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Nicolas Mariot, *Tous unis dans la tranchée? 1914-1918, les intellectuels rencontrent le peuple*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2013. 496 pp. Tables, notes, bibliography, and index. 24.00€. (cl). ISBN 978-2-02-111880-3.

Review by James E. Connolly, University of Manchester.

Nicolas Mariot is clear in what he seeks to achieve in this book. Firstly, the work is a response to perceived problems within the historiography concerning French combatants of the First World War. For Mariot, scholarship has drawn on intellectuals' writings too uncritically, with little acknowledgement that they are disproportionately represented among published testimony, or little care for the implications of their different social status on their experience of the conflict. Indeed, Mariot argues that many authors use such testimony to make claims about all French combatants—regardless of differences such as class, education level, or geographical origin—partly due to an argument that the trench experience led to osmosis between different social groups. So studies largely ignore social difference but nevertheless argue that the crucible of fire flattened such difference. Such a view is partially due to post-war memoirs of combatants who tried to emphasise shared sacrifice—what Mariot calls a particularly French “rêve ‘démocratique’” (p. 31). In contrast, Mariot purports that physical proximity between different social groups in the trenches actually crystallised social differences and in some instances widened the gap (pp. 11-12). For many intellectuals, the conflict offered a unique opportunity to “discover” the *classes populaires*, whose lack of national sentiment in particular shocked the former. This experience also had acute ramifications for the intellectuals' sense of social identity. The central goal of the work is to elucidate and examine this discovery.

Mariot draws explicitly on a sociological methodology and provides considerable background information on the individuals examined. Although present throughout, such details are especially outlined in the prologue (subtitled “Portrait de groupe avant la bataille”) and in further detail in the aptly titled post-conclusion chapter, “échafaudages.” This final chapter is aimed more evidently at the academic reader, but the overall style of the work and its heavily sociological nature mean that it can be somewhat dry. Mariot's approach is in some ways an extension of his previous work on soldiers' motivation, and also seems inspired by his article on Durkheimian sociologist Robert Hertz, one of the intellectuals studied in the current book.[1]

Mariot explains his methodology meticulously: an initial corpus of 733 *témoins*—combatants whose testimony was published—was narrowed down to the forty-two *héros* whose lives and writings are examined in detail. Thirteen of the forty-two are well-known intellectuals such as Guillaume Apollinaire, Léon Werth, Georges Duhamel, Henri Barbusse, and Marc Bloch. Whilst all had a similarly advanced level of education (a key factor in designating them as intellectuals, essentially a synonym for *lettrés*) and thirty-six of them were involved in intellectual or artistic professions as outlined by Christophe Charle, they did not know each other and differed in marital status, geographical origin, and political and religious views. Mariot chose these forty-two precisely because they had been in close contact with *le peuple* as either *hommes de rang* or *sous-officiers*, and had described their daily life during the war, not afterwards. Not all men were in fighting roles, but all served at the front in some way. The source base therefore comprises the published correspondence or *carnets* kept by these men, with the aim of gaining an insight into social relations which may not have been present in texts written explicitly for

publication, especially considering that such works focus more on combat than instances of *repos* which are more useful for examining interactions between soldiers. The decision to focus on such documents rather than well-known publications, at least for the thirteen famous intellectuals, is original and insightful, although Mariot acknowledges that there are four exceptions to this rule—the most notable and frequently-cited being Werth's autobiographical novel, *Clavel soldat*.<sup>[2]</sup> Occasionally the writings of members of the *classes populaires* are used as a counter-point to those of the intellectuals, but these are far and few between, something which Mariot acknowledges.

The book is split into three parts, each containing two chapters. Part one, entitled “La matérialité d'une rencontre,” studies the specificity of intellectuals' experience of front-line duty. Mariot argues that “dans la rencontre interclasses, les lettrés restent souvent des supérieurs hiérarchiques” and underlines the difficulty in separating the authority of rank from social position (p. 66). Although thirty-one of the forty-two started the war as “simples soldats ou caporaux,” many were promoted at some point—largely, Mariot argues, because under the Third Republic military promotion was heavily linked to educational abilities (p. 68). *Gradés* at the front enjoyed better living conditions: more comfortable accommodation, better quality food, even orderlies leading to what Mariot calls “une domesticité militaire” (p. 99). The examination of the officer-orderly relationship, with orderlies almost exclusively coming from the *classes populaires*, is particular strong. That most officers came from the “classes dominantes” (p. 67) and that they lived a somewhat more comfortable experience at the front may seem unsurprising. However, this was in allegedly egalitarian France, leading Mariot to conclude: “bien loin du mélange supposément égalitaire évoqué dans nombre de souvenirs, le conflit est le lien d'un maintien de la domination sociale à travers les services rendus” (p. 110).

Yet even those intellectuals without a superior rank, Mariot purports, experienced greater material comfort—for example, they received more numerous and frequent parcels from their families, whereas seven out of ten families of soldiers could not afford the postage cost. Yet material comfort was not everything: a recurring argument of the book is that intellectuals felt acutely isolated from their lower-class comrades. This was doubly the case for intellectuals who were among the *soldats de rang*. Whilst Mariot acknowledges that some *hommes du peuple* may have felt isolated, he argues that the isolation of the intellectuals was more social, more about feeling out of place and missing like-minded people, and also proportionally more common. Little evidence is provided for the non-intellectual side of this argument, but the choice extracts from intellectuals Mariot provides certainly reinforce this idea. The language of the common soldier, often a patois, was one distancing factor. Some intellectuals experienced a *déclassement* as they engaged in manual tasks that they felt did not draw upon their mental capacities, but intellectuals always maintained a sense of superiority over their fellow soldiers. What they lacked was stimulating conversation, and the quest for this sometimes trumped military hierarchies, with soldier-intellectuals maintaining close contacts with superiors as part of “la bonne société des tranchées” (p. 148). Many of the themes present in the first part are developed later on, and sometimes the reader is left wondering whether a better structure would have been possible.

Part two, “Le savant et le populaire, *in vivo*,” concentrates on the way in which the intellectuals experienced the physicality of life at the front, and how they marshalled their intellectual capacities. Many struggled to cope with the difficulties of trench life: lack of sleep, poor hygiene, thirst, hunger, and especially manual tasks such as digging trenches. Marcot notes that problems of physical endurance affected all classes, and there was no link between the *classes populaires* and physical strength. However, the intellectuals struggled more than others to cope with these new conditions. This was partly because most of the forty-two lacked technical know-how, often admiring this trait among their comrades and enjoying acquiring new forms of knowledge. Their fellow soldiers sometimes mocked and humiliated them for their ignorance of practical matters, which may explain why some of the forty-two tried to shed manners or clothing betraying them as intellectuals, even asking loved ones to send fewer or less obviously bourgeois items. However, Mariot presents a distinction evident in the sources examined

between intellectuals, who generally preferred solitude, reading and writing, and the *hommes du peuple* who preferred groups, drinking, and playing cards.

Thus periods of *repos* represented the greatest instances of social distance and rupture with the pre-war world. For intellectuals, reading and writing--and the search for a quiet space in which to do this--was about preserving their sense of being. The general disdain for drinking and cards (the latter explained by an odd heavy metal analogy) did have exceptions, but overall, "les tranchées deviennent alors le lieu d'une perte et d'une inlassable reconquête: celles des outils d'intellectualité" (p. 225). However, *lettrés* could also mobilise their intellectuality in a different way, by becoming what Mariot calls "l'intello de service": reading or writing letters for their comrades. These *intellos* also continued academic pursuits, whether studying fellow soldiers from an anthropological or ethnographic perspective, as with Robert Hertz, or writing a doctoral thesis, as Pierre-Maurice Masson did (he was killed at Verdun before getting the chance to sit his *soutenance* and was awarded a posthumous doctorate). Yet this interest in fellow men waned as the war continued, and everyone simply wanted to leave the trenches. In the end, "plus la guerre avance, ...plus les barrières de classe semblent se refermer" (p. 267).

Part three, "Corps et âmes," focuses on the issue of motivation, patriotic and national sentiment, notably the differences between intellectuals and *hommes du peuple* in this regard. Mariot demonstrates that many of the men studied bemoaned the less than glorious nature of trench warfare. Nevertheless, there was social pressure for these intellectuals to engage in acts of heroism and bravery, seen both in their own letters and those of their loved ones. Intellectuals, it is suggested, possessed a strong sense of patriotism, and often reflected on the necessity of the war. This is precisely why they were shocked at what they saw as the lack of patriotism of their comrades, and ruminated on how these men endured without such motivation. They bemoaned this "incompétence patriotique" (p. 298), instead seeing resignation among the men, which they tried to explain. One of the forty-two, Henri Jacquelin, provided one possible explanation for endurance: not patriotism, a sense of law or justice, or hatred of Germans, but a sense of doing a job well. Others suggested that the "simple" soldiers lacked a conscience but were driven by spirit or instinct. Mariot ends this chapter by providing counter-examples from popular accounts, highlighting instances of resignation, fatalism, and "je m'en fichisme" (p. 319) in the face of higher authorities represented by officers and occasionally soldier-intellectuals.

Many of the forty-two reacted to this situation, Mariot suggests, by attempting to use their talents to promote the patriotic cause and spirit among their comrades via a "travail intime de consolation morale" (p. 341). Even when the duration of the war sapped the spirits of the intellectuals, the resignation of the masses incited them to continue this work. However, Mariot clarifies that the difference between intellectuals and other soldiers was not the presence or absence of patriotism, but that the former "clament haut et fort leur maîtrise d'un patriotisme réfléchi et personnel" (p. 369). Indeed, intellectuals looked down upon a simple patriotism, such as songs, often born of hatred of the enemy. These are subtle and potentially insightful distinctions, but would benefit from further development.

There are some other issues with the work. Some ideas (such as the intellectuals' sense of social isolation and search for like-minded individuals) are presented in a repetitive manner, whereas others are not developed as fully as they deserve. Another example of the latter is that we are told that the intellectuals denounced the "irresponsabilité" of the mutineers of 1917 (p. 298), but Mariot offers no further information on this fascinating topic. Similarly, many of the examples used throughout focus on 1914-1916, although this is largely explained by the fact that a substantial number of the forty-two were killed in this period. Further, for a work that so impressively "shows its workings" and provides detailed contextual information and analysis, it is a shame that more is not made of potential differences concerning those who fought in different sectors, fronts or in different military branches. Perhaps there were none, but the instances, for example, of sources relating to the *Armée de l'Orient* or Austrian naval personnel is slightly jarring. Finally, although counter-examples "from below" are sometimes provided,

readers too often have to draw on their own knowledge of such testimony of the conflict to properly contextualise intellectuals' experience. To be fair, rectifying this would have been a vast undertaking and may have lengthened to the point of tedium an already lengthy work.

Despite such minor problems, this book makes a compelling argument: that the intellectuals examined had an experience of life at the front distinct from that of their lower-class comrades, and thus one's social status affected the nature of one's wartime experience, including patriotism, motivation, and support for the war. The thesis is supported by extensive and well-chosen quotations from the sources, accompanied by detailed explanations of the methodology, source-base, and the social composition of the *héros*—especially in the final pages of the book. In doing so, Mariot is correcting what he claims to be flaws in the approach of other scholars, notably cultural historians, whom he accuses of providing no detail on the “attributs sociaux de ceux qu'ils convoquent et font parler” and remaining silent on the “question du corpus des textes mobilisés” (p. 391).<sup>[3]</sup> Indeed, Mariot acknowledges that his work has a “conclusion peu suprenante” (p. 374), but it is novel regarding the French case. This is linked to a final aim of the book: it is an implicit and explicit intervention in the debate among scholars of France in the First World War. To paint an inevitably simplistic picture, on one side sit proponents of cultural history and especially the concept of a *culture de guerre*—notably its originators, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, and others of the Péronne school linked to the *Historial de la Grande Guerre*.<sup>[4]</sup> The notion has changed over time, but one definition is a “broad-based system through which belligerent populations made sense of the war and persuaded themselves to continue fighting it.”<sup>[5]</sup> This notion and approach became linked to the idea of brutalisation, violence, but above all consent—that French men bought into the war culture, and were thus willing to fight and endure combat.<sup>[6]</sup>

Those who are critical of this approach usually favour a more sociological methodology, notably the members of the *Collectif de Recherche International et de Débat sur la Guerre de 1914-1918* (CRID) such as Remy Cazals, Frédéric Roussou, and Mariot himself.<sup>[7]</sup> In general, they emphasise the importance of constraint as an explanation of French participation, although this consent vs. constraint dichotomy is somewhat simplistic.<sup>[8]</sup> The CRID also points to the problems of putting forward a single culture applicable to the entire French nation, especially given its implicit support of a break from pre-war culture, and sometimes criticises the very use and understanding of the word “culture”.<sup>[9]</sup> The debates around war culture, constraint and consent have been raging for many years, so what does Mariot's latest study actually add? Clearly, Mariot notes, the importance of social class in understandings of and reactions to the conflict among fighting men, the way in which the intellectuals acted in a different manner to their fellow soldiers, would seem to undermine the notion of a *culture de guerre*—showing that there was no unanimous or single national experience of conflict, no unity of classes. It is therefore difficult to speak of shared culture and consent.

The difference between the social (or perhaps more correctly sociological) and cultural history of the conflict, Mariot argues, is in the end a fundamental opposition between scholarly perceptions of the importance of the social world and the place of individual autonomy in the case of army mobilisation. As such, there can be no reconciliation between the two perspectives, and it is “aux lecteurs intéressés de se faire, pièces à l'appui, un jugement” (p. 395). Such an opposition seems extreme: the *culture de guerre* has always been a flexible concept, and is there not an argument it can be tweaked or improved, for instance in the manner suggested by Jay Winter, by simply pluralising it to “cultures de guerre,” allowing room for social, religious, or gender differences?<sup>[10]</sup> Could one not speak of cultures, born of pre-war norms but radically altered by the conflict, shared by certain sub-sections of society? Indeed, even early on in the development of the concept, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau argued that this was the case regarding the “culture de guerre pour enfants.”<sup>[11]</sup> This may be stretching analytical concepts too far and misconstruing the author's intentions, but a case could be made for the intellectuals studied in Mariot's book as exemplary of one such culture, of a similar way of perceiving, understanding, and even experiencing the war. In any case, Elise Julien argued a decade ago that the cultural history of this

conflict could benefit from a deeper examination of its sources and authors, and a wider examination of the specificities of different groups' experience. [12]

This book demonstrates that not enough has been done to rectify this, or to satisfy critics of the cultural approach. Perhaps, though, rather than sounding the death-knell of such an approach, Mariot's strong (although not unproblematic) work could provide a starting-point for a more nuanced approach to the history of the conflict, an example of what can be achieved by both studying and acknowledging differences in experience and providing deeper context. Social/sociological history could perhaps, in turn, learn from cultural history's desire to highlight systems of representations that potentially guided and explain behaviours, or it could at least consider behaviours, mentalities, or cultural productions--and the potential links between them--more fully. Even opponents of "war culture" do not completely dismiss its ideas or subject of study, even if they do reject its totalising logic and its explanatory framework, notably because of a lack of quantitative analysis. [13] A cultural history containing such analysis, acknowledging multiple experiences, yet still providing an explanatory framework would be an interesting addition to the debate. Exchange rather than opposition between the two schools would surely be preferable, [14] but would admittedly be pointless if one agrees with Mariot's assessment of fundamental, irreconcilable differences. Ultimately, whatever one's take on the implications of this work for the consent/coercion debates or the opposition between cultural and social-sociological approaches, it cannot be denied that this book offers a unique insight into class and social relations among French combatants.

#### NOTES

[1] Nicolas Mariot, "Faut-il être motivé pour tuer? Sur quelques explications 'aux violences de guerre,'" *Genèses* 53(2003/4): 154-177; Nicolas Mariot, "Les archives de saint Besse. Conditions et réception de l'enquête directe dans le milieu durkheimien," *Genèses* 63(June 2006): 66-87.

[2] Léon Werth, *Clavel soldat* (Paris: Editions Viviane Hamy, 2006).

[3] For further examples of this criticism made by Mariot and his colleagues, see Mariot, "Faut-il"; François Buton, André Loez, Nicolas Mariot and Philippe Olivera, "1914-1918: Understanding the Controversy," *Books and Ideas* (11 June 2009), accessed online on 7 July 2015 at <http://www.booksandideas.net/1914-1918-Understanding-the.html>; Nicolas Offenstadt, Philippe Olivera, Emmanuelle Picard and Frédéric Rousseau, "À propos d'une notion récente: 'la culture de guerre,'" in Frédéric Rousseau, ed., *Guerres, paix et sociétés, 1911-1946* (Neuilly: Atlande, 2004), pp. 667-674, accessed online on 7 July 2015 at [http://crid1418.org/espace\\_scientifique/textes/culture\\_de\\_guerre.htm](http://crid1418.org/espace_scientifique/textes/culture_de_guerre.htm).

[4] For more on the the debate/controversy, see, for example: Nicolas Baupré, *Les Grandes Guerres, 1914-1945* (Paris: Belin, 2012), p.1046-1050; Leonard V. Smith, "The 'Culture de guerre' and French Historiography of the Great War of 1914-1918," *History Compass* 5/6(2007): 1967-1979; Elise Julien, "À propos de l'historiographie française de la première guerre mondiale," *Labyrinthe* 18/2(2004): 53-68; Buton, Loez, Mariot and Olivera, "Understanding the Controversy"; Offenstadt, Olivera, Picard and Rousseau, "À propos"; Jean-Yves Le Naour, "Le champ de bataille des historiens," *La Vie des idées* (10 November 2008), accessed online on 7 July 2015 at <http://www.laviedesidees.fr/Le-champ-de-bataille-des.html>.

[5] Stéphane Audoin-Rozeau and Annette Becker, *14-18: Retrouver la guerre* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), p. 145; Leonard V. Smith, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *France and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. xv.

[6] See, for example, Baupré, *Les Grandes Guerres*, pp. 1046-1050.

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[7] For more on the CRID, see its website, accessed on 7 July 2015: <http://crid1418.org/>.

[8] They make this explicit in Buton, Loez, Mariot and Olivera, "Understanding the Controversy."

[9] See [http://www.crid1418.org/espace\\_scientifique/textes/conceptsgg\\_01.htm](http://www.crid1418.org/espace_scientifique/textes/conceptsgg_01.htm), accessed online on 7 July 2015.

[10] As explained in Julien, "À propos," p. 63.

[11] Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *La Guerre des enfants, 1914-1918: Essai d'histoire culturelle* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1993), pp. 185-186.

[12] Julien, "À propos," pp. 66-67.

[13] Buton, Loez, Mariot and Olivera, "1914-1918: Understanding the Controversy." The authors state: "It should be stated that the notion of "war culture" as it has been developed over the past fifteen years is not in itself problematic: it is entirely legitimate to seek to describe sensibilities and representations, their differential appropriations and their transformations over time. But it becomes problematic as soon as one makes it play a role in explaining individual and collective practices and behavior."

[14] Gary Sheffield made a similar point whilst criticising cultural history, noting: "The way of the future is surely to integrate different facets of the history of the war, not to privilege some and marginalize others." Gary Sheffield, "Review: *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present* by Jay Winter, Antoine Prost," *The International History Review* 28/4(December 2006), p. 860.

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