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Chapter 1
Introduction: Through the Fog of War

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This volume originated in a conference organised at the University of Birmingham in September 2010 by its Centre for First World War Studies, Department of German Studies and European Research Institute.[1] By bringing together historians, literary scholars, political scientists and cultural studies experts to discuss the legacies and memories of war in twentieth-century Europe (1918–1945–1989), the organisers aimed to create conditions for a genuine and fruitful interdisciplinary conversation on the impact and legacies of twentieth-century Europe's three major conflicts.

This venture was born of the conviction that modern warfare raises a unique combination of problems that demands a collaborative intellectual response.[2] In place of the monopoly once enjoyed by military historians, transformations in warfare and belligerence have led to the emergence of interdisciplinary 'war studies', a field whose very plurality accounts for its vitality across continents and academic cultures. Our focus on the legacies of wars reflects the centrality of these questions in contemporary and historiographical reflections on the experience of armed conflicts. This volume does not, by any means, offer a comprehensive view of the interdisciplinary perspectives that scholars now mobilise to elucidate the experience of war. It does, nonetheless, underline the fact that the problematic relationship between the experience of conflict and its representations concerns most students of war, irrespective of their disciplinary training or institutional setting.

That the European experience of warfare in the twentieth century should continue to exercise scholars would surprise few, if any, readers. The European origins, experiences and legacies of both world wars, of the Holocaust and of the Cold War continue to raise questions of profound contemporary relevance,

[1] The conference was made possible by a generous grant from the University of Birmingham's Jean Monnet European Centre of Excellence.

[2] See, for example, Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (eds), *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

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within and beyond the confines of the European Union. Though the 'Age of Total War'[3] brought about and confirmed the relative relegation of European nations on the global stage, Europe retained a pivotal if diminished role in subsequent reconfigurations of the world order. While European economic and political unification was a self-conscious response to the ravages of war, this volume adopts a critical approach to the twentieth-century European experience. It recognises the existence of common cultural dynamics as well as the resilience and continuing relevance of national and local specificities across the continent. In a modest but resolute way, the following chapters also attempt to bridge the analytical gap inherited from the political division between Western and Eastern Europe, a division all too often replicated by scholars.[4] The inclusion of a chapter on Japan also allows us to place the European situation into a larger context, at a time when European exceptionalism is often misleadingly invoked to account for the virtues and – more often than not – the limitations of the European Union's political project.

A seemingly omnipresent feature of human life, war is often treated as a natural phenomenon that no degree of civilisation, cultural refinement or political modernisation could ever consign to history; it is as if war belonged to the realm of inevitably recurring ecological disasters. The prevalence of armed conflicts in traditional agricultural societies does perhaps account for the polysemic resonances of 'aftermath', the unwanted crop that immediately follows the scything.[5] This is, perhaps, an appropriate metaphor for belligerent societies attempting to rebuild across a landscape of devastation, a scorched earth whose meagre yield could only leave a bitter taste. Of course, the aftermath of wars – particularly but not uniquely that of modern conflicts – does not simply call into question the material fortune of former belligerents. Just as the aftermath of war calls for the reconstitution of productive capacities, infrastructures and dwellings, it also demands the reconstruction of lives and communities shattered by the conflict. The obvious material challenges are compounded by the political and psychological necessity to come to terms with the experience of war and to make sense of devastation and human loss on an unprecedented scale.

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[3] The title of the first chapter of Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994).

[4] Outstanding exceptions to this tendency include Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), and Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005).

[5] See Azar Gat, *War in Human Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), Part 2 ('Agriculture, Civilization, and War').

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Further etymological reflection on the term 'aftermath' leads us to its synonym and to one of Clausewitz's most celebrated phrases, the 'fog of war'. Pursuing this metaphor could, however, be misleading in many respects and would also be somewhat at odds with Clausewitz's original formulation: 'War is the realm of uncertainty: three-quarters of those things upon which action in war must be calculated, lie hidden in the fog of greater or lesser uncertainty.'[6] Proceeding in this associative fashion nonetheless points to a common characteristic of wars and their aftermaths. Indeed, irrespective of the outcome of the conflict, post-war periods are – like combat itself – typically laden with uncertainty. Even when a victor nation self-righteously presented the end of the war as the working of immanent justice, as France did, for instance, in 1918, such dominant conviction could hardly suppress and disguise the internal debates that called, in a profound and lasting way, for a reappraisal of the nature and directions of the national community.[7] For in the aftermath of Europe's twentieth-century conflicts, uncertainty undermined and destabilised conventional visions of the past and understandings of present challenges. As a result, former belligerent societies strove and struggled to project themselves into the post-war future.

In this respect, the aftermath of military conflicts proves as complex and messy as the business of war itself. Through their training and their leadership in the field, military commanders endeavoured to impose some order onto the 'fog of war'. The very concept of 'order of battle', like the sophisticated mapping of military operations, testifies to this systematic attempt to address the operational challenge of prosecuting war in an orderly manner. For this challenge, like those issued in the aftermath of war, is both political and representational.[8] As the following chapters demonstrate, the seemingly ordered legalities of the international treaties and judicial proceedings that followed both world wars belie the extraordinarily complex and ambivalent processes of coming to terms

[6] 'Der Krieg ist das Gebiet der Ungewißheit; drei Vierteile derjenigen Dinge, worauf das Handeln im Kriege gebaut wird, liegen im Nebel einer mehr oder weniger großen Ungewißheit.' Carl von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege* [On War] (Berlin: Dümmlers Verlag, 1832), Book 1, Ch. 3.

[7] The literature on defeated countries has produced some of the most stimulating explorations of the aftermath of wars. See, for example, Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat* (New York: Picador, 2004), which compares experiences of national trauma, mourning and recovery in the American South after 1865, in France after 1871 and in Germany after 1918; and Jenny Macleod, *Defeat and Memory: Cultural Histories of Military Defeat in the Modern Era* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

[8] For a remarkable treatment of this representational challenge in literature, see Kate McLoughlin, *Authoring War* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

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with war. While diplomacy sought to define a clear outcome to conflicts, societies in victorious and vanquished nations alike faced an uncertain, confusing and messy aftermath. The political division of the continent and the subsequent Cold War added further layers of complexity to the processes of coming to terms with war, often overturning accepted configurations of victimhood and guilt; not infrequently, dictatorships and civil wars saw victims and perpetrators exchange roles and positions. Studying the aftermath of the wars that ravaged Europe in the twentieth century therefore calls for reflection on the nature of these conflicts and on the types of mobilisation – political, military, industrial, social and cultural – that they required. In Britain, for example, as Dan Todman shows in this volume, the country's strategic position explains the relative balance of civilian and military losses that helped to shape British memory of the Second World War.

Determined by the conduct of war, entangled in the memory and legacies of previous conflicts, aftermath is not an end, as Stephen Forcer demonstrates. Rather, it denotes the multifarious processes whereby belligerent societies attempted to resolve the open-ended questions raised by the experience of war. In so doing, former belligerents grappled with the difficult transition from war to peace. The comforting linearity of the chronologies inherited from diplomatic and military history tends to obscure the fact that the aftermaths of war were defined by the uneasy conjunction of different temporalities. For peace between nations did not necessarily mean that the war was over for individuals and communities. It is critical to highlight the continuing presence of war in the aftermath. Jay Winter stresses in his contribution to this volume that one should not equate silence with forgetting and that conventional, binary approaches to memory and forgetting must be transcended.

This volume is therefore an invitation to reconsider conventional chronologies of conflict and aftermath, for the aftermath of the conflicts discussed here was defined during and after these conflicts both by projections into the future and by regressions and nostalgic ruminations on the pre-war period. Linear temporalities were further subverted by the emergence of generations defined by the experience of war and not merely by biology. Indeed, the transmission of memory within families and kinship networks was disrupted by the untimely deaths of soldiers and civilians. As Mary Fulbrook demonstrates in her chapter, conventional chronologies often fail to do justice to the experience of generations forged by wars, dictatorships and their aftermaths. War literature provides further illustration of the dynamics at work here. Martin Hurcombe, in his exploration of French writings of the First World War, shows how

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witnesses of and participants in the Great War sought to address the political and representational challenges raised by the conflict.

The wars of the twentieth century dramatically demonstrated the capacity of the State to mobilise the material and cultural resources of the belligerent nations for the prosecution of war. The State also emerged as a critical, though by no means always dominant, agent in the process of commemoration. As a result, the competition over access to its resources and political instruments often revealed a larger contest over the meaning of past conflicts. The politics of commemoration are addressed in several contributions. John Paul Newman's analysis of the paradigmatic value of the First World War in Serbia and Geoffrey Swain's study of Latvia underline the critical centrality of these countries' contested pasts as they charted their national courses through the twentieth century. This volume also reveals the importance of a host of initiatives, often taken at the supra- or infra-national levels. Tara Windsor thus investigates the mobilisation of transnational cultural networks in the aftermath of the First World War, while Gabriela Welch underscores the roles of religious organisations in post-Soviet Moldova. In Europe as in Japan, the cultural and political legacies of conflicts were, and remain, defined by their plurality and multivocality, as Aaron William Moore argues persuasively in his contribution.

Fraught and contested, the legacies of wars and conflicts in twentieth-century Europe continue to exercise commentators, policymakers and scholars alike. Recent crises in the Eurozone have given rise in Greece and elsewhere to unreconstructed visions of a common past defined by violence, victimhood and war. One might perhaps bemoan Europeans' apparent inability to bring the twentieth century to a long-awaited closure. Yet it reminds us that the initial objective of the founding fathers of the European Union – the political unification of the continent through ever-closer economic ties in order to prevent future armed conflict – has not yet been fully secured. In this respect, Europe's citizens continue to grapple with the aftermath of war.

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