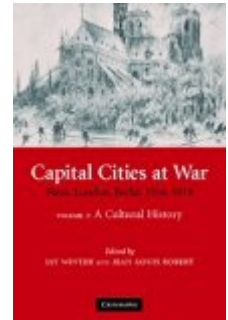


Jay M. Winter, Jean-Louis Robert, eds.. *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin 1914-1919; Volume 2: A Cultural History..* Studies in the Social and Cultural History of Modern Warfare. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. xiii + 545 pp. \$110.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-521-87043-6.



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Commissioned by Susan R. Boettcher

This is a remarkable book. A sequel to the pioneering volume on the three European capitals in wartime, it took ten years in the making, but it was worth the wait.[1] Just like its predecessor, this collection of essays stands out as a model of international collaborative research and makes a significant contribution to the social and cultural history of the First World War. The eleven comparative studies (with introductory and concluding chapters) are the result of collective writing, synthesized by so-called "conveners," but in fact the joint product of several researchers and authors. The articles are arranged into three sections: "Cityscapes," "Civic Culture," and "Sites of Passage/Rites of Passage"; they explore "the practices of metropolitan life in wartime" (p. 1). Together, they offer a vivid picture of lived experiences and contemporary reactions to the conflict, complementing the first tome, which had focused on the material conditions of urban life under the ordeal of war and featured a wealth of statistical data.

The overarching conceptual framework of the volume is wide and eclectic. The editors introduce different approaches, ranging from an examination of the complexities of identity formation to Michel de Certeau's theory on the practice of everyday life, from Svetlana Boym's work on nostalgia to a critical assessment of Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau's and Annette Becker's "war culture" concept.[2] A more coherent interpretative agenda might have made the edition more accessible, but could probably not have done full justice to the multifariousness of cultural expressions and activities covered here.

The same holds true for the methodological diversity evident in the work. Some chapters are fully comparative, striving to cover the three cities equally in an intertwined manner, while others concentrate on a particular case and relate it to the two others. This pragmatism makes sense, but it appears that Berlin has not altogether received the same consideration as its counterparts. This emphasis is regrettable given the recent shift

in German historiography towards an urban history of the Great War.[3] Adrian Gregory, for instance, in his stimulating essay on railway stations as "gateways and termini," as a "focus of nostalgia, site of the exchange of identities, information, and cash" (p. 56), hardly mentions the German capital. The use of a wide array of original primary material is one of the merits of the book, and Gregory draws extensively on newspaper articles and archival sources. Catherine Rollet's chapter on "The Home and Family Life," in contrast, is founded on unpublished private material (letters, diaries, written accounts), partly made available to her by descendants of World War I families after she placed an advertisement in a Berlin daily. It is, however, not quite clear to what extent the reality of family life in Paris, London, or the German capital differed from experiences in other metropolitan (or indeed rural) localities. This conceptual problem is also apparent in other contributions, such as Jay M. Winter's fascinating piece on hospitals as "sites for the construction and re-construction of soldiers' bodies, minds, and identities" (p. 382), which is clearly inspired by Michel Foucault and applies yet another interpretative approach. Carine Trevisan and Elise Julien ("Cemeteries") present an interesting account of new mourning rituals and funerary practices necessitated by the absence of the soldiers' bodies, but devote the greatest part of their chapter to the postwar period and official commemorative efforts.

One of the main themes of the book is the tension between tradition and modernity, between metropolitan nostalgia and the reality of total war. Jan Rüger ("Entertainments") and Stefan Goebel ("Exhibitions") observe the resilience of traditional imagery and conservative values, marginalizing modernist representations of the conflict in favor of war kitsch, patriotic spectacles, or trivial comedies. The pervasive desire for popular mass entertainment (in cinemas, music halls, and theaters) and propagandistic displays of the

war effort is, so the authors claim, to be understood as an escapist reflex, an expression of the yearning for a return to the harmony and stability of an idealized past. Historians have for years engaged in a discussion as to whether the World War represented a catalyst of modernity, and while it remains important to study and evaluate vanguardist positions, both authors do rightly to bring the cultural imaginations and aesthetic demands of ordinary people back in.[4]

Emmanuelle Cronier ("The Street") demonstrates vividly how war affected the ambience and character of daily life in the capital cities, describing for instance more obvious developments such as the militarization and feminization of street life, but also changes in time, light, sound, or smell. Urban life seemed to have regressed to an almost archaic, pre-modern state: fewer vehicles and people were on the street, lighting was reduced significantly, rubbish as well as wild gardens proliferated, and city dwellers smelled stronger than before (due to the lack of water and soap). Interestingly, turning to the prewar period here meant a return to modernity, to the comforts of sophisticated city life.

The detailed articles on schools (Stefan Goebel) and universities (Elizabeth Fordham) explore how educational concerns and academic interests clashed with the demands of total war. The authors cover the role of the institutions in propaganda and in the mobilization of the civilian population, but also draw attention to innovative learning and research methods, to a new set of functions and relations. The teaching of foreign languages, to give just one example, became a highly debated field of activity, leading for instance to a re-assessment of the relative importance of German in Paris and London, or to the establishment of a chair of Hungarian language and literature at the University of Berlin. Here, we come across another interesting finding of the collection: the war as an international encounter led to xenophobia and exacerbated nationalism, but

it also encouraged cultural exchange and a better understanding of other societies and ways of life. Londoners faced the influx of Belgian refugees and Austro-Slav renegades, Parisians hailed the arrival of U.S. soldiers, and Berliners learned about their Austro-Hungarian, Bulgarian, and Turkish allies.

The contributions by Jon Lawrence on the struggles over the control and designation of public space between state authorities and competing social movements ("Public Space, Political Space"), and by Adrian Gregory and Annette Becker on the spiritual mobilization of the population, the role of the church, and the fate of Jewish communities ("Religious Sites and Practices") add to the multifaceted picture of everyday life on the home front. Taken together, the studies gathered in this book illustrate well that the urban wartime experience, interpretations of and responses to the conflict varied significantly not only between the three metropolises, but also within each local community. Returning to the concept of "war culture," the editors in the concluding chapter argue that the notion is "too monolithic, too unified for the variegated and chameleon-like cultural practices it is meant to describe" (p. 473). War affected metropolitan society in a variety of ways, and the militarization and brutalization of civilians is just one, albeit significant, aspect amongst others: "War cultures were polyvalent and polyvocal; no one voice out-shouted them all" (p. 473).

The interested reader will find the volume a compelling yet somewhat uneven read, not just for the variety of approaches mentioned above. The use of illustrations is imbalanced, and the overall editing standard leaves something to be desired. Some scholars may frown upon the classification of several chapters as "cultural history," or lament the absence of sections on literary representations, on the arts and high culture, war ideology, or the press. Moreover, it might have been interesting to look in more detail at the meanings of the status of capital city and changes

in the symbolic authority of the three cities in question. Berlin, for instance, was not only conceived of as the political center of the German nation-state, but also as the focal point of a future central European empire stretching from the North Sea to Minor Asia (*Mitteleuropa*). The Entente powers perceived the German capital as seat of the main aggressors and leaders of the hostile coalition. At the same time, Bavarian politicians and intellectuals increasingly objected to Berlin's (or Prussia's) predominance in the *Kaiserreich*, and in the early postwar period, South and West German separatists repeatedly threatened Germany's territorial integrity.

Arguably, the book would also have benefited from a more pronounced outlook on Second World War experiences or some reflections as to the fate of other European capitals, in particular in eastern Europe.[5] Urban life was very different in embattled and occupied metropolises such as Brussels, Warsaw, or Belgrade. Vienna was the center of a multinational empire in decay, while wartime St. Petersburg was first renamed, twice revolutionized; and in March 1918, it altogether lost its status to Moscow. Capitals of non-belligerent countries such as Bern or Stockholm played an important role as gathering points and gateways for pacifists, agents, and revolutionaries. All of this reflection raises the question to what extent London, Paris, and Berlin can stand as paradigmatic for other metropolitan experiences.

In sum, however, this collection of meticulously researched essays will undoubtedly be of great interest to many scholars of both urban history and the history of the First World War. It demonstrates convincingly that "contemporaries experienced and understood the global conflict and the national war effort through close reading with specific locales and venues" (p. 185). By offering a comparative analysis of the urban experience, both volumes of *Capital Cities at War* enhance our understanding of national and European history in the period from Sarajevo to Ver-

sailles, providing a veritable goldmine for future research. The editors and contributors are to be commended on this major achievement.

Notes

[1]. Jay M. Winter and Jean-Louis Robert, eds., *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin 1914-1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[2]. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001); and Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14-18: Understanding the Great War*, trans. Catherine Temerson (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002).

[3]. Recent studies include Antje Strahl, *Rostock im Ersten Weltkrieg: Bildung, Kultur und Alltag in einer Seestadt zwischen 1914 und 1918* (Berlin: LIT, 2007); Dietmar Molthagen, *Das Ende der Bürgerlichkeit? Liverpools und Hamburger Bürgerfamilien im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2007); Roger Chickering, *The Great War and Urban Life in Germany: Freiburg, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and Florian Altenhöner, *Kommunikation und Kontrolle: Gerüchte und städtische Öffentlichkeiten in Berlin und London 1914/1918* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2008).

[4]. A discussion of *World War I and the Cultures of Modernity*, ed. Douglas Mackaman and Michael Mays (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000) would have been useful here.

[5]. See, for instance, *Endangered Cities: Military Power and Urban Societies in the Era of the World Wars*, ed. Marcus Funck and Roger Chickering (Boston: Brill, 2004).

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