

Close Encounters in War Journal – n. 3 (2020)

Thematic Issue: “Close Encounters in War and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder”

Call for articles

Close Encounters in War Journal (www.closeencountersinwar.org) is a peer-reviewed journal aimed at studying war as a human experience, through interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches ranging from the Humanities to the Social Sciences. The third issue (n. 3) of the journal will be thematic and dedicated to the experience of PTSD as a consequence of war and conflict, and titled “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as Aftermath of Close Encounters in War”.

Wars in general are cultural phenomena, among the most ancient and deeply rooted aspects of human cultural evolution: investigating their meaning, by reflecting on the ways we experience wars and conflicts as human beings is therefore essential. Conflict is deeply intertwined with language, culture, instincts, passions, behavioural patterns and with the human ability to represent concepts aesthetically. The concept of “encounter” is therefore fundamental as it involves experience, and as a consequence it implies that war can shape and develop our minds and affect our behaviour by questioning habits and values, prejudices and views of the world.

The notion of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was first introduced in the early 1980s by the American Psychiatric Association in order to describe a psychiatric condition occurring to people who have been involved in traumatic events as victims or witnesses. Although PTSD is not exclusively related to war and conflict, in common imagery it is mostly connected with veterans, with particular insistence on those who served in the American and British Forces deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan over the last few decades. Military personnel, civilians, NGO operators, journalists, and displaced people are equally exposed to PTSD as an aftermath of being involved in war. Over the most recent years, figures have grown, demonstrating that PTSD remains a major factor of the negative impact of war on society, together with environmental destruction, human and economic loss.

The label PTSD has replaced, in the field of combat-related conditions, previous definitions that were aimed at describing the psychiatric and bodily state of distress of combatants who, despite not being physically injured, were nonetheless unable to keep serving and needed medical assistance. Although scholars have attempted to date back PTSD to ancient warfare, even Greek,¹ the first attempt to clinically define the state was made during the Napoleonic wars. The state of shock in which soldiers were left by passing-by cannonballs was called *vent du boulet*, or “cannonball wind”.² During the American Civil War, the state of combat-related mental distress was called “soldier’s heart” and during the Great War the label was changed into “shell shock”, although the condition was not limited to casualties of explosions. During WWII the more generic definitions of “war neurosis”, “combat fatigue”, and “operational fatigue” spread in the English-speaking psychiatry, while German and Russian doctors coined their own formulas to describe one same phenomenon shared by thousands of combatants (and civilians as well): a state of confusion and hyperarousal, amnesia, dullness, with outbursts of rage and fear, hyperkinesis and tremors that could appear immediately as well as after months from the trauma and persisted as an impairing condition.

Nowadays, combat-related PTSD is addressed by national medical institutions (military and civilian) as a major cause of social distress, suicide, violence, antisocial behaviour, depression, and addiction

¹ Helen King, *Recovering Hysteria from History: Herodotus and the First Case of “Shell-Shock”*, in *Contemporary Approaches to the Science of Hysteria. Clinical and Theoretical Perspectives*, ed. by Peter Halligan, Christopher Bass and John Marshall, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 36-48.

² Marc-Antoine Crocq and Louis Crocq, *From Shell Shock and War Neurosis to Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A History of Psychotraumatology*, «Clinical research», 2, 1 (2000): 47-55 (p. 48).

to substances among a relevant number of veterans, with a significant negative impact on the quality of life of families and relatives, not to mention the deterioration of life-expectancy for the veterans themselves. The main fields of study in which PTSD is addressed today are neuropsychiatry and cognitive psychology with thousands of publications, while the Arts and Humanities have so far provided a modest contribution to the understanding of the topic. Historical research has largely focused on WWI and “shell shock” and the number of scholars (especially in the US and the UK) who study PTSD in connection with the wars in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan is growing. Sound interdisciplinary research is still wanted and a broad spectrum of disciplinary fields have not yet been covered in the framework of PTSD-studies.

Issue n. 3 of CEIWJ will aim to investigate the theme of close encounters in connection to the experience of PTSD by exploring its facets both on a micro-scale, by studying individual testimonies and experiences, and on a theoretical and critical basis throughout history. CEIWJ encourages interdisciplinary approaches and the dialogue among different scientific fields. We therefore welcome articles on conflict-related PTSD that frame the topic within the context of close encounters in war from the perspective of Aesthetics, Anthropology, Arts, Classics, Cognitive Science, Ethics, History, Linguistics, Politics, Psychology, Sociology, and other disciplines relevant for the investigation of the topic.

We invite articles which analyse the experience of PTSD from ancient to modern and contemporary periods, from the perspective of the encounter, reaching beyond the study of military tactics and strategy and focusing on the way human beings ‘encounter’ each other with and within the experience of PTSD. Contributions are invited to promote discussion and scholarly research from established scholars, early-career researchers, and from practitioners who have encountered conflict-related PTSD in the course of their activities.

The topics that can be investigated include but are not limited to:

- Violence and trauma
- Cultural, ethical, social, political, and psychological response to conflict-related PTSD
- PTSD and colonial wars, civil wars, international conflicts
- War captivity and other forms of deportation
- War crimes, ethnic cleansing, gendered violence
- Representations of otherness, race, and gender
- Cognitive aspects of conflict-related PTSD
- Testimonies, personal narratives
- PTSD in the arts
- Oral history and memory studies

The editors of *Close Encounters in War Journal* invite the submission of articles of 6000-8000 words (endnotes included, bibliographical references not included in word-count: please see submission guidelines at <https://closeencountersinwar.org/instruction-for-authors-submissions/>) in English by **1st June 2020** to ceiw2018@gmail.com. Decisions will be made by 30th June 2020, and the selected articles will undergo a process of double-blind peer-review. The authors invited to publish will have to submit their fully revised articles by 1st November 2020.