

Chapter 6

AUSTRIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY AND  
PERSPECTIVES ON WORLD WAR I

The Long Shadow of the “Just War,” 1914–2018

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**Remembrance of the World War as  
an Ambivalent *Lieu de Mémoire* in Austria**

After the collapse of the Habsburg Empire, the Republic of Austria, whose integration into the German Reich had been refused by the Allies, was condemned to be a “small country against its will.” Yet the sense of lost greatness and of the glorious past of an empire of fifty million people lingered, providing the backdrop against which the Austrian memory culture of the interwar years was played out. Two elements dominated this memory after 1919–20: the heroism of the Austrian soldiers on the one hand, and their suffering on the other. It was primarily the conservative forces in the postwar culture (which had fallen into two to three camps) that dominated the discourse about heroic masculinity in World War I and demanded the remilitarization of the society in view of the border conflicts with Italy and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. These forces quickly organized themselves into rightist-conservative and for the most part antidemocratic networks, primarily in the paramilitary Home Guard (*Heimwehr*) or in various veterans’ associations. These groups

brought together Christian socialists and “Greater Germany” backers as well as many former officers, most of whom had experienced a total loss of their previous social status.<sup>1</sup> The social democrats, on the other hand, stuck with the line that World War I had been a crime and a political mistake, and remained silent about their own sustained enthusiasm for the war and their loyalty to the House of Habsburg. When their participation with the Christian socialists in a grand coalition ended in 1920, they established their own paramilitary self-defense unit, the Republican Protective League (*Republikanischer Schutzbund*), which after 1923 was publicly active and visible. Up until 1920, the social democrats played an important role in the creation of a democratic transitional defense force (*Volkswehr*); however, this force quite quickly was given a different political coloration, directed in this case by Carl Vaugoin, the Christian socialist defense minister, a post he held almost continuously from 1921 to 1933.

Any commemorations of the world war were correspondingly politically riven and full of conflict; in the conservative camp, what was primarily celebrated was the image of the war hero in the Habsburg myth (particularly common were the depictions of the stalwart fighter toughing it out in the snow and glaciers of the Dolomites, or a Tyrolean *Kaiserjäger* or a daring horseman). In this regard, the loss of South Tyrol, which was separated off and given to Italy, seemed to have influenced the emotional supercharging of what had been an extremely bloody frontline in the Dolomites and on the Isonzo. What became an important symbolic connecting link in the remembrance culture were the world war memorials bearing the names of the fallen soldiers and officers. Remarkably, these were quickly erected even in the smallest villages, then becoming crystallization points for commemorations and veterans’ gatherings. Even the entertainment industry adopted this hero *topos*—such as Luis Trenker did with the film *Mountains on Fire* (*Berge in Flammen*), showing the superhuman Florian Dimai battling against “unyielding and white death” and rescuing his comrades.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, on the other hand, the inglorious Balkan and Russian fronts remained very much on the periphery of the remembrance culture even if they were extremely present in many of the countless regimental histories. There was one notable exception: stories from the prisoner-of-war camps in Russia and Siberia were quite popular.

These tendencies led to a passionate commemorative conflict with the social democrats, who were pushing the idea that there was but one lesson to be drawn from the war: pacifism. This conflict became apparent, for example, when the film *All Quiet on the Western Front* (*Im Westen nichts Neues*), taken from the world war novel by Erich Maria Remarque,

came to Austria. At its premier in the Apollo Theater on 3 January 1931 in Vienna, there was furious street fighting since the National Socialists had called in around two thousand demonstrators. Then, even though the social-democrat mayor of Vienna, Karl Seitz, supported the showing, and in spite of deploying 2,000 policemen in the days following, the minister of the interior ended up banning the showing of the film in Austria. Support for this ban, however, was already well in place: back in 1929 the christian-socialist minister for military affairs, Vaugoin, had banned Remarque's novel from all soldier libraries, and a parliamentary majority in December 1930 had recommended prohibiting the showing of the film in all federal provinces.

After the shattering of the democratic model in 1933 and the banning of the social democrats after the civil war in 1934, the heroizing of World War I was further promoted during the chancellor dictatorship of Engelbert Dollfuß, who himself had been a lieutenant in the Tyrolean mountain division (*Gebirgsjäger*). Not only did the uniforms from the time of the monarchy come back into vogue as a form of symbolic reinforcement in the confrontation with National Socialist Germany, but a memorial to the fallen heroes was also built at the outer gate (*Äußeres Burgtor*) near the Heldenplatz in Vienna. Already during the war, laurel wreaths made "from an alloy not suited for deadly bullets" had been displayed there as "laurels for our heroes 1914–1916." Now in 1934, an open sky "hall of honor" with engravings on the walls of "the Austrian soldier" ranging from the Thirty Years' War to the world war was to honor the heroes who had fallen on the fields of battle. Wilhelm Frass, a sculptor with National Socialist sympathies, hewed a prone image of a fallen soldier out of red marble and hid within it an NS propaganda line (which was removed in 2012). On 15 March 1938, Adolf Hitler used this memorial for the laying of a wreath, symbolically launching the *Anschluss*. The longer World War II lasted, the more intensively did the *Wehrmacht* borrow old Austrian heroes such as Prince Eugene. However, the World War I museum in the *Neue Burg*, for which the Schuschnigg regime had concrete plans, never came to be. Instead, it became a depot for those artworks plundered from the private collections of Viennese Jews and intended for display in Hitler's planned museum in Linz.

The army was reestablished in 1955, but not as a volunteer army as it had been before 1938; it was now based on universal compulsory military service to what was now a neutral state. At this point, any attention given to World War I clearly diminished, and in the end, it was totally overshadowed by World War II and its aftermath. However, that notwithstanding, on the national holiday of 26 October, the federal government continued laying wreaths at the outer gate, until the Nazi inscription was

discovered in 2012. Then, after a brief pause, they again began laying a wreath at the outer gate in memory of all soldiers who had died.

It was not until 2014 that public interest in World War I and Austria's and the Habsburg Empire's role in the conflict emerged again (that is, beyond the small community of people interested in military history in general).<sup>3</sup> However, the opportunity to reflect upon the Austrian decision makers' shared responsibility for World War I was missed. Instead, Christopher Clark's "Sleepwalkers thesis" was embraced and internalized with great enthusiasm. This was all the more so the case with Clark's keynote address at the Salzburg Festival in 2014, a presentation that understood itself as a peace project arising out of the World War I.

In this context, leading Austrian politicians such as the social democrat chancellor Werner Faymann and Federal President Heinz Fischer did indeed urge a drawing forth of the "lessons of history" and emphasized the European Union's role in securing peace. Accordingly, the federal government published an independent position paper developed by historians that sought in concise and easily readable form to deconstruct any mythic creations.<sup>4</sup> Here both the key responsibility of Austria-Hungary by declaring war on Serbia and the escalating decisions taken by Germany, the Entente Powers (England and France), and Russia were critically analyzed.

There was also a dedicated attempt by the Vienna Philharmonic (at the initiative of its executive director, Clemens Hellsberg, and in conjunction with its conductor, Franz Welser-Möst) to put on in Sarajevo something along the lines of a commemorative concert on 28 June 2014,<sup>5</sup> the anniversary of the assassination of the heir to the throne, Franz Ferdinand, and his wife Sophie, Duchess of Hohenburg. They sought to do this while still making it relevant to the present situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In spite of the concert's high artistic quality, it turned out to have no lasting political impact.

The public awareness of World War I received some strong stimulation from the organization of fourteen historical exhibitions,<sup>6</sup> which approached World War I in various ways (including fine arts and literature). These took place not just in Vienna but also in Linz, Salzburg, Innsbruck, Graz, Eisenstadt, Klagenfurt, and other locations.

The Museum of Military History, which from the beginning had never documented the effort by the army after 1955 to foster a sense of tradition, having focused instead on the monarchy, now used the anniversary for a revamped permanent exhibition of its World War I collection. Yet as frequently happens, military technology and uniforms were predominant, with much less about how inhuman everyday life was during the war or the war crimes committed.

What has been successful and deserves mention are a few newly prepared digital collections of material and sources—photographs, films, recordings available through Mediathek<sup>7</sup> and in the photo archive of the Austrian National Library,<sup>8</sup> which has access to its own war collection covering the years 1914–18. The Vienna Library as well offers impressive holdings that document quite vividly what everyday life was like in metropolitan Vienna during the war.<sup>9</sup> So, in 2014 World War I became in Austria a definite part of the culture industry in its historicizing aspect, doing so, however, without achieving any special importance in the construction of Austrian identity.

### **Between Apologia and Glorification: World War I Historiographies**

#### **1914–45**

There is no doubt that immediately after the war began, the war guilt question took center stage in the Austrian debate over World War I, a position that this topic (within certain limits) still occupies today. Even by the time the first “color books” began appearing in 1915–16,<sup>10</sup> a central thesis based on a clever presentation of documents had emerged. For many decades to come it would thereafter shape the historiography and also the public discourse in Austria. The thesis was: Serbia bore full responsibility for the declaration of war subsequent to the murder of the heir to the throne, Franz Ferdinand, and his wife Sophie by a pro-Serbian terrorist. The Austro-Hungarian ultimatum of 23 July, which considerably escalated the July crisis, was viewed as a fair diplomatic note seeking clarification of the circumstances surrounding the assassination. In addition to that, beginning in 1915 accusations arose against Italy, initially an ally, but who in 1914 remained neutral and whose later entrance into the war was interpreted as a betrayal. At the same time, the close “brotherhood in arms” with the German Empire took center place in the portrayal of the war. Conversely, the Russian tsarist empire was represented as an *agent provocateur*, and even as early as 1914 a “Russian officer”<sup>11</sup> was imputed with having trained the group of assassins; however, this was a myth, and after 1918 it was no longer mentioned all that frequently. Yet, envisioning Russia in the image of the enemy continued to have strong currency after the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1917, and even intensified out of fear of a Bolshevik revolution.

After the war, the tradition of the “color books” was in many respects continued by selective document editions. It is noteworthy, however, that the first political guidelines issued by social democrat leader Otto Bauer,

then head of the Office of Foreign Affairs, actually insisted that the sole political responsibility for the war rested with the Austro-Hungarian leadership.<sup>12</sup> As a result, Roderich Goos, who had been an archivist in the Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv before joining first the Austrian and later on the German diplomatic service, placed the Habsburg emperor's and the Austro-Hungarian government's responsibility at the center of his selection of documents and his line of argumentation. At the same time, the Republic of German-Austria was being presented as a new polity, which, on the basis of a legal opinion from Hans Kelsen, meant that it should not be considered as the legal successor of the Habsburg Monarchy. In 1921 Goos—at the time already a legation councilor in the German Foreign Office in Berlin—abandoned this primarily social democrat line of thought and shifted the sole responsibility for the war's outbreak on Serbia. From that point on his view was that the ultimatum to Serbia in 1914 was actually in accord with what at the time were the rules of international law. The Serbian government had, in its desire for territorial expansion, quite simply responded evasively and inadequately. Moreover, the destruction of Serbia was never supposed to have been a war aim; instead, the war was considered to be all about the preservation of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Being consistent, Goos in 1921, in the analysis he provided for the first German parliamentary commission of inquiry, also proffered his theses in opposition to those of the social democrats' Southeast Europe expert Hermann Wendel. The latter, in his assessment of the "Austrian-Serbian Problem," had placed blame for the war on Germany.<sup>13</sup> While Berlin may have focused on a local conflict in Serbia, it had nevertheless uncompromisingly advocated for a policy of military aggression.

What is fascinating, by the way, as a precise addendum to and wrinkle in the aggressive policies of the *hawks* at the federal chancellery, was the publication "1914: Das etwas andere Lesebuch zum 1. Weltkrieg" (1914: The somewhat different textbook about World War I) by Rudolf Agstner.<sup>14</sup> It contains some genuinely sensational source materials that document the Austrian miscalculation of the situation in Serbia and reveals from close up how totally overwhelmed the diplomatic bureaucracy in fact was.

The subsequent official government publications<sup>15</sup> after 1921 thus completed an apologetic change in direction and negated the war guilt thesis of the social democrat Otto Bauer, who as a lieutenant in the reserve had himself enthusiastically gone to war in 1914. Just as Austrian society after 1918 had fallen into two separate political factions (social democrat and Christian socialist), to be sure the question as to the war guilt remained ideologically highly controversial.

A high point in the increasing involvement of prominent historians such as Alfred Francis Přibram and Heinrich von Srbik came with the publication of a comprehensive nine-volume edition dealing with the foreign policy of Austria-Hungary from 1908 until the outbreak of the war. This highly patriotic, German-national-oriented project was intended to preempt the soon-to-expire embargo on the archives and once again with a governmental mandate buttress the official interpretation and response to the question of war guilt.<sup>16</sup> Přibram, who was of Jewish background and who had been harassed by anti-Semites at the University of Vienna, held a thesis that was similar to the anti-Semitic German nationalists Srbik and Ludwig Bittner, which was that the mid-sized powers were not to be ascribed any war guilt. But in 1938 this ideological German-national clique was riven once and for all. Přibram, who was also an internationally recognized historian, fled into exile to England in 1939, while Srbik and Bittner continued their careers in Vienna as staunch members of the NSDAP during the Nazi period. Bittner, as archivist, even had the “opportunity” to look through the “enemy archive” in Belgrade after the Axis’s military aggression against Yugoslavia. After having organized the transfer of 214 boxes of documents from Belgrade to Vienna, he declared in 1943, referring to the work of Friedrich Reinöhl on “The case Jeftanovitsch-Schola-Gavrila,” that Reinöhl had proven for the first time the “intervention of Jews in great power World policy.”<sup>17</sup>

In addition to the unreserved assignment of war guilt to Serbia (plus Russia) and the accusation of betrayal on the part of Italy, the totally unreflective positive assessment of the military performance of the imperial-royal army command around Chief of the General Staff Conrad von Hötzendorf shaped not only the war propaganda during 1914–18 but also the military historiography of the interwar period up until 1938. This can best be seen in the monumental official work on the history of the war edited on behalf of the Austrian ministry of war and the *Kriegsarchiv*.<sup>18</sup> German-nationalist officers were in the fore here, such as Edmund Glaise von Horstenau (who later on also served the National Socialists) and Ferdinand Stöller. As the only professors in military history at the University of Vienna, they both shaped for an extended period what was being taught there.<sup>19</sup> Hötzendorf himself (and later on his widow Gina), wrote their memoirs<sup>20</sup> to advance this myth, which was to last long after 1945.<sup>21</sup> However, it was common operational history that was particularly active in reinforcing the view that the army in actuality had not been defeated in World War I.<sup>22</sup> In the year of the *Anschluss* of the Schuschnigg dictatorship to National Socialist Germany, Hötzendorf was celebrated as a soldier *extraordinaire*.<sup>23</sup> It was not until 2013 that a first comprehensive and critical biography of him was published by Wolfram Dornik.<sup>24</sup>

Alongside the military memoirs that flooded the book market, it was the memoirs written by civilians—around one hundred works from the Austro-Hungarian decision-making elite are relevant here—that participated in constructing and consolidating this apologetic narrative. Very much like their military counterparts, they were only to a very moderate extent intended to be critical self-reflections. Foreign Minister Leopold Berchtold, for instance, denied any responsibility for the disaster; the special envoy Legation Councilor Alexander Graf von Hoyos, who in 1914 had conducted the decisive discussions in Berlin, was somewhat more self-reflective, even if he did not break with the prevailing consensus either.<sup>25</sup>

The National Socialist propaganda strategists, although decidedly oriented against the Habsburg Monarchy, cleverly made use of that regime's construction of military heroes in order to bolster the defensive will of those in the "Ostmark," the "alpine and Danube districts."<sup>26</sup> For this reason, the original "old-Austrian" fostering of military tradition was still being functionalized in 1943 in World War II by using heroic stories from the Military Order of Maria Theresa.<sup>27</sup>

### **The First Critical Historiographic Efforts after 1956**

With the Austrian State Treaty and Declaration of Neutrality of 1955, along with rearmament, the introduction of universal military service, and the reestablishment of the army, military historiography once again came back to life and started to exploit the new source material regarding World War I that had been made available.<sup>28</sup> What became quite clear in this (early postwar) period was the significant continuity in historiography. As before, what predominated was the school of thought of the veteran officers, who had started to work and publish on World War I in the interwar years, and whose view either withstood unscathed all political change or proved sufficiently flexible to adapt to new conditions. Rudolf Kizsling is a case in point: this former imperial lieutenant colonel of the general staff had already back in 1920 enjoyed access to the war archives. In 1937 he had become the national archivist and deputy head of the war archives after the actual director of the archives, Edmund Glaise-Horstenau, was called by the NSDAP to serve as a minister without portfolio in the authoritarian government of Chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg. Between July 1938 and May 1945 he was director of what was called the Military Archives Vienna,<sup>29</sup> which in fact was the Vienna branch of the Potsdam German Military Archives. In addition to this office, he became the director of the Prague branch of the German Military Archives in 1940 (a few months after the suppression of democratic Czechoslovakia).



As a “Banat German,” he was known to be emphatically nationalistic in his mindset, but he was not a member of the NSDAP. Although only an autodidact, he nevertheless dominated military historiography for a period of time (with over one hundred books and articles about World War I, the history of the imperial army, and the history of Austria generally). Moreover, he certainly did so into the 1950s, long after his forced departure in 1945 as director of the Military Archives Vienna.<sup>30</sup> The seven volumes of his main justificatory work *Austria-Hungary's Last War 1914–1918*, which appeared between 1929 and 1938, show primarily his hand at work even though in Germany the opus was largely attributed to Glaise-Horstenau.

However, in the mid-1950s the first cracks in this apologetic narrative started to appear. It was in particular the young historian Fritz Fellner, a veteran of World War II, who analyzed the matter quite differently, seeking to write a new critical history of the diplomacy during World War I and its pre- and postwar history. With his publication of the political notes found in the extensive diaries of the legal historian and politician Josef Redlich, he could reveal a first critical voice as to the political and social developments in 1914 and later on.<sup>31</sup> Redlich (1869–1936) had been a well-informed political networker with excellent connections to political and bureaucratic leaders, and he had served in various political positions: as a representative in the Moravian state parliament, as a member of the Austrian Imperial Council, as a participant in the provisional national assembly, and as finance minister for a few months in both 1918 and 1931. In addition to these, he had been a member of the Carnegie Commission regarding the Balkan region and had held a Harvard professorship for comparative public law from 1924 until 1934. In his diaries and letters he repeatedly and harshly criticized the policies pursued by the leaders of the state. Fellner, for his part, however, was to remain rather isolated in Austria, unable to build a group around himself.

It was not until ten years later that the studies from Rudolf Neck and Helmut Rumpler, at a broader level, produced a critical examination primarily of the domestic prehistory of the world war.<sup>32</sup> But even in this case, one remained captive to a bottom-line view that relativized Austrian war guilt. That is especially true of the biographies of the political *acteurs* published during this period, such as the study from Hugo Hantsch about Count Berchtold, who had been a particularly aggressive proponent of the war, and the biography by Ladislaus Singer of the imperial foreign minister Ottokar Czernin.<sup>33</sup> Concurrently, international historiography began for the first time to question these highly relativizing and uncritical writings about the imperial-royal monarchy. Someone who deserves special mention here is Solomon Wank, who in his dissertation at Columbia

University in 1961 used the example of Alois Lexa Graf von Aehrenthal (1906–12) in order to address the foreign policy *acteurs* of the Habsburg Monarchy in 1914. Then, two years later, with a short article on Graf Berchtold, he opened up new perspectives for a critical-analytical form of biography.<sup>34</sup> As a result, he remained an important reference person for historians writing critically about the end phase of the monarchy and its political *acteurs*.

### The Subcutaneous Fritz Fischer Controversy in Austria

Overall, however, there was no comprehensive discussion about the causes of the war and the question of war guilt that was comparable to the German Fischer controversy that began in 1961/1962 with the intense debate over the theses of the Hamburg historian Fritz Fischer in his book *Germany's Aims in the First World War*.<sup>35</sup> Fischer's focus on Germany's aggressive aims and interests generated a huge debate that at the time was extremely politicized. Yet in Austria, the central "gatekeepers" of the discussion about World War I sought not to let any kind of doubt arise about a looming paradigm shift. Hugo Hantsch, for example, challenged Fischer only subtly and reservedly:

Your comprehensive and in-depth work definitely deserves recognition. You will indeed see that I cannot always share your opinion. I myself had my prejudices against Graf Berchtold. It should not be taken as an apology, but rather a factual processing of the source material . . . [that] neither the German nor the Austrian governments wanted to unleash the World War! . . . The basic reason for the decisions lay in fear. That this fear was not without foundation is something that primarily a reading of Sasonow's letters has shown me. France especially did everything she could to use Russia in the First World War as a tool for her plans. Things then became so matted together, and there was no great statesman present who could have altered the course of things.<sup>36</sup>

What made the situation complicated, at least from an Austrian point of view, was that Fischer's main antagonist in the German debate, Gerhard Ritter, whose conservative approach to the war's outbreak was very much in line with Hantsch's, was particularly severe in his assessment of the Austrian-Hungarian policy prior to World War I, considering that the German alliance partner had been preset on a military confrontation with Serbia well before 1914. However, this "secondary arena" did not play a role in the German debate. At the twelfth International Congress of Historical Sciences in 1965 in Vienna, the debate could well have exploded, yet it was left to the young Fritz Fellner to cautiously attempt

to initiate a discussion about the responsibility of the Austro-Hungarian diplomats and military leaders for the declaration of war on Serbia; yet once again, this was quickly stifled by Hantsch and others.<sup>37</sup>

### A Slow Paradigm Shift in the 1970s and 1980s

While it seemed at first as though Fellner (in the meantime a tenured professor of history at the University of Salzburg) would at this point in the discussion proffer a new perspective on the July crisis and the international decision-making processes, such a shift in approach was actually left to an article he published in 1976 about the Hoyos mission.<sup>38</sup> In international historiography, and on the basis of new archival research, a distinctly more critical view of the Austro-Hungarian policy in the summer of 1914 was gaining acceptance. In this context, it was surely not an accident that no Austrian publisher translated into German and brought to print the pivotal 1991 study by Samuel R. Williamson Jr. in which the author summarized and further developed his conclusions about the responsibility of the imperial-royal monarchy for the outbreak of the war, a conclusion he had previously published in part in essay form in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>39</sup> It was not until 1993 that a critical English-language study by the British historian John Leslie was at least published in a collection of articles in Austria, although not translated.<sup>40</sup> The reasons for this reticence of the Austrian historians to take up this central question about the international decision-making networks and to engage in a thorough analysis of the interests behind the causes of World War I is something Günther Kronenbitter sees (in addition to the conservative, rather Habsburg-friendly postwar school of thought around Hantsch) as also reflective of the neutrality sentiments in the midst of the Cold War. Here ultimately the victim theory predominated, namely that Austria was a victim of the Germans in World War II and the Holocaust.<sup>41</sup> A third reason lies (incidentally also coming from the United States from Carl Schorske, among others) in their imported discovery of the *fin de siècle* in Vienna (around 1900), and this would then shape the historiography and cultural studies of the 1980s and 1990s. This cultural turn influenced younger historians to move away from political and diplomatic history as well as from military history.

Initial cautious modifications of the long-held traditions (from the perspectives of military history, content, and methods) were apparent in the collections of essays about the history of the Habsburg Monarchy that came from within the framework of the Austrian Academy of Science.<sup>42</sup> However, what dominated in the individual articles was still just a comprehensive and detail-rich organizational and traditional military history.

## Rediscovery and New Appraisal—the 1990s

It was not until the 1990s that one recognizes a clear overcoming of fears about touching matters dealing with World War I and then, as a consequence, an embracing of a thorough, substantive reappraisal. In 1989, from the pen of Erwin Schmidl came the first study about Jewish soldiers and officers in the imperial army up until 1918.<sup>43</sup> This sudden research interest could well have been connected to the fierce discussion surrounding the reappraisal of the role of Austrians in the German army as it related to the wartime past of the former UN secretary general Kurt Waldheim. For the first time, as well, historians reflected on new perspectives and topics: for example, in Marion Breiter's dissertation<sup>44</sup> on the civilian population, or in structural history and labor history.<sup>45</sup> In that regard, Margarete Grandner's study on labor unions was particularly useful.<sup>46</sup> Last but not least, from Rudolf Jeřábek came the first critical biography of a person of high military rank, namely Oskar Potiorek,<sup>47</sup> revealing the possibility of a new history in the form of biography. Lastly, Fritz Fellner entered back into the discussion with individual studies based on his previous work in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>48</sup> An innovative method with new socio-political perspectives applicable especially to researching the world war and identity was offered in the ambitious social history study of the officer corps from the years 1848 to 1918 by the historian Istvan Déak (teaching at Columbia University at the time and coming from a prominent Hungarian noble family).<sup>49</sup> He gives an answer to the question as to how the army, in the face of its catastrophic inferiority and in spite of the conflict of nationalities and multilingualism, could militarily hold the line and actually embody a kind of transnational collective at its leadership level.

A change in the way military history was done was in the end set by Manfred Rauchensteiner, director of the Military History Museum. While he dealt less so with the international prehistory of the war, he took a new look at the military developments of the war and did not shrink back from any taboos.<sup>50</sup> One of the strengths of his book was the critical examination of the poor military leadership and the escalating use of force in the occupied regions (including against the civilian population). By 1993 this study was a standard work, later offered in an expanded edition in 2013<sup>51</sup> and an English translation in 2014.<sup>52</sup> What remained at the center of his analysis were the military *acteurs* (even down to the level of companies) and the war economy, even if in his new edition he assigns a more central role to Emperor Franz Joseph himself with regard to the decision in favor of war against Serbia in 1914.

From 1994 to 1996, what also became conspicuous were intensified bilateral efforts to seek scholarly examination of the war with Italy (which

started in 1915 and included the bloody Battles of the Isonzo).<sup>53</sup> Yet there still seemed to be very few new methodological initiatives—worth mentioning is Christa Hämmerle’s effort to develop a gender history of World War I.<sup>54</sup> More innovative were the critical views in the field of German studies (*Germanistik*) presented in a collection of essays about the functionality of *literati* with regard to propaganda both at the beginning and then during the course of the war.<sup>55</sup>

### **On the Way to an Internationalization: Intensive World War I Research 2000–2018**

The German historian Günther Kronenbitter, in his *Habilitationsschrift* in 2003, presented the first thorough and clear analysis of the *acteurs* within the Habsburg decision-making elite.<sup>56</sup> This study represented a clean break from the studies that had been revisionist and (after 1945) relativizing regarding the role of the military decision-making elite of the imperial-royal army. Kronenbitter painstakingly sought, using primarily the example of the Balkan policies of the Habsburg elite, to connect military and diplomatic history, and to reconstruct the influence of the military on foreign policy. Because of the abundance of material, however, what often retreats into the background are the important interactions between Conrad von Hötzendorf, Franz Ferdinand (the heir to the throne), and the Foreign Ministers Aehrenthal and Berchtold, as well as the conflicts over decisions among the general staff, the foreign ministry, and the military chancery of the heir to the throne. What faded away, however, (once again unheard) were the pleas for a new cultural history of World War I in Austria.<sup>57</sup>

By 2010, the approaching one hundredth anniversary of the start of World War I was already casting a shadow in advance of itself. Samuel R. Williamson Jr., in an English-language collection of articles, offered a new analysis of the role of Foreign Minister Berchtold. A group around Laurence Cole, Christa Hämmerle, and Martin Scheutz sought a course shift with regard to method—although taking a very broad approach that encompassed a time period from 1800 to 1918. The results, however, despite the high theoretical aspirations, remained rather fragmentary. In addition to these efforts, Fritz Fellner edited a complete edition of the Redlich diaries, and the espionage case of Colonel Redl was also further studied using new documents (this followed upon an initial attempt in 1997 by Verena Moritz and Hannes Leidinger). The strategic importance of the betrayal of the mobilization plans to Russian intelligence was made all the clearer.<sup>58</sup> In addition, Tamara Scheer at this time worked on the

Austro-Hungarian military administration and the War Surveillance Office (Kriegsüberwachungsamt).<sup>59</sup>

Between 2013 and 2018 there was an unprecedented boom in scholarly publications and historical exhibitions. For the first time, a history of emotions approach was attempted from a sociological perspective, with totally new and thoroughly valid interpretations of semiofficial regimental histories.<sup>60</sup> In 2015, the star violinist Fritz Kreisler's war recollections, *Four Weeks in the Trenches*<sup>61</sup> (which were frequently quoted in the Anglo-American arena as an authentic portrayal of the first weeks of the war on the front), were published and edited in German for the first time.<sup>62</sup> Although Kreisler's book ranks in English-language academic literature as an exceptional document for the modern history of the emotions of World War I,<sup>63</sup> it had not been responded to in German-language literature prior to the translation. At that moment, for many returning from war, the assessment of Walter Benjamin applied, namely, that "the men who returned from the battlefield had grown silent—not richer, but poorer in communicable experience."<sup>64</sup> Kreisler, on the contrary, belonged to those who had already overcome this immediate loss of words by 1914 and 1915.

In an exciting collection of articles,<sup>65</sup> the first efforts at a history of the experiences and perceptions of the imperial-royal soldiers from very different nationalities are being collected, yet further possibilities for a comparative analysis are surely still available for future studies. At the level of the memories of frontline soldiers, what stands out above others is an edition of an uncommonly precise source, *Franz Arneitz, Meine Erlebnisse in dem furchtbaren Weltkrieg 1914–1918* (My experiences in the horrible World War 1914–1918), published by Andreas Kuchler.<sup>66</sup> Based on his detailed recording of his war experiences, he reports about the disaster on the front in Galicia, and likewise reflects openly about the war crimes and about the senselessness of the war on the Italian front.

One distinctive feature of the centenary-related dynamics in research is the fact that new sources regarding regional aspects of the effects of the war have been worked upon quite intensely—frequently in connection with exhibitions. The studies being done on Vienna (the imperial capital and royal residence), and particularly on the effects of the war, took a form that was rigorous in research and source work. In *Epizentrum des Zusammenbruchs* (*Epicenter of the Collapse*), a team led by Alfred Pfoser and Andreas Weigl realized a comprehensive analysis of wartime Vienna, reconstructing all the facets of the downfall of one of Europe's thriving metropolises, a downfall and collapse that had started to become all too apparent as soon as 1917.<sup>67</sup> Quantitatively even more impressive are the publications about the diverse aspects of the war and its aftermath for

Tyrol,<sup>68</sup> as well as the actual impact that the memories of the bloody Battles of the Isonzo had on the political interpretation of history, the situation of the prisoners of war in Italy, and bilateral tourism. Tyrol and Italy form an unusually intense and joint arena for reflection about World War I.<sup>69</sup> More recent research is presented in a special issue of the *European Review of History*, edited by Tamara Scheer and Nancy Wingfield.<sup>70</sup>

By the 1990s there had already been relevant preparatory works for Tyrol; for Styria, Lower Austria, and Salzburg there are also relevant regional studies available about the consequences and the propaganda of World War I.<sup>71</sup> Of special importance was the reconstruction of the living conditions in the prisoner-of-war camps—for example, in Wagna near Graz. What are also fascinating are the new studies about the effects of the war on the periphery of the Habsburg Empire, for example in Galicia, Romania, and Bukovina, and the perspectives of the Ukrainians and the Jewish populations in the east.<sup>72</sup> Having potential as well are studies that investigate the Orient in more detail, where Austro-Hungarian imperialist plans are also clearly found, but which were not successful because of a lack of military strength. On the other hand, the propaganda and intelligence operations in the Near East have now been reconstructed quite well.<sup>73</sup> What becomes clear is that the holy war of all Muslims against the Entente was an impromptu program and consequently in the end was also not successful. The area of gender history, essentially carried on by Christa Hämmerle, was discussed intensively for the first time,<sup>74</sup> even if a comprehensive foundational study is still lacking.

Deserving special emphasis is the fact that unique, new possibilities for research in source material have opened up. So, the Austrian National Library, using the internet platform of the photo archive and the graphics collection, offered for the first time (on ANNO—AustriaN Newspapers Online) a full text search of all the digitally recorded print media, totaling 810,000 pages. Additionally, casualty lists as well as the complete material of the war collection and the albums of the war press bureau were made available.<sup>75</sup> The databank contains placards, flyers, postcards, special editions, children's drawings and school compositions, postage and sealing stamps, etc. The placards, Vivat ribbons, and postcards have already been catalogued.<sup>76</sup> The Vienna Library, on the other hand, has made available digitally over 120,000 newspaper clippings about everyday life in the years 1914–18, as well books and placards, and police reports on the public mood.<sup>77</sup> The Austrian State Archive is also displaying a few examples of its countless archival documents and short texts about World War I.<sup>78</sup> Something innovative in the Jewish museum in Vienna was a first exhibit about Jewish soldiers and officers in the imperial army, with a catalogue at the level of a scholarly anthology addressing new research.

Erwin Schmidl further developed his earlier studies on this topic in a new monograph.<sup>79</sup>

The most comprehensive overall examination of Austria-Hungary during the war comes in the revised study by Manfred Rauchensteiner, which in 1,223 pages and along the lines of the original presentation of 1993 forcefully lays out the interactions between domestic and foreign policies in the geostrategic decisions, putting more emphasis than before on the aggressive revenge strategy of Foreign Minister Berchtold.<sup>80</sup> From the Austrian perspective, the *leitmotiv* of Christopher Clark's best-seller *Sleepwalkers* did not really present anything new. The European or, for that matter, Austrian "tumbling" into the war fits nicely with the long-advocated victim theory.<sup>81</sup> This is true all the more so in light of the fact that Clark placed ultimate responsibility on Serbia, which he makes very clear and which he stressed primarily in the early interviews about the book. This view matches the traditional military history narrative in Austria up until the 1970s and 1980s.

In comparison to Rauchensteiner, Lothar Höbelt's book, which is interested more in the domestic policy debate, is much too entangled in the thesis that the state structures were actually relatively stable up until 1918, even if no push for reform in the nationalities question had been successful and that in the end it was the military defeats that influenced domestic policy. But he is not successful in providing a network analysis of domestic policy that addresses its valences and strength of influence, nor are the interdependent relations with foreign policy compellingly analyzed despite a plethora of details. The most interesting part of Höbelt's study is his analysis of ambivalent relations with the larger partner in the alliance, Germany. One can also agree with Höbelt's finding that Austria was not merely a tool of German militarism but had played a very active role in the war within the alliance.<sup>82</sup>

With regard to new analyses of the *acteurs*, Wolfram Dornik's biography of Conrad von Hötzendorf<sup>83</sup> surely deserves to be positively highlighted, and it uses new Russian archival material alongside Austrian primary sources. Back in 2000, Lawrence Sondhaus had offered a critical study in English on this topic.<sup>84</sup> First and foremost, Sondhaus laid out clearly the highly ambivalent and totally unsuitable personality of Hötzendorf for being in such a central leadership position, and in so doing he could finally deconstruct the myth formation from World War I and the interwar period that had been perpetuated for such a long time.

Still tantalizing for research is the figure of the heir to the throne, Franz Ferdinand, who was murdered along with his wife in Sarajevo; however, no really new appraisals and analyses of his personality have been offered so far. This is true particularly of the biography from the French historian



Jean-Paul Bled,<sup>85</sup> who had earlier also made attempts at Emperor Franz Joseph and Crown Prince Rudolf. However, there was an intellectually quite perceptive approach to Franz Ferdinand offered by Richard Ned Lebow, professor for international political theory at King's College in London; his was a counterfactual history, envisioning what would have been if Franz Ferdinand had not been killed.<sup>86</sup> Also worth reading, extremely well researched, and excellently written is the biography of the Prague journalist Ludwig Winder from 1937—banned at the time by both National Socialist Germany and the chancellor dictatorship in Austria. The book was republished in 2013.<sup>87</sup> For the first time, in a comparative anthology, an overall analysis of the social and party-political causes of the war, that is to say, its repercussions on the political culture, has been made the focus of discussion.<sup>88</sup>

In international historiography on Austria, in terms of a critical diplomatic history and using a comprehensively source-saturated approach, what should first and foremost be mentioned is a dissertation by Marvin Benjamin Fried at the London School of Economics (accepted in 2011 and published in 2014). In his book he emphasizes the expansionistic aims of the foreign policy of the Austrian Federal Chancellery and the central warmongering role of diplomats, which were in contrast to the rather restrained reactions of the military with the exception of Hötzen-dorf.<sup>89</sup> He sees here a strong continuity in and an absolute intransigence among the leading *acteurs* in Austria-Hungary, which lasted up until May of 1917.

What remains extremely fragmented are studies about the war economy of the Habsburg Empire, which even in 2014 did not attract much attention.<sup>90</sup> The current historiography, with its starting point in the “visual turn,” is dedicating itself to the massive war crimes of the diverse units of the Habsburg army. First and foremost, it is the photo historian Anton Holzer who has contributed importantly to this.<sup>91</sup> A comprehensive examination of the war crimes and the brutal everyday life under occupation, along with the excessive military justice and extraordinary courts of the imperial-royal army—with due consideration of the situation of the prisoners of war and interned civilians—is something that Hannes Leidinger, Verena Moritz, Karin Moser, and Wolfram Dornik sought to do in 2014.<sup>92</sup> With respect to the immense abundance of the holdings of the war archive (now unfortunately becoming a challenge to work with because of deteriorating file cards), an important and methodologically valid first step has been made that rests on the preparatory work of the authors.<sup>93</sup> In this context, there is a dissertation dealing with Czech soldiers that delves further into aspects of the political high treason trials, and it rebuts generally the myth of the “duplicious Czechs” during World

War I.<sup>94</sup> New, innovative fields of research are also the history of medicine in World War I, and the postwar care for the victims of the war.<sup>95</sup>

In a collection of essays from Wolfram Dornik, Julia Walleczek-Fritz, and Stefan Wedrac,<sup>96</sup> there is an attempt at a comparative analysis of World War I between home front and military front, that is to say, a comparison between these two different “theaters” of the world war. While there are some innovative individual articles in this, the attempt to meet the high goal it set for itself is not successful. Yet out of just such experiences, quite innovative future research can arise.

All things considered, however, this volume seems typical of—with few exceptions—a research landscape of Austria in World War I that is made up of many small elements, now seeking increasingly to connect to methodological innovations in international research; but it still remains much too captivated by the “classical” themes and archival documents. With the exception of the book from Rauchensteiner, hardly any contributions were published in English, and moreover no compelling comparisons were sought with international research on the world war. What would be innovative would be if in future projects, the now functioning transnational cooperation with Italy could be expanded to include the other former foreign opponents (with a focus on Serbia and Russia) and also a comparative scholarly debate with what is found in Anglo-American, French, and German literature.

It was finally possible in 2014 to definitively overcome and deconstruct the remnants of the old victim doctrine. That Austrian authors by all means can make a difference in the overall history of World War I is something that Hannes Leidinger and Verena Moritz have shown with their concise and quite interesting paperback book about World War I.<sup>97</sup> It would be nice, however, if we could one day see the emergence of the next “Christopher Clark” from the region of the former Habsburg Empire.

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