The Tomb of the Unknown Warrior - TeToma o te Toa Matangaro November 2004.

Cultural memory is a concept by means of which New Zealand national identity is formed and retained. It pertains to both the formal and informal process by which people, society and governments seek to preserve a sense of identity in respect of nationhood, often as a response to issues of national significance such as warfare. However warfare collapses public and private memory. When enshrined in either objects or ceremonies recalling the sacrifices of war, cultural memory also performs an important social function in symbolizing events, people and places of significance to New Zealanders and acting as a place of remembrance, reflection, and homage. But as Emsley suggests, "How far do . . . [New Zealander's] have a common memory of those events and how far is there a common way of commemorating them?" (Emsley, 2003, p. 41).

In recent New Zealand history the 'Tomb of the Unknown Warrior' was designed to serve as a national symbol of those New Zealanders who have fallen in battle in foreign wars. Importantly, it was seen as a symbolic 'homecoming' for them, a reintegration of personal and lives lost into the fabric of national memory.

The origin of the concept of a national symbol emerged shortly after the conclusion of WWI. In 1919 the New Zealand government under the Rt. Honourable W. F. Massey approved a vote of 100 000 pounds for the erection of a National War Memorial in 1920 at Mount Cook, Wellington. The concept of the 'Tomb of the Unknown Warrior' originated in New Zealand's participation at a re-internment ceremony for 'A British Warrior' at Westminster Abbey on 11 November 1920. Prime Minister Massey thought to emulate the British ceremony with a proposal to bring home the remains of 'the unknown New Zealand warrior' which would memorialise the fate of those New Zealander's who fell in battle in the Great War.

However, the idea did not resurface again until 1999 when it regained the support of the New Zealand government. In 2002 an agreement was made with the Commonwealth war Commission to repatriate the remains of an 'unknown' New Zealander soldier killed on the

Western front, in France in WWI. The 'unknown' soldier would symbolize all those who fell in overseas wars but who were not identified, or received no marked burial. The project was led by the Ministry of Culture and Heritage and culminated in a trans-national ceremony in November 2004. As the then Governor General, Dame Sylvia Cartwright stated, "Today the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior' symbolises the resting place of all our fallen servicemen and women, known and unknown" (Cartwright cited in Shoebridge, 2009, p. 7) The ceremony on Armistice Day 2004 commemorated the 250 000 New Zealanders who served in overseas wars and the 30 000 who lost their lives in conflict (Rt. Hon. Clarke cited in Shoebridge, 2009, p. 8).

The Tomb of the Unknown Warrior, is thus a 'national building' event acting so as to symbolise an important aspect of New Zealand cultural memory. It demonstrates the public significance of the acts of the fallen soldiers and acts as a shrine for those many New Zealanders' whose lives were affected by this terrible loss.

The actual details of the death of the 'Unknown Warrior' are not known, however, this is precisely the point. The body is that of a soldier who lost his life in France on the Western front, between April 1916 and November 1918, found without identification other than that of a fragment of New Zealand uniform, who was buried in a Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery. The grave had a simple headstone, bearing the memorial 'A New Zealand soldier of the Great War known unto God'. The mystery thus contains both an anxiety and a grief, for those who were honoured in named graves were a relatively recent development.

Kingsley Baird. The Tomb of the Unknown Warrior. Photo by Guy Robinson.

Many of those who fell in the European wars were not so 'fortunate'. Shoebridge relates how on the Gallipoli Peninsula, for example, three years would pass after the battle until the Allies could return to the field to retrieve the fallen, many of whom had been buried in mass graves and temporary graves. Many of those who fell on the Western Front in France had no burial at

all, or whose bodies could not be identified. Some 2721 New Zealanders fell at Gallipolis; 12 483 on the Western Front and of these 67% 'disappeared, were recovered but not identified, or were buried at sea' (after Gallipolis) (2009, p. 10).

Though there were memorials in Europe to those lost, at Thiepal in France, the Mennin gate in Belgium and Cape Helliers at Gallipolis, these were multi-national. Following Prime Minister Massey's wishes a later government sought a ceremony and shrine for the 're-internment' of New Zealand's fallen. The Ministry of Culture and Heritage identified four significant cultural functions for the 'Tomb of the Unknown Warrior': a suitable resting place for an 'unknown soldier', a fitting memorial to all who have died in war, a place of respectful contemplation and reflection, a reminder of the ideals, interests, and selfless service to the nation (Shoebridge, 2009, 12). It is as Gregory relates, "part of a sustained and creative effort to give meaning and purpose to the terrifying and unexpected experience of mass death" (Gregory, 1994, p. 19).

The design of the tomb was carried out by Robert Jahnke of Ngāti Porou and the construction design and refurbishment of the exterior and surrounds of the National War Museum was awarded to Kingsley Baird Design Team of Wellington. The symbolic features of the design contain references that form a part of the New Zealand/Aotearoa cultural imaginary. The central motif if expressed through the Southern cross constellation, and the use symbols and language reflects the 'unique identity of [New Zealand] land and people" (Shoebridge, 2009, 14). The concept for the ceremony and New Zealand 're-internment' is that the warrior is guided back by the stars of The Southern Cross on his journey back to New Zealand (a theme we have already encountered in our discussion of Polynesian navigation). The distance from the foreign land of the battlefield is signified on the base of the tomb by a 'night sky of granite inlaid with light grey Takaka marble crosses'. The crosses represent the warriors 'fallen companions'. A Karanga in Maori and English lines the base of the tomb symbolising the calling of the warrior back to the New Zealand homeland, whilst a cloak of bronze provides reference to the New Zealand national flag through decoration of inlaid pounamu crosses. (Shoebridge, 2009, p. 14).

Thus the symbolism of the tomb is intricately identified by the emblems of national sovereignty, through geographical references, the expression of bi-cultural significance, and through a sense of social and cultural commemoration. The purpose is to transcend earlier

grief and provide collective memory. The site of the 'Tomb of the Unknown Warrior' at the National War Memorial, in Mount Cook, Wellington, received a formal blessing on 13 May 2003. The 'journey and return home' of the unknown warrior began on 6 November 2004 with the formal recovery from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission office and its return to Wellington on 10 November. A ceremony was held at the Royal New Zealand Air Force base at Rongotai. The cortege arrived in parliament grounds, where the defence force formally handed over the remains to the nation marked by a 'lie-in-state in the legislative council Chamber. A memorial service was held in Wellington at the Cathedral of St. Paul on 11 November, the 'Unknown Warrior' was then processed through the streets of Wellington to the final resting place at the National war Memorial (Shoebridge, 2009, p. 20). At the internment ceremony a poem by Vincent O'Sullivan was read, '*Homecoming - TeHokinga Mai*', and a choral lament of Timothy Hurd's '*Memento for an Unknown Warrior'* performed by The Tudor Consort.

'Homecoming – Te Hokinga Mai' by Vincent O'Sullivan

The figure at the paddock's edge,
The shadow in the football team,
The memory beside the hedge,
The notes behind a song that seem
Another song, a different dream –
The past we harvest that was yours,
The present that you gave for ours.

The life in places once your own
And left behind, and what was said
To husband, father, lover, son,
Are stories that were lost instead,
That ran to darkness where you bled –
Are what we owe you, we who say
'See morning in its usual way

Moving along the ridges, the bright
Day broadening on the river,
The warmth of cities wakening, the sight
Of roads ahead and doors forever
Onto families, friends, whatever
Life allows us, one another –
What we have and you do not, our brother.'

Solemn the speeches and the drum
That draw you to the unguessed tomb,
But more than these, the sounds that come

To us as once to you, from
Bach and backyard, from marae and town,
Our standing where you too have stood
'Now and forever, home is good'.

O'Sullivan's poem is a commentary on the 'homecoming' of all those called to national service – the flickering edges of dawn at the border of recognition. It speaks to the moment of pride and humility of the soldiers return, the familiarity of New Zealand life after the tumult and dislocation of overseas campaigning – a salutatory to those who fought for origins worth returning to.

When considering the question of state sponsored remembrance of war, citizens are usually inspired by patriotism or to give it the political term, nationalism. Thus while the symbolism of the remembrance of war may be a matter for civic debate and the aesthetics for government commission, and the act of remembrance may be both personal and public, the question remains whether the patriotic or nationalistic love of one's country is a matter of unassailable virtue, or a source of mindless obedience which may in turn inspire militarism? Furthermore, do citizens have an obligation to one another that goes beyond the concept of the duty they have to one-another in families or communities? Are these obligations (for national remembrance) based on mutual consent or of the form of a social contact? How does the symbolism of our national memorials such as the 'Tomb of the Unknown Warrior' contribute to patriotism and how does the experience of them contribute to nationalism? For Rousseau, communal attachments and identities necessarily supplement the concept of a universal humanity. But at the same time, national remembrance may be a 'limiting' principle that intensifies fellow feeling. Do fellow citizens bound together by common memory, shared understandings and real or imaginary communities, owe more to one-another than they do to people who do not share this national identity and how does this change over time as political and regional influences shift? The ability of the state to regulate the conditions of membership through tacit and official support of national memorials is a form of communal interdependence in the construction of civic identities. So there is a tension between the idea that the state is an arbiter of our own moral obligations in acts of public commemoration or that such events or symbols reflect obligations can based on the idea of communal narrative which may share in or not.

References:

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