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“Nothing New in The West”: Paralleling the War Rhetoric and Measures of the COVID-19 Pandemic with the WW1 Horrors Described by Erich Maria Remarque

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Abstract

Since its outbreak, several political leaders compared the gestation of the COVID19 pandemic to a War: (Sanchez, Macron, Draghi). This argument (or better, declaration) has been particularly enforced in concomitance with the harshening of the first lockdown measures and since then repeated and reused - comparing medics to front-line defenders, masks to ammo, etc. In my paper, I will draw parallels with the real essence of front-line and trench warfare as testified in the short novel by E.M. Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929). With a vividness and tragedy that cost him exile, the author describes the unbearable conditions of living locked within trenches, the propaganda of war which required fighting “whatever the cost” (over our youngest); the feeling that war becomes the only existence that matters, taking over our actions and thoughts; the deep certainty that we will never return to normality once it is all “over” – whatever “normality” meant before. My argument is that if we want to live this pandemic as a War, we must thus take into consideration the true horror of its implications: what war indeed justifies and has justified, what it causes and changes. The long-term effects of such a condition, like the ones described in the novel, are becoming more and more evident.

Keywords: COVID-19; World War 1; resilience; War rhetoric; reflexive comparison; shell-shock; trench malaise

Introduction

Since its outbreak, the gestation of the COVID pandemic has been compared to a War by several political leaders since March 2020 (Pedro Sanchez, see Faus, 2020; Macron, see DW.com, 2020; or Mario Draghi, see Draghi, 2020). This argument (or better, declaration) has been particularly enforced in concomitance with the harshening of the first lockdown measures. In the name of this emergency, we have accepted “whatever it takes” – a sentence notoriously used by the same Draghi in 2012 regarding the measures to contain the Euro speculation (Draghi, 2012). The “whatever it takes” condition is central in setting the terms of a bloody war: death tools, curfew, limitation to movement; to these, we have added more subtle measures: social distancing, social surveillance, social tracking and social suspicion. Indeed, these measures were taken to prevent the spread of an enemy that is hidden everywhere, and to which anyone is at the same time potential victim and threat, but also a conspirator and traitor (if he does not abide by the necessary rules). In such rhetoric, the enemy thus appears to be not simply the “virus” (anonymous, irrational, invisible), but whoever – knowingly or not – transmits and transports the virus: especially if he is (or could be) traceable, if his actions could be rational, and his conditions visible

(but are perhaps hidden). The fear about the virus, the parasite, appears perfectly in tune with the fear also towards whoever is possessed by the virus, and thus himself becomes a parasite: and must be treated as such – an argument evermore significant with the scapegoating of so-called “novaxxers”. The metaphor of warfare appears thus central in defining and tackling the pathogen of the danger: whoever transmits Covid-19 creates the disorder, continues the unease, and perpetuates the ab-normality. When we talk about a virus, about this virus,¹ what we really are talking about is *enemies*. It is something that must be tackled, defeated, eliminated: an agent attacked with the harshest words of our vocabulary. And this vocabulary has been used before.

Guidelines for the West

During my lockdown months, having, as everyone else, all my local libraries and bookstores closed, I found myself rummaging through the bookshelves around the house. For no apparent reason, I picked up Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front*. At the time, a First World War drama appeared of no particular significance to my current mood. Nevertheless, having read some of Agamben’s words and Simone Weil’s considerations on the “aura” of WW2, the image of children led to slaughter in trenches appeared suddenly relevant. I read through the small book over a matter of months, unable to endure more than a couple of pages per time: too much was going on and there were too many striking parallels with the present. The unbearable conditions of living locked within trenches; the propaganda about a war worth fighting – at “whatever the cost” (implying the death of our youth); the feeling that War becomes the only thing that matters, taking over our mind, thoughts, hopes and conversations; the certainty, so deep, that we will never return to normality, whatever “normality” before meant. Indeed, using Remarque’s novel, I will focus on collective desperation: a reflexive consideration of the horrors faced that cannot be forgotten, nor left undenounced. Being not a historian, apart from this novel I attempted to study the period from a sociological perspective. Significant literature has been found in the rewarding work of Eric J. Leed, *No Man’s Land*,² that beguinely underlines the enduring aura of malaise the Great War caused across the whole of Europe. I complemented this, among other things, with the reading of G. Mak’s non-fiction *In Europe* (2004), which offered a most engaging and fulfilling recollection of the War in a non-linear fashion.

The argument of this article is that although War rhetoric and metaphors have been lately used indiscriminately by rulers and leaders across the world, a War is a terrible thing, and is quite different from what is being currently experienced. That said, I do not wish to claim there is no emergency: rather, if we really accept to live this pandemic as a War, then the consequences, just as of the First World War, are bound to be disastrous, enduring and perhaps circularly recurring – to the extreme of a totalitarian dystopia, just as Fascism and Nazism endured, not to mention the economical crisis that followed, again globally. Indeed, the long-term effects, like the ones described in the novel, are becoming more and more evident – visible even with the most superficial use of a “sociological eye”. As Remarque himself stated, in an anecdotal justification of his work, “This book is to be neither an accusation nor a confession, and least of all an adventure, for death is not an adventure to those who stand face to face with it. It will try simply to

tell of a generation of men who, even though they may have escaped shells, were destroyed by the war.”

This is what, a hundred years or so later, we still might expect: a generation of men who, though they have escaped death by the virus, have been destroyed by the inconsiderate waging of such a war.

What do talk about when we talk about War?

Over the last 20 years (if not 50; see (Hobsbawm, 1994) the rhetoric of War, and its subsequent crisis – physical, digital and economic – has been constant and recurring in Western society. We have opened the current century with the desperate cry of the Twin Towers, opening the War on Terror, that replaced – or better, put to one side and integrated – the War on Drugs (Björnehed, 2004).³ Such a new War has since changed more than ever our concept of world security. The manoeuvres to tackle terrorism were not only effective in opening war against Iraq and Afghanistan. Immediate actions were taken with the systematic control of our travelling habits: both physically, as by airport restrictions and CCTV installations, and digitally – the relatively recent scandals of Datagate.

Along the way, there came another danger: we witnessed and paid for the financial struggles of the 2008 collapse, putting in jeopardy, at least apparently, the neo-liberal way of life of the West. Today, with the pandemic and virus this threat appears more present and tactile as ever, ever recurring and invisible, yet at the same time vague and uncertain: nonetheless, its threat is treated as immediate and effective, something for which we are all potential victims or perpetrators.⁴

Today, less than a century after the end of the Great War, the rhetoric of war has become central and integral to all restrictions and tactics to halt the virus: the very discourse used is militarily based, promoted through the media machine and shared among social media. I have made note of relevant articles, that will be compared with the work of Remarque – a work, that among other testimonies and letters from the front made it clear how “nobody will make out of this War without becoming someone else” (Leeds, 1979)

Medics in trenches

“No one, no soldier, no strategist, was prepared for such war” (Mak, 2004, p. 91) expresses journalist Geert Mak regarding the conditions of World War 1. The same can be said for the outbreak of COVID-19. Yet, the rhetoric of war has been an integral part of governmental action and media discourse. In the case of health professionals, their engagement has been compared to fighting without being fully equipped or protected (i.e. “At War Without Ammo”, *New York Times*, (Jacobs, et al., 2020) and indeed suffering from “frontline” shortages (Sridhar, 2020). Online magazine the Conversation, quotes professor David Hunter’s considerations, with the war rhetoric claiming that if it truly is a war, then “by golly” we need to arm our men with proper equipment (1/04/2020). “The frontline troops are running out of protective gear (PPE), ammunition (beds) and heavy equipment (ventilators)” (Hunter, 2020)

With the thin line between medics and soldiers during war becoming increasingly blurred, by 2021 we may notice a further intensification of one such aspect of warfare. Across the globe, media are discussing the need to have medics protected from unlawful killing charges lawsuits (BBC, 2021), especially in the case of medical staff administering vaccines, as in Italy (Ansa, 2021). Again, the idea of impunity in the case of manslaughter is effectively a war measure, whereas soldiers, as in the infamous Nuremberg defence, committing dubious actions claimed that they were “just following orders”.

But such a form of defence, known also *Befehl ist Befehl* (Orders are orders) was used as a justification for the German horrors of the Second World War. Such a comparison appears today too much of a stretch. Rather, what we are witnessing is something that perhaps still is partly German based, but a few decades older (to say the least). It may be compared with events of the First World War, which Remarque described so vividly in his *All Quiet on the Western Front*, a title that was liberally so translated from the original *Im Westen Nichts Neues* (lit. “In West Nothing New”). But before we will discuss this book, central case study of this paper, we will briefly consider the relationship between the idea of War and the origin of Pandemics in a direct parallel from a century ago.

Nothing New

As noted by (Jenkins, 2020), before the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, a series of “false alarms” took place globally. In 1997 the bird flu was announced, with predictions of thousands of deaths, while in 1999 the BSE appeared amidst claims it could cause up to 500,000 deaths (BBC, 2000). Thankfully, none of that happened, not even in the slightest. In the years to come, we witnessed a series of SARS outbreaks (2003, 2004 and 2005), all claiming a terrifying perspective of “being worse than AIDS” and owning a “25% chance of killing tens of millions” (Jenkins, 2020). There followed the 2006 scare of a new H5N1 bird Flu, that however never met the much-expected body count. This scare was followed by a pig-induced variation in 2009, with claims about the potential death of 65,000 British leading to one of the greatest pandemic-related controversies (Forster, 2013). It is not clear what prevented the disaster from happening, whether actual medical intervention or simply the lack of grounds for predicting the disaster which was preannounced.

What is certain is that even before the Great War, likewise, there were quite a few historical crises that preceded the great horror. In 1905-1906 European diplomacy was at the verge of a war because of Germany’s opposition to France’s expansion in Morocco. In July-August 1911 the Moroccan Crisis again broke out, again threatening a potential war that was contained. Then we saw the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913. Thus, since the beginning of the century the condition of crisis was always palpable in Europe, dealt with through diplomacy until it simply could not longer be contained (Renouvin, 1993). In a brief hesitance, during the first months of 1914, the “tension” of international relations seemed to enjoy an apparent ease (Mak, 2004), albeit rapidly collapsing with the killing of Franz Ferdinand. Both examples (war and virus) proved their predictions: the war exploded, just as the Pandemic, prepared and announced for over decades, and eventually “leaking” across the globe. Both episodes appear to have spilled over when no one any longer had neither the will nor the means to contain them.

Military talk in the media

The specifics of the military action necessary to halt the virus, as a response to world leaders' declarations in early March 2020, can be found in a mid-April 2020 *Fortune* discussion with Lt. Gen. Michael Nagata, a US retired military officer. General Nagata compared the need to proceed against COVID-19 with preliminary phases to deal with insurgence, "as outlined by the U.S. Army's counterinsurgency doctrine (COIN)" (Hendrix & Long, 2020). Both with the virus and a supposed enemy, in the early phases the opponent "remains hidden, presenting only a potential threat and expanding its power and influence through acts of subversion and disruption". In such conditions, the "Plans for a coordinated, immediate response may be delayed" as for the "inherent reluctance to disrupt daily life, resulting in inaction and allowing the insurgency to expand unchecked." (Ibidem)

In the same way, General Nagata notices how "COVID-19 also assumes a low profile as the virus penetrates deep into population centres, remaining outside our awareness for up to 14 days when individuals are asymptomatic: it appears as the perfect threat, a hidden cell that is hard to spot, and one may only make assumptions on its spread". While the article acknowledges the US delay in "tactical" response (a factor blamed in most media to the presidency of Trump (Viglione, 2020); (Friedersdorf, 2020), it does underline "America's current siege posture" to which "We all have a role to play in this fight. While the majority of Americans are not directly engaged in combating COVID-19 in our hospitals, we all have a responsibility to protect our communities. COVID-19 will demand every ounce of strength that our medical personnel have to give." Indeed, in the pandemic War the medical personnel have been quintessentially referred to as the equivalent of the front line.⁵

Looking back at the War

As it is the case for many adolescent students during the current pandemic, Remarque – born Remark though of French origins – found himself in 1916 forced to interrupt his studies at the age of eighteen and sent a year later to the "carnage" of Verdun. The consideration of the Western front conflicts, where the German push towards Paris was resisted by the French trenches, re-emerged into Remarque's writing only ten years after the War. In those "peaceful" years, Remarque worked in the mutilated Weimar Republic as a primary-school teacher, automobile tyre reseller, illustrator, and sports commentator. None of these employments apparently fulfilled him, but rather, as he stated, left him more and more conscious of the scars the War had left on him. The emptiness created by the loss of what was before could not be filled. He could not return to normality, after all he had been through. When he finally managed to write down – in a feverish six-week take – *Im Westen Nichts Neues* (Lit. In the West Nothing New) in 1927, he felt relieved, though no publisher would accept it. Apparently, in the whole of Germany the scars of the War were far from healed (indeed, Hitler would insistently scratch them open) – and anti-war messages were still in need of containment. Yet, when in 1929 finally the book found an

editor, possibly thanks to the success of Arnold Zweig’s *The Case of Sergeant Grischka*, another anti-war novel (1927), *Im Westen Nichts Neues* became an immediate success. Indeed, its thought-provoking considerations would become so influential that, with the rise in power of the Third Reich, the book took up an exemplary place in the Nazi public burnings. Remarque, stigmatized also for the anti-national change in his name, fled first to Switzerland and then to the US, having his German citizenship revoked in 1938. He will, from then on, carry on the literary resonance of his battle-scars, one war after the other.

Lockdown and trenches

The first idea that strikes the reader are the parallels not between a soldier’s life and that of medics, but with the actual people living with the consequences of the virus while at home. There is the sense of claustrophobia perceived within the trenches: during an endless bombing session, which may end at any instant, or rather be the last instant of life itself, we sense a permanent postponing of the release from tension. What the reader perceives is the idea of a shelter that is supposed to protect you, but at the same time may bury you. It is the only safe space, yet it is nonetheless fragile, futile, and unbearable. During the worse instances of attack and segregation, the soldier “feels as though he is suffocating here and wants to get out at any price.” His only impulse is to get out, even at the risk of losing his life – a prospect that is not allowed, and indeed the other soldiers will attempt to restore order mercilessly: through exemplary beating. But it is not enough.

Of course, lockdowns are not trenches – and our homes are (for the most) far from muddy shelters. Yet the metaphor is quite similar, in the perspective that outside is a Hobbesian state of nature – with the stress of death requiring ever more measures of control, to avoid the anarchic death threat. Houses, in this instance, much like the modes in which the war hospitals are described in the novel, become just like trenches themselves, isolated and yet welcoming – while outside there is nothing but a tomb, or effectively a graveyard. In this context, Remarque notices how man loses all sense. In waging a War, possibly any war (just as this Pandemic), “We have become wild beasts. We do not fight; we defend ourselves against annihilation.” And the fear of annihilation allows any measure of the State of Nature. Anything else is halted, and egocentrism is pushed to the extreme. Everyone thinks for themselves – pretending to be a platoon caring for the other. We must endure anything to survive, and our survival is the most important thing: a strict instinct. With social distancing, we notice how this centrism has become geometrically measured: 1 metre, or 1.8 metres – in some places 2, whatever difference it makes. That is the mandatory distance you must stand from your enemy before you also become an enemy.

Good food and shelter

Apart from killing – that is far from being enjoyed by any soldier, but rather is coexisted with – the priorities of a soldier during wartime are described by Remarque as “good food and rest”. These are the pitiful yet valuable pleasures he may enjoy, while the world around appears to be in ashes. Remarque notices how: “That’s not much when one comes to think

of it. A few years ago we would have despised ourselves terribly. But now we are almost happy. It is all a matter of habit – even the frontline.”

Just as during the lockdown and in general under restraining orders, the soldier/citizen in such conditions enjoy the little aspects of such comfort – much like in a Kierkegaardian self-awareness. Indeed, the 2020/21 lockdowns offered to citizens all the comforts of the modern age, from supply-filled supermarkets to unlimited entertainment options. Exemplary is the European launch of Disney + streaming service, becoming available online simultaneously in Austria, the United Kingdom, Spain, Italy, Germany, Ireland, and Switzerland on 24 March 2020, effectively offering (as a sort of parachute first aid kit) content for families during the harshest closing down measures. But we also witnessed the “reprise” of home cooking as a healthy and social trend during lockdown (Lavelle, 2021), characterized for example by “a wave of bread making ‘obsession’” (Rahman, 2020). Similarly, in *All Quiet on the Western Front*, to cook well, enjoy trivial entertainment and occasionally chase women, seem the only release to the “death pressure valve”, necessary to keep all the front “quiet”. Remarque also devotes quite some pages to the somewhat comic figure of Tjaden – describing the “great eats” he manages to organize, even in the harshest conditions. Eating, thus food and finding food, appear to be the greatest concern for a soldier. Similar importance is afforded to the shelter – a refuge in whatever condition: “I wish I were ‘back home’. Home – he means the huts.” Indeed, the trench and the hut, having no other alternatives, become the soldier’s most valuable space. It is his only satisfaction, so as not to think about what actually surrounds him, while outside the war is waged and others die – or at least such is the perceptions. Eating and having “quality” time with those who share the same evil are the only ways of resisting looking around (much less behind) and thinking of our state of being.

Thinking and remembering

Thinking is a central concern, though in a paradoxical way: the soldier must do less and less of it. Less than anything, he must endure remembering, especially the past. Memories are a phantom, which Remarque says it is too painful to halt on: “In the quiet hours when the puzzling reflection of former days like a blurred mirror, projects beyond me the figure of my present existence, I often sit over against myself, as before a stranger, and wonder how the unnameable active principle that calls itself to life has adapted itself even to this form.” And still further: “Their stillness is the reason why these memories of former times do not awaken desire so much as sorrow—a vast, inapprehensible melancholy. Once we had such desires—but they return not. They are past, they belong to another world that is gone from us.” Melancholy becomes the central characteristic of the “soldier” – whether in WW1 or during the pandemic; the Guardian has indeed opened a specific series on how to deal with “Sadness of Lockdown” (The Guardian, 2020).

In any case, “Those are the dangerous moments. They show us that the adjustment is only artificial, that it is not simple rest, but sharpest struggle for rest.” The past, as underlined by Remarque – the idea of a normal life – is gone and it will not return. Even our conception of what was before coronavirus is being labelled as a past that is irretrievably gone: we must “get over it” and accept a post-COVID New-Normality (Tesar, 2020) that had ended the old world. Education in this condition is no longer significant.

What went on in schools, the math problems posed, and the poems learned, appear to be completely useless – a waste of time – compared to the effective relevance of war. All the rest is only a distraction. For shoes to be shiny and to have the uniform tidy are the only prerogative of the soldier. A quite distinctive parallel appears today: we have a new pandemic uniform, made of masks, gloves, even “face-shields”, specific for the top rank officials, the medics, but even for the trench-commoners, the citizens. We even have our own new military salute: the non-handshake, a touchless and meaningless exchange of recognition during encounters (quite useless in a strict sense, as one is not supposed to meet anyone). To stay alive is the mantra for which repetitive gestures are fixated in the mind of the war-bearer – from rapidly charging the gun to efficiently sanitizing surfaces – washing hands, wearing masks, keeping distance, repeated in every speaker, radio, TV set, article, and social network.

Indeed, Remarque notices how: “even if these scenes of our youth were given back to us we would hardly know what to do. The tender, secret influence that passed from them into us could not rise again. We might be amongst them and move in them; we might remember and love them and be stirred by the sight of them.” Such a perception is becoming more and more significant in the anxiety, perceived globally (Drake, 2021), when visualizing in movies social proximity occasions – or even conceiving a hospital ward with doctors without masks. It appears almost inconceivable, just as for Remarque the touch of such memories “would be like gazing at the photograph of a dead comrade; those are his features, it is his face, and the days we spent together take on a mournful life in the memory; but the man himself it is not.” War has taken over the past, just as its mentality has overshadowed the judgment of people in every context. War on COVID is not simply promoted by the politicians, but enforced by the police authorities, and conformity to it is monitored by the supermarket cashier, the bank manager, the anxious neighbour. Just as in 1914, the people were keen to go to battle; the numbers of voluntary subscribers speak for themselves (Mak, 2004). Not to conform is a matter of life or death, a disgrace and a hazard. In both wars, youngsters in particular are required to conform: in the great War to serve the country, during COVID-19, they are stigmatized as potential transmitters (BBC, 2021), and fundamental dissidents from the restrictions (BBC, 2020).

Loneliness and resilience

The soldier, just as the modern-day socially distanced citizen, relies fundamentally on his strength and weakness in the loneliness he must endure. The soldier stands in a crowd alone: “We were all at once terribly alone; and alone we must see it through.” And loneliness is the central technique to dodge bullets, with the inexperienced youngsters who face the battlefield “flock[ing] together like sheep instead of scattering” – and together are shot down. Becoming an expert trench warrior, as Remarque tells us, “demands knowledge and experience”. He knows the rules to prevent death (read contagion) and survives thanks to this expertise. He is resistant: “a man must have a feeling for the contours of the ground, an ear for the sound and character of the shells, must be able to decide before hand where they will drop, how they will burst, and how to shelter from them”. The word resilience, which did not appear in the translation I consulted, seem fitting – and indeed was a repeated trope used by the media recently across the globe, especially in Italy (Amato,

2020). Loneliness and resilience become the central weapons to protect oneself – but also lead to further breakdown, as: “These voices, these quiet words, these footsteps in the trench behind me recall me at a bound from the terrible loneliness and fear of death by which I had been almost destroyed.” But what are these voices? Paul/Erich has no doubt about them, as revealed in the concluding lines of his novel: “They are more to me than life, these voices, they are more than motherliness and more than fear; they are the strongest, most comforting thing there is anywhere: they are the voices of my comrades.”

Aftermath: a new-normality

A surreal condition arises, whereas the condition of War becomes not only normality, but when the War is over, it is the normality we feel to relate to.⁶ It is sad to engage with today’s paper proclaiming not only the rhetoric of war, but the advantages war offers and have offered to nations. Some articles (not worth referencing), read in the spring of 2021, claim the coming to be of an actual post-COVID renaissance – applauding social, artistic and economic recovery, an actual rebirth from its stale condition. This parallel goes further, correlating the suffering of the plague with exiting the “dark ages” and the post-War industry boom. All this is fine if we don’t look too deeply into how the past was truly experienced. Regarding the Great War, no great recovery afterwards can be easily perceived. Rather, no return to normality was indeed followed, as we have said, as there was no longer a normality to cling on. It had gone, also buried under the trenches. Europe had changed, and for years “street life was characterised by what was referred to in those days as ‘broken faces’” (Mak, 2004, p. 125). Moreover, it was in the grounds of its horror that dictatorships rose, democracies crumbled, and World War Two came to be: the Great War, with its Ypres and Verdun, showed us the way. Yes, in the last years of Covid we have not suffered the multimillion deaths of the young. Yet, we have lived with the fear of it – both young and old. Instead, we are locked in our homes, enjoying comforting moments of peace and serenity. But these moments, part of a specific comfort zone while the threat of death wages outside, are obviously nothing but an illusion: the events, the normality, the friendships, the travelling, the “being together” have been put to question, and perhaps will never return as granted, necessary and rightful as before.

What we really crave after was the time long before the War – but the War has just brushed it away. In the name of what?

In the name of War

The rhetoric of war, as we have seen, is a repeated formula across the globe, used in order to render effective and convincing the danger of the virus. Such wording, nonetheless, reminds us of the most distressing times of mankind – and indeed might well form a scary “self-fulfilling prophecy” concerning the scars we are about to endure. But more considerations must be made. With the Vaccine Campaign heading toward a perhaps ever-recurring inculcation of doses, we are seeing the rise of a new enemy evoked using the rhetoric of war – the dissidents, the “deniers” – in other words all those oddly recollected and vaguely associated acts of No-Mask, No-Vax, their perpetrators characterised as right-

wing and anti-democratic. These have become the emblem of the traitors to the cause, dissidents to the War: dangerous as – and accomplices to – the virus itself. Yet, in the novel we read of a conversation among comrades that could happen just as well today. What was the war about in the first place?, they ask themselves. Who were they fighting? Yes, Remarque notices how they were fighting the French, just as we the Coronavirus – but who in particular? Who called for this war, what is the purpose, why was it called this way, and why is there no easy solution?

«*I think it is more of a kind of fever*» says Albert – in a striking and contemporary consideration: «*No one in particular wants it, and then all at once there it is. We didn't want the war, the others say the same thing—and yet half the world is in it all the same.* » To this, Albert replies in yet another incredible parallel:

«*But there are more lies told by the other side than by us,* » say I [underlying possibly the fundamental thought of Remarque himself]; «*just think of those pamphlets the prisoners have on them, where it says that we eat Belgian children. The fellows who write those lies ought to go and hang themselves. They are the real culprits.* »

And within this true culprit we may easily relate mediated lies, hysteria and moral panic spread and gone viral online – just as the virus itself – and possibly the most dangerous of all: the waging of war and the rhetoric of war – of death counts and mistakes, of killings and manslaughter.

But again, the question stays and becomes pervasive, unanswered and yet filled with so many deaths across a century:

«*Then what exactly is the war for?* » asks Tjaden.

Kat shrugs his shoulders. «There must be some people to whom the war is useful.»

Notes

¹ It is interesting how by October 2021 the Wikipedia entry for ‘virus’ depicts an image of a ‘coronavirus’, as if to underline that it is The Virus *par excellence*.

² I must thank Professor Richard Griffin for suggesting this to me.

³ Indeed, Björnehed notices use of the buzz-word Narco-Terrorism is an ideal ‘portmanteau’ that integrated perfectly the war on drugs and the terror threat.

⁴ And, arguably, even the environment itself is turning into an enemy.

⁵ Particularly interesting is the false – yet extremely “viral” – candidacy of Italian medics for the Nobel Peace Prize. Many leading newspapers published the false “official” motivations from Oslo, praising how they “Have resorted to possible war medicine remedies by fighting in the trenches to save lives and often losing theirs”. The rhetoric, again, strikes as incredible, due to the words used – and these were actually believed by most Italians.

⁶ And may even feel nostalgia for, as in the case of the lockdowns (Crampton, 2021).

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