TOWARD A GEOGRAPHY OF MEMORY: GEOGRAPHICAL DIMENSIONS OF PUBLIC MEMORY AND COMMEMORATION

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Journal of Political and Military Sociology, 2007, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Summer): 125-144

This article focuses on contemporary research in geography on issues of public memory and commemoration—the ways in which discourse of the past is constructed socially and expressed materially in landscape, public memorials, and heritage sites. Interest in these sites has grown rapidly because they both reflect—and expose for study—social tensions, political realities, and cultural values. Compared to work in other disciplines, geography offers spatial, locational, and material perspectives on the patterns and dynamics of commemorative practices. Much attention has focused on the political dynamics of memory, but recent research has also revealed much about the chronology of commemoration, the interplay of social and elite groups in defining commemorative practices, and recent trends that expand the range of events and people remembered.

Interest in the geography of public memory and commemoration has grown quickly over the past two decades. Inspired by earlier works focusing on landscape symbolism (Cosgrove 1984; Harvey 1979; Lowenthal 1975, 1985; Tuan 1974, 1979) research has expanded to include issues central to heritage tourism, historical preservation, and the politics of commemoration, national identity and patriotism. Interest in these issues has been rising across the social sciences and humanities and has drawn considerable recent attention to how the past is constructed socially—and expressed materially in landscape, public space, art, popular media, and architecture. These constructions—in whatever media—are of interest because they reflect and expose for study social tensions, political realities, and cultural values. We concentrate in this article on the contributions of geographers and on works available largely in English but set our discussion in a broader international and interdisciplinary context.

Much of the research both inside and outside of geography has focused on wars, revolutions, and other major historical events from the late eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century. Among the events which have received the most attention are nationalism and wars of independence (Agulhon 1981; Azaryahu 1992; Confino and Fritzsche 2002; Dabrowski 2004; Foote 2003;

Gold and Gold 2002; Johnson 1994, 1995; Kong 2007; Leith 1991; Lowry 1985; Mayo 1988; Nora 1984; Özyürek 2007; Roudometof 2002; Schama 1995; Trouillas 1988; Vale 1992; Wang 2004), the American Civil War and subsequent conflicts (Blair 2003; Blight 2002a, 2002b; Brundage 2000; Fahs and Waugh 2004; Foster 1987; Linenthal 1991; Marling and Wetenhall 1991; Neff 2005; Piehler 1995; Savage 1997; Schein 2006; Shackel 2001, 2003; Wagner-Pacific and Schwartz 1991), the First and Second World Wars (Ashplant, Dawson and Roper 2001; Beaumont 2004; Farmer 1999; Fussell 1975; Heffernan 1995; Inglis 1998; Jeans 1988; Koshar 1998, 2000; Ladd 1997; Lloyd 1998; Morris 1997; Mosse 1990; Müller 2002; Muzaini and Yeoh 2005a, 2005b; Raivo 1998, 2001; Rosenfeld 2000; Stangl 2003; Till 2005; Tumarkin 1994; Wood 1999), the Holocaust (Hartman 1994; Hornstein and Jacobowitz 2003; Marcuse 2001; Rürup 1987; Van Pelt and Dwork 1996; Young 1993), post-Soviet Europe (Argenbright 1999; Azaryahu 1997; Bell 1999; Foote, Tóth, and Árvay 2000; Forrest and Johnson 2002; Hochschild 1994; James 2005; Levinson 1998; Light 2004; Rév 2005; Smith 1996; Till 1999; Verdery 1999), and some civil and ethnic conflicts and other acts of violence (Alderman and Dwyer 2004; Ashworth and Hartmann 2005; Azaryahu 1996c; Falah 1996; Hershkovitz 1993; Leitner and Kang 1999; Lennon and Foley 2000). This means that scholarship is rich for some periods and places, but weak in others particularly for Latin American, Asia, and Africa. We focus here on the theoretical themes raised by this research rather than using a chronological or regional approach because similar themes emerge in varying historical and regional contexts.

CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF MEMORY IN RECENT GEOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH

At the most general level, memory pertains to the actualization of the past in some form of contemporary experience—a tourist's visit to a battle site, a community's celebration of its centennial, the dedication of a new memorial, the release of a new historical film or book, historical re-enactments, and many other types of event. This conception advances upon earlier notions of collective memory in that memory is seen as socially constructed, not innately given, and always shaped by economic, social, cultural, economic, political, and ideological contexts of its creation. In this sense, memory is an invented tradition often shaped by many individuals and groups over long periods of time (Cosgrove and Daniels 1988; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Memory is related to the objective notion of "history" but is often a selectively embellished or mythologized version of events, people, and places that serves social or political ends.

Public memory is the interface where the past is represented in the present by means of shared cultural productions and reproductions (MacCannell 1976:23-34). The cultural production of public memory refers to both the medium of presentation and the process through which the representation of the

past assumes its particular form, often an involving engagement of the senses, emotions, imagination, and intellect of visitors. Commemorations of events, people, and places are fundamental elements of most traditions of public memory.

Commemorations assign significance to events and figures to create a "register of sacred history" (Schwartz, 1982), a set of shared historical experiences and attitudes that define and bond a community or, for the nation-state, what Roudometof (2002:8) has termed a "national narrative." In this capacity, public memory is part of the symbolic foundation of collective identity, where the question, "who we are," is answered, at least partially, by answering the question, "where do we come from," and what we share and do together as a community. The geography of memory locates history and its representations in space and landscape. It answers the question, "where is memory," in terms of places and sites that cast a certain vision of history into a mold of commemorative permanence. In comparison to other formulations of collective memory and social memory (Connerton 1989; Fentress and Wickham 1992; Halbwachs 1980; Nora 1984; Schwartz, 2000), geographers focus on the spatial, locational, and material patterns and dynamics of these commemorative practices, generally in public spaces (Foote 1988, 1990).

THE SPATIAL AND MATERIAL DIMENSIONS OF PUBLIC MEMORY

Public memory might be conceived as a matrix in which time and space are used separately and in combination to embed shared historical experiences and a sense of a shared past in the public life of a community or of a religious or social group. Memorial days, anniversaries, festivals, and other commemorative rituals, for example, help to link memory to the regularities of the weekly, monthly, and yearly calendar with other anniversaries celebrated at still longer intervals. These observances often take place in or near to shrines, memorials, museums, cemeteries, and other significant places allowing the past to be rendered material and visual. Ceremonial activities and commemorative events facilitate the convergence of liturgical time and mythic space and exude a sense of permanence. As Lowenthal (1985:238) noted, "What is potentially visible is omnipresent"—suggesting the power of monuments and memorial spaces in general to reify the past as long-term features of the landscape.

Historic sites such as battlefields, concentration camps, or locations of events like assassinations or massacres are dedicated to the reproduction of their pasts. Such reproductions take advantage of the common perception of history as being an intrinsic quality of the local landscape; in this sense, commemorative measures make this explicit—they provide a tangible link to the past they evoke. The formal transformation of historic sites into "memoryscapes" (Edensor 1997) involves the availability of cultural productions that assume commemorative forms. Cultural productions of the past employ the agency of display to create an "interpretive interface" that mediates and thereby transforms

that which is shown into a vision of history. The location itself, as the scene of past events, together with any available physical remains, can be used to create a sense of authenticity. Valued as relics, remains of the past serve as both "witnesses" and "evidence." In this symbolic capacity, they are instrumental in rendering the version of history presented at and by the site credible (Azaryahu 1993; DeLyser 1999, 2003, 2005; Hoelscher 1998).

Cemeteries, as one type of memorial space, create a symbolic encounter between the living and the dead in the form of individual gravesites and the ritual activities taking place in the burial space (Kong 1999). In contrast to communal cemeteries, national cemeteries are state shrines that belong to the national narrative of history (Azaryahu 1996a). The heroes buried there—most prominently national leaders and fallen soldiers—are privileged members of the national pantheon. Of special significance are the symbolic meanings associated with the architectural design of the cemetery and to the spatial configuration of the gravesites, as well as to the integration of the sacred space into the ceremonial rhythms of memorial days that constitute the national calendar (Blair 2003; Mosse 1990; Sledge 2005; Winter 1995). It is significant in this regard that the first efforts to mark the graves of *all* soldiers, not just their commanders, date to the American Civil War as does the tradition of Memorial Day (begun as Decoration Day). This sense of egalitarianism is now a commonplace of memorial designs that seek to recognize all victims irrespective of their station.

The cultural reproduction of the past at the site includes an array of complementary modes of representation—inscriptions, guidebooks, maps, films, artifacts, and so forth. Museums and historical exhibits are often able to provide a broader historical context and interpretations according to the intentions of their creators (Katriel 1997; Kirchenblatt-Gimblett 1998). The affiliation of the exhibition with the historical location is crucial for the production of meaning; the exhibition "explains" the site, whereas the site augments the arguments put forward by the exhibition and validates its version of history. Official outline maps and guidebooks offer an official version of the site, its history, and its place in history. Suggested tour paths translate the spatiality of historic sites into a linear sequence of particular sights. The different modes of cultural production employed at a site are intended to complement each other in propagating its official story.

Unlike memorials that are architectural edifices, street names serve a commemorative function but belong to the realm of language. Whereas the primary function of memorials is symbolic, street names have a well-defined utilitarian function: to distinguish between streets and provide spatial orientation. When invested with commemorative functions, street names introduce an official version of history into everyday life in a way that seems totally detached from ideological contexts or communal obligations; the ostensible ordinariness of street names that allows them to render a certain version of history not only

familiar, but also self-evident (Alderman 2000, 2003; Azaryahu 1986, 1996b; Ferguson 1988; Gill 2005; Palonen 1993; Stump 1988; Yeoh 1992, 1996).

THE POLITICS OF COMMEMORATION

Within the literature, the most attention has focused on the political dimensions of public memory—specifically how the past is re-presented to express hegemonic relations of power and authority. A distinction is often made between official and unofficial commemorations, but it is important to note that the impetus for memorial making stems from many different motives and usually involves many different groups—survivors, veterans, their families and descendents, political organizations and their constituencies, community groups, nongovernmental organizations, and activists. These efforts may eventually attract official support but perhaps only after the passage of decades, generations, or centuries. In some nations with strong central, authoritarian or totalitarian governments it is not uncommon for memory to be imposed on landscape, but these are perhaps the exceptions rather than the rule (Michalski 1998).

In democratic regimes, patterns of commemoration may show considerable local and regional variation. But, irrespective of their origins, unless memorial landscapes attract a broad, long-lasting constituency they are unlikely to endure beyond the era or regime of their creation. In fact, relatively few events, people, and places ever attain official or unofficial status at all. This element of selectivity is not always clearly apparent in the contemporary landscape because we see only what *has been* marked, rather than what *has not been*. This filtering or forgetting—which writers such as Boyarin (1994), Huyssen (1995), and Yoneyama (1999) lament as historical amnesia—means that people today often assume that official commemoration is more common than it actually is.

The chronology of the memorialization process is important to understanding how memories are represented and reproduced. Participants, victims, survivors, and families usually exert the greatest control of meaning in the immediate aftermath of an event. Gradually, however, others parties enter the discussion—and it is this latter debate, however heated, that is critical to understanding how memory is shaped from sometimes competing interpretations. Such debate forces competing interpretations into the open and, in the long run, is perhaps of greater importance than any tangible, physical monument that may result (Foote, 2003:342). Young (1997) calls this "memory work" and it is important in the early stages of commemoration, as are the spontaneous shrines that emerge on site often advocating particular points of view (Everett 2002; Grider 2000, 2001; Jorgensen-Earp and Lanzilotti 1998; Santino 2006). Key decisions and changes are often made on anniversaries, the most critical being those thirty to fifty years after an event when the direct witnesses begin to die. Efforts to erect memorials crescendo as the last survivors seek to bear final witness for future generations. In this period of intergenerational transfer the

process of building constituencies and generating financial support often entails reaching compromises over meaning. It is easy to assume that major memorials, such as those in the United States for events relating to the Revolutionary and Civil Wars and to historical figures like Presidents Washington and Lincoln, were inevitable and arose quickly, when in fact decades and generations were involved in the shaping of the major memorials that exist today. Recent events like the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995 and the 9/11 terrorist attacks have suggested that this "memory work" can be sped up and compressed into only a few years, but there is no guarantee that such efforts will generate the support and consensus necessary to conserve memory in the long term.

Historical memory is an important aspect of shared identities within local communities and nations (Morley and Robins 1995), and commemorative measures also amount to a mechanism of identity formation (Gillis 1994). Commemorative activities figure prominently during national revivals and stages of state formation. Revolutionary regimes that are engaged in state formation—a case in point is Republican France, Nazi Germany, and the former Soviet Union—cast historical memory in an ideological mold that conforms with and legitimizes the new social order and its peculiar power structures (Lane, 1968; Rosenfeld 2000; Taylor 1974; Tumarkin 1983). Notwithstanding the excesses of revolutionary regimes and periods of nation building, official versions of historical memory are embedded into the symbolic foundations of modern statehood. Hegemonic forces in society manipulate historical memory to legitimize their authority. However, as Koshar (1998:16) noted, "Memory is a source of power for elites, but also a potential of noncompliance or even resistance for the powerless." Memorial sites and street names are possible sites of contestation: They belong to the societal discourse of history and often provide prisms through which possibly alternative interpretations of the past are refracted. Contested sites like these, where the powerless can confront the powerful, can be effective points for resistance, like La Plaza de las Tres Culturas at Tlatelolco in Mexico City, the site of the 1968 government massacre of students; La Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where the mothers and grandmothers of the "disappeared" hold their vigils; or Parcel 301 in a Budapest cemetery, where many executed political leaders were buried after the 1956 Hungarian uprising.

Recent studies have also underscored the point that the geography of public memory is dynamic: New commemorative features are added while others, abruptly or gradually, disappear. Monuments are reinterpreted and their social and political relevance is reformulated according to contemporary priorities and sensitivities. For example, at the end of the twentieth century a shift occurred in the West in regard to what and who should be remembered. Traditionally, commemoration was mainly about the celebration of heroes, martyrs, and glorious events that exuded grandeur and meant to evoke veneration. To this category belonged war memorials, statues of politicians, and monuments to

generals and military victories that cast the national past in a heroic mold. A new and significant development has been the growing emphasis on commemorating shameful events and honoring the memory of victims of genocides and massacres, in effect acknowledging more openly the influence that violence plays in society. A case in point is the extensive commemoration of the victims of the Nazi regime. Memorials and former concentration and death camps figure prominently in the geography of Holocaust remembrance. Also, until quite recently, events of mass murder, terrorism, and everyday violence led almost exclusively to what Foote (2003:23-27) has termed obliteration and rectification (or reuse); now memorials can be found to such events with one of the largest being the Oklahoma City National Bombing Memorial. In the United States there has also been a greater willingness to commemorate events, people, and groups that have generally been excluded from American memory: the labor monument (Moore 2002; Saitta, Walker, and Reckner 2006) and the contributions of Native Americans, African Americans, Japanese Americans, Chinese Americans, and Hispanic groups to American history (Alderman 2000, 2003; Alderman and Dwyer 2004; Dwyer 2000, 2002, 2003, 2006; Hoelscher and Alderman 2004). The issue of gender and sexuality in commemorative landscapes and the continuing unequal commemoration of women and women's accomplishments is also gaining attention (Mill 1992; Monk 1992).

But it is also true that the meanings of almost all memorial spaces and activities change through time. As Werlen (1993:174) has noted, "Socially constructed artifacts may be invested with a symbolic meaning which need not coincide with the rationale underlying, and preserved, in their construction." Susceptible to different and possibly contradictory interpretations, the meanings of commemorative spaces and historical sites are dynamic. We would even suggest that a major function of memorials is to engage successive generation in debate over their significance, rather than to attempt to define permanent, inflexible meanings. As studies as diverse as those of the Vittorio Emanuele II monument in Rome (Atkinson and Cosgrove 1998) and the Dachau concentration camp (Marcuse 2001) demonstrate, the meanings ascribed to commemorations are constantly modulated according to the social and ideological contexts of their celebration as politically relevant representations of the past. Major United States' battlefields such as Gettysburg, Little Bighorn, and Pearl Harbor, have all been reinterpreted many times with each generation seeing different meanings in the events (Foote 2003; Linenthal 1991). Highly partisan interpretations often give way to efforts at reconciliation. Memorials are at the center of a controversy when the exclusion or inclusion of certain aspects of the past they actualize—Catholic shrines at Auschwitz or the Enola Gay at the Smithsonian—are publicly challenged and the authority of the memorial as an appropriate rendition of the past is disputed (Charlesworth 1994; Linenthal and Engelhardt 1996).

Traditional meanings of memorials may also be replaced or undergo erosion, even vandalism. Replacement and vandalism figure prominently in periods of discontinuity in the political history of societies and regimes. In such situations, the procedure often assumes dramatic forms, e.g., pulling down statues and renaming streets, measures that have become common markers of a political change. The commemorative history of memorials is possibly punctuated by discontinuities that evince the ideological priorities of successive regimes. One good example is the Neue Wache in Berlin. Constructed as a guardhouse in 1816, it was converted into a memorial to the fallen of the First World War in 1931 by the Prussian state, used as a focus of Nazi ceremonies after 1933, converted into a "Memorial to the Victims of Fascism and Militarism" in 1960 by the German Democratic Republic (GDR), and rededicated as the "Central Memorial of the Federal Republic of Germany for the Victims of War and Tyranny" in 1993 after the reunification of Germany (Stangl 2006; Till 1999). Following the collapse of the Third Reich the Nazi past was erased form the street signs of German and Austrian cities (Azaryahu 1990). Renaming the Communist past figured prominently in post-communist Moscow, Bucharest, Budapest and East Berlin (Azaryahu 1997; Foote et al. 2000; Gill 2005; Light 2004; Light, Nicolae, and Suditu 2002). Historical revision is usually a two-fold procedure involving the de-commemoration of persons and events associated with the old regime and the commemoration of heroes and events associated with the ideological underpinning of the new regime. As such, revision is both a celebration of triumph and a means of settling scores with the vanquished regime.

Yet replacing memory can also be a prolonged process that evinces different approaches to the past and evaluations of history. As the "reorientation" of the Buchenwald memorial site in the context of German reunification (Azaryahu, 2003) shows, the conflicts that arise in this context highlight the extent to which historical memory not only represents the past but also specific interpretations of the past that evince and correspond to well-defined political interests and ideological perspectives.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Research is emerging rapidly on many fronts, but more is needed in at least three areas. First, more work is needed to expand the range of cases available for comparative analysis, particularly those from outside of Europe and North America. Consideration of commemoration of a more diverse range of events—such as the development of commemorative traditions in Latin America, Africa and Asia—could add new theoretical insights (Ross 2004, 2006; Walkowitz and Knauer 2004). Second, more attention might be focused on events, like the Holocaust, whose meanings cross international borders and require negotiations among nations that were once enemies, as for example between Japan and South Korea and China over atrocities of the Second World

War. Third, while geographers offer important perspectives on issues of public memory, future research will continue to benefit from interdisciplinary perspectives which consider how public memory and commemoration are expressed across a wider range of cultural practices and media and how space and place interact with these.

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IN THIS ISSUE

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