The Rhetoric of Civil-Military Relations in Contemporary Armed Forces Museums

This article undertakes a rhetorical analysis of two European armed forces museums (the National Army Museum in London and the Bundeswehr Military History Museum in Dresden) in order to show how such institutions provide a space for the negotiation of civil-military relations in 'post-military' societies. It argues that both museums construct a world of military professionalism that shields the soldier from potential criticism in the context of contemporary armed conflicts, while encouraging the civilian visitor as democratic citizen to accept their responsibility for the deployment of the armed forces as a matter of policy. The article nevertheless highlights differences in the depiction soldiers and of warfare in general in both museums, which in turn point to differences in the discourse of war in the UK and Germany.

Keywords: museums, war, civil-military relations, armed forces

Introduction

Museums that display the military heritage of nations have often been understood as being primarily concerned with the construction of national identity. This is not an unreasonable conclusion. If we understand warfare and the preparation for it as a moment at which the relationship between territory, nationhood and citizenship is particularly foregrounded (Clarke and Wóycicka, 2019, p. 79), and if we take into account the fact that many war museums and military museums have also assumed memorial functions in relation to past conflicts, it is hardly surprising that these institutions can be understood in many cases as 'semi-sacred sites' of memory for the nation (Winter, 2015, pp. 21–24). This tradition remains strong, despite the development in recent decades of major museums that aim to show transnational histories of conflict with an agenda for peace, such as the Musée Mémorial de Caen

(Brower, 1999) or the Historial de la Grande Guerre in Péronne (Cercel, Parish and Rowley, 2019).

However, my contention in this article will be that an exclusive focus on national identity-formation in the musealization of war and conflict can distract us from the more complex role that such institutions can play in what Bernd Hüppauf has called the 'discourse' of war. In his proposals for a cultural history of war, Hüppauf uses the term 'discourse' to refer to the heterogenous and multimedial constructions of war itself as a feature of a given society. Hüppauf's proposition is that cultural historians should primarily concern themselves with how societies come to an understanding of what war is and what it is for, thereby making war possible in its historically various forms (Hüppauf, 2013, p. 41). Furthermore, he argues, cultural historians should consider how individual experiences both feed into and are informed by such understanding (2013, p. 70). Despite highlighting museums as a key medium of the discourse of war (2013, p. 109), Hüppauf has relatively little to say about what happens in them and the contribution they might make to our culturally situated constructions of war and the military.

In this article, I will suggest that one of the functions of the representations of the military and armed conflict in contemporary museums can be the negotiation of civil-military relations. This does not happen outside the national frame, of course, but I will argue that there is more going on here than simply an identification with the imagined community of the nation through identification with its armed forces and their histories. Rather, I will argue that the museums I will analyse in detail, namely the UK's National Army Museum in London (NAM) and Germany's Bundeswehr Military History Museum in Dresden (Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr, MHM), offer a space in which a specific professional role is constructed for the military within

the political community of the nation, and where the visitor (implicitly understood as civilian) is called upon to assume political responsibility for the nation's deployment of the armed forces.

For the purposes of this discussion, I understand civil-military relations in a modified form of the classic Clausewitzian formulation that defines war as an instrument of policy, or as the pursuit of policy by other means (Clausewitz, 2014, p. 50). As Samuel Huntingdon sets out in his seminal study of civil-military relations, what this amounts to in practice is the recognition that the military, although having a separate sphere of professional activity that is bound by its own culture and practices, nevertheless puts itself in the service of the civilian government and does not seek to formulate or pursue its own policy. This is what Huntington (1957, p. 83) refers to as a situation of 'objective civilian control', in which 'the recognition of autonomous military professionalism' is combined with control of the military's deployment by civilian government.

Huntington's focus on civilian control largely concerns itself with the role played by policymakers. In the contemporary context of Western democracies, however, this classic formulation needs to be augmented by taking into account the role of civilians beyond the ranks of the political elite (what we might call 'societal-military relations'). The warfare conducted on behalf of what have been referred to as 'post-military' or 'post-heroic' societies in the post-Cold War era is distinguished from the wars of the first half of the 20th century by a number of key factors: contemporary military engagements tend to be wars of choice rather than wars in which national survival is (perceived to be) at stake; they are fought by professional armies using advanced technology, far from the national territory, with the public at home experiencing the war remotely in a highly mediatized fashion; rather than leading to the

clear-cut defeat of a defined enemy, many of these conflicts are drawn-out, open-ended, and aim to produce improvements in national security and global stability, rather than ensuring outright victory over another nation (Danilova, 2015, pp. 8–51). These factors combine to make the general public, which exists in a peaceful society (Von Bredow, 2000, p. 199), sensitive to the costs of war, both in terms of military casualties on their own side, but also to potential injustice and violence perpetrated by the nation's own troops.

The post-9/11 wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are paradigmatic here, and it is no accident that the two military museums I will be discussing in this paper respond more-or-less directly to issues arising from these conflicts. Notably also, the potential for public disillusion with or even hostility to such military action is not only directed at the policymakers who decide on war, but can also lead to criticism of combatants. The unpopularity of wars whose purpose, likelihood of success, and justice of cause seem in question can lead to a blurring of the lines between the responsibility of policymakers and the perceived responsibility of individual members of the armed forces or the armed forces as a whole. Just war doctrine, in contrast, has traditionally sought to preserve the distinction between the political responsibility for making war on just grounds (*jus ad bellum*) and the soldier's responsibility for making war in a just fashion on the field of battle (*jus in bello*) (Lynn, 2008, pp. 132–133), so that the armed forces as instruments of civilian policy are not made to carry the moral responsibility of policymaker decisions (Wetham, 2017, p. 187). In this article, I will ask how two contemporary military museums, the NAM in the UK and the MHM in Germany, seek to frame civil-military relations in this fraught context, thereby contributing to the discourse of war. In particular, I will emphasize their mobilization of the nation's military history to address the question of civil-military relations in the present.

The second key issue to be addressed in this article is methodological. In order to understand the significance of war and military museums in the cultural discourse of war, the researcher must necessarily produce readings of museum exhibitions themselves. While, as post-structuralist literary criticism has demonstrated, texts are by no means reducible to one correct reading that is understood by all readers, the museum experience adds layers of complexity to interpretation, given that it mobilizes both text and an ever-expanding range of elements of display, which now includes interactive digital content, sound effects, lighting, projections, and so on, alongside the more traditional display of museum artefacts. Indeed, even where objects are concerned, museum professionals are increasingly developing innovative methods of presentation that seek to offer new perspectives on exhibits.

There are also questions to be answered about the very project of seeking to 'interpret' a museum exhibition, by reducing it to a meaning that can be summed up in words, a process that necessarily excludes a good deal of the lived experience of being in and moving through the museum space (Thiemeyer, 2010, pp. 87–89). While one solution to this problem might lie in the empiricism of visitor studies, there is also evidence to suggest that visitors to museums and heritage sites with a strongly emotive content (such as war) arrive with particular expectations that shape their interpretation of and feelings about the material displayed (Poria, Reichel and Biran, 2006; Smith and Campbell, 2015).

In this article, I intend to adopt a rhetorical approach to the museum exhibitions discussed. Building on Hüppauf's notion of war as discourse, a focus on rhetoric asks us to consider how the media of war discourse are constructed in such a way as to act persuasively on citizens. Rhetorical approaches to the study of museums have two important advantages over hermeneutic readings. Firstly, they acknowledge that the

meaning of museums is not merely discursive. Rather, they focus on how exhibitions in the museum space become meaningful in the interaction of 'discourses, events, objects and practices' that all carry 'evocative, affective weight' (Blair, Dickinson and Ott, 2010, p. 16). Secondly, the use of the term 'rhetoric' deliberately shifts our attention onto the configuration of material, spatial, textual and experiential elements that exhibitions employ persuasively to shape the understanding of visitors. This by no means implies that museums can determine that understanding, but rhetorical approaches to exhibitions focus on the means by which the visitor is encouraged to a adopt a particular stance towards the material at issue (Taylor, 2010, p. 128).

This stance is also closely linked to questions of identity: museum scholars who adopt a rhetorical approach understand the persuasive shaping of visitor perceptions not primarily in terms of the messages they may take away with them, but rather in terms of how visitors are urged to take on particular values and identities. M. Elizabeth Weiser has argued in this respect that museums can fulfil an epideictic rhetorical function, which she defines in terms of a public, ceremonial rhetoric that invites identification with civic values. As Weiser proposes, such an approach to the museum space

> focuses attention on the ways in which materiality and narrative intertwine as bodies move through crafted space, inventing modified civic experiences out of aesthetic encounters. Museums' interpreted display of the social world is an ongoing expression of the power of ceremonial epideictic rhetoric (in its visual, spatial, material as well as textual forms) to reflect and strengthen but also to create communal values from individual affects. (2017, p. 6)

As I will show below, this rhetorical perspective is particularly appropriate to the two museums I will analyse here, given that both invite visitors to adopt a specific attitude

to civil-military relations from a civilian point of view, defined in terms of the adoption of collective democratic responsibility for the deployment of armed force overseas, while also encouraging respect for the professional values of the soldiers who carry out such policy. My argument will be that, even if not all visitors adopt the civilian identity constructed as appropriate by the museum exhibitions, we can nevertheless identify the rhetoric of those exhibitions by paying attention to the interaction of their various exhibitionary strategies, which can be deemed rhetorical on account of their persuasive character. Furthermore, by offering persuasive accounts of the ideal nature of civil-military relations, such museums contribute to the wider discourse of war described by Hüppauf.

This article's contribution is therefore threefold. Firstly, in relation to the role of the war or military museum in contemporary society, it argues that the reduction of representations of the military and armed conflict to questions of national identification misses the important contribution that museums make to the discourse of war by mediating civil-military relations. Secondly, it shows the methodological possibilities of a rhetorical approach to museum exhibitions when addressing civil-military relations in the museum. Thirdly, as will become clear below, its comparative aspect allows me to show how the divergent cultures of civil-military relations in the two countries studied (the UK and Germany) impact on the rhetoric of civil-military relations that the selected museums express.

The National Army Museum, London

The two museums I have chosen to compare have a good deal in common. Both are

national institutions with close links to the branch of the armed forces they represent. In the case of the NAM, the original collections that form the core of the institution were assembled by an army committee at the Royal Military College in Sandhurst after World War Two, and featured 'relics' of historical regiments or of contemporary regiments that did not have facilities to hold these items in their own museums (Boyden, 1986, p. 23). Eventually outgrowing this space, the museum moved to its current home in Chelsea in 1971, where its permanent exhibition initially focused on telling the story of the British Army from the 15th century to 1914. The galleries focused heavily on displays of militaria, including uniforms and weaponry, as well as showing war art and displaying trophies of war (Chandler, 1972). It was not until 2006 that the museum displays were reorganized, a process that continued into 2011. This was followed by a more fundamental redesign, which also included a re-conceptualization of the building's interior architecture in 2017. The museum's transformation has shifted its focus from the traditional tasks of the military museum, involving the preservation and display of militaria and the honouring of military tradition (Hacker and Vining, 2015, p. 41), to a more dialogic approach, in which the museum is understood as a 'forum' (Cameron, 1971) for engaging in a conversation with visitors about the relationship of the army to wider society. For example, the NAM's website describes its function as follows:

> The National Army Museum is for everyone, no matter what they think about the British Army. […] We explore thoughts and ideas as well as real stories of real people. And we challenge the way people think about the Army and their relationship with it. (https://www.nam.ac.uk/about/about-the-museum)

This re-presentation of the NAM has fallen in a period of particular upheaval in terms of civil-military relations in the UK. As David Wethman notes, the UK's involvement in the Second Iraq War from 2003 and its continued engagement in Afghanistan (where it had been active since 2001) were leading by the mid-2000s to an atmosphere of criticism of the armed forces, whose members in some cases found themselves held responsible for these unpopular conflicts. Although a number of factors came together to shift this public mood from around 2007, there was nevertheless concern among military personnel that public support for and understanding of the armed forces has been damaged by their association with unpopular government policy, particularly in Iraq (Wetham, 2017, pp. 187–190). The NAM is funded directly with a grant from the Ministry of Defence, but remains formally independent of the Army. Nevertheless, it maintains close links with the Army and senior retired military figures serve on its governing Council. By shifting the focus of the NAM towards an 'engagement with the politics of the Army and its public image' (Bates, 2018, p. 200), the new exhibition design responds to a context in which that public image is perceived to be problematic. Indeed, in formulating its rationale for the major re-design of the museum and its permanent exhibition in the 2010s, the NAM acknowledged the controversial nature of the Army's past and present, while at the same time seeking to rhetorically ascribe a particular role and responsibility to civilian visitors as democratic citizens in their understanding of the role of the Army: 'Society elects the government that directs where the Army goes and what it does.' (National Army Museum, 2015, p. 16)

The dividing line between the civilian world and the world of the army is established in the first of the museum's five permanent galleries, the 'Soldier Gallery'. Visitors are engaged immediately in a process of self-reflection on entering the gallery,

where they are asked to answer the question whether they can imagine themselves becoming a soldier. Depending on which side of the entrance gate one walks through to answer this question, one's choice is recorded by an electronic sensor. Later, on leaving the 'Soldier Gallery', visitors are asked to press one of two buttons to either confirm their original answer or to change their minds. On the first of my two visits to the gallery in February 2018, the cumulative results, which are displayed to visitors on a video screen as they leave, showed a marked shift away from belief on the part of visitors that they would cope with life in the army: whereas over 60% had answered in the affirmative on entering, some 30% fewer held the same view on exiting the gallery.

To judge from this change in attitudes, the 'Soldier Gallery' appears to have a profound effect on many visitors' perceptions; but perhaps a rather troubling one, given that military museums of this kind have traditionally been understood as celebrating military tradition, which one might instinctively understand as a potential recruitment tool, not as a means of putting off would-be recruits. However, I would argue that the rhetoric of the 'Soldier Gallery' aims precisely at delineating a world of military professionalism to which only a small percentage of the population can belong. In doing so, the 'Soldier Gallery', which provides the starting point for a visit to the museum's permanent exhibition as a whole, reproduces the discourse of 'separation and exclusiveness' that, as Thomas Kucera argues (2018, p. 171), is central to the self-understanding of the British Army. Furthermore, by bringing home to the majority of that population their exclusion from this world, this gallery assigns them a civilian identity that demands a specific sets of attitudes to the soldier and his or her experiences.

This effect of demarcating the civilian from the military world is achieved by introducing visitors to the process of recruitment and training, and to the rigours of

army life more generally. These are presented in historical comparison, which has the effect of establishing particular rituals and practices of the military world as transhistorical elements of soldierly experience: for example, the measurement and kitting out of soldiers with uniforms, or military drill. The gallery thereby seeks to persuade visitors that to enter the army is to enter 'a different world'. As one text panel puts it:

> Soldiers give up their personal freedoms in ways that might seem like huge sacrifices to most civilians. Once they've passed a medical, recruits immediately step into a very different world of rules, regulations, communal living and separation from their friends and loved ones.

This 'different world' is one that visitors are encouraged to experience vicariously from the beginning of the gallery, in strongly embodied ways. For instance, when entering the gallery, visitors are encouraged to stand in front of display columns showing historical uniforms from various periods of the army's history. On a video screen, the visitor's face is then superimposed onto the uniform, so that he or she can literally see themselves as a soldier in uniform. This encouragement to imagine oneself as a soldier through physical enactment continues throughout the gallery, where, for example, one can learn to drill with a virtual sergeant major, using a motion-sensitive video game console. At other moments, visitors are encouraged to feel the weight of army kit or to practice packing symbolic representations of that kit in quick time, all of which is designed to bring the visitor closer to the physical and psychological demands of the life of a soldier.

It is notable, however, that the 'Soldier Gallery' does not contain reference to actual combat, which is only dealt with later in the museum's 'Battle Gallery': this has a much more traditional approach in terms of its focus on displaying weaponry and recounting the exploits of soldiers in battle, with an emphasis on 'courage' and

'leadership'. This exclusion of combat action from the 'Soldier Gallery' de-centres violence from the life of the soldier, establishing early on in the visit the notion that professional life of the military is above all characterized by discipline and hardship of a kind that most civilians would prefer not to endure, not by carrying out acts of violence. The 'Soldier Gallery' therefore tends to establish an over-arching rhetoric for the museum as a whole, namely that soldiers do a tough job on behalf of a civilian population who, by and large, would not be willing to take their place.

The museum's next two galleries, which are positioned in such a way that the visitor is less guided in terms of which should be visited first, address civil-military relations very directly: the 'Army Gallery' and the 'Society and the Army' gallery. The 'Army Gallery' continues the tradition of the original NAM by narrating the institutional history of the British Army, devoting a good deal of space to the display of historic uniforms, medals, and insignia. However, these elements are framed by a series of questions about the historic and contemporary purpose of the army and its control by civilian government. Visitors are asked via interactive displays to consider when the army should be used, for what purposes, how much the UK should be spending on it, and even whether it should exist. According to Stefan Berger this is

> part and parcel of the dialogic set up of the museum which is confronting the
> visitor with different opinions on the army and challenges the visitor to make up
> their minds on questions including the one whether the army is worth the
> considerable cost to society at large. (Berger, no date, p. 16)

This interpretation certainly aligns with the NAM's own stated ambition for its new permanent exhibition, namely to 'present information […] from multiple perspectives so that our visitors can draw their own findings' (National Army Museum, 2015, p. 16). Nevertheless, this apparent dialogue in the 'Army Gallery' needs to be seen in the context of its representation of the purpose of the army to 'protect and serve us', as the

introductory panel puts it. This purpose is presented as transcending societal change, at the same time as calling on the civilian citizen to take responsibility for the uses to which the army is put. In the contemporary context, the army thereby becomes a neutral tool in the hands of the democratic citizenry, who have to take collective responsibility for the wars that only those who join the 'world apart' of the army are capable of fighting. While the exhibition leaves open the possibility that some visitors may decide that it would be better if the army did not exist, it does not help the visitor to imagine how a world without armies might look, but rather asserts that, while armies continue to exist (implicitly for our protection), it is civilians who are ultimately responsible for their deployment.

The notion that soldiers may commit morally questionable acts in combat, for which they would have to bear personal responsibility, is addressed somewhat later in the 'Battle Gallery': a series of questions such as 'is it souvenirs or loot?', 'should snipers be shot on sight?', 'is it justifiable not to take prisoners in battle?' are raised here, collected together on one wall of the gallery, but in a perfunctory way. The exhibition does not provide answers or pursue these questions further, and, while this does amount to an acknowledgement that questions of *jus in bello* might be questions for soldiers too, it remains unclear who these questions are directed at and who might resolve them. Given that all of the other questions posed in the museum address to the implicitly civilian visitor, it would be easy to assume that, here again, such moral dilemmas are the province of those outside of the army who exercise objective civilian control over it through democratic institutions.

The museum's rhetoric remains focused throughout on persuading civilians of their responsibility not only for deploying the army, but also for reflecting on their own relationship to it. This latter aspect is addressed in the 'Society and the Army' gallery,

which largely investigates cultural representations of the army (for example in music, film, and literature), many of which are critical. By contrasting such representations, the gallery encourages the visitor to understand the culturally constructed nature of attitudes both to the military and to the memory of war. For example, a display of remembrance poppies not only points out that the wearing of such symbols can be a sign of social conformity as much as it is a sign of genuine mourning for the war dead, but also shows how the poppy symbol can be misappropriated by far-right groups such as the English Defence League. Nevertheless, despite this apparent multiperspectivity, the gallery's overall emphasis on societal perceptions of the army tends again to underline civilian responsibility. The army's identity as a group of special individuals doing difficult work in the service of the democratic polity is clearly established in the 'Soldier Gallery' and the 'Army Gallery.' Against this background, cultural projections of meaning onto the army are firmly identified as the responsibility of society and therefore as not directly of the army's concern: it is society that is presented as bearing responsibility for the trivialising, demonising or glorifying of soldiers, not soldiers themselves. By implication, therefore, where these ascriptions of meaning to the army fail to live up to the reality, it is the civilian world that becomes culpable.

Notably, this gallery's display on remembrance and the poppy symbol also includes an opportunity for visitors to pay tribute to soldiers by filling in cards with their own thoughts and memories. These cards use the following prompt question: 'What do you think about soldiers and their service? Is there a particular story you've heard that has affected you?' On my second field trip to the museum in the autumn of 2019, some of the completed cards on display made reference to specific ancestors who had died in the First and Second World Wars. However, the predominant message chimed in with the museum's rhetoric in relation to the difficulty of the soldier's work

and the visitor's acknowledgement and respect for that difficulty. This discourse intersected with the notion that such work was necessary to 'protect and serve' the nation and its civilians. One contributor, for example, wrote as follows: 'Even though terrible things happen their [sic] happy to serve us and because of that I will thank them until my dying day.'

This sense of gratitude to soldiers for their difficult work was frequently conflated with more patriotic sentiment, however. For instance, another contributor wrote: 'The people who do what they do and all those many people who sacrificed their lifes [sic] for our country is overwhelming and I'm so proud.' These feelings of patriotic pride evoked by the museum are interesting in as far as they do not feature heavily in the museum's rhetoric, which rather stresses a sense of civilian responsibility for the military and respect for the soldier's professional contribution. However, expressions of pride in the sacrifice of those fallen in defence of the national community are common in the more general cultural discourse of war in the UK (Kidd and Sayner, 2018). Their appearance here is further proof that feelings, as theorists of affect have argued, can attach themselves to apparently inappropriate objects in unpredictable ways (Kosofsky Sedgwick, 2003, p. 19; Anderson, 2014, p. 6). Nevertheless, it is clear that, even when visitors are expressing such sentiment, they are able to relate this to the museum's foregrounding of the value of military professionalism under difficult circumstances as key to the persuasive rhetoric employed. This suggests that the NAM may be effective in achieving the acceptance of its vision of civil-military relations among visitors, therefore contributing to the discourse of war in the UK, to return to Hüppauf's formulation.

The Bundeswehr Museum of Military History

While there are strong links between the British Army and the NAM, the Bundeswehr

Museum of Military History in Dresden is, as the name suggests, an official institution of the German armed forces, subordinate to its Office for Historical Research (Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt) (Cercel 2018, 11). The building, which is located in a former armoury in Dresden, had served as a military museum since the end of the 19th century, subsequently functioning as the official museum of both the National Socialist Wehrmacht and the National People's Army of the GDR (Rogg, 2011). In the process of amalgamation of the two post-war German armies in the 1990s, Dresden was designated as the Bundeswehr's leading museum (taking over this role from the Defence History Museum at Rastatt in Baden-Württemberg). The MHM has attracted considerable scholarly attention (Arnold-de Simine, 2013, pp. 71–86; Weiser, 2017, pp. 52–55; Cercel, 2018; Cercel, Parish and Rowley, 2019; Jaeger, 2020, pp. 129–149) for its innovative approach to the musealization of military history.

Like the NAM, the MHM underwent a redesign in the 'post-heroic', post-Cold War world, closing from 1989 until 2011. Not only were the permanent exhibitions, of which there are now two, reconceptualized, but this reconceptualization went hand in hand with an internal and external architectural intervention that radically altered the face of the building. Star architect Daniel Libeskind designed a wedge of glass and steel that now cuts into the historic façade, from the apex of which visitors can view the city. This viewpoint is aligned with the flight paths of the Allied bombers that destroyed the old centre of Dresden in February 1945, thereby symbolically establishing a link between warfare and its consequences for civilian populations.

Libeskind's wedge also serves to divide the building between its two permanent exhibitions. The thematic exhibition, which explores links between war and society, occupies the wedge over five floors and is designed so that visitors begin their tour at the apex with the view over Dresden and then move down through the exhibition. The

historical exhibition, on the other hand, begins on the ground floor and ends on the first, occupying the space either side of the wedge. Visitors are not precluded from moving between two exhibitions on these floors, but they are clearly demarcated. Given the deliberately more provocative and experimental nature of the thematic exhibition, it is this element that has attracted more scholarly attention. Indeed, even the director of the permanent exhibitions in his own description of the museum's design has tended to play down the chronological tour as 'traditional', despite the fact it is in fact the larger of the two permanent exhibitions and contains the majority of the museum's 10,000 exhibits (Pieken, 2012, pp. 169–172).

As the chief curator has also highlighted (Pieken, 2012), the museum conception has been based on an anthropological understanding of violence as endemic to human society, with war as one manifestation of this broader phenomenon. This is above all the focus of the thematic exhibition, which looks at the various cultural interchanges between the military and the civilian world, through fashion, children's toys, films, and art, for example. Other researchers have rightly noted that this philosophical starting point impedes to some extent the museum's role in explaining the nature of war as a specific kind of violence (Arnold-de Simine 2013, 85; Cercel, Parish, and Rowley 2019, 202). Furthermore, as Elke Heckner has argued, this emphasis on 'a shared notion of the human capacity for destruction' might play into the hands of a resurgent Right in Germany, which seeks to draw equivalences between German suffering during the Second World War, for instance in the firebombing of Dresden, and that of National Socialism's victims (2016, p. 366). Nevertheless, by stressing the ways in which civilian society is implicated in the culture of war, rather than simply being on the receiving end of its violence, the thematic exhibition does promote a sense of collective responsibility for the culture that makes conflict possible. Or, as Stefan Jaeger has put it,

'visitors are forced to reflect on the relationship between violence/war and their own personal attitudes and actions as well as the broader future goals of human society' (Jaeger, 2020, p. 149).

For example, in one exhibit from the thematic exhibition, a parade of military toys from various periods has been created, at whose head stands a toy tank damaged during the fire-bombing of Dresden in 1945. This element of the exhibit asks the visitor to consider how cultures that foster violence and war take root in society and what the consequences of those cultures can be, particularly in terms of their effect on the young (Jaeger, 2020, p. 140). On the other hand, the weaponry displayed in the thematic exhibition, for instance the German V2 rocket of the Second World War, links technological advancement, which may also have positive civilian uses, with destruction, but also with the desire for defence and protection. This inherent ambiguity in the objects displayed (Cercel, Parish and Rowley, 2019, p. 203) is key to the exhibitionary practice of the museum overall (Pieken, 2011, pp. 23–24).

At times, this ambiguity is enhanced by shifting the physical perspective of the visitor in relation to the objects, as in one of the atria of the building that displays a series of rockets hanging from its ceiling. Descending the stairs of this atrium, it is possible to see these missiles as achievements of military technology, or even to consider how they might be launched against an enemy. However, on arriving at the bottom of the display, visitors are led directly under the missiles and are forced to consider the possibility of finding themselves on the receiving end of such mechanized violence. This effect is driven home by the installation in this space of an art work by Ingo Günther ('The Hiroshima Thank You Instrument'), which flashes a bright light every few seconds against a wall covered with phosphorescent paint, so that the visitor's shadow is briefly captured on its surface, recalling the shadows cast by

vaporized victims of the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Arnold-de Simine, 2013, p. 72).

In summary, then, the thematic exhibition at the centre of the museum emphasizes the ambivalent relationship of civilian society to warfare: civilians are victims of violence in war, but also express a fascination with its technologies, identify with militaristic ideologies, and so on. The persuasive rhetoric of the thematic exhibition therefore calls on citizens to see themselves as implicated in the society that creates the conditions for warfare, not merely as the passive objects of military aggression. Against the backdrop of this assumption that the expression of violence in society is a collective responsibility for citizens, those who also choose to visit the historical exhibition are confronted with the further question of how military institutions have developed over time, and to consider what the most appropriate ordering of civil-military relations might be.

A point of orientation for visitors in considering this issue is provided in the entrance hall, between the lift that takes visitors to the top of the building to begin the thematic tour and the door to the beginning of the chronological exhibition on the ground floor. Here, Clausewitz's dictum 'Der Krieg ist eine bloße Fortsetzung der Politik mit anderen Mitteln' ('War is a mere continuation of policy by other means') (Clausewitz, 2014, p. 50) scrolls past on an LED display. This apparently frivolous medium, more reminiscent of the context of advertising than of serious military thought, arguably creates an ironic distance to Clausewitz's statement. Nevertheless, if we take these words as the hinge between the two exhibitions, the museum's rhetorical stance becomes clearer. Although Clausewitz's thought is not explored in further detail in the museum as a whole, he does subscribe to the museum's own understanding of the primordial nature of violence as a 'blind natural force' that is unleashed in war. While

noting that the setting free of such violence leads to unpredictable and chaotic situations, Clausewitz sees the key element of armed conflict in terms of the subordination of violence to policy (Clausewitz, 2014, p. 53). If the thematic axis of the MHM tends to draw visitors' attention to the human and societal causes and impacts of violence, the historical exhibit focuses more strongly on the interplay between violence and policy, showing the political ends that warfare has served throughout German history.

The historical exhibition is both large and complex, so it will only be possible here to outline the most important elements of its representation of military history from the late medieval period to the present day. The exhibition focuses on turning points in German military history and the nature of the social and political order in those epochs. It pays particular attention to questions of power, to the development of military technology and its effect on the experience of warfare, and to the physical suffering caused by that technology. In order to address technological developments, the exhibition necessarily has to show historical artefacts, but these are often presented in such a way as to deflect any potential fetishization of weaponry and armour, for example by suspending them in mid-air or presenting them as if they were clothing an uncannily absent body. Exhibits such as a blood-stained tunic belonging to a young officer whose arm was amputated during the Seven Years' War, or photographs of soldiers' bodies in the barbed wire of the First World War, serve to maintain the link between the use of weapons and human suffering and death, an element distinctly downplayed in the NAM by comparison. Nevertheless, the overriding concern is to demonstrate that, while war has been a constant feature of German history, the interests it has served have been the power interests of the time, which have driven specific forms of warfare, further conditioned by the available technology of the era.

These societal constellations of power and the military are presented, through their association with human suffering, in negative terms, that is to say as unsatisfactory solutions to the quandary of how the human capacity for violence might be subordinated to policy. This is nowhere more evident than on the first floor of the building, where the period 1914–1945 is the focus. It is worth noting here that the ground floor, although a large exhibition space, is made to cover around six centuries of German military history, whereas the two world wars are dealt with in much greater detail in a separate wing of the first floor. Rather than a strictly chronological approach, as on the ground floor, these two wars are presented side-by-side. While a dividing line on the floor shows which exhibits pertain to which war, the displays on either side of the line are thematically coordinated to present the two world wars as comparable with each other, but also as a fundamentally new kind of conflict in the history of human civilization. In particular, these wars' combination of ideology, mechanisation, mediatization, and mass loss of human life is emphasized. So, for example, thematic sections show the economic factors in both conflicts in an era of industrialized mass production, the role of women in war, the effects of modern weapons on the bodies of soldiers, or the role of ideology in the mass media.

In comparison, the post-war section of the historical exhibition, which occupies the other wing of the first floor, provides a largely affirmative account of the post-war Federal Republic's turn to a policy of *innere Führung* (inner leadership) in the Bundeswehr and the reconceptualization of the soldier as *Staatsbürger in Uniform* (citizen in uniform), which is contrasted favourably with the situation in the German Democratic Republic's National People's Army, where militaristic and authoritarian traditions continued to hold sway. The concepts of inner leadership and of the citizen in uniform were characteristic of the Bundeswehr during the Cold War, when it sought to

present itself as a 'liberal' army subject to what Huntington would describe as 'subjective civilian control' (Huntington, 1957, p. 83). In other words, as Kucera points out, soldiers were expected to behave as autonomous, liberal citizens committed to the values of democracy and human rights that were anchored in the West German constitution, and not to place a separate military ethos and identity above such concerns. The principle underlying this ideology was the notion that, as a purely defensive army, the Bundeswehr required above all armed citizens willing to protect democracy, who must therefore be motivated primarily by a commitment to democratic values (Kucera, 2018, p. 39).

The MHM's chronological exhibition is concerned to point out that the remilitarization of West Germany was by no means uncontested, and that civil society and politicians continued to regard the Bundeswehr with scepticism or even outright hostility, as the displays detailing the refusal of military service demonstrate. However, the final post-unification section of the exhibition deals with a more significant challenge to the post-war model, occasioned by the Bundeswehr's shift to increasingly involvement in overseas missions and its emergence as a purely professional force as conscription has come to an end. The participation of the Bundeswehr in missions in the Gulf, the former Yugoslavia, Somalia, and (most controversially) Afghanistan has led to shifts in self-perception towards an ethos of military professionalism (Kucera, 2018, p. 96), which has been accompanied by a sense of insecurity among some officers that the purpose of the Bundeswehr has become less defined due to the new uses that politicians are making of it (Leonhard, 2019, p. 314). As in the British case, concerns have been raised both within the Bundeswehr and by commentators on military affairs that potentially controversial deployments could lead to a decline in overall support for the soldiers in the civilian population and even to criticism of the armed forces where such

deployments lead to undesired consequences (Von Bredow, 2000, pp. 199–200; Buch, 2011, p. 13).

In framing the potential complexities of the relationship between policymakers and German society, on the one hand, and a professional army on the other, the museum ends its exhibition by staking out clear roles for both sides of the civil-military divide. This section is introduced with an injunction to politicians and civilians to consider the consequences of Germany's expanding international role:

> If Germany wants to take on more international responsibility in the future, politicians and society will have to come to terms with the fact this does not in principle rule out the use of military operations. (My translation)

Pointing to the many factors of instability in the world today (for example, terrorism, war, the refugee crisis), the exhibition challenges civilian visitors to think about the kinds of military deployment they would find acceptable, while at the same time characterising the soldiers of the Bundeswehr as professionals committed to making the world a better place. For example, one display entitled 'Personal Commitment' shows examples of German soldiers helping the regions they have worked in, even after the end of their missions.

This part of the exhibition is deliberately open-ended, in that objects and texts relating to contemporary crises are added as the situation in the world changes. However, the key message here is that, faced with these new challenges, German society and its politicians must make decisions about how the soldiers of the Bundeswehr will be used as an instrument of policy. While German soldiers are portrayed as wanting to make the world a better place, responsibility for their deployment is firmly handed back to democratic society, which must then, implicitly, take responsibility for the consequences of that deployment. This democratic

responsibility is underlined by the display that opens this section of the exhibition, which shows a German military jeep that was damaged by a roadside bomb in Kunduz in 2004, leaving several occupants badly injured. This jeep is displayed alongside the Bundestag voting cards of the then German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and the leader of the opposition, Angela Merkel, who both voted in favour of this deployment.

In summary then, we can say that the rhetoric of the MHM firmly establishes the capacity for violence and armed conflict as a universal feature of human society, in which all are potentially complicit. In its historical exhibition, however, the question as to the justification for making violence a matter of policy is examined, showing how the use of armed force in the service of ultimately illegitimate power culminated in the 20th century with catastrophic conflict and loss of human life. The Federal Republic of the post-war period is shown grappling with the question of how violence might be subordinated to policy in a democratic society, before the exhibition ends with the observation that Germany has no alternative but to address this question in an increasingly unpredictable contemporary world. However, the response is to be determined entirely by democratic means. The rhetoric of the exhibition thereby calls on German civilians to take responsibility for the deployment of a professionalized and committed Bundeswehr, which is available to them as an instrument of democratic policy.

Conclusion

'Post-military' and 'post-heroic' societies in Western Europe face challenges today in justifying and maintaining support for their military interventions overseas in pursuit of their perceived security and humanitarian interests. As I have shown above, military history museums, and armed forces museums in particular, can play a role in providing a space where citizens can engage with the history of armed conflict and reflect on their

own responsibilities in democratically sanctioning the deployment of violence in the service of policy. As I have shown, the NAM and the MHM both engage in rhetorical strategies to encourage the visitor as citizen to adopt a particular stance in relation to the modern armed forces and the people who serve in them. That stance both recognizes the challenges faced by military professionals and accepts that the responsibility for going to war for just cause, understood in terms of *jus ad bellam*, lies above all with civilian society and its democratic institutions. The world of the soldier is portrayed as a world apart, that is to say as an instrument of civilian power, but not a part of the civilian world. In this way, both museums contribute to a 'discourse of war' in Hüppauf's terms, promoting the acceptance of a particular interpretation of the ideal nature of contemporary civil-military relations.

There are, however, differences between the two cases: whereas the NAM attributes the military culture of the British Army to the rigours of 'service' to the nation, the Bundeswehr in the MHM is ultimately associated with its soldiers' commitment to make the world a better place. This offers a cosmopolitan updating of the *Bürger in Uniform* of the post-war period, with German soldiers now serving universal ethical values rather than national interests (Leonhard, 2016, p. 116): something perhaps more akin to a *Weltbürger in Uniform*. In both cases, however, the decision of where and how to deploy this tool of the state is devolved to civilian society, affirming Huntington's ideal of 'objective civilian control'.

While my analysis has focused on visitors to these museums primarily as civilians, it should also be noted that both museums also potentially address soldiers and former soldiers themselves. While veterans are certainly among the visitors to the NAM, the MHM in fact plays an important role in the training of new recruits, who are required to attend guided tours of the exhibit. A question for future research might

involve an analysis of these military tours in comparison with the versions offered to civilian visitors. Nevertheless, just as the civilian visitor is offered a clear point of identification as democratic citizen in the two museums, so too the museums construct an idea of the military world that could appeal to military visitors, offering them an identity and a set of values as soldiers, which civilians can recognize and respect.

With regard to the MHM, my focus on rhetoric also suggests another limitation to this analysis. In contrast to the NAM, which can be visited in smaller sections without the overall rhetorical framing of the exhibition being lost, the MHM is a very large museum that few visitors will see in its entirety. For reference, a detailed engagement with every exhibit in the building, including one of the two available guided tours, took this researcher around eight hours during the one field trip that was made for the writing of this article. The division of the MHM into two permanent exhibitions with a different focus arguably encourages visitors to choose which perspective they find most interesting, so that engagement with the other strand may be superficial or non-existent. There is therefore a question mark over whether a rhetorical reading of the various elements of the museum taken as a whole makes sense from the point-of-view of real visitors. Nevertheless, I would argue that a reading of the entire museum design and the inter-relation of its elements allows us to see the address that the museum makes to what might be called its ideal visitor, who is supposed to engage with all of the material presented.

While both museums formulate a rhetoric that is textual, visual, and experiential, there are also clear differences in terms of the NAM's arguable idealization of the world of the soldier in the 'Soldier Gallery', in which violence and the business of the war are bracketed out to be dealt with elsewhere in the exhibition. The MHM strongly employs elements of embodied visitor experience in its thematic exhibition, as described above,

whereas the historical exhibition is much more traditional in terms of placing the visitor in front of glass cases, which create a sense of distance to the soldier's experience. The violence (both inflicted and suffered) that is part of that historical experience is shown as integral to military history. Displays of weaponry are subject to forms of estrangement that resist imaginative identification with combatants, while the exhibition also makes clear the horrendous physical effects of those weapons. In addition, the MHM devotes considerably more space to the biographies of those who have opposed war, such as pacifists and those who have resisted the draft, while negative portrayals of the military in the NAM's 'Society and the Army' gallery tend to juxtapose (implicitly questionable) civilian representations of the army with the 'real' experience of soldiers addressed elsewhere, placing the latter in the context of the army's stated mission to 'protect' and 'serve' the nation.

Finally, it is worth noting that, whereas the MHM seeks to show how war-themed toys can feed into a culture of militarism, the NAM runs its own gift shop with children's camouflage uniforms, 'Action Man' dolls and other military toys that seem to speak of an uncritical acceptance of young people's imaginative investment in war. Overall, therefore, the MHM (which, by contrast, houses a small independent bookshop selling anti-war classics such as Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*) is warier of potential glorification of the world of the soldier than the NAM. As Eva Zwach observes, this desire to avoid accusations of militarism was already present in the Bundeswehr museum in Rastatt during the Cold War (Zwach, 1999, p. 152), and the new MHM clearly continues this tradition. Nevertheless, the MHM still affirms the value of the contemporary Bundeswehr as a professional institution under objective civilian control.

What this analysis has shown overall, therefore, is that museums representing armed conflict and the military potentially have a broader function in contemporary society than simply offering opportunities for the bolstering of national identity. Although the museums analysed here do work within the national frame, my rhetorical approach to their presentation of civil-military relations suggests that the representation of war and of armies in museums may create spaces in which the relationship of contemporary societies to war and violence, and to those charged with carrying out such violence, is negotiated. Both museums present themselves as fora for such negotiations (in the case of the MHM, see Rogg, 2011, p. 13), yet their exhibitionary strategies ultimately suggest not an open-ended debate, but rather an effort of rhetorical persuasion in which visitors are urged to adopt a particular identity as civilians who share an understanding of the ideal nature of civil-military relations.

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