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James E. Connolly, *The Experience of Occupation in The Nord, 1914-1918. Living With the Enemy in First World War France*. Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 2018. 333pp. Map, photos, tables, notes, bibliography, index. £80.00. ISBN 978-1-5261-1780-9.

Review by Nicole Dombrowski Risser, Towson University, Baltimore, MD

After fewer than two months into the hostilities now named “The Great War,” the Kaiser’s troops conquered Belgium. Simultaneously, one French border town after another fell: Roubaix, Tourcoing, Douai, Cambrai. Censored reports dribbling back to London, then to the U.S., managed to capture the Allies’ vain efforts in Lille, “About midnight the news was given out that the white flag had been hoisted on the town hall, but at 2 o’clock the firing recommenced and continued for over three hours. Evidently the French were making a last attempt on the border town, unfortunately without success.”[1]

What followed for the inhabitants of the newly occupied territories was a kind of cease-fire inferno. Reporters observed, “Whoever now holds Lille, it is a wrecked city. Flames have completed the work of bombardment. The city’s biggest quarter, including the station, prefecture and most important public buildings is in ruins.”[2] From October 13, 1914 until October 18, 1918 the Germans occupied Lille and, ultimately, nine north-eastern French departments. Under deplorable conditions—with destruction levied against water sources, agricultural fields, public buildings, private businesses and homes—the Germans administered the French. The French tried to salvage their lives, families, communities, household finances, and dignity. To do so often involved painful trade-offs. James E. Connolly’s deeply researched study of French life under German occupation excavates fragments of lives rebuilt under ambiguous circumstances of penury, police surveillance, middle-class moral respectability and sometimes political resistance. His study is less interested in the relationships between the French and the Germans than between the French themselves, often played against each other as pawns manipulated by a resource-confiscating, labor-thirsty German war machine.

To approach his study, Connolly minimizes what he considers erroneous and overreaching absolutist categories of patriotic resistance and criminal complicity as dominant poles of daily life.[3] Instead, he navigates the shadowy pathways of private and public behavior that offered few examples of clarity for assigning binary attributes of resistance or collaboration. Through the examination of police archives, repatriation dossiers, personal journals, published diaries and local histories Connolly puzzles together a grittier record of the activities of civilian residents and administrators. Reviving E.P. Thompson’s notion of a moral economy, Connolly judiciously applies Thompson’s concept as a lens to inspect and understand the interactions between French

civilians of the Nord and their German overseers. He argues that a new, spontaneously generated cultural paradigm emerged in the occupied territories to balance self-interest and communal interest. He insists that the “culture of the occupied” changed as the war endured and as particular situations presented themselves (p. 3). Connolly reveals how “a widely held system of representations and understandings underpinning the experience of occupation” emerged (p. 6). By drawing distinctions between wartime culture (experienced by the French living in free, but warring France) and that of occupation culture (created by those living under the German boot) helps historians recover a distinct wartime experience in the Nord. *Nordistes’* 14–18 experiences—and Connolly leaves us to assume his findings would extend to the other occupied territories—became subsumed under a national collective memory narrative generated between the two World Wars, which was determined to equalize the suffering and sacrifices of all French citizens.

A sub-argument of the study devotes itself to challenging Annette Becker’s established findings of the predominance of widespread patriotism in Nord. What matters for Connolly, I believe, is to document what happens to people who lose their liberty and the right to fight when their compatriots continue the struggle. The historian’s goal here is to understand and empathize with certain victims and petty villains of history, to sort out harmful or bad behavior in order to understand how the occupied created a pedagogy for good behavior. The actions he finds fall short of patriotism. Connolly seeks to recognize the ways occupation compromised French men and women’s ability to honor core values, fought for over centuries and extinguished in military defeat in a matter of weeks (p. 252). Perhaps believing it not fair to hold an entire population to conflated notions of patriotism and resistance, Connolly wants to locate a middle-ground of admirable or even acceptable unacceptable behavior. In order to do that, he recognizes and records the wide range of human behavior, especially “misconduct,” the chief subject of part one of his study.

Part one includes five chapters: “Sexual misconduct,” “General misconduct and popular reprisals,” “Male misconduct,” “*Une sacrée désunion?* Conflict continues,” and “Moral borderlands: Criminality during the occupation.” Beginning this part of the study with *Nordistes’* accusations of women’s sexual misconduct is perhaps a way to begin with acts symbolically exaggerated in disproportion to their impact on day-to-day communal life. A total of 626 women in the Nord faced charges of sexual misconduct across the years of occupation (p.39). Connolly is less interested in whether sexual misconduct by these women actually occurred, than why *Nordistes’* cultural artifacts (poems, songs, diaries) and subsequent repatriation testimonies obsessed about the topic. Connolly’s interpretive ambitions in his discussion of sexual misconduct seem modest. He sketches a variety of different scenarios of sexual misconduct and local criticisms against it. Critiquing women’s real or perceived sexual relations with Germans formed a discourse through which communities could discourage their members from fraternizing with the Germans and—more importantly as the occupation wore on and as more young women seemed tempted to fall in with Germans—to remind everyone that the Germans were still the enemy being actively fought by free Frenchmen on non-occupied soil (p.55).

By contrast, Connolly finds that general misconduct was far more widespread than sexual misconduct. Amassing a wide range of denunciation reports from many municipal archives from Roubaix to Cambrai, Connolly exposes a society in a state of near civil war. The volume of his evidence is overwhelming. In Roubaix, the Germans actually wanted to discourage the number of denunciations being deposited by locals. They adopted the extreme practice of displaying the denunciation letters in a public display case for all passers-by to read, so as to erode the

dénonciateurs' and *dénonciatrices*' confidence in protected anonymity. Connolly finds that often women penned denunciations against other women believed to be engaged in sexual misconduct with the Germans. A fact Connolly uncovered that I found extraordinary, was that *dénonciateurs/dénonciatrices* ran around snapping photos of their *concitoyennes* engaged in acts of sexual deceit (p. 102). Connolly found the archives stacked with photos stapled to letters of denunciation. The fact makes one wonder how, during times of such scarcity, so many French men or women had access to cameras and film development services! Other letters denounced individuals hiding goods that were to be confiscated by the Germans. Often, letters reported officials who disobeyed rationing regulations. In this section of the book in particular, but also throughout the study, Connolly engages with the work of Philippe Nivet.[4] "Nivet calls denunciation the form of collaboration with the most serious consequences," quotes Connolly (p.71). Denunciation for hiding Allied aviators, French soldiers, or for spying or serving as guides from the occupied to the unoccupied territory, could lead to the death penalty. While Connolly offers rich details about cases of denunciation, he offers less evidence about motivations to denounce.

The recent work of Sandra Ott on collaboration and justice in the Western Pyrenees during World War II, suggests avenues for developing a stronger conceptual framework than Connolly presents for thinking about why the French denounced each other.[5] Ott, unlike Connolly, offers close examination of competing political animosities left over from the interwar period, which fueled wartime denunciations. Connolly's study, illuminating and comprehensive in so many other ways, is slightly weakened here by subordinating, almost divorcing, pre-war politics from occupation activities.

Denouncers were the most dangerous anti-social activists, but hardly the only actors to fall into the files of police. Snitches formed just one dangerous group among a broad array of anti-social actors that included grifters, black marketeers, thieves, bribers, fraudsters, smugglers and corrupt officials. The latter often skimmed resources from the Red Cross or CANF (Comité d'Alimentation du Nord de la France) charity contributions delivered through the services administered by American Herbert Hoover.

Many of Connolly's identified categories of misconduct appropriately overlapped and proved difficult to disentangle, then and now. French officials' fulfillment of German labor demands provides an example of collaboration, which took place during both the First and the Second World Wars, that have had enduring, devastating consequences on individual and collective experience and memory. Connolly strives to examine evidence fairly and to deepen our current understanding of the stakes at play for French administrators, *Nordiste* workers, and German occupation authorities. One example is the case of M. Raviart who denounced Mayor Lescaillez for having "designated that I work with the Germans, against my will..." (p. 97). New testimonies surfacing from World War II also now highlight the sense of obligation to comply with labor conscription felt by French officials and many deported workers whose actions later received harsh judgement as insufficiently *résistant*, compared for example to *réfracteurs* who joined the *maquis* after 1943 and after the *relève*. Drawing on the work of Sébastien Debarge, Connolly agrees that often workers did not understand the difficulty appointed (perhaps formerly elected) officials faced in resisting German orders (p. 292.). French mayors during both wars were constantly concerned with how to hedge resistance in handing over names of potential workers against reprisals potentially levied by Germans against an entire community.

Connolly further expands the discussion of forced labor by analyzing the legitimacy of the German demands for certain services from occupied citizens, such as the assembly of sandbags to be used in trenches at the front. Aware of the Hague Conventions prohibiting civilians from engaging in the manufacture of weapons that would harm their own national combatants, many *Nordistes* refused to manufacture the sandbags, while others unable to refuse paid labor complied, creating one of many divisions within occupied culture that Connolly sums up as “*Une sacrée disunion.*” Were officials who enforced German labor drafts unpatriotic? Were workers who reported to labor duty collaborating? Were manufacturers who lent their facilities to German production collaborators? These questions remain difficult to answer and Connolly draws heavily upon the conclusions sketched out by Lynne Taylor in her enduring work on the Second World War.[7] Taylor found that the Germans were not an all-powerful force, able to push the French into compliance. But she also sketched out vast acres of moral territory which existed between the extreme points of intentional activity deemed collaboration or intentional resistance (p. 21 and p. 145). Postwar trials held in the Nord absolved many industrialists of charges of complicity with the Germans and showed that local understandings of the complexity of decision-making during the occupation extended into the postwar period, informing justice.

As with theft, Connolly confirms that crime and transgressions against previously established moral codes happened widely. Whether actions were criminal and anti-patriotic when practiced against other *occupés*, or whether actions which harassed the Germans counted as expressions of patriotism, mattered as part of a reordering of the moral code of the occupation. These actions often invited stiff reprisals and undermined theoretical aspirations to mount a united front against the occupier. Rather than invest such activity with political significance, Connolly encourages historians to recognize that these transgressions existed and were born of the harsh material circumstances of occupation that reordered moral considerations and in particular challenged notions of pre-war middle-class respectability, values which endured, despite major contraction, for many bourgeois notables in the Nord.

Part two, “Popular patriotism and resistance *avant la majuscule*”, includes four chapters and introduces more political analysis than Connolly offers in part one. Chapters include: “Notable protests, Respectable resistance (*coups de gueule polis*)”, “Symbolic resistance (*coups de coeur*)”, “Active resistance (*coups de poker, coups d’éclat*)”, and an epilogue, “Liberation, remembering and forgetting”. Throughout his discussion of various forms of resistance, Connolly describes *occupés*’ notions of respectability, while at the same time questioning the application of such bourgeois notions to understand the iterations of working-class or marginals’ values. Bourgeois notables played an important mediating role between the Germans and the majority population. Largely, they were men of the Third Republic, deeply committed to notions of legal conduct, political representation and bourgeois respectability. Few raised partisan arms against the Germans as they would after 1940. Instead they used their pen to draw a line in the sand designating demands the Germans might legitimately expect the French to fulfill and those to which honor prohibited them from acquiescing. Oscar Fanyau, a former mayor of Hellemmes, objected to German demands to turn in metals, “...do not ask me, a Frenchman, who had the honour of serving his country as an officer, to declare and hand over metals that will be used to fabricate projectiles destined to kill my brothers; this would be contrary to my honour and my patriotism” (p. 187). Many similar notables invoked Article 52 of the Hague Convention, and Article 46 regarding the preservation of family honour and private property (p. 200).

Acts of extreme bravery and the organization of clandestine resistance groups like the Comité Jacquet which aided 200 Allied servicemen to escape to unoccupied France to continue the war against Germany, set a high bar for measuring resistance credentials during and after the war. On 22 September 1915 all four members of the group were arrested and executed. The Germans captured 200 other activists. The members of Comité Jacquet and other resistance figures like Louise de Bettignies became martyrs to the cause and memory of resistance. In his discussion of active resistance, Connolly concludes, perhaps too cautiously, that resisters expressed patriotism and concepts of duty. They acted out of a sense of respectability important to a large sector of the population. In so doing, these heroic figures symbolized—even embodied—the dignity of French citizens eroded daily by the compromises forced upon them by the occupation. Connolly is careful, however, to say that the subsequent cult of martyrs created problems for understanding acceptable behavior during the occupation and in its aftermath, setting impossibly high standards of individual conduct against which the government and communities measured and rewarded occupation-time activities.

On 9 October 1918, Canadian troops liberated Cambrai, future site of the signing of the armistice. Emancipated *Nordistes* responded unanimously with “joy, jubilation, relief, gratitude and expressions of patriotic fervor” (p. 285). The unanimity of happiness, Connolly has shown, too quickly masked the four-year-long experience of disunity at play between *Nordistes*. Official commemoration instantly capitalized on the spontaneous outburst of unity to lay the foundation for a postwar narrative of occupation-time patriotic resistance. On his official visit to the liberated territories President Raymond Poincaré declared, “the Flemish people have never put up with tyranny” (p. 293). Poincaré’s speech, Connolly claims, cemented the patriotic resistance narrative, making it easy—even essential—for *Nordistes* to commemorate and remember the expressions of active resistance and individual instances of martyrdom, while subordinating the memory of social fragmentation and disunity experienced on a daily basis.

Jeanne Lefebvre’s diary, one of many private journals Connolly has uncovered, recorded a more nuanced view of affairs: “We are liberated, but now that the first moments of joy have passed, we only see sadness and desolation everywhere” (p. 287). For four years during World War I, and then for another five years during World War II, the Nord, Pas-de-Calais and the border departments of France suffered the destruction of their land, cities and homes.[8] Indeed, as some of the municipalities and citizens’ committees unveiled the last statues to the resistance heroes of 1914–1918, new hostilities broke out that ultimately demanded intensified, large-scale, violent forms of civilian resistance to renewed German military and economic occupation.

Narratives of patriotism—anti-Boche or anti-Nazi—mattered acutely for French citizens of these territories in the two postwar periods of reconstruction, because, as Connolly notes, they lived in such close proximity with the enemy. *Nordistes’* rehabilitation into French citizenship, Connolly suggests, required forgetting the fact of disunity and embellishing the myth of unified patriotic resistance. That was a fine project for French citizens, but one Connolly believes historians of France need not perpetuate. Mona Siegel, in her astute reading of interwar collective memory, concluded, “Collective memory increasingly commemorated the nation’s suffering and sacrifice; scholastic history celebrated French heroism and victory.” Siegel noted that “patriotism and pacifism served as the dual ideological underpinnings of collective memory and scholastic history.”[9] Both served as bulwarks against a return to war. Connolly’s conclusions show that the memory of shared sacrifice and suffering could also be turned into the fuel of future conflict.

But two important postwar processes swirled as undercurrents against the narrative of *occupés*' unified suffering. Postwar trials of war profiteers, women accomplices to the Germans, and assorted other criminals reminded locals that key individuals had worked against the moral economy of the occupation. Newspapers, by contrast, constantly stressed the importance of commemorating heroic, active resistance, holding martyrs up above others who struggled silently in less publicly heroic, but nevertheless individually significant, ways. These memories of superior sacrifice and suffering, combined with the expense of the physical damage to public and private property in occupied areas, fueled French demands in the 1920s for German war reparations. Those war reparations payments, we now know, formed the centerpiece of National Socialist propaganda and anger against the Versailles Peace Treaty and the French. Perpetuation of the "remembered suffering" perhaps ultimately undermined the anti-militarist, pacifist, yet patriotic purposes collective memory had marshalled itself to support.

Connolly's findings about the internal conflicts *Nordistes* endured while negotiating daily life under the occupation, combined with social histories of the area during World War II, remind contemporary observers of France and Europe to consider this region within the *longue durée* of history. That the survivors of a hellish war would again suffer occupation, forced labor, isolation, deportation and food deprivations during wartime and afterwards begs for continued attention to this perpetually distressed region, which has recently elected four of the eight Front National deputies to the French National Assembly in the 2017 Legislative elections.[10]

Examining the long-term impact of the destruction twice visited on this region within a century— and taking seriously Connolly's evidence of disunity, anti-patriotism, and misconduct in a region that sits at the crossroads of a troubled Europe—is as important for understanding continuities between World War I and World War II as it is for understanding and resolving the problems of the present. Connolly is now engaged in an important study of the Ruhr Valley, the German twin to this French tragedy. I am sure he will bring the same careful research and cautious interpretation to his new project as he has to this immensely valuable, well written, exhaustively documented book. James E. Connolly has shown how important it is to illuminate the history of those who acted not only with dignity, but also the many who disrupted and deteriorated France's social fabric during a time of national crisis.

NOTES

[1] Correspondent for *The Daily Telegraph of London*, "Lille Mass of Ruins, Correspondent Writes: Entry of Germans Into French City," *Courier-Journal*, Oct. 23, 1914, 2.

[2] Correspondent for *The Daily Telegraph of London*, "Lille in Ruins after Weeks of Shelling," *Indianapolis Star*, Oct. 23, 1914, 1.

[3] Annette Becker, "D'une guerre à l'autre : mémoire de l'occupation et de la résistance, 1914-1940," *Revue du Nord*, 76: 306 (1994) : 453-65. Connolly's work engages not only Becker's analysis in this article but the larger body of her interpretive work.

[4] Philippe Nivet, *La France occupée, 1914-1918* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2011).

[5] Sandra Ott, *Living with the Enemy: German Occupation, Collaboration and Justice in the Western Pyrenees, 1940-48* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

[6] Sébastien Debarge, "Fourmies occupée pendant la Grande Guerre," *Revue du Nord*, 80:325 (1998). See also the recently published testimony of a survivor of World War II German work brigades, Elie Poulard. *A French Slave in Nazi Germany*, Jean V. Poulard, ed., trans. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016).

[7] Lynne Taylor, *Between Resistance and Collaboration: Popular Protest in Northern France, 1940-45* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999).

[8] Connolly notes 50 per cent of communes were completely destroyed; 53,172 buildings and farms were destroyed; 30,117 farms seriously damaged, and 164,626 partially damaged. My research on just three cities in Nord and Pas-de-Calais for 1940-41 shows 4,770 buildings destroyed, and 7,600 severely damaged. These figures do not include Lille. See Nicole Dombrowski Risser, *France under Fire: German Invasion, Civilian Flight, and Family Survival during World War II* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 261, p. 263.

[9] Mona Siegel, "History Is the Opposite of Forgetting: The Limits of Memory and the Lessons of History in Interwar France," *The Journal of Modern History*, 74: 4 (December 2002): 800.

[10] From the formerly occupied territories: Sébastien Chenu (Nord), José Evrard (Pas-de-Calais), Bruno Bilde (Pas-de-Calais), Marine Le Pen (Pas-de-Calais). From the south: Emmanuelle Menard (Hérault), Louis Aliot (Pyrénées-Orientales), Gilbert Collard (Gard).

Nicole Dombrowski Risser
Towson University, Baltimore, MD
ndombrowski@towson.edu

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