Introduction: Close Encounters in War and the Emotions

By the Editors

The universe of emotions has always represented a major challenge for research in every field of knowledge, from Philosophy to Physics, from Psychology to the Arts. Although everyone knows what emotions are insofar as almost everyone can "feel", when it comes to providing a clear or systematic explanation of emotions, scholars from a range of disciplines struggle to find common ground. One breakthrough that has oriented research agendas since the 1990s consists in the claim that the human mind is – despite the rationalist tradition rooted in Descartes's philosophy and the following theories of Enlightenment and Positivism – emotional (see, for example, pivotal studies by Antonio Damasio and Joseph Ledoux in the 1990s). Interdisciplinary studies see cognitivists collaborating with psychologists (Hollitscher, *Aggressionstrieb*), anthropologists (Fried and others, *War*), sociologists (Ahäll & Gregory, *Emotions, Politics and War*), and historians (Langhamer, Noakes & Siebrecht, *Total War*) to understand the link between war and the emotions.

The so-called "emotional turn" is perhaps the most recent development in the scholarship on war. Social and cultural approaches to the study of war and conflict have allowed the expansion of this field beyond politics, military history and strategy, thus repositioning the focus of the history of war on society more broadly. Gender studies, for example, have shown the impact of cultural constructs on masculinity and femininity in wartime (Diamond, *Women and the Second World War in France*; Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*), whereas the more recent "memory boom" has established the complexity of the memories of war and the ways in which they are affected by experience, trauma and the specific contexts of remembering (Ashplant, Dawson & Roper, *Commemorating War*; Thomson, *Anzac Memories*; and Winter, *Remembering War*). Zooming in on emotions and feelings as categories for historical and interdisciplinary analysis in the field of war and conflict thus seems like a crucial step forward.

During the preparation of Issue n. 3, devoted to post-traumatic stress disorder, we grew even more aware that war and emotions are deeply entwined. We may even dare to say that if humans go to war, it is mostly due to emotions, although the rational urge to organise and explain war in terms of science is equally powerful (as historian Bernd Hüppauf and ethologist Irenäus Eibl-Eibelsfeld have demonstrated). People caught in a war are exposed to a

great number of emotional stimuli that affect their reactions, decision-making, and eventually their ability to remember their experiences. Emotions caused by propaganda, the feeling of "belonging", affective bonds, ethical inclinations, and cultural notions such as racism, nationalism, patriotism, cosmopolitanism, are only some of the numerous and varied contributing factors that may lead people to take part in a war enthusiastically or to avoid it at all costs. We believe that the "close encounter" is a fundamental emotional experience in war, as far as we can learn from the most ancient testimonies like the Epic of Gilgamesh up to science fiction, even considering its smallest sample, i.e. Fredric Brown's powerful short story *Sentry*.

War involves emotions on the broadest scale, from courage, joy, and aggression to disgust, anxiety, and fear, which Joanna Bourke claims to be the most important emotion in war (*The Emotions in War*: 315). The emotional mark of war is not limited to the time of combat, but lingers on over the decades, haunting and shaping the communities that have to deal with the emotional turmoil that affects the veterans and their families (Hutchison & Blaiker, *Grief and the Transformation of Emotions after War*), sometimes giving birth to traditions, subcultural movements, and even political currents that use the emotional legacy of war as a tool to gain power, such as Fascism in Italy in 1919. Aesthetic representations, above all in movies, but also in literary artefacts like novels and personal narratives, often suggest the misleading idea that the combatants' response to violence, killing, suffering, and dehumanisation be overwhelmingly difficult or far too easy. Conversely, all emotional reactions are context-related and escape any attempt to determine their magnitude and intensity *a priori* and schematically, without assessing the actual conditions in which such emotions were triggered, felt, and eventually elaborated consciously (Malešević, *Is It Easy to Kill in War?*: 5-6, 12-24 and 28). The elusive nature of the emotions in war has even urged mathematicians and engineers to elaborate programs for combat modelling that should provide the military with the "implementation of realistic models of combatant emotion" (Van Dyke Parunak and others, *Representing Dispositions and Emotions in Simulated Combat*). Controlling emotions in war, both on the individual and collective levels, has always been one of the fundamental aims of drill and military discipline, but recent studies show that the final goal of keeping emotions under control in the multifaceted context of war remains far from being achieved. Understanding what emotions do in war, and what war does to emotions is possible, instead, by means of observation and data collection.

The fourth issue of CEIWJ investigates the theme of close encounters in connection to emotions by exploring its facets both on a micro-scale, by

studying individual testimonies and experiences, and on a theoretical and critical basis throughout history. The articles that we propose frame the topic from the perspectives of anthropology, classical theatre, photography, personal narratives, literary representations, cultural memory, and oral history. The articles are distributed into two groups: the first section includes three articles by Maria Arpaia, Alessandra Rosati, and Lise Zurné that mainly focus on literary representation and performance; the second hosts four contributions by Dalila Colucci, Lindsey Dodd, Joana Etchart, and Mara Josi that explore the topic of emotions in war theoretically and from the perspective of witnessing through photography, personal narratives, and oral history.

The contributions

Maria Arpaia's *Fear, Self-Pity, and War in Fifth-Century Athenian Tragedy: Ethos and Education in a Warrior Society* considers the representation of war-related emotions (above all fear and self-pity) in the Greek tragedies written by Aeschylus and Euripides after the Persian War and the Peloponnesian War. By taking into account the pedagogical role of theatre in ancient Greek culture, the author claims that "the theatrical performance was an occasion to permit the citizens to experience fear, pity and compassion in a safe way to develop self-awareness" (*infra*, p. 12). to support this claim, Arpaia analyses the importance of the visual element to trigger the emotions of fear and horror (hence the feeling of pity) through the synesthetic performance of the tragedy, in which spoken word, dance, and music combine to convey a powerful emotional drive. The historical determination of the context within which this occurred is crucial to the argumentation because Aeschylus and Euripides experienced two profoundly different wars. The former looked at the ethos of warriorhood after the Persian War, by depicting in *Seven against Thebes* the fear-stricken Athenian community facing the imminent danger of invasion. The *Chorus* embodies in this tragedy the voice of the people – especially women – that would suffer the greatest suffering in the case on a military defeat. Euripides, with *Trojan Women* looks instead at the disastrous aftermath of the inter-Greek Peloponnesian war, that weakened the cities and unmasked the real imperialistic aggressiveness of Athens. By observing the effects of war from the perspective of the vanquished Trojan women that the Greek victors have deported to their land as slaves, Euripides "describes a scenario that resembles a modern humanitarian crisis and depicts the feelings and grief of displaced people, especially women, seeking refuge from war and annihilation" (*infra*, p. 21). in conclusion, Arpaia explains that the *Chorus* played a crucial role as far as it embodied non-conventional perspectives (women, slaves, outsiders, and so on) and thus

managed to influence the citizens' decision-making process to form the ethical opinion of the broader political body.

Alessandra Rosati's *Wounded Cities, Fragmented Selves: Walking, Melancholia and the Interwar Novel. Woolf's* Mrs Dalloway *and Bontempelli's* La vita operosa radically changes historical era and lands in post-war Europe of the 1920s. By sharing with Arpaia a comparative approach, Rosati brings together two different authors who look at the aftermath of the Great War from the perspective of a veteran who is apparently displaced in the big city (London and Milan), which is represented as the impersonal background where the modern human being experiences the feeling of melancholia. The two novels represent opposite trajectories of post-war demobbing: as Septimus – one of the main characters in *Mrs Dalloway* – struggles with melancholia and eventually succumbs to its gloom and commits suicide, the protagonist of Bontempelli's novel finds his way to reconcile with life and go on by ironically "counter-mourning" the bleak condition of the veteran and the death-drive triggered by the haunting memory of the war. In both cases, mourning and melancholia shape the inner landscape of the two characters, who defy their societies in which they struggle to find their place. In both cases, the war affects "the perceptions of post-war urban reality of the main characters of Bontempelli's and Woolf's novels, which share the modernist preoccupation with self-knowledge and the difficult negotiation of the social system in the face of madness, death and the irrational conditions occasioned by the war" (*infra*, p. 48).

The article *Sensing World War II: Affect, Ritual and Community in Historical Re-Enactment*, by Lise Zurné, turns to look at a different conception of performance and representation, namely the practice of re-enactment. Since historians started considering with attention this kind of direct approach to the past, re-enactment has become the object of a series of academic studies that problematize its validity while praising its effectiveness and pedagogical usefulness as a powerful means to access history. After briefly discussing the state of the art about re-enactment in connection with WWII and beyond, Zurné focuses on two groups of performers who portrayed in 2020 the 277 *Volksgrenadierdivision* of the German *Wehrmacht* and the United States Army Nurse Corps. By interviewing the re-enactors, the author aims to grasp the emotional substrate of this form of historical storytelling in which embodiment, physicality and emotions play a major role in connecting people with the past and in particular with the context of war, by means of processes of authentication. The concept of *liminoid* conditions (such as "immersion") and space (where the re-enactors place themselves in the past) is key to accessing

the practice of re-enactment, which implies the encounter between the present person and an "avatar" that has to do with a *liminoid* past. The body is the real place of this encounter, with the corollary of feelings and emotions that allow the re-enactors to look at the past differently than they would for example by reading a book. This eventually can even create social and affective bonds similar to those existing in war among comrades. In conclusion, Zurné claims that "as an embodied practice, re-enactment is particularly insightful in the study of emotions, not simply because re-enactors aim to approximate the actions, thoughts, and emotions of historical actors [...], but also because emotions are experienced, learned, and mediated through practices of the body" (*infra*, p. 71).

With *Images of Propaganda: Emotional Representations of the Italo-Turkish War*, Dalila Colucci examines how the visual imagery mediated the perception of the colonial war between Italy and Turkey for the control of Libya in 1911, in Italy and abroad, depicting the conflict as a glorious mission of civilization and easy land appropriation. The author analyses a collection of photographs taken by witnesses during the war, stored at Harvard University, and compares these photographic sources with contemporary illustrations which appeared in European magazines and newspapers between 1911 and 1912. Based on this study the author claims that "the emotional effects of the visual imagery of the Italo-Turkish War fostered a collective falsification mechanism: one that emphasized the experience of the conflict as a heroic adventure, in contrast with the reality of the combats and massacres that were taking place, all the while unconsciously denouncing the colonialist gaze" (*infra*, p. 85). The use of photographic testimonies allows Colucci to analyse the non-verbal narrative by focusing on its rhetorical and emotional strategies and distortion, because "the narrative and visual manipulation of these facts from the Italian point of view embodies the most interesting case of sentimental misrepresentation of the Italo-Turkish War" (*infra*, p. 86).

Lindsey Dodd's *Fellow-Feeling in Childhood Memories of Second World War France: Sympathy, Empathy and the Emotions of History* examines fellow feeling in a selection of French childhood oral narratives from WW2 to demonstrate that more attention should be paid to the complex ways that emotions affect the story(ing) of the past. The author frames her work within a thorough theoretical discussion of the concepts of "fellow feeling", empathy, and "composure" of the oral testimony as an intersubjective and emotion-affected source, to claim that historians should consider emotions not only as a content to interpret but rather as an actively constructing factor of the very process of interview-building: "We can therefore consider many – if not all – oral history narratives

to be structured by feeling and that feeling may be discerned by looking for affective intensities […]. Thus tracking articulated and unarticulated feelings can provide insight into past emotional states when memories were laid down, and present ones as they are told" (*infra*, p. 140). These observations draw attention on the centrality of empathy (in comparison with sympathy) in the epistemological and gnoseological processes of oral history. These concepts refer to states of mind, inclinations, or predispositions that affect profoundly the encounter between the historian and the witness, in a dialectic confrontation that requires methodological awareness, adjustment, and interpretation. The article then moves on to propose three case studies. By referring to this theoretical framework, Dodd highlights in this part of her contribution the importance of "recalibrating" fellow feeling and eventually lands on the "ethical demand" at the limits of empathy, because "fellow-feeling, whether sympathy or empathy, engenders a set of moral and ethical questions about who should or can feel what about whom, why, and with what consequences" (*infra*, p. 154).

"It's a Very Emotional Kind of Thought". An Appraisal of Five Community Workers' Accounts of their Involvement during the Troubles in Northern Ireland, by Joana Etchart, continues to explore the emotional aspects of oral history, this time by focusing on the Irish context of the so-called "Troubles". By building on state of the art about affective disorders, Etchart seeks to identify what emotional patterns may be drawn from the sample interviews that she provides as case studies, i.e. five testimonies by social workers who were involved in the Troubles. In agreement with the previous author, Dodd, Etchart, too, posits "that personal accounts may be taken into consideration in the historical analysis even when they are subjective" (*infra*, p. 162), which also means to consider feelings, emotions and affective experiences as constructive factors in oral history. The selected interviews present one further element of emotional disruption as far as the witnesses belonged to non-violent communities, which made their encounter with the conflict rather challenging and emotionally disturbing. As a consequence, fear seems to become the predominant emotion involved in the process of re-elaboration of past experiences. The author identifies signs "such as the reference to an emotional experience – fear for instance – but also less obvious signs pertaining to the oral nature of the sources – such as allusive pace and phrasing", which are "key indicators of various phenomena of infiltration and of affective disorders of historical significance" (*infra*, p. 179). Once more, oral history demands that historians approach their witnesses by carrying a complex set of methodological instruments, including psychological, anthropological, semiotic, and hermeneutic tools as well.

Mara Josi concludes the collection with her *Emotions Out of Pages:* Si può stampare *by Silvia Forti Lombroso*, which analyses the presence, meaning, and transformation of emotions and feelings in Siliva Forti Lombroso's diary, a Jewish woman (and a relative of Cesare Lombroso), who lived in Trieste when the Italian racial laws were emanated in 1938 and fled into hiding when the Germans occupied Italy after 8th September 1943. The relevance of the source consists of two main reasons: the first is that "the diary is an act of transfer which provides an inter- and trans-generational dialogue about an ordinary everyday life in the extraordinary circumstances of discrimination, persecution and the war in Italy [with] the potential to reach a wider readership and promote the understanding of historical events through sensorial and emotional descriptions" (*infra*, p. 189), and in this sense it works as a "prosthetic memory" and a "emotional bridge over time"; the second is that as a personal narrative the diary is also capable of voicing subjects that have been excluded from mainstream historical narratives such as women and the "little people", thus accounting for a multifaceted past. These points of strength combined make the diary a powerful source of information and, more than that, a material source capable of "changing readers' perceptions, adding to their knowledge, and influencing their everyday communication", as far as "emotions, sense of empathy, and identification can […] influence the perception of historical 'data' […] and engender forms of prosthetic memory" (*infra*, p. 200).

References

Ashplant, Timothy, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper (eds.). *Commemorating War. The Politics of Memory*. London: Routledge, 2004.

Bourke, Joanna. *The Emotions in War: Fear and the British and American Military, 1914-45*. «Historical Research», 74, 185 (2001): 314-330.

Eibl-Eibesfeldt, Irenäus. *The Biology of Peace and War. Men, Animals and Aggression*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1979.

————. *Warfare, Man's Indoctrinability and Group Selection*. «Zeitschrift für Tierpsychologie», 60 (1982): 177-198.

Eibl-Eibesfeldt, Irenäus and Frank Salter. *Indoctrinability, Ideology, and Warfare. Evolutionary Perspectives*, Oxford, Berghan, 1996.

Damasio, Antonio. *Descartes' Error*. New York: Avon Books, 1994.

Diamond, Hanna. *Women and the Second World War in France, 1939-48. Choices and Constraints*. London: Routledge, 1999.

Fried, Morton, Marvin Harrys and Robert Murphy (eds.). *War. The Anthropology of Armed Conflict and Aggression*. New York: Garden City, 1968.

Ahäll, Linda and Thomas Gregory (eds.). *Emotions, Politics and War*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2015.

Hollitscher, Walter (ed.). *Aggressionstrieb und Krieg*. Stuttgart: DVA, 1973.

Hüppauf, Bernd. *Der moderne Krieg und das Irrationale*. In *Schuld und Sühne? Kriegserlebnis und Kriegsdeutung in deutsche Medien der Nachkriegszeit (1945-1961). Ergebnisse der internationalen Konferenz vom 01.-04. 09. 1999 in Berlin*. Ed. by Ursula Heukenkamp. «Amsterdamer Beiträge zur neueren Germanistik», 50, 1-2 (2001): (1) 155-171.

Hutchison, Emma and Roland Blaiker. *Grief and the Transformation of Emotions after War*. In *Emotions, Politics and War*. Ed. by Linda Åhäll and Thomas Gregory. Abingdon: Routledge, 2015. 210-221.

Langhamer, Claire, Lucy Noakes and Claudia Siebrecht (eds.). *Total War. An Emotional History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.

LeDoux, Joseph. *The Emotional Brain*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

Malešević, Siniša. *The Act of Killing: Understanding the Emotional Dynamics of Violence on the Battlefield*, «Critical Military Studies», 7 (2021): 313-334.

————. *Is it Easy to Kill in War? Emotions and Violence in the Combat Zones of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (1991-1995)*. «European Journal of Sociology», (2020): 1-31.

Summerfield, Penny. *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998.

Thomson, Alistair. *Anzac Memories. Living with the Legend*. Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2013.

Van Dyke Parunak, H. and Others. *Representing Dispositions and Emotions in Simulated Combat*. Paper presented at the Workshop on Defence Applications of Multi-Agent Systems (DAMAS05) at AAMAS05, Utrecht, Altarum Institute, July 2005.

Winter, Jay. *Remembering War. The Great War and Historical Memory in the Twentieth Century*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006.