



THE NATIONAL BETWEEN THE GLOBAL AND THE LOCAL: COMMEMORATING THE FIRST WORLD WAR IN GERMANY

Lo nacional entre lo global y lo local: la conmemoración de la Primera Guerra Mundial en Alemania

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Some German commentators have spoken of 2014 as the *Supergedenksjahr* – the super commemoration year – which marks the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the 75th anniversary of the start of the Second World War, and the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War. This article offers a number of observations about the commemoration of the First World War within the context of a broader politics of history in contemporary Germany. First, the First World War has emerged from the shadows of the two other major events in twentieth-century German history – the Third Reich and the division of Germany overcome in 1989. Whether this will remain the case is doubtful, as the pull of the other events remains stronger. Second, if there was a single overriding debate in Germany about the First World War it owed much to the success of *The Sleepwalkers* by Christopher Clark. His thesis of shared responsibility was read against the background of Fritz Fischer's thesis, which ascribed most responsibility to reckless German leaders. In turn, the re-emergence of the war guilt debate was related to discussions about Germany's role in European politics today. Finally, the commemoration has been marked by a move away from the nation-state framework so that many exhibitions and programmes adopt either a global or a local perspective.



Abstract

“Super Commemoration Year”; global; Third Reich; Berlin Wall; Sleepwalkers
«año de la súper-conmemoración»; global; Tercer Reich; Muro de Berlín; *Sonámbulos*



Key words

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Fechas

Algunos comentaristas alemanes se han referido al año 2014 como el Supergedenksjahr –el año de la súper conmemoración– que señala el 25 aniversario de la caída del Muro de Berlín, el 75 aniversario del comienzo de la Segunda Guerra Mundial y el centenario del estallido de la Primera Guerra Mundial. Este artículo ofrece varias observaciones acerca de la conmemoración de la Primera Guerra Mundial dentro del contexto más amplio de las política con respecto al pasado en la Alemania contemporánea. En primer lugar, la Primera Guerra Mundial emerge de las sombras de otros dos eventos de enorme importancia en la historia alemana del siglo XX –el Tercer Reich y la división de Alemania superada en 1989. Si esto se mantendrá así es incierto, puesto que la atracción por los otros dos eventos se mantiene pujante. En segundo lugar, si hubo algún debate primordial en Alemania sobre la Primera Guerra Mundial se debe en gran parte al éxito del libro Sonámbulos, de Christopher Clark. Su tesis sobre la responsabilidad compartida se analizó en contraposición a la tesis de fondo de Fritz Fischer, que atribuía gran parte de la responsabilidad a los imprudentes líderes alemanes. A su vez, el resurgimiento del debate sobre la culpabilidad de la guerra se relacionó con los debates actuales sobre el rol de Alemania en la política europea. Para terminar, la conmemoración se ha caracterizado por un alejamiento del marco estado-nación, por lo que muchas exhibiciones y programas adoptan o una perspectiva global o local.



On 27 June 2014, the German President, Joachim Gauck, hosted a day of commemoration and reflection at his official residence, Schloss Bellevue. Entitled “1914-2014: one hundred European years”¹, the event centred on the contemporary resonances of the First World War. There was an explicit international focus as historians and commentators from Belgium, Britain, Croatia, France, Greece, Poland, Russia, and Turkey participated, as well as leading scholars from Germany, such as Jörn Leonhard, Herfried Münkler, and Karl Schlögel. The image produced for the event was a simple list of years between 1914 and 1989. Three of these years were printed in red to distinguish them from the others – 1914, 1939, and 1989. These years symbolised the major dates in German commemorative culture in 2014. The hundredth anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War coincided with the seventy-fifth anniversary of the German invasion of Poland, and the twenty-fifth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. The short-twentieth century, the age of extremes as Eric Hobsbawm characterised it, was neatly captured in this chronological coincidence. With a fondness for compound words, Germans referred to 2014 as the “Super-Gedenksjahr” or “Super Commemoration Year”.

According to one estimate more than fifty exhibitions devoted to themes about the First World War took place in Germany throughout 2014.² In addition, libraries, academic institutions, and research institutes hosted numerous public lectures, films, and presentations. The diversity of events is striking – from exhibitions devoted to the local town to the digitalisation of sources

1 I would like to thank Katharina Wiedemann (Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin) for bringing this event to my attention. The event can be accessed at <http://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Berichte/DE/Joachim-Gauck/2014/06/140627-Erster-Weltkrieg-Gedenktag.html>

2 I would like to thank Markus Pöhlmann of the Zentrum für Militärgeschichte und Sozialwissenschaften (ZMS) der Bundeswehr for this unpublished list from the ZMS.

across Europe (Europeana collections 1914-18, 2012)³. Art galleries have played a prominent role in the commemorations, with successful exhibitions on avant-garde artists and the war hosted by the Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic in Bonn and another dedicated to Otto Dix's famous tryptych, *War*, hosted by the Albertinum in Dresden.

It is too soon to say how the centenary of the First World War will impact the texture of historical commemoration in Germany, one that centres largely on the Third Reich and, to a lesser extent, the German Democratic Republic. The particular combination of anniversaries invited Germans to consider the legacies of the First World War within the context of Germany's and Europe's twentieth century. George Kennan's now well-worn phrase about the First World War – “the seminal catastrophe” (*die Urkatastrophe*) of the twentieth century – was repeatedly invoked, as though the meaning of the war, now that no veterans of the trenches remain alive, could only be transmitted through the prism of more recent catastrophes. Nonetheless, there are a number of striking features about the commemoration of the First World War in the Federal Republic which point to a diversity of approaches, a shift towards broader European and global perspectives in place of national ones, and an emphasis on the experiences of individuals. An older framework, which emphasised the place of the First World War in the continuum of the history of the nation-state between 1871 and 1945, has been replaced by a new perspective, emphasising the First World War as the rupture between the nineteenth and twentieth century.

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The war guilt debate, 2014

The dominant public debate in Germany about the war has centred on *The Sleepwalkers*, the work of Christopher Clark, the Australian-born historian and Regius Professor of Modern History at the University of Cambridge. Translated into German in 2013 under the title, *Die Schlafwandler*, the book became a best seller, figuring at the top of *Der Spiegel's* lists for months in late 2013 and early 2014. Clark had already established himself as a major public figure in Germany, due to the success of his previous work, *The Iron Kingdom*, a history of Prussia that offered a nuanced reading of the history of a state often reduced to the twin themes of militarism and authoritarianism. With his excellent command of German, an engaging style, and a new six-part television series on ZDF, “Deutschland-Saga”⁴, Clark has become an insider in German public historical debate, while also retaining the perspective and advantages of the outsider.

The Sleepwalkers is a complex book, which seeks to show how the European powers came to war in 1914. Clark claims to eschew the “finger-jabbing”, prosecutorial style of previous historians, who sought to identify a guilty party or responsible culprit for the outbreak of the conflict. While he emphasises the cumulative interactions of decisions made in the various European capitals, which led to a world war that nobody wanted, but all were ultimately prepared to risk, he also pays attention to the “why”, to the motives and intentions of European leaders. The gap between intention and outcome is one of the tragic themes of his book (and also of Thomas Otte's masterful, *The July Crisis*). Responsibility is shared between European statesmen; in contrast to Otte, who attributes the largest part of responsibility to leaders in Vienna, Berlin,

3 I would like to thank Sonja Grund (Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin) for this reference.

4 The television series can be accessed at <http://www.zdf.de/zdf/neue-dokureihe-zur-geschichte-deutschlands-mit-christopher-clark-33995576.html>.

and St Petersburg, Clark shies away from proportioning responsibility, though it is reasonable to conclude that he views it as equally shared.

In Germany, Clark's thesis was read in the light of the last great controversy over the First World War: the Fischer controversy of the 1960s. This coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak of the war, but was largely unconnected to it. Instead, Fischer's thesis – that German leaders bore the primary responsibility for the war and had planned a war of aggression since the infamous War Council of December 1912 – was part of a larger debate about the continuities of German history, in particular the place of the Nazi past. Indeed, the moral impulse for Fischer's engagement with the history of Imperial Germany came from his own struggles to work through his personal history between 1933 and 1945 and his concern for the establishment of a robust, critical, democratic culture in West Germany. Fischer located the roots of the Third Reich within the Kaiserreich. Expansionist power politics, authoritarianism, and anti-semitism had their roots in the late nineteenth century. This argument was a challenge to conservative German historians, such as Gerhard Ritter and Friedrich Meinecke, who saw the Third Reich as an outcome of the modernisation of politics, the practices of mass politics, and the "demonic" temptations of European power politics. The Fischer controversy, therefore, was never solely about the origins of the war or the war aims of the German elite, but rather about German domestic politics and the country's place in Europe. Fischer's opponents accused him of giving succour to Communist critics of West Germany and the western orientation of the Federal Republic, while his supporters, including a younger generation of historians such as John Röhl, lauded his engagement with the less savoury aspects of the Kaiserreich as a contribution to West German political renewal. By the early 1970s Fischer's thesis had carried the day. While historians such as Hans Ulrich Wehler and Volker Berghahn developed new approaches, particularly in terms of social history, the dominant interpretation stressed the continuities in modern German history.

In the light of the commemorations in 2014, there are two related points worth bearing in mind about the legacy of the Fischer debate. First, the years of the German nation state, from the foundation of the Kaiserreich in 1871 to the defeat of the Third Reich in 1945, became the chronological cast within which debate took place. Second, the geographical framework tended to privilege the German nation state as the main object of historical research. The primacy of foreign policy, which emphasised how international pressures and the exposed geopolitical position in central Europe had shaped German history, was replaced with an interest in the primacy of domestic politics. According to this interpretation, the roots of the First World War lay in the domestic political and social conditions of the Kaiserreich. An expansionist, militarised foreign policy reflected the failure of German elites after 1871 to come to terms with the challenges of economic and political modernisation. The primacy of domestic politics accentuated the responsibility of leaders in Berlin for the outbreak of the First World War and, by extension, implied that the decision-makers in the other capitals were reacting defensively to German aggression.

Although many of the pillars of the Fischer thesis and the broader arguments about the continuities in modern German history had been challenged, even overturned, before the appearance of Clark's tome, the public debate set off by *The Sleepwalkers* was the first major popular controversy about war guilt since the 1960s. The public debate had several dimensions – historical evidence and approach, generational divisions, and contemporary political resonances.

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Clark's critics – though it should be emphasised that this debate has been moderate in tone and the *ad hominem* attacks of the Fischer controversy or the *Historikerstreit* of the mid-1980s have been conspicuous by their absence – make several charges. First, they argue that Clark played down evidence of aggressive intentions in Berlin by ignoring evidence of a growing willingness to countenance preventive war in early 1914. Annika Mombauer, the biographer of Helmuth von Moltke, the chief of the general staff in 1914 and author of a deft survey of the July crisis, noted that Clark ignored an important exchange between Moltke and Gottlieb von Jagow, the Foreign Secretary, in May 1914, which pointed towards the readiness of German civilian and military leaders to risk war. Although she praised Clark's presentation of belligerent sentiment in Paris and St Petersburg, she considered the book "one-sided" (Chatzoudis, 2014, April 1). In a lengthy article in *Die Zeit*, John Röhl analysed the report of 11 March 1914 of the long-time Baden envoy to Berlin, Sigismund Graf von Berckheim, which Röhl had found in the General-landesarchiv in Karlsruhe. This report emphasised William II's confidence in Germany's security in Europe, as Britain was mired in the Home Rule crisis, and financial restraints and fear of revolution made France and Russia, respectively, unwilling to risk war. While William II pronounced against a preventive war, despite the favourable conditions, other key figures in Berlin wanted to make the most of this opportunity to strike their putative enemies. Yet one sought in vain, Röhl (2014) concluded, evidence of German aggressive intentions in Clark's book.

Röhl also made a broader point about the politics of commemoration. The German public, he claimed, read Clark's book as a "Freispruch" – a not guilty verdict – and this would create a commemorative "Sonderweg" or special path in Germany, placing it at odds with the popular understanding of the origins of the war in other European countries, from Britain to Russia. Röhl's arguments, as befits the foremost biographer of William II and an historian who knows the high politics of the Kaiserreich better than any other, rest on a profound knowledge of the sources, but he is also conscious of the political resonances of historical debate. The "Freispruch" verdict, undoubtedly a misreading of Clark's thesis, fuelled concerns that the reception of *The Sleepwalkers* would undo the work of the 1960s and subsequent decades, in which German society had come to terms with the Nazi past and its roots in German history. Given that the democratic institutions and Germany's stabilising role in European integration are seen to be based, in part, on *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* ("coming to terms with the past"), the political stakes of this debate are potentially far-reaching.

The Euro crisis has given added impetus to this debate. The flawed architecture of the Euro, the fears of many German voters that they must repeatedly support weaker economies, and the anger in other European states towards what many see as a German-imposed austerity policy, raise the question of the historical legacies of two world wars. If Clark's book diminishes German responsibility for the First World War, does this translate into a more robust assertion of German national interest in the European Union, one unburdened by historical legacies? In January 2014, a group of historians, Dominik Geppert (Bonn University), Thomas Weber (Aberdeen/Harvard Universities), Sönke Neitzel (London School of Economics), and Cora Stephan, an independent writer, argued that the war guilt thesis, which attributed sole or most responsibility to leaders in Berlin, was both historically wrong and politically dangerous. In general, they accepted Clark's thesis, noting correctly that it was not a "Freispruch". But neither were they "Schuldstolz", a particular kind of German pride in national guilt. Indeed, those sentiments of guilt contributed to a "negative exceptionalism", which threatened democratic institutions and Germany's proper role in Europe. "Europe" was not the conceptual opposite of

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“nation”; rather the functioning of the European Union required an appreciation of the nation-state (Geppert, Neitzel, Stephen & Weber, 2014). Geppert (2013) had already outlined this argument in a powerful analysis of the historic myths that had once served European integration, but now threatened to derail it. While the war-time and post-war generation saw European integration as the only alternative to war and the fastening of peace, the alternative choice of “integration or war” had lost its appeal to a younger generation. The promise of Europe had changed from peace to prosperity precisely because the European Union had been so successful that nobody could imagine a future war between states in the European Union today. Even with regard to the current Ukraine crisis, it is difficult to imagine a major inter-state conflict between the leading European states.

Geppert further argued that the failure of German politicians to pursue a justified national interest had eroded faith in the European project. The apparent paradox was that only a more robust assertion of the national interest would persuade German voters that their interests could be served within the framework of European integration. And herein lay the intersection with the implications of Clark’s thesis of general, rather than German, responsibility for the First World War. By offering a more rounded interpretation of the origins of the war, one which placed the decisions made in Berlin within the broader European context, Clark had helped to create the appropriate historical-political context for a better appreciation of the German national interest and its role in the European Union. In commemorating the beginning of the war, German politicians recognised the Kaiserreich’s responsibility for invading Belgium and France, but the tone of the international ceremonies on 3 and 4 August 2014 emphasised the European project as a means of reconciliation. The media reported that German politicians were grateful to the French president, François Hollande, for emphasising “European reconciliation” over the “war guilt question” (ZDF, 2014, August 4).

It is difficult to offer a schematic analysis of Clark’s critics, and those who support his thesis, as generalisations based on political affiliations, methodological approaches, and generational factors overlook the diversity of the different groups in the debate about the war’s origins and its contemporary political implications. But at the risk of contradicting the previous sentence, those who favour Clark’s thesis appear to be generally more optimistic about a self-confident expression of German identity. In contrast to those who find Clark’s thesis unsettling because of the past dangers that the assertion of German national interest posed for European stability, the more optimistic perspective emphasises the importance of moderate national confidence. Arguably, such a view chimes with the relatively vibrant German economy, the increasing comfort of its leaders in shaping European politics, and the cultural openness and tolerance of contemporary Germany.

In turn these factors also beg the question of whether the debate about the origins of the war will shape perceptions of the national interest as much as either group believes. A survey of popular attitudes concerning the outbreak of the First World War found that 58% of Germans believed all belligerents bore approximately equal responsibility and 19% thought that German leaders in 1914 bore most responsibility (“Junge Deutsche wollen mehr über den Ersten Weltkrieg wissen”, 2014, January 15). But this view of the “war guilt question” is highly unlikely to lead to a more aggressive German foreign policy. Other surveys have suggested that the vast majority of Germans (and Europeans) do not think that they would risk their life for their country. Only 16.6% of Germans were prepared to risk their life for the Fatherland, but 89% would for their family and 43% for their ideals. These ideals were “justice”, “freedom”, and “peace” (BR,

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2014). As Geppert suggested, it takes time for historical-political controversies to work their way through the body politic and the direct links between decision-making and political culture are difficult to define.

The global war and Germany in the world, 2014

The international system as a collection of autonomous states remains the broad paradigm for analysing the origins of the First World War. As Clark and others have pointed out, however, states before 1914 were increasingly porous. Economic, social, and emotional ties seeped through the borders of the state, creating complex international interactions that shaped the context of great power politics. Historians have paid increasing attention to these international networks, flows, and exchanges, partly in response to globalising processes since the 1980s. While the state remained the focus of arguments about the origins of the war, new geographical frameworks allowed for fresh perspectives on the First World War. In recent years, German scholars, such as Jürgen Osterhammel and Sebastian Conrad, have become leading exponents of global history, a perspective that moves away from the realm of national societies and states. Two recent major books on the First World War, by Oliver Janz of the Free University Berlin and Jörn Leonhard of Freiburg University, adopted an explicitly global historical perspective on the conflict. The war differed from previous conflicts, such as the Seven Years' War, in which European empires had dragged colonies into their conflicts, because non-European belligerents, such as Japan and the United States, viewed the war through a distinct geographical perspective. British dominions developed their own "sub-imperial" ambitions (Janz, 2013, pp. 133-39; Leonhard, 2014, pp. 194-204).

This also represented a move away from the older paradigm, centred on the history of the German nation state, though it remains, not surprisingly, an important aspect of public debate. For example, Herfried Münkler's book, *Der Grosse Krieg: Die Welt 1914-1918* (2013), was another major popular success. Yet its subtitle was somewhat misleading as it largely concentrated on the Kaiserreich. Nevertheless, his short essay on the fall of empires as a means of organising political communities in Europe, which appeared in a special issue of *Der Spiegel*, argued that the global perspective could enrich the understanding of German politics during the era of the First World War (Münkler, 2013).

This global perspective on the war is evident in several major exhibitions this year. The German Historical Museum in Berlin opened its exhibition in June 2014. Using just one single floor of its three-storey special exhibition space, the museum sought to portray the global dimensions of the conflict. Taking fourteen particular places, such as Gallipoli and Tannenberg, the exhibition illustrated different themes, including the battle-front experience, conditions on the home front, violence against civilians, and the legacies of the conflict. The exhibition succeeded in conveying the diversity of experiences across the globe. It displayed a newspaper for some Muslim prisoners of war in German captivity who volunteered to join the Ottoman forces and ended up fighting in Mesopotamia. The drawing of a refugee family in Poland by Max Fabian, an impressionist painter and volunteer in 1914, provided the occasion to reflect upon the refugees in eastern Europe and Russia. The final section showed a poster from the Third Reich, depicting a steel helmet, the symbol of the front soldier. The shadow of the Nazi past remains a central element of understanding the First World War. In the introduction to the catalogue of the exhibition, *Der Erste Weltkrieg in 100 Objekten* - based on the successful model of the British Museum - Gerd Krumeich concluded that the deaths of two million German soldiers

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was rendered meaningless by defeat and the treaty of Versailles, which enabled Hitler eventually to profit from popular anger by promising to overturn the post-1918 peace settlement. Hitler then unleashed a “greater and more terrible war”, whose “total” dimensions had only been anticipated between 1914 and 1918 (Krumeich, 2014, p. 19). However the connections between the First World War and the Third Reich have been placed in a different geographical and chronological context, one that emphasises 1914 as a rupture, the start of Europe’s “dark” century, to adapt the title of Mark Mazower’s book. This marks a shift from the perspectives of the Fischer debate with its concentration on the German nation state between 1871 and 1945.

Yet in exploring the global dimensions of the war, the exhibition, according to critics, ended up “atomising” the war, rather than providing a comprehensive overview (Kilb, 2014). By moving away from the core narrative, centred on the western front, the exhibition wandered from theatre to theatre. This is a challenge for global history as it confronts established national narratives. Granted, narratives based on national histories are complex and highly contested, but there is generally a core to them, which some seek to defend, others to overturn. Global history is an approach, not an explanation. It provides a framework for understanding events and issues in a new light, but it does not provide a fresh explanation for what happened in the same way, as say, ideas about class conflict or the primacy of foreign policy. Global approaches purposefully de-centre established national narratives. Yet this raises the question of whether a global history of the war can say anything more than the conflict was a complex event with different consequences in different locations.

Paradoxically, global history may work more effectively in a minor key. At the Historisches Museum in Frankfurt, curators used ten photographs of French colonial soldiers, taken prisoner of war, to offer insights into the global dimensions of the First World War. The project itself had a transnational dimension, as the French Institute of History in Germany, based in Frankfurt, supported the exhibition. Its director, Pierre Monnet, viewed the exhibition as an example of “Histoire croisée”, a particularly French form of transnational history. The photographs, taken as part of an anthropological research project, were found in the archive of the Leo Frobenius Institute. Using a wide range of material, posters, letters, books, photographs, and sound recordings, the exhibition offered a powerful insight into the global dimensions of the war, the connections forged between metropole and colony, and the encounters between German officers, academics, propagandists and African prisoners. The exhibition followed colonial soldiers as they were recruited, often forcefully, into French and British armies, and sent to fight in Europe. Germans viewed the presence of colonial troops on European battlefields as a form of barbarism, an atrocity, and a betrayal of European values. Thousands of these soldiers were taken prisoner, distributed around camps in Germany, and subject to pressure to volunteer to fight for the Central Powers and especially Germany’s ally, the Ottoman empire. The exhibition also stressed that scientists saw these prisoners as subjects for research, from linguistics to phrenology. The exhibition concluded by examining the post-war legacies – the fears, inspired by racism, of French colonial soldiers in occupied German territory, the affirmation of the French civilising mission, and the struggle of colonial soldiers to secure rights and pensions after demobilisation. Nor were the current debates about globalisation, particularly immigration into Germany, absent from the consideration of the exhibition organisers. These photographs, which fed into the racist world view of National Socialism, contributed to racism today, they argued, by “bolstering current racism against ‘the Arabs’ or ‘the blacks’, who represent the alien and the exotic.” (Burkard & Lebret, 2014, p. 11).

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The success in promoting global perspectives on the war owes much to the vibrant debate within Germany about its global role and place. In 2013 Germany was the second most popular destination for emigrants, after the United States, though the Pegida (Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes) movement represents an important anti-immigrant strain within German politics. The dependency of the German economy on trade, increasingly with China and India, rather than with traditional trade partners in Europe, also heightens awareness of global affairs. In the 1960s, West Germany was open to Europe; the reunified Germany is increasingly open to global influences and relationships.

Local commemorations

Commemorative events and programmes have also paid attention to the local dimensions of the war. Building on decades of research into the social history of the conflict, the main emphasis of these events is on the “war experience” and the meaning contemporaries attributed to the war. Neither experience nor meaning is reducible to a single national framework, but the dominant message concentrates on the hardships and miseries of war, the loss of limbs, grief, and hunger in urban areas, to name but some.

Local perspectives prove to be panoramic, not restrictive. They enable visitors to appreciate the range of different experiences, marked by gender, class, and age. The exhibition at the Nuremberg City Archive, “Leap into the Dark” (itself a play on the well-known argument about German “risk policy” in the July crisis), charted the transition of the economy from war to peace, the food shortages, the municipal welfare regimes, the connections between home front and fighting front, and the hospitals for war wounded. A diary, started by an eight-year boy in July 1914, provided the occasion for schoolchildren in Nuremberg to examine “hunger and want” which replaced the initial feelings of euphoria in this boy’s family experiences.

The recent discovery of the remains of twenty-one German soldiers, who were entombed during an artillery attack, provided the inspiration for *Die Suche nach den verlorenen Söhnen* (*The search for the lost sons*), an hour long programme on ZDF. Through the expertise of battlefield archaeologists, research in local archives, and interviews with surviving relatives, the programme makers were able to reconstruct the lives and war experiences of the dead soldiers. They came from the Wesel, on the lower Rhine, not far from the Dutch border. The tone of the programme was poignant, as the narrator emphasised that these “young men had their lives before them”. The narrator also reminded the viewer that the experiences and outlooks of these men were not so distant from “ours today”. This point was repeatedly emphasised by a focus on their everyday experience – writing to family, playing games to pass the time, and thinking about the future. These men might have died in March 1918, but “they were not forgotten”. Hannelore Börgen, the great-niece of the officer, August Hütten, who had died in the attack, recalled how the Kriegsgräberfürsorge, the charity which cares for war graves, sent a letter to her eighty-eight-year-old mother. Her mother immediately thought the letter must refer to “Uncle August, about whom we always talked at family reunions.” By emphasising the normality of these soldiers, rather than their brutalisation, the programme heightened the sense of the tragic. In the final scene, this sense was reinforced as a photograph showed a First World War veteran, married and with a son, about to join the Wehrmacht.

While programmes such as *The search for the lost sons* opened up the tragedy of individual families, other local exhibitions showed how the commemoration of the dead after 1918 was cap-

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tured by nationalist groups. The University of Magdeburg's exhibition on daily life in Saxony-Anhalt during the war offers a striking example of this, because Magdeburg was the birthplace in the 1920s of the *Reichsbanner Schwarz Rot Gold*, the leading socialist veterans' association, which regularly marched under the banner of "Never again war". In the university's exhibition, the emphasis was on the nationalist and militarist message of commemorations. The war dead were portrayed as the avant-garde of a new Germany, whose sacrifice would be redeemed in a second war. It was only in the aftermath of 1945 that commemorative practices viewed the war dead as "victims" rather than "heroes".

The local perspective both enriches and complicates the national framework of commemorations. Together, they link local and national together so that moments such as the mobilisation at the outbreak of war, the "turnip winter" of 1916-1917, and defeat in 1918 unify regions. On the other hand, the emphasis on the industrialisation of the war in exhibitions in Nuremberg and North-Rhine Westphalia reflects a specific regional experience that contrasts with experiences in rural society and smaller towns. The regional defies neat national frameworks.

To conclude, in November 2014 Germans commemorated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. For weeks, Berlin had prepared for the celebrations, which culminated with the release of thousands of illuminated balloons charting the course of the wall. The commemorations necessarily had a different quality to those marking the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War. Many Germans have personal memories, experiences, and stories of the division of the country, the dictatorship in East Germany, and the end of the Cold War. This provided an immediacy, a connection between the personal and the national, that was much less pronounced in the commemorations of the First World War. The emotional register of the commemorations differed. The celebratory tone that accompanied the events marking the fall of the wall was evidently absent in those commemorations of the war, where a sense of tragedy and horror reigned. Coming to terms with the East German past remains a highly contentious political issue, most recently evident in the bitter debate about the election of Bodo Ramelow of the Left Party as minister president of Thuringia. The Left Party is home to many former members of the Socialist Unity Party (the East German Communist Party) and faces criticism for its failure to condemn adequately the abuses of East German dictatorship.

Over the coming years, other centenaries will jostle for the attention of the German public – 2015 is the bi-centenary of the birth of Otto von Bismarck, the first Chancellor of a united Germany, and 2017 marks the quinqucentenary of the Reformation. It is difficult to say what legacies the centenary of the First World War will bequeath, but it is possible to see the outlines of a new story, one that embeds German history within a broader global framework and that views the war as the starting point of a catastrophic twentieth century.

In so far as the differing local, national, and global perspectives on the commemoration of the war are united by a register, or a tone, it is one of poignancy and tragedy. Pride, evident in some aspects of French and British commemorative culture, is completely absent. At times the lesson – for commemorations can never be fully divorced from a pedagogic purpose – seems to be resolutely anti-war. The German Foreign Minister, Frank Walter Steinmeier, organised several events in early 2014, which warned that the July crisis represented the failure of diplomacy. Such a failure, in the context of crises in East Asia, the Ukraine, and the Middle East, would be even more costly today. And yet the tragedy of the First World War, suggested Jens Bisky, a German journalist who chaired a panel discussion at the Schloss Bellevue on 27 June, was that

Many Germans have personal memories of the division of the country, the dictatorship in East Germany, and the end of the Cold War. This provided an immediacy, a connection between the personal and the national, that was much less pronounced in the commemorations of the First World War

it was a futile war, one that no power should have sought or needed to fight; whereas the lesson of the Second World War was that military force had to be employed. The president, Joachim Gauck (2014), has echoed this message during the year. Germany, he argues, cannot be a bystander in world politics, but rather must intervene for “freedom and law, for enlightenment, for tolerance, for justice and humanity”. It is as likely that current political controversies will shape the continuing commemoration of the First World War as memories of the war will offer fresh perspectives on the challenges German society and politics face today.

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