

Conference.

From Combat to Commemoration. Veteran Politics and Memory: A Global Perspective.
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Proposal.

Moral witness: war narratives and the Portuguese soldiers experience of the First World War

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Portugal's entry into First World War led to the mobilization of around a hundred thousand men, first in Africa (1914) and then on the European front (1917). Though these numbers pale in comparison to those of other allies, the national controversy around the country's participation on the European front and the fallout from the tragedy would leave Portugal a "mutilated" victor. The Portuguese case throws considerable light on the argument that commemoration helped to brutalize society and politics in the post-war years. In this case and although national politics evolved first into a military dictatorship and afterwards a fascist regime, remembrance practices are far removed from the modern forms present in fascist culture, particularly as in the Italian case. In my comparative study on war veterans and the politics of memory, I attempted to understand their role in national politics; it became evident that shared experience was a moral coefficient ripe to legitimate both collective organizing and the memory-linked protagonism claimed by war veterans. The presentation at hand now seeks to look beyond collective mentalities and delve into individual experiences. By looking at the memories of Portuguese soldiers who fought in the Great War, this article seeks to understand the devices used by soldiers in their effort to make sense of and thereby normalize their war experience. It will analyze the narrative strategies of their memoirs written in the post-war and demonstrate, on the one hand, what leads the soldiers to write and, on the other, how they do this in a dialogue with the broad sense of the war as a tragedy – a metanarrative of the tragedy. Finally, it will seek to understand how a moral "responsibility" head the way modern war experience is transferred to the public sphere in an interwar context of political and social polarization.

Sílvia Correia, Ph.D.

Since 2013, I have been a Professor at Instituto de História - Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) and an associate researcher at the Instituto de História Contemporânea (IHC) - Universidade NOVA de Lisboa (Portugal).

I presented my PhD dissertation entitled “The politics of memory of the First World War in Portugal, 1918-1933: Between experience and myth”, in 2011, at the Universidade NOVA de Lisboa, and in 2015 had it published as a book by a nationally recognized, non-academic, publishing house in Portugal. Between 2009 and 2011, I supervised the creation of the Oral History Archive of the Portuguese Workers General Confederation, founded by the European Union. In 2012, I was a Fulbright Visiting Scholar at the Department of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies at Brown University (USA). Since completing my postdoctoral research (2012-2013), developed at the IHC and Brown University, I have been working about the *Political memory of the Portuguese Colonial War and the Algerian War - a comparative perspective*. My new and ongoing research project is titled “Representation and Limit: Memories of the Portuguese Experience in World War I”.