

**Helena da Silva, Paulo Teodoro de Matos
and José Miguel Sardica (eds.)
*War Hecatombs. International Effects on
Public health, Demography and Mentalities in
the 20th Century***

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Wars offer excellent opportunities to historians who wish to study the tendencies, attitudes and structures that are particular to certain societies, especially in the field of public health, demography and mentalities. How societies cope with the disasters emanating from large-scale warfare and its consequences, and what solutions were found or were beyond resolve, often reveal these societies' potential as well as their limitations. Furthermore, wars often act as important transformative moments, creating breakthroughs towards new social patterns, attitudes and societal structures. The study of wars should therefore not be left to diplomatic and political historians alone; they offer enormously fertile ground for economic and social historians too. This volume of articles on big military conflicts in the twentieth century recognises that academic study potential. The volume contains twelve contributions, most of which (nine of them) relate to the First World War.

The title *War Hecatombs* refers to the Greek concept of large animal offerings to the gods, usually of 100 cattle (*hekatomb* means one hundred; *bous* translates to bulls). The aim of the editors is to reveal 'how states and different agents were compelled to act and to face the new post-war reality, bringing to light an innovative social agenda while simultaneously trying to cope with the overwhelming phenomenon of physically and mentally scared multitudes of veterans and their families'. The first article presents a form of kick-off by José Miguel Sardica who investigates the cultural meanings of World War I, aptly brought together under the umbrella of 'from innocence to harshness'. This contribution sets the stage, painting the contours of a shattered world entering a dark and pessimistic post-war era from which all hopes had vanished. At the other end of the volume, in the final paper, Ioan Bolovan and Sorina Paula Bolovan take a look back at all contributions under the provocative question whether World War I might be seen as a 'necessary evil', by which they try to identify the war's positive consequences in terms of the progress of scientific knowledge and improvements in people's everyday lives.

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The historiography on World War I and its aftermath is enormously rich, also from the perspective of social and cultural history, relating to a host of topics ranging from gender relations, women's work, or collective mentalities, and intellectual and artistic perceptions. Most of that literature however focuses on Great Britain or France. In that sense this volume of papers is especially welcome since it makes accessible to English-language scholars interesting and relevant histories on World War I for countries such as Portugal, Transylvania, Italy, Romania, Austria and Poland. There is only one article on Britain, by Simon Walker, in which he discusses material on suicides by soldiers based on ego-documents such as letters and memoirs, and other qualitative material. He presents moving emotional accounts and shows that these suicides not only occurred in the front lines of the conflict, but also at the so-called home front, for instance when soldiers were denied a return to the battlefield.

War efforts often lead to enhancement of gender stereotypes. Georgeta Fodor and Maria Tâtar-Dan describe how World War I was linked to the development of strong masculine and feminine identities in Transylvania, and a national discourse of the emerging Romanian nation. Their account shows how the 'soldier' became the central focus of manly virtues and masculine duties, whereas femininity likewise came to be cast in war-like terms. Women were re-cast as home-front warriors upon whose efforts the fate of the nation depended. The article describes how the church as one of the most powerful national institutions provided role-models for both the masculine and the feminine ideal in the form of the priests and their wives. Consequently, next to patriotism, also religiosity came to be a central virtue for both men and women

In an interesting paper by Nicholas Todd, we learn about the legal innovation in French family law aimed at World War I orphans, which was called *pupille de la Nation*. War orphans, children of fathers who had died in the war, could receive this status of 'children of the state' which opened access to special financial benefits. No wealth prerequisites were stipulated, but in practice few elite families or mothers did apply for this special legal status, whilst for the most vulnerable war orphans, those born outside of wedlock the status of *pupille de la Nation* remained out of reach. Their paternity connection to a soldier-father was inherently difficult to prove.

In many countries, World War I also strongly impacted upon perceptions of physical and social health as understood in a very broad sense. In the paper by Emilia Musumeci on the eugenic legislation in Italy during WWI we learn how the eugenics scientific movement changed its ideological orientation from believing that war might bring out the 'birth of the new man' to believing that the war was triggering its destruction. Regenerating social and demographic policies were therefore called for, such as control on sexually transmitted diseases, and enhanced fertility and active pronatalist policies. Later on in the century, in the 1930s, these ideas were then feeding into Italian Fascist policies strongly focused on collectivist conceptions of health, under state rule, and the sort of 'regenerating eugenics' in which biological racism held a dominant place.

The volume also contributes to the rising interest for the Spanish Flu which has only recently found its way back into our collective memory. José Manuel Sobral and Maria

Luísa Lima describe how the Spanish Flu was kept out of the collective remembrance in Portugal. They argue that the state played a decisive role, as it saw the pandemic as revealing national and political failures. In addition, the authors connect it to risk perceptions: the Flu was seen at the time as a phenomenon causing dispersed deaths not connected to a traumatic national event. It became an event which was not worthy of collective remembering.

In another paper, Oana Habor elaborates on the impact of the war on the development of psychology as an academic field in Romania. It is not difficult to imagine that the horror and the traumatic experiences in the trenches and on the battlefield must have created generations of men defined by serious mental disorders. This situation stimulated an upsurge in psychological studies in the country. It is somewhat surprising that the author did not link up with the many studies in France and the United Kingdom done on war-related mental conditions, at that time often framed as 'shell-shock'.

Other casualties of the war were the many mutilated and disabled soldiers in each of the belligerent countries. Sílvia Correia, writing on the Portuguese experience, shows the extreme difficulties these men were facing in terms of material circumstances but also because they were excluded from the national and civic discourses of war and heroism on account of their 'incomplete' bodies. As was the case elsewhere, national reconstruction after the war connected citizenship exclusively to strong male bodies with high economic and sexual competence. The disabled soldier represented a vulnerable national past that had better be forgotten.

Demographic losses did however not only occur on the battlefield, but also behind the front lines, in the form of increases in civic mortality and decreases in marriages and fertility. Peter Teibenbacher analyses these demographic effects for the Austrian population and comparing it to developments in France, England and Wales, Germany and Sweden. Teibenbacher concludes that the war mainly acted as a temporary interruption of an ongoing structurally based demographic transition process towards lower fertility and marriage rates, and increasing individual survival.

After the war armed hostilities continued between some countries. This was for instance the case between Greece and the Ottoman Empire led by Kemal Atatürk, as described by Anastasios Zografos. The background of this military conflict does not become very clear to the reader, but what does become clear is that the Greek state, after its defeat at the hands of the Turks, decided to quarantine thousands of returning refugees and prisoners of war on a small island in order to protect the mainland from potential health threats. Many of the refugees were in a bad condition and suffering from serious diseases. Still, epidemic outbreaks on the Greek mainland could not be avoided. This testifies to the many ways in which wars may lead to huge death tolls far away from the actual battlefields.

As is clear from all papers in this volume, large-scale armed conflicts often present historians with historical situation that might be seen as a 'social laboratory' in which characteristics of societies and groups can become visible in a way that we could oth-

erwise never have seen. World War II also presented historians with a very cruel bio-social laboratory in the form of the Dutch Famine during the winter of 1944-45 during when a large part of the population was subjected to an extreme form of food shortage. This period became the subject of a large stream of studies by biologists, geneticists, economists and historians looking into the longer term effects on the survivors. Grażyna Liczbińska et al. follow this lead and study the impact of WWII on the longer term health effects of the war on a cohort of young female students. They compare height, weight and Body Mass Index (BMI) for three different cohorts (born before, during and after the war) for a total of 644 students. It is interesting to see that students born during the war differed from the other two cohorts only in terms of height in that they were shorter, but not for weight and BMI. Social status, in the form of father's educational level, also played a role: female height increased with father's educational level.

To wrap things up, this volume represents a very interesting collection of papers on the social and demographic history of war in the twentieth century. It testifies to the enormous impact these total wars had on the European continent. Above all it shows the fertile study ground for social histories of the phenomenon of war. Let's not leave these wars to the political historians only!