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Between Participation and Victimization

World War I Urban Mobilization in Comparative Perspective

The ‘totalizing logic’¹ of the Great War had for consequence to blur the boundaries between combatants and non-combatants, between ‘soldier and civilian’². Pitting mass armies supported by industrialized economies, the conduct of the war first demanded the commitment of the nation’s material and technical resources to the conflict. The meaning of wartime mobilization thus shifted from its original military definition to encompass the contribution of civil society, whose human, financial, and cultural resources were also expected to directly support the armed forces in the field. At the same time, the new technologies of warfare allowed armies to overcome the physical limitations that had hitherto delineated a clear demarcation between the front and the rear. The development of modern artillery, of submarine warfare and aerial bombardments, like the experience of occupation, thus challenged the cultural and legal barriers which had aimed to protect civilians from the direct impact of military offensives. In the English language, the emergence of the notion of “home front”, first recorded by the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1917, merely illustrated the acceleration of an ongoing process that the Second World War was to radicalize. The Wars of German Unification and the Franco-Prussian war in particular had indeed seen the word *Heimatfront* gain wide currency in the newly unified Germany³. In WWI Italy, *fronte interno* became a term of choice in interventionist and nationalist circles. In this context, as A. Gibelli points out, the notion conjured up the existence of an internal enemy whose activities should be met as resolutely as those of the enemy at the

¹ John Horne (ed.), *State, Society, and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War* (Cambridge 1997) 3.

² Roger Chickering, Stig Förster (eds.), *Great War, Total War. Combat and Mobilization on the Western Front, 1914–1918* (Cambridge, New York 2000) 8; Jean-Jacques Becker, *Retour sur la comparaison et réflexion sur les héritages*, in: *Retour sur la comparaison et réflexion sur les héritages, La violence de guerre, 1914–1945* (Bruxelles 2002) 336–337.

³ Alexander Seyferth, *Die Heimatfront 1870/71. Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft im deutsch-französischen Krieg* (Paderborn 2007). I should like to thank my colleague Dr. Nicholas Martin for his comments on this point and for bringing this reference to my attention.

front⁴. The outbreak of the war in August 1914 therefore heralded a critical redefinition of the role of civilians in war, as the conflict challenged conventional understanding of the relationship between the business of war and the organization of modern civil society. The experience of cities and towns across combatant nations testify to this transformation and to the subsequent emergence of contemporary belligerence.

The mobilization and victimization of the home fronts also appear as the two pillars of what John R. Gillis and others described as a process of “militarization”⁵; a process whereby the evolution in the nature of warfare conduced to the emergence of characteristic warring societies, to which the notion of home front referred most appositely. From 1914 onwards, ‘total war’ brought about the dismantling of the civilian sphere, subverted by war violence, which inexorably pervaded societies and led to the dissolution of the civil-military divide⁶. The notion of militarization indicates a profound change in the nature of the belligerent societies. It belies, however, the significance of the role played by civil society itself in this process, for neither militarization nor victimization encapsulates the complexity of the civilian contribution and participation to the war effort. The violence of the battlefield and the experience and fear of the invasion did of course loom large on the horizon of urban populations in 1914–1918. Yet this chapter will suggest that it underpinned, rather than undermined, the discourses and practices of solidarities which lay at the core of the mobilization of the home fronts.

A comparative study of two medium-sized towns – Béziers in France, and Northampton in England – will allow us to explore the dynamics of urban mobilization in wartime thanks to a critical shift in the scale of analysis. In going both beyond and below the nations, my objective is to suggest some of the ways in which we may consider the dialectical and ambivalent articulation of violence and solidarity, of participation and victimization. This proposed break with the national framework of analysis is certainly not meant to underplay the importance of the nation-state for the urban populations of Britain and France. It is nonetheless intended to supplement a historiography which has so far largely neglected to combine local and comparative analysis.

This approach first allows to explore the interplay between local identities and the cultural dynamics of wartime national mobilization. This question emerged out of a reflection on the experience of Béziers, where the strong local identity had traditionally been seen as a challenge to the centralization process and to the national state. In June 1907, the mutiny of the 17th Infantry Regiment in protest against the suppression of the local winegrowers’ revolt had illustrated in a spec-

⁴ *Antonio Gibelli*, *La Grande Guerra degli italiani* (Milano 1998) 174. I am grateful to Sean Brady (Trinity College, Dublin) for bringing this passage to my attention.

⁵ *John R. Gillis*, *The Militarization of the Western World* (New Brunswick, N.J., London 1989).

⁶ *Michael Geyer*, *Gewalt und Gewalterfahrung im 20. Jahrhundert – Der Erste Weltkrieg*, in: *Rolf Spilker, Bernd Urich* (eds.), *Der Tod als Maschinist: der industrialisierte Krieg, 1914–1918* (Bramsche 1998) 241–257.

tacular fashion the allegedly unreliable nature of the southern regions, whose local identity was deemed to threaten the integrity of the French Nation-State. The challenge these soldiers so dramatically issued to the military authorities underlines the problematic nature of the articulation between local and national identities in France at the turn of the twentieth century. Yet, when the First World War broke out in August 1914, Béziers responded unreservedly to the call to arms. In this particular urban context, the indisputable success of national mobilization questions conventional interpretations of the process of nationalization. It also prompted a comparative study of urban and national mobilizations in Britain, France's main ally in 1914. Comparing the experience of Béziers with that of an English town, Northampton, broadens and deepens the scope of the analysis.

Historians of Britain have legitimately been concerned with Britishness and the cultural articulation of the four nations. They have, as a consequence, sometimes neglected local identities and seemed to assume that locality had lost its relevance by 1914 thanks to the social and economic modernization Britain had experienced. As a result, the 'local' has only been explored in a tiny minority of accounts of Britain during the war. Of course, nineteenth-century scholars have not overlooked the continuing significance of local identities in France and Britain. They notably demonstrated how the nineteenth-century municipal experiments had prompted a reformulation of 'civic prides' and local identities⁷. Recent works on late-nineteenth-century France and Germany in particular have also pointed up the role of local elites in fostering a sense of belonging, steeped in a past that local history, civic rituals, and commemorations unearthed and extolled⁸. It is also difficult to argue, as Keith Robbins rightly did 25 years ago, that 'the territorial dimension in modern British history' has been excluded 'from serious consideration'⁹. Cultural practices, reforms of local governance and the emergence of local public services all attested to the continuing relevance of the local¹⁰.

⁷ Joyce M. Ellis, "For the honour of the town": comparison, competition and civic identity in eighteenth-century England, in: *Urban History* 30 (2003) 325–337; Eleanor Allen, *Civic pride* (London 1979); Andrew J. Richardson, *Civic pride: The major public buildings of England and Wales* (Liverpool 1988); Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (London 1983).

⁸ Celia Applegate, *A nation of provincials: the German idea of Heimat* (Berkeley, Oxford 1990); Dieter K. Buse, *Urban and National Identity: Bremen, 1860–1920*, in: *Journal of Social History* 26 (1993) 521–537; Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor. Württemberg, Imperial Germany and National Memory, 1871–1918* (Chapel Hill, London 1997); Stéphane Gerson, *The Pride of Place. Local Memories and Political Culture in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, London 2003); Stéphane Gerson, *Une France Locale: The Local Past in Recent French Scholarship*, in: *French Historical Studies* 26 (2003) 539–559.

⁹ Keith Robbins, *Core and Periphery in Modern British History* (Raleigh Lecture on History, Proceedings of the British Academy, London 1984) 276.

¹⁰ José Harris, *Private lives, public spirit: Britain 1870–1914* (London 1994) 17–19; David Cannadine, *The transformation of civic ritual in Modern Britain: the Colchester Oyster feast*, in: *Past and Present* 94 (1982) 107–130; Mike Savage, *Political alignments in modern Britain: do localities matter?*, in: *Political Geography Quarterly* 6 (1987) 53–76; Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the people: party, language, and popular politics in England, 1867–1914* (Cambridge 1998).

Historians of the First World War have long assumed that the process of nationalization of the British and French polities had reached its apex in August 1914. In recent years, however, a string of works on France and Germany in particular have demonstrated that nation-making and centralization had not systematically entailed the gradual withering of local identities and senses of belonging¹¹. Historians have demonstrated that the outbreak of war in 1914 did not lead to an eruption of nationalist enthusiasm¹². The conflict was nonetheless to be a protracted trial of the nations as it challenged the very fabric of the belligerent societies. To analyse the modalities of urban mobilization, I have looked into a range of practices elicited by the war effort: the raising and support of local military units, the assistance to war victims, various charitable initiatives, and the commemoration of military and patriotic service. Wartime mobilization ran across and along the boundaries of multiple social and cultural spheres. It revealed the plurality of urban identities and the complex set of concomitant senses of belonging that affected and hallmarked the commitment to the national war effort. Furthermore, this renewed attention to political cultures and to the political mobilization of local identities invites us to reconsider the operations of the State at the local level and its interactions with communal forms of organization. In particular, the specificities of the British State and its relationship with civil society led me to question the usual assumptions about the contours of the State in WWI France, and more generally about the Third Republic's political system and its universalist political culture. Indeed, the pluralist nature of the British political and administrative system encouraged me to break with the traditional monist approach to the French state that has so far underestimated the importance of civil society in the process of social mobilization. For all the wartime growth of the state apparatus, this comparison helps to prove that, as far as the relationship between state and civil society is concerned, the war was not a zero-sum game. This chapter suggests that a reflection on the deployment of violence and coercion in an urban context must be placed alongside an examination of the manifestations and practices of solidarity. It is thus hoped to reveal some of the fundamental dynamics of wartime social mobilization.

This joint emphasis on solidarity and coercion must also stress the importance of contention in the urban experience of the war; for social movements and conflicts did not merely demonstrate the frailty of the consensus stipulated by the prescriptions of nationalism. In fact, urban contention constituted a critical mediation of the war experience, whereby national and infra-national identities were

¹¹ *Jean-François Chanut*, *L'école républicaine et les petites patries* (Paris 1996); *Anne-Marie Thiesse*, *Ils apprenaient la France. L'exaltation des régions dans le discours patriotique* (Paris 1997); *Applegate*, *A nation of provincials: the German idea of Heimat*; *Confino*, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor. Württemberg, Imperial Germany and National Memory, 1871–1918*.

¹² *Jean-Jacques Becker*, *1914: Comment les français sont entrés dans la guerre* (Paris 1977); *Jeffrey Verhey*, *The Spirit of 1914: Militarism, Myth, and Mobilization in Germany* (Cambridge 2000); *Adrian Gregory*, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge 2008).

asserted, mobilized, and played out on the urban stage. Urban civil societies thus ensured, to a large extent, the success of national mobilization in WWI Britain and France. It is also perhaps at that level that the contingent, ongoing, and contested nature of these mobilizations appears most clearly¹³.

The “Meridional Question”: urban identities and national mobilizations in wartime

Unsurprisingly perhaps, the origin of my comparative study of urban mobilization lies at home. My initial interest in the local dimensions of national mobilization arose in Béziers, my hometown, at the heart of what used to be known as the *Midi Rouge* – the red south – a region where the strong local identity had traditionally been seen as a challenge to the centralization process and to the national state. Yet, when the First World War broke out in August 1914, Béziers responded unreservedly to the call to arms. In towns and cities across the belligerent nations, the local elites reflected and shaped the social responses to the conflict. The wartime discourses and iconography produced by civic authorities, newspapers and voluntary organizations show how local elites used the main symbols of local identity to stress that victory would belong to the urban community as well as to the nation. The wartime systems of representations thus rested on a process of acculturation, on the appropriation of the national narratives through local cultural codes.

In Northampton and Béziers, the vision of the war offered to the local community fell into line with the national mobilization whose ‘totalizing logic’ enlisted the cultural, moral, and ideological commitment of each nation to fight an uncivilized enemy to its capitulation. Defeat was not merely construed in military and strategic terms but was synonymous with the end of one’s culture, identity, and way of life. The dominant discourses on the war therefore presented the conflict as a defensive one imposed on France and Britain by German aggression¹⁴. Beyond the conservative and nationalist groups of both towns, Béziers radicals and Northampton liberals concurred with the majority of local socialists in presenting the Entente as the last bulwark against the German autocracy and militarism that was threatening Democracy. In other words, besides the denunciation of a barbaric enemy and the evocation of the German ‘atrocities’, the ideological vindication of the conflict echoed the dominant political cultures and such propinquity certainly strengthened its purchase among populations of both towns.

The local dimensions of the martial involvement of the population first appeared in the representation of the threat posed to the local identities. Since the

¹³ *Pierre Purseigle*, *Mobilisation, sacrifice, et citoyenneté. Angleterre – France, 1914–1918* (Paris 2013).

¹⁴ *Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, Annette Becker*, *Retrouver la guerre* (Paris 2000) 14–18.

war was ultimately waged to preserve everyday values, the local elite immediately resorted to some specific figures to underline the mobilization of local communities. In reference to the billeting of the Welsh Territorial Division, Northampton's daily newspapers thus depicted a cobbler whose handshake with a soldier symbolized the effort that the town was contributing in service of those who would be defending it on the front-line¹⁵. Local cultural codes were also used in the debasement of the enemy and underpinned the local vision of an intrinsically inferior German. The bad shoes of the Hun logically came to represent, in contrast to the great quality of the locally-made boots, the inherent weakness of the Central Powers¹⁶. In Béziers, like in Northampton, the organizers of charity days turned to the main symbols of local identity, namely vine and wine, to stress that Victory would belong to the local community as well as to the Nation. In a somewhat traditional depiction of the rapacious and barbaric 'Boche', the enemy is defeated by Bacchus and a jolly 'Poilu' both sitting astride a wine barrel¹⁷. Here the opposition is made blatant between the wine-drinking southern Frenchman and the beer-drinking, grape-treading German, whom Bacchus nicknames 'phyll-oxera' after the infestation which had done so much damage to local vines. The utilization of specific local schemas of representation ensured a perfect understanding and reception of wartime propaganda.

Similar mechanisms were thus at work on both sides of the Channel. The success of the patriotic days that explicitly pandered to civic pride underlined the potency of local identities in the process of mobilization. During the war, local communities established an order of priorities that stressed, for instance, the necessity of propping up the local economy and of supporting the towns' traders at the expense of their national or regional rivals. A more significant example was the organization of assistance to war victims, which was not only organized at the local level but was also primarily directed at the members of the local communities. A single principle presided over the war victims' relief, which the Northampton *Independent* summed up in a blunt way: 'Our own prisoners first.'¹⁸ But these discriminatory processes were not a crude expression of local selfishness that, after all, might have been vindicated by the scarcity of available resources. The success of the wartime mobilization rested on a set of discriminatory processes that structured the local commitment to national defence. Local solidarities and identities ultimately reinforced national resilience. When, in February 1918, the Northampton elite weighed in with the organization of a 'Tank Week' dedicated to war loans, the chairman of the organizing committee spelled out the call to civic

¹⁵ Daily Echo, 29 August 1914; Mercury, 4 September 1914.

¹⁶ Northampton Independent 12 & 19 December 1914, 25 March 1916. After the conflict, a history of wartime Northampton made extensive use of this image. See *W. H. Holloway, Northamptonshire and the Great War* (Northampton 1920) 216–219.

¹⁷ ADH 2 R 783: Journée de l'Hérault (15 October 1916) au profit exclusif des œuvres de guerre du département, organisée par le préfet et les municipalités.

¹⁸ Northampton Independent, 20 July 1918.

pride, and conjured up a national competition with the other towns holding a 'Tank Week' at the same time¹⁹.

In the French case, however, two specificities ought to be brought to light. First, the central and indeed instrumental role played in this mobilization of local identities and solidarities by the Prefect, the local representative of the Government, deemed to embody the presence of the Universalist Republic in every department. Organizer of the departmental main charity day, the Prefect assumed control of all aspects of the events and ensured that the local symbols and emblems figured prominently on the promotional material. Across the country, Prefects could also rely on what appears to be a cottage industry, churning out material and artefacts which explicitly resorted to local cultural codes.

This process of appropriation first accounts for the diversity of the war cultures that sustained the mobilization of the home fronts. More significantly perhaps, while it shore the language of mobilization of its loftier elements, it did not undermine the potency of the war cultures. Indeed, the defence of the nation was commonly articulated in communitarian terms and framed in the language of urban, class, or religious solidarities²⁰. Notwithstanding the rhetoric of professional patriotic orators, this war of national defence was soon construed as a personal battle for the safety of one's family and home. The very conventional nature and mundanity of national sentiment account for its resilience in the face of industrial warfare.

The military experience of the locality

Enrolled in mass armies, the combatants of the First World War remained, first and foremost, civilians in uniform. As a result, the solidarity between front and home front remained a problematic issue throughout the conflict. Deemed critical to the cohesion of belligerent societies by political and military leaders alike, it remains central to our current historiographical discussions²¹. In Britain as well as in France, local identity enabled soldiers and civilians to mediate their experience, to conjure up solidarity. Here however, the comparison must take account of the critical difference between the systems of military recruitment in operation in

¹⁹ Northampton Independent, 16, 23 February and 9 March 1918.

²⁰ *Pierre Purseigle*, *Beyond and below the nations. Towards a comparative history of local communities at war*, in: *Jenny Macleod, Pierre Purseigle* (eds.), *Uncovered Fields. Perspectives in First World War studies* (Boston, Leiden 2004) 95–123; *Stefan Goebel*, *Forging the industrial home front in Germany: iron-nail memorials in the Ruhr*, in: *Macleod, Purseigle* (eds.), *Uncovered Fields* 159–178; *Roger Chickering*, *The Great War and Urban Life in Germany: Freiburg, 1914–1918* (Cambridge 2007); *Purseigle*, *Mobilisation, sacrifice, et citoyen-neté. Angleterre – France, 1914–1918*.

²¹ *Benjamin Ziemann*, *War experiences in rural Germany, 1914–1923* (Oxford, New York 2007) English ed.

France and Britain, as they determined the forms of the local mediations of the wartime national experience.

In Britain, the regimental system had been established in 1881 as a system of localized recruiting. The explicit objective of this reform was to strengthen the link between the army and civilian society, to extol a common identity and combine civic and martial pride²². In Northampton, the 'Pals Battalions' raised along the lines of pre-existing sociabilities – professional in particular – enabled the local community to bring itself, albeit vicariously, to the front line. In this process of local appropriation of the war experience, the 'Cobblers' of the 7th Northants constituted the medium of choice²³. Indeed, shoemaking offered a well-established semantic field for the local press to plough. In search of a metaphor to extol the resilience of those Northampton lads imprisoned in POW camps, the *Northampton Independent* prisoners of war proudly announced they were 'sticking to the last'²⁴.

In France, conscription was part and parcel of the national Revolutionary heritage, the modern manifestation of the *levée en masse*, the republican concept of the nation in arms. Though the 1907 mutiny had illustrated the distance between the local populations and the military institution, it did not follow that the Meridional towns had renounced patriotism. As a matter of fact, when the war came in August 1914, the recruitment centre of Béziers registered half as many draft dodgers as the country as a whole (0.89% against 1.5%)²⁵. Yet, the image and reputation of the Meridional soldiers proved extremely resilient throughout the war and also explain the virulence of the so-called '15th Army Corp polemic'.

This polemic broke out in the autumn of 1914 when, after a series of defeats, southern regiments fighting within the 15th and 16th Army Corps were accused of having fallen back under the enemy's fire. In many instances, national newspapers invoked the 'indolence' of the southerners held responsible for this retreat. This polemic reactivated traditional stereotypes and the opposition between the South (Midi) and the North that were translated through publications and private correspondence alike. Problematic as a result, the local appropriation of the war experience had been made even more difficult by the relocation after the 1907 mutiny of the 17th Infantry Regiment; a unit with which the town had had a long-established relationship. This makes all the more remarkable the efforts made by the local elites and by the town council in particular to strengthen the links with the 96th Infantry Regiment which had succeeded the 17th. These efforts culminated in 1917

²² Peter Simkins, *Kitchener's army: the raising of the new armies, 1914–16* (Manchester 1988); Peter Simkins, *The Four Armies, 1914–1918*, in: David Chandler, Ian F. W. Beckett (eds.), *The Oxford Illustrated History of the British Army* (Oxford 1994) 241–262; David French, *Military Identities. The Regimental System, the British Army, and the British People, c. 1870–2000* (Oxford 2005).

²³ Northampton Independent, 6 February 1915.

²⁴ Northampton Independent, 20 April 1918.

²⁵ Jules Maurin, *Armée-Guerre-Société: soldats languedociens (1889–1919)* (Paris 1982) 379.

when the Town Council officially proclaimed that the 96th had obtained its 'droit de cité', a revealing turn of phrase denoting both acceptance and citizenship²⁶.

The local appropriation of the national idea in wartime France and Britain therefore followed a similar logic in both countries. One may surmise, however, that the language of civic pride had greater purchase in England than in France where the 'social relations of sacrifice'²⁷ were also articulated in terms of a 'blood tax', inseparable from the revolutionary notion of 'levée en masse'²⁸.

The ethics of urban mobilization

The cultures of war in 1914–18 were grounded in the moral superiority that each camp claimed to embody. Yet, the ethics of mobilization also ran deeper and helped define and regulate behaviours and social relations within the belligerent societies. Here again, the cultural dynamic of mobilization stemmed from the transformations of warfare, for the totalizing logic of the conflicts led to the emergence of specific norms of wartime social life. The mobilization of the home fronts thus prompted the emergence of new divisions, new categories within the belligerent citizenry whose respective positions were evoked in terms of duty and defined by the wartime "social relations of sacrifice". Accordingly, the front-line soldier stood out as the main character and role model of a wartime narrative that designed the ideal civilian comportment as the daily life translation of duty, sacrifice and solidarity. The demands of industrial warfare were such that the material comfort of the home front populations was not merely compromised as a gesture of solidarity with the soldiers at the front; it was expected to become a casualty of the war. The material deprivations soon added to the military losses to foster a growing sense of victimization on the home fronts. The dialectical articulation of victimization and participation thus structured the perception and behaviour patterns which ultimately determined the level and form of social mobilization, as attested for instance by the reception of refugees²⁹. More generally, as the war dragged on, a series of distinct 'characters', dominated by the towering figure of the soldier in arms came to embody the ethics of mobilization, creating a "language of social morality (what is felt to be 'fair' or 'unjust', acceptable or unacceptable)" which regulated "relations between social actors"³⁰. The munitions worker, the nurse, the shirker, to name but a few, thus presented distinctive figures

²⁶ A.M.B. ID 104, extraordinary meeting, 26 October 1917.

²⁷ Jay M. Winter, *Jean-Louis Robert*, Capital cities at war: Paris, London, Berlin, 1914–1919 (Cambridge 1997) vol. 1, 10.

²⁸ John Horne, "L'impôt du sang". Republican rhetoric and industrial warfare in France, 1914–1918, in: *Social History* 14 (1989) 201–223.

²⁹ Pierre Purseigle, "A wave onto our shores". Exile and resettlement of Western Front refugees, 1914–1918, in: *Contemporary European History* 16 (2007) 427–444.

³⁰ John Horne, Social identity in war: France, 1914–1918, in: T. G. Fraser et al. (eds.), *Men, women and war* (Dublin 1993) 119–135.

of mobilization, however positive or negative, that corresponded to specific levels of participation in the war effort. Across belligerent societies one figure, that of “profiteer”, became the paradigmatic embodiment of this language³¹. Suspicions were first likely to be attached to those who had been spared from military. Even in countries where conscription was in place, age and physical fitness were not always enough to avoid bitter recriminations, particularly as women’s contribution to the wartime economy and society challenged conventional gendered definition of patriotic service³². Beside military service, the issue of fair access to foodstuff and other material resources lay at the core of accusations of profiteering.

Wartime politics

This exploration of the dynamics of wartime mobilization, thus far centred on the wartime logic and practices of solidarity, also suggest how such a comparative urban history may further our understanding of wartime politics. Urban politics in 1914–18 is quite an elusive object since the disruptions brought about by the war substantially modified the urban polity. The suspension of the electoral process as well as the curtailment of the public sphere by censorship, propaganda or material hardships, were obvious demonstrations of wartime changes. Likewise, the conscription and recruitment of political activists had strong implications for local political life.

The study of urban civil society in England and France demonstrates the necessity to reevaluate the role of contention and social conflicts. It constitutes an invitation to take issue with what one may call “the consensual view” of wartime mobilization; the surprisingly prevalent idea that wartime mobilization stemmed from the “Union Sacrée”, the “party truce”, or from a rather improbable national consensus. As a result, social conflicts are exclusively understood as a crisis; a sure sign that the mobilization was gradually unravelling in the face of the demands of industrial warfare. However, social mobilization was a more dynamic process in which social conflicts performed a critical function.

Contrary to traditional interpretations, the wartime growth of the state’s apparatus and intervention did not strip the local civil societies of their mediating role. Indeed, a closer look at local associations discloses the extent to which the war altered the social location of power and therefore shifted political conflicts into the realm of voluntary organizations. The organizations of the urban civil society were contentious spaces that partially made up for the wartime curtailment of the public sphere³³. For instance, the increased collaboration of the labour movement

³¹ *Jean-Louis Robert*, The image of the profiteer, in: *Jay M. Winter, Jean-Louis Robert* (eds.), *Capital Cities at War*. London, Paris, Berlin, 1914–1919 (Cambridge 1997) 104–132.

³² *Janet S. K. Watson*, *Fighting different wars: experience, memory, and the First World War in Britain* (Cambridge 2004).

³³ *Pierre Purseigle*, *Les associations locales face à la Grande Guerre: Société civile et Etat de*

with the local authorities and its association with the main phases of the war effort lent a new legitimacy to a local institution which had, up to the war, been carefully shackled. The nomination as Justice of Peace in December 1916 of the secretary of the Northampton Trades' Council was indeed celebrated and acclaimed by the labour movement as recognition of the increased socialist presence in the local polity.

Social conflicts raise numerous questions because they translated the new kinds of political problems entailed by the war. The social relations of sacrifice took on political dimensions because the issues of recruiting and conscription, of the organization of labour, of the supply and shortages of food or coal undermined the legitimacy of authority on national and local levels alike. This was indeed the case in both societies for the 1916 dear food campaign in Northampton³⁴, and the 1917–18 strikes in Béziers³⁵ issued *mutatis mutandis* comparable political challenges. Across the battle front, the urban history of Germany has similarly highlighted the critical nature of such conflicts over the access and distribution of essential resources³⁶. Part and parcel of the process of mobilization, these conflicts enabled belligerent societies, by way of strikes and protest, to articulate the conditions of their commitment to the war effort. A continuing process of negotiation and bargaining thus manufactured popular consent to a war effort elaborated as much through struggles and conflicts as through outspoken support³⁷.

The comparison of urban mobilization thus enriches our understanding of wartime politics. It also invites to look afresh at the impact of the wartime mobilization on conventional conceptions of citizenship and of the State. Modern British political thought has established the philosophical basis of autonomous institutions and of communitarian and local political structures or institutions. French Republicanism, on the other hand, was built upon individual – as opposed to communitarian – autonomy and on the primacy of the Nation-State. In other words, this form of universalist Republicanism leaves little conceptual room – if any at all – for intermediary bodies and communities to play a mediating role between the individual citizen and the Nation-State. As a result the “articulation of political universalism and the diversity of opinions and identities”, or as Cécile Laborde put it, “how to represent the social in the Republic” raises particular historical

guerre. Etude comparée Angleterre – France, in: *Marc Frangi, Bruno Benoit* (eds.), *Guerres et associations* (Lyon 2003) 87–104.

³⁴ NRO, Northampton Trades Council NTC 4–5.

³⁵ ADH, 10 M 244–245.

³⁶ *Chickering*, *The Great War and Urban Life in Germany: Freiburg, 1914–1918*, 554, 556; *Belinda Davis*, *Home fires burning: food, politics, and everyday life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill, London 2000); *E. H. Tobin*, *War and the working class: the case of Düsseldorf 1914–1918*, in: *Central European History* 18 (1985) 257–298.

³⁷ *Charles Tilly*, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1990* (Oxford, Cambridge, Mass. 1990) 102; *Charles Tilly* (ed.), *Citizenship, Identity, and Social History* (Cambridge 1996) 229.

challenges³⁸. Specifically, this framework of analysis, inherited from the Third Republic's language of politics, hampers historical investigations into the local dimensions of citizenship.

At this point, one must again insist on the profound and significant differences in the relationship between citizenship and military service³⁹. In France "universal" military service and conscription were seen as essential vehicles of modernization and nationalization; critical vectors of the political education of the masses. In Britain, as Frank Prochaska demonstrated, urban civil society was the prime site of elaboration of citizenship⁴⁰. While the experience of industrialized warfare challenged gender roles and gendered conceptions of citizenship in both countries, it certainly had a more dramatic impact in Britain⁴¹. In France no "Representation of the People Act" redefined citizenship as it did in Britain in 1918. Thanks to conscription, citizenship was less problematic in France than it was in Britain. There, post-war electoral reforms underlined the continuing challenge issued by both the working-classes and women, whose participation in the war effort had been instrumental to the Nation's victory.

The experience of the Citizen Corps, renamed Volunteer Training Corps in 1916, perfectly illustrates, in my view, the problematic reconfigurations of British citizenship that gender historians have illuminated. These units, initially raised to defend Britain in the event of an invasion have largely been overlooked by war historians for they were militarily insignificant; to the point of complete irrelevance. These units were largely made up of middle and upper-middle class men, too old, unable, or – before 1916 – unwilling to join the army. Interestingly, many of these men saw themselves as leaders of the urban community and as linchpins of its wartime mobilization. Those men had never doubted their civic virtue. Yet, the nature of the conflict and the type of social mobilization required to meet the demands of industrial warfare challenged this very certainty. As serving working-class men or women who had so far been deprived of full citizenship now embodied the commitment to national defence, these non-combatant middle-class males had to reassert their quality of citizen. The position of these stalwarts and mainstays of the Edwardian political system was unsettled. The war did not only put sexist stereotypes to the test; it also put into question these men's political pre-eminence. The history of these Volunteer Training Corps was therefore that of a quest for recognition of their wartime service; a wartime service which fell short of the standard they had contributed to define.

The functions of social regulation performed by urban elites in wartime enable the historian to investigate the political dimensions of social mobilization that lay

³⁸ Cécile Laborde, *La Citoyenneté*, in: Vincent Duclert, Christophe Prochasson (eds.), *Dictionnaire critique de la République* (Paris 2002) 117.

³⁹ Charles Tilly, *Citizenship, Identity, and Social History*, in: Charles Tilly (ed.), *Citizenship, Identity, and Social History* (Cambridge 1996) 231.

⁴⁰ Frank Prochaska, *Schools of Citizenship. Charity and Civic Virtue* (London 2002) 9.

⁴¹ Susan R. Grayzel, *Women's identities at war. Gender, motherhood, and politics in Britain and France during the First World War* (Chapel Hill, London 1999).

beyond party politics. Social conflicts revealed the tensions provoked by the wartime economic disruptions but also reveal significant changes in the structure of political participation. When seamstresses went on strike in Béziers in 1915 and 1917, they asked the mayor to forward their demands to their main customer, the military⁴². The fact that such a political mediation was performed by local elites is not very surprising. It reveals the extent to which the French structure of authority based on the concept of popular sovereignty had been internalized since the onset of the Third Republic. What is more interesting in the case of the seamstresses' strikes is that their gender had excluded them from formal participation in the electoral process and from the mainstream of political life.

Urban mobilization and the contours of the wartime state

As Charles Tilly has demonstrated, the evolution of warfare and its growing demands for material resources and organizational reforms accounted for the formation and development of State structures in Europe. While 'the organization of coercion and preparation for war' constituted the State's main objectives and functions, the raising of mass armies and the advent of industrial warfare contributed to the extension and gradual empowerment of citizenry⁴³. Thus, Tilly sets out to explain 'how war made states and vice versa'⁴⁴, and suggests how the preparation for war and war making affected the polity as a whole including urban civil society⁴⁵ within which, this chapter contends, the respective demands of the state and the citizenry were mediated. The First World War dramatically reinforced the terms of the social contract to which 'citizenship' refers; it also underlined the central place of negotiation, bargaining, and conflict in the organization of solidarity and in the operations of the State's coercitive apparatus. The most striking example of the complex relationship between the State and civil society in wartime is perhaps provided by the local military service tribunals set up in Britain by the Military Service Act of 1916 which established conscription⁴⁶. These tribunals constituted an unprecedented institutional framework through which the interest of the local community, the prescriptions of nationalism, and the

⁴² AMB VII F; Subsequent strikes over similar problems are documented by the collections of the ADH 10 M 244–245.

⁴³ Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States*, AD 990–1990 83.

⁴⁴ Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States*, AD 990–1990 67.

⁴⁵ Surprisingly, Charles Tilly does not mention *Norbert Elias*. The *Civilizing Process* (New York 1978) whereas he does also explicitly link the monopolization of legitimate coercion and the decline of interpersonal violence *Charles Tilly*, *Coercion, Capital, and European States*, AD 990–1990 68 ff.

⁴⁶ A comparative study may also be fruitfully extended to include an analysis of the local recruitment board set up in the United States in June 1917. See *Theda Skocpol* et al., *Patriotic partnerships: why Great Wars nourished American civic voluntarism*, in: *Ira Katznelson, Martin Shefter* (eds.), *Shaped by war and trade. International influences on American political development* (Princeton, Oxford 2002) 152.

State's extractive demands were to be mediated and balanced. Operated by local dignitaries selected from each quarter of the local community, these tribunals provided a site where agents of the State pursued military manpower in face of individual opposition and local economic interests. They arbitrated between the demands of the military and the interests of local communities, which were formulated in economic, moral or political terms. Representatives of civil society thus adjudicated conflicts which often reflected a wider debate over the extraction of the means of war making⁴⁷. From November 1915 to December 1918, the Northampton Military Tribunals examined 8,000 individual cases, amounting almost 26,000 appeals. Judges met over 200 times, hearings lasted 5 hours on average (25 cases per hour)⁴⁸. The participation of civil society in the enforcement of the State's authoritative requests may lead us to revise the very definition of the State in wartime; particularly if one conceives the State in Weberian terms as the monopoly of legitimate coercion/violence⁴⁹.

The history of the wartime state has largely and rightly focused on the national administrative structures and governmental agencies⁵⁰. The comparative urban history of mobilization supplements this perspective with an investigation into the adaptation of public services in the exceptional circumstances of the conflict. Civil society provided many of the material or human resources so needed by the state. From strict control to flexible partnership, circumstances dictated the attitude of the State towards civil society organization. Circumstances if not universal goodwill imposed cooperation; even in France where the prefects, the local representatives of the government were traditionally reluctant to cede or share any of their prerogatives to civil society. Due to the limitations of administrative bodies disorganized by the military mobilization, the assistance to soldiers' dependents and war victims was ensured by civil society organizations organized in each locality⁵¹. In Britain, the *Soldiers & Sailors Families Association* thus played a critical

⁴⁷ On the articulation of war making, state making, protection, extraction, distribution and production, see *Tilly*, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1990* 97.

⁴⁸ Northampton Independent, 14 December 1918.

⁴⁹ It would certainly supplement the approach developed in: *S. J. D. Green, R. C. Whiting, The boundaries of state in modern Britain* (Cambridge 1996).

⁵⁰ *Pierre Renouvin, Les formes de gouvernement de guerre. L'organisation gouvernementale française pendant la Guerre* (Paris, New Haven 1925); *S. J. Hurwitz, State intervention in Great Britain. A study of Economic control and social response, 1914–1919* (New York 1949); *R. Lowe, The erosion of state intervention in Britain, 1917–1918*, in: *The Economic History Review XXXI* (1978) 270–286; *Fabienne Bock, L'exubérance de l'Etat en France de 1914 à 1918*, in: *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'Histoire* 3 (1984) 41–51; *Anthony Rowley, Nouvelle régulation ou retour à la normale? Le cas britannique après 1918*, in: *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'Histoire* 3 (1984) 53–68; *James Cronin, The crisis of state and society in Britain, 1917–22*, in: *Leopold H. Haimson, Charles Tilly* (eds.), *Strikes, wars, and revolutions in an international perspective. Strikes waves in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries* (Cambridge, Paris 1989) 457–476; *Green, Whiting, The boundaries of state in modern Britain*.

⁵¹ *Louis Rolland, L'administration locale et la guerre. Les faits et les idées directrices*, in: *Revue du droit public et de la science politique en France et à l'étranger* (1915).

role in maintaining the cohesion of the home front until June 1916 when the War Pensions Committee took charge of this mission⁵². In 1916 both governments strengthened the legislative framework in which voluntary organizations had been operating under: the *Loi du 30 mai 1916* “relative aux œuvres qui font appel à la générosité publique”⁵³ and the War Charities Act, 1916.

The critical importance of local philanthropy had been, by 1914, long established in Britain⁵⁴. In France, the necessities of war and the structure of military recruitment forced a temporary redefinition of the contours of the local state.

There is no need here to discuss at length the indisputable expansion of state agency entailed by the nature of an industrial conflict waged on a global scale. Yet, local, national, and comparative studies have demonstrated how voluntary organizations compensated for the shortcomings of the State, proving indispensable in the mobilization of the material and cultural resources of the nation, and even benefiting from the war⁵⁵. Historians of the state have even stressed the necessity and importance of the ‘state’s ability to secure the consent of key groups in civil society’⁵⁶.

The degree to which the French state cooperated with – and indeed relied on – civil society during the war has led me to insist on the “pragmatic pluralism” demonstrated by the Third Republic in 1914–1918. Born out of necessity, such pragmatism was also born out of opportunity. In this regard too, the structure of military participation in the communities under scrutiny had a significant political impact. When the number of enlisted men as a percentage of the male population of military age hovered around 80% in France, as opposed to 53% in Britain, the political availability of the younger cohorts was significantly curtailed in the former countries⁵⁷. Therefore, military recruitment reinforced the social determinants of a political system that already put a premium on the accumulation of social capital and financial resources. This point stresses the importance for historians of political life to pay closer attention to the sociological determinants of collective action. The Great War did not usher in any major upheaval, any redefinition of the organizing and managing principles of the Republican State. Civil

⁵² W. H. Holloway, *Northamptonshire and the Great War* (Northampton, c 1920) 192–194.

⁵³ For an analysis of the *Loi du 30 mai 1916*, see *Louis Rolland*, *Institutions et services de solidarité*, in: *Revue du droit public et de la science politique en France et à l'étranger* (1918) 39–45.

⁵⁴ *William E. H. Lecky*, *Democracy and Liberty* (London 1899); *Frank Prochaska*, *Philanthropy*, in: *F. M. L. Thompson* (ed.), *The Cambridge social history of Britain 1750–1950* (Cambridge 1990) 357–393; *Prochaska*, *Schools of Citizenship. Charity and Civic Virtue*.

⁵⁵ For a contemporary perspective on British voluntarism see *C. F. G. Masterman*, *The temper of the people*, in: *The Contemporary Review* (1915) 1–11; On the assistance to war orphans in France see *Olivier Faron*, *Les enfants du deuil: Orphelins et pupilles de la nation de la Première Guerre mondiale, 1914–1941* (Paris 2001); On American voluntarism, *Skocpol* et al., *Patriotic partnerships: why Great Wars nourished American civic voluntarism*.

⁵⁶ *Cronin*, *The crisis of state and society in Britain, 1917–22*, 459.

⁵⁷ *Adrian Gregory*, *Lost generations: the impact of military casualties on Paris, London, and Berlin*, in: *Jay M. Winter, Jean-Louis Robert* (eds.), *Capital Cities at War. Paris, London, Berlin, 1914–1919* (Cambridge 1997) 57–103.

society was literally embodied by groups and individuals who were perfectly integrated into the Third Republic political system. There is no need for a detailed prosopography of urban elites to note the pre-eminence of teachers, lawyers, and other professionals. The over-representation of traditional republican elites was simply reinforced by the structures of military recruitment. The unitary republican state could give pluralism its chance since military mobilization had, de facto, transformed urban political sociology and all but eliminated oppositional groups and activists.

The social and political proximity between these urban elites and the upper echelons of the state administration account for the latitude granted to voluntary organizations by the prefectural administration. The war challenged institutional and normative definition of the Republican State and vindicates the pragmatic approach to public service embraced by Léon Duguit⁵⁸. For Duguit argued that the modern State was, in the era of the Great War, better understood not as a set of coercive institution, but as a provider of public services:

The modern State increasingly appears as a group of individuals working in a concerted fashion to meet the material and moral needs of participants, under the leadership and control of governing authorities; the notion of public service is thus substituted to that of public might; the State ceases to be an authority that orders to become a group that works⁵⁹.

Concluding remarks:

In the face of industrial warfare, belligerent societies were compelled to commit most of their human, material and cultural resources to the conflict. The technological evolutions of warfare and the operational imperatives underline the apparent link between the modernization of warfare and the totalizing logic of both the conflicts. Yet, as Hew Strachan points out, the ideological foundations of total war preceded the invention of the means of modern war and plunge their roots back into the political revolutions of the eighteenth century⁶⁰. Beyond the technological and logistical evolution precipitated by the subsequent Industrial Revolutions, the transformation of warfare witnessed in the First World War was therefore, as Michael Howard put it, 'a function of the transformation of society which occurred when the narrow social basis of the states-system was broadened by the political participation of new layers of the population'⁶¹. In the nineteenth-cen-

⁵⁸ Léon Duguit offered a first iteration of his doctrine in 1901. *Léon Duguit, L'Etat, le droit objectif et la loi positive* (1901, repr. Paris 2003).

⁵⁹ *Léon Duguit, Traité de Droit Constitutionnel* (Paris 1927).

⁶⁰ *Hew Strachan, Total War in the Twentieth Century*, in: *Arthur Marwick* (ed.), *Total war and historical change: Europe, 1914–1955* (Buckingham, Philadelphia, Pa. 2001) 271; *Daniel Moran, Arthur Waldron* (eds.), *The people in arms: military myth and national mobilization since the French Revolution* (Cambridge 2002).

⁶¹ *Michael Howard, Total war in the twentieth century: participation and consensus in the*

tury, national ideals were translated in military terms by the *levée en masse* and the gradual but imperious association of citizenship and national defence. Now enhanced by the means of warfare at the disposal of industrialized societies, “total war” dramatically redefined the contours of belligerence.

The First World War had showcased the transformative potential of total war as the experience of urban communities across the belligerent world demonstrates. As Elie Halévy put it “the world crisis of 1914–1918 was not only a war – the war of 1914 – but also a revolution – the revolution of 1917”⁶². Beyond Russia, the war had in fact brought down the German, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires and allowed the birth or rebirth of nations across Europe. In Japan, the conflict contributed to a redefinition of national identity⁶³. As the political elites attempted to relocate the Empire on the international stage, the Rice Riots of 1918 allowed the working-class to castigate a class of *nouveaux-riches* whose war profits they deemed illegitimate while they had borne the brunt of inflation and deteriorating living standards. Limited in scope and intensity, these post-war movements nonetheless led to the partial liberalization of the political system⁶⁴. From Washington to Beijing, social movements challenged established political, racial, gendered and social hierarchies⁶⁵. In the eyes of these protesters, the Great War had demonstrated the need for a redefinition of the contours of their national and their local polities. Post-conflict demobilization thus proved to be as contested a process as the wartime mobilization had been. Central to the experience of military conflict, violence and coercion do not exhaust the war experience. In towns and cities across belligerent nations, solidarity, as much as violence and coercion, had defined the conflict. The history of urban mobilization must as a consequence be placed at the heart of our reflections on the social history of violence in the twentieth century.

Second World War, in: *Brian Bond, Ian Roy* (eds.), *War and society. A yearbook of military history* (London 1977) 217.

⁶² *Elie Halévy*, *The Era of Tyrannies. Essays on Socialism and War*, ed. by *Fritz Stern* (London 1967) 162.

⁶³ *Frederick Dickinson*, *War and national reinvention: Japan in the Great War, 1914–1919*, (Cambridge, Mass. 1999) 81–3, 114–5, 151, 153.

⁶⁴ *Michael Lewis*, *Rioters and Citizens: Mass Protest in Imperial Japan* (Berkeley 1990).

⁶⁵ *Rana Mitter*, *A bitter revolution: China's struggle with the modern world* (New York 2005); *Susan R. Grayzel*, *Across Battle Fronts: Gender and the Comparative Cultural History of Modern European War*, in: *Deborah Cohen, Maura O'Connor* (eds.), *Comparison and History. Europe in cross-national perspective* (Abingdon, New York 2004) 71–84; *Jennifer D. Keene*, *Protest and disability: a new look at African-American soldiers during the First World War*, in: *Pierre Purseigle* (ed.), *Warfare and Belligerence. Perspectives in First World War Studies* (Leiden, Boston 2005) 177–203.

Summary

The outbreak of the war in August 1914 heralded a critical redefinition of the role of civilians in war, as the conflict challenged conventional understanding of the relationship between the business of war and the organization of modern civil society. The experience of cities and towns across combatant nations testify to this transformation and to the subsequent emergence of contemporary belligerence. This chapter suggests that the violence of the battlefield underpinned, rather than undermined, the discourses and practices of solidarities which lay at the core of the mobilization of the home fronts. This chapter shows some of the ways in which we may consider the dialectical and ambivalent articulation of violence and solidarity, of participation and victimization.

Such an emphasis on both solidarity and coercion also stresses the importance of contention in the urban experience of the war. This chapter does indeed argue that urban civil societies ensured, to a large extent, the success of national mobilization in WWI. It is also perhaps at that level that the contingent, ongoing, and contested nature of these mobilizations appears most clearly.

Central to the experience of military conflict, violence and coercion do not exhaust the war experience. In towns and cities across belligerent nations, solidarity, as much as violence and coercion, had defined the conflict. The history of urban mobilization must as a consequence be placed at the heart of our reflections on the social history of violence in the twentieth century.