Shared heritage on the Hartmannswillerkopf

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Introduction

Using the example of the Hartmannswillerkopf in Alsace, France, this chapter shows both the differences and the process of convergence of national discourses of remembrance in Germany and France, and thus moves towards an interpretation of European history as a common heritage. It is inspired by recent historical research that uses a transnational perspective on the 20th century (Krumeich 2018) as well as the peace work that Germany and France had initiated in the 1980s. Thus, at the latest after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the end of the Cold War, both countries had become pioneers of the idea of a peaceful Europe that was to redefine itself to a "community of memory" (Assmann 2018a, p. 250)[1] after years of division. Its most important task was to learn from its own history and, in the spirit of "Never again!" (Assmann 2018b, p. 63), to prevent military conflicts and crimes against humanity on its own soil.

While the idea of a politically united Europe found expression in the treaties and institutions of the EU, it was incumbent on the agencies of memory culture to actively work on a "modern European self-understanding" (Kaelble 2001, p. 254). The goal of the European self-understanding was a transnational culture of memory that would contextualize national memory sites and artifacts from multiple perspectives and mediate them dialogically (Winter and Prost 2004; Offenstadt 2010). Museums, monuments, and memorials were understood as places of a collective memory that no longer only transmits national myths, but should show connecting lines between individual national histories and take many perspectives into account in order to strengthen "European identity constructions" (Assmann 2018a, p. 251).

This approach can also be observed at the binational memorial site Hartmannswillerkopf. The 957-meter-high hilltop, which remains central to France and Germany's national commemoration of World War I to this day, is located between Colmar and Mulhouse, France. It was here that a bitter war of position over land and

1 For better readability, quotations from French and German literature have been translated into English. French and German sources are marked as such in the bibliography.

border took place from 1914 to 1918. The top of the mountain changed hands four times during the war. Today, the site, sometimes called the "mountain of death", stands in the memory of the two former enemies for the senselessness of the war, and is visited as a memorial by both French and Germans. Thus, it has become an important symbol also of binational state and history politics. For example, then German President Joachim Gauck and French President François Hollande met at Hartmannswillerkopf on August 3, 2014, to lay the cornerstone for a joint Franco-German information center commemorating the battles (Michelberger 2015). On November 10, 2017, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and French President Emmanuel Macron inaugurated this information center, as a *Historial*.[2] It embodies the idea and form of a place of commemoration and mediation of Franco-German history, located directly on the Franco-German border and also in an area that has been influenced by both cultures for centuries: Alsace.

Against this background, the analysis traces how a changed politics of history can lead to a new view of the common heritage of two countries, their acts of war and their remembrance of war, and why the Hartmannswillerkopf as a binational memorial and exemplary learning site is particularly suitable for this. The article draws on the author's many years of research work as a military historian and co-chairman of the Scientific Advisory Board of *Historial*.

Warrior or comrade? German monuments in the Weimar Republic

From 1919 to 1933, the German memory of the First World War was and remained deeply marked by the fact that the "legacy" of the world war was tremendously contentious. Why had the war been lost and the *Treaty of Versailles* signed? A common remembrance, a silence of political dispute over the graves of the fallen did not even begin to exist in the Weimar Republic (Wette 1990; Löffelbein 2013; Krumeich 2014b).

There were many reasons for this. First, a tremendous incoherence confusion of the decision-making authorities in charge of the monument construction. The Weimar Republic was a federal state, and the states certainly had their own and conflicting regulations and requirements, with clear political differences, for example between a Catholic "black" state like Bavaria and a "red" one like Thuringia. The individual states set up so-called state advisory offices for monument construction, whose competence lay primarily – as Lurz has ironically noted – in preventing initiatives (1986). Between rising police concerns and sales tax legal requirements, the harassment varied from country to country, but in most cases was extremely restrictive. There was a tremendous amount of regulation as to what motifs could be used, whether a standing warrior had to face west or east, for example, and many more.

2 The name *Historial* is a combination of *Histoire* and *Mémoire*, of history and commemoration.

It is not necessary to go into detail here. What is important is that "the indirect call to continue the fight was regularly demanded as the actual statement of the monuments" (Lurz 1986, p. 158), a demand that was realized in many places. Thus, already in the early phase of monument designs, i.e., in the years 1919 to about 1924, fighter figures such as *Nackter Krieger* (naked warrior), *Trotziger Krieger* (defiant warrior), *Marschierende Einheit* (marching unit) were more common than pacifist monuments, for example with the motif *Trauernde Mutter* (grieving mother), *Trauernder Kamerad* (grieving comrade), or *Verwundeter Krieger* (wounded warrior). Jeismann and Westheider have drawn the following conclusion from this finding:

> The vast majority of monuments are characterized by a dull heroism – often dressed up in Christian terms – in which defeat tends to be suppressed or even reinterpreted as victory. Monuments that convey pure messages of mourning are extremely rare. On the other hand, those that proclaim a blatant revanchism ('Undefeated in the field') were erected in large numbers (1988, p. 12).

In principle, this quite common assessment is correct, but "Undefeated in the field" does not necessarily seem to indicate "revanchist" intentions frequently. This quasi-stereotypical assurance is not coupled with clearly bellicose forms of expression. Undefeated in the field seems rather to have been an extension or a specification of the assurance to the dead and the living that the soldiers had fallen "not in vain". Reinhart Koselleck, in his seminal essay on war memorials, has even emphasized that the topos of the soldiers' "meaningful death" was widespread in all political camps. Moreover, he formulated the thesis – probably going a bit too far – that there had been no monuments at all in Germany after 1918 that staged a "visible demand for revenge" (Koselleck 1979, p. 262). Such a demand did not go off without political confrontation, even struggle, including street fighting, as Saehrendt has shown (2004). In Berlin, for example, the impression arose that any war commemoration by the left ("Never again war") or the erection of corresponding monuments in individual "red" districts immediately resulted in interventions by the nationalists, and vice versa (Friedrich 1924).

A famous example of this is also the dispute over the so-called *39th monument* in Düsseldorf. (Fig. 1) The 39th Lower Rhine Infantry Regiment had a special significance because it was Ludendorff's parent regiment and therefore particularly prestigious. The Düsseldorf city councilors opted for a large monument of the "wounded warrior" type, which was erected at the Tonhalle in 1928. Two crawling soldiers were depicted, one wounded, taken by the hand of his comrade in a caring manner. For the nationalists of all shades, however, this very realistic – and also not particularly war-critical – topos was "unworthy". It was also unacceptable to them because the two men somehow looked "foreign" or "semitic", as contemporary opponents complained (Thanner 1997; Krumeich 2004; Krumeich 2010). The monument was reg-

ularly damaged and defaced, and in 1933, immediately after the National Socialists came to power, it was replaced by the "heroic" monument at Reeserplatz – which still exists today. This monument, inaugurated in 1936, shows a group of soldiers of the 1914 war descending into the tomb and a group of soldiers of the new Wehrmacht emerging from it. Engraved are the names of battles of the First and Second World War.

In summary, it can be said that the political situation in Germany during the Weimar Republic was so torn that in many places the planned monuments were not even realized. The examples of this provided by Lurz and more recently by Kaiser (2010) are innumerable. One among many, but particularly interesting, is the example of the town of Marbach am Neckar, the famous "Schiller town". There, at the old town gate, still stands one of the most unusual and remarkable monuments of the First World War. Two soldiers, one from the First World War and one from the Wehrmacht, recognizable by their helmets, stand dressed in one and the same garment, namely the uniform of the Wehrmacht. This realization was the result of more than ten years of dispute about the monument (Alexander-Seitz-Geschichtswerkstatt Marbach 1985),[3] which was only ended by the *Machtübernahme* (seizure of power) and the "heroic" monuments enforced by the new rulers here, as in many other places in Germany, as early as March 1933 (Behrenbeck 1996). The seizure of power by National Socialism thus also includes its energetic and never slackening grip on the memorial culture of the First World War (ibid; Thamer 1997). It is no coincidence that the Tannenberg Memorial, which had originally been planned to provide a memorial to the "Unknown Soldier" for Germany as well, was only completed by the National Socialists, and designated a "Reich memorial of honor" (Fischer 1990). Hindenburg, who was revered by Germans across party lines, was buried there in 1934, a symbolic act in the National Socialists' effort to restore Germany's honor and greatness.

"Ils ne passeront pas": French memorials and monuments

In France, the First World War, which was ultimately won in 1918 despite all the great losses, was able to create a fundamentally shared memory of the suffering and heroism of the soldiers and the nation from the very beginning. The local mourning communities institutionalized by the Republic also created a bond of *memoria*, of com-

3 The Marbach municipal archive has an, unsorted, bundle of files on this monument. Probably the only – unfortunately strongly polemical – publication on the subject to date is by Alexander-Seitz-Geschichtswerkstatt Marbach und Umgebung (Alexander-Seitz-Geschichtswerkstatt 1985).

mon remembrance, which could not be severed even by sharp domestic political controversies.[4]

From the very beginning, the French culture of remembrance focused less on the brave warrior, whose myth was used by the defeated German empire, than on the unknown soldier as a symbol of the male citizen who remained without a grave of his own and was missing in every family as a father, son or brother. It was not by chance that a soldier from the Verdun area had been transferred to the Arc de Triomphe in 1920 as a *Soldat inconnu* (unknown soldier). Verdun remains the greatest French memorial to the First World War. The battle, in which more than 350,000 French soldiers were killed or wounded in 1916, is the symbolic site of the unity of the fighting nation. Here, the German invader had been decisively stopped: "Ils ne passeront pas" (The Germans will not get through here), this slogan issued by Pétain in April 1916 had finally been fulfilled on *Onze Novembre* (eleventh november) 1918.

At the same time, the sites of the fighting were in victorious France after 1919. Verdun and the surrounding battlefields were, and in some cases still are, sacred ground for the French (Werth 1979). There are villages there that have not been rebuilt, such as Douaumont, but nevertheless have a mayor, as a sign that they have been erased from the map but not from the hearts. The Verdun cult went so far in the interwar period that clay pots in the shape of one of the kilometer stones of the *Voie Sacrée*, the sacred road between Bar-le-Duc and Verdun on which the soldiers and supplies had been transported, were filled with earth from the battle zone and kept all over France. For almost every French soldier had been deployed at least once "in front of Verdun". The *Ossuaire*, the Douaumont Bone House, is still the most important French necropolis. Here, at the beginning of the 1920s, the bodies of dead soldiers found during the clearing of the battlefields were buried.

As for France's commemorative activities by means of monuments, the law of November 23, 1919 stipulated that every French municipality must erect a war memorial. This law is still in force today, and there is probably no municipality in which the *poilu* (colloquially: French frontline soldier) is not commemorated (Prost 1987; Prost 1992; Ackermann 1994; Becker 1994; Behrenbeck 1996; Becker 1998).[5] In more than 38,000 municipalities in France there is a *Monument aux Morts*, be it in the immediate vicinity of the town hall and the school (these are the left-wing republican-oriented municipalities), or near the church, by which one immediately recognizes a traditionally more conservative Catholic community. (Fig. 2) All of these monuments were produced in a virtually "catalog-based" fashion, with

4 For an overview of the types of monuments erected in France, with many pictorial sources, see: Rive/ Morelle (1995); Franck (2013).

5 Unfortunately, Ackermann (1994) has twisted the Xenotaph inscription known to every Frenchman. It actually reads: "Ceux qui pieusement sont morts pour la France" (Those who piously died for France).

communities given a choice of different types of depiction of the soldier: the *poilu* charging forward with flag; the *poilu* dying; the mother weeping with her fallen son in her arms (the *Pietà* motif) – the choice did not come much wider. The most common, however, was a plain memorial column, with the inscription: "La Commune XY à ses enfants morts pour la France" (The XY Commune to its children who died for France). The soldiers who died in the war belonging to this very commune were listed by name on the monument.

Even today, the enormous blood toll paid by France during the First World War can be seen when, for example, in a community of 800 inhabitants, up to 80 names are engraved, very often several sons of one and the same family. In addition to these statues, more neutral and above all preserving the internal peace of the place, in a few cases there were also nationalist or chauvinist designs, such as the *poilu triumphant avec lauriers* (poilu triumphant with laurels), or the *poilu* kicking a piked helmet. However, they are much rarer.

The main reason why these monuments are still standing today (to the extent that they were not dismantled and melted down during the German occupation during World War II) is that consensus was sought from the outset. The monuments in France have not been planned and financed either purely by the commune or purely by the state. The mentioned law of 1919 prescribes state subsidies, proportional to the municipal financial expenses. The state therefore contributed up to 15 percent of the cost of presentation, and the choice of motifs catalogued and produced had its influence on the amount of the state's financial contribution.

In contrast to Germany, there has been no significant dispute in France about the form of commemoration of the victims. This is due, among other things, to the fact that, with very few exceptions, all Frenchmen were convinced, and remain convinced to this day, that France fought a genuine defensive war from 1914 to 1918. Consequently, there was no trace of a "war of position over monuments" as in Germany. One certainty was unbreakable for the French and has remained so to this day: in the First World War, the *poilus* defended the "sacred soil of the fatherland" (so the Marseillaise) together against the German invader. Battles like the Marne and Verdun are therefore firmly anchored in the collective memory.

Remembering together? Politics of history and places of remembrance

For many decades, there was no common mourning and commemoration of the World War dead between Germans and French people. In many cases, even the commemoration was not free of anger towards the enemy and feelings of revenge. The *Pietà monument* in Péronne, of the mother holding her dead son in her lap and swearing revenge with her fist, testifies to this, as do the many German monuments of the interwar period whose gestures and inscriptions clearly indicate that "another reck-

oning" is due. This behavior was and remained – for the most part until today – the standard of commemoration of the dead. At the same time, the need for joint remembrance and commemoration arose early on, as evidenced, for example, by the oath of peace taken by the German and French Verdun fighters in 1936, the initiative for which came from the Comité France-Allemagne, founded in 1935, and was joined by the most important soldiers' associations of both nations:

> Because those who lie here and elsewhere entered into the peace of the dead only to establish the peace of the living, and because it would be unholy for us to allow in the future what the dead abhorred, therefore we swear to preserve and want the peace we owe to their sacrifice (Krumeich and Prost 2016, p. 198).

However, such calls remained the exception, not least due to the historical caesura of National Socialism and the Second World War. Their official continuation was delayed until well after 1945, although it is worth noting that from the 1960s onward, German former Front soldiers were also involved in the construction of the *Mémorial of Verdun* as a memorial to the First World War. The first politically decisive step in the direction of a common remembrance occurred only in 1984, when – also in Verdun – the French President Francois Mitterrand and the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl posed hand in hand in front of the Douaumont Ossuary. This unforgettable gesture became a political emblem and reflected the desire for a common culture of remembrance, which was to bear institutional fruit a little later, mainly on French territory: in the form of a reconsideration of cemeteries or a redesign of war museums, which as *Mémorial* (Verdun and Meaux) or *Historial* (Péronne and Hartmannswillerkopf) claim to combine factual information and objects of the war in a context of supranational remembrance.

If one looks at the military cemeteries, their once nation-state and thus separate commemoration can already be seen in the geography. The military cemeteries were set up separately in the former combat zone after 1919, for example in Verdun, where it was impossible to commemorate the German dead in the *Ossuaire* cemetery – they were buried in two cemeteries far away in Azannes. At Hartmannswillerkopf, the French soldiers were buried around the crypt, while the Germans were given a burial place at Etain, on the plain outside Mulhouse. This form of monoperspectival commemorative culture, rooted in the soil of World War I remembrance, changed only when the centenary celebrations of World War I approached in 2014, under the auspices of continuing European peace politics. Thus, on the occasion of the commemorations of the Battle of Verdun, it was established for the first time in memorialistic terms that in the aforementioned *Ossuaire*, with the utmost certainty, half of the bones collected were the remains of German soldiers.

Fig. 1: Inauguration of the 39er monument by Jupp Rübsam in Düsseldorf, 1928 (Copyright: Duisburg Institute for Linguistic and Social Research/Wikimedia Commons)

Fig. 2: The war memorial to the fallen French soldiers of World War I in Péronne by Paul Auban, 1926 (Photo: Wikimedia/ Ybroc)

Fig. 3: Aerial view of the French military cemetery with crypt (Copyright: Comité du Monument National du Hartmannswillerkopf)

Fig. 4: View of the permanent exhibition of the Historial, which opened in 2017 (Copyright: Comité du Monument National du Hartmannswillerkopf)

Since then, the dome of the *Ossuaire* has been engraved by a German and French inscription: "Here rest together the bones of 130,000 French and German soldiers who fell on the battlefield before Verdun. Let us never forget this horror" (see Other Sources: No. 1). The inscription, which would have been unthinkable just a few years earlier, was ceremoniously unveiled by Angela Merkel and François Hollande in May 2016. The *Anneau du Souvenir* (Ring of Remembrance) of Notre Dame de Lorette (2014) should also be mentioned in this context – it too is a sign of a deliberately modified culture of remembrance of the dead. Here, the names of nearly 600,000 soldiers of all nations killed in the fighting in the Pas de Calais are engraved in a circular wall, without any distinction.

Even if this view of the common history has by no means become the majority view until today, a very important continuation of the common remembrance theme was also the transformation of the *Mémorial* of Verdun, founded in 1960, which originally served solely the French war memory and the memory of the *poilus* fallen before Verdun. This was to become a museum *and* place of remembrance, which also wanted to include the fight, suffering, and death of the German soldiers (and has also achieved this in parts in an exemplary manner). For example, when in an information film shown in the entrance area, a German historian explains the battle and its consequences to the largely French audience. In this way, this traditionally very French place of remembrance is gradually becoming an institution for a comparative view of the First World War.

The name *Historial* is a combination of *Histoire* and *Mémoire*, of history and commemoration. This is the driving notion behind the idea of a (new) dialogical commemoration, which should also be actively pursued in the mediation work of the places of remembrance (Krumeich 2018). Already in 1992, in response to the political rapprochement of European nations, a new type of museum had been created and opened in Péronne with a clear international and comparative mission: the *Historial* of Péronne. It was particularly important here that the staging, which was still common at the time, was completely dispensed with: no more sound or light effects to make visitors understand the horror of the battlefield. Likewise, any heroization of the soldiers or morbid fascination with "beautiful" weapons and other implements of war was to be avoided. Museally revolutionary were the trenches strewn with bodies dressed in the uniforms of the nations involved in the war – but without heads, without individual expressions. Today, many museums around the world have adopted this concept. At the time, it was simply unbearable for many visitors, even well-intentioned ones. There were also museums that reclaimed the objects they had lent to the *Historial* out of indignation at the changed narrative and its staging. But the most important thing about the *Historial*'s concept is certainly its emphasized supranationality. The documents and objects of all nations involved in the war are exhibited with absolute parity. At the same time, this museum became the starting point for a *ircuit du souvenir*, a round trip to the most important sites of the

fighting on the Somme with its million wounded and dead, whereby the visitor has to walk through an area of about 400 square kilometers (Krumeich 2008).

The *Historial* of Péronne was thus the first museum demonstration of an internationally comparative and at the same time commemorative view, which from then on inspired the public culture of remembrance of the First World War and its reception today from a European perspective. This development has been rounded off since 2017 by the establishment of the Franco-German *Historial* on the battlefield of Hartmannswillerkopf in Alsace (HWK).

The Historial of the Hartmannswillerkopf – German-French commemoration

The Hartmannswillerkopf (Fig. 3) is one of four national memorials of the First World War in France and therefore has a high significance for the country. On the Hartmannswillerkopf, which was a strategically important theater of war in 1914, an all-German-French battle took place that lasted until 1918. Here, at an altitude of 1000 meters, the war was fought under special conditions. Also, the fighters were not masses of common soldiers, "Feldgraue" or *poilus*, but elite troops of alpine hunters and *chasseurs alpins*. They waged a relentless close combat on impassable terrain, using all the technical advances of industrialized warfare, from gas as a combat agent and heavy mortars to electric pumps and even high altitude cable cars.

The theater of war in Alsace had the peculiarity that the fighters of both nations fought here, so to speak, "in the homeland" and "for the homeland", since Alsace, annexed by the Germans since 1871, was for both the Germans and the French part of their own fatherland (see Other Sources: No. 2). This is probably also the reason for the particular tenacity of the fighting, even at a time when the Hartmannswillerkopf was only a sideshow of the war, because the front had, so to speak, "moved on to the west." As early as 1921, the Hartmannswillerkopf was designated a place of French memorial culture, roads were laid out for mourners and tourists, and the trenches were made accessible to visitors. The same, however, was not true for the German positions; German visitors and commemorators were unwanted (see Other Sources: No. 2). It was not until almost 100 years later that the time was ripe for joint commemoration with Germany here in Alsace as well. Since 2003, a committee of French and German scientists, researchers, and archivists has been working to preserve the memorial, starting with the restoration of the summit cross. This was inaugurated with a Franco-German ceremony. Restoration of the entire site began in 2009 and was completed in 2013, funded in part by the European Union and the *German War Graves Commission* (VDK) (Comité du Monument National du Hartmannswillerkopf 2014). The inclusion of the German perspective was initially carried out gradually, by

naming the German regiments involved in the battles in the crypt for the first time, and culminated in 2017 with the opening of the *Historial* by the two heads of state.

The *Historial* HWK is the brainchild of Jean Klinkert, director of the *Historial* (and the "heart and soul" of the institution) and head of the Colmar Tourist Office. Klinkert was inspired to create the *Historial* by his grandfather, who was mayor of Colmar for 30 years (Klinkert 2020). He was also guided by the *Historial* in Péronne – a monoperspectival memory was to be similarly broken up at Hartmannswillerkopf. Today, a motivated team of on-site specialists works with Klinkert, of whom Florian Hensel as curator of permanent and special exhibitions and Thierry Ehret as book author deserve special mention (Ehret 2015). In addition, there is a Scientific Advisory Board with German and French members, among the latter several Alsatians. Thus, the awareness of the special historical situation between Germany and France is always maintained and flows into the design of the exhibitions.

The *Historial*, whose building blends inconspicuously into the natural surroundings thanks to its almond shape and use of wood, is intended to make the battlefield comprehensible. It is not conceived as a war museum, but as an information center and starting point for visiting the battlefield immediately adjacent to it, with its trenches and barracks, dugouts, machine gun emplacements and still rudimentary components of equipment used in the war, most of which are very well preserved. The exhibition spaces are mediated by contemporary documents and objects, but mainly by audiovisual presentations and interactive monitors. (Fig. 4) The *Historial* contains only a few uniforms as well as some models of the guns and shells typical of this battlefield, and a trench with examples of actual wartime archaeology. The center of the exhibition is a darkened circular hall in which a film plays on a wide screen, suggesting the battle amidst an abstractly depicted landscape, while off-screen voices quote from French and German soldiers' diaries and letters of the time. One hears the despair of the situation, the physical suffering in sub-zero temperatures at 1000 meters, the constant attacks and counter-attacks, the shifts in position. But one also hears the strong awareness on both sides of making a necessary sacrifice for the fatherland here. At the same time, the course of the battle is shown on a topographical 3-D map with luminous signals. The whole thing is – this is confirmed by visitors again and again – a sensitive and direct presentation of the events of that time and the emotions of the soldiers. Furthermore, the names of all German and French soldiers who fell at Hartmannswillerkopf are listed alphabetically in an electronic file in the information center and can be looked up. The list can also be completed by visitors. Also on display is a precise model of a cable car at Hartmannswillerkopf at the time, as well as a 3D view made of wood of all the medical posts, field hospitals, etc. on the German and French sides.

The way a nation presents, processes, and interprets its war sites has a major influence on how historical events are anchored. On the *Historial* website and in the accompanying brochure, it is therefore pointed out that, in addition to commemora-

tion, the exhibition primarily aims at education, with the idea of dialogue and reconciliation already expressed in the German title: *Hartmannswillerkopf – Ihre Geschichte wird unsere Geschichte* (Hartmannswillerkopf – Your story becomes our story) (see Other Sources: No. 2). At the same time, the permanent exhibition does not try to harmonize, but to points out differences:

> Beyond the local vision, the permanent exhibition constantly keeps in mind the duality and the Franco-German friendship, from the end of the war, when the combatants of both sides meet on the battlefield, to the international commemorations [...] (Other Sources: No. 3).

The Historial's special exhibitions are similarly positioned (see Other Sources: No. 4, 5). The *Historial*'s target group consists primarily of middle and high school students from all over France and Germany, although it is striking that on the French side, children as young as eight or nine are expected to visit a war museum and battlefield. This is certainly due to the fact that the French are more deeply rooted in the history of their own nation than their German counterparts. Through didactic projects, the *Historial* wants to actively involve students and keep the memory of the war alive (Comité du Monument National du Hartmannswillerkopf 2020). However, it sees itself as an educational site not only for school-age children, but also for adults, for example through events and conferences. The *Historial* Museum also attracts many tourists who visit the Hartmannswillerkopf as part of excursions to Alsace. In all its offerings, the memorial and museum site aim to preserve the binational view of history (Comité du Monument National du Hartmannswillerkopf 2020). By aiming to be a place of dialogue, the *Historial* tries to create a common culture of remembrance (Comité du Monument National du Hartmannswillerkopf 2020). The multiperspective reappraisal of history in a memorial is intended to be groundbreaking for the shaping of the Franco-German culture of remembrance and for the European Union (Krumeich 2018).

With this concept, the *Historial* proved successful from the start. In 2019, it had a total of almost 40,000 visitors, 64% of whom were French, 25% German, and 6% from Switzerland (Comité du Monument National du Hartmannswillerkopf 2020). In the fall of 2021, despite being closed for a period due to the Corona pandemic, the *Historial was* already able to record its 100,000th visitor – she came from Austria. Whatever the individual motivation to explore the *Historial* and the battlefield, without a doubt this effort to make the war accessible in its terrible reality leaves a strong impression of. The *Historial of* Hartmannswillerkopf is and remains an important historical bridge between Germans and French people and other Europeans. And it sees itself quite explicitly as a stage on the way to a genuine common European memory of the First World War.

Conclusions: War experience as a shared heritage?

In the end, the difficult question arises as to how far it is possible, in the commemoration of the First World War, to transcend national borders and perhaps even to arrive at a common European memory, as a historical underpinning and thus an essential building block of European unity. It is hardly conceivable that a truly unified remembrance can be achieved through dialogue alone. The ways in which the various nations experienced the First World War are far too different for that. And the long periods of remembrance and commemoration or non-memoration have also been too historically formative for that. Thus, while it is hardly possible to completely overcome national perspectives, traumas, and pains, it is good to have places like the *Historial* in which to enter into conversation, to see how the people of the other nations involved in the war fared, and to see what hopes arise from this, all the way to a European identity based on the idea of unbreakable peace in Europe that is common to all (Leggewie 2011; Assmann 2018b).

What is possible and desirable, however, is for each country to take its neighbors' commemorative traditions seriously as part of its shared history. For example, this would include France recognizing the fact that the German soldiers were not simply brutal aggressors either, but went out and fell in defense of their fatherland – just like the French *poilus*. The Germans should be aware that they fought this "defensive war" in France and in many other places, and that neighboring nations had to endure horrendous suffering as a result, until they finally defeated Germany. French people, Belgians, and British people, on the other hand, should take seriously the fact that German soldiers fought and fell at the Somme and before Verdun not because of a German "grab for world power" but in defense of their fatherland. Only in this way can war memory become a kind of "engine of Europe" (Leggewie 2011, p. 32) in the long run.

The new war in Europe, triggered by the Russian aggression on Ukraine in the spring of 2022, naturally shifts the perspectives on the wars of earlier times, and not least on the First World War. War is once again and quite unexpectedly becoming a terrible reality for all Europeans. While it has been the intention of the *Historial* and many other war museums to show the war of the past with a kind of apotheosis of a new international understanding, it will be necessary in the future to bring the pressing reality, the terrible images of immense destruction, the horror of violence and endless suffering, which is updated again and again by the media, into the presentation of historical wars in a new way. For those who are shown daily the devastation in the cities and villages of Ukraine might naturally feel less interested in, say, the trenches and shell craters on the HWK or before Verdun and on the Somme. A new museology will be needed to readjust the relationship between history and contemporary experience for visitors of all nations and ages.

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