INTRODUCTION: PERSPECTIVES IN FIRST WORLD WAR STUDIES

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The papers gathered together in this book were originally presented at a small conference held in Lyon on 7 & 8 September 2001. The conference brought together young scholars—defined loosely as postgraduate or postdoctoral—who work upon the First World War at universities in seven different countries.¹ There were various motivations behind the conference: an awareness of recent renewed interest in 1914–18, a desire to explore the influence of perceived historiographical shifts, an ambition to lower some intra-disciplinary boundaries, to foster international collaboration and comparative history, and to share preliminary or more polished findings. The conference was prompted, above all, by the perception that communication between historians who had recently entered the fray was relatively weak.

More than 50 academics, including some of the historians who have been involved in the historiography of the First World War since the 1970s, joined together to discuss the work of the newest scholars in the field. Some of their research is presented here to a wider audience. The following fifteen papers reflect the individual undertaking of postgraduate students and postdoctoral scholars, and represent a broad assessment of the state of First World War studies in 2001.

As organizers and as editors, we will now attempt—somewhat untraditionally—to distance ourselves from a project we coordinated. Our aim is to provide a critical assessment of the intellectual and academic environment which made it necessary, and prompted the questions we tried collectively to address.

The approach adopted here has been inspired by Gérard Noiriel’s *Sur la crise de l’histoire.*² His book issued several important challenges

¹ In order to build upon the connections made at the conference, the International Society for First World War Studies has been established. For further information, see its website: http://doc-iep.univ-lyon2.fr/wwi/.

to historians in their work. Drawing from a wide set of philosophical, sociological and historical ideas, Noiriel stresses the way in which the historical profession is not only involved in the production of knowledge, and the creation of collective memory, but is simultaneously engaged in power relationships. Noiriel's 'pragmatic approach' attempts to resolve the traditional tensions between theory and practice and to reinstate historical scholarship in its social environment. Having observed the fissiparous tendencies at work within academia, he urges historians to spell out their point of view, method and approach in order to safeguard the unity of the discipline and ensure ongoing exchanges.

What, then, might be suggested as the particularities of our situation? In an increasingly competitive academic job market, professional advancement depends on the public submission of one's research, peer-reviewing, and of course publication. These activities establish one’s position within the historical community at large. By convening a conference and selecting speakers (and ultimately the contributors to this book), we took upon ourselves a responsibility with which junior scholars are rarely entrusted. In further explaining our choices, we hope to stress both the characteristics and limits of this project, as well as to suggest ways of moving forward towards a better understanding of the conflict.

We will first attend to the recent renewal of interest in the First World War and the relationship between the re-kindling of commemoration and the vitality of academic activity. Then, we will present the state of historical studies of the Great War as we perceived it in 2001 and the way in which we reflected our perceptions in our call for papers. Its characteristics owe a great deal to intellectual trends and structural factors that ought to be highlighted. Whilst this edited collection is not exhaustive, it nevertheless reveals one of the strongest and most dynamic undercurrents in the history of modern warfare: the emphasis on the cultural and social dimensions of the World War I experience. The works presented here could therefore be rallied under the banner of the 'new cultural history of the war'. In accepting a pre-existing label, we make no claim to write as a new generation of historians, nor hold any pretension to a paradigmatic breakthrough.

The contemporary relevance of an historical topic is unusually clear in the case of First World War studies. The conflict continues to intrude on the public sphere of former belligerent societies, and
in many instances, historians have been called upon to engage in controversies that have produced more heat than light. Indeed, it seems that World War I has gained in importance since the 1990s. The growing interest in commemoration and the increased ‘social demand’ addressed to professional historians account, to a certain extent, for the dynamism of First World War studies.

These trends can be illustrated by the situation in Australia. The experience of the First World War, particularly the activities of the Anzacs in the Gallipoli campaign of 1915, lies at the heart of Australia’s national identity. Numerous state-sponsored and personal commemorative activities demonstrate this. On 25 April each year, the anniversary of the early morning landings on the Gallipoli peninsula is marked as ‘Anzac Day’. Dawn services are held across the country, followed by marches later in the morning. Thousands of Australian backpackers in Europe include a visit to Gallipoli on their itinerary each year. The Australian cricket team even made a pilgrimage there en route to the Ashes series in England in 2001. Furthermore, upon his death in May 2002, the last veteran of Gallipoli, Alec Campbell, was honoured with a state funeral. Yet, the public importance of Gallipoli in Australia has not remained constant. There was a discernible decline in interest during the 1960s and 70s, before the spectacular flowering of commemorative activities with the 75th anniversary of the landings in 1990.

Given the importance of Gallipoli in Australia, historians are occasionally drawn into public controversies on the subject. A recent example arose in the wake of a conference, ‘Australia in War and Peace’ convened by the Australian War Memorial and Curtin University and held at Canakkale, the nearest town to the Gallipoli peninsula. The interesting and scholarly research on the military and cultural history of the campaign was reported in the Australian newspaper as the ‘Charge of the rewrite brigade’. The story was picked up by talk radio in Australia and the press in New Zealand, by which time the supposedly self-styled ‘rewrite brigade’ were said to have called upon Australia to apologise for the 1915 ‘invasion’ of

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3 A name derived from the acronym Australian and New Zealand Army Corps.
4 Macleod (2002). See also, Macleod, Reconsidering Gallipoli (Manchester University Press, forthcoming).
Gallipoli and to have compared it to the British invasion of Aboriginal land in 1788. Yet, the academics drew no such political conclusions. What they did do was to attempt to examine the basis of a story that is invested with tremendous significance. Sober academic endeavour became hyperbole; such is the resonance of the First World War in Australia and New Zealand.

The public importance of historical debate may be heightened in a country that is struggling to come to terms with its colonial and Aboriginal heritage and its new Asian orientation and multicultural identity. However, the First World War also remains of central importance in countries like Britain and France that have a more richly documented historical legacy to draw upon. Such is the depth of the scar inflicted by previously unparalleled casualties of the war. As in Australia, World War I can prompt public controversies. For example, the parallel debates aroused by military discipline. In Britain, a campaign developed in 1997–8 to grant a posthumous blanket pardon for soldiers who had been ‘shot at dawn’ in punishment for crimes in the war zone. This controversial issue was reignited by Julian Sykes’ and Julian Putowski’s historical research. It promoted both public debate and further academic research that demonstrated the limitations of their argument. A parliamentary review followed, but concluded that a formal pardon was impossible. The campaign continues.

In France—as well as in Italy—a similar controversy broke out during the celebrations of the 80th Anniversary of the Armistice of 1918. At a ceremony held in Craonne on 5 November 1998, the French Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, asked for the ‘reintegration in the collective national memory’ of the soldiers who were shot ‘for the sake of example’ in 1914–15 and those who mutinied in 1917.

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7 Prime Minister John Howard and his predecessor Paul Keating, provide a stark contrast in their views on Australia’s history. Howard rejects the ‘black arm-band’ view of history associated with Keating.

8 The campaign’s website is www.shotatdawn.org.uk.


As Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau pointed out, the fierce debate that followed bore witness to the increasing ‘presence’ of the First World War in the French collective memory. This ‘presence’ is paradoxical, however, since the renewal of societal and political interest in the conflict has led to public discourse that is based on the victimization of the belligerent societies, yet to a large extent this view remains at odds with the historiography of the conflict. This gap prompted Audoin-Rouzeau to talk with regard to the 1998 commemoration of a ‘cognitive reversion (recul)’.\(^{11}\)

Whilst acknowledging the lack of any systematic comparative history of the ‘presence’ of the First World War,\(^{12}\) Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker claimed that France was the country in which this phenomenon manifested itself most forcefully.\(^{13}\) We cannot agree. Various statistics suggest a significant level of public engagement in Britain. In 1998 the Public Record Office received, on average, 130 questions each week about soldiers of the Great War.\(^{14}\) The same year, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission dealt with more than 35,000 queries specifically related to the war.\(^{15}\) Many of these queries will have come from people investigating their family history. A more general illustration is the British Legion’s annual campaign to sell poppies as an emblem of remembrance for Britain’s war dead. Each November, this symbol is a pervasive presence; featuring on the front pages of newspapers, on car stickers, and worn proudly by politicians across the political spectrum. Although representing all wars, the poppy remains closely associated with the battles in Flanders. However important the ‘shot at dawn’ controversy was in France in 1998, it seems that it subsequently subsided whereas in the British case, the popular commitment to the memory of the war is still being channelled by charities and voluntary organizations.\(^{16}\) And as the calls upon the PRO and the CWGC demonstrate, this is a phenomenon imbedded in family memory as much as in national commemorative forms.

\(^{15}\) Moriarty (1999), p. 653.
Similarly, the comparative literary or cultural landscapes show a common pattern rather than a French exception. The public success of novels like those of Jean Rouaud,17 or Sébastien Japrisot,18 of the comic strips of Tardi, or of the recent films inspired by the war experience,19 are undoubtedly significant, but they can barely substantiate the claim of a uniquely French phenomenon. Indeed, some of the most successful recent English-language literature has been based on the World War I experience such as Sebastian Faulks’ *Birdsong* or Pat Barker’s *Regeneration* trilogy.20 The popularity of *Blackadder Goes Forth* (BBC TV, 1989), voted the number nine in *100 Great Television Moments* of the century21 and of the re-broadcast of the 1960s documentary series, *The Great War* in 2003, in addition to less well received films such as *The Trench* (1999) or *Deathwatch* (2002) and the BBC TV documentary *The Trench* (2002) also testify to enduring interest.

The First World War thus remains a powerful subject in several countries, both in terms of public discourse and academic endeavour. In this respect, as the liveliness of debates about military discipline or Gallipoli suggest, the relationship between history in the public sphere and historical research ought now to be systematically and comparatively addressed since it accounts for the conditions in which World War I historians have been operating in recent years. For example, it has been recently suggested that this renewed interest in the First World War may be interpreted as a ‘reaction against the overwhelming weight of the Second World War’ both in collective memory and in the historiography.22

In parallel to this public phenomenon, it has also seemed that the community of scholars dedicated to the history of the First World War has grown significantly in recent years. Random meetings with colleagues or students, and the experience of historical conferences or gatherings, appear to confirm the vitality of academic activity in

18 *Un long dimanche de fiançailles* (1997).
our field. This impression encouraged the idea of the conference as a means to foster intellectual exchanges in this growing community.

It may be useful here to chart the development of this subjective perspective through a simple but significant indicator, the number of publications listed in one of the major databases: Historical Abstracts. This database has been published since 1954 and covers over 2,000 journals in the social sciences and humanities whose publications interest historians across period and geographical area.23

Out of the 619,002 books and articles listed by the database, 6,860 references were explicitly related to the history of the First World War. As the figure above shows, the overall increase in World War I publication is undeniable and on average 200 articles or books were published annually between 1980 and 1999. Despite the structural limitations and especially the linguistic imbalance inherent in this survey, it can at least be taken as a conservative estimate of activity in our field. It is likely that the upsurge would be more noticeable if it were possible to measure book sales or overall publications, including fiction, referring to World War I.24

Our first conclusion thus confirms a ‘common sense approach’ and the overall increase vindicates our initial premises. Yet in relative terms, the steady increase shown since the 1980s only means that First World War studies constitute between 1 and 1.5% of the global historical production. World War I studies may indeed be a booming field, but its growth took place in an environment which, related to the ‘democratization’ of higher education, led to an increase in historical studies altogether.

It is possible that some of the surges in output on the graph correlate with the 50th, 70th and 80th anniversaries of the war. To speculate further requires this numerical overview of academic activity to be placed within a broader intellectual context in order to observe some historiographical trends. In a recent survey, David Cannadine highlighted a “shift away from the search for causation to the search for meaning”25 as one of the key developments in historical enquiry. This change is central to the influence of cultural

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23 Cf. ABC-Clio website at http://serials.abc-clio.com/it must be noted that Historical Abstracts excludes publications related to the United States and Canada which are covered in a different database, America: History and Life.
24 Todman (Phd thesis).
Graph 2. Publications in First World War Studies: percentage of overall historical production 1954-2001

Source: Historical Abstract, CD Rom ABC-CLio
history on all varieties of historical scholarship. Miri Rubin has explained its nature thus:

the ‘cultural turn’ is served by a hybrid of critical strategies which illuminate modes of communication, the circulation of ideas and practices and the agency of the individual, and which always attend to meaning. It is best when practised with an awareness of the intellectual roots of its concepts and procedures, alert to the allure of its rhetoric. To deal with culture is thus to deal by definition with the mixing of categories, for it is the system of meanings which makes order, ranks priority and suggests useful connections between things—real, felt, and imagined. [..] contexts of use; use and practice are the ways in which we gain entry into the world of meanings of those among whom we have never lived.26

In the context of First World War studies, this agenda has reinvigorated research. A decade ago, Jay Winter surveyed a series of recent books that constituted ‘a new cultural history of the Great War’.27 His later survey identified the significant trend inherent in this new development as a shift from social history (‘the history of defiance’) to cultural history (‘the history of consent’).28 French historiography does not quite fit this pattern, but nonetheless demonstrates the centrality of cultural history. In what has been described as a somewhat ‘muted and artificial’29 controversy the French co-directors of the Historial (notably Annette Becker & Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau) have disagreed with a small group of historians30 who refute their emphasis on ‘war culture’ as a critical concept in the understanding of the conflict.

It has been observed that one of the weaknesses of cultural history is its eclecticism and that the solution is to adopt a comparative approach.31 Furthermore, a phenomenon such as the First World War requires comparison since it was, by definition, a trans-national event, yet a truly exhaustive comparative study of the conflict remains a daunting ideal. Given the scale of the conflict comparison can only be achieved in limited fashion or through extensive coordinated coop-

29 Prost (2002).
30 Rousseau (1999); Cazals & Rousseau (2001); Abbal (2000).
eration. The comparative study of the cultural history of the war has been implemented by the scholars associated with the Historial de la Grande Guerre. Behind their determination to gather together scholars from different countries, lay the conviction that the system of representation of the belligerent societies was the unifying factor which shaped the common experience of the conflict through the mobilization of state agencies and civil societies, regardless of nationalities and allegiances.

However, despite its continuous influence on the historiography, the programme of comparative history that Marc Bloch, himself a World War I veteran suggested, still faces inherent difficulties and criticism which partly explains its minor status. The response to our call for papers, which explicitly encouraged comparative history, offers an illustration here. Out of the 92 proposals received, only a dozen were based on a comparative study. This quantitative weakness of comparative history betrays the difficulties associated with this kind of study. The necessity of immersing oneself in one or two different cultures and more than one national historiography is a formidable challenge. Moreover, the need to work in more than one language, not only requires significant linguistic ability, but may in itself raise intractable problems. That is, historians build their narrative and analysis on categories which belong to a particular culture or at least to a linguistic area. In doing so, translation difficulties naturally crop up, but they may also be symptomatic of a deeper historiographical problem with which comparativists have then to grapple—the history of shell shock is a case in point.

Michel Espagne has made further important criticisms of the comparative approach. In his work, Espagne aims to break with the national perspectives that dominate historical studies and which, he argues, amount to a ‘historiographical ethnocentrism’. His programme of research investigates cultural contacts, processes of cultural cross-fertilization, circulations, and supranational acculturation. However, Espagne underestimates the heuristic value of comparative history and misrepresents it. To focus on his fundamental premise, Espagne argues that:

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33 See the special issue of the *Journal of Contemporary History* (2000), 35, 1 and Winter (2000).
34 Espagne (1999), pp. 35–36.
To compare two objects means to oppose them in order to enumerate their resemblances and differences as well as, by an unavoidable shift, to petrify the oppositions [ ... ] the comparison comforts the national divide and makes its questioning problematic.

He thus implies that comparative history is limited to the study of national identity or structures and hampers the breaking down of the nation as a cultural entity. Yet the individual comparative essays presented here suggest otherwise. Espagne views comparative history as a study of cultural structures; his focus on cultural transfers is such that he seems oblivious to the usefulness of comparison in analysing a social or cultural process. Whereas, the comparative history of the First World War is, first and foremost, the history of a process of adaptation to industrial warfare.

Undeniably, there is still a long way to go before comparativists can claim a major part of scholarly production. Many intellectual and professional hurdles remain in the path of comparative history but there is hope that the structure of the profession may be changing in its favour. The Historial de la Grande Guerre has been influential here. It is not simply the type of history it physically embodies or fosters financially that has achieved this. The Historial’s impact lies primarily in the communication and teaching dispensed by its founders and scholars. Through their publications and their other activities in the public sphere, the body of scholarship which can be associated with the Historial has influenced both historical production at large and the teaching of Modern European History. The collective and individual curricula embodied in this book have clearly been shaped by the Historial’s agenda. In a more direct way, many of our contributors were or still are supervised by historians who have been contributing to the Historial’s development since its foundation. The Historial also provided moral and material support to the editors in the run-up to the Lyon conference. For these reasons, the issues discussed at our conference were closely aligned with the Historial’s main preoccupations, that is, the challenge of think-

35 Espagne (1999), p. 36.
36 Jay Winter was the co-producer, co-writer and chief historian for the PBS series The Great War and the Shaping of the Twentieth Century, shown on the BBC as 1914–18: The Great War and the Shaping of the Twentieth Century, special issue of Le Monde in 1998 dedicated to the war.
ing about the Great War in terms of the entire century and the entire world, and of viewing the war’s cultural aspects as the heart of the conflict.\footnote{Audoin-Rouzeu, Becker, Becker, Krumeich, Winter (1994), p. 8.}

Yet if the vertical links between established and younger scholars may be detected, horizontal links at the lower levels are less readily established. The youngest scholars largely remain ignorant of their peers in other institutions. There are many reasons for this relative isolation; they include the individualistic culture that predominates in intellectual circles, the lack of funding in history departments for travel, and the dominance of established scholars at conferences and seminars. All of which leaves relatively little space for the newest historians to submit their work to critical assessment, even when they have the confidence to do so. One of the crucial motivations behind the Lyon conference was the ambition to create a forum dedicated to this purpose. The conference thus presented an opportunity to view the research being conducted on World War I by the youngest cohort of the profession.

With the aforementioned observations in mind, we thus intended to reflect in our call for papers our desire to address the issues raised by the history of the Great War in an interdisciplinary and comparative approach by organizing an event at which different generations of scholars would get together and exchange ideas. Our call for papers identified four themes and a specific set of questions resulted from each of them.

1— Waging war:

To what extent have cultural and military historians truly colonized each other’s areas as the epigraph to the Cambridge University Press series ‘Studies in the social and cultural history of modern warfare’ suggests?\footnote{Jay Winter’s Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning. The Great War in European Cultural History inaugurated this series in 1995.} Can the social history of war be studied without a thorough engagement with events at the front or vice versa? Does the recent and provocative Niall Ferguson’s \textit{Pity of War}\footnote{Niall Ferguson, \textit{The Pity of War} (London, 1998).} point to an original and proper way to combine military, economic, diplomatic, political and cultural history?
2- Communities at war:

From the individual to the state, how did the different levels of social organisation deal with the conflict and its consequences? What kind of solidarities, discrimination and mobilisation processes were at work in 1914–18? What relationship was established between military and civilian needs? Can new light be shed in this way upon the economic and political life of the belligerent societies?

3- The First World War and the intimate:

The ‘totalizing logic’ of the Great War meant that it pervaded the most intimate spheres of the belligerent societies. How did the conflict impinge on sexual morality and gender relationships, on individuals and families? From shellshock to home front anxieties and mourning process, how were the variegated sufferings faced? How did contemporary medical science and practices cope with the war?

4- Intellectual responses to the war:

What kind of artistic, literary and scholarly responses did the war provoke? Where did the dividing line run through these different responses? What should be deemed as paramount: degree and qualities of participation in the war effort, nationality, or intellectual generation?

The responses elicited by this appeal illuminated the range and diversity of the research being carried out in our field at the time. It is now up to the reader to determine if the papers we selected, which form the basis of this book, live up to the challenges issued by our call for papers. They illustrate both the editors’ subjective preferences and some significant aspects of the history of the First World War as it is currently being written.

The most important division that is traditionally drawn in the historiography of war is that between military and cultural history. Our
collection illustrates some ways in which this division is being bridged. For example, the coming together of military and socio-cultural histories has given credence to the notion of the ‘home front’ in historiographies whose national language has no direct equivalent. In French for instance, ‘l’arrière’ (the rear) is the closest translation, but it misses the critical point now raised by the historiography of the conflict: the blurring of boundaries between soldiers and civilians during the Great War whose ‘totalizing logic’ determined the social responses to the war. Thus the scrutiny of the mechanisms of social and cultural mobilization in this collection leads to a reconsideration of the distinction between combatants and non-combatants and envisions societies as agents of warfare as much as victims of the conflagration. It therefore refutes the argument, at the heart of the collective memory of the Great War, that the experience of the conflict was solely one of victimization.

Such papers typify both the influence of the rise of women’s and gender history, and the colonisation of military history by cultural history, just as Jay Winter called for the jettisoning of “outworn distinctions between ‘high’ and ‘popular’ culture, and between both the political, economic and military history of the day. In the 1914–18 conflict, all were mobilized; all were transformed.” Military history has benefited from the extra breadth this has brought to the discipline, but there are limits to this colonisation. Although war must rate as one of the central shaping experiences of humanity, an historical topic that must be explored in all its aspects, the attentions of cultural historians and social historians before them have not served to draw military history fully into the body of the kirk. Witness the decision, acknowledged by the editor, to omit military history

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with others from a survey of *What is History Now?*. The failure to include operational military history here, despite the intention evidenced in the call for papers to give military history equal weighting to other genres, reflects the paucity of proposals from this area, the editors’ taste, and ultimately a serious flaw for which Mike Neiberg’s study of civil-military relations in Britain, France and the U.S. and Michelle Moyd’s scrutiny of racism in the German Officer Corps partially compensate. They respectively illustrate the potential of a comparative approach, and the way in which attention to cultural themes can enrich military history.

Despite their diversity, it is possible to discern some other themes running through our chapters. Several of them reflect the attention paid by the historiography to the pervasiveness of the war which seeped into the intimate and issued dramatic challenges to every belligerent society whose very humanity was then at stake. In the wake of seminal studies by George Mosse, Joanna Bourke, and Paul Lerner, Anne Dumenil’s paper on suffering and military discipline, André Loez’s on soldiers’ tears, Jessica Meyer’s on shell shock and masculinity and Hans-Georg Hofer’s on shell shock and multi-ethnicity address the psychological consequences of the conflict and provide us with rigorous yet sympathetic analyses of individual suffering in wartime. Although their respective preoccupations are somewhat removed from these studies, Jean-Yves Le Naour’s paper on decadence and regeneration, Emmanuelle Cronier’s on soldiers on leave, Matthew Stibbe’s on a community built by civilian internees, Susanne Terwey’s on anti-Semitism, and Pierre Purseigle’s on the mobilisation of local communities interestingly supplement them. They cannot be rallied under the banner of ‘social psychology’ but they nonetheless show how the mental and emotional aspects of the war experience are now being systematically encompassed in the social history of the conflict.

Taken as a whole, the following studies demonstrate that it is not only its sheer size and its industrial and technical dimensions that make the First World War of outstanding importance in modern history. The conflict impinged so dramatically upon individuals, challenging their definitions and assertions of self so extensively, that a

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collective, if not necessarily concerted, historical endeavour has been prompted in order to understand the intimate dimension of the war experience. In this undertaking, World War I historians face a thorny question, that of the articulation of the collective and individual levels of experience. This issue is likely to beleaguer cultural historians for some time to come, as witness the debates about micro-history and the relations between social and cultural history.

This willingness to unravel the arcane lineaments of the war experience takes place amidst changes in the usual scale of historical explanations.\(^{48}\) This is obviously implied in the turn towards comparative methods. What may be more significant here is an equal commitment to reconsider the very chronology of the conflict.\(^{49}\) Tracing aspects of the conflict back into the 19th century and onwards to the advent of the Second World War is vital to understanding the First World War in context.

The central debate in the chronology of the cultural history of the war has opposed the traditional and the modern. Paul Fussell, Modris Eksteins and Samuel Hynes\(^{50}\) have argued that the conflict constituted a profound break which forced social and cultural modernity on to the world. Whereas Jay Winter has pointed to the continued consolatory power of ‘traditional’ forms of imagining warfare.\(^{51}\) In their works, Stefan Goebel and Susanne Terwey present two arguments based respectively on the resonance of medievalism in German commemorations of the war and on the combination of anti-Semitism and Germanophobia in Britain, which lead, in this respect, to different conclusions. Dissonances of this kind speak to the complexity of the social responses to the conflict.

Olivier Compagnon also examines the idea of the war as a watershed. This chapter encompasses the conflict in Latin America’s modern cultural history and assesses its position, contrasting it with traditional European perspectives. This paper also prompts another challenge: that of adjusting the scale of analysis to the geographical dimensions of the conflict and recovering the aspects that made this a world war. Our papers thus look beyond the Western Front and beyond the three main belligerents. Ismee Tames explores the

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\(^{48}\) Jacques Revel, *Jeux d’échelle.*

\(^{49}\) Prochasson (1998).


intellectual challenges that war posed in a neutral country. It is dis-
appointing that we were not able to include more papers in the con-
ference and in the book from neutral and non-belligerent countries, 
Italy and the Balkans are also notable absences from the line-up.

In an interview published in 1996, Paul Fussell said of his book The 
Great War and Modern Memory, ‘It’s really about the Vietnam War as 
much as it is about the First World War’. Fussell’s remark illustra-
tes that, as Jay Winter has pointed out, the new cultural history 
can be seen as the product of a generation that began writing about 
the Great War in the shadow of Vietnam. Similarly, Pierre Nora 
has compared the ‘historiographical upheaval’ of the First World 
War to the reappraisal applied to the French Revolution a decade 
ago, describing it as ‘the generational advent of an international 
team, German, English, French, and through a collective and orig-
inal experience’, that of the Historial. Building on Kuhn’s definition 
of a paradigm and on Noiriel’s ‘pragmatism’, the perspective adopted 
here has stressed the social dimensions of our historiographical under-
taking. Moreover, the priority given to young scholars in our project 
is likely to raise a similar kind of question for one may indeed wonder 
if the collection presented here comprises the work of a new intel-
lectual generation. However gratifying this would sound, it does not.

If an ‘intellectual generation’ is based on the notion of engage-
ment and commitment to the social and political life of one’s time, it is 
difficult to identify a unifying political factor. Where the 1960s 
were marked by ideological quarrels and the heyday of social his-
tory, or the 1970s by liberation movements and the rise of gender 
history and the linguistic turn, it is more difficult to identify a polit-
ical movement with a similar intellectual legacy in the 1990s. War 
in Europe did make it back to the headlines in this decade, at the 
very time when most of us were entering higher education. Yet, it 
is difficult to see war in the Balkans as the defining moment of our 
generation. How this conflict played out in terms of the study of the 
First World War—beyond glib observations on the implications of

52 Paul Fussell interviewed by Sheldon Hackney in ‘The initial shock... A con-
versation with Paul Fussell.’, Humanities, November/December 1996. The interview 
can also be read online at http://www.neh.gov/news/humanities/1996-11/fussell.html.
assassinations in Sarajevo—is a story which remains to be told. One exception may be that the creation of the European Union has encouraged historians to view 1914–18 as a transnational event. Beyond this, the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the claimed triumph of liberal capitalism in the ‘end of history’, provided the ideological backdrop against which we started exercising our citizen’s rights but it would be near to impossible to identify common political grounds on which our relationship to History has been built. Although the idea of a politically apathetic ‘Generation X’ is an unfair caricature, it is the case that our approach to historiographical controversies is not obviously motivated by political agendas. Nor did particular national historiographical debates spill over into our collective discussions. Indeed, this may point to a characteristic of international gatherings of the sort. While the fierce debate which in France pits the respective advocates of the schools of ‘consent’ and ‘coercion’ rings somewhat hollow beyond French academic circles, the controversy prompted by Niall Ferguson’s *Pity of War* although explicitly mentioned in our call for papers, fared no better in this respect. Such debates indeed remain circumscribed within national boundaries just as the debate about the ‘learning curve’ which animates the anglophone military historiography of the First World War does not seem to find an echo on the continent.

At any rate, neither the editors nor the collective would claim to have given birth to a new paradigm. Indeed, there is not even agreement among us on key concepts. For example, the editors continue to disagree over the idea of ‘war culture’ and its ‘matrix’ function. While the importance of the wartime system of representations is acknowledged in many of the papers here, there is divergence on the degree to which cultural aspects might have counterbalanced or determined other factors which like technology or innovation held sway over the way the conflict ultimately was waged. As Dennis Showalter observes:

> This point is particularly significant within the context of an historiography increasingly stressing compliance rather than cozening or coercion as the crucial element in maintaining support for the war effort. Emotional investment in national identity certainly was important. […]

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56 Fukuyama (1989).
57 Reviews by Prior and Wilson (2000) and by Jay Winter (with the author’s reply) at http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/paper/ferguson.htm.
58 Bond (2002); Sheffield (2001).
One might also suggest, however, that Verdun, the Somme, and the endless battles of the Isonzo were all manifestations of morale sustained by a culture of competence and a technology of everyday whose proper functionings were as crucial to the Great War as any of the more obviously martial manifestations of the machine age.59

The importance of the coming together of military and cultural history lies in the new perspectives it has prompted both disciplines to encompass. In their respective works, military and cultural historians have been incorporating previously overlooked factors, and have consequently refined their traditional approaches to the First World War.

To a large extent, the following collection illustrates a common willingness to address the complexities of the war experience and to engage critically with all quarters of the historiography. The distinctions once drawn between a French school concerned with a history of the representations of the war and its German and Anglo-Saxon counterparts, respectively presented as the study of the presence of the war in the political sphere and as the history of wartime mass and popular culture, have now lost their relevance.60 Although these themes remain central in World War I historiography, the circulation between different national historiographies and their cross-fertilization are now too important to allow these sorts of national distinctions. A comparativist attitude can only further undermine such boundaries. However variegated, our approaches seem to have broken with the traditional opposition between the idea of function and the idea of human agency. Setting aside philosophical arguments about determinisms and individual freedom (as well as their political offshoots), the cultural historians of the Great War acknowledge this critical tension and recognize the necessity of taking agents seriously. In a context where the growth of state apparatus and coercive instruments were conspicuous, representations are not only uncovered as delusions of the ‘truth’ or by-products of propaganda, but also account for the meaning given to events and social practices.61 In line with the overall evolution of historical studies, World War I historians thus address the ‘social construction’ of the war experience.62 In this process, as this collection illustrates, the ‘multivocality’ of cultural history is once more asserted.

59 Showalter (2002), p. 82.
This last qualification leads us back to Gérard Noiriel and the historiographical crisis he engages with. The historiography of the First World War now presents a complex picture of the conflict and draws on multiple approaches to a common object. Yet, the splitting up of the historiography regretted by Noiriel for the divisive tensions it has brought about does not in this case constitute a crisis. Indeed, the vitality of First World War studies lies in a renewed commitment to Lord Acton’s call to ‘study problems in preference to periods’.63

As Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau pointed out, the goal of understanding the Great War seems out of reach, a nagging issue in the cultural historian’s consciousness.64 The bewilderment brought about by this conflict undoubtedly accounts for the energy dispensed in studying it. Yet, by introducing the following collection, we would like to strike a more hopeful note than the gloomy tone induced by the 1998 commemorations. In many respects, a proper understanding of the Great War may seem a remote prospect, rendered all the more difficult by a century’s distance from the attitudes which made the slaughter possible. Nonetheless, we remain convinced that we present here a set of chapters which offer a significant contribution to our field. We hope that our project has laid foundations which will encourage sociability amongst the newest World War I historians. A network has been formed that will enable the sharing of a set of common reference points and the exchange of ideas.

The contributors to this book may be seen as a cohort who are implementing and elaborating on earlier insights. Such a mobilisation both tests and pays tribute to our mentors’ hypotheses and previous works. In doing so, we will continue to pursue that demanding ambition of the total history of a total war.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


64 ‘Tout se passe en effet comme si nous voulions, plus que jamais auparavant, comprendre la Grande Guerre. Mais sans avoir désormais, peut-être, les moyens d’y parvenir jamais’ Audoin-Rouzeau (1999), p. 130. Some military and international historians however, deny that the war is unique, intangible or ‘outside history’ (Sheffield (2001), pp. 14 & 232; Bond (2002), p. 100).


INTRODUCTION: PERSPECTIVES IN FIRST WORLD WAR STUDIES


