

Troubling Memories in Nation-building: World War II Memories and Germans' Inter-ethnic Encounters in Canada after 1945

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For postwar Canadians, especially for those who had served in Europe or had lost relatives and friends in the war, as well as for European immigrants who had suffered under the Nazi terror, the great influx of German-speaking immigrants could pose a difficult personal confrontation with the past. This was also true for the German immigrants. The dominant national narrative, that the Allies had fought a good war against an evil empire, created a gulf between German Canadians and other Canadians and left little room for German immigrants to make sense of their wartime memories. German immigrants interpreted and responded to personal encounters and public representations of the war and the Holocaust in different ways. Some guarded their memories through silence in inter-ethnic relations or withdrew from such relations altogether, while others used such relations to learn more about the past. While multiculturalism helped bridge divides at the individual level, it did not integrate into the national historical memory the experiences of immigrants who had been former enemies.

Après la guerre, l'afflux en grand nombre d'immigrants germanophones pouvait semer chez les Canadiens, surtout chez ceux qui avaient servi en Europe ou qui avaient perdu des parents et des amis durant le conflit et chez les immigrants européens qui avaient souffert sous le régime de terreur de l'Allemagne nazie, un sentiment troublant de confrontation de soi avec le passé. Le récit nationaliste dominant – que les Alliés avaient livré une guerre juste contre l'empire du mal – a creusé un gouffre entre les Canadiens allemands et les autres Canadiens et n'a donné aux immigrants allemands aucun marge d'interprétation de leurs souvenirs

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de guerre. Leurs rencontres personnelles et les représentations publiques de la guerre et de l'Holocauste ont suscité chez les immigrants allemands des interprétations et des réactions différentes. La plupart ont soustrait leurs souvenirs de guerre au regard des autres durant leurs relations interethniques ou sont demeurés en retrait de telles relations. Si le multiculturalisme a permis de rétablir des ponts individuels, il n'a pas accueilli dans la mémoire historique nationale le vécu d'immigrants et ennemis de jadis.

IN SEPTEMBER 2000, Chuck Cadman, a member of the Canadian Alliance, spoke in Parliament in favour of Bill C-334, which would permit relatives of deceased veterans to wear their war decorations. To support his case he referred to his parents' war experiences. His father had helped liberate the Netherlands in 1945 and married a Dutch woman. "Neither of my parents spoke much about the war," Cadman said. "They did not have to. My mother's traumatic experience of years under the Nazi occupation was evident in her reaction whenever she heard someone speak with a German accent." As a teenager in the early 1960s,¹ Cadman once brought home with him a friend whose parents were German immigrants. "He was tall and lean with sharp square features, blond hair and spoke with a heavy accent. My mother was very gracious to him but after he had gone she asked me not to bring him around any more if she was at home." She did not object to her son's friendship with the German boy, "but to be in the same room with him was just too much for her."²

Cadman's anecdote reminds us that, for postwar Canadians — especially for those who had served in Europe or lost relatives and friends in the war, as well as for European immigrants who had suffered under the Nazi terror — the great influx of German-speaking immigrants after the war posed, at least potentially, a personal confrontation with the recent past that could be difficult to navigate.³ Cadman's public use of his family memory also shows that several decades later, at the turn of the twentieth century, World War II still

1 Cadman was born in Kitchener, Ontario, in 1948 and grew up in North Bay, Ontario [web page, retrieved October 3, 2005], <<http://www.chuckcadman-mp.com>>.

2 Chuck Cadman (Canadian Alliance – Surrey North), 36th Parliament, 2nd Session, Edited *Hansard*, no. 116, Monday, September 18, 2000 [online document, retrieved April 14, 2003], <www.parl.gc.ca/36/2/parlbus/chambus/house/debates/116_2000-09-18/HAN116-E.htm>.

3 There is little research on the impact of memories of the war and the Holocaust on inter-ethnic relations in postwar Canada, but see Harold Troper and Morton Weinfeld, *Old Wounds: Jews, Ukrainians and the Hunt for Nazi War Criminals in Canada* (Markham, ON: Penguin, 1989); Fred Stambrok, ed., *A Sharing of Diversities: Proceedings of the Jewish Mennonite Ukrainian Conference, "Building Bridges"* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1999). Inter-ethnic relations were shaped by war memories in a different way in the case of the Canadian government's internment and displacement of Japanese Canadians and the internment of Italian Canadians and German Canadians during World War II. See Franca Iacovetta *et al.*, eds., *Enemies Within: Italian and Other Internees in Canada and Abroad* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); Roy Miki, *Justice in Our Time: The Japanese-Canadian Redress Settlement* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1992).

plays an integral part in Canada's collective national-historical memory. Cadman knew that others like him identified with the nation by commemorating the specifically Canadian suffering and sacrifice of the war and by celebrating Canada's liberation of the Netherlands.⁴

Other Canadians, however, experienced and remembered such intercultural encounters from another perspective: that of Cadman's "Aryan"-looking and German-speaking friend. Yet Cadman excluded his friend from the national community of commemoration by asking his audience to sympathize and identify with his mother, not his friend, who — after half a century of German postwar immigration and a generation of official multiculturalism — could alternatively be seen as a vulnerable adolescent refugee from a war-torn country.⁵

To learn more about this other perspective, let us look at the story of Mark Maatz*,⁶ who was 22 years old when he immigrated to Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, in 1951. He worked at a steel plant and ate dinner at a boarding house in the company of 15 other European immigrants. When they learned that he was from Austria and spoke German, they all turned silent, and one said, "So, then you are a Nazi." From then on, even though he tried to engage them in a dialogue, Maatz was cut dead. After three months, he decided to get his dinner at a different boarding house. At work, where the foremen knew only English and many of the recent East European immigrants knew no English but some German, Maatz was asked to translate the work orders. His co-workers, Maatz explained, had learned their German as forced labourers in Nazi Germany. Believing they had got as far away from Germany as possible, they were shocked and dismayed that, according to Maatz, "once again" they were being given orders in German. Some reacted by threatening Maatz and beating him up. He finally quit the job and moved away.⁷ Like Cadman's story, Maatz's story shows that the re-awakening of old memories as a result of inter-ethnic encounters could open "old wounds"⁸

4 This was evident, for example, in the national mainstream media discourse at the 50th and 60th anniversaries of D-Day and VE-Day in 1994–1995 and 2004–2005. This discourse is too voluminous to be listed here, and it still awaits analysis and interpretation similar to Jonathan F. Vance's analysis of World War I memories in interwar Canada in *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997).

5 This alternative reading and, for Cadman, reinterpretation of the episode was available because Parliament at the same time was debating two bills dealing with war-affected children abroad and in Canada: Bill C–19, *An Act Respecting Genocide, Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes and to Implement the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and to Make Consequential Amendments to Other Acts*, received royal assent on June 29, 2000. Bill S–18, *An Act to Amend the National Defence Act* (non-deployment of persons under the age of 18 years to theatres of hostilities), also received royal assent on June 29, 2000. Nor did Cadman ask whether, in a multicultural society and under Bill C–334, his German friend should be allowed to wear his father's German military war decorations.

6 Some interviewees were given pseudonyms that resemble their real names, and are marked with an asterisk at first mention.

7 Mark Maatz, interview by Alexander Freund, Edmonton, October 2 and 3, 1996.

8 Troper and Weinfeld, *Old Wounds*.

When he related this story in an oral history interview in 1996, Maatz explained that his co-workers' hostility was directed toward the German language, not Germans or Austrians, and that he found this "understandable" considering their experiences in Nazi Germany. It was also a result, he argued, of Canadian postwar society, in which "all" first-generation immigrants sought comfort among fellow ethnics, which prevented them from learning English. Later generations no longer "isolated" themselves. In Maatz's view, then, inter-ethnic conflict was part of an immigrant society, while multiculturalism helped to transcend such conflict. All of these experiences, he seemed to say, were part of Canadian history.

Thus we have two stories: Cadman's and Maatz's. What do we make of them? They tell of the same kind of event or social situation — an intercultural encounter in postwar Canada shaped by memories of the Second World War. The encounters harboured conflict because the nations and families of those involved had fought on opposing sides in the war. They held assumptions (for example, all German-speakers were Nazis; only some/few/other Germans were Nazis) that were informed by personal experiences of loss and hardship as well as national interpretations of the war: the Allies had fought a good war against an evil empire; Germans had been deceived by a madman.⁹ Allied narratives about the war cast the participants in antagonistic roles of good-evil and victim-perpetrator, creating a gulf between German-speaking immigrants and other Canadians. As a result, inter-ethnic relations came under pressure and some were torn: neither the Cadmans nor Maatz and his co-workers found a common language to bridge the divide or to craft, in a joint effort, a unifying meaning out of the opposing memories of war. Yet they also attempted to mend this broken relationship. Maatz did not withdraw from relations with East European immigrants after experiencing hostility at the steel mill, nor did Cadman's mother let her trauma stand in the way of her son's friendship with the young immigrant. Cadman's and Maatz's experiences and interpretations were not exceptional. In one way or another, memories of the war shaped relationships between German Canadians and other Canadians in the 1950s and throughout the last 60 years. They made sense of such encounters in different ways.

Memory is understood here not simply as a storage box of information — "[n]o memory can preserve the past"¹⁰ — but as the continuous individual

9 On the immediate postwar interpretations of German historians of the "German Catastrophe", as Friedrich Meinecke called it, see Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (London: Edward Arnold, 1993), pp. 6–7, 14, 25; for an early Canadian interpretation, see William Lyon Mackenzie King, *Canada and the Fight For Freedom* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pierce, 1944). The Austrian national narrative until the 1980s told of Austria as Hitler's first victim; see Peter Utgaard *Remembering and Forgetting Nazism: Education, National Identity, and the Victim Myth in Postwar Austria* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003).

10 Jan Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity", trans. John Czaplicka, *New German Critique*, no. 65 (Spring/Summer 1995), p. 130.

and collective construction and reshaping of personal experiences, knowledge, and social discourses into a repertoire of stories about the past. It is through memory's continuous reworking of experiences that people make sense of their experiences. Historians have only indirect access to this individual and collective memory, namely through the everyday communication of social groups, such as anecdotes, jokes, gossip, and stories about experiences (communicative memory) and through the lasting products of cultures, such as texts, memorials, and institutional practices (cultural memory). Communicative memory can be distinguished by the social group that establishes it, be it a family, an ethnic group, a nation, or humanity.¹¹ Cadman's and Maatz's stories can therefore be understood as individual memories that were constituted in relation to their specific group ("Canadians" in Cadman's case, German-speaking immigrants in Maatz's case). In both cases, the groups were "imagined communities" that "conceive[d] their unity and peculiarity through a common image of their past".¹²

Communicative memory, Jan Assmann notes, "constitute[s] the field of oral history".¹³ It is therefore not surprising that oral history interviews are the major source used here and in the larger ongoing project on which this study is based.¹⁴ The project explores German immigrants' ways of dealing with the Nazi past in Canada and the United States and their relationships with Jewish North Americans in the second half of the twentieth century. This topic emerged from interviews about migration experiences I conducted with postwar German immigrants, half of whom recounted (without my prompting) encounters shaped by memories of war and the Holocaust.

These interviews with about 80 Germans who immigrated to Canada and the United States during the late 1940s and 1950s fall into two categories. The first set did not explicitly explore confrontations with the Nazi past or personal encounters with Jews, although these themes did surface during the course of the interviews. By contrast, memories of war and the Holocaust

11 The classic work on collective memory is Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed., trans. and with an introduction by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992 [1941]); on communicative and cultural memory, see Assmann, "Collective Memory"; on social memory, see James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory: New Perspectives on the Past* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); on communicative memory, see Harald Welzer et al., "Opa war kein Nazi." *Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer, 2002); Harald Welzer, ed., *Das soziale Gedächtnis. Geschichte, Erinnerung, Tradierung* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2001). On the role of narration in memory and knowing, see Donald Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988); Jerome S. Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1986), and *Acts of Meaning* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1990).

12 Assmann, "Collective Memory", p. 127; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (New York: Verso, 1996).

13 Assmann, "Collective Memory", p. 126.

14 Started as a postdoctoral project in 1999, it was expanded and named "Encounters" in the summer of 2005. For more information, see <<http://germancanadian.uwinnipeg.ca>>. The project is ongoing and the results presented here are therefore preliminary.

were centre-stage in the second group of interviews, conducted between 2000 and 2005 with about 60 men and women.¹⁵ Included are interviews with German residents of New York and Manitoba who migrated to North America in the decades following World War II, with second- and third-generation German Canadians and German Americans, and with Jewish Americans and Canadians, including those born in North America and those who immigrated before or after the war.¹⁶

Most of my interviewees were self-selected: they responded to letters to the editor in ethnic and mainstream newspapers and to flyers in German and Jewish institutions such as consulates, clubs, churches, and synagogues. Some were referred by other interviewees (“snowball system”). The life-story interview method used for the interviews consisted of two parts. In part one, the interviewee was asked to tell his or her life story as completely as possible without interference by the interviewer; in part two, the interviewer asked specific questions.¹⁷ Interviews conducted by other researchers were based on specific questions; how interviewees were selected is unclear.

Migrants and Transnational Memories

Between the end of World War II and the early 1960s, approximately 270,000 Germans immigrated to Canada. This was a heterogeneous migration. About

15 I conducted interviews in British Columbia in 1993, in Alberta and Michigan in 1996, in Washington (DC), Virginia, and Maryland in 1996 and 1998, and in Ontario in 1998. For more information on the interviews, see Alexander Freund, “Identity in Immigration: Self-Conceptualization and Myth in the Narratives of German Immigrant Women in Vancouver, BC, 1950–1960” (MA thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1994), and *Aufbrüche nach dem Zusammenbruch: Die deutsche Nordamerika-Auswanderung nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2004). Only the interviews with the 49 German immigrants to Canada are used for this article. More recently, I have begun using interviews with German Canadians conducted by others, especially those Arthur Grenke conducted with pre-World-War-I immigrants in Winnipeg in the 1970s (deposited at the Manitoba Museum Archives in Winnipeg) and several hundred that the Multicultural History Society of Ontario (MHSO) conducted with postwar German as well as German-Jewish immigrants in Ontario and Manitoba in the late 1970s and early 1980s and, in co-operation with the Chair in German-Canadian Studies at the University of Winnipeg, in the second half of the 1990s. Most of the MHSO interviews have not yet been examined.

16 Interviews with Germans who migrated to North America between the late 1940s and 1990s, with children and grandchildren of German immigrants, and with Jewish North Americans were conducted in New York in 2000 and 2001 and in Manitoba in 2004 and 2005 (in the summer of 2005 by two research assistants, Angela Thiessen and Christine Kampen). For more information on the New York interviews and the project, see Alexander Freund, “Dealing with the Past Abroad: German Immigrants’ *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and their Relations with Jews in North America Since 1945”, in *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, vol. 31 (Fall 2002), pp. 51–63 [online article], <<http://www.ghi-dc.org/bulletinF02/51.pdf>>. Only the interviews with German immigrants to Canada are used for this article. Interviews continue to be conducted throughout Canada.

17 This method is adapted from German oral history practice. For an English-language introduction, see Alexander von Plato, “Aspects of Recent Oral History in Germany”, in *International Yearbook of Oral History and Life Stories I: Memory and Totalitarianism* (1992), pp. 192–196. The objective of part one of the interview is to create a narrative that is as free of interviewer influence as possible.



Figure 1: “Immigrants crowd the deck of the *S.S. Beaverbrae*, as the moment comes to disembark at the port of Quebec and commence their new life in Canada” (CPR/Library and Archives Canada, PA-124423).

one-third were refugees from Eastern Europe and the former German territories east of the rivers Oder and Neisse, and two-thirds were from rural regions and urban centres in the four Zones of Occupation and the later West and East Germany. One-third were single men and women, while the rest came in family groups. Most had been born in the interwar years, but there were also substantial minorities of younger and older Germans. The people identified as “Germans” in postwar Canada included German and Austrian nationals as well as so-called *Volksdeutsche* or ethnic Germans — people who had left German territories in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries or earlier and lived in linguistic and often religious enclaves or as members of the local urban elites and middle classes throughout Eastern Europe. Before migrating to Canada, many had experienced multiple migrations before, during, and after the war, be these under voluntary or forcible Nazi resettlement schemes, as evacuees from western German cities bombed by the Allies, in flight from the Red Army, as expellees and deportees from postwar Eastern Europe, as refugees from the Soviet Zone of Occupation to western zones of occupation (or from East to West Germany), or under voluntary resettlement schemes within western Germany.



Figure 2: “German children framed by the wheel of Europe Canada Line vessel *The Seven Seas* [bound for Montreal, then Merrickville, Ont., with their parents], ca. 1958” (Europe Canada Line/Library and Archives of Canada, PA-124957).

Because part of the overseas migration to Canada was sponsored and arranged by church organizations, the migrants came to specific regions and locales within Canada, such as Baptists and Mennonites settling on the Prairies. Many migrants had to have sponsors, and they often followed friends and family — some of whom had come to Canada in the 1920s or before World War I — to German neighbourhoods in Vancouver, Winnipeg, and Toronto. Also, because Canada recruited skilled workers, migrants were sent to industrial centres, mining and logging towns, farms, and private homes and institutions in need of domestic servants. Experiences were therefore often local and regional rather than national and supranational.¹⁸

18 On this migration, see my *Aufbrüche nach dem Zusammenbruch*.

Nevertheless, general patterns in dealing with the Nazi past were common to German immigrants across Canada during the 1950s. The postwar immigrants brought with them interpretations informed by personal experiences and German public discourses about the Third Reich, the war, and Nazi atrocities. In the second half of the 1940s, the Allies had pushed Germans to face up to what their nation had done between 1933 and 1945. Germans learned about the extent of the "Final Solution" through the war crimes tribunal in Nuremberg, public displays of photographs and screenings of films showing concentration camps, and re-education efforts. Of the 12 million Germans who had been members of the Nazi party (NSDAP) or one of its organizations, 270,000 were arrested in 1945, and others lost their jobs. In the western zones, 3.66 million Germans had to appear before courts that classified and, if appropriate, punished them according to their degree of involvement in Nazi crimes. Public anti-Semitism became taboo. In the Soviet zone, the nationalization of estates and big industry and the purging of over half a million Nazis from the public service sector was the most thorough denazification in any of the four zones. To what degree denazification was effective remains unclear. Half of the German population believed throughout the late 1940s that National Socialism was a good idea that had been badly carried out. Nevertheless, by 1949 Germans had learned about the extent of Nazi atrocities.¹⁹

With the founding of the two German states in 1949 and the intensification of the Cold War, however, Allies and Germans were no longer interested in denazification and instead turned to economic and military reconstruction. Physicians, lawyers, justices, bankers, industrialists, and politicians who had been in the higher Nazi ranks and had committed atrocities received pardons and regained their positions and status. The 1950s became the decade of

19 Bernd Hey, "Zwischen Vergangenheitsbewältigung und heiler Welt. Nachkriegsdeutsche Befindlichkeiten im Spielfilm", in *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, vol. 52, no. 4 (April 2001), pp. 231–232; polls in R. L. and A. J. Merritt, *Public Opinion in Occupied Germany: The OMGUS-Surveys, 1945–1949* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970); Christoph Kleßmann, *Die doppelte Staatsgründung. Deutsche Geschichte 1945–1955*, 5th revised and extended ed. (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1991), pp. 53–55, 78–99; Mary Fulbrook, *German National Identity After the Holocaust* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1999); Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), and "The Holocaust and the Competition of Memories in Germany, 1945–1999", in Dan Michman, ed., *Remembering the Holocaust in Germany, 1945–2000: German Strategies and Jewish Responses* (New York: Lang, 2002), pp. 9–30; Y. Michael Bodemann, "The Uncanny Clatter: The Holocaust in Germany Before its Mass Commemoration", in Michman, ed., *Remembering the Holocaust*, pp. 43–53; Robert G. Moeller, "War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany", *American Historical Review*, vol. 101, no. 4 (October 1996), pp. 1008–1048; Samuel Moyn, "Two Regimes of Memory", *American Historical Review*, vol. 103, no. 4 (October 1998), pp. 1182–1186; Frank Stern, *The Whitewashing of the Yellow Badge: Antisemitism and Philosemitism in Postwar Germany*, trans. William Templer (Oxford and New York: Pergamon Press, 1992); Werner Bergmann and Rainer Erb, *Anti-Semitism in Germany: The Post-Nazi Epoch since 1945* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1997).

silence or “remembering selectively” (Moeller). West Germans watched *Heimat* movies that told worry-free stories set in the romantic Black Forest. They followed soccer matches, culminating in Germany’s unexpected win of the 1954 World Championship, which led to a new national pride. In the second half of the decade, younger Germans turned to rock’n’roll as a form of rebellion. Schoolteachers, many of whom had been adults during the Third Reich, did not teach about German history after 1933. In families, no one talked about the Nazi crimes.

Instead, Germans made sense of the war by pointing to their own miserable situation, including the immense losses of soldiers and civilians, hunger in the first postwar years, insufficient housing and employment until the late 1950s, the burden of 12 million refugees, and the Allies’ “new injustices” against Germans in the form of “victor’s justice” and reparations. They distinguished between the good German army and the bad SS, and rejected the accusation of collective guilt. At the same time, the “integrative ideology” (Kleßmann) of anti-Communism allowed West Germans to see themselves as being on the “right” side. East Germans, or at least their official state narrative, refused responsibility for Nazi crimes because they saw themselves as successors to the Communists and Socialists of the Weimar Republic and thus as capitalist fascism’s first victims.

The desecration of Jewish cemeteries, new war crimes trials, and the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961 slowly started a new phase of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* or “coming to terms with the past” in West Germany, in which the young generation asked questions about their parents’ generation’s involvement in the Nazi crimes.²⁰ By that time, however, most of Germany’s postwar migrants had already arrived in North America, where they were cut off from those new discourses.

Thus it was the Germans-as-victims narrative that most German immigrants knew when they arrived in Canada. Some, especially younger, single migrants, however, left Germany to escape this oppressively conservative mentality and hoped to find greater “freedom” in Canada. Here they were confronted with the Nazi past in three different kinds of situations. First, they encountered North American published and media interpretations of the Third Reich that were either not present or marginal in 1950s Germany. Secondly, as related in Cadman’s and Maatz’s stories, they were confronted with the Nazi past on a personal level in their everyday encounters with other Canadians. Thirdly, unlike in Germany, they frequently met Jews. They experienced these situations, furthermore, as members of an ethnic minority.

20 Hey, “Zwischen Vergangenheitsbewältigung und heiler Welt”; Kleßmann, *Die doppelte Staatsgründung*, pp. 251–257, and *Zwei Staaten, eine Nation. Deutsche Geschichte 1955–1970* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1988), pp. 44–62, 179–185; Fulbrook, *German National Identity*; Herf, *Divided Memory*, and “The Holocaust and the Competition of Memories”; Bodemann, “The Uncanny Clatter”; Moeller, “War Stories”; Moyn, “Two Regimes of Memory”; Stern, *The Whitewashing of the Yellow Badge*; Bergmann and Erb, *Anti-Semitism in Germany*.

While some continued to hold on to the victim narrative, others adopted new interpretations of the past. Encounters shaped by war memories thus influenced not only the relations between German immigrants and other Canadians, but also the way in which German migrants thought about — and remembered — the Nazi past.

Public Confrontations with the Nazi Past

In the 1950s and 1960s North American collective memory of the Second World War was constructed and expressed in part through war movies and television shows that depicted German soldiers and SS officers as evil monsters or bumbling fools and that equated villains and Germans. Commemorations on Armistice or Remembrance Day and on the anniversaries of battles and the war's end, which contributed to the formation of a dominant Canadian national memory, focused on Canadian and Allied sacrifices.²¹ Public awareness and interest in the Holocaust emerged in North America only in the 1970s²² and was heightened by Canada's renewed interest in war criminals in the 1980s.²³ Canadian mainstream media focused increasingly on the positive aspects of Canadians' contributions to "the good fight".²⁴ German immigrants interpreted and responded to these public Canadian representations of the war and the Holocaust in various ways.

In the first two postwar decades, some interviewees reported, American war movies incited anti-German sentiments because they depicted all Germans as Nazis, so that Canadians consequently did not distinguish between Germans and Nazis. Helene Dobel immigrated to Canada in 1951 together with her husband, who had been a prisoner of war in Canada and liked Canadians. She said that in their daily struggles for jobs and an apartment, they

21 It seems that World War II did not play any significant role in Canada's nationalism in the first three postwar decades, when the relationship between French- and English-speaking Canadians became more pronounced, as did the declining bond to Great Britain and an increasingly important relationship to the United States (continentalism). See George Grant, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1965); Peter Russell, ed., and the University League for Social Reform, *Nationalism in Canada* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1966); Philip Resnick, *The Land of Cain: Class and Nationalism in English Canada, 1945–1975* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1977).

22 Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999); Hilene Flanzbaum, ed., *The Americanization of the Holocaust* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

23 Canada, Commission of Inquiry on War Criminals, *Report, Commission of Inquiry on War Criminals* (Ottawa: The Commission, 1986), and *Findings and Recommendations* (Ottawa: The Commission, 1986); Grant Purves, "War Criminals: The Deschênes Commission", [online document, retrieved October 3, 2005], rev. October 16, 1998, <<http://dsp-psd.communication.gc.ca/Collection-R/LoPBdP/CIR/873-e.htm>>; Howard Margolian, *Unauthorized Entry: The Truth About Nazi War Criminals in Canada, 1946–1956* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

24 Jeffrey A. Keshen, *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers: Canada's Second World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004), pp. 3–5; Jack L. Granatstein and Peter Neary, eds., *The Good Fight: Canadians in the Second World War* (Toronto: Copp Clark Longman, 1995).

had to fight prejudice against Germans because of war movies. “The first years were very terrible because of that.” Speaking some Russian, she could find her first seamstress job in Winnipeg only after pretending to be Russian. Renting an apartment was similarly difficult, because Canadians “were so stirred up by the movies of the war” that they did not rent to Germans. “Everyone said, when we said ‘German’ — ‘Nazis, no! No, no Nazis.’” They finally rented an apartment from a French-Canadian family from Newfoundland. The extent of such discrimination against postwar immigrants is unclear. On one hand, some hostility against Germans in Canada had occurred during the Second World War, and postwar opinion polls showed that few Canadians wanted to see Germans as immigrants.²⁵ On the other hand, few interviewees reported similar experiences of discrimination, and, of the 136 job discrimination complaints in Toronto from 1962 to 1966, only six were filed by Germans.²⁶

The Dobels soon became Canadian citizens. One year after their arrival, Helene Dobel also became secretary of the German-Canadian Society in the Winnipeg’s North End, the city’s immigrant district.²⁷ Two ways in which the Dobels integrated into Canadian society, perhaps in part also as a response to the hostility, were to seek civic integration through citizenship and to find ethnic solidarity among fellow Germans.

A more commonly expressed reaction to war movies was interviewees’ feeling that such movies “discriminated” against Germans in general but not personally. Agnes Stich* was born in Nuremberg in 1932 and immigrated to Vancouver in 1955. Asked whether there was prejudice against Germans in the 1950s, she said, “Yes, sort of, well, not that we really felt it. But I know when we came over — I do not know, I did not really feel it as such that somebody was against us.”²⁸ Brigitte Rabe,* who was born in Berlin in 1937 and immigrated to Vancouver in 1957, felt similarly. She said that during the 1950s there had been general anti-immigrant sentiment, but she did not experience “that much discrimination”.²⁹ Heidi Schute,* who was born in 1924 and immigrated in 1953, “felt often that lots of Canadians ... did not really like the German, as a people, as a country. But in my personal experience that was not really true. I cannot recall that anybody said something negative to me, because I was German. But I know on TV or when you listened to sometimes people talk: ‘Oh, those Germans, they caused the war.’ And I almost felt guilty that I was German.” She added that feeling guilty was “more on my part, that

25 Irving Abella and Harold Troper, *None is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe 1933–1948* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1982), pp. 190–279, especially 231–232.

26 Canada, Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, *Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, vol. 4: The Cultural Contribution of Other Ethnic Groups* (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1970) [hereafter B&B Commission], pp. 61–62, tables 6 and 7.

27 Helene Dobel, interview by L. Lenze, Winnipeg, January 22, 1997, MHSO A003A.

28 Agnes Stich, interview by Alexander Freund, Vancouver, June 28, 1993.

29 Brigitte Rabe, interview by Alexander Freund, Vancouver, September 14, 1993.



Figure 3: “German immigrants: New employer Mrs. Leslie Perrin (far left) greets Elizabeth Lange, Henrich, and a relief worker, Kitchener, Ont. (vicinity), 1952” (L. Jaques/Library and Archives Canada, PA-173819).

I was conscious of being German”. Seeing herself as “represent[ing] German people”, Schute navigated such ambiguities of identity by attempting to avoid being negatively stereotyped, striving instead to “make an impression of a good German ... by being *fleißig* [hard-working] and friendly and helpful”. Assimilation became an important goal. “I wanted to be part of Canada,” she said, explaining that this included voting in elections, trying not “to stick with German groups”, and seeing Canada as “my homeland”.³⁰

Sara Varsintzky,* who was born in Silesia in 1931, immigrated to Canada in 1953 and soon after saw her first American war movie “where there were Nazis”: “I was so upset that they portrayed our soldiers so badly that I ran out half way through, crying.” Varsintzky made sense of this troubling experience by treating it as a revelation she simply had to accept: “So that was the first time I sort of came face to face with that there was another side, you know.”³¹ The ensuing process of “overcom[ing] this guilt-feeling” included doubting her religion and then “work[ing] this out in myself. Because you want to be proud of your heritage. And that was taken away a little when I

30 Heidi Schute, interview by Alexander Freund, Surrey, BC, November 30 and December 6, 1993.

31 Sara Varsintzky, interview by Alexander Freund, Ottawa, March 26, 1998.

came here. I sort of rather not said anything.” She began to learn more about the Nazi past and the Holocaust. As shocking as it was, the movie became a learning experience.

When Irma Hiebert, who came to Winnipeg in 1953, saw war movies on television, she became angry, upset, and sad because they reminded her of the atrocities committed by her fellow Germans. She had grown up in Hamburg, where her father owned a factory. Her parents and she were opposed to the Nazis, and her brother was imprisoned for listening to jazz. Although the movies made her upset, she used them to teach her children about her and their German heritage, which included acknowledging the Nazi atrocities as much as enjoying German culture.³²

During the 1960s German Canadians became, according to the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, “less reluctant to express their views or to try to influence the course of politics”. Through the Trans-Canada Alliance for German Canadians (TCA), a national German-Canadian umbrella organization founded in 1951, German Canadians expressed concern about citizenship, immigration, and language, but not about war movies.³³ At the same time, however, some German immigrants were upset about the CBS television comedy show *Hogan’s Heroes* (1965–1971), which depicted the adventures of clever US Air Force officers in a German prisoner of war camp run by cowardly, incompetent, but basically good-hearted German soldiers.³⁴ Letters to the editor in German-Canadian newspapers such as *Courier* decried the show as “hate propaganda”.³⁵ At the TCA’s 1973 annual meeting, members debated what to do against *Hetzfilme* or “inflammatory films” and agreed on the basis of “previous experience” that they could not count on the West German government for any help.³⁶ While it is unclear which films the members found so objectionable, the protest came a year before the TCA, which until then had been dominated by social democrats, was taken over by ultraconservative and extreme right-wing members.³⁷

32 Irma Hiebert, interview by Angela Thiessen, Winnipeg, July 14, 2005; Nancy Pauls (Irma Hiebert’s youngest daughter), interview by Angela Thiessen, Winnipeg, August 18, 2005; Otto Bender, *Swing unterm Hakenkreuz in Hamburg, 1933–1943* (Hamburg: Christians, 1993); Michael H. Kater, *Different Drummers: Jazz in the Culture of Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

33 B&B Commission, p. 83.

34 See *Hogan’s Heroes*, Internet Movie Database [website, retrieved September 25, 2005], <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt058812>>.

35 Library and Archives of Canada, MG 31 H39, Cardinal, Kurt von, vol. 3: Trans-Canada Alliance of German Canadians (TCA), file “Hate Propaganda”.

36 Ontario Archives, Multicultural History Society of Ontario Papers F1405, Series 60, German Canadian Papers, File 060–073, “Protokoll zur Jahreshauptversammlung der Trans-Canada Alliance am 28. und 29. Oktober 1973 im Concordia Club, in Kitchener, Ontario”, p. 6.

37 Fritz Wieden, *The Trans-Canada Alliance of German Canadians: A Study in Culture* (Windsor: Tolle Lege, 1985). Wieden, Cultural Advisor and First Vice President of the TCA from 1969 to 1974 and professor of German at the University of Windsor, was among those ousted by “the right-wing autocracy” (p. 79). According to Wieden, they made the TCA “into a right-wing German organization similar to the old [Nazi sympathetic] *Deutscher Bund Canada*” (p. 67).

According to Peter Hessel, who in the 1980s was a representative to the TCA's successor organization, the German-Canadian Congress (GCC, founded in 1984), some German Canadians continued to agitate against such movies. Among them were authors of letters to the editor in the German-Canadian newspaper *Kanada Kurier*. Hessel rejected this kind of activity and argued that it damaged the image of German Canadians.³⁸ Disagreement about how to deal with public discourses about the war thus led to tensions among German Canadians themselves.

The protest against *Hetzfilme* also coincided with a growing awareness of the Holocaust in North America (and Western Europe), which had begun with the Eichmann trial and increased with the NBC television mini-series *Holocaust* in 1978.³⁹ Several interviewees said that such media portrayals of the Holocaust had a greater impact on them than the earlier war movies. In a 1993 interview, Agnes Stich said, "[W]hat annoys me is still this terrible — they do not leave it alone, after so many years the war is over, they still have these movies going and all those young kids, they have not got a clue."⁴⁰ Brigitte Rabe explained in 1993 that "it is now pretty hard to live in North America being a German" because there was so much reporting about Nazi history. "[B]eing a German of course you are [seen as] a Nazi. That is starting to be very, very hard on even my kids, who have never been — we have never been prejudiced."⁴¹

In 1998 interviewer R. Zirger, whose parents were German immigrants, argued that "very often people do not make the distinction between Germans and Nazis. And I think that certainly continues. I have found that even with the news coverage." Her interviewee, former GCC president Gerry Meinzer, agreed.⁴² Wilhelm Kreyes, who was born in 1923 and came to Canada in 1951, wrote: "Towards the end of the sixties [*sic*] and the begin[ning] of the seventies, the anti-German propaganda in the news, in books and magazines with distorted reports about history increased."⁴³ Peter Ruprecht, who was born in Poland in 1937 and together with his parents immigrated to Canada in 1959, objected to the lack of context. He found it "puzzling" that war movies were "repeated over and over and without commentary or clarification or putting into the larger context, that to a degree those films often were propaganda for their own side too". In effect, the "propaganda aspect" of the films increased, and no distinction was made between Germans and Nazis. "This is most disconcerting that history, in a sense, is not cleansing itself of preju-

38 Peter Hessel, interview by Alexander Freund, Waba, ON, March 22, 1998. For example, "Vierzig Jahre sind zu lange zum Hassen", *Kanada Kurier* (Toronto Ausgabe), November 29, 1984, reprinted in *Canadiana Germanica*, no. 45 (March 1985), p. 33.

39 Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*.

40 Stich interview.

41 Rabe interview.

42 Gerry Meinzer, interview by R. Zirger, June 30, 1998.

43 Wilhelm Kreyes, Questionnaire, p. 3.

dices. It is actually, in this case, revising history by retroactively placing shall we say a collective guilt on the perception of history.” Even “well-seasoned broadcasters” and journalists, he said, no longer made the distinction even though they had done so at an earlier time.⁴⁴

Immigrants believed that the media attention to the war and the Holocaust increased prejudice against them. Germans in Germany often felt the same way. Calls for considering the matter of the Nazi past closed, for a return to “normalcy”, and for less reporting on the Holocaust became increasingly louder in Germany when the fortieth, fiftieth, and sixtieth anniversaries of the end of the war were commemorated.⁴⁵ For immigrants, however, the stakes were higher. In Germany the attention to the Holocaust was perceived as a barrier to Germany’s return as a major player to the stage of world politics; German immigrants, on the other hand, saw it as a hurdle for themselves and their children in their integration into Canadian society. The fact that interviewees did not refer to the debates in Germany may indicate that they did not know about them, were not influenced by them, or found them useless in their own struggles.

Children watched movies about the war and the Holocaust in more precarious situations than their parents. John and Valerie Werner were born in post-war Austria, came to Toronto in 1949 and 1954 respectively, and married in 1974. Their experiences of watching Holocaust movies in high school were quite different. Valerie’s history teacher was a “lovely English lady” who was “was very sympathetic towards the Germans”; she also had fellow German and Lithuanian students and “enough different people that it was not a really, sort of, ‘everybody down our throats’ kind of thing”. John, on the other hand, was one of only a few Austrian and German students in his high school, and his history teacher “just did not distinguish” between Nazis and Germans. As a result, he felt like “crawling ... under a table” and got “a lot of harassment from fellow students.... It really broke a lot of the friendships that you had developed with other people.” At home, he got into a heated argument with his father about whether the history books told the truth, which his father denied.⁴⁶

While some interviewees did not talk about or remember media discourses about the war and the Holocaust, others noted that they went to the movies in

44 Peter Ruprecht, interview by R. Zirger, June 14, 1998.

45 Günter Pursch, “Unzufriedenheit mit dem politischen System wächst”, in *Das Parlament*, no. 6 (February 4, 2000) [online publication, retrieved July 1, 2003], < http://www.das-parlament.de/2000/06/Kulissen/2000_6_010_399.html>.

46 John and Valerie Werner, interview by R. Zirger, July 16, 1998. It is unclear to what degree German immigrants denied or diminished the Holocaust or interpreted the Third Reich in a positive way; according to Marion E. Meyer, among the 60 German Canadians she interviewed in Kingston, Ontario, in the early 1980s, “the view that Hitler was not totally bad ... is fairly wide-spread. That the holocaust did not take place or that it did not claim the number of victims usually quoted is an opinion held by a few.” Marion E. Meyer, “New Canadians of German Origin: A Preliminary Report” (Kingston, Queen’s University), reprinted in *Canadiana Germanica*, no. 45 (March 1985), pp. 4–7.

the postwar period for entertainment and to learn English, and that they did not feel discriminated or bothered by the increasing media reports about the Holocaust after the 1970s. Several argued that it was important not to forget. Dvora Marcuse, who had grown up in a Jewish family in Montreal, said that, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, two of her German immigrant friends in Winnipeg asked her to accompany them to Holocaust movies to get her "input, my point of view or, whatever, so we could talk about it afterwards".⁴⁷ Thus media reports about the Nazi period affected the acculturation of some, but not all, German-speaking immigrants. They found different ways to make sense of such confrontations with the Nazi past. Those who felt excluded from the Canadian collective memory chose to become part of the nation through citizenship, assimilation, or ethnic activism. As became clear, this was very much influenced by personal relations with people from the same and other ethnic groups.

Personal Confrontations with the Nazi Past

It was in personal, everyday encounters with other Canadians that German immigrants were more directly confronted with the Nazi past. Again, they dealt with these situations in ways ranging from claiming ignorance and innocence to understanding and trying to learn more about the past.

The most common encounter, according to the interviewees, was that of being called "Nazi", "Kraut", or some other derogatory term in private and public. Varsintzky was greeted as a "Nazi" by a priest when, to his disappointment, he found out that she was not Catholic. She showed more grace and invited him in for tea.⁴⁸ Dennis Bock, author of the bestseller *The Ash Garden* (2001), grew up in 1970s Southern Ontario as the child of German postwar immigrants. At school, older kids teased him about it. "The implication", he explained in a 2001 interview with Associated Press, "was that a German-Canadian had a definite connection with the Holocaust." This did not "traumatize" but rather "fascinated" him.⁴⁹

When 12-year-old John Werner went shopping with his aunt and 14-year-old cousin on a busy Toronto street on a Saturday morning, a number of young teenage boys yelled at them from across the street, "Hey, you bunch of Nazis." He said, "[T]his was the kind of thing that you got, that I remember getting a lot of in school, in High School particularly." It continued at work where he was given "unflattering nicknames" when colleagues found out he was German. While in the beginning he "used to just sort of smile and walk away and just not bring up the subject", in the 1980s he saw a general greater sensitivity in Canadian society toward ethnic slurs as a new means to deal

47 Dvora Marcuse, interview by Alexander Freund, Winnipeg, May 2004.

48 Varsintzky interview.

49 Hillel Italie (Associated Press), "Young Novelist Looks Back at World War II in *Ash Garden*", *Detroit News*, October 4, 2001 [online, retrieved September 26, 2005], <<http://www.detnews.com/2001/hometech/0110/18/d06-309566.htm>>.



Figure 4: “German immigrants: Classes to teach newcomers English are held by many different groups. Often, however, they have learned the language in Germany. Kitchener, Ont. (vicinity), 1952” (L. Jaques/Library and Archives Canada, PA-173822).

with such confrontations: “I think it is about time a lot of Germans stand up and say: ‘Hey, this is — that is a racist comment you are making and I do not like it.’ And I started doing that and people are sort of taken aback.” He said that Canadians believed they had licence to “insult” Germans because they were assimilated, “pushovers”, and “feel really guilty about it”.

His wife Valerie, on the other hand, who had already had an easier time in high school, said she had never had experiences like that at her workplace, because, as she explained, her colleagues were better educated than her husband’s.⁵⁰ John interjected, “You might have a thicker skin.” He also

⁵⁰ Werner interview.

explained that it was no longer “a major problem” for him, in part because Canadians were beginning to realize that there were two sides to the World War II story, proof for which he saw in the CBC television series *The Valour and the Horror*, which pointed to some of the Allies' controversial military actions such as the area bombing of German cities.⁵¹

Other immigrants said they had never felt any resentment. Peter Ruprecht experienced an atmosphere of “total trust and total equality” at work during the 1960s. Some of his young co-workers had served in the war, but “there was never any reference that, quote ‘every German had to be a Nazi’, or ‘every German was no good’, or ‘they are very busy but they really do not know anything about freedom’. None of those things ever surfaced.”⁵²

Encounters with Canadian war veterans also varied. Herbert Zerbel,* born in 1934, immigrated to Canada in 1953. He interpreted various experiences as an immigrant by pointing to Canadian prejudices against Germans. In the mid-1950s, he said, Ottawa police broke up small groups of young German men standing outside restaurants in the evening. “Whatever that meant,” he commented, “we always said, ‘They hate the Germans because of the war and the stuff that happened.’ But we always said, ‘Yes, but we did not have anything to do with that. Why are they stepping on our toes?’”⁵³

Sara Varsintzky argued in a similar manner about the 1950s. Confrontations with the Nazi past were “difficult, because as children all during the war we were sheltered, we were not told anything that was going on, you know.... I would tell myself, ‘Oh, I have not done anybody any harm, my dad was not in the party.’ But then they all said, ‘Oh yes, nobody is ever in the party!’ That is how the Canadians would talk, you know.” Unlike Zerbel, however, Varsintzky “adjusted more about this problem and I could sort of try to come to grips with it”. She did so, she said, by learning more about the Nazi past and accepting it as part of her identity.⁵⁴ Zerbel could not do that. When he and some German friends applied to join the Canadian military “as a way to get back to Germany, because we did not have any money”, they were rejected because their English was not good enough, “and I also believe that the hate toward Germans was still very big, because all those who back then were in the army were old warriors, who had been in the Second World War and did not care much for Germans.”⁵⁵

51 David J. Bercuson and S. F. Wise, *The Valour and the Horror Revisited* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994); “The Valour and the Horror: A Mental Blocks Production” [online document, retrieved September 26, 2005], <<http://www.valourandhorror.com>>; Jeannette Sloniowski, “The Valour and the Horror. Canadian Documentary” [article on website of Museum of Broadcast Communications], <<http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/V/htmlV/valourandth/valourandth.htm>>.

52 Ruprecht interview.

53 Herbert Zerbel, interview by Alexander Freund, Ottawa, March 11, 1998.

54 Varsintzky interview.

55 Zerbel interview.

Relations between German and Canadian war veterans differed by region. In Lethbridge, Alberta, “several Canadian war veterans objected to the presence of a German war veteran at their Remembrance Day ceremony” in 1986.⁵⁶ In an interview with the *Winnipeg Free Press* in 2003, Wilhelm Kreyes said that he would not feel comfortable at a Remembrance Day ceremony, and the newspaper made sure to point out to its readers that as a medic he had been a “non-combatant”, had served on the Eastern Front, and had helped wounded Allied soldiers.⁵⁷ Relations in Kitchener-Waterloo, the Canadian region with the highest proportion of German Canadians, were, according to the *Kitchener-Waterloo Record*, “generally quite amicable” in 1986. Quoting the president of local Royal Canadian Legion Branch in Kitchener, the newspaper reported there had been “a little bit of flak a couple of years ago.... But they [the Germans] are accepted now.” German Canadians laid wreaths at the cenotaph and held a public ceremony for German soldiers who had died in Canadian POW camps during World War II and were interred at a local cemetery.⁵⁸

Christian Taufberg, who was born in 1928 and immigrated to Canada in 1951, found yet another way of uniting with Canadian war veterans. He had married a German woman, Gitte, in 1957 and they settled in Ottawa. The couple recounted that people would complain about the “Krauts” but would apologize when they found out that they were Germans. Both perceived being called “Krauts” as teasing and laughed about it. In the 1960s and 1970s, the couple was active in the peace and antiwar movement and gave American draft dodgers refuge in their home. Christian was also a member of the organization Veterans Against Nuclear Armament. He commented, “The funny thing is that I came as a veteran from Germany, so, I as a German veteran, and they are all Canadian veterans. But I must say, they could not care less. There is great comradeship and it is very friendly, we are all of one opinion.”⁵⁹ The Taufbergs thus found a way to deal with the Nazi past that became popular in West Germany in the late 1960s: they became active in the peace movement, arguing that it was exactly their personal experiences of war that united them with rather than divided them from other Canadians. No other interviewees reported similar strategies, but some used a general anti-war philosophy as a way to deal with the Nazi past.

German immigrants’ inter-ethnic relations were also shaped by relations with other postwar immigrants from Europe, as the examples of Cadman and Maatz show. Such experiences ranged from outright hostility to understanding, friendship, and marriage. Magda Blos, who immigrated to Vancouver in

56 Charles Howitt, “Wounds Largely Healed for Canadian, German Vets Here”, *Kitchener-Waterloo Record*, November 13, 1986, reprinted in *Canadiana Germanica*, no. 52 (December 1986), p. 37.

57 Wilhelm Kreyes, interview by Angela Thiessen, Winnipeg, July 15, 2005; Tom Ayers, “Former Medic Quietly Observes Remembrance Day”, *Winnipeg Free Press*, November 10, 2003, p. B4.

58 Howitt, “Wounds Largely Healed”.

59 Christian and Gitte Taufberg, interview by Alexander Freund, Chelsea, QC, March 15, 1998.

the late 1950s as a single mother, said that in the early 1960s a Greek immigrant man asked her to a dance only to humiliate and hit her in public as revenge for his parents, who had been killed by German soldiers. This, she said, was the only negative intercultural encounter she ever experienced.⁶⁰ Of all interviewees, only Bloss and Maatz reported hostility of such a degree.

More commonly, memories created unease. Johanna Grohsmann, who was born in Poland in 1929 and came to Vancouver in 1957, worked as a domestic servant. Her colleague at her first place of work, a nanny, had emigrated from the Netherlands. Grohsmann said that the relationship was problematic for her: "She was nice — but — she was Dutch. And sometimes you could feel it. And the Germans and the Dutch during the war, that was not so nice. But what could I do?" I asked how she could feel it. First Grohsmann paused; then she said, "She was the better one, you know. She always thought the Germans are not good — character-wise.... [She made] remarks about the Germans, 'maybe not you, but your people'." The issues at hand were both the suffering of the Dutch population under the German occupation and the Holocaust, as Grohsmann explained: "Then the Jews and all that — I did not even know about things existed like that." Grohsmann felt helpless and treated unfairly. While such opposing interpretations of the war overshadowed the relationship, it did not break down. As Grohsmann said, "later on she got to know me and then she was really nice." Relations with her Anglo-Canadian employers were much better, because they never brought up the subject and "tried to even learn a little German".⁶¹ Like some other German immigrants, Grohsmann felt overwhelmed by such reactions and responded by rejecting involvement or knowledge about the Nazi crimes. She felt personally attacked for something for which she did not feel responsible. The memories of the war led to tension, and the inability to find a common narrative, for example mutual empathy, led at least initially to a breakdown of intercultural exchange. The encounter could become neither a learning experience nor the reshaping of opposite memories into a common memory.

Other Germans who met Dutch immigrants felt empathy and took the encounter as a means of learning more about the past. Karin Young,* born in 1926, came to Canada in 1952. Recounting that a Dutch immigrant woman had said something negative about her behind her back, she explained: "She had lost all of her relatives in the war. It was terrible in Holland, the hunger. They ate tulips, the tulip bulbs. Terrible."⁶² Doris Schulz,* born in 1926, immigrated in 1951. Coming from a faraway country, she had expected to be greeted enthusiastically as an interesting, exotic newcomer. She soon found out, however, that this was not so. Instead, she began to ask other people about their lives and got to know other European immigrants. She was partic-

60 Magda Bloss, interview by Alexander Freund, Vancouver, March 1993.

61 Johanna Grohsmann, interview by Alexander Freund, Vancouver, November 26, 1993.

62 Karin Young, interview by Alexander Freund, Kanata, ON, March 21, 1998.

ularly impressed by the Dutch people's "courage, tolerance and bravery" in hiding Jews and fighting in the resistance: "I was just flabbergasted." In 1955 she married a Dutch immigrant and overcame his parents' initially strong rejection to him marrying a German.⁶³ Although she did not become active in the peace movement, she, like the Taufbergs, saw an antiwar narrative as a means of overcoming opposing war memories to engage in intercultural relations. Personal encounters were experienced, navigated, and interpreted differently. The common, uniting narratives that some people were able to craft, however, did not have the power to change the dominant national memory of the war as the story of specifically Canadian sacrifices and heroism, a story that excluded the differing memories of postwar German immigrants.

German-Jewish Encounters

In *Olympia*, Dennis Bock tells the story of a boy growing up as the son of German immigrants in Southern Ontario. At a family outing to the beach, the boy describes watching an elderly couple next to them: "The man was rubbing lotion onto his wife's shoulders. I watched how he warmed the cream in his large hands before spreading it over her skin. She faced the water. Her head moving gently with his rubbing motion. That's when I saw the numbers tattooed like dark crawling ants into the loose white skin of his forearm."⁶⁴ The couple is not mentioned again. While such a scene may have been the extent of encounters with Jews in Canada for some German Canadians, for many others relations were more personal and prolonged. In *Olympia*, the German Canadian marries a Jewish woman in Spain.

Some of the immigrants had met Jews in Germany, but most had not. Of the 49 German-Canadian interviewees who were not specifically asked about German-Jewish relations, 24 mentioned encounters with Jews in Canada.⁶⁵ Relations with Canadian-born Jews as well as prewar refugees and camp survivors who had come after the war were sometimes fleeting encounters, but most were longer relationships, often in an employer-employee situation, but also as acquaintances and friends.

With the exception of three interviewees who held anti-Semitic views, the interviewees spoke positively about encounters and relations with Jews. Many expressed their surprise at Jews' lack of resentment and their friendliness, because as Germans they had expected more animosity. Sara Varsintzky, who, like several other German newcomers, had moved in with a Jewish family, stated, "They were so nice to me. And I remember thinking,

63 Doris Schulz, interview by Alexander Freund, Richmond, BC, September 22, 1993.

64 Dennis Bock, *Olympia* (Toronto: HarperPerennial, 1998), p. 45. Bock is author of the bestseller *The Ash Garden*.

65 While this is not statistically representative, this set of interviews gives a better picture than those conducted specifically about German-Jewish relations; in the latter set, all German interviewees had had encounters or relations with Jews and most of the Jewish interviewees had had encounters or relations with German immigrants.

'How come they're nice to me? How can they be nice to me?' I had to sort of struggle with this.... I always thought I wouldn't be surprised — I wouldn't be mad at these people if they had killed every German after the war for what they have done."⁶⁶

Side comments made clear, however, that interviewees hesitated to talk about negative encounters. After Jack Jenninger* had told stories about the "generosity" of his Jewish employers and colleagues "so shortly after the war", saying that this was an "eye-opener", his wife Barbara* interrupted, "You cannot, of course, generalize that, because there were also some, who were the opposite, who had the old feelings [of animosity], which was understandable." They dropped the topic immediately and told more positive stories. This expressed perhaps a fear of being perceived as anti-Semitic,⁶⁷ but it also showed a belief in the value of good inter-ethnic relations. Such silences were expressions of selective forgetting. They functioned as individual and familial life strategies in crafting coherent and stable identities as firmly integrated immigrants. In the telling of stories, respondents edited in the form of silences, repressions, or vague terminology, allowing listeners to fill in the blanks with comfortable and consensual assumptions about what happened.⁶⁸

One group of German immigrants experienced German-Jewish relations in a particular context. Several of the 25,000 young single German women who came to Canada as domestic servants during the 1950s worked and lived in Jewish homes. Christel Meisinger,* born in 1931, came to Canada in 1952, together with her 18-year-old girlfriend Helga.* While she was happy at her place of employment, Helga was so unhappy that Meisinger "rescued" her with the help of her own Anglo-Canadian employer. When I asked her why the situation was so dramatic, she hesitated — remembering that the tape recorder was running — and wrote the word *Juden* (Jews) on a piece of paper. She later "explained" her own bad experiences in domestic service with the same one-word reference.⁶⁹ Such a reaction showed a fear of being perceived as anti-Semitic, postwar Germans' anxiety about using the word *Jude*,⁷⁰ an implicit assumption that Jews disliked Germans because of the

66 Varsintzky interview.

67 Stern, *Whitewashing of the Yellow Badge*.

68 Barbara and Johannes (Jack) Jenninger, interview by Alexander Freund, Gloucester, ON, March 23, 1998. For a more detailed study of German immigrants' perceptions of German-Jewish relations in post-1945 North America, see Alexander Freund, "'How Come They're Nice to Me?' Deutsche und Juden nach dem Holocaust in Nordamerika", in Sylvia Hahn, Christiane Harzig, and Dirk Hoerder, eds., *Transculturalism and Memory: Understanding Transitions through Life Writings* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, in press); Weltzer, *et al.*, "*Opa war kein Nazi*".

69 Christel Meisinger, interview by Alexander Freund, Burnaby, BC, December 1, 1993.

70 According to Susanne Dietrich and Julia Schulze, eds., *Zwischen Selbstorganisation und Stigmatisierung. Die Lebenswirklichkeit jüdischer Displaced Persons und die neue Gestalt des Antisemitismus in der deutschen Nachkriegsgesellschaft* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1998), pp. 175–177, the West German bureaucracy replaced the word *Jude*, which was too reminiscent of Nazi terminology, with *jüdischer Staatsbürger* or *jüdischer Mitbürger* (Jewish citizen or Jewish fellow citizen).

Holocaust, and a pattern of racial stereotyping that was the bedrock of anti-Semitism as much as of philo-Semitism.⁷¹

Those who had more lasting, intimate, and positive relations with Jews, however, felt freer to talk about their Jewish employers or friends. Yet they did not always know what sense to make out of such relations. Anna Grevesmühl,* born in a small village in Poland in 1927, immigrated in 1951. In Vancouver, she worked for the first four months for a young Hungarian-Jewish family that had survived the Nazi death camps. There, with the help of the children she cared for, she learned to speak English and, under the guidance of the employer, she learned kosher cooking, which she found more difficult. She then changed employers for better pay and worked for two and one-half years for a Czech-Austrian Jewish family who had immigrated before the war. Both families “treated me well”, and the male employer of the second family “was sometimes like a father to me”. The working conditions and the way she was treated were better in these two families than in the families she had worked for in Germany, where, unlike in Canada, she felt discriminated against as a refugee from Eastern Europe.⁷²

Grevesmühl expressed surprise at the kind treatment she received from people who had suffered so much under the Nazi terror. At that point, however, she stopped pondering the meaning of such reactions and relationships. She did not know why her Jewish employers were nice to her, nor did she ask them why they had hired her. Like other German immigrants, Grevesmühl was not able to use her good relationships with Jews as stepping-stones for learning more about the Nazi past and about other people’s experiences, for sharing memories and thus grappling with the past in more constructive ways. Neither, of course, did her employers.

While the silences in Jenninger’s Meisinger’s, and Grevesmühl’s narratives told of selective forgetting, avoidance, and confusion, their silences and those of their Jewish employers, colleagues, acquaintances, and friends also expressed an unspoken understanding between Jews and Germans that they could have functioning relations only if they chose not to talk about the Holocaust. Indeed, several interviewees talked about such strategic consensual silences quite explicitly.

Other immigrants were able to go one step further and tried to understand relations and friendships with Jews as ways to deal with the past in more constructive ways. Much more often than in Germany, Germans in Canada became friends with Jews. Some used these relationships to learn about other experiences and to share memories. Edeltraud Haubricht,* born in 1929, came to Canada in 1952 and lived for a while with a Jewish family whose children she cared for. A few times, she met her employer’s mother, who had survived Auschwitz: “I will never forget it, they were infinitely sensitive people.... She was a very refined lady.... [She] looked at me and greeted me

71 Stern, *Whitewashing of the Yellow Badge*.

72 Anna Grevesmühl, interview by Alexander Freund, Vancouver, July 5, 1993.

very cordially. I felt — I saw the number on her arm and she was, I think, thoughtful. That is the worst I can say for her.” Incidents like these, Haubricht said, made her “think about my role or my past as a German, through little things like that. And that is what started me thinking about what really happened.”⁷³

Troubling the National Memory

In his remarks to Parliament, Chuck Cadman referred to the sharp divides between victims and perpetrators drawn by World War II. As the interviewees' great range of experiences and interpretations shows, he did so in a world and in a society where these lines had become blurred by the impact of postwar immigration to Canada. In myriad personal, everyday intercultural encounters and relations, German Canadians and other Canadians were forced to confront troubling memories. While in some cases opposing memories of the war and the Holocaust prevented the formation of inter-ethnic relationships, in other cases, people found ways to patch, bridge, and even cross the old divides. German immigrants negotiated their often unexpected confrontations with the Nazi past sometimes through attempts to understand and learn, and at other times through ignorance, silence, and withdrawal.

Selective memory served not only the construction of individual life stories and personal inter-ethnic relations, but also of the dominant national narrative. If national identity is constructed from myriad but selected communicative and cultural memories,⁷⁴ Canadian national identity was the continually changing product of ongoing postwar struggles over which memories to include. German-speaking immigrants' memories of the Nazi past were excluded. Neither did German Canadians' (or other Canadians') postwar experiences of inter-ethnic encounters become part of Canada's collective national-historical memory. The reasons were complex.

Politically, internal disagreement as well as disinterest hindered efforts by German-Canadian organizations. Most immigrants, however, abstained from political activism. Like Germans in Germany, they disagreed on what should be remembered and how. Some felt it would be wrong to commemorate Germans' wartime losses because this would equate them with Jewish, Canadian, and other Nazi victims' losses. Others, perceiving Canadian society's interest in World War II and the Holocaust as one-sided and based on the stereotyping of all Germans as Nazis, withdrew into a “culture of grievance”.⁷⁵ As an ethnic group, German Canadians did not find a way to use memory and

73 Edeltraud Haubricht, interview by Alexander Freund, Vanier and Ottawa, March 16 and 30, 1998.

74 According to Ernest Renan, nation is “constructed from a rich legacy of memories”. Ernest Renan, “What is a Nation?”, trans. Martin Horn, in Homi Bhabha, ed, *Nation and Narration* (London: 1990), p. 19, cited in Hue-Tam Ho Tai, “Review Essay: Remembered Realms: Pierre Nora and the French National Memory”, *American Historical Review*, vol. 106 (June 2001), p. 915.

75 Angelika E. Sauer and Matthias Zimmer, eds., *A Chorus of Different Voices: German Canadian Identities* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998); Dirk Hoerder, “German-language Diasporas: A Survey, Critique and Interpretation”, *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1 (Spring 2002), p. 35.

commemoration as a means of integration, except for the Remembrance Day services in Kitchener-Waterloo and literary texts by German-Canadian authors. Their confrontations with the Nazi past were experienced in isolation and did not produce sites of memory; they were themselves not remembered collectively.⁷⁶

On the other side of the equation, neither Canadian society at large nor its dominant memory-makers (historians, journalists, politicians, veterans' organizations) felt compelled to integrate German wartime memories along with the postwar immigrants they had recruited as workers and citizens. While more research on society's and the state's reaction to the wartime memories of German immigrants is needed, it is clear that the national narrative did not allow German immigrants to integrate their experiences into the nation and that no interpretive template emerged that would have enabled them to reinterpret their memories to make them fit the national story. While some immigrants found marginal narratives and political movements such as the peace movement, most accommodated themselves by guarding their memories through silence in inter-ethnic relations or withdrawing from such relations altogether. Multiculturalism helped bridge divides at the individual level, but at the level of the national-historical memory, it did not integrate the memories of immigrants who had been former enemies. Because the dominant national narrative did not help German immigrants make sense of their wartime memories in a Canadian context, the Canadian nation hardly surfaced in their life stories.

As a shaper of individual historical consciousness and memory, Canadian national-historical memory in turn taught Canadians nothing about Germans' war experiences — even though many German immigrants became their neighbours and co-workers after 1945. Considering the continuing influx of migrants from dictatorial regimes and war-torn countries, one must ask whether Canadian society has nothing to learn from immigrants who grew up in a dictatorship and experienced war and flight as children or adolescents. Could we not see German immigrants' stories of becoming Nazis after 1933 and democrats in Canada as an alternative to the current national story, one that shows democracy as a work in progress rather than a one-time achievement? John Bodnar has argued that the American memory of World War II is based on veterans' "call for recognition of their special anguish" and militaristic heroization and glorification without any reference to democracy.⁷⁷ The Canadian memory of World War II is similar. Following Bodnar's ideas,

76 The term "site of memory" is taken from Pierre Nora, ed., *Realms of Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996–1998) and describes the concept of places, buildings, objects, texts, and other elements that are inscribed with ideas that unify a nation; see also Tai, "Review Essay", p. 920. One could, however, see Holocaust denier Ernst Zündel and his followers as a site of memory that unifies Canadians in what they reject as a nation.

77 John Bodnar, "Pierre Nora, National Memory, and Democracy: A Review", *Journal of American History*, vol. 87, no. 3 (December 2000), p. 959.

then, could German (and, by extension, Italian and Japanese) postwar immigrants' memories not be used in the new Canadian War Museum, in history books, in Remembrance Day services, and in other sites of memory to endorse a national identity based on the quest for social justice and equal rights for all?

Two issues make the integration of former enemies' war memories difficult: first, they were on the wrong side of the war and implicated in the Holocaust; second is the fear of making Germans into victims and implicitly equating their experiences with those of the Nazis' victims. The first point is true, but it is also true that the former enemies became members of the Canadian nation shortly after the war. The second point does not have to be true. As German society is slowly learning, Germans' war experiences can be remembered without forgetting who was responsible for causing the war.⁷⁸ The memories of German postwar immigrants, then, are uneasy and uncomfortable because they do not evoke sympathy for or solidarity with those who bear them. In the Canadian context, however, they are nevertheless counter-memories that can and should trouble Canada's national memory.

⁷⁸ Only very recently has Germany's intellectual and political left begun to re-evaluate, and not without controversy, Allied area bombings of civilian cities and the violent expulsion of Germans from Eastern Europe. See Günter Grass, *Crabwalk* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2002); W. G. Sebald, *On the History of Natural Destruction* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2003); Ralph Giordano, "Codewort Empathie", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, July 30, 2004, p. 6.