

## Representations of War in Western Europe, 1939-1945

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This paper proposes to think experimentally about representations of war in Western Europe - referred to here as the countries of Western Europe invaded and occupied by Nazi Germany (France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Denmark and Norway) - during and after the second World War, through the comparison with the Great War and with the same war on the Eastern Front. In doing so, it tries to suggest some elements which might contribute towards an understanding why « In contrast to the post-1918 period, the rupture of language and imagery which followed the second World War was profound and enduring » (Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, p. 8). It first addresses the issue of the coexistence, in Western Europe, of traditional codes of warfare with the unprecedented forms of violence of the Nazi *Weltanschauungskrieg*. A second set of questions investigates the consequences of a radically new geography of mass death for the representations of war. The third part of the paper describes how memories of the second World War were cast in the framework offered by the Great War, despite the loss of meaning of its most structuring elements, such as the notions of army, soldier, front-line, battlefield and Nation.

### 1. Ancient codes of warfare in the Age of *Weltanschauungskrieg*

It is indispensable for a proper understanding of the representations of war on the Western Front to recall that the second World War, which introduced unprecedented forms and levels of violence against civilian populations in these societies, also, and, chronologically, first of all, constituted a partial return to codes of legitimate violence that had been transgressed during the first World War. The most emblematic example of this is the choice, respected by all belligerents on all theatres of war, not to use combat gas. Even though the Wehrmacht had produced and stocked large quantities of it, the constant refusal by World War I veteran Adolf Hitler to use it in even the most desperate military situations, while simultaneously putting lethal gas to unprecedented use against

civilian populations, shows the complex nature of nazi warfare, transgressing thresholds of violence in previously unimaginable ways, while restoring certain other thresholds. The chasm between an ethic applied to the military and a different ethic applied to certain categories of civilians as revealed in this example was doubled by a more general chasm between different adversaries. We will mention three examples of the restoration or the endurance of traditional codes of « rightful warfare » in Western Europe in an age of total war: first the behaviour of German troops during the invasion in 1940 and the permanent references to 1914 in this context; second the policy towards prisoners of war by the Nazi Army and State and third the figure of the franc tireur as both a model and a moral interdiction for resistance movements in the occupied countries.

The memory of the atrocities committed by the German army against the local civilian population during their invasion 24 years earlier, caused a mass psychosis and a flight southwards of millions of inhabitants from Belgium and the North of France in May 1940. Yet, their fears were contradicted by the events. The disciplined behaviour of the German troops, their correctness and, in some reports, even their courtesy towards civilian populations created a crucial psychological setting that contributed to the widespread acceptance of the occupation during the first year of the war at least. Most refugees returned home in the course of the summer of 1940. The occupier and the collaboration movements even inverted the accusations, indicting the national authorities who contributed to the panic, propelling the population on the roads, while they could safely have stayed at home. Mayors who « abandoned » their post and thus the population for which they were responsible, were revoked and replaced. In Belgium in particular, collaborationist movements and the occupier prosecuted those responsible for the arrests and abduction to Southern France of individuals suspected of intelligence with the enemy: notorious pre-war nazis, pro-German elements and German nationals or former German nationals, for good part Jewish refugees. The arbitrary character of the arrests and the fact that Jews and anti-Semitic New Order elements were arrested on the same footing, the « inhuman conditions » of the « deportation » and even the « atrocities », in particular one episode whereby 21 suspects were executed by panicking French troops, retreating from Abbeville, among whom the Flemish fascist leader Joris van Severen,

served partly as a justification for their collaboration, partly as a final condemnation of the Old Order, deemed responsible for an inadequate response to a legitimate, because disciplined, German invasion. In France too, the panic accompanying the collapse was portrayed as a proof of the moral fallacy of the Third Republic. Accusations of atrocities again served to inverse the moral responsibilities for the violence of the invasion. The most notorious case of this is Jean Moulin's attempted suicide, when the German invader tried to force him as prefect in Chartres to sign a document accusing French colonial troops of atrocities committed in the region. Discipline and the renaissance of time honoured warrior codes were central to the way nazism portrayed itself and the representations of a rightful invader versus a wrongful defender continued the inter-war propaganda on false and true atrocities, *Schwarze Schmach* (the Black Shame) included.

Societies who had no experience with German invasion and modern warfare in general were potentially even better predisposed towards the new German « correctness ». Denmark allowed German troops to take their positions on Danish territory without any form of opposition nor any manifestation of violence, be it on the German or the Danish side (the walk-through that was twice refused by neutral Belgium). The presence of German troops and the absence of violence was well accepted by Danish society at large until well in 1943. The Netherlands on the contrary were genuinely shocked by the German invasion, which bombed the country into capitulation in five days time, in particular through the massive destruction of Rotterdam. The invasion brutally introduced the Netherlands to modern warfare and thus, in more than one way, to the twentieth century. The inconceivable nature of the event for the Dutch population was wonderfully expressed by the declaration of the Queen following the invasion, invoking its « unprecedented character » - never mind Poland and Czechoslovakia only months earlier, or most of Europe two decades earlier. Yet, after this initial shock of violence administered from the air, the exercise of violence would be very mediated by the occupier and generally rejected by the population, resistance movements included, until the liberation of the territory through German capitulation five years later, as we will develop later on.

The « correct » behaviour of German troops in 1940 was not only a matter of propaganda, neither more nor less than the atrocities of 1914. Both challenge the general validity of concepts of « brutalisation » - which the soldiers of 1914 could not yet have undergone, while it should have eroded the norms by which the troops of 1940 behaved. German troops continued to behave « correctly » for most of the occupation. Duty in a Western European country was considered as a leave of combat service - which it mostly was. Paris, Amsterdam, Copenhagen or Brussels were tourist destinations for a majority of soldiers stationed there and there was no confusion possible between the behaviour towards occupied populations in the West and in the East. Military tasks - mostly the absence of military tasks - were functionally separated by the occupation apparatus from the tasks of policing or implementing persecution. It is only in the very last phase of the occupation, when the allied landing had brought the war back to Western Europe, that random atrocities against civilian populations did occur, such as Oradour, or Putten or against soldiers, such as in Bastogne. It is only then that, in a combat situation, confusion between East and West (as was prominently the case in Oradour) could occur.

« Brutalisation », affecting behaviour towards fellow human beings in general, has to be complemented by racial hierarchies, causing radically different behaviour by Wehrmacht soldiers in one geographical theatre or the other. Next to racial contempt on the East stand vague feelings of cultural inferiority and unease reported by German soldiers and even by party officials stationed in Paris. The French resistance novel *Le silence de la Mer* about a German officer billeted with a French family, is at least as revealing of German as of French attitudes.

The treatment of prisoners of war by Nazi Germany similarly illustrates the coexistence of scrupulous respect for international conventions and systematic decimation. One of the immediate effects of the strategy of the Blitzkrieg were the huge numbers of prisoners of war. In the French case this meant the whole French army. Of one million and a half soldiers made captive in May and June 1940, almost one million would remain in German hands until the end of the war. About twenty thousand of them died in captivity, which can be considered, taking into account the living conditions of ordinary German civilians during the last months of the war, a measure of natural mortality. Of the three

hundred thousand strong Dutch army, only twenty thousand soldiers were abducted in captivity, and all were liberated by the end of the summer of 1940. The liberation of Dutch soldiers, which contrasts so starkly with the French situation, was granted in exchange for an oath that each would abstain from any further combat against Germany in the future. Only about sixty officers refused to do so and most felt obliged afterwards by this oath. The discovery in May 1942 of the involvement of career officers in the creation of a Dutch underground army - explicitly organised for post-war purposes rather than to combat the occupier - led to the revocation of soldiers into captivity, but on a voluntary basis and followed by very little effect. In Belgium, about one third of the seven hundred thousand men strong army were taken to Germany in captivity, but in the course of the first year, Flemish soldiers - screened on the basis of a language exam - were liberated, while their French-speaking compatriots were held captive. The sharp discrimination between French speakers and Dutch speakers, which separated France from the Netherlands and split Belgium in two, was a matter of political calculus, whereby the latter were deemed, by cultural proximity, to be more receptive to pro-German attitudes than the former. Still, both categories were recognised in their quality of soldiers of a regular army, to which the Geneva convention applied. One single statistic expresses all the difference there is with the 5,7 million Soviet POW's in German hands, 3,3 million of whom died, half of them in a matter of months after the invasion, through starvation and mass executions.

For Western European prisoners of war, the application of the Geneva convention implied their entitlement to diplomatic monitoring (for the French captives exceptionally assumed by their own government in Vichy), registration and protection by the international Red Cross (which effectively replicated the Nazi distinction between the rules that apply to the military and the civilian), spiritual care by a national chaplain service, correspondence and post-parcels and a form of self-organisation. The status of POW was an exceptionally strong protection to the extent that there was no safer place in Nazi Europe for any Jewish man than a German-held POW camp. In the New Nazi Order, the ancient status of military prisoner (as the one of war veteran for Vichy) was the only one capable of offering protection, whereas other highly formalised status, such

as that of civil servant, offered none. Similarly, the distinction between soldier and officer, Stalag and Offlag, in captivity, remained sacrosanct. Faced with an increasingly debilitating labour shortage, Nazi authorities first offered to French POW's a voluntary transformation into civilian workers, paid a wage equal to that of German workers, in the hope of increasing their productivity. In April 1944, the labour shortage even gained the upper hand of the ultimate ideological imperative of the genocide, as the Hungarian Jews were put to work in concentration camps rather than massacred and the work of concentration camp inmates at large fully economically exploited (rather than used for disciplinary purposes only). Yet at no stage was it even envisaged to put captive enemy officers to work. Respect for military values and hierarchies proved to be a hard core of shared opinions between SS elites and military aristocracy.

The third example shifts the focus from the invader and occupier to the occupied population and how it had interiorised notions of legitimate violence in war-time. One of the most striking aspects of the very patriotic controversy around the atrocities of 1914 is that the local population, political and religious authorities, the national governments during the war and the successive post-war governments who produced reports and apologetic documents all vehemently denied the very existence of franc tireurs, of civilians shooting at soldiers, implicitly conceding that, had they existed, German retaliation would have been legitimate. At first sight, a surprising reversal occurs in 1944, when the existence of francs tireurs is blatantly claimed with a patent measure of exaggeration and outright invention of them, not by the German occupier, but by its victims. The new affirmation, suggesting a profound change in conceptions of legitimate violence, predates 1944. The very expression of francs tireurs figures as the self-definition of the French communist resistance brigades, called francs tireurs et partisans, but it is also the title, as of 1940, of a liberal Flemish resistance underground newspaper. The elimination of the national army triggers parallels with revolutionary warfare - 1870 rather than 1914 - and appeals for generalised insurrection, at least on the rhetorical level. Still, this rhetorical adoption of what during the inter-war years was still considered illegitimate, contrasted with the very controversial nature of shooting German soldiers outside the context of regular battle.

The absence of any franc tireur activity in the surroundings during the occupation is central to the collective identity of the survivors of Oradour as innocent victims. Similarly in Civitella, near Arezzo, another site of Nazi massacres against civilian populations, local memory is directed against the local partisan movement who would irresponsibly have provoked the killings, rather than against the German perpetrators of it. The legitimacy of a regular army even when killing innocent civilians appears in this popular interpretations still stronger than that of francs tireurs even when killing an illegitimate invader and brutal oppressor. The monopoly of violence sanctioned by the State continued to hold a very strong validity including in war-time societies. In the Netherlands and Denmark, where political polarisation was weak and experience with modern war absent, violent action of any kind by resistance organisations was limited. The episode whereby the Dutch Calvinist resistance organisation sent an emissary to a professor of constitutional law to submit him the question of the legitimacy of procuring documents and rationing cards for its underground activists through violent action, is eloquent enough.

In the history of Western European Resistance movements, the strategy of randomly shooting German soldiers remains exceptional and controversial. The figure of Colonel Fabien, the first communist militant who shot a German officer in the Paris metro in August 1941 is emblematic, rather than representative. In communist ranks, the strategy was contested because of the tremendous price arrested militants and innocent civilians paid in German retaliation shootings and because of its unpopularity. It was moreover questioned on ideological grounds, since shooting German mobilised soldiers, whose political beliefs, unlike those of miliciens (the French collaborationist force) or gestapistes were unknown, might hit comrades. Random shootings were incompatible with that other action of the party, inciting German soldiers to desertion and subversion through pamphlets written in German and distributed among the troops. Next to strategic opportunism, the communist resistance somehow, through this argument, recognised a special legitimacy for a regular army, compared to political militia's. The controversy was further complicated by the fact that most radical actions, such as the bombing of a

movie theatre attended by German soldiers in Toulouse, were carried out by brigades constituted by immigrants, particularly East European Jews. They stood implicitly accused of confusing their own struggle for survival with the cause of the French population at large, whose interests were best served by avoiding radicalisation of the occupation policy. The Belgian partisan movement only engaged in the shooting of German soldiers during the first weeks of 1943, pushed into radical violence by the decimation of party ranks through massive arrests and German executions of arrested communists in retaliation for attacks on collaborationists. The suicidal nature of the franc tireur strategy soon made it abandon this course and concentrate on shooting Belgian « traitors » instead. In the months before the allied landing and pressured by the exile government, the communist-lead Independence Front even abandoned its plan for calling a general insurrection at the approach of the allied armies, agreeing to a secondary role in a regular military confrontation.

The spectre of the francs tireurs pulled powerful levers in Hitler's imagination, rooted in his memories of the Great War, and each report of shootings prompted him to claim draconian retaliation, claims which were often toned down by the local officials of the occupation policy, who equally feared their counter-productivity through a radicalisation of the local population. Increasingly unwilling to protect local collaborationists movements through massive retaliation shootings by the German army, German occupation authorities would, in the last phase of the war, increasingly shift their strategy to an active support to undercover death squads, who would « privatise » political violence into a civil war between compatriots engaged in resistance and collaboration. This strategy, next to criminalising the resistance and abandoning the collaboration movements they had helped to create, also served to separate political violence - unruly and illegitimate - from the regular military confrontation the Wehrmacht was bound to face on the Western Front too and it underscored its hope to be treated as loyal contenders by the Allied armies, entitled to the codes and regulations of traditional warfare.

In Western Europe total warfare and Weltanschauungskrieg did not entirely blur the



boundaries between regular armies and militia's, between civil war and military conflict, between the « legitimate violence » of time-honoured codes of warfare and the « illegitimate violence » administered by civilians, even those involved in a struggle for survival.

## 2. New forms of violence

The relevance of the observations above are severely limited by the radically new cartography of mass death in Western Europe during the second World War compared to the first. While attaching, as shown above, importance to an appearance of legitimate military behaviour, the Nazi occupier implemented a radically new program of ideological warfare to which none of the rules of traditional warfare applied. Partly as a result of this, the difference in the human consequences of both wars applies to the absolute figures; to the chronological and geographical distribution; and, most importantly, to the distribution over different categories of war deaths. Overall figures for France, for example, are four times lower than for the Great War (four hundred thousand). For the Netherlands, with one fifth of France's population and hit harder than most of its neighbours, they do not reach two hundred thousand. In a war that by far surpassed the total death toll of the first World War, the occupied countries of Western Europe constitute an exception and even a counter-example.

Military conflict intervenes only punctually in the overall death toll in Western Europe. Of the four million soldiers killed in the service of the Reich, only 128.000 die on the Western Front, between September 1939 and December 1944. On the opposite side, the invasion of 1940 cost the lives of 7.500 soldiers in Belgium, 2.900 in the Netherlands, 2.000 in Norway and none in Denmark. Liberation in 1945 followed after the capitulation of German troops in Norway, Denmark and the greatest part of the Dutch territory. Belgium and the Southern part of the Netherlands were liberated by allied troops in a reversal of Blitzkrieg and German strategic withdrawal in a matter of days in the course of September and October of 1944, with little local casualties. Only France constitutes a partial exception to this picture. The six weeks of the campaign of May-June 1940 left

one hundred thousand French soldiers dead, in the single most deadly episode of the war for France, with daily death tolls comparable to the most deadly offensives of the Great War. Other campaigns in which French soldiers participated are dwarfed by these figures: 15.000 deaths on the Western Front between D-day and V-day, 8.500 in Italy and 8.000 in the African campaign. These numbers comprise up to sixty per cent of colonial troops, particularly Senegalese and Moroccan soldiers. Moreover, more French citizens die in Wehrmacht uniforms after 17 June 1940 than in the ranks of all allied armies combined, because of the heavy death toll on the Eastern Front among conscripts from the annexed territories of Alsace-Lorraine. All military deaths combined add up to about 150.000, or about one third of French war losses.

The second largest group of war-related deaths in France are the Jewish victims of the genocide, 75.000 of whom are murdered, mostly after deportation to Auschwitz. This group has one feature in common with the deaths during the campaign of 1940: their arrest, deportation and murder is mostly concentrated in the brief period of the summer months of 1942, when two thirds of the total number of victims are apprehended and deported. A comparable number of French citizens die in Germany in very different circumstances: POW's, workers drafted for the German industry and non-Jewish inmates of concentration camps. Taken together, these different categories of French residents, who died in Germany or German occupied Poland outside any context of military confrontation, as a consequence of mass murder, ill-treatment or natural deaths, represent another large third of French war losses. A last small third is constituted by civilians who die on French territory as a consequence of allied bombing (about 60.000), military confrontation or execution (about 10.000).

More than half of the total number of 200.000 Jews deported and killed from occupied Western Europe, were part of the relatively small Jewish community of the Netherlands at the time of their deportation. They represent fifty five per cent of all war-related deaths in the Netherlands, the remaining major categories being victims of the war against Japan, victims of bombing (both around 23.000) and victims of the famine of the winter of 1945 (15.000). 25.000 Jews are deported from Belgium, about 750 from Norway and

about one hundred from Denmark.

A very brief overview of war-related deaths in occupied Western Europe shows striking differences. Military deaths intervene for one third of war losses in France, but they are negligible in Denmark and the Netherlands and very minor in Norway and Belgium. Genocide accounts for a majority of the Dutch losses, for about one quarter in Belgium, one sixth in France, for a small proportion in Norway and very little in Denmark. Within each country, losses are also distributed very unequally. The Dutch Jewish community almost faced complete annihilation. In France the Jewish community, the annexed departments, some colonial territories such as Senegal and Morocco, the ranks of the pre-war communist party, or the departments of Normandy who were the theatre of the allied landing, take a disproportionate share of war related deaths.

Yet, for the average local community in occupied Western Europe and for France very much unlike the Great War, mass death is not part of the direct experience of families, neighbourhoods and workplaces. Neither is death at war a generational experience. Instead of a « lost generation » stands a fragmented generation, of POW's and workers (each about one million in France), of collaborationists and resisters, of exiles and victims of persecution. The « burden of war » is distributed very unequally, between the conscripts of the nation, communities targeted by the enemy's persecution and arbitrary victims. The small part - depending on each national situation - of conscripts or volunteers among the war dead, who somehow consented in the violence of war and took actively part in it, implies that for the vast majority of victims, death during the years of war happened to them, either from the air, either through an external identification by the enemy as target of persecution. Death at war was neither a national experience, nor did it, for a vast majority, occur while fulfilling a national duty.

The challenge of making sense of death at war was further complicated by the virtual disappearance of the territoriality of violence and death. The absence of a stabilised front-line during the combat of invasion and liberation scattered military burial sites over innumerable locations. The only exceptions, such as the Normandy beaches, Arnhem or

the Ardennes, concerned the allied armies mainly. Bombing sites, apart from presenting the inconvenience of being mostly sites of death delivered by the future liberators, were similarly dispersed. Exile of governments and parts of the armed forces literally projected the front-line beyond the national frontiers and dissolved the distinction between rear and front.

Deportation, an act of undeniable violence, perpetrated at the heart of civilian life, was only a prelude to murder or maltreatment. While the brutality of the round-ups and, in the case of the Jewish victims, the choice of children and elderly persons among the victims, augured badly, the cultivated ambiguity of the deportation *Nach Osten* was partly successful in entertaining margins of doubt and hope, both with its victims and with bystanders. Public manifestations, such as the protest and ensuing strike after the brutal man-hunt in the Amsterdam ghetto, were exceptions in occupied Western Europe. Deportation, to the East or to places of detention on the national territory but inaccessible to witnesses, was a deliberate mediation of the brutality of the persecution, to avoid any radicalisation of the relationship between occupier and occupied populations. Atrocities were geographically displaced in order to render their apprehension as difficult as possible. The imaginary destination *Pitchipoï* of Yiddish folk-tales for Jewish children in the French transit camp Drancy enabled them to survive while anticipating the departure for an unknown destination. The margins of uncertainty offered by deportation (rather than killing on the spot, such as implemented on a large scale in Eastern Europe by the *Einsatzgruppen*) also offered the comfort to bystanders of imagining less than the worst outcome. Occupation authorities in Western Europe also displaced atrocities socially, substituting the execution or deportation of foreign Jews for retaliation shootings or deportations of national citizens, in the hope of keeping up the appearances of a purely military occupation resorting to legitimate, defensive violence only. For arrested resistance fighters the *Nacht und Nebel* decree came to play a major role in their representations of deportation as a form of disappearance and thus a death of sorts, even if its importance was most often retroactively invested in the experience or extended beyond its actual application. Deportation was numerically the preferred deterrent to « terrorism » for the occupation authorities in Western Europe, rather than executions on

the spot. Compared to Eastern Europe again, executions mostly took place on remote locations and only rarely, in the final phase of the occupation, by public hanging or shooting. These rare occasions occupied a disproportionate place in the representation of violence by the occupier in the underground press and in the first post-liberation narratives, precisely because the occupier had allowed them to be represented.

While priding themselves on the accomplishment, in the greatest secrecy, of unprecedented crimes, nazi elites in occupied Western Europe took great care to avoid giving the impression of brutalisation. As a result, mass-murder in German occupied Poland but even the detention in atrocious circumstances in concentration camps were not only beyond what people could imagine during the war. It was also, plainly, beyond what they could witness with their own eyes. Soldiers of the Great War had given witness daily by the thousands on the apocalypse before their own eyes, through correspondence or when on leave. The full extent of German atrocities during the second World War in Western Europe was only discovered during the spring of 1945. Moreover, the deterritorialisation of death at war continued. While « missing in action » during the first World War had implied the certainty of death but the impossibility to identify corpses and pieces of corpses mangled beyond recognition, at the end of World War II « disappearance » not only implied the absence of a burial site, but uncertainty on the death itself of hundreds of thousands of individuals. Jewish survivors, relatives of arrested resisters, workers drafted for German industry, but also waiting wives of Alsatian POWs in Soviet hands or exiled collaborationists and war criminals, tragically and wryly shared a prolonged period when hope and despair coexisted as mass death mingled with massive population displacement, thus impeding any process of mourning.

### 3. Metaphorical memory

War in occupied Western Europe in the years 1939-1945 defied representation for different reasons. Some of the most structuring elements of traditional representations of war had lost their centrality: the regular army and with it the figure of the soldier, consenting participant in the violence of war, sanctioned by the task conferred to him by

the State; the notion of front-line and battlefield and with it the geographical location of death at war and the possibility of creating collective burial sites charged with a meaning, referring to events, battles lost or won. Yet, this situation was not primarily created by the advent of a new form of total war, whereby the distinctions between soldier and civilian would have been blurred. Rather, two very different wars were waged by the invader and occupant at the same time. On the one hand, the military occupation restored notions of procedural, legitimate violence. The primacy of the principle of « collaboration » in the occupation policy implied that the occupied population as such was not conceived of as an enemy of the German Reich. Correct and co-operative behaviour by both occupier and occupied would, in this view, open the way for a mutually beneficial cohabitation in a New Order under German leadership. On the other hand, separate from the military conflict, the occupier waged its Weltanschauungskrieg against its ideological enemies, whom he denied any form of recognition as part of the same humanity, let alone as equal contenders in a military contest to whom the rules of honourable warfare applied. This persecution was witnessed by infinitely less individuals than the violence of the war of the trenches. This violence, concentrated as it was on decimated communities, was not part of the individual experience of a vast majority, since it did not intrude the horizon of their networks of kinship, neither the visual horizon of what they could witness with their own eyes. This, ultimately, challenged the Nation as a framework for representing and interpreting war. The Nation, for the defeated countries of Western Europe, had failed in war; only a minority of the war dead died while serving its defence or reconquest; mass mortality had not been a national, but a very fragmented experience.

The distinctions enumerated above between the « total war » of 1914-1918 and that other « total war » of 1939-1945 were largely lost on contemporaries of the events, who could not fail to be impressed by the continuities suggested by the chronological proximity of both conflicts. Western European societies in general and French and Belgian society very concretely, had been introduced to massive levels of violence and death two decades earlier. Representations of the effects of modern war impregnated inter-war culture, as has been convincingly described by Jay Winter. The references to the Great War were inescapable - as exemplified above they even determined the perception and thus for

good part the course itself of the events. Representations of the second World War were inevitably cast in the framework offered by that first, paradigmatic World War. The evocation of this war, the ways to present a violence that had been in good part withdrawn from the experience of contemporaries, was necessarily referential, because it used the same language and rituals, because it was integrated in the workings of the apparatus of social memory, ranking from the sociability of veteran's organisations to legislation, administration and even the physical buildings destined for the care of war victims.

As a consequence, in Western Europe, a violence that was not, in fact, « collective », i.e. striking the population in an equally diffused measure, was, to a great extent « collectivised » in memory. Mass-death and the metaphor of the front was the dominant way of remembering, even to some extent in countries, such as the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway, that had not participated in the first World War. The challenge for post-war society was not the scale of the violence it underwent, but its highly selective nature. The central question was how to reconstitute a community, how to invent a common experience to substitute for this disrupted past. The answer of commemorators to this highly selective violence would be a highly selective commemoration, whereby certain experiences, certain groups and certain symbols came to be seen as common to all, as characteristic of a « national » experience. This metaphoric memory - the *pars pro toto* - propagated common symbols of what had been an all but common suffering.

A consensual, national commemoration of resistance was almost immediately put into place. Rituals stemming from a military context - banners, parades, monuments to the unknown soldier - and celebrating victory through combat were however hardly convincing in the post-1945 context and in a matter of months, resistance formations lost much of their capacity to function as national *milieu de mémoire*, as standard-bearers of a national memory by proxy. In the course of the second half of the 1940s and continuing into the 1950s a different and more powerful memory is in the ascendancy: the « memory of the camps ». Not only did the shock of the carnage and the image of the skeleton-like survivors provoke a shock of comparable impact with the slaughter of the war in the

trenches, it also allowed for a patriotic commemoration. Among the returning survivors of concentration camps, the arrested resistance fighters and political opponents represented a new generation of poilus of a new war of unedited cruelty and heroism. Symbols of their extreme experience - barbed wire, camp barracks, human beings packed in freight cars, prison uniforms, shaved heads, SS prison guards, dogs and watchtowers - constituted a powerful language representing the war experience tout court - including the experience of groups of the population whose individual trajectory had never included any of it.

The first to assimilate the symbolism of the univers concentrationnaire were POWs and workers. They aspired to be included in the aura of incomparable suffering and patriotism that surrounded the hero-survivors of the camps. Commemorations establishing a direct link between the horror of the « deportation » and the horror of the Great War were at least as influential as the ones establishing a link between the victory of 1918 and the « victory » of the resistance in 1945. The language and the symbolism of « deportation » gradually supplanted earlier commemorations centred around the resistance. Political controversy and popular scepticism had devalued the aura of the resistance as unsuspected heroes. The memory of resistance and deportation underwent in fact a fusion in their public representation. On the one hand, undisputed resistance heroes were the ones who had proven and paid their heroism with deportation to Nazi camps. On the other hand, all survivors of the camps were represented as resistance heroes, whose deportation had been the consequence of their patriotic or at least anti-fascist opinions and activities. This implied the marginalisation of « lesser martyrs » who had claimed to be part of the univers de la déportation earlier: POWs and, particularly, workers. This also implied the exclusion of or the assimilation with anti-fascists and patriots of all other victims of Nazi persecution, and particularly Jewish survivors of the genocide. By the early 1950s organisations of « deportees », representing themselves as the representatives of both heroism through national resistance and martyrdom through victimisation by the Nazi persecutor are the only officially accredited, generally respected milieu de mémoire of the second World War in liberated Western Europe.



During the 1950s « deportation » became a cultural icon with a codified symbolism in monuments, rituals, expositions and publications. Most concentration camp sites were organised as places of remembrance according to this « icon » in the late 1950s and in the course of the 1960, both in the DDR (Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, Ravensbrück) and the BRD (Dachau) as were national sites of remembrance of persecution (the Breendonk camp, the *journée nationale de la déportation*). They were an awkward historical construction, creating a confused image of national heroes victim of the supreme horror applied by Nazi henchmen, including gas chambers. Workers and POWs were explicitly excluded from this extra-ordinary univers concentrationnaire, Jews, for whom the gas chambers were essentially designed, more implicitly so. The metaphor, the *pars pro toto*, was reduced to a narrow construction of national martyrdom, to the smallest common denominator of the multiplicity of national experiences during the war. The axiomatic profession that the war had been a collective ordeal had found its expression in the formalised symbolism of « deportation » whereby the best of the nation had suffered most. The occupied countries of Western Europe were mourning their deaths, who died in horrific circumstance, in a way that was reminiscent of the post-1918 period, with that difference that their experience was not part of the recognisable personal experience of the overwhelming majority of the population. Constructed as it was as a peculiar combination of inexpressible horror and staunch heroism, the univers concentrationnaire was a remote abstraction in which almost none of the contemporaries, including most victims of Nazi persecution, could recognise their personal experience.

The effect of this gross inadequacy of collective ways of remembering the war was some form of alienation between private memory and public discourse. Public remembrance, at the level of monuments, organisations and discourse, often contradicted private memories to the point of inauthenticity. Contrary to the collective mourning after 1918, which helped individuals in the process of surviving and overcoming, the heroicised remembrance after 1945 often rendered this process more difficult. This also explains why this particular kind of remembrance was so short-lived - contrary again to many of the timeless rituals inaugurated after 1918. The emergence of the memory of the genocide in particular shattered the very idea of a « common experience », of a nationally shared

destiny, from the early 1960s onwards. In the longer run, an experience as shattered and fragmented as the Nazi occupation of Western Europe could only generate a shattered and fragmented memory.