This article attempts to chart a course through works published on the First World War approximately since 2001, with the focus primarily on research monographs in English, German, French, and Italian. I make no claim to comprehensiveness, which would be condemned to defeat by the sheer volume of published scholarship. The main questions of this article are to what extent research on a world-wide phenomenon has been internationalised and whether the often-announced claim to write transnational history has been fulfilled. Why are some battles virtually unknown in some national histories while they have powerful symbolic value in others? Why is the war almost entirely unknown in history and memory in some states, despite the utter devastation it caused? This survey therefore seeks answers from the historiography that often lie outside the control of historians, who do not «own» history but nevertheless have a duty to push at the frontiers of their discipline in terms of methodology and content. A common feature of many studies of the war is the idea that it was a kind of «laboratory», a testing ground for later radicalised practices; some historians posit a theory of continuity of total war from the First to the Second World War. Much recent writing is inspired by two associated questions: what enabled men – and more broadly entire societies – to mobilise for war and endure it for so long? This debate is especially acute in French historiography, expressed in the antithesis between «coercion» and «consent», but it resonates in every national history. Related to that is the question how we should understand the «culture of war» – as the product of totalising tendencies driven by ever more militarised states, or as a process of popular self-mobilisation from below?

First, a few remarks on the longer-term context. The historiography of the First World War began during the war itself, with the publication of documents selected by governments to justify their conduct in the decisions leading to war, starting a
debate that dominated historiography until the 1970s. The rediscovery of the economic and social history of the war in the 1960s and 1970s was prompted in Germany by the Fischer debate, in Britain by an anti-establishment reflex and hence an interest in labour history and the everyday life of soldiers, in France partly by the Annales school of social and economic history, and in Italy by a rejection of the traditions of the bourgeois nation state. Since the late 1980s there has been a turn to cultural history, broadly defined as «how men and women make sense of the world in which they live».

Within this overall pattern there have been notable exceptions. During the entire period since 1918 military writers have continuously produced official histories and histories of individual campaigns and battles. At their best, military historians had successfully integrated the history of mentalities and soldiers’ experience well before any «cultural turn»; John Keegan’s chapter on the Somme in The Face of Battle is a classic example. Noteworthy social, economic and cultural histories of the war emerged in the 1920s, with the publications of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, many of which remain unsurpassed. The history of propaganda, which is a manifestation of culture, also featured among the earliest scholarly studies in the 1920s. The everyday experience of soldiers featured already in the publication by Norton Cru, Témoins, in 1929 and (with a more pronounced heroising and patriotic intent) the collection of fallen students’ letters published in several editions, beginning in 1916, by Philipp Witkop. The cultural history of the war received a major impetus from the classic book on the literary reinterpretation of the war, Paul Fussell’s The Great War and Modern Memory, which first appeared in 1975. Fussell’s


argument was that pre-war language «could not accommodate the sense experience of the trenches»; building on the traditional language of literature and using the language of irony, war writers expressed the authenticity of soldiers’ experience which was what constituted evidence. Fussell’s privileging of «experience» and his faulty methodology have been subjected to a delightfully mordant critique by Len Smith, yet in the Anglophone world it has continued to be influential. Possibly, this is because the book convinced historians «that narrative matters»; the war, Smith argues, was a part of a «metanarrative of tragedy» that pointed forward to 1939–1945.¹⁰

German historiography of the First World War was for a long time under precisely that shadow. Moreover, cultural history was seen primarily as «high culture», unlike in the English-speaking world, where there was little difficulty in integrating «popular» culture.¹¹ In the 1990s, the first fruits of the new cultural history were harvested in a collection edited by Gerhard Hirschfeld and Gerd Krumeich, a study of mentalities based on German soldiers’ letters by Bernd Ulrich, and further valuable monographs published by the Library of Contemporary History, Stuttgart.¹² The team of Hirschfeld, Krumeich and Irina Renz brought together German and international research in 2003 in an encyclopaedia that can be regarded as the happy union of the new cultural history with the military operational and broader history of the war.¹³

The French counterpart, Encyclopédie de la Grande Guerre, edited by Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Jean-Jacques Becker, is in fact a very large (1300 page) collection of brief essays rather than an encyclopaedia, although its index is some help in locating information. Its contributors are associated with the Péronne Historical de la Grande Guerre, an innovative museum created in 1992 and a major research centre on the war directed also by Annette Becker, John Horne, Gerd Krumeich, Antoine Prost and Jay Winter. The Historical has incubated a new generation of scholarship and the Encyclopédie is one of its products. Despite its subtitle, «culture» is not the only topic: there are entries on many other essential aspects.¹⁴ The subtitle nevertheless indicates the hegemony of cultural history, as practised by the Péronne school in French historiography over the last two decades.

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¹³ Hirschfeld / Krumeich / Renz, Enzyklopädie, 304–315.

¹⁴ S. Audoin-Rouzeau / J.-J. Becker (eds.), Encyclo- pédie de la Grande Guerre 1914–1918. Histoire et cul- ture, Paris 2004. Unfortunately, the articles lack precise references, and in some cases the research is very dated (e.g. «Financer la guerre»).
This has been challenged by the historians associated with the Collectif de Recherche International et de Débat sur la Guerre de 1914–1918 (CRID). Nicolas Offenstadt sees the cultural history paradigm as the attempt to distance the historian from the participants to «end» the war, just as François Furet had «ended» the French Revolution. He claims that the Péronne school has produced no sources-based monographs on the ordinary soldiers; their limited source material was produced behind the front by elite groups. Offenstadt finds little evidence of hatred among ordinary soldiers, at least after the first few weeks of war, or of a «crusade», as claimed by the cultural historians.\footnote{15} The CRID aims thus to redress the lack of social historical studies while remaining open to all genres of history of the war.

Although Offenstadt’s critique is to some extent justified in that the «imperialism» of cultural history and the preoccupation with discourse, representation and memory can sometimes obscure other aspects, he does not give due recognition to the real advances in historiography prompted by those he criticises. Thus Jean-Jacques Becker and Gerd Krumeich produced a genuinely comparative Franco-German history of the war, in which «culture» plays only a minor part. Certainly, their framework is a «political history of war mentalities», but high politics, the experience of ordinary soldiers and social history feature just as prominently.\footnote{16} The monograph on the Battle of Charleroi by Baldin and Saint-Fuscien succeeds in integrating narrative military history with the experience of front-line soldiers and civilians, and broader cultural history.\footnote{17} Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert’s second volume of essays resulting from the «capital cities» project expressly seeks to integrate cultural with social and economic history.\footnote{18} As with the first volume, the chapters are co-authored to ensure a transnational, comparative approach; they are the product of sources-driven research that conveys the multitude of experiences of urban life.

The Italian *La Grande Guerra: dall’Intervento alla «vittoria mutilata»* edited by Daniele Ceschin and Mario Isnenghi, is a comprehensive handbook on Italy in the war. It contains 95 properly referenced, full-length articles.\footnote{19} Not all of them, however, represent the state of research. The contribution on morale, for example, is stuck in an older mode of historiography that sees propaganda purely as a state-driven, top-down process of manipulation and soldiers merely as recipients of ideology. Modern international research that emphasises a range of aspects including

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{17} D. Baldin / E. Saint-Fuscien, *Charleroi. 21–23 août 1914*, Paris 2012.
\end{itemize}
self-mobilisation from below and factors beyond propaganda that affect morale is largely ignored.\(^\text{20}\)

The German and French encyclopaedias, and to a lesser extent the Italian compendium, show the growing internationalisation of research on the war: a transnational approach is now becoming the standard to which much new research aspires. Yet each of them is essentially based on the historiography of the respective home country; the main spotlight remains on the west European theatre and Germany, while the eastern and southern European theatres, not to mention the global aspects, are left largely in the dark.\(^\text{21}\) John Horne’s *Companion to World War I* comes closer to achieving more balanced coverage of theatres and nations outside western and central Europe with useful summaries of the research, but by authors almost exclusively from western Europe and the western world.\(^\text{22}\) By contrast, a truly transnational perspective inspires the major project at the Free University of Berlin, *1914–1918 Online: International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, due to be launched in 2014. This promises not only a global approach, but also to make full use of the potential of global communications technology to produce an interactive, sustainable, multi-media reference work that meets all scholarly standards of research.

The advent of the internet and ever cheaper international transport have facilitated communication between early career researchers who have emancipated themselves from traditional academic hierarchies. Since 2001 the International Society for First World War Studies has held a series of conferences and published the results, and it launched the journal *First World War Studies* in 2010.\(^\text{23}\)

### 1. Origins

A transnational approach is the *sine qua non* to explain the origins of the war; Christopher Clark’s *Sleepwalkers* meets that condition. It is an ambitious attempt to revise the history of the origins of the war. Clark contends that the protagonists were «sleepwalkers [...] blind to the reality of the horror they were about to bring into the world».\(^\text{24}\) There are telling vignettes that illustrate the vanity, irresponsibility and over-confidence of the decision-makers in Europe’s capitals. The book recreates the complexity of the bilateral and multilateral relations between the five great powers

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and some of the lesser states, and their wide array of policy options. Coming down on the side of an interpretation that stresses contingency, not intention, Clark rightly restores the occasion for war, the assassination at Sarajevo, to centre stage, and makes a persuasive case to take account of the violent dynamic of Serbian politics in the constellation of international politics.

Yet despite the impressive amount of new material mined in the archives, the yield is in the end disappointing. He drives his interpretation beyond the evidence, arguing that Serbia was a kind of rogue state, hell-bent on war with Austria-Hungary. Accordingly, the Serbian government was complicit in the plot to assassinate Franz Ferdinand to provoke a war from which a Serb-dominated Yugoslav state would emerge. Generations of politicians, military occupiers (in both world wars) and historians have tried to link the government of Pašić with the conspiracy, and Clark is no more successful. Instead, he reduces Serbia’s highly conflicted politics into a unified will to war. Clark ignores evidence that contradicts his thesis: with a depleted army, an indebted state struggling to integrate the newly conquered southern territories and an election campaign in progress, it can hardly have been in the Serb government’s interest to provoke a war with the neighbouring great power. Moreover, what kind of ruthless warmongering conspiracy is it that allows its army chief of staff, the highly talented General Putnik, to take a spa cure in Austria during the July crisis?

Surprisingly for a historian of Germany, Clark devotes little attention to German policy, except for two main aspects: the Kaiser’s «pacifism» and the government’s belief that the Austro-Serb conflict would remain localised. Clark claims that the German decision-makers believed that Russia would not join in. The preponderance of German documents in July 1914 shows that the military and the chancellor expected and wanted war, and the Kaiser himself told the Habsburg ambassador in the crucial meeting on 5 July that Germany would stand by Austria-Hungary in taking action against Serbia, though it meant war with Russia. In fact, chancellor Bethmann Hollweg and the foreign ministry were engaged in a careful campaign of disinformation: they wanted everyone outside a very small circle of decision-makers to believe in the myth of «localisation», while actually reckoning with European war.

Clark is anxious to portray Wilhelm II as a «Friedenskaiser» resolved to keep the peace, at least in regard to his reaction to Serbia’s answer to the Austrian ultimatum. Wilhelm called it «a capitulation of the most humiliating kind» and continued: «Any reason for war has now been eliminated.» Clark does not seem to understand the bizarre nature of the Kaiser’s proposal that the Austro-Hungarian army should now «occupy Belgrade [and][]... a part of Serbia’ to enforce compliance with Vienna’s demands; for Clark the Kaiser, unlike the warmongers in Berlin and Vienna, «remained wedded to the notion of a political resolution of the Balkan problem».25

One can easily imagine the response if the Tsar had proposed the occupation of Berlin.

Clark’s eagerness to exonerate the Habsburg decision-makers leads him to adopt uncritically the Habsburg perspective. Despite inveighing against a teleological reading of the origins of the war, Clark appears to agree that «time was running out for Austria-Hungary», and there was no alternative to its «drastic solution» of the harsh ultimatum to Serbia.\(^\text{26}\) Yet he does not find the space to mention that the Habsburg envoy in Belgrade was instructed: «However the Serbs react to the ultimatum, you must break off relations and it must come to war.»\(^\text{27}\) The Russian government was thus not mistaken in suspecting that Vienna was determined on war, at the latest from 7 July, but lacked proof until they had news of the ultimatum on 24 July. It is only logical, given his view of Serbian responsibility, that Clark believes that Austria had «a right to counter-measures in the face of Serbian irredentism».\(^\text{28}\) When Austria-Hungary launched war on Serbia on 28 July, it was Russia and France, in Clark’s view, that bore the main responsibility for the European war because they decided to resist.

Finally, the thesis that the decision-makers stumbled into war, ignorant of the consequences, is not only a step back to the unhistorical view of Lloyd George that «the nations slithered over the brink into the boiling cauldron of war [...] Nobody wanted war».\(^\text{29}\) There clearly were actors, not only in Vienna and Berlin, who wanted war and helped to bring it about, and their respective contributions have to be assessed. It also ignores the evidence that many military and civilian decision-makers, from Bethmann Hollweg and Moltke to Edward Grey, each with his own expectations, fears and imagination, realised well enough the magnitude of the dangers they were incurring. And many on the German general staff explicitly expected a long, destructive war, as Stig Förster pointed out in a seminal article.\(^\text{30}\) If there is a sub-text to all of this, it is that Clark rejects the German «special path» (Sonderweg) argument, namely the notion that German historical development diverged fatefully from the western, democratic model, and that there was an essential continuity of policy from the Wilhelmine Reich to the Nazi state.\(^\text{31}\) The intention is laudable, and most historians would agree that a single-nation approach to a complex multinational process is inadequate. But by starting with the argument that no one in

\(^\text{26}\) Ibid., 416–430.
\(^\text{28}\) Clark, The Sleepwalkers, 481.
\(^\text{29}\) War Memoirs of David Lloyd George, 6 vols., London 1933–1936, vol. I, 49, 52. Lloyd George knew better than this during the war and the peace conference; the remark should be seen in the context of his gradual shift to a policy of reconciliation with Germany that ended with him as an apologist for Hitler.
particular was responsible, and concluding that Serbia, Russia and France were to blame, Clark is ultimately not convincing.

Hamilton and Herwig, William Mulligan and Annika Mombauer have provided more balanced accounts of the war’s origins. Without reducing everything to German responsibility, Mombauer’s lucid, sensible book confirms that the German military desired pre-emptive war before the army reforms in France and Russia brought about crushing superiority, and in July 1914 Bethmann accepted the risk of a European war. Mulligan sets a different emphasis, arguing for the contingency of history: the concert of European powers had resolved conflicts in the past and could have achieved détente in 1914, but for the coincidence of unfortunate events in the Balkans.\(^{32}\)

2. Combat on the Western Front

The minor debate started by Terence Zuber in 2002 with his book *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan*, in which he argued that the «Schlieffen Plan» did not exist, has rumbled on through the decade.\(^{33}\) Hans Ehler, Michael Epkenhans and Gerhard P. Groß published a book that argued that there was after all a Schlieffen Plan; a summary of their arguments appeared in English in an article in *War in History*.\(^{34}\) The simple matter is that the original version of the plan is indeed missing. However, the paper trail in the archives and a facsimile reproduction of some pages prove that it existed – so much for the purely material aspect. Zuber’s argument is that the very idea of the plan did not exist. There are several elements to this, one of which is his claim that «German troops never studied the western envelopment of Paris or battles on French ground. [Schlieffen’s] map exercises always took place only in Lorraine or Belgium.»\(^{35}\) Zuber’s central point is that German war planning before 1914 was defensive. Gerhard Groß cites copious documentation showing that Schlieffen conducted exercises in general staff rides in 1905 in which German troops advanced through Belgium to the line Lille–Maubeuge in northern France and crossed the Seine near Rouen, including realistic scenarios for French counter-offensives. Zuber’s main argument is thus groundless. Yet the debate has not been entirely fruitless. New material has been uncovered and published. Groß took the

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opportunity to revise some previously held convictions; he states for example, that Schlieffen was no mere military technocrat and was far more attuned to international political developments than assumed: «Schlieffen’s operations plans were [...] far less dogmatic than previously thought. Political considerations consistently formed part of his assessment of the situation.» Moltke’s adaptations of the plan in line with shifts in the international situation after 1906 meant that «in 1914 the German soldiers entered the field not with a Schlieffen plan but with a Moltke plan.» Nevertheless, the essence of Schlieffen remained: a massive offensive in the west to envelop and annihilate the French army before turning east to defeat Russia.36

Several battles have been the topic of renewed attention. The Canadian historian Holger Herwig has returned to the (first) battle of Marne, which he sees as the encounter that «changed the world». A German victory on the Marne in the struggle between «monarchy and democracy» (Wilhelm II) «would have been a German <condominium> over the Continent <for all imaginable time>». It was therefore the first turning point of the war.37 In several great battles before the Marne, known collectively as the battle of the frontiers, the French and British had been badly beaten and forced to retreat.38 By 1 September, Moltke was «ecstatic» at the reports of victory after victory. Yet not only did a «Cannae», a gigantic encirclement to annihilate the enemy, fail to materialise, but the German attack also suffered a painful defeat with immense losses in the usually disregarded operation to storm Nancy.39 The German defeat on the Marne had several causes, most of which need not be repeated here. Herwig gives due consideration to all factors on the German and the French sides, but particularly stresses the poor communication – technical and personal – between the German commanders, each of whom acted as prima donna, squabbling furiously. Whether this was decisive is still open. Herwig’s judgement on the Hentsch mission is to reject the many German military historians’ view that the lieutenant-colonel, by giving the order to retreat, lost a certain victory. However, ascribing responsibility instead to Bülow and Kluck, commanders of the second and first armies, is an uncharacteristic oversimplification. By and large, Herwig’s lively book is full of well-founded judgments, based on thorough archive research.

The Marne hardly features in the popular memory in the Anglophone world; in France it is perhaps better known as the «miracle» battle, with the mythic image of the Paris taxis rushing soldiers to the front. Perhaps the explanation is that most of

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38 Few of these have been the subject of modern research, but that is beginning to change. See Baldin and Saint-Fuscien, Charleroi. Charleroi was the «most murderous three days of combat» during the entire war for the French army, yet it has been in an «historiographical no man’s land» (191).
39 Terence Zuber wilfully misunderstands this, like much else, as a «complete vindication of German tactical doctrine and training». The Battle of the Frontiers: Ardennes 1914, Stroud 2007, 127, cited in Herwig, Marne, 214.
the well-known war memorials are on the Somme, in Flanders or at Verdun. Yet the Marne (with the associated preceding battles) caused more casualties than Verdun. ⁴⁰

The Somme has by contrast been treated in countless English books, poems and films, giving it an unassailable place in both memory and scholarship. Readers outside the Anglophone world may be puzzled by the peculiar obsession with this battle. This resulted from the history of memory after the war, when the war was seen to have been in vain. ⁴¹ At the end of his magisterial book Bloody Victory, William Philpott explains how the memory of the Somme has fashioned the contemporary popular understanding of the war in the Anglophone world: a futile battle that failed to bring the end of a futile war closer. This perception came from none other than Winston S. Churchill. With his account of the Somme in The World Crisis (1927) Churchill «was to manufacture one of Britain’s great historical myths». Influential military writers like Basil Liddell Hart continued the condemnation of the British army and in particular its commander-in-chief, General Sir Douglas Haig. Soon, intellectuals contributed to the growing literature of disenchantment, the cynical view that the war had been a great swindle perpetrated on brave soldiers by uncaring and unimaginative commanders. ⁴²

Unlike many British historians who write about the Somme as if no other nations were there, Philpott readily acknowledges that the role of France has been «all but forgotten by posterity». ⁴³ Refreshingly iconoclastic, he deflates the claim of some of the more enthusiastic advocates of the «learning curve» theory that by 1918 the British army was the best in the war. Instead, he proposes «a complex, up-and-down dynamic» and stresses that the British army certainly learned lessons in the effective combination of men and matériel into a «weapons system» that played a major role in the defeat of the German army. ⁴⁴ Using French sources, Philpott details the Franco-British planning of the offensive: for the first time the two allies launched a coordinated Allied strategic offensive, under Joffre as de facto allied generalissimo. He recognises that Verdun was a «co-dependent, conjoined twin with the Somme. The battles were […] the two components of a sustained campaign of attrition in 1916». ⁴⁵ In other words, Philpott raises his sights well above the Somme battlefield.

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⁴² Philpott’s book supersedes the book on the Somme by the Australian historians Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, who were highly critical of British command: The Somme, New Haven 2005. They also saw the Somme as a mainly British or British empire affair, with Haig in command of the operation.
⁴⁴ Ibid., 51–52, 264–265.
He dispenses with the cliché that the British troops advanced in long, straight lines, and argues that the attack plans allowed far more flexibility and variation of tactics than hitherto assumed. Nevertheless, he pulls no punches in exposing the failures of British command. The British artillery arm, which previous historians have rightly identified as a weak point, was not as experienced as the French artillery, although Fourth Army was beginning to learn the vital lesson that the infantry could not advance beyond the range of the artillery. Only in the last two years of the war did the British gradually perfect the techniques of the creeping barrage and «interdiction», i.e. preventing reinforcements from being deployed.46

General Foch emerges as possibly the only allied officer who realised the Somme would not be a single, decisive battle, but part of a sequence of operations over a sustained period which would eventually wear out the German army.47 Philpott’s careful conclusion is that «the offensive was conducted according to a coherent strategic and operational scheme (for which Foch should take much of the credit); [...] it came closer to breaking German resistance than is generally supposed.»48

In Germany Verdun is the great historic battle that symbolises the war, even though the Somme caused twice as many casualties. Above all in France, Verdun holds a special place as the battle that the entire French army experienced, while twenty nations fought on the Allied side at the Somme. A recent German collection of essays and documents on the Somme explains why it does not feature as a German «site of memory».49 For Germany it was a defensive battle, and although the immediate result was only a small territorial gain for the Allies, in 1917 the German forces retreated from it, leaving behind no significant memorials, only a deliberately devastated region. After 1933 and especially after 1945 the Somme and associated «scorched earth» policy were deliberately forgotten or denied in memory, and for Germany, unlike for Britain, it could not become a site of national commemoration.50 Only specialists seem to know about the impact of the Somme on the German command, which had not taken the British seriously hitherto and were shocked at the high quality of the attacking troops and, above all, at the crushing superiority of their aircraft and artillery fire power produced by an efficient war industry.51

46 Philpott, Bloody Victory, 146, 151.
47 Ibid., 117, 128.
48 Ibid., 625.
3. Non-combatants

Recent historical research has turned to topics far removed from the battlefields. Among these are occupations and the internment of prisoners of war and civilians. As Sophie de Schaepdrijver points out, these were «both separate from and central to the war».

Although civilians under occupation were usually outside the combat zone, many had experienced the violence of invasion or the chaos of retreats. Even away from the front, civilians were subject to surveillance, invasion of privacy, exploitation and poverty. This is well documented for France and Belgium, and there is more research in the pipeline. Christian Westerhoff published pioneering research on forced labour in Poland and Lithuania. Wolfgang Dornik and Stefan Karner edited an enlightening collection on the occupation of the Ukraine which serves to show how much remains to be researched. Mark von Hagen’s *War in a European Borderland* is a highly concentrated book that examines the little-known occupations of Galicia and the Bukovina between 1914 and 1918 and of the Ukraine in 1918. The main focus, indeed, is on the territory claimed by the Ukrainian national movement. Von Hagen shows how the war was «especially destructive and transformative for the peoples of the territories on the borders between Germany, Austria-Hungary and the Russian Empire. [...] Poles, Jews, Ukrainians, Belarusians, and the Baltic peoples, but also for [...] the Russians, Germans and Austrians». The consequence of the years of world war, revolution, civil war and occupations was «the destruction of most of Ukrainian civil society [...] and the repartition of Ukraine».

The German occupation regimes have led historians to reflect on the possible continuities from the First World War to Nazi occupation policies in the Second World War. Annette Becker sees the occupation of France not merely as a «laboratory of the totalisation of war» but also clear parallels between the two occupations. Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius brackets the two wars, but makes the crucial distinction: the occupation of eastern Europe was «a starting point or baseline for more radical visions of domination» in the Second World War. Moreover, occupation did not

57 Ibid., 104–106.
58 V. G. Liulevicius, «German-Occupied Eastern
mean the same everywhere. He notes the contrast between German-occupied Poland and the territories known as Ober Ost (Lithuania, southern Latvia and parts of Poland and Belarus). The Central Powers attempted to gain the support of the Poles by ruling through a civilian administration, and in 1916 declared the establishment of a Polish kingdom with limited autonomy. Ober Ost, by contrast, was a military colony under direct army rule; far from holding out the promise of autonomy, preparations were made for long-term occupation, even annexation. We now know a good deal about German perceptions of the east from the work of Liulevicius, Nelson, Hoeres and Volkman, which perhaps indicates that the «cultural turn» is reaching its limits. Apart from recent research on Polish labour for Germany, research is still lacking on the extent of economic exploitation during the occupation of Poland and Ober Ost, both subjected to thorough exploitation, which inevitably conflicted with the goal of winning over the population.

Most historians prefer not to examine occupation in the First World War through the lens of the Second, but explain it in its own context. The power of the occupation authorities was not unlimited, Westerhoff shows: many Polish civilians proved remarkably recalcitrant in evading forced labour recruitment. Liulevicius refers to sporadic resistance and the growth of bandit groups in the countryside which challenged German rule in eastern Europe.

As Jonathan Gumz shows, there was outright resistance in Serbia, with guerrilla war in the southern districts in 1917. Gumz’s thesis is that the Habsburg military treated the entire Serb civilian population, including women and children, as combatants, and it seriously considered the option of waging total war in Serbia through the instrument of food supply. Starvation would be used «to punish an entire country». However, because of its traditional outlook, conceptions of morality and awareness of international law, the Habsburg army stepped back from that precipice.

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200, here 192–194. Volkman differs on some key questions from Hoeres: H.-E. Volkmann,
«Der Ostkrieg 1914/15 als Erlebnis- und Erfah -
25 rungswelt des deutschen Militärs», in: Groß, Die
vergessene Front, 263–293, here 281.

30 the German occupation of Belgium in 1914–1918 as a direct forerunner of the Nazi occupation, but their sensationalist approach is too crude to provide a reasoned historical examination of possible continuities and discontinuities. This is discussed in J. Horne / A. Kramer, German Atrocities 1914. A History of Denial, New Haven, London 2001.


62 Liulevicius, «German-Occupied Eastern Europe», 454. Further research on this would be welcome.


64 Ibid., 201–205, 215–248.
A useful guide to the historiography and sources on Belgium in the war is provided by Tammy M. Proctor.\textsuperscript{65} Noting that the Commission for Relief in Belgium – Herbert Hoover’s extraordinary organisation that kept the civilian population alive in occupied Belgium and France – has been «strangely absent from most accounts of the war», Proctor rightly points to the important issues it raises, such as international law, transnational charity, blockade, and social history. There is need for further work on the gender history of war and occupation in Belgium, as well as Belgian colonial history in the war.

Proctor’s subsequent book on civilians treats the war as a truly global conflict. She argues that the distinction between civilian and soldier became blurred, as civilians were «militarised» to the extent that it was hard to tell the difference between them and soldiers. The further away from the west European theatre, where conditions were bad enough, the harsher and the more lethal conditions became for civilian workers, especially in Africa. There is interesting material on the internment of civilians, collaboration and resistance, and on charitable relief organisations. Although the «blurred distinction» argument is somewhat overstated, the book sketches the potential for further research.\textsuperscript{66}

At the other end of the spectrum, micro-history can also yield rich dividends, as Roger Chickering has demonstrated. His exemplary study of Freiburg treats the themes of everyday life, food supply, hunger and the social and political repercussions of war in urban Germany, a «total history» of a limited space.\textsuperscript{67}

Adrian Gregory’s book \textit{The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War} is a major contribution, challenging many past judgements on the basis of an extensive synthesis of research. It is an eloquent, sometimes polemical riposte to the consensus view in Britain that the First World War was «the definitive bad war», that the dead died in vain.\textsuperscript{68} Inspired by international research, Gregory carefully dissects the many strands of popular opinion in Britain in 1914 – and indeed in the rest of the war.\textsuperscript{69} Until 4 August 1914 only a minority were in favour of intervention.\textsuperscript{70} After that, the mood shifted to supporting intervention, but enthusiasm «was quite socially limited, probably most evident amongst young men of the middle classes» and strongest among intellectuals.\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{70} Gregory, \textit{The Last Great War}, 12–16.
Since Britain was alone among major belligerents in not having conscription, a good measure of consent is the fact that half of the 5.7 million men who served in the armed forces had volunteered before conscription was introduced in 1916. Gregory shows that several reasons apart from patriotic loyalty explain the high rate of volunteering: moral pressure, high unemployment, direct orders to enlist by employers, as well as the spikes in the perceived threat to Britain’s security. The central section of the book examines the turn to compulsion and the increasingly important idea of sacrifice which enabled British society to endure the long war, but also sharpened the tensions that emerged in full after the war.

One part of the United Kingdom was utterly changed by the war. As John Horne argues, «Few countries were more decisively affected by the Great War than Ireland. [...] Ireland’s modern political shape to a great extent derives from it.» His edited collection of essays, Our War, seeks to restore to public awareness the history of a hitherto unmentionable war. The war defined and polarised four competing kinds of Irish statehood: unionism, northern unionism, Home Rule nationalism, and separatist nationalism, and those conflicting mobilisations determined Ireland’s post-war development.72

Maureen Healy’s book on Vienna deserves to be much better known. This social and cultural history argues that the disintegration of the Habsburg state was due to the «fall» of the home front rather than to battlefield defeat. Healy shows how initial solidarity and a spirit of sacrifice turned quite early into a process of decline: increasingly bitter resentments and a breakdown of social cohesion «that left Vienna nearly ungovernable». Hunger and the competition for scarce resources meant that solidarity between the suffering was at best fleeting and usually ineffectual, a conclusion that is more convincing than that of Belinda Davis, who claimed that «women of lesser means» in Berlin engaged in collective action and had «power».73 Other than Healy’s fine book, there is a paucity of research on the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and even less on the Transleithanian lands and Bosnia-Herzegovina. A younger generation of Austrian historians has made a start.74

Anton Holzer published two books that are unusual in historical scholarship: collections of photographs documenting Habsburg warfare. High-quality reproductions, most of them published for the first time, bring the war uncomfortably close to the reader, and Holzer’s explanatory texts are in themselves a useful contribution to the neglected Habsburg eastern, Balkan and Italian fronts. They show not only the consequences of combat, but also the
massive disruption of impoverished societies, and suggest the vast extent of Habsburg violence against suspected spies, traitors and civilian resistance fighters. Holzer’s carefully written text provokes a wealth of questions for further research. As Gerhard Paul has argued, the time has come to take photo history seriously, both in the composition of history and in the construction of memory. Holzer’s books underline the key question raised by Paul: why, and by what means, does a war picture become an iconic image? Holzer argues that photographs tell a different story to text sources; he does not use photos as illustration, but treats them as sources to be critically analysed. The presence of civilians as victims and bystanders in many photographs suggests that the different forms of violence away from the front remain under-represented in research; we still lack a systematic study of Habsburg military violence against partisans and non-combatants.76

The questions of why soldiers commit illegal violence against civilians (regarded on the victim side as «atrocities»), historical antecedents, the comparative dimension and the questions of propaganda and memory are discussed by John Horne and Alan Kramer in German Atrocities 1914, which focuses mainly on Belgium and France.

The past decade has seen a surge of studies on incarceration in the war. Alon Rachamimov’s book POWs and the Great War. Captivity on the Eastern Front is mainly on Austro-Hungarian prisoners in Russia. It argues that their treatment was inspired more by nineteenth-century traditions of humanitarian law and chivalry than mid-twentieth-century totalitarianism: the tsarist government tried to comply with its obligations under the Hague Conventions, and such sporadic hardships as occurred resulted from the incompetence of overburdened camp administrations in a failing state.77 By contrast, Reinhard Nachtigal shows how Russia committed massive violations of international law, sanctioning the death of prisoners through malnutrition and maltreatment, culminating in the mass death of prisoner labour in the construction of the Murmansk railway, although this case was admittedly untypical.78 The study by Uta Hinz, Gefangen im Großen Krieg, is a well-researched contribution but remains within the regional confines of Württemberg.79 Jochen Oltmer edited a collection of essays that represent international research.80 The history of

78 R. Nachtigal, Kriegsgefangenschaft an der Ostfront 1914 bis 1918. Ein Literaturbericht, Frankfurt am Main 2005.
Austro-Hungarian prisoners in Italy is explored by Alessandro Tortato. Using sources and literature in Italian, he focuses on the political and institutional aspects of the topic, but includes so far as possible translated testimony of former prisoners. Official documents and prisoners’ memoirs concur in depicting good relations with the civilian population, adequate nutrition and an almost total absence of violence. The opposite applies to the fate of the Italian prisoners of war in Austria-Hungary.

Heather Jones published a comparative monograph on captivity, focusing on the evolution of violence against prisoners and forced prisoner labour in France, Germany and Britain. This is a path breaking book, for she uses a transnational approach to overcome the limitations of traditional, single-nation studies. One significant conclusion is that «the concept of the prisoner of war as a non-combatant [in pre-war international law] [...] had collapsed by 1916». Her study raises the question whether the systematic violence against prisoners during the Second World War really was sui generis. In other words, she challenges the prevailing consensus among historians of the twentieth century, and argues that the history of incarceration in 1914–1918 was a watershed in the totalisation of warfare. The prisoner of war experience in the First World War was thus no «laboratory», but the genuine article.

Several other studies noted how repressive regimes emerged from the war in a process that is more multi-faceted than is implied by the thesis of the «brutalisation» of politics. All belligerent states introduced measures of press censorship, postal surveillance and incarceration of subversives. Harmless citizens who found themselves abroad when war came, as tourists, businessmen or migrant workers, were interned in what were unofficially soon called «concentration camps», a term that was intended to recall the mass internment of civilians in the South African War (1899–1902). Not only so-called enemy aliens were interned, but also internal refugees from the war zone and politically suspect members of ethnic minorities. Matthew Stibbe published pioneering work on the incarceration and forced labour of large masses of civilians that became a feature of modern states at war in the early twentieth century. He situates this in the context of the debate on the origins of the concentration camps, but without falling into the trap of a teleological perspective. With their well-documented study of Russian prisoners of war Verena Moritz and Hannes Leidinger reveal the hitherto virtually unknown terrible conditions in

81 A. Tortato, La prigionia di guerra in Italia, Milan 2004, 165.
Habsburg captivity and also make a serious contribution to the history of Austria-Hungary during the war.\[86\]

Some states carried out population policies that meant the expulsion or deportation of millions of civilians, usually because they were suspected of sympathising with the enemy. This was nothing new in Russia, where millions of Poles, ethnic Germans, Jews, Lithuanians and others were deported during the war: the Tsarist state had a long tradition of forced population removals in its wars on the colonial periphery, as Peter Holquist points out.\[87\]

The potential for state repression to mutate into racist genocide became visible in Ottoman Turkey’s attempt to eradicate the Armenian people in Anatolia. While serious scholarship has made great advances in understanding this phenomenon over the last decade or so, it is seldom integrated into the broader history of Turkey’s involvement in the war.\[88\]

4. Other Fronts

One extra-European battle that has particular significance in Allied memory is Gallipoli. Unlike the Somme, this was an Allied defeat, moreover at the hands of a supposedly inferior enemy. Badly planned from the start, without sufficient attention from the British government and without sufficient coordination between the army and the navy, its execution was also a succession of errors compounded by over-confidence and arrogance. This is a story that has been told many times, and the latest scholarly account, by the Australian historian Robin Prior, does not have much to add on the level of narrative. His main contribution is to debunk the myths surrounding the idea that the Dardanelles offensive was a great «lost opportunity» that might have defeated Turkey, thus saving Russia, opening up the Balkans and shortening the war. He makes a well-founded case to show that the Turks would have gone on fighting even if they had had to retreat from the Dardanelles and Constantinople. In addition, he has revised upwards the Allied casualty figures from the 180,000 previously reported to 390,000.\[89\] What we still lack is a truly transnational account from both the Allied and the Turkish perspective. This will no doubt be a part of the forthcoming book on the Ottoman Empire in the First World War by Mustafa Aksalal, who recently published on Turkey’s entry into the war.\[90\]
The research on Italy in the war is still largely influenced by a social history approach dating back to the 1960s that is highly critical of the state and the military, and that places the Italian state of the First World War in a continuity virtually unbroken by Fascism and the Second World War. The Liberal regime had in this interpretation taken Italy into the war by way of a putsch against parliament and people, and national unity could thus never develop. The peasants in the army and the workers in the factories therefore had to be coerced into fighting the war. Nevertheless, several studies have also pointed to the ambivalences and wide range of war experience, mentalities and motivation of soldiers and civilians: between the extremes of nationalist militarism and complete rejection of war there were various forms of resignation, indifference and adaptation to everyday life at the front. Antonio Gibelli, Giovanna Procacci, Mario Isnenghi and Giorgio Rochat wrote path-breaking studies that deserve to be better known internationally. Especially the latter has consistently posed the question why most soldiers, despite all hardships and their lack of national enthusiasm, endured the war. The joint work by Isnenghi and Rochat, La Grande Guerra, is thus still unsurpassed.\footnote{M. Isnenghi / G. Rochat, La Grande Guerra 1914–1918, Milan 2000.} Above all in the last year of the war, when it turned into a war of defence, there was a broader degree of consent and morale rose.\footnote{O. Janz, «Zwischen Konsens und Dissens. Zur Historiographie des Ersten Weltkriegs in Italien», in: Bauerkämper / Julien, Durchhalten!, 195–213.} In the 1990s several historians (such as Andrea Fava) showed how this was not the result of state propaganda: there was a broad bourgeois self-mobilisation from below.

Within these limitations, there has been some stimulating research. Antonio Gibelli’s influential chapter «Fateful Miracles. The Great War and the Apotheosis of Modernity» argues that the war has often been seen as one in which the breath of modernity impelled it towards horizons which were not yet clearly defined, but the future of the century was visible.\footnote{Ibid., 556.} It became the prototype of the «great wars» of the twentieth century, revealing the characteristics of modernity and its burden of «destructive creativity». The Somme, Verdun and the fighting on the Italian front were no longer battles, but conflicts of unprecedented violence and destruction; more, they were protracted ordeals, sustained by technological apparatuses which relied on the unceasing work of hundreds of thousands of men. This amounted to the industrial production of death. Gibelli concludes that it became a war that made the nation. This was a country where, not long before the war, peasants from the Abruzzi said when they were leaving home for military service that they were going «to Italy». Now they all faced the same conditions, the same discipline and the same suffering, wherever they came from, and the Italian language «became the indispensable code of communication in order to overcome the Babel of dialects».\footnote{A. Gibelli, «Nefaste meraviglie. Grande Guerra e apoteosi della modernità», in: R. Romano / C. Vivanti (eds.) Vol. 18: Guerra e pace, W. Barberis (ed.) Turin 2002, 549–589.} The war

\footnote{https://doi.org/10.17104/1611-8944_2014_1_5
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brought modernity to the peasant masses who had not previously known modernity. Even the diffusion of writing was a sign of modernity experienced first by soldiers, then more generally by the Italians.\textsuperscript{95} While not intending to confirm the contemporary patriotic narrative, he perhaps overstates the «equality of suffering» thesis; the onset of modernity, moreover, remained very uneven across Italy, as cursory inspection of the mezzogiorno would show.

Gibelli wrote also on children at war in a study that covers both the First and Second World Wars, with particular reference, among others, to the fact that it was not the Fascist movement that invented the ideological mobilisation of childhood. Using a great variety of sources, including iconographic and material objects, Gibelli shows the continuity of nationalist mobilisation from the First World War – and before it – to Fascism.\textsuperscript{96}

Among the younger generation of historians, Daniele Ceschin stands out above all for his book on the Italian refugees who fled from the north-eastern provinces in the aftermath of Caporetto.\textsuperscript{97} Two entire provinces, Udine and Belluno, half of Treviso and a part of the Veneto were occupied by the enemy, with a population of 900,000 civilians remaining behind the lines. A «human sea» of some 600,000 civilians fled into the Italian interior, leaving behind their houses, shops and farms. This was a historically unprecedented movement of population, not to be repeated even in the Second World War. Yet far from entering popular memory, the phenomenon hardly featured in collective consciousness after 1918, and it has been ignored in historical treatment of the war. It is this paradox that Ceschin set out to explain in a study based on a rich variety of sources. He discusses what motivated civilians to flee: it was not only the obvious fear of being caught up in the combat zone, but also because their imagination was «full of the German barbarities in Belgium». They had been left in the lurch by the civilian and military authorities, who were also fleeing in panic. Ceschin describes graphically the chaos and drama of the situation, as desperate families mingled on crowded roads with demoralised, sometime drunk and violent soldiers, while the incompetent army command failed to do anything decisive except blow up bridges, often thus cutting off the last chance to escape. The tribulations of the refugees did not end when they reached safety, for they were suddenly left destitute in locations as distant as Sicily and Calabria where they knew no one and could barely understand the local language, and had to rely on hastily improvised welfare schemes.

Marco Mondini’s elegantly written book Alpini is a cultural history of this most famous corps of the Italian army. Established just after the unification of Italy, they soon developed mythic status as a hardy band of warriors recruited from the Alpine

\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 576–577.  
\textsuperscript{96} A. Gibelli, Il popolo bambino. Infanzia e nazione dalla Grande guerra a Salò, Turin 2005.  
\textsuperscript{97} D. Ceschin, Gli esuli di Caporetto. I profughi in Italia durante la Grande Guerra, Rome, Bari 2006.
region. Within a few months of the mobilisation of war culture in 1915, the *Alpini* embodied a myth intended to create a consensus of the nation in arms to prove its right to existence through sacrifice. For Cesare Battisti, the democratic interventionist who left Habsburg Austria to volunteer for the Italian army, the war had overcome the distrust between Italians and enabled them to rediscover their identity as a nation. The *Alpini* played a key role in this as a force well used to privation and tough conditions, in which officers enjoyed the confidence of their men and were united in an intuitive love of the Alps, Italy’s natural frontier. They were all too familiar with the German-speaking «barbari d’oltralpe» (barbarians from beyond the Alps).

But the *Alpini* did not, Battisti wrote, love war for its own sake, unlike the *Arditi* founded later in the war as Italy’s storm troops, with close subsequent connections to Fascism. They were democrats, in Battisti’s case socialist, not nationalists, prototypical good soldiers, «soldier-citizens». Mondini argues that the *Alpini* represented as in France cultural mobilisation in defence of humanitarian, «Latin», ideals against «Germanic» domination. They were the antithesis of the image of the passive, inert soldiers of the mass armies depicted in much of the post-war memory of the war as amorphous «men without qualities». Battisti’s own book *Gli Alpini*, published in 1916 only a few weeks after he was captured by the enemy and executed for treason, became an immediate bestseller. Together with the dissemination of the picture of his execution that exemplified the «barbaric» nature of Austria, the book was a classic case of the self-mobilisation of Italian culture.

An important trench newspaper edited by the *Alpini* officer Piero Jahier, *L’Astico*, expressed contempt for the triumphalist excesses of the civilian press, whose journalists lived comfortably in the safety of their homes. As a newspaper «for soldiers, by soldiers», it aimed to reach out to the ordinary soldiers by using truthful, simple language. Jahier wrote to rally support and admiration for the entire army, but he portrayed the *Alpini* as the quintessence of the nation in arms and as the exemplar to be emulated.

It is debatable whether one may leap from them to the mass of the conscripts who served in the Italian army in the war, but Mondini’s argument is persuasive: although there was little demonstrable enthusiasm among the troops as Italy entered the war, the vast majority of them held out for over three years, which cannot be ascribed solely to coercion and repression. This amounts to a rebuttal of the dominant school of historiography which has consistently argued that the Italian state and army kept their men in the field only by ruthless discipline and brutal repression.

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100 Ibid., 27–31.
101 Ibid., 37–53. In addition, Mondini discusses the role of the civilian press in its portrayal of Italy’s war, in particular the *Alpini*, including the British and French press and the illustrated press. The second half of the book is on the myth of the *Alpini* in the Fascist and post-Fascist periods.
Despite these modifications and the turn by some historians to topics such as trauma and mental illness,\textsuperscript{103} the parameters of traditional social history remain virtually unchallenged. There has been little internationalisation of Italian historiography of the war, and although most historians make the claim of Italian exceptionalism there is a dearth of studies systematically comparing Italy with other belligerents.\textsuperscript{104}

In view of the limitations of Italian historiography it was not surprisingly an outsider who published a truly comparative work. MacGregor Knox produced in 2007 the first of two volumes on the \textit{Origins and Dynamics of the Fascist and National Socialist Dictatorships}.\textsuperscript{105} This combines the history of ideas, military institutions, the economy, and political culture stretching back beyond the nineteenth-century unifications, but stresses above all the centrality of the quite different military cultures of Germany and Italy and their experience in the First World War. It provides the best analysis of Italy’s intervention crisis of any English-language history, as well as a succinct account of military developments and war politics. Not only was the structure of the army different (Italy almost entirely lacked professional non-commissioned officers, for example), even the front/rear cleavage was different because the Italian «front community» was divided: the fault-line ran between the \textit{contadini} (peasants) and the \textit{signori}, between the rural infantry and the urban \textit{imboscati} (shirkers), rather than between the \textit{Frontkämpfer} and the rear.\textsuperscript{106} Yet there were also some important structural similarities: the myth of betrayal by the internal enemy that military leaders and the nationalist right used to explain Caporetto was directly paralleled in Germany by the legend of the stab in the back.\textsuperscript{107}

\textit{End of part I.}

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\textsuperscript{104} Janz, «Zwischen Konsens und Dissens», 207–209.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 209.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 221–223.
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Recent Historiography of the First World War

Locating recent international historiography on the First World War within the long-term context, this article discusses above all the internationalisation of the topic and the trend towards transnational history. It asks why the war is almost entirely unknown in the history and memory of some states, while it has powerful symbolic value in others. Was the war a kind of «laboratory» for later radicalised practices, or was there even a continuity of total war from the First to the Second World War? Is the debate in historiography between «coercion» and «consent» now resolved? How we should understand the «culture of war» – as the product of totalising tendencies driven by ever more militarised states, or of a process of popular self-mobilisation from below? Is the cultural history of war now the new orthodoxy?

Jüngste Historiografie des Ersten Weltkrieges


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