Introduction

The war of 1914–18 belongs to no one, not even to historians. Since its outbreak, there has been a veritable tide of publications destined for many different audiences throughout the world on the subject of the war. Certainly, interest has fluctuated; indeed, during some periods the First World War has been marginalized by the Second World War, but at no time has there been a consensus that the history of the Great War has been written once and for all. Even today, the subject remains an open one, and inspires passionate debate; although receding over the horizon of living memory, the subject remains vivid, and this fascination is evident in new books produced by well-known historians who are not particular specialists in this period. The eminent scholar Jean-Baptiste Duroselle completed his career by writing a new synthesis on the French people and the Great War (Duroselle, 1994).[1]

The volume of work in this field is dizzying in its magnitude. It would take several working lives just to read the existing literature on the Great War: more than 50,000 titles are listed in the library of the Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine in Paris. The French journal *Revue historique* published 757 reviews or bibliographical notices between 1919 and 2002; in the same period, there were 420 articles and reviews in a cluster of Anglo-Saxon historical journals, whose holdings have been digitized and preserved by the on-line repository, JSTOR. In the French case, since the 1970s the *Revue historique* has ceased to serve as a place of publication in this field, even though it has grown dramatically in the 1980s and 1990s. From 1983 to 1998 there have appeared more than 1,100 new books on the Great War in French, and over 100 were published in the year 1998 alone.[2] Each week new books are published in France or elsewhere, some of which break new ground, some of which go over the old ground again. Many articles, at times more important in the development of the subject than books, are published by journals, the number of which is growing as well. We must add too films, television documentaries, exhibitions, museums, internet sites whose narratives both draw on and contribute to the work of professional historians.

It is surprising, therefore, that ninety years after the war we still lack a general analysis of the ways in which this history has been written. Histories of the war, of its battles, its machines, its many facets, fill entire libraries, but no one to our knowledge has put the question as to whether this literature is structured in particular ways, or if, at particular moments, particular topics or questions were dealt with, or how successive developments related to one another. Is it the case that these studies repeat each other or do they pose new questions and provide new answers for different audiences in different contexts? Here is the heart of this book's enquiry.

To begin to respond to these questions, we must limit our field of vision to the history of the war itself, its conduct and its immediate consequences. To study the middle-term and long-term consequences of the war for the major belligerents and for the world it overturned is beyond our reach. Above all, we privilege books, and not scholarly articles, which are less accessible, although many of these play an essential role in the making of historical knowledge.[3]

In this dense and multiform forest, we have tried to trace the most important pathways. We certainly do not intend to provide prizes for outstanding works, or to pretend to offer an exhaustive review of such a huge body of writing. Of course we are well aware that there are many important books we have not cited. We hope readers will forgive us, and not conclude that our objective, already daunting, is thereby unattainable. First and foremost we aim to describe the trends or patterns of historical enquiry and knowledge in one particular field. We aim to show how the historical category 'The First World War' has been constructed. We are interested in the way historians and non-historians have contributed to this task, and by the different themes adopted in different periods by writers in different national contexts. This task transcends professional, chronological, and national boundaries. Our aim is to explore what questions have been posed, what definitions used, what themes have been broached. In sum, how has the history of the Great War been written?

Such a project requires as broad an approach as possible in order not to prejudge our findings. We have rejected three simplifications of this subject which would have eased our task, but which would have barred us from our objective. First, we do not restrict our discussion solely to professional historians, who after all do not hold a monopoly in this field. We do privilege the work of our colleagues, past and present, but accept that the boundaries of our profession are porous in at least two respects. Not only

within the English-speaking academy, historians have been joined in this field by other specialists, by literary scholars and sociologists in particular, whose similar and different points of view help to deepen historical enquiry. But the academy itself is not a closed environment. Many historians write for a general public, and many central figures in the war itself published their memoirs in the form of historical accounts. Some writers and journalists have tried to write history, at times with success. In the chorus of voices which have contributed to the history of the war, historians have not been alone.

This historiography bears the marks of two kinds of crossing vectors, one outside the historical profession, one inside it. Public expectations and preoccupations have changed; the questions posed about the First World War have been transformed by the Second World War, by the wars in Algeria and Vietnam. For our generation, attitudes to tolerable levels of violence, and to the body, patterns of consumption, and modes of living are radically different from those of a century ago. French or British children pass through Europe now much more fully than their grandfathers passed through Britain or France. National sentiments are no longer expressed about the same questions. The reading of history has changed under the impact of different or complementary narratives. Professional history is not immune from these changes, but it follows particular trends and has massively expanded. There are new research centres; new archives have been opened. The mode of writing history has changed, and each generation writes its own dictionary of what it terms the 'new history'. The history of the Great War never escapes from this broader context, and forces us to ask how different this body of writing is from other fields of specialization.

Secondly, we refuse to recognize thematic or narrow temporal boundaries. The majority of books which bear the title 'history of the war' generally deal only with its military, diplomatic, or political aspects. If we had limited our discussion solely to these books, we would be unable to understand how this kind of history intersects with others – social, cultural, and economic history in particular. In more general books, in which the war appears only in some chapters or which deal with a longer span of time, new interpretations of the war can emerge. We therefore do not ignore studies which begin before or continue after the Armistice, since many of these books account for the significance of the war through their very periodization. A broad and inclusive approach to the field we are studying is necessary in order to account for the relative significance of political, diplomatic, military, economic, social, and cultural histories at different times and the ways in which these approaches take on different configurations.

Thirdly and finally, since war is a multinational phenomenon, it would have been absurd to restrict this study to the historiography of one country. If we were to focus on French writing in this field alone, we would be unable to appreciate the upward inflection of Anglophone scholarship. As the audience for French publications wanes, that in English grows ever larger, reflecting the growth of the English-speaking academy. In addition, we have taken into account aspects of the German literature in this field, either in the original or translated into English, and some studies written by Italian scholars. On the other hand, for practical reasons, we have neither treated the complex historiography of nationalities inside the Austro-Hungarian Empire, nor have we included works in Soviet and Russian historiography. Another deliberate omission is the growing literature on the Great War from the vantage point of Asian, African, and Latin American history. We leave these subjects to further consideration by our colleagues professionally trained to do so.

This threefold framework provides us with a flexible mode of analysing change over time and over themes. This interest in the diachronic and thematic requires us from to time to return to similar subjects. We have tried to limit such overlaps, but eliminating them all would have diminished our treatment of particular subjects. Many publications are not restricted to a particular domain, and in light of recent scholarly work earlier sources take on new significance. For example, the series sponsored by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace has to be seen first as the testimony of those who ran important facets of the war effort. Secondly, it is the earliest pillar of our understanding of the economic history of the war. Thirdly, no one can write the social and cultural history of the conflict without reference to many of its volumes. After all, when visiting a town, if one passes time and again a central square, it does not mean that the visit is ill-planned, but that the square is indeed a central one.

These assumptions which we share inform our collaboration, which has emerged from discussions and a friendship decades long. But this wish to write in two voices, for each of which we both take responsibility, has been enlightening. It has enabled us to emphasize the dialogue between different national histories, and to stress the national framework which still dominates historical writing about the war. Hence this book about the history of the disintegration of an older Europe may serve as a kind of introduction to a more European history of the First World War, which one day must be written if Europe is ever to forge its own identity.

NOTES

1. In order to lighten the weight of references in the text, we refer to works cited in the bibliography in this form, familiar to sociologists, in which author's name and date suffice to indicate first publication of the work in its original language, and page references are given for quotations from individual works.
2. Jean-Charles Jauffret, 'Quinze ans d'historiographie française sur la Grande Guerre 1983–1998: essai de bilan', in Maurin and Jauffret, 2002, pp. 39–67, followed by a research bibliography, pp. 68–143.
3. Key references to scholarly articles will be cited as endnotes to the text of each chapter.

1 Three historiographical configurations

For the soldiers, at least on the Western Front, there is no doubt: the war which began in 1914 ended on 11 November 1918, when they no longer had to fear for their lives. But for heads of state, the war ended later, either with the peace treaties or with their implementation. It had begun before mobilization, at the moment of the assassination of Franz-Ferdinand at Sarajevo, or even earlier, with the Balkan wars, or the Franco-German crisis over Agadir. Professional soldiers include the war plans which unfolded on both sides in August 1914. For the French administration, the end of hostilities was fixed by law as 24 October 1919, and emergency regulations lapsed on 15 November. Hence the boundaries of war are not fixed once and for all, because war is not a discrete entity, but something intricately lived, conceptualized, and imagined. It is an actual experience, to which contemporaries gave meaning by thinking about it. The vocabulary acutely discloses this diversity of experiences and meanings. Of course, the words 'the war of 1914–18', 'world war', or 'Great War' do not have precisely the same meaning.

Historical writings are part of this social construction of the historical object. The passage of time induces a kind of sedimentation, and close to a century after these events historians may persuade themselves that they hold a monopoly on this history. The multiple voices, which, in the turmoil of collective and individual emotions, conjured up these events, died out progressively, while the voices of historians were amplified, buoyed up by prior studies. If we wait long enough, the Great War will join the Thirty Years War or the Peloponnesian wars in the broad domain reserved exclusively to historians. But when passions and anxieties were still vivid, everyone spoke about the war, and many tried to share their understanding of it. Everyone had something to say about it. Here is a clear sign of great historical events, moments in history about which people continue to speak.

At the same time history, as a particular kind of narrative, defined by its own rules and procedures, progressively emerged from a set of discursive fields outside it, some of which have historical elements – like first-person

accounts or comments – which are not yet history but will become part of it. It is all too easy to separate history from the materials out of which it is constructed; the opposition of the witness and the historian, of the document and the historical narrative, of the construction of evidence and of its interpretation, all provide the basis for a reassuring epistemology. This conception gives the historian a pre-eminent position, because it makes him the master of meaning who renders order out of the chaos of evidence and documents. Unfortunately, things are not so simple. To make this point, it is sufficient to analyse how the history of the First World War has been constructed.

The first configuration: military and diplomatic

When historical actors and professional historians were one

Very rapidly contemporaries understood that they were living through an exceptional event, of epic character, which formed part of history on the grand scale. They named it the Great War already in 1915.[1] Its history did not await the silencing of the guns. One is struck by this precocity. Just as it was won and lost, the Battle of the Marne became an historical subject. Here it is impossible to separate different narrative forms: generals telling the story of their battles speak as witnesses as well as historians. Their testimony rests on direct knowledge which professional historians later analyse and utilize. Of course generals write with a view to defending their reputation and their strategic choices, and these motives are not sufficient to discredit their narratives. This braiding together of witnessing and history is characteristic of the first period, when the most learned and apparently impartial books, often illustrated like the massive history of Hanotaux (1915–23), were no less influenced by friendships, relationships, or political commitments, all the more at a time when all these authors were well aware of the importance of their writings for the morale of the nation.

This merging of actors, witnesses, and historians defines the first historiographical configuration, which did not end at the Armistice but continued later on as politicians and diplomats followed in the footsteps of the generals. The historical narrative was just beginning, in the form of the collection and the critique of documents. In each issue, the *Revue d'histoire de la guerre mondiale* put side by side articles by historians, by witnesses, by generals, and by diplomats. The French *Revue historique* reviewed works of popularization, at times booklets sold at kiosks in railway stations, as well as the memoirs of the main actors, and historical studies. History had not yet emerged from its chrysalis.

In this configuration, it is important to recognize the pre-eminent role played by the series sponsored by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. In chapter 5 and elsewhere we will analyse this project in greater detail, but, for the moment, it should suffice to emphasize these particular points. This project was the largest single historical enterprise ever constructed. It was a 'comprehensive economic history of the war, the theme of which should be the extent of displacement caused by the war in the normal process of civilization' (Shotwell, 1924, p. 1). There were 132 volumes published on almost every belligerent nation and some neutral countries, through national committees composed of bureaucrats, businessmen, statesmen, as well as some economists and historians. The British committee included both Keynes and Beveridge, who was responsible for manpower and food supply during the war. The French committee was composed of Charles Gide, Charles Rist, Arthur Fontaine, and the historian Henri Hauser, who was during the war one of the advisors of the Minister of Trade, Etienne Clémentel. This series remains of the highest interest to historians, because of the position of their authors in scholarship and administration, and the documentation they personally had at their disposal.

The primacy of diplomatic questions

The main undertaking of this first configuration was the publication of full sets of diplomatic documents. In effect, contemporaries were haunted by a central question which dominated their work: that of war guilt. It is difficult today to appreciate the amplitude and intensity of this debate. The ordeal had been so long, so hard, so murderous, the cost had been so staggering, that everyone absolutely had to know why it had broken out and why it had lasted so long. Each nation was convinced of the justice of its cause. The Germans had been persuaded of the reality of the menace of encirclement which presented them with the danger of an aggressive France set on revenge and of Allies determined to block German access to the place she deserved as a robust world power. They clung to the notion that all they had done was to defend themselves. To them their defeat was unjust, all the more so since article 231 of the Versailles Treaty made them bear sole responsibility for the war. Arguments tending to minimize the significance of this article did not reach a population in a state of shock. Even before the historians began to intervene, two incompatible versions of the subject of war guilt lived side by side.

To establish the validity of their arguments, governments undertook the publication of official documents, not only on the immediate origins of the war, but on the whole field of international relations which

determined the alliance system and then precipitated the war. Each government mobilized its professional historians to manage this task and to assure its objectivity. Of course, when the archives were opened in later years the views drawn from these documents would be corrected. But for the time being, these vast publications of diplomatic documents dominated the work of historians and absorbed their energies. As universities were weak institutions, professional historians were few in number; hence their role in the global historical literature was limited. They published fewer books than did actors, witnesses, and diverse essayists.

This general situation varied country by country. The French case is distinguished from others in two respects. On the one hand, the Faculties of Letters were weaker than elsewhere. They emerged effectively only from the 1880s; they had few students and graduated in history approximately 100 students each year. There were few Professors of history: fifty-five throughout the country, covering the history of every period and every nation. In the Sorbonne, Seignobos was the only Professor of the 'political history of modern and contemporary times'. On the other hand, this weakness was balanced by the exceptional importance given to the teaching of history in high schools. The teaching of history was obligatory in all secondary schools and was taught by specialized teachers, who numbered 620 in 1914. Such a huge historical event as the Great War could not remain outside the classroom. The teaching of this subject was launched officially in 1929, but even before that date the author of the most widely used textbook, Jules Isaac, completed in 1921 the classic text of Albert Malet, killed in the war, by adding a chapter of 100 pages in a separate volume, on the history of the war.[2]

Since French universities were relatively weak, historical enquiry about the war was centred on a particular institution run by the Ministry of Public Instruction under the supervision of a professional committee: the Library and Museum of the War, which rapidly became the Library of Contemporary International Documentation (BDIC).[3] This library was linked to the Society for the History of the War, which from 1923 published the *Revue d'histoire de la guerre mondiale*. This journal later became the *Revue d'histoire de la deuxième guerre mondiale*, and today (2004) is *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*. The BDIC was directed by Camille Bloch, and a young *agrégé* in history,[4] Pierre Renouvin, who had lost his left arm in the Battle of the Chemin des Dames in 1917, served as librarian. As early as 1922, he was invited to lecture in the Sorbonne about the origins of the war (Renouvin, 1925b). He was elected to a chair in history in the Sorbonne in 1932. His professional and moral authority was above reproach. Editor of the *Revue historique*, dean of the Sorbonne from 1955 to 1958, chairman of the National Foundation of Political

Science, he directed the publication of French diplomatic documents. A member of the Institut de France, honoured by the highest degree of the Legion of Honour, Renouvin dominated the history of the Great War and that of contemporary political history until his retirement in 1964 and his death ten years later.[5] Neither in Germany nor in the United Kingdom did a single outstanding historian tower over the history of the Great War as did Renouvin. Across the Rhine, the war was too dark and too conflicted a memory; across the English Channel, it seemed too recent for historical analysis, and the Oxford English History abruptly stopped in 1914. There were exceptions, though. Cruttwell's military history of the war appeared in 1934, though it never approached Renouvin's work in stature.

Renouvin's reputation was definitively established by his volume 19 in the great series 'Peoples and civilizations' edited by Halphen and Sagnac, a parallel project to the many volumes published at the same time as the Cambridge Histories. Isaac, who did not share and sometimes criticized Renouvin's views, reviewed this book in the warmest terms. This book is, Isaac wrote, 'the first synthesis which can be considered as scientific. I would readily say that this book, respectful of the rules of the art, is a perfect example of the kind of historical writing celebrated in the French university, the methods and principles of which our masters Langlois and Seignobos have set out.'[6] This large volume (640 pages) has been re-published and updated in 1939, 1948, 1962, 1969 (776 pages in the 1969 edition). Its status as a classic rests on the breadth of its learning, the precision of its documentation, the rigorous nature of its interpretations, the clarity of its organization, and the fluidity of its prose. No one matches Renouvin's ability to explain the most complex situations in the simplest and most lucid manner. His intelligence was contagious, and his analyses are so easily understood as to appear self-evident. Not surprisingly, he was asked to write the section on the war in the textbook for higher education in the series 'Clio' on the eve of 1940 (Renouvin, Préclin, and Hardy, 1939). In 1965, he produced the volume on the war in the series 'Que sais-je?', which has an unparalleled status as an authoritative encyclopedia of knowledge.

Let us turn to *La crise européenne et la grande guerre*. It is a purely political, diplomatic, and military history. The economic and social aspects of the conflict are neglected. Only two pages are given to the 1917 strikes and the mutinies of that year. In total one paragraph dealt with the strike wave, twenty-six lines were sufficient for the mutinies and Pétain's response to them, and one paragraph was devoted to their causes (Renouvin, 1934, pp. 437–8). In the 'Clio' volume, published later, Renouvin enlarged his comments on the economic aspects of the war: