Olga V. Alexeeva (Quebec), Chinese workers in Russia during the First World War: Victims of Another War”

Migration between China and Russia has a long and complex history. The perspectives for development of this movement were defined by the geographical proximity of the two countries, by the complementarity of their economies and by their intense political relations. In the beginning of the 20th century, the Chinese have come to form a distinct ethnic minority within Imperial Russia, especially in the Russian Far East, where Chinese workers were actively employed in various sectors of the emerging local industries and ventures. With the outbreak of the First World War, Russia was forced to resort to Chinese workers in order compensate for the shortage of labour caused by the military conscription of large numbers of Russian peasants and workers. As a result, Chinese communities appeared in major Russian cities, including the European part of the Empire. According to Russian official statistics, between January 1915 and April 1917, 159,972 Chinese workers were transported on the Trans-Siberian railway. The Chinese were employed on major railway-building and military fortification projects, in the mining of raw materials in Siberia and the Russian Far East, in the production of arms and other military products. When the Civil War broke out in Russia, thousands of Chinese workers already on Russian soil found themselves trapped in various Russian cities with no work and no money, nor any hope of being able to return to China. This paper will examine the role of Chinese migrants in Russia during the First World War and study the processes of their recruitment in China, their journeys to Russia, working conditions, war experiences and repatriation problems.

Peter C. Appelbaum (Penn State), The Judenzahlung (Jewish census) of 1916 in the German army

On 11 October 1916, War Minister Wild von Hohenborn was persuaded —probably by Ernst von Wrisberg—Head of the Army Section of the General War Department—, Joseph Roth (founder of the Reichshammerbund), and a certain influential Colonel Max Bauer, to decree a Judenzählung (Jewish Census) to look for presumed ‘slacking.’ Questionnaires were sent to all fronts. Hindenburg and Ludendorff were likely unaware of this census, which petered out in February 1917, its results never published. It was condemned by Germany’s Jewish soldiers (who correctly regarded it as a slap in the face) and civilians alike. Despite remonstrations by leading German Jews, no proper explanation was received. In 1919, Roth (pseudonym Otto Armin) published ‘his’ results of the Judenzählung ‘according to unnamed ‘official sources’ in a scurrilously anti-Semitic booklet, followed in 1921 by von Wrisberg’s memoirs summarizing identical data. By the time real data were published in 1922, damage had already been done. Modern German historians believe that 1) The census caused great harm and contributed to the post-war stab-in-the-back legend; it was instituted to counter statistical analyses already being performed by Jewish organizations, in an effort to allow Jews to enter the Prussian
officer’s corps after the war; 2) It was common knowledge that the Census could not be properly performed from the outset, and that it reflected the start of a search for scapegoats in view of deteriorating war news; 3) The Census was the first legitimation of anti-Semitism since 1812 when Germany’s Jews were initially emancipated, and was the clearest sign of how the Burgfrieden (civil truce) of 1914 had been replaced by the radical anti-Semitic right wing; 4) It occurred because the Prussian officers corps wanted to confirm rather than refute their prevailing anti-Semitism, and contributed a new degree of anti-Semitism to that which already existed; 5) The army wished to deter future claims that Jews were promoted and given too many medals; 6) Post-1918 it helped equate an increased tide of anti-Semitism with Judaeo-Bolshevism. The minority opinion that the Census was merely a passing episode is not borne out by the facts.

Mark Benbow (Marymount), Enemies in our Midst!: Anti-German Fears in Washington, D.C. During the First World War

In the 1910s Washington, D.C. had a small but active German-American community with its own newspaper and civic associations. Their place in the nation’s capital began to change in 1917. On January 31 Germany announced it would begin unrestricted submarine warfare around the British Isles. President Woodrow Wilson responded by breaking diplomatic relations and on April 2 asked Congress to declare war on Germany. Beginning in February, as the United States moved ever closer to and then finally entered the World War, the capital was subject to growing paranoia about the local German community fearing an “army of spies” and saboteurs.

In the midst of this hysteria Washington’s German-Americans found themselves the subject of growing hatred and repression. Even such established community figures as brewer Christian Heurich, who had lived in the District since 1872 and was one of the city’s most prominent businessmen, fell under suspicion of disloyalty. The District’s German-Americans were placed under increasingly harsh restrictions. Local newspapers encouraged an even great mistrust, and before the war was over many members of the District’s German community had left the city and many local institutions, such as the Sängerbund (singing club) and the German-language Journal, had closed. These institutions never fully recovered after the war and German-Americans never again played as large a role in local affairs as a distinct community.

The proposed paper will explore the fear and hysteria in Washington, D.C., how the local press exploited these fears, and how the German-American community reacted to the growing repression of their community. Studying the fears and actions of the United States government in the country’s capital city will illustrate the types of fears Americans experienced during the war, and the ways in which they attempted to deal with those fears, as well as how German-Americans coped as the subject of the hysteria.
William Buck (Limerick), Ireland's National Minorities and the First World War

Although the overall percentage of foreign nationalities was as small as 0.37% of the overall percentage of Ireland’s population before the start of the war, compared with 0.69% of Britain’s population, the existence of these groups of individuals played a significant part in moulding wartime legislation between 1914 and 1918. The British government’s internment and repatriation policies, coupled with a tumultuous series of events in Ireland during the war, such as the intensification of politics across the Ireland, the Lusitania disaster, Germany’s U-boat war, the 1916 Rising, the entry of America into the war effort, the rise of Sinn Fein and the conscription question all led to aliens experiencing a confusing and worrying existence within Ireland.

Gia Caglioti (Napoli Federico II),
Property rights and economic nationalism: the war on enemy aliens property in Europe and the US

In almost all the countries which took part in the First World War, governments and parliaments devised and implemented measures directed against civilians whose only fault was that they were nationals of enemy origin. These people became the target of policies often presented as retaliation and justified by the need to preserve the integrity of the state and to guarantee its security. These policies curtailed individual freedom, civil liberties and property rights. Even though suspension of habeas corpus, expulsion, repatriation, deportation of civilians from occupied territories, internment, confiscation had been experienced in past conflicts, WWI was the first conflict in which all these features coalesced to affect the lives of hundreds of thousands of people on an unprecedented scale.

This paper explores one aspect which has been so far overlooked by the historiography on WWI: the policies adopted and implemented against enemy aliens’ property in Britain (and its Empire), France, Germany, the Russian Empire, Italy, and the U.S. from the start of the war to the provisions of the peace treaties.
By analyzing the measures adopted, the discourse which justified and legitimized their adoption and their implementation (economic nationalism, “nostrification”, decrease of competition, etc.), the paper look at the dramatic shift the war provoked from the liberal recognition of the inviolability of property rights on a national and an international scale to the re-affirmation of state sovereignty, economic nationalistic policies and increasing state intervention in the economy, which prefigured autarchy and collectivization.

Andrea Carteny (Sapienza University of Rome)
The Congress of Rome (April 1918) and the Italian policy for the support of “oppressed nationalities”

The Italian policy face to the nationalities evolved in 1918, from the London Pact to a new support of national minorities in Austria-Hungary. Influential newspaper, as Il Corriere della sera, and columnist, as the Senatore Luigi Albertini, prospected this evolution: but the government official defence of the London Pact resisted, until the Congress of “oppressed nationalities of Austria-Hungary”. This Congress, held in Rome in April 1918, consequence of an agreement between Italian and Yugoslav moderate nationalist environments, was a turning point in the Italian military support to the nationalities. Legions of foreign soldiers, former war prisoners,
were finally formed and employed at the Italian front, and a strong program of anti-Austrian propaganda was launched. In six months, between 15th May and 1st November 1918, more than 50 millions of posters and 9 millions of the weekly newspaper were launched from the Italian front over the enemy's territory. These factors have been relevant for the final victory of the Entente.

Sally Charnow (Hofstra), “A rabbi, a priest, and a minister were billeted in same house during the Great War...”: Edmond Fleg's *La Maison du Bon Dieu*, a Representation of Ecumenism during The Great War

In 1920 Edmond Fleg's play *La Maison du Bon Dieu* opened at the Théâtre des Arts in Paris. Hailed in reviews as “delicately executed, true, without hysteria or hyperbole,” and “a beautiful tour de force,” the play focuses on a conversation among a Catholic priest, a rabbi, and a Protestant minister who are all billeted in the same house in Alsace during the Great War. A secondary narrative thread revolves around the developing love between a robust male schoolteacher with a defiantly secular worldview and a young pious Catholic woman. The three clergy tell jokes, reminisce and find the continuities among their various belief systems. The play posits reconciliation between the Christian Churches and European Jewry. Fleg's play was informed by actual experience during the war in which, as historian Annette Becker has explained, chaplains – Catholic, Protestant, Jewish – were engaged in the same work of consolation and encouragement. They took pleasure in the company of their “colleagues” whom they mostly disliked before the war. My aim is to explore Fleg's representation of the ecumenical spirit forged during the war.

Known as a novelist, poet, and playwright, much of Edmond Fleg’s literary oeuvre is steeped in Jewish and Christian biblical legend and reaches for the most universalistic interpretations. Fleg’s ideals, as he showed in this play, were only realizable through hard work and commitment.

In the wake of World War One, French Jewish writers and poets articulated a new, cultural definition of what it meant to be a Jew. They considered Judaism as a cultural fact akin to an ethnicity, what tied the Jewish people together, they argued, was shared history and traditions. By defining Jewish identity in such a way they also challenged the popular, if rigid, formulation of an exclusive French national identity. Edmond Fleg was one of the most important figures of this French Jewish awakening. *La Maison de Bon Dieu* suggests a dynamic relationship between the Jewish renaissance in 1920s Paris and wider French interest in spirituality

Daniele Conversi (Basque Country), Prelude to Obliteration: Minorities, Cultural Homogenization and the Modern Nation State's Eliminationist Drive

Most social historians agree that totalitarianism would have been unthinkable without WW1. The war offered state elites and military cadres the actual opportunity to exercise a kind of mass control and totalitarian ‘re-ordering’ of society never experienced before, certainly before fascist ideologues could theorize totalitarianism as their guiding principle. As Jay Winter has convincingly documented, the Armenian genocide would have been unconceivable outside the mindset provided by WW1 (Winter 2003). Others have stressed the ‘cumulative
radicalization’ process deriving from the war (Bloxham 2003) -applying a concept previously used by Hans Mommsen to explain Nazi Germany’s self-destruction (Mommsen 2000). Among genocide scholars, there is widespread agreement that war and genocide have been inseparable bedfellows (Bartrop 2002; Markusen and Kopf 1995: ch. 4; Shaw 2003; Totten and Bartrop 2008) - an argument confirmed by a younger generation of Holocaust scholars as regard to WW2 (Bartov 1991; 2000; 2001; Bartov and Weitz 2013) and applied to various international contexts, like the Rwandan genocide (McDoom 2010).

However, these approaches often pay insufficient attention to the nationalizing forces unleashed by modern states before their entrance into war. This paper focuses on the way elite-driven nationalist ideology sought to monopolize power to the exclusion of minorities through policies of cultural homogenization, in which the linkage between culture and nationhood played a key role. At the same time, myths of ethnic origins shaped the way the modern state was built on nationalist foundations. The paper argues that all of these factors must be considered jointly in order to understand the effects of WW1 on ethnic, cultural, national and other minorities, as well as on ‘majorities’. It finally argues that policies of cultural homogenization were a precondition to, and an ominous preview of, the fate of ethnic minorities during under WW1.

Dominiek Dendooven (Flanders Field Museum), World Wide Frustrations. War Experience and Political Awakening

During the First World War, leaders of minorities (or minorised populations) all over the world were lured to join the war effort by the hope or even an explicit promise of (more) civil rights, home rule or emancipation. They called their following to sign up and thousands served in the trenches of the western front or formed labour battalions engaged along the lines of communication. In a context of utter destruction and alienation, these men were confronted with various degrees of racism and discrimination, but also with more friendly encounters, both within the army as among the local populations. The overall experience did not seldom result in the awakening of political awareness of those who fought in or worked behind the trenches of the western front. When the war was over, the high hopes cherished at the beginning of the war, not seldom proved to be entirely idle which in turn further galvanized political views.

Rather than focusing on one particular ethnic group, my paper aims to present a worldwide comparative overview of similarities (and differences) in the motivations of minority leaders in all five continents to join the war effort, how the war experience affected their supporters and how this in return influenced post-war politics at home.

Zoë Denness (Kent), ‘A South African Legacy? The Imperial Roots of British Internment Policy during the First World War’

Between 1914 and 1918, more than 32,000 male ‘enemy aliens’ living in Britain were interned by the British state. While internment was clearly driven in many ways by specific contemporary discourses, particularly the racialized enemy imagery which flourished within an anti-German wartime atmosphere, this paper will suggest that the treatment of enemy minorities during the First World War was also shaped by Britain’s recent history of colonial
The connection between the two internment episodes was evident in administrative terms (First World War internment planners directly referred to the South African ‘concentration camps’ as a useful precedent) as well as on an ideological level. Campaigns in the British press for the introduction of internment were, during both conflicts, underpinned by strongly racialized imagery which depicted the (‘white’) enemy as uncivilized and barbaric. Most strikingly, the scandal created in 1901 by the incarceration and deaths of thousands of women and children in the South African camps contributed to a gendering of First World War internment policy. Between 1914 and 1918 British officials consistently and strenuously resisted female internment, and great pains were taken to demonstrate that Britain’s treatment of female enemy aliens conformed to contemporary gender ideals; the memory of the concentration camps scandal was a significant factor in determining this approach. This paper will explore the significance of these practical and ideological precedents on the treatment of enemy aliens during the First World War as well as considering how the ‘total war’ context shaped the treatment of enemy minorities in new ways.

Emmanuel Destenay (Paris IV Sorbonne), Asserting Irishness, contesting Britishness: unveiling and identifying Irishmen’s national identity in the First World War

Irishmen’s experiences of the First World War are enshrined within experiences of minorities at war. When the conflict broke out in August 1914, 20 000 Irishmen were already serving in the British Army. Added to that the 134 200 volunteers who participated in the war effort, the Irish represented a visible minority during the conflict. Far from suppressing the distinct character of the Irish engaged in the conflict the First World War contributed to assert their identity. A variety of undertakings aimed at maintaining the character of the battalions was implemented: the willingness to set up three Irish divisions, the presence of the green flags on the battlefield, the ordination of Irish chaplains (to mention only a few) offered the regiments the opportunity to stand out and differentiate themselves. French citizens often regarded all the soldiers of the British Army as “British” or “English” and Irish soldiers were particularly careful to correct them. Nonetheless the ability to identify Irishmen at war did not always stem from their desire to be singled out. The “other” played a crucial and determinant role in asserting Irishmen’s national identity. This paper intends to understand to what extent the Great War cemented and unveiled the Irish identity and exposed the soldiers as a distinctive group. Particular attention will be given to the Germans who regarded the soldiers as a distinct minority within the British Army and even secluded Irish prisoners of war in the intention of raising an Irish brigade against Britain. The 1916 Uprising and the conscription crisis greatly contributed to single out the battalions, uncovered the identity of the troops, and exposed Irishmen to widespread suspicion while directly questioning their British identity and loyalty towards Britain.
Serge Durflinger, (University of Ottawa)
Canada's Easter Riots: French-Canadian Anti-conscription Rioting March-April 1918

Enormous Canadian casualties on the Western Front obliged the federal government to enact conscription on 28 August 1917. French-speaking Canadians, especially those living in Québec, were overwhelmingly and vehemently opposed to the measure. At the end of March 1918 a mob destroyed the offices of the Military Service Registry in Québec City. Martial law was declared and military authorities rushed in English-speaking conscript troops. On 1 April, they opened fire on a crowd, killing four demonstrators and wounding dozens of others. My intention is to revise popular opinions on the actual nature of, on the one hand, the protesters' violence and, on the other, the military responses. Were the soldiers' deadly reactions unjustified, draconian, and illegal or were they measured, restrained, and, in fact, in self defence? To what extent did the rioters represent the views of French Canada? Based on an extensive reading of the pertinent national and local archives, I will review the crowd's dramatically escalating threat levels, including intermittent gunfire directed at the soldiers, to conclude that this event has been misinterpreted by Canadian historians for nearly a century. In this instance, the French-Canadian minority was not brutally repressed by English-Canadian violence.

Christopher Fischer (Indiana State), Not Quite French, Not Quite German: Interned Alsatians in France, 1914-1918

World War I often blurred the boundaries between the frontlines and homefront. This was obviously the case for people in occupied Belgium, for victims of Zeppelin raids over England, or for malnourished Germans. For resident aliens living in their enemies’ homelands or colonies, the war often meant internment in camps lest they engage in espionage or subversion. Not surprisingly, as historians such Jean-Claude Farcy, Matthew Stibbe, and Tammy Proctor have shown, England and France rounded up Germans and Austrians as part of the drive for state security.

Among the groups rounded up in France were Alsatians, either those who had been working in France before the conflict or adult males evacuated from the sliver of Alsace occupied by the French army at the war's outset. On one level, these Alsatians, as German citizens, were natural targets for internment; even Albert Schweitzer spent time in a civil internment camp. On another level though, the internment of Alsatians flew in the face of French propaganda. Alsatians, after all, were portrayed as loyal French citizens suffering under the jackboot of German rule.

This paper will address the place of interned Alsatian civilians in France during World War I. It will explore the conundrum for French authorities who wanted to ensure national security, but also tried to woo the Alsatians, for example, by offering opportunities to work or even serve in the military, for the guarantee of French citizenship. This paper will also give focus to the experiences of Alsatians, who despite a rhetoric of inclusion in French propaganda, often felt isolated and insulted first by their internment, then by the treatment at the hands of local Frenchmen, and finally, at least for some, by special commissions which could decide on degrees of freedom based upon perceived national loyalty. Finally, the paper will turn to the aftermath of the war. If Alsatians imprisoned by German authorities during the war were feted and compensated for their suffering, Alsatians interned in France received little recognition
and little recompense. Not surprisingly, their cases provided fodder for the autonomists who condemned French rule during the interwar period.

Examining the fate of Alsatian civilian internees allows us to extend our knowledge of how the war impacted the lives of ordinary Europeans. Studying the Alsatians, a group both celebrated and feared by the French, offers the opportunity to explore how the war forced countries to balance priorities of national security and national belonging. As for the Alsatians, they were German enough to be imprisoned, French enough to create consternation at their internment.

Nicole-Melanie Goll (Graz), The war experience of a minority forced deportation and internment of the Ruthenians in the Habsburg empire during World War One: The civil internment camp Thakerhof near the Styrian capital of Graz

This paper deals with a minority and their war experience that has been neglected in the context of World War I and minority studies so far:
The “Ruthenians”, as Austrian authorities officially named the Ukrainians within the multi-ethnic Habsburg Empire, lived in Galicia and Bukovina. Conflicts with the Polish majority happened regularly and fed their nationalist movement. Apart from this, their religion, language, the rising Russophile movement and of course their vicinity to the Russian Empire made them “suspicious” for Austro-Hungarian authorities.

At the outbreak of WW1 Galicia immediately became an important theatre of war for the Austrian-Hungarian Army, military interests became predominant and affected also the lives of civilians and non-combatants.

This paper deals with the official sanctions directed at large strata of the Ruthenian civil population in Galicia and Bukovina. As they were perceived as a security risk, very quickly an institutionally backed security policy was established, which manifested itself in persecutions of so-called „Russophiles“. Besides numerous assaults and assassinations, entire parts of the Ruthenian population – men, women and children – were forcefully evacuated. According to the improvised security concept, these people were transferred to the more “secure” hinterland area where they were interned without any legal foundation, even though they were “normal” Austro-Hungarian citizens.

On the one hand the paper analyses the interaction of various regional and nationalistic factors with the outbreak of the Great War and, on the other hand, the construction of this administrative machinery dominated by the military as a not fully thought-out form of custody for Austria-Hungary’s own citizens. These individuals were classified as security hazards and deported to “Thalerhof”. The central question addressed here is how the security system of forced deportation and civil internment of large sections of the Ruthenian population was structured and why it was introduced. Whilst the camp was completely forgotten in Austria, this “camp of doom” has had a long-lasting impact on generations of Ukrainians.

John Gribble (Sea Change Heritage), The South African Native Labour Corps: A Forgotten World War I History

On 21 February 1917, the steamship Mendi was involved in a collision in the English Channel. She sank in 20 minutes with the loss of nearly 650 lives. Most of those who died that morning were black non-combatant labourers of the 5th Battalion, South African Native Labour Corps, en route to serve behind the lines on the Western Front. This paper will use the wreck of
the Mendi as a focus to consider the largely forgotten wartime experience of those black South Africans who enlisted for service in the SANLC.

It will briefly examine the politics of South Africa’s involvement in World War I and the tensions this created in a racially divided country: the white minority anxious to ensure that the black majority was not trained in arms or exposed to the outside influences and ideas that service overseas would inevitably bring, and the black majority equally anxious to be seen to serve King and Country as a way of drawing the attention of the King and British Government to the increasingly repressive political reality they faced in South Africa.

The paper will go on to describe the SANLC experience and will also cast its net beyond the SANLC to include the wartime experience some of the other so-called Foreign Labour Corps - particularly those from Egypt and China. All of these labour corps suffered discrimination of varying degree, and their wartime experience was plagued by disputes around terms of service (many of them bloody and some fatal) between the labourers and the military personnel who commanded them.

To conclude, the paper will touch on the post-war treatment by the South African government of the veterans of the SANLC.

Kirk Hansen (Dundee), Scottish-Jewish Conscientious Objectors

Conscientious Objectors in First World War Britain have received a fair amount of academic attention, but little attention has been given to Jewish objectors, specifically those in Scotland. There are two main factors that limit the ability to understand the story of Scottish-Jewish Conscientious Objectors. First, almost nothing regarding Conscientious Objectors can be gleaned from the Jewish press since its goal was to show how patriotic British Jewry was, and little can be found in the British press since the Defense of the Realm Act limited coverage of this topic. Second, in 1921 the Ministry of Health ordered all Military Tribunal documents destroyed except for the Appeal Tribunal records of Lothians and Peebles and of Middlesex. The Lothians and Peebles documents are therefore valuable for understanding the issues concerning Conscientious Objectors from the Edinburgh Jewish community. After a brief explanation of tribunal proceedings, this paper will explore seven cases of conscientious objection to military service by Edinburgh Jews with the goal of answering two key questions: how were Jewish Conscientious Objectors viewed and treated by Scottish society and what do Jewish Conscientious Objectors reveal about Scottish Jewry during the First World War?

Rachel Hasted (English Heritage), Remembrance and Forgetting: The Muslim Burial Ground, Horsell Common, Woking

Built between 1915-17 to the designs of the India Office Surveyor in the “Mughal” style, the Muslim Burial Ground at Horsell Common, Woking addressed the need for the British to be seen to provide respectful and appropriate burial for Muslim servicemen who died of their wounds in England. This provision pre-dated the creation of the Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC) in 1917.

Woking was chosen because it already had the only purpose-built mosque in
England but it did not then have a community with roots in the sub-continent.

Photographs showing the newly completed burial ground were commissioned by the India Office. These were for use in the sub-continent to counter German propaganda which suggested British disregard for Muslim burial customs.

The Burial Ground came under the care of IWGC in 1921 and was used again for some burials in WW II. In 1968, following racist vandalism and grave desecration at the site, the then Commonwealth War Graves Commission removed all the burials to Brookwood, where the distinctive grave markers can still be found.

The artist Said Ardrus has made a work based on this process of attack and amnesia. The recently founded Woking Lightbox Museum started a process of memory recovery. Woking Council, with grant aid from English Heritage, is now leading a project involving the post-WWII Muslim community in Woking with roots in the sub-continent and the local Horsell Common amenity society to conserve the site for the centenary of WW1.

This paper will examine the thinking behind the original creation of the Burial Ground, its later history as a site of racist attack on the memory of a Muslim and Asian contribution to Britain’s war effort and the recent revival of the Burial Ground as a site of memory.

Richard Hawkins (Wolverhampton), The Surveillance of New York Jews with pro-German Sympathies during the First World War

This paper looks at the Jewish American community in New York City during World War I. Before America's entry into the war the community was divided between supporters of the Entente Powers and the Central Powers. The greater part of the community opposed the Entente Powers because of Russia's anti-Semitic policies. The German government exploited this ill-feeling toward Russia in order to work with sympathetic members of New York's Jewish community to covertly influence public opinion in favour of neutrality. The American federal government placed those Jews who were deemed sympathetic to the Central Powers under surveillance. This paper uses the Untermyer family as a case study of this surveillance.

Martyn Housden (Bradford), The consequences of war: minorities as peace-builders?

The conference will make plain the manifold tragedies which afflicted national minorities during the First World War, this paper will explore how some of their number responded to the challenge of creating a society which would not fall prey to carnage again. Drawing on ideas that had been pioneered by Austro-Marxists and Bundist Jews, a number of Baltic Germans promoted a system for organising multi-cultural societies on the basis of respect for separate cultural rights attached to persons rather than territories.

The key Baltic Germans were Paul Schiemann (Latvia), Ewald Ammende (Estonia) and Werner Hasselblatt (Estonia). Recognising that it would never be possible to draw territorial boundaries to match the demographic patterns of Central and Eastern Europe, they promoted ideas of society in which different national cultures could share the same territories whilst pursuing their particular cultural lives separately. The ideas were put into practise with the Latvian Schooling Law (1919) and the Estonian Cultural Autonomy Law of 1925. The latter was the
more extensive measure, permitting the creation of a cultural council, the levying of a special cultural tax by the national group and allowing for any given national minority to manage its own system of schools. Eventually in Estonia, both the German and Jewish minorities implemented cultural autonomy.

Cultural autonomy, then, was an initiative aiming to create harmonious societies which originated with minorities inhabiting Central and Eastern Europe. It was moved onto an international platform with the founding of, first, the Association of German Minorities in Europe (1922) and, later, the European Congress of Nationalities (1925). The latter in particular lobbied the League of Nations long and hard to become more resolute in its protection of national minorities in the new and expanded states of Central and Eastern Europe. It promoted an understanding of Europe in which the national minorities question was understood to underlie every possible threat to peace.

The rise of Nazism, however, wrecked the constructive work achieved by Schiemann, Ammende and Hasselblatt during the 1920s. To different extents Ammende and Hasselblatt sold out to Hitler’s movement. It is appropriate, therefore, to assess the limits of cultural autonomy’s contribution to peace-building.

Anja Huber (Bern),
Aliens in Switzerland: the Fate of Foreigners in Switzerland during the First World War

When the First World War began, Switzerland as a neutral country was not at, but nevertheless in war. Therefore, the country was affected by aspects of militarisation, centralisation and mobilisation. The feeling of the „nation at risk“ made borders more important and strengthened the sense of nationhood. Loyalty to one’s own country and the protection of one’s home from the potential threat posed by real or imagined enemy aliens were key factors in the context of war and could lead to the restriction of individual liberties. Even before the outbreak of war, a defensive outlook rather than an integrative approach had started to dominate the discourse in Switzerland. This trend was strengthened during the war and protectionist views, xenophobia and a nationalist outlook began to dominate the public space in Switzerland.

The contribution I propose here will focus on the treatment of foreign military internees, deserters and refractories in Switzerland during the First World War. The Swiss citizens perceived deserters and refractories mainly as enemy aliens, war profiteers or potential spies. Therefore, an increasingly defensive perception of foreigners began to spread. In this context the “Eidgenössische Fremdenpolizei” was founded in 1917. Planned as a temporary institution for collecting information on and for the coordination of cantonal policies on foreigners in Switzerland, it became a permanent factor of the Swiss dealings with foreigners.

In contrast to deserters and refractories the military internees were widely accepted by the citizens of Switzerland. The admission of military internees was an important economic factor for the country, especially for the alluring tourism industry, as well as a political strategy to defend its own neutrality in and outside the national borders. The aim of my contribution is to point out the tensions between the idea of defending Switzerland against enemy aliens and the political and economic interests of a neutral country in war.
Jiri Hutecka (Hradec Kralove),
Remembering the Wrong War: Czech Soldiers in the Austro-Hungarian Service and Their Memory of the Great War

During the First World War, almost a million soldiers of Czech ethnic origin served in the Austro-Hungarian who came from either from Bohemia or Moravia. They served everywhere from Galicia to Serbia, from the Alps to the submarines in the Adriatic. Some of them did not mind serving the emperor, most of them took it as a duty to be done, and many hated it outright. In the end, about a hundred thousand formed the Czechoslovak legion, an army without a state. And when this army finally got its state of Czechoslovakia in 1918, a struggle for memory began.

Well documented in many sources, this struggle was fought out on several grounds at once. One of them was the individual memory and its private (re)construction, connected to the collective veterans’ memory of the war. The soldier’s sense of their own heroism and loss had to cope with the fact that, with the exception of the state-celebrated “legionaries”, almost everyone fought in the wrong war, on the wrong side, and with the wrong sense of duty. Many veterans were struggling with the problem of commemorating their war experience in the public space where this part of war was best forgotten. Also, very often, this struggle cut even deeper, to their own sense of “national” manliness and to the way, how it was supposed to be enhanced by military experience – only not of this kind.

In my paper, I would like to follow this process through the lens of veterans’ newspapers, journals and memoirs, trying to establish some basic conclusions about the way the former Czech K.u.K. soldiers had used in the process of retelling their stories so that these would be acceptable both to the “new” public as well as to their own sense of national as well as masculine integrity.

David Innerhuber (King’s College), The Nationality Problem in the Austro-Hungarian Army before and during the First World War

In my conference paper I want to address the Habsburg nationality question from the perspective of the Austro-Hungarian army. With the exception of Britain, which recruited many soldiers from its colonies and overseas territories, no European Great Power other than Austria-Hungary combined so many different nationalities in its armed forces. As Gunther Rothenberg points out, the Austro-Hungarian Army reflected the national division of the whole Empire: Of 1000 soldiers, only 267 were Austrians, 223 were Hungarians, 135 Czechs, 85 Poles, 81 Ruthenians, 67 Serbs and Croats, 64 Rumanians, 38 Slovaks, 26 Slovenes and 14 Italians.1

Based on autobiographical documents (memoirs, diaries, letters) of common soldiers and low-ranking officers, that have never been analysed in any major research project before, I want to show how certain minority groups within the army (mainly Hungarians, Czechs and Jews) were perceived by the German-speaking Austrian majority of soldiers.

In opposition to a revisionist school of Habsburg historians, which, over the preceding decades, has argued that the nationality problem did not play a major role in the downfall of the Habsburg monarchy, my sources paint a rather different picture of tensions and distrust between the empire’s nationalities and ethnic groups. While the majority of Polish and Bosnian soldiers, for example, fully supported the Austro-Hungarian war effort, especially the Slavs held close ties to groups outside the Habsburg Empire. Given these internal rivalries, let
alone the existence of about a dozen different languages, the Habsburg military leadership had major difficulties in keeping this army operational throughout the Great War. Instead of declining, as some recent academic literature has suggested, the nationality problems in fact further aggravated towards the end of the war, constituting one of the main weaknesses of the Imperial-and-Royal army.

Thus, my findings might add some fuel to the on-going (and maybe never-ending) debate of whether the Habsburg Empire was a peoples’ prison or rather the least evil for the nationalities that were part of it.

Pad Kumlertsakul (National Archives Kew), Siam in the First World War

The talk will look at the involvement and contribution of one of the lesser known belligerent nations in the First World War - Siam, now called Thailand. There has been very little written about Siam during this period, as the outbreak of the First World War did not affect Siam directly due to its distance from Europe.¹ I will provide the background of why the Siamese Government of King Vajiravudh (Rama VI) participated in the War, which can be traced back to the Franco-Siamese War in 1893.

From the time King Vajiravudh came to the throne in 1910, the Siamese generally had a good relationship with the European powers, and many high echelon officials studied in Germany. Siam retained a strict neutrality policy, on the outbreak of war, the turning point occurred when Germany declared unrestricted submarine warfare in 1917. This event led to the United States of America joining the war on April 2 of the same year, and subsequently Siam followed a few months after.

The above event can be explained in terms of the political necessity of the decision to participate in the War as a belligerent nation on the side of the Allies rather than remain strictly neutral - despite the fact that one of the major allies, namely France, had annexed large chunks of Siamese territory just over 20 years before Siam declared war on Germany.

I will show how the amicable neutrality that once existed between Siam and Germany until 1917 was shattered by Germany's declared intention to wage an unrestricted war. I will also show how participating on the side of the Allies enabled Siam to reshape the nature of its relationships with nations that previously sought to exploit the region.


During the First World War, the anglophone majority of Canada's Maritime Provinces widely criticized their francophone neighbours, the Acadians, for their supposed “slackerism,” that is, their supposed refusal to enrol in the Canadian Expeditionary Force.² These assertions have gone largely untested by historians, who have instead focused on the undeniable opposition to the war expressed by many members of the French-Canadian majority of the Province of


In hindsight, it appears that Acadian young men were just as likely to voluntarily enrol for military service as their anglophone counterparts. In 1915, several Acadian leaders prevailed upon the Canadian government to create an Acadian battalion - led by Acadian officers and served by Catholic priests. The 165th (Acadian) Battalion was ultimately disbanded in 1917 and many of its soldiers ended up in the Canadian Forestry Corps. Although the 165th Battalion did not earn the military glory its founders had hoped for, it nevertheless represented an earnest attempt by the Acadian minority to support the Canadian war effort.

This paper uses military attestation records and the 1911 census to study the almost 900 men who answered the call to join the 165th Battalion and serve both Canada and their ethnic community. Who were they and what motivated them to join? How did their origins and backgrounds compare with those of English-Canadian soldiers? The results of this research will contribute to the social history of the First World War in Canada and intersects with the conference theme of the experience of minorities in the armed forces.

Georgia Kouta (King's College), The London Greek Propaganda; how minorities shaped politics during the First World War

At the midst of the First World War, the London Greeks were both a wealthy and a well connected community with a definite political aim. This paper examines how a minority of the Greek diaspora, namely the London Greek bourgeoisie, shaped politics regarding the First World War while at the same time manipulating domestic policies at a distance.

The central instrument of this transnational intervention was the Anglo-Hellenic League in London, founded in 1913, which maintained an energetic campaign through pamphlets, newspaper articles, meetings and dinners aimed at shaping British and Greek public opinion. I examine, in particular, how its protagonists propagated the Megali Idea (the 'Great Idea' of an expanding Greek nation), which was linked to irredentist agendas, and to a renegotiation of relations with Bulgaria, Albania and Turkey. The League also promoted the interests of the Greek minority in Asia Minor which during the War suffered an economic boycott and persecutions by the Young Turks.

This was achieved through the establishment of a political league which acted both in Greece as a representative of British interests and in Britain as an advocator the Greek state. However, in order to understand these interests one will eventually discover that the driving factors in the Anglo-Hellenic relations were the negotiations between British Imperialism and Greek Capital.

Hence, I aim to demonstrate how the politics of Modern Greece during the Great War, were powerfully shaped by an organised minority of the diaspora.

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3 For example, Jean-Yves Gravel (dir.), Le Québec et la Guerre (Montréal : Les Éditions du Boréal Express, 1974).

4 Claude E. Leger, Le bataillon acadien de la Première Guerre mondiale (Moncton, 2001) 209-211.
The beginning of the First World War saw Belgium, a newcomer on the imperial stage, confronted for the first time to the possibility of using colonial troops from the Congo on the Western front. While both Great Britain and France recruited soldiers from their colonies for the European theatre of war, Belgian authorities showed little enthusiasm for this prospect. Despite the early enlistment of 32 Congolese men recruited within the metropole, the opportunity of using colonial troops was never obvious and entailed two years of investigations on a trans-imperial level (including visits to the French military headquarters and tirailleurs camps in order to evaluate the pros and cons of dealing with colonial minorities on European battlefields). In this paper, I would like to connect discourses of imperial comparison and of associated anxieties linked to race, prestige and authority, to the final Belgian decision not to authorize the presence of Congolese soldiers on its soil nor during the war, neither after. Dismissed by the traditional historiography of WW1 in Belgium as irrelevant and neglected by an international literature that has mainly studied colonial troops from the British and French Empire, this non-presence and the debates that surrounded it will be connected to the general history of minorities in Belgium and will be used as starting points to interrogate the specificities of Belgian-Congolese racial economies.

Tony Lentin (Wolfson College, Cambridge), Anglo-German victims of The Great War: The Troublesome Case of Sir Edgar Speyer

Sir Edgar Speyer (1862-1932) was a conspicuous figure in the financial, cultural, social and political life of Edwardian London. For heading the syndicate which financed the construction of the new 'tube lines' he became known as the 'King of the Underground'. He was also a connoisseur and active patron of the arts who rescued the 'Proms' from collapse, enhanced the nation's musical and artistic life and directed the funding of Captain Scott's Antarctic expeditions. Speyer and his wife, the concert violinist Leonora Speyer, lived in a fabulously magnificent style. In the early summer of 1914 they stood at the peak of their success and celebrity in London society.

However, within weeks, at the outbreak of war, they became pariahs; objects of suspicion and aversion. Despite having been a naturalised British citizen for over 20 years and a ubiquitous public benefactor, Speyer found himself ostracised by society and mercilessly harried by the Northcliffe Press. Under the Aliens Act of 1918 Speyer was summoned in 1921 before a judicial enquiry, which found him guilty of disloyalty and disaffection and of communicating and trading with the enemy. He was stripped of his citizenship and membership of the Privy Council. Pilloried by The Times as a traitor, Speyer vehemently denied the charges, but he never returned to England again and never forgot his ordeal.

The downfall of Sir Edgar Speyer has been described as 'a minor tragedy of the war'. Tony's book, published in 2013, is the first detailed account of the episode, the Speyers' prominence in London society and their fall from that height. It re-examines the Speyer case from documents newly released, presents the evidence and invites the reader to decide whether Sir Edgar was an innocent victim of nationalistic war fever, a scapegoat for the perceived failings of
Prime Minister Asquith and the UK’s last Liberal Government, or a traitor to his adopted country.

Mark Levene (Southampton), Minorities, Genocide, and the Psychopathology of the Great War

This contribution will seek to explore how communal groups in the context of Great War, European military stalemate could become the butt of unprecedented state and societal accusations of fifth column sabotage and worse. Our focus will be on Armenians as an alleged existential threat to the Ottoman polity and the supposed ‘international’ power of the Jews as perceived widely both among Allied and Central Power elites. The presentation will argue that the Jewish and Armenian Great War experiences played into a more general post-war mentality in which ‘minorities’ always signified disloyalty, subversion and danger to the integrity of the sovereign nation-state.

Anne Lloyd (Southampton), Faith under fire: Jewish army service in World War One in Britain

Judaism was formally recognised by the British Army’s Queen’s Regulations 25 years before the start of the First World War. On the eve of hostilities 400 Jews were serving as part of a voluntary force of just under a quarter of a million men: by the Armistice Jewish soldiers numbered over 41,000 in a conscripted army of over five million.

This paper examines the opinion voiced at a Jewish chaplains’ conference in March, 1918 that military service had acted as a ‘khaki anaesthesia’ on Judaism. While the Army made no general provision for the observance of Jewish dietary laws or the Saturday Sabbath, many soldiers made great efforts throughout the war to sustain their religious practices and rituals. Some, however, regarded these as markers of ethnic identity and ‘otherness’, prompting them to seek invisibility among their comrades. Others, notably officers drawn from Anglo-Jewry, were less than punctilious in their observances. On the battlefields widely differing responses by Jewish troops to the ministry of their own chaplains, whose selection and activity were regulated by committees of elite Anglo-Jews in London, offer further insights into the problematic nature of religious practice for the Jewish minority.

It could be argued that the exigencies of Army life revealed the wide spectrum of observance among a diverse minority made up of assimilated and immigrant Jews, whose pre-war civilian lives had exhibited great economic, political, cultural and social differences.

Denis Maier (Lucerne), German Jewish Orthodoxy and the experience of the First World War: The Case of Isaac Breuer

This paper discusses Isaac Breuer’s reaction to the experience of the First World War. In general, Jewish responses to the First World War were remarkably similar to those of the wider German public. German Jews were as patriotic as other Germans albeit with a specific twist. For them, participation in the war was a way to prove their loyalty to Germany, and part of their struggle for acceptance in the German society. The philosopher of Jewish Orthodoxy Isaac Breuer follows a different path. He develops a full-fledged critique of war and of nationalism.
that he both regards as the “radical evil”. For Breuer the First World War serves a double purpose. In the framework of general philosophy of history, it represents the crisis of humanity and of world history. As such, it designates the beginning of the messianic epoch. In the framework of Breuer’s communal activism this entails a harsh critique of Zionist aspirations and of contemporary Orthodoxy. Zionism fails to realise the fundamental threat that political sovereignty poses to humanity, whereas Orthodoxy fails to grasp the divine call for re-orientation (Neuorientierung) implicit in the War. The paper draws on articles published during the First World War, review articles of Hermann Cohen’s “Deutschtum und Judentum” and Josef Wohlgemuth’s “Der Weltkrieg im Lichte des Judentums” (The World War in the Light of Judaism), novels and substantial theoretical essays written at the end of the war and in the twenties. The main argument is that for Breuer the First World War leads to an apocalyptic understanding of history. Orthodox Judaism in this framework is the saviour of mankind that is supposed to redeem humanity from the threat of sovereignty.

Stefan Manz (Aston), Interned in Scotland: The Stobs Camp during World War I

‘Enemy alien’ internment in Britain during World War I is usually associated with the Knockaloe Camp on the Isle of Man. This is justified to some extent, as this was the largest camp with a maximum capacity of 23,000 in 1915. Mainland Britain, however, was also dotted with smaller camps, and these tend to fall under the radar of scholarship. This paper concentrates on the Stobs Camp in the Scottish Borders region which held a maximum of 4,500 internees in 1916. These were equally divided into military POWs and civilian ‘enemy aliens’. Based on local and national sources from British and German archives, the paper concentrates on features such as camp life, censorship, ‘barbed wire disease’, external support and inspection visits, and contact with the local population as well as the German ethnic minority in Britain. The paper also investigates Germanophobic expressions in the Scottish public and argues that the policy of internment was largely supported by the general population. Xenophobia ran just as high in Scotland as in England. The paper thus charts out new territory for a more comprehensive understanding of internment during the First World War.

Nicola Morris (Chester), “The most insubordinate men in the army”: Irish Methodist Chaplains in the Great War

Irish Methodism entered the First World with only one minister officially recognised as a Chaplain to the Forces, it ended the war with a total of 22 ministers accredited as Chaplains and on active service. This was proportionately more, per head of congregation, than any other Irish Church and constituted over 10 per cent of their active ministerial cohort. These men served with a range of British and Irish Divisions, in every major theatre, defying orders from senior officers to serve their men.

Through an examination of the chaplain’s correspondence and memoirs this paper will explore how these ministers articulated their vocation as ‘spiritual guide and comforter’ in the midst of conflict in light on their theological convictions. Chaplains acted as a link between home and
the front line troops, often acting as a conduit for gifts and letters, as well as providing a range of material services in addition to their spiritual activities. Methodist journals in Ireland were keen to published details of clergy activity serving with the Forces and encourage gifts, money and correspondence to be sent to them.

Irish Methodists drew no distinction in religious terms between the Irish Conference and the British, treating British Methodists stationed in Ireland as their own, and deploying ministers through the British Army and Navy Board based in London. However, Irish clergy did have a distinct national identity even when serving with Divisions raised in Britain, and felt ‘very much of an exile so far as Ireland was concerned’ particularly in the weeks following the 1916 rising. How ministers expressed and mediated their sense of Irishness and Britishness over the course of the war will be discussed, and how the course of the conflict changed their identification.

Guisepppe Motta (Sapienza)
The Italian Military Governorship and the German minorities in south Tyrol, November 1918-July 1919

The first World War decreed the victory of Italy and a consistent extension of her territories both northwards, in South Tyrol, and eastwards, in Istria. These regions were included within the terms of the well-known agreement signed in London, before Italian declaration of war, in 1915. But at the end of the war, the occupation of these zones generated a whole of problems which concerned the administration of areas ruined because of the conflict as well as the relationships with the local population, who was composed by non-Italian groups. In Trentino and South Tyrol (Alto Adige), in particular, the presence of Italians was limited to the territories of Trento, while the norther part of the region was purely German. The arrival of the Italian army, therefore, was not welcomed everywhere, but created many problems, as happened in many other European regions, where new agitations were generated by the troublesome coexistence between the local communities and the new military and civil administration. In South Tyrol, however, the relationships between the Germans and the Italian military governorship were quite peaceful and the documents showed that the latter approached the minority question with tolerance and moderation. Unfortunately, this experience was short-lived and the passage of the government to the civil authorities marked a gradual shift towards more drastic and discriminatory measures. Paradoxically, in few years South Tyrol passed from the Italian liberal tradition which characterized the military governorship to the new denationalization policies of Fascism, which in the Twenties aimed to convert the region into a pure Italian territory.

David Murphy (Stirling), Race and the Legacy of the First World War in French Anti-Colonial Politics of the 1920s

On 24 November 1924, the former tirailleur sénégalais, Lamine Senghor, made his entry on to the French political scene when he appeared as a witness for the defence in a libel trial in Paris. This trial thrust the politics of France’s black colonial populations to the forefront of public debate, in particular the issue of the participation of colonial troops in the First World War. In
October 1924, the French Caribbean novelist René Maran had published an article ‘The good disciple’ in which he accused Blaise Diagne, Senegalese deputy to the French parliament, feted for his role in a recruitment drive across West Africa in early 1918, of having received ‘a certain commission for each soldier recruited’. Unsurprisingly, Diagne sued for libel. As with so much of the racial and anti-colonial politics of 1920s France, the fault line between the two men thus centred on the ‘blood debt’ that France was deemed to owe to its colonial troops who had played such a vital role in the First World War: over 130,000 black African troops had participated in the war with over 30,000 killed. Although initially feted as a hero, Diagne had become by the time of the libel trial in 1924, a figure of hate for some, especially amongst black activists. Chief amongst his enemies was his compatriot Lamine Senghor, a decorated war veteran who had been gassed at Verdun in 1917, and who now emerged as a communist-inspired, anti-colonial activist: between the libel trial of 1924 and his early death from TB in late 1927, Senghor became the leading black radical voice in France. This paper will examine the issues exposed by the trial and, in particular, the ways in which Senghor projected his identity as a war veteran in his speeches and writings.


The black presence in World War I is a newly emerging field in which writers are exploring the ramifications of Africans and those of African descent who participated in the war and social constructions that flowed from their participation. This study will advance the historiography by examining the African American experience of equality with the Senegalese experience of inequality under French general ship during war. Since the end of the Great War many scholars have tackled the issues that arose out of the war: the main protagonist, the advancement in weaponry, and the tentacles that spread from it to connect it to WWII. Despite all the works that have been written on the subject, the black experience has not been full flushed to understand their participation This study concludes that the French constructed a dichotomy within their racial paradigm perception. The formation of France’s racial paradigm begins in 1899 with the Exposition Universell and ends in 1919 with World War One. By deeply inspecting the French racial attitudes toward people of color, the study concludes that the differences in the French perception between colonials and African Americans stemmed from the mindset that African Americans had been exposed to white civilization because they had lived amongst white people in America; while the Senegalese were barbaric as all those who lived on the dark African continent.


This presentation is an extract on my work on Percy Nettle, an ‘old China hand’ who took 6,600 Chinese Labourers to France in 1917 from Tsingtao in Northern China to Boulogne in France via Canada and England. Percy, although an Australian was in the BEF at the time, spoke Chinese, and was made a Captain in the Chinese Labour Corps. He tells of his journey to France and the difficulties of negotiating the Canadian and English transport systems and Bureaucracy with 6,600 Chinese in tow.
Giuseppe Perri (Université libre, Brussels), The Fate of the Ukrainian Poles after World War I

The fate of the Ukrainian Poles after World War I was tragic: following the collapse of Russia, about six hundred thousand Poles of Ukraine (one million throughout the former Tsarist Empire, above all from Belarus and Lithuania) decided to emigrate and leave their birthplace; they immigrated before 1921 to the new Polish state. The forced emigration from Ukraine provoked in most of them a suffered breaking of their cross identity and their belonging to neighboring worlds. The fate of those who remained was no better: in the Twenties there were in Soviet Union almost 780,000 Poles (476,000 in The Ukrainian Soviet Republic); against the Poles, classified as “enemy nationality”, were launched in the Thirties by Soviet NKVD a series of “operations” that caused tens of thousands of deaths.

My paper aims to describe the Ukrainian Pole’s attitude in 1917-1920, focusing on the analysis of Vyačeslav Lypyn’skjy, a writer and political activist who failed in the attempt, conducted before the war, to make the Polish minority as an important component of a future Ukrainian state, so as to allow it to remain linked to its territory and to the history of its centuries-old settlement in Ukraine; for Lypyn’skjy the young Ukrainian state would have to use the skills and the abilities of a social group always used to be a ruling class. But the Ukrainian national movement refused to form an alliance with the Poles landowners and vice versa.

On the other hand, I show as the submerged world of the Ukrainian Poles and their identity break live on in the pages of Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, one of the finest Polish poets and novelists of the Twentieth century.

Lila Rakoczy (Sam Houston State), ‘Behind the Pine Curtain’: The First World War Experiences of African Americans from Walker County, Texas

Research over the last few decades has revealed a growing recognition of the diversity and richness of African-American experiences during the First World War. Although all stress the difficulties borne by African Americans in a largely hostile, white American society, two divergent and dominant research narratives can be detected: one that emphasises the education and military willingness/prowess of Northern African Americans, and one that emphasises the draft resistance, lack of education, and unskilled labor contribution of Southern African Americans. Through the case study of Walker County, a mostly rural area in the pine forests of East Texas, this paper will argue that the real experience of Southern African-American males, or at the very least East Texan African Americans, was more complex. Illiterate draftees rubbed shoulders with their university-educated neighbors, and wartime roles included skilled and technical labor, frontline combat, and even officers. The African-American experience in Walker County included lynching, resistance, and harassment, but equally was one of enthusiastic military participation, career soldiers, and a burgeoning educational and political consciousness that began to emerge in the post-war period. This unfolding legacy, invisible to most of the current residents of Walker County, nevertheless played (and continues to play) an important role in shaping both black and white communities ‘behind the pine curtain’.
James Renton (Edge Hill), Taming Zionism: A French Orientalist Project of the First World War

Scholars such as Mark Levene and Tom Segev have highlighted the ambivalence that lay at the heart of British support for Zionism during the First World War. They have shown that the Government’s issuance of the Balfour Declaration was predicated on the erroneous assumption, rooted in antisemitism, that the Jews were a great power, especially in the USA and Russia, whose allegiance in the war could be won by an appeal to their supposed Zionist identity. The great turning point for Zionism derived, therefore, from a highly problematic assessment of Jews. Similar assumptions about Jewish power and Zionism were also evident in the corridors of power in Germany and France. Scholars have overlooked, however, the consequences of this ambivalence, for Jewry, Zionism and Palestine.

This paper will argue that an important window into this story is to be found in the actions and perspective of the French Government. French policy-makers agreed with their British counterparts that Zionism had to be backed to keep US power, especially in the realm of finance, on side. They were concerned, however, that Zionism could create problems for France’s colonial aims in Syria and the rest of the Arab world. The paper will explore how, as a result, the French Government sought to tame Zionism—to keep it away from statist ambitions that would conflict with French policy imperatives in the new Middle East. It will contend that this attempted moderation of Zionism during the war was, in essence, an Orientalist project, an effort to monitor and shape the new place of the Jews in the East. The paper will focus, in particular, on the part played by the French Jewish Orientalist, Sylvain Levi, who the French enlisted as their agent in the world of Zionism.

Michael Robinson (Liverpool), ‘Nobody's children?’: Irish Great War Veterans, Politics and Society, 1918-1939

The aim of this conference paper is to analyse the experiences of Irish Great War participants by examining their treatment in the turbulent post-war years of southern Ireland and in the newly founded Irish Free State. Once this analysis has taken place it will be possible to place them in context of the secondary literature that has already analysed the homecoming conditions of every other major combatant nation.

Whilst the research into Ireland’s involvement in the Great War was once described as being in a state of ‘collective amnesia’, this description has become increasingly inaccurate over the past decade. However, despite the existence of systematic studies discussing Ireland’s military contribution during the conflict, the current historiography contains no dedicated post-war scholarly monograph focused on a group which encompassed several hundred-thousand men. At best the post-war lives of Irish Great War veterans are given a passing reference by historians; at worst they are completely erased from the secondary literature as Tom Johnstone argued: ‘Most Irish ex-soldiers retired into historical oblivion.’

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5 The description of Irish Great War veterans was first used by Michael Heffernan, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Irish Ministry of Posts and Telegraph, in Dail Eireann in 1927.


By utilising a host of primary research material, including archival documents and contemporary newspaper articles, this paper will critically analyse the Irish experience and compare it to the other major European powers and discover how unique, and contrasting, the experience of Irish Great War veterans really was.

Daniel Marc Segesser (Bern), Victims of War must be loyal to deserve protection: International law and national legislation on enemy aliens 1907-1918

In international law the internment of civilians has only been regulated in writing in the context of the 4th Geneva Convention of 1949. Nevertheless this did not mean that civilians were not protected by at least some rules of customary international law before that date and especially in World War I. Furthermore specialists of international law expected states – at least those considered to be part of the community of civilized nations – to continue to treat all men equal before the law even in wartime. As research already conducted (Bird, Panayi, Fischer) has shown, this was not the case during World War I. Based on these findings the presentation proposed here wants to look into the development of international law and into some national preparations for treating so called “enemy aliens” in the period before 1914 (Austria-Hungary, Australia, United Kingdom), in order to see to what extent principles of international law protecting civilians from the consequences of war can be detected in the pre-war preparations. As far as can be judged so far the issue of loyalty was central in this context. Looking at the war itself, the presentation proposed here will try to look at how far the principles of international law alluded to above continued to influence the policies on “enemy aliens” in the countries mentioned and to see, how the International Committee of the Red Cross tried to use them to legitimize and expand its protective policies in regard to civilians interned in belligerent as well as neutral countries throughout the war.

Stephanie Seul (Bremen), The impact of World War I and the rise of anti-Semitism on German-Jewish identity: An Analysis of discourses in the German-Jewish press

For German Jewry the outbreak of the Great War marked a historic opportunity to demonstrate its unconditional loyalty towards the Reich. The Emperor’s proclamation of the Burgfrieden – a political truce for the duration of the war – raised hopes that anti-Semitism and discrimination were overcome. Yet, these hopes proved short-lived. Völkisch and anti-Semitic groups rejected the inclusion of Jews in the national war alliance. Shortly after the outbreak of war they began to publicly accuse the Jews of unpatriotic behaviour such as shirking from military service or economic profiteering. As the war continued and hopes for a German victory perished, the anti-Semitic propaganda spread by right-wing extremist groups grew in strength. Ultimately, the Great War led to a radicalisation of anti-Jewish stereotypes and reinforced ideologies that called for the removal of the Jews from the German nation. The initial hope of the German Jews that the war would lead to equality and social acceptance thus soon gave way to a feeling of deep disappointment.

The outbreak of the Great War set in motion a lively debate in the German-Jewish press on the current and future position of the Jews within the German nation. In my paper I propose to analyse the Jewish perceptions of the Great War and of its impact on Jewish life in Germany, using selected German-Jewish newspapers as a source. The medium of the German-Jewish press is particularly appropriate for the study of the vital concerns of Jewish life as the newspapers
Stephen Shannon (Northumbria), ‘Irishmen to Arms’: The Irish response in the North East of England to the Great War, 1914-1918

By 1914, after more than 60 years of mass migration, the Irish were the largest ethnic group in England, and, in the North East of England, thousands lived and worked in the industrial heartlands of Tyneside and Teesside, and in the scattered colliery villages and small industrial towns of County Durham and Northumberland. On 3 August 1914, as war in Europe threatened and just days after British soldiers had shot and bayoneted unarmed civilians on the streets of Dublin, John Redmond MP, leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, pledged his support to Britain in return for Irish self-government, when the war ended.

This paper will consider how, with the coming of war, Irish nationalist organisations in Britain, following Redmond’s lead, seized the opportunity to prove both their loyalty to Britain and Ireland’s fitness for self-government, through the mobilisation of the Irish living in Britain in support of the war. This culminated in the North East of England with the raising, through the combined efforts of the nationalist organisations, of the Tyneside Irish Brigade for service in the British Army, as disciplined, khaki-clad proof of that loyalty and fitness.

Though the Tyneside Irish Brigade was the crowning achievement of the pre-1916 Irish nationalist organisations in Britain, the paper will conclude by demonstrating how that mobilisation left those organisations in the North East exhausted and ill-prepared to respond to the Irish Revolution and the crushing electoral defeat of the Irish Parliamentary Party.

John Siblon (Birkbeck),
Absence and impoliticness: Remembrance of British colonial African and Caribbean contributions in the immediate aftermath of the First World War

My paper proposes to look at whether the contributions of Africans and Caribbeans from British colonies to the First World War were ‘remembered’ or not in the immediate aftermath of the conflict. During the war, military and colonial officials connived to ensure that Africans and Caribbeans were not allowed to participate as combatants in the main theatre. Some units were employed in non-combat roles in Europe, which remains the popular memory of their contribution. Officials were also reluctant to use ‘native’ troops in the fighting in Africa. How would these contributions, therefore, be remembered? The focus of the paper will be on official and unofficial commemoration of the African and Caribbean living and dead in 1919 and 1920 in both colony and metropole. Did military and colonial officials commemorate the service and sacrifice of Africans and Caribbeans as well as Europeans, Dominion forces and Indians? This paper will address particularly the Peace Celebrations of 1919 and the first
Armistice ceremony and will argue that a prevailing ‘culture of exclusion’ ensured that African and Caribbean contributions were reduced to a footnote to the efforts of other imperial forces.

Christopher Smith (King’s College) The Jewish Battalion in the First World War

In the summer of 1917 the British Government created the 38th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers, to be recruited from the Russian Jewish population of London’s East End. The Battalion’s impact on British-Jewish politics was complex; it split Anglo-Jewish leadership between those who feared the “differentness” associated with the name “Jewish Battalion” and those who felt it would be a powerful tool against British Anti-Semitism within the Army; Zionist organisations were torn between support for the scheme based on the potency of its symbolic contribution to their cause and distaste for its overt militarism. The scheme met hostility within Russian Jewish masculinity, yet the majority enlisted in the Battalion given the alternative of service elsewhere in the British Army or deportation back to Russia.

The Jewish Battalion has often been interpreted as an ephemeral event in the 20th Century historiography of Anglo-Jewry and treated cursorily as a result. This presentation will seek to show it left a profound and lasting mark, especially on the immigrant Jewish population of London’s East End. The central questions of the presentation will be:

How did the controversy of the Battalion widen pre-war divisions between the Anglo-Jewish Establishment and the immigrant community?

Did the Battalion dispel, reinforce or create British stereotypes of Jews, in particular relating to War and masculinity?

What was the effect of the Battalion on Zionist politics and the radicalisation of East End Jewish Labour movements?

To what extent did the Battalion instil a Jewish nationalism and concurrently a sense of “Britishness” in its recruits where both were previously lacking?

The presentation uses War Office files at the National Archives in London and veteran’s testimonials from the Beit Hagudim Museum in Avichail Israel unused by researchers focusing on the social impact of the Battalion on the Jewish immigrant community of East London.

Matthew Stibbe (Sheffield Hallam), The Internment of Enemy Aliens in Habsburg Austria (Cisleithania) during the First World War

In some ways it is a misnomer to speak of minorities in the Austrian half of the Habsburg empire, as there was no dominant majority here. All ethnic and national groups were in effect minorities, including Germans, Italians, Czechs, Slovenes, Croats, Poles, Ukrainians (Ruthenes) and Jews. Unlike belligerent states in the west, the Habsburg empire also interned many more of its own subjects than it did enemy aliens during the First World War. Austrian Italians suspected of irredentism, Bosnian Serb ‘terrorists’ and ‘pro-Russian’ Ukrainians were all deported to camps in the Austrian interior.

Nonetheless, enemy aliens (British, French, Russian, Serb and Montenegrin subjects; after 1915 Italians; and after 1916 Romanians) also faced social marginalisation, economic discrimination, confinement and in some cases internment. The aim of this paper is to examine the experiences of enemy aliens in First World War Austria, with particular emphasis
on those who ended up behind barbed wire. A key theme will be Austria’s deliberate discrimination against particular national groups, especially Italians and Romanians, who usually faced harsher conditions, forced labour and, by 1918, hunger. This will be contrasted with the much better treatment afforded to British and French nationals. Attention will also be focused on Austria’s entanglement in a global system of internment, its efforts to protect the interests of its own subjects in enemy hands, and its involvement in the propaganda war over which side was the more ‘civilised’ in its treatment of military and civilian captives. While Austrian internment policies have often been presented as a more moderate version of a European-wide/international phenomenon, this paper will conclude by arguing that the disintegrating Habsburg Monarchy made its own distinctive contribution to the persecution of alien minorities in wartime.

Ulrich Tiedau (UCL), Belgium 1914–1918: German occupation and the Flemish movement

Belgium was one of the central stages of WWI, not only militarily but also in the theatre of cultural propaganda, and the Flemish struggle for emancipation played a central role in it. While in the words of Maurice Maeterlinck, Belgium by resisting against the German aggression had saved ‘the Latin civilisation’, the occupier, in classic imperial divide and conquer strategy, tried to attain cultural hegemony by taking advantage of (parts of) the Flemish movement.

The Imperial-German Chancellor gave orders for a ‘Flemish policy’ to be pursued, which meant that the existing, but scarcely applied Belgian laws that were intended to place Flemish on a par with French and provide cultural autonomy for the Flemings, were put into practice. Dutch replaced French as language of instruction in schools and at the University of Ghent and while this realization of old Flemish demands failed to overcome the anti-German affect of the public in general it did entice a not insignificant minority of Flemish activists, mainly intellectuals, to collaborate.

Simultaneously German writers, scholars and publishers, not few of them in military service, discovered Flemish literature and engaged in a large-scale translation programme which did not fail to resonate with a German public among whom the idea of German-Flemish linguistic and ethnic affinity (‘Stammverwandtschaft’) was widespread. Consequently, Belgium and the Flemish question became a much discussed topic in Germany, where even a kind of ‘romanticism for the Flemings’ developed.

The talk will present an overview of this West-European minority question in the war and propaganda efforts of the time. It will pay special attention to language intermediaries and other cultural mediators and the impact of WWI, which has also been dubbed the ‘most literary of all wars’, on Belgian society and the image of Belgium and Flanders abroad.

Alessandro Vagnini (Sapienza), From Prisoners to a National Force: The Romanian Legion in the Italian Army

By 1916 the percentage of the Austro-Hungarian prisoners of Romanian nationality in Italian custody was relevant and mainly concentrated in Northern Italy and in the prison camp of Avezzano, where the Romanians were the largest group. In April 1918, at the Congress of Oppressed Nationalities of Rome, the Romanian delegates obtained from the Italian Ministry of War the authorization of forming armed units of autonomous national basis, with the legal status of allies. It was then constituted the Romanian Legion (Legione Romena d’Italia) under
the command of Brigadier General Luciano Ferigo, the formerly Italian military attaché to Bucharest. The Legion comprised abjurers of the Austro-Hungarian Army, mainly contingents from Transylvania and Bukovina that once in Italian custody, volunteered for service against the Central Powers supporting the idea of a union with Romania. On 28 June 1918, the first of three Romanian companies received its “Flag of war” and from that moment the Legion could be considered operational and would eventually fight standing out in the field.

The paper will provide an overview of the Romanian Legion, based on the records of the Italian Army General Staff, a particularly rich source for the story of the Legion and for its role on the battlefield and in the Romanian political balance immediately after the war.

Julia Walleczek-Fritz (Austrian State Archives, Vienna), An underrated aspect of POW policy: The treatment of POW ethnic and national minorities in Austria-Hungary during World War One

A total number of eight to nine million soldiers of all belligerents were kept as prisoners of war during World War One thus they are named a mass phenomenon. More than two million soldiers were caught by Austro-Hungarian troops between 1914 and 1918 and caused severe problems for the so called “Gewahrsamstaat”. The majority of POWs – more than 1.2 million soldiers – came from the Romanov Empire, followed by Italians (369,000), Serbs (154,700) and Rumanians (52,800). The number of POWs from Montenegro, Albania, France or the USA remained comparatively little. Austro-Hungarian authorities became aware of chances according to nationalistic propaganda among POWs in the end of 1914. But the Danube Monarchy wavered stimulating the contrasts between POWs of the multiethnic Russian Empire – completely different to German and Russian POW policy.

In 1915, however plans had ripened so far that propaganda should both evoke and strengthen the national self assurance of the involved POWs. Stressing the peculiarity of a separate autonomous culture should finally have led to independence movements of POWs’ nations to break away from Russia. Primarily Ukrainians or Polish soldiers just as POWs from the Baltic regions, Cossacks, Georgians, Tartars or Kalmyks should have been concentrated on. Muslim POWs represented a special target group ‘cause they should have been mobilized to a “holy war” in order to fight with the Ottoman ally against Russia. Jewish POWs should serve another purpose.

Especially POWs from the Ukraine were affected by Austro-Hungarian propaganda measures that included cooperation with several Ukrainian exile organizations since 1914 which did not work quite well. POWs were transferred to the propaganda camp Freistadt in Upper Austria where they were taught in Ukrainian literature, history and geography. Austria-Hungary’s propaganda measures among soldiers of the Russian Empire failed because of many reasons. Besides, the need of forced labourers in order to maintain k.u.k, wartime economy highly influenced POW policy and the propaganda program.
Military Service as a Means to Recover Lost Masculinity: The Experience of Eastern State Penitentiary Inmates in the First World War

Even as the narrative of the First World War expands to include a wide spectrum of minorities, one group continues to be excluded. Prison inmates, even those successfully paroled into society after completing their sentence, remain collectively and individually an ignored population condemned to remain on the fringes of civil society. In the United States and elsewhere, felons were considered beyond civic virtue, if not considered to be mentally and eugenically unfit, and hence were excluded from military service. Yet while their exclusion was a matter of public record, nevertheless many one time felons entered the ranks during the Great War.

This project examines a group of 121 one-time felony inmates from Pennsylvania’s Eastern State Penitentiary. During the First World War, a concerted effort was made by prison officials to assist paroled inmates in entering the military. This effort occurred despite clear restrictions in the Selective Service Act of 1917 denying current and former felons access to this civic duty. While part of a much larger research project I have been engaged in for over a decade, this paper will present insights into the social makeup of this group of civically emasculated males. It will also examine the premise that military service was embraced by the former prisoners and their warden, Robert J. McKenty, as a means to restore their public masculinity in the eyes of American society. One of the last great Progressive penologists, McKenty’s support and intervention on behalf of his one-time wards needs to be seen as an attempt to redefine civic identity and extend the rehabilitative imperative of the penitentiary beyond its physical boundaries to reforge a new legitimate masculine identity for these men.

Georg Wurzer (Independent Scholar), Jews as prisoners of war in Russia during World War I

At the outbreak of WWI many Jews hoped by showing their patriotism to contribute to their social emancipation, also in the German Reich and Austro-Hungary. Many of them volunteered but soon were frustrated by the notorious anti-Semitism of their Christian fellow-soldiers. Famous is the Judenzaehlung of 1916 in the German Army. In Austro-Hungary the marginalization of Jews also existed, but in a more subtle way.

In my lecture, I want to explore the fate of the approximately 1500 Reichs-German and 75000 Austro-Hungarian Jewish prisoners of war in Russian custody.

The starting point for my proposed paper derives from two hypotheses: 1. The prisoner of war camps in Russia during World War I can be called „hothouses of Anti-Semitism“, where – because of the extreme living conditions, especially the great misery of the rank and file prisoners, the humiliation of being taken prisoner and the isolation – future developments in Central and Eastern Europe at the societal level can be observed. 2. Under these circumstances even the secularized Jews from Central Europe embraced their ethnic identity as a reaction to the appalling conditions they were confronted with.

As part of my presentation, I wish to address these issues:
The Jews in Central Europe before World War I;
The Jews in the military of the Mittelmacht during the war, the Judenzaehlung of 1916;
The position of Jews inside the prisoner community and Identity in the memoirs and novels of Jewish prisoners.
The sources for my work are derived mainly from the memoirs/novels of former Jewish and non-Jewish prisoners and from unpublished materials in Russian, German, and Austrian archives.