



INSTITUT D'ÉTUDES  
AVANCÉES DE PARIS



## “War as contact zone in the nineteenth century”. Workshop at the Institut d'études avancées and the Institut historique allemand de Paris, 28-29 June 2018

Call for Papers - Appel à contribution

### **War as contact zone in the nineteenth century**

Military history has come a long way in the last fifty years. Popular media such as the *History Channel* and the biographies of great generals on the shelves of many bookstores might suggest at first glance that the field is still dominated by ‘drum and trumpet historians’ that speak to audiences well on the right of the political spectrum. However, the ascendancy of ‘new military history’/‘nouvelle histoire-bataille’ and the ‘cultural history of war’ has in fact advanced our understanding of human conflict enormously. We know more than ever before about the multilayered webs of entanglement that connect army and society, as well as the way in which soldiers and civilians experience violence. Work in this vein has shown that instead of being an exceptional state and thus marginal to society’s ‘true’ concerns, war has been implicated in some of history’s most far-reaching changes, such as the evolution of the modern idea of citizenship.

While military conflicts are undeniably destructive in terms of their human and material cost, they also have unintended creative consequences. The German historian Ute Frevert has aptly termed wars ‘inter- and transnational events par excellence’ because no other phenomenon - with the possible exception of migration - brings so many people in such close contact with each other. Napoleon may have failed to establish a lasting European empire, but the veterans of the *Grande Armée* could boast familiarity with all parts of Europe after having marched across the Continent for almost a quarter of a century. Of course, when such large bodies of men fuse together or interact with civilian populations, the nature of these encounters differs widely. Some manifestations are benign, including the bonds of comradeship that can blossom into ‘fictive kinship’ (Jay Winter) among soldiers, whereas atrocities and genocidal mass exterminations represent the opposite form of encounter. Both extremes of the spectrum have been the subject of extensive scholarship in recent decades, thanks to a process of analytical cross-fertilisation through interdisciplinary borrowing. Just as it is no longer good practice to write about morale and combat effectiveness without attention to sociological or anthropological theories that explain unit cohesion, investigations into the causes of war crimes have underscored the benefits that accrue from close analytical attention to the psychological triggers of violence and the spaces in which

these acts take place. Finally, the fruits of transnational history and global history remind us that any attempt to explain war-as-encounter must have a firm grounding in cultural studies, especially with a view to uncovering how patterns of communication evolve and the transfer of knowledge occurs.

Building on these insights, the workshop seeks to encourage further debate on the mechanics of encounter and transfer processes in war during the 'long nineteenth century' (1789-1914). In a second step we wish to explore how historians working on this subject can use new digital methods and impact case studies to make their findings accessible to the public. The choice of period is informed by this era's manifold innovations in such fields as communication, mass transport, weaponry, international law and the conduct of war, which have generated fruitful dialogue on the question whether the nineteenth century set the path for a totalitarianisation of warfare or should instead be evaluated on their own terms.

The overall objective of the workshop is to assemble a team of scholars that is prepared to tackle fresh research questions, including (but not limited to) the following ones:

- To what extent is the claim of the sociologist P. H. Gulliver that the modes of interactive behaviour in transcultural negotiations are 'essentially similar despite marked differences in interests, ideas, values, rules and assumptions' among the parties concerned borne out by historical evidence?
- How do soldiers manage cultural differences and build trust in unequal relationships power such as military captivity?
- How does society at home perceive and interpret encounters with prisoners of war, either in real life or through images, art and literary sources?
- How does the law shape encounters in war? What formative role do gender, race, class and religion play?
- Finally, if war can be understood as a 'moral theatre' that enables soldiers to display their masculine virtues, as Michael Ignatieff argues, what can the conceptualisation of contact zones as a stage tell historians about the performative dimension of combat?

The two-day workshop will take place at the Institut d'études avancées and the Institut historique allemand in Paris on 28 and 29 June 2018. Applications focusing on the above or related themes of 'war as contact zone in the nineteenth century' are encouraged especially from early-career scholars. The organisers aim to defray the travel costs of all invited speakers subject to the availability of funds. Please submit a 200-word abstract of your proposed paper together with a one-page CV in English or French to [warascontactzone@gmail.com](mailto:warascontactzone@gmail.com) by **15 February 2018**.

We look forward to hearing from you.

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