

WEIMAR CINEMA AND THE CONTESTED REMEMBRANCE OF WORLD WAR I: THE BAN OF *ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT* IN GERMANY (1930)¹

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ABSTRACT

In 1930, the film *All Quiet on the Western Front* was banned in Germany. This paper argues that the ban was not only due to the riots related to screenings of the film, which were incited by Nazis under Joseph Goebbels, but that it was resented by conservatives because it was perceived as a strong attack on their remembrance of the First World War. The paper concludes by suggesting an explanation as to why their specific remembrance of the war was so important to conservative nationalist milieus.

KEYWORDS

All Quiet on the Western Front, Westfront 1918, film, Weimar Republic, First World War.

INTRODUCTION

Film reflects mentalities common within a certain society.² This basic premise of historic film studies is particularly convincing for the war films produced in the Weimar Republic, which, representing the World War lost by Germany in 1918, dealt in a subject matter that was still very present in the collective memory of the nation.³ Consequently, historians have found great interest in the Weimar war films, especially in more recent years.

The most prominent and well-examined example of this is Lewis Milestone's adaptation of Erich Maria Remarque's 1928/29 novel, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (*Im Westen nichts Neues*), and the scandal it caused in Germany.⁴ When the film opened to the public in December 1930 in Berlin, heckling National Socialists led by Joseph Goebbels successfully interrupted the screening until fights broke out and the police had to be called to break up the event. Continuing riots whenever the film was shown in the following week and the increasing polemics by conservatives led to a complete ban of the film on 11 December, just one week after its première.⁵ In the history of the Weimar cinema, the quarrels about *All Quiet on the Western Front* are probably unsurpassed in their vehemence, yet the case is not completely unique as it is part of a wide range of political controversies surrounding films during the period.⁶

It is therefore all the more baffling that at the same time other movies which dealt with the world war in a quite critical way—such as Heinz Paul's *The Other Side* (*Die andere Seite*, 1931), Viktor Trivas' *No Man's land* (*Niemandsland*, 1931), or Georg Wilhelm Pabst's *Westfront 1918* (*Westfront 1918: Vier von der Infanterie*, 1930)—could be shown without being disturbed. The question of why a scandal was sparked off only by *All Quiet on the Western Front* and not by any of these other films, all of them pacifist in tendency, has not been thoroughly investigated, but explanations can be found through examination of contemporary literature concerning German film and the particular case of *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Since Remarque's book, a German story, was adapted for the screen in America—an enemy during the World War—some elements of German society, so one argument runs, were afraid that the film and its international success would damage Germany's international prestige, particularly because America had a certain reputation for producing anti-German war movies,

and *All Quiet on the Western Front* was seen to be part of that tradition. This was also the official ground for banning the movie.⁷ The scandal is further explained by the Nazis' increased confidence after the landslide victory in the September 1930 elections, which had made the NSDAP the second strongest faction in the Reichstag.⁸ However, these explanations are somewhat problematic for the simple reason that they hardly refer to the contents of the film, concentrating almost exclusively on the campaigns surrounding the production and the screening of the movie.⁹ Undoubtedly, scandalizing the film was a political instrument for the Nazis, but solely stressing this factor, as the explanations above suggest, does not even raise the question of whether other protesters resented specific contents of the film. The arguments of conservatives in the Weimar Republic are then easily dismissed as merely a 'farce,'¹⁰ which does little justice to the nature of the national milieu.

To answer the question why *All Quiet on the Western Front* was resented more than any other film, the images themselves and the possible interpretations they suggest in comparison to other movies that did not excite a similar reaction must be central to the analysis. Of the films mentioned above, *Westfront 1918*,¹¹ which premièred only six months before *All Quiet on the Western Front* in May 1930, would seem to be a useful choice for a comparison, because its economic success and structural similarities in the film's content make it appear to be the 'German equivalent' of *All Quiet on the Western Front*.¹² First however, the cinematic representations of war must be placed in the context of the different cultures of remembrance pertaining to the World War in Weimar Germany to enable us to understand the contemporary debate around these films.

GERMAN REMEMBRANCE OF THE WORLD WAR

Contrary to France, for instance, where the individual memory of the war experience was embedded in a universally accepted frame of reference made up of such values as patriotism, pacifism, and republicanism, no basic consensus like that existed in the Weimar Republic. Instead, the way the war was remembered and the meaning that was attached to it largely depended on one's affiliation to one of the three big social milieus or political camps which constituted the Weimar society. While the Catholic milieu did not develop a specific, closed pattern for interpreting the war, the diametrically opposed cultures of remembrance maintained in the socialist/social-democratic, and the national camp (the former comprising mostly labourers, the latter liberal and conservative milieus) and their respective claims to the exclusive 'truth' formed the background of the bitter disputes surrounding the interpretation of the war.¹³

In particular, three political myths were central to nationalist memories of the war experience. The war enthusiasm of August 1914, commonly referred to as 'August experiences' (*Augusterlebnis*) or 'spirit of 1914,' had made it possible for all the distressful social segmentation to be transcended in a fraternization across all strata. This was prolonged in the 'camaraderie of the front lines' (*Frontkameradschaft*), where the German soldiers could prove their manhood and demonstrate their devotion, fighting heroically to defend the nation. They remained undefeated on the battlefield and it was only due to the alleged 'stab in the back,' the '*Dolchstoß*' of the home front, that Germany eventually had to capitulate. Veterans belonging to the social-democratic milieu, like the ones organized within the *Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold*, tried to refute these myths, contrasting the 'camaraderie' with the 'caste spirit' widespread among officers in the army, the 'stab in the back' with military inferiority due to the exhaustion of the troops, and the heroic stylization of the soldiers and their front experiences with the miserable living conditions in the trenches and the sober insight that death was fundamentally senseless in the annihilation of industrialized warfare. A deeper meaning of the war and its horrors could only be found in the ideals of pacifism and the consequent recon-

ciliation between the nations, particularly between Germany and France, as a prerequisite to prevent further wars in Europe.¹⁴ These irreconcilable differences existed since the war had been lost, but only about ten years after the defeat did the conflict about the assessment of the war deepen and result in violent clashes. That the war became ever more present as a subject in literature, visual art, and film from around 1930¹⁵ is telling and, in turn, contributed to further aggravating the conflict.

The treatments of the war and the interpretations offered by both *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *Westfront 1918*, influencing memories and the imagination, are consequently to be seen within this framework of different discourses surrounding the war.¹⁶ Since both films attempted to be as ‘realistic’ as possible in their mode of portraying the war,¹⁷ their claim to authenticity and thus their significance in the debate was particularly high. This is also demonstrated in the marketing of *Westfront 1918*, which always stressed that three of the four main actors had actually fought in the war themselves.¹⁸ In a similar fashion, the novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* was stylized as ‘the authentic report on the life of the simple soldier Remarque’ and the film-makers tried (in vain) to convince Remarque to take part in their project as screenwriter or even as actor.¹⁹ The analysis of the films should therefore concentrate on what interpretations they suggest concerning the conflicting views of the war in the different milieus and in comparison to each other. Additionally, newspapers belonging to the national camp will be used to show what conservatives’ reactions were to both films.²⁰ Since the riots incited by the Nazis dominated the reports on *All Quiet on the Western Front* from 6 December onwards, the reviews referring to the non-public screening of the film on 4 December, which only dealt with the film’s content, are of greater interest to this investigation.²¹

WAR GUILT AND THE ‘SPIRIT OF 1914’

The Treaty of Versailles, which formally ended World War One, was perceived as great injustice by members of all strata in German post-war society. Besides the economic, military, and territorial terms, which were felt to be very harsh, it was understood to stipulate that Germany alone was to blame for the outbreak of the war, which sparked widespread moral indignation. Right-wing groups were particularly outraged at this idea, and from the late 1920s onwards, the catchphrase of the ‘war guilt lie’ became ever more important in their propaganda as a means to unite the nationalist camp and to mobilize the masses.²² As the very political question of war guilt played a big role in the contemporary view of the world war, and as both Pabst’s and Milestone’s film contain scenes which could be understood as statements on this question, these seem to be a suitable starting-point for the analysis.

In the final scene of *Westfront 1918* Karl, one of the four main characters, lies in a field hospital and has a vision of his wife, whom he had caught cheating on him with a butcher while he was on furlough in a previous scene. He now forgives her for the indiscretion, and his dying words are: ‘I know, I do know. Not you, this all—we are all to blame.’ He recognizes that his wife, as she had explained to him earlier, was forced to prostitute herself for further rations and that the war is thus to blame for her indiscretion. Who is to blame for the war, however, remains an open question as Karl’s vague ‘we are all’ does not contain an accusation against anyone specific—it could be interpreted in many different ways.

The scene in *All Quiet on the Western Front* in which the German soldiers openly discuss the causes of the war—blaming weapons manufacturers and generals because they benefit from it—is far more explicit. Katczinski, one of the older soldiers, suggests that in the future the warmongers and generals should fight out the war themselves and the discussion even includes an accusation against the Kaiser himself, who, according to one of the younger soldiers, needed the war ‘to make him famous.’ As the scene fuelled ‘the notion that Germany

was to be blamed for the war,' Curt Emmrich, a veteran who wrote a lengthy review in the conservative *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung (DAZ)*, referring to the version of *All Quiet on the Western Front* he had seen in Paris, resented this scene, just as he resented the whole film. He claimed that in the German edition, the scene had been 'changed profoundly and [was] made completely harmless.'²³ Yet according to a report in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* at least Katczinski's suggestion could be seen in Berlin.²⁴ Emmrich was probably exaggerating the differences between the German and the French versions of the movie because it was his aim to show how strongly anti-German the film was in cinemas abroad. Ironically, the cuts that had been made to tone down some of the scenes for the German market did eventually find their way into the German discourse—through Emmrich's report.²⁵

Another example concerning the beginning of the war is provided by the well-known narrative of the 'Augusterlebnis,' or 'spirit of 1914.' When the war broke out in the summer of 1914, it was welcomed with an excitement that was soon interpreted, above all by conservatives, as a sudden transformation of the heterogeneous German society into one national 'community.' This interpretation of the events in August 1914, used also as a propaganda instrument to conjure up unity and unanimity towards the end of the war, survived as a political myth into the Weimar Republic,²⁶ becoming a cornerstone of nationalist remembrance of the war.

While *Westfront 1918* does not contain any statements concerning 'the spirit of 1914', it lies at the core of the first sequence of *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Soldiers are marching through the street accompanied by marching music and cries like 'For Kaiser and fatherland!', while flowers are thrown from a cheering crowd. The camera pans into a classroom where the teacher is holding a passionate speech about honour and the fulfilment of one's duty towards the nation. The sequence ends with the whole class leaving the room, joyfully chanting, to volunteer for the front. The ardour displayed in the images is intensified by the pace of the editing: while the pupils jump to their feet, one after the other declaring their personal entry into the war with shouts like 'Me, too!', the camera keeps switching faster and faster between close-ups of the pupils and the teacher, seeming to frantically lose itself in the ecstasy of the moment. However, all the cheering is critically contrasted by the figure of Behm, a pupil who looks insecure and afraid, and has to be convinced by his friends to join them—later he is the first of the group to die in the trenches. Still in the classroom, another pupil imagines himself coming home proudly in uniform just to see his mother devastated at his decision. Full of shame he tries to get rid of his uniform and he continues to look embarrassed until the picture fades back to the classroom, even when his father enters the room with an expression of pride on his face.

The reviewer of the nationalist *Deutsche Zeitung (DZ)*, who denounced *All Quiet on the Western Front* as a 'humiliating film' for the liking of 'deserters, shirkers, pacifists and enemies of Germany,' was particularly outraged by this scene, as the following passage from his article shows: 'Mothers of German blood will not tolerate the forgery that their children were "alien" to them in uniform.'²⁷

CAMARADERIE AND HEROISM

The scenes following the excitement and enthusiasm over the outbreak of the war in *All Quiet on the Western Front* show how the pupils are completely disillusioned. When they come to the barracks, they are surprised that their instructor is their postman Himmelstoss, who was shown joking with some of the pupils in the very first scene of the film. Now, his response to their joy at seeing him is cold: he has them stand to attention and makes quite clear that he is not their friend but their commanding officer, and that he is mindful of distinctions according to rank. He turns out to be a real 'slave-driver,' for instance ordering the pupils to dive into

puddles of mud, apparently only to annoy them.²⁸ However, *All Quiet on the Western Front* did not completely deny notions of camaraderie, of a special bond between the soldiers, as is particularly illustrated by Kaczkinski and how fatherly he looked after the young pupils. Indeed, the notion of a special front camaraderie was not entirely alien to the remembrance of the war within the social-democratic milieu. Pertaining only to common soldiers, however, it denied a community including officers and it was egalitarian in principle. In contrast, nationalist concepts of the front camaraderie were strongly influenced by hierarchical thinking and a stress on martial heroism.²⁹

Westfront 1918 does not display such divisions. Quite to the contrary, its protagonists—except for Karl—represent through their symbolic names (the Student, the Bavarian, the Lieutenant) a Germany united regardless of social, regional, or hierarchical affiliation.³⁰ The three non-officers seem to be good friends; there are no apparent conflicts with the Lieutenant, and nothing to suggest anything like a ‘caste spirit’ within the officer corps. Karl confirms the camaraderie with quite explicit words when he leaves his wife to return to the front from his furlough. His wife remarks that he seemed to be glad, and he answers with a grin on his face: ‘Yes! I’m really looking forward to the trenches, you know, to the Student and all the other comrades. ... That’s simply what it’s like if you’ve been lying in the dirt together for such a long time.’

The greatest similarity between the two films can probably be observed in their rejection of a heroic image of the soldiers, which they opposed with a sober portrayal of warfare stressing particularly extreme cruelties and the mechanical character of death on modern battlefields.³¹ On the school class’ very first deployment to the front, one of the pupils in *All Quiet on the Western Front* wets himself which, however, merely elicits an encouraging comment by Kaczkinski: ‘There, never mind, it’s happened to better men than you; and it’s happened to me.’ Similar unheroic behaviour can be observed in many powerful images throughout the film. For example, soldiers fearfully crouch on the ground, drumfire leads to some of them turning mad in the dugouts, and they avert their gaze in disgust from a particularly horrifying sight—such as the hands of a soldier that keep clinging to a piece of barbed wire after his body is torn to pieces by a grenade. Finally, even desertion is portrayed as nothing reprehensible when, towards the end of the movie, Paul returns from his furlough and has a chat with one of his old friends about Detering, a man who tried to flee from the front. ‘They got him behind the lines, and we never heard of him since. He was just homesick, but probably they couldn’t see it that way,’ Paul’s friend tells him, displaying sympathy for Detering and a somewhat resigned criticism of the authorities.

Westfront 1918 also contained striking scenes displaying how dreadful the industrialized war could be for individuals, most notably perhaps one of the last scenes of the film in which the Lieutenant turns mad. Standing in the midst of a large amount of dead soldiers on the battlefield he screams: ‘Yes, your majesty!’ and ‘Hooray! Hooray!’ He is then brought into a field hospital where he continues to scream and someone else emphatically mourns the loss of his legs—none of the wounded men bears his fate with dignity or ‘manliness.’ Statements by the soldiers also deconstruct the image of the heroic combatant (*Frontkämpfer*). At the beginning of the movie, for instance, a group of soldiers is interrupted by a call to line up while playing cards. The slowest of the men calls out to one of his friends, who is rushing on ahead: ‘Boy, ... you’ll get your hero’s death soon enough.’ However, another such statement later in the movie, which was certainly meant to be understood in a pacifist sense,³² is actually quite ambiguous. When one soldier points in shock at a corpse, another says cynically: ‘Pull yourself together, man. After all, we’re heroes!’ The Bavarian replies: ‘My dear fellow, if we were heroes, we would have gone home a long time ago.’³³ Indeed, there are also scenes that could be understood as showing courageous and ‘manly’ soldiers: the Bavarian holding out while his comrades free him from a dugout in which he is buried; the Lieutenant, who is standing to

attention under heavy drumfire and meets his orders with a ‘Yes, major!’; or Karl volunteering to take up an advanced and therefore very dangerous machine-gun position.

The reactions to both films were accordingly different, although conservative reviewers generally disapproved of both. Emmrich in the *DAZ*, for instance, recognized that *Westfront 1918* skilfully showed ‘in many details ... the nicest things from a soldier’s life.’³⁴ The review in the *Neue Preußische Kreuz-Zeitung* (*Kreuz-Zeitung*), though protesting against the scenes which contained the strongest attacks on the image of the heroic soldier (the Lieutenant turning mad and the field hospital), similarly praised the portrayal of the troops in the resting quarters, in the dugouts, and in a scene showing a front cabaret.³⁵ The article in the *DZ* fits into the same pattern. While the film was generally rejected as ‘corrupting nonsense,’ it was acknowledged to succeed in portraying, ‘as far as the trench, the drumfire, and the spirit of the front are concerned, for the first time something that may be called proximity to the experiences at the modern front.’³⁶ Not only the technical accomplishments of the film were appreciated, but *Westfront 1918* was also recognized by some to give what may be called an accurate depiction of life at the front.

In contrast, the more consequent deconstruction of the notions of heroism and manhood in *All Quiet on the Western Front* could only meet with fierce disapproval. The only positive mention in the nationalist newspapers analysed here was an acknowledgment of the film’s technical qualities and the figure of Kaczkinski in the *Kreuz-Zeitung*, because he was the only one to behave like a true soldier. Other than that, the film was complained about because it denied any ‘heroic’ and ‘manly’ side of the war and instead showed a miserable German Army made up of ‘weaklings and cowards:’

[The] German youth of 1914, who went from lecture halls and higher school classes to Flanders, paying with their blood and their life for their enthusiasm for the cause of their fatherland near Langemarck,³⁷ have nothing in common with the wretched sissies that Remarque and this film describe.

In comparison, Pabst’s *Westfront 1918* was, according to the reviewer, a ‘heroic epic,’ representing ‘life and death of the German soldier as it really was.’³⁸

Emmrich in the *DAZ* particularly contested the quick disillusionment of the pupils due to social conflicts in the Army which the postman Himmelstoss personified in *All Quiet on the Western Front*:

‘Mr Remarque has the Himmelstoss complex, and it took only a postman in uniform for his enthusiasm to collapse. It must have been a sad enthusiasm. That of the German war volunteers lasted until Ypres, Diksmuide, Chemin des Dames, and Verdun.’³⁹

The reviewer in the *DZ* similarly rejected the portrayal of Himmelstoss and the tough basic training, arguing that in these scenes, by turning the ‘necessary drill’ into ‘hare-brained inhumanity,’ the film exacted revenge on the ‘marvellous system that once created the world’s best army.’ The systematically unheroic depiction of life and death at the front also met a sore point. Even when the Germans were shown to be ‘bravely facing the enemy,’ they fought for the wrong reasons, namely their ‘bare, miserable life,’ and not for the greater cause of the nation: the film knew nothing about ‘our great fatherland.’⁴⁰

The protocol of the session before the *Film-Oberprüfstelle*, the appellate board before which *All Quiet on the Western Front* was tried after its initial release, shows that the same objections raised in the *DZ* were of importance in the arguments brought forth to achieve a ban. The expert of the Ministry of the Interior also criticized *All Quiet on the Western Front*

for depicting the war as completely senseless because it showed the pupils, 'sobered up by the drill in the courtyard of the barracks,' meeting their fates on the western front not with 'victorious idealism,' but with 'only their physical nature, with their animal will to life.' The film thus denied the war any 'purifying and redeeming sense (*Sinngebung*) due to a higher cause.'⁴¹ Other scenes deconstructing the notion of heroism, like the ones showing the soldiers' fear or how they ravenously eat whatever food they can find, were also rejected both by the expert of the Defence Ministry and in the official statement of reasons for banning of the film.⁴²

THE 'DOLCHSTOß'

Neither of the films depicted the end of the war explicitly. Both, however, contained scenes which could be interpreted as statements about the cause of Germany's defeat. In *Westfront 1918* it is the final battle sequence, which could be, and has been, interpreted to show German military exhaustion,⁴³ thus refuting the legend of a stab in the back. In many long takes, French soldiers are shown storming German positions. They are supported by tanks, which are at first shadowy in the fog of the explosions, but become bigger and clearer throughout the sequence, slowly but inexorably moving across the picture. The advance can only be stopped using poison gas, and the German counter-attack remains feeble. The images are apt to create the impression that, while this attack could still be repelled, eventually Germany would stand no chance against the military superiority of the Entente powers. This interpretation, however, is never made explicit within the film itself.

Again, *All Quiet on the Western Front* is more explicit. At the end of the film, Kaczinski openly talks with Paul about the enemies' material advantages in the form of airplanes and tanks. The exhaustion of the German troops is also a recurrent theme, shown by the hunger which constantly plagues the soldiers and becomes increasingly worse towards the end of the film. In many scenes, some of which were cut by the producers before submission to the censorship board, soldiers are seen eating ravenously, and they even fight with a cook who refuses to give them a larger ration. At the end even Kaczinski, who was able to somehow find a whole pig in the scene introducing him, returns empty-handed from his search for food. Finally, the exhaustion is symbolized in the sequence which shows Paul returning to the front from his furlough. He barely recognizes his unit because most of his comrades are dead and have been replaced by much younger men. In a discussion with an old friend, Paul is asked if it was true that there would be an armistice soon. He answers: 'Doesn't look that way back there,' to which his friend comments: 'You mean, they want us to go on fighting? ... They're crazy! Germany will be empty pretty soon.'

These scenes also played a part in the grounds for the ban of *All Quiet on the Western Front*. According to the expert of the Ministry of the Interior, the film showed not 'the German war,' but 'the German defeat' and portrayed it as 'a necessity of fate' in the display of the 'last reserves of boyish figures.'⁴⁴ This argument signifies how widespread the belief in the '*Dolchstoß*' was, a narrative which allowed for Germany's defeat to be suppressed in the remembrance of the war by claiming in many variations that it had only been lost because the army had been 'stabbed in the back' by the home front. In fact military defeat had been inevitable in 1918, just like *All Quiet on the Western Front* suggested.⁴⁵

CONCLUSION

This comparison has shown that *Westfront 1918*, although planned as a 'bill of indictment against the war'⁴⁶ by its director, Pabst, was considerably more ambiguous in its portrayal of the war experience, thereby enabling cinema-goers who had differing and even conflicting

preconceptions of the war to find confirmation for their respective views. Hence, it was not perceived to be as radical as *All Quiet on the Western Front*.⁴⁷ This may have been partly due to the absence of a controversial scene that the producers forced Pabst to cut, and also because the film was not as technically proficient as Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front*.⁴⁸ The anti-militaristic thrust of *Westfront 1918* relied only on objectively displaying the horrors of the war, but the film did not contain any explicit statements telling the viewers which conclusions they were to draw from them.⁴⁹ That their interpretations did not have to be pacifist is illustrated by an article a member of the social-democratic veteran association 'Reichsbund' published in the organization's periodical, worrying about how much *Westfront 1918* apparently fascinated young people:

One wants to look inside the souls of our youth, one wants to be able to register the emotions by which they are moved when they watch the film in fascination ... Do young people see these things differently from those who have experienced them? Could a young person, who lacks a clarifying voice by his side, perhaps confuse film and reality and see romanticism instead of horror in a film about the western front?⁵⁰

All Quiet on the Western Front, in comparison, was perceived as a much more radical attack on nationalist concepts of the remembrance of the World War. To Goebbels and the Nazis that he led to stage a scandal, this was probably not of great importance.⁵¹ However, the Nazi campaign could only be successful because conservatives in decisive positions to achieve a ban also resented the film, for reasons that—although they may seem less obvious to today's viewers—related to the specific contents of *All Quiet on the Western Front*.⁵² One may object that many, or perhaps even most protesters had not even viewed the film themselves⁵³—but to them it was a symbol of leftist attacks on their remembrance of the war. They had certain expectations concerning the film due to their attitudes towards Remarque's novel, which had been met with similar responses, and their expectations would have been confirmed by the newspaper reports.

Evidently, the right were extremely sensitive when it came to the remembrance of the World War. A curious passage from the protocol of the censorship proceedings illustrates this: 'Concerning questions of national honour and of the Army's honour, the Ministry of Defence will not be surpassed in sensitivity by anyone,' the ministry's expert told the censorship board.⁵⁴ But why this sensitivity?

The depiction in *All Quiet on the Western Front* of an essentially futile war suggested that it had been fought in vain and without purpose. The pacifist interpretation of the war as a cause for reconciliation and the prevention of future wars, which both *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *Westfront 1918* offered their viewers, was not felt to be an adequate response to the question of what it had all been for. The cohesive system of the nationalist narratives outlined above brought meaning to the war and its deeply dissatisfying outcome in a more agreeable and utilitarian way than leftist interpretations ever could, particularly to those who had no immediate front experience such as those who were too young—as the demonstrators mentioned in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*.⁵⁵

However, the myths of the right were not only related to personal experiences in the past but also expressed the widely-felt disapproval of the present Republic and the desire to overcome it in the future. The vehement denial of war guilt, the narratives of the 'spirit of 1914,' the heroic 'front camaraderie,' and the 'stab in the back' created the image of a German people transformed by fate into one national community (*Volksgemeinschaft*), superior to the 'decadent' and overly rational Western democracies by strong will, which would transcend the segmented society and the sober, quarrelsome Republic Weimar was deemed to be.⁵⁶ In this,

the narratives were inherently political, for insisting on them could also demonstrate one's bitter opposition against the democratic state. How much influence these ideas promoted by the right could gain towards the end of the Weimar Republic is indicated by how quickly *All Quiet on the Western Front*, a film which was lauded outside nationalist circles, was banned.

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- ¹ The citations from *All Quiet on the Western Front* follow the English audio channel on the modern DVD edition. All other translations are mine.
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- ³ Cf. Winter, J., *Sites of memory, sites of mourning. The Great War in European cultural history*, (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge UP, 1995), p. 144; Kienitz, S., 'Beschädigte Helden. Zur Politisierung des kriegsinvaliden Soldatenkörpers in der Weimarer Republik,' in J. Düllfer and G. Krumeich (eds.), *Der verlorene Frieden. Politik und Kriegskultur nach 1918*, (Essen: Klartext, 2002), pp. 199–214, here pp. 200–201 with n. 6 there; Ziemann, B., 'Republikanische Kriegserinnerung in einer polarisierten Öffentlichkeit. Das Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold als Veteranenverband der sozialistischen Arbeiterschaft,' *Historische Zeitschrift* 267 (1998), pp. 357–398, here p. 361.
- ⁴ *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Director: Lewis Milestone, USA. Première in Germany: 4.12.1930. Remarque, E. M., *Im Westen nichts Neues*, (Berlin: Propyläen, 1929). The novel was first published in serialized form in November and December 1928 in the *Vossische Zeitung*.
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- ⁶ Cf. Saunders, T., 'Politics, the Cinema, and early Revisitations of War in Weimar Germany,' *Canadian Journal of History / Annales canadiennes d'histoire* 23.1 (1988), pp. 25–48, here p. 27.
- ⁷ Kester, B., *Film Front Weimar. Representations of the First World War in German films from the Weimar period (1919-1933)*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2003), p. 128. Cf. Beller, H., 'Gegen den Krieg. Im Westen nichts Neues (*All Quiet on the Western Front*, 1929),' in W. Faulstich and H. Korte (eds.), *Fischer Filmgeschichte. Band 2: Der Film als gesellschaftliche Kraft 1925–1944*, (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1991), pp. 110–129, here p. 112; Eksteins, M., 'War, Memory, and Politics,' pp. 65 and 77.
- ⁸ Schrader, B., *Der Fall Remarque*, pp. 12–13; Jelavich, P., *Berlin Alexanderplatz. Radio, Film, and the Death of Weimar Culture*, (Berkeley et al.: U of California P, 2006), p. 160; Korte, H., *Der Spielfilm und das Ende der Weimarer Republik. Ein rezeptionshistorischer Versuch*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), pp. 106–7; but cf. *ibid.* 218–219 for a short analytical comparison of *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *Westfront 1918* with regard to content.
- ⁹ Cf. Riederer, 'Den Bilderschatz heben,' pp. 24–30.
- ¹⁰ See for instance Schrader, B., *Der Fall Remarque*, p. 15; cf. Jelavich, P., *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, pp. 166–170.
- ¹¹ *Westfront 1918: Vier von der Infanterie*. Director: Georg Wilhelm Pabst, Germany. Première: 23.05.1930. Like *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *Westfront 1918* was the adaptation of a novel: Johannsen, E., *Vier von der Infanterie. Ihre letzten Tag an der Westfront*, (Hamburg: Fackelreiter, 1929).
- ¹² Rother, R., 'The experience of the First World War and the German Film,' in M. Paris, *The First World War and Popular Cinema. 1914 to the Present*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP 1999), pp. 217–246, here p. 230. *Westfront 1918*'s economic success: cf. Korte, H., *Der Spielfilm*, p. 193. Both films are available on DVD; however, *All Quiet on the Western Front* was never shown in the full version reconstructed by the Library of Congress in 1998 but was cut substantially even before its première in 1930. In the analysis I will of course pay attention to these abridgements, although their exact extent is unknown today. There are lists of scenes missing from the German edition in an article in the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, evening edition, 5.12.1930 and in a letter by

- Defence Minister Wilhelm Groener to Chancellor Heinrich Brüning from 13 December 1930, in parts referring to the newspaper article, Bundesarchiv Berlin (BArch), R 43 I/2500, p. 141–142.
- ¹³ Ulrich, B., ‘Die umkämpfte Erinnerung. Überlegungen zur Wahrnehmung des Ersten Weltkrieges in der Weimarer Republik,’ in J. Döppler and G. P. Groß (eds.), *Kriegsende 1918. Ereignis, Wirkung, Nachwirkung*, (München: Oldenbourg, 1999), pp. 367–375, here esp. p. 367; Ziemann, B., ‘Die Erinnerung an den Ersten Weltkrieg in den Milieukulturen der Weimarer Republik,’ in T. F. Schneider (ed.), *The Experience of War and the Creation of Myths. The image of ‘modern’ war in literature, theatre, photography, and film. Vol. 1: Before the First World War, The First World War*, (Osnabrück: Rasch, 1999), pp. 249–270, here pp. 249–259; On how strongly individual memories were structured and eclipsed by public cultures of remembrance, see Brandt, S., ‘Bilder von der Zerstörung an der Westfront und die doppelte Verdrängung der Niederlage,’ in G. Hirschfeld *et al.*, *Kriegserfahrungen. Studien zur Sozial- und Mentalitätsgeschichte des Ersten Weltkriegs*, (Essen: Klartext, 1995), pp. 439–454, here p. 447.
- ¹⁴ Ziemann, B., ‘Republikanische Kriegserinnerung,’ pp. 371–383; *idem*, ‘„Macht der Maschine“ – Mythen des industriellen Krieges,’ in R. Spilker and B. Ulrich (eds.), *Der Tod als Maschinist. Der industrialisierte Krieg 1914–1918*, (Bramsche: Rasch, 1998), pp. 176–196, here pp. 178–183; Weiß, C., ‘„Soldaten des Friedens“. Die pazifistischen Veteranen und Kriegsoffer des „Reichsbundes“ und ihre Kontakte zu den *anciens combattants* 1919–1933,’ in W. Hardtwig, *Politische Kulturgeschichte der Zwischenkriegszeit 1918–1933*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), pp. 183–204, here pp. 183, 187–188, 194–198.
- ¹⁵ Bridgwater, P., ‘Painting the First World War in Retrospect,’ in W. Görtzschacher and H. Klein, *Modern War on Stage and Screen/Der moderne Krieg auf der Bühne*, (Lewiston: Mellen, 1997), pp. 237–251, here p. 238; Eksteins, M., ‘All Quiet on the Western Front and the Fate of War,’ *Journal of Contemporary History* 15.2 (1980), pp. 345–366, here pp. 345–347; Rother, R., ‘The experience of the First World War,’ p. 226; Saunders, T., ‘Politics, the Cinema and early Revisitations,’ p. 25.
- ¹⁶ Cf. Paul, G., *Bilder des Krieges. Krieg der Bilder. Die Visualisierung des modernen Krieges*, (Paderborn *et al.*: Schöningh/Fink, 2004), *passim*; Ziareis, B., ‘Freunde, Feinde und Frauen,’ p. 49; *idem*, ‘Kriegsgeschichte im Spielfilmformat. Der Erste Weltkrieg im Tonspielfilm der Weimarer Republik,’ in B. Chiari *et al.*, *Krieg und Militär im Film des 20. Jahrhunderts*, (München: Oldenbourg, 2003), pp. 297–318, here pp. 298–300.
- ¹⁷ Cf. Montgomery, G., ‘“Realistic” War Films in Weimar Germany: entertainment as education,’ *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 9.2 (1989), pp. 115–133, here esp. p. 117.
- ¹⁸ Ziareis, B., *Der Erste Weltkrieg als Epochenfahrung im Tonspielfilm der Weimarer Zeit*, unpublished Magister thesis, (Regensburg: 1999), pp. 44–45 (a copy of the thesis can be found in the library of the Bundesarchiv – Abteilung FA-Filmarchiv in Berlin); cf. Montgomery, G., ‘“Realistic” War Films,’ p. 121.
- ¹⁹ Eksteins, M., ‘All Quiet on the Western Front,’ pp. 347–348; *idem*, ‘War, Memory, and Politics,’ p. 61; Schrader, B., *Der Fall Remarque*, pp. 9–11 (citation from p. 11); cf. Paul, *Bilder des Krieges*, pp. 147–148.
- ²⁰ For the methodology of historical film analyses see also in general Korte, H., *Der Spielfilm*, pp. 40–45.
- ²¹ It should be noted that in the following chronologically ordered sections I will only be able to give some examples from the full analysis, owing to the size of this paper. Many more could certainly be found.
- ²² Heinemann, U., *Die verdrängte Niederlage. Politische Öffentlichkeit und Kriegsschuldfrage in der Weimarer Republik*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), pp. 239–251. Cf. Winkler, H. A., *Weimar 1918–1933. Die Geschichte der ersten deutschen Demokratie*, 4th edition, (München: Beck, 2005), p. 96.
- ²³ *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, evening edition, 5.12.1930.
- ²⁴ *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 6.12.1930.
- ²⁵ See also above, n. 12.
- ²⁶ Verhey, J., *The Spirit of 1914. Militarism, Myth, and Mobilization in Germany*, (Cambridge *et al.*: Cambridge UP, 2000) and in short *idem*, ‘Der Mythos des „Geistes von 1914“ in der Weimarer Republik,’ in W. Bialas and B. Stenzel (eds.), *Die Weimarer Republik zwischen Metropole und Provinz. Intellektuellendiskurse zur politischen Kultur*, (Weimar *et al.*: Böhlau, 1996), pp. 85–96.
- ²⁷ *Deutsche Zeitung*, evening edition, 5.12.1930.
- ²⁸ Many volunteers would indeed have made similar experiences during the first months of the war, see Ulrich, B., ‘Die Desillusionierung der Kriegsfreiwilligen von 1914,’ in W. Wette, *Der Krieg des kleinen Mannes. Eine Militärgeschichte von unten*, 2nd edition, (Munich: Piper, 1995), pp. 110–126, here pp. 116–119.
- ²⁹ Ziemann, B., ‘Republikanische Kriegserinnerung,’ pp. 373–374; Kühne, T., ‘“... aus diesem Krieg werden nicht nur harte Männer heimkehren.” Kriegskameradschaft und Männlichkeit im 20. Jahrhundert,’ in *idem*, *Männergeschichte – Geschlechtergeschichte. Männlichkeit im Wandel der Moderne*, (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1996), pp. 174–192, here pp. 177–179.

- ³⁰ See also Kester, B., *Film Front Weimar*, p. 129 with n. 38 there; Korte, H., *Der Spielfilm*, p. 197–198.
- ³¹ See for the depiction of death in *All Quiet on the Western Front* Beller, H., ‘Gegen den Krieg,’ pp. 117–118.
- ³² Cf. below, n. 46.
- ³³ Kurt Pinthus in the social-democratic *8-Uhr-Abendblatt*, 24.5.1930 also recognized this ambiguity. The article can also be found in Ulrich, B., Ziemann, B. (eds.), *Krieg im Frieden. Die umkämpfte Erinnerung an den Ersten Weltkrieg. Quellen und Dokumente*, (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1997), document no. 20f, p. 150.
- ³⁴ *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, evening edition, 24.5.1930.
- ³⁵ *Neue Preußische Kreuz-Zeitung*, 2nd Sunday edition, 25.5.1930.
- ³⁶ *Deutsche Zeitung*, morning edition, 25.5.1930.
- ³⁷ The term ‘Langemarck’ stands for one of the first battles of the World War, which, although it was without success and involved heavy losses, was propagandistically transfigured to epitomize love for the fatherland and the readiness to make sacrifices in nationalist remembrances of the war. See Ziemann, B., ‘„Macht der Maschine.“’
- ³⁸ *Neue Preußische Kreuz-Zeitung*, 2nd supplement, 6.12.1930. Also printed in Schrader, B., *Der Fall Remarque*, pp. 121–124.
- ³⁹ *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, evening edition, 5.12.1930.
- ⁴⁰ *Deutsche Zeitung*, evening edition, 5.12.1930.
- ⁴¹ BArch, R 43 I/2500, p. 159.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 156–157, 162.
- ⁴³ See Korte, H., *Der Spielfilm*, pp. 202–204.
- ⁴⁴ BArch, R 43 I/2500, pp. 159, see also for the offensiveness of the hunger scenes pp. 156–157, 162.
- ⁴⁵ See Krumeich, G., ‘Die Dolchstoß-Legende,’ in E. François and H. Schulze (eds.), *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte I*, 4th edition, (Munich: Beck, 2002), pp. 585–599, here p. 585; Moses, J., ‘Die Wirkung der Dolchstoßlegende im deutschen Geschichtsbewusstsein,’ in B. Hüppauf (ed.), *Ansichten vom Krieg. Vergleichende Studien zum Ersten Weltkrieg in Literatur und Gesellschaft*, (Königstein: Forum Academicum, 1984), pp. 240–256, here p. 241; cf. Brandt, S., ‘Bilder von der Zerstörung,’ pp. 449–451.
- ⁴⁶ Quoted in Toeplitz, J., *Geschichte des Films. Vol. 2, 1928–1933*, 3rd edition, (Berlin: Henschel, 1985), p. 208.
- ⁴⁷ The difference in the perception of both films is also evident in the treatment by moderate newspapers like the Catholic *Germania* and the left-liberal *Vossische Zeitung*, see the relevant articles from 25.5.1930 and 5.12.1930 (the latter are printed in Schrader, B., *Der Fall Remarque*, pp. 105 and 116–118) and cf. also the film journal *Kinematograph*, 24.5.1930, in which *Westfront 1918* was seen as ‘a great hymn [*hohes Lied*] to the valour of our *Feldgrau*.’
- ⁴⁸ Deleted scene: Geisler, M., ‘The battleground of Modernity: *Westfront 1918* (1930),’ in E. Rentschler (ed.), *The Films of G. W. Pabst. An Extraterritorial Cinema*, (New Brunswick et al.: Rutgers UP, 1990), pp. 91–102, here p. 94. Technical realization: cf. *8-Uhr-Abendblatt*, 24.5.1930; pace Müller, C., *Vom Stummfilm zum Tonfilm*, (Munich: Fink, 2003), p. 225.
- ⁴⁹ Cf. Kracauer, S., *From Caligari to Hitler*, p. 234–235.
- ⁵⁰ Ulrich, B., Ziemann, B. (eds.), *Krieg im Frieden*, document no. 20g, p. 151.
- ⁵¹ Dörp, P., ‘Goebbels’ Kampf gegen Remarque,’ pp. 57–58.
- ⁵² However, to achieve a ban of the film, the arguments had to lead to the grounds the German cinema law (*Reichslichtspielgesetz*) stated. In the case of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, these were danger to the public order (the riots incited by the Nazis could be used as an argument here), danger to Germany’s prestige abroad, and a demoralizing effect of the film. See Jelavich, P., *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, p. 129 and BArch R 43 I/2500, pp. 153–155.
- ⁵³ Cf. *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 11.12.1930. It remains unclear whether the leaders of the *Deutscher Offizier-Bund e.V* and the *Stahlhelm*, who wrote rather unspecific letters of protest to Chancellor Brüning (dated 9.12.1930, BArch R 43 I/2500, pp. 128–129, 133), had actually watched *All Quiet on the Western Front*.
- ⁵⁴ BArch R 43 I/2500, p. 157.
- ⁵⁵ *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 11.12.1930.
- ⁵⁶ Cf. Fritzsche, P., *Germans Into Nazis*, (Cambridge, MA et al.: Harvard UP, 1998); Kühne, T., “... aus diesem Krieg,” pp. 176–177; Verhey, J., *The Spirit of 1914*, pp. 212–223.