Coping with Trauma through Spiritual Remembrance: A Case Study of Canadian Veterans of the Vietnam War

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Introduction

In this article, I examine "spiritual remembrance" as it is enacted by three members of the Canadian Vietnam Veterans Memorial Association (CVVMA) in Windsor, Ontario as a means of coming to terms with traumatic experiences from the Vietnam War. Spiritual remembrance is a term I use to describe a fusion of one's religious heritage and one's private understanding and expression of spirituality as it occurs in the context of memorialisation. It can occur when a group with a shared memory of trauma or horror memorialises their experiences according to what they hold as the deepest meanings of life. In this article, I present the methodology I used to collect the data, provide definitions for the terminology being used, offer a context for the theory, give some examples of spiritual remembrance as it is enacted by the veterans and finally, offer some conclusions regarding the utility of the theory.

I argue that spiritual remembrance, as it is lived by the veterans, is a means of coping with losses they suffered during the Vietnam War. There are three key ways in which spiritual remembrance manifests in the veterans'

activities: a dedication to the "brotherhood"[1] of veterans, acts of service (especially with respect to memorialisation) for other veterans and their family members, and pilgrimages to memorial sites. Within these contexts the men define their ultimate values and attempt to make a connection with the spiritual realm[2].

In their community's memorial activities, the veterans find support and understanding; in their religious activities, the veterans seek forgiveness for their actions in Vietnam and for surviving when others did not. For the men I interviewed (all of whom identified themselves as Christians yet also stated they were "not religious"[3]), spiritual remembrance brings healing of emotional and psychological damage experienced during the war.

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[1] Vietnam veterans in both Canada and the United States refer to the personnel who served with them in the field as "brothers and sisters." Many women served in Vietnam as field nurses and clerks. However, because all the experiences related to me by the veterans were about men, throughout this article I will use the term "brotherhood" exclusively.

[2] The men described the spiritual realm in accordance with Christian views of God and heaven.

[3] In fall 2004, I participated in a graduate level Field Research course taught by Dr. Ron Grimes of Wilfrid Laurier University. Our project in that course was to conduct field research that would ultimately contribute to a study called the "Waterloo Religions Project" aimed at discovering some aspects of religion as it is lived in the region of South-Western Ontario in Canada. My particular project for this course, in keeping with my dissertation research on the role religion plays for military personnel, was an examination of the role of religion for Canadian veterans of the Vietnam War. Ethics approval for the study was requested and received under the umbrella of Dr. Grimes' Waterloo Religions Project of which each student was a contributing member. In addition to offering participants anonymity at their request (none of my participants desired anonymity), participant request letters and semi-structured interview questions were reviewed and approved by the Office of Research Ethics at Wilfrid Laurier University. I used a semi-structured interview guide and relied on ethnographic methodology to gather the data I used in this article. Equipped with these tools, I contacted the Canadian Vietnam Veterans Memorial Association in Windsor, Ontario and requested participants for the study. Three Vietnam veterans agreed to be interviewed. Unless indicated otherwise, all interview material comes from a group interview conducted on January 18, 2005.

Method

I conducted several hours of semi-structured group interviews using ethnographic methodologies with Gary, Wayne and Bob. These men are all Canadian citizens who served in the American Forces during the American war in Vietnam. The men served there for between six months and one year. Gary was a naturalised American living in California when he was drafted. He could have returned to Canada to avoid military service but he said he felt it was his duty to complete his military service. Wayne was a married enlisted man with only six months military service remaining when he was sent to Vietnam. He had joined the forces because he could not find work in Canada and the Canadian military was not recruiting at the time. Bob was a 17-year old high school drop out who could not get work in Canada before he signed up. Both he and Wayne said they had never even heard of Vietnam before they received their papers. Gary drove a tank in the armoured division, Bob was a member of a reconnaissance patrol group and Wayne served in the airborne division. Although they all had different duties, all of them saw action and had similar experiences such as the death of friends, constant fear of death, a sense of alienation on their return to North America and continuing nightmares and flashbacks about the Vietnam War.

In addition to interviewing the men, I visited their memorial in Assumption Park overlooking the Detroit River. The memorial is called “The North Wall” in deference to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC,

commonly referred to simply as "The Wall." I spent time examining their personal scrapbooks, photo albums, and medals. I reviewed websites of other Canadian Vietnam veteran associations and did textual analysis of Canadian and American material on the experiences of soldiers in Vietnam.[4]

In July of 2005, I returned to Windsor to participate in the 10th anniversary celebration of the establishment of the North Wall memorial. The family members of all the deceased servicemen whose names are engraved on the North Wall had been invited to attend. Many of these people were learning about their relative's final days for the first time from people who had served in the field alongside him. During a weekend of memorial events that had been planned to span both Canada Day and Independence Day, I observed or participated in parades, religious services, a display of the travelling "Wall that Heals,"[5] and ritual activities designed to commemorate the dead[6] and honour the living veterans of Vietnam.

As I examined the ethnographic material I had collected and read the experiences of other Canadian and American veterans of Vietnam, I noted several

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[4] See bibliography for further details.
[5] The Wall That Heals is a half-scale replica of The Wall in Washington, DC. It is moved around North America to various Vietnam veteran memorials and reunions in a transport truck. In addition to carrying the replica, the truck has built-in glass display cases where memorabilia and news clippings are displayed for public view.
[6] Such as one in which I participated where each member of the crowd was given the name of a deceased soldier whose name is engraved on the memorial. We were asked to come forward to a microphone stand and read the veteran's name. Following our reading, the crowd was to repeat, "We will remember him" and a candle was lit.

ways in which the veterans live out their most deeply held values of loyalty, service and honour. They demonstrate loyalty through dedication to the brotherhood of veterans; service through various acts that assist veterans and their families; and honour in their pilgrimages to sites they consider "holy ground" and in their participation in memorial activities that occur at these sites.

Definitions

Spiritual remembrance is intentional. It incorporates elements of people's religious heritage and their most deeply held values for the purpose of honouring victims within a community of memory. A community of memory is a group that shares the memory of a particular trauma, loss or horror. Spiritual remembrance happens when a community of memory attempts to create a link to what they understand as the spiritual world (e.g., with those deceased, usually as a result of the trauma) through methods such as prayer, meditation or silent reflection. In many cases, spiritual remembrance is a means of making sense of a collective traumatic experience while also seeking forgiveness for their actions and atonement for their survival.

Gary, Wayne and Bob agreed that their Christian beliefs are directly connected to the values they developed as soldiers in the field. The men engage in spiritual remembrance when they memorialise veterans of Vietnam. In these activities, the veterans attempt to create a link between themselves and the

spiritual world through prayer, silence, ritual activities, pilgrimages to memorial sites and acts of service in their community. They remember the dead, pray that they are at rest, and ask God for healing from the physical and emotional pain of being left behind.

Like a growing number of people in North America, [7] members of the CVVMA have little connection to churches and formal religion. However, all the men I interviewed claimed to be spiritual on a personal level. None of them were regular churchgoers but they all claimed to believe in God and pray regularly. Bob said, "I'm a Christian, but I'm not religious." Wayne added, "I believe in God, in Jesus, but you don't have to go to church to pray." Theology and doctrines are peripheral to what they consider authentic spirituality.[8] Ritual and formal religion are often present in the veterans' commemorative functions, pilgrimages and military funerals; however, the veterans agreed that their personal sense of Christian spirituality is paramount.

Robert C. Fuller states that growing-confusion between how the terms religion and spirituality are employed comes from the gradual association of the word *spiritual* with the private realm of thought and experience.[9] The word

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[7] Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual but not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1.

[8] Robert C. Fuller, "Fresh Takes on a Classic: William James's Varieties Approaches its Centennial," *Religious Studies Review* 26 (April 2000), 151-55.

[9] These changes have been well-documented by sociologists of religion such as Robert Wuthnow and Wade Roof Clark among others, as having occurred in North America during the last fifty years.

religious, on the other hand, is associated more with the public realm of "membership in religious institutions, participation in formal rituals, and adherence to official denominational doctrines."[10] He suggests that people who call themselves "spiritual but not religious" reject formal religious organisations in favour of "individualized spirituality that includes picking and choosing from a wide range of alternative religious philosophies."[11]

While the veterans have not altogether rejected formal religious organisations, they have been selective in retaining only what is meaningful to them and what fits in with their values. That is to say that, for the veterans, their "picking and choosing" is not so much from alternative religious philosophies as it is from the values they developed in Vietnam and the Christian traditions in which they were raised. Wayne told me, "If I want to go into a Baptist or Episcopalian [church], and kneel down and pray then I'll do that. And we've [prayed] at the Jewish synagogue when we go to do services. We can go in there and pray our own stuff." Wayne described his reliance on prayer in the following manner, "We've had troubles in our lives and we don't need that any more and we pray to God that we don't see it. I pray every day that my sons and my grandsons never have to go through what I went through, as far as going to war and stuff like

[10] Fuller, *Spiritual but not Religious*, 5.
[11] Fuller, *Spiritual but not Religious*, 6.

that, and hopefully, they never will." For the veterans, prayer itself is essential but where one does it is irrelevant.

Fuller points out that many secular activities serve the same functions and meet the same socio-psychological needs as religion. Based on his earlier distinction between the "religious" and the "spiritual," it might seem as though the activities of the CVVMA do not in fact have a spiritual dimension, but only *seem* to because they are similar to certain Christian religious activities. However, Fuller goes on to add that spirituality becomes relevant in these activities

> … wherever we struggle with the issue of how our lives fit in to the greater cosmic scheme of things. This is true even when our questions never give way to specific answers or give rise to specific practices such as prayer or meditation. We encounter spiritual issues every time we wonder where the universe comes from, why we are here, or what happens when we die. We also become spiritual when we [are] moved by values … that seem to reveal a meaning or power beyond our visible world. An idea or practice is 'spiritual' when it reveals our personal desire to establish a felt-relationship with the deepest meanings or powers governing life."[12]

My research indicates that spiritual remembrance is a search for healing and atonement. For the Windsor veterans, and no doubt for other veterans who share their values, the focus of their spirituality is found in their struggle to cope with their losses in Vietnam, to deal with their memories and to remember their lost comrades. The veterans seek forgiveness for being unable to save fellow-soldiers during the war and for actions they took in Vietnam. Gary, who served as a tank

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[12] Fuller, *Spiritual but not Religious*, 8.

driver in the armoured division, told me a story about having become ill with malaria. He was due to go out with his four-man team on a mission, but his best friend from another team convinced him to go to the infirmary and get treatment. Gary's friend replaced him on the mission while he lay ill in the hospital. During that mission, the tank hit a mine. His best friend and three other team-mates were killed. Gary told me that he lives with the memory of his friends' sacrifice and the loss of his team-mates every day. Another veteran, Bob, became emotional as he told me about the first time he went to The Wall in Washington. He told me that while he was there, he saw his best friend's name on the wall – a boy with whom he had gone to high school and whom he had held as he died. He told me, "And I saw his name and it did me in. Destroyed me. And really, I've never been the same again."

Many veterans seek healing for themselves in dealing with their memories of actions in Vietnam, as well as healing for the families of those who died.[13] When personal spirituality and the shared values of a community of memory become a way for people to uphold their values and make a connection with the

[13] This is true for both for the families of the dead soldiers and for families living in Vietnam. The "Vets With a Mission" program (which is chaired by a Canadian veteran of Vietnam) for example, is "dedicated to bringing healing, restoration and renewal to the people of Vietnam" through helping the poor, building medical clinics and providing health care in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. (Vets With a Mission, "Vets With a Mission," http://www.vwam.com/index.html, n.d. [Retrieved January 12, 2005]).

dead in a way that helps them make sense of their experiences, spiritual remembrance occurs.

> Day-to-day social practices need not involve drawing from the storehouse of collective memory, [but] when they do, when our sense of the past becomes 'activated,' memory becomes *remembrance*. At those times we do pay attention; whether through a commemorative gesture, a heated discussion or simply a moment of reflection, we are engaged with the past…resulting in new ways of making sense.[14]

The veterans do this as they consciously strive to integrate their lives in terms of their self-stated values of loyalty, service and honour.

Context

Unlike previous wars, there was no front line in Vietnam and no clear understanding of who was the enemy.[15] Although it is widely known that American soldiers committed atrocities and abuses against the Vietnamese people, the Viet Cong[16] also misused the Vietnamese people to ambush soldiers.[17] As a result of never knowing whom to trust and never knowing when or from where an attack might come, soldiers in Vietnam formed what they called a

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[14] Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (New Jersey and London: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 14. Emphasis mine.

[15] This was equally true for the Vietnamese people who were often caught between and mistreated by both American and Viet Cong forces.

[16] Officially known as *Viet Nam Cong San*, or Vietnamese Communists. This group employed guerrilla warfare with the aim of establishing Communist rule in Vietnam.

[17] Wayne told me a story of his sergeant attempting to shake hands with a young boy who approached their unit at a road block. As the boy raised his hand to be shaken, a grenade dropped out from under his arm and the whole party was killed. For further reading on these types of incidents, see Charles R. Figley and Seymour Leventman, eds., *Strangers at Home: Vietnam Veterans Since the War* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1980), 64.

"brotherhood" of solidarity and trust.[18] The men concurred that you could not trust anyone other than your fellow soldiers. Bob said, "You could never rest, you could never trust anybody except your buddies. That's who you'd trust."

Back home in North America, the war was not popular and much of society did not view the returning veterans as heroes.[19] Although the young men saw their time served in Vietnam as having "done their duty" and "served society in the fight against Communism," when they arrived home, two of them described being called "baby killers" in reference to the atrocities that occurred at My Lai where an entire village was brutally murdered by American soldiers, and being spat at in the streets. Bob, who was wounded during his tour of duty, described being unable to get a job from a company whose walls displayed posters encouraging employers to "Hire a Vet!" All three men told me they did not receive a welcome from society, and Gary said that even legion halls and veterans associations rejected them. Without the trust and solidarity of their brotherhood in the field, the veterans learned to hide their involvement in Vietnam and suffer alone. Throughout North America, Vietnam veterans who could not hide their physical and emotional wounds often became outcasts from society.[20]

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[18] For further reading on this phenomena, see Figley and Leventman, *Strangers at Home*.
[19] Fred Gaffen, *Unknown Warriors - Canadians in the Vietnam War* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1990), 28.
[20] These experiences were common to many returning veterans across North America. For further reading, see Joel Osler Brende and Erwin Randolph Parson's, *Vietnam Veterans: The Road to Recovery* (New York: Signet Classics, 1986).

Years after the end of the Vietnam War, public consciousness about the suffering that veterans had endured was raised by books, movies and the establishment of The Wall in Washington, DC. This long black granite wall is engraved with the names of 58,245 men and women who were lost in the Vietnam War over a period of 16 years (1959 to 1975, although the official Western combat years went from 1965 to 1973). In Canada, the veterans remained hidden from society even though approximately 12,000 of them had served in Vietnam.[21] In 1995, two veterans from Michigan noted the lack of recognition given to Canadian veterans and decided to create a memorial dedicated to Canadian veterans of Vietnam. Eventually, this memorial was placed in Assumption Park on Riverbank Drive in Windsor, Ontario. When the memorial was dedicated, the men told me it meant that, for the first time since their return to North America after the Vietnam War, they felt they were finally being welcomed home.

At the same time that the memorial was established, the local chapter of the Canadian Vietnam Veterans Memorial Association (CVVMA) was created. For the veterans I interviewed, the association marked a re-establishment of the brotherhood they had known as soldiers in the field, and they dedicated themselves to ensuring that no other veterans or their families would have to

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[21] According to Fred Gaffen, the chief historian at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa: "It is impossible to determine exactly how many Canadians fought in Vietnam. …Estimates vary from 20,000 to 30,000…but based on current information, the number of Canadian volunteers from this country who went to Vietnam was closer to 6,000. If one includes Canadians who were already in the United States…the total is over 12, 000" (*Unknown Warriors*, 36).

suffer alone and unrecognised as they had. As members of a veterans' association, the men felt free to participate in the wider community of Vietnam veterans by joining in pilgrimages to Vietnam memorial sites and reunions across North America.

The Brotherhood

The brotherhood of veterans is a community of memory that represents the re-establishment of the brotherhood of soldiers in the fields of Vietnam. Irwin-Zarecka writes: "For people to feel a sense of bonding with others solely because of a shared experience, the experience itself [is] often…of extraordinary if not traumatic quality…." and these communities "often remain apart in their visceral, often untranslatable memory of the horror." [22] The brotherhood is dedicated to protecting, respecting, honouring and embracing other veterans of Vietnam, and those who participate in it are expected to share the values and interests of those within the community. For example, the mission statement of the Quebec Vietnam Veterans Association lists among their objectives their intention to "offer every veteran who needs support a welcome center where he would feel at home and where he could meet with other veterans," and to be a "…spiritual, psychological and adaptation center to bring help and support to the veterans and

[22] Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance*, 47-48.

their families." [23] The British Columbia Vietnam Veterans in Canada (VVIC) says:

> We expect the same level of honesty and trust among each other as was expected on the battlefield. Our willingness to reach out to other Veterans and their family members is great. But our tolerance for bullshit is low. Eighteen years of "outreach" have taught us many lessons. [24] Too many of those lessons were painful. We mention this only to let you know that we will go to great lengths to validate information. That is good if you are the real thing. Not so good if you are not. [25]

When the veterans are with other veterans, they know that they are among others who understand and support them. Wayne told me, "When you talk to another Vietnam veteran, he understands. They know what you went through…" He described seeing veterans crying in front of The Wall in Washington saying, "If we know he's a vet, we'll just go up and hug him because we understand what he's going through. We know what he's talking about. We know what he's crying for."

From their links with the past and their relationship with others who share their experiences has grown a deep desire to honour, serve and memorialise other Vietnam veterans. The brotherhood actively reaches out to help other veterans and, as a result, these veterans' associations share the mission of caring for all

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[23] "Mission," *Association Québécoise des Vétérans du Vietnam* [http://www.aqvv.ca/en/mission.htm], (retrieved Feb. 15, 05), par. 8.

[24] The veterans described "wannabe" veterans who occasionally came into their association as people who claimed to have been in Vietnam but could not produce official papers or otherwise prove their military background. Gary and Wayne told me you could often spot the "fakers" because, unlike real veterans, they loved to "sit around telling war stories".

[25] "Unit Profile," *Vietnam Veterans in Canada* [http://www.vvic.org/unit_profile.htm], (retrieved Feb. 5, 2005), par. 3.

veterans and creating a safe haven for its members. This mission is most noticeable in the veterans' acts of service.

Acts of Service

Acts of service for veterans and families of veterans are another way in which the men I interviewed enact spiritual remembrance. Acts of service are important for the veterans' own healing and, additionally, they are important as a means of creating a link between themselves and would-be "outsiders" such as their local community and family members of servicemen. Typical acts of service might include things as mundane as assisting another veteran to get their American pension or paying to have a hand-rail installed in their bathtub but many of the activities occur in the form of memorialisation of those who died in Vietnam.

Janet McLellan describes memorial activities as being important not only for their spiritual qualities but because of their therapeutic value. She says that

> … memorial rituals enable individuals to reintegrate past traumatic events, enormous personal loss, and family disruption into a present and future reality. Failure to reintegrate past suffering enhances post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and increases the tendency for mental health problems to occur.[26]

In memorializing the dead, the veterans establish connections between their association and the families of deceased veterans who are not members of their group. They make such connections through a religious service which

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[26] Janet McLellan, *Many Petals of the Lotus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 1999), 6.

commemorates them as soldiers and remembers them as honourable servants to their society.[27] McLellan says that memorialising services

> … are an adaptive strategy to help [people] cope with their loss and to ensure cultural …continuity. The memorial ceremony, as a ritual communion, enables difficult grieving processes, whether from loss of identity [or] loved ones, …facilitating coming to terms with the enormity of loss, through personal as well as group experiences. The memorial services provide a cognitive ordering of the past, present and future.[28]

The Windsor group offers services in the community such as giving Remembrance Day talks in local schools and supporting local sports teams and community events. In addition to these typical service club activities, the CVVMA offers the unusual service of providing military-style funerary services for all veterans and families of veterans who request their assistance regardless of whether the people are members of the CVVMA or a Canadian Legion.[29] In describing their efforts to prepare the memorial celebrations that would take place at the tenth anniversary of the North Wall, Bob said they were determined to do things "right." They told me that having the family members of the men whose names are on the North Wall present was very important. Wayne said, "They're the ones that count right now." Gary added, "It might have taken thirty years for this to happen, but we never forgot. They were never forgotten." In these acts,

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[27] Despite having served with American forces in an American war, all the men described themselves as having "done their duty" to "serve and protect" against communism. Interestingly, at the same time the men gave me text book answers like these, they described being used and deceived by the American leaders who sent them in to Vietnam.

[28] McLellan, *Many Petals of the Lotus*, 194.

[29] This activity is unusual in that veterans' associations do not offer military funeral services (although members may participate in them) and, if members participate, honours are typically given only to Association or Legion members.

the veterans extend their community of memory to the family members of deceased veterans in the hopes of providing comfort and healing to the survivors – the same comfort and healing that veterans, as survivors of war, desire for themselves.

Pilgrimage to Sacred Sites

Many soldiers of Vietnam who were killed or missing in action were never accorded the dignity of a proper burial. For those left behind, there was the challenge of "grieving without graves." [30] In the context of military and North American Christian society, funeral rites have great and sacred significance, but "when a loss is not recognised as a loss, grieving is not natural."[31] For the men in the Windsor group, the establishment of the North Wall memorial meant "bringing our brothers home."[32] Wayne provided the following description of the North Wall:

> It's Holy Ground. You know, you sit there and you look at the names and nothing else matters in the outside world when you're by yourself right there. I bring my grandchildren down there. They call it Poppa's Friends – you know, 'That's Poppa's Friends' Place.' And they go down there and they put their hands on the wall and they know when I'm there at The Wall, they've got to be quiet. They know they can't take a popsicle, they can't take a pop. They can't

[30] Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance*, 18.
[31] Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance*, 18.
[32] Interestingly, the North Wall memorial was paid for and established by American veterans more than 20 years after the war in Vietnam ended. The American veterans who established the North Wall did so because they believed their Canadian "brothers and sisters" deserved recognition for their military duties. This gift to the Canadian veterans was the singular cause of the establishment of the Canadian Vietnam Veterans Association and the re-establishment of the "brotherhood" of soldiers in Windsor.

> have anything there when they're in that little triangle there [in front of the memorial] and they know that.

For the men of the CVVMA, the North Wall memorial is a sacred space where they can grieve for their losses, remember their lost friends and find some peace and consolation through prayer and quiet reflection.

In addition to regular visits to the North Wall memorial, the Windsor veterans make pilgrimages to The Wall in Washington D.C. and other Vietnam memorials and reunions throughout North America. The men told me that these pilgrimages are significant for them in the same way that the North Wall in Windsor is considered holy ground. Vietnam memorials and veterans' reunions bring significance to the veterans' experiences and provide a focus for their sentiments of grief, loss, guilt and hope for the future. By attending these places, the men demonstrate an act of allegiance and devotion to other veterans and their fallen comrades.

The veterans' descriptions of these journeys are reminiscent of Muslim descriptions of the Hajj or Catholic descriptions of the shrine at Lourdes in terms of the sheer number of people in attendance and the activities involved. For example, at one reunion held in a farmer's field outside of Kokomo, Indiana, there were over 45,000 people in attendance. At the Rolling Thunder[33] motorcycle ride past The Wall in Washington over 250,000 motorcycles formed the parade. In

[33] Rolling Thunder Inc. is an American organisation whose mandate is to publicize the fact that many prisoners of war and missing in action were left behind at the conclusion of the Vietnam War. [http://www.rollingthunder1.com], par.1.

addition to the large numbers of people that convene for these events, the pilgrimages typically include the elements of prayer, and acts of service, atonement and remembrance of those who have died. The trips that Gary, Wayne and Bob had been on included fellowship, shared meals, deeply-felt emotions and a strong sense of connection with the spiritual world both in space (at the monuments) and time (remembrance of the dead and fellowship with the living).

Conclusions

In this article I have argued that spiritual remembrance, as it is lived by the veterans, includes dedication to the brotherhood of veterans, acts of service for veterans and their family members and pilgrimage to memorial sites. The veterans' ultimate values are defined in these contexts and their desire to connect with a spiritual realm stems from them.

The major conclusions I have drawn from my interviews with Gary, Wayne and Bob are that, in the brotherhood of veterans, the men have found understanding, mutual support and healing after years of isolation and loneliness. These men, along with other veterans, share a strong bond based on their experiences in Vietnam. This bond allows their brotherhood to consolidate without the veterans having to express or explain their experiences. For the Windsor veterans, healing has occurred as a result of this understanding and acceptance.

In their acts of service for families of veterans and in their communities, the men I interviewed are able to draw a connection between their community of memory and outsiders. They do this by conducting military funerals for veterans and their families, helping families of veterans secure veterans' benefits, speaking in local schools on Remembrance Day, and acting as a service group that supports community sports teams and charity events. Their participation in the Legion extends their community further by connecting them with veterans from WWII and the Korean War.

In their pilgrimages to locations and events that memorialize and attempt to honour Vietnam veterans, the men demonstrate an act of devotion to the memory of their dead comrades. The central theme of the sites the men visit is "You are not forgotten." When Gary, Bob and Wayne go on a pilgrimage to one of the Vietnam memorial sites, they go as a way of connecting with those who did not come back from Vietnam. The men described the North Wall memorial, The Wall in Washington D.C. and other Vietnam memorial locations as "holy ground" where veterans of Vietnam weep and pray as they commune with their lost friends and make atonement for their own survival and actions in Vietnam. I have described spiritual remembrance, in essence, as an act of reconciliation. In the acts I associate with spiritual remembrance, the veterans feel that they can connect with their fallen brothers in a greater cosmic context. Many of the websites and books written on the experiences of American veterans of Vietnam

and veterans of other wars attest to at least some of the elements I have described here.

Examining the role that religion plays for veterans and others who have experienced great trauma is an important area of study that has been largely ignored. By learning more about the role of religion during and after a period of great stress we might gain insights into opportunities for treating depression and anxiety-related disorders. This case study offers a preliminary base from which further studies on the intersection of religion and trauma might proceed.[34]

Although my definition of spiritual remembrance has been developed and examined on a very small sample size (three men) within a very specific sub-culture (Canadian veterans of the American war in Vietnam), I believe it may be experienced by many communities of memory and not just veterans of war. Many people who live through a tragedy feel guilt at having lived when so many others died. It is likely that those people seek reconciliation with the deceased and understanding from other survivors. For example, many survivors of the 9/11 tragedy participate in communities of mutual support, find ways to speak out about their experiences and make pilgrimages to the site of the Twin Towers.[35]

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[34] In fact, my current doctoral research with active military personnel in the Canadian Forces continues to address this topic.

[35] In fact, in a quick web search on this topic, I immediately found the *9-11 Visibility Project* [http://www.septembereleventh.org/index.php] and the *Voices of September 11th* website [http://www.voicesofsept11.org/] both of which are dedicated to the support and service of people affected by the tragedy of September 11, 2000. There is significant indication on both these sites that spiritual remembrance is taking place within that community of memory.

To further examine the utility of this theory for veterans and other communities of memory, a larger-scale study is required. Future research on this topic should examine how the sub-contexts of spiritual remembrance present in the wider society of veterans and in other communities of memory.

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