



The resilience of French society in 1914-1918: what lessons for the future? 2/2

military-Earth thinking notebook

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Histoire & stratégie

- Propaganda: a privileged vector to support resilience

Propaganda, a notion of religious origin (the congregation De propaganda fide was founded in the 17th century to "propagate ^{the faith}"), became in 1914-1918 an aspect of total warfare. Its excesses and its generalisation often make it seem like "head stuffing". However, it also has an impact, admittedly difficult to measure, which contributes to the shaping of opinion. By providing a cultural and social environment, it is a breeding ground for resilience. Propaganda works in four directions:

- within the country, among the population and among the mobilized soldiers, whose morale must be sustained.
- with allies, to ensure the cohesion of alliances.
- with the adversary, to demoralize him. But because of censorship and the enemy's own propaganda, it finally meets with little response from the enemy.
- with the neutrals, to enlighten or even rally them.

Its main themes are the "crusade of democracies" against Prussian militarism (especially after the defection of Russia), the war of law, justice, democracy and the rule of law. The main themes are the "crusade of democracies" against Prussian militarism (especially after the defection of Russia), the war of law, justice, the defence of oppressed nationalities (Alsacians-Lorrainers, Poles, Czechs) and the moral responsibility of the central empires for the outbreak of the conflict. Other, less ideological themes highlight the atrocities of an adversary described as "barbaric": reminders of the violation of Belgian neutrality, executions of civilians, atrocities committed against children ("hands cut off" theme), the bombing of Reims Cathedral... Each country also develops specific themes. Appealing to the nation's memory, France presents itself as the "homeland of the Revolution", or even the "eldest daughter of the Church". Its message passes fairly easily to public opinion since it concerns the defence of the national territory.

In France, propaganda is under the joint control of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, War and the Navy. At the beginning of 1916, a press house was created (which became the General Commission for Propaganda in May 1918) to centralise the various efforts. At the same time, a centre for action and propaganda against the enemy was founded. From now on, the word "propaganda" was openly used. But beyond these official bodies, many patriotic associations also participated in the mobilization of minds, sometimes with the support of the public authorities, such as the Catholic Committee for French Propaganda Abroad. The Ministry of Education and Fine Arts is responsible for supervising the artistic style of graphic expressions.

The press is the main instrument of propaganda. It uses editorial techniques to mitigate the effect of certain information, helping to control it: euphemisms ("correction of lines" for "retreat" or "retreat"), disinformation, under-information... The press is also aimed at. The press is also targeted by censorship, nicknamed "Anastasia", which is complementary to propaganda through its function of framing public opinion[1]. In January 1915, it was placed under the control of the Press Office at the War Ministry. On the basis of requests from the various services, the latter formulated instructions, such as the prohibition of certain political, military and social themes. However, censorship could not permanently conceal certain facts: even if the press did not indicate the number of dead, for example, obituaries suggested the high rate of losses. Censorship can only limit the area in which information is disseminated and shift awareness, in other words, fragment opinion.

Image is another propaganda vector contributing to the mobilization of minds. First of all, there are posters, which were mainly used from 1915 onwards. They were intended to frighten people, especially in 1917-1918, when patriotic zeal ran out of steam, by resorting to apocalyptic representations. They sought to manipulate public opinion by symbolically involving in the war the population in the rear, who lived outside the fighting, and by showing the combatants that they had not been forgotten. This is done by calling for financial contributions: "They spill their blood for France, spill your money". Finally, the posters seek to train and mobilise, for example by highlighting figures of soldiers.

Press photography also plays an important role. In theory, the state should be the sole producer and distributor of images for the front. In the spring of 1915, a photographic section of the army was created and integrated into the press information office. But newspapers such as *Le Miroir* or *L'Illustration* also used photographs of the soldiers, even though they were not allowed to carry cameras online. The war is the central subject, but there are no battle scenes (because of the bulky equipment, long exposure times, poorly visible enemy). At the beginning of the war, the death of one's own people is little represented, or only in a neutral and distant or partial way. It is then instrumentalized to stigmatize the enemy, a barbarian who murders. More widespread, the photograph of the death of the adversary is part of the culture of war: it is a matter of rejoicing in the face of the death of the Other. The image thus contributes to trivializing violence and breaking an ancestral taboo. However, from 1915 onwards, death was removed from photographic reportage - just as it was after the attacks at the beginning of the 21st century. Even when battle scenes are shown, there are no bodies. The focus is now on the daily life of the soldiers in the trenches. Thus, under the pretext of getting closer to the reality of war, the reports obscure the essential. Heroism in death has shifted to heroism in everyday life, no doubt because death in the trenches is no longer perceived as heroic. It has become collective and anonymous, and therefore dreadful. It is "to see/not to see war" [2].

With the war, film producers have to rethink cinema in terms of values (good/evil, enemy/friend) and no longer in terms of techniques (real/fictional, direct/reconstructed). News becomes a war zone. This is why film sections are appearing in the photographic services of armies. Each shot must be a point of view on events (this shift is the basis of propaganda). The documentaries aim to reassure public opinion and to underline the barbarity and weakness of the adversary. Their brevity does not allow them to give an overall view of the conflict, but their weekly repetition gives the feeling of a kind of spiral. The movement gives them a (temporal) reality that is more powerful than that of the photo.

- The trivialization of war

Other forms of propaganda contribute to trivializing war by making it close and acceptable, by making it daily, while "euphemising" it [3].

Published in millions of copies, postcards are the vector of private and family correspondence. They convey representations related to war, ordinary hair, virility, ambushes... Others evoke the military leaders (Joffre), the allegiances (of France, of the Republic), historical legacies (Joan of Arc, Napoleon), present prayers or pastiche biblical texts (Our Father, the 10 commandments). The postcards draw from different registers, sentimental, humorous, patriotic, which make it possible to curb a little anxiety, or at least to place it at a controllable level. These postcards contribute to trivializing the war by spreading a mythical image of it. Any realistic image is avoided.

The same applies to propaganda of a commercial nature. The war is used for advertising purposes that contribute to the morale of the population. Advertisements for various products (soap, Duval broth, Michelin tyres, piou-piou biscuits...) evoke their usefulness to soldiers or compare their qualities with the virtue of the Poilus or the effectiveness of weapons. Such propaganda also seeks to show that companies are demonstrating patriotism in this way. The culture of war permeates everyday life.

Patriotic objects, in the form of shells, cartridges or helmets, as well as toys (warrior goose games, uniform sets) are widely distributed. They participate in the enterprise of trivialization (trivialization) of the war. Through it, the reality of the conflict is concealed, controlled, to feed the myths. This process makes it possible to come to terms with war, without exalting or glorifying it, by integrating it into a familiar and ordinary world.

From the Great War to today: perceptions, questions, answers

To what extent can the resilient attitudes of French society in 1914-1918 inspire, guide or influence current behaviour, if not inspire, guide or influence it, at least enlighten it and help us understand it?

- The usefulness and limitations of comparisons

After the attacks of 13 November 2015, historian Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, a specialist in the Great War, carried out a comparative exercise, showing how the French public opinion found, over the course of a few weeks, forms of a culture of war that could recall certain

aspects of the summer of 1914 [4].

4] He thus underlines the call for sacred union, an expression taken up in particular by the Prime Minister of the time and relayed by the main media. It is the sign of a patriotism that is claimed and affirmed. The historian also shows how the designation of the enemy as "barbarian" or "savage" echoes the statements made against the Germans who had committed "atrocities" against civilians during the 1914 invasion. Patriotic symbols are once again highlighted, from the Marseillaise, sometimes spontaneously sung after minutes of silence in memory of the victims, to the tricolour flag, which is even flown on the facades of private houses. The figure of the Republic is central in these representations, with gatherings and luminaries on the square of the same name in Paris, in front of the eponymous statue. It is also the praise of the heroes that brings to mind the precedent of the Great War: the dead of the attacks were honoured during a ceremony at the Invalides, as for fallen soldiers. A "call of the dead", as during the commemorative ceremonies on 11 November, also took place. A specific decoration, the fourth national order, was even created for the "victims of terrorism" in 2016: it is reminiscent of the institution of specific distinctions during and after the Great War. Members of the police force, who were also acclaimed by the population, as well as the fire brigade, were also heroes. Volunteers flocked, up to 1,500 a day, to the army recruitment offices, the reserve and the gendarmerie. This movement may recall the enlistments, certainly in much higher numbers, of the summer of 1914. Finally, it is necessary to underline the religious "pervasiveness", comparable in certain respects to the forms of religiosity of war: services in places of worship in memory of the dead, the placing of candles or flowers in the forecourt of certain churches, etc., which were not always in keeping with the religious faith of the war. All this could contribute to the resilience of society.

However, this momentum did not last, especially since France was no longer directly targeted for a few months. The following attacks, which certainly occurred at the heart of the summer holidays (July 2016), did not generate the same momentum, the same fervour, the same practices. The French quickly rediscovered their habits, their practices and their way of life.

- The apparent difficulties of today's resilience

As during the Great War, society perceives the threats to them, but with the difference that Islamic Jihadism is less directly visible and identifiable on national soil than, for example, the Germans were. At least in the media, it only appears from time to time in the form of attacks, the dismantling of networks or the arrest of suspects. This explains the "astonishment" effect that occurs after each of its violent expressions and the circumstantial calls for resilience. But what about the medium term? How do we get beyond the "emotion" of the moment?

Another difficulty, highlighted by many experts, is defining the context of this threat. For some military or political leaders, it is a "war". But the term is debatable, as it seems far removed from the realities of traditional media and historical representations of the war (1914-1918, whose centenary is being commemorated at the same time): The deep forces of the country are not mobilized, even partially; there is no distinction between the rear and the front; the political discourse of the politicians, which is intended to mobilize, is not followed by concrete measures, except for the state of emergency. The situation was more reminiscent of the Algerian war, another conflict that had long been presented as mere "law enforcement operations". All of this contributes to blurring the message, to

incomprehension, to tension and to anxiety-provoking effects.

This unspoken war is accompanied by a difficulty in clearly identifying the enemy^[5]. Without going back over this question regularly raised by analysts, it is a question of measuring its scope in order to grasp the stakes of society's resilience. This is facilitated by the clear distinction between enemy and friend, which is invariant to the culture of war. Confusion over who is the adversary - and even the fact that we do not really talk about adversary or enemy - contributes to confusion.

Today's French society is more fragmented and more individualistic than it was a century ago, which does not facilitate solidarity, mutual aid and the spirit of national community. However, the society of 1914 was not as united as it seems in retrospect: strong political, social and religious tensions fractured the country. However, with the outbreak of war, which brought the country into a different temporality and reality, it achieved sacred union, even if this also had its limits and hiccups. In reality, every tendency, current or party rallies the sacred union out of interest, or at least measures the disadvantages of not doing so, or even opposing it. Communitarianism is another characteristic of today's society: it can lead to fears that certain sections of the population will withhold support or even oppose it in the event of conflict. During the Great War, however, governments were concerned about the effects of the Sultan-Caliph's call for jihad in Constantinople in November 1914, particularly on the inhabitants of colonial North Africa. Yet this call has hardly moved ^[6].

Resilience in 1914-1918 was possible because almost everyone knew what his or her duty was: serving in uniform and fighting, producing weapons, cultivating crops to feed the population, getting involved in charitable associations for the benefit of the wounded, prisoners, refugees, and the mobilized, so many ways of commitment and mobilization in the war effort. Today, however, citizens understand less what their duty can be. Some have joined the army - where they sometimes find themselves carrying out low-key Sentinel missions; others are ready to get involved in one way or another to help strengthen social ties. But the possibilities for concrete commitments are not overwhelming, while the needs do not seem to be really defined either. Initiatives are not encouraged by the public authorities.

- What is at stake?

The role of the media is, of course, decisive, but it is difficult to conceive of the press today as a propaganda tool as it was in 1914-1918. "Information" is nevertheless a "pillar of societal resilience" through the "awareness of risks" that it can foster, and through the "relativization of shocks" to which it can contribute ^[7]. But there are several difficulties. On the one hand, the media in a democracy have a great deal of freedom: this is their strength and interest. Any attempt at control would then turn against the public authorities. At the same time, freedom of the press is a central element of French society: to curb it would be to justify terrorist Islamic jihadism. But public opinion has little confidence in the media. Another difficulty lies in the fact that the press, especially digital television, is an immediate phenomenon, whereas resilience takes time.

In the face of adversity, crises, international tensions and terrorism, social cohesion is indispensable. The population is the centre of gravity of the strategies of the new

troublemakers. Therefore, one of the modalities of resilience must be societal[8]. 8] It is achieved through the establishment of social ties, through education, through collective activities, through joint celebrations, whether festive (football World Cup) or commemorative, through associative commitments.

The importance of education for citizenship, for "living together", for the "values" of French society, for theThe importance of education for citizenship, for "living together", for the "values" of French society, for the spirit of defence, is a necessary prerequisite for forging the cohesion of a nation and thus its ability to react in the face of adversity. Admittedly, the formulas, repeated over and over again by the media and politicians, can sometimes create an illusion and give the impression of readiness to think. The question of values can also give rise to debate - but probably no more than on the eve of 1914 when the French were divided between clerics and anticlericals, republicans and monarchists... They did, however, agree on the essentials, the fatherland, duty, civics...

Preparing to face the threat, through collective containment exercises in schools or public institutions, can facilitate resilience, even if the example of over-trained soldiers suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder shows that nothing can be taken for granted from this point of view. Civilians of the Great War living in cities in relative proximity to the front line learned how to protect themselves from bombing, how to get down to the shelters: they were able to save their lives, but also to prepare to bounce back.

The White Paper on Defence and National Security of 2013 emphasizes, among other things, the institutional and public actors of resilience, as well as the armed-nation link, which is certainly more difficult to maintain than in 1914-1918 when it was the army nation that was mobilized. But "recruitment, recognition of the profession of arms, the support of the population for the action of the forces, as well as the capacity for resilience in the face of a crisis depend to a large extent on the strength of the link between these forces and French society" [9]. The White Paper also calls for an "approach associating local and regional authorities as well as major operators of vital importance with the country's objective of resilience" [10]. 10] But these are only complementary institutional means that facilitate societal resilience.

Ultimately, what counts is the will to be resilient. This attitude is, moreover, valued in the media by politicians and even by the public who want to continue to live normally, "as usual". It is a form of immediate expression of resilience, which implies, for example, continuing to "go out", to show that one is not afraid and that terrorism must not prevent the country from functioning.

These few reflections show how the trying experience of the war lived by the French in 1914-1918, without being directly transposable to the current conflict situation, can nevertheless reveal the deep-seated strengths of a society and its ability to overcome its divisions in order to overcome suffering, grief and threats. Resilience is the result of the consensual mobilization of an entire people strong in its values, history and cohesion, and which can be framed, accompanied or supported by institutional means. This resilience can be facilitated by the media and by the exaltation of "hero" figures, from the Hairy One of 1914-1918 to the unknown who rise up in danger.

1] See Olivier Forcade, "[1] See Olivier Forcade, "Censorship in France during the Great War" Fayard, 2016, 474 p.

2] Laurent Gervereau et al (eds.), Voir/ne pas voir la guerre. Histoire des représentations photographiques de la guerre (exhibition catalogue), Paris, BDIC / Somogy, 2001, 351 p.

3] George Mosse, "From the Great War to totalitarianism: the brutalization of European societies" Paris, Hachette littératures, 1999, 291 pp.

4] Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, "L'après-13 novembre. Birth and death of a "culture of war"?" Twentieth Century. Revue d'histoire 2017/2 , no. 134, p. 11-19.

5] Jean-Yves Le Drian, "...Who is the enemy?" Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 2016, 96 p.

[6] Jean-Yves Le Naour, "[6] Jean-Yves Le Naour, "Jihad 1914-1918. France facing pan-Islamism", Paris, Perrin, 2017, 301 p.

[7] Thierry de Montbrial and Dominique David - IFRI (dir.), "Ramses 2017 - A World of Ruptures - Terrorism, Middle East, European Crisis", Paris, Dunod, 2016, p. 57.

[8] Ibid.

9] White Paper on Defence and National Security 2013, Paris, 2013, p. 122.

10] Ibid.

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