

Bereavement and Mourning

By [Manfred Hettling](#) and [Tino Schölz](#)

Summary

In the modern era, new forms of mourning and meaning-making for fallen soldiers emerged. The human losses of the First World War were largely mourned, honoured and remembered within historically-established traditions, supplemented by only a few new forms. This “political cult of the dead” focussed equally on the “private” and the “political” body of the fallen soldier, both allowing relatives to mourn and providing a political justification. The First World War acted as a catalyst for the global spread of the political cult of the dead. The concrete formation of the commemoration of the dead was closely linked to nation- and state-building, while factors such as cultural and religious influences, conventional systems of government and colonial traditions explain its various manifestations.

Table of contents

- [1 Meaning-Making and Mourning: The Two Bodies of the Soldier](#)
- [2 The Western Model](#)
 - [2.1 Definition and Chronological Phases](#)
 - [2.2 Veterans](#)
 - [2.3 Structural Similarities](#)
 - [2.4 National Differences](#)
- [3 Changes Caused by the First World War](#)
- [4 Beyond Europe: Adaptations and Domestic Traditions](#)
 - [4.1 Colonies](#)
 - [4.2 Religion](#)
 - [4.3 The Special Case of Japan, or: Multiple Modernities of Meaning-Making and Mourning](#)
- [5 Conclusion](#)
- [Notes](#)
- [Selected Bibliography](#)
- [Citation](#)

Meaning-Making and Mourning: The Two Bodies of the Soldier

The world war functioned as an epochal boundary, sharply dividing the time which preceded and succeeded it. The term “seminal catastrophe”, coined by [George F. Kennan \(1904-2005\)](#), emphasises its destructive power, the pulverisation of the old order and traditional contexts,

as well as a creative dimension, the enabling of something new. It has become a generally accepted cypher for the caesural character of the world war. At the same time, however, the world war is subject to the long-standing traditions and contexts that connect the 19th and 20th centuries.¹ Cultural patterns of honouring [military dead](#) reflect this dialectic of continuity and rupture. The “Great War” can only be sufficiently understood as the “seminal catastrophe” of the 20th century if its far-reaching influence, which *continued* to have an effect after 1918, is seen in the context of the courses and conditions that arose since the birth of political modernity in the revolutionary period around 1800.

The political meaning-making surrounding the soldier is at the centre of modern [commemoration of the fallen](#). The political public only turned their attention to civilian victims of war at a much later date. In the pre-modern era, before the wartime nationalisation of states and death, there were two different categories of war deaths in Europe. Firstly, princes and nobility, who were the only victims deemed worthy of mention and remembrance within an estate-based culture focussed on honour and, secondly, the great mass of ordinary soldiers. The latter were afforded little respect in the feudal estate system. At best, they were hastily buried in mass graves with simple [religious](#) ceremonies. Modern commemoration of the fallen, which has developed since 1800, evened out this feudal-hierarchical dichotomy, valorised the lone subject as an individual with his or her own name, and instead formed another central distinction: the *two bodies* of a single soldier. Henceforth, it was possible to differentiate between the private person (as a human being) and the political role of the soldier (as a member of a political union, usually a nation). The private body was and remained perishable and could be mourned by relatives. In the political cult of the dead, the political body of the fallen soldier received a secular promise of permanence, and its death was ascribed political meaning. Herein lies the true political function of the modern cult of the dead. The idea of the political nation’s continuity was linked with the promise to permanently remember the fallen. The private and the political bodies can therefore be respectively attributed to the gravesite and the memorial, each of which had different functions. The grave served to bury the material body and as a site for private remembrance and mourning. The memorial, on the other hand, functioned as a representation and embodiment of political meaning. During the world war, the German architect [Georg Bestelmeyer \(1874-1942\)](#) succinctly defined the requirements for soldiers’ graves: “Memorials should preserve the memory of an idea; gravestones merely the memory of a person.”² War cemeteries united these two elements: through the sheer mass and uniformity of the graves, they (also) became political monuments.

The political body of the fallen soldier was first represented symbolically through the preservation of the name on memorial plaques and monuments. Only later did this lead to

the entitlement to individual burial of the single dead body. The differentiation between these two bodies of a soldier is based on [Ernst Kantorowicz \(1895-1963\)](#), who distinguished the private, mortal and human body of a king from his political body, which outlives the man himself.³ The ancient concept of *patria*, which has come gradually back into use since the late Middle Ages, consolidated the idea of allegiance to a territorially limited political union. Loyalty to the *patria* could, then, supersede a religiously legitimised, universal [empire](#) and personal loyalty to a feudal lord. It was from this that the state emerged at the dawn of the modern era.⁴ The subject that Kantorowicz analysed in terms of the dynastic sovereign underwent a democratisation in the age of revolutionary and national mass movements. This included mobilisation for war, to kill and allow oneself to be killed ([Benedict Anderson \(1936-2015\)](#)), as well as an increase in the political importance of the individual. This was tied to ideas and concepts of mythical, extraordinary purity – for which the body of the fallen soldier became a symbol.⁵ The valorisation and equalisation of the political body of the soldier manifested itself after the war through, among other things, electoral reforms – both for the victors and losers of the war. The equality of death radicalised the idea of national equality and de-legitimised inegalitarian suffrage. This could also include women: in [Belgium](#), universal suffrage was introduced in 1919 – for men, war widows and women who had served in the war.⁶

Despite the significance of this new political dimension of the fallen soldier, one should not assume a fundamental separation of the political and private body. Since the 19th century, the fallen soldier has been considered a bearer of political meaning and has been represented and honoured in the public sphere through memorials. Over time, financial transfers have also been linked to this quality (the [USA](#) and [Japan](#) are paradigmatic examples).⁷ As this political aspect gained publicity, the private body could *also* become visible and be thematised in public to the same extent. Thus, these two dimensions were closely interwoven. The increase and intensification and, at the same time, public display of the private pain, mourning and suffering of family members, friends, comrades and colleagues became, as a result, utterable and presentable beyond conventional religious, ecclesiastical forms of representation. Death notices of fallen soldiers in newspapers, for example, were a form in which the private and the political body were expressed simultaneously.

For a comparative account of the political cult of the dead, it is important that several analytical differentiations are made regarding the manifestations of private mourning and political meaning-making. Firstly, between long-term cultural patterns in dealing with the war dead since the late 18th century, and single, short-term factors and respective national

circumstances during and after the world war. Secondly, any analysis of the political cult of the dead must be informed by the forms and traditions present in a society's way of dealing with dead civilians. However, this has rarely happened so far.⁸ In the following sections, the basic components of the political cult of the fallen that has emerged in Europe and North America since about 1800 will first be described in a simplified form as the "Western model" (section two). The few changes that can be traced back to the world war will then be outlined (section three). Finally, phenomena in non-European countries will be discussed and some conditions for comparative studies will be set out (section four).

The Western Model

Definition and Chronological Phases

The "political cult of the dead" ([Reinhart Koselleck \(1923-2005\)](#)) originated in Europe around 1800. It was deliberately dissociated from the dynastic cult of the dead under pre-modern princely rule and absolutism. At its core, it consists of new forms of honouring the fallen within the public realm. Its aim is to *meaningfully interpret* and morally glorify the death of the soldier. Its function is to legitimise the political community and to mobilise it for the state.⁹ Political meaning-making also enabled and encouraged public expression and representation of mourning and bereavement, in addition to religious rites.¹⁰ Mourning as a cultural form of expression and its political function influence but do not counterbalance one another. Their temporal structures are diametrically opposed. In psychoanalytic theory, mourning enables separation (from a love object) and leads to the acceptance of loss. Political commemoration, on the other hand, promises a lasting [memory](#).

The foundation of the political cult of the dead, which survives to this day, can be divided into three phases. In the *first* phase, during the revolutionary and national wars between 1789 and 1815, key forms of interpretation and methods for the political justification of military death were developed. During the 19th century, national traditions which drew on different historical experiences emerged. *Secondly*, modern commemoration of the fallen became immensely widespread during the First World War. In quantitative terms, the challenge around 1800 was analogous to that after 1914, as the ratio of the number of deaths to the total population in Europe remained approximately the same. The some 5 million deaths caused by the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars between 1789 and 1815 represent a percentage of the population on the European continent (about 195 million around 1800) similar to the 8.6 million military and 6 million civilian deaths in the world war (against a total population of about 450 million).¹¹

In contrast to the belligerent era around 1800, the military dead in the first half of the 20th century were now predominantly victims of military violence. Thanks to modern [medicine](#), the proportion of those who died from [diseases](#) and infections was comparatively low. After 1918, the mass nature of dying corresponded to a sustained presence of mourning, honouring and remembrance. Mourning and meaning-making became the two central parameters of the public way of dealing with the two bodies of the fallen, whereby mourning was paramount when it came to the private body, while the attribution of political meaning was the focus at public events. The First World War thus resulted in the propagation of existing forms on a massive scale, but did not generate new ones. In this respect, it marked the climax of the 19th century's civic-national commemoration of the fallen. *Thirdly*, the Second World War led – from 1931 in Asia and 1939 in Europe – to a multiplication of the number of fatalities. At the same time, significantly more civilians than combatants (narrowly defined) were killed. Together with the experience of crimes against civilian populations, this extended and transformed the public forms of commemorating war dead that had emerged since the early 19th century. Since the Second World War, the *creation* of meaning surrounding military death in war, which forms the core of the modern cult of the fallen, has competed with a *search* for meaning in light of the millions of civilian deaths.¹²

In summary, the “political cult of the dead” emerged around 1800 as an *idea*¹³ and subsequently established itself as a [norm](#) and *practice* in Western nation-states. First, in Prussia, after 1813-1815, in [Great Britain](#) continuously, with first signs of it after the Napoleonic Wars, then after the Crimean War (1853-1856) and after the Boer War in [South Africa](#) (1899-1902), in the USA during the Civil War (1861-1865), and in [France](#) since the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871. Outside of Europe, a political cult of the dead developed in Japan¹⁴, which was a nation state based primarily on its own traditions, in the civil wars of the early Meiji era, in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) and especially after the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). However, the modern cult of the dead only became more generally widespread after 1918. During and due to the First World War it also became more common in non-European societies. Since the Second World War, there has also been growing *competition* between fallen soldiers and killed civilians, between that which should be remembered: the [sacrifice](#), or the victims.

Veterans

For those affected by it, the First World War resulted in experiential ruptures and surges, which radically questioned many customary categories of interpretation. The changed nature of military violence and its effect on wartime memories and experience has been frequently

analysed. The differences in the experience of war, however, have been researched far less. "The common war is not experienced by everyone in common" indeed, it is also only remembered in common to a limited extent.¹⁵ Differences in religion, class, political orientation, gender, social position, and so on lead to different experiences. Additionally, there is a temporal difference: although the dead fell during the war, in most countries their deaths were not discussed extensively until after the end of the war. This resulted in varying lines of differentiation between soldiers and civilians, men and women, officers and lower ranks, and the military and politicians. However, veterans, as those who had experienced the war and its significance and were therefore entitled to explicate its legacy, proved to be the most influential group in all countries. Common to their interpretations of war was an evocation of inner qualities, especially bravery and masculinity. These qualities, they claimed, manifested themselves in soldiers, particularly given the hopelessness of individual action, as represented in classic images of war. There were also national differences, such as the emphasis on chivalry in England.¹⁶ On the whole, however, veterans often prevailed in the interpretative battles regarding the memory of the war.¹⁷

Structural Similarities

Internationally, forms of mourning and political models for justifying death in war have more similarities than differences. Six fundamental aspects shaped the cult of the fallen since the 19th century. Although a quantitative expansion occurred after 1918, hardly any innovation resulted from this.

1) *Memorialisation*, that is, the consolidation of memory through the construction of graves and memorials (and their materiality), as well as through rites, which ensure the continuity of commemoration and are also intended to integrate later generations into the process. What is referred to in German as the "eternal right to rest in peace" ("*ewiges Ruherecht*") was paradigmatically expressed and reinforced with historical comparisons by the then minister of war, [Winston Churchill \(1874-1965\)](#) in a debate on war cemeteries in the House of Commons in Westminster on 4 May 1920. The cemeteries would be "sustained by the wealth of this great nation and Empire, as long as we remain a nation and an Empire." The "stone of remembrance" (the standard, uniform symbol of a British war cemetery, alongside the "cross of sacrifice") embodied, Churchill continued, the goal of the War Graves Commission to erect a permanent monument:

and these stones will certainly be in existence 2,000 or 3,000 years hence. We know the mutability of human arrangements, but even if our language, our institutions, and our Empire all have faded from the memory of man, these great stones will still preserve the memory of

a common purpose pursued by a great nation in the remote past, and will undoubtedly excite the wonder and the reverence of a future age ... this may bring a measure of comfort and consolation to many of those who have lost their dear ones.¹⁸

2) *Individualisation* has referred to using the name of each fallen soldier since the 19th century. Since the First World War, it has also referred to burial in individual graves. This was the basis for war cemeteries, which became the norm internationally after 1918, although their history began with the American Civil War and the Boshin War of 1867-1869 in Japan.¹⁹ This norm of individualised remembrance and burial finally gained acceptance in all western, European countries during the world war. A decrease in and limitation of this practice can partly be found in colonial territories (for the fallen from the colonies) as well as in non-Christian countries.²⁰

3) *Equalisation*, that is, the anti-class and anti-hierarchical equality of the members of each respective nation, evened out differences between officers and soldiers on monuments and in commemoration rituals. Semantically, it was reflected in the fact that the designation “[hero](#)” and the recognition of “sacrifice” was granted equally to all fallen soldiers, without singling out specific, individual actions. Military [medals](#) and awards coexisted alongside this political equality. The logic of political distinctions, however, also continued to exist under the banner of national equality. Parallel to this, new differentiations and hierarchies emerged, such as the distinction between military and civilian deaths, and the continued singling-out of individual groups to which an active moment was ascribed. In Belgium, after 1918, civilian partisans and “martyrs” were, in comparison to most ordinary soldiers, especially honoured.

Additionally, a notable difference should be emphasised here: a hierarchy of death for the respective political purpose is inherent to revolutionary cultures of remembrance, while national cultures of remembrance have an egalitarian structure. Since the First World War, and especially since 1945, the question of balancing military and civilian deaths has also arisen in national cultures of remembrance.

4) *Democratisation* grew out of the equalisation of the war dead. There was no longer a distinction made on the basis of status; instead, all were integrated in the equality of revolutionary or national death. A noble “death for the fatherland/revolution” was linked to the promise of political participation. The grounding of new democratic states and nation-building after 1918 cannot be adequately understood without taking the impact of violent death in the world war into account. Conversely, however, these developments cannot be attributed solely to war fatalities.

5) *Emotionalisation* is an underlying trend in modern commemoration of the fallen. Private feelings (the pain of relatives) are expressed more explicitly and politically loaded. This emotionalisation in dealing with death first manifested itself in civilian life – only on that basis could violent death or death for the fatherland be emotionalised. Here, emotionalisation and politicisation describe different dimensions that ultimately coexisted. The political attribution of meaning *accompanied* the growing articulation of personal suffering and individual pain. Thus, politicisation did not suppress the expression of feelings, and conversely, publicly visible feelings of loss did not delegitimise the purported meaningfulness of mass death in war (with the qualification that this was much more common in defeated states after 1918).

6) A tension between *secularisation and sacralisation* lingers in all national variants of commemorating the fallen. Although mundane forms of securing permanence beyond the end of an individual's life emerged, religious forms and interpretations were frequently adopted for this purpose. And, of course, sacred interpretations of death were also available and could be utilised in parallel to others. One of the best-known examples of this is the "martyr", which always retained some degree of religious connotation, even though the term was popularised in the secularised form of the national or revolutionary martyr. The concept of the martyr has religious roots in both Christianity and Islam. In the cult of the fallen, religious and secular interpretations always coexist. This starts at the grave with the juxtaposition of religious and political symbols: a cross, Star of David or crescent moon next to an "[Iron Cross](#)", national flag or phrase like "*Mort pour la patrie*". It includes a linking of earthly promises of remembrance with transcendent salvation, as well as political interpretations that frame the political collective as both a secular entity and a sacred virtue.

National Differences

The differences in diverging national paths can be attributed to several causes.

Firstly, questions can be raised about concrete structural factors. How many deaths were there, and what was the ratio of military to civilian deaths? These quantitative aspects already point to immense differences between the respective countries.

Secondly, it is more difficult to determine who was among the winners and who was among losers beyond the obvious victorious powers, such as the British Empire, France, [Italy](#), the USA, Japan, and smaller victors such as Belgium. Of the four defeated states, only two ([Germany](#) and [Bulgaria](#)) survived the end of the war. The [Habsburg](#) and [Ottoman](#) empires fell and from their successor states only Austria (and Hungary, at the latest after Trianon) saw themselves as having been defeated in the war, while [Poland](#) and [Czechoslovakia](#) defined themselves as winners of national sovereignty. Turkey felt like both an imperial loser of the war as well as a national winner (after 1923). The supposedly rigid binary of winner/loser thus

depends on whether states experienced political renewal after 1918, and what form these changes took. In this respect, it is no coincidence that Austria, probably the greatest loser of the war, did not develop its own secular memorial day for the fallen. Instead, the Catholic All Souls' Day served to [commemorate the fallen](#). Additionally, there was an independent celebration of the foundation of the republic (12 November) – without any reference to the fallen. However, this national day never even came close to gaining approval across the political spectrum.²¹

[Russia](#) constitutes a special case. Here, the tsarist empire did not live to see the defeat of its enemy and, in the revolutionary Soviet Union, commemoration of the [revolution](#) superseded [commemoration of the war](#). Another special case is [China](#), which supported the Entente with an army of [workers](#) and eventually, in 1917, formally declared war on the Central Powers. Therefore, it can nominally be counted among the victors. However, China was outmanoeuvred by superior Japanese diplomacy in [Versailles](#) and, in consequence, viewed itself as a loser of the peace treaty.

Thirdly, the paths pursued by existing nation states as a result of greatly differing historical experiences of war or cultural and institutional influences should be considered. European nations were based more on statist (France) or social (Great Britain, USA) order systems. They were centrally or federally organised, and politically either democratic or more authoritarian. This, too, created different conditions for processing death at war. For example, the ability to hark back to a historically established state tradition played a role – it was a necessary condition for stand-alone secular forms of commemoration. This distinguishes classic nation states in Europe from the new nation states that emerged from the disintegrating empires after 1918 and, especially, from the majority of the [former colonies](#).

Fourthly and finally, thought must also be given to religious influences and the impact they might have had on political forms of commemoration. Which political agendas resulted from differing notions of death, the afterlife and salvation? The respective commemoration of the fallen is shaped and determined by religious requirements for honouring the dead and the relationship between religion and political power. This applies to Christian concepts in their many forms (Protestant, Catholic, Greek Orthodox etc.), the religious foundations offered by Islam, and principles defined by Judaism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Buddhism and Shinto, in their respective variants, with regards to honouring the dead and the relationship between religion and political rule.

Changes Caused by the First World War

The death of the millions buried and remembered after 1914 was politically justified through structures of interpretation dating back to 1789. In the newly-formed states, which were unable to hark back to nation-building wars (Belgium and the British dominions), distinctive national forms of commemoration began to emerge. Regarding the great proliferation of memorials and commemoration events, however, there are two exceptions: in the USA, the relevant forms of commemoration and mourning had already developed in the wake of the Civil War. As for Europe, in Germany (after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871) and Great Britain (after the Boer War of 1899-1902), the ratio of fallen soldiers to memorials was not fundamentally different to that after 1918.²² Aside from an increase in numbers, which had a lasting impact on public perception, there were essentially only *three* innovations. Two of them can be explicitly traced back to the First World War: monuments to or tombs of the unknown soldier as a form, and the collective minute of silence as a new ritual. War cemeteries marked the *third* innovation. They became an essential element of commemoration in Europe after 1918, but had already emerged as a separate form of cemetery in the USA during the Civil War and in Japan in the 1870s. After 1918, they rapidly became one of the best-known symbols for the First World War.

1) The concept of *monuments to/tombs of the unknown soldier* was only successful because there was a historically-established expectation that every fallen soldier would be remembered by name. Separate military and state administrations were therefore created during the world war in order to implement this right to an individual grave. The idea of the representative single burial of an unidentifiable fallen soldier arose, as a symbol for all soldiers killed in action who could no longer be identified and were therefore “unknown”. It represented a solution to the issue of burial: masses of corpses simply no longer existed physically and, similarly, a mass number of corpses and body parts could no longer be identified. The popularity of this form of expression quickly led to the “unknown soldier” becoming the central symbol for *all* fallen soldiers.

Prior to the world war, there were already some cenotaph-like graves for those missing in action, as well as separate mass graves for unidentifiable fallen soldiers. After 1918, the idea spread in European nations. Sir [Herbert Edward Ryle \(1856-1925\)](#), the dean of Westminster, effectively initiated the erection of a tomb for the unknown soldier in autumn 1920 in London.²³ The inauguration took place simultaneously in London and Paris on 11 November 1920. Tombs followed shortly after in [Italy](#) (26 October 1921), the USA (11 November 1921), Lithuania (1921, here, though, for the fallen in the “[Freedom Struggles](#)” of 1920-1921 against the Soviet Union), Belgium (11 November 1922), Czechoslovakia (1922, also for the fallen of

the War of Independence) and [India](#) (1931), to name only a few.

Two things are notable about these examples. *Firstly*, they were victorious states in the world war and/or nation states that emerged from the collapse of supranational empires, such as Lithuania or Czechoslovakia. However, the latter states did not remember the fallen of the past empire with a “tomb of the unknown soldier”, but rather honoured the fallen of their “own” nation, thus symbolising the political continuity of this nation.²⁴ The losers of the world war, the Central Powers, did not erect monuments for unknown soldiers. Germany, Austria, Turkey and Bulgaria did not remember those who had fallen in the world war with tombs of the unknown soldier.²⁵ In Germany and Austria, it was explicitly rejected: no “Western-style” monument to an unknown soldier were to be constructed.²⁶ There were indeed [monuments](#) at which unidentified soldiers were buried, however they were effectively ornamental burials of nameless fallen soldiers. At the Monument to the Battle of the Nations (*Völkerschlachtdenkmal*) near Leipzig, designed in 1913 as a symbolic, monumental tomb, fallen soldiers found by chance near the structures were buried and incorporated into the monument without this being particularly emphasised. They embodied the aura of the site as an authentic place of battle. This is similar to the Tannenberg Memorial (1927), where the unknown dead were also only an addition, rather than a symbol.²⁷

Secondly, the rapid spread of this symbol demonstrates its political power. The death of the individual for the nation was interpreted as a political endorsement of the nation and used as a source of legitimacy for the political regime. The idea that people had died for it served as a justification for the nation. An assumed continuity between past fallen soldiers and the current unity of political action was also extrapolated from this. Where this was evident in national identity, as in Poland for example, the [tomb of the unknown soldier](#) could also be used to remember those who had fallen in the world war, even if they had fought in foreign armies (for Germany, the Habsburgs or the Russian Empire) against each other and possibly killed one another. This national interpretation later became easier, as the Polish tomb of the unknown soldier also incorporated the fallen of the young nation state in its [war against the Soviet Union](#) in 1920.²⁸ In a similar way, Britain defended the empire’s claim to power by refusing the dominions their own tombs of the unknown soldier. Therefore, [Australia](#) (1941) and [New Zealand](#) (2004) did not bury their own national unknown soldiers under their own memorials until much later. They incorporated the fallen of previous and subsequent wars into the memorials, and the inauguration date of 11 November (armistice) preserved a connection to the First World War and confirmed its central importance over the course of the 20th century. This is the case in all countries whose losses in the Second World War were less severe than those in the First World War. Monuments to and tombs of the unknown soldier

were thus a symbol: the body of the nation was represented in the political body of a single fallen soldier. The community of the nation, which had become visible, as it were, through the countless bodies of fallen soldiers during the war and had, at the same time, been found to be vulnerable, was represented by this cult as immortal.

2) The collectivity and commonality of the nation were expressed in the ritual of the *minute of silence*. Through this *one* gesture, through the public and private standstill of social life, *all* living members were expected to experience unity. The minute of silence was first practised on Armistice Day (11 November) in 1919 in Great Britain and the dominions, and did not involve extensive planning or long-term preparation. High Commissioner Sir [Percy Fitzpatrick \(1862-1931\)](#), who had previously been active in South Africa, raised the idea only a few weeks prior in a discussion about a provisional cenotaph. In South Africa, a collective three-minute silence had been introduced during the war as people had a desire “to find some lasting expression of their feeling for those who gave their lives in the war”.²⁹ It took place for the first time in the British Empire on 11 November, in accordance with a royal decree. Elements of this ritual had already developed in the years prior. Trains had stood still and work had been interrupted. Some examples are: during the funeral of [Edward VII, King of Great Britain \(1841-1910\)](#), in 1910; for the victims of the Titanic, in April 1912; in [Portugal](#), for the late Brazilian foreign minister; [commemoration of the fallen](#) in South Africa on a local scale during the war; and, on 9 February 1919, nationwide in the USA to honour President [Theodore Roosevelt \(1858-1919\)](#), who was no longer in office when he died in January. The English decree of 1919 elevated this idea to a national gesture and permanently established it in the modern arsenal of remembrance.

The “minute of silence” is made up of three central elements: first, the silence, which usually lasted between thirty seconds and two minutes; second, the collective action of all social and functional subgroups in public (parliamentarians, train drivers, pastors, publicans, workers, professors, doctors, shoeshiners, etc.); third, the cessation of all movement. The moment of silence was the symbolic expression of a devout, reverential pause, of the concentration on the dead through silence, and of the equality of all. The effectiveness of the ritual lies in its double meaning. On the one hand, it is an impressively simple way of representing the commonality of everyone in and through the nation. The nation’s elemental promise of equality for all is expressed in collective silence and pause. It also combines the two dimensions manifested separately in the two bodies of the fallen soldier: the political and the private. Accounts of the first minute of silence, in particular, describe this. They emphasise the emotional impact of mass silence and suggest that the internal effect was probably stronger than the politically-intended experience of an integrated nation. All [post-war societies](#) were, indeed, fragmented, torn and, frequently, characterised by internal struggle in the early 1920s. According to a 1919 newspaper report, hate and violence persisted despite

the ritual of unity. The British newspaper therefore appealed, "by the sacred memory of those lost to you, swear to yourself that never again, God helping you, shall the peace and happiness of the world fall into the murderous hands of a few cynical old men".³⁰ The external unity of the nation was not the realistic goal of ritual expression. Instead, the emphasis lay on the personal and private duty to the dead, as well as the duty of the individual to turn this experience and remembrance of personal suffering into the basis of political action. The private and political bodies of the fallen were reunited through emotional devotion. Thus, the minute of silence reflected an increasing trend in the 20th century: private emotional states found their way into the public sphere and were articulated publicly. Privacy and personal emotionality concerning the fallen did not stand in opposition to political relevance. Conversely, the political significance of the fallen, his political body, did not outweigh private bereavement. In fact, they stood alongside one another and both became public in the 20th century. This two-faced nature of mourning and meaning-making became constitutive of the relation to the war dead; it combined the political and private dimensions, both of which became public. Evidence of a decline in the heroism that drowned out all private suffering can be found in the design of monuments, the language of death notices and in private testimonies of condolences for bereaved relatives.³¹ The intertwined coexistence of mourning and political meaning corresponded to the two bodies of the fallen soldier, which have shared an equal status since the mass death of the world war.

The minute of silence enjoyed popularity from the outset, and continues to be popular to this day. It became established in the USA and several other countries such as France, Belgium and Poland, but not in Germany. There, such attempts failed in the mid-1920s. It is likely that this ritual, like the unknown soldier, was perceived as a symbol of the Entente. In France, the political left in particular initially had reservations regarding the ritual, fearing that it would be appropriated by conservatives and the military. After a few years, however, the minute of silence became generally accepted.³² As a national memorial ritual for the war dead, this ritual has been taken up in many countries since 1919, for example in Israel since 1953 (accompanied by wailing sirens since the 1960s) and in the Soviet Union/Russia since 1965.³³

3) The *war cemetery* was, as mentioned above, only an innovation in Europe after 1914.³⁴ Its emergence was not an imitation of American or Japanese war cemeteries (neither of which appear to have even been known of).³⁵ Instead, it emerged from the by then generally recognised norm of burying every dead soldier individually. During the war, this was first carried out by lower-ranking military units, which resulted in a wide variety of graves and, importantly, could not ensure their preservation. This was due to the fact that such units

were often mobile and, in trench warfare, cemeteries which were established close to the front out of necessity were often literally ploughed up by artillery fire. Living in the trenches often meant living side by side with unburied corpses (in [no man's land](#) between the lines) and ensembles of makeshift graves nearby. For these practical reasons, separate grave administrations were created. They compiled records of the dead and their locations, and concentrated graves in increasingly larger cemeteries farther away from the front. They also standardised graves and informed relatives about the burial sites. Along with the graves, these grave administrations outlasted the war, organising reburials, repatriation, and the maintenance of the graves, as well as providing information to relatives. They were structurally similar in their tasks and institutionally similar in their composition. The "Imperial War Graves Commission" in Great Britain (later the "Commonwealth War Graves Commission"), the "American Battle Monuments Commission" in the USA, the subdivision of the Ministry of Defence in France and the respective bodies in most other countries were state institutions. Private associations, which both co-operated and competed with state institutions, were founded in Germany ("[Volksbund deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V.](#)") and Austria ("[Schwarzes Kreuz](#)").

The construction of war cemeteries involved several fundamental decisions: were soldiers to be laid to rest in the war zone or their homeland? Were they to be buried close to home, mostly in [church](#) cemeteries, or in the new national cemeteries? A question that some contemporaries found very difficult to answer was whether identified and unidentified soldiers could be treated *unequally*, in that only the identified were afforded the possibility of repatriation.³⁶ Such problems gave rise to a framework of repatriation, which differed considerably from one country to another. For various reasons, governments were generally opposed to repatriation and only allowed for it after pressure from relatives. As long as the war continued, most states tried to prevent the repatriation of corpses, mostly citing hygiene problems, but mainly in order to save resources. However, they also wanted to avoid discussions on fairness, as the costs had to be borne by relatives. Privately organised and financed repatriations were therefore prevented wherever possible. Two different variants then emerged: firstly, the countries which buried their corpses abroad on battlefields, and secondly, the countries which offered relatives repatriations or even made it a principle to bring every dead soldier home, if possible. The USA is the best-known example of the latter. Since the Civil War, there had already been a tradition of burying soldiers in individual graves in separate military cemeteries. After 1918, there was intense debate about repatriation. From the spring of 1920, the decision was left to relatives, whereupon about 70 percent of fallen American soldiers were brought home. From the Soviet Union, the defeated states of Germany and the territory of the former Habsburg Empire, however, every fallen American soldier was repatriated.³⁷ In Great Britain (and the British dominions, which were

geographically even further removed from the war in Central Europe³⁸), there was also intense public debate of the question. It was decided that cemeteries in the former war zone would be used, partially in order to treat all of the fallen equally and prevent distinctions according to social status.³⁹ The question was similarly decided in France, where the considerable majority of the 1.3 million fallen soldiers lay on national territory anyway. Prior to the inauguration of the tomb of the unknown soldier (11 November 1920), a law was passed, in September 1920, which allowed families to decide whether they wanted to have their fallen relatives transferred to their home cemetery at the expense of the state. Of the approximately 1 million identified fallen French soldiers, about a quarter (240,000) were transferred in the following years.⁴⁰ It would be worth investigating whether relatives' motives perhaps lay in wanting to bury the fallen in a church cemetery, not at the new state burial sites. This problem was also addressed in Germany, which profited from the fact that the [Treaty of Versailles](#) had stipulated that every country had to maintain and preserve the graves of all fallen on its territory. Since there was a lack of resources for reburials and most of the Allies repatriated their fallen soldiers from graves in Germany to their respective homelands, Germany (after 1918) ultimately had to take care of relatively few foreign graves on its own territory. This only changed after 1945 with the cemeteries for the fallen of the Soviet Red Army.⁴¹ The concentration of graves in separate cemeteries, some abroad, some on another continent, distanced them spatially from the survivors. This was one reason why monuments became increasingly important at home. They symbolised the political body of the fallen, which was ubiquitous in the everyday environment of post-war societies. The war cemetery preserved the private body of the fallen, but stripped it of visibility both through distance and burial. In contrast, representations of the political body stood in every village and city.

In comparison, Japanese practice was markedly different, as religious reasons made multiple burial sites possible. The practice of repatriation had begun during the wars against China (1894-1895) and [Russia](#) (1904-1905). Remains were cremated and at first provisionally buried on the battlefield. After the end of the respective military operation, they were reinterred in military cemeteries on main islands of Japan or in annexed territories (particularly Port Arthur), or handed over to their surviving relatives. This practice did not apply to the entirety of their remains, however. Instead, after cremation only the bones (*ikotsu*), in urns, were generally taken to Japan, while the actual ashes (*ihai*), which accumulated from the widespread collective cremation of the lower ranks, were buried in mass graves in combat zones. After the First Sino-Japanese War had ended, these remains were also brought to the main islands and buried in a mass grave at the military cemetery in Tokyo in 1902. Following the Russo-Japanese War, newly constructed mass graves either in

the motherland or in the annexed territories were used for this purpose. Within a short period of time, a whole set of ceremonies developed around the return of remains, in which not only relatives but also the military, the community, schools, associations and local priests all joined in commemorating the dead. Through the creation of special, visually-prominent “soldier graves” (*gunjin-baka*) next to their respective family graves, the fallen also became visible in their home town.⁴²

Despite these differences concerning repatriation (the practice of transferring all of the fallen back to the homeland has prevailed in most countries since 1945), the war cemetery became the widespread norm internationally after 1918. It shaped the public perception of the burial of fallen soldiers through its transnational uniformity. It incorporated the possibility for relatives to mourn privately as well as the political valorisation of the soldier’s death through the nation. Over the long term, the importance of central national war cemeteries has increased since the First World War, especially in non-European countries such as Israel and South Korea. A deciding factor for this is whether the cemeteries are located domestically or abroad.

Beyond Europe: Adaptations and Domestic Traditions

Although a European-Western model lies at the historical core of the political cult of the dead, it spread globally in the 20th century. It would, however, be wrong to understand this as “Europeanisation”. The cultural influence of war on commemoration in non-European countries must be seen in a differentiated manner. Put simplistically, a distinction must be made between Western states, states that emerged from former colonies (which could have highly varied traditions of statehood) and independent dominions (in particular in East Asia).⁴³ Two determining factors stand out in this respect. First, the respective extent of statehood and nation-building, and second, religious-cultural factors in the societal way of dealing with death.

Colonies

The colonies of the Entente powers were involved in the war to a considerable extent. About 2 million people from Africa took part in the war and approximately 10 percent [lost their lives](#) in action (infrequently in [combat](#), mostly in [auxiliary functions](#) such as the [carrier corps](#) etc.).⁴⁴ These losses did not reach the dimensions of those of the main European powers, but nevertheless massively disrupted local life. These human losses were processed within the framework of forms prescribed by the colonial powers. They constructed memorials based on the European model and, simultaneously, enabled ways of mourning and offered forms of

meaning that adhered to the Western paradigm. However, these memorials were usually limited to a few central monuments. The multitude of regional and local memorials that characterised the landscape of post-1918 Europe was completely absent in the colonies. The monuments were erected by the colonial centres *for* and *in* the colonial peripheries, rather than by local initiatives. This hierarchy was reflected in symbolism. Despite the Imperial War Graves Commission's persistent claim that it treated all fallen soldiers equally, this was only the case within Europe. For example, some 5,000 [fallen Indian soldiers](#) were named on the Indian Memorial in Neuve-Chapelle (France). Beyond the European continent, however, "hyper-nominalism", which had developed in Europe since 1800, was denied to [non-white soldiers](#).⁴⁵ Fallen African soldiers were not remembered by name on memorials, and neither were their Indian counterparts on a memorial in Mesopotamia (Basra); collective terms were used instead. Likewise, an effort was made to bury white soldiers in individual graves, while African soldiers were mostly buried in mass graves.⁴⁶ Although there are reports that these memorials were indeed accepted by parts of the population as an opportunity to articulate mourning, the introduction of these Western forms had no lasting or profound effect in the colonies. Most African states did not develop a political [cult of the dead](#) comparable to the Western model, even after achieving state sovereignty. Instead, in the long term, the adoption of monumental forms that reference rulers is more common. These share, if you will, more similarities with pre-modern dynastic monuments or imperial or socialist personality cults.⁴⁷

The influence of the world war on the development of commemorative forms in non-European countries should not be overestimated. Even in India, which had both its own foundations as a high culture and a long period of British transformation behind it at the beginning of the 20th century, the [cult of commemoration](#) established by the English colonial rulers failed to gain lasting acceptance. The "India Gate" erected in Delhi in 1921 by [Edwin Lutyens \(1869-1944\)](#) is representative of this. It was formally based on the style of Great Britain's Flemish and French memorials, for example the [Menin Gate](#) in Ypres (Belgium). It pays tribute to the 60,000 Indian⁴⁸ soldiers who died in the First World War, as well as the more than 13,000 British and Indian officers – whose names are mentioned, under an inscription promising "sacred memory" – who fell in the wars in [Afghanistan](#). Since then, the India Gate has been updated to include the names of those killed in the 1971 war against Pakistan, and those awarded the highest military order. The number of these is in the lower double-digit range. Even though the majority were awarded their decorations posthumously, this was not a necessary condition. The monument to the fallen was thereby extended to include recognition of classic military valour – which in turn voided the principle of equality central to the Western cult of the dead. An authentic state cult of the fallen has only emerged

in recent years. Under the Hindu nationalist government, the decades-old plan of a second memorial alongside the India Gate for all those fallen in wars since 1945 is currently being realised.⁴⁹

Participation in the First World War had a markedly different effect in the dominions, where it was both a measure of and a factor in the process of nation-building. Those who had died in the world war, formally both in and for the empire, and were buried in shared cemeteries on European battlefields, retrospectively became “founding fathers” of sorts for a “nation-building” that accelerated after 1918. In Australia, New Zealand and [Canada](#), dying for the (British) king and empire mutated into dying for the (own, emerging) nation.

A look at developments outside Europe in the 20th century shows that the form the political cult of the dead took is an indicator for the development of statehood and of ideational nation-building. In the 20th century, the influence of Marxism probably had a far greater impact on non-European forms of commemoration than the First World War. As an ideology and dictatorial form of rule, Marxism took hold in many countries between Africa and East Asia through regime changes under the auspices of anti-capitalist (and anti-Western) liberation.⁵⁰ Where socialist regimes conquered state power, they translated the basic ideas of revolutionary martyrdom, of dying for the [revolution](#) out of political conviction, into national cultures of commemoration and developed national-revolutionary traditions of commemoration. These differ from national variants in that they always contain a hierarchy (of convictions) which overshadows equality (of the nation).⁵¹ With the erosion of Marxism since the late 20th century, this ideological framework of nation-building disappeared. Whether something else can take its place, and what this might be, remains to be seen. The political cult of the dead will continue to be an indicator of this.

Religion

When making global comparisons, it is vital to consider the potential of religious and cultural structures of interpretation in each particular case. For the “West”, a reference to the central cultural influence of Christianity is trivial. In the modern era, religious ideas have fused with or been transformed into secular ones. The “*pro patria mori*” topos, which developed in the egalitarian civic world of antiquity, articulated a common, uniform existential interest in the preservation of one’s own political union. From the late Middle Ages, Christian ideas of an “*unio mystica*” merged with revitalised ideas of a secular “*patria*”. As a result, the idea of “*pro patria mori*” could be revisited and combined with Christian concepts of *sacrifice*.⁵² Christianity’s privileging of sacrifice for eternal human salvation was a powerful notion, which

was, in the political cult of the dead, transformed into the valorisation of the idea of “dying for the nation” (or the revolution, of whichever kind). This religious basis of sacrifice and its potential idealisation became central to the Western cult of the fallen. The fact that the respective fatherland or nation could always be ascribed an individual and special “purity”, which could give meaning to individual sacrifices, cannot be understood sufficiently without conditions set by Christianity.⁵³ There are certainly similarities to the West’s religious foundation in countries that are religiously influenced by Islam. From the late phase of the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish word for those who fell heroically for their faith (*şehîd*) slowly came to designate [fallen soldiers](#). The Turkish nation state then consistently adapted this term; it is a classic example of religious categories of interpretation translating into secular contexts.⁵⁴ Therefore, a systematic investigation could be carried out to establish whether religions offer interpretative patterns for understanding “sacrifice” and thus provide secular political groups with strategies of interpretation and action. Religiously established interpretations of sacrifice undoubtedly ease secular efforts to legitimise violent death for a political union. On the other hand, religious interpretations can also present obstacles to secular legitimisation of dying as sacrifice, which must first be overcome in order for a national or revolutionary cult of the dead to be established.

Religious influences set highly varied conditions for the political cult of the dead. This will be illustrated here briefly with an example from East Asia, namely the strained relationship between Confucianism and the military. China, for example, has a rich military tradition and long history of armed conflicts. According to traditional Confucian doctrine, the martial (*wǔ*) and the civil (*wén*) were regarded as equally important subjects, which officials should have knowledge of. They were indispensable for successful rule.⁵⁵ Since the beginning of the Song dynasty (960-1279), however, the civil slowly came to be exalted as a cultural ideal. Martiality, in turn, was abhorred. Ultimately, the literary, artistic and – especially – civilised *wén* was seen as the central characteristic of China, while the martial and militaristic *wǔ* was perceived as foreign and non-Chinese. Political and cultural elites therefore distanced themselves from the military. This state of affairs prevailed without lasting interruption during the rule of the Manchurian Qing dynasty after 1644. In the long term, it probably hindered the development of a cult of the dead. The same can be said for the Confucian cardinal virtue of filial piety (*xiào*) and the closely related ancestor worship. Securing the continuation of the line through the existence of male descendants is one of the core tasks of a family. In this respect, the death of a male family member in war could pose a threat to ancestor worship. In the present day, for example, there is a separate ancestral hall at the central Korean military cemetery in Seoul for families who lost their last male descendent in war and whose ancestor worship is now carried out by the national state community.

The Special Case of Japan, or: Multiple Modernities of Meaning-Making and Mourning

Japan was only peripherally involved in the First World War. It does stand out, however, as possessing a cult of the fallen that shares striking similarities with the Western model, although it is not based on reception of the Western example. This draws attention to functional conditions and authentic traditions, as well as the aftermath of the world wars. We should consider whether 20th century wars, which became increasingly entangled in perception as well as in military and political interdependence, lead to standardised forms of expression with regards to violent death, or whether it was possible for different variants to develop.

In modern Japan, the political cult of the dead before 1945 was shaped above all by its *own* traditions. In contrast to, for instance, China, death on the battlefield was already seen in a good light in the Middle Ages. It was seen as particularly honourable and interpreted either as an expression of loyalty to the emperor (*chū*) or as an independent action. This was a central prerequisite for the development of an authentic political cult of the dead in the 19th century. Although the impetus for the formation of a nation state came from the external challenge of Western [imperialism](#), the transformation into modernity was not a mere adoption of Western standards. The modern cult of the fallen emerged in Japan against the backdrop of violent clashes over the opening of the country in 1853 and the Meiji Restoration after 1868. For the victorious side in these conflicts, legitimisation through the *Tennō* (emperor) was of particular importance. Accordingly, the young nation state, which had deeply authoritarian characteristics, was built with a strong focus on the monarch and had distinct royal prerogatives in the constitutional order. This applies in particular to the armed forces: the army and navy were independent branches, which, as “armed forces of the *Tennō*” (*tennō no guntai*), were beyond [civilian control](#). Accordingly, in military training as well as in the educational system, the Confucian cardinal virtue of “loyalty to the ruler” (*chū*) assumed a central role. At the same time, State Shinto was established, which initially had a strong anti-Buddhist character and became, in a sense, the state religion, although its religious character was officially denied.⁵⁶ The political cult of the dead and private death rituals were integrated into State Shinto and developed into one of the key pillars of this state religion. Therefore, public commemoration of the dead in Japan before 1945 was not secular but rather a matter for state religion.

The cult of the dead before 1945 was in fact a succession of complex rituals. These developed between the 1860s and the decade between the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), when they took on their full form. In

concrete terms, the corpse of a fallen soldier was cremated and his mortal remains were divided. A portion of the ashes – especially those which could no longer be individually matched to anyone – was interred in a tomb in the warzone, while the rest were taken to the homeland in an urn. There, the ashes were divided again: one part was interred in the garrison's military cemetery, and the other was handed over to the family, which laid them to rest at the family grave site, in a separate "soldier grave" (*gunjin-baka*). These individual steps were public events, which were carried out in the presence of military personnel and representatives from the community, schools, associations, and so forth. There was no space for private mourning. In parallel, the soul of the fallen was apotheosized in *shōkon* ceremonies ("ceremonies to summon the soul") in accordance with Shinto custom. The souls of the fallen were elevated to the status of "gods of national defence" (*gokoku no kami*) or "heroic souls" (*eirei*) and were placed permanently in special Shinto sanctuaries, where they received ongoing veneration. The Buddhist form of honouring the dead, which traditionally determined the treatment of the deceased in Japan, was largely relegated to the private sphere. Finally, public remembrance of the dead was ensured through the erection of monuments engraved with the names of the war dead; the construction of "heroic soul rooms" (*eirei-shitsu*) in schools, where their pictures were hung; and the publication of lists of names. The official line was that dying as a soldier was above all dying for the *Tennō* and, accordingly, the most distinguished expression of the Confucian virtue of "loyalty to the ruler". This was expressed linguistically in terms such as "loyal death" (*chūshi*) or "loyal soul" (*chūkon*) for the fallen. "Death for the fatherland", which was widespread in the West at the time, only played a secondary role.

As a result, there are at least two significant differences between Japan and European and North American societies. First, the connection of the political cult of the dead to the monarchy continued to dominate beyond the 19th century. In the West, if it had once existed, this connection had long since lost its importance. A significant sign of this is, for instance, that traditional phrases related to death such as "For King and Country" in Great Britain or "*Mit Gott für König und Vaterland*" ("With God for the King and Fatherland") in Prussian Germany changed during the First World War. Dying was now only related to the nation. Second, in Japan, official state commemoration of the fallen was, at its core, religious. There was an explicit promise of the afterlife, which distinguished it from Buddhist concepts; exclusive sanctuaries; and a separate priesthood to ensure veneration of the dead.

Japan entered the First World War on the side of the Entente on 23 August 1914 by declaring war on the German *Reich*. Two days later, Tokyo also declared war on Austria-Hungary.⁵⁷ Japan's [military operations](#) were initially limited to East Asia and the [Pacific region](#). In September 1914, Japanese troops landed in Shandong and laid [siege to Qingdao](#), which

surrendered in November. In October, the Japanese Navy occupied the northern parts of the German colonial empire in the South Pacific, including the Mariana Islands, Caroline Islands and Marshall Islands, without encountering any significant resistance. From 1917, Japanese naval units operated in the [Mediterranean](#), where they mainly escorted troop transports and fought against submarines belonging to the Central Powers. Finally, between 1918 and 1922, Japan participated with a total of over 70,000 men in the Allied [intervention in Siberia](#), which aimed to support the White Army in the [Russian Civil War](#).⁵⁸ Although Japan had largely exercised military restraint during the First World War, the East Asian empire was included within the circle of victorious powers in Versailles.⁵⁹ A total of almost 5,000 Japanese had paid for this with their lives during the First World War.⁶⁰

For the Japanese Empire, the First World War was a classic state war waged at limited cost against German troops who were completely outnumbered. It served to further expand Japan's colonial sphere of influence in East Asia and the Pacific region. Joint intervention in the Russian Civil War with the other Allied powers also served to secure Japan's position in Northeast Asia and was, among other things, a consequence of the political elites' fear of the Bolshevik Revolution. In terms of their significance for the state and society, these acts of war lagged far behind the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. Although this conflict anticipated many of the military and [technological](#) aspects of the First World War in Europe, it did not come close to reaching the totality of the European conflict between 1914 and 1918. This did not occur until the heavy losses after 1931 in the Asia-Pacific War. The First World War also led to a domestic extension of democratic participation rights, such as the transition to party cabinets from 1918 and the introduction of universal male suffrage in 1925, even though these developments should not be seen as a fundamental break with the political constitution. The years between 1914 and 1918 did not represent a considerable turning point for Japan; it did not experience the totality of war or mass death. Core elements of the state order largely remained stable, such as the position of the *Tennō* within the constitutional framework and the independence of the military. Therefore, the basic forms of mourning and the political cult of the dead did not change. This would come later with the far-reaching turning point of 1945.

Conclusion

Looking back a century later, the quantitative dimension of death in the First World War continues to stand out. Ten million dead, most of them killed by weapons, led to a complex and dense landscape of commemoration. This was based on norms and practices of heroising and commemorating the fallen developed in the 19th century. These consisted in collective rituals and objects (monuments, plaques, living memorials, the use of names,

commemorative coins, etc.) and myriad expressions of mourning, which were articulated in both the private and public spheres. Over time, mourning receded into the background, at the latest with the experiences of subsequent wars and the transition between generations. As distance grew, public perception was increasingly determined by the material elements of the commemorative landscape, especially memorials and war cemeteries. It should be emphasised that in Great Britain and France, the minute of silence has remained a collective ritual. In contrast to Germany and central and eastern European countries, the First World War has, in these two places, by no means been eclipsed in political memory by the Second World War. A look back at the innovations brought about by the First World War shows that tombs of the unknown soldier and war cemeteries have since become widely accepted, spreading beyond the borders of countries who fought in the war. The collective ritual of the minute of silence, by contrast, has not proven as universal.

Two basic factors can be identified that influence the forms of commemorating the fallen which have taken root since the First World War. First, the influence of processes of state- and nation-building. These made it functionally necessary to honour all of the political union's fallen soldiers equally. As members of the nation "imagine" themselves as part of a community (Anderson), political justifications of their death must be provided, and the emotional dimension of this imagined community must be expressed in the face of death in battle. For survivors, the death of a community member poses different challenges, including of an emotional nature, than the death of a mercenary or a subgroup of the estate does. This functional correlation is present wherever state- and nation-building advance in a context of armed violence.

By contrast, historical traditions and particularly religious influence are factors that still determine and explain differences in the way war deaths are processed. The more religions contain the concept of sacrifice for salvation, the easier it is to formulate the idea of sacrifice for political purposes and establish (secular) ideas of sacrifice to legitimise death in war. This has mostly not appeared in the post-1918 articulations of mourning and meaning-making surrounding the millions of deaths in the First World War. Although different national sacrificial narratives stood in opposition to one another, they all shared the Christian terminology of sacrifice as a common source. In this respect, the phenomena of First World War commemoration and mourning are a dominantly European cultural landscape.

Manfred Hettling, Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg

Tino Schölz, Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg

Notes

1. Kennan, George F.: *The Decline of Bismarck's European Order. Franco-Russian Relations 1875-1890*, Princeton 1979, p. 3. [↑](#)
2. "Denkmäler sollen die Erinnerung an eine Idee festhalten, das Grabmal bloß jene an eine Person". Bestelmeyer, Georg: *Der Friedhof*, in: *Kriegergräber im Felde und daheim*, Munich 1917, pp. 21-23, here 21. [↑](#)
3. Kantorowicz, Ernst H.: *The King's Two Bodies. A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*, Princeton 1957. [↑](#)
4. Kantorowicz, Ernst H.: *Die zwei Körper des toten Soldaten. Eine Studie zur politischen Theologie des Mittelalters*, Munich 1990, in particular 241-278, as well as Kantorowicz, Ernst H.: *Pro Patria Mori in Medieval Political Thought*, in: Kantorowicz, Ernst H. (ed.): *Selected Studies*, New York 1965, pp. 308-324. [↑](#)
5. The extraordinary thing about the great wars of the 20th century was not so much the immense capacity and willingness to kill, but rather the "unimaginable masses of people who were seduced into surrendering their lives". Death for one's country was "crowned by a moral grandeur", which was connected with a "purity" that could be attributed to the nation, or the revolution, for which masses of people also died in the 20th century. Anderson, Benedict: *Die Erfindung der Nation*, Frankfurt 1993, p. 145. [↑](#)
6. Kruse, Volker: *Kriegsgesellschaftliche Moderne. Zur strukturbildenden Dynamik großer Kriege*, Cologne 2017, p. 140. [↑](#)
7. Skocpol, Theda: *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers. The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States*, Cambridge 1995; Schölz, Tino: "Die Gefallenen besänftigen und ihre Taten rühmen". *Gefallenenkult und politische Verfasstheit in Japan seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin 2016. [↑](#)
8. See, on Italy, Janz, Oliver: *Das symbolische Kapital der Trauer. Nation, Religion und Familie im italienischen Gefallenenkult des Ersten Weltkriegs*, Tübingen 2009; on Great Britain, Cannadine, David: *War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain*, in: Whaley, Joachim (ed.): *Mirrors of Mortality. Studies in the Social History of Death*, London 1981, pp. 187-242; Jalland, Pat: *Death in the Victorian Family*, Oxford 1996; Jalland, Pat: *Death in War and Peace. Loss and Grief in England, 1914-1970*, Oxford 2010; on Russia, Merridale, Catherine: *Night of Stone. Death and Memory in Russia*, New York 2001; on the USA, Mitford, Jessica: *The American Way of Death*, New York 1963; Mitford, Jessica: *The American Way of Death Revisited*, New York 1998; Laderman, Gary: *The Sacred Remains. American Attitudes toward Death, 1799-1883*, New Haven 1996; and, for Germany (but only from the late 1920s) Black, Monica: *Death in Berlin. From Weimar to Divided Germany*, Cambridge 2010. For a comparative perspective, see Laqueur, Thomas: *The Work of the Dead. A Cultural History of Mortal*

Remains, Princeton 2015. ↑

9. Primarily Koselleck, Reinhart: Kriegerdenkmale als Identitätsstiftungen der Überlebenden, in: Marquard, Odo / Stierle, Karlheinz (eds.): Identität, Munich 1979, pp. 255-276; Koselleck, Reinhart / Jeismann, Michael (eds.): Der politische Totenkult. Kriegerdenkmäler in der Moderne, Munich 1994; Inglis, Kenneth S.: War Memorials. Ten Questions for Historians, in: Guerres mondiales 167 (1992), pp. 5-21; Hettling, Manfred: Nationale Weichenstellungen und Individualisierung der Erinnerung. Politischer Totenkult im Vergleich, in: Hettling, Manfred / Echternkamp, Jörg (eds.): Gefallenengedenken im globalen Vergleich. Nationale Tradition, politische Legitimation und Individualisierung der Erinnerung, Munich 2013, pp. 11-42. ↑
10. This view of the genuinely political function thus differs in part from important and influential studies, which have focused in particular on the search for appropriate language for the loss of people in war, above all Winter, Jay: Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning. The Great War in European Cultural History, Cambridge 1995; prior to this also Fussell, Paul: The Great War and Modern Memory, Oxford 1975; Hynes, Samuel: A War Imagined. The Great War and English Culture, London 1991. ↑
11. See Gates, David: The Napoleonic Wars 1803-1815, London 1997, p. 272; Hirschfeld, Gerhard / Krumeich, Gerd / Renz, Irina (eds.): Enzyklopädie Erster Weltkrieg, Paderborn 2003, pp. 664-665. ↑
12. Koselleck, Reinhart: Die Transformation der politischen Totenmale im 20. Jahrhundert, in: Transit 22 (1990), pp. 59-87. ↑
13. There were similar concepts in ancient Greek democracy; see Chaniotis, Angelos: The Ritualized Commemoration of War in the Hellenistic City. Memory, Identity, Emotion, in: Low, Polly / Oliver, Graham J. / Rhodes, P. J. (eds.): Cultures of Commemoration. War Memorials, Ancient and Modern, Oxford 2012, pp. 41-62; Low, Polly: The Monuments to the War Dead in Classical Athens. Form, Contexts, Meanings, in: Low, Polly / Oliver, Graham J. / Rhodes, P. J. (eds.): Cultures of Commemoration. War Memorials, Ancient and Modern, Oxford 2012, pp. 13-39. ↑
14. Schölz, Gefallenen 2016. ↑
15. "... der gemeinsame Krieg wird nicht von allen gemeinsam erfahren". Koselleck, Reinhart: Erinnerungsschleusen und Erfahrungsschichten. Der Einfluss der beiden Weltkriege auf das soziale Bewusstsein, in: Koselleck, Reinhart: Zeitschichten, Frankfurt 2000, pp. 265-284, here 265-266. ↑
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the term “martyr” had already taken root for all those who died), but for those who died during the 1919-1922 war against Greece, there was only a war of independence and nation-building; Kreiser, Klaus: Türkei. Vom namenlosen Glaubenszeugen zum patriotischen Heldenkult. Kriegerdenkmäler und Gedenkstätten, in: Hettling, Manfred / Echternkamp, Jörg (eds.): Gefallenengedenken im globalen Vergleich. Nationale Tradition, politische Legitimation und Individualisierung der Erinnerung, Göttingen 2013, pp. 469-486, here 482-483; Staliunas, Darius: Der Kult des Unbekannten Soldaten in Litauen, in: Nordost-Archiv 17 (2008/2009), pp. 248-266. [↑](#)

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27. Winter, Sites 1995, p. 28; Ziemann, Benjamin: Veteranen der Republik. Kriegserinnerung und demokratische Politik 1918-1933, Bonn 2014, p. 192; Ziemann, Benjamin: Contested Commemorations. Republican War Veterans and Weimar Political Culture, Cambridge 2013; Tietz, Jürgen: Das Tannenberg-Nationaldenkmal. Architektur/Geschichte/Kontext, Berlin 1999. The “Lion of the Confederacy” (Atlanta, Oakland Cemetery) comes closer to later tombs of the unknown soldier. It was donated in 1894 by the Atlanta Ladies Memorial Association. Aesthetically, it is a copy of Bertel Thorwaldsen’s (1770-1844) Lucerne Lion Monument from 1821, which is – and this was presumably the reason for adopting it in Atlanta – dedicated to Swiss soldiers who fell during the assault on the Tuileries (10 August 1792) and symbolises their bravery and loyalty. [↑](#)
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[Africa](#) > [Union of South Africa](#)

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[East Asia](#) > [Korea](#)

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[Eastern Europe](#) > [Russian Empire](#)

[Middle East](#) > [Ottoman Empire](#)

[North America](#) > [Canada](#)

[North America](#) > [USA](#)

[South East Europe](#) > [Bulgaria](#)

[South East Europe](#) > [Greece](#)

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[Western Europe](#) > [Great Britain and Ireland](#) > [Great Britain](#)

[Western Europe](#) > [Portugal](#)

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[Home Front](#)

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[Culture](#) > [Mobilization, cultural](#) > [Cult of sacrifice](#)

[Culture](#) > [Mobilization, cultural](#) > [Hero cult](#)

[Culture](#) > [Mobilization, cultural](#) > [Interpretations of war](#)

[Economy](#) > [Labour](#) > [Colonial labour](#)

[Memory and historiography](#) > [Bereavement and mourning](#)

[Memory and historiography](#) > [Commemoration, cult of the fallen](#) > [Cemeteries and burials](#)

[Memory and historiography](#) > [Commemoration, cult of the fallen](#) > [Remembrance days](#)

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[Politics, law](#) > [Post-war politics](#) > [Proclamations of new states](#)

[Politics, law](#) > [Resistance and revolutions](#) > [Revolutions](#)

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[Society](#) > [Demography](#) > [War losses, military](#)

[Society](#) > [Everyday life, civilian war experience](#) > [Associations](#)

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[Society](#) > [Social groups](#) > [Working classes](#)

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