

Introduction

The First World War is considered by many historians to have been a critical conflict, a turning point. The notion that the twentieth century began in 1914 has shaped the social memories, as well as the historiographies, of the countries that fought in the war. The period was marked by very real shifts in global power, by the demise of the European empires, and by the development of industrial weapons and tactics. Britain's pre-eminence as an imperial force waned, America's grew, and the Hapsburg, Hohenzollern, and Romanov dynasties collapsed, along with what remained of the Turkish Ottoman Empire. Eric Hobsbawm's recent study of that century, which emphasizes the acceleration of causal events in overlapping eras of catastrophe and transformation, recounts yet again the ruptures that began in early August 1914. He begins by considering the war's immediate cause, the diplomatic crisis after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo. He addresses the war's underlying origins, from imperialism, nationalism, and militarism to the system of European alliances, before moving on to highlight the significance of the destruction and dislocation that followed.¹

To a degree, his approach is conventional. He works toward coherent explanations for past events, however destructive and irrational the outcomes. His work presents, in other words, reasons rooted in mistaken ideologies for the many disastrous, often misguided, decisions that have framed global histories to the near-present. He studies nation-states and empires. He considers what maintained them and what their populations produced and consumed. He addresses why various peoples invaded, killed, resisted, or revolted within and beyond their borders. He presents the century as short, brutal, and of ominous consequence.

In so doing, Hobsbawm also considers news of violence broadcast by a new breed of war correspondents reporting from scattered locations in Africa and Asia. Sparing us any detour into semiotics, he suggests that proliferating print media romanticized clashes between the major powers in colonized regions, deliberately cast as exotic, foreign and Other. During the

long epoch of infrequent hostilities along the borders of major powers that paralleled endemic conflicts in disputed territories on the edges of empire, military spending was often justified as a necessity in contests of imperial hegemony. In broader terms, therefore, the oft-noted hiatus, from 1815 to 1914, of major warfare in Europe itself referred to little more than a fictional 'peace' between the powers. Apart from brief wars in the Crimea (1854-56), during German and Italian unification, in the Balkans, or between France and Germany (1870-71) and Russia and Japan (1905), armed encounters, mobilizations, and wartime planning occurred either in colonized zones or through the output and projects of factories, shipyards, military academies, and military strategists. Buildups in land forces and naval inventories, most notably the dreadnought race between Germany and Britain, took place against a backdrop of popular images of distant wars, feeding distorted perceptions of colonization and hostile encounters far from Europe.

Such images of conflict and compelling Otherness in colonized regions not only intersected with new technologies and productive capacities to amass land and sea arsenals, they also often validated use of these new weapons in the modern world. Meanwhile, through a growing popular press and book-publishing industry, audiences consumed multiple images of sexualities, racial differences, and violence in cross-cultural encounters. 'Such exotic conflicts,' Hobsbawm notes, 'were the stuff of adventure literature or the reports of that mid-nineteenth-century innovation the war correspondent, rather than matters of direct relevance to most inhabitants of the states that waged and won them.' Against the gilded, heroic, imperial warriors of popular imagination, the arms race and march toward the catastrophic carnage that began in Belgium becomes, in Hobsbawm's story as in countless others, a threshold, a one-way door. Its long-term trajectories, from dynastic overthrow and economic collapse to the rise of fascism, have been repeatedly classified and reclassified in many grand narratives, few of which share Hobsbawm's sophistication. On the impact of the First World War on mass societies and cultures in the West, he writes simply: 'All this changed in 1914.'²

By examining Canada's part, especially how home front populations perceived and experienced the war's many demands and consequences, historians can begin to understand more fully how relationships of empire, nationality, gender, class, and public power began to shift in significant ways during this four-year crucible. These ruptures were not just directed by empires and large-scale business interests. However self-serving imperialism and capitalism were, neither the great powers nor the financial backers of empire and industry could sustain their activities in a vacuum. Rather, they operated within fluid cultural spheres of information, images, and ritualizations. Hometown sites were frequently used to represent a 'great' war of European powers, overseas dominions, and far-flung colonies, a

struggle often shaped in hometown communities through popular and public experiences. This book examines relationships between public perceptions on a local level and the making of a national home front in Canada, which was part of an imperial system undergoing shifts and transformations, as the fighting overseas intensified.

The use of routinely generated materials, from hometown newspapers to the private records of local residents, does not dispute projects like Hobsbawm's, but adopts alternative positions to examine how the war was perceived on a popular level and how it evoked public responses. This is a study of locally situated evidence – of the settings and circumstances in which ordinary Canadians at home came to experience a distant war overseas. It is thus, in many respects, a study of a war imagined. It considers how people in three very different Canadian cities witnessed and actively interpreted this intense period of conflict by examining what they used to see it through or with. What circulated as newspaper texts, illustrations, or photographs, what was staged as parades or march pasts on city streets, or what was expressed as orations or songs were usually commonplace, replicated in one form or another in urban spaces across the country. They were also very powerful. Many of the public displays and demands of the war meshed with everyday life to produce significant cumulative effects, but it is difficult for historians to reach unqualified generalizations about these effects.

The multiple sites of war-related discourses considered here also point to the importance of isolating public events in the cultural spaces people ordinarily inhabit, of selecting localized, culturally constituted domains in which particular information and images circulated. Through them we can learn much more about how recruitment, enemy alien treatment, conscription, or veteran re-establishment were experienced and understood by ordinary people than we might by considering accounts from politicians and commanders alone. Public events and information flows in specific cities produced novel emotions and ideas as people imagined, felt, and invented interpretations of how the war was affecting them and how it might shape their future.

As a study of hometown horizons, this book places the flow of social interaction and cultural representations on the countless intersections between local, national, and international histories, between the immediacy of parochial settings and a war fought on two fronts. Such an approach offers particular advantages for historians as it keeps us focused on what many people saw first-hand and experienced most directly. It also prompts us to consider how specific discourses worked, how communication was linked to social differentiation, how movements from signs to boundaries enforced crucial divisions in society: recruits from civilians, enemy aliens from the host society, men from women, conscription supporters from their

various opponents, or returned soldiers from civilians. That social differences of gender, ethnicity, class, and age helped to configure other social barriers created by the war cannot be understood without examining how everyday communications inscribed these differences. In this way, the themes pursued here seek to show how ordinary, home front Canadians made visible, and circulated, perceptions of a distant war that had fundamental effects on them as they lived through an extraordinary period of history.

Recent histories of culture and communication show a greater sensitivity to relationships between everyday life in a particular social domain and the authorized powers of distant decision-making centres. Instead of viewing government as a command centre and different, scattered populations as the lower, suppliant part of a top-down hierarchy; instead of assuming an impermeable split between the power of national authorities and the power of local knowledges; instead of overlooking the often reciprocal and fluid exchanges between ruler and ruled, these recent histories not only acknowledge the importance of ordinary modes of experience, but also consider those positions as crucial domains in repositioning studies of socio-historical movements or inertias. There have been significant shifts in methods and conceptual approaches across the disciplines, as well as in their inquiries and objects of study. For historians this has meant reorienting their investigations, moving from studies of overarching structures to multiple networks, from quantifiable social categories to lived experience, or from societal norms to individual tactics and strategies.

In Canada during the war, evidence of local, public expressions of action and sentiment remains scattered. Although responses to the fighting varied, few Canadians were isolated entirely from the war's carnage. Yet what they used to interpret events was often situated close to home, though its referents, from Ottawa's command decisions to the carnage overseas, usually were not. From the first reports of the outbreak of fighting in Belgium, to the letters of condolence that came later, to fantastic accounts of enemy alien sabotage or stories about the injured bodies of returned men, news of the war reached home front populations through a series of ordinary, local channels that circumscribed how people imagined or understood events outside their immediate surroundings. Studies of selected sites used to broadcast images and specific understandings of the war – a school classroom, a civic meeting, a patriotic rally, an editorial, a commemoration ritual – can help to uncover how people came to view the war and to interpret its wider implications. The texts, practices, and varied sites of encounter that transported signs of the war – whether they were as typical as battle coverage in a city newspaper or as unique as the Lethbridge enemy alien internment camp located on that city's exhibition grounds – often provided not simply windows to wider worlds, but distorting mirrors, misleading settings, and illusionary situations. They could be very powerful. Sites like these, where

local knowledges confronted war-related discourses, can help us understand how home front populations perceived their circumstances and acted in the context of a world war.

As well, we need to recognize that public events, and publicly invented interpretations of events, could have significant consequences beyond the cities and regions in which they took place. War-related communication across the country may be seen as complex oscillations from margins to centres and back again – from Ottawa or from the front or from mass-circulating depictions of the hated Kaiser or the martyred Edith Cavell to the pinpoints of particular responses, shaped by local means and perceptions. This book probes the home front as an evolving sequence of exchanges between hinterland populations and centres of command, objects of fascination, and apocalyptic fighting fronts that produced massive killing and loss. It addresses how Canada's home front was shaped by local horizons and responses during more than fifty months of destruction that we now call the First World War.

Between Canada at War and City Life

My research stems largely from routinely generated evidence, the kind produced in comparable ways in all the belligerent countries from August 1914 to the initial phase of veteran re-establishment. Local newspapers, dailies and weeklies, provided diverse depictions of everyday life considered here, from public ritualizations to more incidental evidence of people living through the war. Their photographs, descriptions of local events, editorials, and reports on the war overseas opened avenues to revisit home front experiences from the perspectives of local participants and observers. They presented complex and wide arrays of representations, from local to national politics, from gendered images to those of ethnic and class relations, all in hometown settings depicted in local texts that circulated widely and, like any successful press, strove to attract both readers and advertising. I worked to piece together the histories and unravel the languages of voluntary clubs and associations, military documents, municipal minutes, school and church records, and personal and family papers.

I also chose a comparative approach and gathered evidence pertaining to home front responses in three very different Canadian cities: Trois-Rivières, resettled by Europeans of the *ancien régime* at the confluence of the Mauricie and St. Lawrence rivers; Guelph, a city in mid-southern Ontario that grew from a townsite laid down in the early nineteenth century; and Lethbridge, a more recently urbanized, southern Alberta locale in a rapidly populated province created, with Saskatchewan, less than a decade before the outbreak of war. Studies of public sites in these cities can uncover how peoples in different regions defined themselves in relation to national demands and constraints. There are often revealing gaps between the context of a country at

war and the local texts that result. Local responses that interested me most were those shaped by hometown horizons of understanding, perception, and imagination. The distances between wartime circumstances and hometown-produced responses necessarily mediate flows in either direction between national imperatives and urban spaces and discourses. This book addresses their many ambiguities as encounters between command centre directives and local peculiarities. Military historians of Canada and the war, for instance, have referred often to Sam Hughes' snap decision at the outbreak to scrap a recruit mobilization plan already in place. Instead, the Department of Militia and Defence sent 226 night telegrams asking for enlistments to militia commanders across the country. Brief chaos resulted. Trois-Rivières' previous militia commander, Lt.-Col. Louis-Phillipe Mercier, got one of these calls for troops and had to remind Ottawa that his unit had just been disbanded. The breakup in June 1914 of the 86th Three Rivers Regiment had already prompted bitter reaction from one city newspaper, and it underscores the complete absence, at a crucial time, of a local recruiting desk for a significantly large regional centre in Quebec.

Meanwhile, Guelph and Lethbridge papers joined the popular press across Canada in generating vivid descriptions of crowded armouries, 'official' pronouncements, and the first send-off rallies staged by local communities: the announcement of war, the sight of young civilians crowding around the armoury, the recruiter's desk, documents, medical examinations, marching drills, all were followed by frenetic send-off displays. Each part of this process was liminal, ephemeral, immediate, and situated. Such sites activated parochial experiences, measured by the perpetual distances between a country at war and the complexities of varied urban populations. By critically examining hometown horizons as local responses mediated on local sites, we can particularize a wide variety of questions concerning homefront perceptions. What did recruits represent? Why were enemy aliens a threat? On what grounds should conscription be supported or opposed? How should veterans be treated?

Answers to these questions, of course, were far from singular. During the conscription crisis, for instance, when Lester Pearson's father, the Rev. Edwin A. Pearson, pastor of Guelph's Norfolk Street Methodist Church, declared that 'the principle reason why I support Sir Robert Borden and the Hon. Hugh Guthrie and Union Government is my entire family of three sons are at the front,' he offered a position for others to see a contentious issue.³ His brief oration, reprinted in the local press, can be compared to an address by the Rev. W.J. Hindley, a war veteran, delivered before a crowd attending a first-ever Chautauqua show at Lethbridge's Eckstorm auditorium. Hindley was said to have animated his audience when he spoke about conscription as an unneeded measure in western Canada. He described the West as a patriotic heartland, fiercely loyal to Canada and to Britain, a region which

had already paid far more than its fair share. 'The east,' Hindley claimed, 'has said that the west is materialistic, but when the war broke out, the four western provinces proved themselves by the enlistments of men and by the generosity of their gifts.' Muscular patriotism, as he put it, was a virtue of Canada's West. 'Wild ruggedness and loyal hearts,' he declared, 'go to make up the westerner.'⁴

Examining how such evidence was formed or 'situated' – how it was said, where it was said, and by whom – helps us to interpret both its content and effects. What, for example, was the relationship between send-off rallies and the making of recruits as hometown products at the beginning of the war? How in Guelph did a military inquiry, staged to investigate veteran care in one of its hospitals, both express and influence how its patients saw themselves shortly after it ended?

As Joan Scott has argued, subjects in situations analogous to these encounter signifying acts that become symbolic not simply as 'an experience,' but because they are experienced in active ways. The proposition that 'experience' becomes significant when subjects replace prior interpretations with new ones is particularly applicable here. As the intensity of many challenges mounted, Canadians at home during the war were repeatedly required to develop new interpretations of what lay ahead in their appropriation of public discourses. As local participants, audiences, or principal actors, city inhabitants also helped to 'make' their hometown horizons both visible and potent. Conceptions and reconceptions were continually derived from complex flows of sensory information, typically found in local situations. Conceptually, as Roger Chartier has put it, the 'history of the construction of social identities thus becomes a history of relations of symbolic force.'⁵ On the home front, these histories can often be located in accessible, familiar, and local texts and the sites on which they circulated.

I selected these particular cities because of their obvious differences as medium-sized urban spaces in francophone, anglophone, industrial (both Trois-Rivières and Guelph), and agricultural regions (especially Lethbridge); because of the richness of local, archival evidence; and because each supported particularly detailed and revealing local newspapers that were preserved, reasonably legible, and topically comprehensive. Although the same might be said for comparable materials drawn from other locales, in terms of scale (between eight and sixteen thousand inhabitants), regional variation (land-use histories and corresponding ethnic geographies), and record survival, these choices avoided the empirical hazard of amassing too much material from too many regions while affording core samples sufficiently rooted in local peculiarities and perspectives.

I would not say, however, that this book emphasizes local or even regional identities; only that these became part of a much more complex perceptual mix when it came to representing the war publicly and to fashioning the

many boundaries that divided home front populations. A large and very useful historiography has accumulated that considers Canadian responses, and the responses of some of Canada's regions, to the war. Descriptive overviews include, most notably, Desmond Morton and J.L. Granatstein's *Marching to Armageddon* (1989), though both authors have published, individually and with others, detailed studies of conscription, Canada's overseas war ministry, and veteran re-establishment.⁶ On regional histories of the home front, John Herd Thompson's study of the Prairie provinces is joined by a much earlier work on the conscription crisis in Quebec by Elizabeth Armstrong. Donald Avery, Howard Palmer, and Bill Waiser have each examined the plight of enemy aliens in the western provinces, perceived by the host society of mainly white, Anglo-Saxon Canadians as 'dangerous,' close to the bottom of an ethnic 'pecking order,' and ultimately subject to internment and forced labour that included major projects building roads and facilities at Jasper, Banff, and Yoho national parks in Alberta and British Columbia. Other works have concentrated on specific topics related to military affairs or military-civilian relations based on regional or provincial histories. Jean-Pierre Gagnon, for instance, presented a detailed social-historical analysis of the 22nd Battalion, recruited largely in Quebec, while more recently Paul Maroney examined cultural aspects of recruitment in Ontario.⁷

Generally, historians in the past have paid close attention to developing the war's political and diplomatic chronologies and have highlighted its significance as an armed encounter that fundamentally altered Canada's relationship to Britain and the Empire. From A.F. Duguid's officially authorized version of events, presented in 1938, to G.W.L. Nicholson's subsequent account of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, published in 1962, their emphasis on military history remained faithful to a compelling politic in Canadian history writing: to bring to light a more independent role for Canada. The war became a sign, a watershed, for the colony-to-nation school. This theme has since been reinforced in broad surveys of Canada's military history by C.P. Stacey, Stephen Harris, and Desmond Morton, among others, that embrace the war years.⁸ These more traditional approaches, which ostensibly seek to explain decision-making processes, battlefield outcomes, and reconstruction efforts, also demonstrate a remarkably consistent enterprise of connecting selected aspects of Canada's national identity to its participation in the Great War. 'Even though Canadians fought as allies of the British,' as Morton and Granatstein put it, 'for Canada the Great War was a war of independence. By 1918, the self-governing colony that had trusted its fate to British statecraft was not only committed to speaking with its own voice in the world, it had won on the battlefield the right to be heard.'⁹

Nation-building was fostered in a variety of ways. Veterans, for instance, as Morton and Glenn Wright have shown, waged a 'second battle' in their struggle for better re-establishment programs that the authors present as a

precursor to the subsequent development of the modern welfare state in Canada. On the other hand, social memories of the war, as Jonathan F. Vance's recent turn toward cultural history points out, coalesced around themes of sacrifice, duty, and honour that also produced a new and popular sense of nationhood built on mythical conceptions of the ultimate meaning of the death and destruction it caused. Vance unearthed a vast range of middlebrow literature and commemorative practices, and he focused his interpretive efforts on their role in shaping a new and more distinct national identity. He emphasized that throughout the interwar period, popular exercises of myth-making 'added the nation-building thesis' to a remarkably persistent effort across the country to derive positive meaning from what had been such a costly and disastrous event. Many wished to believe that great sacrifices had been made by a new and now greater nation, a country made whole, not torn apart, during the strenuous tests of 1914-18.¹⁰

Though this was hardly a reality during the conscription crisis or when dealing with enemy aliens or during efforts to reintegrate returned soldiers, to note major exceptions, Vance was looking at something quite different. His work considered the subsequent 'uses' of a cultural sense of the past. It examined how the memory of the war became a national heritage project, based on sanitizing myths fashioned to ennoble those who had made the supreme sacrifice. Such illusions could be powerful. 'By encouraging people to focus their thoughts on a time when the nation appeared to be united in a common cause, the memory of the war could prove that the twentieth century did indeed belong to Canada.'¹¹ Striving for political and military independence, in other words, rested in part on the invention of idealized versions of the war, imagined and remembered through popular discourses, from commemorative rites to middlebrow fiction and consumer advertising.

While these studies show a marked consistency linking wartime experience to nation-building, it is equally important to note that significant shifts in topics and methods have taken place as well, from military, diplomatic, and political history and biography to social and, most recently, cultural histories of the war. These changing historical practices should be placed in a broader context, revealing a new emphasis on home front histories and away from the fighting itself. While in the 1970s Eric J. Leed's and Paul Fussell's work considered the war experience as a crucial break for the soldiers themselves – a liminal transition for the troops who survived the horror of no man's land, according to Leed, and a significant shift in subsequent languages and literary genres, according to Fussell, and later Samuel Hynes – Modris Eksteins subsequently went beyond these domains in his examination of many parallel aspects of the war as a cultural break from tradition. Eksteins considered its impact across Western societies, and his book joined

a growing body of work that relocated the many consequences of war well back from the actual fighting, deeply embedded in the societal and cultural contexts ultimately affected by the carnage. The work of social historians in particular, from the collaborative projects of Jay Winter to new studies and edited collections of women and the war, has examined war's consequences behind the lines through studies of the complex systems of social structure and cultural exchange on different national home fronts.¹²

In two important collaborations, *The Upheaval of War* (1988) and *Capital Cities at War* (1997), Jay Winter and others presented new work that emphasized the quantitative social history of home front conditions, primarily through comparative studies of living standards, family life, workers, women, and youth.¹³ While the latter book, based on studies of Paris, London, and Berlin, emphasized social and demographic assessments, it left consideration of popular culture, particularly interpretations of local representations, open to further study and alternative approaches. Although the volume remains a useful examination of urban spaces and wartime experience, and purports to 'turn to the social history of material life in Paris, London, and Berlin' to 'trace the history of social relations of work, wages, and consumption, attending both to quantitative evidence and to the perceptions of contemporaries,' it falls short in tracing histories of perception. Only one of the sixteen essays – on the image of the war profiteer – tackles representations per se as a central object of study.

Nonetheless, as a study primarily of social relations and structural change, this project achieved other aims admirably, following an introduction that addresses the relationship between localized and national experiences of Europeans at war. Winter observes that the history of the Great War has been told within various 'national frameworks.' Nations, however, do not wage wars, he reminds us. 'Groups of people organized in states do.' Only in an 'abstract, legal' sense did France and Britain wage war on Germany, he suggests. On the one hand, 'a declaration of war was ratified by the appropriately empowered bodies; funds were earmarked, and enabling acts opened the way to armed conflict'; on the other, local differences made armed mobilization and home front support a more complex process. The 'concrete, visible steps taken by Frenchmen, Germans, or Englishmen,' Winter argued, 'to go to war, to provision the men who joined up, and to adjust to the consequences – the human dimension of war – were almost always taken within and expressed through collective life at the local level: communities of volunteers or conscripts; communities of munitions workers; communities of the faithful and bereaved.'¹⁴

While the nation, to invoke Benedict Anderson's thesis, is an imagined experience, local life is often less so. Living locally entails direct encounters and interactions. A sense of national belonging, however, is framed much more by the symbols of an imagined community, those patent, traditional,

often patriotic signs that are shared across a population experiencing life within the nation-state on different levels simultaneously. Images of a warring nation, as a clear example, are powerful to the extent that they bring local life and national community into close communion. Studying their points of intersection, Winter indicated, helps us understand how this war was waged, lived, and experienced. Problematically, however, he relied on a static notion of 'community' to emphasize this fundamental point: 'We take "community" to mean social and geographical entities around which ordinary people construct their daily lives. In this sense a neighbourhood is an "experienced community"; a "nation," as Benedict Anderson tells us, is an "imagined community"; a city is at the meeting point of the two, with both an imaginative and a visible existence, one much closer to the neighbourhood than the nation.'¹⁵

Distinctions between experienced and imagined communities are not easily drawn. Parades, for instance, were often organized to frame perceptions of what lay beyond the environs of town and city. In these local situations, where did the nation begin and the street, neighbourhood, or city recede into the background? If local sites are used to see much larger pictures, then clear distinctions between microhistorical events and macrohistorical circumstances remain elusive. 'The distinction,' Winter conceded, 'between "experienced" and "imagined" communities is best understood as a heuristic device.' As he saw it (and this is where my work departs from his most) the effects of cultural signs – what people use to communicate with or through – can be distinguished from those of material settings – what people face as material circumstances. He implies a dichotomy between 'lived perceptions' and 'lived conditions.' He also assumes that wartime demands increased the force of the latter. Reading the signs of home front experiences becomes secondary to analytical assessments of the 'physical realities' of wartime demands and conditions, from enforced laws to shortages to morbidity rates. 'One of the challenges of such research has been to escape the trap of idealism in social history, to avoid the fashionable current in which only representations exist,' Winter writes. 'Wartime cities were full of such images, but the realities of daily life in wartime all too frequently deflated them by bringing to the fore the physical realities of conscription, shortages, and spiraling food prices.'¹⁶

I do not think they were necessarily deflated or that some representations paled in comparison to the actual conditions. Without assuming, reductively, that locally experienced lives were constituted by discursive strategies alone, historians are increasingly challenged to examine relationships between actual conditions and actual responses. The signs and the practices of local life mediated an awareness of various physical 'realities' – of death, danger, hardship, or loss. 'Urban populations,' as Winter put it himself, 'faced these tangible, visceral difficulties in one way or another every day of the war.'

But encounters with these 'realities' did not displace other signs of the war, somehow relegated to the background as murmurs or noise. Indeed, the most tangible and visceral of wartime referents were made real through interpretations of their ordinary, popular, and local signs. 'All we can claim,' as he concluded before turning to the studies themselves, 'is that these levels of perception and adaptation can be explored more effectively on the local level than on the national level.'¹⁷ About this we are in preliminary agreement. Since most work to date has paid little attention to what people in local settings typically used as signs or as symbols to see the war with, or through, I would emphasize that the local level becomes a crucial plane of experience on which national-level 'realities' were lived, while retaining Winter's other point – that assessing the evidence of local life often becomes crucial in determining wartime perceptions.

I had much to choose from. From Trois-Rivières, for instance, there was the *Bien Public* itself, the city's most widely circulated newspaper and vanguard for French Catholicism. There was the *hôtel de ville* (city hall), where speeches endorsing the Canadian Patriotic Fund were delivered; the St. Lawrence River waterfront, where troopships bound for England steamed downstream, while those carrying the wounded or returned moved upriver; the Canadian Pacific station platform, with a military guard posted, watchful of unruly soldiers stepping off for a smoke while local citizens scuttled by in fear of contracting the *peste blanc*, tuberculosis. Guelph had its Grand Trunk Railroad platform, which most troops left from or returned to; its exhibition grounds; and its armoury, which, with many of its churches, created settings for send-off ceremonies at the beginning of the war and welcome-home and memorial services afterwards. In Lethbridge, the Department of Militia and Defence had converted a portion of the city's exhibition grounds into a prison camp for enemy aliens. Half a dozen escapes, several drawn-out military inquiries, and a series of newspaper reports later helped to conjure fantastic images of enemy aliens, a fear built on demonization efforts situated close to home.

This is not a study of three cities during the war. In Habermasian terms, the public spheres or lifeworlds one finds in them were far from holistic: there was no single 'Lethbridge,' Alberta, or 'Guelph,' Ontario, or 'Trois-Rivières,' Quebec, from which the evidence of the war could be seen or read or constructed in only locally identifiable terms. As Geertz remarked famously, it is not villages that anthropologists study, but rather what takes place within them.¹⁸ I would like to say the same of my approach. Ordinary perceptions of civilian-military relations, even as the war dragged on and its effects became vastly general, were constrained by place, by localized referential modes, and by pre-existing patterns of expression and understanding (despite the fact that telegraph, telephone, and rail had significantly reduced the time taken to traverse or to communicate).

The framing was communicated in public spheres that varied, but remained site-specific. It could introduce novelty or notions of the meaning of the battles overseas. Trois-Rivières's location on the shores of Canada's main waterway access to the interior, for instance, provided moments of experiential connection to the war that could not have been duplicated in inland communities like Lethbridge or Guelph. As people paused to gaze out from the municipal waterfront, they often saw large vessels moving up or down the St. Lawrence, comprising an important share of Canada's North Atlantic sea traffic. In several press reports, these ships and the river soon came to symbolize a sense of local connection to the fighting overseas. One afternoon in June 1915, for example, news of a troopship passing the city upstream carrying wounded from the Canadian Expeditionary Force's first battles attracted onlookers, described quite differently from those who applauded Pearson's remarks or cheered Hindley vociferously. Instead, this gathering was said to have watched in near silence as the vessel moved out of sight, in a moment conducive to imagining a very different war. 'Quite a number were on the wharf Sunday to see the S.S. *Missanabie* go up,' the *New-comer* described the scene, 'as there were quite a number of wounded officers and soldiers on board.'¹⁹

The deceptive and crucial distances between what people immediately construe and what actually happens elsewhere increased in many home front situations. This gives historians fair scope to juxtapose interior, localized, vertical perspectives, perhaps those of the crowd of onlookers gathered at Trois-Rivières's city wharf, with imagined horizons of the fighting overseas and home front conditions generally. War-related discourse and practices were formulated, amplified, and exchanged on 'known' or 'knowable' sites, seldom distant from everyday life but far removed from their referents or motivating aims. The spate of myth-making, propagandizing, demonizing, hero-worshipping, or fear-mongering that is ordinarily found in the vehicles of public culture, from newspaper sensationalism to street theatre, is approached here as a series of messages that could open considerable gaps. Popular interpretations, perhaps created by a grotesque report of enemy alien sabotage, often repressed a corresponding reality of, for instance, young Hungarians from Lethbridge on the march to forced labour in Banff National Park. This book considers how reports like these in Lethbridge, Guelph, and Trois-Rivières operated as transports of Otherness, fashioning on the parochial sites of urban spaces a potent dissonance between popular discourses and the wartime realities that others experienced, from enemy aliens to front-line soldiers.

Throughout, I consider how verbal and pictorial texts or military and civilian rituals were placed in power struggles on these sites, where prior knowledge was deployed, as narratives and social memories, to adjust, inscribe, or reconstitute aspects of wartime identity. How did narrative

clusters – patriotic, gendered, religious, or nationalistic – demonize enemy aliens, proclaim loyalty, or delineate boundaries between veterans and other Canadians? How were they used to circumscribe or to police gendered margins, or to delineate positions for or against compulsory military service? Evidence in these forms, multiple as codes and meanings, can tell us much about how home front perceptions were fashioned within the fluid environs of a city. It also suggests how the differences we view as the most fundamental divisions created by the war across Canada came into being through the immediacy and contingency of everyday life.