



HAL
open science

Being at war : revisiting the Franco-German conflict (1870-1871)

Mareike König, Odile Roynette

► **To cite this version:**

Mareike König, Odile Roynette. Being at war : revisiting the Franco-German conflict (1870-1871). *Revue d'histoire du XIXe siècle*, 2020, Revisiting war experiences in France and Germany (1870-1871), 60 (1), pp.75-89. hal-03576120

HAL Id: hal-03576120

<https://u-bourgogne.hal.science/hal-03576120>

Submitted on 9 Mar 2022

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Being at war: revisiting the Franco-German conflict (1870-1871)

The Franco-German war of 1870-1871 is no longer a “forgotten war”. This notion, which emerged at the turn of the 1990s in two of the main studies of the conflict by French historians¹, no longer applies. True, this ferocious confrontation, which took place in the last third of the 19th century, has all but disappeared from the collective memories of France and Germany, being almost entirely overshadowed by memories of the two World Wars which have largely erased it from people’s minds. It would incidentally be well worth writing a history of this disappearance which has been slower and less linear than one might at first sight be inclined to think. For example, in his doctoral dissertation Alain Corbin showed that echoes of the war of 1870 could still be found in the long-term memory of the farmers, employees and industrial workers in the Haute-Vienne region whom he interviewed in 1967², but also found no trace in their discourse of any perception of Germany as the “hereditary enemy”³, in marked contrast with a still lively Anglophobia.

Moreover, until the summer of 1914, the 1870-1871 war had been the decisive event through which French and German people framed their relationship with each other and with other countries. The profusion of writing published on the conflict on both sides of the Rhine – memoirs, recollections, chronicles, essays, novels and short stories⁴ – reflects the intensity with which people then regarded the event and underscores the role it played in defining the collective identities of both nations. In France, the trauma of the defeat and the civil war, along with the depth of national humiliation, gave rise to a complex process of healing, within the framework of the Republic, with regards to Germany which was seen both as a model to be followed and a rival to be kept at bay⁵. For the Germans, the foundation of the Empire after the third of the conflicts referred to after the event as the “wars of unification”, helped give the victory of 1871 an almost mythical status and turn it into a powerful force of cohesion, despite the objections expressed during the conflict by democrats, socialists or Catholics in the Southern states, who were uneasy with regard to Prussian hegemony, but also more generally

¹ Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *1870. La France dans la guerre*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1989, p. 7 and François Roth, *La guerre de 1870*, Paris, Fayard, 1990, p. 7. Cf. also Karine Varley, ‘Memories Not Yet Formed: Commemorating the Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune’, *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, 9/2/2020, p. 1-20.

² Cf. Alain Corbin, *Prélude au Front populaire : étude de l’opinion publique dans le département de la Haute-Vienne : février 1934-mai 1936*, doctoral dissertation (thèse de 3^e cycle) under the direction of Georges Castellan, 1968, reprinted in *Paroles de Français anonymes. Au cœur des années trente*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2019, p. 116-121.

³ Cf. Michael Jeismann, *La patrie de l’ennemi. La notion d’ennemi national et la représentation de la nation en France et en Allemagne de 1792 à 1918*, Paris, CNRS Éditions, [1992 in German] 1997.

⁴ One of the first inventories of this writing was drawn up by Barthélémy-Edmond Palat, *Bibliographie générale de la guerre de 1870-1871. Répertoire alphabétique et raisonné des publications de toute nature concernant la guerre franco-allemande parues en France et à l’étranger*, Paris, Berger-Levrault et C^{ie} éditeurs, 1896. He listed approximately 1,000 publications for both countries together for the “novels and short stories”, “anecdotal history” and “general history” categories, 410 in France and 595 in Germany.

⁵ One of the first to have pointed this out was Claude Digeon in *La crise allemande de la pensée française*, Paris, PUF, 1959.

in parts of the North German Confederation⁶. This successful outcome also bestowed upon the victorious German army, which made effective use of conscription, and on everything connected with the military, a great deal of prestige, if not an almost sacred status, along with a central role in the socialization of young people⁷.

The contributions published in this collection, designed to coincide with the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the conflict, are rooted in the recognition of how central war was for those who lived through it. These papers seek to question the forms of this centrality, on the basis of a historiography which, though it is insufficiently comparative⁸, is now international⁹, giving pride of place to the field of individual and collective experiences of war. Other lines of research¹⁰, though particularly fruitful, could not be included in this collection. We also decided, given the limited space available in this volume, not to focus specifically on the Commune¹¹, which was a direct consequence of wounded French patriotism, strengthened by revolutionary aspirations¹², as Jean Jaurès had already emphasized in 1901, in his volume of the *Histoire socialiste* devoted to the war of 1870-1871. He saw it both as the product of “the revolt of bruised national feeling” and as an “assertion of a proletarian ideal¹³”.

Focusing on “experiences of war” demands at the very least a few clarifications on what this notion entails and on its impact from an epistemological point of view. It first emerged in the historiography of the First World War when, in 1929, Jean Norton Cru gave it a central heuristic value by considering it as the decisive criterion in establishing historical truth. Taking part in the fighting, being physically present at the front in the lower ranks – because for him

⁶ Cf. Frank Becker, *Bilder von Krieg und Nation. Die Einigungskriege in der bürgerlichen Öffentlichkeit Deutschlands, 1864-1913*, Munich, Oldenburg, 2001 and by the same author ‘La guerre et l’armée: des espaces de négociation pour l’ordre politique national’, *Revue d’histoire du XIX^e siècle*, 2016, n° 46-1, p. 33-50 ; Alexander Seyferth, *Die Heimatfront 1870/71. Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft im deutsch-französischen Krieg*, Paderborn, F. Schöningh, 2007.

⁷ Cf. Jakob Vogel, *Nationen im Gleichschritt. Der Kult der “Nation in Waffen” in Deutschland und Frankreich, 1871-1914*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997; Ute Frevert, *A Nation in Barracks. Modern Germany, Military Conscription and Civil Society*, Oxford-New-York, Berg, [2001 in German] 2004.

⁸ Cf. on this question the analysis proposed by Mareike König in Mareike König & Élise Julien, *Rivalités et interdépendances 1870-1918*, coll. Histoire franco-allemande, vol. 7, Lille, Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2018 [in German 2019], p. 19-29 and p. 285-305.

⁹ Four of the six articles in our collection have been translated into French, two from English and two from German. We are profoundly grateful not only to the *Revue du XIX^e siècle* but also to the institutions and research laboratories who have agreed to fund these translations: the Centre d’études sociologiques et politiques Raymond Aron (CESPRA) at the EHESS, the ELLIADD laboratory (Université Franche-Comté) and the Institut historique allemand (IHA) in Paris.

¹⁰ This is most particularly the case for diplomatic history of the conflict (cf. David Wetzel, *A Duel of Giants. Bismarck, Napoleon III and the Origins of the Franco-Prussian War*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 2001 and by the same author *A Duel of Nations. Germany, France and the Diplomacy of the War of 1870-1871*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 2012); for its economic consequences (cf. particularly Béatrice Dedinger, ‘The Franco-German Trade Puzzle: an Analysis of the Economic Consequences of the Franco-Prussian War’, *Economic History Review*, vol. 65, n° 3, 2012, p. 1029-1054) and its religious implications on which there is an abundant German historiography. Cf. especially Christian Rak, *Krieg, Nation und Konfession: die Erfahrung des deutsch-französischen Krieges von 1870/71*, Paderborn, F. Schöningh, 2004; Christine Krüger, ‘Les juifs français et allemands durant les conflits de 1870 et de 1914-1918: espoirs et déceptions’, in Jean-François Chanet *et alii* (ed.), *D’une guerre à l’autre: que reste-t-il de 1870-1871 en 1914?*, Paris, Centre d’Histoire de Sciences Po, 2016, p. 277-295.

¹¹ The forthcoming issue of the *Revue d’histoire du XIX^e siècle*, edited by Quentin Deluermoz and Éric Fournier, will be entirely devoted to this subject.

¹² As witnessed by the Parisian day of uprising on 31 October 1870, which began in response to the announcement of the capitulation of the army at Metz on 28 October and of the preliminary preparations for peace made by Thiers.

¹³ Jean Jaurès, *La guerre franco-allemande (1870-1871)*, Paris, Flammarion, 2^e éd., 1971 [Paris, Jules Rouff et Cie, 1901], p. 292.

there was no truth outside that of what he called the “simple combatants”¹⁴, a vast category ranging from private to junior officer – were the essential elements in experience, defined here restrictively as direct participation in the action or event, limited to its military dimension. The consequence was a reliance on the veterans’ recollections, narratives, personal stories and notebooks, perceived as traces or reflections of experience, in contrast to the discursive fictions of writers and essayists, which were relegated to the sidelines as texts of dubious, even dangerous, documentary status¹⁵.

This promotion of experience as the framework for a renewed intelligibility of the phenomenon of war has helped several major historiographic developments to emerge. In the first place, it accompanied the rise, particularly after the Second World War, of a social history of war, based on a rejection of traditional “battle history” and focusing on the people involved, including civilians and the home front, on societies at war as a whole and their ability to respond to the challenges raised by wartime¹⁶. It also formed a useful analytical framework for a renewed approach to the experience of fighting itself, as proposed in 1976 by John Keegan¹⁷, who also attempted to move beyond traditional military narrative and, contrary to a history of heroes, to examine the actions and techniques of fighting, and their consequences on the men involved. This history from below, which is a history of bodies and minds, restored visibility to the invisible actors of these military worlds, the very soldiers who were all too often absent from historical discourse, especially for periods before the 20th century, when the written record they left was not only much rarer but also more difficult to decipher, particularly as a result of lower levels of education¹⁸. It also meant, in the wake of a cultural history of war of which it was one of the key elements¹⁹, that the very notion of experience could be refined, its definition extended well beyond its initial factual dimension. The concept of experience, or rather experiences, those of combatants and civilians, of men and women, of different social groups confronted with war, focused not only on practices but also on the way they were affected by systems of representation which played a major role in shaping them. In short, it provided a way to explore a history of societies at war which could go beyond the binary opposition

¹⁴ Jean Norton Cru, *Témoins. Essai d'analyse et de critique des souvenirs de combattants édités en français de 1915 à 1928*, Nancy, Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 2^e éd., 2006 [Paris, Les Étoiles, 1929], p. 333. He borrowed the expression from Georges Kimpflin, the author of a personal account, *Le Premier souffle*, Paris, Perrin, 1920, p. 12.

¹⁵ There is an abundant bibliography on this point which it would be impossible to reference here exhaustively. Cf. in particular Christophe Prochasson, ‘Les mots pour le dire: Jean-Norton Cru, du témoignage à l’histoire’, *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 2001, 48/4, p. 161-189; Frédéric Rousseau, *Le Procès des témoins de la Grande Guerre: l’affaire Norton Cru*, Paris, Seuil, 2003; Leonard V. Smith, ‘Jean Norton Cru et la subjectivité de l’objectivité’, in Jean-Jacques Becker (ed.), *Histoire culturelle de la Grande Guerre*. Paris, Armand Colin, p. 89-100 and by the same author *The Embattled Self. French Soldiers’ Testimony of the Great War*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 2007.

¹⁶ Here again, the First World War occupies a considerable place in this historiographical turning point. Cf. on this question Antoine Prost & Jay Winter, *Penser la Grande Guerre. Un essai d’historiographie*, Paris, Éd. du Seuil, coll. Points, 2004, p. 30-42, p. 109-213.

¹⁷ John Keegan, *Anatomie de la bataille. Azincourt 1415, Waterloo 1815, la Somme 1916*, Paris, Robert Laffont [1976 in English], 1993.

¹⁸ For personal accounts in German there is the added difficulty of the complexity of the Gothic script generally used by writers.

¹⁹ Cf. for a historiographical overview of this field Hervé Mazurel, ‘Un tournant historiographique: l’histoire culturelle de la guerre en France’, in Philippe Poirrier (ed.), *La Grande Guerre. Une histoire culturelle*, Dijon, Éditions universitaires de Dijon, 2015, p. 19-40.

between social- and cultural history²⁰, and to inaugurate a cultural history of social phenomena of the kind Roger Chartier had called for in a now seminal manifesto²¹.

Also used in German historiography, the notion of experiences of war (*Kriegserfahrungen*) refers to the perception and interpretation of wars and violence in terms of the social and cultural affiliations of individuals, particularly with regard to the nation and religion²². Interest is focused on the collective perception of wars and on the way they are legitimized or delegitimized²³.

The experience of war is itself a form of social experience, defined in the field of sociology as a set of “individual and collective behaviours dominated by the heterogeneity of their constitutive principles, and by the activities of individuals who need to construct the meaning of their practices within this heterogeneity”²⁴. Both plural and changing – including for single individuals who may, according to the circumstances, be moved to change their attitude in the course of a single day –, the behaviours of men at war are the product of a complex alchemy between pre-existing systems of representation – models of anticipation –, reactions determined by individual and collective factors, and the creation of narratives which seek to establish coherence after the event, in an attempt to make sense of the past. The experience of war, like any social experience, can only be grasped through narratives structured by textual or graphic practices which not only vary depending on the cultural and national contexts, but can also change as a function of a timeline which influences the way narratives are constructed and conditions the intentions of the actors who produce them.

The contributions brought together in this collection all engage in different ways with this complexity to examine the relationships between actors, societies at war and neutral states, the wide range of situations generated by the Franco-German conflict and the ways in which contemporaries sought to make sense of it, both in an individual and collective capacity.

Considering the conflict on the basis of its own categories

The first challenge which runs through the articles in this collection is to envision the events of this Franco-German confrontation endogenously, thus attempting to restore to contemporary actors their own perspectives, independently of the later repercussions of the conflict on European history, by striving to keep at a distance, without overlooking them, the great interpretative frameworks applied to the evolution of war in the Western world since the modern era. In other words, the aim is to steer clear of a teleological vision which sometimes reduces the 1870-1871 war to a “dress rehearsal²⁵”, perceived as a forerunner of the 1914-1918 disaster, which was able to develop in a polarized context, especially on the French side, through a particularly abundant bibliography devoted to the First World War. On the German side, the historiography sought for a long time to identify the signs of a German *Sonderweg* which may have led the *Kaiserreich* – considered economically strong, but politically and

²⁰ On this sterile opposition cf. Dominique Kalifa, ‘L’histoire culturelle contre l’histoire sociale?’ in Laurent Martin & Sylvain Venayre (eds.), *L’Histoire culturelle du contemporain*, Actes du colloque de Cerisy, Paris, Nouveau Monde éditions, 2005, p. 75-84.

²¹ Roger Chartier, ‘Le monde comme représentation’, *Annales ESC*, November 1989, p. 1505-1520.

²² Cf. Georg Schild & Anton Schildling (eds.), *Kriegserfahrungen. Krieg und Gesellschaft in der Neuzeit: Neue Horizonte der Forschung*, Paderborn, Schöningh 2009.

²³ Cf. Alan Forrest, Karen Hagemann & Jane Rendall (eds.), *Soldiers, Citizens and Civilians: Experiences and Perceptions of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1790-1820*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan 2009; Karen Hagemann, *Umkämpftes Gedächtnis: die Antinapoleonischen Kriege in der deutschen Erinnerung*, Paderborn, Schöningh, 2019; Julia Murken, *Bayerische Soldaten im Russlandfeldzug 1812: ihre Kriegserfahrungen und deren Umdeutungen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Munich, C.H. Beck, 2006; Ute Planert, *Der Mythos vom Befreiungskrieg. Frankreichs Kriege und der deutsche Süden. Alltag, Wahrnehmung, Deutung, 1792-1841*, Paderborn, Schöningh, 2007.

²⁴ François Dubet, *Sociologie de l’expérience*, Paris, Éd. du Seuil, coll. “La couleur des idées”, 1994, p. 15.

²⁵ Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, 1870. *La France dans la guerre*, op. cit., p. 320.

socially retrograde – directly towards the First and then the Second World Wars, by emphasizing a teleological determinism concerning most notably relations between France and Germany²⁶.

A relative lack of historical research had for long affected the period between 1815 and 1870, perceived in Europe as a peaceful interlude following the collapse of the French Empire. This encouraged a certain indifference towards those long neglected decades, both in the European theatre²⁷ and in more distant spaces, where colonial wars and their violence drew little attention from historians²⁸. It led to a situation in which the Franco-German war of 1870-1871 was considered in the light of the conflict that followed it, attempting to discern signs of a radicalization of warlike activity, as well as signs of how actors whose cultural mindsets greatly differed from those which would later dominate the early 20th century had voluntarily attempted to limit the conduct of war. For this reason, analysis of the experiences of the 1870-1871 war has often been dependent on the great historiographical debate on “total war”²⁹, which continues to drive part of the research on this conflict³⁰, even if this analytical framework has had a beneficial impact on our knowledge of this event, as it concluded that this interpretation of the Franco-German war is anachronistic³¹. All the articles in our collection engage in different ways with the debate on these topics, but they strive to free their analysis from the shackles of the notion of “total war” in an attempt to reconstruct the mindsets of the actors involved and how their perceptions changed during the conflict.

Representations in context

This approach, which could be referred to as intrinsic, requires careful attention to the systems of representation through which contemporaries viewed the 1870-1871 war. It stresses the influence of memories of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, which provided powerful stereotypes that determined perceptions of the Other – which itself changed over time – according to an ever-evolving spatial and temporal context. In France, the invasion in the months of August and September 1870, characterized by a succession of bloody engagements and localized reprisals against armed civilians, as in the well-known case of Bazeilles³²,

²⁶ Cf. Mareike König & Élise Julien, *Rivalités et interdépendances...*, *op. cit.*, p. 12-15 and p. 325-330.

²⁷ As Odile Roynette emphasized in ‘Pour une histoire culturelle de la guerre au XIX^e siècle’, *Revue d’histoire du XIX^e siècle*, n° 30, 2005, p. 11-12.

²⁸ This lack of interest is now a thing of the past. Cf. in particular research by Benjamin Brower, *A Desert Named Peace: The Violence of France’s Empire in the Algerian Sahara, 1844-1902*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2009; Jacques Frémeaux, *De quoi fut fait l’Empire. Les guerres coloniales au XIX^e siècle*, Paris, CNRS éditions, 2010; William Gallois, *A History of Violence in the Early Algerian Colony*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. On the practices of conquest within the framework of the construction of the German empire after 1871 cf. Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction. Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2005; Susanne Kuss, *German Colonial Wars and the Context of Military Violence*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2017 [in German 2011].

²⁹ On this controversial notion cf. Jean-Yves Guiomar, *L’invention de la guerre totale XVIII^e-XX^e siècle*, Paris, Éditions du Félin, 2004; David Bell, *La première guerre totale. L’Europe de Napoléon et la naissance de la guerre moderne*, Seyssel, Champ Vallon, 2010 [2007 in English]; *On the Road to Total War. The American Civil War and the German Wars of Unification, 1861-1871*, Stig Förster & Jörg Nagler (eds.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997. For a discussion of the relevance of the notion in the context of wars during the period 1750-1850 cf. Bernard Gainot, ‘Les affrontements militaires sous la Révolution et l’Empire: une “guerre totale”’, *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 2012/2 n° 59-2, p. 178-186.

³⁰ For a recent overview of this research cf. Mareike König & Élise Julien, *Rivalités et interdépendances...*, *op. cit.*, p. 285-295.

³¹ Cf. Dieter Langewiesche et Nikolaus Buschmann, “‘Dem Vertilgungskrieg Grenzen setzen’: Kriegstypen des 19. Jahrhunderts und der deutsch-französische Krieg. Gehegter Krieg – Volks- und Nationalkrieg – Revolutionskrieg – Dschihad’, in Dietrich Beyrau, Michael Hochgeschwender & Dieter Langewiesche (eds.), *Formen des Krieges: Von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, Paderborn, F. Schöningh, 2007, p. 163-196.

³² Cf. Bastian Matteo Scianna, ‘A predisposition to brutality? German practices against civilians and *francs-tireurs* during the Franco-Prussian war 1870–1871 and their relevance for the German “military *Sonderweg*” debate’,

provided a particularly fertile breeding-ground for a reactivation of the image of wild hordes, inherited from the memory of the invasions of 1814-1815³³, focused on the figures of the Cossack and the Uhlan, and thereafter extended more widely to other troops. Conversely, German soldiers entered French soil with a repertoire of negative stereotypes passed down from the Napoleonic occupation and the *Befreiungskriege* (wars of liberation), which probably played a role in increasing their fear, at a moment of maximum vulnerability. The move from invasion to occupation, as Oliver Stein shows in his article, is a moment rich in potential for a possible remobilization of derogatory stereotypes, such as that of the avaricious Frenchman, or, conversely, of the rapacious German. But, depending on the extent of requisitions and billeting, these commonplaces were either likely to lose ground when the occupier exercised reasonable pressure, as part of a medium- or long-term situation of a kind likely to encourage the search for a respective balance, or, on the contrary, to exacerbate antagonism when pressure on the people in whose homes they were quartered was both intense and repeated.

The lexical repertoire, which is itself closely linked to political cultures, betrays the powerful influence of the revolutionary and Napoleonic past in contemporaries' systems of perception³⁴, particularly in France, where it had been kept alive by the second Bonapartism³⁵. It re-emerged under different forms, in the self-mobilization of civilians in response to invasion and the organization of resistance to sieges³⁶ and, more generally, in the deployment of a rhetorical arsenal inherited from the Revolution, that of a threatened homeland, of a mass uprising and all-out war, used by the Republicans after 4 September 1870, and resisted by the German authorities who were determined to eradicate any form of "popular war", particularly the one carried out by the *francs-tireurs*³⁷, with which the Prussians had already been confronted in 1866 in Bohemia, Moravia and Upper Silesia³⁸. Both Rachel Chrastil and Bertrand Taithe insist not only on the French civilians' lack of experience when the war reached them, but also on the spontaneous organizational abilities deployed at local level to cope with material destruction, rationing and the influx of the wounded and the sick. In this the National Guard played an important role, particularly when Paris was under siege. There a form of solidarity was improvised, forming, within the neighbourhood family councils which replaced poor relief institutions, a number of microstructures infused with a political and social objective implemented by the Commune during the second siege³⁹.

Small Wars & Insurgencies, 2019 n° 30-4/5, p. 968-993; Mark R. Stoneman, 'The Bavarian Army and French Civilians in the War of 1870-1871. A Cultural Interpretation', *War in History*, 8, 2001, p. 271-293; Odile Roynette, 'Le village de la mort. Les "atrocités allemandes" en 1870', in Anne-Emmanuelle Demartini & Dominique Kalifa (eds.), *Imaginaires et sensibilités au XIX^e siècle. Études pour Alain Corbin*, Paris, 2005, p. 257-269.

³³ Jacques Hantraye, *Les Cosaques aux Champs-Élysées*, Paris, Belin, 2005; Christine Haynes, *Our Friends the Enemies. The Occupation of France after Napoleon*, Harvard, Harvard University Press, 2018.

³⁴ Cf. Sophie Wahnich (ed.), *Histoire d'un trésor perdu. La transmission de l'événement révolutionnaire, 1789-2012*, Paris, Les Prairies ordinaires, 2013.

³⁵ Sudhir Hazareesingh, *La Saint-Napoléon. Quand le 14 Juillet se fêtait le 15 Août*, Paris, Tallandier, 2007 [2004 en anglais].

³⁶ Rachel Chrastil, *The Siege of Strasbourg*, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 2014; Bertrand Taithe, *Defeated Flesh. Medicine, Welfare, and Warfare in the Making of Modern France*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999, p. 46-130.

³⁷ On the *francs-tireurs* see Armel Dirou, 'Les francs-tireurs pendant la guerre de 1870-1871' in Hervé Coutau-Bégarie (ed.), *Stratégies irrégulières*, Paris, Économica, 2010, p. 406-438; Katja Mitze, "'Seit der babylonischen Gefangenschaft hat die Welt nichts derart erlebt.'" Französische Kriegsgefangene und Francs-tireurs im Deutsch-Französischen Krieg 1870/71', in Rüdiger Overmans (ed.), *In der Hand des Feindes. Kriegsgefangenschaft von der Antike bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Cologne, Böhlau, 1999, p. 235-254.

³⁸ Wolfgang Etschmann, 'Guerillas und Francs-tireurs, 1866 und 1870' in Erwin Schmidl (ed.), *Freund oder Feind? Kombattanten, Nichtkombattanten und Zivilisten in Krieg und Bürgerkrieg seit dem 18. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt, Lang, 1995, p. 31-44.

³⁹ Robert Tombs, *The Paris Commune 1871*, New York, London, Longman, 1999; Roger V. Gould, 'In the Paris Commune', *American Sociological Review*, t. 56, n°6, 1991, p. 716-729.

This lack of preparation also hints indirectly at the shock experienced by French civilians whose common expectation until 1870 was a prospect of peace rather than war. The emergence of a vast humanitarian movement at an international level⁴⁰ had played a part in consolidating within Europe the hope of sustainable peace and the disappearance of war. The creation in Geneva in 1863 of an International Committee for Relief to the Wounded, followed in 1864 by the emergence of the first international treaty obliging signatory states to observe rules in the event of warfare on land, soon after extended to conflict at sea⁴¹, was not only intended to “humanize” war. It was also designed to discourage all recourse to war, as was declared on the eve of the conflict by one of the main promoters of the Geneva Convention: Daniel Marc Segesser quotes Gustave Moynier, who wrote, “national wars are becoming less and less likely”⁴². This optimism, both performative in intention and international in scope, had however been seriously contradicted by the situation in East-Central Europe since the 1850s, when Prussia was waging war to impose its supremacy by supporting the Schleswig-Holstein uprising in 1848-1851 against Denmark. It fought once again against Denmark in 1864, in alliance with Austria, and then against Austria and Italy in 1866⁴³. Mark Hewitson has clearly shown how military conflict then became acceptable in Prussia, and even desirable for civilians, influenced by an idealized vision of war and by the institutionalization of conscription⁴⁴. Moreover, the victorious campaign of 1866 provided the Prussian army with war experience on a vast scale against an organized and well-trained European coalition – 355,000 soldiers deployed by Prussia against 528,000 by Austria and its allies⁴⁵ – whereas on the other side of the Rhine, although the French military was considered as an experienced army, it had above all been engaged in distant, asymmetric conflicts, in Algeria or Mexico between 1862 and 1867⁴⁶, and military service was widely discredited, thus hindering any fundamental reform⁴⁷.

Heterogeneity and variability of experiences of fighting

The military casualty figures on both sides – which would be an important subject for further historical research – were estimated shortly after the conflict to be 172,617 German combatants (40,741 killed, 127,867 wounded and 4,000 missing) *versus* 140,870 killed and at least 143,000 wounded on the French side⁴⁸. It is important also to take into account excess

⁴⁰ Cf. in particular Geoffrey Best, *Humanity in Warfare: The Modern History of the International Law of Armed Conflicts*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980; Véronique Harouel, *Histoire de la Croix-Rouge*, Paris, PUF, 1999; John F. Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity. War and the Rise of the Red Cross*, Colorado and Oxford, Wetsview Press, 1996.

⁴¹ In the additional articles to the 1864 Geneva Convention, which were signed in Geneva in 1868 but never ratified.

⁴² Gustave Moynier, *Étude sur la convention de Genève pour l'amélioration du sort des militaires blessés dans les armées en campagne (1864 et 1868)*, Paris, Librairie de Joël Cherbuliez, 1870, p. 303-304.

⁴³ Klaus-Jürgen Bremm, *1866: Bismarcks Krieg gegen die Habsburger*, Darmstadt, Theiss, 2016; Dennis E. Showalter, *The Wars of German Unification*, London, Arnold, 2004; Geoffrey Wawro, *The Austro-Prussian War: Austria's War with Prussia and Italy in 1866*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

⁴⁴ Mark Hewitson, *The People's Wars. Histories of Violence in the German Lands, 1820-1888*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 251-282.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 360.

⁴⁶ Jean Avenel, *La campagne du Mexique (1862-1867). La fin de l'hégémonie européenne en Amérique du Nord*, Paris, Economica, 1996 and Manuel Charpy & Claire Fredj, *Lettres du Mexique. Itinéraires du zouave Augustin-Louis Frélaud 1862-1867*, Paris, Éditions Nicolas Philippe, 2003.

⁴⁷ Cf. Odile Roynette's overview, *Bons pour le service. La caserne à la fin du XIX^e siècle*, Paris, Belin, 2017 [2nd edition, 2000], p. 69-89.

⁴⁸ For combatants, the data come essentially from the German statistics established after the war by Dr. Engel, director of the Central Statistical Office in Berlin. Cf. on this point the figures proposed by the French doctor Jean-Charles Chenu in *Rapport au conseil de la Société française de secours aux blessés des armées de terre et de mer, sur le service médico-chirurgical des ambulances et des hôpitaux pendant la guerre de 1870-1871*, Paris, Imprimerie J. Dumaine, 1874, t. 1, p. LXXIV-LXXXV.

mortality among civilians and the military caused by the conflict, which includes in particular the role of epidemics. It is estimated that as many as 570,000 people died on the French side⁴⁹. On the German side, the smallpox epidemic spread by prisoners of war is believed to have been responsible for the deaths of almost 177,000 German civilians⁵⁰. These estimates therefore class the 1870-1871 conflict as a “modern war”, as they reflect the effects of massification of military manpower since the end of the 18th century, along with the increased power of the means of destruction and the development of greater logistic possibilities⁵¹. From this point of view, the Franco-German war is clearly part of the growing spiral which gathered pace in the West during the 1860s as a result of the use of trains and the telegraph and the deployment of modernized weaponry – artillery, machine guns, rifles – whose power to inflict harm had increased tenfold⁵². Both civilian and military doctors, mentioned by Odile Roynette in her article, were privileged observers of these changes and reported as objectively as possible in notes which point not only to increasingly lethal firepower on the battlefield but also to the different effects it had on combatants who, on the German side, could count on a hospital system that was more effective than its French counterpart, which to a large extent was improvised under the pressure of events.

However, the notion of modern war implies an over-generalizing vision of combatants’ experiences, making it difficult to allow for the diversity and variability of these experiences according to place and time. The conflict is made up of a juxtaposition of different types of combat (siege warfare and war of mobility) which affect the troops engaged in the fight differently. It means that combatants are exposed to danger in different ways, according to a wide range of factors which sometimes combine and sometimes cancel each other out. Rank (officers were proportionately more affected than lower ranks), force within the army (the infantry and cavalry were particularly exposed to fire), and speciality all contribute to a fragmentation of experiences, even within a single regiment. Even within one given unit, in the French line infantry for example, there were “ordinary” companies and elite companies – grenadiers and *voltigeurs* – who were not used in battle in the same fashion and who reacted to stress and danger in ways which were probably very different too. The level of military training was an essential differentiating factor, between battle-hardened troops, who were more numerous on both sides at the beginning of the conflict, and inexperienced and poorly equipped recruits, of which there were a particularly large number on the French side from the middle of August onwards. It is therefore important to pursue the analysis further, by constructing a detailed history of combatant experiences that is able to vary the scale of observation on both sides (within a company, a battalion, a regiment, an army corps) and to allow for changing spatial and temporal contexts.

Several articles in our collection emphasize the power of the representation systems that framed the behaviours of the combatants and armies involved, especially a conception of honour which Jasper Heinzen shows had a great influence on the officer corps of both the French and German armies, shaped by a professional culture which bore more similarities than differences. It entailed an aristocratic model of chivalry shared beyond borders between states, which was able to provide a behavioural norm and encourage a widely applied respect for rules concerning the humane treatment of prisoners and the wounded, who were the object of mutual care provided by the hospital services on both sides. It is important however to examine the

⁴⁹ Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, 1870. *La France dans la guerre*, *op. cit.*, p. 315.

⁵⁰ Matthew Smallman-Raynor & Andrew D. Cliff, ‘The geographical Transmission of Smallpox in the Franco-Prussian War: Prisoner of War Camps and their Impact upon Epidemic Diffusion Processes in the Civil Settlement System of Prussia 1870-1871’, *Medical History*, 46, n° 2, April 2002, p. 247 p. 241-263

⁵¹ On this notion, see David A. Bell, ‘Introduction’ to the first part of ‘La guerre moderne’ in Bruno Cabanes *et alii* (eds.), *Une histoire de la guerre du XIX^e siècle à nos jours*, Paris, Éd. du Seuil, 2018, p. 29-36.

⁵² On these questions, see the overview by Hervé Mazurel, ‘Le corps à l’épreuve’, *Ibid*, p. 409-422.

limits of this regulation of behaviour, particularly as a function of social status. In the context of the occupation, this regulation was probably more characteristic, as Oliver Stein suggests, of the relationships established between French and German élites who shared the same cultural code and the same fear of *franc-tireur* partisans, than relationships between German military personnel and French civilians from the popular classes, who were less interested in manufacturing a consensus. The transnational perspective also stresses the strength of hostility within the societies of the different German states and among German troops towards soldiers from the colonial contingents in the French army, and particularly towards the Algerian *tirailleurs* or “*turcos*”. The power of the racist stereotypes which were applied to them facilitated a dehumanization of a kind likely to encourage the use of uncontained violence against them, the extent of which needs to be better assessed⁵³.

Visibility and invisibility of war experiences

The Franco-German conflict led to an intense mobilization of contemporary observers who were keen to describe, show and report the events of the war, which is consistent with an increasing exposure of the public to accounts of war since the beginning of the 19th century. Mark Hewitson has emphasized, on the basis of a study of the German states, how an idealized representation of war spread into the heart of public opinions after 1815, widening the gap between an increasingly brutal reality and a vision of war which had become gradually remote from reality, deployed in particular in the newspapers on the occasion of the commemoration of the wars of national liberation, especially during the fiftieth anniversary of the battle of Leipzig⁵⁴. In Europe, the press, whose power was strengthened by the advent of mass- and newspaper culture⁵⁵, seized on the subject of armed conflict through war reporting, which emerged during the Crimean war⁵⁶. The visual coverage of this conflict, which was also profoundly divorced from reality, as can be seen in the photographs taken by the British photographer Roger Fenton, which gave pride of place to group portraits of soldiers eating, drinking and smoking⁵⁷, reinforced a reassuring perception of war, which still dominated media coverage of the 1864 war between Prussia and Denmark. The 1860s played a part in challenging this conformist vision, by introducing more visual realism, as the American press did during the Civil War⁵⁸, and by drawing more attention to the suffering of combatants on the battlefield.

In 1870-1871, two factors converged to give greater visibility to certain forms of the confrontation and to some of its protagonists. The effect of the intense media coverage of events (fighting, sieges, capitulation)⁵⁹ was, on both sides, to show war to people who had no direct experience of it and to forge a consensus based on demonizing of the other⁶⁰. A growing

⁵³ Frank Becker, ‘Fremde Soldaten in der Armee des Feindes. Deutsche Darstellungen der Französischen “Turko”-Truppen im Krieg 1870/71’, in Christian Geulen, Anne von der Heiden & Burkhard Liebsch (eds.), *Vom Sinn der Feindschaft*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 2002, p. 167-181; Thomas Rohkrämer, ‘Daily Life at the Front’, in Stig Förster & Jörg Nagler (ed.), *On the Road to Total War*, *op. cit.*, p. 511-515.

⁵⁴ Mark Hewitson, *The People’s Wars. Histories of Violence*, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

⁵⁵ Understood as a series of “reflexes, references and patterns which progressively built up a paper-based perception, which became increasingly massive and widespread, and triumphed on the eve of 1914”. Cf. Dominique Kalifa, Philippe Régner, Marie-Ève Thérenty & Alain Vaillant, *La Civilisation du journal. Histoire culturelle et littéraire de la presse française au XIX^e siècle*, Paris, Nouveau Monde éditions, 2011, p. 13.

⁵⁶ Ulrich Keller, *The Ultimate Spectacle: A Visual History of the Crimean War*, Amsterdam, Gordon and Breach, 2001.

⁵⁷ Cf. Matthias Miller, ‘Photographier la guerre en 1870-1871’, in Mathilde Benoistel, Sylvie Ray-Burimi & Christophe Pommier (eds.), *France Allemagne(s) 1870-1871. La guerre, la Commune, les mémoires*, Paris, Gallimard, 2017, p. 97-98.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Howard G. Brown, *Mass Violence and the Self: From the French Wars of Religion to the Paris Commune*, Ithaca (N. Y.), Cornell University Press, 2018, p. 176-177 et p. 187.

⁶⁰ Cf. Frank Becker, *Bilder von Krieg und Nation...*, *op. cit.*, p. 499.

dehumanization of the adversary, deployed in the derogatory representations which became increasingly widespread in caricatures and the press, was seen at that time on both sides of the Rhine.

The Franco-German war also saw the intervention of individuals – men and women – engaged in humanitarian action to a degree never before seen in Europe. Several articles in this collection highlight the role of volunteers in the organization of relief on the battlefield and in besieged cities. They also emphasize the role of these new actors in the construction of a narrative of the suffering caused by war, which became a spectacle in its own right. Bertrand Taithe gives particular emphasis to the way bodies affected by the aftermath of the conflict were turned into a spectacle. This phenomenon was particularly apparent when attempts were made to break through the German blockade around Paris and, even more so, when ambulances returned to the city with their load of casualties. The wounded body, as Odile Roynette also shows, was paid particular attention, for wounds fitted neatly into a perception of warfare which valued virile qualities and gave pain a special place in the process of battle hardening and in the manufacture of heroism. Wounds, much more than disease, were foregrounded in the reports drafted by doctors who highlighted their skills and also recorded, when the wounded were civilians, the gap between the sensitive world to which they belonged, which had become less tolerant of suffering, and the world of the military who could cope with it more readily. Because of this, the sick were relegated to the background, not only in care units but also in the medical narratives which played a role in this erasure process.

The ordeals endured by civilians, particularly those caused by bombardment and disease in besieged cities, were therefore given much less prominence in the great collective narrative that was constructed during the conflict. They were much more prominent in personal accounts which bear the traces, as Rachel Chrastil stresses, of the trauma of exposure to danger and of the feeling of transgression experienced by the individuals concerned, a feeling which also included the threat of destruction which imperilled the cultural heritage⁶¹. Therefore, these difficult periods were recorded in the photographs of ruins, mainly in cities, which became widespread. They were not only “meaningful signs – of disaster for the French, and of victory for the Germans”⁶², but also an indirect way of transcribing a painful reality, that of the impact of the war on civilians, which was largely ignored after the event in the different forms of commemoration, which were dominated on both sides by tributes to the combatants and their sacrifice on the altar of the homeland⁶³. After the war, the need to give better protection to civilians was taken up by international lawyers, keen to improve the provisions of the first Geneva Convention, and who, as Daniel Marc Segesser indicates, provided further impetus to plans for an international tribunal of neutral judges tasked with prosecuting violations of the law of war.

Amongst the civilians directly involved in the conflict, women are even less visible than men. This points to the usefulness of a gendered approach which sheds light on the campaign of delegitimization to which women were subjected, particularly when they stood alongside

⁶¹ Cf. also on this subject Sandra Chapelle & Odile Roynette, ‘Tuer le temps: le journal d'Auguste Castan pendant la guerre de 1870-1871’, *Revue d'histoire du XIX^e siècle*, n° 51, 2015/2, p. 167.

⁶² Sylvie Le Ray-Burini, “Comme un rêve de pierre”. Ruines et oubli de la guerre de 1870-1871’, in Mathilde Benoistel, Sylvie Ray-Burini & Christophe Pommier (eds.), *France Allemagne(s) 1870-1871...*, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

⁶³ Cf. Karine Varley, *Under the Shadow of Defeat. The War of 1870-1871 in French Memory*, New-York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008; Stéphane Tison, *Comment sortir de la guerre? Deuil, mémoire et traumatisme (1870-1940)*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2011, p. 135-155 et p. 241-258; Christine G. Krüger, ‘German Suffering in the Franco-German War’, *German History*, 29 (2011) p. 404-422; June Hargrove & Neil McWilliam, *Nationalism and French Visual Culture, 1870-1914*, New-Haven, London, National Gallery of Art, Washington, 2005; Bertrand Tillier, ‘Spectaculariser l’Année terrible’, in Mathilde Benoistel, Sylvie Ray-Burini & Christophe Pommier (eds.), *France Allemagne(s) 1870-1871...*, *op. cit.*, p. 114-120.

their menfolk in defence of their village or neighbourhood or during the Commune⁶⁴. These criticisms were met by silence on the part of the victims, particularly in the case of sexual violence, the reality of which is sometimes suggested but never explicitly expressed⁶⁵. In line with the gendered distribution of roles in wartime, the involvement of women in providing care and assistance to victims was, conversely, applauded, provided it did not give rise to any contact with the bodies of wounded and sick men that was considered too close. The work of volunteer nurses in particular was highlighted, as long as it took place in hospitals which were distant from the theatre of war or, as recommended by the French surgeon Léon Le Fort who commanded a volunteer ambulance during the conflict, where they could provide “what only women can do and know how to do [...] and give: encouragement, and a hope for better things” and provide the “material care which women are much better at giving than men⁶⁶”. Thus the involvement of women during the 1870-1871 war remains largely underexplored by scholars, apart from a small number of studies on patriotic women’s associations in Germany⁶⁷. Unlike men, who were able to demonstrate and give practical expression to their patriotism publicly through military service, women had to express their opinions on the war and the enemy informally. Large-scale digitization of autobiographical sources could provide a new understanding in this area and contribute to renewed academic approaches into the 1870-1871 war⁶⁸, in which, more generally, this collection hopes to play a part.

Mareike König is a historian and director of the “Digital Humanities” department at the Institut historique allemand in Paris.

Odile Roynette is a senior lecturer and research director in contemporary history at the university of Bourgogne-Franche-Comté and a research fellow at CESPRA (EHESS).

Article traduit en anglais par Michael Parsons

⁶⁴ Frank Becker, *Bilder von Krieg und Nation ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 182-185 et p. 237.

⁶⁵ As in the case of reprisals against civilians at Bazeilles. Cf. Odile Roynette, ‘Le village de la mort...’, *art. cit.* p. 265-266.

⁶⁶ Léon Le Fort, *La chirurgie militaire et les sociétés de secours de France et à l'étranger*, Paris, Librairie Germer Baillière, 1872, p. 231.

⁶⁷ Jasper Heinzen, *Making Prussians, Raising Germans: A Cultural History of Prussian State-Building after Civil War, 1866-1935*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017, p. 216-254; Jean H. Quataret, *Staging Philanthropy: Patriotic Women and the National Imagination in Dynastic Germany, 1813-1916*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2001, p. 79-89.

⁶⁸ Cf. Mareike König, ‘Quelles perspectives pour l’histoire de la guerre 1870-1871 à l’ère du numérique?’, *Guerre franco-allemande*, 24 mai 2020, <https://guerre1870.hypotheses.org/1924>.