

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON WORLD WAR I

A Roundtable Discussion

The centennial of the outbreak of World War I in the summer of 1914 has already produced a wave of new books, exhibitions, documentaries, films, articles, websites, and research projects on the war and will continue to do so over the course of the next years, at least until the centenary of the armistice in 2018. One might witness this rising tide with mixed feelings: the arbitrariness of anniversaries and the ambivalent suggestive power of round numbers are a topic which merits reflection in and of its own. But the First World War has continued to be of lasting and even growing interest for historians over the past decades independently of anniversaries. Jay Winter and Antoine Prost have noted that the number of volumes that were catalogued in the British Library under the rubric of ›The World War, 1914 to 1918‹ quadrupled between 1980 and 2001, and Roger Chickering gathered further evidence for the ›enduring charm of the Great War‹ in 2011.¹ At the same time, these last decades have witnessed a number of methodological shifts and changes within the historical profession, which also affected the study of the First World War. The centennial might therefore be a good opportunity for taking stock of the current state of affairs in World War I studies and for pondering their possible future directions. This is why our journal has decided to contribute to the rising tide of World War I publications with a roundtable discussion.

1 Jay Winter/Antoine Prost, *The Great War in History. Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present*, Cambridge 2005, p. 17; Roger Chickering, The Enduring Charm of the Great War: Some Reflections on Methodological Issues, in: Sven Oliver Müller/Cornelius Torp (eds), *Imperial Germany Revisited. Continuing Debates and New Perspectives*, New York 2011, pp. 201-212.

We have chosen this format in order to capture different voices on a variety of aspects of World War I studies. One of the most important shifts of the recent years certainly is what can be called the ›global turn‹ in historiography. This encompasses both the expanding scope of historical studies and the growing internationalization of the historical profession, facilitated by the new possibilities of digitalization and electronic communication. One indicator of this trend within World War I studies is the online encyclopedia ›1914-1918-online‹, which offers a global history of the First World War with an international team of editors and contributors.² On a much smaller scale, we also strove to gather a multi-national group of contributors for our roundtable discussion in order to transcend the national or Eurocentric perspective, which still often shapes accounts of the First World War. We are therefore quite happy that *Santanu Das* (King's College London), *Gerhard Hirschfeld* (Stuttgart University), *Heather Jones* (London School of Economics and Political Science), *Jennifer Keene* (Chapman University), *Boris Kolonitskii* (European University at St. Petersburg), and *Jay Winter* (Yale University) have agreed to participate in our roundtable discussion. They all answered four questions on 1) the new global perspective on World War I, 2) methodological changes in World War I studies, 3) the long-term significance of World War I, and 4) the relationship between academic research and public memory of the ›Great War‹.

In their answers, a good deal of agreement between the different academic and generational perspectives comes to light, but also some significant differences remain. In contrast to the heated debates about the *Kriegsschuldfrage* during the inter-war years, these interventions show the emergence of a higher degree of international understanding over questions of the First World War. The greater temporal distance and the death of the last direct participants have removed some of the emotional intensity of earlier interpretative conflicts, especially since the process of European integration has rendered nationalist perspectives less relevant. As a result, recent studies like Christopher Clark's *Sleepwalkers* have been able to offer a more nuanced picture of responsibility for the outbreak of the conflict. At the same time the methodological changes towards transnational and global perspectives demonstrate that there is still a lot to be researched, discussed, and communicated both on the level of academic historiography and of public memory. From the role of gender to everyday experiences, from the Eastern front to the world wide implications, a whole host of topics still awaits a new generation of historical research.

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2 <<http://www.1914-1918-online.net>>. From a primarily German perspective, but also international in scope, see <<http://www.erster-weltkrieg.clio-online.de>>. The German Historical Institute Paris organizes the blog ›La Grand Guerre. The Global History of World War I‹: <<http://grandeguerre.hypotheses.org>>. For some new book publications in this context, see e.g. Daniel Marc Segesser, *Der Erste Weltkrieg in globaler Perspektive*, Wiesbaden 2010; Lawrence Sondhaus, *World War One. The Global Revolution*, Cambridge 2011; Andrew Tait Jarboe/Richard Fogarty (eds), *Empires in World War I. Shifting Frontiers and Imperial Dynamics in a Global Conflict*, London 2014; Stefan Karner/Philipp Lesiak (eds), *Erster Weltkrieg. Globaler Konflikt – lokale Folgen. Neue Perspektiven*, Innsbruck 2014; *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 40 (2014) 2: *Der Erste Weltkrieg in globaler Perspektive*, ed. by Oliver Janz.

1. Global Perspective vs. National Narratives

For a long time the history of the World Wars was written primarily from different national perspectives. The recent trend toward global history, however, has influenced the perception and interpretation of World War I as well. Thus, the dominant understanding of the First World War as a major conflict of Western Europe from August 1914 until November 1918 has lost its distinctiveness by shifting the emphasis to the Eastern front and by focusing on the beginnings of decolonization. Likewise, the global-historical perspective relativizes the meaning of the war when looking at, for example, the involvement of the colonies or the aggrandizement of Japan. How do you think this global perspective relates to the national narratives of German, British or French history of the First World War? What new insights can be gained by dealing with the First World War from the perspective of global history?

Gerhard Hirschfeld: The impact of global perspectives on the historiography of the First World War is obvious: no serious scholar writing about the radicalization or barbarization of warfare, the deportation and employment of foreign labor or processes of migration during and after the war, can do so without looking to related phenomena outside Europe. But even the established narratives of relatively well-known battles like the first battle of the Somme in 1916 or the three Allied campaigns in Flanders between 1915 and 1917 cannot be told without describing and analyzing the strong participation of non-European nations as soldiers or (mostly Asian) laborers behind the fronts. The use of some 485,000 non-white soldiers from the French colonies and 160,000 from the British colonies in Europe not only became a fierce topic of cultural debate and propaganda in Germany – thereby mirroring European and North American patterns of racism –, but was a constant reminder that this war, already in its initial phase, had acquired a global significance.

The global character was further enhanced by the expansion of the war into the Ottoman Empire (involving large parts of the Middle East from the Russian Caucasus down to Syria, Palestine and Egypt) and into the German colonies (Africa, China and the Pacific), by the active participation of British Dominions in the Allied war effort and, most significantly, by the entries of Japan (however marginal) and the USA (as a decisive factor) into the war. These developments certainly left their marks on colonial as well as on non-colonial territories, systems of governments, rulers and populations, but they also had serious repercussions for the European belligerent states and societies. Nevertheless, after 1918 Europe – with the noticeable exception of defeated Germany and an equally shattered Austrian-Hungarian empire – remained a centre of imperialist activities around the world. With regard to the colonial systems the outcome of the First World War initiated and accelerated a process of political and social transformation

that brought about decolonization on a large scale after the Second World War. Furthermore the results of WWI enhanced the national self-consciousness of Dominions and colonies alike and fostered political and economic ambitions to a large extent.

Despite the fact that many global aspects of the First World War still require additional research – hardly anything is known about the specific ›war experience‹ of indigenous inhabitants or of ›colored‹ soldiers serving alongside white troops – the non-European perspective has established itself within any national, or for that matter, transnational narrative. Even micro-historical or local and regional studies of the war can be accommodated within the framework of global or transnational histories.

Jay Winter: Most of us recognize that we have moved into a phase of writing about the Great War which is transnational and global in character. The term ›global‹ describes both the tendency to write about the war in more than European terms and to see the conflict as trans-European, trans-Atlantic, and beyond. Here was the first war among industrialized countries, reaching the Middle East and Africa, the Falkland Islands and China, drawing soldiers into the epicenter in Europe from Vancouver to Capetown to Bombay and to Adelaide. Here was a war that gave birth to the Turkey of Atatürk and to the Soviet Union of Lenin and Stalin. Demands for decolonization arose from a war that had promised self-determination and had produced very little of the kind. Economic troubles arose directly out of the war, and these were sufficiently serious to undermine the capacity of the older imperial powers to pay for their imperial and quasi-imperial footholds around the world.

A word or two may be useful to distinguish the international approach, common to much writing about the war both today and in the recent past, from what I have termed the transnational approach to the history of the Great War. For nearly a century, the Great War was framed in terms of a system of international relations in which the national and imperial levels of conflict and cooperation were taken as given. Transnational history does not start with one state and move on to others, but takes multiple levels of historical experience as given, levels which are both below and above the national level. Thus the history of mutiny is transnational, in that it happened in different armies for different reasons, some of which are strikingly similar to the sources of protest and refusal in other armies. So is the history of finance, technology, war economies, logistics, and command. The history of commemoration also happened on many levels, and the national is not necessarily the most significant, not the most enduring. The peace treaties following the Great War show the meaning of the transnational in other ways. Now we can see that the war was both the apogee and the beginning of the end of imperial power, spanning and eroding national and imperial boundaries. Erez Manela's work on ›the Wilsonian moment‹ is a case in point. He reconfigures the meaning of the Versailles settlement by exploring its unintended consequences in stimulating movements of national liberation in Egypt, India, Korea, and China. Instead of telling us about the interplay of Great Power politics, he shows how non-Europeans invented their own version of Wilson in their search for a kind of

self-determination that he, alongside Lloyd George, Clemenceau, and Orlando, was unprepared to offer to them. Who could have imagined that the decision these men took to award rights to Shandong Province, formerly held by Germany, not to China but to Japan would lead to major rioting and the formation of the Chinese Communist Party?³

Historians of the revolutionary moment in Europe itself between 1917 and 1921 have approached their subject more and more as a transnational phenomenon. After all, both revolutionaries and the forces of order who worked to destroy them were well aware of what may be termed the cultural transfer of revolutionary (and counter-revolutionary) strategy, tactics, and violence. In recent years, these exchanges have been analyzed at the urban and regional levels, helping us to see the complexity of a story somewhat obscured by treating it solely in national terms. Comparative urban history has established the striking parallels between the challenges urban populations faced in different warring states. Now we can answer in the affirmative the question as to whether there is a metropolitan history of warfare. In important respects, the residents of Paris, London, and Berlin shared more with one another than they did with their respective rural compatriots. These experienced communities had a visceral reality somewhat lacking even in the imagined communities of the nation.

Here we must be sensitive to the way contemporaries used the language of nation and empire to describe loyalties and affiliations of a much smaller level of aggregation. A journalist asking British troops on the Western front whether they were fighting for the Empire got a ›yes‹ from one soldier. His mates asked him what he meant. The answer was that he was fighting for the Empire Music Hall in Hackney, a working-class district of London. This attachment to the local and the familiar was utterly transnational.⁴ So was the use of transnational terms like ›empire‹ to describe local habits, languages, and ways of life. I like to see the transnational as completely compatible with the national, in that the awareness of the significance of the local and the global will enable much more sophisticated national history of the Great War to emerge.

Heather Jones: At the time it was fought, the Great War was seen as a ›world‹ war – it was only in the post-1945 period that it came to be depicted as primarily a European conflict in comparison to the Second World War. So the current scholarly interest in assessing the war's ›global‹ nature is something of a rediscovery rather than completely new. Moreover, the reality is that the shift to discussing the First World War in terms of global history has developed far more in some countries than in others. Germany and the UK have really been the pioneers of this shift, in the UK advanced by Hew Strachan, in particular, who has focused on the global political effects of the

3 Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment. Self-determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism*, Oxford 2007.

4 Jay Winter, *British Popular Culture in the First World War*, in: Richard Stites/Aviel Roshwald (eds), *Popular Culture in the First World War*, Cambridge 1999, pp. 138-159.

conflict, and in Germany, influenced by the work of Sebastian Conrad which has placed the Kaiserreich in a global cultural comparative perspective; it is much more difficult to yet see the same new ›global‹ approach in the French, Belgian or the Italian historiography although nascent hints of new trends in this direction are beginning to appear there. And for certain countries the national history of the war is still under-researched which makes it really difficult to integrate global and national levels. Think of Russia, Bulgaria or Greece, for example, where we still lack well-researched national histories of the war experience and where so many dimensions of the war's social, political, economic and cultural effects remain unexplored; the same applies for many of the Austro-Hungarian successor states, where the national history is only now being written.

Moreover, in some countries the war's centrality to national myths means that trying to reframe it in terms of global trends or international changes is also relatively unpopular – Australian and New Zealand historiographies still focus very much on the national, for example, and the public in these countries and in the UK is deeply reluctant to engage with the war in terms of a global event, preferring to repeat sacralized national and local historical accounts. I would even go so far as to say that in Western Europe there is a continuing divide between the increasingly globalizing and comparative academic historiographies and the nationally-framed public understanding of the history of the war. In sum, the shift to depicting the war in global terms – as a worldwide conflict – which incorporates its major effects on Africa, Asia and the Americas (exemplified by the work of Xu Guoqi on China and the Great War⁵) is definitely a visible new trend, although it is still a limited one. But the key issue is that the national histories of the war are not exhausted: we lack detailed national histories for so many countries still, particularly in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, areas where the war had tumultuous effects.

Perhaps the value of a more ›global‹ approach is that it can highlight those areas where national historiographies contradict each other or where questions that are more developed in particular national historiographies can influence less developed ones. For example, we know a lot about 1914 mobilization in Western Europe now, but what of regional cities in Russia or the Ottoman Empire? How did they react to the war outbreak? Likewise we have had a wave of new research on wartime occupation in Belgium and Northern France but what of the occupation of northern Italy by Austria-Hungary – which is only now becoming a developed research topic? What of occupation in the Baltics, again only now being scrutinized? And we have developed historiographical questions about how the war led to cultural encounters between different nationalities but these have been applied much more to Western Europe than elsewhere. What of the relationship between Allied troops and the Italian population? Or between British and French troops and the ethnically diverse local population in

5 Xu Guoqi, *China and the Great War. China's Pursuit of a New National Identity and Internationalization*, Cambridge 2005; idem, *Strangers on the Western Front. Chinese Workers in the Great War*, Cambridge 2011.

Salonika? What of veterans in the post-war Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Poland or Hungary? These are new fields now opening up with work by historians such as John Paul Newman and Julia Eichenberg.

The one area where there has been a very successful shift to a global historiography is in the study of the experience of colonial troops, on the Western Front and in Africa. Here there has been excellent new research done, particularly on Indian troops, by historians such as Santanu Das and George Morton Jack and on Askari by Michelle Moyd, and the diversification of our understanding of the range of ethnicities who actually fought in the war has really influenced museum and popular depictions in the UK and France, for example. The Great War can simply no longer be portrayed as a ›white man's war‹ – as it was in the mid-twentieth century. If I could make a prediction it is that we are going to see a range of new work on the Middle East and the First World War, as there is growing interest in this topic, and there is now a wave of young Turkish scholars working on the Ottoman war effort. Obviously this theme links to new histories of colonialism and imperialism, themes that are also becoming the focus of renewed interest among First World War historians. The war fronts in Palestine and in Mesopotamia are areas of renewed interest and research and the war is now often presented as laying the basis for the ›modern Middle East‹. So the idea of the Great War as an ›imperial‹ war is currently enjoying a major revival and renewed scrutiny as part of the shift back to the idea of the war as a ›global‹ conflict.

Jennifer Keene: As Heather, Jay, and Gerhard suggest, the new global approach to studying the First World War teaches us that much of what we assumed about the war was wrong. The global approach challenges the traditional core and periphery model in which scholars examine the experiences of non-European nations and territories primarily through their relationships with the main European combatant nations. The global approach instead allows us to consider how the war transformed international relations within regions such as North America, re-emphasizing the importance of geography in world history. Within North America the war accelerated the coordination of American and Canadian diplomatic goals and domestic policies, strengthening bi-lateral relations between the two nations. To the south the war unsettled U.S.-Mexican relations, ultimately prompting the United States to use force to assert its economic, political, and military dominance. Most importantly, the war amplified American influence within the Western Hemisphere. Moving the spotlight away from U.S.-European interactions illuminates how the war-related economic, political, and integration of North America hastened the emergence of the United States as a twentieth-century world power. The choice, therefore, is not just between national and global. Regional studies are also needed to adequately assess the transformative impact of the war.

The global studies approach also allows scholars to focus on the large-scale migrations that the war put into motion as the movement of men, goods, and ideas accelerated. The globalization of the world economy meant that millions of civilians

worldwide felt the war's impact even if they never left their homes. The best example of this is the quick diffusion of the Spanish Influenza around the globe, a catastrophic epidemic that war-related travel intensified. The interactions of colonized and subjugated peoples mobilized to serve their imperial rulers laid the basis for transnational political movements such as Pan-Africanism. The broad circulation of Woodrow Wilson's ideas on the right to self-determination inspired anti-colonial activists within Asia and the Middle East. Placed in a global context Wilson appears less like an inept diplomat who failed to ensure permanent peace in Europe and more as the intellectual who (somewhat unintentionally) encouraged anti-colonial independence movements to flourish.

The global studies approach offers a safeguard against the tendency to see a particular nation's experience as representative of the entire World War I experience. Paying attention to battlefields other than the Western Front challenges the acceptance of trench warfare as the singularly distinctive battlefield experience. Integrating the Eastern Front into the central narrative even calls into question one of the most basic assumptions made about that war: that it ended on November 11, 1918. Within the politically shattered areas of Eastern Europe the fighting extended well beyond this date.

Finally, taking a global perspective offers more than a way to tell the bird's eye story. This approach also helps recapture the diverse wartime experiences of communities within nations, and presents an opportunity to connect those experiences to the global war. This is where Gerhard's comment that we hardly know anything about ›coloured soldiers serving alongside white troops‹ is telling. There has actually been a flurry of new works on non-white soldiers, but these works tend to connect to discrete national histories rather than to the overall narrative of the war. The multiple new works on the African American soldier experience, for instance, are framed within the context of American history and consequently read by few World War I historians without an interest in the American war experience. The same can be said of works on African and Indian troops. John Morrow's *The Great War. An Imperial History* (2004) attempted to place the collective experiences of non-white soldiers into a global framework. Are we overlaying these experiences onto pre-existing interpretative frameworks, or using this scholarship to challenge existing interpretative frameworks? Perhaps Santanu would like to take up this question.

Santanu Das: As Heather says, the Great War was viewed as a ›world war‹ at the time and during the war years, Germany referred to the conflict as ›world war‹ (*Weltkrieg*). Interestingly, it is in imperial histories such as Charles Lucas's *The Empire at War* (1921) and Albert Sarraut's *La mise en valeur des colonies françaises* (1923) that we have some of the earliest records of extra-European dimensions (though framed within the ideology of the age and the lines of enquiry are very different). In recent years, there has been a big swell of interest in the global nature of the conflict. The global and transnational direction in First World War studies was much-needed and now looks

irreversible – no serious scholar can ignore the global dimension any more – but we may need to clarify and put more pressure on these terms and approaches. If ›local/global‹ is the new mantra, one has to be both historically nuanced and adventurous in how the two relate (and sometimes do not relate) to each other and address both the excitements and challenges we face.

For even after the ›global‹ and ›transnational‹ turn, the history of the First World War remains starkly asymmetrical: we have highly developed histories of the role of the Western European nations and the former (white) dominions such as Australia, Canada or New Zealand but we know comparatively very little, for example, about the experience of the 2 million Africans (particularly those who served in Africa) or the 1.5 million Indians (particularly in the extra-European theatres) or the 100,000 Vietnamese who were involved. In 2003, Gail Braybon noted that ›more words have been written about the British war poets than about all the non-white troops put together.‹⁶ There were more than four million non-white men (including combatants and non-combatants) who served all over the world. I should add that there has been some excellent work on Africa and the First World War by scholars such as David Killingray, Marc Michel, Joe Lunn, Melvin Page and Anne Samson, and more recently, there is an increasing interest in Asia but still there's a long way to go. While there have been some military and social studies, cultural and literary history of the war in the colonial non-white sphere is yet to take off. Or indeed works on the processes of memory (or its erasure) and memorialization of the First World War. For example, a look at the inscription on the India Gate (All-India War Memorial) at Delhi – ›To the dead of the Indian armies who fell honoured in France and Flanders, Mesopotamia and Persia, East Africa, Gallipoli and elsewhere in the near and the far-east and in sacred memory also of those whose names are recorded and who fell in India or the north-west frontier and during the Third Afghan War‹ – reveals not just the war's global reach for the subjects of the empire but how it gets connected to other, more local, conflicts in particular national or regional memories and contexts.

Moreover, the colonial home-front, particularly in Asia and Africa, remains one of the weakest links in First World War history. Lack of adequate or accessible source-material, coupled with Eurocentricism in the past, is largely responsible. So, within the colonial context, there may be a slight danger of jumping the gun if one moves straight onto the transnational and comparative perspectives without having fully developed national histories of these former colonies' war experience in the first place – whether social, military or cultural. At the same time, a ›transnational‹ approach reveals hitherto unknown or unnoticed perspectives and rectifies many of the blindspots of national narratives. For example, the Indian troops would have had more experiences in common with the Senegalese or Vietnamese troops than with the elite Indian nationalists. I agree with Jay that the national and transnational approaches are compatible and can illuminate each other more fully.

6 Gail Braybon, Introduction, in: idem (ed.), *Evidence, History and the Great War. Historians and the Impact of 1914–1918*, New York 2003, pp. 1-29, here p. 28.

What can be sometimes frustrating is that the conceptual categories, focal points and timelines important for Europe are adopted as the parameters to understand non-European war experiences. Rather than just investigating the well-known battles and trying to find for instance the African or Indian ›Tommy‹ in the Somme, one needs to go beyond these dates and sites: for example, for the Indians, it is the Battle of Neuve Chapelle in March 1915 rather than the Somme, and Mesopotamia rather than the Western Front that carry special resonance. Similarly, other dates and sites will have particular relevance for other nations/ethnic groups. The ethnic and cultural diversity of the troops in Ypres (Indian, Senegalese, Vietnamese) is receiving increasing attention which is excellent, but what about the East African campaign which was ethnically almost equally diverse? The Western Front still dominates popular memory. Moreover, for many countries, the First World War may well not be the defining or the only narrative: think of the Easter Rising in Dublin in 1916 or the Amritsar massacre in the Punjab in 1919 and how they affect war memory in these countries.

Boris Kolonitskii: In my opinion the trend towards global history isn't quite so global as far as some academic traditions and schools are concerned. Our research of World War I is still based mostly on national archives, and national archives are designed in a way that fits much better the national history perspective. Of course there are some good comparative research projects, and the famous comparison of Berlin, London and Paris is a good example.⁷ However, even within that successful project scholars faced serious methodological challenges: the asymmetrical structure of the British, French and German archives was a serious problem for researchers. I'm afraid that bringing Rome, St. Petersburg (Petrograd), Istanbul or Vienna into a similar comparative project would be quite problematic.

There are specific difficulties for bringing Russian history – my field of research – into a global history of the war. This endeavor faces special obstacles and has special significance at the same time. The First World War is still described as a ›forgotten war‹ in my country – some books and documentary films are titled in that way. Actually this is not correct: even within the Soviet period the war was ›remembered‹, though in a special way – as the recent research of Karen Petrone vividly demonstrates.⁸ However, the history of the war was overshadowed by the history of the 1917 revolution, some research themes were neglected, while all research in that period was censored. There is a great interest in the First World War in contemporary Russia, though that curiosity is shaped mostly by a national history discourse. In that sense Soviet historiography was global: it treated the ›world system of imperialism‹ – the ›last stage of capitalism‹ – as the main cause of the war, and it perceived the Russian revolution of 1917 as a global event. To some extent many contemporary Russian

7 Jay Winter/Jean-Louis Robert (eds), *Capital Cities at War. London, Paris, Berlin, 1914–1919*, 2 vols, Cambridge 1997/2007.

8 Karen Petrone, *The Great War in Russian Memory*, Bloomington 2011.

historians of the war are repeating the earlier stages of the Western historiography.⁹ This trend is also in accord with the contemporary official politics of memory which outline ›positive‹ aspects of Russian history – therefore scholars are invited to demonstrate the effectiveness of the patriotic mobilization of 1914–1917 and the heroism of Russian soldiers. We can see a strong trend of ›de-globalization‹ in contemporary Russian historiography. Some public historians just quote the patriotic discourse of 1914 and even use it as a substitute for their own description or analysis. And there is no place for the 1917 revolution in such a vision of the war. It is quite predictable that such an approach could dominate the 2014 anniversary: some scholars and politicians in Russia even speak about ›celebrating‹ this event!

In such an environment the special emphasis on the Eastern front in contemporary research has multiple aims: it helps to bring the region into the global – and comparative – historiography. At the same time it helps also to bring regional scholars into the international community of historians: they could apply different themes and methods elaborated in classical research of the war, they could benefit from previous discussions instead of repeating them. This is relevant for the ›pure‹ academic research and for projects addressed for public audiences.

2. Methodological Approaches

Until the last third of the twentieth century the history of the First World War was primarily written as a political and military history. In the 1980s and 1990s a social and cultural analysis of the Great War began, discovering, for example, *Feldpostbriefe* (letters sent from the front) as an important source for a ›bottom-up‹ approach to the history of wars, emphasizing the term ›war experience‹ and extending the focus from the fighting to the home front. What recent trends do you notice about contemporary research on the First World War? Is there a renaissance of political history and diplomatic history and a return towards former topics, such as the question of war guilt (cf. Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*)? Are new general trends like the history of the senses, emotions, or objects also reflected in the research on the Great War – or should they be?

Jennifer Keene: In one of the most fruitful new methodological trends, cultural and social historians have redefined what constitutes political history. In time of war, every action in some respect can be considered a political act. The earlier social history emphasis on documenting wartime experiences from ›the bottom up‹ for the sake of

9 See for important observations on different periods of Western historiography Winter/Prost, *The Great War in History* (fn. 1), pp. 6-34, 192-213.

inclusiveness has now evolved into a more sophisticated awareness that political history needs to account for more than just the conversations or decisions of political leaders.

This new approach has permanently altered our understanding of how societies mobilized, governments governed, and armies fought. Historians now mine soldiers' letters for more than evidence of the horrors of modern warfare. Break-through studies have detailed how implicit negotiations between officers and men defined the terms of obedience and discipline, putting a new spin on the lingering question of whether soldiers were coerced or consented to fight. New scholarship reveals that even the ›learning curve‹ that all armies experienced over the course of the war emanated, not just from the closed door strategy sessions of generals, but from the field experiences of commanders and enlisted men.

Some questions, such as the origins of the war or who was responsible for the ultimate victory, remain with us in part because a conclusive answer seems elusive. Nonetheless the insights provided by social and cultural history have permanently altered how historians collectively approach these questions. For every new book recounting the diplomatic and political choices leaders made that brought their countries one step closer to war, another analyzes the public's reactions to the growing crisis. Similarly, the question of who won the war now encompasses not just victories on the battlefields or at the peace conferences, but also the postwar commemorative cultures that arose in belligerent nations.

One exciting methodological trend centers on contextualizing and dissecting iconographic and material objects. Historians are now scrutinizing posters, postcards, and photographs to ascertain the politics behind their creation, dissemination and consumption. The visual conversations that occurred within communities about the war offer yet another method for connecting the social experience of war to the politics dictating its prosecution. In 1915 Belgian women embroidered flour sacks as gifts for the American farm communities that had donated the flour to alleviate civilian sufferings in occupied areas. When these farmers in turn displayed these sacks in their town shop windows, they were making a political statement about what role they believed a then-neutral America should play in the war. These farm communities viewed neutrality as giving Americans a responsibility to aid civilians in need; Wilson placed heavy emphasis on negotiating a ›peace without victory‹. These types of investigations into material culture force us to acknowledge that political leaders and citizens shared the power to define what neutrality meant. Through their actions, not just their words, Americans debated the scope of the nation's humanitarian wartime mission.

Heather Jones: With regard to methodological approaches, it is clear that the ›bottom-up‹ approach remains very important. At present, the historiography of the war is seeing a revival of interest in the civilian experience of the conflict – taking over from the focus on the combatant experience in the 1990s. There is major interest in the experience of civilians as refugees, internees in camps, deportees and also as populations

enduring enemy occupation. This is particularly the case for the Eastern front. Civilian suffering has also come to the forefront with the recent integration of the history of the Armenian genocide into the history of the First World War. Indeed, historians are now considering the extent to which the civilian sufferings of the Russian Civil War, the Polish-Soviet War and the Greco-Turkish War are also part of a continuum of Great War violence that exploded into these later conflicts. In sum, ordinary civilians' sufferings during the war are now at the forefront of new research. In part this is because since the collapse of Communism we can research beyond Western Europe where most of the fighting was restricted to battlefields: the high death rates of Serbian and Italian civilians in Austro-Hungarian internment camps, for example, can now be studied.

It is also important to clarify that the idea of a ›bottom-up‹ approach has evolved differently in different countries and is not universal yet; we still need more bottom-up approaches to America's war, for example. The history of the ›war experience‹ which was associated with the study of the war from the perspective of ordinary people has really dominated much German historiography in the past twenty years. More broadly, in terms of methodology the social history of the war, which pioneered the bottom-up approach in the 1960s and 1970s, morphed, in the 1990s, into cultural history in much of Western Europe, and has since dominated First World War historiography. However, this dominance has varied greatly from country to country: in Italy, for example, social history approaches remained strong.

The current dominance of cultural history approaches in First World War Studies overall is unlikely to change but throughout the past forty years, political histories have continued to be published and remained very popular in British academia in particular, but also in the United States. Therefore to claim a current revival of ›political‹ approaches is over-stated: they never totally disappeared in the English-language historiography (in contrast to France where the French historiography of the war has eschewed traditional political history approaches for some time). There has, however, been a revival of interest in the July Crisis in the past two years as evidenced by the popularity of Christopher Clark's book *The Sleepwalkers* and also by the fact that other historians plan to publish new books on the July Crisis. But this is not a ›revival‹ in political history: it never went away in the UK and the US, both countries where the military history of the war has also remained very strong. The success of Christopher Clark's book is rather a sign of the increasingly close interaction between European historians since the 1990s with more war histories being translated, sold and read across multiple European countries than before due to the development of common publishing markets and online sales making it easier to know of foreign publications and to buy them.

In terms of the latest historiographical methodologies – history of the emotions or the history of objects – there have been quite a number of new First World War studies that have used these very effectively to enrich our understanding: historians such as Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau or Michael Roper have shown how useful these approaches can be, particularly for topics like ›domesticity‹ in the trenches or combat weaponry or

grief. This trend is likely to continue as it relates closely to cultural history methodologies more generally which still dominate in Germany, France, Ireland, Belgium and, to a lesser extent, in Britain.

Santanu Das: First World War studies today are characterized by a variety of methodical approaches – military, political, cultural, anthropological, literary, sociological – and each has its own distinct importance. One of the most important shifts in recent years has been from the military model of the war as ›combat‹ to a more expansive and nuanced cultural model of the war as ›conflict‹, affecting whole communities, including women, civilians and children. The other is the comparative and interdisciplinary dimension. The work of Jay Winter and John Horne, among others, has played a key role in both. I would also like to mention the role played by feminist cultural historians and literary scholars in recovering civilian and women's experience and writing which has not just added to the corpus but has basically changed the way, as Margaret Higonnet notes, we ›reconceptualize war – and therefore the vocabulary of war.‹¹⁰ I have in mind an anthology such as Higonnet's *Lines of Fire: Women Writers of the First World War* (1999) which is international, comparative, intimate. But at the same time, I don't think military or political history ever went away – they retain a very important place. Thankfully it is not a Darwinian struggle: one kind of history does not have to supplant another but each rather helps the other for a fuller understanding. Moreover, with reference to the recovery of the experiences and memories of colonial troops and labourers – many of whom were non-literate – as well as women in those countries, we need to go far beyond official colonial archives, and devise fresh methodologies nuanced to specific sources and contexts. Just to give one example: I am thinking of the extraordinary audio-recordings of soldiers' voices and songs done by the Royal Prussian Phonographic Commission – there are more than 2,000 of these recordings in the Humboldt Sound Archives, including a substantial number by non-white soldiers – and how a resource like this necessitates an innovative and interdisciplinary methodology.

The emotional and sensuous dimensions are fundamental, I believe, to understanding war, particularly combat, experience – and this is not new. Think of the letters and what moves us about them. Reading Isaac Rosenberg's poetry, Siegfried Sassoon observed: ›Sensuous frontline experience is there, hateful and repellent, unforgettable and inescapable.‹¹¹ Trench experience marks a watershed in the history of (male) emotion and the senses. This is one of the reasons for the singular power and popularity of war literature, particularly the poetry of Owen and Sassoon which, some historians fear, has almost hijacked First World War memory. Interestingly it was the literary critic Paul Fussell who with his seminal if controversial book *The Great War*

10 Margaret Higonnet, Not So Quiet in No-Woman's Land, in: Miriam Cooking/Angela Woollacott (eds), *Gendering War Talk*, Princeton 1993, pp. 205-226, here p. 208.

11 Siegfried Sassoon, Foreword, in: Ian Parsons (ed.), *The Collected Poems of Isaac Rosenberg*, London 1979, p. ix.

and Modern Memory (1975) may be said to have introduced cultural history to First World War studies, particularly literary criticism. Jay Winter in *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (1995) took issue with its thesis and powerfully pushed it into much wider and comparative directions, thus inaugurating a new phase of WWI cultural history and memory studies. One of the reasons for the enduring value of both books is their deeply humane and emotive dimension. When Fussell writes about soldiers bathing together or Winter talks about seeing Käthe Kollwitz's memorial to her son in a light drizzle, ›with drops of water falling from her face‹ – well what is it if not a history of emotion and the senses? Rather than announcing their name, they are gathered into the texture of writing, into the art of evocation. I had a similar aim in *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (2005) where I tried at once to evoke and analyze the emotional and sensuous dimensions of trench warfare and the hospitals. I realized how central were the touch, feel, smell of particular objects, places, persons to the soldiers and nurses – they pervade their diaries, letters, memoirs, poems, interviews and often structure memory more deeply than maps or battles or places. So, rather than being the product of recent ›trends‹ such as history of emotions and senses, they arise organically out of the source material. But it is so delicate and hard to express it in language – it's a bit like what Robert Graves says about trying to communicate ›noise‹.

Boris Kolonitskii: I think that rhythms of intellectual activity – and changes of intellectual fashions – are different in different regions, and that Russian historiography is a good example. From the 1920s on Soviet scholars were traditionally interested in the history of industrial workers and – to a lesser extent – in peasant history. Of course this type of social history was dominated by a Soviet style Marxist approach, rather dogmatic in its method and partisan in its conclusions. Many history writings resembled political propaganda pamphlets. However, even within such ideological constraints some scholars managed to do serious research based on archival sources. Economic history of the war was also popular in Soviet times. Other historians studied Russian political elites in a serious way though decorating their texts with multiple quotations of Lenin (though sometimes it was just necessary mimicry in order to overcome the censorship). Unfortunately they were not translated into foreign languages. But some Western scholars of Russian history were influenced by their projects and therefore some Soviet historians could participate – though indirectly – in the international exchange of ideas.

The fall of Communism changed the intellectual landscape of the field dramatically; it was influenced by the relative freedom from censorship and the direct impact of new intellectual trends. Many scholars continued to study Russian political elites; and sometimes they were much more sympathetic towards monarchy and Nicholas II himself. At the same time when social and economic history became less and less popular, it became clear that for many scholars such themes were previously imposed by Soviet academic authorities. This trend coincided also with a time when social history became less central within other academic cultures in different countries. At this

stage I would encourage young scholars in the field of Russian history to do something defined as ›traditional‹: some issues that are treated as ›done‹ as far as British, French or German histories are concerned could be absolutely innovative being applied to the field of Russian history, and that's also a good way to make comparison a part of research and bring Russian history into the global picture. I also hope that the combination of ›old‹ and ›new‹ approaches might be intellectually interesting, and it could help also to use new groups of sources from the rich archives of the Russian Empire.

Foreign policy and the issue of war guilt are still extremely important issues in the contemporary Russian context. In the 1920s Soviet scholars did their best to stress the war guilt of the Tsarist government, and Soviet historians published Russian diplomatic documents in a very explicit way – it was a big political project (cooperation between Soviet and German publication projects that involved historians, archivists, and politicians from both sides deserves special research). However some important Russian scholars challenged the dominant Bolshevik historical discourse about war guilt, inspiring serious discussions, though at the beginning of the 1930s ideological control and political censorship increased. In the middle of the 1930s the situation changed dramatically, Stalin's geopolitical goals changed previous official Communist opinion towards prerevolutionary foreign policies; now not the strategic goals of the Tsarist government were blamed but their inefficient implementation. The big Soviet publication of diplomatic documents was interrupted by the war, and it was never resumed afterwards – because of the different political environment. After Stalin's death the censorship in the field of diplomatic history was relaxed, and some scholars managed to write solid works. However the appearance of ›revisionist‹ works in that field is still impossible, and there are no serious academic or public discussions about the Russian guilt (or Russian share in the international guilt). The general politics of memory mentioned above and the currently dominant historical discourse also do not encourage scholars to cultivate that field. Unfortunately the quality of some recent Western books devoted to the Russian guilt cannot provoke serious discussion either – there are too many shortcomings that make the main theses of the authors too vulnerable. I am afraid of being too pessimistic but I do not expect new interesting projects in the field of the history of Russian foreign policy in contemporary Russia, though some interesting facts could be published (e.g. there are some fruitful publications based on archives of military intelligence – previously classified).

I am more optimistic about such fields as internal politics, culture and history of emotions though for different reasons young serious history students do not make the history of the Great War the topic of their research. And there are some recent Russian books devoted to everyday life within the catastrophe, to the history of violence, representations and rumors.

Gerhard Hirschfeld: The cultural turn of WWI historiography began during the early 1990s. Twenty years later this approach has been widely acknowledged and its methodological tools and requirements have been largely accepted. By and large,

concepts of cultural histories (mark the plural!) of the First World War seemed to have surpassed, at least for the moment, all other historiographical approaches like political, military, economic and even social histories of this war. The long time existing gap between the old style social history and the new cultural history (encompassing *inter alia* the histories of mentalities, gender, masculinity, senses and emotions) has for the most part been bridged due to the more recent adaptation of cultural and performative concepts (performative turn) by social historians. Whether the cultural paradigm has therefore become the new orthodoxy, as some scholars have suggested, is still a matter of debate.

The central notion of the new cultural interpretation of WWI still remains the ›war experience‹, shaped by representations of values, norms and expectations (John Horne). Needless to say that the ›war experience‹ of ordinary soldiers as well as of junior officers found its most significant expression in those ego-documents which cultural historians are still discovering and employing on a grand scale: letters to and from the fronts, diaries and memoirs written by soldiers and civilians alike. These mostly unpublished sources continue to form the basis for the writing of cultural histories besides all kinds of visualized representations of the war like private photos or drawings.

Besides the dominant cultural historical interpretations and narratives of the Great War there always were and still are a number of very successful attempts to write more conventional, though basically sound and solid, political and diplomatic histories – mostly undertaken by Anglo-American scholars and writers. The elegantly written, skillfully observed, though rather morally argued, diplomatic epos *The Sleepwalkers* by the Australian born, Cambridge based historian Christopher Clark clearly belongs to this honourable, publically as well as commercially enormously successful genre and tradition. Clark's overtly revisionist interpretation of the historical causes and political contexts of the July 1914 crisis has created considerable interest in the media but will neither stir up public sentiments or controversies (as for instance the Fritz Fischer debate in West-Germany in the early 1960s has done) nor will it give a new lease of life to the long disputed question of war guilt. This historical question has ultimately been laid to rest.

3. Long-term significance and evaluation in contemporary history

Due to the shift of horizons in contemporary history to more recent issues like the overthrow of Communism, the history of the First World War has receded further into the past. Does this conflict remain interesting in the early twenty-first century? Can we still maintain the interpretation of ›the great seminal catastrophe‹ of the twentieth century – or do other perspectives apply? Which overall developments of the twentieth

century can reasonably be attributed or related to the First World War – such as the competition between liberal democracy, Communism and Fascism or the attempt at juridification and moralization of international relations?

Heather Jones: There is no doubt that the Great War has become more distant since the turn of the twenty-first century in terms of popular awareness. Even in Britain, a country with a particularly vibrant public remembrance culture surrounding the war, a recent survey found that only 46% of respondents aged 16–24 were able to correctly name 1914 as the year that the First World War started and only 40% knew it ended in 1918.¹² Only a quarter knew that Passchendaele was a First World War battle and 12% thought the battle of Waterloo (1815) was a Great War battle. So a generational gap is developing, with younger generations less aware of the conflict and its history. There is what might be termed a growing historical deficit emerging in youth culture among the web generation who rely on Google rather than learned dates and who spend little time with the elderly, listening to their stories.

This declining knowledge of the war is, I think, less true for France where there is enormous public interest in the conflict, which continues to grow and spans all generations. For other states, such as Germany or Poland, the First World War has always been largely overshadowed by the Second and it has never had the same degree of public remembrance as it did in Britain or Australia, New Zealand and Canada. For the United States, the war remains, in comparison to the Civil War, the Second World War or Vietnam, the poor relation in terms of public awareness and interest. The challenge for historians in all countries – and it is a real one – is to engage the under-24s in the subject. There is no doubt that the First World War was the seminal catastrophe of the twentieth century from which fascism and Communism sprang, but the under-24s do not remember a Europe divided by Communism – in fact the current generation of undergraduates, born in 1993 or 1994 barely remember the twentieth century! So we need to stop assuming they feel a strong personal connection with the twentieth century; the war is a long time ago for them and the century they identify with is the twenty-first.

In terms of what overall developments of the twentieth century can reasonably be attributed or related to the First World War, I think there is no doubt that the war interrupted very interesting, significant developments in liberal democracy and globalization that were occurring in the decade leading up to 1914, such as suffrage reform and the rise of a kind of moderate social democracy. It also allowed particularly virulent forms of radical nationalism that were on the rise around 1900 to become dominant after 1918. However, the First World War also gave rise to new ideas about European integration, collective security through a League of Nations, destroyed the credibility of dynastic rule, and accelerated pre-1914 new trends towards decolonization, international law and racial equality – and these were the trends that ultimately had come to

12 Half of young Britons fail to name date of First World War, in: *The Telegraph*, 4 November 2012.

dominate by the end of the twentieth century. I don't think we can continue to see the war's impact as entirely negative, although its cost in lives and terrible human suffering, I would argue, certainly outweighed the positive elements of its legacy.

Jay Winter: Unlike Heather, I believe that the Great War is still alive not just in academic writing but also in public discourse. The main reason for this is the overlap between family history and military history. The centenary of the outbreak of the war matters because millions of family narratives about the war get told from grandmother to grandchild to this day. After all, the grandmothers of today grew up in the shadow of the Great War. Secondly, the institutionalization of war narratives in museums has kept the Great War in the public eye. The Imperial War Museum in London, the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, and the Historial de la grande guerre at Péronne and the Museum of the Great War in Meaux in France all braid together world history and family history. That is the central reason why we can still refer to the Great War as the *ur-catastrophe* of our times: it makes sense to families, who are defined in part by who vanished between 1914–18, who isn't there in the photo albums, who never had the chance to live his life. My work in France and in Australia has reinforced my view that the Great War is a major presence in the life of young people, who learn about it from their grandparents, over the head of that difficult generation – their parents – in the middle. These family stories are transmitted independently of the work of historians. Indeed, what we scholars write matters little to these microhistorical family circles, but that is not the same as saying that the war matters little. These small family collectives create collective memory, just as Maurice Halbwachs wrote 90 years ago, and that collective memory is very much alive in a number of places. Not everywhere to be sure, and there are some places where talk of the Great War is virtually absent, but in Western Europe, in Canada, in the Antipodes, the Great War as a family story is very much alive.

Boris Kolonitskii: In the particular Russian intellectual, cultural and political context it is still an urgent task to repeat that the war was ›the great seminal catastrophe‹ of the twentieth century, and it is relevant for some other academic cultures too. To some extent the fall of Communism made that task even more urgent, because it is important for several post-Soviet countries to elaborate a new attitude towards revolution. It is difficult to separate the history of war from the history of the Russian revolution, but that is exactly the way some historians structure their narratives. In Soviet times the Great War was overshadowed by the history of the revolution, and now many historians oppose the ›national‹, ›patriotic‹ and ›defensive‹ war to the ›irrational‹ Civil war. While speaking about Bolshevism some historians ignore the impact of political and economic, social and cultural conditions of the war on all sides of the Russian Civil War. Other scholars try to trace these roots of the Red and White policies which were influenced by the experience of the Great War. Therefore it is important to overcome

the symbolic watershed of 1917.¹³ Of course, the radical ideology of the Bolsheviks shaped many aspects of their politics, but this ideology itself also was influenced by the specific environment of mobilization practices invented in the course of the war. The history of the Great War is doomed to be interesting in the Russian context because this past is still ›usable‹ for many contemporary political actors.

Gerhard Hirschfeld: The thesis of a second Thirty Years War between 1914 and 1945 (first expressed by General Charles de Gaulle during his exile years in London and later popularized by Raymond Aron in the 1950s) rests on the assumption that the First World War formed the seedbed for the following one. Of course, there has not been an uncontested continuity from one war to the other – politicians as well as peoples during the *interbellum* certainly had political options – but neither the Bolshevik revolution nor the rise of Fascism and National Socialism would have been conceivable without the experience and the outcome of WWI. Thus the two wars historically belong together and they explain each other. Besides, both world wars are inextricably linked by a number of historical phenomena: both were mass industrialized wars characterized by a common and lasting experience of uncontrolled and excessive violence, death and destruction. Both wars saw an expansion of the means and methods of warfare including new and powerful military technology and weapons, but also a total *Entgrenzung* of the war into all areas of human lives. This expansion reached its apogee during the First World War with the deportations and mass killings of the Armenian population in 1915, while the Holocaust, the genocide of European Jews, presented yet another excelled aggravation during the Second World War.

While Eric Hobsbawm's famous characterization of the First World War as a ›machine for brutalizing the world‹ and George Mosse's equally popular theorem of brutalizing societies in the wake of the Great War did not go undisputed, the experiences of the previous war nevertheless remained a strong reminder and challenge for many contemporaries, not least for the German War Youth Generation and their compliance with the ideology and policies of the Third Reich (see e.g. the works by Ulrich Herbert and Michael Wildt). During the Second World War many German soldiers still harboured powerful images and perceptions of the First World War, in particular the *Kosakeninfall* (the invasion of Cossacks) into East Prussia in August 1914 with an ensuing widespread fear of Russian soldiers. Similarly negative images of *der Bolschewist* (the Bolshevik) that had been produced during and after the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the German Revolution of 1918/19 were invoked after the German attack on Russia in 1941. A number of German generals and troop commanders frequently used

13 See Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution. Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914–1921*, Cambridge 2002. A big international research project has been initiated in order to put Russia's experience into international context and to study the years 1914–1922 as a special period of Russian history; see <<http://russiasgreatwar.org/index.php>>.

these images to confront and relate their new experiences during the Second World War with those from the previous war as well as other military conflicts fought in the East like the *Freikorpskämpfe* (fights of the Free Corps) in the Baltic after 1919.

Santanu Das: The answer to the question above depends on what you mean by ›contemporary history‹ and I don't think that it can be confined only to landmarks in political history or bracketed from the cultural. The ›great seminal catastrophe‹ accretes fresh, different, intensities of meaning for different sections of the society. For example, in recent years, there's a lot of interest from the South Asian diasporic community across Europe in their forefathers' war contribution. Over the last ten years, hundreds of Sikhs from all over Europe came to the Menin Gate on the Armistice Day. As we enter the centennial years, colonial service in the First World War is attracting a lot of attention and not just within academia. The Imperial War Museum has recently produced a film called *Whose Remembrance?* about the colonial non-white contributions to the two World Wars, and it has been screened in different places in London, including at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, to diverse audiences. I have been present in some of the screenings and I am always struck by the intensity of the discussions and debates that followed, particularly from members of the diasporic and ethnic communities who rightly feel that their contributions have so far been largely invisible. At the same time, one has to be careful about how the experience and memory of the colonial troops are being used – and at times manipulated – by various interest groups and I think we will see quite a bit of that in the next four years, but that's a different story.

In many ways, we are still living out the political legacies of the First World War but I would briefly like to mention some of its cultural legacies. One of the main things which keeps the First World War alive – generation after generation and in large parts of the world – is its literature. Think of the place ›Dulce et Decorum Est‹ occupies in the British school syllabus and in the syllabi of many other schools in the English-speaking world – and in the mental map of these people. The poetry of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon are not just objects of cultural memory but are part of the structure of feeling of growing up for many people in the English-speaking world. For example I read their poetry in Calcutta and it drew me to the history of the war – and I see that happening with countless others. First World War poetry often provides the template for our understanding of the poetry of subsequent wars: one of the reasons why we bemoan the lack of poets in the Second World War is that we are so used to ›WWI poets‹ as the only form of ›war poets‹ that we fail to recognize other forms of war poetry written during the Second World War.

Jennifer Keene: It almost goes without saying that the war redefined the history of the twentieth century, leading in one way or another to the rise of communism, fascism, the end of empire, and the emergence of the United States as a world power. With

these historic developments fading in importance, does the war continue to be relevant to understanding contemporary history? The answer is yes, perhaps more so than ever.

Suddenly the war once again offers important cautionary tales about the diplomatic and political missteps that caused a catastrophic, and likely, unnecessary war in 1914. The cascade of events following September 11, 2001 that led to a wider war with tremendous civilian suffering and an unclear political resolution recalls the blunders of diplomacy in the summer of 1914 when expectations of a short war proved erroneous. The violent civil wars that greeted the dissolution of empires in 1918–1920 suddenly interest us anew, inviting comparisons to present-day conflicts in the Middle East. The resurgence of ethnic nationalism, the psychological trauma experienced by veterans, and the concerns over the use of chemical weapons all have parallels with the 1914–1918 tragedy.

4. Remembrance and the Politics of Memory

The First World War is not only a subject of historical research but also of public memory and the politics of memory. Yet, the Great War has remained stronger in the collective recollection of some nations than in others, where it was overshadowed by the remembrance of World War II. How do you see recent developments of memorialization and musealization? Can we, for example, speak of a Europeanization or even internationalization of memory? What function in the politics of memory does the public remembrance of the Great War have today – a century after its outbreak? How do historical research on and public perception of the Great War relate to one another in general?

Jay Winter: There are three memory regimes in the world today: in the Western European memory regime, the Great War and the Second World War form one story of disaster; the balance between the two is unstable, but both matter to large publics. In the Eastern European memory regime, the Great War is occluded by the Second World War. There are screen memories of the 1914–18 conflict, but always filtered by the later conflict and by Stalinism. Some steps have been taken, particularly in Poland, to commemorate if not the 1914–18 war, then the war of independence after it, but these are bound to remain small efforts compared to the massive presence of the Second World War. In the third memory regimes, in Asia, the Great War is virtually non-existent. Again, there are minor steps being taken to mark the centenary of the war, but these are virtually inaudible alongside the chorus of voices commemorating the Second World War. In China, so far as a brief visit showed me, the Holocaust is virtually unknown. The war against Japan occupies not the centre stage, but the entire stage of remembrance.

Gerhard Hirschfeld: Already during, but more so after the Second World War with its hecatombs of lives, cut-off biographies and enormous scale of destruction, the First World War lost its central memorial position in German society. The Great War became overshadowed by events and consequences of the Second World War – like it did in Russia and other East or central East European countries but also, for instance, in the Netherlands, in Scandinavia and even in the USA. In these and other countries the Second World War, sometimes re-named and commemorated as the ›Great Patriotic War‹ (Russia) or the ›War of Liberation from Nazi oppression‹ (Netherlands), has shaped and ultimately dominated the collective memory of their citizens. Reasons may vary from country to country but the result nevertheless looks the same: While for most of the former Entente powers and their allies and dominions the First World War still remains the Great War, others have begun to look to the Second World War as the most decisive historical event and watershed in the history of the Twentieth Century. To what extent the experience and memorialization of the *Shoah* has contributed to this now widely held perception is still a matter of debate. But there are strong indications that the murder of six million European Jews not only represents an unparalleled *Zivilisationsbruch* (rupture of civilization) but has also given this war its ultimate place in history.

With the generational change of our historical and cultural memory in the years to come, Germans as well as other European countries will have to face a further historicization of the twentieth century that will inevitably draw both world wars stronger together than ever before. This process of historicization will also effect – I think it has already begun to effect – the work of historians as well as the work of all those concerned with the memorialization and the heritage of both World Wars.

The growing public interest in Germany in the Great War over the last two decades was as much the result of a generational change as of a new orientation of historians towards cultural approaches to the historiography of this war. Intellectually the First World War seems to have escaped from the shadow of the Second World War to become a surprisingly popular subject for history books, historical and political magazines, TV-documentaries and even feature films. A number of ambitious and often sumptuous World War I exhibitions have succeeded to attract large audiences, which occasionally even surprised the curators and organizers of these presentations. Apart from their international and often comparative approaches, these presentations of the First World War make good use of the current state of research, in particular, by employing the historiographical concept of *guerre et culture*. As a welcome result the catalogues that were written and produced in preparing the exhibitions often became standard works and thus benchmarks in their own right.

Unlike France, Belgium and other countries, Germany still does not possess a museum of the Great War. This shortcoming, at least partly due to the federal structure of the German Republic, however, has not turned out to be a permanent drawback – on the contrary. Special exhibitions that take place in any case only for relatively short periods are usually spared the obvious deficits and long standing controversies, which

seemed to be part and parcel of historical museums and monuments these days throughout the world. Instead they are usually open for innovative and experimental ideas and developments, can be reflective of scholarly arguments and, in any case, they are much cheaper than permanent solutions. It is perhaps worth mentioning that the new *Bundeswehr* Military History Museum in Dresden has dedicated a large section of its permanent exhibition to the *Zeit der Weltkriege* (era of World Wars).

Jennifer Keene: I agree with Jay and Gerhard that the upcoming centennial has underscored the enormous divide between countries where remembrance of World War I occupies a central place in national commemorative culture and those that have almost no functioning memory of the war. This has led to abundant hand-wringing amid efforts to explain the reasons for this memory deficit. The better question might be why we expect the public worldwide to take notice of the centennial. After all anniversaries simply mark arbitrary dates; they do not magically dictate an historical event's importance to issues of the present-day. Once commemorative dates lose their primary constituency (the men who served) or stop having a clear political ›lesson‹ to offer policymakers, they become rote exercises of ›honoring the troops‹ or ›abhorring the horrors of war‹ without providing the public much actual insight into the most recent scholarship on the First World War.

Interest in commemorating the centennial is the strongest in countries that link their modern-day national identities to the conflict – Britain, France, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. The notion that there is a strong compelling political reason to commemorate the war's centennial therefore only exists among a small group of nations. Instead it is the tyranny of the calendar that seemingly requires historians in other nations to come up with a reason (beyond the hopes of large book sales) for igniting massive public interest in the war.

A vast gulf exists between the vibrant and innovative scholarship on the war and the public's perception of it. Every Australian schoolchild pilgrimages to the Australian War Memorial to learn about Gallipoli, but retaining Turkish permission to visit the battlefield (a rite-of-passage trip for young Australians) requires downplaying the Armenian genocide. The recent condemnation by the New South Wales government of the wartime genocide, for example, prompted the Turkish government to ban the participation of officials from this Australian state in commemoration ceremonies. It seems doubtful, therefore, that the centennial will successfully become a vehicle for challenging the traditional national narratives attached to the war.

The state of affairs among scholars is quite different. ›1914-1918-online‹, a peer-review encyclopedia that includes hundreds of essays by experts world-wide, is facilitating an international scholarly dialogue, taking advantage of a digital platform to create connections where they did not exist before. The English-language project removes linguistic barriers that prevent scholars from learning about research conducted

globally, helping to globalize conceptual approaches and understandings of the war. The goal of ›internationalizing‹ the memory of the war has the best chance of succeeding within the scholarly community.

Heather Jones: I am not sure we can really speak yet of a ›Europeanization‹ of memory, beyond academia. Certainly among early career scholars there is immense interaction across the European continent, and indeed, globally, particularly at Ph.D. and post-doctoral level, and First World War historians in general are very international and work in a transnational environment in many cases. Conferences and books extoll comparative history and, although most popular histories of the war and lectureships continue to operate within a national framework, it is increasingly common within academia to do comparative research on several states. However, military historians of the war remain less transnational. And the public memory of the war is far from European or international – the war remains *national* history with populations looking for local and national stories. There is still very little British public interest in the battle of Verdun, for example and the French public does not show much interest in Gallipoli, even though more French soldiers died there than Australians. In this regard, the war remains part of a process of identity-seeking – public audiences want to connect with their own identity through the history of the war. Even in countries such as Ireland, where the history of the war was taboo until very recently, as those Irishmen who volunteered to fight in the British army were seen as traitors to Irish nationalism after Irish independence was achieved for southern Ireland in 1922, much of the wave of enormous public interest in the war at present is among older generations, in rediscovering, or finally telling, the histories of forgotten ancestors. It is not about learning about Ottoman wartime politics or Franco-German animosity in 1914. Creating a shared ›European history‹ of the war remains hampered by different languages, cultures and values – and for this reason, national history continues to be the public norm.

Santanu Das: I agree with Jennifer and Heather that there's a gap between current scholarship on the First World War and public's perception of it; indeed, as both observe, the public memory of the war is often stubbornly national, rather than European or international. Indeed, the colour of First World War memory in public perception remains largely white. However there are some encouraging signs of change: from governmental initiatives such as the erection of the Memorial Gates at Hyde Park, London, in 2002 to commemorate the contribution of the Commonwealth nations to the two World Wars to conscious rectifications in museological practices such as the increased space devoted to the South African Native Labour Corps in the museum in Delville Wood or innovative exhibitions such as ›Man – Culture – War: Multicultural aspects of the First World War‹ (2008) at the In Flanders Fields Museum, Ypres. A recent poll done by the think tank *British Futures* found that 44% of the people interviewed were aware that the war involved Indians and in Britain, there are some plans

to highlight the role of the British colonial and dominion troops through a programme of public lectures and events in the next four years. Hopefully during the centennial years – given the large diasporic population in Europe – there will be a move towards a more culturally and ethnically diverse memory of the First World War.

Outside Europe, there is a great diversity and divergence in the memorialization of the First World War and the politics of cultural memory. For example, across the former British Empire, there's a huge difference between the former ›dominions‹ and ›colonies‹ for a variety of reasons. While there is a powerful and elaborate culture of memorialization – partly through First World War service being made almost foundational to the national identity in countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada – there is an almost corresponding cultural amnesia in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh (or at least the memory of the war is buried very deep). There, the anti-colonial nationalist movement has almost wholly overshadowed and overlaid the memory of the First World War; the Amritsar massacre of 1919 clouds imperial war service. The war gets marginalized or suppressed as many of these former colonies, now nation-states, negotiate with their difficult post-war, often nationalist, histories. Moreover, in many of these places, there isn't a strong culture of museology and war archives, partly due to the lack of resources: there isn't anything like the Australian War Memorial and Museum in India. So there seems to be a strange gap for a number of reasons, from the political to a question of resources.

But again things are changing and if we look hard, there is often a subterranean vein of memory. Take India, for example. In 2002, a small memorial was erected for the Indian soldiers at Menin Gate and then made into a bigger, more formal memorial, with a visit from Sonia Gandhi in 2006. And, a short distance away, in the (Indian) War Memorial at Neuve Chapelle, the comments and reflections in the visitors' book (because of globalization, there is an increasing number of Indian visitors) are most revealing about the complex politics of South Asian memory of the First World War. Within India, there is recently a concerted effort by some governmental officials and military historians to commemorate the country's role in the conflict over the centennial years. There is a wider academic swell as well: within South Asian studies, there's a fresh interest in the country's experience of the conflict, with conferences and publications planned. But how much of this will percolate to the general public or what significance it will have for them – well, I cannot say.

In his poem ›The War Graves‹, the celebrated Northern Irish poet Michael Longley (whose father fought in the war) writes, ›There will be no end to cleaning up after the war.¹⁴ In the next five years, I think there will be a lot of fresh digging as the war's debris will be inspected afresh by various hands all over the world – and not all the hands will be white.

14 Michael Longley, *The War Graves*, in: idem, *Collected Poems*, London 2006, p. 256.

Boris Kolonitskii: If in some countries the war is perceived now as ›a European civil war‹, in other countries it is still the war of ›us‹ against ›them‹, and this last approach encourages memory wars. I'm afraid it is utopian and naive to think that globalization, internationalization and integration of any kind can quickly overcome such approaches: they are deeply rooted in some national identities, and they influence not just the politics of memory but academic writing too.

In Russia the remembrance of World War II is a main source of national identity, and the First World War was definitely overshadowed by the ›Great Patriotic War‹ of 1941–45. However, for reasons mentioned above the memory of the Great War ›is moving out of the shadow‹. There is no historical academic community in Russia which could influence public perception as a specific actor united by professional standards. Of course there are different schools in different countries and political divides – explicit and implicit – could be traced everywhere. This influences historical discussions both public and academic. However, the post-Soviet situation is quite special, many historians still perceive themselves as ›partisan historians‹ though they belong now to different parties: neo-communist and anti-communist, liberal and nationalist. The declining standards of historical research prevent serious discussions between these ›party lines‹, actually party judgments often matter more than sources and methods of research. Such ›hyper politicization‹ of historians is bad for the profession: the general audience gets a simplified vision of history, and therefore the community of historians is not perceived as real experts, the authority of the professions declines. Therefore public discussions sometimes ignore solid academic works.

The combination of these factors creates also a simplification of World War I history. Some public historians have popularized several conspiracy theories, based on facts and rumors. Such a vision of history is appealing to a contemporary audience that consumes enthusiastically detective stories. Of course secret services and secret societies played an important role in the course of the war in different countries. However the decontextualization of such activities often overplays their role.

The ›Europeanization‹ of World War I history is still a project for many countries – including Russia – in terms of structure of the narrative and research methods applied, the language of the discussion and general evaluations. 2014 could prove an interesting test for many countries, their identities and their education, their academic communities and their political cultures. I would encourage a project that could monitor the situation in several countries; it would be interesting to compare politics of memory in different societies, and especially the role that professional historians play in the creation and implementation of such a policy. The anniversary of 1914 will be able to tell us a lot about ourselves.

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