Aftermath: Legacies and Memories of War in Europe, 1918–1945–1989

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This conference brought together established academics and postgraduate researchers, in order to shed important, cross-disciplinary light on war and its impact in Europe in the twentieth century. The conference organisers sought to include but also extend beyond the field of memory studies, and to investigate a wide range of legacies and memories of war over a broad span of time and space. Taking 1918, 1945 and 1989 as the key dates of its overarching temporal scheme, the conference invited examinations of the ways in which the First World War, the Second World War and the Cold War cast their shadows over the periods which followed them, both in short- and long-term perspectives.

The conference opened with a series of papers on cultural responses to the First World War. MARTIN HURCOMBE (Bristol) introduced a key recurrent theme – the relationship between the living and the dead in the aftermath of war – by examining the 'ghostly memory and haunting of the war dead' in Roland Dorgelès' *Le Réveil des morts* (1923) and the 1934 film version of *Les Croix de bois* (1919). In his portrayal of the uncanny, grotesque return of the fallen to haunt their surviving comrades, Hurcombe argued, Dorgelès 'mobilised' the war dead in order to push veterans to exert their moral influence over post-war civil society in France, which had neglected both the memory of the dead and the veterans' own welfare needs.

NICHOLAS MARTIN (Birmingham) evaluated Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* (1924) as a literary response to the First World War. Whereas many other writings of the 1920s present more direct confrontations with military combat, Mann reconstructs ideological struggles which plagued Europe before, during and after the Great War. Martin showed how *The Magic Mountain* explores the challenge facing Mann's characters, the artist himself and his fellow Europeans of overcoming an irrational fascination with Death in order to embrace Life. While this intellectual and emotional dilemma was not a specific legacy of the First World War, its urgency increased with this conflict, and was inextricably linked with what Mann saw as the threat of an 'irrational backlash' in the post-war years.

The cultural and ideological legacies of the First World War were expanded upon by TARA WINDSOR (Birmingham) in a paper on German Writers and Cultural Diplomacy. The inseparability of the military and cultural conflicts of 1914-1918 created a situation in post-war Germany in which culture was seen as both a means and an end to national and international reconstruction. The examples of the International PEN Club, its first German section, and selected writers involved in these cultural institutions illustrated various bids for renewed international cultural contact, which in turn reflected conflicts, both old and new, that hampered the Weimar Republic's international and domestic affairs.

Continuing the examination of the relationship between the Great War and international culture, STEPHEN FORCER (Birmingham) explored the 'mad' responses of the European avant-garde to the 'madness' of war. Reading examples of Dada and Surrealist art alongside secondary material from the fields of linguistics, psychoanalysis and history, Forcer tested the relevance of avant-garde aesthetics to real experiences and symptoms of warfare. In particular, Forcer posited 'compelling connections' between the empirical evidence contained in Joanna Bourke's *An Intimate History of Killing* (1999) and common themes in Surrealist art, illustrating that war is not just 'surreal', but an 'extremely vivid form of Surrealism itself'.

The contested commemoration of war was discussed in three papers dealing with Eastern Europe from the twentieth century to the present. JOHN PAUL NEWMAN (Dublin) examined changing public memories of the Great War in Serbian history and the place

of these narratives in debates about Serbia's identity within Yugoslavia. Between 1918 and 1941, discussions emphasised the feeling that Serbs had made great sacrifices on behalf of all South Slavs, but that the newly established Kingdom of Yugoslavia did not do justice to their wartime efforts. The late 1960s and 1970s saw renewed interest in the Great War, which also exploited narratives of disproportionate and unrewarded sacrifice, now portrayed as 'exemplary' of Serbia's twentieth century by nationalist intellectuals seeking to legitimise a Serbian 'revival' within the Yugoslavian state.

GEOFFREY SWAIN (Glasgow) investigated the political significance and contestation of commemorative dates in Latvia. Swain first explained how the frequent regime changes between 1918 and 1945 resulted in correspondingly frequent and radical attempts to (re-)structure commemoration of conflicts that had taken place in Latvia since the First World War. Swain then addressed the public search for commemorative dates in post-Soviet Latvia, which has been dominated by populist antagonisms between ethnic Latvians and Russian-speakers, particularly over the commemoration of the Second World War, while the democratic Latvian government struggles to assert a pro-Western historical narrative of its own.

GABRIELA POPA (Florence) examined the 'symbolic appropriation' of the Second World War in post-Soviet Moldova, and demonstrated how war monuments from the Soviet era have been incorporated into rather than removed from commemorative practices and spaces since 1991. Popa argued that memory of the Second World War appears not to have been contested but characterised by a search for inclusive commemoration at national and local levels. By adding religious symbols to existing Soviet monuments, and remembering the fallen of the Second World War together with victims of later conflicts, such war monuments have become both sites of mourning for ordinary people, and reflections of the independent Moldovan state's 'mobilisation' of its Soviet legacy alongside its 'emerging national iconography'.

The centrepieces of the conference were keynote lectures delivered by JAY WINTER (New Haven) and MARY FULBROOK (London). Winter pleaded for the addition of silence to the landscape of scholarship on war and the memory of war, which has been dominated hitherto by a binary approach focusing on memory versus forgetting. According to Winter, the important place of silence *between* remembering and forgetting lies in its often performative nature – silence not only exists in the world, it has many forms, meanings and moral dimensions, not least in the aftermath of conflict. Winter introduced three analytical categories of socially constructed silence, which he termed 'liturgical', 'political or strategic' and 'essentialist' silences, drawing attention, for example, to the central role of silence in public mourning; to issues of privilege and authority entailed in remembrance, and the question of who is entitled, forbidden or chooses not to speak; and to the fact that silence can be broken by multiple actors who thereby undermine taboos and expose prejudice.

Fulbrook's lecture surveyed experiences of distinct generations during and after periods of violence in twentieth-century Germany, and linked this to their 'availability for mobilisation' in the political systems established in the aftermath of these conflicts. Contested defeat in 1918 meant that Germans born in the first decade of the century later sought to complete 'violent revisionist missions' which, together with the violence of the Nazi regime, created the preconditions for some of them to become complicit in the Holocaust. After total defeat in 1945, the younger generation socialised under Nazism made a radical break with the recent past and became key carriers of the GDR. The 'gentle revolution' of 1989 did not result in political mobilisation of the kinds seen earlier in the century, but in individual self-mobilisation and varied patterns of response to the Western-driven, post-Cold-War world. Responses to conflict differed throughout Germany's twentieth century, but Fulbrook stressed the underlying generational dynamic at each stage, illustrating the ambivalent emotional bonds of the young to the old and to what had gone before.

Three papers with their disciplinary roots in historical studies illuminated some of the immediate and longer term legacies of the

Second World War. SABINE LEE (Birmingham) contributed to the conference's 'generational' strand by examining a generation of children born of war and occupation in Britain and Germany before and after 1945. Lee outlined categories of children fathered by American GIs with British and German women, and considered the treatment of these children, highlighting, in particular, the experiences of mixed-race children of GIs in Britain and the measures taken to solving the so-called 'Brown Baby' problem.

Whereas Lee examined a 'human legacy' of the Second World War, STEFFEN PRAUSER (Birmingham) and DANIEL TODMAN (London) addressed aspects of the mythologisation of this conflict. Prauser traced the creation and perpetuation of the myth in Germany after 1945 of the 'untainted' Wehrmacht, which became part of a discourse deliberately upheld by the Adenauer government and veterans' organisations, while literary and filmic treatments of the war did not generally question the actions of the 'honest' soldier. The mythologisation of the Wehrmacht was part of a broader 'competition' between groups of victims in the Bundesrepublik and was by and large criticised only by historians until the 1990s. Public perceptions of the Wehrmacht only changed with the controversial Wehrmacht exhibition of 1995-99, paralleled by the 'comeback' of other groups of victims, such as German expellees and bombing victims.

Todman examined how striking statistics presented in Richard Titmuss' *The Problems of Social Policy* (1950) have made their way into later accounts of the war and resulted in a widely asserted historical 'fact' that more civilians were killed than combatants, leading in turn to a civilian-centric narrative of the conflict. Todman showed that while Titmuss was skilled at precise statistical analysis, he often deployed carefully selected evidence and distinctive written presentation to make his own points about the social impacts and outcomes of war. Todman argued that Titmuss' figures have become 'liberated' from the original context of his book and have become 'assumed pieces of historical knowledge', shaping both academic accounts and popular understandings of the war in Britain.

The conference closed with three contemporary cultural perspectives on the memories and legacies of war. MARY COSGROVE (Edinburgh) introduced Jenny Erpenbeck's 2008 novel *Heimsuchung* which portrays the experiences of five generations of Germans from before the Weimar Republic to post-reunification Germany. The short but epic novel tackles a sweep of major historical events and concerns of Germany's twentieth century through the stories of the characters who variously occupy and vacate a plot of land on the outskirts of Berlin. Cosgrove argued that within the novel's shifting perspectives, dominant memories of the Second World War are revisited from a post-Cold War, eastern German perspective.

JOANNE SAYNER (Birmingham) presented a case study of an 'immersive learning project' run by the Imperial War Museum for professionals involved in teaching the legacies of conflict in Europe. Drawing on her own experiences of the programme, Sayner explored the original goals behind the project and its emphasis on both the national and the supranational contexts of remembering conflict. Specifically, Sayner reflected on her project-group's trips to Central European sites commemorating the Second World War, the Holocaust and Cold War repression, applying theoretical concepts from memory studies to help explain the various reactions experienced by the 'educators of memory' at these sites.

The dissemination of knowledge and memory of war was expanded geographically by AARON MOORE (Manchester) in his paper on Japanese Peace and War Museums. Although often accused of avoiding public discussion of its wartime past, Japan has more museums of this kind than any other country. Moore examined the foundation and organisation of these museums and the political messages they have conveyed, from Left to Right, in Japan since 1945. Moore argued that the religious and spiritual language surrounding many of the more conservative museums hinders access to archives, which poses a serious but not insurmountable problem to the pursuit of critical research into war and its legacies.

The conference's interdisciplinary ap-

proach resulted in a rich collection of papers which covered a wide range of thematic, regional, temporal and methodological perspectives, while also illuminating a number of recurrent though differentiated ideas concerning memorialisation, mythologisation, mobilisation, commemoration and confrontation, reconstruction and representation in the aftermath of conflict. The post-war relationship between the living and the dead, the contestation of memories and legacies of war in cultural and political discourses, and the significance of generations emerged as key threads which ran through the conference's discussions. The conference broadened and deepened understanding on a vast subject, demonstrating the continuing importance and fruitfulness of the study of legacies and memories of war in the twentieth century.

Conference Overview:

Session 1

Martin Hurcombe (University of Bristol): The Haunting of Roland D. The First World War Dead in the Writings of Roland Dorgelès

Nicholas Martin (University of Birmingham): *The Magic Mountain* in the German Literary Landscape after the First World War

Session 2

Tara Windsor (University of Birmingham): Between Cultural Conflict and Cultural Contact: German Writers, Cultural Diplomacy and the Legacies of the First World War

Stephen Forcer (University of Birmingham): Beyond Mental: Avant-garde Culture and War

Session 3

John Paul Newman (University College Dublin): Times of Death: The First World War and Serbia's Twentieth Century

Geoffrey Swain (University of Glasgow): Politicising Commemoration in Twentieth-Century Latvia

Session 4

Gabriela Popa (European University Institute, Florence): Challenging the „Sacred": Symbolic Appropriation of the Second World War Monuments in post-Soviet Moldova

Sabine Lee (University of Birmingham): The Human Legacy: Children Born of War and Occupation during and after the Second World War

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Jay Winter (Yale University): The Social Construction of Silence

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Mary Fulbrook (University College London): Generations and the ruptures of 1918, 1945, and 1989 in Germany

Session 5

Steffen Prauser (University of Birmingham): Veterans of the Second World War in the so-called collective memory in Germany after 1945

Daniel Todman (Queen Mary, University of London): Richard Titmuss, Problems of Social Policy and the British Construction of the Second World War

Session 6

Joanne Sayner (University of Birmingham): Politics and Pedagogy: Educating the Educators of Memory

Mary Cosgrove (University of Edinburgh): Circumspection or Competition? War Memories in Jenny Erpenbeck's *Heimsuchung* (2008)

Session 7

Aaron Moore (University of Manchester): To Defile a Sacred Memory: Japanese Peace and War Museums in a Comparative Framework

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