



Introduction: Rethinking World War I

Occupation, Liberation, and Reconstruction

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The centennial of World War I has brought forth an explosion of new history books, articles, conferences, exhibits, and documentaries, of which this special issue of *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* is but one example. This has also been an occasion for old works to be rediscovered and reach new audiences. The wartime diary of French soldier Louis Barthas became a best seller upon its reissue in 2014, while a film version of British nurse Vera Brittain's war memoir, *Testament of Youth*, was released to critical acclaim in 2015.¹ An important historical initiative to emerge from the centennial has been the appeal for family records related to the war by Europeana, a digital library supported by the European Union.²

In the century since the war ended, interest in the conflict by historians has ebbed and flowed, but has never disappeared. The types of histories written about World War I have changed dramatically over time, and they continue to evolve. For almost fifty years following the Armistice, histories of the war focused almost exclusively on military and diplomatic topics. This work was based on official state archives and the memoirs and personal papers of politicians and generals, with little regard for the experiences of ordinary soldiers and civilians. Although there was a publishing boom during the 1920s and 1930s of memoirs and other writings by soldiers, nurses, and war workers, this literature had little impact on how professional historians discussed the war.

The rise of social history in the 1960s initiated a wave of new studies about World War I, focused on the experiences of ordinary people. This "history from below" was facilitated by the massive expansion of higher educa-



tion in Europe and the United States. As more middle- and working-class people studied history at university and became historians, they increasingly turned their attention to people like themselves in the past. New disciplines, such as labor history and women's history, expanded wartime topics to include the role of trade unions, strikes, labor shortages, women workers, rationing, food riots, and welfare policies. Historians no longer depicted wartime populations as abstract "masses" to be commanded by generals and politicians, but as opinionated citizens who had to be courted and cajoled by intensive propaganda campaigns. Scholars supplemented traditional state archives with more popular sources like posters, newspapers, magazines, films, and the diaries and letters of ordinary soldiers and civilians.³

Since the 1990s cultural historians have supplemented the work of social historians with new studies of how the war has been perceived and represented in the arts, popular culture, and collective memory. As the literary critic Samuel Hynes explained, "The First World War was the great military and political event of its time; but it was also the great *imaginative* event. It altered the ways in which men and women thought not only about war but also about the world, and about culture and its expressions."⁴ The American scholar Paul Fussell helped initiate the cultural turn in World War I studies with his highly influential book *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975). More recent academic interest in material culture has led to a new appreciation of sites and objects, such as war memorials, further expanding the kinds of cultural "documents" utilized by historians of the war.⁵

The proliferation of different historical approaches to the study of World War I has itself expanded questions and debates concerning the conflict. As Jay Winter and Antoine Prost emphasize in their historiographical survey of World War I, *The Great War in History* (2005), "at no time has there been a consensus that the history of the Great War has been written once and for all. Even today, the subject remains an open one, and inspires passionate debate."⁶ Controversies about the war that still exercise historians include debates over the war as a matter of deliberate choice or as a consequence of mistakes and miscalculations; the degree of responsibility for starting the war attributable to the various belligerents; the ways in which propaganda either manipulated populations or simply embodied the popular will; the charges of invasion atrocities as commonplace or as magnified by propagandists; the influence of the war on women's work and relationship to the home; the extent to which food shortages in Germany were caused by the British blockade or by poor management of resources by German authorities; the root of mutinies as fundamental opposition to the war itself or mere anger over frontline conditions; and how the war ended, whether through attrition or through a strategic breakthrough by Allied commanders. In debating these and other questions related to World War I, historians have overturned old assumptions and uncovered new sources.

The six articles in this issue represent some of the best new work related to World War I. They address a wide array of topics connected to the war,

such as propaganda, collaboration, political protest, humanitarian relief, women's war work, postwar reconstruction, crimes by veterans, and economic globalism. The articles also utilize innovative sources for the study of the war, including photographs, scrapbooks, police reports, criminal court records, and the archives of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) like the Red Cross, the Commission for Relief in Belgium, the American Fund for French Wounded, and the Comité franco-américain pour la protection des enfants de la frontière.

The first three contributions to this volume explore different responses by French civilians, officials, and artists to the German occupation, exploitation, and destruction of northern France during the war. Unlike the more complete German occupation of France during World War II, which has been much studied by historians and has raised troubling issues of collaboration with the Nazis, histories of World War I have long tended to gloss over the German occupation of northern France. Only in the wake of revisionist studies on the 1940–1944 occupation, particularly Robert Paxton's *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order* (1972), did historians like Louis Köll and Richard Cobb and polymaths like Marc Blancpain begin examining the 1914–1918 occupation.⁷ Even with this new attention to the occupation, the works produced tended to be brief or impressionistic, or stressed a simple narrative of patriotic if largely passive resistance. The stories told in the present volume are rather more nuanced and interesting, building on the recent monographs by Annette Becker, Helen McPhail, and Philippe Nivet and—in a broader sense—on the insights of John Horne, Alan Kramer, and Sophie De Schaepdrijver regarding the invasion and administration of Belgium.⁸ German occupation of western Russia has also evolved into a subject of sustained scholarship, figuring not only in Vejas Liulevicius's *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity, and German Occupation in World War I* (2000) but also in Sophie De Schaepdrijver's pan-European consideration of "Populations under Occupation" in volume three of Jay Winter's edited collection *The Cambridge History of the First World War* (2016).⁹

James Connolly examines the political, economic, and social complexities of the German occupation of the French textile manufacturing town of Roubaix. His article centers on a series of strikes and public protests that occurred in 1915 over the issue of French workers making sandbags for the German military. The "sandbag affair" provides insights into the often tortuous relationships that existed under occupation. The French local government and police sought to restore public order and to shield the populace from German reprisals, but did not want to appear too cozy with the occupiers. The local population had to earn a living, which almost unavoidably entailed working for the Germans, but there were nonetheless self-imposed limits as to what was acceptable and what crossed the line into collaboration. Connolly documents how the occupied population "negotiated a moral-patriotic minefield" in which they both judged one another and justified

their own behavior, reflecting a variant of French war culture that Connolly has aptly termed the *culture de l'occupé*.

Michael McGuire focuses on French reconstruction of Picardy following German withdrawal from the region in 1917. As the Germans retreated, they systematically demolished buildings, flooded mines, and destroyed farm equipment, leaving the region devastated. Similar to Connolly's, McGuire's article is situated within current French historical debates over the extent to which France's wartime society was motivated by patriotic consent or intimidation and coercion.¹⁰ McGuire eschews the consent/coercion dichotomy, documenting how Picardy's recovery included elements of both. The French authorities employed intimidating measures such as deporting peasants suspected of collaboration, but they also cultivated peasant cooperation and goodwill through the provision of free farm equipment. McGuire further complicates the usual narrative by highlighting the role of British and American humanitarian agencies that participated in Picardy's restoration independent of French authorities. McGuire concludes that "multiple *cultures de guerre*" contributed to the region's reintegration into France from 1917 to 1918.

Nicole Hudgins introduces us to French photographic depictions of the ruins left by German invaders and occupiers. Widely disseminated via postcards, magazines, and books, ruin photographs helped the French process the war's destructiveness in numerous ways. Photos of ruins positioned the Germans as "modern Vandals" laying waste to European civilization. They could also stand in for the dead and damaged bodies of French soldiers, which wartime censorship forbade to be photographed. The photos might even shield French citizens in occupied regions from charges of collaboration, by providing palpable evidence of their suffering. Hudgins demonstrates aesthetic continuities between ruin photographs and academic paintings of classical ruins, but she emphasizes their different functions. *Ruiniste* paintings were intended as philosophic reflections on the impermanence of civilization, while the ruin photographs were visual aids for the rebuilding of civilization and documentary evidence for assessing reparations. Photographs were effective propaganda not only because they seemed to embody the immediate "reality" of the war but also because, like propaganda posters, their visual imagery reflected long-standing tropes about civilization and barbarism.

The next two articles focus on issues of gender. Since the 1980s this subject has been a major concern of World War I historians, who have especially documented the war's impact on women's roles, with important studies of women peace activists, munitions workers, military auxiliaries, and nurses.¹¹ Much of this work has focused on the British Isles, so Michelle Moravec's case study of an American woman's war experiences is a welcome addition to the scholarship. Moravec examines two wartime scrapbooks compiled by an American socialite, Alma Clarke, who served in France as both a welfare worker among refugee children and as an auxiliary nurse for

the Red Cross. Moravec notes that scrapbooks, traditionally feminine compilations, have been neglected by historians but can offer unique insights into how women saw their own wartime contributions. Clarke's scrapbooks contain a wealth of ephemeral materials related to the war: magazine clippings, newspaper articles, official memoranda, candid snapshots, postcards, and drawings and poems contributed by wounded soldiers. In a close reading of the scrapbooks, Moravec scrutinizes how Clarke juxtaposed materials, altered images, recaptioned familiar illustrations, and favored certain types of female imagery, especially those that depicted women war workers as sisterly comrades to soldiers. The scrapbooks also suggest that Clarke saw her "humanitarian work as a form of patriotic expertise." Tending refugee children was not merely traditional female charity work but a matter of vital national security, one that required education and training. In preserving her scrapbooks and later donating them to Bryn Mawr College, Clarke asserted, years before historians did, that her participation in the war mattered.

Historians have long studied the war's impact on female gender identity. Only recently, however, have some scholars insisted that World War I also represented a crisis of masculinity and that men's postwar status and roles were as troubled as women's.¹² As Ginger Frost points out, British commentators assumed that the war had hardened men to violence, and they predicted an upsurge of crime and social disorder during the 1920s. While a postwar crime wave never materialized, the courts did have "to adjudicate domestic upheavals after the war because of long separations and over-hasty marriages." Frost examines two high-profile murder cases involving British veterans accused of killing illegitimate children as a means of exploring postwar notions of masculinity and popular perspectives on violent acts committed by former soldiers. There was considerable sympathy for both men, one who was unable to find a job in the postwar depression and the other who returned home to find his wife involved with another man. Although both men were convicted of murder, their death sentences were commuted to life imprisonment, and they were each released after serving several years. One of the men received a hero's welcome from his neighbors upon his return. Frost sees a divergence between popular attitudes of journalists and community members, who sympathized with criminal veterans as victims of "war trauma" and unemployment, and official attitudes of police and court officials, who upheld traditional notions of male responsibility and rationality.

While the previous articles in this volume focus on individual and national stories from World War I, the final contribution, by Carl Strikwerda, situates the war within the larger history of globalization during the past century. Although most people are aware that an interconnected global economy has emerged since the 1990s, few appreciate the extent to which a similar system existed a century ago. World War I ended the highly integrated world economy of the early twentieth century and seriously

inhibited later attempts to reconstitute global trade and finance networks. While historians have debated whether globalization inhibited or promoted war among the great powers,¹³ Strikwerda emphasizes that nations went to war in 1914 to strengthen their positions “within a free-flowing international economy,” not to destroy such an economy. Once the war shattered the global economy, however, it could not be easily rebuilt. Conservative politicians saw the war as vindication for colonies, high tariffs, and agricultural self-sufficiency. Indeed, as Strikwerda argues, “statist policies made the post–World War I era the true ‘age of imperialism,’” as European nations expanded trade with their colonies and sought to exclude rivals from colonial markets. Other postwar autarchic policies, like agricultural subsidies, still exist. Strikwerda warns us that today, no less than in 1914, there are “dangers inherent in a multipolar world where globalization produces both economic growth and social tensions.”

We should not be surprised that World War I still resonates so strongly with current issues and events. As Jeremy Black recently noted, the Great War was a key factor in “the making of the modern world,” and many contemporary phenomena flow inexorably from its unbridled nationalism and totalizing violence.¹⁴ From shell shock to PTSD, from the Balfour Declaration and the Sykes-Picot Agreement to the current struggles in the Middle East, from the Armenian genocide to the Rwandan genocide, from the sack of Louvain to the destruction of Palmyra, World War I has cast its long shadow over the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. That historians will continue to study the war and its legacy seems well assured.

Notes

1. Louis Barthas, *Poilu: The World War I Notebooks of Corporal Louis Barthas, Barrel-maker, 1914–1918*, trans. Edward M. Strauss, with a foreword by Robert Cowley (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014); James Kent, dir., *Testament of Youth* (London: BBC Films, 2015).
2. See the website *Europeana 1914–1918* at www.europeana1914-1918.eu.
3. See, for example, Maurice Rickards, *Posters of the First World War* (New York: Walker, 1968); Barbara Jones and Bill Howell, *Popular Arts of the First World War* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972); Larry Ward, *The Motion Picture Goes to War* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1985); Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (London: Bodley Head, 1965); Jean-Jacques Becker, *The Great War and the French People*, trans. Arnold Pomerans (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1980); David Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).
4. Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (New York: Atheneum, 1991), xi.
5. For studies of war memorials, see Annette Becker, *Les Monuments aux morts: Patrioisme et mémoire de la Grand Guerre* (Paris: Éditions Errance, 1988); Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Kenneth Inglis, *Sacred Places: War Memorials*

- in the Australian Landscape* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1998); Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975). For a focus on material culture, see Nicholas Saunders, *Matters of Conflict: Material Culture, Memory and the First World War* (London: Routledge, 2004); John Hughes-Wilson, *The First World War in 100 Objects* (Richmond Hill: Firefly Books, 2014).
6. Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1.
 7. Louis Köll, "La population civile d'Auboué durant l'occupation allemande," in *1914–1918, l'autre front*, ed. Patrick Fridenson (Paris: Les Éditions ouvrières, 1977), 35–63; Richard Cobb, *French and Germans, Germans and French* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 1983); Marc Blancpain, *Quand Guillaume II gouvernait de la Somme aux Vosges* (Paris: Fayard, 1980); Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940–1944* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972).
 8. Annette Becker, *Oubliés de la Grande guerre* (Paris: Noësis, 1998); Annette Becker, *Les Cicatrices rouges, 14–18: France et Belgique occupées* (Paris: Fayard, 2010); Helen McPhail, *The Long Silence: Civilian Life under the German Occupation of Northern France, 1914–1918* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999); Philippe Nivet, *La France occupée, 1914–1918* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2011); John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001); Sophie De Schaepdrijver, *La Belgique et la Première Guerre Mondiale* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2004).
 9. Vejas Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity, and German Occupation in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Sophie De Schaepdrijver, "Populations under Occupation," in *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, vol. 3, *Civil Society*, ed. Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), chap. 10. Even literary responses to occupation, most notably Maxence Van der Meersch's novel *Invasion 14* (1935), have enjoyed a remarkable renaissance. In 2014 Albin Michel reissued *Invasion 14*. It is also available in English translation: Maxence Van der Meersch, *Invasion 14: A Novel*, trans. W. Brian Newsome (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016).
 10. For the two sides of this debate, see Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *14–18: Les combattants des tranchées* (Paris: A. Colin, 1968); Rémy Cazals and Frédéric Rousseau, *14–18, le cri d'une génération* (Toulouse: Éditions Privat, 2001).
 11. Among the extensive work on women and the war, see Angela Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munition Workers in the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Susan Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Margaret Darrow, *French Women and the First World War: War Stories of the Home Front* (Oxford: Berg, 2000); Margaret Higonnet, *Nurses at the Front: Writing the Wounds of the Great War* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 2001); George Robb, *British Culture and the First World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), chap. 2; Lucy Noakes, *Women in the British Army: War and the Gentle Sex* (London: Routledge, 2006).
 12. For the war's impact on masculinity, see Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization Without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Paul Frederick Lerner, *Hysterical Men: War, Psychiatry, and the Politics of Trauma in Germany, 1890–1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University

- Press, 2003); Julie Anderson, *War, Disability, and Rehabilitation in Britain: "Soul of a Nation"* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011); Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).
13. For a good overview of the debate, see Patrick J. McDonald and Kevin Sweeney, "The Achilles' Heel of Liberal IR Theory? Globalization and Conflict in the Pre-World War I Era," *World Politics* 59, no. 3 (2007): 370–403.
 14. Jeremy Black, *The Great War and the Making of the Modern World* (London: Continuum, 2011), 266–277. See also Christopher Coker, *War and the Twentieth Century: A Study of Modern Consciousness* (London: Brassey's, 1994); Omer Bartov, *Mirrors of Destruction: War, Genocide, and Modern Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).