

Institution: University of Cambridge		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 28		
Title of case study: <i>The Sleepwalkers</i> : A Study that Impacted German and European historical consciousness		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2003-present		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Christopher Clark	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of History (Regius) (1724)	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 01.10.1990-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 – present		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) <p>Professor Christopher Clark is the author of <i>Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600-1947</i> and <i>The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914</i>. His academic work has resulted in a series of major television documentaries in Germany as well as close collaboration with the German government around their response to the 100th anniversary of the Great War. Clark's work has also impacted and shaped how German documentary producers, TV networks, and policy makers think about and present their nation's history and popular perceptions of German history both at home and abroad. His work has further influenced a number of political leaders in their reflections on the role of Germany in Europe and the causes of the Great War.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) <p>Christopher Clark's standing as a public historian and his broader public impact are associated above all with two publications. <i>Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600-1947</i> published in 2007 [R2], offered a major reinterpretation of the history of the Kingdom of Prussia between around 1600 and 1947, when Prussia was abolished by order of the victorious Allies after the end of the Second World War. <i>The Sleepwalkers</i> [R4] drew on secondary source work in libraries and online (Jstor) and manuscript primary source work in archives in Russia, Serbia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria and Britain to draw a fresh picture of the processes of change that made the outbreak of a European war possible in 1914. Both books were animated by Clark's aspiration, first, to write European history in a truly joined-up sense (an aspiration also pursued in the earlier co-edited study <i>Culture Wars: Catholic-Secular Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe</i>, published in 2007 [R1]) and second, to challenge the binary oppositions, often implicitly ethical or evaluative in character, that underwrote some of the most influential narratives in his field (an aspiration also pursued in the political study <i>Kaiser Wilhelm II. A Life in Power</i>, published in 2009 [R3]). <i>Iron Kingdom</i> was not ostensibly European in scope, but it did seek to pull its subject -- the history of Brandenburg-Prussia -- out from under the history of Germany, by insisting on the non-national and European character of this state. <i>The Sleepwalkers</i> aimed to achieve an account of the coming of war in 1914 that made sense of complex, multipolar interactions on a European scale. Here too, the aim was to write European history in a way that did justice to the continental scale of events.</p> <p>In both cases, foregrounding the European framework of events had the additional effect of challenging binary moral narratives. Separating Prussia from the history of Germany meant, among other things, writing its history outside the constraints of the <i>Sonderweg</i> or 'special path', a powerful post-war narrative of German negative exceptionalism. <i>The Sleepwalkers</i>, too, attempted to manoeuvre the debate on the origins of the First World War beyond the ethically polarised accounts focused on Germany's primary or sole responsibility for the outbreak of the</p>		

conflict. The outbreak of the war was not – the book argued – a James Bond drama, in which velvet-jacketed villains in mountain hideaways planned and launched global Armageddon. By focusing on the continent-wide interactions between the powers, the book aimed *not* to exculpate the Germans – that was neither the intention nor the effect – but to restore to visibility the unpredictability of a continent inhabited by rapacious and intermittently reckless great powers, nearly all of which had more than one potential enemy.

The Sleepwalkers shifted the focus of attention by changing the question. Instead of asking *why* the war broke out, it posed the question: how did peace become war? The aim was not to identify a suspect state and gather evidence for the prosecution, but to look at all the events and processes that made this war possible, to understand how the pieces of causation needed to bring it about fell into place before and in 1914. Approaching the problem this way meant adopting a strongly multipolar and trans-national approach, in contrast to many studies which confined their view to a specific state and its responsibility or innocence in the outbreak of the conflict.

The Sleepwalkers offered a more thoroughly multipolar and interactive account of the processes that brought war than had hitherto been available. It was not primarily focused on the issue of responsibility, but it offered a strongly distributed account of the attitudes and initiatives that made it possible for a war of this type to break out in the summer of 1914, and by moving away from the ‘why’ questions at the heart of the ‘origins’ literature, it stressed the open-endedness of the situations in which decision-makers found themselves, focusing on questions about what they could and could not know and what pressures or fears were pressing on them. In these ways, it produced an interpretation that was viewed as distinctive within the context of the war-origins literature.

Both books stirred intense scholarly and public discussion. *Iron Kingdom* was seen as reframing the history of Prussia in a way that recalibrated German public memory, creating the possibility of a more open and less polarised relationship with the Prussian past. And this was seen as significant because at a time when the integration of newly united Germany was still underway it brought into focus a history that East and West Germans shared. *The Sleepwalkers* stirred a more heated and controversial debate over Germany’s place in the outbreak of war (see below). In combination, the two books and the consequent radio and television appearances prompted ZDF, through the Production Company Interscience Film, to contact Clark with a view to making a new kind of historical documentary.

In October 2010, the German government awarded Clark the Officer's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany on the grounds that his research ‘had contributed greatly to German-British relations’. In the Birthday honours of June 2015, Clark was knighted on the recommendation of the British Foreign Secretary for his services to Anglo-German relations. In June 2019, Clark was elected to the Order *Pour le Mérite* for the Arts and Sciences. Clark holds honorary doctorates at the Universities of Ghent, Birmingham and Sydney.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- [R1] Clark, C. and Kaiser, W. (Eds.). (2003). *Culture Wars: Catholic-Secular Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Cambridge University Press. ISBN 9780521108454. [DOI](#)
- [R2] Clark, C. (2007). *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600-1947*. Penguin. ISBN 9780140293340.
- [R3] Clark, C. (2009). *Kaiser Wilhelm II: A Life in Power*. Penguin. ISBN 9780141039930.
- [R4] Clark, C. (2012). *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914*. Penguin. ISBN 9780141027821.

The above books have all been published by international presses, and Clarke has, as a result of their publication, won the following prizes evidencing that they exceed the 2* minimum quality requirement:

Wolfson Prize (GBP10,000); Queensland State Premier's History Prize (AUD15,000) and the NSW State Premier's History Prize (AUD20,000); *HSK-Buchpreis für Neuere Geschichte*; *Deutscher Historikerpreis* 2010 (EUR30,000) – Clark was the first historian from outside the German-speaking area to receive this award); Los Angeles Times Book Prize in History (USD5,000), *Prix d'Aujourd'hui* (EUR35,000), European Parliament Book Prize; *Bruno-Kreisky-Preis* (EUR9,000), *Prix Madeleine Laurent-Portemer of the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques* (EUR7,000); *Braunschweiger Geschichtspreis* (EUR3000) and the Cundill Recognition of Excellence Prize (CAD10,000)

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The impact case falls into three categories: (i) Interpreting German history to German and other audiences; (ii) Reflecting on the meaning of the Great War and using the arguments made in *The Sleepwalkers* to illuminate contemporary political debate; (iii) Developing the insights gathered from the research (*Iron Kingdom*, *Culture Wars*, *A Life in Power* and *The Sleepwalkers*) to deliver accessible interpretations of German and European history to a mass television audience.

Interpreting German History to German and other audiences

Iron Kingdom and *The Sleepwalkers* both won multiple prizes and received hundreds of reviews in the academic and popular press. *The Sleepwalkers* in particular was widely and controversially reviewed. In 2014 it was frequently cited and mentioned by political figures as a book whose lessons were relevant to the crises threatening Europe, most importantly the Ukrainian crisis that broke out in that year. In a speech at the Munich Security Conference on 1 February 2014, the then German Foreign Minister (now President) Frank-Walter Steinmeier stated: 'The importance of these things has been brought home to us in particular in this year, in which we recall the outbreak of the First World War, by Christopher Clark in his book *The Sleepwalkers*.' [E3] On 28 August 2014, François Hollande, then President of the French Republic, also referred to *The Sleepwalkers* in his ex officio address to the 22nd annual *Conférence des Ambassadeurs de France*. [E4]

In a leader article entitled 'Fear of the abyss' for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on 17 March 2014, the journalist Berthold Kohler commented on the book's impact on European decision-makers: 'The book for the current Ukraine Crisis was not written by a Russian or a German, but by an Australian. ... For western diplomacy, notwithstanding the fact that many things have changed since then, Clark's book has become a kind of anti-script for the Crimean Crisis.' [E5] Kohler was referring in part to the fact that the German Chancellor Angela Merkel was known to have read the book, as was reported by Daniel Goffart and Peter Gruber in *FOCUS Magazin* on 5 May 2014: 'Merkel read Christopher Clark's book *The Sleepwalkers* during the days of convalescence she spent at home after a skiing injury early in the year. Almost 900 pages about a regional conflict that led, exactly one hundred years ago, to the First World War.' [E6] Merkel's interest in the book and her references to it during a meeting of the Council of Europe also prompted a response from the Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras in a piece for *Le Monde* on 17 January 2014, in which he used the arguments in the book to counter Merkel's approach to the Greek financial crisis: 'The fact is that one of the basic conclusions from the book that your esteemed newspaper has revealed the Chancellor of Germany is currently reading - Christopher Clark's *The Sleepwalkers* – is that the habitual use of threats of extreme choices as an instrument in politics implies the risk of those same threats functioning as a self-fulfilling prophesy. Therefore, an accidental event somewhere in the southern periphery of Europe, or the obsession with erroneous blackmails, may result in dramatic and unanticipated developments in the entire continent.' [E7]

Hollande's successor as President, Emmanuel Macron, has also referred repeatedly to the book. *The Economist* reported on 19 April 2018 that, in a speech to the European Parliament, Macron

said 'We cannot carry on as if this were any old debate', adding that he did not want to belong 'to a generation of Sleepwalkers'. *The Economist* commented 'As he knows, the warnings in Christopher Clark's book of the same name, which charts the diplomatic missteps that led to the First World War, resonate with Mrs Merkel.' Also reporting Macron's speech, *The Tagespiegel* noted that 'The term, coined by Christopher Clark, recalled with what recklessness the responsible decision-makers plunged Europe into the catastrophe of the First World War.' [E8]

These arguments were picked up in many other places. In May 2014, the former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt used the book to highlight the dangers in the current situation, [E9] and in December 2017, the UN Special Envoy to North Korea, Jeffrey Feltman, presented *The Sleepwalkers* to the North Korean foreign minister Ri Yong Ho as a warning of how 'processes of escalation can lead to a war neither side really wants'; finally, former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd argued in August 2017 that the arguments advanced in *The Sleepwalkers* highlighted the risk of conflict in the present-day Asia-Pacific region. [E10]

Reflecting on the meaning of the Great War

It would be absurd to suggest that *The Sleepwalkers* prevented the outbreak of another major war or changed fundamentally the behaviour of statespeople. But it did shape international discussion in a period of crisis, in the context of which it was used as an argument for extreme caution in international relations and the avoidance of provocations and escalations. It may also have played a role in shaping the policy of the German government on the matter of how to commemorate the First World War. As Professor Michael Epkenhans, a historian at the Historical Office of the Ministry of Defence reports in [E1], the German Foreign Office had, prior to late 2013, no interest in organising any kind of national commemoration or in coordinating this activity with foreign partners. A policy only emerged after Clark was invited (at the prompting of Professor Epkenhans) to a meeting with State Secretary Dr Emily Haber, then head of the Political Department of the German Foreign Office (now German ambassador to the United States) in Berlin on 24 October 2013. At this meeting, which was minuted by a departmental secretary, Clark was asked whether and how the German government should engage with European partner states in making arrangements for commemorations. The discussion that resulted helped to shape the Foreign Office's management of this issue, inaugurating a period of open discussion with the partner states and a measure of coordinated international preparation for the anniversary.

Delivering accessible interpretations of German and European history to a mass television audience

During the public debate in Germany over *The Sleepwalkers* and its relevance both for the framing of modern German history and for contemporary political challenges, Clark gave frequent radio and television interviews, presented many public lectures and took part in numerous podium discussions, often with senior political figures – the Parliamentary caucus of the SPD, SPD foreign minister (later President) Frank-Walter Steinmeier, SPD finance Minister Olaf Scholz, SPD Chancellor-candidate Martin Schulz, *Die Linke* leader Oskar Lafontaine, sometime SPD presidential candidate Gesine Schwan, Anton Hofreiter, Leader of the Parliamentary Fraction of the Greens, CDU Ministers Wolfgang Schäuble, Interior Minister Thomas de Maizièrre, former Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and many others. On the basis of these appearances and of his published research, he was invited by ZDF (Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen, a German public broadcaster) to present and co-author a series of television programmes. Of these, the most important were two six-part series, *Deutschland-Saga* and *Europa-Saga*.

Clark used these to encourage Germans to rethink their relationship with their country's history, imagining it not as the history of an unchanging ethnic or national essence but as a space in which waves of immigration and intensive cultural interaction had always shaped experience and

identity. *Europa-Saga* adopted a similar perspective, showing how crucial exogenous influences had been to the formation of Europe from the very beginning and how mobility and exchange had always been at the heart of the European experience. Both series encouraged viewers to think of both national and European identities not as something primordial but as works in progress, always subject to change. The objective was not just to convey information, but to reflect on the meanings of these complex histories and to do so in a way that was humane, light-footed, accessible, entertaining and intelligent. It is, of course, impossible to know how these programmes affected the thinking of those who encountered them, but the viewer figures have been consistently high. Figures for *Deutschland-Saga* ranged from 4.11 to 4.87 million for the first airing, amounting to 12.5 and 15.9% of national market share respectively. *Europa-Saga* attracted between 3.81 and 4.43 million viewers, amounting to between 12 and 13.5% of national market share. [E2]

Both series have been aired many times since, picking up unknown numbers of further viewers in Germany with each cycle and the broadcaster estimates that at least 10 million viewers worldwide have seen the English-language version of *Europa-Saga*. *Deutschland-Saga* won the World Silver Medal for TV Documentary at the New York Film Festival in 2015. *Europa-Saga* won the World Gold Medal for TV Documentary at the New York Film Festival. [E2] *Exodus: Eine Geschichte der europäischen Juden* [Exodus: A History of the European Jews], a two-part documentary that attempted to explain the phenomena of traditional and modern antisemitism against the background of the history of the Jews and to arm viewers against the appeal of antisemitic rhetoric and arguments, won the Bavarian Television Award for the Best Documentary. [E2] For his television work and for *Europa-Saga* in particular, Clark was awarded the 2018 European Prize for Political Culture (EUR50,000) in Ascona, Switzerland. In his laudatio, Wolfgang Schäuble, President of the German Bundestag, stated that 'if history is an oracle, then Christopher Clark is its seasoned attendant, almost a high priest of profound interpretation of sources, clever analysis, stringent reasoning and rousing descriptions. A European perspective is central to his historical work. He thereby contributes to an understanding of European history and to a European consciousness – something we need more urgently than ever.' [E12]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[E1] Testimonial: Director of Historical Research, Zentrum für Militärgeschichte und Sozialwissenschaften der Bundeswehr in Potsdam, 30 November 2019.

[E2] ZDF viewing figures and market share for *Deutschland-Saga*, *Europa-Saga* and other documentaries.

[E3] Speech: F.-W. Steinmeier, Munich Security Conference (in German), 01.02.2014. [\[Link\]](#)

[E4] Speech: M. François Hollande, *Conférence des Ambassadeurs* (in French), 28.08.2014. [\[Link\]](#)

[E5] Article: Kohler, B. *Frankfurter Allgemeine* (in German), 17.03.2014. [\[Link\]](#)

[E6] Article: Gruber, P. *FOCUS Magazin* (in German), 05.05.2014. [\[Link\]](#)

[E7] Article: *Mme Merkel est devenue la "somnambule" de l'austérité*. *Le Monde* (in French). [\[Link\]](#)

[E8] Articles: *The Economist*. 21.04.2018. [\[Link\]](#). *Der Tagesspiegel* (in German). 19.04.2018. [\[Link\]](#).

[E9] Article: AFP. *Times of Israel*, 16.05.2014. [\[Link\]](#)

[E10] Article: Ignatius, D. *The Washington Post*, 19.12.2017. [\[Link\]](#)

[E11] Article: Rudd, K. *Financial Times*, 10.08.2017. [\[Link\]](#).

[E12] Press release: European Prize for Political Culture 2018.