



Memory, War and Trauma

by Nigel C. Hunt. Cambridge University Press, New York, NY, 2010, 232 pages. \$34.99 (paper), \$99.00 (hardcover).

The author states that “This book is an account of the psychosocial impact of war in the broadest sense—that of understanding memory not just as individual memory, but also as the ways in which other people, society and culture, and history, all affect how we remember” (p 2). This is an ambitious goal, and the author largely succeeds in laying foundations for it. The book consists of 14 chapters including a historical perspective; current theory concerning posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD); memory and history; personal narrative and social discourse; aging, trauma, and memory; and memorialization and commemoration, among others. Earlier chapters provide a reasonably comprehensive review of literature concerning war traumas and PTSD as well as positive outcomes of traumatic experiences. The author is obviously not a physician when he denotes propranolol as an α -adrenergic antagonist (p 73).

The later chapters in this book, beginning with Chapter 7, “Memory and History,” read much more smoothly than previous chapters, and I found them to be quite insightful and thought-provoking. The author’s emphasis of the personal narrative and how it interacts with social forces is quite apropos, and I found his discussion of aging and traumatic memory (both individual and collective) quite intriguing. The author concludes that memory, narratives, social discourse, and history are interlinked via the remembrance of war, and people have a psychological need and a social duty to remember those who died in past wars through memorialization and commemoration.

The author states in the preface that he started to write about the health consequences of war, but felt overwhelmed with the number of wars and casualties. It is, indeed, overwhelming to review all aspects of memory, war, and trauma. In this book, the author sheds new light on the individual and social narratives relating to this enormous subject.

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