
BOOK REVIEWS

SHANTI SUMARTOJO and BEN WELLINGS, eds.
Nation, Memory and Great War
Commemoration: Mobilizing the Past
in Europe, Australia and New Zealand
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IMPLYING COMMEMORATIVE activities, academic meetings and public wide spread ceremonies dedicated to the beginning of the 2014–2018 centenary period, the First World War centenary involve in the years to come countries, nations, politicians and researchers all over the world a fact that confers it a truly global period of remembrance.

This innovative volume grew from a symposium called “Politics of the Past” held in April 2012 at the Australian National University in Melbourne. Edited by Shanti Sumartojo, research fellow in the School of Architecture and Design at RMIT University, and Ben Wellings, lecturer in the School of Social Sciences at Monash University and a visiting fellow at the Australian National University Centre for European Studies, the contributions examine First World War commemoration in an international, multidisciplinary and comparative context. Reunind scholars from Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand and South Pacific the papers analyzes from historical, historiographical, geopolitical, sociological and cultural perspective the continuities and tensions that have shaped national commemoration and the social

and political forces that condition this unique international event.

Introduced by “Acknowledgements” and a general overview study titled “The Centenary to End All Centenaries: The Great War, Nation and Commemoration,” the 16 papers are organized in four sections animated by the following questions: “How is war remembered in what is often characterized as a global and post-national era?; How does commemoration of the Great War inflect questions of national belonging in developed societies today?; To what extent has the memory of the Great War been consciously or unconsciously mobilized as part of a wider politics of legitimacy?; How are specific locations of commemoration and commemorative acts designed to shape individual and collective understandings of the past and present?”

The first part “War and Memory in a Post-national Era” contains three studies signed by John Hutchinson, Ben Wellings and Roger Hillman which understand Great War commemoration as a activity shaped by international and global forces. In Hutchinson’s study “National Commemoration after the Second Thirty Years War,” we face a historical-sociological analysis that situates contemporary remembrance in the wider structures of global change of the past thirty years, nothing in particular the impossibility of remembering the First World War without remembering the Second. The main conclusion is that the two World Wars can be regarded together and seen as a universal phenomenon that eroded belief in European nation-

al identities and enabled the rise of global and regional identities. The second author, Ben Wellings, analyses under the title “Lest You Forget: Memory and Australian Nationalism in a Global Era” the increasing cultural and political prominence accorded to war commemoration in the past three decades by way of intersection of nationalism and globalization. He concludes that nationalism itself is a response to globalization, a process that he exemplified on the Australian model and argued that the new attempts to link state to citizen is a clear sign that nationalism is far from being eroded. The next contribution “From No Man’s Land to Transnational Spaces: The Representation of Great War Memory in Film,” signed by Roger Hillman, demonstrates in an innovative way of research how knowledge of the First World War is refracted through contemporary memory of the Second. He wants to show how cinematic interpretations of the Great War have been generated by a “sentimental supranationalism” in light of contemporary European concerns, arguing that “film is better suited than written history to honing symbolic history.” His discourse is built on the analyses of the following four movies: *Gallipoli: the Front Line Experience* (2005), *Das Weisse Band* (2009), *Dimanche de Fiançailles* (2004), based on a successful novel of the early 1990s, and *Joyeux Noël* (2005), film about Hillman argues that “it has far more to do with the strivings of the ‘new Europe,’ than with the events of Christmas 1914.”

The second part gathers four contributions and its titled “Commemoration and the Politics of National Belonging,” matter that its been analysed on four different cases: Australia, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Belgium, asking how Great War com-

memoration might alternately exacerbate or obscure cleavages within the communities in question. In the first study “Anzac and the Politics of Inclusion,” written by Frank Bongiorno, it is been argued how in the development of the Anzac narrative of the past thirty years to question and to criticize the social and political complexities of the First World War commemoration in Australia, due to its multicultural context, can become “un-Australian,” because the main political and narrative stream has a generalizing and inclusive nature. Andrew Mycock illustrates in the next contribution “The Politics of the Great War Centenary in the United Kingdom,” showing how the Cameron government aimed to capture and express “our national spirit,” but in the context of the Scottish independence referendum in September 2014 it did not pointed out clearly the boundaries of the nation in question. The author concludes that the recognition and “adaptation of a multidimensional approach that acknowledges the interconnected and entangled histories of the citizens and nations of the UK and its former Empire during the First World War, and the pluralities and complex configurations that result from it, are as such largely absent from the UK government’s plans.” In “Divergent Memories: Remembering and Forgetting the Great War in Loyalist and Nationalist Ireland,” James W. McAuley argues that the moment of partition of Ireland between 1916 and 1923 conditioned the historical memory of the Great War amongst unionist and nationalist communities in sharply divergent ways. This initial divergence was then compounded by the Troubles from the 1960s, particularly for unionists and “loyalists.” This tension contributed in the commemoration and memorialization of

the Great War through highly localized and populist memorials that appeared over the past three decades, phenomenon which represents actually a strong contrast with the state-organized memorials of many of the other case studies presented in this volume. One of the main conclusions of this study is that “in both the Republic and Northern Ireland over the past century, the memory of the past has been enlisted in the cause of the contemporary politics, a role that it serves to this day.” In the last case study of this section, Laurence van Ypersele examines under the title “The Great War in Belgian Memories: From Unanimity to Divergence,” the gradual deconstruction of Belgian national identity since 1918. Basing his research on “a corpus of official speeches, parliamentary, news articles and commemorative monuments,” van Ypersele focuses on the ways in which the past has been represented, and how these portrayals have evolved, often becoming fragmented over time. Showing that the different versions of the past began to diverge in the 1930s between the Flemish and French-speaking historical parts of Belgium, the author writes that the divergent memories of the Great War in Flanders and Wallonia have created difficulties for Belgium’s central role as a location of commemorative activities in the centenary year 2014, thus the memory of the War “provided an avenue for greater fragmentation than deeper unity.”

The four contributions of the third part “Mobilizing the Great War” interrogate the way that the Great War has been used in the past century for various political projects. The contribution of Mark McKenna debates “The Anzac Resurgence and Military Heritage in Australia and New Zealand.” He argues that the centenary of

the Anzac landings in 2015 will serve to the remaking of the Anzac myth in both countries such that no politician would dare question its centrality to the nation’s identity. The next study “Memorial Diplomacy in Franco-Australian Relations,” signed by Matthew Graves, points out that the inauguration or rededication of sites of memory has long served as a platform for reinforcing relations between governments. Elisabeth Rechniewski presents in the third article another face of the Great War and its memory under the title “Contested Sites of Memory: Commemorating Wars and Warriors in New Caledonia.” The last contribution of this section is dedicated by Matthew Stibe to a case study on the country that was blamed at the Peace Treaty of Paris–Versailles with wearing the fault of starting the war. “Remembering, Commemorating and (Re)fighting the Great War in Germany from 1919 to the Present Day,” explores the divergent ways in which the war was represented and remembered in the Weimar, Nazi, Cold War and post-reunification Germany periods. Stibe examines German historiography and public discourses about the Great War and concludes, on the one hand, that after 1945 the First World War has been completely overshadowed by the Second, such that it has been registered only weakly in contemporary consciousness, and, on the other, that it has been “refought in Germany at many different stages” and moments in the twentieth century, “reflecting shifting political priorities, generational expectations, geopolitical realities and cultural trends.”

The fourth section is titled “Locations of Commemoration” and gathers five chapters focused on how, where and by what means the First World War will be remembered. The authors discuss memo-

rials, museums and other commemorative sites, engaging with the politics and complexities of such *lieux de mémoire*. Sarah Christie opens this part with an analysis of the cultural production of memory at the intersection of gender and nation under the title “The Sinking of the *Marquette*: Gender, Nationalism and New Zealand’s Great War Remembrance.” Her conclusion is that the initial framing of the event becomes part of collective memory and is then important in defining the subsequent parameters of public discussion. The second article returns to Australia with Guy Hansens’s contribution: “Museums and the Great War: A Curator’s Perspective on the History of Anzac.” Former head curator at the National Museum of Australia, Hansen argues that museums play a central role in promulgating the Anzac myth, which he describes as a “set of cultural practices rather than as a type of verifiable history.” Christine Cadot remains on the topic of museums by debating the subject of “Wars Afterwards: The Repression of the Great War in European Collective Memory.” She concludes that the Great War has been largely silenced in museum narratives of European integration and in “2014 a European memory still remains political wishful thinking, rather than a proven, existing reality.” The next chapter is signed by Romain Fathi who presents “A Piece of Australia in France: Australian Authorities and the Commemoration of Anzac Day at Villers-Bretonneux in the Last Decade,” in which he illustrates the interaction between state and civil society actors in the production of commemorative activity. Finally, Shanti Sumartojo analyzes “Anzac Kinship and National Identity on the Australian Remembrance Trail.”

One of the central conclusions of all this contributions is, such as the editors underline, that one hundred years after the Great War, the impact of the conflagration is still evident in its mobilization for contemporary political and nationalist projects, observation that explains also the title of the volume. Whithout doubt all the presented studies represent and will generate a starting point seen from different perspectives for ongoing research focused on the First World War during all the centenary period inaugurated with the beginning of 2014.



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