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James Connolly, Emmanuel Debruyne, Élise Julien, and Matthias Meirlaen, eds., *En territoire ennemi. Expériences d'occupation, transferts, héritages (1914-1919)*. Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2018. 234 pp. Notes, index of place-names, index of people. €23.00 (pb). ISBN 978-2-7574-1924-3; €17.00 (eb). ISBN 978-2-7574-1924-3.

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The First World War was not only a war of battles, of front lines, and of conscript soldiers; it was also a war of occupations, of improvised structures of rule, and of the consequent entangled relations between the military occupier and the civilian occupied. This simple premise forms the basis of this important collective volume, which explores the occupations that took place in the west of Europe—primarily the German occupation of Belgium and northern France—between 1914 and 1918, as well as locating those experiences in the wider context of the multiple occupations that occurred across Europe and beyond during the first half of the twentieth century.

As the four editors rightly argue in their collective introduction, the study of occupations has struggled to acquire its rightful place in the history of the First World War. The focus on the military front lines, and the soldiers who served there, has distracted attention from the important if less dramatic reality that all but a small corner of Belgium was occupied by the German armies throughout the conflict, along with, in full or in part, ten of the *départements* of northeastern France. The essays presented in this volume are intended to address this historiographical neglect by presenting the fruits of the various research projects that have been undertaken in recent years on the years of occupation, especially in Belgium. It is therefore appropriate that the volume begins with a preface by Sophie De Schaepdrijver, whose pioneering study of German-occupied Belgium has been the stimulus for much subsequent work. [1] The essays that follow amply demonstrate how a younger generation of scholars have taken forward her work, as well as pointing to the potential for further research. There are important empirical essays by Mélanie Bost and and Élise Rezsöhazi on German police agents in occupied Belgium, by Gertjan Leenders on the denunciations made to the Belgian authorities in Antwerp after 1918 by civilians who accused their fellow citizens of having profited from the German occupation, and by Jan Naert on the administrative enquiries carried out by the postwar authorities into the actions of Belgian mayors (*bourgmestres*) under German rule. Antoon Vrints contributes a stimulating study of the moral codes of behaviour that developed in Belgium during the occupation years. These focused on maintaining a patriotic distance from the occupier, and a fierce hatred against those—the wealthy, farmers, and shopkeepers—who were perceived to be profiting from the sufferings of the population. A similar code of patriotism and of social

solidarity in occupied northern France is well demonstrated by an excellent study by Philippe Salson of the wartime diary kept by a young woman (Henriette Moisson) in a village in the Aisne. It demonstrates how among her middle-class family and neighbours correct behaviour towards the German occupiers was combined with gestures of patriotic solidarity, and an obsessive concern with hiding food and other commodities from the German police. Memory too has its place: twin essays by Laurence van Ypersele and Karla Vanraepenbusch on Belgium, and by Matthias Meirlaen on northern France, demonstrate the efforts to memorialise the sufferings and sacrifices of the war years. This was much easier in Belgium, where the almost universal experience was of occupation, but much more difficult in northern France, where the specific experiences of the civilians under German occupation—of material hardships, deportations, and displacement—were suffocated by a postwar national discourse of the *poilus* and of military heroism.

If some of these subjects and agendas seem familiar to those of us who have worked on the era of the Second World War, this is not accidental. As the editors of this volume somewhat ruefully admit, study of the occupations of the First World War remains in the long shadow cast retrospectively by the subsequent European conflict, and by the attention that has been devoted by historians to the regimes and experiences of occupation generated by that war. This is of course emphatically the case for France and Belgium, but also for the vast range of territories conquered and ruled by the Nazi and Italian forces and their subordinates, as well as subsequently by the Soviet and western Allied armies. [2] The Second World War was, and has remained, pre-eminently a war of occupations, in which the mobility of the conflict on land, in the air, and behind the lines, as well as the plurality of competing state authorities, created an almost infinitely complex kaleidoscope of occupation regimes and experiences.

Faced by the imposing library of studies of the 1940s, the editors of this volume do not seek to argue for the pre-eminent importance of the occupations of the First World War. Instead, they have chosen to combine their detailed studies of that conflict with a second half of the volume composed of comparative studies which situate the experience of the First World War in the longer history of modern occupation regimes within Europe and beyond. This is a laudable aim, and in their conclusion the editors write well about the forms of transfer that occurred between occupations: the continuities of individuals, of structures of rule, and of methods of control and of repression. Some of these studies complement nicely the first half of the volume, particularly a genuinely funny piece by Marnix Beyen and Svenja Weers which traces the ever more desperate efforts by the Wehrmacht administrators who ruled Belgium from 1940 to 1944 to use the papers of their First World War predecessors to discover precedents that would help them to consolidate their rule, while repulsing the ambitions of the SS to impose their own power on Belgium. But such explicit repetition from one occupation to another was exceptional, and in most contexts the threads of continuity between occupations were more tenuous. Thus, Heiko Brendel writes interestingly about the way in which a popular German military historian, Arthur Ehrhardt, used the papers and memories of Austro-Hungarian officers who had confronted insurrectionary uprisings in Montenegro and Serbia in the First World War to write manuals for German forces in the east in the 1940s, without really being able to demonstrate that there was a transfer of knowledge from the one to the other. Every occupation is to a large degree *sui generis*, as Leonid Rein demonstrates in his powerful piece comparing the many differences in German occupation policies towards Jewish populations in eastern Europe during the First and Second World Wars. If there were forms of transfer, they often lay more in the mechanics and mentalities of rule. This is effectively demonstrated by Drew Flanagan's study of the French

occupation of southwestern Germany after 1945. Flanagan shows how the actions of the French commanders remained rooted in their formative experiences of repressing anti-colonial uprisings in Morocco in the first decades of the twentieth century, even to the extent of referring on occasions to the German population by colonial terms such as “*éléments autochtones*” or “*indigènes*” (pp. 214–215).

As these exercises in comparison indicate, occupations are a little like weeds in gardens. When you start looking for them, you find them everywhere. The First World War did not invent the modern phenomenon of occupation, which was forged in imperial wars of conquest in the Tsarist conquest of central Asia and the Austro-Hungarian annexation of Bosnia, as well as in the more distant imperial conquests engaged in by European powers from Algeria to India.[3] Nor did the experience of occupation end when wars ended. Occupations were an ever-present component of the narrative of the first half of the twentieth century, from German rule in *Ober Ost* during the First World War[4] to Soviet rule in the same territories over the subsequent years; from the Mandate territories created by the League of Nations to Francoist reconquest of Spain in the Spanish Civil War. Indeed, occupation was the rule rather than the exception in much of eastern and southern Europe between 1870 and 1950. New rulers generally arrived through conquest, and established regimes of occupation which—again like weeds—gradually took root in the new context. If they were successful, the structures of occupation were replaced over time by more embedded and consensual structures of governance; conversely, however, where the graft did not take, the sense of alien rule—and of occupation—remained.

But the ubiquity of occupations by victorious armies, international authorities, liberating forces, or colonial empires should not lead us to think that they possessed an essential sameness. Every occupation had its distinctive characteristics; and that was especially so in the case of the occupations in western Europe during the First World War. These were occupations that had a particular density. The proximity to the mechanised warfare of the Western front, the high concentration of German forces, and the closely-knit social structure of the cities, industrial centres, and villages which characterised much of northern France and Belgium gave this wartime occupation a particular character. It was above all immobile: the front line did not move significantly, the populations were blocked where they were, and occupiers and occupied lived in a suffocating atmosphere of proximity. The tensions generated by this immobility found its expression in the explosion of rancour which followed the eventual German retreat in 1918.

In this lockdown occupation, dominated by shortages of food, fuel, and money, the actions of governments and the outcomes of battles lacked much purchase on daily life. Instead, the horizons of many were reduced to “le domicile familial, le voisinage immédiat, et la commune” (p. 69). Amidst pervasive scarcity, there was little space for politics, or individual choice. There were some “*rapprochements*” (p. 26) with the German occupiers, but—with the exception of the Flemish intellectuals who engaged with the German-sponsored Raad van Vlaanderen—little of the partisan collaboration that flourished during the second war. Similarly, though the French and Belgian communities possessed a strong instinctive patriotism, resistance was primarily a matter of retaining what De Schaepdrijver terms a “*distance patriotique*” (cited on p. 95) from the German occupier, rather than attempting to challenge his authority through actions or violence.[5]

This was all very different from the occupations of the same areas during the Second World War. Between 1940 and 1944, nothing was ever certain for long: front lines on land and air moved rapidly, armies marched in every direction towards distant frontiers, resistance groups launched

assaults on German and collaborationist forces, and populations were bombarded with propaganda from occupiers, governments and exile authorities. Above all, the patterns of their local life were profoundly disrupted by the forced deportations and persecutions carried out by the German occupiers, by the actions of pro-Nazi militias and a plethora of Resistance organisations, as well as by the aerial bombing and parachute drops of agents and guns into the occupied territories. The overall impact of this second occupation was therefore delocalising, destructive but also in certain ways liberating. Individuals made choices, which sometimes led to death or imprisonment, but which also projected them into radically new forms of political action, both within their communities and across Occupied Europe and beyond. Social bonds, and the simple predictability of life, were disrupted in ways that could never be reversed. [6]

This differentness of the two occupations should not diminish the importance of the first occupation. Indeed, the main merit of this volume ought to be to discourage us from thinking of the occupation of 1914–1918 as the first occupation. It was a major event in its own right, which brought face to face the authoritarian structures of the Second Reich with its uniforms and bureaucratic procedures, and the densely populated territories of Belgium and northeastern France, with their landscapes of mines, textile mills, canals and railways, as well as long-standing traditions of local particularism. The origins of the invasion by the German forces had its specifically military logics. But it is tempting to see the occupation as expressive of a wider conflict in the early twentieth century between two versions of modern Europe. On the one hand, there was the explosive projection of state power and unitary nationalism embodied by Imperial Germany, while on the other, there was a much more devolved combination of industrial and commercial growth, political representation, and the co-existence of different social and ideological traditions. The eventual outcome of this clash in 1918 was far from inevitable, or indeed definitive. But the occupation of 1914–1918 nonetheless marked a particular watershed, when the full force of a modern regime of military power failed to prevail over more socially-rooted cultures of localised rule.

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NOTES

[1] Sophie De Schaepdrijver, *De Grootte Oorlog: het koninkrijk België tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog* (Amsterdam and Antwerp: Atlas, 1997).

[2] For the French case, see for example: Philippe Burrin, *La France à l'heure allemande, 1940-1944* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995); Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years 1940-1944* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); and Robert Gildea, *Marianne in Chains: In Search of the German Occupation, 1940-1945* (London: Macmillan, 2002). For the Belgian case, see for example: Jean Gérard-Libois and José Gotovitch, *L'an 40: la Belgique occupée* (Brussels: CRISP, 1971); and Étienne Verhoeyen, *La Belgique occupée: de l'an 40 à la Libération* (Brussels: De Boeck Université, 1994). For other occupied territories, see for example: Vojtech Mastny, *The Czechs under Nazi Rule: the failure of national resistance, 1939-1942* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1971); Jan Tomasz Gross, *Polish Society under German Occupation: the Generalgouvernement, 1939-1944* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979); and Mark Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece: The Experience of Occupation, 1941-44* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993). Finally, for the postwar occupation experience, see for example: Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: a History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995); William I. Hitchcock, *Liberation: The Bitter Road to Freedom, Europe 1944-1945* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009); and Peter Schrijvers, *Liberators: The Allies and Belgian Society, 1944-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[3] Alexander Morrison, *The Russian Conquest of Central Asia: A Study in Imperial Expansion, 1814-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); James McDougall, *A History of Algeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

[4] Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[5] Sophie de Schaepdrijver, "Deux patries: la Belgique entre exaltation et rejet, 1914-1918," *Cahiers d'histoire du temps présent* 7 (2000): 22-23.

[6] I have explored these issues in Martin Conway, *The Sorrows of Belgium: Liberation and Political Reconstruction, 1944-1947* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

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