



Let me begin with a story, a story about a Canadian family memory of the Second World War.

In September 2000, Chuck Cadman, a member of the Canadian Alliance, spoke in Parliament in favour of Bill C-334. This bill was to permit relatives of deceased veterans

in the same room with him was just too much for her. I learned something that day about the impact of war on people.

The larger debate within which Cadman's statement and the discussion of this bill was located was about the appropriate ways to remember the wars in which Canadians had fought. Over the last sixty years, Canadians have remembered, commemorated, and been reminded of the Second World War in many different ways. They have created a collective World War Two-memory that has contributed to the building of the Canadian nation. As the conservative Canadian journalist Robert Fulford noted in *The Triumph of Narrative* (1999 CBC Massey Lectures): "[S]everal Western countries, including Canada and the United States, have used as a [national] master narrative the only sure source of righteousness and moral certainty available to us, the Second World War."

Whether they agreed with this master narrative or not, individuals at the same time searched for ways to integrate painful memories into their lives. As we know from memory research, memories are not fixed but rather continually challenged by and adapted to changing social situations. One such new situation in postwar Canada was created by the great influx of German-speaking immigrants in the 1950s. It confronted Canadians with their former enemies. Such confrontations could be difficult to navigate, especially for those Canadians 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.

Cadman's public use of his family memory shows that several decades later, at the turn to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, World War Two still played 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.

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 for sympathy for and identification with his mother, but 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.

To learn more about this other perspective, let us look at the story of Mark Maatz, who was 22 years old when he immigrated from Austria to Sue-Saint Marie (Sault-Ste. Marie), Ontario, in 1951. He worked at a steel plant and ate dinner at a Scottish woman's boarding house in the company of fifteen other European immigrants and Canadians. In the following story, Maatz describes what happened when the others found out that he was from a German-speaking country, specifically Austria. The story is in German, and the core of the story is transcribed here in English:

One them asked me whether there were many kangaroos. And I say, "No kangaroos in Austria," I say, "we are in the mountains, in the Alps." And he says, "What kind of language do you speak?" I say, "German." And at that moment one could have [heard a pin drop]. [...] The whole table was silent and -- one of them said then --: "So, then you are a Nazi."

Despite talking about war experiences, Maatz was henceforth excluded from all table talk. After three months, Mark Maatz eventually decided to get his dinner at a different boarding house.

Like Cadman's story, Maatz's story shows that interethnic encounters could re-awaken painful memories and that these "old wounds" profoundly shaped parts of postwar Canadian society. As a result, interethnic 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 and 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, and Cadman's mother did not let her trauma stand in the way of her son's friendship with the young immigrant. Thus, solutions to dealing with such troubling memories were individual rather than social or national.

Cadman's and Maatz's experiences and interpretations were not exceptional. In one way or another, memories of the war shaped the relationships between German-Canadians and other Canadians in the 1950s and throughout the last sixty years. And they made sense of such encounters in different ways. In the rest of this presentation, I want to describe some of the German migrants' experiences and memories by documenting the diversity of such interethnic encounters and discussing the issues at stake for the New Canadians.

Let me give you, very briefly, some background on the German migration to Canada after World War Two.

Between 1946 and the early 1960s, about 270,000 Germans immigrated to Canada. The Canadian government actively recruited them as workers and future citizens in its effort to shape the Canadian nation as a many-cultured but mostly white European society. The German immigrants were of many different backgrounds, and many had experienced multiple migrations before, during, and after the war before coming to Canada. Most of them were in their twenties and thirties, but there were also children and older people.

They brought with them an understanding of the Nazi past that was informed by personal experiences and German public discourses about the Third Reich, the war, and Nazi atrocities. Although immediately after the war the Allies had made great efforts to denazify and re-educate Germans, these

they encountered North American published and media interpretations of the Third Reich that were either not present or marginal in 1950s Germany; and, 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. While some New Canadians continued to hold on to the victim-narrative, others adopted new interpretations of the past.

Let us look first at confrontations with public discourses.

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/Remembrance Day and on 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. Public awareness and interest in the Holocaust emerged in North America only in the 1970s, and was heightened by Canada's renewed interest in war criminals in the 1980s (Deschenes Commission). Canadian mainstream media focused increasingly on the positive aspects of Canadians' contributions to 'the good fight.' German immigrants interpreted and responded to these public Canadian representations of the war and the Holocaust in different ways.

Some interviewees reported that in the first two postwar decades, American war movies incited anti-German sentiments in postwar Canada, because they depicted all Germans as Nazis, so that Canadians consequently did not distinguish between Germans and Nazis. The extent of such discrimination against postwar immigrants is unclear. There had, on

the one hand, been some hostility against Germans during the Second World War, and postwar opinion polls showed that few Canadians wanted to see Germans as immigrants. Only few interviewees reported that negative stereotypes obstructed their attempts to find apartments or jobs, and Germans filed only six of the 136 job-discrimination complaints in Toronto between 1962 and 1966. A majority of interviewees reported that positive stereotypes of Germans as hard-working, clean and orderly helped them, especially in their search for jobs.

A more commonly expressed reaction to war movies was the feeling that such movies “discriminated” against Germans in general, but not personally. Here are three voices of German immigrant women who commented on such feelings:

Agnes Stich: You mean the prejudice?

Agnes Stich: Yeah sort of, well, not that we really felt it. But I know when we came over--I don't know, I didn't really feel it as such that somebody was against us, but you can still--what annoys me is still this terrible-- they don't leave it alone, after so many years the war is over, they still have these movies going and all those young kids, they haven't got a clue. They haven't got a clue!

Brigitte Rabe: I have not really experienced that much discrimination. Mind you, it is now pretty hard to live in North America being a German. Every single time



you open the paper or you look at T.V. or you listen to the radio, they talk about all these Nazis and all these Nazis and being a German of course you're a Nazi. That is starting to be very, very hard on even my kids, who have never been-- we've never been prejudiced. Like I said, we had kids from every denomination that we are friends with. And people and everybody, you know. But it--.

Rabe: Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes, oh yes. In the '50s they said: "Oh well, you are warmongers" and that's it. I mean, okay, but what can you do about it? I mean, I was eight years when the last war was over, so I wasn't really that responsible for it. But then it ebbed down quite a bit. But people also said to us: "Because you DPs come here and take our jobs." That we heard a lot. But not only the Germans. The Italians heard that, the Hungarians heard that, the Yugoslavs, anybody who came here. But it has been like Germans had been accepted as being quite all right up until about five to eight years [ago] and then it started to be a real search into bad Germany again. So what can you do, that's part of it, I guess. And my kids, like I said, they have all kinds of friends, but they are now-- they start to feel more German now, because there is so much said against the Germans, than they felt when they were young. When they were young, you know, they felt "We're Canadians, like everybody else." But you know, you have the constant-- Every time you open the paper, as I said, it just doesn't stop.

Heidi Schute: I felt often that lots of Canadians - I thought, I perceived this, after the war they didn't really like the German, as a people, as a country, because of

the ... and often it came out, maybe, I thought. But in my personal experience that wasn't really true. I can't recall that anybody said something negative to me, because I was German. But I know on t.v. or when you listened to sometimes people talk: "Oh, those Germans, they caused the war." And I almost felt guilty that I was German. But then I worked for a Jewish lady in a household. And she didn't mind me being German and I didn't mind her being Jewish (laughs). We got along real fine. It was a process. It was more on my part that I was conscious of being German, and part of a country which caused so much trouble for... and they didn't speak kindly of Germans as people. But personally, I couldn't say that anybody treated me different. But I myself was always conscious of it and wanted to make an impression of a good German.

All three women explained that assimilation became an important strategy to deal with such experiences, although it was not always a successful strategy, even for the children. Other immigrants saw learning about the past, the whole process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, as a useful if difficult strategy to negotiate such initially-unexpected confrontations with the Nazi past. Sara Varsintzky, who was born in Silesia in 1931, immigrated to Canada in 1953. Here is an excerpt from an interview with her where she talks about the first year in Canada:

I didn't know it at first, but I moved in with a Jewish family. and they were so nice to me. And I remember thinking: How come they're nice to me? How can they be nice to me? And I had to sort of struggle with this. I don't struggle with it anymore today, but at that age. And I remember going to a movie, it was the first American movie I saw where there were

portrayed our soldiers so badly that I ran out half way through, crying. So that was the first time I sort of came face to face with that there was another side, you know. And this was difficult, because as children all during the war we were sheltered, we weren't told anything that was going on, you know. So I had to, finally, I heard more and more and adjusted more about this problem and I could sort of try to come to grips with it, and I'd tell myself: oh, I haven't done anybody any harm, my dad wasn't in the party, but then they all said: oh ya, nobody is ever in the party, that's how the Canadians would talk, you know.

The ensuing process of “overcome[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 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.

This was true of other immigrants as well, who realized that they could not run away from recent German history by going abroad. Dealing with the Nazi past became part of their identities as Germans in Canada. It did not, however, become part of a larger Canadian identity. Working through the past by learning about it was not a way of connecting with other Canadians or a means of participating in building the Canadian nation. It was a highly individualized process. Even among themselves, German immigrants did not talk about their experiences, and thus, unlike in Germany, dealing with the past did not become a process for German-Canadians that somehow bound them together in an imagined community of Germans abroad.

The only attempts at political organizing around the issue of the Nazi past came from the extreme right-wing of German-Canadians. It was during the 1960s that 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, a national German-Canadian umbrella organization founded in 1951, German-Canadians expressed concern about citizenship, immigration, and language, but not about war movies. 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 U.S. Air Force officers in a German prisoners-of-war camp run by cowardly, incompetent, but basically good-hearted German soldiers. (Currently running Monday nights on Kabel Eins as “Ein Käfig voller Helden” as a “Comedyserie”.) In letters-to-the-editor to German-Canadian newspapers, a few German-Canadians decried the show as “hate propaganda”. At the Alliance’s 1973 Annual Meeting, members debated what to do against such “inflammatory films” (“Hetzfilme”). The protest came a year before the predominantly social democratic Alliance was taken over by extreme right-wing members. While some German-Canadians continued to agitate against such movies, especially in letters to German-Canadian papers, other German immigrants who were active in ethnic organizations rejected this kind of activity and argued that it damaged the image of German-Canadians. Thus, German-Canadians, at least within their political organizations, dealt with public discourses about the war not only in different, but also opposing ways that led to tensions among them.

Throughout the stories about encounters with North American media, we have heard stories about personal, everyday encounters with other Canadians. I want to turn to these now and describe how such personal encounters confronted the immigrants more directly with the Nazi past.

The most common personal encounter, according to the interviewees, was that of being called 'Nazi,' 'Kraut' or some other derogatory term in private and public. Sara 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. 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 "fascinate" him, and both the Holocaust and the tension of growing up German in Canada have played prominent roles in his novels and short stories.

Other children had more difficulties in navigating such challenges. When twelve-year-old John Werner, a postwar immigrant from Austria, went shopping with his aunt and fourteen-year-old cousin on a busy Toronto street on a Saturday morning in the 1950s, a number of teenage boys yelled at them from across the street, "Hey, you bunch of Nazis." He said: "this was the kind of thing that you got, that I remember getting a lot of in school." Indeed, he had lost school friends after the class had watched movies about the Holocaust. Later, at work, he was given "unflattering nicknames". At first, he "used to just sort of smile and walk away and just not bring up the subject," but in the 1980s he

saw a general greater sensitivity in Canadian society toward ethnic slurs as a new means to deal with such confrontations. He said: "I think it is about time a lot of Germans stand

to the *Kitchener-Waterloo Record*, “generally quite amicable” in 1986. Quoting the president of the 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 Two and who were interred at a local cemetery.

Christian Taufberg, who was born in 1928 and immigrated to Canada in 1951, found yet another way of coming together with Canadian war vets. In the 1960s and 1970s, he and his German wife were active in the peace and antiwar movement and gave American draft dodgers refuge in their home. He 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

immigrant man asked her out 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. Of all interviewees, only Blos 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. This is what she said about her colleague, a nanny from the Netherlands:

Johanna Grohsmann: Should we? (laughs, looks at microphone). She was nice-- but – she was Dutch. And sometimes you could feel it. And the German and the Dutch during the war, that was not so nice. But what could I do?

Grohsmann: Umm~~~ she was the better one, you know. She always thought the Germans are not good – characterwise. Then the Jews and all that – I didn't even know about things existed like that. We actually didn't have this communication at that time, everything was secret. And my upbringing and all that-- ohh, then they said, ya, all of the sudden they said: "You wanted to be the goody-goodies." But what could I do? I mean I was still



Grohsmann: [Pause] Remarks about the Germans, “maybe not you, but (laughs), your people.”

Grohsmann: No, I didn't feel good, that's for sure. But later on she got to know me and then she was really nice.

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 she felt not responsible for. The memories of the war led to tension, and the inability to find a common narrative, for example mutual empathy, led to a break-down of intercultural exchange, so that 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. Doris Schulz, also born in 1926, immigrated in 1951. Here she explains how her understanding of herself and of history changed when she met Canadians and other European immigrants in Vancouver:

I wanted to be alone. And when I came to Vancouver and I was in that house as a domestic there were these workers, they had renovations going on and they would say: "Where are you from, you are so busy." And I learned what it means to be busy, I was always busy doing things. And he said: "Where are you from?" and I said: "From Germany!" - "Oh." he said, "that's nice." And then little by little I learned it wasn't such a big deal to come from Germany. So, I turned and

switched and that is when I mean I think my Germanness, I was trying to get away from it for a little while after I came here. Because only here I learned what had actually been happening outside Germany during the war, but I didn't hat



in Canada not as an alternative to the current national story, one that shows democracy as a work in progress rather than a one-time achievement? Could German (and, by extension, Italian and Japanese) postwar immigrants' memories not be used in the new Canadian War Museum, in history books, Remembrance Day services, and other sites of memory to endorse a national identity based on the quest for social justice and equal rights?

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 to make Germans into victims and implicitly equate their experiences with those of the Nazis' victims. The first point is true, but it is also true that the former enemies did become 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 the war and the Holocaust. German postwar immigrants' memories then are uneasy and uncomfortable because they do not immediately allow for sympathy for or