

INTRODUCTION

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In 2008, Stanford Professor James J. Sheehan published a topical history entitled *Where have all the soldiers gone?* The book charted the demise of Europeans' love for the trappings of militarism and warfare.¹ It suggested that across the twentieth century but particularly in the aftermath of the two world wars (and context of the Cold War) Europe became a peace-loving place and Europeans lost their drive for war. Sheehan further contrasted the existence of a 'relatively peaceful Europe' in his own time with another relative peaceful era for Europe in the years before the outbreak of the First World War.² Four years before Sheehan published this influential book, Professor Micheline Ishay also posited that despite the immense violence of the twentieth century, humanitarianism and human rights were nevertheless advancing apace (and continue to advance apace).³ Both Sheehan and Ishay looked with optimistic eyes to the future.

Today, a decade on, Sheehan and Ishay's assertions do not look as solid. In the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, Europe seems to be slipping back into a period of populism, its political and cultural fault-lines hardening.⁴ War and its effects are omnipresent,

¹ James J. Sheehan, *Where have all the soldiers' gone? The transformation of Europe*. Houghton Mifflin, 2008.

² Sheehan, *Where?* p. 45. Also: Geoffrey Wheatcroft, 'Europeans are from Venus' *New York Times*. 10 February 2008, available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/10/books/review/Wheatcroft-t.html> (accessed February 2017).

³ Madeline Ishay, *The History of Human Rights from Ancient Times to the Modern Era*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 2004.

⁴ For more: Giacomo Lichtner, Mark Seymour, Maartje Abbenhuis, 'Between cohesion and division. Reconciling the faultlines of Europe's past' 14 January 2015, *democraticauditUK*, available at:

both in Ukraine and in the lengthening conflict in Syria. The presence of soldiers in Europe may yet again become common place, be they welcome or not.

It is then highly timely that this special issue of the *New Zealand Journal of Research on Europe* focuses on the presence and importance of the theme of war and peace in European history. It does so by training its lens on the era of the First World War, namely on its origins and legacies. Before the war, as Sheehan and others suggest, Europe experienced a peculiar era of peace despite the existence of numerous global and imperial crises.⁵ The three contributions offered here present important lenses on the waging of war in Europe, on the value of peace and the importance of conceptualisations of neutrality and belligerency in understanding European warfare, and on the mobilisation of military necessity as a political concept. They do so by focussing on the perspectives of Britons and subjects of the British Dominion (later Commonwealth nation) of New Zealand on Europe's wars in the period 1898 – 1918.

Our first contribution, by Cambridge University PhD candidate Annalise Higgins, is particularly important. In this highly original article, Higgins highlights how prevalent British understandings of

<http://www.democraticaudit.com/2015/01/14/between-cohesion-and-division-reconciling-the-faultlines-of-europes-past/> (accessed February 2017), republished as 'Europe's history is key to understanding the current fault-lines in European politics' *London School of Economics and Political Science Euopp* website, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/euoppblog/2015/01/17/europes-history-is-key-to-understanding-the-current-fault-lines-in-european-politics/> (accessed February 2017).

⁵ Sheehan, *Where?* c.p. 45; William Mulligan, *Origins of the First World War*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

neutrality were in British popular and political culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Traditionally, historians of the late Victorian and early Edwardian era foreground the role played by popular navalism and imperialism in shaping British identities.⁶ Higgins convincingly argues that at the turn of the century, well-read Britons were equally engaged with concepts of neutrality. Building on recent scholarship on Britain as a long-term ‘occasional neutral’ in the nineteenth century, Higgins complicates the reading and understanding of the role of war in British society and with it asks essential questions about how Anglo-Europeans around the world considered their world and its wars at the *fin de siècle*.

Our second contribution by early-career scholar Alan Anderson also focuses on the *fin-de-siècle* period. In this article, which is based on PhD research undertaken at Kings’ College London, Anderson questions the depiction of Sir John Arbuthnot Fisher (“Jacky” Fisher) as a bellicose war fanatic whose pomposity on the subject of unrestrained warfare shocked the delegates at the first Hague peace conference of 1899. Anderson not only shows us that Fisher was a mild-mannered and useful delegate at the conference but also that his pronouncements on the concept of ‘military necessity’ in the period 1907 to 1914 must be read in the context of the Royal Navy’s wider strategy leading up to the First World War. Anderson suggests that Fisher (and his close friend W. T. Stead) framed their own version of the 1899 events, in the context of his appointment as First Sea Lord

⁶ As an example: Glenn R. Wilkinson, *Depictions and Images of War in Edwardian Newspapers 1899 – 1914*. Palgrave MacMillan, 2003.

and the growing naval rivalry between Britain and Germany of the time. As such, it was Jacky Fisher himself who wanted to be portrayed as a hard-nosed militarist for it served his political needs.

The final contribution, by Monash University's Sally Carlton, offers a different lens on European warfare. Carlton's article focuses on the ways in which New Zealanders today reflect upon and commemorate the First World War. She presents the content of a series of interviews undertaken in 2015 to show how multi-dimensional New Zealanders' views of war are today. She also highlights how the commemoration of the 'war to end all wars' remains topical and essential, despite the many myths that remain around ANZAC Day. In so doing, Carlton reminds us not only that the First World War was a global phenomenon but also that its legacies extended (and extend) far beyond Europe.