

In the Heart of the Great War

The Individual at the Crossroads between the Civilian and Military Worlds

The 2016 Summer School organised by the International Research Centre of the Historial de la Grande Guerre de Péronne has led to many exchanges and debates which needed to be prolonged and perpetuated. In that sense, we invite papers for a symposium directed at young researchers, such as graduate students and PhD students. The organisers intend to publish the proceedings of this conference at a later date.

The historiography of World War I has been largely built upon the basis of separation between the History of battles on one side and occupied populations and the home front on the other¹. Nonetheless, to reason with this image is to forget that World War I, as total warfare, has set new means of meeting, coexisting and cohabitating between the civilian and the military spheres. From the military front to the home front, and through occupied territories, the war experience is a crossway, perhaps even an interaction between the civilian and military worlds, as the expression 'home front' suggests².

For the people subjected to military service, the general mobilization is certainly a deep rupture with life before the war: especially the family and the village. However, the acceptance of the conflict must also be understood in terms of a continuity, which re-imagines the process of training for the civilian, who, from the school playground to the army barracks, is predisposed to war. Similarly, the spirit of the combatants cannot be viewed without considering a recurring and essential element in their way of thinking—the home front—meaning both memory and hope. Ignoring the relationship between the civilian and military world would also be forgetting that most soldiers during the Great War were civilians wearing uniforms. In the midst of this intersection, there also is the need to question the transference of practice from the civilian sphere to the military sphere.

Similar comments on the porous nature of these two spheres are applicable to populations in occupied territories and in the home front. War invites itself into lives, homes and families, thus becoming an integral part of everyday life. In occupied territories, from collaboration to resistance, the civilian response to occupiers' presence shows the intrusion of the military into the civilian sphere. In this way, civilians adapt and interpret the military, bringing new behaviors. After the war, actions towards the collaborators, as those towards women, called *femmes à boches*, tell of a conflict extending to the most private and intimate spheres of the social life of the occupied societies. Furthermore, home front should not be reduced to war effort or *Union Sacrée* but reassessed in order to discover the complexity of civilians' relationship to military affairs.

Far from denying the necessary distinction between the radically different experiences of the soldier and of the people under occupation or in the home front, we have to bring back the individual in the same approach: the human being at war, an actor at the heart of the intervention on the military and civilian fields. This analytical grid, largely inherited from a renewed historiography of the First World War, which tends to put the individual at the centre of the discussion, supports our argument. Beyond a simple encounter between civilians and soldiers, the purpose of this reflection is to grasp how the human being integrates and associates these two realms, narrates this junction, and how one shows and expresses one's choices and behaviours, individual or collective.

¹ PROST Antoine and WINTER Jay, *Penser la Grande, un essai d'historiographie*, Paris, Seuil, 2004.

² For a new and transnational analysis of the 'home front' concept, see the yet to be published acts of the "Les Fronts intérieurs européens : l'arrière en guerre (1914-1920)" symposium that took place on November 2015.

Expected proposals will discuss this link between the civilian and military worlds in the Great War, but may also extend across a longer timeframe. The geographical frame of the subject is not limited to European events, but can also stretch out to other places of confrontation, in order to question the relevance of this interpretative framework to all the warring countries. Proposals should be approximately one page in length. Applications should also be accompanied by a short CV. Please submit proposals to intheheartofthegreatwar@gmail.com by 3th March 2017. The working language of the conference is French and English.

The symposium will take place from 26th to 28th October 2017 at the Mons Memorial Museum in Mons, Belgium. Expenses for accommodation and travel will be cover insofar as possible. We invite you to ask first to your institution.

Website: intheheartofthegreatwar.wordpress.com

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