

## Cambridge Histories Online

<http://universitypublishingonline.org/cambridge/histories/>



The Cambridge History of the First World War

Edited by Jay Winter

Book DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CHO9780511675669>

Online ISBN: 9780511675669

Hardback ISBN: 9780521763851

Chapter

7 - 1919: Aftermath pp. 172-198

Chapter DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CHO9780511675669.010>

Cambridge University Press

## 1919: Aftermath

BRUNO CABANES

The end of the First World War cannot be easily demarcated by a specific date. The war's long-term effects were so devastating that it is fair to say no clear dividing-line separates the war itself from the post-war period; nearly 10 million men died, in other words, one in seven of all soldiers; 21 million were wounded; millions of widows, orphans and other grieving relatives were left behind to mourn their dead. The war's aftermath produced countless human tragedies; nearly every family continued to feel the emotional and psychological effects for years to come.<sup>1</sup> To take the single year of 1919 and consider it as a specific historical subject in its own right thus constitutes another way to question traditional chronology, which tends to view the Armistice of 11 November 1918 and the subsequent peace treaties as the two decisive markers in the return to peace. In reality, 1919 constitutes at most a step – but only a step – in what historians now call 'the transition from war to peace', in French, *la sortie de guerre*. This term refers to a transition period of several years, characterised by the return home of soldiers and prisoners of war, the pacification of the belligerent nations and the far slower demobilisation of minds and attitudes, or what is also called 'cultural demobilisation'.<sup>2</sup> This process was far from straightforward. It took place in a series of fits and starts, with periods of simultaneous demobilisation and remobilisation, gestures of peace and examples of the impossibility or refusal to demobilise.

Another difficulty in the complex transition from war to peace lay in the wide variety of national circumstances. In France and Great Britain, 1919 was a year of military demobilisation and rebuilding. Returning soldiers had to take

Helen McPhail translated this chapter from French into English.

1 Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Christophe Prochasson (eds.), *Sortir de la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Tallandier, 2008).

2 John Horne (ed.), 'Démobilisations culturelles après la Grande Guerre', 14–18: *Aujourd'hui, Today, Heute*, 5 (Paris: Noësis, 2002), pp. 43–53.

up their civilian lives again, which was much more difficult for some than for others. The state and charitable organisations established aid programmes for victims of the war, while survivors tried to rebuild the ruins of regions devastated by the conflict. But in other countries, 1919 meant that outbreaks of violence were still occurring between armed factions and against civilians: the occupation of the Rhineland by Allied troops; confrontations between revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries in Germany; civil war in Russia and in Ireland; frontier struggles between Greece and Turkey (1919–22), as well as Russia and Poland (1919–21), to name only a few. All these conflicts, each deadly to some degree, prolonged and magnified the effects of the First World War, to the extent that national histories sometimes associate the Great War with later confrontations as part of the same chronological sequence. The Greeks, for example, consider that a single period of war began with the Balkan wars in 1912 and ended ten years later, with the Greco-Turkish War. In 1919, some armies simply changed enemies. Roger Vercelet's novel *Capitaine Conan* (1934), for example, portrays veterans of the French unit known as the *Armée d'Orient* engaging in the struggle against the Bolsheviks. In short, from the standpoint of a 'transition from war to peace', it is almost as if the year 1919 represents only the beginning of a larger phenomenon: a slow and chaotic demobilisation.

But 1919 was not only a step in an ongoing process: it was also a moment – in the way that Erez Manela has described a 'Wilsonian moment', a short period in which significant collective expectations coalesced. This occurred not just in the Western world, as has long been thought, but also on a global scale.<sup>3</sup> Seen as the dawn of a new era, the peace treaties embodied collective hopes for a profound change in international relations. New states were coming into being or were reborn out of the ruins of the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, German and Ottoman Empires. During the first six months of 1919, delegations from around the world came to Paris while everywhere else, the public generally followed the peace negotiations with great interest; they were major events in a globalised world. The signing of the Treaty of Versailles, on 28 June 1919, in the Hall of Mirrors, represented a kind of apotheosis. It was followed by the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye with Austria (10 September 1919), the Treaty of Neuilly-sur-Seine with Bulgaria (27 November 1919), then the Treaty of Trianon with Hungary (4 June 1920) and the Treaty of Sèvres with Turkey (10 August 1920), itself revised in the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923. In the autumn of 1919, the campaign began for the

<sup>3</sup> Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

ratification of the Treaty of Versailles in the United States Congress, but the American Senate ultimately rejected the treaty with a final vote in March 1920.<sup>4</sup>

The year 1919 to some extent symbolises all the hopes of the post-war era: a new diplomacy based on world peace and collective security; major transnational organisations like the ILO (International Labour Organisation) established in Geneva early in 1919; recognition of the right to self-determination. However, it was also a year of threats and disillusionment, which weakened the dynamics of demobilisation.

### The Treaty of Versailles, or the disappointed dreams of Wilsonianism

On 28 June 1919, at 3.00 p.m. precisely, two German emissaries in ceremonial dress entered the great Hall of Mirrors in the château of Versailles and advanced to the centre of the room, escorted by Allied soldiers. The emissaries were Hermann Müller, the new German Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Johannes Bell, the Minister for Transport; they were there to sign the peace treaty that would bring the First World War to an end. ‘The whole affair was elaborately staged and made as humiliating to the enemy as it well could be. To my mind it is out of keeping with the new era which we profess an ardent desire to promote’, noted Colonel House, diplomatic adviser to the American President, Woodrow Wilson.<sup>5</sup> The French Président du Conseil, Georges Clemenceau, had designed a veritable Roman triumph. The two German emissaries had to proceed past a delegation of *gueules cassées*, men with permanently disfigured faces, who served as living reminders of the damage inflicted by the Central Powers.<sup>6</sup> In a historic first, cameras filmed the signing of the treaty. ‘[The two Germans] passed close to me. It was like seeing prisoners led in to hear the reading of their sentence’, a British diplomat reported. Müller and Bell returned to Berlin the same evening, while in Paris, captured enemy guns were paraded through the streets.

The peace negotiations had opened five months earlier in the red and gold Salon de l’Horloge at the headquarters of the French Ministry for Foreign

4 John Milton Cooper, Jr., *Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

5 Edward M. House, *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House Arranged as a Narrative by Charles Seymour*, 4 vols. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1926–8), vol. iv, p. 487.

6 Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, ‘Die Delegation der “Gueules cassées” in Versailles am 28. Juni 1919’, in Gerd Krumeich *et al.* (eds.), *Versailles 1919: Ziele, Wirkung, Wahrnehmung* (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2001), pp. 280–7.

Affairs, located on the Quai d'Orsay. Clemenceau had chosen the date of 18 January 1919, the anniversary of Kaiser Wilhelm I's 1871 coronation. He also insisted that the treaty be signed in the Hall of Mirrors, the very same place where the German Reich had been first proclaimed. John Maynard Keynes, a member of the British delegation, has left us a mordant portrait of Clemenceau: 'Silent . . . throned, in his grey gloves, on the brocade chair, dry in soul and empty of hope, very old and tired, and surveying the scene with a cynical and almost impish air.'<sup>7</sup> In reality, recent historiography has largely done justice to Clemenceau and called into question the 'black legend' that tended to portray the French *Président du Conseil* ('who felt about France what Pericles felt about Athens', in Keynes's words) as the man responsible for all the defects of the peace treaty.

The vanquished imperial powers and their successors – Germany, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, Turkey – were not invited, nor was Russia. In this respect, the Paris Peace Conference differed significantly from the negotiations of 1815, the great European peace conference of the previous century. Another difference lay in the number of participating countries: five at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, but twenty-seven in Paris. The delegations themselves were far larger, comprising several hundred people on average, accompanied by chauffeurs and secretaries, and there were more than 500 journalists. In the words of Margaret Macmillan:

Between January and June, Paris was at once the world's government, its court of appeal and its parliament, the focus of its fears and hopes. Officially, the Peace Conference lasted into 1920, but those first six months are the ones that counted, when the key decisions were taken and the crucial chain of events set in motion. The world has never seen anything quite like this and never will again.<sup>8</sup>

The Paris Peace Conference was a carefully structured hierarchical edifice in which the representatives of the Great Powers controlled the game. In January and February 1919, two members each from the French, British, Italian, American and Japanese delegations met under Clemenceau's chairmanship in the salons of the Quai d'Orsay. The Council of Ten, in which the representatives of smaller countries also participated, gave way to a Council of Four, with Clemenceau, the British and Italian Prime Ministers, David Lloyd

<sup>7</sup> John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), p. 32.

<sup>8</sup> Margaret Macmillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2001), Introduction, p. xxv.

George and Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, and Woodrow Wilson, the first American head of state to travel abroad during his term in office. At the end of April 1919, it was mainly Clemenceau, Wilson and Lloyd George who decided on the essentials, often after lively discussions that revealed the tensions among the three men.<sup>9</sup> Here, the professional diplomats ceded their power to the politicians. Their influence was felt instead within the fifty-two commissions that worked on a wide range of technical issues: borders for the new states, the fate of ethnic minorities and questions of reparations.

The procedures of the conference remained nonetheless somewhat chaotic. No one had considered exactly how the negotiations would progress, nor at what speed. Important members had other obligations that required them to leave for long periods, such as President Wilson, who returned to the United States for nearly a month in mid February. It was not until mid April that an agenda was decided upon and minutes kept for each meeting. In the end, the Peace Treaty and its 440 articles were drawn up in great haste. The delegations of the victorious nations read over the text only a few hours before it was sent to representatives of the defeated countries.

Each delegation leader had come to Paris with his own objectives; he bore the weight of the expectations of public opinion in his own country. But all the delegations shared a common concern: the fate of Germany in post-war Europe. For France, both security and justice were at stake: ten French *départements* had suffered from direct experience of battle or occupation, and the entire nation had lost a quarter of its male population between the ages of 18 and 27. Faced with such large-scale sacrifices, endured by his nation for over four years, Clemenceau nonetheless showed himself to be a realist. He confided to Raymond Poincaré, President of the French Republic, 'We will perhaps not have the peace that you and I would wish for. France must make concessions, not to Germany but to her Allies.' For the British, who suspected the French of harbouring ambitions to annex the Rhineland, the reinforcement of French power in Europe was at least as alarming as the matter of German power. The Prime Minister, Lloyd George, sought to reconcile what he considered a just punishment for the war crimes committed by the Central Powers with maintaining economic harmony in Europe. Italy wanted to see the Allies keep the promises made during the London Conference in 1915, notably, to give up the irredentist territories of Trentino and Trieste, as well as Istria and Dalmatia. President Wilson, for his part, had always thought that the

<sup>9</sup> Paul Mantoux, *Les délibérations du Conseil des Quatre*, 2 vols. (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 1955).

peace should be a 'just peace', based on a kind of moral pact that he called a 'covenant', that it should not take place at the price of a severely weakened Germany and that a distinction had to be made between the German people and their rulers, who alone were responsible for the war.<sup>10</sup>

After the treaty was signed, Articles 231 and 232 became the most frequent topics of debate. Article 231 assigned responsibility for the damages suffered by the Allies to Germany and the Central Powers, while Article 232 reached the conclusion that a guilty Germany owed reparations for the damages that it had caused. It made no difference that the great historian Pierre Renouvin, himself a veteran of the war, explained early on that the terms 'responsibility' and 'reparations' should be understood not in moral terms but in the terms of civil law.<sup>11</sup> The fact remains that for the Germans, and for most of the Allies, Articles 231 and 232 were seen as a form of moral condemnation – no doubt all the more unacceptable to Germany who itself had lost more than 2 million of its own soldiers. The sting of this moral condemnation was compounded by a sense of humiliation, shared by the Austrians, over their territorial losses and the end of imperial grandeur.

To understand the Allies' apparent harshness towards Germany, it is important to take into account the moral climate of the post-war period and especially the state of mind prevailing in Allied countries during the winter of 1918–19.<sup>12</sup> The discovery of the damage caused by the German troops during their withdrawal in the autumn of 1918,<sup>13</sup> the treatment meted out to civilians in occupied regions and the handling of prisoners of war<sup>14</sup> – in other words, the renewed energy in 1918–19 of the theme of 'German atrocities' – weighed heavily on the heads of state and diplomats at the Paris Conference. Another issue was the attitude towards Kaiser Wilhelm II, who had fled to the Netherlands and whom the Allies almost unanimously viewed as one of the worst war criminals in history. It is hardly surprising, then, that when French soldiers awaiting demobilisation first heard the terms of the peace treaties,

10 Manfred F. Boemeke, 'Woodrow Wilson's image of Germany, the war-guilt question and the Treaty of Versailles', in Manfred F. Boemeke, Gerald D. Feldman and Elisabeth Glaser (eds.), *The Treaty of Versailles: A Reassessment after 75 Years* (German Historical Institute and Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 603–14.

11 Pierre Renouvin, *Histoire des relations internationales*, 3 vols. (Paris: Hachette, 1958, republished 1994), vol. III, p. 446.

12 Gerd Krumeich et al., *Versailles 1919: Ziele, Wirkung, Wahrnehmung* (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2001).

13 Michael Geyer, 'Insurrectionary warfare: the German debate about a *levée en masse* in October 1918', *Journal of Modern History*, 73 (2001), pp. 459–527.

14 Annette Becker, *Oubliés de la Grande Guerre: humanitaire et culture de guerre, 1914–1918: populations occupées, déportés civils, prisonniers de guerre* (Paris: Éditions Noësis, 1998).

they spoke of these terms in their letters home not as excessively harsh, but as not severe enough.<sup>15</sup>

The bibliography on the issue of reparations is vast. Beginning with John Maynard Keynes's pamphlet *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, an instant bestseller published in the summer of 1919, an early tendency emphasised the disastrous consequences of the reparations on the German economy and the young Weimar Republic. Conversely, in the aftermath of the Second World War, Keynes found himself the subject of criticism, particularly in a famous text by Étienne Mantoux, who reproached him with simultaneously spreading the 'black legend' of the Treaty of Versailles, provoking the American Senate to reject the treaty and inspiring an attitude of appeasement towards Nazi Germany.<sup>16</sup> A long historiographical tradition resulted from this reversal of opinion,<sup>17</sup> continued today in the recent works of Niall Ferguson,<sup>18</sup> who has observed that between 1920 and 1932, from one negotiation to another, the reparations in fact paid by Germany never represented more than 8.3 per cent of the nation's gross national income – and not the 20–50 per cent recorded by Keynes. Did Germany have the means to pay? Certainly. Had Keynes allowed himself to be influenced by the propaganda of German bankers? Probably. Nonetheless, the question of reparations poisoned diplomatic relations throughout the interwar years; their cost was the subject of endless negotiations in numerous subsequent conferences and nurtured nationalist feeling in Germany.

In hindsight, the Treaty of Versailles, often presented as a victors' peace, was in fact a compromise peace: a compromise between Wilson's idealistic aspirations and a more realistic post-war approach; between the objectives of each nation and the need for each one to manage its allies; and between hatred for Germany, which reached its paroxysm at the end of the war, and the need for the gradual reintegration of the vanquished countries into the wider circle of nations. Indeed, the declared aim of the peace negotiations in Paris was not only to chastise the nations held responsible for the outbreak of war, it was also to implement the ideas advanced by Wilson in his 'Fourteen Points'

15 Bruno Cabanes, *La victoire endeuillée: la sortie de guerre des soldats français (1918–1920)* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2004).

16 Étienne Mantoux, *La paix calomniée ou les conséquences économiques de Monsieur Keynes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1946). The first criticism came from Jacques Bainville, in his famous response to Keynes, *Les conséquences politiques de la paix* (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie Nationale, 1920).

17 Sally Marks, 'Smoke and mirrors, in smoke-filled rooms and the Galerie des Glaces', in Boemeke, Feldman and Glaser (eds.), *The Treaty of Versailles*, pp. 337–70.

18 Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (London: Basic Books, 1998), chapter 14.



speech of 8 January 1918 and to banish war once and for all.<sup>19</sup> A young British diplomat, Harold Nicolson, noted: 'We were preparing not Peace only, but Eternal Peace. There was about us the halo of some divine mission.'<sup>20</sup> The presence of the American President on European soil gave birth to hopes in a way that no other foreign head of state had ever been able to stir. Throughout the journey that brought him to Paris, Wilson received an enthusiastic welcome. Upon his arrival in France, the Mayor of Brest, where the American President landed on 13 December 1919, greeted him as 'the Apostle of Liberty' who came to liberate the European peoples from their sufferings. In the words of the English writer H. G. Wells early in the 1930s, 'For a brief interval, Wilson . . . ceased to be a common statesman; he became a Messiah.'<sup>21</sup>

While scholars of the history of international relations have devoted a great deal of effort to exploring the European aspects of the peace negotiations, the repercussions these negotiations had beyond the Western world were neglected until recently.<sup>22</sup> And yet the beginning of 1919 was marked by the growing consciousness worldwide of a right to self-determination, which first emerged in 1917 in the writing by Lenin and Trotsky condemning the Russian Empire. Wilson later popularised this principle in 1918 when he saw it as the expression of government by consent.<sup>23</sup> In practice, Wilson had in mind the territories of the three empires – German, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman – rather than Asian or African colonies.<sup>24</sup> Colonial soldiers were profoundly affected by their discovery of Europe and by the traumatic experience of the war; they were torn between pride at having fought, hope of seeing their situation improve on their return and disillusionment at the inertia of colonial society. 'When the survivors returned home in 1918 and 1919, they faced a new social phenomenon . . . the end of the myth of the invincibility and honesty of the white man', recalled Amadou Hampaté Bâ, a veteran of the Great War and a writer, originally from Mali. He added:

19 Jay Winter, *Dreams of Peace and Freedom: Utopian Moments in the 20th Century* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2006), chapter 2.

20 Harold Nicolson, *Peacemaking, 1919* (London: Constable, 1933), pp. 31–2.

21 H. G. Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come* (New York: Macmillan, 1933), p. 82.

22 Erez Manela, 'Imagining Woodrow Wilson in Asia: dreams of East-West harmony and the revolt against empire in 1919', *American Historical Review*, 111:5 (2006), pp. 1327–51.

23 Arno Mayer, *Wilson vs. Lenin: Political Origins of the New Democracy, 1917–1918* (New York: World Publishing Co., 1967).

24 Michla Pomerance, 'The United States and self determination: perspectives on the Wilsonian conception', *American Journal of International Law*, 70 (1976), pp. 1–27; William R. Keylor, 'Versailles and international diplomacy', in Boemeke, Feldman and Glaser (eds.), *The Treaty of Versailles*, pp. 469–506.

Now, the black soldiers had experienced trench warfare alongside their white companions. They had seen heroes and courageous men, but they had also seen those men cry and scream with terror . . . And it was then, in 1919, that the spirit of emancipation and the voicing of demands began to appear.<sup>25</sup>

Messengers arrived at the Paris Peace Conference from almost everywhere, bearing petitions in favour of votes for women,<sup>26</sup> the rights of African Americans and workers' rights; there were spokesmen for those seeking recognition of their right to a state, including Zionists and Armenians among many others. A young *sous-chef* at the Ritz wrote to Woodrow Wilson to claim independence for his state and hired a suit in the hope of a private audience with him; this young man was the future Hô Chi Minh. Dressed in Eastern garb, T. E. Lawrence served as translator and adviser to Feisal, who had led the Arab uprising against Ottoman domination in June 1916 and would be the first King of Iraq after the war. Others had no opportunity to come to Paris to defend the rights of their people, such as Syngman Rhee, who had been refused a passport. In 1948, Rhee became the first President of South Korea.

Thanks to developments in journalism in Egypt, India and China, Wilson's speeches were translated and his message widely diffused and debated in nationalist circles, despite the censorship of colonial authorities. Extracts from the Fourteen Points speech were learned by heart in some Chinese schools.<sup>27</sup> Acknowledging the triumph of Wilson's ideas in India, V. S. Srinivasa Sastri imagined how the American President would have been welcomed in the Asian capitals: 'It would have been as though one of the great teachers of humanity, Christ or Buddha, had come back to his home, crowned with the glory that the centuries had brought him since he last walked the earth.'<sup>28</sup> In January 1919, many saw the Paris Peace Conference as a test of Western determination to see the right to self-determination put into practice. The Chinese delegation, consisting of young, westernised

25 Quoted in Thomas Compère-Morel (ed.), *Mémoires d'outre-mer: les colonies et la Première Guerre Mondiale* (Péronne: Historial de la Grande Guerre, 1996), p. 64. On African veterans, see also Marc Michel, *Les Africains et la Grande Guerre: l'appel à l'Afrique, 1914–1918* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1982; republished, Paris: Karthala, 2003); and Joe Lunn, *Memoirs of the Maelstrom: A Senegalese Oral History of the First World War* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999).

26 In France, a law on votes for women was proposed in the *Chambre des Députés* in 1919, and then abandoned in 1922. British and German women won the right to vote in 1918.

27 Guoqi Xu, *China and the Great War: China's Pursuit of a New National Identity and Internationalization* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 245.

28 V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, 'Woodrow Wilson's message for Eastern Nations', quoted by Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*, p. 55.

diplomats (V. T. Wellington Koo studied at Columbia, C. T. Wang at Yale), advocated for the transfer to China of former German concessions. The setback in negotiations, which gave Japan control of the Shandong Peninsula, ruined the hopes of the Chinese nationalists, who refused to sign the peace treaty. Immediately, anti-Japanese demonstrations broke out throughout China, particularly on 4 May 1919, when 5,000 Chinese students marched through the streets of Beijing. In mid April, the Indian nationalist movement was repressed violently in the Amritsar massacre, when the troops of the British general Sir William Dyer fired on and killed several hundred demonstrators. Almost everywhere in Asia and Africa, the Versailles Treaty aroused dismay and revolution after the high hopes raised by Wilsonianism.

Recent studies of the Versailles Treaty have broadened our perspective to striking effect, showing the aftermath of the war no longer in strictly Western terms but on a worldwide scale. In the end, perhaps, the true failure of the Treaty of Versailles and the turning point of 1919 can be located beyond the borders of Europe and the battlefields of the Great War. By ignoring the hopes of colonised peoples, and by refusing to ratify equality between the races,<sup>29</sup> the negotiators in Paris ran the risk of disappointing all those who had placed their hopes in the doctrine of President Wilson. This course of action subsequently fuelled nationalism and stirred the first manifestations of Asian communism.<sup>30</sup>

### A time for mourning and reflection

Internationally, the unfolding of the Peace Conference, its pitfalls and the ratification or non-ratification of the treaties all defined the year 1919. Nonetheless, the stakes of the immediate post-war period extended far beyond the context of international diplomacy. For many families, 1919 was above all a year of waiting – for the return home of soldiers or prisoners of war, for the identification of the bodies of missing soldiers, for the return of those bodies already identified but who could not yet be taken back to their family cemeteries, for the rebuilding of a house or a village destroyed in the fighting. Only at the end of the summer of 1920 did French law authorise the return of soldiers' bodies. This repatriation, in the form of entire trainloads of

29 Naoko Shimazu, *Japan, Race and Equality: The Racial Equality Proposal of 1919* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

30 Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), chapter 13.

coffins, over a few months, undoubtedly marked a major turning point in the life of many grieving families.

To better understand the chronology of 1919, we must therefore situate the survivors of the Great War, whether civilians or veterans, in the context of their domestic life. Demobilisation of the armies alone was a colossal task, if only because of the numbers of men involved: 5 million in the case of French survivors, 6 million Germans – many more than the number mobilised in the summer of 1914. In the case of Great Britain and the United States, demobilisation was a relatively straightforward process, even if the return home was never fast enough for the demobilised men. In his short story ‘Soldier’s home’, published in 1923, Ernest Hemingway describes the varied types of welcome that greeted the waves of returning soldiers:

By the time Krebs returned to his hometown in Oklahoma [in the summer of 1919], the greeting of heroes was over. He came back much too late. The men from the town who had been drafted had all been welcomed elaborately on their return. There had been a great deal of hysteria. Now the reaction had set in. People seemed to think it was rather ridiculous for Krebs to be getting back so late, years after the war was over.<sup>31</sup>

In Germany, in a context of defeat compounded by political revolution, the army literally fell apart in the space of two months. Nearly 500,000 German soldiers left their units as soon as they were across the Rhine and made their own way back to their families. Their homecoming was warmly celebrated, in contrast to the later claims of Nazi mythology of the ‘stab in the back’.<sup>32</sup> It was mainly in France that demobilisation dragged on, an interminable process begun in November 1918, interrupted briefly in May–June 1919 and then relaunched and extended until early 1920. Following the principles of egalitarian, republican rule, French military authorities decided to demobilise according to age; but as the return of each age group depended on the demobilisation of the preceding group, it was impossible for the men to foresee exactly when they would return home. When reading their letters from that year, 1919 appears as a kind of suspended time, somewhere between war and peace. Some soldiers left to occupy the Rhineland, while others remained in the barracks, waiting to be demobilised, their morale worn away by boredom.

<sup>31</sup> Ernest Hemingway, ‘Soldier’s home’, 1923, in *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1987), pp. 109–16.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Bessel, *Germany after the First World War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

At the outset of 1919, both plans and worries shaped the future. Demobilisation held the promise of a return to everyday life, but would veterans really be able to return to their pre-war lives? Rumours ran through the ranks of waiting soldiers about men who returned home to find themselves abandoned by unfaithful wives, or ignored by indifferent civilians. In France, the law of 22 November 1918 required each employer to rehire his former employees – but in order for that to happen, both the business and its owner had to have survived the war. Veterans originally from the areas of France destroyed by the fighting returned home only to find their houses in ruins. Sometimes their family home no longer existed, and everything had to be rebuilt.<sup>33</sup> It did not take long for the refugees who had fled during the war to return home: the town of Liévin in northern France, which had been entirely destroyed, already numbered 7,000 inhabitants by October 1919. In France, the *Charte des sinistrés* (Victims' charter) of 11 April 1919 opened the way to substantial reparations for victims of war damage. A true break with tradition in France's administrative history, this charter recognised the state's responsibility for the destruction caused by the war and established a form of national solidarity for the victims.

The very concept of 'war victims' thus had to be redefined and with it, rights to reparations. The Great War caused such vast losses that the entire system of legal categories, as well as the aid structures already in place, had to be brought up to date. In Great Britain it was mainly charitable organisations that came to the aid of wounded veterans and grieving families, while in Germany and France this role fell principally to the state, which modernised nineteenth-century pension laws in order to meet the new requirements of a conscript army.<sup>34</sup> In May 1920, the Weimar Republic voted in laws reforming the system for allocating pensions to disabled veterans, widows and orphans.<sup>35</sup> In France, the law of 31 March 1919 established a 'right to reparations' that accorded each disabled veteran, whatever his military rank, the status of 'war victim', along with a pension. Later, in 1923, jobs were reserved especially for disabled veterans. The jurist René Cassin, himself severely injured in the war,

33 Hugh Clout, *After the Ruins: Restoring the Countryside of Northern France after the Great War* (University of Exeter Press, 1996); Frédérique Pilleboue et al. (eds.), *Reconstructions en Picardie après 1919* (Paris: RMN, 2000); Eric Bussière, Patrice Marcilloux and Denis Varaschin (eds.), *La grande reconstruction: reconstruire le Pas-de-Calais après la Grande Guerre* (Archives départementales du Pas-de-Calais, 2000).

34 Deborah Cohen, *The War Come Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914–1939* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001).

35 Sabine Kienitz, *Beschädigte Helden: Kriegsinvalidität und Körperbilder 1914–1923* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2008).

was one of the leading advocates of disabled veterans' rights. At the same time, the United States, which was still spending \$2 million a year in pensions for veterans of the American Civil War, sought to promote a new model based on the rehabilitation of wounded soldiers, the development of specialised hospitals (such as the Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, DC) and a rapid return to active life.<sup>36</sup> 'Rights, not charity' was the slogan on which veterans' organisations were based, a slogan that acquired increasing social significance. The year 1919 saw the first great conferences of veterans' associations, which subsequently joined forces with each other.

New rituals emerged in connection with the war memorials being built. These rituals linked former soldiers and civilians together in honouring the memory of the dead of the Great War.<sup>37</sup> This nationalisation of the memory of war very quickly came to hold a central place in national identities. In the case of Australia and New Zealand, the war experience of the Anzac troops became a true founding myth for these new nations.<sup>38</sup> The summer of 1919 saw a series of great victory parades organised in the Allied countries: 14 July in Paris; 19 July in London; 22 July in Brussels; 10 September in New York. On each occasion the ceremonies were associated with national symbols: in Paris, the procession passed beneath the Arc de Triomphe; in London, by way of denouncing enemy crimes, a wall was built consisting of thousands of pointed helmets along the route of the parade. In New York, where six successive parades were organised, thousands of wounded men from the 1st American Division took part in the procession. At the head of the column, soldiers on horseback carried banners such as: 'First Division: 4,899 killed; 21,433 wounded.' In Paris, 1,000 disabled veterans opened the victory parade down the Champs-Élysées – an overwhelming spectacle, illustrated by Jean Galtier-Boissière in his famous painting, *The Victory Parade*, where a blind soldier advances, leaning on the shoulder of a disabled veteran.

In every country, the construction of a national memory of the Great War was inseparable from the memory of the war dead. The Prix Goncourt for 1919 was awarded to Marcel Proust for *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* instead of to the war novel by Roland Dorgelès, *Les croix de bois* ('The wooden

36 Beth Linker, *War's Waste: Rehabilitation in World War I America* (University of Chicago Press, 2011).

37 For a general approach, Stephen R. Ward (ed.), *The War Generation: Veterans of the First World War* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1975); in the case of France, Antoine Prost, *Les anciens combattants et la société française, 1914–1939* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1977).

38 Alistair Thomson, *ANZAC Memories: Living with the Legend* (Oxford University Press, 1994).

crosses'), a decision which could be seen as a sign of continuing 'cultural demobilisation' – i.e., people wanted to read about something other than the war. But 1919 was also the year of the great film *J'accuse*, which opened in April. With gripping realism, the director Abel Gance showed the dead of Verdun rising from the ground to return and haunt the living and to assert, in the face of civilian immorality, that their sacrifice had been in vain. Gance took up the theme of the 'return of the dead', which expressed perfectly the mindset of the immediate post-war period: societies tormented by the memory of the dead, and by a form of moral responsibility imposed on them by the sacrifice of so many soldiers.<sup>39</sup>

This demand for loyalty to the memory of the dead was responsible for the emergence of two contradictory kinds of discourse. Gance's film expressed a pacifist message that in the end became established as a kind of shared culture in the second half of the 1920s: '*nie wieder Krieg*', 'Never again war', '*Plus jamais ça*', in the former soldiers' words. At the same time, hatred of the enemy was still strong. A form of remobilisation can even be seen in the immediate post-war period, delaying and hindering the process of mourning: to turn the page on the war would be to betray the dead. In France, probably more than in other Allied countries, the desire for vengeance dominated public opinion. It was visible among the troops who occupied the Rhineland, through the full range of humiliations imposed on the German civilian population. In December 1918, the novelist Jacques Rivière, a former prisoner of war who had initially adopted the Wilsonian ideal of peace, published a text entitled *L'ennemi*. In his opening pages, Rivière described his feelings towards the Germans:

What I reproach the Germans for is not primarily their deeds ... My complaint is more profound, it is their very being that I hate, or rather the void of their being. What I resent most in the Germans is that they are nothing.<sup>40</sup>

In how many grieving families did hatred of the enemy mark a large part of the interwar years? In 1925, the great mathematician Émile Picard, who had lost three sons during the war, argued that German scientists should continue to be excluded from the International Research Council. Six years since the

<sup>39</sup> Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), chapter 1. On the presence of the war in German cinema in the 1920s, see also Anton Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema: Weimar Culture and the Wounds of War* (Princeton University Press, 2009).

<sup>40</sup> Jacques Rivière, *L'ennemi* (Paris: Gallimard, 1918).

end of the war represented ‘a very short time to throw a veil over so many odious and criminal acts’ he explained, ‘especially when no regret was expressed’.<sup>41</sup>

### Transnational stakes in the aftermath of war

In the eyes of many Westerners, however, the most serious threat came from the disintegration of the great empires of Central and Eastern Europe, and from the growth of communism. Fear of the ‘Reds’, Bolsheviks and revolutionaries profoundly affected many people. This fear was fed by the massive strikes that occurred in many countries after the war. In France, the Paris region witnessed the largest strikes in the history of the metalworking industry, in the spring of 1919.<sup>42</sup> The general strike in Winnipeg (15 May–25 June 1919) unleashed by the inflationary surge of the post-war period, was a major event in the history of the labour movement in Canada. In the United States, 1919 alone saw nearly 3,600 examples of social conflict. This ‘fear of the Reds’ could turn to madness, as when a bomb exploded on Wall Street on 16 September 1920, leaving thirty-eight dead and hundreds wounded.<sup>43</sup> The attack, which remains unexplained, was initially attributed to anarchists and later to Leninist agents.

Thus when Russian refugees flooded into Western Europe after the defeat of the White armies in the Russian civil war (1919–21), their presence inspired great anxiety. In the spring of 1919 more than 10,000 people, including 6,000 soldiers and officers from the White armies, fled to Turkey from Odessa. A total of 150,000 refugees followed after the defeat of General Wrangel’s army in November 1920. The great majority of these refugees, completely destitute, settled into crowded camps on the outskirts of Constantinople, such as the camp installed near the battlefield of Gallipoli, or they ended up on ships moored in the Sea of Marmara. As Jean-Charles de Watteville of the

41 International Research Council, Third Assembly, Brussels, 1925, cited by Brigitte Schroeder-Gudehus, ‘Pas de Locarno pour la science: la coopération scientifique internationale et la politique étrangère des États pendant l’entre-deux-guerres’, *Relations Internationales*, 46 (1986), p. 183.

42 Jean-Louis Robert, *Les ouvriers, la patrie et la Révolution, 1914–1919* (Annales littéraires de l’Université de Besançon/Les Belles Lettres, 1995). On the birth of the French Communist Party, see Romain Ducoulombier, *Camarades: la naissance du parti communiste en France* (Paris: Perrin, 2010).

43 Beverly Gage, *The Day Wall Street Exploded: A Story of America in its First Age of Terror* (Oxford University Press, 2009).



International Committee of the Red Cross noted in the course of a humanitarian mission in 1921:

The refugees could be compared to prisoners of war. Constantinople is a prison from which it is impossible to escape. [The refugees] are living in surroundings entirely strange to them, and this results in increased mental demoralisation and a growing incapacity to work.<sup>44</sup>

The governments that had supported the White armies, particularly France and Great Britain, sent food and aid before organising the evacuation of Russian refugees to the Balkans – including some Armenians who had escaped the genocide in 1915.

Other refugees crossed the Russo-Polish frontier, fleeing the wave of pogroms in which around 10 per cent of Ukrainian Jews disappeared in 1919. The war between Russia and Poland (1919–21) also resulted in vast population movements, initially of Polish citizens driven out of their homes by the fighting, then of individuals departing to the West and fleeing the famine gripping the valley of the Volga, Transcaucasia and the Ukraine in 1921. Two great floods of refugees, some from Poland and the others from the Baltic states, thus ended up in Germany, mainly in Berlin, where more than 500,000 refugees arrived in the autumn of 1920.<sup>45</sup> The most prosperous among them soon set off again, either to France, where 80,000 Russian immigrants settled in the early 1920s, or to Great Britain. For all these refugees, one of the major problems was the absence of immigration documents enabling them to cross borders. Some had identity papers from the Russian Empire, which no longer existed; others had lost everything in the civil war; and still others had lost their citizenship in a campaign undertaken by the Soviet authorities in December 1921 against their political enemies. A new legal category arose, that of the stateless person, who lacked any of the rights belonging to citizens with a country of their own.

The management of the refugee crisis consisted of several elements, one philanthropic (providing aid, often as a matter of emergency, to populations without any resources whatsoever) and the other legal (the rapid creation of a legal framework setting out a form of international recognition for stateless individuals was essential). The humanitarian element was undertaken by many organisations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, which had played a major role in aid for prisoners of war in 1914–18, the

<sup>44</sup> International Red Cross Archives, Geneva, CR 87 / SDN, 1921.

<sup>45</sup> Annemarie H. Sammartino, *The Impossible Border: Germany and the East, 1914–1922* (Cornell University Press, 2010).

Quakers, the Save the Children Fund, founded in 1919 by the philanthropist Eglantyne Jebb, or Near East Relief. Humanitarian aid, rooted in a long Anglo-Saxon tradition dating back to the nineteenth century, expanded afresh at the end of the war. Nonetheless, action on the ground remained relatively improvised, even as it increasingly mobilised social activists and medical help.

At the legal level, the circulation of refugees clashed with identity controls that were much stricter for foreigners since the establishment of the international passport during the Great War. For stateless people, the only solution was the establishment of an internationally recognised document that would enable them to circulate freely and find work in other countries. In July 1922, the 'Nansen certificate' was created, from the name of the Norwegian diplomat Fridtjof Nansen who, since 1921, had served as the League of Nations' High Commissioner for Russian Refugees. This document was not a passport, since it did not allow its holder to return to the country that had granted it. Further, the beneficiaries of the Nansen certificate were subject to the same restrictive laws on immigration as others, such as the law on quotas adopted by the United States in 1921 and 1924. However, this document, soon extended to Armenians beginning in 1924 and then to Assyro-Chaldeans, represented a revolution in international law and solidified what Dzovinar Kévonian has called 'the institutionalisation of the international humanitarian field'.<sup>46</sup>

For many legal scholars in the 1920s, the transnational nature of the questions arising during the transition from war to peace required a profound redefinition of international law. The refugee problem, the return home of prisoners of war, economic reconstruction, epidemics and the distribution of humanitarian aid could no longer be dealt with solely within a national framework. In their work, Herbert Hoover, Fridtjof Nansen, Albert Thomas, René Cassin and Eglantyne Jebb, whether from a humanitarian or diplomatic background, best illustrate this surge in the spirit of internationalism.<sup>47</sup> 'We must deliberately and definitively reject the notion of sovereignty, for it is false and it is harmful', declared the jurist Georges Scelle, who considered the First World War to have been 'the greatest event recorded by History since the fall of the Roman Empire'.<sup>48</sup> Scelle, however, was one of the most radical voices among those thinkers who challenged not the

46 Dzovinar Kévonian, *Réfugiés et diplomatie humanitaire: les acteurs européens et la scène proche-orientale pendant l'entre-deux-guerres* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2004).

47 Bruno Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism, 1918–1924* (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

48 Georges Scelle, *Le pacte de la Société des Nations et sa liaison avec le traité de Paix* (Paris: Librairie du recueil Sirey, 1919).

sovereignty of states in itself but their *absolute sovereignty*. The birth of the League of Nations, ‘the first dawn of an international judicial organisation’ in his words, thus raised great hopes, even if international legal scholars were initially somewhat sceptical about the real range of the organisation. In the absence of any sanction against those who contravened international law, and in the absence of armed forces capable of imposing peace, the League of Nations could not ‘attain the goal of high international morality, the aim with which it had been founded’, in the words of Léon Duguit. The new history of international relations has studied extensively the limits of this new international order born of the war: ‘The lights that failed’, to use Zara Steiner’s expression.<sup>49</sup> But this history has also stressed the breadth of the goals achieved towards better world governance under the sponsorship of the League of Nations, particularly in the social arena.<sup>50</sup>

From this point of view, one of the most dynamic organisations of the post-war world was undoubtedly the International Labour Organisation, established under Article 13 of the Treaty of Versailles and managed as of 1919 by the former French Minister for Munitions, Albert Thomas. His agenda was broad. Even a brief examination of the questions on the programme for the first labour conference in Washington, in October–November 1919, is impressive: the eight-hour workday, unemployment, protection for women before and after childbirth, no night work or unhealthy work by women and children, the minimum age for industrial work, etc., etc. Through the establishment of standards designed to improve the living conditions of workers and to protect their rights, the ILO gave substance to the belief in universal justice born from the ruins of the First World War. In the first issue of the *Revue Internationale du Travail*, published in 1921, Albert Thomas recalled that:

It was the war that made the legislation of labour a matter of primordial importance. It was the war that forced governments to undertake to abolish poverty, injustice and the privations from which workers suffered. It was the war again that led organised workers to understand that the action of legal protection, in taking all its powers from the international field, was necessary to the realisation of some of their aspirations.

The ILO was not only the heir to the reformist movements established throughout Europe since the end of the nineteenth century; it also brought

49 Zara Steiner, *The Lights that Failed: European International History, 1919–1933* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

50 Susan Pedersen, ‘Back to the League of Nations: review essay’, *American Historical Review*, 112:4 (2007), pp. 1091–117.

together aspirations towards a better world, which were to be supported by dialogue between unions and employers and the work of a new social group in full expansion after the war: international experts. Behind this quest for social justice lay the ambition for a world free from war. *Si vis pacem, cole justitiam* was the motto of the ILO – ‘If you want peace, cultivate justice.’

For Albert Thomas and his team, coming from the ‘reformist nebula’ of pre-war years, 1919 was clearly a turning point, the dawn of a new era. Yet contemporary historians of the ILO increasingly tend to emphasise the tensions between transnational ideals and the persistent rivalries among nation-states, which deeply affected the inner workings of the institution. The fact that Germany and the other Central Powers quickly joined the ILO in 1919, did not mean that the painful memory of the war had faded. Meetings between veterans’ groups from both sides were organised in the immediate post-war period, to discuss the rights of disabled veterans. At the first such meeting, Adrien Tixier of the ILO, himself severely wounded in the war, commented:

I know from experience that it is not pleasant to meet people who not long ago were firing bullets and grenades at you while you were firing at them, but it is precisely in the interest of world peace that I judge such meetings necessary.<sup>51</sup>

The pacification of minds within the framework of international organisations was not self-evident, and in many countries, other kinds of conflict – border wars, civil wars, etc. – prolonged the violence of the First World War.

### Post-war forms of violence: an experiment in typology

In recent years, a new field of research has gradually come to the forefront among specialists of the war: the Great War’s place in the twentieth century and its impact on forms of violence after the war.<sup>52</sup> In the tradition of George

<sup>51</sup> Archives of the International Labour Office, Geneva, A / B.I.T. / MU / 7 / 5 / 1, Tixier to Albert Thomas, letter dated 31 October 1922.

<sup>52</sup> Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe’s Twentieth Century* (New York: Knopf, 1998); Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, Annette Becker, Christian Ingrao and Henry Rousso (eds.), *La violence de guerre 1914–1945* (Brussels: Éditions Complexe, 2002); and Roger Chickering and Stig Förster (eds.), *The Shadows of Total War: Europe, East Asia and the United States, 1919–1939* (Cambridge University Press, 2003). For a study of recent historiography, see Robert Gerwarth and John Horne, ‘The Great War and paramilitarism in Europe, 1917–23’, *Contemporary European History*, 19:3 (2010), pp. 267–73.

Mosse,<sup>53</sup> some historians stress the process of 'brutalisation' that occurred after the war, although it is not clear whether this phenomenon mainly affects post-war societies and their political life, or former combatants as individuals, or whether it affects all countries in similar ways.<sup>54</sup> The transfer of wartime violence to the post-war period is in fact a complex mechanism and the terms 'violence' or 'forms of violence' are used to designate very different realities: battles between regular armies, for example, the Greco-Turkish War; ideological struggles against an 'inner enemy', as in the case of the Russian civil war; liquidation of the war's legacy, such as the purge of collaborators in Belgium; violence perpetrated by paramilitary groups, as seen in the counter-revolutionary repression in Germany; acts of ethnic or community violence, as in Poland, Ireland, etc. The specificity of these conflicts depended somewhat heavily on the experience of individual nations in the First World War (conquest, invasion or occupation? victory or defeat?), the ability of the state to channel or redirect the violence deployed during the war and the nation's place on the world stage. A resurgence of violence in the colonies thus characterises the post-war period, particularly in India, Egypt and Iraq in the case of the British,<sup>55</sup> and in Algeria and Indochina in the case of France.<sup>56</sup>

Several factors, sometimes working in concert, explain the violence of the post-war period, namely, the repercussions of the Russian Revolution in 1917 in Russia and other countries, and the frustrations born of defeat. In addition, national or ethnic tensions inherited from the disintegration of the four great empires (German, Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman), could take various forms: territorial claims, border tensions, populations on the move . . . In this extremely diverse and complicated climate, a clear delineation of any continuity between the 'cultures of war' in 1914–18 and post-war violence is therefore far from straightforward. Different approaches are often necessary:

53 George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford University Press, 1990).

54 For a critical discussion of George Mosse's book, see Antoine Prost, 'The impact of war on French and German political cultures', *Historical Journal*, 37:1 (1994), pp. 209–17.

55 David M. Anderson and David Killingray (eds.), *Policing and Decolonisation: Politics, Nationalism and the Police, 1917–1965* (Manchester University Press, 1992).

56 This last area of research remains relatively unexplored at present, and much remains to be done on the links between colonial violence and war violence, both before and after the Great War. On the fear of the 'brutalisation' aroused by the Amritsar massacre, see Derek Sayer, 'British reaction to the Amritsar Massacre, 1919–1920', *Past and Present*, 131:1 (1991), pp. 130–64; Jon Lawrence, 'Forging a peaceable kingdom: war, violence and fear of brutalization in post First World War Britain', *Journal of Modern History*, 75 (2003), pp. 557–89; and Susan Kingsley Kent, *Aftershocks: Politics and Trauma in Britain, 1918–1931* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 64–90.

studies of local circumstances,<sup>57</sup> the progress of veterans and veterans' groups, civilians who refused to move on from the war,<sup>58</sup> the possible reuse of tactics and weapons first used on the battlefields and then in the 1920s, the gestures and language of violence, the ideological legacy of myths born during the war – for example, the 'myth of the War Experience' (George Mosse), the central element of the *völkisch* ideology in Germany or Italian fascism. The *Arditi* in Italy, the *Freikorps* in Germany and the Black and Tans in Ireland, all were veterans of the First World War, while Béla Kun's Republic of Councils in Hungary (March–July 1919) was based on former prisoners of war returning from captivity in Russia.

I will attempt a brief typology of post-war violence here. Certain forms of violence were a direct consequence of whether a country had been victorious or defeated in the war, and related to the implementation of the Armistice conventions. The year 1919 saw the liberation of countries occupied during the Great War and the occupation of the Rhineland by the victors, which gave rise in both cases to violence against individuals and property. Belgium witnessed the hunting down of collaborators, particularly war profiteers and 'shirkers'. In the spring of 1919, the Coppées, father and son, major employers in Hainaut, were accused of enriching themselves by supplying coal to the Germans. Their trial inflamed Belgian public opinion, which considered that the law was not dealing severely enough with collaborators. A similar emotion greeted the acquittal of several informers, especially Gaston Quien, brought to trial in 1919 for having betrayed Edith Cavell. In countries deeply divided by the war, as with the Flemings and Walloons in Belgium in 1914–18, the immediate post-war period was a time for settling accounts with wartime enemies. In Alsace, civilians of German descent were expelled to Germany in the winter of 1918–19, even if they no longer had any ties with that country.<sup>59</sup> In the Rhineland, occupying troops were known to play out, on a smaller scale, the confrontations of the First World War: brawls with German

57 A good example of comparative history can be found in Timothy Wilson, *Frontiers of Violence: Conflict and Identity in Ulster and Upper Silesia, 1918–1922* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

58 The micro-historical dimension appears particularly promising. See, for example, Christian Ingrao's study of the path taken by Oskar Dirlewanger, from infantry officer in the First World War to *Freikorps* leader to head of a Waffen-S.S. brigade made up of convicted criminals: *Les chasseurs noirs* (Paris: Perrin, 2006).

59 David Allen Harvey, 'Lost children or enemy aliens? Classifying the population of Alsace after the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 34 (1999), pp. 537–54; and Laird Boswell, 'From liberation to purge trials in the "mythic provinces": recasting French identities in Alsace and Lorraine, 1918–1920', *French Historical Studies*, 23:1 (2000), pp. 129–62.

civilians, destruction of the 1870 war memorial at Ems, insults and humiliations for the Rhineland population.

In other cases it was the collapse of the structure of the state, combined with material chaos, which lay behind the explosions of violence. In many countries, the end of the war brought with it a collective traumatic shock, and a reformulation of the 'culture of war' into the struggles between counter-revolutionary and revolutionary movements.<sup>60</sup> In Italy, the rise to power of the *Arditi* and the fascist movement can broadly be explained by the moral collapse of military and political elites during the Great War: the nation was victorious, but the victory was incomplete and ambiguous, insufficiently convincing to wipe out the humiliation of Caporetto.<sup>61</sup> The position of Germany was distinctive because here defeat was attributed to treason, which facilitated the transformation of foreign war into civil war.<sup>62</sup> In Berlin, 1919 opened with the Spartakist insurrection (5–11 January) and the particularly brutal assassination of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht by members of the *Freikorps* on 15 January. For several weeks the streets of the German capital were awash with the violence of war. A Berliner recorded in his diary that

The combat . . . began near the colonnade of the Belleallianceplatz, then spread out against the snipers hidden on rooftops, before reaching the strongly barricaded headquarters of the newspaper *Vorwärts*, with its network of interior courtyards. People were using large-calibre bombs and flame-throwers. The doors were blown open by hand grenades and the defenders surrendered only on the approach of assault troops. Three hundred prisoners were captured and one hundred machine guns seized.

The German state no longer held a monopoly on legitimate violence. Its army had been largely dismantled since the defeat. To deal with the revolutionary threat, it depended on recently demobilised veterans, on groups of students too young to have fought in the war but keen to use their strength in the struggle against the 'Reds'<sup>63</sup> and on local militias, who called for the

60 Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning and Recovery* (London: Granta Books, 2000).

61 Adrian Lyttelton, 'Fascism and violence in post-war Italy: political strategy and social conflict', in Wolfgang Mommsen and Gerhard Hirschfeld (eds.), *Social Protest, Violence and Terror in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Europe* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1982), pp. 257–74; and Emilio Gentile, *Le origini dell'ideologia fascista, 1918–1925* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1975).

62 This is the theory that George Mosse develops in *Fallen Soldiers*.

63 Christian Ingrao, 'Etudiants allemands, mémoire de la guerre et militantisme nazi: étude de cas', 14–18: *Aujourd'hui, Today, Heute*, 5 (2002), pp. 54–71.

destruction of the ‘Bolshevik vermin’. Everything seemed to favour a radicalisation of political violence: the eschatological anguish aroused by the defeat, the fear of contamination by communists or Jews, the hope that the fraternity of soldiers in the trenches could be recreated against a common enemy. ‘People told us that the war was over. That made us laugh. We ourselves are the war’, declared a *Freikorps* volunteer.<sup>64</sup> In this climate, the government of the Weimar Republic renounced its pursuit of those guilty of the double crime of the Spartakist leaders. At the funerals of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, nearly 300,000 activists shouted their anger against the Social Democratic government. The *Freikorps*, officially dissolved on 6 March 1919, proceeded two months later to crush the Munich ‘Republic of Councils’ in a bloody repression that resulted in 650 deaths. On the eastern margins of Germany, the Bolshevik threat was equally present, and the *Freikorps* were used to counter the risk of revolutionary expansion.

In Russia, the weakening of state power also opened the way for warlords to take control, with their private armies pillaging, terrorising the population and conducting repeated pogroms, such as in Ukraine.<sup>65</sup> The Allied intervention on the side of the White armies, in the context of the civil war, further contributed to the radicalisation of the violence of war. Faced with the intervention of a foreign force, which numbered nearly 20,000 men in 1919, and with the pressures of ‘internal enemies’ (White partisans of the armies of Kolchak, Denikin or Wrangel; *kulaks*, i.e., prosperous peasants, and ethnic minorities), the Bolshevik regime sensed that it was fighting for its survival. In this particular period of ‘War Communism’ (1918–21), political splits between communists and (real or supposed) counter-revolutionary opponents, currents of social antagonism between urban and rural societies and ethnic struggles and national confrontations all came together to sustain a climate of permanent and varied violence. One such war, between Russia and Poland in 1919–21, left 250,000 dead. In a speech at Rostov-on-Don in November 1919, the philosopher Piotr Struve, a former Bolshevik who rallied to the White movement, stated that

The world war ended formally with the conclusion of the armistice . . . In fact, however, everything that we have experienced from that point

<sup>64</sup> Quoted by Peter Gatrell, ‘War after the war: conflicts, 1919–23’, in John Horne (ed.), *A Companion to World War I* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), p. 568.

<sup>65</sup> Joshua Sanborn, ‘The genesis of Russian warlordism: violence and governance during the First World War and the civil war’, *Contemporary European History*, 19:3 (2010), pp. 195–213.



onward, and continue to experience, is a continuation and a transformation of the world war.<sup>66</sup>

During the so-called ‘peasant wars’ that broke out over the requisitions of grain crops, the special forces of the *Cheka*, the political police, used extreme brutality to crush rebellious peasants. Civilians massacred, villages shelled, the use of mustard gas – all demonstrate the full extent to which the practices of war inherited from the Great War were used on the home front, along with a radicalised perception of the enemy within.<sup>67</sup>

The fourth and final element in post-war violence was ethnic. The collapse of the Russian Empire first brought a surge in nationalist tensions in the Caucasus, in the new Baltic states and in Poland. These tensions tended to concentrate in smaller territories that carried symbolic weight, such as the city of Vilnius, disputed by Poland and Lithuania, or the port city of Memel, which the Treaty of Versailles put under the control of an Allied commission. Poland and Lithuania both claimed Memel, and Lithuania eventually took over the city in January 1923. The city of Fiume was another example of territorial struggle. Accorded to the Croats<sup>68</sup> under the Treaty of London on 26 April 1915, Italy subsequently staked a claim to Fiume during negotiations at the Paris Peace Conference, citing the presence of the city’s sizeable Italian community. On 12 September 1919 the nationalist poet Gabriele D’Annunzio occupied Fiume illegally with a volunteer army, and for more than a year he headed a provisional government that favoured returning the city to Italian control.

In 1919–20, signatories of the peace treaties aimed to limit the risks of war by redistributing population groups, in the interests of building better ethnic homogeneity. However, the complexity of the intermingling languages, ethnicities and cultures, particularly in Central Europe and the Balkans, meant that things remained extremely confusing. In addition, the peace treaties set up clauses for the protection of minorities, which were guaranteed by the League of Nations. Furthermore, the treaties required each individual to settle in the country whose nationality he had adopted. In total, around 10 million people left territories that had passed into the hands of a third nation.

66 Quoted by Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia’s Continuum of Crisis, 1914–1921* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 2.

67 Evan Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987); and Vladimir N. Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War* (Princeton University Press, 1994).

68 For a comparative approach to the question of minorities in relation to national identity, see Tara Zahra, ‘The “minority problem”: national classification in the French and Czechoslovak borderlands’, *Contemporary European Review*, 17 (2008), pp. 137–65.

The Greco-Turkish war which broke out in May 1919, culminated in the capture of Smyrna by Kemalist troops, the burning of Armenian and Christian neighbourhoods and the massacre of nearly 30,000 civilians in September 1922. The forced transfer of populations between Greece and Turkey, undertaken under the auspices of the League of Nations in 1923, was the most dramatic consequence of the ethnic violence that broke out in the immediate post-war period, because it legalised an ethnicised definition of territory.

In this context as well, paramilitary groups appeared; they were responsible for much of the post-war violence. The distinctions between civilians and combatants, already vague during the First World War, completely vanished in this type of conflict. The Irish Civil War provides a good example of this; both the insurrection of 1919 against the British and the counter-insurrection were led by small groups that did not limit their targets to other armed combatants. The wives and families of militants fighting for independence were considered equally valid targets. British soldiers, supported by the Black and Tans, committed numerous atrocities against civilians. Conversely, the IRA conducted a policy of intimidation and revenge against those whom it saw as traitors. The bodies of those it executed were frequently left in a public place with the message: 'Spy. By Order of the IRA. Take Warning.' In the end, the Irish Civil War produced much heavier losses than the First World War did.<sup>69</sup> Several factors were at work here: the lack of compunction on the part of paramilitary troops, who attacked civilians more readily than regular troops might have done; the power of identity stakes in a war that radicalised positions on both sides; and surely the brutalisation that the Great War seems to have brought in its wake to the Europe of the 1920s.

## Conclusion

The year 1919 did not mark the end of the cycle that began in 1914, nor, indeed, did it illustrate any shifts in the violence of war. In many countries the already strong tensions produced by the war seemed to expand in the immediate post-war period, at the very moment when the diplomats from all over the world were gathering together in Paris to negotiate the cessation of hostilities. In the ruins of four empires destroyed by the Great War, nationalism expanded.

<sup>69</sup> Julia Eichenberg, 'The dark side of independence: paramilitary violence in Ireland and Poland after the First World War', *Contemporary European History*, 19:3 (2010), pp. 221–48.

Revolutionary fever spread across Central Europe, stirring counter-revolutionary movements of equal violence. Sometimes, the First World War simply continued. Armies and combat tactics that had been tested on the battlefields beginning in 1914 were transferred to the context of domestic warfare and used against civilians. Sometimes, various states of conflict coalesced. In the case of Russia, for example, four different kinds of wars interconnected and fuelled one another: the war against Poland; the war of the Bolshevik powers against the White armies and their Western allies; the class war against the *kulaks*; and the repression of ethnic minorities by the central powers in Moscow.

Was 1919 the year of peace or the year of an impossible transition from war to peace? An appropriate visual metaphor to describe 1919 would be an image of lines converging towards a vanishing point. Indeed, the year 1919 opens up various lines illustrating what would become, for several years, a difficult transition from war to peace: a world agitated by powerful ideological tensions between communism and liberalism; vast movements of populations, harried by civil war, hunger or religious persecution; hatreds inherited from the Great War . . . But 1919 was also the year of the Paris Peace Conference, the founding of the League of Nations and the creation of the International Labour Organisation; it was a moment when those who lived through the war became aware that they were living in a globalised world, when they aspired to reframe international relations accordingly. For the survivors, 1919 was above all a time of waiting, grieving and disillusionment. This was a time when many veterans and civilians came to realise that they would never completely get away from war. In a letter written to his friend Robert Graves in 1922, that is, during the post-war transition period, T. E. Lawrence made this disturbing observation:

What's the cause that you, and Siegfried Sassoon, and I . . . can't get away from the war? Here are you riddled with thought like any old table-leg with worms; [Sassoon] yawning about like a ship aback: me in the ranks, finding squalor and maltreatment the only permitted experience: what's the matter with us all? It's like the malarial bugs in the blood, coming out months and years after in recurrent attacks.<sup>70</sup>

When did 1919 end? No one knows.

<sup>70</sup> T. E. Lawrence to His Biographer, Robert Graves: *Information About Himself, in the Form of Letters, Notes, and Answers to Questions, Edited with a Critical Commentary* (London, Faber & Faber, 1938), p. 31.

