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Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert, eds., *Capital Cities at War*, vol. 2, *A Cultural History*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. xiii + 545 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$110 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-0-521-87043-6.

Review by Gearóid Barry, National University of Ireland, Galway.

Writing in their historiographical survey *The Great War in history* (2005), Jay Winter and Antoine Prost affirmed that “total war deserves nothing less than total history.”[1] Recent monographs such as Roger Chickering’s study of the city of Freiburg at war suggest that detailed urban studies are a fruitful way of advancing the cultural history of the First World War.[2] After all, “cultural history is a history of the intimate...a history of signifying practices; it studies how men and women make sense of the world in which they live.”[3] In the same vein, Jean-Louis Robert and Jay Winter have completed their mammoth “capital cities” project. For this they deserve credit and our thanks, and not just for endurance. The editors gave us a first volume of fine social history coloured by cultural history in 1997.[4] This present comparative cultural history of London, Paris and Berlin between 1914–19 is the second of two volumes. In summary, it takes the concept of metropolitan identity and asks what it meant to say that you were a Londoner, a Parisian or a Berliner in wartime.

That the “capital cities” volumes, taken as a bloc, are a meeting of social and cultural history is indeed apt; the whole cultural turn in First World War studies this past two decades grew organically from social history’s concern with the relationship of social groups to the war.[5] When, in 1988, Winter used demography to show that British public health had improved in wartime, some demurred at his findings.[6] He replied by proposing a comparative study, using French and German materials to compare with the British data. Thus was born the first volume which both reflected and advanced a more general shift of emphasis from quantitative history to a history of sentiments. This new departure centred on the concept of “war culture” meaning “the sum total of the means through which contemporaries understood the conflict and persuaded themselves to continue fighting it.”[7] Historians wanted to work out the anthropology of that consent, though others continued to argue for the primacy of coercion as an explanation.

The first volume of this collaborative “capital cities” enterprise was a well-received social history of these cities at war “[trying] to describe within a comparative framework the material conditions of urban life.”[8] The authors made excellent use of statistical measurements. Crucially, they also used the more cultural concepts of entitlements, capabilities and functionings developed by Amartya Sen to redefine the standard of living in wartime to mean “not living well in a material sense but in a moral sense.”[9] Voluntary sacrifice was bound up with the valorisation of “fairness” in the distribution between individuals and classes of scarce resources and abundant risks, from military service to bread queues.[10] In this second volume, the authors extend the application of a winning interpretative framework. However, for this volume, explicitly subtitled “A Cultural History”, they announce that a different set of questions is being posed, requiring a “more eclectic approach” (p. 1). Already in 1997, at the end of volume one, Winter and Robert set out the agenda for the second, promising it would explore the “intermediary levels of experience” of war within families, neighbourhoods, and political and social organizations.[11] At the outset of the 2007 volume, the authors put forward the idea of identity as

that extra interpretative tool. “Everyone needed a cultural passport in wartime”, they argue, and identity in its multiple forms provided it (p. 3). Between individual and national identity lay, they maintain, local identity, metropolitan in this case, which “related to a sense of a shared landscape and a shared set of cultural references located in that particular place” (p. 3). The sites in question here were capital cities which were unique because they were also political centres. As sites of transit in industrialised war, they dwarfed virtually all provincial cities (p. 5). Identities do not just exist, though, they are performed. “City dwellers ‘spoke’ the city by traversing it. And so do we” (p. 7).

With the interpretative framework in place, though, a street plan for the “scholarly perambulation” through these three cities is still lacking. Two burning methodological issues have to be tackled. How are the twenty-six collaborators to do comparative cultural history? And how were they to turn that research into a readable coherent book? To take the issue of writing first, research in the three cities led to drafts dealing with each topic in all three cities. These were revised after meetings of the collective. The chapter convenors then synthesised the writing of all collaborators who are also scrupulously acknowledged (pp. xi-xiii). The authorial voice is that of the group and Winter and Robert worked hard to give *Capital Cities* the coherence edited collections sometimes lack. On comparative history, Winter and Robert acknowledge straight up that it is easier in the case of social and economic history where statistics can be compared. Cultural comparison is more slippery and linguistic and cultural particularities get in the way. What direct equivalents does London music hall have, for instance? (p. 106). Undeterred, they argue sensibly for two types of comparison. The first is fully comparative, treating various sites in all three cities equally. The second, the “relational” model, focuses primarily on one city, highlighting its special cultural forms by reference to the other two cases. This geometrical approach places one city at the centre of a grid from which the co-ordinates of the other two are triangulated (pp. 8-9). This pragmatic approach was often dictated by the sources and the uneven archival traces in each case. This brings us to the scope and organization of the book. It is divided into three parts: part one treats cityscapes, part two concerns civic culture, while part three deals with sites of passage/rites of passage. Its eleven themes ranging from entertainment to family life to schools, travelling through hospitals, churches and cemeteries give this cultural history an ambitious scope.

As for content, all the treatments are well above par. In chapter eleven, on religion, Adrian Gregory and Annette Becker prioritise the dominant Christian denominations, Anglican, Catholic and Lutheran in each case, but give us full comparison of the Jewish communities in all three cities. The comparisons of universities by Elizabeth Fordham appportion attention well. Jon Lawrence’s examination of public space as political space demonstrates masterfully similarities and divergences over the right of public assembly. All three were fearful of the mob, none of the three cities licencing a right to public protest as such. In London, though, “political customs ...licensed behaviour [that] would certainly not have been tolerated in wartime Paris or Berlin” (p. 299). Carine Trevisan and Elise Julien’s discussion of cemeteries brings in the crucial issue of memory. They make the obvious but overlooked point that Paris, no more than London or Berlin, has no metropolitan monument to its war dead. Every hamlet had to have its own but the capitals’ war dead were subsumed into the war memorials of nation and Empire either at the Arc de Triomphe or the Cenotaph (p. 452). The comparative method here reveals a “significant absence” that had been obscure in the national histories (p. 470). Emmanuelle Cronier guides us through “the street” of wartime Paris passing through rue Guynemer, re-named after the air ace of that name, like other street re-baptisms performed on 14 July 1918 (p. 72). Her chapter also amplifies the theme of civic entitlements and shared risk that are the concern of both volumes. She documents how the aerial bombardments of Paris heightened civic solidarity. The streets saw division too, though. Painstaking work in police stations’ day books reveals instances of on-leave soldiers abusing the police restraining them as “shirkers” who lorded over them with an unearned power (p. 87). Add to this civilian resentment of refugees (“Belgianitis has quite abated”, wrote Miss M. Coules of London in her diary) and we see how they were also “theatres of resentment and anxiety” (p. 96).

As is evident from the last two examples, the range of sources and their use is impressive indeed. The

bibliography alone runs to forty-five pages detailing an array of archives, newspapers and printed primary sources such as memoirs. The secondary literature cited includes histories of the Parisian bus companies! In the chapter on the home and family life, Catherine Rollet synthesises a variety of sources to enter the private sphere from family papers to mothers' service exemption pleas to the Middlesex Appeal Tribunal (p. 320). The primary sources often speak of that self-mobilization for war John Horne argues is a concomitant of cultural mobilisation. [12] A perfect example is the self-regulation and moral policing of the film industry as revealed in the minutes of the London Cinema Commission which made the state enforcement of patriotism on the silver screen superfluous (p. 114). Very clear examples of cultural mobilization for war are seen in Stefan Goebel's chapter on exhibitions. On-street displays of war trophies showed the war to a metropolitan audience, allowing them to understand the national effort "through close reading within specific locales and venues" (p. 185). Goebel integrates well-chosen photographs to illustrate his point, including the inevitable Iron Hindenberg in Berlin and a more revealing Imperial War Museum photo of Londoners' bond purchasing from a "tank bank" (literally) in Trafalgar Square (p. 158).

Jay Winter's examination of hospitals in this volume focuses on psychiatric care in an excellent piece on treating shellshock. Paris was "a solar system of care for men of all kinds", with satellites in the suburbs, he states (p. 366). It might seem odd not to examine the treatment of other injuries in the capital or hospital care of civilians in this context. However, volume one did consider hospitals' role in public health, epidemic and TB control in particular and the treatment of physical war wounds. However, one still feels there is an element missing here in this second volume. The cultural history of the physically war wounded or disease-infected *poilu* in Parisian hospitals is absent. Were they adopted by *marraines* and "blessed" with visitors in a way the more disturbing casualties—the facially disfigured and the mentally ill—might not have been? Two other absences must be noted. The authors' billing at the end of the first instalment promised to look at city dwellers in their political and social organisations. However, while we see them in their churches we do not really see them in secular equivalents like the trade union movement. Moreover, save for reference to eastern European Jews, the social networks of migrants, be they Irish, Welsh or Chinese, do not become featured here either.

Readers pursuing overall arguments in this volume will find elements of continuity with Winter's *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*. In that book, Jay Winter argued that this modern industrial war precipitated a deluge of traditional forms in the realm of culture and cultural practices. [13] This thesis re-emerges in this book in a slightly revised guise, that of "restorative nostalgia." Modern war was transforming the very idyll it was meant to defend. Yet, "the more the war modified urban life, the greater the urge" to nostalgia. (p. 14). This was more wistful than reactionary. Jan Rüger's essay on entertainment seems to bear out this point concluding that modernist artistic efforts were the exception. The avant-garde retreated as it was targeted as a site of treason (pp. 136-7). Contrast this with the runaway success of the Haydn Wood and Herbert Weaterly song "Roses of Picardy" in 1917 with its echoes of romantic poetry, amplifying a traditionalism that chimed with the prevailing "metropolitan nostalgia" (p. 133).

However, the real presiding ideas of this cultural history are civic entitlement and obligation on the one hand and the negotiation of identity on the other. It is the chapters on schools and railway stations that develop them best. Stefan Goebel argues that in the "new hierarchy of urban citizenship" during the conflict, soldiers trumped schoolchildren every time (p. 194). Reports held at the Archives de Paris documented the chronic overcrowding of schools due to military requisitioning (p. 195). "You too are in the fight", French schoolchildren were told by their instituteurs. However, Goebel implies that Audoin-Rouzeau's thesis that the war culture "successfully invaded French schools and brutalized children" is somewhat overstated. More public duty was instilled than military brutality, he argues (p. 201).

However, it is Adrian Gregory's chapter on railway stations that really gets to grips with the exchange of identities that is at the heart of war. A poem in *Le petit Parisien* in September 1914 wrote of how 'a

thousand cares, sternly repressed, surround these railway stations' (p. 25). These were sites where men were 'shedding social roles and adopting new ones' (p. 24). Press reports of the arrival of trainloads of refugees, meanwhile, and the mobilisation of (often female) reception committees to tend to them, testify to the stations' role of as liminal zones where the invasion's victims, "as soon as they had set foot on the railway stations' platforms of Paris, were born as 'refugees' in the eyes of the other civilians" (p. 31). Of course, Parisian stations rapidly became gates of leave. The human traffic was enormous. Some 420,000 permissionaires passed through Paris in the last week of May 1917. Women awaited reunions at the entrance. Other women worked in a sometimes seedy "leave land" where soldiers not so fortunate could choose to divert or dissipate themselves, consuming food, drink or sex as desired. The war itself became part of the fabric of the Gare de l'Est. Verdun was added to the title of the station making it the start of the *voie sacrée*. A great mural showed men leaving for the front. Gregory remarks pithily that for many such reminders were unnecessary as this railway station "would always be the first station of the cross" (p. 56).

An important question to ask at the end of this review is the extent to which *Capital Cities* represents the outline of a European history of the First World War. The authors' own conclusion states that the comparative history of the war is still in its infancy but they modestly omit to say how much the project they have just completed has done to wean the child. Might not a comparative project on occupied cities in either world war be on the cards now following this template? Metropolitan history deepens but does not displace national history. But the sheer mass of citizens from outside the metropolis that spent time in "their" capital did "nationalize" them further. The volumes have produced many new insights for which we should be grateful. But perhaps the most valuable lesson to be drawn here confirms what many working in the field of the First World War were already thinking. Winter and Robert qualify the war culture concept in order to play down the idea it was a vector of unadulterated hate. Wiser to say that "hatred was part of one 'war culture' among many," along with other less violent elements such as laughter (p. 473). The experience of the First World War was as varied as it was intrusive for the people of Berlin, London and Paris. By sifting through their identities, the team headed by Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert have produced a monumental piece of cultural history that is worthy of scholars' attention but even more worthy of the people that are its subjects.

#### LIST OF ESSAYS

Jay Winter, "The Practices of Metropolitan Life in Wartime"

Adrian Gregory, "Railway Stations: Gateways and Termini"

Emmanuelle Cronier, "The Street"

Jan Rüger, "Entertainments"

Stefan Goebel, "Exhibitions"

Elizabeth Fordham, "Universities"

Jon Lawrence, "Public Space, Political Space"

Catherine Rollet, "The Home and Family Life"

Jay Winter, "Hospitals"

Adrian Gregory, "Religious Sites and Practices"

Carine Trevisan, "Cemeteries"

Jay Winter & Jean-Louis Robert, "Conclusion"

#### NOTES

[1] Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, *The Great War in History* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 172.

[2] Roger Chickering, *The Great War and urban life in Germany; Freiburg, 1914-1918* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[3] Winter and Prost, *The Great War in History*, p. 29.

[4] Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert, eds., *Capital Cities at War: Paris. London. Berlin 1914-19* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[5] A good example of this is Jean-Louis Robert, *Les ouvriers, la patrie et la Révolution, 1914-1919* (Besançon: Annales Littéraires de Besançon, 1995).

[6] Jay Winter, *The Experience of World War I* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988).

[7] Leonard V. Smith "The *culture de guerre* and French Historiography of the Great War of 1914-1918," *History Compass* 5 (2007): 1967-1979 at p. 1967.

[8] Winter and Robert, eds., *Capital Cities at War*, p. 34.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 131.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 553.

[12] John Horne, "Introduction: mobilizing for 'total war,'" in John Horne, ed., *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 1.

[13] Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning. The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

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