Introduction
Liberation and unification

The embattled kingdom

Near the beginning of Rebecca West's vast travelogue *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, based on a series of trips she made to Yugoslavia in the 1930s, the author describes an argument between her Serbian tour guide, introduced as 'Constantine', and a Croat, 'Valetta'. Constantine, an employee of the government's press office, has been defending the regime against Valetta's accusations of corruption and unfair treatment of non-Serbs. The quarrel soon becomes acrimonious: Constantine claims that the problem in Yugoslavia with the Croats is that they are 'more lawyers than soldiers', that is, better at quibbling for special privileges than they are at fighting for the state.[1] After Valetta has left, Constantine tells his British guest a story from his time serving in the Serbian army during the First World War:

> 'There was a hill in Serbia that we were fighting for all night with Austrian troops. Sometimes we had it, sometimes they had it, and at the end we wholly had it, and when they charged us we cried to them to surrender, and through the night they answered. 'The soldiers of the Empire do not surrender,' and it was in our own tongue they spoke. So we knew they were our brothers the Croats, and because they were our brothers we knew that they meant it, and so they came against us, and we had to kill them, and in the morning they all lay dead, and they were all our brothers.'[2]

This was West's attempt to explain the contemporary problems of the South Slav state in the 1930s through the prism of its recent history, in this case, the inability of Serbs and Croats to see eye to eye is related back to the First World War. It was an approach West took throughout *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, reworking her experiences, ventriloquizing her 'characters' so that they would enact her own ideas. And yet regardless of West's embellishments, this episode retains a historical resonance:

[1] Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey through Yugoslavia* (London: Cannongate Press, 2006, originally 1942), 86.
[2] Ibid., 89.

'Constantine' is West's pseudonym for Stanislav Vinaver, the Serbian Jewish poet who returned to Serbia to enlist in the army at the time of the Balkan wars (1912–1913) and during the First World War served as a lieutenant in the Serbian army's celebrated Students' Battalion. The battalion fought in the early clashes between Serbia and Austria-Hungary, as the imperial army tried without success to knock Serbia quickly out of the war before turning to its larger tasks in the east. Austria-Hungary, keen to win both the propaganda and the military war against Serbia, often used regiments with large contingents of South Slav officers and soldiers in these early Balkan campaigns: their prowess on the battlefield was to serve as a demonstration of the loyalty of the monarchy's South Slav subjects and their willingness to join the fight against Serbia.[3] According to Constantine/Vinaver, they were Croats, but in fact the Serbian army had also fought against Slovenes, Bosnian Muslims, and indeed Serbs. Here is a man who has been marked by his experiences in war, a man for whom the war served as an important point of reference, a standard by which the state could be judged and through which its problems could be understood.

This was not a lone voice: in interwar Yugoslavia there were tens of thousands of men who had served in the Serbian army during 1912–1918, that is, during the Balkan wars of 1912–1913 and the First World War (years which were typically remembered by Serbians as a single and continuous 'period' of warfare). And there were also tens of thousands of former 'soldiers of the Emperor' in Yugoslavia, Vinaver's one-time adversaries, now his fellow subjects. This book is about their presence and the presence of the First World War in Yugoslavia. Its subject is the tens of thousands of men like Vinaver who served or fought in the Serbian army during the war years, and the tens of thousands of South Slavs who served or fought in the Austro-Hungarian army. It is a study in the social and cultural consequences of conflict in Yugoslavia, one that emphasizes the fact that this state, like most others in interwar eastern and central Europe, was formed in the aftermath of a protracted period of conflict during which many of its subjects had been mobilized in opposition to each other. The parts of the book are organized around the patriotic and veterans' associations that were an important feature of the interwar state's life, and also around a number of 'archetypes': veterans of the wars of 1912–1918 – figures often considered of lesser importance in the history of Yugoslavia – and their surprising biographies.

The story of these associations and individuals is used to chart a larger historical process in Yugoslavia, that is, the downfall of liberal state

[3] Andrej Mitrović, *Srbija u prvom svetskom ratu* (Belgrade: Stubovi culture, 2004), 89.

institutions and their subsequent replacement by an authoritarian regime at the end of the 1920s. The following pages address the failures of state institutions such as the new national army, the welfare programme, and, especially, the parliamentary system to reconcile war veterans, both to each other and to the state itself. These failures left a large cohort of the population at odds with the institutions of the new state, exasperated with the failures of liberal politics and willing to see them replaced barely a decade after the end of the war. There are regional implications to this argument, since almost all of the new states of eastern and central Europe succumbed to authoritarianism quite soon after the end of the war, and many of these states, like Yugoslavia, were formed on the fault lines of the First World War, they experienced similar problems in reconciling war veterans to the new politics. The conflict lived on in people's hearts and minds after 1918; the fractures of the war years undermined the post-war Wilsonian order throughout the region; ultimately, the democratic institutions established in the states of 'New Europe' after 1918 were too fragile to reconcile these divisions. This book uses Yugoslavia as a case study in how and why liberal institutions, installed throughout the new states of central and eastern Europe at the end of the war, collapsed almost uniformly in the years after 1918.

The book's second major concern is the 'remobilization' of South Slav war veterans, wherein some of the men who had served and fought for the Allies and for the Central Powers eventually returned to war after 1941. It is important to note that we are talking about a significant minority of war veterans rather than an outright majority. As we shall see, most men who had fought in the First World War did not return to the battle in 1941; however, those that did played a pivotal role in the establishment and ideological organization of groups contested the civil war in Yugoslavia from 1941 to 1945. Specifically, it will be shown how and why former Austro-Hungarian officers of Croat descent made an important contribution to the programme of the Croatian paramilitary/fascist group, the 'Ustashe', and how nationalist veterans of Serbia's wars from 1912 to 1918, increasingly unhappy with the lot of Serbs and Serbia in the interwar state and with the failure to integrate newly associated 'Serbian' lands such as Kosovo and Macedonia, would radically restate their nationalizing agenda in the 'Yugoslav Army in the Homeland' (the Serbian Chetniks) after 1941.

Once again, these arguments are offered with a view to their broader implications for European history: by analysing the continuities and discontinuities between the violence of 1914–1918 and that of 1941–1945 in the Balkans, this book is intended as an intervention into the ongoing debate about the relationship between the quality and kind of violence

seen during the First World War with that seen during the Second World War.[4] This is unquestionably one of the most important lines of enquiry in studies of twentieth-century European history: to understand and to meaningfully compare the two world wars is to better understand the trajectory of Europe over the past century and the historical forces that have shaped – and continue to shape – the continent to the present day. Rather than a direct and diachronic comparison between the type of violence that marked the First and Second World Wars, this book uses war veterans who played a role in both conflicts to tease out the differences and the development of violence from one war to the next. In other words, it traces the experiences of a generational cohort whose members are implicated in the conduct of war during both 1914–1918 and 1941–1945.

Demobilization, victories, and defeats

The arguments of the book are drawn in large part from the scholarship of cultural historians working on the First World War in Western countries such as France and Great Britain, historians whose work over the last few decades has significantly enhanced our understanding of the 'human factor' of the war, that is, its impact on 'ordinary' men and women, and of course, its impact on the men who fought. The work of cultural historians such as John Keegan, Leonard Smith, Benjamin Ziemann, and Alexander Watson (to name but a few) has shown how soldiers in combat were more than just passive and malleable *materiel* in the hands of generals and other military leaders; they were, in fact, active historical agents in their own right, whose actions shaped the course of events during the war years.[5] Men who fought during 1914–1918 continued to be active agents out of uniform and after the war, of course, and there have also been a number of excellent studies of the war veteran and

[4] See, e.g. Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005); Volker R. Berghahn, *Europe in the Era of Two World Wars: From Militarism and Genocide to Civil Society, 1900–1950* (Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2006); and in the Balkan context, Jonathan E. Gumz, *The Resurrection and Collapse of Empire in Habsburg Serbia, 1914–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[5] John Keegan, *The Face of Battle: A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo and the Somme* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976); Leonard V. Smith, *Between Mutiny and Obedience: The Case of the French Fifth Infantry Division* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Benjamin Ziemann, *War Experiences in Rural Germany: 1914–1923* (Oxford: Berg, 2007) and *Contested Commemorations: Republican War Veterans and Weimar Political Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

his fate after 1918. The work of scholars such as Richard Bessel, Joanna Bourke, Deborah Cohen, Eric J. Leed, Antoine Prost, and Robert Weldon Whalen[6] has helped establish a framework for the study of veterans that can be profitably applied beyond the national case studies in question.

For many men, the transition from war to peace was a slow and painful one; and each of the formerly belligerent states of the First World War, to a greater or lesser extent, confronted the challenge of 'demobilization' in the years after the Armistice. Demobilization is used here in its broader sense, meaning both 'military demobilization', the necessary process of reducing an army raised for war into a peacetime force, and also, importantly, 'cultural demobilization', the disengagement of wartime mentalities through which people are motivated to fight. This latter definition is taken from the volume *State, Society, and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War* (edited by John Horne), whose contributors discuss

> the engagement of the different belligerent nations in their war efforts both imaginatively, through collective representations and the belief and value systems giving rise to these, and organizationally, through the state and civil society.[7]

It is this fuller definition of 'cultural demobilization' that is crucial for understanding the role of former soldiers in interwar Europe, and in Yugoslavia, too. For many veterans, the transition from war to peace also involved the disengagement, distancing, or reworking of those values and belief systems that were effective in mobilizing societies during the war.

To a certain extent, Allied countries such as France and Great Britain, two of the 'victor states' of the First World War, were successful in re-integrating war veterans into civilian society in the years after the war. In these countries it seems a compact was forged between former soldiers and the state based around welfare provision and participation in – or at least acceptance of – national institutions and national politics. Long-standing liberal and democratic traditions, deeply embedded in the political culture of these states, were apparently robust enough to

[6] Richard Bessel, *Germany after the First World War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain, and the Great War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Deborah Cohen, *The War Come Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany 1914–1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Eric J. Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War One* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Antoine Prost, *In the Wake of the War: 'Les Anciens Combattants' and French Society 1914–1939* (Oxford: Berg, 1992); and Robert Weldon Whalen, *Bitter Wounds: German Victims of the Great War, 1914–1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

[7] John Horne, 'Introduction: Mobilizing for "Total War", 1914–1918', in *State, Society, and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1.

absorb most former soldiers into post-war society and thus meet one of the most pressing challenges of the post-war period. This is not to say that France and Great Britain witnessed no violence, or that their national institutions faced no challenges in the post-war order from former soldiers – they did. The vehemence of paramilitary forces such as the 'Black and Tans' and the army auxiliaries in Ulster during the Irish War of Independence is an example that shows how Britain had its share of battle-hardened veterans who were engaged in violence well after the end of the war.[8] And in France, the *Action Française* fascist movement sought to topple the liberal republican order in the interwar period,[9] or, as Chris Millington has argued in a challenging and important work, right-wing war veterans would go on to play an important role in the Vichy regime of Philippe Pétain during the Second World War.[10] Nevertheless, these remained marginal or distant forces in interwar Britain and France, insufficiently powerful to seriously unsteady the liberal institutions of the countries in question.

Germany and Italy fared less well in the years after the war. In the case of Weimar Germany, as recent research has shown, a majority of war veterans remained loyal to the republican values and politics of the liberal state during the 1920s.[11] Nevertheless, state institutions were assailed from early on by groups of right-wing soldiers unsatisfied with their post-war circumstances.[12] This noisy minority formed the new phalanxes from which Hitler and the National Socialists created a political movement that made promises about restoring the dignity of the German veteran, and especially by avenging the humiliation of 1918. Hitler created what George Mosse has termed a 'myth of war experience' through which the varied reality of Germany's war and the different experiences and political

[8] On Great Britain during and after the war, see Jon Lawrence, 'Forging a Peaceable Kingdom: War, Violence, and Fear of Brutalization in Post-First World War Britain', *The Journal of Modern History*, 75/3 (September 2003); and Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[9] On the challenges faced by national institutions in France in the wake of the war, and the successful overcoming of those challenges, see John Horne, 'Defending Victory: Paramilitary Politics in France, 1918–1926. A Counter-example', in Robert Gerwarth and John Horne (eds.), *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[10] Chris Millington, *From Victory to Vichy: Veterans in Interwar France* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).

[11] See Ziemann, *Contested Commemorations*; and William Mulligan, 'German Veterans' Associations and the Culture of Peace: The Case of the Reichsbanner', in Julia Eichenberg and John Paul Newman (eds.), *The Great War and Veterans' Internationalism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[12] Bessel, *Germany after the First World War*.

affiliations of German war veterans were masked with a single, unifying story of soldiers undefeated on the battlefield but betrayed by civilian leaders during the war.[13] There was a similar situation in Italy, a state whose failure to obtain coveted territories on the Adriatic led to resentment on the part of a large number of former soldiers. This, coupled with a fragile liberal political system, made Italy easy prey for Benito Mussolini and the fascists, a political movement that transfigured ideals of sacrifice and war into political action, creating what Emilio Gentile has described as a kind of 'civic religion' central to which was the war and the experience of the Italian soldier.[14] Veterans themselves came to occupy a central position in fascist rhetoric and political culture. As in Germany, the fascist 'myth of war experience' came to supplant all other accounts of the war.

Germany differed from France and Great Britain in that it was one of the war's defeated states, of course, many of whose veterans, instead of celebrating their wartime victory, nursed a resentment both to the civilian leaders and national institutions of the Weimar state and to the post-war European settlement more generally. Thus, Wolfgang Schivelbusch speaks of a 'culture of defeat' in Germany after 1918, one that cleansed the nation of its moral culpability for the war and one that demanded redemption through some kind of radical political project, in this case, National Socialism.[15] Schivelbusch's arguments are applicable to other defeated states and parties of the First World War (Italy's 'mutilated victory', for example, felt more like a defeat for many former soldiers). But it has also been suggested that the culture of defeat has an alter ego in interwar Europe, a 'culture of victory' permeating societies, such as France and Great Britain, which had emerged as victors from the First World War. In such cases, the war victory was invested also with a moral component, where veterans saw their sacrifice and triumph during 1914–1918 as part of a righteous cause, to defeat Prussian militarism, to liberate Alsace-Lorraine, to restore to Europe the ideals of democracy and liberalism.[16] Replete in victory, the veterans of countries such as France

[13] George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).
[14] Emilio Gentile, *The Sacrilization of Politics in Fascist Italy* (trans. Keith Botsford) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).
[15] Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004); see also Jenny Macleod (ed.), *Defeat and Memory: Cultural Histories of Military Defeat since 1815* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
[16] See John Horne, 'Beyond Cultures of Victory and Cultures of Defeat? Interwar Veterans' Internationalism', in Eichenberg and Newman, *The Great War and Veterans' Internationalism*.

and Great Britain were committed to upholding the post-war order and to projecting the values of the war victory across the continent.

The legacy of war in central and eastern Europe

In the interwar period and beyond, patterns of mobilization and demobilization and the fault lines of victory and defeat transcended national boundaries. The processes of demobilization; the practices of commemoration and of marking the war sacrifice; the veteran, militarist, and patriotic societies formed by former soldiers were typical of societies across Europe in the interwar period. For this reason, comparisons and contrasts can be meaningfully made among post-war European states. And this includes, of course, the interwar states of eastern and central Europe, since the war was also a defining event in these countries, and they, in turn, are an integral part of the common European experience of war. There is a gap between the vast historiography of the war and its aftermath in the West and the smaller but expanding historiography of the war in the East. The gap is being closed by a number of innovative and original works, many of which have drawn on the scholarship of cultural historians of the war and its aftermath in western Europe and which have enriched our understanding not only of eastern European history but also of the shared experience of war throughout Europe in the twentieth century.[17] Thus, in recent times, cultural historians of central and eastern Europe have produced works dealing with commemoration of the war in the region;[18] gender relations in the wake of the war;[19] the hegemony of certain national, social, or political groups in war remembrance, and the marginalization of certain others;[20] the role of myth and propaganda in

[17] And 'beyond' Europe, since it should also be noted that over the last decade or so a number of exciting studies dealing with the First World War and its impact on Russia are now emerging. They include Peter Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War One* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999); Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914–1921* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Joshua Sanborn, *Drafting the Nation: Military Conscription, Total War, and Mass Politics, 1905–1925* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois Press, 2003); and more recently, Karen Petrone, *The Great War in Russian Memory* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011).

[18] Maria Bucur and Nancy Wingfield (eds.), *Staging the Past: The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe 1848 to the Present* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2001); and Snezhana Dimitrova, '"The Experienced War" and Bulgarian Modernization in the Interwar Years', *Rethinking History*, 6/1 (April 2002).

[19] Maria Bucur and Nancy Wingfield (eds.), *Gender and War in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2006).

[20] Maria Bucur, *Heroes and Victims: Remembering War in Twentieth-Century Romania* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2009); and Martin Zückert, 'National Concepts of

the creation of a new national culture after 1918;[21] and many other topics.[22]

The central and eastern European 'successor states' of Austria-Hungary – that is, Austria, Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia – represent a fascinating blend of cultures of defeat and victory and of processes of demobilization after 1918. At the end of the war, the peacemakers in Paris neatly divided the states that had emerged from the collapse of the Dual Monarchy into victorious and defeated parties. The vanquished were clearly represented by the new republics of Austria and Hungary, the imperial nations whom the Allies held partly responsible (along with Germany, the Ottoman Empire, and Bulgaria) for the outbreak of the war. They were duly punished by the treaties of Saint Germain (Austria) and Trianon (Hungary): stripped of many of their territories and peoples and reduced to shadows of their former imperial glory. Throughout the interwar period, there were many Austrians and Hungarians, both inside and outside the new states, who harboured powerful resentments against the new European order and who nursed revisionist designs on surrounding territories. Schivelbusch's 'culture of defeat' is visible in both these cases, and it is unsurprising that in the interwar period many of the leaders of both Austria and Hungary were committed to revisionist projects.

For their part, Austrian and Hungarian veterans had to come to terms not only with the defeat of 1918, but also with the demise of the great empire for which they had fought, and the emergence in its place of reduced and lustreless republics.[23] Indeed, many former subjects of Austria-Hungary throughout the region shared this disorienting sense of having fought for an extinguished state and idea.[24] In many cases, former soldiers remobilized in support of right-wing revisionist projects,

Freedom and Government Pacification Policies: The Case of Czechoslovakia in the Transitional Period after 1918', *Contemporary European History*, 17/3 (2008).

[21] Andrea Orzoff, *The Battle for the Castle: The Myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe 1914–1948* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[22] There are also the contributions by Harold B. Segel, Aviel Roshwald, Claire Nolte, Joseph Held, Andrew Wachtel, Evelina Kelbetcheva, and Maria Bucur in Aviel Roshwald and Richard Stites (eds.), *European Culture in the Great War: The Arts, Entertainment, and Propaganda 1914–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[23] On the ways in which members of the Austro-Hungarian elites came to terms with this loss, see Gergely Romsics, *Myth and Remembrance: The Dissolution of the Habsburg Empire in the Memoir Literature of the Austro-Hungarian Political Elite* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

[24] Their experiences are taken up by the contributors to the volume *Sacrifice and Rebirth: The Legacy of the Great War in East-Central Europe* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015), edited by Mark Cornwall and John Paul Newman.

gravitating towards the paramilitary *Heimwehr* groups (in Austria) or the anti-Bolshevik 'White' forces centred in Szeged (Hungary).[25]

In contrast, the 'victor' states were the newly formed – or greatly expanded – states that comprised the 'New Europe': Romania, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Yugoslavia; states identified with the 'small nations' on whose behalf the Allies claimed to have fought during 1914–1918, and whose 'liberation' had supposedly been realized with the victory of 1918. In the 1920s, leaders of these countries carefully cultivated an identification with the victorious parties of the First World War – especially France and Great Britain – promoting a self-image of small states which had fought alongside the Allies and had emerged triumphantly as legitimate members of the post-war Wilsonian order in Europe. In many cases this was a continuation of wartime propaganda whose intention had been to persuade the Allies that their national group sympathized not with the Central Powers but with the Allies themselves. Thus, as Andrea Orzoff has shown in the case of Czechoslovakia, during the war Edvard Beneš and Tomáš Masaryk built up the image of the Czech Legions as representative of the pro-Allied sympathies of an entire people.[26] After 1918, the 'myth' of the legions became central to the national culture of the first Czechoslovak republic.[27]

In the 1920s, and throughout the region, the 'culture of victory' was an integral part of the diplomatic agenda of the successor states, as leaders in Bucharest, Prague, Warsaw, and Belgrade attempted to stabilize their rule, shore up the territorial gains they had made in the peace treaties, and protect themselves from the real and imagined threats of revisionism, Habsburg restoration, and Bolshevik revolution. The victory was cultivated and maintained in veterans' parades, public ceremonies, and war monuments that emphasized the inter-Allied ties of the country in question.[28] And it was enshrined into diplomatic alliances such as the 'Little Entente', intended, in the words of the Romanian politician Take

[25] Robert Gerwarth, 'The Central European Counter-Revolution: Paramilitary Violence in Germany, Austria and Hungary after the Great War', *Past and Present*, 200 (2008).
[26] Orzoff, *The Battle for the Castle*.
[27] On the Czechoslovak legions and cultures of defeat and victory in the First Republic, see also Rudolf Kučera, 'Exploiting Victory, Bewailing Defeat: Uniformed Violence in the Creation of the New Czechoslovakia and Austria after 1918–1922', forthcoming.
[28] Along with Orzoff's work on interwar Czechoslovakia, there is Julia Eichenberg's recent monograph on Polish veterans and their internationalist and inter-Allied contacts, *Kämpfen für Frieden und Fürsorge. Polnische Veteranen des Ersten Weltkriegs und ihre internationalen Kontakte, 1918–1939* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2011), and on Yugoslavia, Vesna Drapac's *Constructing Yugoslavia: A Transnational History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 96–146, and Melissa Bokovoy's forthcoming monograph on gender and commemoration of the Balkan wars and the First World War in the South Slav state.