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The Consumer on the Home Front
*Second World War Civilian
Consumption in Comparative Perspective*

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The Lessons of War:
Reordering the Public and Private
Capacities and Dynamics of Consumption

FRANK TRENTMANN

The year 1945 was not hour zero in the history of consumer culture. As the essays in this volume have shown, for all the horror, suffering, and deprivation it caused, the Second World War also mobilized pre-existing desires and stimulated material aspirations for the future. From pre-packaged ready meals for Nazi troops to the fashion design institute set up in Moscow in 1944, regimes at war exploited the technologies of consumption associated with product innovation, marketing, and fashion in peacetime. Deprivation and aspiration operated in tandem, and regimes manipulated the latter to make people stomach the former. Similarly, the pressures of a wartime economy and the need to make the most of food and other resources generated new expertise in knowing and managing consumption that would continue to shape policy-making and marketing into the postwar era of affluence.

In the 1950s and 1960s commentators first started to talk of a ‘consumer society’ and a ‘mass consumption society’. Rather than being an entirely new creature, however, affluent societies emerged from material foundations that were already being assembled before and during the war. Rising levels of comfort, the growing importance of private possessions, the fashion cycle, a hunger for novelties, and faster circulation of goods were well under way by the inter-war years. A higher material standard of living and greater turnover of goods was a mantra not only in liberal capitalist societies but also in socialist and fascist regimes. It was in 1935 that Stalin announced

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‘life is getting better, life has become more joyous’, as if goods and fashion would pave the road to socialism. Inter-war Japan had the ‘life reform’ movement, which promoted Western-style kitchens, lifestyle, and comfort. The Second World War needs to be located in this longer story.¹

In addition to helping us revise the chronological outline of the story of ‘consumer society’, recognition of material desires and habits in wartime raises conceptual and analytical questions that are of interest to the study of consumption more generally. In the first place, it challenges the almost instinctive treatment of consumption as an activity pursued in peacetime and affluence. There are many reasons for this association, but most can be traced back to two ways of thinking. The first is economic and looks at private individuals making purchases in the marketplace. Here consumption is about end-use and a household activity—states, war, and armies impinge on such private, commercial activities but they are not main actors in the story. The second is psychological. It was, interestingly, in 1943 that the American psychologist Abraham Maslow formulated his pyramid of the ‘hierarchy of needs’, where people always start by seeking to fulfil their ‘basic needs’, such as food, shelter, and security, before they move ‘up’ the civilizational ladder to concern themselves with discretionary goods for the sake of identity, display, and fun.² In this model, societies at war, like poor or underdeveloped societies, are about physical survival. Consumption is the preserve of affluent societies with discretionary income.

In the next few pages we will gradually loosen and suspend these core assumptions, using the Second World War and the postwar

¹ Frank Trentmann, *Empire of Things: How We Became a World of Consumers, Fifteenth Century to the Twenty-First* (London, 2016). For national studies with material on the first half of the twentieth century see Erika Rappaport *et al.* (eds.), *Consuming Behaviours: Identity, Politics and Pleasure in Twentieth-Century Britain* (London, 2015); Matthew Hilton, *Consumerism in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, 2003); Emanuela Scarpellini, *L'Italia dei consumi* (Rome, 2008); Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Claudius Torp (eds.), *Die Konsumgesellschaft in Deutschland, 1890–1990* (Frankfurt a.M., 2009); Marie-Emmanuelle Chessel, *Histoire de la consommation* (Paris, 2012); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times. Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford, 1999); Sheldon Garon and Patricia L. Maclachlan (eds.), *The Ambivalent Consumer: Questioning Consumption in East Asia and the West* (Ithaca, NY, 2006). For the earlier period see esp. Timothy Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China* (Berkeley, 1998); Evelyn Welch, *Shopping in the Renaissance: Consumer Cultures in Italy 1400–1600* (New Haven, 2005); Frank Trentmann (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption* (Oxford, 2012).

² Abraham H. Maslow, ‘A Theory of Human Motivation’, *Psychological Review*, 50 (1943): 370–96.

period to explore hidden or neglected dimensions of consumption. We begin, classically, with the war's impact on private spending, before briefly looking at changes in taste and generational identities. We then widen the perspective to include public consumption in relation to private consumption. Here the war put in play dynamics that would be of enormous significance for the postwar years, changing the quality as well as quantity of consumption. In the late nineteenth century, economists and social scientists came to focus on the consumer as the end-user and began to eliminate from their analysis of consumption those intermediate resources that were used up in factories and firms in the production of the end-product for sale.³ Yet an understanding of private consumption is incomplete without setting it in relation to states and firms. These relationships also matter in peacetime, but they were particularly transformative in the Second World War, even more so than in the American Civil War and the First World War. Transformation was the result of public-private competition over resources, the destruction of private wealth, a transfer of resources, and the public creation of new capacities for private consumption. Energy and housing, social spending, and rising equality will illustrate these developments. The war, in other words, affected not only the temporary flow of goods but also the future stock and direction of consumption, including its more equitable distribution among those lucky enough to survive and enjoy the years of growth in the 1950s and 1960s. Affluent societies of the 1950s and 1960s need to be viewed in the context of these public-private dynamics.

'Consumption' can be a vast and unwieldy concept. Previous essays have looked at particular goods (food, clothing, tobacco) or broken down 'consumers' into different social groups. The economic and psychological approaches to consumption invite us to think of it in terms of outcome (purchase/utility) or motivation (desire). But consuming is also a process and tied to various activities that involve the using up of resources in order to accomplish certain tasks. By way of conclusion, we will ask what wartime dynamics might reveal about consuming as practice.

³ For competing definitions and approaches see Frank Trentmann, 'The Modern Genealogy of the Consumer: Meanings, Identities and Political Synapses', in John Brewer and Frank Trentmann (eds.), *Consuming Cultures, Global Perspectives: Historical Trajectories, Transnational Exchanges* (Oxford, 2006), 19–69.

The Impact of War

While building on prewar foundations, the war had a significant effect on *how* as well as how much people consumed. For many millions war meant annihilation, and the tragic consequences of hunger and hunger-related diseases have been discussed in earlier essays on food. What about those more fortunate?

The official inquiry into 'The Impact of the War on Civilian Consumption in the United Kingdom, The United States and Canada', conducted in early 1945, gives a snapshot of the immediate consequences of the war for levels of consumption in these countries.⁴ In the United Kingdom, per capita purchases of consumer goods and services dropped by 15–20 per cent (at prewar prices) between 1938 and 1941. In the United States and Canada, by contrast, the average citizen bought 10–15 per cent more in 1944 than in 1939. What had been a narrow gap in the standard of living at the beginning of the war had widened into a transatlantic gulf by its end. Without this dramatic shift, British (and European) ambivalence about America as a new type of 'consumer society' in the 1950s would be inconceivable.

There were multiple reasons for this contrasting experience. Britain was much more affected by the shortage of shipping than the United States or Canada, and blackouts and bombing made it difficult to increase efficiency. Being in the war from the start also meant that inventories were run down more quickly. Above all, and unlike its North American allies, Britain suffered from a more limited pool of labour because of higher employment on the eve of the war. By contrast, the USA managed to expand its economy during the war and the opportunities for consumption with it, because it was able to tap into a large reservoir of unused labour and resources; Nazi Germany, in a similar manner, had been able to disguise the effects of state spending on arms and war on civilian consumption for so long because it took over at a time of high unemployment and low consumption. In the case of Germany, the war years came not only with some shortages and lower-quality products but also with Nazi promises of future abundance, which

⁴ *The Impact of the War on Civilian Consumption in the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada: A Report to the Combined Production and Resources Board from a Special Combined Committee on Non-Food Consumption Levels* (London, 1945).

would tickle greater consumer desires after the war. The point is simple but fundamental: we can only understand consumption during the war in relation to production and employment before it.

The role reversal does not mean that people in the Allied countries did not share certain qualitative shifts. Train travel displaced private motoring in America as in Britain. Domestic comfort was squeezed as homes became more crowded, in Mobile, Alabama as much as in Swindon. Restrictions on domestic appliances meant spending moved towards alcohol and entertainment. In the United States and Canada people were spending more on consumer goods and services, but these same people were also working harder. In all countries the war saw an increase in paid work as well as in unpaid home production, from sewing and knitting to 'victory gardens'. Since consumption needs time as well as money, data on consumer spending gives only part of the picture. The average American or Canadian who was able to spend 15 per cent more on purchases at the end of the war than at its start was also someone who had less time for leisure. In the United States, for which we have the best historical time-use data, women aged 25 to 54 lost one hour of leisure each week, on average: 35.03 average weekly hours of leisure in 1940, and 33.97 in 1945. Young women (aged 18 to 24) lost almost two hours of leisure a week on average. For men, the decline was even more drastic: 25- to 54-year-old men lost four hours of leisure a week during the war. The main reason for the decline was the rise in hours of paid work: average weekly paid hours of work for Americans of all ages rose from 22 hours in 1940 to 29.48 in 1944. By contrast, (unpaid) home production stayed remarkable constant.⁵

The war therefore probably intensified consumption, as Americans and Canadians earned more but also worked harder and, given the limited availability or absence of certain consumer goods such as durables, had to spend their money on a smaller number of discretionary items. Spending rose both on time-demanding forms of consumption, such as cinema and entertainment, and on luxury goods such as jewellery. I am not aware of any study that has tried to construct a time-use analysis for leisure practices during the war years to compare them with those in datasets available for later decades. It would be interesting to connect the wartime dynamic to the intensification of commercial leisure activities discernible from the

⁵ N. Francis and V. Ramey, 'A Century of Work and Leisure', *American Economic Journal: Macroeconomics*, 1/2 (2009), 189–224.

late 1950s,⁶ which is normally associated with the growing prestige of ‘busyness’ in a high-growth, peacetime economy, as well as to later debates about ‘hurriedness’ in the 1970s and ‘time poverty’ since.⁷

Quantitative shifts in levels of consumption had qualitative repercussions, too. In terms of calories, the average Briton ate 11 per cent less in 1944 than in 1938, but Americans and Canadians ate that much more. The wartime expansion of their economies allowed Americans and Canadians to buy more clothes, soft goods, cosmetics, and toys, whereas in Britain such purchases slowed down. Living on its wealth literally meant Britons were wearing the same old clothes. As the 1945 Committee noted, by 1944 British wardrobes contained ‘a large proportion of items that even by war-time standards in the United States and Canada would be classed as worn out’.⁸

How many of these changes would have happened without the war? This takes us into the realm of counterfactual history, but it is a question worth considering, if only briefly. The economic historian Hugh Rockoff has argued that the United States would have expanded along the same lines between 1941 and 1946 if it had stayed out of the war. As he acknowledges, his projections presume the United States would have adopted an ‘aggressive monetary and fiscal policy’.⁹ A riposte to this is that it is not at all clear whether a second New Deal and economic stimulus would have come about without the political push of war. The depression might have been allowed to continue. The (counterfactual) case looks rather different for Britain, and Europe more generally. Without a shipping shortage, Britons would surely have enjoyed more and varied food if Neville Chamberlain had managed to secure ‘peace in our time’—though not necessarily better nutrition. And they would have changed their dresses and furniture more frequently.

Many of the qualitative shifts initiated by the war were more distant and indirect. Two deserve greater attention for the study

⁶ A. Heckscher and S. DeGrazia, ‘Executive Leisure’, *Harvard Business Review*, 37/4 (1959), 6–12.

⁷ Two opposing views are Juliet B. Schor, *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure* (New York, 1991), and J. P. Robinson and G. Godbey, *Time for Life: The Surprising Ways Americans Use their Time* (University Park, Pa., 1997).

⁸ *The Impact of the War on Civilian Consumption*, 6.

⁹ Hugh Rockoff, ‘The United States: From Ploughshares to Swords’, in Mark Harrison (ed.), *The Economics of World War II: Six Great Powers in International Comparison* (Cambridge, 2000), 81–121, at 114.

of consumption: the role of armies and force in the transnational transfer of new styles and products; and the transformation of generational ideals and identities.

Armies played a decisive role in the diffusion of new styles and products. Troops carried not just guns and diseases but tastes. A good deal has been written about the role of American GIs in Britain and Germany. But the phenomenon is not limited to Americanization. Sergey Zhuravlev reminds us that when the Red Army entered central Europe and Germany in 1944–5, soldiers began sending ‘trophy clothes’ to their loved ones back in the Soviet Union.¹⁰ Films from Italy and Germany were popular in Eastern Europe immediately after the war, including in the Soviet Union. The Georgian capital Tbilisi came to a halt in 1947 when the Nazis’ *Girl of My Dreams* (*Die Frau meiner Träume*) was shown with the glamorous Marika Rökk, the Hungarian singer-dancer. Many female students tried to copy her hairstyle.¹¹

Although the preferred products and entertainment were distinctive, in general the Second World War can be seen to have continued in the footsteps of earlier wars in this respect. Throughout history, armies have been important schools of consumption, acquainting people with new products and lifestyles: the American Civil War introduced soldiers to tinned goods; many Swiss ate their first chocolate in the army in the late nineteenth century, so-called *Schokoladenpatronen* or chocolate bullets. The Second World War, and its build-up and fallout, had the added effect of mixing the taste buds, leading to the creation of new ethnic fusion cuisines. In inter-war Japan, the idea that beriberi, a nervous disease, was caused by a lack of protein had far-reaching consequences, although it was medical nonsense (vitamin B1 deficiency was to blame). Japanese army canteens started to serve up hamburger dishes and doughnuts, and introduced curry and Chinese stir-fries to flavour and disguise cheap meats (although some curry dishes in Japanese restaurants dated back to the very early twentieth century). After the Second World War, army chefs and nutritionists took these multicultural recipes to restaurants and company cafeterias.¹² Many Americans were introduced to steak by the army. West Germans had their

¹⁰ See Sergey Zhuravlev’s essay in this volume.

¹¹ Juliane Fürst, ‘The Importance of Being Stylish’, in ead. (ed.), *Late Stalinist Russia: Society between Reconstruction and Reinvention* (London, 2006), 209–30, at 213–14.

¹² K. J. Cwiertka, ‘Popularizing a Military Diet in Wartime and Postwar Japan’,

Balkan- and Pušta-Grills in the 1950s, often run by former forced labourers from Yugoslavia who stayed on after the war or refugees from the Tito regime.¹³ In addition to culinary exchange, the war also boosted postwar travel and tourism, not only by introducing soldiers on the move to foreign climes and cultures but also by significantly expanding the infrastructure for roads and aviation, including the number of trained pilots.

Of course, in the history of warfare, troops did not automatically cause a revolution of taste. The fact that the German army had been in France three times since 1870–1 did not mean that Germans began eating croissants and *coq au vin* back home. After the Second World War, ethnic restaurants served a mix of foreign and indigenous dishes; in the 1950s, Balkan-Grills served standard German fare—bouillon, ‘Kraftbrühe mit Einlage’—alongside *čevapčići* and goulash. The longing for foreign or oriental tastes and dishes was not suddenly created by soldiers on the move, but reached back to early modern travellers and beyond. As Maren Möhring has stressed for postwar Germany, the popularity of early ethnic Balkan restaurants must be located in a longer history, of German nostalgia for Mitteleuropa and the cultural value of the Austro-Hungarian empire—what she calls the ‘familiar exotic’. These were favourable preconditions which, in turn, paved the way for Greek and Turkish restaurants and snack bars in the 1970s and afterwards.

How critical, then, was the war, and the movements of troops and prisoners of war, for the cultural mutations of taste and culinary habits and experience? Would ethnic food and restaurants not also have taken off if there had been no Second World War, a critical reader might wonder? Perhaps, but, like earlier wars, this total war gave a particular shape to the migration of people and foodstuffs. The Second World War should be viewed as one chapter in the longer history of colonial wars and expansion that produced changes in taste and diet. Sugar, coffee, tea, and chocolate were all entangled in histories of violence, war, and colonization, as were many other mass consumer goods, such as cotton.¹⁴

Asian Anthropology, 1 (2002), 1–30; ead., *Modern Japanese Cuisine: Food, Power and National Identity* (London, 2006).

¹³ Maren Möhring, *Fremdes Essen: Die Geschichte der ausländischen Gastronomie in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Munich, 2012). There were 114,000 forced labourers in 1943, and some 23,000 fled Yugoslavia for Germany in the immediate postwar years.

¹⁴ Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York,

The second qualitative aspect concerns generations. War disrupts generational relations. This is an obvious point, but not one that has been followed through for its effects on consumption. Of course, societies are not static in peacetime either. Adults and authorities were already worried about juvenile delinquency, gangs, and wild dances before the First World War: that young men and women spend excessively on fashionable items is an age-old trope. In the long term, the introduction of mass education was probably as important as war in transforming generational identities. But just because it is not the only cause does not mean we should completely neglect the war either. The effects are clearest for the young. With women doing war work and fathers away waging war, dead, or in prison camps, children and adolescents had unprecedented free spaces; for the Nazis the priorities lay in building tanks, not daycare centres or after-school clubs. Displacement, camps, and housing crises after the war added to the upheaval. Without this upheaval, it is impossible to understand youth culture after the war and the extremely nervous reaction of adults to it. Fears of moral decay were circulating before mopeds and jeans. Already in 1952 a Dutch commission reported on youths running wild. It found a dangerous mix of excess and lack of purpose. Gerard and Piet, 14-year-old twins, for example, returned home from a family party with their parents at 4 a.m., 'stomdronken' ('drunk as a skunk'). Youth mirrored a world that had 'lost its form'.¹⁵ They were whirling madly, dancing boogie-woogie. In Buiksloot, an Amsterdam suburb, 17-year-old workers spent most of their earnings on clothes, cinema, and cigarettes. When they did not go dancing on the Nieuwendijk, they were 'hanging about' on street corners.

The rise of the postwar teenager is a well-trodden chapter in the story of consumer culture.¹⁶ What it has obscured is that the war had an equally important effect on the elderly. Here, as with

1985); William Gervase Clarence-Smith, *Cocoa and Chocolate, 1765–1914* (London, 2000); Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A New History of Global Capitalism* (London, 2014); Lizzie Collingham, *The Taste of War: World War Two and the Battle for Food* (London, 2011).

¹⁵ Kunsten en Wetenschappen Netherlands Ministerie van Onderwijs, *Maatschappelijke verwildering der jeugd* (The Hague, 1952): 'stomdronken', 35; 'gestalteloos . . . men leunt, hangt, slentert, enz.', 17–18.

¹⁶ Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History* (New York, 1996); David Fowler, *The First Teenagers: The Lifestyle of Young Wage-Earners in Interwar Britain* (London, 1995); Ludvine Bantigny, *Le Plus Bel Âge? Jeunes et jeunesse en France de l'aube des 'Trente Glorieuses' à la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris, 2007); Petra Goedde, *GIs and Germans: Culture, Gender, and*

the teenager, the United States led the way. Pensions had been a direct legacy of the Civil War. By the 1930s the first trailer parks sprang up with dedicated leisure activities for the elderly. These trends would probably have continued with or without the Second World War. But with the war they were explicitly mobilized in defence of democracy. The first Golden Age Club in Chicago was founded in 1940 by Oskar Schulze, an émigré from Germany who had witnessed the appeal of extreme doctrines to the elderly after the 1923 hyperinflation wiped out their savings and pensions. Poor, lonely, and disaffected seniors were easy prey for the enemies of democracy. A rich cultural programme, Schulze said, helped to keep 'their interest alive in community and national affairs so that they do not feel out of it'.¹⁷ The club offered Chinese checkers and cards, picnics and boating trips. By 1946 Golden Age Clubs had grown into a national network. Similar clubs sprang up across the country.

The federal government put its weight behind active ageing during the Korean War, calling a first national conference on ageing in 1950–1, at Harry S. Truman's request—the president had just turned 66 himself. Oscar Ewing, the Administrator of the Federal Security Agency, said it was vital to see the elderly as 'great national assets', not a burden. The idea that older people ought to avoid exertion had been discredited, he said. Senior citizens played softball and went camping. They had plenty of vitality left. There was a 'spark of genius' in each and every one of them. Recreation had the ability to foster new talents and rekindle the 'will to do'. And it was the 'impulse to do' which led the individual into new activities and relationships. Active leisure, in this view, made for democratic as well as personal growth. With the young generation serving in the Korean war, Ewing argued, the United States could no longer afford to waste the potential of its older citizens at home.¹⁸ While it would be wrong to imagine that elderly people had all been passive before the mid twentieth century, the new discourse of active ageing certainly gave them fresh recognition and widened the acceptance that old people, too, were part of consumer culture and had a right to have choices and fun.

Foreign Relations, 1945–1949 (New Haven, 2003); Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture* (New York, 2007).

¹⁷ Oskar Schulze, 'Recreation for the Aged', *Journal of Gerontology*, 4 (1949), 310–13, at 312.

¹⁸ US Federal Security Agency, *First National Conference on the Aging: Man and his Years* (Washington, 1951), quoted at 1, 43, 181, 199.

Public and Private Consumption

The dominant mode of thinking about consumption is to presume a zero-sum relationship between private interest and public life. In what has been the most influential account of postwar affluence, J. K. Galbraith points to the importance of the war economy for the growth of consumption.¹⁹ This is correct. The war enormously expanded the productive base for consumer products and appliances, although this does not necessarily mean that, as Galbraith argued, their uptake required a kind of brainwashing to implant 'false' needs. Unfortunately, recognition of the positive effect of state spending for private consumption in wartime did not lead Galbraith to ponder similar types of interaction during peacetime. Instead, he presumed that the expansion of private wants had to entail a contraction of public ethos and spending: more private consumption meant less public consumption.

The historical record of the postwar years shows how incorrect this assumption has been. Government spending saw an unprecedented increase in the period from 1945 to the late 1980s. Of course, the American state waged wars in Korea and Vietnam in this period, but the military was not the main source for the large increase in public spending in the postwar decades. In fact, the rate of public spending on war declined after the end of the Korean War—15 per cent of total government spending in 1953 but less than 5 per cent since the 1980s. Significantly, even during the height of the Vietnam War annual government spending on national defence grew by no more than 1.2 per cent (1959–70 per annum). By comparison, education, health, and recreation and culture each enjoyed annual growth rates of 6 per cent in this period; income security grew by 8.2 per cent per annum. The 1970s, the decade after the boom, and the 1980s, the Reagan years, would see lower growth rates in government social spending (income security grew by 6 per cent in the 1970s and 1.8 per cent in the 1980s, health by 3 per cent and 4 per cent respectively), but national defence spending shrank in the 1970s (–1.9 per cent per annum) before Ronald Reagan gave it a boost in the 1980s (4.4 per cent per annum).²⁰ State and local consumption expenditure, similarly, grew by an average 4.1 per cent

¹⁹ John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (New York, 1958).

²⁰ Pamela A. Kelly, Bruce E. Baker, and Brooks B. Robinson, 'Estimates of

a year in the 1950s and by 5.5 per cent a year in the 1960s, slightly less than personal consumption expenditure (1950s: 5 per cent per annum; 1960s: 7 per cent), but nonetheless at an impressive rate in the age of affluence.

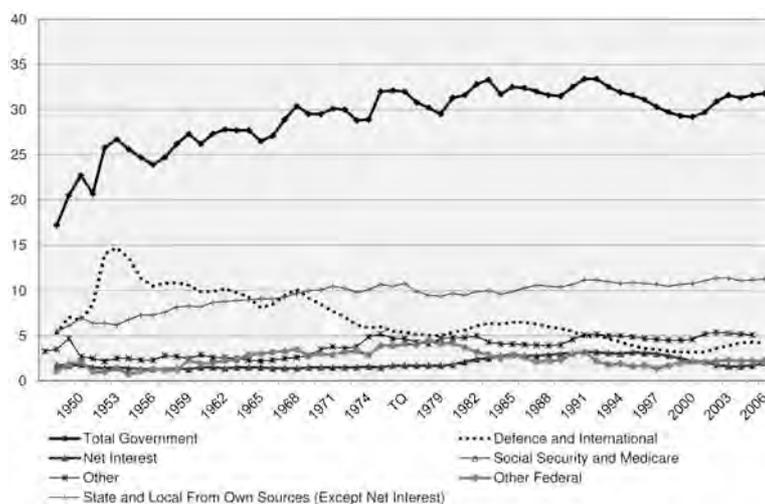


FIG. 1. The United States: The Rise of Government Spending, 1948–2006

Note: The data have been extracted from (United States of America) Bureau of Economic Analysis/Department of Commerce, Tables on Government Consumption Expenditure and Personal Consumption Expenditure (<http://www.bea.gov/>) [accessed 19 Mar. 2015]. On average, US government consumption expenditure grew by 2.1 per cent per annum between 1956 and 2011 compared to 3 per cent for private consumption expenditure. Between 1956 and 2012 there were only five years in which government expenditure actually declined (1970, 1971, 1973, 1993, and 2011), and then by only 0.3–1.3 per cent.

Source: US White House, 'Total Government Expenditures by Major Category of Expenditure as Percentages of GDP: 1948–2011' (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/budget/fy2013/assets/hist1525.xls>) [accessed 4 Sept. 2016].

Much has been made of the contrast between a 'market empire' and social democratic European regimes in this period.²¹ Of course, there are differences, not least in certain social services, such as the minute provision of public housing in the United States compared

Real Government Consumption Expenditures and Gross Investment by Function for 1959–2003', *Survey of Current Business* (Oct. 2004), 5–10.

²¹ Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass. 2005).

with that in northern and Continental Europe as well as in Canada. And, yes, Western European societies have been spending relatively more on social services, although austerity regimes since the 2009 recession have started to diminish that contrast. Still, these are differences of degree, not kind. The United States in the late 1940s and 1950s created its own 'hidden welfare state', with the GI Bill, subsidized mortgages, loan guarantees, and healthcare spending.²² Admittedly, these disproportionately favoured the white middle class. At the same time, it is worth pointing out that public social spending is not everywhere progressive in Europe; public consumption may favour the poor in Scandinavia (although the Swedish and Danish states take back a good share via taxes) but in Mediterranean countries the pension system disproportionately favours better-off groups with a privileged track record of good employment, skills, and pay. Intriguingly, the annual growth of total government consumption expenditure in West Germany between 1971 and 2011 was 2.1 per cent, identical to that in the United States; Norway's was slightly higher (2.8 per cent per annum between 1979 and 2011), but the United Kingdom's was lower (1.6 per cent from 1956 to 2011).²³

The rise in healthcare expenditure illustrates the importance of public contributions for private consumption. In the United States, government insurance and employer contributions have financed the bulk of individuals' spending on health since the late 1960s. Indeed, by 2005 government and employer contributions made up 16 per cent of all personal consumption expenditure.²⁴ Any observer from earlier centuries would have been struck by the unprecedented parallel growth in public spending since the Second World War and the rising share of social benefits, pensions, public education, social transfers, and public housing and housing benefits as a portion of

²² See Jacob S. Hacker, *The Divided Welfare State: The Battle over Public and Private Social Benefits in the United States* (New York, 2002); Jennifer Klein, *For All These Rights: Business, Labor, and the Shaping of America's Public-Private Welfare State* (Princeton, 2003); Elizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York, 2003), ch. 3; Jan Logemann, 'Is it in the Interest of the Consumer to Pay Taxes? Transatlantic Differences in Postwar Approaches to Public Consumption', *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 11 (2011), 339–65.

²³ OECD figures, taken from OECD.StatExtracts (<http://stats.oecd.org/>) [accessed 22 Mar. 2015].

²⁴ Bruce Meyer and James Sullivan, 'The Material Well-Being of the Poor and the Middle Class since 1980', *AEI Working Paper No. 2011-04* (2011) (http://www3.nd.edu/~jsulliv4/well_being_middle_class_poor4.3.pdf) [accessed 25 Aug. 2016].

that. The decline in public housing in the United Kingdom since the 1980s is a partial exception.²⁵

In general, then, the postwar trend has been the very opposite of Galbraith's dystopian vision. Greater development and private affluence have been accompanied by greater public consumption. Of course, Galbraith indirectly contributed to the rise in social spending by injecting progressive ideas into the public debate which would facilitate Lyndon B. Johnson's 'Great Society' social programmes in 1964–5, although his direct influence on policy as an adviser to John F. Kennedy had been marginal. What needs to be stressed, however, is that the upward trend in public consumption was well under way in the United States when Galbraith launched his critique, and that there was nothing peculiarly American or progressive about it. The complementary rise in affluence and public spending has been repeated by all rich and developing societies—and continues to the present, even after the Great Recession of 2007. In the OECD 34, public social spending in 2014 makes up more than twice the share of GDP it did in 1960.²⁶ While private consumption expenditure on average grew faster, it was outpaced by public consumption in some years (1957, 1962, 1967, 1968, 1985, 1986, 2002 in the United States—only 1957, from August 1957 to April 1958, was a recession year).²⁷

What, then, might be an alternative account of the relationship between the two, and how might the war shed light on this historic transformation? The discussion so far prompts one immediate suggestion: households and consumer markets do not exist in isolation and scholars of the subject need to recognize the interplay between private and public consumption. Greater public spending on health, education, housing, pensions, social benefits, and other types of consumption will have an effect on what households spend their own market income on. Of course, public consumption does not automatically boost private consumption. It can also 'crowd it out', depending on the circumstances. In the era of affluence, high growth and high employment probably minimized such crowding-out effects. Social transfers and housing benefits were important

²⁵ Peter H. Lindert, *Growing Public: Social Spending and Economic Growth since the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2004).

²⁶ OECD Social Expenditure database (2012, 2014).

²⁷ Comparison of private consumption expenditure and government consumption expenditure taken from OECD.StatExtracts (<http://stats.oecd.org/>) [accessed 22 Mar. 2015].

for lifting the poor into societies of mass consumption, although in some countries, such as Canada, the consumption-boosting effects of federal transfers in the immediate postwar years lost its force as inflation eroded the benefit of the family allowance, as Bettina Liverant demonstrates.²⁸

In addition to such direct monetary effects, we should also consider more indirect and sideways mechanisms with which governments helped to rearrange the private worlds of consumption. The following observations are not meant to provide a rigorous model, but to stimulate ideas for a more capacious and realistic view of consumption by looking at a few key domains: energy, housing, company leisure, and equality.

As every student of the Second World War knows, fuel was of strategic importance. Oil, coal, and gas consequently feature prominently as 'war resources'. By contrast, these fuels are all but absent in studies of consumption, unless it is about reactions to the first oil shock in 1973. Similarly, studies of electricity are mainly about supply and technology.²⁹ Yet energy is a vital form of consumption that enables all the other things we do when we consume, from cooking to sitting in a heated, warm room, to driving to the shops or tourist sites. This is not the place for a proper integration of energy into consumer studies. I wish merely to point to some of the consequences that 'public war resources' had for 'private consumption'.

An immediate consequence arose from countries at war having to make a trade-off between the energy devoted to military destruction and defence and that for civilian living. The effect on private motoring is well known. In Britain, petrol was rationed from 1940. On the eve of the war, private motoring had used up 2.4 million tons of petrol, roughly half of the national total. By 1945, this had fallen to 617,000 tons. In contrast to Germany's 'walking army', the British army experienced fast motorization; by early 1941 troops already consumed more than 75 per cent of what all private motorists together used, a thirst to which the Oil Control Board responded with a 10 per cent cut in rations for the armed forces. By 1945 the armed forces consumed virtually all aviation spirit.³⁰

²⁸ See Bettina Liverant's essay in this volume.

²⁹ Leslie Hannah, *Electricity before Nationalisation: A Study of the Development of the Electricity Supply Industry in Britain to 1948* (London, 1979); D. J. Payton-Smith, *Oil: A Study of War-Time Policy and Administration* (London, 1971); Rainer Karlsch, *Vom Licht zur Wärme: Geschichte der ostdeutschen Gaswirtschaft 1855–2008* (Berlin, 2008).

³⁰ Payton-Smith, *Oil*, tables 53 and 56, pp. 484–7 and 181–2.

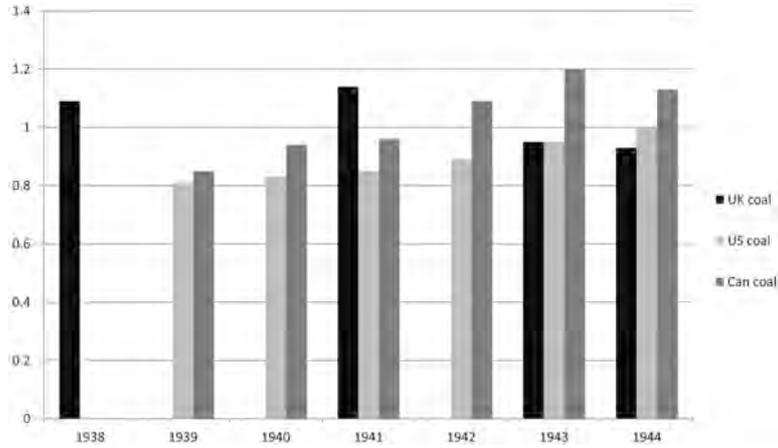


FIG. 2. Physical Quantities of Coal Consumed per capita in the UK, USA, and Canada, 1938-1944

Note: UK coal is in long tons; US and Can coal in net tons; US coal is anthracite and bituminous. No data available for UK 1939, 1940; US and Can 1938.

Source: *The Impact of the War on Civilian Consumption in the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada: A Report to the Combined Production and Resources Board from a Special Combined Committee on Non-Food Consumption Levels* (London, 1945).

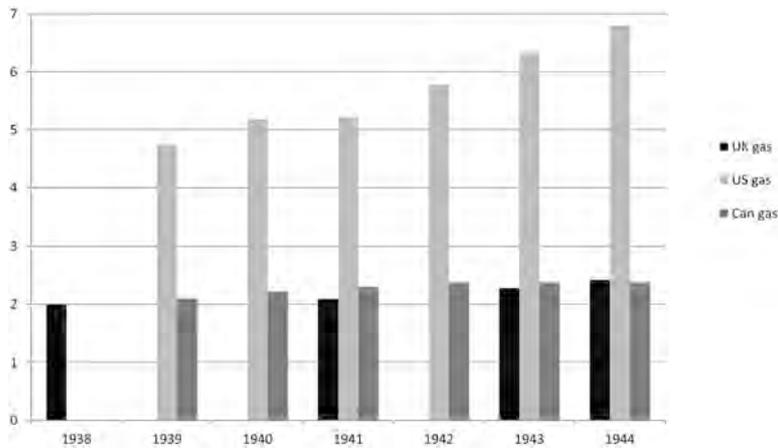


FIG. 3. Physical Quantities of Gas Consumed per capita in the UK, USA, and Canada, 1938-1945

Note: UK Gas is in million BTUs; US and Can gas in thousand cubic feet. 1 BTU = 1,100 cubic feet of natural gas or 540 feet of manufactured gas. No data available for UK 1939, 1940, 1942; US and Can 1938.

Source: *The Impact of the War on Civilian Consumption* (1945).

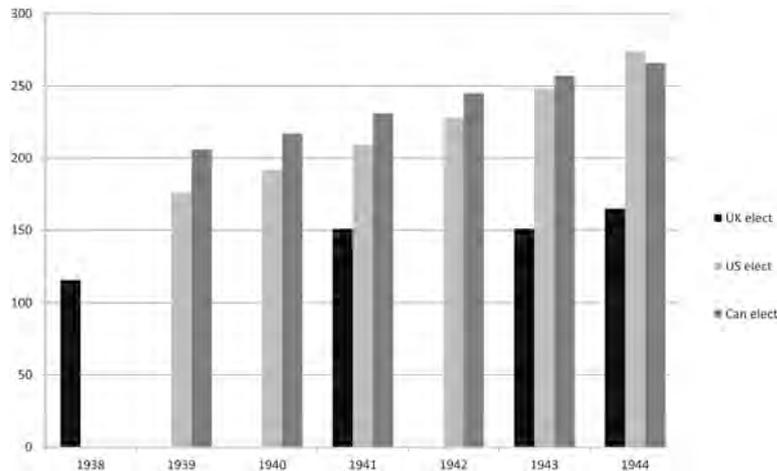


FIG. 4. Electricity Consumption per capita in the UK, USA, and Canada, 1938–1944

Note: Electricity in kilowatt hours. No data available for UK 1939, 1940, 1942; US and Can 1938.

Source: *The Impact of the War on Civilian Consumption* (1945).

Just as important as the shift from civilian to military consumption was the shift from one type of fuel to another. In Britain, petroleum consumption almost doubled during the war, from 10.8 million tons in 1938 to 18.9 million tons in 1944; in 1943 civilian consumption still exceeded that of the armed forces, albeit only by a small margin. The United Kingdom also managed to double its indigenous crude oil output (crude petrol and shale oil) to 1.1 million tons by 1944.³¹ In reverse, per capita purchases of coal fell by 15 per cent in Britain during the war. In the USA and Canada, by contrast, people's coal consumption increased by 25 per cent. The only civilian fuels which declined in the USA were fuel oil and coke, which were diverted to war industries and submarines; the eastern and mid-western states introduced rationing in October 1942, the Pacific north-west followed in February 1943.³²

What accounts for this difference across the Atlantic and what does it tell us about civilian consumption in relation to the war effort? It brings us back to the significance of the labour market for wartime dynamics of consumption. The fall in Britain's coal output

³¹ *Ibid.*, table 49.

³² *The Impact of the War on Civilian Consumption*, 46–8.

was the combined result of labour shortages, lagging repairs, and plant outages. Furthermore, the war moved people from one habitat of material culture to another by physically moving them from one environment to another. Canadians and Americans started to burn more coal and gas, on average, because millions of rural inhabitants moved to cities to do war work. Instead of burning wood from their farm, they started to consume gas and coal. Compared with the more densely populated and urbanized British Isles, in America and Canada the war led to greater urbanization and, by doing so, played a significant role in accustoming formerly rural inhabitants to higher standards of comfort. In terms of thermal units, the American home consumed 17 per cent more at the end of the war than at the beginning. The typical British home, by contrast, got 5 per cent colder.³³

Energy transitions were further accelerated by energy shortages during the war and in the immediate postwar years. Civilian consumption of electricity shot up significantly in the final stages of the war and continued to do so in subsequent years, in Britain and Germany as well as in America. At first sight, this looks counter-intuitive given the serious shortages of coal, material deprivation, and chaos of these years. Per capita British electricity consumption jumped up by 40 per cent between 1939 and 1944 (gas by 20 per cent); in the USA it was 30 per cent (gas by 15 per cent). The largest chunk went towards space heating, but there was also a proliferation of electric cookers and appliances in these years.³⁴ War meant not only that civilian coal was short, but more expensive than ever before. It drove people to find comfort in more convenient, clean electricity.

The social and cultural effects of this process were highly uneven, however. Electrification was not democratic. Britain had been lagging behind Germany in terms of connection since the late nineteenth century. The war did not altogether stop British energy providers from connecting new customers, but it slowed down the extension of the network.³⁵ The jump in electricity consumption mainly meant that the lucky 70 per cent who were already connected now intensified their use by switching on electric radiators and cookers in addition to their lights. Overcrowding and billeting raised levels further. Individuals and families billeted in other

³³ Ibid. 46–8, 104–10.

³⁴ 1945 Committee, tables 104–11.

³⁵ Hannah, *Electricity before Nationalisation*, 302–4.

people's homes preferred to use electric hotplates and portable heaters in their own rooms.³⁶ Within crowded homes, electricity defused a clash of competing claims on time in the kitchen. For networks, however, it also caused a serious aggravation of the peak load problem in the postwar years that would plague German as well as British cities, as civilian use of electricity on winter evenings triggered blackouts and the collapse of the grid.

Whether real or feared, energy shortages were not an affair for private consumers only. They concerned big and industrial consumers, firms, and shops. In postwar Japan, Germany, Britain, and many other countries, energy shortages triggered a distributional politics between different types of consumer. How different regimes confronted these challenges lies beyond the scope of this essay. What matters is that private consumers can only be understood in relation to the demands and power of big industrial consumers. A sole focus on the end-user creates an artificial fantasy of a sovereign household as an island. In reality, energy-demanding habits of cooking, washing, and heating and their timing were affected by the demands of energy-hungry industries and firms; this was one reason why energy-hungry sectors in the Weimar Republic demanded to be recognized as consumer representatives in corporate politics. The definition of the consumer as a private end-user in economics, sociology, and anthropology since has made it difficult to appreciate such interconnections between individuals and firms. Energy is one domain where they could be recovered, but such linkages and rivalries also occur in health, transport, education, housing, and many other areas of consumption.

By powering the private home, electrification had further knock-on effects on the space and capacity of consumption. The turn to electricity opened the door for the many electrical machines that would enter the home in the postwar decades. The transition started with electrical energy, not the appliance. Changes in the 'private infrastructure' of the home need to be viewed in relation to changes in public infrastructures. This was not necessarily a one-way street, with changes in big infrastructure automatically leading to changes in private lifestyle. Households were not passive actors, nor necessarily always compliant users. In London in the 1960s, for example, many residents refused to switch on the electric underfloor

³⁶ Landesarchiv Berlin, C Rep. 149-06 nr 28, Protokoll, Tagung der bezirklichen Energiekommission, 11 Dec. 1953.

heating that local authorities had installed on their council estates.³⁷ Equally, we should be cautious about the supposed influence of electrical showrooms, advertisers, and urban planners in artificially creating demand. Few homes in Europe in the 1950s and even the 1960s resembled an all-electric dream. In Stocksbridge, England, in the late 1950s, for example, council tenants complained that not enough sockets had been installed on their new estate. In 1961, in West Germany, a survey of housewives by the Frankfurt advisory bureau for electricity use found that housewives' dominant concern was the 'socket bottleneck' ('Engpass Steckdose'). As late as 1964, 41 per cent of flats in Germany still had only one socket in the kitchen, and 4 per cent had none at all.³⁸

So far, we have queried two dimensions in conventional discussions of consumption: the person who does it and the commercial arena where the activity is seen to take place. Consuming, we have argued, is about more than the private end-user and not limited to the marketplace. The above discussion points to a third weakness in standard approaches, and that concerns the *modus operandi* of consuming. Cooking, washing, doing laundry, and heating are all types of consuming, but they follow a very different logic from the psychological mindset of motivation, behaviour, stimulus, and response that informs most accounts of choice, preferences, and purchasing decisions. Rather than conspicuous, they are examples of what sociologists call 'ordinary consumption'. Habit, a central aspect of William James's psychology in the 1890s, has been one of the victims of the economic and behaviourist conquest of the subject of consumption. Given their importance, it is remarkable how little we know about changing consumption habits, their formation, evolution, and disruption.

In this volume, habit appears a few times—in the Nazis' difficulty in changing tobacco-smoking, and in Jan Logemann's discussion of Kurt Lewin's interest in food habits as part of an American wartime attempt to engineer new eating patterns. Margaret Mead, who served on the wartime Committee, stressed the contribution

³⁷ London Metropolitan Archive, GLC/HG/HHM/L247, pt. 1, Survey: Electric Under-Floor Warming, 1963.

³⁸ *Energiewirtschaftliche Tagesfragen* 11/97, p. 194. As late as 1964, 41 per cent of flats in Germany still had only one socket in the kitchen, and 4 per cent had none at all: *Energiewirtschaftliche Tagesfragen* 14/123, pp. 155–6. See also now Sophie Gerber, *Küche, Kühlschrank, Kilowatt: Zur Geschichte des privaten Energiekonsums in Deutschland, 1945–1990* (Bielefeld, 2015).

of cultural anthropology for an understanding of food habits as ‘the culturally standardized set of behaviours in regard to food manifested by individuals who have been reared within a given cultural tradition’, behaviours that were ‘systematically interrelated with other standardized behaviours in the same culture’.³⁹ Learning about food itself involved habits. But even here, habits were already being diluted by a psychological interest in motivations, at least in Lewin’s interest in the role of money and health considerations for individuals’ food preferences.⁴⁰ One way forward for historical studies of consumption (in war as well as peace) would be to unpack habits and give them a greater space of their own. The recent revival of interest in habits and routines among sociologists provides some analytical support.⁴¹ So could studies of disruption which enquire into the nature and process of normalization, and point to the relational aspects, norms, and rules that people draw on when putting their life back together after a disruption. As a large-scale disruption which simultaneously operated at macro- and micro-levels, the Second World War makes a good case for testing the idea that rather than disruption being a break with order, the two should be viewed as entwined processes.⁴²

Housing plays a critical role for ‘ordinary’ consumption, not just because a lot of consuming takes place at home but because housing is a major item of private and public spending, and, from the 1930s onwards, increasingly became a consumer good in its own right. Pressure for social housing emerged as part of the movement for social reform in the late nineteenth century, but, significantly, it was total war, inflation, and calls for collective sacrifice that generated plans to build ‘Homes Fit for Heroes’, to use the name of David Lloyd George’s British campaign in 1919. Significantly, rent control in Britain was an invention of the First World War. After being relaxed in the inter-war years, it was toughened up in the Second World War.

³⁹ Margaret Mead, ‘The Problem of Changing Food Habits: Report of the Committee on Food Habits’, *Bulletin of the National Research Council*, 108 (Oct. 1943), 20–31, at 21.

⁴⁰ Kurt Lewin, ‘Forces behind Food Habits and Methods of Change’, *Bulletin of the National Research Council*, 108 (1943), 35–65, at 44 ff.

⁴¹ Jukka Gronow and Alan Warde (eds.), *Ordinary Consumption* (London, 2001); A. Warde and D. Southerton (eds.), *The Habits of Consumption* (Helsinki, 2012); Elizabeth Shove, Mika Pantzar, and Matthew Watson, *The Dynamics of Social Practice: Everyday Life and How it Changes* (London, 2012).

⁴² Hendrik Vollmer, *The Sociology of Disruption, Disaster and Social Change: Punctuated Cooperation* (Cambridge, 2013).

In the short run, destruction and the priority given to war industries meant that the housing stock declined in the Second World War. In the long run, however, the war changed the overall provision of housing and the mix of public and private ownership. In Britain, as elsewhere in Europe, the number of council homes (social housing) rose steadily. Public housing in the United Kingdom was 12 per cent of the housing stock in 1945 but 30 per cent in 1969. At the same time, home ownership also rose dramatically, from 29 per cent in Britain in 1950 to 50 per cent of all housing stock in 1970.⁴³ It was the rental market that was squeezed. The German situation has been shaped by tax laws that encouraged renting, but, contrary to the popular picture of low home-ownership rates and German exceptionalism, it is worth noting the pronounced regional differences within the country. In the Rhineland and Baden-Württemberg today, home ownership rates are just as high as elsewhere in Europe, while in Bremen and Hamburg they are disproportionately low.

Across Europe, the war gave a boost to the argument for a property-owning democracy, although the idea of ‘a stake in the country’, of course, has earlier origins. The war, too, reinforced the home’s appeal as a place of security. ‘The home of tomorrow’, a German guide for the home owner stressed in 1954, ‘is a bulwark against a wicked world, and makes the family impregnable from the outside.’⁴⁴ What home ownership together with public housing did was to take housing more and more out of the parameters of what we normally recognize as consumption. It became either an asset or a social transfer (paid for by the state).

We have noted the role of public spending and transfers for private consumption. Public housing is such an example. But just as consumption is not all funded by private income, so it does not all take place in private. Firms and the workplace are significant sources and spaces of collective consumption. Industrial recreation tends to be discussed under the rubric of industrial relations and management. But it was not all about quelling strikes and revolution. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, companies and company towns introduced workers to new forms of leisure. The

⁴³ Aled Davies, ‘“Right to Buy”: The Development of a Conservative Housing Policy, 1945–1980’, *Contemporary British History*, 27 (2013), 421–44.

⁴⁴ Siegfried Stratemann, *Das große Buch vom eigenen Haus: Eine Entwurfslehre f. d. Eigenheim*, 2nd rev. edn. (Munich, 1954), 15: ‘Das Haus von morgen ist Bollwerk gegen die feindliche Welt und für den Familienverband von außen unangreifbar.’

Second World War gave a boost to industrial recreation, especially in the United States, where leisure was a way to attract and integrate new workers, and industrial recreation had the support of the Federal Security Agency, which was keen to improve relations with the trade unions. Baseball and other sports raised morale and productivity. Some firms did the laundry and Christmas shopping for their employees. By 1953, 30,000 companies spent some \$800 million in organizing recreational programmes for 34 million workers—50 per cent above the prewar level, and more than was devoted to all the schools in the United States together. Importantly, company leisure was no longer just for workers, but increasingly for the whole family.⁴⁵

In wartime Britain and Europe, recreational services were less generous. In coalmining communities in Britain, spending on recreational welfare had by 1945 dropped to 10 per cent of its prewar level. The lack of recreational facilities for female workers in British government hostels was a constant complaint, although some companies, such as Cadbury's, supported 'holidays at home' in Birmingham.⁴⁶ Yet there were also major counter-trends. France installed *comités d'entreprise* (CEs) in 1945 and made them mandatory in any firm with more than fifty employees. The growing popularity of holidaying and caravanning in France in the 1950s and 1960s is inconceivable without the support of CEs.⁴⁷ The decline of war canteens in Britain is often commented on, but, from a comparative perspective, it is no more typical than the rise of canteen meals in Finland, which persist to this day. The decline of company-sponsored consumption in the second half of the twentieth century may be an Anglo-Saxon peculiarity. If we look at new industrial nations (such as Japan or Finland), and add non-wage benefits (housing benefits, subsidized food, and healthcare) to the picture, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the period since the Second World War has seen an expansion of company-sponsored consumption.

A final example of the Second World War's indirect legacy for consumption concerns its role in diminishing social inequality. The

⁴⁵ Jackson Moore Anderson, *Industrial Recreation: A Guide to its Organization and Administration* (New York, 1955), 64–8, and 8 for Christmas shopping during the war.

⁴⁶ Sandra Trudgen Dawson, 'Busy and Bored: The Politics of Work and Leisure for Women Workers in Second World War British Government Hostels', *Twentieth Century British History*, 21 (2010), 29–49.

⁴⁷ Georges Mouradian (ed.), *L'Enfance des comités d'entreprise, de leur genèse dans les conditions de la défaite de 1940 à leur enracinement dans les années 1950* (Roubaix, 1997).

war did not create a classless consumer society; even in the United States class cultures persisted in the affluent 1950s and 1960s. But it narrowed the extremes. The historically unprecedented rise in equality in these years across the West is difficult to square with the ruling orthodox critique of ‘consumerism’, where it is inequality that drives excess, emulation, and materialist frenzy. This view follows in the tradition of the critique of luxury that stretches from the ancients via Jean-Jacques Rousseau to Thorstein Veblen all the way to Robert Frank’s recent *Luxury Fever*. Consumption here resembles an avalanche, with rich élites’ spending on ever bigger yachts and houses triggering a lust for more among the less fortunate sections of society. There are good reasons to be sceptical about this presumed mechanism—people tend to care about their peer group, not distant billionaires, about whose riches and lifestyle we, in fact, know surprisingly little. The historical record, too, runs counter to the hypothesis. Income inequality fell to a historic low in the postwar decades, the very time when consumption expanded by leaps and bounds. Contrary to the diagnosis of luxury fever caused by inequality, the age of affluence saw a symbiotic relationship between greater equality and higher levels of consumption, in the United States as well as in Europe (East and West).

Higher income tax, inheritance tax (in the case of Britain), and the added destruction of wealth (in the case of Germany) left behind societies that were more equal than before the war.⁴⁸ Welfare benefits would probably have risen sooner or later. As Peter Lindert has shown, the upward trend is already discernible in the inter-war years and needs to be related to democratic franchises. But the war certainly strengthened states’ confidence in their capacity and duty to support major welfare programmes and social transfers. In addition, peace brought a new, more liberal world economic order, which reinforced the trend towards greater equality; it is difficult to see how the deadlock of economic nationalism would have been broken without war.⁴⁹

After the Second World War, states began to fund a much larger chunk of people’s consumption—directly and indirectly. Public spending on education, healthcare, and housing had redistributive

⁴⁸ Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 2014).

⁴⁹ P. H. Lindert and J. G. Williamson, ‘Does Globalization Make the World More Unequal?’ in M. Bordo *et al.* (eds.), *Globalization in Historical Perspective* (Chicago, 2003), 227–71.

effects which raised poorer sections of society onto the plateau of a mass consumption society. The narrowing of the gap between the richest and the poorest simultaneously created a new middling atmosphere of consumer culture, aimed at convergence towards a shared set of norms and ideals rather than excess and distance. In the late nineteenth century, millionaires of the gilded age had built their mansions in Newport. Their grandchildren in the more equal 1950s and 1960s closed them, fired the servants, sold off big yachts, and tried to live a 'normal' middle-class lifestyle. The new élite were sportsmen and stars from show business, not the old super-rich. Television assisted this pull towards the middle.

Conclusion

We have come full circle. Let me conclude by putting the different units together. The literature on consumer culture focuses mainly on private choice, what people buy in the marketplace, and what they then do with these things in their private lives. The focus on choice has additional methodological consequences, leading to a preoccupation with individual motivation and behaviour. These elements clearly matter, but they are not the only ones that matter. The dramatic expansion of consumption also involved an increase in public consumption and collective forms of provision and use, especially since the 1930s. A lot of consuming is about habits and routines, and not the result of conscious decisions about maximizing utility or status-seeking. These dimensions tend to all but disappear in standard treatments of consumer society. The intellectual, cultural, and statistical reworking of consumption since the late nineteenth century into an act of private purchase by an end-user may have led to a more robust theoretical model, but has also impoverished the subject.

There is an irony here. On the one hand, total war prepared modern states to take over a growing chunk of what and where people consume. On the other, since the Second World War, the state's statistics embraced GDP as the core measurement and thus elevated market transactions into the defining marker of what counts in economic life. In real life, of course, people consume not only what they themselves pay for but also what they enjoy thanks to provision by states, firms, friends, or other institutions. Just how crucial public services and spending are is suggested by

the economists Joseph E. Stiglitz, Amartya Sen, and Jean-Paul Fitoussi, who have examined fresh ways of measuring economic performance. In France and Finland, they show, household final consumption expenditure jumps by 20 per cent once social transfers are taken into account. In 2007 the French government channelled 290 billion euros to households, mainly in the form of health services and education. In the United States, by contrast, such transfers add only 10 per cent.⁵⁰ Real consumption in France and Finland, then, is much closer to that in the United States than standard national accounts would have us believe. Directly and indirectly, the Second World War played a pivotal role in raising the level of public support for private consumption. To recognize the war's contribution need not lead to a romantic celebration of welfarism. After all, it also means that states and firms should take some of the responsibility for the expansion of consumption and the social and environmental problems it has entailed. What it does mean is that attention to the role of war, shortages, and collective provision allows us to see features of consumption previously hidden from view. And this is a lesson that may be as relevant for times of peace as times of war.

⁵⁰ Joseph E. Stiglitz, Amartya Sen, and Jean-Paul Fitoussi, 'Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress' (http://www.insee.fr/fr/publications-et-services/dossiers_web/stiglitz/doc-commission/RAPPORT_anglais.pdf) (2009), esp. 30–2, 89–90 [accessed 25 Aug. 2016].