

# War Culture in the First World War: on the Portuguese Participation

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## Introduction

In *Penser la Grande Guerre*<sup>3</sup>, Antoine Prost and Jay Winter produced a substantial analysis of World War I historiography. Seeking to go beyond national boundaries and outline the general changes in this historiographical process, the authors condensed this fluid movement into three major configurations, “The first ... explains the history of decisions by the actors, and the second by the issue of social forces; the latter makes culture the driving force of history and finds in it its own explanations. Representations determine actions”.<sup>4</sup>

After the 1960s, when war began mainly to be analyzed by social perspectives, rather than by the narrower approach of political and military history that had prevailed until then, the 1980s brought some important research into the history of war culture and war memories. In this transition, George L. Mosse proclaimed that “[t]he time has come to go beyond the study of [...] elitist groups to a more thorough investigation of popular practices and sentiments. In an age of mass politics and mass culture, the intellectual historian needs new approaches that take into account those popular notions that have played such a cardinal role in the evolution of men and society.”<sup>5</sup> Encouraged by these assertions and contextual transformations, the cultural history approach began to have an impact on the historiography of the Great War.

There are two main strands to be noted in the cultural history approach to World War I. Mario Isnenghi (1970) and George Lachman Mosse (1990) focus on the war’s subsequent impact on the radicalization of postwar society and politics. Another approach, favored by Paul Fussell (1975) and Samuel Hynes (1991, 1997), saw memory as the main

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, *Penser la Grande Guerre. Un essai d'historiographie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2004), 15-50.

<sup>4</sup> Winter and Prost, *Penser la Grande Guerre...*, 47-48.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted by Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, “Préface”, in George L. Mosse, *De la Grande Guerre au totalitarisme. La brutalisation des sociétés européennes* (Paris: Hachete Littératures, 1999), VI-VII.

basis for analyzing the war's cultural history and for understanding the origins of what was to become a major rupture in the modern era. Winter and Prost, however, cut across these two perspectives and define cultural history as “a history of signifying practices... [that] studies how men and women gave meaning to the world in which they lived. Hence the importance of mourning...the brutalization of society... [and] the violence of war”.<sup>6</sup>

Following two conferences organized in France, namely *Les sociétés européennes et la guerre de 1914-1918* (Nanterre, 1988) and *Guerre et cultures* (Historial de Péronne, 1992), the notion of war culture – a central feature in this issue – has come to be defined as a set of mental tools that contemporary men and women resorted to in order to make the conflict intelligible and meaningful. In relation to World War I, Annette Becker and Audoin-Rouzeau define war culture as “a set of practices, representations, attitudes and creations from the years 1914-1918. This is also true in the following years, to the extent that this kind of [cultural] history gives ample room for postwar remembrances and commemorations.”<sup>7</sup>

It is also important to add that the history of war culture should not be confused with the history of cultural, literary or artistic works or their creators. The rapid pace of historiographical transition is explained by the fact that there was already cultural history in pre-existing social history.

In Portugal, the scholarship undertaken under this historiographical umbrella has only been developed in the 21st century, with just a few exceptions. Isabel Pestana Marques' pioneering thesis (1995) on the daily life of Portuguese soldiers in the trenches was mainly published in the following decade (1998, 2002, 2008). While Marques focused mostly on the soldiers' individual and group memories, Sílvia Correia (2011, 2013) wrote the first extensive work on war culture and political memory in the aftermath of the war. Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses (2004, 2006, 2011, 2012) has also written about war memory, but mostly from a political perspective. As far as this last topic is concerned, but focusing on the cultural dimension, we have the work of Jorge Pais de Sousa (2011). Then there are also the less extensive works on war literature by Ernesto Castro Leal (2000, 2010) and on arts and artists by Carlos Silveira (2010) and Joaquim Saial (1991).

Finally, we should draw attention to two major conferences that played an important role in bringing together different perspectives about this subject and most of all bringing researchers together. These conferences were entitled *From the trenches to Versailles*:

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<sup>6</sup> Winter and Prost, *Penser la Grande Guerre...*, 47-48

<sup>7</sup> Quoted by Thierry Lemoine, “‘Culture(s) de guerre’, évolution d'un concept”, in Laurence van Ypersele (dir.), *Questions d'histoire contemporaine: conflits, mémoires et identités* (Paris: PUF, 2006), 136.

*War and Memory* (1914-1919) (2009) organized by the Institute of Contemporary History (New University of Lisbon) and Ceis 20 (Coimbra University) and *Portugal in the trenches – The First War of the Republic* (2010), organized by the Museum of the Presidency of the Republic.

Interest in this perspective, which is less widely discussed in Portugal, has led researchers to propose this special issue of the E-Journal of Portuguese History, which is intended to cover a “a set of practices, representations, attitudes and creations from the years 1914-1918”, but also from the aftermath of the war.

War culture and politics are the main focus of the first two articles. Helena Pinto Janeiro writes about the use of propaganda in First World War Portugal, focusing on the use of cinema. The Minister of War, Norton de Matos, is best remembered for the so-called "Miracle of Tancos", namely the assembly and training of a Portuguese contingent to fight on the western front. However, he was also responsible for setting up a pioneering film propaganda unit in Portugal, which was able to record events such as the departure of the first Portuguese troops for France. As well as clarifying various institutional aspects of this propaganda unit, Janeiro presents data about the exhibition of these films and their public reception.

Miguel Dias Santos studies the other side of the propaganda war in Portugal, or at least a central part of it: the counterpropaganda of the monarchists. He analyzes this group's representations and narratives of the war and their impact on the growing public opposition both to the war and to the main Republican leaders in power. He then discusses the role played by those representations in the revolutionary actions that took place between 1914 and 1918.

The next two papers relate to the intersection of war culture and memory. Cláudia Figueiredo analyzes the representations of the conflict in Portuguese dramaturgy both during the war and in its aftermath. Whether taking the form of comedies or dramas, these plays reveal a shift in people's attitudes towards the war, beginning with an initial and fairly widespread nationalist enthusiasm and subsequently ending in disillusionment arising from the long duration of this devastating conflict. The wounds of war that were represented in the theater extended far beyond the soldiers' bodies, affecting social and economic relations as well.

Finally, Sílvia Correia focuses her analysis on the way in which representations of death were incorporated as political capital and helped to construct the official memory of World War I in Portugal, until the institutionalization of Salazar's New State in 1933. She

scrutinizes the treatment of the dead and the delineation of different places of memory, mostly focusing on the Portuguese unknown warriors, discussing the integration of Portuguese memorial rites into European war culture and the central role that death plays in our remembrances of the Great War.

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Received for publication: 31 March 2013

Accepted in revised form: 6 October 2013

Recebido para publicação: 31 de março de 2013

Aceite após revisão: 6 de outubro de 2013