

Introduction

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Introduction[1]

Sandra Brée, Saskia Hin

Foreword

This edited volume is the result of a conference on the impact of WWI on marriages, divorces and gender relations in Europe held at the KUL in Leuven in October 2017. The conference was organized in the context of the BELSPO-project "The Great War from Below". We kindly thank BELSPO, and the Société de Démographie Historique, for their financial support, and the speakers and attendees for their participation and exchange of thought.

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Tuesday, January 5, 1915

Belle and I took a walk today to see the place under snow. The soldiers make very merry and many a good game of snowballs I witness. The war seems wholesale murder. A lady here got her first letter from her husband two weeks after his departure saying: 'Beloved wife, my last greetings on our third wedding anniversary'. That was all he was able to write being mortally wounded. She was at home with a one-year-old baby.

Thursday, April 15, 1915

I saw a lot of men going to Berlin today. It was such a sad sight. I went to the Doctor's and when I got there a woman, who was watching the procession from the windows in the Doctor's rooms, asked me if my husband was amongst them for she could see that I had been

crying. I said no - my husband was already away. She said: 'So is mine. But I am past crying. Many of the wives of these poor men expect them home tonight, but they will get a telegram from Berlin instead'.

Tuesday, February 6, 1917

I will leave here this morning at a quarter to seven and I hope for a successful journey. I am just writing a letter to Arthur and pray that I shall soon meet him.

These words were written by Annie Droege, a British woman born in 1874 in Stockport. Married to a husband of British-German descent, the couple had moved to Germany in 1910 after Arthur inherited a family fortune there. As World War I broke out, Annie got stuck in Germany while her husband was, because of his family connections to the British enemy, interned in a prison camp near Berlin. Close to the centennial of WWI, her great-nephew encountered Annie's most personal treasures in a box on an attic in Stockport: a photo album and a diary describing her experiences during the war.

Published as the "Diary of Annie's War", Annie's diary[2] describes an experience that was, in many ways, unique: she was a British woman spending most of her days in the German garrison town Hildesheim, as "the only foreigners in the district, and, of course… the object of all their spite", with friends fighting for the German Kaiser, and family members on the allied side of the front. Yet Annie's diary also reveals very sharply how the departure and loss of men impacted on the lives of married couples and daily life for women in Germany. During the war, in physical separation from her husband, Annie experienced her own moments of anxiety, surrounded by hostilities in her daily moves in the region and the journeys she had to make. While the letters she wrote to her husband Arthur are lost, her diary grippingly shows how she,

and the women around her, struggled with the absence of their husbands and the knowledge that their lives were at risk.

Annie's story is one of many feedings into a long-standing debate among historians: that of the impact of the war on everyday life, and on people's life histories. Among one group of scientists involved in this debate, historical demographers, focus has traditionally been on the demographic impact of the war on losses of human lives[3] and the number of children couples produced[4].

In this volume, we leave behind the often-addressed themes of wartime deaths and the steep drop in births that the war provoked. Instead, we focus on a theme that has been relatively understudied, and only seems to be gaining increasing attention now, at the 100th anniversary of the end of WWI: that of the impact of the war in terms of marriages and divorces, and, intertwined with these, that of gender relations. For that purpose, we brought together historians, sociologists and demographers from various European countries that each brought their own unique vantage point and expertise to study the longer-term impact of *The Great War* on the life-courses of "ordinary" citizens. The novel methodological approach of this volume lies in the fact that it looks at developments in marriage, divorce and gender relations across Europe from a comparative perspective ~~with~~, balancing quantitative and qualitative perspectives. In contrast to most of the earlier studies that almost exclusively focused on Western Europe, we have tried to include studies on the effects of WWI on the life course of people in Eastern and Southeastern Europe as well.

Now that the centennial of the war has passed, 100-year privacy protection laws on personal data have lapsed, and the increased (and still increasing) availability of data for this period

provides unique opportunities to look into patterns of family formation and dissolution and ask what these might tell us about the dynamics of gender relations before, during, and after the Great War.

The question of the emancipation of women as a consequence of the First World War is a very complex issue. Initially, the First World War was often thought to have had positive implications for gender equality and the position of women in Europe. The war indeed undermined traditional gender patterns and created new opportunities for women. As men were fighting at the front, women took over crucial positions in the labour market. Thanks to these new experiences, women would have gained more autonomy and respect. It also would have led to greater gender equality as war shook up societies in ways that gave women more prominence and crucial roles in the economies of their home countries. Increased gender equality expressed itself in different ways, at different levels, with the suffragettes claiming voting rights for women and the "flappers", with their short skirts and boyish hairdos, as the most compelling examples.

However, a new generation of historians have started to question this traditional idea pointing out that the emancipation of women as a consequence of the Great War is not that obvious[5]: war frequently correlated somewhat with gender inequality cross-culturally, but modestly and unevenly[6]. Timm and Sandborn[7] underline that emancipatory gains were very short-lived and argue that we cannot speak of a liberalization of women as the long-term effects of war were negative for women across the board. If women somehow emancipated, by working, managing home, and even gained the right to vote in many countries (around twenty between 1918 and 1920), they were also sent back home at 'their' place of wives and especially of mothers while the men regained 'their' position of head of family[8].

WWI as a catalyst for emancipation, or as a conservative force?

This book follows on new generations of historians asking whether the earlier coarse picture of female emancipation as resulting from WWI can stand once we start to dig deeper and delve into the geographic heterogeneity of war experiences and pre-existing differentiation in marriage and family patterns and gender relations. Through the little studied perspective of the war influence on gender relations and marriage and family patterns, this volume tries to shed new light on this intricate question. Can WWI really be thought of as a breaking or turning point in history that had a lasting impact on couples and marriages? Or did things, for most people, in the end, remain more or less the same as before? Can we see a greater female empowerment and, if so, was this due to the war or to longer-term processes? Was change adopted by a broad range of men and women, or rather only by groups with a specific war history, or with certain socio-economic characteristics?

Both macro- and microlevel demographic sources provide us with excellent material for studying these questions across a variety of European countries. The comparison of European countries with different family and gender relation histories allows us to understand the impact of the WWI on changes in the practices of marriage, divorce and gender relations. How did these evolve during the early twentieth century? And what role did, WWI play in these evolutions? Are there differences according to heterogeneous war experiences of countries or regions? Is there evidence of female empowerment in marriage patterns, in the ages at which women married and in the types of partners they chose, and in patterns of divorce? And how did the development of male marriage patterns relate to that of women?

The macro- and microlevel demographic sources combined with qualitative evidence (diaries, letters and other private or household accounts) and gender and social analysis shed new light

on the debate of how World War I impacted on gender relations. The large number of countries studied, and the heterogeneity of their situations begin to shed light on the situation of families and couples before the war and of the impact of the latest on marriage and family patterns and gender relations. Above all, this volume highlights geographic diversity and points out how different methodological approaches – including both qualitative and quantitative perspectives – complement each other.

The current volume should be seen as a start in indicating new directions to study the evolution of gender relations and women's emancipation. We hope that the demographic perspectives that are provided here will inspire further systematic research drawing on archival resources that are increasingly becoming publicly available.

Couples and families before the Great war: a background sketch

At the time WWI broke out, there were strong contrasts between the countries of Europe in the processes of family formation and family dissolution. The demographic transition had already begun in some countries of western Europe. In most of them, women still have between three and four children but in Belgium and in England fertility had fallen to below three children per women. France stood out as a special case: the number of children per woman here was much lower than in most other European countries: 2.2 at the onset of WWI. This was due to the fact that in France, the fertility transition occurred already just before the French Revolution, whereas it started almost one century later in the other countries of north-western Europe. In the countries of the south and the east of Europe, the transition began even later. By 1914, it had reached the peripheries of the continent, even in the rural areas, but it was still at its

beginnings, especially in the east. In Russia and the Balkans, fertility was still at more than five children per women at the eve of the WWI[9].

While fertility thus was in decline across Europe, well-established characteristics of marriages had not yet changed much before the First World War. Clear differentiations existed though between marriage patterns in different zones within Europe, although at a local level these general patterns could be very different[10]. Whereas the northern-west part of Europe was characterised by a relatively high age at first marriage (between 25 and 30 for men and 20 and 27 for women), a high share of people remaining single at 25-29 (around than 50 % for men and 41% for women) and a high proportion of permanent celibacy (around 10 %), a pattern known as the "European marriage pattern"[11], in the southern and eastern parts of Europe, almost all men and women got married and marriages took place at an earlier age than was common in northwestern Europe (around 70% of men and 90% of women were already married before 30). The age gaps between partners was clearly larger in the East and South of Europe than it was in the West, with men often being years older than their wives. It deserves emphasis here that in anthropology, sociology and gender theory, the age gap between partners is seen as a factor that is of importance to gender relations, with pronounced age gaps contributing to uneven power relations in marriage. Important to note here is also that early marriage in most of the southern and eastern European regions implied that the age at motherhood was quite low.

Partly as a consequence of the aforementioned differences in marriage patterns and numbers of children, the composition of households in which people lived– often defined as people sharing a roof and a kitchen or common meals – also differed strongly across Europe. In their turn, household characteristics had an effect on the life courses of the household members. Following Laslett[12], Todd[13] lists four big groups of types of families in pré-industrial Europe,

while recognizing a series of subgroups within these. Characteristic of the 'authoritarian' family in central Europe (Germany, Austria, Belgium) and Scandinavia as well as in the Celtic areas (Wales, West of England, Scotland, Ireland, the south-east of France, the north-west of Spain and northern Portugal) was that only one of the sons (often the first born) got married and all the familial patrimony was transmitted to him. The 'community' family in Russia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Finland, Albania and Central Italy was characterized by the cohabitation of married sons and their parents. Here, the inheritance was equally shared between the sons. In the 'absolute nuclear' families in the Netherlands, Denmark, the south and south-east of Great-Britain and the east of France, a father could divide the familial patrimony between his sons as he pleased. Each child of the family could marry, have children, and found independent households. Finally, in the 'egalitarian nuclear' families in northern France, northern Italy, central and southern Spain, central Portugal, Greece, Romania and Poland, a father could not divide his patrimony as he wanted but had to divide it equally between all of his sons.

At the eve of WWI, these familial characteristics had started to change, in particular with industrialization and urbanization. Nuclear families were increasingly numerous in the cities to which they were better adapted. This held true especially among the working classes of the urban industrial areas of the Western Europe.

In cities, unofficial forms of union were also developing. While across Europe, in general, a marriage was the only way for couples to officially live together and share a household, in England, Wales and Scotland, unmarried cohabiting couples were recognized and officially registered. In many other countries, unofficial or 'companionate' marriages increased during the nineteenth century in the footsteps of urbanization. It was a predominantly urban phenomenon, prevalent mostly among the working class[14]. It can be seen as linked to the costs of living and marriage: in Paris, for instance, the cost of marriages was so high that workers no

longer got married and instead could live together for several years, and even have children out of wedlock[15]. This can also be a sign of a decline in social, family and religious control[16]. For Matovic[17], following Shorter[18], extra-legal families reflect also a relatively strong position of women on the labor market who could support themselves without marrying and thus could delay their marriage. But for Tilly, Scott and Cohen[19], industrialization and urbanization have, on the contrary, led to the formation of a poor, uneducated and, consequently, vulnerable and often isolated population (especially women).

The at times high levels of informal cohabitation[20], as well as the rising number of single unmarried mothers who became pregnant after a promise of marriage; a simple adventure; or, sometimes, a rape, led to a high number of births out of wedlock. However, after a long period of rising illegitimacy – since the end of the eighteenth century – levels had started to decline in western Europe et the end of the nineteenth century. This decline is often attributed to the spread of contraceptive practices among unmarried couples and the rise of abortions[21]. Laslett[22], however, saw this trend more as the result of increased opportunities to getting married for couples of which the woman became pregnant out of wedlock. Recent research on Belgium seems to confirm this so-called 'courtship model'[23]. It does not imply, however, that increased use of contraception and abortion also played a role in the decline of non-marital fertility.

Legal divorce patterns also distinguished northern-western European countries from the rest of Europe. Around the beginning of WWI, divorce was allowed on the grounds of adultery, violence, or a partner's abandonment of married life in France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany, Austria and Great Britain. Although in England and Wales divorce was legalized in 1857, it was expensive and difficult to obtain, especially for women. In Scotland, by contrast, it was easier to divorce (see Thane in this volume). As in England and Wales, there were

inequalities in access to divorce between men and women in other countries as well, with access being more limited for women. In France, a woman could, for instance, ask divorce on the grounds of adultery only if her husband had lodged his mistress at the matrimonial home, whereas men just had to prove the adultery of their wife[24]. In Romania also, divorce was authorized from 1864 onwards, on the basis of the French civil code of 1804.

The fifty years preceding the war, therefore, were a transitional period in the history of divorce[25]. In those European countries in which divorce was authorized rates increased significantly, and divorce became a major social issue. Divorce rates rose even more dramatically in the immediate postwar period, especially in the countries that had been militarily involved in the war: France, England and Germany. An increase of divorce has been observed frequently during postwar periods, such as following World War II or the American Civil war.

But while divorce rates continued to rise in Germany and in England and Wales, in France, by contrast, levels fell back after the post-war recovery[26]. In the Netherlands and in Sweden, countries that had not (militarily) been involved in the war, rates rose steadily. Given these differential patterns, it is hard to establish whether the war accelerated the process of divorce, whether it was even a 'watershed in the history of divorce' as Phillips argued[27], or whether we simply witness the continual of a trend that had started half a century earlier. What we can say is that it seems that the war did indeed induce change in at least some countries, since in Russia and Czechoslovakia, as well as in the Scandinavian countries, divorce would first be authorized after the Great War.

According to Phillips[28], there are four processes that can explain the weakening of marriages during and after wartime. First, the separation of the couples for months or years. Husbands and wives lived through experiences that were very different from what they knew before the war, and they did so separately from each other. For men these experiences included the battles and

the front, and for women being in full charge of the house or the farm and work in civilian employment or in ammunition factories. Second, during the war some marriages were contracted more quickly than they would have been in peacetime. These hasty unions may have been more fragile than those of people who had known each other for a long time. A third explanation may lie in wartime adultery of both men[29] and women[30]. Finally, the rise of divorces in itself made divorce more socially accepted[31], especially in the cities. This change in attitude, which was part of a broader set of changes, such as the evolution of the status of women, could also have contributed to the general expansion of divorces.

As to the Southern catholic countries, divorce was authorized in Spain from 1932 to 1938 and then only again in 1982 and only in 1970 in Italy and 1975 in Portugal. However, it must be pointed out that during periods when divorce was not authorized – and sometimes even while it was – legal separations were possible, and so were marriage annulations for catholic marriages. But, in contrast to divorces, legal separations did not allow for remarriage. The existence of legal divorce however did not in itself guarantee the possibility of remarriage. In Scotland, even if divorce was allowed and easy to obtain, it was not possible to remarry during the lifetime of the former partner because the churches opposed it and civil marriage did not exist until 1939.

In addition to the decline in fertility across Europe; the rise of divorce and unmarried cohabitation in many parts of Europe; and the Western European decline in non-marital fertility, from the end of the nineteenth century a rise in ‘romantic love’ occurred. In fact, the rise of divorce and unmarried cohabitations can be linked to an evolution of the concept of marriage. Marriage, which had traditionally been seen as an economic contract, evolved into the formalization of a romantic union of love. This notion of love, rather than economic need or family interest, as the foundation of a union also made that couples increasingly lived together

even if they could not afford to get married. Divorce, on the other hand, came to be seen as a phenomenon that enabled people to end sharing a household with someone who beat them or cheated on them, and also to enable people to remarry with someone they loved. The most ardent defenders of divorce pointed out that the absence of sentiment in marriage caused infidelity and adultery. For Coontz[32], the rise in divorce was the logical complement to the "rise of love": the increasing possibility of *choosing* one's partner increased the importance of love in this choice and, consequently, disenchantment – and, therefore, divorce. The availability of divorce enabled people to think about the family differently. Women no longer were either single girls or married women, and the possibility of divorce, of getting "de-married"[33] changed the place of women in society. Some authors also argue that the rise of divorce in the nineteenth century can be linked to the increasingly gendered specialization of roles. This led to a constraint of women in explicitly "female" roles, as mothers and housewives, as the centres of the private sphere; while social norms that ascribed men to the public sphere strengthened. These increasingly sharply defined roles fit uneasily for some women: whence the rise of divorce[34].

Couples and families during and after the war

During the First World war, a lot of men had to leave their home to fight for their country. Mass soldiering hugely impacted France, Serbia, Germany, Britain (less so Ireland, which had no conscription), Austria-Hungary, Serbia and Italy but affected Belgium less than other European states because the country was early occupied by the German army (as the North of France). These soldiers left their wives, fiancées, children and families for months or years. Even if people wrote a lot to each other during the conflict[35], these long-term separations - but also the fear of learning the death of the absent - left traces in the history of couples and families. Women and men sometimes lived several years apart during the conflict and children grew up without

seeing – sometimes without knowing – their fathers[36]. This forced separation affected young couples more heavily, as military recruitment and conscription was concentrated among the younger cohorts of men. “In the main combatant nations, approximately one third of children - more in France and the other continental states and less in the English-speaking states - had fathers in the military. Separation on this scale was unprecedented in the history of the West, and for those families affected, it recast relationships profoundly”[37]. In other cases, wives and children had to live without their husbands and fathers because men were sent off to work as forced labourers for the enemy – a phenomenon which, for example, heavily affected Belgian and especially Walloon working class families. In these cases, the age groups affected were wider: men between ages 18 and 55 were deported.[38] Forced by circumstances, women and children learnt to live without their husbands and fathers which was hard emotionally but also economically. Public assistance was often not sufficient to live and women and sometimes children had to work to compensate for the missing earnings of the absent father.

At the end of the war, a lot of soldiers did not come back as the number of deaths was close to 10 million. Serbia suffered the relatively highest number of deaths (10 % of the population) followed by France, the Ottoman Empire, the German Empire and Romania (3 to 4 % of the population)[39]. Alongside casualties directly invoked by violence, many men fell victim to the influenza epidemic – better known as the Spanish Flu – that hit hardly upon European armies in 1918.[40] Yet other men were separated from their families for long because they were captured as prisoners of war (POWs, whose numbers are estimated at 7 to 9 million) and did not come back before 1919, or, for the Russian prisoners, sometimes not even until1922.

Whatever the case, most of the separations were undoubtedly painful and made readjustment to family life upon return generally difficult. In those families where the soldier came back, some

couples experienced strong difficulties returning to their married life and eventually divorced. The conflict was for many couples a sentimental and sometimes a marital catastrophe[41]. In addition to the separation itself, a lot of soldiers were injured or traumatized.

The consequences of the war were also very hard for the widows and the orphans the conflict had made[42]. According to Jay Winter[43], out of the total of 9.7 million soldiers that were killed or went missing in the war, one in three headed a family of his own. These men left behind, on average, a widow and two orphans: as a result, historians count an estimated 525,000 widows in Germany in 1920, 240,000 in Great Britain, and 200,000 in Italy. In France, 1,400,000 military men killed or missing left behind 700,000 war widows[44]. Despite the material supports for widows and orphans, life was very hard for these women and mothers who had to survive by themselves but who also became chiefs of their families[45] and also for the war orphans[46]. In some countries, as in France[47], war widows remarried much more than before the war. French war widows thus manage to remarry despite the very high number of single women of marrying age. In England also war widow remarried but some of them preferred to cohabit since they lost their war pension on remarriage[48].

The war conditions also led to increasing migration of certain population groups, and their integration into local communities at their destination place led to new types of intermarriages. An important group in this were the prisoners of war. While the first of them were imprisoned into camps, gradually prisoners were transferred to work detachments; to the *Kommandos*; put to work in the industry; engaged in the construction of public works; or forced to exploit farms. Only 10% to 15% of prisoners still lived in camps by late 1917[49]. Their long stay abroad, and their increasing level of integration into local civil society led to relationships, children and even marriages with local women[50]. The war conditions also promoted intercultural or

transregional marriages due to increases in free labour mobility that were linked to the war. For example, Austrian women migrated to work in the German textile industry[51]. These phenomena also provoked concurrent redefinitions or reinforcements of norms regarding "bi-national" and sometimes "inter-racial" marriages.

All this created major tensions in gender roles that became more contested than before the war. These tensions were aggravated by the massive readjustment of roles that needed to take place in the post-war world.

A demographic perspective

The war brought along dramatic demographic changes. The impact of these changes has been studied mostly at the macro-level, with a focus on estimates of the death tolls, declining birth rates and resulting changes in the age- and sex-structure of the different populations affected.[52] But behind these counts, most derived from national level statistics, lie countless individual life histories that, because they took unexpected turns, jointly produced these macro-level statistics. Individual level records on marriage, divorce, childbirth and death allow for reconstruction of the life histories of men, women and children that lived through the war, and can thereby show in what ways the war impacted crucial aspects of the life course such as whether or not women contracted a marriage, at what age and with what kind of spouses, whether or not they had children and how they kept their marriage intact. Importantly, such individual-level records also provide unique opportunities to study heterogeneity in the effects of the First World War, and the intensity of these effects, on different subgroups within populations, for example heterogeneity by socio-economic status, gender, and age.

Yet limited access to the primary sources that can unveil these micro-level stories, and are vital to the study of demography, has made that the first half of the twentieth century has thus far remained one of the most understudied periods in historical demography. Due to regulations protecting the privacy of living citizens, registers containing records on births, marriages, and divorces in most countries can only be accessed once they are more than 100 years old. While, for some countries as France, Belgium or England, we have empirical information about the general patterns of marriages and births after WWI[53], even the most basic trends are surprisingly understudied for many others[54]. This volume, in trying to get a better sense of how the life courses of men and women were affected by the Great War, builds on and should be situated within what we know about general demographic patterns and trends. We here provide a short, by no means comprehensive, overview of key elements of this macro-demographic framework.

That the First World War created dents into the populations involved could still be seen in their respective age pyramids at the end of the twentieth century: with the millions of (especially male) deaths and the "missing births" of the 1914-1918 period moved up in the age pyramids as clearly visible dents reflecting smaller age groups. Although WWI had only a minimal effect on the population size, it strongly affected the number of people in specific age and gender groups. One could therefore expect changes on the marriage market that could have had an impact on the marriage pattern. However, research has shown that, even in the more affected countries where the number of deaths was huge and the sex ratio was strongly affected, the impact of the war was not as strong as it could have been on marriages[55] and fertility[56]. According to Henry[57], in France, four elements compensated for the loss of men: the unions of women with widowed or divorced men and with foreigners, as well as marriages of women with men younger or older than usual, and a decrease in men's celibacy. As a result, the permanent celibacy rate (i.e. to be single at 50) among women was a lot lower than it could

have been. As a consequence, fertility declined a lot less than it might have[58]. While the number of marriages did generally decline in Europe, in Great-Britain they actually increased during the war. As a consequence, in England and in Scotland, the proportion of married people was higher than before the war and celibacy declined[59].

A part of the 'lost births' were recovered during the immediate afterwar period, during which a peak of fertility can be observed in almost all European countries involved in WWI. However, subsequently, fertility indices declined very quickly again. From the beginning or the middle of the 1920s, the fertility transition, which had often started long before the war, continued its evolution. The number of children per woman reached its lowest level in the 1930s, whether countries had been involved in the conflict (France, England, Germany, Belgium) or not (The Netherlands). In the southern and eastern countries, fertility also declined but, because these countries began their fertility transition after the western ones, the number of births per women was still high. The very low levels of fertility in the 1930s, therefore, do not seem to be a consequence of the conflict, as had previously been suggested[60]. As Ronsin summarized, "even if the temptation is strong to explain the decline of the birth rate by the influence of these losses on the state of nuptiality (many women seem condemned to widowhood or celibacy) [...] the opposite [...] occurs: the proportion of single men decreases considerably, their age at marriage decreases and, even though the influence of the return to peace is no longer sensitive, the number of unions celebrated annually in France reaches a forgotten level for a very long time. [...] The fall in the French birth rate is not due to a decline in marriage rates."[61] But what holds true for France does not necessarily hold true everywhere. Lack of published data for countries other than France and the UK points to a need for additional research to better understand the effects of WWI on marriage.

In the eastern part of Europe, the impact of WWI on demography is harder to measure because data are few. The geographic entities of many Eastern European countries changed

after the war, which makes a demographic analysis for countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary very difficult. Furthermore, in the Balkans, the conflict had begun in 1912 already, and lasted longer than WWI did in Western Europe, sometimes even until 1922. Fluid transitions between WWI and local or regional violent conflicts make that the distinction is at times hard to make between demographic change directly connected to WWI, and changes in demographic trends that were not, or only indirectly related to the First World War. What we do know is that the demographic transition, which began late in comparison to Western Europe, speeded up during the interwar period[62]. In Russia, for example, an intense debate on family and marriage occurred after 1917. A very liberal discourse questioned the foundations of the "bourgeoise" family and marriages and advocated the end of civil marriage and the development of cohabitation. At the end of 1917, divorce was liberalized[63], followed by abortion in 1920 in Russia and in 1921 in the Ukraine and the other republics. Both without doubt contributed to the decline of fertility. Finally, however, more traditional attitudes towards marriage and the family gained force again. After several revisions restraining the right to abort (1924), abortion was prohibited in 1936. That same year, a new legislation made divorce a lot more difficult to obtain, and marriage got back its privileged status.

The current state of knowledge, therefore, seems to suggest that, when we look at larger time trends, continuity prevails in the demographic patterns of couples and family in Europe before and after the First World War. WWI has a short-lived impact only and is more of a "blip" in larger period trends than a breaking point in demographic history. But even if the demographic impact of the First World war was not as strong as it could have been, the behavioral change of adaptation in partner choices that we see is extremely important from a social-historical perspective, and from the perspective of gender history. Its relevance clearly shows, for example, in the, higher risk of divorce for the couples that suffered the most from war

separation[64], or in changes in the type of partner people chose during WWI. Using new kinds of macro data (on divorces for instance) or looking at micro-individual perspectives and individual life courses allows us to understand more precisely what the consequences of the Great War on couples, families and gender relations were. Moreover, as this introduction shows, most of the knowledge on this topic relates to the western countries. This book will bring new evidence since several chapters cover Eastern European countries such as Poland, Albania or Russia.

New qualitative and quantitative perspectives on marriage and divorce: a brief overview

The chapters contributing to this volume investigate key aspects of marriage and divorce as a window into gender relations and do so by placing WW1 in the context of the demographic history of the first thirty years of the twentieth century.

The first part of the volume focuses on *Continuity and change in gender relations*. Chapters in part I adopt a broad perspective in discussing gender relations as well as couple and household dynamics in Europe in the period before, during, and after WWI (1900-1930) in the light of (changing) social, demographic economic, institutional, and legal contexts and highlight the potential impact of WWI. In Chapter 1, Martha Hanna uses the rich qualitative source of letter exchanges between husbands and wives to contrast two cultural narratives of the impact of war on gender relationships in France: a first narrative that considers the war as having created unbridgeable divides between men and women, and a second that emphasizes the strong bonds between husbands and wives, able to withstand the extreme challenges with which their lives were faced. Her in depth-analyses of preserved letter exchanges leads Hanna to conclude that the second narrative looks to have been closer to the lived reality of wartime couples. She shows how, in many cases, couples communicated surprisingly openly about their circumstances,

fears, and (sexual) desires in their letter exchanges. Letters became a vital lifeline, with the help of which men drew their wives closer to the front by giving them information about the routines of their military lives, and about the dangers they were exposed to. Women, on their part, informed their husbands about their struggles and (household) work and the wellbeing and academic progress of their children. Both men and women expressed their longing for each other, at times in deeply intimate or even unapologetically erotic fashion. Importantly, Hanna's analysis of letter exchanges also reveals how men kept "one foot firmly planted in their civilian world", by providing their wives with detailed instructions on how to keep their business going, or, in the case of writers, schoolteachers, scholars and other liberal professions, continuing to draft or correct materials that they passed on in their letters. This pattern of continued engagement and assumption of a leading role in absence shows how we should not regard the war as having created an absolute breach in traditional gender roles in the labour market.

Chapters 2 by Pat Thane and 3 by Katarzyna Sierakowska highlight the diversity of gender relations in western (Britain) and eastern (Poland) Europe. Based on many different sources – both qualitative and quantitative –Thane and Sierakowska demonstrate the *status quo* of gender relations within couples and within society as a whole prior to the war. Their very detailed analyses reveal continuity and change in areas of life affecting gender relations during the war, and show the difficulties involved in attempts to discern what trends could be considered consequences of the war, and which ones may only have been a simple continuation of a background trend that already began before the war.

In Britain, the war does not seem to have had any effect on age gaps between partners, and while marriage ages changed somewhat during the war, the post-war period saw a quick return to pre-war patterns. The common depiction of the rise of single women as a phenomenon linked to impact of the First World War is, so Thane demonstrates, mostly a myth: while their numbers were slightly on the rise, Britain had always had a surplus of women – and hence, single women

– and during the war, the proportion of married men actually rose, a factor which likely limited the number of women who remained unmarried.

In another important area that is thought to be a driving force behind gender relations, that of the extant of female integration in the labor market, most changes were short-lived. Opportunities provided by the war were long-term only for middle-class women. For working class women, opportunities that existed during the war quickly disappeared again once peace and the men returned. During the war, middle class women were active in campaigning for social and legal reforms to increase gender equality and improve social conditions. This, and new confidence gained from war-time changes in roles may have contributed to gaining the vote, but was not directly driving a process that had been set in long before the war.

Yet there were also areas of gender relations that did see modest changes during the war that can be attributed to it more directly. Aspects of gender relationships that had previously remained hidden were brought into public discourse. Among these was unmarried motherhood. Before the war, unmarried motherhood was strongly stigmatized. While the idea that women who got pregnant without being married had a lack of morals continued to exist, the fact that some of these mothers were put in that situation because the war prevented them from getting married to the father led to greater public support for unmarried mothers and their children. Second, the war situation revealed that the normative family of married couples was, to some extent, a fiction. As the British military sought to give financial support to the legal wives and children of their soldiers, it became clear that a substantial number of "wives" in fact were not wives but informal partners. Because they were so prevalent, the government decided that not only legally married wives, but also "unmarried wives" were eligible for financial allowances if they had children and could show that they had in fact been in a long-term relationship with an army soldier. War brought "deviations" from the marriage norm into clearer view, and brought more recognition for women who did not conform to the marriage norm.

Katarzyna Sierakowska presents what, to our knowledge, is the first qualitative study on the impact of WWI on marital relations in current-day Poland. In her take on the question of the relation between war and gender relations, she focuses on discrepancies between concepts of gender roles and war reality. Based on more than 100 wartime diaries, letters, memoirs and journals by women and men, her analyses highlight how female independence increased in practice during the war. Forced by circumstances, women functioned as head of the family during the war. Self-realisation came to be seen as a factor of importance, and went hand-in-hand with smaller families. But the perception of the "right" social roles of both sexes barely followed through. Single women, for example, met with growing acceptance in the press, but this change towards greater gender equality was by no means big, dramatic, or universally accepted. Earning an income remained a necessity for women after the war, and job openings for women encouraged uptake of schooling for girls, but at the same time working women came to be seen as competitors for the position of the head of the family. Small and childless families were a source of concern, with public debate arising on the needs of society, and the young were sometimes charged them with egoism and caring for their own comforts only. Incidentally, the latter was viewed by many as a reaction to the hardship of the war.

Authors in the second part of the book, *Wartime upheaval and persistence in marriage patterns before and after the war*, focus more specifically on the changes that war may have provoked in marital patterns and gender relations The four chapters in this part bring new light on the impact of the First World War by pointing out which changes in marriage patterns can be attributed to the war and which changes are rather continuities of a groundswell that began before the war. The heterogeneity of the contexts: western and eastern countries, actively involved in the war (France) or occupied by foreign forces (Belgium[65], Poland[66], or Albania),

with more or less men involved in the armies and more or less death and injuries shows different aspects of the impact of the war on marriages and divorces.

In chapter 4, Saskia Hin, Paul Puschmann and Koen Matthijs focus on Belgium, a country that was occupied and place of numerous battles during the war. This country thus did not experience a substantial expansion of labour opportunities for women, and, since few men died, neither a strongly imbalanced sex ratio after the war. Therefore, the authors were able to measure those impacts of the war that were not due to casualties or female emancipation induced by increased labour opportunities for women. Drawing on individual level records on marriage as well qualitative contextual evidence, they show that while the war deeply devastated the country, there is no evidence of long-lasting changes in gender relations. The fact that the country was so devastated may have contributed to this lack of persistent change: it created an environment in which conservative forces could successfully gain ground. These forces – political parties as well as the Catholic church – emphasized the need for both women and men to revert back to their traditional gender roles in order to successfully rebuild the country. That said, the reversion back to more traditional gender roles is a trend we see across many countries that were involved in the war. Economic devastation or not, we may therefore simply see this reversal as a process of recovery characterized by a falling back to pre-war norms and traditions. Perhaps this reaction was one that was needed for people to reconstruct themselves.

In chapter 5, Siegfried Gruber, Gentiana Kera and Enriketa Pandelejmoni use newly available census data from a still widely unknown census in Albania in 1918 to study marriage patterns in this area, which was recognized as an independent state only in 1913. They compare their findings from the 1918 census with qualitative information from ethnographers on marriage patterns and gender relations before the war, and with marriage patterns as evidenced by the 1930 to get a sense of post-war trends. While recognizing the limitations of their cross-

sectional approach, with the material they dispose of Gruber and colleagues sheds important light on a region that was deeply affected by conflict and fighting during the WWI period, but has hardly received any attention in previous research on the demographic effects of that war because of the inaccessibility of data on the area. The authors also show the importance of confronting analyses by gender with socio-economic and geographic perspectives through contrasting marriage patterns in rural and urban Albania.

The demographic characteristics of the current territory of Albania prior to the war differed markedly from those in the other countries studied in this volume, with very early marriage for women, relatively late marriage for men, a huge age gap between marriage partners and the presence of polygamy among Muslim subpopulations. This pattern formed part of a deeply patriarchal society, characterized by strong gender disparities, in which marriage marked transition into a new family for women. As Gruber *et al*. show, the 1930 demographic characterisics of Albania were different from those in 1918, suggesting – but not proving that - change in marriage behavior occurred during or after the First World War. In 1930, the age difference between spouses was smaller than before, as men's marriage age had decreased compared to 1918, while that of women had increased. However, patterns did not change dramatically, and age differences between spouses were still large by European standards. Gruber *et al*.'s first investigation into marriage patterns on early 20th century Albanian territory thus reveal trends of interest to the history of gender relations that open the way for further investigation.

In chapter 6, Sandra Brée uses quantitative data to show the evolution of marriages and divorces in France before, during and after the war. In doing so, she highlights the evolution of gender relations from a different perspective. In France, despite the extremely significant losses that decimated several cohorts of young men, the Great War had more limited effects than expected on the intensity of marriages of the French because women married or remarried men

they would not necessarily have married during peacetime. As to divorces, at first sight, it seems that the peak of divorces observed just after the war compensated the divorces that did not occur during the conflict. Furthermore, the divorce rates of the interwar period are weaker than expected considering the movement of divorces before the war. But by investing more, it appears that the cohorts are not affected in the same way. Indeed, the couples married just before the war, during the conflict or just after it have higher risks of divorce than the previous ones. The couples married during the war were the most likely to divorce. The rush of some of these marriages could explain why so many of them ended in divorce. As to the couples who suffered the separation of the conflict, they divorced more often than their elders. the war also brought more real or suspected infidelity. Marriages of the immediate period also had higher risks of divorce than expected. Some of these brides married men they would not have chosen in peacetime which can explain a higher risk of divorce. But these marriages also concerned mainly the male cohort the most affected by the war in terms of mortality (born between 1891 and 1895). These young men were psychologically and physically traumatised and even if they managed to marry, the impact of the war seems to have had strong repercussions on their romantic, marital, and family lives. Even if the rates of divorce did not reach extremely high levels, except for the peak after the war, it appears that the First World War did devastate families, gender relations within couples, and probably relations between fathers and children.

In chapter 7, Bartósz Ogórek uses community-level demographic data from the Municipal Statistical Bureau of Cracow that reveal how the war led to a marriage squeeze among the inhabitants of this city. This squeeze translated into changes in the patterns of age at marriage, in the occurrence of remarriages and in widening geographic horizons over which marriage partners were sought. It was women who had to adjust their preferences in finding a partner. Using additional data on cost of living and mortality shocks, Ogórek demonstrates that spikes in food prices resulted in marriage postponement, thus showing an association between specific

historical wartime events and trends in the frequency marriage. Changes in marriage patterns that occurred during the war, however, were short-lived: except for divorce, marriage characteristics tended to return to pre-war patterns within a couple of years after the war. However, among the cohorts that were young during the war, the effects of the war often lasted a lifetime: among women that were of marriageable age during the war, for example, there were still distinctly more cases of celibacy at age 50 than among women whose prime years on the marriage market had not been affected by the wartime absence of men. And so the effects of the war could still be seen far into the twentieth century.

The third part of the volume brings together chapters about *Intercultural marriages and alternative life choices.* Chapters 8, 9 and 10 show the impact of the First World War on marriages by focusing on intercultural marriages and relationships. Many of these marriages fell into one of two categories: first, marriages resulting from the displacement of war prisoners, who sometimes married were they used to be held prisoner; and, second, those that emerged from the relations between occupiers and occupied.

In Chapter 8, Christoph Lorke brings together evidence on different areas within Germany. His nuanced analysis of nationally and culturally 'mixed' marriages, with attention for both male and female perspectives, brings to light how couples met with differential societal response depending on the origin, income, religion, skin colour, and professional status of foreign brides and grooms. While intercultural and mixed nationality marriages were certainly not new in Germany, but rather had been spurred earlier on by industrialization, the First World War, as Lorke shows, catalyzed the problematization and dismissive perception of some of these relationships. This concern was part of a larger morally conservative movement that arose in response to more progressive tendencies that had gained force in Germany during and after the war: rising female self-confidence, sexual awakening, and increasing divorces and

cohabitation without marriage. More conservative forces considered these developments as a threat to the nuclear family and as a challenge to the restauration of male hegemony. During the post-war period, regularization of marriages and families increasingly came to be seen as a vital tool to achieve national and ethnic homogenization. Gender played a key role in this process, as intermarriages of women with foreign men were perceived as a threat to stability, while those of German men with foreign women were not seen as much of a problem. This had everything to do with gender relations and the status of men and women in society: from a legal perspective, the offspring of unions of German men with foreign women would be German, while those of German women with foreign men would fall under the authority of a non-German. It was the latter types of unions that, therefore, invoked much larger difficulties for the couples involved, and prompted German authorities to limit, or even to prohibit, such marriages. In the aftermath of WWI, the connection between sexuality, nation, race, and gender thus became increasingly important.

In Belgium too, like in Germany, intercultural relationships and marriages resulting from the war caused social tensions and faced couples with the challenge of acceptance, as Chapter 9 by Emmanuel Debruyne brings to the fore. While before the war, there were frequent intermarriages between Belgians and Germans of both sexes, as there was a sizeable community of Germans living in Belgium, the outbreak of the conflict led to a near complete disappearance of potential German citizen marriage partners. Most civilian Germans left or were expelled, and the new military German population that replaced it was exclusively male.

Marriage register data for one province in Belgium show an 83% percent decline in the number of intermarriages between Germans and Belgians during the years 1915-1918, and Debruyne estimates that among the whole Belgian population, there were probably only about forty marriages between Germans and Belgians during the war. Debruyne's analysis of war diaries, register data reveals that the socio-economic characteristics of these marriages were different

than before the war: most men and women entering a marriage with partners from abroad now were from the working classes. Additional information derived from documentation by the German administration in Belgium shows how such marriages faced with resistance from both the Belgian and the German side. He convincingly argues that it is likely that the officially recorded marriages reflect only a small portion of intended marriages, intentions that were blocked by the authorities that refused or prohibited intermarriages between enemy sides or foregone by hostility of the social surroundings. In both Belgian and German minds, maintaining a "patriotic distance" towards the enemy became a behavioural norm that excluded intimate relationships, let alone marriages. Perhaps partly as a result of obstacles against formal marriage, the number of single Belgian mothers significantly rose, and by showing how this rise concentrated in areas where German troops were stationed, Debruyne links growing numbers of children registered as "of unknown fathers" to wartime relationships or sexual encounters between Belgian women and German men. In small communities surrounded by German trenches, these babies represented up to nearly 20% of the total births. That the frequency of intimate relationships between Belgian women and German men is only revealed indirectly, as a statistical disturbance in birth records, and received very little traceable attention is, according to Debruyne, telling of the oblivion with which Belgian society preferred to deal with what was seen as a shameful phenomenon.

In the Russian Urals, meanwhile, local society was faced with the question of integration of numerous prisoners of war, or POWs, who were sent there after their captivation by the Russian army. Their ranks were dominated by men from Germany and from the territories of the Austria-Hungarian Empire. The question what impact their presence had on local marriage patterns forms the heart of Chapter 10 by Elena Glavatskaya, Julia Borovik, Gunnar Thorvaldsen and Elizaveta Zabolotnykh. They work with individual-level records from a range of religious sources covering the vital events of local religious communities: Catholics, Jews,

Lutherans, Muslims, Russian Orthodox and Old Believers (a split-off from the Russian Orthodox Church). The complementariness of these sources allows them both to provide an overview of general marriage trends in the Urals, and in particular in the city of Yekaterinenburg, as well as to investigate differences between religious communities. They find that despite prohibitions of POWs to intermarry with locals until 1917, the settlement of POWs in both urban and rural areas led to romantic relationships between them and local women. The gender imbalance that the war created among the resident population, with a shortage of young men and a surplus of women, made that POWs attracted attention, especially when they were officers with "European" manners and looks. Shared religion made Catholic and Lutheran Russian women in particular open to a relationship with a POW, and the marriage records testify of a relatively high share of intermarriage among these groups. Interestingly, the average age at which Catholic Russian women married decreased, while among Russian Orthodox women the average age at first marriage increased during the war. For Orthodox Russian women, the POWs were not attractive candidates. Among Lutherans, average ages at marriage for women also increased, despite the evidence on intermarriages with POWs – a pattern which Glavatskaya *et al*. attribute to the lower numbers of Lutheran POWs moved into the region. While POWs thus filled supply gaps in the marriage market for some religious groups, for the POWs themselves, as Glavatskaya *et al*. suggest, marriage often seems to have been a survival strategy: at the least, their relatively early age at marriage and their openness to a marriage with a woman from another religion seem to be bear witness of it.

The final chapter, by Florent Verfaillie on Belgium, takes a different starting point: rather than looking into how the First World War changed marriage patterns and opportunities, he focuses on how women's marital status and family status shaped their wartime experiences. Working with a mix of archival sources from penitentiary institutions in Belgium, in which both female political prisoners and female collaborators were held, Verfaillie scrutinizes women's war

experiences as well as their social characteristics, marital status, family situation, and residential environment (urban or rural). Demonstrating the force of intersectionality -- a concept used by scholars of gender that emphasizes the need to cross multiple social characteristics in order to unveal the mutually reinforcing dynamics of various social characteristics on outcomes -- he reveals how different mixes of demographic and social characteristics turned women into patriot or traitor. Women who during the war turned into traitors were often vulnerable women, from the working classes, and single mothers or mothers of large families. Female resistance fighters had a strongly divergent profile: they were far more often single or married but with a small family only, and belonged to the middle classes. Both groups of women tried to take their fate in their own hands, and to negotiate their surroundings to optimize outcomes. However, the definition of what constituted an optimal outcome differed between subgroups of women. Hence women, so he argues, emancipated during the war, but in ways that differed according to their social profiles. The war, in this way, sharpened pre-existing inequalities among women. While it tended to create new perspectives for emancipation for women who were in a stronger starting position, it tended to reduce the already limited opportunities of those who were in a vulnerable position. In conjunction, while for increasingly independent middle-class women remaining single was a form of emancipation, for lower class, vulnerable women emancipation could be found in a good partner and a marriage that brought opportunities for a better life. The meaning of marriage in terms of emancipation changed according to the social class a woman belonged to. Importantly, his work thus stresses the need to give due notice to the heterogeneity of women in gender analyses of the impact of the First World War.

The conclusion by the editors, finally, brings together the diverse threads explored in this volume. It highlights how for men and women, adapting their unions – whether it was through

marriage or through divorce – might have been one of the most important coping mechanisms in extremely troubled times.

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[1] We would like to thank Frans Van Poppel for his proofreading and good advice.
[2] Annie Droege (2012) Diary of Annie’s War. *The diary of an Englishwoman in Germany during WWI*. Tolworth, UK: Grosvenor House Publishing.
[3] cf. e.g. Prost, 2014
[4] e.g. Festy, 1984; Winter, 1992;
[5] cf. e.g. Dumont *et al*. 1981; Reynolds 1996; Thébaud 2014; Gubin and De Smaele 2015.
[6] Goldstein 2004: 114; Debruyne et al. 2018.
[7] Timm and Sandborn, 2016.
[8] Rebreyend, 2008.
[9] Chesnais, 1999
[10] Szoltysek 2008; Viazzo 2003; Alter 1991
[11] Hajnal, 1965.
[12] Laslett, 1972.
[13] Todd, 1990.
[14] Matovic, 1984; Battagliola, 1995.

[15] Battagliola, 1995.
[16] Frost, 2008 ; Brunet, 2008.
[17] Matovic, 1984.
[18] Shorter, 1973; Shorter, Van de Walle and Knodel, 1971.
[19] Tilly, Scott and Cohen, 1976.
[20] If unmarried couples are responsible of a large part of illegitimate fertility in Paris for instance (Brée, 2014, 2017), it doesn't seem to be the case in Stockholm where unmarried couples used to marry before bearing children (Matovic, 1984; Edgren, 1987).
[21] Shorter, Knodel and Van de Walle, 1971, Shorter, 1977; Knodel and Van de Walle, 1979.
[22] Laslett, 1980.
[23] Van Bavel, 2007.
[24] see Brée in this volume.
[25] Phillips, 1988.
[26] See Brée in this volume.
[27] Phillips, 1991, 185.
[28] Phillips, 1988.
[29] Phillips, 1988
[30] Desforges, 1947; Rowntree and Carrier, 1958; Sohn, 1996.
[31] See Simonsson and Sandtröm about the readiness, the ability and the willingness to divorce.
[32] Coontz, 2005.
[33] Théry, 1993.
[34] Matthijs, Baerts and Van de Putte, 2008.
[35] Huss 2000; Vidal-Naquet 2006; Hannah 2008
[36] Hämmerle 1993; Audoin-Rouzeau 1993
[37] Donson, 2014
[38] Charon 2018.
[39] Prost 2014; Rohrbasser 2014
[40] Wever and Van Bergen, 2014.
[41] Vidal-Naquet, 2014
[42] Lomas 2000; Faron 2001; Wingenter 2003; Rollet 2007; Bette 2017.
[43] Winter, 1995.
[44] See Bette 2012, 2015. Peggy Bette (2012) hypothesis that this high proportion of French widows could be related to the French recruitment rules which, unlike those of Great Britain, were not based on volunteering but on a massive mobilization making little distinction between single and fathers of the family. It could also be related to the structure of the population. Because France has begun its fertility transition almost one century before the other European countries, the number of young people is few than in those. The cohorts mobilized in the war can thus be older than in the other countries, involving more married men and also more fathers. Even if the number of orphans per soldier killed is actually closer to one than to two also because of the earlier birth control.
[45] Bette 2017.
[46] Faron 2001; Todd, 2017
[47] Henry, 1966.
[48] Lomas, 2000.
[49] Oltmer, 2006.
[50] See e.g. Glavatskaya *et al.* on Russia in this volume.
[51] see Lorke in this volume.
[52] Kirk 1945; Vallin 1973; Héran 2014; Pison 2014.
[53] cf. Henry, 1966; Festy, 1984; Winter, 1992; Eggerickx, 2014; Brée *et al*., 2016, 2017.
[54] cf. Kok and Van Bavel 2010.
[55] Henry 1966, see Brée's chapter in this volume.
[56] Festy, 1984; Brée *et al.* 2016, 2017.
[57] Henry, 1966.
[58] Festy, 1984.
[59] Dupâquier and Winter, 1998.
[60] Festy 1984; Brée *et al.* 2016, 2017.
[61] Ronsin, 1980: 197.
[62] Dupâquier and Faron, 1999
[63] Blum and Darskij, 1999.
[64] See Brée in this volume
[65] Belgium and France were part of the Triple Alliance.
[66] Poland was then part of the Austro-Hungarian empire, member of the Triple Entente.