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WAR AND PEACE: THE INTERPENETRATION (WWI in a new anthropological perspective)

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Abstract. The paper seeks to investigate some of the *anthropological* consequences of the First World War, which was not simply just another but the first total war. It was without a clear dividing line between the front and the rear; it was with long duration, involving the mobilization of millions of people, most of whom not specialized in conducting military actions. In this perspective, the paper analyses some specific modes of the interpenetrations of peacetime' attitudes and frontline' experiences. Special attention is paid to the rearrangement of the human sensorium of the soldiers in the trenches of the First World War. Another subject is the correspondence between soldiers and their families in the rear. The letters contain both the experience from the front and the peacetime attitudes of the soldiers. Their language is shaped by the tension between the two worlds – of the war and of the peace.

Keywords: total war; frontline experiences; human sensorium; continuous death; soldier's correspondence

The First World War was not simply just another war but the first total war; hence, its historiography is inevitably 'total' as well. The traditional approaches, which treat of it in the separate perspectives of political, diplomatic, or military history, are able to reflect it effectively, but only one-sidedly and, hence, partially. There is a need for cohesion between these separate scientific results. Since, to use Michel Foucault's words, this kind of war runs „through the entire social body and concurrently through the entire history of the social body" (Foucault, 1997), the war's history would be incomplete if the different approaches were not welded together out of the biographical and anthropological history of millions of people, who were simultaneously the destructive subject and the suffering object on the battlefield. Largely, the history of total war is inevitably a history of *man-in-war*, including a history of how war is wedged into the peaceful world of people, while peace is wedged into their military 'body'. In this perspective, I will highlight some of the mutual incursions between the pre-war and the battlefront experiences of men at war are discerned.

World of peace and world of war

As much as they might seem contrary to each other, not related to each other, the world of peace and the world of war have never been separated by a distinct boundary. Such transitivity can be found in the 'world' of the soldiers fighting in World War I. Moreover, precisely because the war is total – without a clear dividing line between the front and the rear, of long duration, and involving the mobilization of millions of people, most of whom are not specialized in conducting military action, etc. – it implies an even deeper interweaving of the 'peaceful' and the 'militaristic' elements. The traits of peace are present on the front, and war has seeped into 'peace' in the rear. I shall illustrate these mutual interpenetrations by examining them in people's frontline experiences[1)].

Life on the front involves extreme situations that cause transformations not only in daily life but also in the psychological consistency of experience. In standing face to face with the unnatural end of human life, in daily burying[2)] their brothers in arms in the trenches, the frontline soldiers became used to death, accepted it as an unavoidable event; it was banalized to some degree, i.e. they began to feel a kind of indifference towards it. Along with this, the combatants were deprived of the feeling of personal significance. This was due to the new military technologies that required of the warrior to primarily fulfil the role of service staff. The heavy artillery that kills at long distances, inaccessible to the eye; the ponderous tanks, which enter into combat like prehistoric monsters[3)]; submarines, aerial bombardments, poisonous gases that carry invisible danger, machine guns with a range of fire reaching 2000 meters, etc. – all these weapons were of a kind that, for the first time, and increasingly, turn the man at war into a *machine operator*. Describing the use of the machine gun, John Keegan calls the person using it a 'machine-minder' – his role is to mind it, supplying it with munitions (cf. Keegan, 1989: 232 – 234). They assign to the warrior the role of an appendage rather than an active agent in battle. The new weapons lend new characteristics to the battlefield. Battle comes to exemplify two basic features of the age of Modernity: the involvement of masses of people and the action at great distances. The battlefield becomes boundless to the eye – both literally and figuratively speaking. The large distances eliminate optical interaction between the military divisions. This new scale of battle changes the nature of military communication. The *face-to-face* communication of previous wars is substituted by telecommunication. In the mediatic sense, World War I is a *telephone war* (cf. Kaufmann, 1996: 208 – 211). Though the telephone was invented earlier, it first became widely used in the battles of this war. It determined the high information density on the battlefield. The generals are no longer located on some high ground, from where they can observe and command the battle – they are in offices full of telephones and maps. The soldiers in most cases cannot see with their own eyes the results of their gunfire. Significant in this respect is the percentage of fatalities by different types of weapons. According to some data, the French sol-

diers killed by artillery fire amount to nearly 65% of the total number of those killed during World War I. The respective percentages are similar in the other armies. As a result of this, millions of fighting soldiers are left with a feeling of impotency and of personal insignificance. J. Keegan stresses that even the soldiers of the victorious armies felt helpless and lost on the battlefield, in which the dominant factor was not man but various gigantic superhuman forces (Keegan, 1989: 282). Being continuously engaged in this shocking environment (historians and military medics introduced the term 'shell-shock'), the warriors acquired an unstable identity – they lost the personal confidence that things depend on them, they lost their orientation, they missed the consistency of life that lends life its necessary sustainability.

The battlefields of the First World War had a brutal effect not only on the self-confidence of the soldiers at war but also on the most solid levels of human existence – the senses – although stable, human senses are not unchanging. As Alain Corbin points out, "the ways in which the senses are used, and their hierarchy in life, are historically changeable" (Corbin, 1982: 10). The war rearranged the sense perceptions of the warriors – it brought to the fore some senses at the expense of others. That is why the history of the senses, as part of general history[4)], is certainly an important element in the history of this war. Sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste acquired new roles in the context of military operations.

The problematized body: rearrangement of the sense perceptions

World War I was mostly a positional war. The soldiers spent weeks and months 'sunk' in trenches. The role of trenches was so great that the concept of 'trench warfare' has almost become synonymous with this war (cf. Audion-Rouzeau, 2012: 172). Trench warfare provoked a kind of frustration among the warring soldiers due to the very restricted and deserted space accessible to sight. Seen from the perspective of a trench, the space of the battlefield lost its usual expressiveness – its natural topography was substituted by signs of danger and the unknown. It was not a field of visual objects but of invisible risks or of gunfire targets. Hence *the eye was replaced by the ear*. In *Instants of Danger: The War and the Senses,* Julia Encke points out the priority of auditory experience connected with the particularities of trench warfare (Encke, 2006: 11). The war placed the sense of hearing in an 'unprecedented state of siege' – it was subjected to colossal pressure but also assumed excessive responsibility. The ear in 'warfare' had to put up with the violence of hitherto unfamiliar sounds. It had to withstand the detonations of many hours of deafening artillery fire – not at separate targets but over whole territories. At the same time, the ear assumed an enormous task. When the eyes are useless in the dark, or when the explosions illuminate the whole battlefield but the sight reaches no farther than the nearest trench, „perception is concentrated in the ear" (Encke, 2006: 113). So one of the most important lessons the newly arrived soldiers had to learn in the trenches was to distinguish, and assess the differences between the

various sounds coming from the enemy zone. The ear had to listen and analyze the amorphous sound of hissing bullets or booming shells, the moans of the wounded, the terrible neighing of dying horses on the battlefield. Ernst Jünger, who had acquired many years of frontline experience in the trenches, stressed that the ability to listen and identify sounds was a necessary condition for having an adequate idea of the combat situation and the sources of danger (Jünger, 2013: 32). Thus, successful attacks and the lives of the combatants in the trenches depended on how well the ear was prepared, trained to detect and recognize the smallest noise. But when hearing and listening predominate over seeing and watching, then the range of contacts and the images of the environment are reduced. The world of practical interaction seems to shrink and become more abstract and enigmatic. The warring soldiers may destroy the enemy at great distances, but the enemy and his location is in most cases invisible, without face or body, deprived of the usual empirical, sensual content of concrete reality. It is as if the ear is groping about the surrounding area; and since its 'anatomy' does not permit a large range of groping, the soldier's space is minimized.

When the functional capacity of sight and hearing is reduced, then the role of the other human senses increases. In his essay 'Sociology of the Senses', Georg Simmel points out that individuals in the modern world, in order to uphold their individual diversity, become „not only short-sighted but short-sensed in general" (Simmel, 2000: 119), because they delimit themselves from the space at large and concentrate on their near environment. But Simmel adds that, in reducing distances, individuals activate and sharpen their sensitivity within the circle of these reduced spaces. A similar causal connection is found to occur in the case of soldiers involved in trench warfare. In losing part of the scope and intensity of their sight, and in reducing the act of listening to a listening for danger, they engage the other two senses, that of smell and touch, all the more actively.

Life at the front raised an enormous challenge to the sense of smell for man in the 20th century, because the history of the West in the last two centuries has been, among other things, a history of the 'deodourizing' of society (Alain Courbin), i.e. of the elimination of bad odours and stench from public space. In Antiquity and during the Middle Ages, smell was looked upon as a sense situated at the same level of value as sight and sound. In those times, it played a symbolic role: certain odours were associated with phenomena of key significance for people. Perfumes in ancient religious cult fulfilled the role of a unifying force, connecting the sacred to the everyday, the distant to the proximate, and the lowly to the lofty. In Christianity, certain sweet-smelling fragrances are a sign of divine presence, while foul odours signal the proximity of hell. Modern times have shaped a different culture of smell. Modernity has begun to treat smell as the presence of the animalistic principle in humankind. Philosophers like Kant assessed the sense of smell as being 'in contradiction' with freedom. In *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of*

View, Kant points out that, unlike the sense of taste, smell makes you perceive the odour of others without choosing to do so and without any great possibility for opposing it. Moreover, when the odour is inhaled, smell may penetrate deep within the individual: the source of smell become 'internally yours' without the permission of the will (Kant, 1992: 124). Sight and sound are the senses of distance and selectivity. The eye and ear can select what they want to perceive, while the nose is to some extent a captive of the olfactory landscape. That is why, the more a culture invests in the individualization of the individual, providing an expanding freedom of action, the more the sense of smell is pushed to the margin of that culture. As Alain Courbin's studies have shown, the 18th and 19th centuries were precisely that kind of period in Western European history – they were a further stage in the 'deodourizing' of public life. By means of persistent sanitation policies and stricter requirements regarding public and personal hygiene, there was a steep decrease in tolerance for bad smells, and these centuries shaped a new culture of smell. There occurred what Courbin calls 'a perceptive revolution'(cf. Corbin, op. cit: 19 – 85).

On the battlefield, the soldiers encountered a past that had seemed gone forever – the past prior to the time when society became 'deodourized'. The noses of the combatants, with their decreased olfactory tolerance, were mercilessly attacked by the stench of the battlefield – a revolting, multifarious smell that included the stench of unburied corpses, rotting dead animals, feces and urine, bad personal hygiene, uniforms smelling of sweat and mould, festering wounds, etc. The bodies of many soldiers killed at the front remained on the battlefield, unburied or unidentified. R. Dalisson and E. Julien give the following explanation of this fact: „Death in World War I was quite unlike that in previous wars: three-quarters of deaths were caused by artillery, which dismembered, exploded and burned bodies. Many bodies were never found and countless others were unidentifiable" (Dalisson & Julien, 2015).

The unadapted nose of a normal Western person proved incapable of standing this brutal pressure. The sense of smell usually functions at short distances. That explains the expression *under your nose*, referring to something around you, close to you, but indiscernible, unperceived by the eye. However, on the battlefield, the stench seems to have no bounds – it is 'under your nose', yet at the same time the whole horizon of the combatant seems soaked in it. This explains why the memory of the overwhelming stench recurs in many of the frontline testimonies. The foul smell is not associated with anything concrete; it has acquired the rank of a general image of the memory of the battlefield. The enduring memory of this stench has been perfectly characterized by I. Ehrenburg, who writes, „The eye might forget the spectacle of the war, the corpses and skeletons, the pieces of meat, the wasteland, the cemetery. The ear might forget those sounds – the roar of the heavy shells, the meowing and hiss of the smaller shells, the crash of grenades, the croak of machine-guns, the roar of soldiers dashing to engage in hand-to-hand combat, the moans of abandoned wounded soldiers. But even if the apparitions were to vanish,

if the terrible voices were silenced for a whole century, we would always have, following us at the heals, the stench of war, which cannot be erased by any means, and which will pursue us to our last hour“ (Ehrenburg, 1923: 21). Writing about the stench on the battlefield, E. Jünger says it is like the „immediate presence of death“ (E. Jünger, op. cit. 100). The foul smell of the battlefield not only provokes nausea in the combatants. It involves them in something much vaster than nausea. The stench carries a message – the message of death. It gushes forth dramatic associations – related to danger and inescapable menace, to death, to the powerlessness of human life and its random destruction. The odour is separable from the object that causes it. That is why it is capable of persisting in memory, in imagination – it is a recollection but also a presentiment of the possible, of what has not taken place but may happen. Thus the „smell of war“ is perceived by the combatants as a sign of death arriving as if on a conveyer belt, a *continuous death*: death yesterday, today and presumably tomorrow.

Another factor of the generalized feeling of *continuous death* is the pain from wounds (these miniature forms of the feeling of death) and from disease, two of the most frequent occurrences on the battlefield. It is very difficult to ascertain the precise number of wounded combatants in the First World War, but the latest calculations point to a total number exceeding 20 million persons (Cf. Prost, 2015). Sophie Delaporte writes that the share of the wounded in the French army was approximately 40% of the total number of troops, and half of them were wounded twice, while 100,000 persons sustained wounds three or more times (Delaporte, 2015). The actual effect of pain is thus broader. This is because pain has the property of expanding and multiplying – not only your own wounds hurt, but those of others as well.

Disease and pain make the ailing person feel helpless; they seem to ‘explain’ to him that the body is not at his command, and that he is a vulnerable part of his ‘own body. His body is only partly subject to his will. Together with this, disease and pain make the sick person look at the future through a thin crack. The future of an ailing person is a reality that slips away from him. The more disease and pain grow acute, the more the future is experienced as a merciless nightmare. The sick person and the healthy one do not live in the same dimension of time. Though coming from ‘outside’, sickness and pain become something very personal: they are my pain, so much mine that the worlds with which I try to tell others about their reality are never enough and are never more than approximate, superficial, alienating words. But despite this, a ‘look’ at another person’s pain usually produces ‘co-experience’. The ‘seen’ and felt pain of another person is not, and cannot be, the same as *my* pain. However, since everyone carries in himself his past sufferings, the other person’s pains waken memories of those sufferings inevitably or at least potentially. Thus, the experience of pain expands beyond the direct experience itself, and includes the pain of compassion. The co-experiencing of another’s pain and

taking on oneself part of the other's suffering has age-old traditions in European culture. The cult of the crucifixion and of the tortured body of Christ is one of the obvious testimonies to this heritage. Another cultural manifestation of this tradition is religious martyrdom. The martyr (in Latin 'martir', signifying 'witness') is a witness by his own person to the sufferings of Christ. His life is a co-experiencing that makes the faithful co-co-experience.

Compassion is especially painful and full of inner contradictions when one views a mutilated face. The physically mutilated face might not hurt more than an amputated leg, but the disfigurement of the face is a kind of depersonalization of the man. Philosophers have long ago found an existing connection between *face* and *personality*. Disfigurement takes away a large part of the possibility of mutual 're-cognition' and interpersonal communication. The face, Simmel says, by its plasticity and mobility, is „the geometric site of all this knowledge, it is a symbol of everything that an individual has brought with him or her as a precondition of his life; deposited in the face is the past of a man, which lies at the foundation of his life and has become immobilized in the form of facial traits" (Simmel, 2000: 112). The First World War is particular in that facial mutilations were considerably more frequent than in previous wars. The fact that it was foremost a trench war led to an increased proportion of injuries to the head and face, the parts exposed to enemy fire. A large number of soldiers survived, but were disfigured, 'deprived of a face'. Sophie Delaporte, one of the few researchers on mutilated soldiers in World War I ('broken faces' – *les gueules cassées* as they were called in France, and *Kriegszermalnte* in Germany), describes the dramatic situation both of the disfigured and of their social milieu. She notes: „The disfigured were relentlessly subjected to the subjectivity of the gaze of others. These „terrifying masks" attracted inevitable attention. The sight of the „broken faces" aroused feelings of fascination and sympathy, mingled with fear, pity or disgust. The mutilated appeared as otherworldly beings" (Delaporte, op. cit.). The disfigured face is a great misfortune, far greater than other forms of bodily disablement. The disfigured soldiers were in mortal danger of social death. That is why compassion for them is such a mixed feeling – it contains admiration and pity, sympathy and disgust, compassion and horror.

The world of *continuous death* led to a change in yet another sensory modality of combatants – the sense of touch, the traces of which have passed almost unnoticed by historiography. The Indian-British historian and literary critic Santanu Das, the author of the study *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature*, emphasizes that reading diaries, letters, memoirs, poems, interviews, of participants in the war enabled him to understand that the touch, the feel, the smell of certain objects, places and persons had structured the memories of combatants to a greater degree than battles. On the basis of ample archive materials and the analysis of so-called tactile aesthetics in the poetry of participants in the war, he concludes that

touch was among the priority senses on the battlefield. Moreover, the conditions of life in the trenches had distorted many of the norms that applied to tactile contact in peacetime. Historically, the act of touching was subject to strict regulation, because it is a sign of closeness, which makes it a structural element of interpersonal relations and of any ethical system. Who, what may be touched with impunity, and where? Different cultures and ages have given categorical answers to these questions. Everyday life at the front violates these inexorable rules of pre-war life. Santanu Das stresses that the haptic experience of the combatants is persistently present in personal archives and literary works from the First World War: „the tactile experience from the horrors of the 'sucking mud that recur in trench diaries, journals and letters to the "full-nerved, still warm boys" of Owen, Nichols and Sassoon to the ordeal of bandaging wound described in memoirs of the women nurses." (Das, 2007: 5). The author detects many nuances in the verbal traces of that experience, in which the body speaks more than the consciousness – homoeroticism, pity and compassion, pain and love, etc.

It is possible to deduce two factors causing the intense activeness of this sense under the conditions of life on the front: the new experience of the body and the intense hunger for consolation and human closeness. In other words, the „pained" body, which makes a person aware of his finitude and the need for consolation, bring about shifts in the hierarchy of the senses that raise touch to a higher position than usual.

In health, the body is self-evident; the healthy body is not problematized, is not the object of special attention. It is not seen *from this side,* from itself, but *from the outside,* even by the person who *inhabits* that body. But when it meets with resistance, when it suffers, feels threatened, the human body breaks into awareness of itself. As Gadamer writes, „I know only too well how illness can make us insistently aware of our bodily nature by creating a disturbance in something which normally in its very freedom from disturbance, almost completely escapes our attention" (Gadamer, 1996: 73). The resistance of the environment (mud[5)], cold and heat, rats and fleas, constant lack of sleep, etc.), the pain of real or imaginary wounds, sickness and constant contact with death – all these accumulated hardships in the trenches create a new bodily experience. Suffering is the force that overturns the world of man, drawing him to see his body from the inside, in its „aliveness and perishability" (Gadamer). The generations that took part in the war had been socialized in the age of deodorization of society and of a kind of social 'anaesthetization': it was as if no one ever died, because proximity to death was left to the doctors and to anesthetics. The battlefield not only brought back the proximity of death, of pain, of suffering, but made of these a living, daily environment, themes that came to the mind of every combatant almost daily.

The soldier on the front inevitably realized he was simultaneously the hunter and the hunted, the victim. The battlefield enclosed the combatant in opposite pos-

sibilities, in conjectures that implicitly pointed to opposite results, due to the chances of killing or being killed, of surviving *this* battle or being crippled in it for life. In such a space full of absolute unpredictability, the normal human psyche is inclined to extreme and quickly changing affects, to reversals from the pleasure and joy that you are alive yet another day to the horror and panic at the next shot coming from the enemy trenches. These sharp swings of mood are an important element of the body's new experience, because the psyche and the somatic element are not mutually impermeable human realities. The wartime body is a 'nervous' body, modeled in its senses by moods that swing with explosive suddenness.

The combatants cannot avoid thinking of death as a possibility that lurks all around; the thought of sufferings never leaves them. Thus, the combatants recognize themselves for what they are: perishable, vulnerable bodies constantly exposed to the growing risk of pain, sickness, and death. However, this situation – alarm and concern of the body, increased acuteness of the senses, physical exhaustion, etc. – has an important consequence. Pain brings insight. The German novelist and essayist Siegfried Lenz calls it „a possibility for fraternity within pain". In suffering, we discover the other, who empathizes with us. Thus, „we become aware that we are not alone" (Lenz, 2000: 26 – 27). Suffering inevitably produces compassion, which is the insight that you are not alone.

To touch the person who shares your fate in the trenches is a precondition and an important part of this insight. It is a key to people opening themselves to each other, because touch is an encounter at a minimal distance. In defining the specific importance of sight for personal interaction, Simmel points out the closeness that appears when *eyes meet.* He stresses that by this act, „the most complete reciprocity in the entire sphere of human relationship" is achieved. Simmel's explanation is that looking into each other's eyes is something more than vision – it creates conditions for those looking to open themselves to each other. Simmel writes, „One reveals oneself in the look that receives the other into oneself; in the same act with which the human subject seeks to recognize its objects it surrenders itself to the object. One cannot take through the eye without at the same time giving. The eye reveals to the other the other the soul that he or she seeks to reveal" (Simmel, op. cit.: 112). Something similar occurs when people touch, because it implies reciprocity between the one who touches and the one who is touched. When reciprocity is present, the touch is not somebody's, because it belongs both to the one who touches and to the one who is touched. Moreover, in touching another, a person feels himself touched as well. The role of touch for drawing people closer together is even greater than when eyes meet, because if the eyes should turn aside, mutuality would slip away, while touch is inevitably mutual giving and taking, a dimension of closeness and mutual trust.

Precisely because the act of touching between combatants in the trenches is a sign of mutuality, it holds an important place in the work of their senses. It is a form

of non-verbal sharing and co-experiencing, a gesture of consoling compassion and personal intercession against fear. That is why it is often mentioned in testimonies about life on the front, which shows that physical proximity through touch reduces the power of fear. S. Das quotes from the diary of a participant in the war, who wrote, „During a bombardment it's terrible to be alone […] one feels that all the enemy guns are pointed at one […] You want to touch someone" (Das, op. cit.: 83). Touch between combatants is not only a form of counteraction against fear. It has a kind of healing function and insures against the feeling of doom and helplessness. An episode from Jünger's diary, telling about his severe war injury, contains the memory of the consoling and cheering touch of his commander's hand, which unburdened him of the terror of expecting death: „This tough man lightly tapped me on the shoulders […] And then, within that mortal exhaustion in which I had fallen, there began to penetrate the feeling of joy, which kept growing and growing […] I thought about death, but this thought did not trouble me anymore" (Jünger, 2013: 67). The frequency of touch in the combatants" world conveys their need for its various functions – to protect them against paralyzing fear[6], to counteract loneliness and the feeling of personal helplessness, and to tacitly awaken the feeling that one is part of a community.

Peacetime attitudes and frontline experiences

Thus, the front changes not only the life but also the being of combatants. Yet, the attitudes of peacetime continue to act behind the stage of battles. Peace is interwoven in the experience of war. An excellent illustration of this divided connection in the lifeworld of the combatant is given in one of Ehrenburg's wartime chronicles about the frontline near the town of Lens. The author had to cross a road that was under heavy artillery fire. He saw a French soldier who was repairing the fence of a little house. Ehrenburg struck up a conversation with him: „What, are they firing?" he asked, though the answer was obvious. The soldier answered calmly, „I don't know, I'm on leave." Ehrenburg succinctly explains the soldier's unusual response: „There, on the front, he cannot fail to be interested whether shells are falling around. But here, he is repairing the fence, even though it might be destroyed by a shell in the next hour. Now he is on leave, he is with himself, he is not at war. The shells do not interest him; death does not concern him" (Ehrenburg, op. cit.). The life of the man in the trenches depends on the effects of falling shells, but amid the shells, he does not cease living in his own home, especially in imagination. So when he is at home, the shells, even though real, are situated only in his imagination. The two worlds are in constant transition from one to the other.

In the lifeworld of the combatants, there are many locations in which peacetime attitudes exist alongside the frontline experiences. Language is the condition without which reality cannot acquire for people the meaning of a *world.* The world becomes a person's world when it passes through the body of language. This is

most evident in the correspondence between soldiers and their families in the rear. The letters contain both the experience from the front and the peacetime attitudes of the soldiers. The language of the letters is shaped by the tension between the two worlds – of war and of peace.

An impressively large number of letters, postcards and parcels were exchanged during the war. Researchers have established that German soldiers sent, on the average, around seven million letters and postcards each day, and the total number of German mail sent between the front and the rear during the years of the war reached 30 billion. French soldiers sent and received a total of 4 million per day, while the British wrote between one and two million letters and postcards daily in 1917 (cf. Hanna, 2015). In summing up the importance of this correspondence, Martha Hanna stresses that it was a very important factor for maintaining high morale and spirit in the soldiers and their dear ones at home. She writes, „Soldiers relied on it for reassurances that those at home remembered and loved them; that their welfare mattered to them; and that they continued to have a civilian identity to which they could return when the war was over" (ibid.). Letters served as a protection against loneliness and the fear of being forgotten; they were a form of resistance against the erosion of one's identity. Correspondence was a remedy against the nightmare of living in a situation of *continuous death.* This effect was achieved insofar as letters promoted, supported the mutuality between people on the front and those in the rear. Correspondence made the experiences of the ones and the others mutually communicable; thus, the lifeworld of the combatants did not shift a dangerously long way from their pre-war lives.

In fact, precisely because this experience was mutually sharable, we may assume that the letters served to maintain the spirit and morale of the correspondents at home as well. The content of war experience had a destabilizing effect because of the terrible hardships, cruelty, pain, arbitrary decisions it involved. This effect was certainly an important element in the experience of *continuous death.* However, in addition to destructive urges and moral traumas, war experience also induced spiritual strength. War was a kind of explosion in the souls of the combatants. But in destroying, it also, to some extent, cleared the soul of hypocrisy; it morally refreshed and sanctified the essence of life. The supreme ordeal of war liberated individuals from certain beliefs and habits and led them to other, simpler and more fundamental ones. War experience changed the understanding of life. And in passing through the soldier's letters, this experience must have inevitably provoked the spirit of their dear ones.

War correspondence, as a connection between the battlefield and the peacetime habitus, displays a kind of paradox – the language of people in the trenches is both impoverished and enriched. The growing verbal crudeness of language and impoverishment of the combatants was due to the hard, long and monotonous everyday life in the trenches, which narrowed down the topics of, and the need for, communi-

cation. The despondency, the causeless irritation, and the understandable reluctance to communicate, inevitably led to a reduction of the soldier's verbal capacity. At the same time, correspondence with the dear ones in the rear stimulated soldiers to emotive verbal emancipation. War separated husband from wife, lover from beloved, son from mother, for long periods of time. It put the love of millions of men and women to a severe test. Physical absence aroused the imagination and erotic desires, provoked jealousy and suspicions, kindled passions and desires, gave rise to nostalgia and reveries. The only place where these intense mental states could find expression was in letters. These were the only possible means to compensate for the long absence. Writing letters proved to be not only an exchange of information but a mastering of a new range of language. In this sense, correspondence expanded the communicative competence of the soldiers – it was in their interest to master the ability of expressing the whole range of intimacy.

The presence of peace in war and of war in peace found particularly striking expression in the lack of fluctuation of criminal behavior before as compared with after the war. Research has shown that the crime rate remained at nearly the same level after the war as before. Statistical data on the dynamics of crime in Germany, France and Great Britain, summarized by Dirk Schumann, show that during the period 1910 – 30, there were no significant changes in the crime rates in these countries. In 1910, the homicide rate in Great Britain was 0.81 and in 1920 it rose slightly to 0.83; but ten years later it fell to 0.75. In France, the violence-related crime rate was 1.6 in 1920, but between 1901 and 1910, it had reached 2.1. The situation in Germany was similar, where violence-related crimes and injuries, even amid the chaos of hyperinflation, were fewer in 1923 than before the war. The severe aggravation of crime that did come about in Germany after the war was not related to violence against persons but to crimes against property under the conditions of intense inflation (cf. Schumann, 2004: 9 – 18)[7].

The indications provided by statistics that the level of brutality and aggressive behavior were almost the same in the years after and before the First World War point in two directions. On the one hand, these data convince us that, even though it was a field for display of fury, excess, violence, the war was not able to erase the pre-war attitudes of the people involved in it. The peacetime attitudes in the life-world of combatants were not a weak, residual thing. On the other hand, however the lacks of significant fluctuation in the levels of brutality before and after the war suggest that, though seemingly accidental, the war did not break out by accident. Its unexpected entry into the peaceful European landscape at the start of the 20th century was well prepared – to a lesser degree by military preparations than by a long anthropological treatment that had been hidden behind trends very different from it and hence invisible to public attention.

The war had a brutal impact upon the combatants, it shook their understanding of themselves and the world, it eroded their self-confidence as „normal people“,

it changed the hierarchy and the workings of their senses, it destroyed, in the final account, some of their previous „Selves“. In the face of *continuous death,* the soldiers on the front were forced to live an „un-normal life“. In many respects, the battlefield changed their peacetime habitus. But evidently this habitus, the ‘incorporated history’(Bourdieu) of individuals and the groups to which they belonged, resisted and did not give in to depersonalization. The combatants“ lifeworld could not possibly be homogeneous: it was structured, on the one hand, by bundles of experiences of the soldier self-identifying both as hunter and as hunted prey; and on the other, by the layers of live and active „legacies“ of peacetime life. The lifeworld had a mosaic pattern and was penetrated by peace and war simultaneously. The combatants experienced events around them, but deep inside these experiences laid the values and attitudes they had brought to the trenches from peacetime life. For the soldiers, the front was not a home but a temporary, dramatic place of residence.

NOTES

1. In this text, words such as *frontline soldier*, *warrior*, *combatants*, and *man-at-war* refer to persons engaged in war on the frontline.
2. The First World War was the most „murderous“ war of the 20th century. Whereas in the Second World War the percentage of the killed was about 4.5 percent of all the individuals involved in fighting, in the First World War the percentage was near to 10 percent. For the duration of 51 months, the war killed an average of 900 French soldiers each day.
3. Ilya Ehrenburg, who during the war was a war correspondent for the French press at the Western Front, described these tanks as „a combination of something archaic and ultra-American, of Noah’s Ark and the autobus of the 21st century.“ (Ehrenburg, 1923: 69)
4. The history of the senses makes it possible to give greater density to the images of the past. The reconstruction of events in terms of how they were seen and heard „at the time“, what passed through the olfactory sense of people living then, is a difficult but necessary task. Since historiography is a sort of „resurrection of the dead“ (J. Ortega-y-Gasset), it would be unsuccessful and incomplete without including a history of the functioning of the senses under different circumstances in the respective epoch.
5. Marc Bloch, who fought in the First World War, calls it „war in the mud“. „Mud“ is the word that recurs remarkably often in his memoirs, written in 1915 – 1916. (cf. Bloch 1988: 36, 42, 98, 102, 108, 152).
6. Gadamer points out the etymological connection between pain, touch and treatment. The German verb for treating a patient is *behandeln*, equivalent to the Latin *palpare.* It means, with the hand (*palpus*), carefully and responsively feeling the patient’s body so as to detect strains and tensions which can perhaps help to confirm or correct the pations’s own subjective localization, that is, the pation’s experience of pain (Gadamer, 1996: 108).

7. Dirk Schumann refers to these statistical data as an argument against E. Hobsbawm's widespread view that the First World War played the role of a „machine for brutalizing the world", and against the explanation that this „brutalization" created the conditions that made National Socialism seem attractive. Schumann distinguishes two forms of brutalization: that of the soldiers as individuals, and that of the political culture in Germany, Russia, and Italy that produced politically motivated violence. (Schumann, op. cit. 16).

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