Introduction: Total war and total history

The gestation of this study reaches back almost two decades to the convergence of several of my intellectual interests. The first was a fruit of my collaboration with Stig Förster on the problem of total war. Our work resulted in a series of conferences that examined the expanding purview of warfare in the era bounded by the American Civil War and the Second World War. We found our efforts dogged by the issue that had inspired them in the first place, for we failed to produce a definition of "total war" that could command general assent among the participants. Questions lingered about the proper chronological scope of the phenomenon – whether it was uniquely a product of the modern era or the twentieth century. We also disagreed about philosophical issues and methodological approaches to total war. We wondered whether any war had in fact been (or could ever be) "total," whether the concept represented instead a heuristic device, an ideal type of Weberian (or Clausewitzian) provenance. As the series neared its end and we analyzed more closely the history of the term itself, some of us began to ask whether the concept of total war had not spawned more confusion than insight.

About one thing we could agree. The great industrial wars of the twentieth century witnessed the systematic erasure of distinctions between the military and civilian spheres, combatants and non-combatants. Civilians were as critical to the outcome of both conflicts – and as likely to become victims – as were soldiers. Homefronts were essential to the material and moral support of armies, navies, and air forces. As a consequence, civilians also became a legitimate, if not the preferred target of military violence, whether in the form of genocide, strategic bombing, or starvation by naval blockade. At the least, we concluded, the term "total" described the fact that the two world wars encompassed the lives of every man, woman, and child in the belligerent states. The historiographical implications of this conclusion seemed, however, more unsettling than our inability to reach a definition of total war. At

stake now was the definition of military history.[1] How, we asked, might one appropriately write the history of such a conflict? The question begged an answer: total war requires total history.

I found this proposition intriguing, because I was at that time interested in total history as well. I had, however, also become sensitive to the risks of pairing one problematic term with another. As the conferences on total war began, I was finishing a biography of the German historical profession's most controversial figure. The career of Karl Lamprecht was devoted to a vision of total history, to the proposition that no dimension of the past – political, economic, social, or cultural – should be excluded from the historical account. In this belief, Lamprecht attempted to write a panoramic history of Germany that integrated every aspect of the nation's past from the tribal era to the beginning of the twentieth century. He failed spectacularly. Much of his problem was due, I concluded, to temperamental flaws, to the furious haste with which he worked, the carelessness that marred his scholarship, and, above all, to the ambitions that endowed his project with dimensions so grandiose that they defied even his vast intellectual energies.

Still, I found it difficult not to admire his goal. I began to wonder whether a project crafted more modestly and carefully might not produce something that at least approached a total history, an account that integrated all dimensions of a society's history at a given moment. Whatever else they might have produced, the controversies over total war suggested an avenue to this end. A war that left no one untouched seemed to offer a common theme around which to organize a historical narrative that might encompass the experience of everyone who lived through the conflict. The goal would be to represent the war's "totality," to trace its impact into every phase of life.

So I decided to try. I quickly discovered, however, that the interests of practicality required a series of compromises that in the end produced a paradox, as they narrowed a project of comprehensive methodological design into a microhistory. The twentieth century's two total wars involved hundreds of millions of people for thousands of days. Lamprecht might have taken up the challenge; I could not. Primarily because of my earlier research interests, I chose instead to restrict the study to Germany during but one of these conflicts, the first. I also chose to limit the account to a single city in the calculation that the experiences collected here were of sufficient breadth and diversity to be of more than local or antiquarian interest.

[1] See Thomas Kühne and Benjamin Ziemann, eds., *Was ist Militärgeschichte?* (Paderborn, 2000).

My selection of Freiburg as the setting for the exercise was due to practical considerations, although I was admittedly taken with the idea of writing about total war in a lovely place. With a population of about 85,000 in 1914, the city was the right size. It was large enough to know the strains of industrial growth, as well as dependence on outside sources for most of its food and other basic material needs. The city was small enough that, working alone, I could follow a sample of its residents through the war with some statistical confidence. Unlike many German cities of this size, Freiburg also offered a source base that had survived the century's second total war reasonably intact. In the municipal archives I found complete records from the many public agencies that managed the supply of food and other scarce resources. The Generallandesarchiv in Karlsruhe contains documents from the central offices that oversaw the administration of the homefront in south Baden; these documents include the records of the army's 14th Corps Command and those of the Badenese *Kriegsamtsstelle*, which regimented the city's economy during the second half of the war.

Practical considerations urged several other temporal and spatial restrictions on the study. The narrative begins on July 24, 1914, when news arrived in town of the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia. The narrative stops on November 11, 1918, as battlefield action officially came to an end. The second date is arbitrary. Most of the city's problems that were born of the war did not cease with the announcement of the armistice, but they were so comprehensive that the effort to fix the war's effective end would have carried the account into the next decade, if not beyond. Although the story extends of necessity well into the surrounding countryside, the basic setting is the city, whose definition is legal; "Freiburg" comprises spaces that were incorporated in 1914, including Littenweiler (but not St. Georgen).

The story does not reach, however, much beyond the regional confines. Although the study has pervasive comparative implications, it stakes no claims to the typicality or representativeness of Freiburg's experience of the Great War. The scholarship on the urban history of this conflict is extensive enough to support a number of comparative generalizations. The war provided a powerful common context. It confronted cities in every part of Germany with a similar palette of problems. These had to do above all with the growing exhaustion of basic resources, particularly food and manpower, and with the cultural and political management of deprivation (a problem that included the death in combat of large numbers of residents). The reply of every German city to these problems was molded in an array of local circumstances, among them the city's size, geographical situation, civic institutions and

traditions, confessional loyalties, the shape of the urban economy (particularly its centrality to military production), and the local contours of social inequality. In Freiburg, both the problems and the local responses were complicated in distinctive ways by the prominence of tourists and pensioners in the prewar economy and by the city's location – its proximity to the fighting front and its isolation from the country's principal centers of supply and distribution. However, beyond its commitment to these propositions, the study ventures comparisons only incidentally, in connection with specific issues.

Two final restrictions apply. The first has to do again with the spatial confines of the study. The account follows soldiers out of the region only insofar as news of them subsequently became public in Freiburg. To recount the frontline experiences of Freiburg's units (which themselves became increasingly diluted with soldiers who were not sons of the city) would require an additional volume. So, as Benjamin Ziemann's work has recently demonstrated, would an attempt to analyze private communications between homefront and battlefront.[2] I drew on autobiographical sources – private letters, memoirs, and interviews – from about two dozen people, some of whom, such as Charlotte Herder, Hermine Paufler, Engelbert Krebs, Edmund Husserl, and the family of Franz Bühler, became regular companions. Most of the documents that support the study are public, however; they were either published during the war or originated in agencies that dealt directly with the public. They speak in the first instance to public behavior, which occupies the larger part of the account. However, these sources also provide access into the private realm, for another of the war's central features was its assault on distinctions between public and private, as private behaviors and sentiments found public expression, or otherwise became the preoccupation of public agencies.

Even within these limits, the methodological challenges posed by the study are daunting. In a total history nothing is irrelevant. The war inhabited the lives of every human being in Freiburg. It also affected cows, horses, dogs, birds, and insects, as well as vegetation and the behavior of pathogens and other organisms. The principal challenge is consequently aesthetic: it lies in devising an organizational framework that is at once coherent and capacious enough to accommodate, in principle at least, the entire spectacle.

I am not the first to try. Early in 1915, the City Council in Freiburg commissioned a historical account of the city's war. The commission fell

[2] Benjamin Ziemann, *Front und Heimat: Ländliche Kriegserfahrungen im südlichen Bayern 1914–1923* (Essen, 1997).

to Wilhelm Fladt, an official in the municipal Office of Property Registration, who dutifully began to collect daily excerpts from the local papers and to supplement them with annotations from his own journal. Little more was said of the project until April 1918, when the initial successes of the German offensive in the west presented the prospect of imminent victory. Fladt was now charged with compiling documents from all the municipal offices and producing a "coherent account" of their efforts.[3] Five months later, with an altogether different resolution of the war impending, the mayor called a halt to the project. Fladt nevertheless continued to work on it until his death in 1941, eventually compiling thirty-six volumes of material as a documentary foundation. The next war sealed the fate of the project. In 1953, the city's archivist noted that aside from the chronicler himself, no one had looked at the material in a quarter century. "This fact alone," he concluded, demonstrated that the whole undertaking was "completely worthless."[4]

The fortunes of Fladt's project speak to difficulties that he shared, as a historian, with the objects of his study. His challenge was to find narrative meaning in a protracted ordeal, which had left no dimension of life in the city unaffected. He contended with mountains of fragmentary evidence. As a participant himself, he at first lacked even the advantages of hindsight. His project was born just as the full dimensions of the conflict began to emerge, along with the realization that the war was going to require herculean efforts of coordination among local agencies. Given the comprehensiveness of the war effort, the challenge of producing a "coherent account" had already become intimidating by the spring of 1918, when the country's military fortunes suggested that the story was going to have a happy end, which would requite the material hardship and vindicate the policies of the city government. The German collapse in the fall of the same year seemed to rob the project of a narrative scheme that might have made acceptable sense of the war. Fladt's continuing labors during the Weimar era were driven by his hope to provide another kind of monument to the war, much like the statues that were then going up around town.[5] His design represented part of a broader turn of interest toward the role of German local government at war. This interest informed several early municipal histories of the German Great War, which argued that local agencies had performed

[3] SRP 576, 10.4.18.
[4] StadtAF, C5/2278, Archivamt to Bürgermeisteramt, 23.5.53. The thirty-six volumes are in the city's archive, StadtAF, B 1 (H), Nr. 317, Kriegschronik.
[5] Ute Scherb, *"Wir bekommen die Denkmäler, die wir verdienen": Freiburger Monumente im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Freiburg, 2005), 95–135.

heroic service amid what was now being portrayed as the tragedy of Germany's defeat.[6] The Second World War brought the final blow, for it seemed to deprive Fladt's material of even this narrative mold.

Every historian of urban life during this war faces similar problems of narrative structure and thematic coherence. The German defeat in 1918 excluded a narrative that was emplotted either in regeneration or requited endurance. The experience of the First World War has subsequently lent itself more plausibly to representation as a tragedy, although no longer in the sense that German observers of the 1920s commonly invoked this term, as they rejected the legitimacy of the outcome. George Kennan's characterization of this war as the "seminal catastrophe" of the twentieth century has by now become iconic. It invokes a broader conception of the tragedy. The tragic figure is no longer the German victims of the *Dolchstoss* but an entire civilization whose fortunes were squandered in a senseless ordeal.[7]

This "tragic" reading has guided the municipal histories of the German war that have appeared since 1945, including several surveys of developments in Freiburg.[8] In their attention to administrative detail, these accounts resemble the histories that were published during the interwar period. Like the earlier histories, they feature the exemplary achievements of local government, the struggles of public officials to control an increasingly unmanageable situation. Nevertheless, the principal narrative motif is cumulative deterioration, the material and moral exhaustion of urban residents, who endured the grueling burdens but faced a challenge that was, in the end, insuperable.

[6] Ernst Kaeber, *Berlin im Weltkriege: Fünf Jahre städtischer Kriegsarbeit* (Berlin, 1921); Adalbert Oehler, *Düsseldorf im Weltkrieg: Schicksal und Arbeit einer deutschen Grossstadt* (Düsseldorf, 1927); cf. Hans Luther, *Im Dienst des Städtetags: Erinnerungen aus den Jahren 1913 bis 1923* (Stuttgart, 1959).

[7] George F. Kennan, *The Decline of Bismarck's European Order: Franco-Russian Relations, 1875–1890* (Princeton, NJ, 1979), 3.

[8] Heiko Haumann and Hans Schadek, eds., *Geschichte der Stadt Freiburg im Breisgau* (3 vols. Stuttgart, 1992–6), III: 255–65 (the author of this segment is Hans-Georg Merz); Andrea Haussmann, *Alltagsleben im Krieg: Freiburg 1914–1918* (Freiburg, 1994); Susanne Asche et al., *Karlsruhe: Die Stadtgeschichte* (Karlsruhe, 1998), 358–85; Hugo Weidenhaupt, ed., *Düsseldorf: Geschichte von den Ursprüngen bis ins 20. Jahrhundert* (4 vols., Düsseldorf, 1988–90), III: 225–56 (by Peter Hüttenberger); Klaus-Dieter Schwarz, *Weltkrieg und Revolution in Nürnberg: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewergung* (Stuttgart, 1971); Jürgen Reulecke, "Städtische Finanzprobleme und Kriegswohlfahrtspflege im Ersten Weltkrieg unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Stadt Barmen," *Zeitschrift für Stadtgeschichte, Stadtsoziologie und Denkmalpflege* 2 (1975): 48–79; Günther Haselier, *Geschichte der Stadt Breisach am Rhein: Der Sturz in den Abgrund 1890–1945* (Breisach, 1985); Lothar Burchardt et al., *Konstanz im 20. Jahrhundert: Die Jahre 1914 bis 1945* (Constance, 1990), 11–66; Friedrich Walter, *Schicksal einer deutschen Stadt: Geschichte Mannheims 1907–1945* (Frankfurt a. M., 1949).

This framing of the war is compelling, but it lacks a compelling narrative resolution. The war just ends. The revolution that followed is another chapter. An alternative reading, which emerged during our total-war conferences, addresses this narrative problem by reversing the valences and rendering the conflict as triumph rather than tragedy. The central figure is not, however, the coalition of forces arrayed against Germany, but the war itself. The central narrative theme becomes the self-realization of war, the fulfillment of its totality, the expanding reign of its corrosive power until those who endured it could resist no longer.[9] The city's desolation in early November 1918, a compelling contrast to the vibrant scenes of early August 1914, now signals a narrative climax. The attraction of this reading is the privilege that it accords to the war's comprehensive impact. It is also faithful to the terms in which most participants understood their own determination to hold out against the war until victory, except that it stipulates the ultimate futility of their undertaking. It thus renders the war at once text and context. The difficulties in the reading are draped in the Clausewitzian language of self-realization; and they have to do with agency. Like a force of nature, the war becomes reified, an irresistible agent whose invasive claims occupied, then overwhelmed the city. Whether they were embodied in soldiers or civilian bureaucrats, these claims mandated passive roles for the people who performed them. The reading fits some features of the war better than others. It captures well the structural and material changes that the war occasioned, as well as the bureaucratic regimentation of the homefront, which, at least in the eyes of its managers, did in fact prescribe passive roles for the people in its dominion. This narrative framework weakens, however, as the analysis broadens into the experience of war. It struggles to accommodate the many different ways in which urban residents made their own war – how they understood, interpreted, or otherwise "constructed" the war's meaning as they dealt with its mounting burdens and, in some cases, contested its claims.[10]

The very mention of competing narrative frameworks pays witness to the methodological controversies that have accompanied and

[9] See Roger Chickering, "Total War: Use and Abuse of a Concept," Manfred Boemeke, Roger Chickering, and Stig Förster, eds., *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experiences, 1871–1914* (Cambridge, 1999), 13–28; cf. Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca, NY, 2005).

[10] See Jürgen Reulecke, "Wirtschaft und Bevölkerung ausgewählter Städte im Ersten Weltkrieg (Barmen, Düsseldorf, Essen, Krefeld)," Reulecke, ed., *Die deutsche Stadt im Industriezeitalter: Beiträge zur modernen deutschen Stadtgeschichte* (Wuppertal, 1978), 114–26.

complicated the long gestation of this study. It is harder now to write the urban history of the First World War than it was when I began. To judge from recent scholarship, however, the rewards have been commensurate with the difficulties.[11] The emphasis has migrated from administrative to social and cultural history, to the complex ways in which the war's multiple meanings were shaped in experiences of class, gender, confession, and ethnicity. The history of the war has been enriched as well by an awareness of the role of language not only in structuring these experiences, but also in representing them in historical scholarship.

The recent controversies over the role of language have also raised basic questions about the intellectual, if not the moral legitimacy of a total history – even of a single city.[12] In its most consequential iteration, the post-modern epistemology of the new cultural history has insisted that because all historical meaning is culturally constructed, it is also open, unstable, subject to constant contestation, and resistant to the coherence demanded by total history (or, for that matter, any kind of historical narrative). Historians are simply additional contestants. Their claims to represent the past can invoke no privilege, no analytical "center" from which to link the vast realms of historical experience in total war. A total history of the war is, as a young colleague chided me several years ago, a "modernist dream." In order to represent the experience of military violence historically, writes another young colleague, one should abandon the desire to "arrange and structure things hierarchically," as in a bourgeois novel. A "model appropriate to the complexity of this theme" is instead, he suggests, a cinematic "montage of disparate levels of actions and chains of events."[13]

I can imagine arranging Freiburg's war as such a montage, just as I can imagine it as a random series of 85,000 biographies. I cannot imagine that anyone would read either. My pursuit of the dream has thus led in

[11] To name just a few: Maureen Healy, *Vienna and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire: Total War and Everyday Life in World War I* (Cambridge, 2004); Janet S. K. Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory, and the First World War in Britain* (Cambridge, 2004); Aribert Reimann, *Der grosse Krieg der Sprachen: Untersuchungen zur historischen Semantik in Deutschland und England zur Zeit des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Essen, 2000); Belinda J. Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill, NC, and London, 2000); Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *La Grande Guerre: 1914–1918* (Paris, 1998); Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert, *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin 1914–1919* (Cambridge, 1997).

[12] Thomas Hengartner, *Forschungsfeld Stadt: Zur Geschichte der volkskundlichen Erforschung städtischer Lebensformen* (Berlin and Hamburg, 1999), 258; cf. Bernd Hüppauf, "Die Stadt als imaginierter Kriegsschauplatz," *Zeitschrift für Germanistik* 5 (1995): 317–35.

[13] Benjamin Ziemann, "'Vergesellschaftung der Gewalt' als Thema der Kriegsgeschichte seit 1914: Perspektiven und Desiderate eines Konzeptes," Bruno Thoss and Hans-Erich Volkmann, eds., *Erster Weltkrieg Zweiter Weltkrieg: Ein Vergleich* (Paderborn, 2002), 758.

another direction. The project rests on a number of working premises, strategic choices, or, as Carlo Ginzburg might call them, "cognitive wagers," the test of which can only be their own practical effectiveness in organizing the sources and generating an account that is at once comprehensive, coherent, plausible, and (I would like to think) easy to read.[14] The first premise is that total war offers, by definition, the analytical center of its own history. The principal theme of the account is accordingly the pervasive impact of war on the lives of the city's residents. A second premise betrays my lingering intellectual debts to historical materialism. I wager that the war had, as one says nowadays, "pretextual materiality." It had immense material consequences. These registered on human bodies that were destroyed, maimed or otherwise traumatized, undernourished, exhausted, and rendered more vulnerable both to the elements and noxious microorganisms. At the same time, my heavy intellectual debts to the new cultural history surface in the assumption that the war also had "textuality." Textuality and materiality stood in a reciprocal relationship. The effort to make sense of the war's vast material consequences was fundamental to the experience of this conflict, but the war and its burdens took on meaning only when read as a text. My approach borrows from recent methodological discussions as it emphasizes the social dimensions of wartime experience.[15] It treats the culture of war as the symbolic construction of shared meanings. This was an interpretive process. It constituted itself in language, in collective dialogues called discourses, and it authorized a wide range of social practices, most of which prolonged the war's material burdens, however they had been textualized. Even as it emphasizes the power (though not the ineluctability) of collective constraints in wartime, this understanding of culture seeks to reconcile materiality and discursivity, structure and agency. It also seeks to balance the alternative narrative frameworks that recommend themselves to reconstituting the experiences of war historically, in dialogue with the surviving sources.

The organization of the study reflects these assumptions, analytical priorities, and goals. An introductory section, which comprises the first two chapters, sets the scene with a survey of the city on the eve of the war, then presents a narrative account of the war's first weeks. The next

[14] Carlo Ginzburg, "Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know about It," *Critical Inquiry* 20 (1976): 32; cf. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1988), 54.

[15] See Nikolaus Buschmann and Horst Carl, eds., *Die Erfahrung des Krieges: Erfahrungsgeschichtliche Perspektiven von der Französischen Revolution bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Paderborn, 2001); Kathleen Canning, "Problematische Dichotomien: Erfahrung zwischen Narrativität und Materialität," *Historische Anthropologie* 10 (2002): 163–82.

four chapters (3–6) focus on the material aspects of the city's war. This section analyzes demographic movements that were stimulated by Freiburg's location near the Alsatian front, the dislocations brought by war to urban production, and the crushing difficulties of providing the city's residents with food and other basic material resources. The emphasis here is on the structures of urban production, distribution, regulation, finance, and demographics. To the extent that experiences figure in the account, they are largely those of the public officials who struggled to hold these structures together. The ensuing two chapters (7–8) represent a transition to a broader analysis of experience. They consider the war's investment of more private concerns. The one chapter addresses the perceptual impact of the shortages, the other traces attempts to deal with the war's disruptions of the human life-cycle, its effects on matters of death, injury, disease, and reproduction. The next four chapters (9–12) turn to collective experiences of war. In an effort to situate these experiences – to determine which meanings were shared by whom – these chapters focus on the several urban discourses of community. By means of an examination of images and practices, they trace the sources of cohesion and fracture in social groups that were marked out by the city itself, its neighborhoods, the region, the nation, class, gender, confession, and age cohort. The final two chapters take up the politics of social experience and the political fragmentation that unsettled urban life late in the war.

I have accumulated heavy debts of many kinds. Here I wish to pay thanks to the institutions and scholars who have provided help in one form or another over the long gestation of this study. My benefactors have included the University of Oregon and the Gerda-Henkel Foundation, which together underwrote the initial research. The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the National Humanities Center provided generous fellowship support as I continued. I also owe thanks for material support from the BMW Center for German and European Studies, the School of Foreign Service, and the Graduate School of Georgetown University. I am grateful as well to the staffs of the archives in which I worked in Freiburg, Karlsruhe, and Stuttgart.

For intellectual encouragement and support I am indebted to more people than I can list. Several of them have died since I began the project, including Thomas Nipperdey, Wolfgang Mommsen, and my dear friend Wilhelm Deist, whose views about military history began to shape my thinking thirty years ago. My gratitude extends to Stig Förster, whose influence has been seminal, as well as to Volker Berghahn, Rüdiger vom Bruch, Hermann Bausinger, Fritz Klein, Christian Jansen,