

KIMBERLY MAIR. *The Biopolitics of Care in Second World War Britain*. Mass-Observation Critical Series. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. Pp. 248. \$115.00 (cloth).
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In *The Biopolitics of Care in Second World War Britain*, published as one of the first volumes in the new Mass-Observation Critical Series, Kimberly Mair not only engages with the history of the eclectic 1937 to c. 1948 social research organization but also stakes new ground in the history of the Second World War. In doing so, she advances several compelling arguments with regard to care and gendered labor, all of which will doubtless interest historians working in the periods immediately before and after the volume's main chronological focus.

As a scholar with a background in sociology, Mair employs a diverse range of theoretical literature on care and, in particular, from the field of animal studies. Throughout her chapters, she juxtaposes a variety of social categories in highly original ways (the domestic interior and the nation, the mother and child, and the human owner and the animal) to better explore their interrelations and the multiple connotations of the terms *care* and *caregiving*. Departing from the enmeshed etymologies of *care* and *security*, Mair argues for a need to reflect on the hierarchical relations revealed (or concealed) by discourses of care. She considers these questions not just at the level of interpersonal relations (parents and children, life partners, individual citizens) but also at the more anonymous level of state and citizen, and even within the complex web of multi-directional and multi-layered observation thrown up by Mass Observation as an archive and a method. In the process, Mair asserts, certain forms of wartime biopolitical logic come into view, replete with the contradictions inhering in all forms of power relations. From a historically grounded perspective, sometimes this theoretical engagement can feel overdone—especially in Mair's very long introduction, which speaks to multiple literatures—but undoubtedly this is the price paid for interdisciplinary scholarship of this nature.

The structure of the book is equally striking and somewhat unusual from a historian's perspective. Mair opens the book with a preface ("Imperatives") in which she interweaves several different written registers (second-person literary thick description of Second World War conditions in the present tense and historical analysis) and offers an index of different modes of wartime care. As noted, the long introductory chapter outlines the theoretical directions of the book and ambitiously maps Mass Observation onto languages of care and broader wartime policy. Five chapters of varying length then follow. In the first, a very useful addition to the Mass Observation scholarship, Mair situates the organization's wartime work as a form of care with all the moral ambivalence that this produced: in popular resistance against the impertinent snooping of the social survey in the name of care; the attitudes of Mass Observation's directors to how their organization might exhibit care to wider society or the state; and how individual Mass Observation writers narrated and grounded their own experiences of giving and receiving care.

In the subsequent three chapters, Mair explores case studies of care which demonstrate the complexities and hierarchies of giving and receiving care. These draw on what Mair terms, in the title of the book's fourth chapter, "confused animacies"—as the discursive line between working-class children and household pets became blurred by questions of value and present and future utility. Narratives about "verminous" children (76–93, 148–51) intermingled with debates about the utilitarian value of keeping pets during wartime. In the final chapter, which serves a conclusion, Mair returns to the unstable meanings of *care*.

Perhaps most significant here are Mair's contributions to the histories of evacuation and of Mass Observation itself. From the popular conception—emergent throughout successive anniversaries of the 1939–1945 war—of evacuation as a symbol of a unified Britain or a bucolic liberation of working-class urban children from the menacing urban environment (such as in the 1981 novel *Goodnight, Mister Tom*), more critical historical work, led by John Macnicol

in the 1990s, sought to recover the eugenic histories behind evacuation policy and the responses to it by voluntary organizations. Mair does not argue against this latter, now dominant, conception of how working-class children and families were treated by state policy, but her work—particularly in its use of the Mass Observation source material—undoubtedly extends such debates in interesting ways. Foremost among these, by using a biopolitical framework, she allows notions of care to be placed back into the story in non-simplistic ways that avoid the trap of nostalgia while acknowledging individual positive experiences and narratives. Mair reminds us of the politics underlying any discourse of care, drawing on feminist theory and animal studies to demonstrate that *care* implies an unequal relationship between giver and receiver. She consequently articulates a convincing argument not just for why attention to a politics of care is a productive lens for approaching gendered histories of the family, but also—if scholars of British history wish to extend this work forward chronologically—how it might allow for fresh perspectives on the history of the postwar British state.

Within Mair's analysis of histories of communities and care, her book also—as would be expected from a volume published as part of the Mass-Observation Critical Series—makes an original contribution to study of the Mass Observation project. Mair builds upon long-standing scholarship—from the work of Nick Hubble or James Hinton on Mass Observation as a social movement to Claire Langhamer and Hester Barron's analysis of the project through the lens of affect—to consider Mass Observation “as source and agent” (13) in its own story and to implicate the historical researcher in its methodological recovery. Mass Observation, Mair suggests, was itself part of an ambivalent project of care: gathering usable data on the population and its morale, while justifying its ability to present the idiosyncrasies of individuals and, in turn, “care” for their stories. Although she specifically makes these claims with the 1937 Mass Observation archive in view, it will be interesting to see how far scholars push her conclusions toward the 1981 revival of the project.

Mair's book, as she concludes forcefully, is ultimately about recovering the possibilities within Mass Observation to work against teleological narratives; the potential for change, different modes of care, or “alternative futures . . . imagined” (169) by the Mass Observation writers. The value lies in the ability of the Mass Observation archive not only to make visible hierarchies (of care and between researcher-researched) but also to force scholars to confront and complicate (if not circumvent) them in their analyses—to provide due care to their historical subjects.

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JATINDER MANN and IAIN JOHNSTON-WHITE, eds. *Revisiting the British World: New Voices and Perspectives*. Studies in Transnationalism Series 5. New York: Peter Lang, 2022. Pp. 276. \$94.95 (cloth).

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Edited by Jatinder Mann and Iain Johnston-White, *Revisiting the British World: New Voices and Perspectives* reintroduces the British World as an idea to be historicized; a scale of inquiry; and a category of analysis in global, imperial, national, and transnational studies in history and political science. The contributions trace its intellectual genealogy back to J. G. A. Pocock's “British History: A Plea for a New Subject” (*New Zealand Journal of History* 8, no. 1 [1974]: 3–21), which was built upon in the edited collection by Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis,