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H-France Review Vol. 14 (September 2014), No. 146

Pierre Purseigle, *Mobilisation, Sacrifice et Citoyenneté: Angleterre-France 1900-1918*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2013. 450 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, and index. \$38.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-2-251-44470-3.

Review by Margaret H. Darrow, Dartmouth College.

Pierre Purseigle's new book, *Mobilisation, Sacrifice et Citoyenneté* compares responses to the First World War in two medium-sized towns, Béziers in the department of l'Hérault in southern France and Northampton in the English Midlands. Purseigle advances a triple argument for the value of such a comparative local study of wartime mobilization. First, he presents it as a way out of the sterile dispute between French scholars of the war over whether the French population consented or was constrained to go to war.<sup>[1]</sup> Second, a comparison shifts the perspective from the national to the international, allowing Purseigle to identify what were common adjustments to the war and what was unique to each society. And thirdly, the shift in perspective downward, from the national to the local, allows him to interrogate and complicate the story of nations at war.

Differences in local economies and in religion nuanced the two towns' responses to the war. As a manufacturer of shoes and boots for the army, Northampton contributed more directly and obviously to the war effort than Béziers, a viticulture center. The local press celebrated the superiority of Northampton's army boots in comparison to Germany's supposedly inferior footwear. Béziers's contribution of wine to the troops, by contrast, was less significant and did not generate much display of civic pride. In Béziers, the Catholic Church's hostility toward the Republic made the cooptation of religion into support for the war a less straightforward project than was the case for Northampton's churches. Purseigle shows that the antagonism persisted on both sides despite the *Union sacrée*, the Church underlining that its support was for France rather than for the regime and *sous-préfet* slapping down the Church's initiative to memorialize the town's war dead.

National, rather than local differences produced the most salient contrasts, however. The fact that, until 1916, Britain raised its army by recruiting volunteers rather than by conscription created a more intimate relationship between Northampton and the British army than between Béziers and the French army. A local rugby star exhorted young men from Northampton to enlist with their friends in local regiments whose exploits the residents of the town celebrated, whose casualties they memorialized, and for which they solicited funds. No such close identification was possible in Béziers that at best—or worst—was left defending southern soldiers from accusations of cowardice. Instead Béziers's municipal government enjoined the Biterrois, as residents of Béziers are called, to take to their hearts the infantry regiment stationed in the town as their adopted sons.

Differences in state administrative structure and ideology also had important local consequences. An example is the fundraising events that Purseigle pairs, the Journée de l'Hérault in Béziers and Tank Week in Northampton. Although Tank Week was a national campaign, a committee of local elected officials and notables organized it in Northampton. By contrast the departmental prefect minutely orchestrated the Journée de l'Hérault down to its last detail. Although Purseigle states that his study

breaks “avec la vision moniste” of the French state (p. 400), to say that it nuances this view would be a fairer conclusion.

Due to the omnipresent state in France and to the need to enlist volunteers in Britain, but also perhaps because of disparities and lacunae in sources, Northampton appears to have produced a more creative wartime culture than Béziers. Northampton’s newspapers kept residents up-to-date with news of the local regiments, regularly publishing letters from their officers, photographs of their activities—for example, a picture of “Northampton Boot Repairers in Mesopotamia” (p. 130)—and artists’ dramatic renderings of their exploits. Volunteers’ families could hang a “hero card” in their windows, displaying their personal attachment to the regiment, as well as their commitment to the war effort. Local businesses published lists of their employees who had volunteered and memorialized those who were killed with commemorative cards and plaques. In comparison, the collection of tokens from Béziers’s Journée de l’Hérault seems paltry. That Purseigle oddly pairs cartoons in the Northampton press with private denunciations in Béziers as comparable modes of wartime social control makes the Biterrois appear, probably unjustly, particularly mean-spirited.

Despite these contrasts, the themes and rhetoric of civic mobilization in both societies were strikingly similar. In both towns, the outbreak of the war inspired pleas for unity, indicating that the *Union sacrée* was far from a foregone conclusion. And deep concern for social unity did not disappear; it reemerged whenever there was any sign of social conflict. Both towns also defined the war as between civilization and barbarism and participated in demonizing the enemy. Both towns as well articulated a deep desire to be seen to share in sacrifice that was somehow equivalent to that of the soldiers. In all of this, Northampton and Béziers participated fully in national war cultures that Purseigle persuasively demonstrates were, in fact, international. Purseigle also shows how this international discourse was translated in these local contexts. For example, a clergyman in Béziers compared the German invasion to mildew on the grapevines, imperiling the sacred soil of the fatherland. A Northampton newspaper depicting “trophies” captured from the Germans, flanked an iconic “pickelhelm” with two decrepit boots (p. 119).

Nonetheless, the national frequently outweighs the international and the local. For example, the poster publicizing the Journée de l’Hérault was designed and produced by a firm in Paris that churned out posters for many other departments and causes. The cartoons published in the *Northampton Independent* that Purseigle discusses as local mechanisms of social control were produced by a nationally syndicated cartoonist, G. M. Payne, and published in newspapers throughout the country. As Purseigle acknowledges, lines between local, regional, national and international war culture are difficult to draw; they often disappear altogether. The study shows how thoroughly both towns had already been “nationalized.”

The last chapter of the book, discussing politics, is the most original. The *Union sacrée* in France and the political truce in Britain suspended electoral and official party politics, but local politics continued nonetheless in other venues and by other means. Politics displayed itself, for example, in competing charity organizations and in battles over fundraising. Local authorities used the rhetoric of national unity to delegitimize opposition, especially from the left, as inimical to the war effort if not downright treasonous. Trade union leaders, on the other hand, used the rhetoric of shared sacrifice to assimilate workers to soldiers and to contrast them to capitalists labeled as war profiteers. Rather than political truce or wartime unity, it was the removal from the local scene of the large majority of younger men, those most susceptible to radicalize any opposition movement, Purseigle argues, that temporarily calmed class tensions during the war.

Nonetheless, the war did redefine the social contract, in Purseigle’s view, at least in Britain. The Military Service Act of 1916 fundamentally altered the understanding of British citizenship. Nicoletta Gullace has argued that by linking citizenship to war service, conscription opened the door to women’s

suffrage in Britain.[2] Purseigle shows it also put pressure on the barrier of class, increasingly legitimating Labour. Northampton's labor leader, James Gribble, is a case in point. In the first year of the war, Gribble presented a plan by which a few pennies each week would be deducted from workers' wages in support of local war charities. Adopted by the town council, the program included worker representatives on the committee that decided how the money would be spent, and thus inserted them into the town's power structure. The evidence is less convincing for France. Purseigle shows that women's and workers' contributions to the war effort made Béziers' administrators anxious, but no comparable renegotiation of citizenship occurred.

*Mobilisation, Sacrifice et Citoyenneté* does not address some topics that would seem central to a study of local mobilization in the First World War. Purseigle refers in passing to a number of local aid organizations, such as Oeuvre d'un vin aux soldats in Béziers, and local branches of national and international aid organizations like the Red Cross, but never gives an overall picture of such volunteerism. We do not learn how many such organizations there were in the two towns, how they were organized and by whom, and if they grew out of pre-war civic, charitable, religious or social organizations or sprang up in response to the war. These questions reveal a larger weakness. The book's subtitle, introduction, and conclusion claim that the book places wartime mobilization in a longer history of the process of nationalization. In fact, despite its subtitle, *Angleterre France 1900-1918*, the book focuses almost exclusively on the war years. A brief first chapter outlines the pre-war political and economic structures of both towns and discusses an example of pre-war agitation in each town: in Béziers, a revolt of vine workers and military mutiny in 1907, in Northampton a strike and march of shoemakers in 1905. The leader of the shoemakers' march, James Gribble, later played an important role in Northampton's war politics, but beyond this, the book makes few links between pre-war and wartime civic engagement. It demonstrates convincingly that during the war both towns were tied closely into national culture but we cannot tell if this was different in degree or quality from what was the case before the war.

The book is generously illustrated with photographs, posters, commemorative plaques, medals, and cartoons. Unfortunately, the text does not discuss many of them and when it does do so, the numbers identifying the illustrations sometimes do not match their references in the text. Most of the illustrations taken from the British press are captioned in English with no French translation, a problem for many French readers.

Purseigle has taken the "spatial turn" with a vengeance. There are spaces of mobilization, of sociability, of legitimation, of negotiation, sometimes crossed by vectors and matrices as well. In contrast to the many metaphoric spaces, geography is notably absent. Both towns appear mostly as loci of rhetorical and symbolic production, rather than as material environments in which real people live and work and socialize. A contrast would be, for example, to William Sheridan Allen's classic study of political mobilization in one German town, *The Nazi Seizure of Power*. [3] Readers of Allen's book gain a mental picture of Norheim and understand how the town's geography shaped its mobilization. No such comprehension of Northampton or Béziers emerges here.

Also absent in *Mobilisation, Sacrifice et Citoyenneté* is a cast of characters. Besides Northampton's rugby star, Edgar Mobbs and labor leader James Grimes, we meet few people in this book. Purseigle points to "les pouvoirs locaux" (p. 20) as principle agents of mobilization, yet we learn nothing about them, not even their names; even l'Hérault's powerful prefect remains nameless.

Instead of the people of Northampton and Béziers, we have political and literary theorists by the bucket-load—Reinhard Koselleck, Michel de Certeau, Jürgen Habermas, Henri Bergson, Emile Durkheim—as well as scholars whose work bridges sociology and history: Pierre Bourdieu, Eugen Weber, E. P. Thompson, Charles Tilly, George Mosse. Their ideas and arguments sometimes illuminate Purseigle's project, but more often not. The result is unsettling: a succession of magnified and engrossing details of

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a picture that never comes into focus as a whole. This is an interesting and original book, but due to its length and often barely penetrable prose, it will not find as wide a readership as it might deserve.

## NOTES

[1] See Jay Winter, "P vs C: The Still Burning Anger when the French Talk of the First World War," *Times Literary Supplement* 16 June, 2006.

[2] Nicoletta Gullace, "*The Blood of Our Sons;*" *Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship During the Great War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

[3] William Sheridan Allen, *The Nazi Seizure of Power: The Experience of a Single German Town, 1930-1935* (Chicago, Ill.: Quadrangle Books, 1965).

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ISSN 1553-9172