

Introduction

In 1916, certain film-goers in Russia's big cities had the privilege of watching dozens of amputees and maimed men hustle and bustle on the screen for almost an hour.¹ We know nothing about these anonymous figures, who represented both victims of war and a narrative of resurrection. We know nothing and no one saw anything but these shots of them as they are getting treated, examined, fitted with prosthetic devices, and professionally retrained. *Reborn to Life* was certainly a silent movie, as were all the films of the time, but what is most significant in this case is that it did not let these veterans speak: we can only attentively follow their attitudes, gestures, and looks, then guess at their thoughts and emotions. The disabled veterans were objectified: they merely stood as a symbol of the war's cruelty; these were victims, the living dead far more conspicuous than the millions of corpses buried at the western margins of the empire. Made to promote philanthropy, these images have retained their informative value, conveyed both by what they show and by what they conceal: in what circumstances the soldiers suffered incapacitating wounds, the time of the tragic amputation, the constant pain, their distress and confusion in the face of their disability, the painstaking efforts required to adapt to a different body and an unknown identity, their solitude even at the very heart of this social group created by random military chance and charitable initiatives.

Reborn to Life was remarkable in wartime Russia, and exclusive because its production allowed two milieus to come into contact with each other: the imperial family and the film industry. Among the dozens of charitable institutions, the Princess Maria Pavlovna Committee focused first on sending suitable clothing to the soldiers at the front. In 1915, it completely redirected its efforts, turning towards disabled veterans and their social reintegration by means of artisanal trades. As it became socially more pressing to sustain morale on the home front, this issue came to the fore; Alexander II's granddaughter entertained the desire of rising to the level of Nicholas II's daughter Tatiana, whose committee took in refugees nationwide. Someone in her entourage had the

¹ *Vozrozhdaemye k zhizni*, Drankov/Maria Pavlovna Committee, 1916, Russian State Documentary Film and Photo Archive (Krasnogorsk) (RGAKFD), film no. 786.

innovative idea of commissioning a film inviting the disabled ex-servicemen to come to the committee's workshops. The famous Muscovite film studio Drankov agreed to produce *The Care of the Committee for the Wounded and Disabled Fighters back from the Front and the Prisoners' Camps* not only to emphasise its commitment to the war effort, but also to compete with the dominant Skobelev Committee in an area where they were not the strongest.² The film showed soldiers from the moment they were wounded – receiving medical care, trying on artificial limbs, using them in everyday life, and labouring in the workshop – up until they met their benefactor Maria Pavlovna. The introductory image associates imperial symbols (the double-headed eagle, the black and orange ribbon of the Cross of St George) and modern advertising: foliage, Art Nouveau typography, and vignettes showing scenes from the film. From a material and psychological point of view, this was well-made film touting a work-based social resurrection that also constituted a fair deal (invalids benefiting invalids). Naturally, it concealed a good number of unpleasant realities that the disabled ex-servicemen were perfectly aware of.

The approximately ten minutes of film that have been preserved in the Russian archives consist of three main sequences: disabled veterans coming and going in front of the Princess Maria Pavlovna Committee workshop's entrance, then working on artificial legs and arms in the workshop, and finally a lengthy inspection of the disabled with their jointed prosthetic devices, probably before they were to return to civilian life and the job market. These random fragments represent only one-sixth of the documentary, which had no equivalent in the production of films in Russia and which was inspired by the First World War. No one in all the belligerent nations had filmed cases of 'maimed soldiers' in such detail, not even in France where there had been a long series of reports on the 'vocational schools for the maimed'.³ No Russian newsreel dwelt so much on the home front, no social group – except for the imperial family – monopolised so much attention. Only a national cause and the totally new aspect of the production could justify such a heavy financial and technical investment; only war could democratise the screen prior to 1917; only the cinema could make the revolution of minds and behaviours appear in the form of flesh and bone.

² The Skobelev Committee produced newsreels (250), dramas (25), comedies (14), and scenic films (15), but only 4 scientific films (none of which was medical): Central State Archive of Literature and Art in St Petersburg (TsGALI), f. 83 (Sevzapikino), op. 1, d. 1, ll. 4–12.

³ Laurent Véray, 'La représentation au cinéma du traumatisme provoqué par la guerre de 14–18', in Christophe Gauthier, David Lescot, and Laurent Véray (eds.), *Les mises en scène de la guerre au XXe siècle. Théâtre et cinéma* (Paris: Éditions Nouveau Monde, 2011), pp. 2–27. On vocational retraining in France, see Clément Collard's doctoral thesis in progress, 'La rééducation professionnelle des mutilés de la Grande Guerre (1914–1960)', directed by Jean-François Chanut and Anne Rasmussen.

An Amputated History

In Russia, the Great War had consisted of a long series of bitter defeats interspersed with a few moments of glory leading nowhere: it precipitated the moral, political, and economic collapse of the empire.⁴ As a ‘catalyst of history’, it made possible the two revolutions of 1917 and paved the way for Lenin’s recourse to war as part of the revolutionary process.⁵ The Bolsheviks methodically rewrote history. For the communist regime and its militants hardened by the fight against the counter-revolution, the First World War was quickly reduced to the level of a simple ‘imperialist war’ in the larger political context of a civil war. The First World War was thus used for political purposes in a number of different ways that gave no consideration to the thoughts and feelings of the ‘soldiers of the old army’.

But three years of war and the fighting over the course of several competing revolutions spanning the year 1917 shattered the lives of about 15.5 million soldiers. Already in 1915, when family breadwinners and only sons were being mobilised, certain villages saw up to half of their able-bodied men leave for distant fronts in Prussia, the Baltic states, Poland, Romania, the Caucasus, Persia, France, and even Macedonia. The ‘Great Slaughter’ (a play on words in Russian)⁶ suddenly produced an unprecedented social phenomenon, hard to quantify with precision, in all the belligerent nations. When we extrapolate the data collected by the local administrations, the *zemstvos*, we get for the first year of the war the minimal figure of 1.14 million soldiers more or less disabled by their wounds or diseases.⁷ Now it has been confirmed that neither the military medical commissions, nor the hospitals, nor the social welfare

⁴ The history of the conflict has long been overshadowed by the civil war, which explains why the historiography of the Great War in Russia has gained prominence only over the past twenty years. For an overview, see Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914–1921* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). See also Peter Gatrell, *Russia's First World War: A Social and Economic History* (Edinburgh: Pearson Longman, 2005); Aleksandr Astashov, *Russkii front v 1914–nachale 1917 goda. Voennyy opyt i sovremennost* (Moscow: Novyi Khronograf, 2014); Alexandre Sumpf, *La Grande Guerre oubliée. Russie, 1914–1918* (Paris: Perrin, 2014); and Joshua Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse: The Great War and the Destruction of the Russian Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). Three collections of articles on specific aspects of the Great War were published in Russia in 2014, and the international project ‘Russia’s Great War and Revolution’ issues several thematically organised volumes every year. On the question of culture and memory, see Karen Petrone, *The Great War in Russian Memory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); and Melissa Stockdale, *Mobilizing the Russian Nation: Patriotism and Citizenship in the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

⁵ V. P. Buldakov, *Voina, porodivshaia revoliutsii. Rossiia, 1914–1917* (Moscow: Novyi Khronograf, 2015); Alexandre Sumpf, *1917. La Russie et les russes en révolution* (Paris: Perrin, 2017).

⁶ *Velikaia boinia* (‘Great Slaughter’) sounds remarkably similar to *Velikaia voina* (‘Great War’) in Russian.

⁷ *Ob uchastii Vserossiiskogo zemskogo soiuza*, p. 62.

bureaus exempted, cared for, or granted pensions to that many men either during the conflict or afterward. As was the case in general for the tsarist army, most soldiers were young men from rural areas, Slavs, and Jews, and to a lesser extent Cossacks, men from the Baltic region, and Muslims from the Kazan region and the Caucasus.

Over the long term of Russian history, disabled veterans were outnumbered by those disabled from birth and, from the 1930s on, by those of all ages and both sexes who had suffered disabling injuries at work. The latter two groups, moreover, received generally more legal, medical, and educational attention.⁸ The disabled ex-servicemen stand out within a whole generation of men afflicted with the wounds, diseases, and deaths occasioned by war and related woes (famines, epidemics, forced displacements) that plagued Russians between 1904 and 1921. For a long time, a war's impact on society was evaluated by referring to the number of those killed in action or who eventually died from their wounds. However, military losses consisted most of all in the number of wounded, ailing, or debilitated soldiers. Their temporary absence weighed heavily on the living, for the worst of the war experience was brought home to civilian life via their bodies and minds.

Over the course of three wars during the first half of the twentieth century, the average rate of those suffering disabling injuries remained remarkably stable at 7–8 per cent. Since the Great War mobilised thirty times more men than had the conflict with Japan, and three times more than did the Red Army during the civil war, the majority of charitable enterprises, along with most of the measures aimed at rehabilitating and reintegrating people with disabilities into the workforce, were aimed at the soldiers of 1914–1918. That is why we have more sources about them than about the others, and our knowledge of their plight makes it possible to shed light on their comrades who were disabled in the wars against Japan (1904–1905) and against the Bolsheviks' many enemies in 1918–1921. They were the most visible part of a maimed generation and of Russia's broken years. This book therefore focuses on their collective fate as well as their individual plights, comparing them with the experience of those who suffered similar misfortunes in the two conflicts that preceded and followed the First World War in Russia.

While the outbreak of war in August 1914 ushered in a new era, it also resulted in an interwar situation experienced by no other major European nation. The war with Japan was the first act of a long military tragedy for Russia. Nicholas II's imperialist ambitions were shattered in 1905 by the frightful defeats inflicted by the Japanese navy at Tsushima and by the infantry at Port Arthur, which set off a revolution throughout the empire.⁹ Most

⁸ Maria Cristina Galmarini-Kabala, *The Right to Be Helped: Deviance, Entitlement, and the Soviet Moral Order* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2016).

⁹ John Bushnell, *Mutiny amid Repression: Russian Soldiers in the Revolution of 1905–1906* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

significantly, the half a million soldiers sent into Manchuria were for the first time in Russian history subjected to the impact of industrialised warfare: many came back wounded, traumatised, disabled. The defeat had made it imperative to engage in a general reconsideration of the army: while military strategy, tactics, and teaching scarcely changed, the legislation of 1912 bolstered the status of career military men, conscripts, and their families.¹⁰ By putting the 1874 reform of military conscription to the test, the war against Japan opened the way for a number of improvements in dealing with conscription, health, and medical and legal matters, including the definition of the laws and customs of war as well as the elaboration of a preliminary status of disabled military personnel in June 1912.¹¹

The successive wars of the first quarter of the twentieth century also led Russian society and the disabled veterans themselves to realise the specific nature of such handicaps. Between 1914 and 1917, as had been the case ten years before, the sources speak of the maimed (*uvechnye*) or the crippled (*kaleki*). The war and the February revolution accelerated history: once the conscripts exempted because of wounds or diseases at last became audible and were heard, the term *invalid* predominated. Taken from the French, the Russian word refers to a professional army veteran who is taken in and cared for because of his old age or lack of resources. Previously powerless victims of war, these invalids constructed their identity and gained a social status. This recognition, once moral and arbitrary, now acquired a medical and legal – and thus rational – basis.

The anxious awareness of the war's human devastation heightened apace with the rising number of wounded and diseased soldiers, and particularly with the definitive homecoming of the disabled soldiers no longer fit for combat. The language of the newspapers and official speeches turned quickly from the militaristic visions of heroism to a humanitarian understanding of suffering. Civil society soon stopped exalting the combatants' sacrifices, and devoted its time and energy to taking care of a whole series of victims. Among the latter, the disabled veterans constituted a 'cause' from the conflict's very beginning: it was the basis of reasoned collective action and a force for justice within the national community. However, while they made possible an autonomous formation of civil society, their individual and collective plight still fell short of the announced objectives, even in the cases where the state did not simply perpetuate its negligence of disabled veterans.¹² Symbolising the required

¹⁰ John W. Steinberg, *All the Tsars' Men: Russia's General Staff and the Fate of the Empire, 1898–1914* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), pp. 151–191.

¹¹ Joshua Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation: Military Conscription, Total War and Mass Politics, 1905–1925* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003), pp. 25–29.

¹² Beate Fieseler, 'Razvitie gosudarstvennoi pomoshchi invalidam v Rossii ot pozdnei imperii do stalinskoi "revoliutsii sverkh"', in I. V. Narskii, O. S. Nagornaia et al. (eds.), *Opyt mirovykh voyn v XX-om veke* (Cheliabinsk: Cheliabinskii Gosudarstvennyi universitet, 2007), pp. 49–64.

proactive approach, the Ministry of Social Protection of the Provisional Government (March–October 1917) stood out as a source of the growing awareness and innovation on all levels. The ministry was nevertheless unable to design and carry out its actions in the short term: in a country on the edge of chaos, there was a lack of time and of actual financial and human resources. The ‘continuum of crisis’ from 1914 to 1921,¹³ during which the revolutionary year played a pivotal role, thus created the conditions for a paradigm shift towards systematic and proactive state intervention. The issue of disabled veterans is particularly emblematic of that shift.

Along with this limitation came a long-term tendency towards the social and political marginalisation of veterans throughout Russia and the Soviet Union: the plight of the veterans of ‘the Great Patriotic War’ (1941–1945) reflected the fate of the disabled veterans of the three previous conflicts.¹⁴ Although individuals were dispossessed and social groups atomised, there were nevertheless undercurrents of dynamic solidarities of wartime and its hardships, all of which were strongly reminiscent of the types of social accommodation practised during the civil war, and generalised under the Soviet regime. Within the mass of veterans, those who had suffered disabling war wounds sought some sort of recognition in vain. They suffered under a tight-fisted state disinclined to reward them for their sacrifice: they found themselves not only prevented from coming together to exert pressure, but also forced to accept a lesser social status justified by their incapacity to fulfil their role as producers.¹⁵ They thus found themselves hunted down in the effort to clean up the socialist streets. When local authorities proved unwilling to facilitate their economic reintegration, such measures became purely repressive.

Almost a century after the fact, we know very little about the disabled Russian veterans of the Great War, and the knowledge that we do have is sparse.¹⁶ The

¹³ Coined by Peter Holquist in 2001, this expression has now become standard for historians, as has viewing the two conflicts telescoped together as forming one terrible ‘seven years’ war’. For my part, I argue that, at least as concerns the matter of disabled veterans, one should include the war between Russia and Japan, the following revolution of 1905, and above all this first interwar period, whose influence is beginning to be re-evaluated on the diplomatic as well as military and social levels.

¹⁴ Mark Edele, *Soviet Veterans of the Second World War: A Popular Movement in an Authoritarian Society, 1941–1991* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹⁵ Beate Fieseler, ‘Soviet-Style Welfare: The Disabled Soldiers of the “Great Patriotic War”’, in Michael Rasell and Elena Iarskaia-Smirmova (eds.), *Disability in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union: History, Policy, and Everyday Life* (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 18–41.

¹⁶ Only one particular aspect has aroused a measure of interest: shellshock. See Iu. P. Golikov, ‘Pervaia mirovaia voina i sotrudniki imperatorskogo instituta eksperimentalnoi meditsiny’, in E. Kolchinskii, D. Beyrau, and Iu. A. Laius (eds.), *Nauka, tekhnika i obshchestvo Rossii i Germanii vo vremia Pervoi mirovoi voyny* (St Petersburg: Nestor-Istoriia, 2007), pp. 290–309; Kim Friedlander, ‘Neskolko aspektov shellshock’a v Rossii, 1914–1916’, in *Rossia i Pervaia mirovaia voina* (St Petersburg: IRI-RAN, 1999), pp.

history of health care during wartime is the field of investigation that has progressed the most following John F. Hutchinson's studies of the relations between the medical profession and the state, expertise and regulation.¹⁷ In addition to published sources and collections of articles,¹⁸ we can now avail ourselves of a synthesis of the 1914–1918 period integrated into the larger picture of the *History of Russian and Soviet Military Medicine*. Based on a multitude of master plans and regulations, the work is incredibly classical in its structure, focusing on the general organisation's evolution and on the battlefield. The portrayal of the leading experts of the time¹⁹ indirectly sheds light on the burgeoning specialised institutes (still active today) that exemplify the competition among the therapeutic approaches: surgery (Vladimir Oppel, 1872–1932), traumatology (Genrikh Ivanovich Turner, 1858–1941), and orthopaedics (Roman Romanovich Vreden, 1867–1933). The carefully aligned rows of statistics do not conceal the narrow scope of this experimental medical care reserved for the luckiest: for the others, little had changed since the war between Russia and Japan.

It is nevertheless possible to implement a global history of the phenomenon of the disabled veteran in Russia from 1904 to 1921. Undertaking this project requires the analysis of a documentation that is not only technical and political, but also literary and sensitive, official and private, without overlooking its iconographic and material aspects. Such an analysis will use a wide array of sources found in the institutional holdings of the national archival centres for the military (RGVIA), civil society (GARF, RGIA), and the cinema (Gosfilmofond, RGAKFD), and also on a regional level (TsGIA SPb, TsGA SPb). I have also drawn from the collections of history museums in Moscow and St Petersburg; unfortunately, the museum of the Academy of Military Medicine does not give access to its holdings. By my own inclination and in view of opening up my field of inquiry, I have also devoted considerable attention to hunting down in works of art and literature the 'details' that Daniel Arasse finds so crucial.²⁰ They mirror the way in which disabled

315–325; A. Astashov, 'Voina kak kulturnyi shok. Analiz psikhopatologicheskogo sostoiianiia russkoi armii v Pervuiu mirovuiu voinu', in *Voenno-istoricheskaiia antropologiia. Ezhegodnik* (Moscow, 2002), pp. 268–281; and I. E. Sirotkina, 'Rossiiskie psikhiiatriia na Pervoi mirovoi voine', in Kolchinskii, Beyrau, and Laius (eds.), *Nauka, tekhnika i obshchestvo*, pp. 326–344.

¹⁷ John F. Hutchinson, *Politics and Public Health in Revolutionary Russia, 1890–1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

¹⁸ S. V. Bukalova, 'Pomoshch bolnym i ranenym voenam v Orlovskii gubernii v gody Pervoi mirovoi voyny', in L. A. Bulgakova (ed.), *Meditsina Rossii v gody voyny i mira. Noveye dokumenty i issledovaniia* (St Petersburg: Nestor-Istoriia, 2011), pp. 359–379.

¹⁹ P. F. Gladkikh et al. (eds.), *Voennaia meditsina nakanune i vo vremia poslednei voyny Imperatorskoi Rossii, 1916–1917. Ocherki istorii otechestvennoi voennoi meditsiny. Kniga XXII* (St Petersburg, 2014), pp. 305–306.

²⁰ Daniel Arasse, *Le Détail. Pour une histoire rapprochée de la peinture* (Paris: Flammarion, 1992).

veterans were inscribed into the representations of their time and, like X-rays, also reveal how they were depicted and redepicted by political approaches to this ‘issue’. Going back and forth among these various sources has made it possible for me to cover systematically the entire field of these notions, and I hope that the reader will follow me or at least not hold this method against me.

Although I have taken correspondence and other personal items into account whenever possible, penetrating into the innermost thoughts and feelings of the war veterans often did not seem to be on the cards either. The solicitations addressed to authorities do have their share of individuality and do indeed project a sort of self-consciousness into the public sphere.²¹ I also happened upon 107 autobiographies in the St Petersburg archives, from a small elite group of well-educated soldiers selected to be trained as professional agricultural leaders.²² While these short handwritten texts (from two to ten – most of the time four – pages long) give us a fantastic window into their authors’ personal considerations, they remain an exception and have the disadvantage of being confined to the war years. Other than that, the lack of a great emblematic narrative that could have rallied Russian veterans together certainly contributed to drowning out their voices, which were already muffled by their lower social status. By contrast, those voices grew to an unprecedented crescendo in other national contexts.²³

Political Bodies

Whether they remained in the USSR or ‘chose’ exile, the disabled Russian veterans of the First World War suffer from a historiography still in its infancy. However, a number of works written over the last two decades shed light on the plight of their British, German, and American counterparts. In order to resituate the singularity of the Russian experience within the worldwide conflict and ensuing peace, it is of course important to analyse it in light of developments in the other belligerent nations, particularly in terms of the pace, the intensity, and the duration of the initiatives that were approved and of the activism of these exceptional veterans. That is indispensable, given that doctors, legal experts, political figures, philanthropists, and veterans themselves were aware of what was being done in other countries and used this knowledge as arguments in the debate taking place in Russia. Beyond that, we need to situate the plight of the Russian veterans in an increasingly well-known transnational history.²⁴ The

²¹ Galmarini-Kabala, *The Right to Be Helped*, pp. 74–77.

²² Central State Historical Archive of St Petersburg (TsGIA SPb), f. 949 (Kursy desiatnikov zemelnykh uluchsheniia dlia uvechnykh voynov inzhenera N. D. Porakova), op. 1, d. 8, ll. 1–231 ob.

²³ Sara Newman, *Writing Disability: A Critical History* (London and Boulder: First Forum Press), pp. 157–160.

²⁴ Bruno Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism, 1918–1924* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Gildas Brégain, *Pour une histoire du handicap au XXe*

right to health care and work and the demand for moral and political rights brought together all types of disabled veterans from every nation. These issues were also the driving force for great institutions that arose from the humanitarian catastrophe or were reinvigorated by it.

The nature of the sources in the archival holdings maintained by institutions explains the approach chosen by most historians, including Beate Fieseler, for the case of Russia and the Soviet Union. The notion of social control inspired by Michel Foucault's writings prevails in the field of disability studies.²⁵ On the one hand, we indeed see coming into play the same dynamics of discipline, norms, and clausturation that are found in the context of the military and psychiatric institutions. On the other hand, however, neither the hospital system's charitable beginnings nor the doctors' social mission, which both eased the hardships imposed on the disabled, can be totally ignored. Most importantly, if we read Foucault carefully, we find that, while emphasising how institutions use the health care system (for 'biopower'), he offers a perspective for research into how individuals, and in particular patients, use this system. Ana Carden-Coyne's approach, centred on the suffering inflicted on soldiers on the battlefield as well in the medical institutions, seems to me a most fruitful one for shedding light on poorly understood aspects of the conflict in Russia.²⁶ Wounds produced a rupture of the body's integrity, a terrible pain that rehabilitation seeks to relieve or even eliminate. The wounded had no choice but to adapt actively to their new body: what remains to be determined is how they were able to do it, and in what conditions. Everywhere, the state's demands on combatants' bodies developed at a time of humanitarianism and faith in their rights. Medical and military institutions instrumentalised bodies through the control they exercised, but made suffering into a political object, since it allowed the soldier to have a voice and an audience. While this suffering was less acknowledged in Russia, and hospital journals were non-existent, the revolution of February 1917 suddenly allowed Russians to express themselves; among veterans, it was the disabled who spoke first, longest, and loudest.

According to Joanna Bourke, the war was conducive to a resexualisation of gender, constructed on a heightened desire for the other sex, a desire that had been intensified by privation, and by the dissemination of masculine standards from medical providers and discourses of bravado and vigour.²⁷ Bodies in

siècle. Approche transnationale (Europe et Amériques) (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2018).

²⁵ Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky, 'Disability History: From the Margins to the Mainstream', in Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky (eds.), *The New Disability History: American Perspectives* (New York: NYU Press, 2003), pp. 1–29.

²⁶ Ana Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds: Military Patients and Medical Power in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 4–6.

²⁷ Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion Books, 1996).

uniform attracted the most attention from the public, and such fervour reinvigorated masculine narcissism. Wounds shatter the body's identity, creating a reversal for adult males by placing weakness, ordinarily characteristic of a woman or a child, at the forefront: this posed a real challenge for Russian society, which was much more patriarchal than its Western counterparts. The bodies of disabled veterans doubted that science had the capacity to improve their plight, criticised the legitimacy of the sacrifice of those who had 'held firm', and wondered about the worker's dependence on social welfare. Images of mutilation were first circulated with the intention of revealing the nature of the war, but such public attention suddenly became undesirable immediately after the conflict had ended.

Disabled veterans were henceforth ordered to hide their bodies, which during the war had become a field for medical experimentation: as objects of normative politics rather than a collection of moving or even edifying individual plights, their bodies no longer belonged to them.²⁸ With the rapid rise of patriotism at the end of the nineteenth century, the body became the dominant metonymy for the nation; above all, it appeared as a social group as much as individual capital. During the Great War, science and technology demolished the bodies of combatants just as they demolished farmland, infrastructure, industrial networks, and cultural heritage. This widespread destruction occasioned difficulties, but also kindled hopes for reconstructing something better in all domains. The men's bodies were then re-created, and they fuelled heated debate: the burning question stirred up fears, and reflections on the plight of the disabled and their short- and long-term demands.²⁹ Neither bodies *nor minds* could be ruined any more: the war effort required societies to rehabilitate veterans for civilian life, and to deal with all injuries, wherever and whatever they were. Doctors and therapists considered repairing men to be restoring the body of the nation, inasmuch as labour was seen as the chief wealth of the post-war era. Beyond economic aims, and the body's usefulness for production, the dream of abolishing poverty and human flaws was founded on the virtue and redemptive value of work.³⁰

While historians, particularly in the UK and the United States, now emphasise the body, suffering, and health, as well as mechanical and social strategies

²⁸ Sabine Kienitz, *Beschädigte Helden. Kriegsinvalidität und Körperbilder 1914–1923* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2008); Sophie Delaporte, *Les gueules cassées. Les blessés de la face de la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Noësis, 1996).

²⁹ Julie Anderson, *War, Disability and Rehabilitation in Britain: 'Soul of a Nation'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011); Heather Perry, *Recycling the Disabled: Army, Medicine, and Modernity in WWI Germany* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014); Beth Linker, *War's Waste: Rehabilitation in World War I America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); and Christine Van Everbroeck and Pieter Verstraete, *Le silence mutilé. Les soldats invalides belges de la Grande Guerre* (Namur: Presses universitaires de Namur, 2015).

³⁰ Sheila Fitzpatrick, 'Ascribing Class: The Construction of Social Identity in Soviet Russia', *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 65, no. 4 (1993), pp.745–770.

for overcoming disabilities, the 'issue of disability' must also be integrated into a reflection on political action. In a tsarist Russia where, prior to 1914, handicaps were, like poverty, more a matter of private charitable undertakings than of medicine, the unexpected masses of soldiers who had been suddenly diminished and seemingly condemned to suffer a degradation of their social status, came under the purview of politics and policies of all sorts. Their existence, their presence, and their suffering gave rise to challenges to the established order, professionalisation by way of criticism, and an accelerated transition to a more abstract, less humane handling of victims. Political powers, military authorities, medical experts, charitable organisations, and the disabled veterans themselves – first individually, then collectively – all had an interest in finding a definitive response to the 'question of the disabled veteran'. Each group, however, posed the question in a different way. Tensions arose from three crucial issues: interpreting the on-going war, re-evaluating bodily norms, and defining the individual's role in society. The present book accordingly focuses on the long process of coming out of the war for the most severely wounded combatants, the intensification of the handicaps experienced by those able and unable to work, and the designation of work as the cardinal value in a Russia that had suffered heavily from confronting several economic and social revolutions.

While the French had dreamed of the immediate post-war period as a time for revenge, and then experienced it as a surprise,³¹ things were very different in Russia, where the debate over peace structured political life after the fall of the tsar. In France, the formation of associations made it possible to envisage a new life without abandoning all reference to the habitus of war: quite the contrary. While the nation collectively elaborated a memory of the conflict and plans for the social reintegration of the survivors in the context of a vast reconstruction, thousands of soldiers were still scattered about in military missions, occupation armies, depots, and hospitals. In Russian neighbourhoods, there was obviously no victory celebration, but a period of mourning, chiefly private and completely uncoded, not to mention the monuments that would never become a reality.³² Like their French counterparts, the tsar's soldiers experienced the extraordinary distorted deceleration of time and the uncertainty that accompanied military demobilisation. In Russia, however, cultural demobilisation took the form of a rapid political and economic remobilisation. The revolutionary process alongside the intertwining of the Great War with a civil war that ultimately destroyed the nation made a clean slate of

³¹ Bruno Cabanes, *La Victoire endeillée. La sortie de guerre des soldats français (1918–1920)* (Paris: Seuil, 2006).

³² Petrone, *The Great War in Russian Memory*, pp. 36–42.

the former model of society, in the process sacrificing an entire generation to these changes.

The prospect of getting out of this war thus appeared to be illusory for the disabled veterans that the conflict had created. Their more strictly compliant way of dress, their inability to march in step with the others, and the little groups that they formed stood out against the garrisoned units parading behind them. Nor did they have the cocky audacity of those who had deserted or mutinied in 1917, who wore their disorderly uniforms as a sign of their rebellion. Their bodies were visibly and deeply shaken as well: truncated and deformed, they imposed the sight of monstrosities *en masse* on a society that tolerated it only as an exception. First put on display, then relegated to obscurity, exemplified yet rendered invisible, the disabled war veterans were a disturbing sight, and they took stock of their situation using what they observed in their counterparts. Ailments were certainly given care and support, mobilising experts and charitable endeavours. But they also engaged powerful emotions and challenged sensibilities, first in the context of a war that undermined social equilibrium, then in a revolution that seemingly offered no prospect of a future peace.

Yet it is not so much the raw encounter of bodies with mechanised warfare that we find in the Russian and Soviet sources: it is rather the relation between a mechanistic view of the human body and the economics of work. While wounds and suffering were necessarily individual matters, the diminished bodies of soldiers belonged to the collectivity that judged its value, a value that was no longer military in any way, but was still involved with the war. In the eighteenth century, disabled people could find a place in the context of everyday life, but industrialisation isolated them from the rest of society.³³ The solidarity among communities of farmers and the moral influence of the Orthodox Church had been eroded by the process of rural depopulation in the second half of the nineteenth century and by the monetisation of exchange. From 1914 to 1921, the interlocking wars greatly heightened the stakes and accelerated the adoption of rules and regulations. And the wandering fools-for-Christ who had been gladly welcomed in the wealthiest families as a sign of their own piety gave way to the victims of war, unwitting heroes for charitable endeavours organised in a military way.

The requirement of serving as a model ignored the singularity of their lived experience: never mind the sorrow of losing bodily integrity and moral serenity, and let's also forego the complaints about immediate practical problems. Disabilities were the future. A fresh start guaranteed by experts and chanted as a mantra by a progressive discourse could finally be legitimately expressed.

³³ Sarah Phillips, "‘There Are No Invalids in the USSR!’: A Missing Soviet Chapter in the New Disability History", *Quarterly Studies*, vol. 29, no. 3 (2009), pp. 1–33.

The cause of the ‘disabled’ replaced the cause of poverty and alcoholism (prohibition had been decreed), with the same leitmotif: the only salvation was in labour, and performance took on a decisive importance.³⁴ Even before the Bolsheviks came onto the scene, the capacity to work (*trudosposobnost*) became the capital criterion of a classification chiefly concerned with perpetually re-evaluating the nature and levels of disability, the thresholds that separate one legal category from another, and the modes of transfer from one group to another.

Nation, Power, and Society on Trial, 1904–1921

The following pages will accordingly focus on wounded bodies that came under suspicion and that were repaired. We will also see how bodies were instrumentalised on different levels, and deal with the veterans’ difficulty in reappropriating their own bodies. Conservation and regeneration, need and order, solidarity and identity are the prisms through which we will study the history of the disabled ex-servicemen. From 1904 to 1921, three wars and three revolutions shattered destinies, but also gave rise to great hopes for transformation, new possibilities for progress, and terrible moral and political disillusion. The story of afflicted bodies still in need of rehabilitation, of a virtually stillborn political organisation, and of the malfunctioning gears of an overloaded machinery of production will be laid out in six chapters. We will consider from a successively statistical, medical, legal, governmental, political, and finally symbolic perspective the experience of wounded and ailing soldiers who never fully recovered. Enumerating a new social group in order to determine its contours; evaluating the quality of medical treatment and ongoing care of disabilities; deciphering the stakes of inventing a legal status; analysing the elaboration of the bureaucracy’s social welfare policy that was detrimental to society; restoring the capacity of disabled war veterans as well as activists to speak on behalf of their own cause; and, finally, explaining how and why they were sacrificed for reasons of state: these complementary approaches make it possible to reconstitute in all its dimensions a phenomenon that sheds great light on Russia’s relation to the Great War.

Our study begins with the formation mechanisms of a social group that were created almost *ex nihilo* by the war (Chapter 1). Men became disabled by suffering an irremediable loss over the course of three conflicts of varying intensity between 1904 and 1921. We must first assess the scope of the loss, which is difficult to do, for in Russia, and then in the USSR, the tallies always

³⁴ Elena Iarskaia-Smirnova and Pavel Romanov, ‘Heroes and Spongers: The Iconography of Disability in Soviet Posters and Films’, in Rasell and Iarskaia-Smirnova (eds.), *Disability*, pp. 72–73.

provided approximate totals that were never definitive. This incredibly massive number was in fact a compilation of individual cases. In order to adopt the best way of approaching this experience, we have to detail the physical and moral ordeals that the soldiers endured from the time they were wounded until they ended up as disabled veterans: this process of transition weighed heavily on their ability to cope successfully. The army lost fighting forces, the men lost a part of themselves along with certain physical or mental capacities, and society lost its future workforce. The rhetoric of defeat, decline, and deficit heavily influenced the conception of the strikingly sudden, widespread phenomenon that exposed the moral fragility of the Russian nation. During the war, attitudes towards repairing bodies were polarised, torn between moralising suspicion (of self-inflicted wounds or simulation) and scientific uncertainties, military verifications and independent assessments of experts.

The amputations and bodily harm inflicted on Russian society nevertheless prompted a revolution in the medical and legal spheres. An unprecedented right to both collective and individual health care arose out of a military necessity (of sending the greatest possible number of men back into battle) and international scientific competition (Chapter 2). As a vast field of experimentation on the soldiers' bodies and minds, the war led to the medicalisation not only of the army, but also of society. Medical specialisations appeared in Russia or were bolstered at the state level, and access to these cutting-edge therapies was rapidly made widely available. That made it, in particular, possible to achieve decisive progress in treating veterans suffering from psychoneuroses: their institutionalisation, which became the norm, henceforth meant they would be cared for and not abandoned. The revolution in prosthetics likewise embodied efforts on the national level. The war prompted innovation and the organisation of nationwide production. It also made it imperative to guarantee that every amputee would receive an artificial limb. The prevalence of a utilitarian conception of the body and the quantification of its socio-economic contribution changed the perception of handicaps, which were now referred to in scientific rather than moral terms.

The state's military engagement also created the impossibility of returning to a normal civilian life, thus requiring the invention of a new social status (Chapter 3). Whereas society was divided on the basis of residential location and professional activity, the war cut across social classes, making certain categories permanent recipients of support. The law of 23 June 1912, first aimed at veterans of the war against Japan, was adapted over the course of the two subsequent conflicts: it established the definition of a wounded soldier, then of a disabled veteran, and finally of a disabled person in general. The law set constantly debated thresholds, and endlessly disputed pensions and rights (clothing, housing, food, education) that remained mainly theoretical. The vast majority of disabled ex-servicemen remained passive, only existing on the

basis of lists drawn up by hospitals or administrative offices. But a minority of individuals sought to understand their rights, take advantage of possibilities open to them, and secure concrete recognition of the state's moral debt. With their demands, they fortified their legal status and improved the plight of their group by forcing experts to be more rigorous and precise. In this way, the state of war thus furthered the rule of law in Russia.

The Great War, moreover, favoured the rapid rise of a national community and local movement federated by philanthropical activity (Chapter 4). While the various forms of involvement with the national cause of the war victims were conducive to the formation of a society of citizens, the veterans remained subjects of propaganda who were deprived of a voice in matters. Even under the Provisional Government, the social assistance system for veterans was discriminatory and selective: they were required to remobilise by participating in the production effort without receiving the means to do so. In terms of functional rehabilitation, professional retraining, and the adaptation of recruitment practices and working conditions, the national economy proved to be ill prepared for the reintegration of disabled veterans. Only the least afflicted physically and psychologically, the most determined, the least 'backward', and the most educated were able to benefit from private and institutional initiatives that were too scattered to form a coherent system. From the very beginning, their liberal nature ran counter to the progressive discourse's ambition of transforming society. This extraordinary mobilisation of civilians did not transcend the deep fractures of Russian society.

From 1904 on, the question of disabled veterans was in no way neutral on the political level. It fostered health care and social welfare policy, impelled an interpretation of the ongoing war, and reconfigured notions of heroism, sacrifice, and patriotism. The period 1915 to 1919 was marked by the disabled veterans' remarkable political activism under three successive regimes, two revolutions, and two wars (Chapter 5). As the only large-scale association of First World War veterans in Russia, the All-Russian Union of Maimed Soldiers managed to rally together men linked only by a common fate. They exerted a visible influence on the solution for the 'question of disabled veterans' in 1917 and put out publicity for their own cause thanks to democratisation. They did not, however, manage to unify a group suffering a host of divisions stemming from the era's political turbulence, nor did they succeed in consolidating a common identity distinct from that of all war veterans or all disabled persons. Their rapid, forced political demobilisation during the civil war made them veterans who had experienced both the Great War and the revolution, and who were lastingly stigmatised by the Bolshevik regime. They suffered discrimination that benefited the disabled veterans of the Red Army, the only ones deemed legitimate under the Soviet regime. The political repression only doubled the punishment for their handicap.

This brutal negation of rights born out of self-sacrifice for country was part of the appalling devaluation of the war experience in early Soviet Russia (Chapter 6). On the whole, these veterans, who came home prematurely, before the war's end, experienced bigger struggles in returning to private life than did their able-bodied comrades:³⁵ they had to get out of the collective norms imposed by the army, locate their place within the civilian population again, and, in the end, find peace. Their long-awaited return occasioned neither joy nor celebration, but rather the destabilisation of families and isolation from their communities. The loss of their ability to work, their prolonged absence, and the war's trauma permanently undermined their authority as husbands and fathers. They were less heroes than victims of the war, and did not obtain recognition from the new socialist state, even though it was at the time putting in place a welfare system extending coverage to a large number of categories. The Bolsheviks indeed constructed their regime in opposition to the 'imperialist war' and one of its most prominent symbols: the disabled ex-servicemen of the tsarist army.

As a fight to rewrite the recent past, the civil war excluded the losers. Among the many groups defeated between 1918 and 1921, the veterans of the Great War have been forgotten: the disabled ex-servicemen were their vanguard and spokesmen. This underscores the violence of the Bolsheviks' assault on them and the absolute necessity of reintegrating their singular experience into the European history of the conflict. Their collective plight and individual itineraries do indeed show that the moral economy of recognition and gratitude towards the veterans has been tragically deficient in all periods of Russian history, but there is much more that their story demonstrates. Their shattered lives were exploited by three ideologically opposed regimes and by all sorts of experts seeking to achieve ends far beyond their own concerns. Whether through co-ordinated action or personal initiatives, these special veterans were also full-fledged political players. They were not only the most visible and active of the former conscripts into the tsarist army, but also the most organised and demanding disabled persons in Russia. If amid the wars and revolutions spanning the period from 1904 to 1921, Russian society ardently aspired to the rule of law, it struggled to integrate into the accelerating course of events those who were weak, or who had special needs, or who had been marginalised. To look unblinkingly at the battered bodies of these veterans as their contemporaries could not manage to do, to give them the opportunity to speak as often as possible, to study them within a time frame extending beyond the First World War, is to recognise that they were the first persons with disabilities to engage in the unfinished battle to change the perception of handicap in Russia. The war broke them, but it made this fight possible and legitimate.

³⁵ Guillaume Piketty and Bruno Cabanes (eds.), *Retour à l'intime au sortir de la guerre* (Paris: Tallandier, 2009).