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### [Review of: M.E. Cox (2019) Hunger in War and Peace: Women and Children in Germany, 1914-1924]

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Mary E. Cox, *Hunger in War and Peace. Women and Children in Germany, 1914-1924* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). 383 p. ISBN 9780198820116.

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The First World War was a global war. Its battles were fought on the Western Front, in Russia, in the Middle East, in Africa and Asia. But its theatres extended beyond the traditional battle spaces into other realms: it was also a war for control over the global production and distribution of key goods and raw materials – including foodstuffs. Keeping the massive armies and those who toiled on the home fronts fed and happy was deemed to be key in ensuring victory. And so, both belligerent blocs, the Allies – joined in April 1917 by the United States as an ‘Associate’ – and the Central Powers, attacked each other’s lines of supply in the hopes of disrupting the supply of food to the front and to those who had remained at home, in the hopes of sapping the enemy’s morale, destroying their industrial capabilities, and undermining the legitimacy of their regime. The Central Powers used U-boats in an effort to isolate Britain from its overseas centres of supplies in a campaign that sank hundreds of ships, killed some 15,000 sailors, and destroyed millions of tons worth of shipping. The Allies, by contrast, cordoned off the North Sea to German and German-bound shipping and used their financial might to control centres of supply and ca-

jole the neutral states bordering Germany to limit their trade with those on the other side of the battle line. This 'blockade' – which was never its official name, because it was not conducted by international rules and regulations governing blockades – became increasingly infamous after the war had ended in German defeat. It was increasingly felt that the blockade had cheapened the Allies' military victory and furthered the myth that Germany had been defeated at home and not in the field. Moreover, economic warfare waged against a home front populated by women and children stood at odds with Allied wartime propaganda highlighting their defense of international law, of common decency and civilization. Debate still rages over the blockade's legality and its effect on the war, and on the post-war settlement. Mary Cox's contribution to these debates is a thoughtful and measured effort to ground them in an analysis of the effects of economic warfare on the nutritional status of Germans during and in the years immediately after the war.

The core of Cox's book is an analysis of three important data sets regarding German nutrition as it was impacted by the war. One is a study by two German physicians, W. Kruse and K. Hintze, of wartime heights, weights and caloric intake of 59 households and three individuals from Leipzig. The other is a set of measurements and weights of children in the Strasbourg area – then still a part of Germany – and the third is a set of summary statistics of the average weight and height of school classes across Germany taken by the Imperial Statistical Office. Cox rightfully acknowledges that each of these data sets are limited in their own way. The first is not an average cross-section and lacks representation from the poorest Leipzigers, the second is limited to schoolboys and the third is comprised of averages rather than data on individual children. The subtitle of the book is therefore slightly misleading: strictly speaking this is an in-depth study of some German male schoolchildren, some households, and a set of averages from German school classes.

Nevertheless, Cox's statistical acumen and innovative comparisons of German wartime data with modern nutritional standards does paint a telling picture. German deprivation was very real, and almost all of Germans featured in the data sets that did not die of hunger or hunger-related diseases suffered significant nutritional deprivation. This is most apparent in children, who did not only lose weight but also experienced stunted growth. Cox draws a number of careful conclusions from these data sets, related to the impact of gendered and class-based norms on food entitlements: men ate more, women suffered to feed their children, the poor ate less and worse than those who were better off – and could supplement, up to a certain degree, their rationed food on the black market. Her most surprising find is that there is little difference between the Strasbourg area urban and countryside youths, where one might

expect those living on or near farms having easier access to food than those in cities. Cox also notes that her data suggests that most children who did not die could, and did, recover in the immediate post-war years, something she credits to the lifting of the blockade after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles and to domestic and international food aid supplied to German children post-1918.

Cox's careful and measured tone is apt when it comes to her analysis of nutritional data – which is limited and biased. Unfortunately, she applies that same tone to other chapters in the book which deal with the legal and moral background of the blockade and with a history of international aid to Germany – chapters that demand, according to this reviewer, that the author takes much more on a position on the topics than simply reviewing the available literature without offering anything by way of conclusion. Moreover, apart from the similarities in tone, these chapters tend to read like they should be in a different book than the statistical analyses presented in others; they make almost no reference to each other. The book's last chapter, especially, stands out: it focuses on German children's views of international relief efforts by (mostly American) agencies, relief organizations and NGOs, which is interesting in and of itself but present such a shift in content that is hard to see how it connects to the carefully weighed arguments in the statistical chapters. That the book lacks a conclusion reinforces the impression that it lacks cohesion.

Despite this, Mary Cox's *Hunger in War and Peace* is an important addition to key debates about the global Great War and its impact on food production and consumption, especially in Germany. The book would have benefited from a more coherent integration of the various types of source materials – statistics, ego documents, government records – and from bolder conclusions, but its core chapters are admirable examples of historical-statistical analysis and will greatly benefit continuing debates on economic warfare and food deprivation.

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