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War in the Museum: The Historial of the Great War in Péronne and the Military History Museum in Dresden

Abstract:

This article examines how contemporary war museums represent war and war-making. It looks at and compares the ideas underpinning the permanent exhibitions of two museums – the Historial of the Great War in Péronne (France) and the Military History Museum (MHM) in Dresden (Germany) –, analyzing examples from the exhibitions to illustrate the argument. It also discusses the architecture of these museums and their respective horizontal and vertical configurations. Our analysis demonstrates that the Historial promotes an anti-war message in the name of European reconciliation whilst the narrative put forward by the MHM allows for the possibility of war. On a theoretical level, it shows that a cosmopolitan mode of remembering, although consensus-oriented, can create surprisingly different political positions whilst suggesting that an agonistic turn in representing war and war-making in the museum, with an onus on multiple, even conflicting, perspectives, can help respond to contemporary challenges related to difficult history.

Keywords:
war museums; cultural turn; Military History Museum in Dresden; Historial of the Great War; cosmopolitan memory; agonistic memory

Both the Historial of the Great War in Péronne (opened in 1992) and the Military History Museum (MHM) in Dresden (reinaugurated in 2011) have attempted to bring to the fore new ways of presenting war in the museum. The endeavour to exhibit the cultural history of war and militarism underpins both museums' approaches and both emphasize that they place the human being at the centre of their exhibitions. Research suggests that there is an affinity between the two (Thiemeyer 2010b). When asked what other museums inspired the renovation of the MHM, some of the actors involved in the latter project mentioned *expressis verbis* the Historial, whilst still emphasizing the unique features of the MHM (Interview with B. Kroener, 29 March 2017; Interview with M. Rogg, 2 June 2016; Interview with H.-U. Thamer, 20 April 2017).[1] Despite the two decades separating them, a comparative analysis of the Historial and the MHM is revealing in terms of how war and war-making are displayed in museums. At first glance, their approaches appear related, yet they have produced different outcomes. In order to understand better their modes of representation, we draw upon the distinction between antagonistic, cosmopolitan and agonistic modes of remembering, and we consider the hegemonic dimension of victimhood-centred cosmopolitan memory discourses in recent decades (Cento Bull and Hansen 2016). In addressing which modes of memory they use, the similarities and the differences between the two museums become clearer as well as the tensions embedded in their approaches.

'Museum analysis', understood as case study analysis, can shed light upon 'general social, political and cultural relations', also considering that exhibitions 'stage orders, histories and identities and thus permanently convey particular interpretations of the world' (Baur 2010: 8; Baur 2013: 447).[2] War exhibitions 'are suitable to set down a political marker' (Thiemeyer 2010a: 20). Furthermore, looking comparatively at museums allows for the identification of contrasts and similarities and hence can enhance the value of critical interpretations (Tzortzi 2015: 6). This article begins by establishing the conceptual framework for the discussion. The ideas and processes leading to the opening of the two museums are then presented, drawing on specific

[2] All translations of direct quotations from German and French into English are by the authors of this article.

examples from both permanent exhibitions. The implementation of these concepts is further studied through an analysis of the architectural redesign of the two buildings, and in particular their horizontal and vertical configurations. This discussion leads to conclusions about how each museum presents different attitudes to war, despite the fact that both are strongly indebted to the cosmopolitan-oriented cultural turn in the presentation of war heritage. The Historial promotes a strong anti-war message in the name of European reconciliation which ultimately loses sight of issues of power and politics and is therefore unable to address more radical perspectives on how to end wars whilst the MHM allows for the possibility of war through almost equating war with nature and through a more open attitude to military intervention. Thus, we show that different – even contrasting – positions can be represented using a similar museological language, with a common conceptual origin. Our research is based on internal documents, exhibition catalogues and other official publications, interviews with relevant actors, as well as on several visits to the museums.

The Cultural Turn. Cosmopolitan and Agonistic Memory.

From the mid-1960s, the historiography of war started moving away from its traditional military history approach, with a focus on technology, battlefield tactics, and military leaders, towards an emphasis on war 'as a social and cultural phenomenon' (Evans 2007: 49). Such developments are part of the broader 'cultural turn' in historical analysis, which came to complement and supplant the previous shift towards social history typical of the first two generations of the French *Annales* school (Hunt 1989; Kühne and Ziemann 2000; Prost and Winter 2004). Furthermore, this cultural turn in historiography has been concurrent with the so-called 'museum boom' or 'museum phenomenon' (Beier-de Haan 2005). Historical anthropology, which examines 'the actions, the suffering, the feelings and the thoughts of the human being rather than abstract structures and processes' along with cultural history have left a significant trace on the configuration of exhibitions and museums about war in the past three decades (Thiemeyer 2010b: 125-127). As a result, there has also been a trend in war museums in Western Europe to go against more traditional modes of representing war and war-making to do with military strategy, technological development, sacrifice and serving one's country, replacing them with an approach focusing on individuals, on their experiences, emotions, passions, and suffering.

We argue that this approach is also connected with the institutionalization of a cosmopolitan mode of remembering, which focuses on victimhood: 'narratives of the past take as their point of departure the experience of the suffering of the victim and his or her descendants, while the image of the "hero" in the traditional sense disappears from the stories' (Cento Bull and Hansen 2016: 391). Furthermore, this cosmopolitan mode of remembering is centred on the Holocaust, a central reference point 'in the global age', and aims to legitimize the expansion of a global liberal human rights regime (Levy and Sznaider 2006). Against this backdrop, national differences aside, the memorialization of the First World War, at least in the Western European context, has also tended to follow this trend, placing emphasis on victimhood and on the absurdity of war-induced human suffering. Yet the focalization on victims' memory also fosters de-politicization and the erasure of the social and political conflict underlying historical events and linked to suffering in the past (Wahnich 2005; Cento Bull and Hansen 2016). Particular tensions can be detected, between the focus on the individual making his/her way into war history and war museums and the often decontextualized, abstract, cosmopolitan memory mode, which highlights the victim experience: individuals are almost reduced to their status as victims. Moreover, these tensions can be conducive to an antagonistic backlash, embodied by a visible resurgence of nationalistic and xenophobic memory discourses throughout Europe and elsewhere, discourses which often also resort to victimhood claims (Cento Bull and Hansen 2016; Lim 2010a; Lim 2010b). The consensual cosmopolitanism promoted by liberal elites 'cannot grasp or give expression to average people's experiences of conflict and struggle, and therefore leaves dangerous gaps for extreme nationalism to fill' (Cento Bull *et al.* 2018: 3). Thus, the contemporary rise of radically conservative and far-right movements in both Western and Eastern Europe (e.g. France, Hungary, Poland, Germany, Italy, Austria) can be associated with a straightforward questioning of hegemonic memory discourses and practices.

One way to resolve such tensions and potential mismatches involves the reinstatement of politics and social conflict into the fabric of memory by enabling counter-hegemonic memory discourses to take part in these discussions and representations. The so-called 'agonistic mode of remembering' is able to encompass these differences: it does not look for consensus, and acknowledges the existence of a multitude of emotions and passions, as well as of conflict and strife, as underpinning the political. It recognizes the role that power, conflict, and antagonisms play in the

shaping of memory discourses (Cento Bull and Hansen 2016). It 're-politicises the binary categories of good and evil' and thereby 're-politicises the relation of present society to the past' (Cento Bull *et al.* 2018: 4). Furthermore, accounting for conflict and socio-political struggles is not meant as a simple presentation of opposing sides, but should also open a space for contingencies and undecidability (Molden 2015: 128, 135; Cento Bull and Hansen 2016: 395; Cercel 2018: 7). Research on war museums has started to apply these theoretical elaborations to various case study analyses, including one on the MHM. Such research suggests that an agonistic turn in museum narratives could prove fruitful in order to better tackle contemporary socio-political challenges in representing difficult history (Clarke *et al.* 2017; Cercel 2018; Deganutti *et al*. 2018; Cento Bull *et al.* 2018).

Cultural History and the Musealization of War

The Historial of the Great War: Everyone Is a Victim

The initiatives towards the establishment of a war museum in the Somme can be dated back to the mid-1980s: they are connected with the decentralization process which took place under the presidency of François Mitterrand, establishing the framework in which initiatives at a local level could be implemented (Krumeich 2012: 645-646). It was Max Lejeune, President of the General Council of the Somme Department, who particularly pushed for the creation of a museum of the First World War in the region, drawing on the well-established 'battlefield tourism' in the area, but also in order to provide a counterweight to the preeminence of Verdun in French First World War memory. Although often occluded in French memory by Verdun, the Battle of the Somme was a Franco-British offensive which mobilized the full force of the Commonwealth and with it the armies of no less than thirty nations. The proliferation of cemeteries and memorials dedicated to soldiers of the German and colonial allied armies in the Somme, along with the significance of the battle in the memories of the implicated nations, meant that any new development would need to be international in character.

A first report drafted in 1986 by consultant Elisabeth Ramus delineates the core principles that would underpin the approach of the Historial. The project was envisaged as international, through the presentation both of the daily experience of participants from all nations involved and of different explanations on the outbreak of the war, as

conceived by historians of different nationalities. The institution was not intended to be a military museum in the style of the imposing Army Museum in Paris, displaying only arms, medals and strategic aspects of the battle; nor a memorial, disconnected from the present; nor a collection of curiosities. It was not meant to be a didactic museum, concerned with retelling the events of 1914-1918; nor a purely aesthetic space where objects were tastefully, but not thoughtfully, displayed. For Ramus (1986: 27), these hazards were to be avoided through the development of 'a dynamic scenario, which would sensitize the audience to the everyday life of the people of the different belligerent countries and allow for the simultaneous confrontation of their experiences'. Hence, the exhibition was intended to break with the representations typical of military museums, proposing instead a focus on daily experiences related to war. Ramus also pleaded for the co-optation of an academic team to ensure credibility and quality.

In order to put these ideas into practice, an international group of historians, all specialists of the First World War, was brought together. Starting in 1987, they convened regularly and drafted the concept for the exhibition (Krumeich 2012: 647). The core team eventually consisted of Jean-Jacques Becker, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, Annette Becker (French), Jay Winter (American), and Gerd Krumeich (German). An architectural competition was won by Henri Ciriani, who was commissioned with the refurbishment and extension of the space of the Péronne castle. The museum eventually opened in the summer of 1992. The important role played by historians in the conceptualization of the museum, albeit in close collaboration with a team of museographers and scenographers, immediately set the Historial apart from traditional war and military history museums (Sherman 1995: 53). A relationship of mutual influence ensued, between historical scholarship and the work of the museum. The tight links between the two at the Historial are also illustrated by the establishment of an International Research Centre institutionally associated with the museum (Pursiegle 2008).

The central figure in the Historial is the *poilu*, the French civilian soldier of the First World War. Long revered in national memory, his experience was largely neglected by historians until the so-called 'cultural turn'. In a climate of renewed attention to the popular experience of the war, 'the Péronnistes felt that they were simply providing a corrective. Great War scholarship was in danger of fetishizing the *poilu*, memory was threatening to overwhelm history' (Farrugia 2015: 73). His fetishization during and immediately after the war is evident in several of the objects

on display. Arguably he is de-fetishized in the present to the extent that his experience is represented alongside his British and German equivalents. The museum's most striking and iconic representation is that of the *poilu* lying recumbent in a shallow, marble-lined dugout, or *fosse*, in the floor of Room 1914-1916. The radical decision to display soldiers' uniforms and kit horizontally and not under glass offers visitors a new perspective from which to view this archetypal figure. A shared trench culture is emphasized by the equivalent presentation of a British, French and German uniform and kit each in their own *fosse*. [**Photo 1**]

The human aspect of the *poilu* and his vulnerability are foregrounded through this innovative presentation which runs counter to traditional martial display. The Historial chooses not to focus on individual acts of military heroism but rather tells a story of universal suffering and grief, experienced by soldiers and civilians alike, heavily indebted to a cosmopolitan memory mode. The horizontal display makes explicit reference to the soldiers' deaths and prevents visitors from reflecting on what these soldiers did when they were alive before, during and potentially after the war; instead their status as victims cannot be forgotten. This omnipresent reference to death also serves to erase any political divides between adversaries and allies. Furthermore, the absence of soldiers' individual identities and emphasis on their collective suffering depoliticizes these exhibits; the symbols that link them to particular nations no longer have meaning in this cosmopolitan context of shared suffering (Wahnich and Tisseron 2001: 65). Although exhibiting the German, French and British experiences on the military and domestic fronts, the Historial does not present a truly polyphonic approach. Instead the pursuit of a common European experience and narrative provides a cosmopolitan consensus which drowns out multiple and dissonant voices.

The Historial illustrates the entanglement of war and society at large. Throughout the permanent exhibition in Péronne, artefacts emblematic of the military and domestic fronts are featured with equal emphasis, a move that was very original in 1992. In its division of space between military and civilian society, the Historial challenges the myth of separation between the fronts, aiming to restore their connection. As visitors weave between the two spheres their paths through the museum space retrace complex patterns of exchange between civilians at home and civilian soldiers in the trenches. Moreover, the museum stresses the pervasion of total war into every aspect of daily life through a focus on 'private, commercial propaganda' (Beaupré and Jones 2008: 143) drawn from the warring nations to include plates, teapots, figurines

and Christmas decorations featuring heroic representations of national soldiers, generals and politicians, or villainous portrayals of their adversarial equivalents. The label display informs the visitor that this 'war kitsch' can be considered as an indicator of popular consent to the prosecution of the conflict.

The result is that the Historial is intended to be an 'anthropological museum of the First World War that favours a multiplicity of viewpoints' (Prévost-Bault 2008: 13), which in effect means paying equal attention to the experiences of soldiers and civilians of the three main belligerents (France, Great Britain, Germany). Yet this also indicates a tension best captured by the Historial's twofold objective: on the one hand, it aims to bring to the fore several national experiences, whilst on the other it aims to underline the shared character of these experiences. This tension is in effect at the crux of the Historial's cosmopolitan mode of remembering: the conflict implied by the objective of presenting a plurality of perspectives is mitigated by the quest for a locus where these perspectives meet. This locus is the trope of victimhood. In the Historial, the horrors of the First World War become a symbol and warning for the horrors of all wars. Its pacifism is constructed by de-emphasizing the political dimension underlying the conflagration and its aftermath. Any agonistic potential that could build on conflicting perspectives and on the complexity of human emotions and passions beyond compassion for the victim is flattened out by a cosmopolitan discourse whose multiperspectivism is carefully circumscribed through the victim experience.

The Military History Museum in Dresden: Violence, an Anthropological Constant

The arsenal building in Dresden was erected in the second half of the nineteenth century, and served as an army museum from 1897, the only interruption occurring between the end of the Second World War and 1972. As a consequence of the unification of Germany and of the merger of the two German armies under the aegis of the Bundeswehr, the MHM was designated the *Leitmuseum* (leading museum) of the latter in 1994. In the 1990s, no radical changes were made to the permanent exhibition, although the first steps towards conceiving a new one were taken (Interview with W. Fleischer, 21 July 2017). In order to live up to its designation as *Leitmuseum*, the museum was in need of renewal. In this context, in 2001 an expert team was commissioned to draft a new concept, a process which was completed in the same year.

Also in 2001, an EU-wide tender for the architectural renovation of the building was announced (Interview with B. Kroener, 29 March 2017; interview with S. Müller, 21 March 2017). The competition was won by Daniel Libeskind, who was commissioned to overhaul the building. The conceptual renovation of the permanent exhibition took place over the next ten years, at the same time as the architectural extension of the museum. These processes were overseen by the male-only Scientific Council of the Military History Research Office, consisting mainly of reputable German historians. Similarly to the Historial, a close interdependence between historical scholarship and the development of the permanent exhibitions exists at the MHM. The museum is hierarchically subordinated to the Military History Research Office, the research branch of the Bundeswehr (Bundesministerium [1994] 1997: 223). There are also tight personnel connections between the Military History Research Office (whose name changed in 2013 to the Centre for Military History and Social Sciences of the Bundeswehr) and the MHM, with employees moving from the former to the latter in various positions (the current and former directors of the MHM were both researchers at the Centre before their managerial stints in Dresden).

At the same time, as it is the flagship museum of the German Army and also a national history museum, a PR dimension lies at the core of the MHM. The fact that it is an institution of the German Ministry of Defence accounts for the role it has to play on the level of national identity politics, thus differentiating it from the Historial. Moreover, the MHM has to contribute officially to 'the political-historical education within the Bundeswehr', teaching soldiers 'the values and norms of the liberal democratic order' and enabling them to 'acquire from the knowledge of the past criteria for the evaluation of contemporary political issues' (Bundesministerium 1999: 1). Furthermore, the MHM's location in Dresden indicates the profoundly interwoven rapport between the local, the national and the transnational. The carpet-bombing which took place on 13 February 1945 transformed Dresden into a key site of memory clashes and conflicts (Vees-Gulani 2008; Fuchs 2012, 2015; Joel 2013; Berek 2015).

Although the new exhibition of the MHM was inaugurated two decades after the opening of the Historial, the two museums share some basic principles. The concept of the MHM built upon the theoretical tenets of 'military history in extension', which aims to broaden the horizons of research on military and war history (Kühne and Ziemann 2000). This approach emphasizes the human dimension of war and the crossovers between the military and society in general. As in the case of the Historial,

there is a clear affinity between the ideas behind the MHM and cultural history. According to the concept behind the MHM, military history contributes to shaping 'a new cultural history of violence'. It argues that, in order to respond to contemporary military challenges, 'discussion' should not only concentrate on the 'legitimation of', but also 'on the diversity of forms and motivations related to the exertion and suffering due to violence' and should present violence as an 'anthropological constant of human behaviour'. The approach embraced by the MHM explicitly states that the 'confrontation with the very diverse forms of exerting and avoiding violence constitutes not only the leading theme of the exhibition design, but is much more than that, the unmistakable stamp of the entire museum' (Konzeptgruppe/Expertenkommission 2003: 28-29, 30, 32).

By presenting a history which starts in the 1300s and goes all the way to the present, the MHM's scope is significantly broader than that of the Historial. Furthermore, the permanent exhibition can be visited by following two different circuits, one chronological, in line with what is more typically expected from history and military history museums, and one thematic. This dual approach makes evident the entanglement of war and the military with society at large. The thematic tour in particular highlights the representation of the MHM as an anthropological museum which aims to present violence as a constant of human behaviour. Thus, a tension between 'history and anthropological universalization' (Jaeger 2017: 39) emerges, mirroring the relationship between the chronological and the thematic representations of war and war-making (also Weiser 2017: 52-54). At the same time, the attempt to equate the history of violence with the history of war, which underpins the MHM's approach, can impede the analysis of war as a *particular* 'social condition' (Hüppauf 2013: 28).

Similarly to the Historial, the MHM's narrative works towards the de-fetishization of the figure of the soldier and of military experience. The first showcase in the room on the two world wars displays a figure representing a soldier, who wears a gas mask and rides a horse recognizable only by its head, 'against a blood-red background' (Weiser 2017: 52-53). The soldier is bent forward rather than upright. One can recognize in this position and presentation a 'clear attempt to break the fascination for military paraphernalia' (Braut 2017: 201). [**Photo 2**] Another key exhibit in the same section is an olfactory gadget, which allows visitors to smell what the soldiers smelled regularly: the peculiar odour of the trench landscape, both putrid and stale.

Soldiers are also visually individualized, for example, through the display of dozens of small photographs taken before they were sent to the front, directly next to a large martial painting of Kaiser Wilhelm II. In comparison to the Historial, the MHM is more prone to recognizing the multiple facets of political and social conflict, staging them by means of such object juxtapositions. The display of biographies showing contrasting life trajectories, of political and military figures to more ordinary soldiers, has a similar function (Cercel 2018: 20-21). The desire to produce a multiperspectival exhibition was key to the MHM's renovation (Pieken 2013: 64). Yet the pluriperspectivism in the MHM is not made out of several national perspectives, but rather object juxtapositions which suggest there are several – even conflicting – ways of approaching one and the same topic (Cercel 2018). If in the Historial the experience of the Western Front in the First World War is sufficient in order to build the case against war, the scope of the narrative proposed by the MHM is much broader. In the latter museum, the First World War is addressed in the same room as the Second World War; the two conflicts are presented together as a 'Thirty-Year War'. This also suggests a more complex engagement with the political dimension underpinning this period in German and by extension European history.

The presentation of the First World War in the MHM cannot be seen as detached from the broader narrative proposed by the museum, which is distinctly present-oriented and has a definite political dimension. The MHM bases its approach on 'a shared notion of the human capacity for destruction' (Heckner 2016: 366). If war, violence and destruction are constants of human history, the case for pacifism is much more difficult, if not impossible, to make. Against this background, also considering its section on contemporary challenges and other juxtapositions in the thematic circuit, the MHM shows a higher degree of ambiguity and open-endedness in comparison to the Historial. It exhibits, for example, the 2006 White Paper delineating the guidelines for German security policy, but also the drone video of the German-ordered and US-conducted 2009 Kunduz airstrike, which caused over 100 victims, most of them civilians; a 2010 photograph of a banner bearing the inscription 'Soldaten sind Mörder zu jeder Zeit an jedem Ort' (Soldiers are murderers anytime anywhere), and two makeshift wooden ladders used by African migrants to try and jump over the fences separating Morocco from the Spanish exclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. The contrasting stances suggested by such exhibits bring the MHM closer to the agonistic mode of remembering, although the critical agonistic potential is not fully realised (Cercel

2018).

Horizontality vs. Verticality

The Historial. Pacifism through Architecture

Both the opening of the Historial and the reopening of the MHM presented architectural extensions of existing buildings: a medieval castle in Péronne and a classical nineteenth-century arsenal in Dresden. The architectural redesign is directly linked to the new concepts behind both museums. There is a salient interconnectedness between architecture, design and the use of space (architecture as *artefact*) on the one hand and the cultural and political orientations conveyed by means of the exhibitions on the other (Wischer 2012). Throughout his career, the vocabulary of Henri Ciriani, the architect behind the Historial, has been mostly Corbusian, linked with modernist social visions, with political and ethical commitments in the name of radical social change, and with the assertion of a clear compatibility between form and function (Ciriani 2002; Historial de la Grande Guerre 2016). In Péronne, his project involved adding a modernist extension, mainly in white concrete, to the back of the castle (Historial de la Grande Guerre 2016) [**Photo 3**]. 'The exterior whiteness' of the architectural add-on is 'intended to evoke the chalky soil of the Somme', whilst 'the protruding marble cylinders on the surface' refer 'to the numerous Commonwealth cemeteries' found throughout the area (Sherman 1995: 69). In designing the Historial, Ciriani placed his bet on simplicity, on an intimate inscription in the surrounding landscape, and on 'a dialogue of reciprocity between the natural and the artefact'. Furthermore, the conversation he stages 'between a new building and an existing edifice' is a 'demonstration of appropriateness with respect to the scale of the ensemble' (Beaudoin 1992: 90). The new building is a modernist addition to a medieval castle, yet the fracture it creates is tempered using Corbusian principles. The space is open and continuous. The two architectural forms merge and the contrast creates equilibrium. Furthermore, the separation between the central hall and the other galleries enables 'light to be captured and indirectly conveyed' into the former (Historial de la Grande Guerre 2016). The Historial, therefore, stands both figuratively and literally under the aegis of light. Paradoxically, this has negative consequences on the conservation of collections, as it can endanger the longevity of the exhibited objects.

The geometry of twentieth-century war memories is marked by the dichotomy (at times complemented by a dialogue) between horizontality and verticality (Winter 2017: 144). Through its architecture and spatial design, the Historial makes use of the former (Beaudoin 1992: 94; Fathi 2013: 51-69; Winter 2017: 165). One of its most surprising features, particularly striking at the time of its inauguration, are the dugouts (*fosses*), where objects used by German, French, and British soldiers are exhibited (Winter 2017: 165; Brait 2017: 193). As discussed earlier, the horizontal representation of soldiers – visitors are obliged to look down at the rectangular showcases which suggest a grave and a trench at the same time – indicates a break with the martial heroism implied by the verticality traditionally associated with heroic militarism. To the display cases in which verticality is supposed to stand for hope and peace, the exhibition design counterposes the 'horizontality of wartime cruelty and suffering'. Altogether, the horizontal axis underlying (even literally) the spatiality of the Historial 'reinforces the view that the museum is pacifist in character'. Furthermore, blending in with its surroundings, the architecture of the Historial emphasizes unity and continuity. It thereby posits the tragedy of the First World War as a key foundation of contemporary European identity. The pacifism of the Historial is that of European reconciliation (Winter, 2017: 162, 166-167).

The MHM. The Architectural Reinscription of Violence and War

In Dresden, Libeskind's project also involves an architectural extension to an existing building, but in the form of a steel and glass wedge which penetrates the imposing nineteenth-century arsenal. The architectural add-on is four storeys high, thus providing two more (exhibition) levels. Its tip supposedly indicates the point where the bombing of Dresden started on 13 February 1945. [**Photo 4**] It is worth noting that there are similarities between the architectural renovation of the MHM and the Imperial War Museum in Manchester (IWM North), another project by Libeskind, inaugurated in 2002. Libeskind's wedge is supposed to stand for the fundamental fracture in German twentieth-century history. If the horizontality-verticality dichotomy posited by Jay Winter (2017: 143-171) is applied to the MHM renovation, different meanings emerge in comparison to the Historial. Libeskind's intervention is vertical, sharp, and points to the sky. It provides a counterweight to the nineteenth-century classical building, disrupting the symmetry of the colossal order of its pillars and questioning the

monolithic and exclusionary identification it conveys (Pieken 2013: 64). By appearing to cut through the arsenal, the wedge symbolizes the brutal rupture brought about by war. Its striking unharmonious character represents a critical interrogation of German and European history, yet this interrogation is brought to the fore from a deconstructivist postmodern subject position, fundamentally at odds with the Corbusian vocabulary that heavily influenced Ciriani. If Ciriani's architectural addition in Péronne creates a contiguous, visitor-friendly space, full of natural light, and blending with the surroundings, Libeskind's wedge stands for unharmonious discontinuity (Rogg 2011). Symbolic architectural violence provides the key for interpretating the history of actual physical violence.

Libeskind's project was a provocative gesture in the local context as it severely altered a building which had not been destroyed in the February 1945 bombing. It was a charged statement which aimed to enter the debate regarding the reconstruction of Dresden, a process which mostly avoided any critical engagement with the Nazi past (Vees-Gulani 2008; Fuchs 2012). According to curator Gorch Pieken (2013: 65), Libeskind's intervention transformed the building 'into the first and largest item of the exhibition'. It loaded the edifice with meaning and turned it into a symbol of Germany's troubled past. In his analysis of the contemporary geometry of the memorialization of war, Winter (2017: 171) concludes that 'the gravity of mass death in war has indeed made it difficult for us to look up when we think about the history of armed conflict'. Consequently, 'the turn away from the vertical' signifies 'a turn away from war' (Winter 2017: 171). But this also implies that the symbolically violent inscription of verticality in the new architecture of the MHM can be connected with the reinscription of war onto the fabric of German politics and into Bundeswehr activities. This violence can be linked to the rejection of pacifism in the MHM's narrative, a rejection that becomes salient when the MHM and the Historial are compared. At the same time, Libeskind's verticality, marked by a deconstructivist vocabulary of dizzying angles, leaning curves and jagged edges, is also qualitatively different from verticality as 'language of uplifting sacrifice, of upright bravery, mostly masculine and in uniform, and of redemptive hope' (Winter 2017: 144). The latter verticality largely appertains in effect to the antagonistic mode of remembering.

Libeskind's architectural refurbishment generated the necessary spatial division for the introduction of a thematic tour as well as the more customary chronological one. The guiding idea regarding violence as an anthropological constant is largely made

possible by and illustrated within the thematic tour. The highest storey of the wedge hosts a section dedicated to the February 1945 bombing of Dresden. The section makes use of horizontal displays, indicating victimhood, but at the same time establishes direct connections between it and the previous Nazi bombings of Wieluń in Poland and Rotterdam in the Netherlands. The museum voice does not allow the potential universal identification between all victims of the Second World War, a discursive strategy often used in order to avoid assigning responsibility. Several personal stories related to the three bombings are presented as part of the exhibition, including, for example, that of Henny Brenner, one of the few Jews still in Dresden in February 1945, whose life was saved by the bombing, since it made it impossible for Nazi authorities to organize transport to Auschwitz. The narrative about the Second World War in general and such stories in particular fundamentally imply that military interventions are not always to be rejected.

In an interview granted on the occasion of the reopening of the museum, Libeskind (2011) argued that in a democracy wars can be legitimate, as they 'are not decided by a higher authority, but are a consequence of a public discussion'. Following reunification, Germany started to intervene militarily abroad, the Bundeswehr becoming a so-called 'army in mission'. Such interventions were presented in a framework which emphasized the country's international responsibility, but also the need to safeguard national interests (Thiemeyer 2010b: 15; German Ministry of Defence 2011). The new concept behind the MHM was developed in the context of 'an increased public interest for the Bundeswehr and of an extended acceptance of military interventions' (Erweiterter wissenschaftlicher Beirat MGFA 2001: 2). The exhibition itself also addresses these interventions, presenting them through the lense of Germany's international responsibility. According to a text in the exhibition, 'if Germany wants to take further responsibility in international affairs, both politicians and society need to become aware of the fact that this could - in principle - include the necessity to take military measures'. If Péronne embraces European reconciliation and pacifism through shared victimhood (a narrative that is nonetheless easier to bring to the fore in relation to the First World War than to the Second World War), the MHM shows a distinct openness towards an acknowledgment of the inescapability of war and towards the possibility of military interventionism.

Conclusions

By regarding the Historial and the MHM as two particularly important moments in the representations of war in museums and by examining their similarities and differences, this article implicitly undertakes a reconnaissance survey regarding changes and transformations of the representation of war in Western European museums in recent decades. Both museums are indebted to the cultural turn in the formulation and configuration of their displays and – albeit to different extents – to the cosmopolitan mode of remembering and focus on the human dimension of war. Nonetheless, beyond these affinities, relevant differences also exist, which indicate that the cosmopolitan memory regime can underlie multiple – even contrasting – stances and positions. The Historial emphasizes pacifism and the absurdity of war through its deployment of horizontality. In contrast, the MHM, marked by Libeskind's symbolically violent and vertical architectural intervention, does not reject war. Moreover, by attempting to equate the history of violence and war, it provides ammunition for the argument that war, protean and versatile, is a habitual state. This is a radically different sentiment from the pacifism typical of the permanent exhibition at the Historial.

The MHM is not unique in this respect. The narrative of the other war museum designed by Libeskind, the IWM North, is also indebted to the idea of 'war as an anthropological constant', almost equating war with nature (Arnold-de Simine 2006: 302). This stance seems to mirror the contemporary zeitgeist, which is very much informed by war. Military interventions abroad, terrorist attacks at home and the war against terror work towards the normalization of war as a possibility and towards a feeling of being at war. Pacifist stances and positions have in effect lost ground in the past two and a half decades. This tendency has also been made visible by our comparative analysis of the Historial and the MHM; two key moments in the development of museum narratives about war in Western Europe. Moreover, even the Historial's pacifism based on a transnational comparative approach emphasizing the commonality of victimhood is now partially offset by anglocentrism and an emphasis on heroism and sacrifice at the Thiepval Museum located at the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme, which opened in 2016 as a sister museum to the Historial (Parish and Rowley forthcoming).

The differences between the two museums also allow for questions about the limits of the cosmopolitan mode of remembering and the political stances with which it is associated. In effect, Western military interventionism in the late twentieth and in

the twenty-first century has taken place mostly under the aegis of cosmopolitan legitimization related to the memory of the Holocaust (the imperative of 'Never again!') and the increased recognition of human rights globally (Levy and Sznaider 2006). Yet this military approach contrasts with the cosmopolitan pacifism offered by the representation of the horrors of the First World War and of a European shared victimhood in the Historial. In their critique of cosmopolitanism, theorizations of agonistic memory have not engaged with these differences, yet our analysis indicates that they should be addressed (Cento Bull and Hansen 2016; Cento Bull *et al.* 2018).

Diverging memories of war play an important role in many of the current political attacks directed against (neo)liberal cosmopolitan democracy in its various forms. A plethora of examples can be brought to the fore in this respect, such as the so-called 'Holocaust Law' supported by the Law and Justice Party in Poland; the depiction of Hungary as a Second World War victim of German occupation in the official memory politics promoted by the Orbán government; Matteo Salvini's thinly veiled positive references to Mussolini's Fascist dictatorship; Jair Bolsonaro's views on the period of military dictatorship in Brazil; Marine Le Pen's denial of French responsibility for the persecution of Jews during the Second World War and her position on French colonialism in Algeria; or the pressures exerted by AFD leaders for a reconsideration of Germany's official memory politics. At best, cosmopolitan positions allow for the condemnation of such discourses without fundamentally engaging with them (Cento Bull *et al.* 2018: 4). At worst, cosmopolitan memory discourses can be appropriated and almost turned on their head by nationalist and parochial subject positions, in particular because of their focus on compassion for victims, their use of simplified moral categories and their tendency to de-contextualize and de-politicize past events.

As suggested in the introduction to this article, an agonistic mode of remembering, allowing for conflict and for the expression of counter-hegemonic positions, could represent a way out of this current situation. Despite their apparent role of (re)producing and stabilizing hegemonic master narratives and despite the commodification trend embedded within the museum boom of the past decades, museums might still be able to provide a setting in which debate and conflict are played out (Andermann and Arnold-de Simine 2012; Coleman 2013; Cameron 1971; Mouffe 2010; Pozzi 2013; Cento Bull *et al.* 2018). The representation of war and conflict in museums in particular can provide the opportunity for engaging with diverging

positions, stances, ideologies, and worldviews. In doing this, it can and perhaps even should draw attention to the social, economic and political conditions behind war and conflict. The rationale for this is not to legitimize, but rather to explain (Cento Bull *et al.* 2018).

Considering that institutionalized cosmopolitan modes of remembering and politics of representation have come under attack mainly from nationalist and right-wing positions, it might be worth subjecting them to some more soul-searching. Are they anything other than a 'civil religion' trying to give a 'virtuous appearance' to the 'democratic vacuum' of the European Union and neoliberal regimes elsewhere (Traverso 2016: 33)? Have they contributed to what appears to be their own demise? In a text written almost two decades ago, historian Sophie Wahnich (2003: 343) criticized the fact that European war museums are characterized by a 'general refusal to admit too much', suggesting that rather than being 'vectors for the democratic invention of a common future,' they are 'places where family secrets are shaped, well guarded vaults that can come to haunt future generations'. Wahnich's considerations also drew on her interpretation of the Historial, that to a large extent ties in with our own. The juxtapositions and the ambiguities addressed by the MHM provide a more complex image of war in comparison to the Historial, but this complexity is nevertheless circumscribed. There are definitely more aspects in the MHM than in the Historial that suggest a compatibility with agonism or a potential move towards agonism (Cercel 2018), yet both museums are largely indebted to the contemporary consensus-searching political project underpinned by the cosmopolitan memory regime, albeit in different forms.

Narratives centred on the imperative of 'Never again!' are just empty words if they do not tackle head-on the conditions for 'Yet again'. This in effect amounts to a critical engagement with the social, economic and political conditions and with the emotions and passions which led and lead to conflict and war. Opening up the museum space for debate, conflict and critique means repoliticizing the past in order to politicize the present. A concerted effort towards agonism in the representation of war in museums means extending the scope of perspectives, by including counter-hegemonic narratives: counter-hegemonic memories and interpretations of the past, counter-hegemonic political projects for the present, counter-hegemonic visions of the future. Presenting alternative pasts, as well as alternative presents and futures, can lead to a

broadening of visions and to a democratic widening of the scope of the representation of war in museums.

Acknowledgments

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