

history of sexuality to the history of medicine and of public health in Peru and would benefit any examination of modern Latin America, feminist and gender studies, the history of sexuality and the history of medicine alike.

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Nadja Durbach, *Many Mouths: The Politics of Food in Britain from the Workhouse to the Welfare State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. vii + 361, £34.99, hardback, ISBN: 9781108483834.

Many Mouths rests on the premise that food is ‘the most visceral connection’ between a government and its people. Ideas about who was entitled to food, how much and which type was at the heart of the British imperial state’s relationship with its subjects. The level of the state’s investment in a particular group of citizens was made manifest by the condition of their bodies.

Through a series of case studies, Nadja Durbach examines the attitude of the British state to paupers, prisoners, famine victims, prisoners of war, schoolchildren and finally, civilians on the home front. The case studies span a crucial period of state formation between the 1830s and the 1940s when political economy rose to dominance. However, rather than tracing a teleological progression of increasing centralisation and efficiency, Durbach demonstrates that state feeding programmes were shaped by ideologies of class, gender, generation, race and nation which often pushed in opposing directions.

The parsimonious conditions in workhouses were designed to demonstrate that those who failed to find a place within the marketplace would be excluded from the polity. The New Poor Law instructed that workhouse Guardians should not even provide the inmates with a festive meal of roast beef and plum pudding at Christmas, arguing that those in the workhouse should not enjoy a meal that honest labouring families would be unable to afford. But here, the new philosophy came into conflict with the older moral economy which through acts of charity, sought to enlist even paupers as loyal subjects of the nation. Guardians and workhouses masters who wished to provide a Christmas dinner were ultimately granted permission to do so. Thus, Durbach begins by showing that the imposition of a rational political economy was a protracted, contested and uneven process.

In the case of prisoners, for example, it would have been more efficient to impose one ration scale within the Empire’s prisons. Instead, multiple dietary regimes were provided throughout the imperial penal system. One Bihari jail employed 53 cooks to prepare food for 504 prisoners. But the myriad different ration scales for white men and women and an array of different ‘races’ – all of whom received different quantities and different types of food – affirmed the more important essentialist racial principle of biological difference on which the colonial social order was founded.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the Government of India was constantly faced with the possibility of millions of famine-struck Indians becoming dependent on the state. The Malthusian political economy, which regarded famine deaths as part of the natural process whereby populations were held in check, was countered by a humanitarian sense that governments were responsible for saving their subjects’ lives. But, Durbach shows how, rather than challenging the callous principles of economic liberalism, the humanitarian impulse which saw the administration of piecemeal and inadequate famine relief ultimately bolstered the principles of political economy. By focusing on feeding children who were characterised as the labourers of the future, the state saved life not for its own sake, but in order to secure its source of future revenue.

A similar rationale lay behind the decision in 1906 to introduce free school meals for poor and malnourished children. During the recruitment drive for the South African War (1899–1902), it had become apparent that the British working class were in a woeful physical state. The school meals feeding scheme was an attempt to improve the fitness of future working-class generations who would be needed

to defend the Empire. Thus, it was military rather than humanitarian or economic considerations that were the leading factor in the government's decision to tackle the problem of working-class malnutrition. This motivation faded in the 1930s when, fearing the scale of the problem the Conservative-led national governments sought to evade taking responsibility for the health of their citizens. In 1934, they switched to a system of medical rather than income selection for eligibility. They claimed that this was a more scientific selection method while at the same time ignoring the growing evidence from the rapidly advancing science of nutrition that it was not poor parenting and fecklessness that was the root cause of malnutrition but poverty.

It was in wartime that nutritional science gained in power and influence. But, the chapter on the feeding of Prisoners of War (POWs) during World War I confirms that state appeals to apparently neutral scientific evidence were invariably politically expedient. Those interned on British soil were compelled to eat unfamiliar foods with the science-based justification that the food in itself was nutritionally adequate. In contrast, the British government portrayed its own POWs interned in Germany as 'starving' for want of sufficient food. In fact, they were far from undernourished but were pining for familiar foods, most especially white bread. The government went to a great deal of expense and effort to supply two thirds of British POWs with white bread through the auspices of a Swiss charity. That the government was willing to bend its own principles of efficiency and thrift in order to satisfy the cultural requirements of its interned subjects is bitterly ironic given that the soldiers still fighting in the front-line trenches complained that more often than not their bread rations were substituted with unpalatable biscuit.

It took World War II and fear that poor morale might adversely affect the war effort to persuade the government to address the chronic malnutrition experienced by a large swathe of the British population. The British Restaurant scheme transformed the poor from the workhouse pariahs of the 1820s into consumers who fully participated in the capitalist system. The wartime food security of British civilians was, however, achieved at the expense of Britain's colonial subjects. And following a depressingly familiar pattern, in the post war world, the colonies were again enlisted to provide foodstuffs to improve British civilian nutrition. Durbach concentrates on the scheme to initiate a concentrated orange juice industry in the Caribbean to supply the Labour government's extended welfare scheme. Despite being dressed up as an initiative, which would stimulate the Caribbean economy, from the beginning it was an unviable scheme reliant on Britain's continued support. When later Conservative governments set about dismantling the welfare state, the West Indies was left with an uneconomic industry without a market.

Through the lens of food, this excellent book traces the rise of the British state that is familiar to us today. One which values only those citizens regarded as assets; a state that evades taking responsibility for its citizens, hiding behind appeals to scientific evidence, and one which consistently chooses the path of political expediency rather than following the principles of good governance.

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John Henderson, *Florence Under Siege: Surviving Plague in an Early Modern City* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2019), pp. 363, £30.00, hardback, ISBN: 9780300196344.

This is a fascinating, readable and beautifully illustrated account of Plague in early seventeenth-century Florence. It provides a panoramic survey of the city: how it was administered, the medical response and how the population fared as the epidemic swept through it. Drawing on a wide range of quantitative and qualitative source materials, one of its great strengths is the way it moves deftly between the two. Clearly analysed tables, graphs and impressive street mapping chart the 'big' data from sources like death registers, whilst discussions of sources like eye-witness accounts, correspondence or court room testimonies are woven around these. This makes it a book rich in the broader context as well as in such