Austria-Hungary was the country that started it all. Its decision to go to war with Serbia one hundred years ago opened the floodgate that fundamentally changed Europe and the rest of the world. Ironically, in the cottage industry that is the history of the First World War, Austria-Hungary always seems to be struggling for attention. The ‘big boys,’ Great Britain, Germany, France, and to a lesser extent Russia, dominate both popular narratives and scholarly analyses. Even authors interested in more global or inclusive approaches have very few or only very dated things to say about Austria-Hungary beyond the run-up to the ultimatum.1 There are historical reasons for this continued bias, not the least the lasting influence of wartime propaganda and the nationalist historiographies of the successor states.2 Nevertheless, as more and more readers recognize that the Western Front was only part of a larger story, and Central and Eastern Europe’s twentieth century was deeply shaped by the war’s legacies, there is an ever pressing and justified need to put Austria-Hungary back in the picture.

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While a lively international literature on Austria-Hungary’s war experiences has been growing for some time, the question remains: How to bring Austria-Hungary’s final war to the mainstream World War I historiography? The editors of *Frontwechsel* (“changing front,” a telling title indeed) are convinced that comparison holds the key. Deploying a more explicitly comparative perspective, they argue, enables historians of Austria-Hungary a fuller engagement with the latest trends in First World War studies. Committing to both synchronic and diachronic comparisons will, moreover, allow historians see the war in the *longue durée*—not merely as the beginning (“Ur-catastrophe”) or the end (“common history under the Habsburg dominion”) of something—and bid a firm farewell to the lingering national and Cold-War strictures (12-13).

*Frontwechsel* is no doubt an ambitious project. It originates in a 2012 conference organized by the enterprising “Forum: Österreich-Ungarn im Ersten Weltkrieg” (Forum on Austria-Hungary in the First World War, founded in 2008). The twenty articles, sixteen in German and four in English, are mostly authored by young (or younger) historians from Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe, and almost all of them incorporate at least a comparative dimension, if not a comparative framework. The first three essays, originally the keynote lectures of the conference, show how much historical writing on the First World War has evolved. Gerhard P. Groß traces the debate on the origins of the war since the highly emotional Fritz Fischer Controversy. He points out that the new research of the last two decades has significantly de-centered Germany’s role in the outbreak of the war (without exculpating it). This development portends a less polemical and more sober discussion of the belligerents’ share of responsibility in the war’s origins. Hannes Leidinger reflects on the necessity to catch up with the comparative trend, arguing that a comparative approach promises to offset the fragmentation of academic WWI research and prepare the ground for much needed up-to-date overviews for the public. Perhaps the most telling of all, the veteran military historian Manfried Rauchensteiner ventures into the history of mentality.

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4 The Forum’s webpage is [http://www.ersterweltkrieg.at](http://www.ersterweltkrieg.at) (accessed 1 July 2014).


identifies typical "warrior mentalities" with first-hand accounts from Austro-Hungarian frontline soldiers. The impact of cultural and everyday historical inquiries into the Western Front is clearly felt here.8

Cultural history and everyday history very much underpin the first, “Experience vs. Memory” section of the book. Liisi Eglit summarizes Estonian World War One soldiers’ experiences of returning to civilian life.9 She underlines the fact that in comparison with their Austrian counterparts, the ensuing Estonian War of Independence (1917-1920) added another layer of war experience and memory-making to Estonian First World War veterans, an occurrence that was not uncommon for many Eastern European soldiers and civilians. Aibe-Marlene Gerdes explores public as well as private initiatives to document the war immediately after its outbreak,10 a “historicizing of the present” in Germany and Austria (143). Ralph Andraschek-Holzer reminds us that there is a corpus of German-language war prose beyond the familiar Erich Maria Remarque and company.11 For these post-1918 ‘Austrian’ writings, he proposes a system for future comparative literary analysis. Maciej Górny contends that there was also a “war of the intellectuals (Krieg der Geister)” in Eastern and Southeastern Europe.12 In contrast to the more well-known Western version, this one was fought crisscrossing lines of state boundaries, behind and across battlefronts, and among supposed allies (or at least those technically on the same side) by a plethora of nationalist activists at odds with each other. Their discourses of civilization versus barbarity and national characters were intended as much for international public opinion as for their opponents/oppressors and co-nationalists.

Another main theme of the first section is the role of transnational/international actors in a conflict between sovereign states. Antje Bräcker asks what Catholic orders could achieve in relief provision in the midst of rising tension between nationalist agitation and the Habsburg interests.13 Julia Walleczek-Fritz discusses neutral humanitarian

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8 On the evolution from the military-diplomatic focus to a socio-cultural paradigm in the British, French, and German interpretations of the First World War, see Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).


11 “Österreichische Prosa zum Ersten Weltkrieg im Vergleich,” in Frontwechsel, 163-189.


13 “Katholisches karitatives Wirken in den Balkankriegen und im Ersten Weltkrieg zwischen Habsburgerreich und Nationalbewegungen am Beispiel der Kriegsgefangenenfürsorge,” in Frontwechsel, 91-104.
organizations’ interventions on behalf of the welfare of Prisoners of War (POWs) in Austro-Hungarian and Russian captivity.\textsuperscript{14} In view of a brand new literature identifying the First World War as the incubator of modern humanitarianism and the international human rights regime,\textsuperscript{15} her essay reminds us that the older principle of reciprocity still defined the interaction between the belligerents and conditioned the neutral, non-state actors’ room for relief intervention.

The second section, “Self-Determination vs. Foreign Domination,” focuses on a theme that is at the very center of the current First World War scholarship: the experiences of occupation. Several articles in the section also touch on the persistence of war conditions extending in both directions beyond the 1914-1918 confines. Daniel Marc Segesser shows that the assumptions about ‘civilization’ and stereotyped views of the Balkan nations on the one hand, and the complicated and contested legality of armed resistance by the occupied people on the other, muted the reaction to the atrocities committed by the Austro-Hungarian forces in Serbia in August 1914—in sharp contrast to German atrocities in Belgium.\textsuperscript{16} Heiko Brendel and Emmanuel Debruyne conduct a methodical comparison of German occupation on the Western Front and the Central Powers’ occupation in the Balkans.\textsuperscript{17} It is perhaps their caution against seeing all the armed conflicts on the ground as part of the First World War that stands out. Small wars fought by insurgent groups for their own reasons in the Balkans started well before 1914, and they force us to consider the limits in applying the term ‘world war.’ Elisabeth Haid compares Austria-Hungary’s and Russia’s policies as well as propaganda related to Galician Ruthenians (the Ukrainian speakers).\textsuperscript{18} Repeatedly changing hands between the two empires during the war, Galicia provided the backdrop for an example of how much prewar stereotypes and suspicions determined the practices of wartime treatment of civilians—whether one’s own or not—in the borderland regions, and how these loaded policies were presented to the home-front audience.

Diachronic comparison is an approach the editors of \textit{Frontwechsel} support. Three essays in the second section represent this attempt. Stephan Lehnstaedt offers

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\item \textsuperscript{14} "Kontrolle durch Fürsorge. Neutrale humanitäre Organisationen und ihre Engagement für Kriegsgefangene in Österreich-Ungarn und Russland im Ersten Weltkrieg in vergleichender Perspektive," in \textit{Frontwechsel}, 105-137.
\item \textsuperscript{17} "Resistance and Repression in Occupied Territories behind the Western and Balkan Fronts, 1914-1918. A Comparative Perspective," in \textit{Frontwechsel}, 235-258.
\item \textsuperscript{18} "Nationalitätenpolitik und Kriegspropaganda. Die galizischen Ruthenen aus der Perspektive Österreich-Ungarns und Russlands," in \textit{Frontwechsel}, 259-282.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
methodological reflections on the diachronic comparison between the occupation of Poland by Imperial Germany and Austria-Hungary in World War One and by Nazi Germany in World War Two.\textsuperscript{19} Petra Svoljšak and Bojan Godeša trace the Italian administration of the Slovene population in the occupied territories during the two world wars.\textsuperscript{20} The Italianization of the Slovene culture was the occupiers’ tool on both occasions, with violence added in the second time around. The Slovene sense of cultural and ethical superiority over the occupiers offers an interesting case of reverse national stereotyping which undermined the Italian rationale. Claire Morelon chooses occupied France in the Second World War as the comparison case in discussing the food shortage-induced urban-rural antagonism in World War One Prague.\textsuperscript{21} In both instances, farmer-centered national narratives were devised to save the endangered national solidarity, with Nazi German occupiers (for the French in the Second World War) and Bohemian Germans (for the Czechs in World War One Prague) assigned the role of the villain, respectively.

The third section of the book, entitled “Civilian Politics vs. the Military,” covers more traditional diplomatic, military, and high-politics topics, but the comparative perspective is not entirely missing. Lothar Höbelt’s article questions common assumptions about wartime civil-military relations by focusing on the role of the constitutional monarchs in war, the plebiscitary legitimacy of military intervention in politics (especially the Hindenburg-Ludendorff regime), coalition war-making and inter-service rivalries, and the assumption by armed forces of anti-bellicose stances.\textsuperscript{22} Austria-Hungary and France, surprisingly, shared to some extent similar dynamics in the high-level civil-military interaction.

More prominent in this section, though, is the interactive dimension between the states. Verena Moritz calls for the injection of intelligence studies into the history of the relations between Austria-Hungary and Russia.\textsuperscript{23} A historical analysis of both sides’ military intelligence activities promises new insights into the diplomacy and military preparedness before and during the early stages of the war. It will, moreover, reveal

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\textsuperscript{19} “Besatzungen vergleichen. Methodische Überlegungen zur Okkupation Polens im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg,” in \textit{Frontwechsel}, 283-301.

\textsuperscript{20} “Italian Interwar Administration of Slovenian Ethnic Territory: Italian Ethnic Policy,” in \textit{Frontwechsel}, 303-323.

\textsuperscript{21} “A Threat to National Unity? The Urban-Rural Antagonism in Prague during the First World War in a Comparative Perspective,” in \textit{Frontwechsel}, 325-342.

\textsuperscript{22} “Frock Coats and Brass Hats: Das Verhältnis von Politik und Militär im Ersten Weltkrieg,” in \textit{Frontwechsel}, 357-376.

mutual perceptions and take the temperature of the prewar public mood through the popular fascination with espionage reportage. M. Christian Ortner charts the development of Austria-Hungary Army's battle procedure (Kampfverfahren) during the First World War. A result of the cult of the offensive undergirded by infantry assault and the belief in sheer will, the catastrophically high casualties of the first months (statistically most frontline junior officers would not be around for a third battle) and the ensuing stationary battles forced the Austrians to learn from the Germans. Lessons from the Western Front introduced linear tactics and better artillery-infantry coordination to the field army in 1915. The German zone defense and storm troop tactics followed in 1917. This was an example of how technology and skills were transferred and circulated during the war. This section is rounded out by Stratos N. Dordanas’s analysis of the Macedonian question during the war, which reveals divergent interests between Germany and Austria-Hungary (and other affiliated countries), and Günther Sandner’s analysis of Otto Neurath’s pre-1914 and wartime theorizing of war economy, which epitomized a more optimistic age in its belief in the collective rationality and democratic management of economy being superior to unregulated market forces.

As a whole, Frontwechsel testifies to the success of cultural history in transforming the study of the First World War. The interest in the representational and the creation of meaning are obvious in the study of memory, experience, and mentality, which is well represented in the volume. But many other articles also highlight the importance of prior perceptions, assumptions, and stereotypes in shaping wartime policies, actions, and the reactions of the belligerents and the neutrals (and the international public) to these very policies and actions. In this regard, Frontwechsel is both an invaluable contribution to a more nuanced and layered understanding of the First World War in Eastern and Southeastern Europe, and a worthy response to what has taken place in the general historiography of the First World War.


27 The historiographical essay by Jay Winter and Antoine Prost (The Great War in History) discusses many of the trends and developments I have in mind here. For new themes, questions, perspectives, and methodologies being explored across the field of First World War Studies, see the five collections of essays published under the auspices of the International Society for First World War Studies (as of this writing a sixth, entitled Other Fronts, Other Wars?, will be published shortly): Jenny Macleod and Pierre Purseigle, eds., Uncovered Fields: Perspectives in First World War Studies, History of Warfare 20 (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Pierre Purseigle, ed., Warfare and Belligerence: Perspectives in First World War Studies, History of Warfare 30 (Leiden: Brill, 2005); Heather Jones, Jennifer O’Brien, and Christoph Schmidt-Supprian, eds., Untold War: New Perspectives in First World War Studies, History of Warfare 49 (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Jennifer D. Keene and
Frontwechsel also poses productive questions about the First World War in more general ways. As several articles clearly show, for many Eastern and Southeastern Europeans, the ‘Great War’ simply could not be confined to the period between 1914 and 1918. Many of the wartime phenomena and conditions began as early as 1912 and lasted beyond 1920. Furthermore, basic categories that historians of the First World War often take for granted, such as state boundaries, national and ethnic identities, the distinction between the civilian and the combatant (as well as that between one’s own citizens and foreign subjects), were less certain, stable, or even meaningful. Frontwechsel makes a strong case that a Habsburg perspective on the First World War will do more than just fill in the factual blanks.

The editors’ confidence in comparison is also justified. The footnotes in the articles prove the advantage of a comparative dimension or framework in marshalling knowledge previously not widely shared beyond individual national historiographies. And in a comparative light, ‘old’ facts gain new significance and compel us to rethink the broader narratives they constitute. But it is also in comparison that Frontwechsel’s ambitious project of innovation reveals its pitfalls. First, the usefulness of diachronic comparison is not convincingly established; the number of articles that actually engage in such comparison in a substantive manner is unfortunately too small. Then there is the question of emphasis. Some articles (Gerdes’s and Lehnstaedt’s, for example) are at best an asymmetrical exercise: the Austro-Hungarian case is compared with its German counterpart in such a way that the real focus and the authors’ expertise clearly lies on the German side. This imbalance unwittingly echoes the wartime power relations and the historiographical marginalization of Austria-Hungary since then—exactly what Frontwechsel wants to overcome. This may well have been the consequence of rushing to explore new questions and sharing new insights, because these articles, and some others (Bräcker’s and Moritz’s) in the volume, are apparently stronger in raising research questions, discussing methodologies, and evaluating sources than in presenting substantive and sustained arguments. These are perhaps less satisfying, but they do point to where we can expect new advances in the near future.

Can Frontwechsel help integrate Austria-Hungary into the mainstream First World War historiography? Methodologically, and to some extent in terms of substantive matters, the historians of these parts of Europe hold up their end and show what they can bring to the table. Let us see if others are ready to take up their offer.

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