultural context (Cole, 2000: 3; see also Bloxham and Kushner, 2005; Karlsson, 2007; Linenthal, 1995; Mintz, 2001; Novick, 1999; Schwarz, 1999). Renowned Holocaust historian Peter Novick has remarked that, “generally speaking, historical events are most talked about shortly after their occurrence, then they gradually move to the margin of consciousness” (1999: 1). However, collective memory of the Holocaust does not follow this pattern. In order to appreciate the magnitude of these claims, one must first understand how Holocaust consciousness has undergone numerous shifts in historical and social representation (Cole, 2000; Levy and Sznajder, 2006; Mintz, 2001; Novick, 1999). Novick illuminates the importance of studying the shifts in American Holocaust consciousness, by observing how “one period made Holocaust memory seem inappropriate, useless, or even harmful; [while] in another period, appropriate and desirable” (1999: 5). Therefore, by drawing on the privilege of hindsight and retrospection, the four major periods of North American Holocaust consciousness identified in the scholarly literature are discussed.

The first period of Holocaust consciousness, or possibly more appropriately, lack of consciousness, is characterized by a widespread silence concerning the genocide of European Jews. This period extended from World War II until the late 1950s. During this time, “the destruction of European Jewry... did not even have a name and was broadly subsumed under the atrocities of the war” (Levy and Sznajder, 2006: 16; see also Cohen, 2007). Scholars have contemplated reasons concerning the reluctance for survivors to share their experiences, the silence of the Jewish community, and the lack of interest by the wider American public, with one of the most widely cited explanations relating to the fact that the trauma of the event was “too close, too painful to be confronted” (Cole, 2000: 2; see also Cohen, 2007; Mintz, 2001; Novick, 1999). Additionally, it has been argued that recently immigrated European Jews focused their efforts upon assimilating into secular American society, and began to “think of themselves more as Americans and less as Jews” (Novick, 1999: 34; see also Mintz, 2001).

In the early 1960s and 1970s Holocaust awareness began to grow (Cole, 2000; Diner, 2003; Finkelstein, 2003; Levy and Sznajder, 2006; Novick, 1999). In 1961 Raul Hilberg published his now seminal work, *The Destruction of the European Jews*. He was the first historian to provide a comprehensive historical account of the Nazi mass murder of European Jews (Bloxham and Kushner, 2005; Lentin, 2004; Linenthal, 1995; Novick, 1999). Hilberg is also credited for breaking the silence concerning the Holocaust within the realm of academia (Cole, 2000; Lentin, 2004; Schwarz, 1999). Another seminal event that contributed to the American public’s increasing interest in the Holocaust was the highly publicized 1961 war crime trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem (Cole, 2000; Levy and Sznajder, 2006; Linenthal, 1995; Mintz, 2001; Novick, 1999). It was due to the Eichmann trial that the term,

‘Holocaust’ began to be widely used in connection with the Nazi murder program... [L]arge numbers of American journalists, covering the Eichmann trial,

learned to use the word that Israelis had for many years chosen to translate “*shoah*” into English (Novick, 1999: 133).

Hannah Arendt’s coverage of the Eichmann Trial for *The New Yorker*, and her subsequent book entitled *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1977 [1964]), appealed to a mass American audience, with her vivid portrayal of the trial and concept of the “banality of evil” galvanizing Jews and non-Jews alike (Cole, 2000; Feingold, 1995; Finkelstein, 2003; Novick, 1999). Additionally, the trial against Eichmann was largely comprised of survivor testimonies, thus shedding light on the seriousness of the atrocities committed under the Nazi regime (Mintz, 2001; Novick, 1999).

It has been observed that during the late 1970s until the early 1980s, Holocaust consciousness was characterized by an “explosion of Holocaust-related material” (Weissman, 2004: 9), and “a flood of commemorative events” (Levy and Sznajder, 2006: 17). Novick says that

by the 1970s and 1980s the Holocaust had become a shocking, massive, distinctive thing: clearly marked off, qualitatively and quantitatively, from other Nazi atrocities and from previous Jewish persecutions, singular in its scope, its symbolism, and its world-historical significance (1999: 19-20).

Therefore, the Holocaust as an historical event of predominantly Jewish mass victimization began to take precedence within the increasingly dominant historical narratives. However, another shift in consciousness and representation allowed the Jewish-centred narratives to be consumed by the larger, non-Jewish American public. The 1970s and 1980s was a period characterized by “a major turning point in media representations and [formed the beginning of] the ‘Americanization’ of the Holocaust” (Levy and Sznajder, 2006: 17; see also Mintz, 2001). Arguably, the “Americanization” of Holocaust narratives has continued throughout the 1990s until today (Cole, 2000; Finkelstein, 2003; Karlsson, 2007).

In order to describe the process of “Americanization of the Holocaust,” Ritzer’s widely cited McDonaldization thesis (2002) and Zukin’s concept of “Disneyfication” (1996) are useful

comparisons, in that mass production, mass consumption and the merchandizing of emotional experiences are central components to these capitalist phenomena. Finkelstein has dubbed the contemporary mass production and consumption of the Holocaust, the “Holocaust industry” (2003). Finkelstein’s conceptualization of the “Holocaust industry,” and the broader concept of the “Americanization of the Holocaust” refer to the social and cultural portrayals, and mass consumption of the Holocaust as an historical event. Akin to Novick’s point, “that Jews play an important and influential role in Hollywood, the television industry, and the newspaper, magazine, and book publishing worlds” (1999: 207-208), Finkelstein suggests that Jews and non-Jews alike contribute to the Holocaust industry, either in the processes of production or consumption (2003). Evidently the dissemination of mass mediated Holocaust narratives to the general American public connects to the concept of claimsmaking discussed in previous chapters (Landsberg, 2004: 114).

In sum, it is through the dispersal and consumption of many contemporary representations that the Holocaust has emerged as a significant part of North American collective memory, rather than a European historical event (Cole, 2000). The Americanization of the Holocaust has taken the form of, “making the Nazi persecution of the Jews more accessible and relevant for a broad American audience by using it as a means to teach fundamental American values” (Weissman, 2004: 11) such as “democracy, pluralism, respect for difference, individual responsibility, freedom from prejudice, and an abhorrence of racism” (Berenbaum, 1990: 11). Also, it is due to the processes of Americanization that, “individuals from every point on the political compass can find the lessons they wish in the Holocaust” (Novick, 1999: 13). The Holocaust has become “the benchmark, the defining moment in the drama of good and evil and that against this single occurrence, one would assess all other deeds” (Cole, 2000: 13). It is in

this way that the Holocaust has become a central “moral reference point” within North American culture, and an increasing number of “lessons” and “messages” are drawn from this historical event (Novick, 1999: 12, 239).

Formation and Public Exposure to Holocaust Narratives

Having illuminated the phenomenon of the Americanization of the Holocaust, it is relevant to consider some examples of the various forms by which North American society has produced and reproduced Holocaust narratives. As alluded to in Chapter 2, ideas about “collective memory” are commonly discussed within the context of mass media, tourism, leisure, and consumption, that is to say, “tabloid history” according to Glassberg (1996: 14). The two main areas of public exposure to Holocaust narratives relate to representations in popular media and Holocaust museums and memorials. Emphasis is placed on the latter representations found in museums and memorial sites, as they represent the “official” or “institutionalized” accounts of the Holocaust (Finkelstein, 2003; Novick, 1999; Williams, 2007). However, popular media have had a large impact within the past thirty years, with libraries and bookstores now having entire sections devoted to Holocaust-related studies, and hundreds of TV shows and movies (fiction or documentary) concerning the Holocaust having been made (Cole, 2000; Finkelstein, 2003; Mintz, 2001; Novick, 1999; Schwarz, 1999). Chomsky’s *Holocaust* mini-series first aired on NBC in 1978 was, and still is regarded as one of the first instances of the widespread dissemination of Holocaust narratives. There are estimates that “close to 100 million Americans watched all or most of the four-part, 9 ½-hour program” (Novick, 1999: 209). Also noteworthy is Lanzmann’s 9-hour film entitled *Shoah* (1985), and Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* (1993). Undeniably, a mass audience has consumed the information and entertainment-based narratives woven by these films. However, these narratives have been critiqued for their reliance on

simplistic dichotomies of good and evil in the framing of Jewish victims and Nazi perpetrators (Cole, 2000; Levy and Sznajder, 2006; Novick, 1999). Additionally, the mass mediation of Holocaust narratives has contributed to the formation of key Holocaust characters and symbols, wherein “the Holocaust has become a universal signifier with endless connotations” (Szejnmann and Davies, 2007: xxiii; see also Bauman, 1989). Anne Frank, probably the most widely recognized victim of the Holocaust has come to symbolize innocence and purity (Cole, 2000; Mintz, 2001; Novick, 1999). Oskar Schindler, has been depicted as the saviour, a righteous Gentile who risked his life in order to save Jewish people (Cole, 2000). And finally, Nazi party leader Adolf Hitler, notorious Auschwitz physician Josef Mengele, and Adolf Eichmann, a key mastermind behind the Nazi Final Solution, have all come to symbolize the villains of these narratives (Cole, 2000)².

There have been many debates in the literature relating to the institutionalization of Holocaust memory, specifically in relation to Holocaust museums and memorial sites (Landsberg, 2004; Levy and Sznajder, 2006; Novick, 1999; Weissman, 2004; Williams, 2007). By drawing on the burgeoning study known as “dark tourism,” the phenomenon of “Holocaust tourism” can be more adequately contextualized and explained. As defined by Sharpley, “dark tourism” refers to tourist destinations or sites that are “associated with death, disaster and suffering” (2009a: 5). Parallels can be drawn to the discussion presented in the previous chapter concerning the media reporting of crime, and the overemphasis and over-representation of serious crimes, “media interest in the concept of dark tourism continues to grow, the juxtaposition of the words ‘dark’ and ‘tourism’ undoubtedly providing an attention-grabbing headline” (Sharpley, 2009a: 6). “Genocide tourism” is a subset within the study of dark tourism,

² For a more in-depth analysis and critique of the Holocaust-related themes presented in popular media and film, consider Novick (1999), Schwarz (1999), Cole (2000), and Mintz (2001).

with Holocaust-related sites, such as Auschwitz, forming one of the most frequently mentioned examples in the literature (Beech, 2009; Feingold, 1995; Sharpley, 2009a; Stone, 2009; Williams, 2007). Within dominant North American Holocaust narratives, Auschwitz has come to symbolize the epicentre or primary symbolic location of the Holocaust, and is “virtually synonymous with generic ‘evil’” (Cole, 2000: 98; see also Bloxham and Kushner, 2005; Feingold, 1995; Lennon and Foley, 2000). However, the infamy of Auschwitz within the cultural imaginations of North Americans only began in the 1960s, as prior to the Americanization of the Holocaust, “Bergen-Belsen and Buchenwald were to ‘Nazi atrocity’, what ‘Auschwitz’ now is to the ‘Holocaust’” (Cole, 2000: 98; see also Lennon and Foley, 2000; Williams, 2007). The reason for the shift in collective consciousness and representation is situated historically. As Tim Cole explains,

because Auschwitz was liberated...by the Red Army, not the Western Allies, Auschwitz remained effectively unknown in the West. Within a divided Europe, a divided geography of remembering the Nazi atrocities emerged. ‘Belsen’ was remembered by the West, and ‘Auschwitz’ by the ‘East’ (2000: 98-99).

Evidently, societal memories of historical events, and by extension the museums and monument that they create, are shaped by the contemporary cultural and political context (Sharpley, 2009b). Since Auschwitz was controlled by the Soviet Union during the immediate aftermath of World War II, many of the sites were interpreted from the perspectives held by the Marxist-Leninist regime (Lennon and Foley, 2000). In this sense, the “glorification of the triumph of the ‘anti-Fascist’ forces” was central to the representations and retelling of the narratives of Auschwitz among other places under Soviet control (Lennon and Foley, 2000: 24).

However, in the post Cold War era, and paralleling the latter periods of North American collective interest in the Holocaust, Auschwitz has become Americanized and one of the primary symbols of the Holocaust, with a record 1,380,000 visitors to the site in 2010 (Auschwitz-

Birkenau State Museum, 2010: 22). As noted by Stone, “contemporary visits to places such as Auschwitz and other Nazi death camps... may come simply ‘out of curiosity or because it is the thing to do’ rather than for more meaningful purposes” (2009: 35). This raises some pertinent ethical questions and moral dilemmas in relation to the consumption of dark tourist spaces such as Auschwitz. Beech’s study of the Buchenwald concentration camp (2000) demonstrates how it has become a contested space, “between those who come to remember, the survivors and the relatives of those who died there, and those who come to not forget, the interested but not directly involved public, and those on educational visits” (Beech, 2009: 211). In other words, there is a clash between the purposes of memorialization, education, and even entertainment.

Wight questions,

what is the most ‘responsible’ way to admit visitors to Auschwitz visitor center and museum in compliance with the moral codes of the relatives of prisoners and victims of brutality but also with the moral codes of other visitor types such as sightseers and other transient visitors? (2009: 131).

Wight underscores the complex ways in which museums and memorials located upon sites of mass atrocities have to balance paying respect to the victims and catering to the demands of tourism. For instance, the Auschwitz Museum’s visitors centre is a point of contention. As Cole demonstrates,

this building combines all of those tourist essentials – cafeteria, toilets, souvenir shop, cinema – and... is assumed by visitors to have been built after the decision to turn the camp into a museum. In reality, it was constructed between 1942-1944 as a place where prisoners were registered, tattooed, robbed, disinfected and shaved (2000: 110).

While the re-purposing of this building has been deemed suitable and in good taste, retrieved knowledge of the original use of the space stands in stark contrast, thus further defining the boundaries of what is and is not appropriate whilst producing and consuming of dark tourism.

Shifting focus from the sites where the mass atrocities of the Holocaust occurred, to the museums physically located elsewhere, consider two of the most widely discussed Holocaust museums in the literature: Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, Israel, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC (USHMM) (Cohen, 2007; Cole, 2000; Landsberg, 2004; Lässig and Pohl, 2007; Linenthal, 1995; Mintz, 2001; Novick, 1999; Weissman, 2004; Williams, 2007). Since the focus of this chapter concerns the formation of dissemination of North American Holocaust narratives, emphasis is placed upon the USHMM. The USHMM is located on the National Mall in Washington, DC, and is a museum that incorporates the teaching of fundamental American values, such as “pluralism, democracy, restraint on government, the...rights of individuals...freedom of religion, and so forth” into their exhibits and overall message (Novick, 1999: 240; see also Cole, 2000; Lässig and Pohl, 2007; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2011). The USHMM also positions “the history of the Nazi genocide in an ‘age of extremes’ and interprets it within a general discourse of human rights and democracy,” thus appealing to a broad American audience (Novick, 1999: 152). The USHMM is what Landsberg has called an “experiential museum,” situated within a “larger trend in American mass culture toward the experiential as a mode of knowledge” (2004: 130). Akin to understanding museums as a “‘Disneyland’ or a theme park,” a trend that began in the 1980s which shaped the presentation of knowledge into being more dynamic and accessible, Landsberg is repulsed by the idea that “a person’s experience at the museum is...meant to ‘thrill’ or to recreate the experience of the victims on the Holocaust” (2004: 131). The USHMM has consciously attempted to

create such an experience for the broad public within the spaces of its permanent exhibition by ‘personalizing’ the horror, bringing home the tragic reality of the Holocaust and making it not a distant historical event, but an immediate experience with great personal meaning (Weissman, 2004: 212).

This is one of the central reasons why the USHMM has become such a popular tourist destination. Furthermore, it has been argued that

there can be little doubt that an element of voyeurism is central to 'Holocaust tourism'. It is the ultimate rubbernecker's experience of passing by and gazing at someone else's tragedy. In visiting the sites of death we are afforded a degree of titillation, albeit titillation camouflaged by more 'worthy' reasons for visiting (Cole, 2000: 114).

As this demonstrates, the lines dividing memorialization, education, and entertainment have become increasingly blurred and eroded within the portrayals of the Holocaust in North American culture (Miller, 1990; Williams, 2007). A number of displays at the USHMM are comprised of "piles of artefacts" such as shoes, eyeglasses and human hair, which portray the innocence of the victims, and by extension, the barbarity of the perpetrators (Cole, 2000: 166; see also Landsberg, 2004; Lennon and Foley, 2000; Linenthal, 1995; Mintz, 2001; Novick, 1999). Again, ethical questions are raised in relation to exhibits that display human remains (Beech, 2009; Cole, 2000). By questioning the boundaries of moral acceptability, Beech comes to the conclusion that "victims of genocide are exploited through the creation of memorials or museums that commemorate the event" (2009: 212; see also Bauman, 1989).

Reactions to the Americanization of the Holocaust

While the Americanization of the Holocaust has produced a mass awareness and acknowledgement concerning the murder of European Jews and has made it "more accessible to people who would otherwise have little or no interest in history," a number of authors have critiqued the result of this process, in terms of the trivialization, "sweetening" and universalization of the Holocaust (Levy and Sznajder, 2006; Novick, 1999; Weissman, 2004). Trivialization refers to the "cheapening" of the Holocaust that occurs when the "gravity or magnitude of the Nazi genocide" is diminished and "relativized through... comparison with

other events” (Weissman 2004: 12). Additionally, trivialization refers to instances “when [the Holocaust] is exploited for personal, political or financial gain; and, when its depiction does not serve any educational or memorial function, but is intended primarily to entertain” (Weissman 2004: 12). To further specify, trivialization stands in opposition of sanctification (Cole, 2000; Foote, 1997). Concerns have been raised when trivialization and tourist consumption are paired together to produce souvenirs and other items of memorabilia (Novick, 1999). Cole demonstrates how it is, “possible to consume the Holocaust equivalents of the ‘kitsch or trashy literature...picture postcards, toys and games, and death camp tourism” (2000: 16; see also Finkelstein, 2003), thus leading some critics to condemn “the transformation of Europe’s most searing genocide...into an American version of kitsch” (Cole, 2000: 15; see also Miller, 1990).

Similar to trivialization, is the “sweetening” or “sugar-coating” of the Holocaust (Weissman, 2004: 12). Holocaust stories that emphasize “happy endings” or that depict themes of “survival, martyrdom, heroism, rescue, redemption, spiritual uplift, and the triumph of humanity over inhumanity” are exemplary of this phenomenon (Weissman, 2004: 12). Again, highlighting the themes of consumption and Americanization, the purpose of minimizing or in some cases completely overlooking the horrors of the Holocaust, is to “appeal to as broad an audience as possible” (Weissman, 2004: 12). One of the most widely cited examples of “sweetening” relate to the American film and stage play of Anne Frank, where it ends on a high note, not revealing her capture and subsequent death at a Nazi concentration camp (Cole, 2000; Novick, 1999; Weissman, 2004).

Arguably, one of the most contested and complicated impacts regarding the Americanization of the Holocaust concerns a process known as “universalization” (Lässig and Pohl, 2007; Levy and Sznajder, 2006; Novick, 1999; Weissman, 2004). Universalization,

“occurs when the historical specificity of the Nazi persecution of the Jews is compromised or neglected” (Weissman, 2004: 12). By this, Weissman makes reference to the narratives that “downplay or disregard” the victims’ Jewishness (2004: 12). Overlooking the core Jewish elements of the Holocaust are “sometimes done to ensure that non-Jews and assimilated Jews will identify with the victims and care about their fate, rather than view them as strangers” (Weissman, 2004: 12). Another primary reason for universalizing the Holocaust, is to make the so called “lessons” of Holocaust comparable to other forms of human-perpetrated mass destruction. It is in this way that the universalized Holocaust has come “to be valued as a symbol or archetype” (Weissman, 2004: 12). This occurs “when the Holocaust is evoked as a symbol of ultimate evil or ultimate suffering, or presented as ‘an extreme example of what could happen if the core values of American society were consistently abrogated’” (Weissman, 2004: 12; see also Lässig and Pohl, 2007; Williams, 2007). This is evident in the USHMM, where the institution “has transformed it [the Holocaust] into a universal imperative, making the issue of universal human rights politically relevant to all who share this new form of memory” (Levy and Sznajder, 2006: 132). The notion is that it is essential to learn from the past in order to avoid making the same mistakes in the future (Levy and Sznajder, 2006: 12; see also Linenthal, 1995; Novick, 1999). Although it minimizes the Jewish experience of the Holocaust, a discussion that will be addressed shortly, the message of “never again” remains central within the Jewish community (Aaron, 1993; Cohen, 2007; Feingold, 1995; Lentin, 2004; Miller, 1990).

Holocaust Victims/Survivors, Perpetrators and Bystanders

Recall from the previous chapter the cultural distinctions made between “victims” and “survivors” of crime, where connotations of power and agency are differentially assigned. These differential meanings extend to the conceptualization of Holocaust survivors and Holocaust

victims. Since the culmination of World War II, the Jewish community has unequivocally considered individuals who have endured the Holocaust as “survivors” (Novick, 1999: 67). This conscious and deliberate rejection of victimhood is thought to have contributed to the widespread silence that occurred in the immediate aftermath of the war (Cohen, 2007; Novick, 1999). Notably, the Jewish community’s preference and claim over the word “Holocaust survivor” is still prevalent today, and one that has been embraced as a “central symbol of Jewish identity” (Novick, 1999: 171; see also Cole, 2007).

In recent years, the symbolic value of the Holocaust survivor has increased dramatically due the Americanization of the Holocaust (Cole, 2007; Levy and Sznajder, 2006; Mintz, 2001). It is “the *symbol* of the survivor – the survivor as emblematic of Jewish suffering, Jewish memory, and Jewish endurance – rather than the highly diverse reality of survivors, that has made the greatest contribution to Holocaust commemoration” (Novick, 1999: 273, italics in original). Thus, the Holocaust survivor has been typified, and the diverse voices of Holocaust survivors have been formed into an overarching, hegemonic experience, that becomes represented and recast within popular culture artefacts such as films, television shows and novels. Levy and Sznajder illustrate the cultural capital carried by the role of the survivor in contemporary popular culture by arguing that,

the connection between Oprah and the Holocaust is not insignificant. Her show deals with alcoholism, child abuse, and morally better people, placing the ‘survivors’ on a moral pedestal. The term ‘survivor,’ which in Jewish thought is so closely tied to the Holocaust, is now frequently invoked to refer to victims of sexual abuse, recovering alcoholics, and other groups of people that have liberated themselves from traumatic victim roles (2006: 139).

As demonstrated, the Holocaust survivor has attained a primary, or master status within North American culture, and has become a role model for “grappling with adversity” (Cole, 2007: 16). Additionally, the status of “Holocaust survivor” is a “lifelong attribute,” in opposition to

instances where, “one survives an earthquake, a shipwreck, but after a while one returns to one’s former identity, despite possible scars left by the calamity” (Novick, 1999: 67). Through the proliferation of this status and the meanings that have been attached to it, Holocaust survivors are expected, or as Goodman-Thau says, “burdened” to narrate their history and experiences (2007: 3).

Therefore, the meaning of the “Holocaust victim” has been assigned beyond the Jewish community, such that it has become more of an American construction than a Jewish construction, and parallels the rise in American victim culture during the 1970s. To reiterate, it was during this period that American attitudes toward victimhood shifted from a status that was to be shunned and stigmatized, to one that was embraced and, in some sense, respectfully celebrated (Berns, 2004; Karmen, 1996; Mintz, 2001; Spalek, 2006). During this time period,

the cultural icon of the strong, silent hero is replaced by the vulnerable and verbose antihero. Stoicism is replaced as a prime value by sensitivity. Instead of enduring in silence, one lets its all hang out. The voicing of pain and outrage is alleged to be ‘empowering’ as well as therapeutic (Novick, 1999: 8).

Therefore, it can be construed that the identity of the “Holocaust victim” parallels the widespread North American public interest and acknowledgement of victimhood, and the mass mediation and Americanization of the Holocaust. As mentioned, the production and dissemination of certain Holocaust narratives over others has occurred. One can observe how the dominant Holocaust narratives single out the Jews as the Nazis’ primary victims (Novick, 1999). A sentiment widely held within the American Jewish community, is that “Hitler meant to kill *all* Jews,” and therefore both survivors of the Holocaust, as well as “non-witnesses” or “empathetic witnesses” have become a part of the community bonded by the memory of the Holocaust, and are to some extent able to claim victim status (Weissman, 2004: 14; see also Epstein and Lefkovitz, 2001; Irwin-Zarecka, 1994; Novick, 1999). It is in this light that Alyson Cole astutely

remarks that the European Holocaust has become a “yardstick” for “contemporary victim claims”, for war and genocide victims in particular (2007: 16).

The criteria that composed Christie’s “ideal victim” (1986), and the processes by which the characteristics of the “ideal victim” are delineated (as an innocent and morally blameless individual), define the ideal perpetrator in opposition. Consequently, by using the language of victimology in relation to prominent Holocaust narratives, it can be observed how Jews are positioned as the ideal victims, thus framing the Nazis as ideal perpetrators. While not denying the fact that millions of people perished under the Nazi regime, attention should be drawn to the problematic nature of the simplistic dichotomies and frames that come to differentiate the ideal victim from the ideal perpetrator. Innocence is contrasted with guilt, good with evil, and passivity with activeness. In other words, for the Jews – both the victims and the survivors of the Holocaust – to be acknowledged as “ideal victims,” acts of resistance are necessarily left out or diminished within the narratives. Furthermore, the Nazi perpetrators become quintessential “folk devils” (Cohen, 1973), thus referencing the presence of a moral classification system and the processes of claimsmaking. This dichotomy is further exemplified by the ways in which the USHMM frames the United States as heroic saviours through the portrayals of ideal victims and perpetrators, meaning that emphasis is placed upon the narratives and artefacts that depict the innocent lives that were lost, especially children, and the horrific actions of the perpetrators (Levy and Sznajder, 2006).

The role of the witnesses and bystander has also been problematized within the Holocaust literature (Barnett, 1999; Bloxham and Kushner, 2005; Cole, 2000; Feingold, 1995; Karlsson, 2007; Linenthal, 1995; Novick, 1999). Unlike popular perceptions that largely situate the bystander along with the victim in terms of their lack of culpability and innocence, hence the

expression “innocent bystander,” the notion of the “guilty bystander” has arisen in relation to the Holocaust (Novick, 1999: 179). Furthermore, the individuals, and more broadly, the societies that observed the events of the Holocaust unfold are thought to be “just as guilty” as the perpetrators (Novick, 1999: 48). The bystander therefore represents a “gray zone” between the overly simplistic dichotomy of the “diabolical perpetrator and saintly victim” (Novick, 1999: 141; see also Bloxham and Kushner, 2005). The “gray zone” has a blurring effect upon the claiming of victim status, as it calls into question the legitimacy and authenticity of the statuses assigned to not only the bystanders, but also the victims and perpetrators. For instance, the role played by the Poles during the Second World War has been the centre of many debates, as a large number of Nazi concentration and death camps were located in occupied Poland (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994; Novick, 1999). An illustrative, albeit lengthy quote by Irwin-Zarecka demonstrates this point;

In theory, people who lived around Auschwitz or Treblinka during their years of operation...people who came a lot closer to the abyss than anyone but the victims themselves, ought to have had traumatic memories of what happened. Some do. But by and large, the Polish witnesses and later, the Polish memory workers affecting the public domain, never produced bonds of remembrance that would reflect their experience of the Holocaust. Two reasons may account for this. First, for the majority of Poles, it is their own victimization during the Nazi occupation that represented a formative trauma...secondly, the disappearance of the Jews did not constitute a trauma for Polish society, either at the time or in the decades that followed, however abhorred were the means to achieve it (1994: 49).

According to Irwin-Zarecka’s bold claims relating to Polish collective memory, it becomes evident that the nation primarily perceives and promotes narratives of *their* victimhood, rather than their role as key bystanders. Additionally, while many Polish Jews perished in the Holocaust, collective memory emphasis is placed upon the commemoration of Polish nationals, rather than individual or group identities (Glassberg, 1996; Linenthal, 1995; Milton, 1991;

Novick, 1999; Sharpley, 2009a; Young, 1993). It is in this way that victimhood can be differentially assigned and perceived from various national standpoints.

Uniqueness of the Holocaust, Hierarchies and Classification Systems

Recall Alyson Cole's statement that the Holocaust has become a "yardstick" for victimization (2007:16), and, Novick's claim that the Holocaust is, "the benchmark of oppression and atrocity" (1999:14). While on the surface these quotes seem uncontested and unproblematic, the underlying meanings and implications relate to a formation of hierarchy of victimhood. Therefore, within the North American context, "the Holocaust has become *the* event and *the* standard to which all other acts of victimization and mass genocides are compared" (Novick, 1999: 14, italics in original). It is located at the top of the hierarchy. In defence of this position, a sense of Jewish ownership or "possessiveness" has been associated with the word "holocaust" (thus becoming "capital H" Holocaust), which stems from claims relating to the uniqueness of the historical event and the prominence of the Holocaust within Jewish identity (Novick, 1999: 197-198; see also Szejnmann and Davies, 2007). This argument stands in direct opposition to claims about the already mentioned universalization of the Holocaust. Furthermore, the assertion that the Holocaust is "unique," "incomprehensible" or "unrepresentable," frames all other catastrophes as "ordinary," "comprehensible" and "representable" (Novick, 1999: 9). By placing the Holocaust as the primary defining criteria of victimization, all other acts of victimization (within and beyond the Holocaust), are positioned as lesser. The "evasive" nature of claiming the Holocaust's uniqueness is as follows:

The identical talk of uniqueness and incomparability surrounding the Holocaust in the United States performs the opposite function: it promotes *evasion* of moral and historical responsibility. The repeated assertion that whatever the United States has done to blacks, Native Americans, Vietnamese, or others pales in comparison to the Holocaust is true – and evasive. And whereas a serious and sustained encounter with the history of hundreds of years of enslavement and

oppression of black might imply costly demands on Americans to redress the wrongs of the past, contemplating the Holocaust is virtually cost-free: few cheap tears (Novick, 1999: 15).

Since contemporary North American Holocaust narratives specifically focus on the Jews as the primary victims of the Nazis, all other groups who were victimized are seen as “less worthy” victims (Novick, 1999: 218). Other disenfranchised groups who have experienced similar tragedies are denied attempts to claim a similar culturally acknowledged victim status, therefore giving weight to the notion that victim status is premised upon criteria that include some at the cost of excluding others (Bowker and Star, 1999; Cole, 2007; Novick, 1999; Weissman, 2004). This further highlights a hierarchy of Holocaust victimhood, and the scarcity and contention over resources assigned to victims. Therefore, as more groups stake claim to a portion of this victim space and the adjoining resources, less resources are able to go around. According to Feingold,

the important difference between the Holocaust and other cases of genocide in history is that European Jewry was not a dissident minority in a remote corner of the world but, by virtue of its thinkers, an important component of European civilization, which dominated the pre-Holocaust world (1995: 24).

Therefore, the dominance of Holocaust narratives that focus exclusively on Jewish victimization can be understood in a two of respects. First, the fact that the mass victimization of European Jews was located in Europe, a Western and developed continent takes a major role in the differentiation of the Holocaust from other genocides. Second, embedded within the denial of victim status for other victims of mass genocide, are claims relating to race, that specifically align with constructions of White supremacy. Since the end of World War II, Jews in North America have been classified as White, and many Jews are currently situated in privileged class positions (Goldberg, 1993; Fleras, 2010; Mills, 1997). These are just two examples of why North American Jews have been successful claimsmakers and primary “owners” of Holocaust

narratives (Novick, 1999). In sum, it is through culturally-based rhetoric that the boundaries of classification systems are formed.

Summary

From the perspective that, “each culture inevitably leaves its stamp on the past it remembers,” this chapter discussed the framing of contemporary North American Holocaust narratives by focusing on the fluid and dynamic social and cultural interpretations of Holocaust consciousness (Berenbaum, 1990: 20). The Americanization of the Holocaust forms a central concept that influences the prominence of certain Holocaust narratives over others, while the study of victimology also contributes to this pursuit. This chapter highlighted dominant Holocaust narratives and the framing of Jews as victims and survivors. In the next chapter I consider a less widely known Holocaust narrative, specifically relating to Jewish resistance. Additionally, the various reasons or purposes served by the dominant “Jews as victims” narratives are considered.

Chapter V: Jewish Resistance Narratives

In Chapter 4, it was argued that in North American culture, certain Holocaust narratives have taken precedence over others. Therefore, it is useful to consider the narratives that do not dominate popular discourse and public memory. As already demonstrated, “history is not democratic; it does not assign equal import to like events” (Feingold, 1995: 39). While one of the first alternative Holocaust narratives that come to mind is Holocaust denial, or the so-called “historical revisionism” movement, due to the constraints of this essay, an analysis will not take place. The justification is that unlike the other narratives that have been discussed, Holocaust denial has been given a lot of attention, both in popular culture and within the academic literature³.

Rather, this concluding chapter focuses on the Holocaust narratives that concentrate upon acts of Jewish resistance and agency under the Nazi regime. The reason for choosing to focus on Holocaust resistance narratives ties back to the previous discussion concerning victim status and victim blaming. Recall that when individuals seeking victim status do not fulfil the sets of culturally imposed status requirements, they are more likely to be held responsible for their victimization (Ryan, 1971). Therefore, questions directed toward the magnitude, and by extension, the authenticity of Jewish victimization during the Holocaust, are embedded with what can be interpreted as elements of victim blaming. One may recall that the first criterion of Christie’s “ideal victim” is that “the ideal victim should be portrayed as physically weak and vulnerable” (1986: 19), and Bayley maintains that, “victims are helpless; if they are not helpless they are not victims” (1991: 61). In this light, any critique of Jewish passivity during the Holocaust can also be interpreted as covert expressions of victim blaming, in that they assert that

³ For detailed scholarly overviews and critical insights, consider Bernard-Donals (2009), Lipstadt (1994), Shermer and Grobman (2000), Stern (1993), and Zimmerman (2000).

European Jews did not do enough to prevent their victimization, and therefore, should be held responsible for their own plight. A number of publications have arisen in response to the alleged passivity of Jews during the Holocaust, by specifically focusing on the importance of Jewish resistance (Feingold, 1995: 54; see also Steinberg, 1974; Suhl, 1967). Some of the major themes presented in the Holocaust resistance literature, and the purposes served by these narratives, are therefore addressed.

“Like Sheep”: The Question of Jewish Resistance

As previously discussed, interest in the events of the Holocaust, and subsequently, its prominence within North American collective memory, has undergone a number of temporal shifts (Cole, 2000; Levy and Sznajder, 2006; Mintz, 2001; Novick, 1999); likewise, attention paid toward Jewish resistance during the Holocaust has followed a similar pattern. Study of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust began in reaction to claims made about “Jewish passivity or collusion of the Jewish leadership in the ghettos” (Bloxham and Kushner, 2005: 7). To set the context, recall the ending of the widespread silence of Holocaust survivors during the early 1960s, in part, due to the popularity of the Eichmann trial, and the publishing of Hilberg’s (1985[1961]), and Arendt’s (1977 [1964]) books. A number of critiques and debates have been raised in response to both publications, questioning the proliferation of the “myth that the Jews did *not* resist [and] that moreover, they willingly assisted in their own destruction” (Suhl, 1967: 15; see also Feingold, 1995; Fischel, 1998; Novick, 1999). An illustrative quote by Hilberg (1961) describes the historical backdrop to these charges. He writes,

The reaction pattern of the Jews is characterized by almost complete lack of resistance...the Jewish victims, caught in the straightjacket of their history, plunged themselves physically and psychologically into catastrophe (as quoted in Suhl, 1967: 15-16).

On one hand, Hilberg frames the Jews as victims of circumstance, thereby stressing their status as blameless victims. On the other hand, there is an underlying accusation embedded in Hilberg's argument, relating to the passivity and possible complicity of the Jewish people under the Nazi regime (Bauer, 1989; Bauman, 1989; Fischel, 1998; Suhl, 1967). Therefore, there is a sentiment that the Jews may not have done enough, both "physically and psychologically," to minimize or lessen the devastating impacts of the Holocaust (Hilberg 1985[1961] as quoted in Suhl, 1967: 15-16). Paralleling the domestic violence literature presented in Chapter 3, one can observe how victim blaming often takes a subtle form, in that on the surface it portrays gestures of kindness and concern, yet simultaneously, the views embedded in the subtext hold the victims responsible for the harm and trauma experienced. Evidently, questions concerning Jewish passivity are multifaceted, and become further complicated when explained using the concept of victim blaming.

The other widely cited example that has sparked much debate about the significance of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust, comes from an interpretation of Arendt's book (1977[1964]), wherein her depictions of the Jewish response to life under a Nazi totalitarian state has been paralleled to the allegory of Jews going "like sheep to the slaughter" (Edelheit and Edelheit, 1994: 91; see also Feingold, 1995; Mintz, 2001; Rutman, 2011). The allegory is two-fold, as sheep represent passive and submissive animals, and second, they move in herds, thereby blindly following one another. The use of this allegory to characterize the passivity of the Jews, stems from Arendt's portrayal of the Jewish leadership, who were complicit during the initial stages of Hitler's Final Solution, and were involved in the Nazi formation of Jewish ghettos and the deportation to concentration camps (Arendt, 1977 [1964], Feingold, 1995; Fischel, 1998; Novick, 1999).

Acts of Jewish Resistance

With that said, a body of academic publications have been dedicated to uncovering and acknowledging Jewish resistance during the Holocaust (Edelheit and Edelheit, 1994; Feingold, 1995; Fischel, 1998; Marrus, 1989; Steinberg 1974; Suhl, 1967). The discussions presented in the literature tend to be divided into two types of resistance, individual and group resistance, and often draw upon exemplary individuals as illustrative case studies (Bauer, 1989; Feingold, 1995). However, the divided categories of individual and group resistance, and more generally, the broader study of resistance are problematic, and questions have been raised concerning the various qualities that comprise “resistance,” and “Jewish resistance” in particular (Bauer, 1989; Marrus, 1989). As we have already seen throughout this essay, these problems arise in the formation of any classification system or typology (Bowker and Star, 1999). A prominent, and practical reason why the study of resistance during the Holocaust has been an underdeveloped area in comparison to the broader, victim-centred and historically-based Holocaust literature, relates to the fact that resistance, especially group resistance, was by definition illegal and therefore secretive in nature (Kwiet, 1989; Steinberg, 1974). Consequently, historical evidence such as records and testimonies that concern Jewish resistance during the Holocaust, are often rare and fragmented. For instance, it has been noted that Jewish diarists during the Holocaust were,

mindful of their writing falling into the wrong hands and incriminating friends and associates. They are often discreet, therefore, on issues such as resistance. More starkly, those in the death camps who survived the initial selections rarely had access to pen and paper (Bloxham and Kushner, 2005: 7).

In this light, one can understand how the extent and type of resistance becomes dependent upon various factors, from one’s social context and physical location, to something as seemingly trivial as access to information recording devices (Bloxham and Kushner, 2005; Marrus, 1989).

One of the main forms of individual resistance discussed in the literature is “spiritual resistance” (Aaron, 1993: 178; Edelheit and Edelheit, 1994: 92; Kwiet, 1989: 51; Landau, 1998: 83). This form of resistance refers to the conscious preservation and continuation of Jewish culture and identity whilst facing persecution. Additionally, as exemplified by the Jewish Holocaust literature, the maintenance of life and hope while a victim of religious and cultural persecution has been lauded as a momentous act of individual resistance (Feingold, 1995; Fischel, 1998; Steinberg, 1974). As illustrated by Feingold:

Each day among the living was a separate victory. They did not lightly abandon their notion of a future because to do so would mean to take the first small steps away from life. Real resistance could not develop until that hope was abandoned. It was part of the diabolical cleverness of the Nazi overlords that they developed all kinds of subterfuges to keep a glimmer of hope alive (1995: 49).

While spiritual resistance may be classified as a physically passive strategy, thus aligning with the “sheep to the slaughter” analogy, it can also be construed as a socially active form of resistance. In other words, the maintenance of a Jewish community in the ghettos and concentration camps and the formation of friendship bonds became methods of resisting dehumanization at the hands of the Nazis. Additionally, it has been noted that survival in the camps was largely made possible due to the, “companionship and cooperation of friends” (Bauer, 1989: 48; see also Aaron, 1993; Caplan, 2010; Garbarz, 1992). Therefore, surviving Hitler’s Final Solution was, and is still, framed as a significant act of resistance.

Other examples of individual resistance specifically located within ghettos, concentration and death camps include: bribery (Fischel, 1998), stealing food and clothing (Garbarz, 1992), escape (Fischel, 1998; Kwiet, 1989; Linn, 2004) and suicide (Fischel, 1998; Garbarz, 1992; Kwiet, 1989). While involvement in prostitution (Caplan, 2010), and working as Nazi helpers (Garbarz, 1992) can be interpreted as forms of resistance, in that individuals were engaged in

acts necessary for survival, these positions were largely characterized by what Lagerwey has termed “choiceless choice” (1998: 63; see also Bauman, 1989). Thus, refusing to participate and thereby disobeying Nazi orders often meant death. Regardless of whether these behaviours can be classified as resistance or not, all of these narratives have been underemphasized within contemporary popular Holocaust discourse and memory. One reason for their minimization, is that they reveal behaviours that are considered deviant and “not honourable,” thus compromising the status of “ideal victimhood.” As conveyed through the testimony of a Holocaust survivor,

it was almost always someone else, hardly ever himself, who stole a spoon, a needle, or a slice of bread from a neighbor, who lorded it over the prisoners or who escaped from the gas chambers at the loss of a fellow inmate’s life (Schwarz, 1999: 12).

In a sense, this quote highlights the manner in which selective memory has shaped Holocaust survivors’ testimonies (Bauer, 1989; Caplan, 2010; Garbarz, 1992; Suhl, 1967). However, it has been pointed out that the sentimentalization of Holocaust victims through depictions of inmates as heroes, disregards the “‘grey zones’ of complicity and transgression that made surviving possible” (Cole, 2007: 15-16; see also Weissman, 2004). It was often the case that individual needs for survival took precedence over others’ needs (Bauman, 1989; Garbarz, 1992). Also underscored in the retelling of these narratives, is the extent of cruelty demonstrated by the Nazis toward the Jews, thus further solidifying their position as “ideal perpetrators.”

Debates surrounding group-level resistance encounter other definitional issues specifically relating to levels of organizational structure and issues of group membership (Bauer, 1989). For instance, the now infamous Warsaw Ghetto Uprising that occurred in April, 1943 exemplifies an organized armed resistance against the Nazis’ plan to deport the Jewish population to the Treblinka extermination camp (Fischel, 1998). The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising has become *the* symbol of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust, like Auschwitz has become

the symbol of the destruction and horror of the Holocaust, and is a narrative that highlights a moment of redemption for Jewish honour and heroism (Bernard-Donals, 2006; Cole, 2000; Feingold, 1995; Fischel, 1998; Linn, 2004). The partisan resistance movements in Nazi occupied Europe are also well-known example of resistance (Bauer, 1989; Fischel, 1998:). However, both of these examples of armed and organized resistance were, in fact, fairly infrequent, in part, due to the “political powerlessness” of the Jewish people under the Nazi regime (Bauer, 1989: 34; see also Fischel, 1998). Thus, unarmed, semi-organized or spontaneous resistance characterized a large portion of the “group” resistance that took place (Bauer, 1989: 47). As Fischel points out, the Jews “acted defiantly when the opportunity presented itself,” yet resistance was often futile, as “the Jewish people were marked for death regardless of their behavior toward the victimizers” (1998: 93).

The Purpose of Resistance Narratives

In a sense, one of the central reasons why Jewish resistance during the Holocaust has not become a dominant narrative within North American culture, relates to the fact that resistance was largely comprised of individual acts. Therefore, individual heroes, who were also victims of the Nazis’ Final Solution, are venerated and remembered in such a way that has become distinct from other Holocaust victims. Hence, the Jews that resisted were able to transcend victimhood and be defined as heroes and even saviours. To use Alyson Cole’s language, they represent “the truest of True Victims” as they “refuse to be victims” (2007: 6).

As the foregoing suggests, the restoration and redemption of Jewish “honour” in response to accusations of passivity form one of the central motives for the increased interest in Jewish resistance. The narratives serve to memorialize resisters through “personal tales of courage and endurance” and form a “heroic cast” that aims to offset the critiques of the dominant narratives

concerning Jewish passivity (Feingold, 1995: 55- 58). As argued by Novick, “in early writings about the Holocaust...Jewish resistance was inflated for inspirational purposes,” thereby highlighting the social construction of collective memory and historical events (1999: 262). For instance, in the Israeli context, “passivity under the heel of the oppressor was regarded as discreditable” (Novick, 1999: 138). Additionally, as exemplified as one of the major distinctions between Yad Vashem and the USHMM, the former institution, located in Israel, places a greater emphasis on Jewish heroism and righteous Gentiles, while in contrast, the latter institution, located in the United States, stresses the significance of victimization and the perpetrators of genocide (Novick, 1999; Williams, 2007). Furthermore, and as previously alluded, the heroic narratives of Jews who both perished and survived the Holocaust have been promoted and conveyed over the narratives that depict Jews involved in dishonourable acts (Caplan, 2010; Garbarz, 1992; Novick, 1999; Suhl, 1967).

The Purpose of Dominant “Passive” Narratives

As demonstrated, it is the often-simplistic, passive Holocaust narratives that diminish Jewish resistance, which have dominated North American collective memory. Many purposes are served by the proliferation of the narrative that fulfils the criteria of the “ideal victim,” largely relating to the access granted toward attaining victim resources and compensation (Christie, 1986; Karlsson, 2007, Shoham and Knepper, 2010; Strobl, 2010). While alternate Holocaust narratives portraying Jewish resistance do exist, they are conveyed through the veneration of individual heroes, thereby casting the Jews in a passive role within the broader Holocaust discourse.

As described in Chapter 4, other groups persecuted by the Nazis have been denied victimhood and are rendered invisible within North American collective memory, which further

highlights a hierarchy of Holocaust victimhood (Feingold, 1995; Weissman, 2004). It is in this way that “the Holocaust,” as represented within North American popular imagination, has largely been reserved for Jewish victims (Cole, 2000: 177; see also Novick, 1999). The quest for primary victim status and “ownership” of the Holocaust is interesting, as “most understand that there is little to be gained by the Jewish people from touting the fact that they were victims rather than the masters of history. The world has a far greater respect for the latter” (Feingold, 1995: 39). However, because the Holocaust has become a “yardstick” for victimization, ownership of the most serious event of contemporary mass victimization becomes sought after for a variety of political and social reasons (Cole, 2007: 16). For instance, groups have used the Holocaust to mobilize and rally around the passing of pro-Israel policies in the United States (Karlsson, 2007). Additionally, victimization during the Holocaust, and by extension, a widespread fear concerning the rise of anti-Semitism has become a central component of contemporary North American Jewish identity, and a principal motivation for group affiliation (Cole, 2007; Novick, 1999).

Summary

In conclusion, resistance narratives aim to minimize the negative portrayals of Jewish passivity under the Nazi regime and to redeem Jewish honour. By revealing moments of Jewish power and agency, these narratives are by definition alternative to the dominant depictions of Jewish victimhood. However, due to the manner in which the resistance narratives are constructed and disseminated, as largely individual feats of strength and determination to survive, they do not impinge on the claims made by the dominant narratives concerning the “ideal victim” status of the Jews. Additionally, the conclusions drawn from the resistance literature reiterate that acts of Jewish resistance were not sufficient to halt or minimize the

devastating impacts of Hitler's Final Solution. In this sense, Holocaust resistance narratives are positioned as complementary and do not hold the Jews responsible for their own plight.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

This essay began by presenting a foundational overview of two central theoretical disciplines: the socio-historical study of collective memory and the criminological field of victimology. Chapters 2 and 3 were comprised of literature reviews, written with the intent to outline some of the central questions and key concepts relating to each field of study. Of note, were the discussions concerning the social formation of collective memories and public histories, the criteria delineated for “ideal victim” status (Christie, 1986), as well as the phenomenon of victim blaming (Ryan, 1971).

Chapter 4 focused upon the ways in which contemporary North American society remembers the Holocaust. Collective memory, characterized by a number of shifts in perspective over time, culminating in the current Americanization of the Holocaust, exemplified the fluidity and dynamic nature of Holocaust consciousness and more broadly, the social construction of historical events. More specifically, the method by which current dominant narratives characterize Jewish passivity, and by extension, “ideal victimhood,” was demonstrated. As described in this chapter, these narratives are disseminated through “official” sources of memory, such as museums and memorials, as well as popular cultural media and artefacts, such as films and books.

Chapter 4 highlighted the ways in which contemporary Holocaust narratives frame the Jews as victims, and Chapter 5 outlined just one of the many alternative Holocaust narratives that have been underemphasized within popular memory. In this regard, narratives of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust formed the central area of focus, as they aimed to counter negative portrayals of Jewish passivity under the Nazi regime, and to redeem Jewish honour. Yet, due to the ways in which these narratives have been constructed, rather than stand in

opposition to the dominant narratives, they in fact coexist alongside them. In other words, they did not call into question the larger portrayal of Jews as “ideal victims.”

Throughout this essay some provocative questions have been raised, and there are many opportunities for future work. Areas of further inquiry include a more in-depth study of the ways in which “ideal victim” status has largely been denied to non-Jewish victims of the Holocaust, as well as a critical exploration of the simplistic frames of victims, perpetrators, bystanders and saviours that arise within the collective narratives. Additionally, in comparison to the breadth of literature dedicated to recounting and recording individual testimonies and the historically-based retelling of events that led to the mass murder of European Jewry during the mid-twentieth century, focus on the political and social reasons for remembering certain Holocaust narratives over others, and the linkages to the attainment of victim status could be explored in more detail. Furthermore, the ways in which North American Jews have been able to become successful claimsmakers and “owners” of the dominant Holocaust narratives signifies an area of further research. As demonstrated, the claiming of victim status within the North American cultural context has become a highly sought-after identity.

Appendix

Table 1: The Six Ideal Types of Mnemonic Malleability or Persistence

	Instrumental	Cultural	Inertial
Persistence	Self-conscious orthodoxy, conservatism, heritage movements	Continued relevance, canon	Habit, routine, repetition, custom
Change	Revisionism, memory entrepreneurship, redress movements, legitimation, invented tradition	Irrelevance, paradigm change, discovery of new facts	Decay, atrophy, saturation, accidental loss, death

Olick and Robbins (1998: 129)

Table 2: Victim Typology

	<i>Self-identifies as a victim</i>	<i>Labelled a victim by others</i>
Actual victim	✓	✓
Non-victim	✗	✗
Rejected victim	✓	✗
Designated victim	✗	✓

Strobl (2010: 6)

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