

How the Canadian Media Memorialized the Fall of the Berlin Wall

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On November 9, 1999, television reporter, Peter Mansbridge announced to Canadians on national news that “in Berlin tonight they’re remembering a night no one could forget. The night ten years ago when an explosion of freedom levelled a wall. And changed the world.”¹ The commemorations being celebrated marked the collapse of the Berlin Wall in the fall of 1989. The opening of the wall eliminated the central symbol of the Cold War period. The barrier had divided East and West Berlin for twenty-eight years, and its spontaneous opening triggered an upheaval that overturned the postwar order on the European continent. All within a single year the German states were unified, the Warsaw Pact collapsed, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was extended to the East.² The free democratic world celebrated Western liberation from post-Stalinist oppression.

In 1999 and 2009 the Canadian media extensively reported on the transnational event of the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Ten and twenty years after the German upheaval of November 9, 1989 the Canadian media commemorated the occasion through the transmission of television programs, interactive webpages, and newspaper articles. This case study will examine, why the Canadian media made the fall of the Berlin Wall such a highly visible media affair on the anniversaries. The cultural constructed productions reveal that the Canadian mass media created a public discourse that celebrated a western democratic victory over the Soviet communist political and economic system. The heroic tale indirectly applauded NATO’s successes on the European continent and commended the advancement of democratization. The Canadian media utilized the German revolution to forge a national narrative that propagated the belief that Canadians should celebrate as victors of the Cold War because of their unwavering commitment to the North Atlantic Alliance and its defeat over its communist opponent.

The mass media is one instrument of authority within the nation state that determines collective national narratives. In order to have a collective identity as a nation, the media publishes certain memories of their past to achieve social cohesion.³ The mass media frames the past in a particular way to influence the

¹ Don Murray, “Berlin Wall Anniversary,” *The National – CBC Television*, November 9, 1999.

² Konrad H. Jarausch, *The Rush to German Unity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 197.

³ Caroline Pearce, *Contemporary Germany and the Nazi Legacy: Remembrance, Politics, and the Dialectic of Normality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 11.

present. Henry Steele Commager believes national memory is shaped into a “usable past” by creating “myths” based on aspects of history most significant to the nation. Intended to portray the nation in such a way, and by using myths that most members of the nation can understand, a collective identity can be created.⁴ In addition, the messages that are transmitted often promote the interests of those in authority that have access to the transmission of media. According to Geoffrey Cubitt, “Contests of power and interest are woven into every phrase and level of the social memory process. Access to the media through which transmission of information is effected and motivation to use those media to influence the way the past is viewed, are not evenly distributed in society.”⁵ In this case, the media used their authority to purposely select and produce cultural productions that evoked a national account of Canadians as the victors in the Cold War.

Cold War Beginnings

Following the defeat of the Third Reich, the four victors of the Second World War, Britain, France, the United States, and the Soviet Union divided the country into four separate territories that were put under military rule. Agreement over how to establish a new German state became virtually impossible as following crises between the western powers and the Soviet Union initiated the East-West conflict. In the fall of 1949, Britain, France, and the U.S. sponsored the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany with its government centered in the western city of Bonn. While in the east the Soviets followed by backing the formation of the German Democratic Republic ruled by the Socialist Unity Party (SED).⁶ By 1955, the two German states joined opposing military alliances, the FRG aligned with the pro-western NATO and the GDR with the pro-eastern Warsaw Pact.⁷ The ideological partition materialized in 1961 with the construction of the Berlin Wall. With Soviet and Warsaw Pact approval, the East German politburo decided to construct *die Mauer* as a desperate attempt to stop the massive population drain to the West.⁸

For Canadian foreign policy diplomacy, the Cold War period was initially focused on maintaining strong traditional relationships with its wartime allies, the United States and the United Kingdom. The formation of NATO in 1949, which

⁴ J. Fentress and C. Wickham, *Social Memory: New Perspectives on the Past* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 129 quoted in Caroline Pearce, *Contemporary Germany and the Nazi Legacy: Remembrance, Politics, and the Dialectic of Normality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 11.

⁵ Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 176.

⁶ Jarausch, 8.

⁷ Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 57.

⁸ Jarausch, 8.

joined ten European nations, Canada and the United States in a military alliance, gave Canada the opportunity to develop bilateral links with other alliance members. This multilateral institution that was developed to safeguard Western security against the Soviet Union changed Canada's relationship to the FRG. As West Germany experienced the *Wirtschaftswunder* (economic miracle) of the 1950s and 1960s under West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer's conservative government, closer political and economic ties were established between the two countries. The Canadian commitment to the FRG was cemented when Canadian ground and air forces were deployed to the West German state beginning in 1951. This was in response to the constant Soviet military threat coming from the neighbouring GDR, coupled with the outbreak of the Korean War.⁹ Roy Rempel explains, "This military pledge, while initially made by Canada to the NATO alliance as a whole, evolved into a commitment by Canada to West Germany most directly."¹⁰ In the Cold War period the FRG held a prominent place in Canada's hierarchy of external relationships and was viewed as an invaluable link that connected Canada to the European continent.

The turbulent year of 1989 signaled the end of the Cold War. Hungary's decision to open its border to Austria on May 2 initiated a flood of East German refugees attempting to flee to the West. By the end of September some 30,000 East Germans had fled their homes through Hungary's borders. Throughout the summer months the West German and international media focused on the stories of East Germans attempting to escape their country.¹¹ On November 9, 1989 the world watched as East Germans jubilantly crossed the border into West Berlin after confused border guards opened the German division. Journalists quickly descended on Berlin to capture the excitement of the unforeseen occasion. Some East Germans reunited with family members, some loaded up their cars with Western purchases, while others simply took in the sites with a sense of amazement. At home, Canadians watched the events on their televisions including then Prime Minister, Brian Mulroney. Mulroney told the *Toronto Star* in 2009 that he remembered watching the evening unfold on his television at 24 Sussex Drive after a long day of challenging meetings with premiers debating the doomed Meech Lake constitutional accord. Although tired from the difficult day, he was engrossed with the events on the screen.¹² The opening of the Berlin Wall

⁹ Roy Rempel, *Counterweights: The Failure of Canada's German and European Policy, 1955-1995* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹ Lothar Kettenacker, *Germany 1989: In the Aftermath of the Cold War* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2009), 101.

¹² Allan Woods, "Don't Go to Berlin, Mulroney Recalls Advising U.S. President." *Toronto Star* (November 9, 2009): A.6.

stunned the world as the central symbol of the Cold War period had been swiftly dismantled.

Media Commemorations in 1999

Ten years later, on November 9, 1999 seven Canadian newspaper corporations and two television networks paid tribute to the destruction of the Berlin Wall. Images from that fateful night were replayed on Canadian televisions across the nation. Michael Ignatieff from the *National Post* later wrote that, "It is strange and touching to see the old footage again of East Berliners pouring through the razed checkpoints. I doubt there was a happier night in Europe in the whole twentieth century. It was probably the last night when freedom still felt joyful, liberating, and infinitely full of promise."¹³ Time has a tendency to revise memories so by reiterating images from that joyful night Canadians were ushered back to the past to be reminded of the cause for celebration. They watched interviews with Berliners such as Gisela Forschbach who recalled, "Total strangers just fell into each other's arms. It was pure joy. It was the most moving day of my life."¹⁴ While one German resident just simply stated, "I was happy, happy, happy."¹⁵ The media published these accounts to remind Canadians of the historical significance behind the collapse of the Berlin wall. As Geoffrey Cubitt explains, "Much of the efficacy of commemorative practices lies in repetition."¹⁶

Canadians also watched an anniversary ceremony being held in Berlin honouring President George Bush (Sr.), Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, and Chancellor Helmut Kohl who were the political architects of German unification. Although a commemorative gathering was taking place in Berlin on November 9, 1999, the day never became an official public holiday in Germany to celebrate the nation's union. German patriotism is reserved for October 3, when the country collectively commemorates the signing of the treaty that completed the unification process of the two German states.¹⁷ November 9 has a dark and complex past in

¹³ Michael Ignatieff, "Reliving a Night When Freedom Still Felt Joyful," *National Post* (November 9, 1999): A.14.

¹⁴ Reuters, "Wall is Gone but Divide Remains: Euphoria has Cooled in the Nine Years Since Two Germanies Reunited," *Calgary Herald* (November 9, 1999): A.18. This article is from an international news agency. Foreign press agencies like Reuters or the Associated Press sell the stories to Canadian media outlets. The Canadian media then chooses which articles to include in their publications.

¹⁵ Lloyd Robertson, "The Fall of the Berlin Wall," *CTV National News – CTV Television*, November 9, 1999.

¹⁶ Cubitt, 140.

¹⁷ West Germany had commemorated their commitment to unification by declaring June 17 as a public holiday after the East German workers uprising in 1953. Politically motivated, the day was used by Bonn to support the half a million East Germans that had demonstrated for free elections

German history and it would have been an impossible day to celebrate national pride since it shares its anniversary with the founding of the short-lived Weimar Republic in 1918, Hitler's Beer Hall Putsch of 1923, and Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass in 1938.¹⁸ Germany is cautious when discussing its national identity, and according to Bettina Warburg, "Germany has spent half a century basing its identity on reorganizing the past."¹⁹ Even on October 3, Germany only meekly cheers for unification and prefers to show their patriotism on the soccer field.²⁰ Yet, Canadian newspapers and television programs let October 3 go by without a single mention, but chose November 9 as their day to commemorate the changes to the post-war order. The media understood that unlike October 3 which was solely a German occasion, November 9 could be used to evoke a past that resonated with Canadians.

In the media's published memories of the German revolution, the Berlin Wall was reiterated as a symbol of "evil" that paralleled other forms of world oppression. This expression for the wall allowed for the concept of victimhood in the GDR to be globalized. In this case, the Canadian media categorized the East Germans to be victims exploited by the Soviets behind the Iron Curtain. The unlikely heroes of the revolution became the ordinary citizens of the GDR that rose up and defeated the oppressive communist system. Discourse surrounding the Berlin Wall came to represent other global injustices. For example, on *The National*, an unidentified German interviewee pleaded with the Canadian journalist, "We ask that the politicians break down all the walls. Physical walls for example in Serbia and Northern Ireland. Walls between the East and West. Between rich and poor."²¹ In addition, *The Globe and Mail* on November 9, 1999 quoted President Bill Clinton marking the tenth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall by connecting it to the need to end Slobodan Milosevic's dictatorial rule in Yugoslavia. Clinton called Milosevic, "The last living relic of the age of European dictators in the Communist era and there can be no future for him."²² In the media's published memories of the Cold War, the Berlin Wall became a

and political change in the communist regime. Seen as a reminder of the Cold War era, the neutral date of October 3 was chosen to be the official commemorative date in the new Germany. For more see Kettenacker, 41.

¹⁸ Siobhan Kattago, *Ambiguous Memory: The Nazi Past and German National Identity* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2001), 121.

¹⁹ Bettina Warburg, "Germany's National Identity, Collective Memory, and Role Abroad," in *Power and The Past: Collective Memory and International Relations*, ed. Eric Langenbacher and Yossi Shain (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2010), 66.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 67.

²¹ Don Murray, "Berlin Wall Anniversary," *The National – CBC Television*, November 9, 1999.

²² Paul Koring, "No Future for Milosevic, Clinton says Berlin Wall Speech pays Tribute to Dissidents," *The Globe and Mail* (November 9, 1999): A.12.

platform to condemn suffering that existed beyond the boundaries of the German state.

On November 9, 1999 the Canadian media reported on the gathering of the former world leaders at the anniversary celebration in Berlin. Soviet leader, Gorbachev was incessantly praised for his role in the unification process. *The Globe and Mail* reported that Kohl pronounced, “You always supported the right of self-determination for the people on the other side of the Iron Curtain.”²³ In addition, Gorbachev received one of Germany’s highest awards, the Cross of Merit for his role in the wall’s collapse. Yet, the Canadian media was quick to differentiate Gorbachev from the intentions of the Russian state. Reporting on the political and social changes in Russia, Michael Ignatieff stated, “Russia is just too big to be weak forever. Sooner or later, it will get up off its knees. Authoritarian leaders, using democracy to ratify their rule, will rebuild the armed forces, rebuild the tax system, and make Russia into a great power.”²⁴ This narrative evoked Cold War memories with Canadians and continued to perpetuate the myth of Russia as the “enemy”. According to Alan Lambert the reason may be that, “An important function of such memories is that they have a remarkable capacity to create a sense of unity or ‘oneness’ among people who would not otherwise see a meaningful sense of kinship.”²⁵ Gorbachev is commended for his reformed thinking and his role in ending the Cold War, but the Russians are still cast in Cold War rhetoric. The West believed that Gorbachev held unique views within the Kremlin. In reference to the wall’s collapse, the *Toronto Star* quoted Gorbachev saying, “There was a lot of talk in the Ministry of Defense – disputes among the generals. Of course we looked at whether there should be military intervention: yes or no. But I had no doubt there would be no force.”²⁶ The fact that Gorbachev had no intention to destroy communism throughout the entire process is never mentioned in the media.²⁷ Instead, the media praised Gorbachev’s role in German unification, but worked to preserve the Cold War rhetoric of the Russians as the “other.”

In addition, the media portrayed the citizens of the GDR as victims of communism that destroyed the Wall in order to gain access to Western style democracy and materialism. On the CTV news, the Wall was described as the

²³ Associated Press, “Former Leaders Celebrate Demise of Berlin Wall,” *Globe and Mail* (November 9, 1999): A.12.

²⁴ Michael Ignatieff, “Reliving a Night When Freedom Still Felt Joyful,” *National Post* (November 9, 1999): A.14.

²⁵ Alan Lambert, Laura Scherer, Chad Rogers, and Larry Jacoby, “How Does Collective Memory Create a Sense of the Collective,” in *Memory in Mind and Culture*, ed. Pascal Boyer and James Wertsch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 194.

²⁶ Lori Montgomery, “Leaders Recall Fears on Fateful Night,” *Toronto Star*, November 9, 1999, First edition.

²⁷ Zelikow and Rice, 369.

front line in the battle between communism and democracy.²⁸ It was obvious that the East German citizens wanted to cross that line. The *Toronto Star* interviewed Christoph Links, an East German pro-democracy activist, author, and publisher who explained, “We thought it would be possible to reform our political parties and move step by step to democracy.”²⁹ However, this picture presented by the Canadian media is an oversimplification of the politics within the GDR. The majority of dissidents within the GDR had varying political ideals. Most were encouraged by the liberalization efforts at the end of 1989, but as Charles Maier asserts, “many would later be disillusioned – especially some of those who wanted some reformed socialism to persist.”³⁰ These dissident political ideals did not fit the Western media’s image of oppressed individuals forced to live under a communist system of government, and because of this none of the leading dissidents of the GDR who had helped to bring down the wall were invited to speak at the anniversary celebrations in Berlin.³¹ Neither the newspaper articles nor the television broadcasts ever made mention that there were citizens of the GDR who desired to reform the existing system than simply abandon it. The stories that were published by the mass media were limited and favoured the political and security structures of the West. Cubitt explains, “The ability to shape peoples understanding of what the nation is and of where its interest lies is a crucial level of power in modern societies, and the ability to secure credit for particular readings and to discredit alternative readings is an important aspect of how this power is exercised.”³² It appears that the alternative version of what some East German dissidents desired for their country complicated the media’s narrative of being the Western liberators from communist oppression.

While the Canadian media covered the anniversary celebration in Berlin, the coverage coincided with reports extensively highlighting the ills of communism. That same day, six out of the seven newspaper corporations reported on former GDR party leader, Egon Krenz, and two of his politburo colleagues receiving prison sentences for ordering the deaths of East German citizens trying to escape. In addition, Olivia Ward from the *Toronto Star* informed Canadian readers of some details about what life was like behind the “wall of lies”. She revealed that, “in the Orwellian world behind the wall, even thoughts were regimented. There was no such thing as Germany, Eastern citizens were told.”³³ Reports of economic difficulties and environmental atrocities revealed the

²⁸ Lloyd Robertson, “The Fall of the Berlin Wall,” *CTV National News – CTV Television*, November 9, 1999.

²⁹ Olivia Ward, “The Fall of the Wall of Lies,” *Toronto Star* (November 9, 1999), First edition.

³⁰ Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 164.

³¹ Ward, 1999.

³² Cubitt, 230.

³³ Ward, 1999.

backwardness within the state. *The Globe and Mail* wrote an article on a toxic infested lake in East Germany, referring to as an “underground sea of poison” that has still not been able to be cleaned and replaced with fresh water.³⁴ The media extended their criticisms beyond the East German state as one article in the *Ottawa Citizen* attacked the core of communist ideology, “To achieve this socialist paradise, any means was justified. Marx’s inheritors took the master at his word, employing police-state terror, mass starvation, and massive prison camp systems, all in the name of achieving the perfect society.”³⁵ The Canadian media used the collapse of the Berlin Wall as a platform to reiterate the immense failures of their Cold War “enemy.”

The media discourse that was being constructed on November 9, 1999 remained within the neatly bound historical borders of the Cold War. The reports celebrated the end of the Cold War, the peaceful collapse of the SED, and the reunification of a divided Germany, yet not a single report made mention of Germany’s Nazi past. Sixty years earlier, Canadians had fought at Britain’s side against the Nazi invasion on the European continent which resulted in the deaths of approximately 50 million people. Yet, only one Reuter’s article reprinted in the *Calgary Herald* noted that the fall of the wall on November 9 has to share its anniversary with several other darker days in German history.³⁶ The Nazi stain on Germany appeared to have been lifted from the discourse surrounding the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Why did Germany’s previous offenses receive such little attention by the Canadian media?

It is not because the Canadian media forgot the past, but rather that West Germany made expressions of sorrow for its former crimes and chose to adopt historical sensitivity as a central feature of their national identity in the newly formed state. Initially in the years following the Second World War, the international community remained suspicious of Germany, but the West German state aligned itself closely to Western values and institutions and began to make reparations to Israel, which “protected the new Germany from the problem of its past.”³⁷ In addition, the FRG used its democratic structures to sharply debate the role of the Holocaust in German national identity and the construction of an official memory, whereas in the GDR, official memory of the past was a restrictive ideological representation that allowed for little debate from its citizens. The democratic debates over how to represent Germany’s past revealed to the international community the German Parliament at work. As James Young

³⁴ John Gray, “Toxic Legacy Bubbles Beneath East German Chemical Town,” *The Globe and Mail* (November 9, 1999): A.12.

³⁵ “Utopia,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, November 9, 1999, sec. A.18, Final edition.

³⁶ Reuters, “Wall is Gone but Divide Remains: Euphoria has Cooled in the Nine Years Since Two Germanies Reunited,” *Calgary Herald* (November 9, 1999): A.18.

³⁷ Warburg, 55.

notes, “The best German memorial to the Fascist era and its victims may not be a single memorial at all – but simply the never-to-be resolved debate over which kind of memory to preserve, how to do it, in whose name, and to what end.”³⁸ West Germany proved that they were choosing to make sense of their past and amend it. The constant negotiation of the past perhaps, “normalized” German national identity to themselves, and to the world.³⁹ West Germany, and then even more a united Germany, demonstrated to the international community that they had become a stable nation with no fears in relation to its foreign policy. As *The New York Times* noted, “The specter of German militarism, once terrifying, is a thing of the past. Contemporary Germans are, if anything, more sensitive than their neighbours to episodes of military wrongdoing.”⁴⁰ Therefore, the Canadian media had no incentive to re-examine Germany’s past since they were already pardoned and accepted as a NATO ally.

Media Commemorations in 2009

November 9, 2009 marked the twentieth anniversary of the collapse of the Berlin Wall. The cultural productions created by the Canadian media twenty years after the German upheaval continued to build on the national account of being the Cold War victors that had been constructed in the anniversary commemorations ten years earlier. According to Timothy Ashplant, Graham Dawson, and Michael Roper, there are an increasing number of anniversary commemorations to indicate the beginning and ending of international conflicts. They assert that the anniversary boom is “fuelled and amplified by the public commemorations media, which seize upon forthcoming commemorative dates to stimulate cultural productions of all kinds.”⁴¹ The twenty year anniversary celebration, like the ten year event became a highly visible media affair. The public discourse surrounding the collapse of the Berlin Wall that had been evoked by the media in 1999 was repeated and deepened ten years later in order to further unite the nation state. Jeffrey Olick argues that the remembered experiences of past commemorative

³⁸James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 21.

³⁹ Warburg, 64. For more on Germany’s ‘normalization’ of its past see Jeffrey Olick’s, “What Does it Mean to Normalize the Past?: Official Memory in German Politics since 1989,” in *States of Memory: Continuities, Conflicts, and Transformations in National Retrospection*, ed. Jeffrey Olick (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 259-288.

⁴⁰ “Germany’s Army,” *New York Times* (November 1, 2006), quoted in Bettina Warburg, “Germany’s National Identity, Collective Memory, and Role Abroad,” in *Power and The Past: Collective Memory and International Relations*, ed. Eric Langenbacher and Yossi Shain (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2010), 63.

⁴¹ Timothy G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson, and Michael Roper, ed., *The Politics of Memory: Commemorating War* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000), 4.

practices profoundly influence each new commemorative production. The same debates, messages, and expectations of the previous occasion shape future observances.⁴²

The Canadian media transmitted similar reports on the twentieth anniversary of the opening of the Berlin Wall in their publications. Lloyd Robertson reported on CTV news that, "Twenty years ago tonight, jubilant East Germans were taking hammers and pick axes to that infamous Berlin Wall. It was a moment the rest of the world watched in awe as the dark symbol of the old Soviet empire crashed into pieces."⁴³ The media used the anniversary as an opportunity to replay emotional footage from that momentous November evening. As images of the wall coming down were shown on televisions across the country, reporter Peter Mansbridge asked Canadians, "That sound, can you hear it? Well, that, of course, is the sound that changed the world, hammering on the Berlin Wall, chipping away at decades of distrust and fear, the sound of nails going into the Cold War's coffin."⁴⁴ They watched German Chancellor Angela Merkel, a former East German citizen herself, asserting the claim that it was one of the happiest moments in her life.⁴⁵ In addition, seven major Canadian newspaper corporations devoted space in their publications to the twentieth anniversary. Deborah Cole, from *The Province*, continued to reiterate the historically inaccurate notion that the East German dissidents were "pro-democracy" fighters clamouring to cross the border.⁴⁶ The published memories constructed by the media in 2009 enhanced the national narrative of Western liberation from post-Stalinist oppression formulated ten years earlier.

At the same time, the wall continued to be cast as a symbol that represented other human rights violations. As world leaders gathered in Berlin to commemorate the peaceful revolution, including Canadian Defense Minister Peter Mackay, U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton used the wall as a platform to advocate for the exportation of Western, democratic values. She remarked, "Our history did not end the night the wall came down. To expand freedom to more people, we cannot accept that freedom does not belong to all people. We cannot allow oppression defined and justified by religion and tribe to replace that of

⁴² Jeffrey Olick, "Genre Memories and Memory Genres: A Dialogical Analysis of May 8, 1945 Commemorations in the Federal Republic of Germany." *American Sociological Review*, vol. 64 (1999), 381-402, quoted in Cubitt, 220.

⁴³ Lloyd Robertson, "Twenty Years After the Fall of the Berlin Wall," *CTV News – CTV Television*, November 9, 2009.

⁴⁴ Peter Mansbridge, "Communist Chic: Nostalgia for the East in Younger Germans," *The National - CBC Television*, November 9, 2009.

⁴⁵ Peter Mansbridge, "Toppling of Dominoes Marks Fall of Berlin Wall," *The National - CBC Television*, November 9, 2009.

⁴⁶ Deborah Cole, "Germans Mark Wall's Fall," *The Province* (November 9, 2009): A.9.

communist ideology.”⁴⁷ This moral proposal dislodged the Berlin Wall from its national boundaries and made it a symbol for human rights on a universal scale. According to Levy and Sznajder, the end of the Cold War ushered in this new period of human rights advocacy which has led to the formation of a Western oriented, global human-rights regime. They argue that the regime “informs the ongoing juridification of international politics and the cosmopolitanization of nation-states’ sovereignty.”⁴⁸ The Western democratic world used the memory of human rights abuses that existed behind the Iron Curtain as a pretext to continue exerting their legitimacy and power in the global world.

In the twenty year commemorations, the memories published by the mass media accentuated Canada’s influence on the international stage. Canada’s political involvement in ending the Cold War was never mentioned in 1999, yet in the twenty year cultural productions the media applauded the impact of Mulroney’s foreign policy diplomacy on world affairs. James McGrath and Arthur Milnes from *The Ottawa Citizen* emphasized the North American involvement. They wrote, “Canadians and Americans can themselves be proud of their role their own nations jointly played in the historical events...our nations had a quiet role in this crucial chapter in the Cold War’s end.”⁴⁹ Canada’s role was certainly quieter than that of the United States. The Americans, along with the three other former occupation powers, played an obvious role in ending the Cold War, due to their involvement in the “Two-Plus-Four” discussions devised to deal with the external issues surrounding German unification. However, Allan Woods from the *Toronto Star* wrote, “The history books will record the actions and words of Gorbachev, Bush, and Helmut Kohl. But Canada played go-between for the two superpowers whose countries had engaged in a protracted battle for territory and influence in Berlin.”⁵⁰ The media portrayed Canada as an integral intermediary that helped usher in the end of the Cold War.

Mulroney’s strategic political maneuvering also became a national cause for celebration. According to McGrath and Milnes in *The Ottawa Citizen*, Mulroney was in the midst of preparing for a lengthy trip to Gorbachev’s Moscow when the wall came down on November 9, 1989. A few days before his departure Bush phoned Mulroney and asked him to deliver the private message to his Soviet counterpart, “Tell him, Brian, I will not posture on the wall.”⁵¹ Sensitive to Soviet instability, Mulroney delivered the American message to Gorbachev later that

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*, trans. Assenka Oksiloff (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 19.

⁴⁹ Arthur Milnes and James McGrath, “As the Wall Fell, Mulroney and Bush Maneuvered,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, November 9, 2009, sec. A.11.

⁵⁰ Allan Woods, “Don’t Go to Berlin, Mulroney Recalls Advising U.S. President,” *Toronto Star*, November 9, 2009, sec. A.6.

⁵¹ Milnes and McGrath, 2009.

month. He believed that “the President’s refusal to strut triumphantly on the ruins of the Berlin Wall while facing Moscow was arguable the President’s finest moment” and an integral political maneuver in helping end the Cold War.⁵² After his talks with Gorbachev, Mulroney flew to Washington to brief the Americans on the Soviets position. As the grounds were being laid for a new Europe in the months leading up to German unification some questioned the validity of North American involvement in the German matter. Yet, Mulroney confidently stated, “We are not renting our seat in Europe. If people want to know how Canada paid for its seat in Europe they should check out the graves in Belgium and France.”⁵³ The media portrayed Mulroney as a hero in ending the Cold War conflict. Both the *Toronto Star* and *The Ottawa Citizen* quoted West German Chancellor Kohl’s 1993 speech, “There was George Bush, who did not hesitate for one minute when it came to German unity. There was Brian Mulroney. And there was Mikhail Gorbachev.”⁵⁴ Twenty years after the event, the media informed the Canadian nation that they should celebrate the memory of their own Prime Minister’s instrumental role in bringing an end to the East-West confrontation. Mulroney became the key personality in the Canadian narrative of victory. Cubitt explains, “Personalities do not establish themselves in social memory as isolated containers of symbolic meaning: much of their significance comes from the ways in which they get connected to larger narrative structures.”⁵⁵ Mulroney’s international political involvement became a central feature in the Canadian media.

Another important theme formulated by the media in 2009 was that of the East German Secret Police, the Stasi. The cruel and inhumane methods used by the communist state security throughout East Germany were frequently mentioned by the media. Damien McElroy from *The Vancouver Sun* wrote about former East German, Cliewe Juritza who was imprisoned for attempting to flee to the West. In an effort to deal with the psychological scars from his past, he visited the former Stasi prison Hohenschonhausen, now a museum, every day. McElroy described the conditions of Juritza’s past, “The interrogation rooms, wet rooms, isolation chambers, and Chinese water torture machines are horrifying symbols of the suffering of its former inmates.”⁵⁶ Reporter Adrienne Arsenault from *The National* interviewed Berlin resident, Rainer Mueller who showed off his extensive Stasi file, which contained all the information that had been collected

⁵² Arthur Milnes and James McGrath, ed., *Age of the Offered Hand: The Cross Border Partnership Between President George H.W. Bush and Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, A Documentary History* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009), 3.

⁵³ Arthur Milnes and James McGrath, “As the Wall Fell, Mulroney and Bush Maneuvered,” *The Ottawa Citizen* (November 9, 2009): A.11.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Cubitt, 214.

⁵⁶ Damien McElroy, “East German Regions Finally Catch Up With Living Standards of West,” *The Vancouver Sun* (November 9, 2009): B.5.

on him by the secret police. Arsenault explained, “On every page, a betrayal. He has not forgiven and takes copious notes. This is how Rainer Mueller wants the young to remember this era, as suspicious and cruel, and he still wants justice.”⁵⁷ The media attempted to justify the West’s superiority by continuing to focus on the brutality that had existed in the communist system.

In addition, the media reported that the Stasi apparatus had a Canadian connection. History professor, Gary Bruce from the University of Waterloo discovered in the German archives, a ninety-five page file on Stasi operations at the Montreal Olympic Games in 1976. East Germany had shocked the world by capturing forty gold metals, but according to the file, the athletes were given performance-enhancing drugs.⁵⁸ The leftovers were thrown into the St. Lawrence River. The *Winnipeg Free Press* cited the official Stasi report under the heading “Destruction of the Rest of the Special Medicine” which stated, “About ten suitcases of medical packaging, needles, and tubular instruments were sunk in the St. Lawrence River.”⁵⁹ The media accurately depicted East Germany as a corrupt communist society, but interestingly also one that had directly aggrieved the Canadian nation. While simultaneously portraying the communist state as a deceitful “enemy”, the media reported on the twentieth anniversary commemorations that Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin had fond memories of his time as a KGB agent in the East German state. The *Calgary Herald* stated that Putin had nostalgia for the regime and his time in Dresden was filled with “warmth and cordiality”. He commented they were, “Not the worst years of my life and I would even say good ones.”⁶⁰ The media’s narrative to emerge in 2009 cast suspicion on the current Russian statehood. The national myth congratulated the West for defeating the communist scare, but remained leery of an untrustworthy modern Russia.

In the media, a dominant aspect of the Soviet’s defeat was the “victory” of market capitalism in the former GDR. In the fall of 1990, West Germany had absorbed the financial ruined and nearly bankrupt East German state.⁶¹ Following the takeover, financial strain on the FRG had been a major source of discontent. Doug Saunders from *The Globe and Mail* cited a report from the Halle Institute for Economic Research which stated that, “The German government has spent 1.3 trillion Euros during the past twenty years on funds to bring the East up to

⁵⁷ Peter Mansbridge, “Communist Chic: Nostalgia for the East in Younger Germans,” *The National - CBC Television*, November 9, 2009.

⁵⁸ Jim Bronskill, “East Germans Tossed Drugs in St. Lawrence at 1976 Games,” *Toronto Star* (November 9, 2009): A.3.

⁵⁹ The Canadian Press, “1976 Doping Mentioned in Stasi Report,” *Winnipeg Free Press* (November 9, 2009), Print edition.

⁶⁰ Herald News Services, “Putin Feels ‘Nostalgia’ for East Germany,” *Calgary Herald* (November 9, 2009): A.2.

⁶¹ Kettenacker, 186.

nationwide social and economic standards.”⁶² However, twenty years later, the Canadian media celebrated the economic equality that was achieved in the former East. Damien McElroy from *The Vancouver Sun* quoted Jochen Staadt, an expert on East Germany from the Free University in Berlin, who claimed that eighty percent of East Germans enjoy the same standard of living as those in the West. He explained, “People of the East face conditions just like all of Germany. Some are well developed and enjoy even higher standards than the West.”⁶³ Olivia Ward from the *Toronto Star* reported that, “Eastern Europe found new stability and prosperity after the crumbling of communism.”⁶⁴ The Canadian media stressed in their publications that the democratic, capitalist West rescued the East from the destitute communist system.

Even though the East had caught up with Western standards of living, the Canadian media suggested that the negative effects of the communist legacy were still ongoing. The publications reflected on the plight of some former East Germans that struggled to transition from East European communist bureaucracy into the Western world after the wall fell. Doug Saunders from *The Globe and Mail* wrote, “For a great many of them, it meant that their entire world had suddenly collapsed, and the future had disappeared. Many of them have still not recovered.”⁶⁵ The blame was placed on the shortcomings of the former regime. Saunders interviewed former East German resident Aram Radomski, who stated, “I realized then that my whole life before had meant nothing. Nothing I had learned in school, none of my jobs were of any use. I had to figure out how the West works. We hadn’t learned that in school- we’d learned the opposite.”⁶⁶ Damien McElroy from *The Vancouver Sun* reported that many thousands of former East Germans are “psychologically scarred” from the Ministry of State Security. They remain “prisoners of their past”, unable to adjust to the changing political tide.⁶⁷ The media emphasized the damaging and still lingering effects of the communist system on the state populace. They were intent on exposing the ordeal of East Germans who had long suffered under the totalitarian system of the GDR.

⁶² Doug Saunders, “The Wall Fell, and Their World Collapsed,” *The Globe and Mail* (November 9, 2009): A.1.

⁶³ Damien McElroy, “East Germans Finally Catch Up with Living Standards in the West,” *The Vancouver Sun* (November 9, 2009): B.5.

⁶⁴ Olivia Ward, “20 Years Later, A New Divide: Former Communist Countries Polarized Between East and West,” *Toronto Star* (November 9, 2009): A.6.

⁶⁵ Doug Saunders, “The Wall Fell, and Their World Collapsed,” *The Globe and Mail* (November 9, 2009): A.1.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Damien McElroy, “East Germans Finally Catch Up with Living Standards in the West,” *The Vancouver Sun* (November 9, 2009): B.5.

Furthermore, the media commended the advancement of democratization and NATO expansion in the former Soviet blocs in the post-Cold War period. The media reported that of the former communist countries, those most able to adapt at the end of the Cold War were the countries that aligned themselves with Western-style governance. Olivia Ward from the *Toronto Star* asserted that a new fault line runs throughout the former Soviet republics. The fault line separates the countries that were accepted into the European Union and NATO, from those that were excluded. According to Arch Puddington, director of research for Freedom House, an organization that monitors democracy worldwide, “Those who were oriented towards Europe after the wall came down had a more democratic fate. Those oriented towards Moscow or the East have not done so well.”⁶⁸ The Cold War myth of the inferior Russian “enemy” continued to be evoked by the media as Olivia Ward from the *Toronto Star* wrote, “When Russian leader Vladimir Putin took power in 1999, the odds on democracy lengthened. The trend to autocracy was worst in Belarus and the Central Asian republics, where despotic regimes and rigged elections succeeded communism.”⁶⁹ In the media’s narrative, after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, former Soviet republics achieved national success by adopting democracy and acceptance into NATO membership. However, those that remained in the Russian sphere of influence continued to be perceived as competing states with conflicting ideology.

Unique to the anniversary commemorations in 2009, was the inclusion of ‘digital media’ made available for Canadians on the Internet. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) created a momentous website to memorialize the collapse of the Berlin Wall twenty years after the event. The website included photo albums, a timeline of the Cold War, an interactive exploration of the wall, archive footage, journalists’ testimonies, eyewitness accounts, and radio transcripts.⁷⁰ The website signifies a new carrier of historical memory in the digital era. The sheer volume of images and discourse available with the rise of digital technologies in the twenty first century is radically changing how the remembered past is being constructed.⁷¹ Memory of the past is being shaped and shared by the modern mass media with the inception of the internet age. Andrew Hoskins argues in his book entitled “Save As...Digital Memories” that “the new media of memory render a past that is not only potentially more visible, accessible, and fluid than that which preceded it, but that also seems at one level more easily revocable and subject to a different kind of collective influence and

⁶⁸ Olivia Ward, “20 Years Later, A New Divide: Former Communist Countries Polarized Between East and West, *Toronto Star*, November 9, 2009, sec. A.6.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ The website can be accessed at <http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/berlinwall/index.html>.

⁷¹ Kattago, 18.

shaping.”⁷² Due to the rapid advancement of digital technologies, the website devoted to the fall of the Berlin Wall was a highly visible conglomeration of selective materials that purposely shaped the media’s desired historical memory of the Cold War’s end.

There is abundant evidence to suggest that the ensemble of images and messages designated for the website called on Canadians to witness the celebration of Western successes on the European continent. The Berlin Wall was merely the material divide that represented a much larger narrative on the international scene. On the website, included with stories from the German upheaval, were articles and personal testimonies that discussed the communist defeats in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Hungary. For example, CBC reporter, Joe Schlesinger wrote about the Velvet Revolution in his former homeland, “Forty years earlier, I had fled Czechoslovakia to escape Communism, and now, I was back to see the forces of darkness that had pushed me out of my own country crumbling. It was, to say the least, a joyful experience.”⁷³ The website only enlisted contributors that could articulate the vision of Western liberation. Therefore, the reporting on the Soviet Union’s perspective was brief and conveyed only by trusted sources. There was a short interview with Gorbachev in which he stated that the Soviet Union helped put a nail in the coffin of the Cold War and that he was “really proud of what happened” on November 9, 1989.⁷⁴ The other Soviet standpoint was from an article written by CBC correspondent Jennifer Clibbon, who reported on the life of former Soviet resident Alexandra Sviridov and her son Lev who had fled post-communist Russia for North America in the early 1990s. The article described their life in the tumultuous transition period under Russian President Boris Yeltsin and their flight to “freedom” in the West. Clibbon reported that, “Sasha, a keen political observer, recognized that in Russia, even though the Communist regime was toppled in name, the members of the former elite were still in positions of power, enjoying a new political life as ‘capitalists’.”⁷⁵ The flood of digital messages on the website was controlled by the media to shape the global picture of Cold War events.

⁷² Andrew Hoskins, “The Mediatization of Memory,” in *Save As...Digital Memories*, ed. Andrew Hoskins, Joanne Garge-Hansen, Anna Reading (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 29.

⁷³ Joe Schlesinger, “Czechoslovakia Rises Up,” *Berlin Wall: Twenty Years After the Fall*, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/berlinwall/memories/vp-schlesinger.html>.

⁷⁴ Berlin Wall: Twenty Years After the Fall, “Mikhail Gorbachev: The Wall and Democracy,” <http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/berlinwall/video/f-transcript-gorbachev.html>.

⁷⁵ Jennifer Clibbon, “The Odd Couple,” *Berlin Wall: Twenty Years After the Fall*, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/berlinwall/memories/vp-clibbon.html>.

Concluding Remarks

The mass media is one of several instruments of authority within the nation state that helps create collective national narratives. Cohesive narratives that members of the nation can understand have the ability to bind the nation state. Thus, how the media frames the past has an influence on the present collective identity of a nation. For that reason, on the anniversary celebration of the fall of the Berlin Wall ten years, and twenty years after the event, the Canadian media formulated a narrative that applauded the Western democratic world's successes on the European continent. They created newspaper articles, webpages, and television programs that called on Canadians to participate in a national celebration of victory over their Cold War communist opponent. The media commended the advancement of democratization to the former Soviet blocs. They indirectly celebrated the extension of NATO into Central and Eastern Europe. It was a celebratory account, reserved only for Canadians and their fellow Western allies as the narrative discreetly continued to alienate the modern Russian state. The Canadian media used the transnational memory of the collapse of the Berlin Wall to strengthen the community of belonging at home, while at the same time, asserting their allegiance to their Western neighbours in global affairs.