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"For the Hungry Have No Past nor Do They Belong to a Political Party": Debates over German Hunger after World War II

Alice Weinreb

WHEN World War II finally came to an end, the Allied forces were primed to face a world of hunger. Since the earliest days of the conflict, experts throughout Europe and Asia had been predicting that the unfathomable scale of the war would result in a massive and permanent restructuring of the global food economy. Military victory itself was cast as inextricably intertwined with control over foodstuffs. In 1940, the British nutritionist and future Director-General of the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization, Sir John Boyd-Orr, had warned that "we are only at the beginning of what looks like a long grim struggle, in which food may be, as it was in the last war, the decisive factor for victory."[1] Even more ominously, such experts foresaw the end of the war as ushering in a world defined less by peace and more by hunger. Australian economist and humanitarian Frank Lidgett McDougall axiomatically declared that "the exigencies of war and of the relief period will in the next few years render almost all men everywhere in the world highly food-conscious."[2] The recognition of the global ramifications of hunger meant that, as Nick Cullather put it in his recent article on the history of the calorie, "the construction of a postwar international order began with food."[3]

During the war, Allied medical concern had focused primarily on the populations of the central European countries that had been longest occupied by the Nazis, where doctors predicted unprecedented levels of malnourishment when the war was over.[4] Reports from "secret sources in prison camps in Europe" described concentration camps and ghettos in the east with entire communities dying of starvation, causing Churchill to warn long before war's end that "the

[1]John Boyd-Orr, *Nutrition in War, Based on an Address Delivered to a Fabian Society Conference on Food Policy* (London: The Fabian Society, 1940), 14.

[2]F. L. McDougall, "International Aspects of Postwar Food and Agriculture," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 225 (January 1943): 122.

[3]Nick Cullather, "The Foreign Policy of the Calorie," *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 2 (2007): 337–364; here 362.

[4]Dr. H. Chick, "Nutritional Research in Vienna after the First World War," *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society* 3, no. 19 (1945).

combined resources of the Allies may be strained to the utmost to prevent hunger and indeed starvation, especially if our victory comes before the new harvest is gathered."[5] Bracing for throngs of displaced and starving victims of Hitler's Third Reich, the Allies were clear about the future status of German civilians. In a hungry Europe, Germany was a land of ample food: "the diet is adequate and any idea that the Germans are starving or are likely to starve in the near future must be dismissed as foolish."[6] Throughout most of the war, nutritional reports confirmed that Germany and Denmark were the best-fed countries in continental Europe.[7] As the war drew on, the Allies developed policies for postwar Germany that were based both on a relative lack of concern for German hunger and the conviction that Germany had a well-functioning and intact food economy.[8]

As a result, neither military nor medical strategists planning for the hunger of postwar Europe expected to aid Germans, who were generally perceived as the cause rather than the victims of hunger. Within months of the country's defeat, however, a new consensus had emerged among the Western Allies that "the problem in Germany is really a food problem."[9] It rapidly became military wisdom that adequately feeding the German civilian population—resolving their hunger—was the single most important task of occupation, the sine qua non of reconstruction and key to "the peace of the world."[10] This shift in Allied perception of the German people represented, more than any other aspect of occupation policy, the growing rapprochement between the Western Allies and the Germans.

Since the very moment of capitulation, German self-understanding had focused nearly exclusively upon the *Magen-Frage*, or "stomach question." Over the course of the occupation, the Western Allies, first the Americans and then the British, came to share this viewpoint. As a result, defeated Germany was

[5]Ibid.; "Partial Starvation and its Treatment," *The Lancet* (March 23, 1945).

[6]Geoffrey H. Bourne, *Starvation in Europe* (London: G. Allen & Unwin Lmt., 1943), 123.

[7]Ibid., 149.

[8]See Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (London: Viking, 2006) for the economic and military importance of domestic food policy for the Third Reich. The Allies held the Nazi rationing scheme in incredibly high regard and attributed to it much of Germany's military success; British nutritionists advocated the emulation of Nazi food distribution strategies. The idea that Germans ate well under Hitler also shaped German memories of the Third Reich; during the postwar Hunger Years and still to this day, Germans recall the Third Reich, in contrast with occupation, as a time of adequate, even good, food supplies. Recent research has begun to challenge these more positive interpretations of daily life under Hitler, and it is clear that food supplies were one of the most common sources of domestic unrest and anger. Cornelia Renner, "'Nicht einmal Brot hat man genug!' Ernährung und Stimmung im Gau Tirol-Vorarlberg 1942/43," *Zeitgeschichte* 2 (1999).

[9]Cited in Eileen Egan and Elizabeth Clark Reiss, *Transfigured Night: The CRALOG Experience* (Philadelphia: Livingston, 1964), 14.

[10]U.S.-British Bipartite Food and Agriculture Panel, *Food and Agriculture: U.S.-U.K. Zones of Germany* (Berlin: Food and Agriculture, 1947).

rapidly reconceptualized: the most powerful and threatening enemy nation was transformed into the primary hotspot of postwar hunger. Hunger became, in the eyes of both Germans and the Western Allies, the defining attribute of the German experience of post-World War II occupation.[11]

This eventual consensus elides what was at the time a contested development. Allied authorities, medical experts, and humanitarian activists initially disputed German claims of mass hunger. This essay argues that the eventual international recognition of German hunger was the consequence of the convergence of two distinct hunger-discourses that developed immediately after the war. On the one hand, for German civilians hunger became the central concept through which they struggled to come to terms with their individual and collective experiences of war and defeat. Hunger provided a universally accessible and emotionally powerful vocabulary with which Germans could explore their past, interpret their present, and predict their future. In response to this powerful discourse, the Allies in turn developed changing policies directed at civilian hunger. Eventually, the Allies came to define the Germans as a hungry people not because of medical evidence, which in fact did not support German claims of widespread starvation, but because of concerns over the political consequences of German hunger for the future of the postwar world. In other words, it was not the actual presence of severe hunger, which was successfully disputed by many of the actors taking part in these debates, but the feared effects of German hunger that galvanized western politicians, humanitarians, and military leaders to vow to resolve this political problem.

In this article, I trace the complex and contested history of how the hunger of defeated Germans rose to such prominence, rapidly becoming the most significant hunger within the global hunger-landscape that emerged at the close of the war. In 1939 or even 1945, it would have seemed absurd and morally

[11] France was little involved in the waves of international aid directed at hungry postwar Germans, while the Soviets developed different symbolic and economic meanings for the category of German hunger. The French zone, the most historically understudied of the zones, was more similar in popular perception and policy to the Soviet zone than the other western zones. Quality of life here was the worst and rations the lowest of the four zones, and mutual distrust and animosity marked local governance. Edgar Wolfrum, *Französische Besatzungspolitik und deutsche Sozialdemokratie. Politische Neuansätze in der "Vergessenen Zone" bis zur Bildung des Südweststaates 1945–1952* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1991). The Soviet government was tremendously concerned about the political consequences of widespread hunger and the global food shortage, but these concerns were framed within a larger Soviet history of frequent and devastating famines and food scarcity. Immediately after the war, the hunger that Stalin initially chose to emphasize was that of starving eastern Europeans rather than of Germans. When the Soviet military leadership finally turned to the problem of German hunger, it was couched in pragmatic rather than moralistic terms: Germans must be better fed to improve their productivity, as well as to ensure their allegiance to socialism. In fact, the Soviet zone (SBZ) recognized even earlier than the American zone the political importance of rations for winning German support. The SBZ especially prioritized food distribution to schoolchildren and worker canteens. The Soviet Zone never recognized a unique quality or moral significance to German hunger, however, nor was it embraced as the main priority of reconstruction as it was in the west.

repugnant to suggest that Allied humanitarian aid should concentrate so heavily on the former enemy. Yet within months of defeat, occupied Germany had become the recipient of the largest food-aid program in history; while the Berlin Air Lift was the most dramatic example of the west's commitment to feeding hungry Germans, the Federal Republic of Germany continued to receive food-aid packages from American relief programs until the early 1960s.[12] This shift in Allied attitude is not only a part of recent German history, but it is also an important chapter in the postwar emergence of a global language of human rights. In unexpected ways, the experience of feeding post-Nazi Germany was to shape theories and practices of American humanitarianism and international food aid.

Because of the tremendous attention paid to German hunger during occupation, there is a rich array of historical studies of the food crisis following World War II. In particular, this literature has focused on the ways in which inadequate food supplies shaped normal Germans' daily activities.[13] Scholars have particularly emphasized tensions over the different Allied rationing systems, and civilians' complex negotiations with the black market. Standing in interminable lines to wait for inadequate portions of tasteless foods; foraging for edible berries, nuts, and wild greens in rural and suburban spaces; and illicit bartering in public squares and markets were the tropes through which Germans, and especially German women, experienced and remembered the Hunger Years. Indeed, the preeminence of food issues at the cost of other social and political concerns was a crucial aspect of the much commented-upon feminization of occupied Germany. This was, as Elizabeth Heinemann argues, the "hour of the woman," a time when the physical absence or incapability of German men meant that women acquired particular economic and cultural significance.[14] Equally important was the rapid ascendancy of traditionally female concerns to dominate the public sphere—above all food concerns. While

[12]Karl-Ludwig Sommer, *Humanitäre Auslandshilfe als Brücke zu atlantischer Partnerschaft. CARE, CRALOG und die Entwicklung der Deutsch-Amerikanischen Beziehungen nach Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs* (Bremen: Selbstverlag des Staatsarchivs Bremen, 1999).

[13]Rainer Gries, *Die Rationen-Gesellschaft: Versorgungskampf und Vergleichsmentalität. Leipzig, München und Köln nach dem Kriege* (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 1991); Karl-Heinz Rothenberger, *Die Hungerjahre nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg. Ernährungs- u. Landwirtschaft in Rheinland-Pfalz 1945–1950* (Boppard am Rhein: Boldt, 1980); Gabriele Stüber, *Der Kampf gegen den Hunger 1945–1950. Die Ernährungslage in der Britischen Zone Deutschlands, insbesondere in Schleswig-Holstein und Hamburg* (Neumünster: K. Wachholtz, 1984); Jutta Heibel, *Vom Hungertuch zum Wohlstandsspeck. Die Ernährungslage in Frankfurt am Main 1939–1955* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Waldemar Kramer, 2002); Günter J. Trittel, *Hunger und Politik. Die Ernährungskrise in der Bizone (1945–1949)* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 1990).

[14]Elizabeth Heinemann, "The Hour of the Woman: Memories of Germany's 'Crisis Years' and West German National Identity," in *The Miracle Years: A Cultural History of West Germany, 1949–1968*, ed. Hanna Schissler (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

previously it had been housewives who worried about the contents of the soup pot, such issues suddenly consumed the entire population.

The uniquely gendered nature of the food crisis of occupied Germany has received substantial attention from scholars and researchers interested in the ways in which German women negotiated the hardships of these years.[15] While scholarship on German postwar hunger has focused special attention on women's experiences during the food crisis in Germany, German and Allied voices of the era in fact insisted on the universality of German hunger.[16] Certainly, women were crucial voices during the occupation, particularly in local struggles over regional political systems.[17] German and Allied experts all recognized the particular hardships that the food crisis brought to women, who were primarily responsible for negotiating the impossible food situation. In the eyes of the Allies, however, women's voices were superseded by the voices of German politicians, doctors, and economists who obsessively delineated specific and highly restrictive boundaries for the category of hunger in relationship to the German population as a whole. Both the medical and the popular press were at least as preoccupied with hungry men as with hungry women. The many medical studies conducted during the occupation on the impact of hunger on the general health of the German population focused far more frequently on men and children than on women; indeed, doctors frequently noted that, contrary to expectations, German women seemed less ravaged by hunger than

[15]One of the earliest postwar studies of German civilians, sociologist Hilde Thurnwald's 1948 study of around 500 families living in occupied Berlin, focused on the struggles of women to acquire food for themselves, their husbands, and especially their children. Hilde Thurnwald, *Gegenwartsprobleme Berliner Familien. Eine soziologische Untersuchung an 498 Familien* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1948). The emergence of feminist and women's history in the FRG in the 1970s and 1980s led to the discovery of the cultural and social importance of the occupation years for the history of West Germany specifically in terms of women's experience and everyday life. Christa Keller-Teske, *Mangeljahre. Lebensverhältnisse und Lebensgefühl im Landkreis Stade, 1945–1949: Eine Dokumentation* (Stade: Verlag Stadt Stade, 1989); Annette Kuhn, *Frauen in der deutschen Nachkriegszeit. Frauenarbeit 1945–1949* (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1984); Sibylle Meyer and Eva Schulze, *Von Liebe sprach damals keiner. Familienalltag in der Nachkriegszeit* (Munich: Beck, 1985); Sibylle Meyer and Eva Schulze, *Wie wir das alles geschafft haben. Alleinstehende Frauen berichten über das Leben nach 1945* (Munich: Beck, 1988).

[16]This emphasis on the German rather than the feminine nature of the postwar hunger crisis distinguishes it from the food crisis that followed World War I. Belinda Davis argues that women's anger over food shortages was central to the collapse of popular support for the war as well as to a new governmental recognition of the political significance of women as well as civilian food supplies. Belinda Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000). In contrast, the hunger that followed World War II was a hunger of peace and surrender, rather than of military conflict—it was caused by, rather than itself causing, defeat.

[17]For example, Donna Harsch illustrates that German communists in the Soviet zone believed that women's everyday concerns, primarily over food shortages, explained their striking lack of success in gaining women's support for the party. Indeed, communists interpreted this perceived-as-female obsession with getting enough to eat as antithetical to an appropriate political awareness. Donna Harsch, "Approach/Avoidance: Communists and Women in East Germany, 1945-9," *Social History* 25, no. 2 (2000): 156–182.

their male counterparts.[18] Indeed, the postwar obsession with dystrophy, the hunger-disease almost universally attributed to German prisoners of war (POWs) returning from the U.S.S.R., effectively made postwar hunger as male as it was female.[19]

This article builds upon this rich and still expanding body of research on the multiple and highly differentiated experiences of German men, children, and women during these years. It explores a different aspect of the Hunger Years, however; rather than addressing the social and economic experience of hunger in occupied Germany, this article explores the specific discursive force and political meaning of the category of German hunger. Thus, the story that it traces is as much about the Allies—the prime audience and judge of German hunger claims during the occupation—as it is about the Germans themselves. In particular, I am interested in the mutability of the category of hunger, a concept that contained multiple and often contradictory meanings in the wake of World War II, depending upon who was claiming it, who was observing it, and who was measuring it.

In its critical approach to hunger as a subject of historical inquiry, my essay takes up recent scholarship on the emergence and transformation of hunger as a category of scientific, social, and political analysis and activism.[20] British historian James Vernon, in his study of the development of a modern humanitarian interest in hunger, has eloquently warned of the "slipperiness of hunger as a category, for the modern proliferation of terms signifying its various states—ranging from starvation to malnourishment and dieting—bear witness to its changing forms and meanings."[21] Few moments in history offer as clear testimony to this "slipperiness" as does the postwar occupation of Germany. For example, there has been increasing interest in the complex political and cultural ramifications of a postwar German civilian population that seemed "exclusively focused on the

[18]See, for example, the most thorough medical study on civilian malnutrition during the occupation years, the British Wuppertal project, which examined only men. University of Cambridge, *Studies of Undernutrition, Wuppertal, 1946–9* (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1951). For an excellent discussion of the politics of medicine during the occupation generally, see Dagmar Ellerbrock, *"Healing Democracy." Demokratie als Heilmittel: Gesundheit, Krankheit und Politik in der amerikanischen Besatzungszone 1945–1949* (Bonn: Dietz, 2004).

[19]See Ernst Günther Schenck, *Extreme Lebensverhältnisse und ihre Folgen. Ein Überblick* (Bonn: Verband d. Heimkehrer, Kriegsgefangenen u. Vermissten-Angehörigen Deutschlands e.V, 1958), for a massive, highly politicized disputation on the consequences of starvation on German POWs. For more on German POWs, see Frank Biess's *Homecomings: Returning POWs and the Legacies of Defeat in Postwar Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006). Biess discusses dystrophy among the returnees. Christiane Winkler has written an excellent article on the perceived crisis of health among German POWs, focusing especially on dystrophy. Christiane Winkler, "Männlichkeit und Gesundheit der deutschen Kriegsheimkehrer im Spiegel der Ärztekongresse des 'Verbands der Heimkehrer'" in *Männlichkeit und Gesundheit im historischen Wandel ca. 1800-ca. 2000*, ed. Martin Dinges (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2007): 157–174.

[20]James Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2007); Cullather, "The Foreign Policy of the Calorie."

[21]Vernon, *Hunger*, 8.

acquisition of food stuffs."[22] Paul Steege uses civilian participation in the black market to explore the complexity of Berliners' claims of helplessness and victimization, while Atina Grossmann has highlighted the centrality of food for the fraught relationships between Jewish Displaced Persons (DPs), Allied soldiers, and German civilians in occupied Germany.[23]

This article focuses attention on the particular importance of food and hunger for establishing categories of culpability and innocence in the immediate aftermath of World War II.[24] While the accusation of collective guilt ostensibly guided Allied attitudes toward Germany immediately after the war, it was countered by Germans' own passionate declarations of innocence and demonstrations of profound suffering. Here, present suffering promised to cancel out the existence of past guilt. There was a wide array of experiences that non-Jewish Germans evoked as symptomatic of their status as victims of the war. Especially important were the Allied bombing attacks on German cities, the experiences of the millions of ethnic Germans expelled from the east, the suffering of German POWs held in Soviet camps, and the mass rapes of German women by Allied, especially Soviet, soldiers in the immediate aftermath of the war.[25] Amidst these multiple forms of suffering, however, hunger was uniquely important for German-Allied relationships during the occupation. Hunger allowed Germans to cast themselves as equivalent in suffering to the innocent victims of the war, and at the same time to perceive themselves as the preeminent postwar victims of the combined forces of the Allies, the Jews, and the Soviets. Hunger was so effective because, unlike other forms of German suffering, it had international relevance (in the midst of a postwar international food crisis) and historical precedent (a long tradition of American aid programs addressing German civilian hunger going back to World War I). By tracing three parallel

[22]Paul Erker, *Ernährungskrise und Nachkriegsgesellschaft. Bauern und Arbeiterschaft in Bayern 1943–1953* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1990), 141.

[23]Paul Steege, *Black Market, Cold War: Everyday Life in Berlin, 1946–1949* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007). For a less critical and highly detailed depiction of German experiences on the black market, see Willi Boelcke, *Der Schwarzmarkt 1945–1948. Vom Überleben nach dem Kriege* (Braunschweig: Georg Westermann Verlag, 1986).

[24]For an outstanding discussion of the international politics of food claims in occupied Germany, focusing especially on DPs, see Atina Grossmann, "Grams, Calories, and Food: Languages of Victimization, Entitlement, and Human Rights in Occupied Germany 1945–1949," *Central European History* 44, no. 1 (2011): 118–148.

[25]See Robert G. Moeller's *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001). On the contested topic of the rape of German women, see Atina Grossmann's "A Question of Silence: The Rape of German Women by Occupation Soldiers," in *West Germany under Construction: Politics, Society, and Culture in the Adenauer Era*, ed. Robert G. Moeller (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997). For an excellent discussion of the politics of current memory debates, see Mary Nolan, "Air Wars, Memory Wars," *Central European History* 38, no. 1 (2005): 7–40. Two important recent works on the topic are Helmut Schmitz, *A Nation of Victims? Representations of German Wartime Suffering from 1945 to the Present* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007); and William Niven, *Germans as Victims: Remembering the Past in Contemporary Germany* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

hunger debates that engaged Germans and Allies, debates over the cause, the scope, and the consequences of German hunger during occupation, this essay reveals hunger's particular power at a specific moment in German history. At the same time, the highly variable nature of Allied responses to these discourses shows just how contentious these claims were. The "Hunger Years" of 1945–1949 were not defined simply by the presence of hunger, but by painful struggles to determine who was hungry, why they were hungry, and whether their particular hunger mattered.

Hunger's Origins: Debating the Causes of German Hunger

During the war, Nazi propaganda had insistently informed the population that the Allies had only one plan upon victory: to starve the Germans. With the final collapse of the Third Reich, hunger emerged just as the Nazis had foretold, but on an unprecedented scale and within an unexpected context. Although Allied victors and defeated Germans all had predicted the presence of some form of hunger among the civilian population as an unavoidable accessory to military defeat, the source of the hunger that did emerge was unclear. Was German hunger an inevitable consequence, economically or ethically, of Hitler's military and social policies within Europe? Or was it caused by flawed Allied occupation policy, or even the result of deliberate maliciousness on the part of enemies of the German people? These questions stood in for larger, more disturbing questions over the connection between the current population of Germany and the recent crimes of the German nation. For many Germans, a focus on determining the origins of their empty bellies shifted postwar reconstruction priorities away from agonizing questions of individual and collective responsibility for wartime horrors, and toward more urgent and increasingly depoliticized concerns over hunger, nutrition, and humanitarian aid. For Allies, Jews, and communists, the question of causation had different implications; their explanations for why Germans were hungry had ethical ramifications that justified current suffering with reference to past misdeeds and other, greater, non-German miseries.

From the beginning of the occupation, the German public blamed Allied policy for its hunger. Neither the postwar global food crisis with its accompanying international famines, nor economic and political difficulties within the Allied nations themselves were seen as relevant to German food shortages. A 1947 Office of Military Government, United States (OMGUS) survey on German opinions on the food situation revealed that "public dispositions seem to be centered upon a set of ideas which may be interpreted as charges against the Allies."[26] The Allied forces were accused of deliberately forcing "the sacrifice

[26]Office of Military Government, Opinion Surveys Branch, *German Understanding of the Reasons for the Food Shortage* (Berlin: OMGUS, 1947), 2.

of east Germany, the bread basket of the Reich, to Russia and its satellite Poland . . . the expulsion of almost fifteen million ethnic Germans . . . and restrictions on the production of fertilizers along with the destruction of the relevant factories."[27] By depriving Germany of its primary source of grains, the Allies decreased the amount of food available. Second, the very people who had transformed this fertile land into the "breadbasket of Germany," ethnic German farmers, had been driven out, depriving the land of its cultivators while increasing the number of mouths to feed in the newer, smaller land. And finally, the lack of adequate supplies and infrastructure within these modest boundaries meant that even the "brave German farmer" could not adequately feed the millions of hungry civilians waiting in vain for the fruits of his labor.[28]

Such collective condemnation of postwar Allied policy frequently slipped into a more familiar language of hunger that had flourished during the war years. During the Third Reich, and especially after the defeat at Stalingrad and the gradual collapse of the German army, inadequate food supplies and unmet rationing allotments had been a primary source of complaint and civilian hostility toward the government.[29] With the end of the war and the end of the Third Reich, complaints over food shortages became one of the most widespread sites of explicitly racialized language, as German men and women relied on Nazi and pre-Nazi tropes to link their hunger with the machinations of Jews and Slavs.[30] Both of these peoples had been historically represented as ravenous threats to the German *Volk*; they also had a demographic presence in occupied Germany on a scale that set this period apart from Germany both before and after the occupation.

The idea that Jews were responsible for German hunger had been a primary trope of Nazi anti-Semitism, which relied on representations of Jews as fat leeches or ticks who fed off the German national body. Such imagery provided German civilians after the war with a vocabulary for expressing both the extremities of their own hunger and their tremendous discomfort with the presence of large numbers of foreign Jews on their soil. During the war, the Jew most consistently linked with German hunger had been the Jewish-American Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau. Morgenthau continued to be the object of intense hatred in occupied Germany. His never-enacted plan to deindustrialize Germany and transform it into an agricultural land was, in the words of German

[27]Fritz Baade, *Amerika und der deutsche Hunger* (Braunschweig: Limbach, 1948), 9.

[28]Ibid.

[29]Nancy Reagin, *Sweeping the German Nation: Domesticity and National Identity in Germany, 1870–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[30]Manfred Weißbecker, "Wenn hier Deutsche wohnen . . . Beharrung und Veränderung im Rußlandbild Hitlers und der NSDAP," in *Das Russlandbild im Dritten Reich*, ed. Hans Erich Volkmann (Cologne: Böhlau, 1994), 9–54. For a typical example of Nazi anti-Semitism in relationship to Allied food distribution, see "England bekämpft den Brei," *Gemeinschaftsverflegung mit Volksernährung* 9 (May 1943).

economist Fritz Baade, deliberately designed "to exterminate [*auszurotten*] half of the population of western Germany through hunger."[31] Although Morgenthau's "murderous plan" was quickly abandoned by the Allies, popular opinion continued to see American Jews as part of a larger conspiracy to destroy Germany through hunger.

Atina Grossmann's work has documented the long-forgotten fact that an unexpectedly large number of Jews settled temporarily on German soil as soon as the war was over. These unwanted inhabitants quickly became the targets of envy and hatred; they were resented as the recipients of undeserved foreign aid and seen as the linchpins of the black market.[32] In fact, the rations allotted to displaced persons, or DPs, were quite variable, changing over time, between zones, and between the different categories of people who made up the DP population.[33] By the end of 1946 the American Zone had officially eliminated extra food rations for former victims of Nazism, while in the Soviet Zones Jews were lumped with communists and other "resistance fighters" as "victims of fascism."[34] Nonetheless, German civilians persistently perceived Jewish DPs as overfed parasites or louses, working in cahoots with the occupation forces to starve Germans, and receiving particularly delicious foods that they did not really need. Former camp inmates were explicitly disassociated from the category of hunger. A German man who had lived near Bergen-Belsen recalled his visits to the camp during the war, asserting that most of the inmates there were adequately nourished: "you saw some that were scrawny, but you also saw those that were well fed."[35] Another local, terrified of the liberated camp inmates flooding her town, explained that "the former camp inmates were really quite well fed. Especially when they began to get extra rations, they started to burst at the seams. If they didn't like their food, they would scream, 'What kind of food is this! We ate better in the camp.'"[36] By underplaying or denying the reality of hunger as part of the Jewish war experience, Germans denied the necessity of

[31] Baade, *Amerika und der deutsche Hunger*, 5.

[32] Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, 175.

[33] In 1946, the 266,000 DPs in the British zone received the same rations as German civilians. Former concentration camp inmates and victims of Nazi persecution received an extra 400 calories a day. In the American zone, DPs who were living in camps received food from American stocks, and therefore it was of a higher quality than typical German rations, which made up 2,000-2,400 calories a day; those who could prove their status as "persecuted" were granted a daily supplement. U.S.-British Bipartite Food and Agriculture Panel, *Food and Agriculture*, 62. In the Soviet zone, "victims of fascism" were also allotted more generous rations, but these were usually provided from German supplies. Landesarchiv Berlin B Rep 209 #1551.

[34] "Die Brücke der Menschlichkeit. Ausländische Liebesgabensendungen für US-Zone," BArch R 86/3585.

[35] Rainer Schulze, *Unruhige Zeiten. Erlebnisberichte aus dem Landkreis Celle 1945–1949* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1990), 305.

[36] Ibid., 121.

extra food allotments, and in turn could blame their current hunger on Jewish appetites.

Although the non-Jewish population of Germany expressed wide-scale anger and resentment toward Jewish displaced persons, it most frequently blamed the Soviet army for actually causing German hunger. Having heard "horrifying tales of German victimization and Soviet barbarism since the last years of the war," Germans were primed to see in this occupation a threat of epic proportions.[37] While antisemitic propaganda had long depicted Jews as fat and greedy, since the late nineteenth century German anthropologists and nutritionists had asserted an innate Russian invulnerability to hunger because it was their natural state of existence.[38] The Nazi state depended upon the U.S.S.R. as a negative foil to depict the ostensibly excellent nutritional status of Germany. In 1935, for example, Goebbels explained that "a temporary restriction of a few groceries is nothing compared to the chronic starvation of the entire Russian people, who receive even the worst and most simple of foods in totally inadequate amounts."[39] In letters written home from the Eastern Front, German soldiers described Russian peasants as both ravenous and greedy. German farmers who were allotted Russian forced laborers to work their fields were warned against feeding them too well: "The Russian has lived with poverty, hunger, and submission for centuries. His belly is elastic, so no false sympathy."[40] During the war, Soviet POWs were the only category of enemy population specifically targeted with starvation as a primary strategy of mass murder.[41] In short, Nazi rhetoric had promoted a racially defined understanding of the very concept of hunger that singled out the Slav as its most intimate associate.[42]

Thus, in a sense, the postwar belief that the Soviet forces caused German hunger was predictable. In the Soviet zone and throughout occupied

[37]Moeller, *War Stories*, 32. For more on conflicts between German civilians and Soviet occupation forces, see Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945–1949* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1995).

[38]While nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German nutritionists relied upon anthropological studies done in Africa to establish theories of diet and human evolution, during the Third Reich, research turned to the various "races" of central and eastern Europe, with special attention paid to the dietary habits of the Slavs. During the war, as food supplies became increasingly restricted, German nutritionists often advocated a more "Russian" diet for the populace, which was described as one of extremely low caloric value and cost that nonetheless maintained a relatively high level of productivity.

[39]Cited in Weißbecker, "Wenn hier Deutsche wohnen," 26.

[40]Cited in Gustavo Corni and Horst Gies, *Brot, Butter, Kanonen. Die Ernährungswirtschaft in Deutschland unter der Diktatur Hitlers* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997), 534.

[41]See Christian Gerlach, *Krieg, Ernährung, Völkermord. Deutsche Vernichtungspolitik im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Zurich: Pendo-Verlag, 2001).

[42]Postwar German nutritionists continued to analyze traditional Russian dietary habits, in particular the purported heavy consumption of sunflower seeds, when looking for ways to stretch rations and stave off starvation among the civilian population. Kurt Saller, *Kampf dem Hunger. Eine Aussprache* (Stuttgart: Hippokrates, 1948), 16–17.

Germany, civilian descriptions of their own suffering evoked earlier racist fantasies of the horrors of defeat: Slavic, Asiatic, or Mongoloid behaviors included pillaging and theft along with the senseless destruction of food supplies. Acts such as throwing grenades into fishing ponds, burning silos, slaughtering cattle, or brewing vodka rather than allowing grain to be used for bread were all paradigmatically Russian ways of behaving. Local reports submitted to Allied officials inevitably subsumed the widespread destruction of stores of food carried out by crazed Nazis in the final moments of war into the damage inflicted by the "liberating" Soviet army. The Health Ministry in the industrial city of Chemnitz blamed "high-level undernourishment on the part of the entire population" primarily on the "very wide-reaching confiscation of the in any case very minimal [food] supplies by the Russian occupation troops."[43] Russians were perceived as particularly voracious eaters—stuffing themselves with raw onions and partially plucked chickens stolen from the German population.[44] One anonymous letter writer, mortally frightened by the threat of land redistribution, accused the Soviet occupying forces of having an agenda of "pure mass murder . . . now the poor starved skeletons are so unobtrusively and secretly dealt with that their own neighbors don't even notice when another one dies."[45] Repeating the narratives spread by Nazi propaganda, German civilians equated communism with institutionalized starvation, citing the mass deaths under Stalin's collectivization program as the greatest horrors of the war while leaving unmentioned the millions who starved under Hitler.[46]

Almost alone among the postwar German population, German communists rejected this model of German hunger as a specifically postwar and Soviet-caused phenomenon, offering a radically different interpretation of the dietary state of the population. For them, the current German hunger was definitionally linked to earlier hungers, hungers that they saw as part and parcel of Nazism as an ideology. German communists and antifascists had long claimed that Hitler's Third Reich would mean an increase in German hunger rather than its elimination. Writing from the United States, the émigré German Jewish doctor Martin Gumbert published a 1940 report on civilian health in Nazi Germany

[43]"Staatliches Gesundheitsamt Chemnitz an Landesverwaltung Sachsen," Stadtarchiv Dresden 11391 #1758. See also "Schreiben zur 'Information an Genossen Walter Ulbricht' von 15.6.1945," in Dieter Hanauske, *Die Sitzungsprotokolle des Magistrats der Stadt Berlin 1945/46 Teil 1* (Berlin: Berlin Vlg. Spitz, 1995), 136–137, note 7.

[44]"Staatliches Gesundheitsamt Chemnitz an Landesverwaltung Sachsen," Stadtarchiv Dresden 11391 #1758.

[45]Cited in Rainer Behring, "Von fehlender Öffentlichkeit. Alltagserfahrungen mit der sowjetischen Besatzungsmacht in Deutschland," in *Sowjetisierung oder Neutralität? Optionen sowjetischer Besatzungspolitik in Deutschland und Österreich 1945–1955*, ed. Andreas Hilger, Mike Schmeitzner, and Clemens Vollnhals (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006).

[46]Since its founding in 1947, the West German news magazine *Der Spiegel* had run extensive coverage of the so-called "Famine-Land" of the U.S.S.R., reporting on cannibalism and mass starvation due to land reform paired with a specifically communist "disregard for life." *Der Spiegel* 20 (May 1947).

dramatically titled *Heil Hunger*. In it he warned that, although direct starvation was absent within the borders of Germany, "there does reign, instead, the much more treacherous and incomplete state of hunger that is a continuous and chronic state of undernourishment."[47] Pointing out that average caloric consumption within Germany had actually dropped below the levels maintained at the height of the interwar Depression, Gumbert warned that a massive war was the only possible outcome of this nutritional crisis; presciently he predicted that it would be a war that "will not still the hunger of the German people!"[48] Within the borders of Germany, underground communist propaganda had long insisted not only that Nazism was starving and killing millions of non-Germans but that it was orchestrating the starvation of the German working class.[49] As a political party that relied on the promise of "bread for all" as a primary recruiting strategy, communists had been particularly critical of NSDAP food policy, condemning Hitler's promises of full bellies as a "Nazi Swindle" wherein "millions of workers go hungry."[50] Indeed, since the politicization of hunger during World War I's hunger blockade, German communists had struggled to radicalize rather than racialize the hunger of the working class.[51]

With the end of the war, communists were the only substantial group of Germans who were able to lay claim to having actively resisted Hitler. This fact, along with the socialist government of the Soviet zone and a strong communist party in all four occupation zones, meant that German communists were important voices in early debates over the "stomach question." They quickly established their primary goal as proving that Hitler was the true cause of the hunger that was plaguing Germany. In their eyes, Germans had to accept historical responsibility for their current misery. The hunger of the postwar years, communists claimed, was caused not by Germany's defeat but by its desire to go to war. Condemning a "century-long German tradition of crafting weapons for the conquest of foreign soil rather than tilling the native fertile ground," these radical left-wing activists linked hunger with militarism rather than with oppression at the hands of the Allies.[52] Reminding the complaining population that "not only Berlin, but all of Europe hungers," communists were outraged by the countless sullen assertions that "we ate better under Hitler," arguing that the relatively

[47]Martin Gumpert, *Heil Hunger* (London: Alliance, 1940), 76.

[48]Ibid., 88.

[49]Hans Burger, *Hitler, Hunger, Krieg. Die Ernährungspolitik des dritten Reiches im Zeichen der Kriegsvorbereitung* (Moscow: Verlagsgenossenschaft ausländischer Arbeiter in der UdSSR, 1936).

[50]Theo Overhagen, *Freiheit und Brot!? Ein Entlarvter Nazi-Schwindel!* (Berlin: Overhagen, 1931), 1.

[51]For more on the German Left and the politicization of food during and immediately after World War I, see William Carl Mathews, "The German Social Democrats and the Inflation: Food, Foreign Trade, and the Politics of Stabilization 1914–1920" (Ph.D. diss., University of California Riverside, 1982).

[52]Wilhelm Ziegelmayer, *Neue Nahrungsquellen. Kommunalpolitische Aufgaben zur Sicherung der deutschen Volksernährung* (Berlin: Heymann, 1949), 10.

good nutritional situation of Germans during the war was neither innocent nor apolitical.[53] They pointed out that the satiety of the early war years had been responsible for the fact that "constant hunger was a guest in the occupied lands."[54] Rather than insisting that German food autonomy was impossible within the new territorial boundaries of the shrunken and divided country, they claimed that "if you were to calculate the productivity of our living space theoretically, you would realize that we do not need to go hungry but that we could easily be satiated."[55] A 1948 booklet aimed at recruiting German farmers to the KPD criticized the fact that

> the most widespread opinion seems to be that there has never been a people anywhere in the world who has experienced anything similar to that of Germany, and there is no place in the world where there is "such a hunger" as currently in Germany . . . Our poor memory for history is no longer acceptable . . . if only we didn't always think exclusively about our bellies.[56]

At stake in these debates were questions of guilt and responsibility that seemed far more significant and personally meaningful to the average German than the far-off horrors of the gas chambers at Auschwitz or the mass graves of Ukraine. If current food shortages were indeed due to Germany's military policies under Hitler and to the destructive force of the war itself, then Germans themselves bore responsibility for their present suffering. If, on the other hand, this hunger had been created by the policies and peoples of the postwar moment, then Germans could be cast as victims of their fate, rather than its makers.

Measuring Hunger: Quantifying Starvation during the German Occupation

Almost immediately after Germany's unconditional surrender in May 1945, Germans and non-Germans alike began to assess the nutritional status of the civilian population. When Germans surveyed their defeated nation and miserable countrymen, they saw only hunger. In contrast, Allied doctors, military leaders, and civilians offered up highly differentiated and often contradictory

[53]Josef Orlopp, *Im Kampf gegen den Hunger* (Berlin: SED Landesverb. Gross-Berlin, 1947), 3. Communists were not the only ones who were shocked by the German insistence that things had been "better under Hitler," particularly in regard to food supplies. The occupying forces as well repeatedly expressed their frustration over this seemingly constant refrain. Photojournalist Margaret Bourke-White, in her dramatic record of her travels through defeated Germany in 1945, recorded such sentiments frequently. Margaret Bourke-White, *"Dear Fatherland, Rest Quietly": A Report on the Collapse of Hitler's "Thousand Years"* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946).

[54]*Unsere Ernährung. Die brennenste Frage* (Berlin, 1946), 3.

[55]Ziegelmayer, *Neue Nahrungsquellen.*

[56]Bruno Bibach, "Grundsätzliche Fragen zur Ernährungswirtschaft im Zweijahresplan," in *Grundfragen unserer Ernährungs-Wirtschaft im Zweijahresplan* (Berlin: Deutscher Bauernverlag, 1948), 6.

measurements of the dietary state of the defeated country. Everyone wanted to know, in other words, exactly how hungry Germans were—and it seemed that every individual and organization in occupied Germany had a different answer. The medical profession seemed the most logical source for factual information about the health of the general populace. The medical profession, however, proved unable to define, and thus to show, wide-scale hunger among the population. The simple question of whether Germans were hungry proved impossible to answer definitively.

The liberation of Nazi camps had resulted in a veritable flood of images of the paradigmatic postwar hungry body.[57] Haunted by visions of these "walking skeletons," the Allied soldiers and civilians who found themselves in Germany immediately after the country's capitulation were vociferous in their assertions that German civilians were not hungry. Indeed, the denazification programs that began early in the Allied occupation relied upon the visual and rhetorical contrast between the bodies of inmates and those of the Germans living near these camps; most infamously, they included mandatory tours of liberated concentration camps with the express purpose of forcing the visual confrontation with emaciated inmates and corpses. The film *Deutschland erwache* (*Germany Awaken*), made as part of American denazification policy aimed at German POWs, juxtaposed the image of a chubby civilian with a starved camp inmate; the narrator commanded his listeners to "look at these Germans after five years of war: fat, round, with double chins and swollen bellies. This man lives only two kilometers from this man."[58]

Indeed, Allied perceptions of the high fat content of German bodies defined initial contact between the occupation forces and German civilians. In his report on the state of the defeated country from April 1945, U.S. military official Eric Wood described the German countryside as "fat and prosperous. The people are fat, well dressed, and smug with good living. Even the dogs are fat."[59] Visitors to Germany and occupying GIs commented on the fatness or plumpness of the German population as a way of metonymically evoking the horrors they had perpetrated upon the victims of the Holocaust. In particular, the German civilian population that lived in proximity to concentration camps was described as overweight or excessively well fed. A doctor working in liberated Bergen-Belsen noted that "the standard of nutrition of the German civilians in the area near Belsen is described as very high. The rosy-cheeked children and young women

[57]F. Lipscomb, "Medical Aspects of Belsen Concentration Camp," *The Lancet* (August 9, 1945); P. L. Mollison, "Observations of Cases of Starvation at Belsen," *British Medical Journal* (January 5, 1946).

[58]Voiceover commentary in *Deutschland erwache*, 1945.

[59]RG 260 Records of United States Occupation Headquarters, World War II, Office of Military Government for Germany (U.S.) (OMGUS), Records of the Executive Office: The Office of the Adjutant General—General Correspondence, Box 91 (AG 383.7 Displaced Persons, Care and Feeding of thru AG 383.6 Prisoners of War (Policy)), Folder 2.

are particularly noticeable."[60] An early report on Buchenwald gave "wide notice to the well-fed, well-dressed appearance of the German civilian population of the Weimar area."[61] Both implicitly and explicitly, non-German men and women compared German civilian bodies to those of the victims of just-liberated camps, the ravaged peoples of much of eastern Europe, and, for Soviet, French, and British visitors, to their own populations at home, who had lived under strict rationing if not downright hunger throughout most of the war.

These critical voices argued that Germans were not hungry because they did not look hungry. Germans countered these attacks by claiming that they were hungrier than they looked. The most extreme example of the German medical profession's rejection of the connection between a body's appearance and its actual nutritional status was the popular diagnosis of *Hungerfettsucht*, or hunger-plumpness. This diagnosis was given to women who displayed an accumulation of excess fat on the bosom, hips, and cheeks yet who were diagnosed as suffering from severe hunger.[62] Ultimately, both German and Allied medical and military personnel decided that physical appearance was not an adequate basis for determining food policy, and instead turned to medical data to determine the real health of their respective populations. Anticipating the need for such statistics, British, American, French, and Soviet doctors had been dispatched to the various zones as soon as the war was over to determine German nutritional health. Allied and German doctors again found themselves at odds in the struggle to quantify German hunger. In direct conflict with German reports, Allied doctors were consistently unable to confirm wide-spread and severe hunger.

The single largest Allied study of German nutrition during occupation, the British-organized Wuppertal project, concluded that "there were in fact none of the signs of really severe undernutrition, and no deaths which could be attributed simply and solely to this cause [hunger] occurred in Wuppertal or in the whole of the British Zone."[63] An American report summarized that "there has been a considerable amount of exaggeration" within the German medical profession regarding the damages of hunger: "when they [the reported hunger-deaths] were investigated in an impartial manner, they were frequently found to be due to causes other than malnutrition, and in general they were less frequent than stated by some observers."[64] A medical report from summer 1947 sponsored by the U.S. President's Famine Emergency Committee opened by reminding its

[60]"Belsen Concentration Camp," *The Lancet* (May 5, 1945).

[61]From the commentary of the film *Nazi Concentration Camps*. Text in IMT-Protokollbänden, 2430-PS.

[62]Gerhart Thienhaus, "Über die Hungerfettsucht junger Mädchen," *Deutsche Medizinische Wochenschrift* 3, no. 3/4 (1948).

[63]University of Cambridge, *Studies of Undernutrition*, 15.

[64]Werner Klatt, "Food and Farming in Germany: I. Food and Nutrition," *International Affairs* 26, no. 1 (Jan. 1950): 54.

readers "that the above opinions of the German physicians are, on the whole, not supported by adequate statistics and are subject to question."[65] An American journalist who visited hospitals in the Soviet zone found that "though there are extensive signs of malnutrition, there is no great evidence of starvation."[66] The Bi-Partite Food Report, authored by western experts generally sympathetic to German civilians, acknowledged that "starvation of the population, as the term is generally understood, does not exist."[67] Even during the harsh winter of 1947, at the peak of German hunger, Allied doctors could only confirm that "a great many Germans appear to believe that they are slowly starving to death owing to the cruelty and indifference of the occupying powers."[68]

Such studies were roundly condemned, or simply ignored, by the German medical professionals working within the occupied country. These doctors began to argue that hunger in Germany simply looked different than hunger usually looked—or, more specifically, different than it had looked in the liberated camps, ghettos, and occupied territories which, during the immediate postwar era, defined public perceptions of what it meant to be starving. On the one hand, German doctors and civilians knowingly exploited the vocabulary and imagery produced by Nazi starvation policies to align themselves with those victims of the Third Reich. Dr. Hans Schulten, a specialist in hunger-disease after the war, described the typical German civilian as possessing the universalized body of pure hunger that was already inextricably linked to the most horrific crimes of the Nazis: "pale, lined skin, deep-set eyes and a weary gaze, cheekbones breaking through the skin, the suit hanging loosely on the limbs, bent forward and broken-down like a prematurely aged wreck."[69] This "typical" postwar German proved harder to find than expected, however, and doctors frantically tried to explain the lack of hunger-symptoms among most of the population. In the regretful words of Schulten, "not all [of the afflicted] display the full range of the disease. Often many crucial symptoms are missing; even weight loss can be relatively minimal."[70]

The impact of diet on health and mortality is difficult to pinpoint, particularly in cases where there is a steady but inadequate food supply (in medical terms, malnourishment rather than starvation). Many diseases, including tuberculosis and influenza, are more deadly if the patient is poorly fed. Accidental injuries and deaths, often at the workplace, increase due to weakness caused by hunger. And pregnancy, childbirth, and infancy all are far more dangerous when paired

[65]"Nutritional Status in Hesse, 2.6.1947," United States, President's Famine Emergency Committee Records, Box no. 26, Hoover Institution Archives.

[66]Gordon Schaffer, *Russian Zone of Germany* (New York: SRT Publications, 1947), 145.

[67]U.S.-British Bipartite Food and Agriculture Panel, *Food and Agriculture*, 56.

[68]Cited in John Farquharson, *The Western Allies and the Politics of Food* (Dover: Berg Publishers, 1985), 235.

[69]Hans Schulten, *Die Hungerkrankheit* (Berlin: K. F. Haug Verlag, 1946), 32.

[70]Ibid., 32.

with inadequate diets. Most civilian deaths that took place in occupied Germany could be attributed to these sorts of indirect causes. Occupation authorities did not accept such secondary "hunger-deaths" as evidence that hunger existed on the massive scale claimed by Germans, however. Instead, they demanded statistical proof of starvation. Thus, embattled German doctors dedicated an enormous amount of their resources to delineating and quantifying the scale and scope of German civilian hunger. The need to define hunger mathematically was crucial for reasons reaching beyond medical knowledge and treatment; it directly affected Allied occupation policies. The Allied forces recognized the need to supply extra food to starving people, something officially confirmed in the 1949 Geneva Convention on human rights. German doctors knew that the higher the percentage of Germans medically defined as starving, the more extra food the population would receive. The four zones applied different eligibility criteria for distributing supplemental rations, or *Zulagen*. These ranged from hard labor, war service, or camp internment to pregnancy, illness, or injury. All four zones, however, recognized a doctor's diagnosis of hunger-disease as a reason for receiving Zulagen. In some areas of Germany, more civilians received these additional "hunger-rations" than from all other sources of Zulagen combined.[71]

Eager to increase the number of patients who could be categorized as suffering from clinical starvation, German doctors regularly broadened their definition of the category, incurring the wrath of Allied overseers who doubted the medical veracity of such diagnoses. In turn, German doctors were morally as well as medically outraged by the demands of the Allies that they prove their claims about German health with charts, graphs, and calculations, arguing that it was impossible to reduce hunger to statistics or general overviews.[72] In the pages of medical journals they bemoaned the fact that their data rarely revealed widespread hunger but instead created "a seemingly positive image [of health]."[73] In their search to prove a hunger that they were convinced was unprecedented in scope and kind, these doctors used and discarded several quantification strategies—ranging from the presence of hunger edemas to increases in mortality rates, to decreases in body weight—before abandoning each method because it did not produce the desired statistical proof of mass hunger.[74] Indeed, all attempts

[71]There are several excellent studies of the rationing programs of the four zones. In addition to Gries, *Die Rationen-Gesellschaft*, and Erker, *Ernährungskrise und Nachkriegsgesellschaft*, see Katherine Pence's dissertation, "From Rations to Fashions: The Gendered Politics of East and West German Consumption, 1945–1961" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1999).

[72]Helmut Gillmann, "Über die Schwierigkeit der vollständigen Erfassung der Unterernährungsschäden," *Deutsche Medizinische Wochenschrift* 9 (March 1949). See also "Betrifft: Hungerödeme," Historisches Archiv der Stadt Köln, 646 #6.

[73]Düssseldorf Stadtarchiv NW 45 #807.

[74]For example, mortality for many common diseases decreased during the Hunger Years, including deaths due to heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. "Betrifft: Hungerödeme," Historisches Archiv der Stadt Köln, 646 #6.

on the part of the German medical profession to document "hunger-deaths" failed in the absence of traditional physiological signs. Instead, in occupied Germany hunger became a category open to constant interpretation. German medical journals agreed that "it is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to offer an accurate picture of the damages of undernourishment in a population," insisting that even those hungry people who lacked "manifest signs of the [hunger] illness" must be regarded as "suffering from a disease."[75] When Germans died of tuberculosis, cold, suicide, or overwork, these could all be ascribed to hunger. Hunger became the primary source of disease, sickness in its most general form.

Famously, when former American first lady Eleanor Roosevelt visited Berlin immediately after the war and noted how inappropriately well-nourished the civilian population seemed, her comments unleashed widespread anger and resentment: "Although many Berliners admit that they are better off than some of the formerly subjugated peoples, they feel it is a gross exaggeration to assert that they are not undernourished."[76] Those "feelings," however, needed medical backing; ultimately the failure of traditional visual markers of hunger—the clear dissimilarity between German civilians and the former inmates of Nazi camps—proved especially damaging for German attempts to assert their own hunger. Despite a tremendous amount of flexibility and creativity on the part of the German medical profession, doctors were never able to satisfactorily document widespread and severe hunger among the civilian population.

This failure did not, however, prove decisive in determining the outcome of Allied investigations of German hunger claims. Despite a lack of clear medical evidence, Allied perception of German hunger underwent a radical shift over the course of the occupation. Within a year, a population that had seemed preternaturally fat in summer 1945 had become shockingly, frighteningly, underfed. By 1947 German civilians, rather than former camp victims, had become the primary focus of postwar hunger-concerns. In direct ratio to this new concern over German hunger, Allied and military interest in documenting the scale or scope of German hunger declined. Rather than citing statistics of underweight or death rates in their appeals for increased food aid, both Germans and Allied humanitarians began to emphasize the potential political consequences of German hunger. International recognition of German hunger as the single most significant hunger of the postwar moment was due to one specific question: not why the Germans were hungry, nor how hungry they were, but what were the future consequences of German hunger, for the Germans themselves and especially for the postwar world.

[75] Gillmann, "Über die Schwierigkeit"; Heinrich Berning, *Die Dystrophie* (Stuttgart: Thieme, 1949), 170.

[76] G-2 US HQ Berlin District, Weekly Summary, February 23, cited in OMGUS, ICD: Daily Intelligence Digest #122, 28.2.46 NARA: RG 260/OMGUS, ICD, OSB, Box 145, Folder: Daily Intelligence Digest.

The Threat of Hunger: The Political Consequences of the German Food Crisis

On June 15, 1947, the West German Medical Board released an official statement on the nutritional situation of the occupied nation. In dramatic language it declared:

> An entire people, once strong and healthy, has been weakened by hunger to the point of absolute incapacity and true disease . . . a lack of calories and proteins has transformed a people who once possessed an internal freedom and strength, who were well equipped to succeed at becoming a peaceful nation despite an inauspicious start, into a hopeless and feeble creature.[77]

Intended to increase international awareness of the plight of the German people and thus to leverage for increases in rations, the report went on to explain that the population could never be "democratic" or "peace-loving" as long as it continued to starve. Crucially, the statement cast hunger as an ethical, political, and philosophical issue rather than a physical one; hunger threatened Germans not because children were stunted or workers exhausted, but because the cultural heritage of the land of "poets and thinkers" was at risk—and with German culture, western culture was threatened as well. Indeed, the authors directly stated that hunger would not only make democracy impossible to achieve, but it would also make communism inevitable. Deliberately creating a sense of urgency, the statement made explicit the idea that allowing Germans to go hungry threatened non-Germans as much as Germans. Hungry Germans embodied a violent and antidemocratic force that the Allies could ill afford to ignore, especially as it had so recently claimed millions of lives.

Upon its initial release, the statement was widely circulated in the German media as medical evidence for the crisis of German health. It quickly came under fire from occupation officials in all four zones, who saw it as medically baseless and politically threatening. The Americans roundly condemned the report, while the British authorities ordered German newspapers to rescind any articles based on the statement. The German health board in the Soviet zone issued a press release arguing that "the claim, made as a sort of threat, that hunger made the German people incapable of responsible democratic behavior must be totally rejected. We Germans were adequately fed when we decided to leave the soil of democracy."[78] The controversy ultimately resulted in the elimination of the Medical Board's nutritional branch and an increased censorship of German doctors.[79] More importantly, though,

[77] "Resolution der deutschen Ärzte zur deutschen Ernährungslage," Landesarchiv Berlin B Rep 012 #131.

[78] Cited in Thomas Gerst, *Ärztliche Standesorganisation und Standespolitik in Deutschland 1945–1955* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2004), 135.

[79] Ibid., 136.

this conflict crystallized the central issue of these German hunger-debates: the consequences of hunger in this most contested part of the world, the nature of the new state that was to emerge out of the defeated and divided land, and the shape of the bodies that would develop from this hungry, miserable, and formerly nazified people.

Allied opinion resolved these concerns by recognizing German hunger as something that was simultaneously constructive and destructive. Alone among the many postwar hungers, German hunger remade the shape not only of the individual body but of the larger collective body. The classic symptoms of hunger—a skinny body, deep-set eyes, protruding joints, weakness, apathy, and depression—were nonthreatening and passive, making their bearer the opposite of the aggressive and expansive Aryan bodies of Nazi ideology. This iconic body of suffering was grafted onto every German individual, young or old, male or female, loyal Nazi or resistance fighter. Thus transformed through hunger from a Nazified people's community (*Volksgemeinschaft*) to a pitiable "community of need" (*Notgemeinschaft*), the entire population, regardless of class, gender, or political allegiance, had access to, and claimed, hunger as his or her own.[80] The German Volk was remade as a people joined not by links of blood and soil, or a shared experience of war and defeat, but rather by the common experience of hunger: "the hunger-disease today has attacked our entire Volk and knows no social distinctions."[81] The voices of German civilians, politicians, doctors, and public figures all agreed that "we hunger all together."[82] By asserting this politicized and internationally relevant form of suffering, these voices documented in painful detail the degeneration of their bodies to display their innocence and powerlessness at the same time that these performances of suffering forged new and politically powerful bonds of shared victimization.

In the specific context of occupied Germany, hunger acquired the ability to transform its sufferer into a victim of Nazism. The German media claimed that the experience of hunger was equivalent to that of "victims of totalitarianism;" not Hitler but "simply the hunger, nothing more than hunger" was, in the words of a Cologne newspaper, the "very worst dictator."[83] Just months after the end of the war, a report from the city of Görlitz unfavorably compared the population's weekly ration of 250 grams of bread to the daily rations of prisoners at Auschwitz's work-camp Monowitz, "as it was reported in the *Deutsche Volkszeitung* on August 2, 1945."[84] Three years later, an article published in the Rhineland compared rations in the concentration camp Buchenwald to

[80] Trittel, *Hunger und Politik*, 74.

[81] Ferdinand Bertram, "Über Ernährungsschäden vom Standpunkt der zentralen Regulationen Teil II," *Deutsche Medizinische Wochenschrift* 5, no. 8 (February 1948).

[82] Cited in Trittel, *Hunger und Politik*, 110.

[83] Cited in Gries, *Die Rationen-Gesellschaft*, 11.

[84] "Grenzstadt Elend in Görlitz," Stadtarchiv Dresden 11391 #1758.

those of the French zone (purportedly 1,675 calories versus 805), leading a local politician to claim that Germans have "for three years been forced to bear a level of hunger such as that known in no concentration camp in the world."[85] A German housewife could watch a film clip from Auschwitz and recognize her own scrawny children in those bodies in striped suits, and a retired teacher would read of the NS rationing system in occupied Czechoslovakia or Poland and realize the depths of his own malnourishment through indignant comparison with Allied rations. When Germans cited the facts of life and death in concentration camps and ghettos, they were displaying how well they had listened to, and learned from, the occupiers. No longer did they claim that "we didn't know anything." Instead, they memorized the individual rationing plans of specific concentration camps to compare them to the last calorie and gram of flour of their own food supplies. This new knowledge, rather than leading to an acknowledgement of culpability or an expression of empathy, enabled a more "accurate" and powerful expression of one's own suffering.

Not only did their hunger mark them as innocent victims of dictatorship, but it also allowed Germans to display a particularly modern form of self-identification. By adeptly applying a new postwar language of humanitarianism and human rights, Germans asserted their right to have adequate food not as Germans, certainly not as Aryans or even Europeans, but rather as humans and "citizens of the world."[86] According to this logic, as long as German hunger existed, it exposed the emptiness of Allied assertions of a common and equal humanity, claims that the Allies used to distinguish themselves from the Nazis. According to the leaders of postwar Germany, topping the list of "laws of humanity" was the right to satiety. Taking up the language of new postwar hunger-relief programs, an amateur economist living in Dresden wrote to his zonal authorities claiming that eating to the point of being full (*das Sattessen*) was "the most basic, natural, and self-evident right that any human being can demand; it comes before even that most democratic of rights, the right for personal freedom."[87] The 1947 resolution cited at the beginning of this section informed the world that "the majority of the German population lives currently from rations that are only equivalent to a third of the internationally recognized minimal requirements," while a Düsseldorf article from a year later used the vocabulary of the Nuremberg trials to claim that "what the German Volk has been forced to endure for the past several years is, in the truest sense of the word, a crime against humanity."[88] The postwar publication *Zur Versorgung des*

[85]Cited in Rothenberger, *Die Hungerjahre*, 196.

[86]See Grossmann, "Grams, Calories, and Food," for a closely related discussion of the human-rights claims made by displaced persons, particularly non-German Jews, during the Hunger Years.

[87]"Denkschrift für die deutsche Wirtschaftskommission f.d. sowj. Besatzungszone zu Ernährungsfragen und zum Kartensystem," Stadtarchiv Dresden 11393 #321.

[88]"Resolution der deutschen Ärzte zur deutschen Ernährungslage," Landesarchiv Berlin B Rep 012 #131; and Trittel, *Hunger und Politik*, 156.

europäischen Kontinents 1945 (*On the Provisioning of the European Continent in 1945*) described German streets full of starving children, reduced to "skeletons, barely covered by paper-thin skin stretched tightly . . . faces hollowed out by hunger . . . a picture of boundless suffering . . . a heart-wrenching accusation against humanity."[89] Vowing to ensure that "nobody will be able to say, 'I did not know,'" the book insisted that "we are not allowed to wait until the hunger-skeletons are pictured yet again in the newspapers."[90] Turning their accusatory gaze upon a world that they felt was standing by and letting them starve, German men and women expressed their horrified conviction that they had been deliberately "condemned to die out," and in so doing revealed their belief in the equality of humanity and in social justice.[91]

Hunger also provided a convenient medical explanation for the wide variety of troublesome behaviors that emerged among the German population after the war. According to German doctors, all moral and psychological problems were "purely biological in nature, rooted in inadequate protein supplies."[92] Hunger was evoked to explain the social crisis and chaos of postwar Germany, the fact that families and friends no longer aided one another, and the abandonment of traditional German values. If Germans seemed hostile, selfish, depressed, racist, reluctant to work, and still glorified the Third Reich and Hitler, thus displaying traits ostensibly "otherwise not present in their character," these were not due to the horrors of war, the internalization of Nazi values, or psychological disturbances, but rather symptoms of the hunger-disease.[93] Policemen and the legal system relied upon a similar belief in the causal power of German hunger. It explained the inexplicable emergence of large-scale crime in what was claimed to be an otherwise law-abiding society. With a logic that was never applied to the former forced laborers or DPs who "terrorized" the postwar landscape, German doctors reminded the Allied legal system that "a person whose food supply cannot be guaranteed will become asocial, eventually a criminal."[94] Hunger led to a sort of passive criminal behavior that left the (German) perpetrator free from culpability. German police reports cited pillaging and stealing by Germans as proof of the suffering of an entire population rather than its criminalization, as hunger was cast as the sole reason for any and all German-committed crimes. At the same time that men, women, and children cast their own participation in the acquisition and distribution of illegal food supplies as evidence of

[89]Robert Böhringer, *Zur Versorgungslage des europäischen Kontinents im Herbst 1945* (Zurich: Rascher, 1945), 46–47.

[90]Ibid., 71.

[91]"An die Wirtschaftskommission," BArch DQ 1/1386.

[92]"Resolution der deutschen Ärzte zur deutschen Ernährungslage," Landesarchiv Berlin B Rep 012 #131.

[93]Schulten, *Die Hungerkrankheit*, 43.

[94]Saller, *Kampf dem Hunger*, 12.

their starvation, they simultaneously blamed the black market and crime itself on "foreigners," especially Jewish DPs and Soviet soldiers.

Hunger thus acquired the ability to change people in multiple ways. It erased the past of individuals and communities—and certainly no people in Europe craved this as much as postwar Germans. It transformed the afflicted into not only history-less beings, but also into beings who by definition were victims of a grave injustice. At the same time that hunger offered the possibility of innocence, however, it also represented a profound threat to postwar society. If hunger was not resolved, particularly German hunger, a dangerous future was well-nigh guaranteed. As the British Jewish philanthropist Victor Gollancz ominously argued in his plea for increased food aid to Germany's children, "hunger does terrible things to a man: it warps him, turns him into something very like a beast, and fills him with hatred for anyone who, rightly or wrongly, he thinks has inflicted it. And it does terrible things, particularly, to children who one day will be men."[95] This evocation of a terrifying future that would emerge out of a hungry present implied that postwar German hunger posed a uniquely horrifying and pressing threat.

In fact, these warnings were drawn directly from earlier American aid programs that had fed German civilians after World War I. That war, and that German hunger, set a powerful precedent for Allied treatment of defeated Germany. These earlier aid projects ensured that Allied treatment of Germany after World War II was shaped in surprising ways by the earlier world war. The experiences of World War I were formative for both German and Allied policies during and after World War II. Indeed, it was this first "Great War" that made German hunger strategically central to international military and political calculations.

World War I had been described almost since its inception as a "hunger war," and the single most discussed military strategy of the war and postwar was the infamous British Hunger Blockade.[96] The British naval blockade of goods entering Germany, which officially declared all foodstuffs contraband of war, meant that both everyday food shortages and the military threat of "starvation" were part

[95]Victor Gollancz, *Leaving Them to their Fate: The Ethics of Starvation* (London: V. Gollancz Ltd., 1946), 43. Such graphic evocations of the threat posed by hungry German children replicated imagery used earlier by Hoover when he successfully advocated for the creation of a massive child feeding program for German and Austrian children. In his pleas for what was initially a highly controversial plan to feed the children of the former enemy, Hoover warned that the only way to ensure that "your children and my children in the future" would not "be infected by a mass of moral and physical degenerates from Europe" was to have "every day of every week and every week of every month until the next harvest, this helpless mass of humanity . . . physically sit at a table spread with American food under the American flag." Herbert Hoover, *Central European Relief* (New York: American Association for International Conciliation, 1921), 110. For more on the pivotal role played by Gollancz in British policy toward occupied Germany, see Matthew Frank's "The New Morality—Victor Gollancz, 'Save Europe Now,' and the German Refugee Crisis, 1945–46," *Twentieth Century British History* 17, no. 2 (2006): 230–256.

[96]"Die Fehler unserer Kriegsernährung," BArch R 3601/475.

and parcel of the war itself. In Germany, the experience of hunger was militarized and transformed into a weapon: "Just as our men must take up the weapons of war in defense of our fatherland against enemy attacks, just so our women must fight the British starvation plan with their cooking spoons."[97]

This rhetoric offered a powerful explanation for Germany's defeat—not military incompetence but civilian hunger. Indeed, Germany's defeat in World War I seemed to prove the importance of adequate food supplies for ensuring military success. Thanks to these early lessons, the NSDAP promoted the view that World War I was lost not by military weakness but due to a hunger-based collapse of the home-front: "In the [First] World War, our weapons remained unvanquished; it was hunger that made the Volk cave in."[98] In response, Hitler promised the populace that they would never suffer from hunger again, identifying himself as a safeguard against that most nefarious of threats. In the reassuring words of Eberhard von der Decken's patriotic 1944 *Die Front gegen den Hunger*, "As paralyzed as the Germans were in the face of the threat of hunger before 1933, just as thorough were the defensive measures that Adolf Hitler established when he came to power. Today the front stands firm against hunger."[99] A substantial amount of Nazi military preparation was spent studying the imperial German government's wartime rationing policy to learn what not to do, on the assumption that avoiding those policies guaranteed victory.[100]

While Nazi Germany had looked obsessively toward World War I's hunger experiences for guidelines for developing its own military policies during the war, after the war the Western Allies also looked to this earlier conflict—not to develop military strategy but to learn from earlier experiences of managing a hungry and defeated German nation. American food-aid programs of the second half of the twentieth century pulled heavily upon the food-aid programs first developed during and immediately after World War I.

At that time, food-aid programs targeting defeated Germany were almost single-handedly organized by the engineer, rabid anticommunist, and future U.S. President Herbert Hoover. It was Hoover, along with the American Quakers, who carried out his program in Germany, who first created a vocabulary and narrative of German hunger that emphasized its particular horror. They blamed British policy and American indifference for Germany's "artificial famine," and claimed that the very existence of German hunger made the United States "guilty of worse atrocities than ever were perpetuated by

[97] "Die Haushaltungsschulen und der Krieg," BArch R 3601/533.

[98] Cited in Hans Erich Volkmann, "Landwirtschaft und Ernährung in Hitlers Europa, 1939–45," in *Das Russlandbild*, ed. Volkmann, 9.

[99] S. Eberhard von der Decken, "Die Front gegen den Hunger. Ernährungskrieg 1939/43," *Gemeinschaftsverflegung mit Volksernährung*, no. 15 (August 1944).

[100] "Die Kartensätze im Weltkrieg 1915–1918," BArch R 43II/613.

Turks."[101] In a scathing essay from May 1920, a Professor W. Foster warned the American public of the very real dangers posed by the German food crisis, which promised to produce "an entirely new type of terrible degeneration in which the individual becomes scarcely responsible for his words and actions . . . present-day Germans are a soil for any sort of senseless idea or moral epidemic."[102] In fact, the primary concern of these aid workers was the specific epidemic of communism. The central premise of American charity programs was the conviction that, more than anything else, feeding German civilians "effectively fights against the spread of Bolshevism."[103]

This combination of fear of communism and empathy with German civilians shaped American food-aid programs during and after World War I. Twenty years later, Hoover again took up the cause of feeding Europe's hungry, and again focused particular attention on the plight of Germany. The food-relief programs that had existed in Germany during the early Weimar Republic provided a template for a politicized and emotive interpretation of a specifically German hunger. Hoover's earlier success at linking Bolshevism with European hunger proved easy to adapt to the new threats of World War II. As early as 1940, Hoover had begun organizing feeding programs for European countries specifically because of his conviction that hunger and "totalitarianism" were inextricably intertwined. Hunger had the ability to pave the way for the spread of "Nazism, communism or any other ism" throughout Europe.[104] A report released in March 1941 by the Hoover-led National Committee on Food for the Small Democracies warned that citizens of western Europe "are reliably reported to be growing 'so tired' through undernourishment that the Germans are easily converting them en masse to Nazism."[105] Hunger was cast as the source of totalitarianism rather than simply of Bolshevism, a shift that allowed for the elision of communism and Nazism. This change in turn ensured that Germany would become the logical focal point of international concern after the war. After Germany's surrender, Allied fear of a resurgence of Nazism was tremendous. Almost as great was America's fear of a "Bolshevization" of Germany. Military Governor of the U.S. Zone General Lucius Clay warned that "there is no choice between becoming a communist on 1,500 calories and a believer in democracy on 1,000 calories."[106] By linking specific political and economic ideologies with hunger,

[101] "The Degradation of the Germans," Friends' War Victims' Relief Committee Records, Box no. 2, Hoover Institution Archives.

[102] "Starving German Nation," Friends' War Victims' Relief Committee Records, Box no. 2, Hoover Institution Archives.

[103] "Fragen an den Reichspräsidenten," BArch R 43I/1270.

[104] "Synopsis of Pros and Cons," National Committee on Food for the Small Democracies Records, Box no. 27, Hoover Institution Archives.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Cited in Trittel, *Hunger und Politik*, 49.

Hoover and other western aid workers effectively advocated for the prioritization of German hunger above other less frightening but often more medically pressing hungers.

Profoundly influenced by these fears, Allied advocates for increasing food rations in Germany assumed that the damage inflicted by a well-fed population paled against the potential threat of a hungry one. In August 1946, the British Zone Review warned its readers that "not only have twelve years of Nazi propaganda retracted the Germans' thinking capacity, but they are now hungry, and hungry men cannot think normally."[107] U.S. government reports on the state of occupied Germany warned that "hunger stupefies minds of people, and only animal urges remain," leaving postwar Germans in "a generally psychopathological state."[108] The very proximity of Germans to the Holocaust and the horrors of their concentration camps gave their hunger particular political resonance. American and British philanthropists deliberately used the language of Nazi Germany's genocidal policies against Europe's Jews to plea for increased rations for the German civilian population. American OSS analyst William Langer declared that "America has become an accomplice in one of the most staggering crimes ever committed against humanity."[109] Eisenhower demanded an improvement in the feeding of German civilians, warning of the consequences of having "the American flag flying over nation-wide Buchenwalds," while Dwight McDonald claimed with disturbing hyperbole that "the Nazis were less hypocritical. When they decided to kill the Jews of Europe, they organized mass executions by gas chambers."[110]

Within two years of Germany's capitulation, widespread and outraged rejection of German hunger had been replaced by sympathetic descriptions of hungry blond children and pretty young women begging for chocolate. American newspapers ran ads exhorting their readers to donate to European and especially German civilians: "Only food will save them . . . Send them help with these nourishing food parcels. Do it today!"[111] Indeed, the vast majority of food packages that American civilians sent to Europe went to Germany.[112] Pro-German propaganda in the United States and Britain ran parallel to increasingly positive relationships between western occupation forces and

[107] Cited in Johannes-Dieter Steinert, *Nach Holocaust und Zwangsarbeit. Britische humanitäre Hilfe in Deutschland: Die Helfer, die Befreiten und die Deutschen* (Osnabrück: Secolo, 2007), 152.

[108] William Langer, *The Famine in Germany* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946), 23.

[109] Ibid., 9.

[110] Cited in Amy Bentley, *Eating for Victory: Food Rationing and the Politics of Domesticity* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 150. Dwight Macdonald, *Shall Europe Starve?* (New York: Politics, 1945), 10.

[111] "Die Brücke der Menschlichkeit. Ausländische Liebesgabensendungen für US-Zone," BArch R 86/3585.

[112] Sommer, *Humanitäre Auslandshilfe.*

German civilians, who increasingly seemed more courteous, attractive, and civilized than former camp inmates. The British media began running highly sympathetic reports of the struggle for daily life in Germany, successfully pushing for changes in food policy that would increase rations to all German civilians regardless of previous political activity.[113] Post-Nazi Germany became the perfect testing ground for making hunger apolitical. Western Allies ceased seeing Germans as a diseased people infected with the guilt of murdering millions, and instead as suffering from a hunger that linked them to those same millions.[114]

Conclusion

The end of World War II was experienced by most Germans as a *Zusammenbruch*, a total and devastating collapse. In the aftermath of the war and the Holocaust, the German past had been officially gutted of all positive force, leaving a population without a center and with empty bellies. This emptiness, however, also offered Germans a remarkable opportunity; hunger transformed their melting-away flesh into an embodied version of the *Stunde Null* (Zero Hour.) The end of the war was a moment and a place primed to recognize, fear, and empathize with starvation. The use of hunger as a weapon by both Axis and Allied forces during the war, the unprecedented scale of wartime hunger and civilian famine, dramatic drops in agricultural productivity, and a shift away from colonial and toward globalized trade relations all meant that the Allied forces had been predicting massive postwar hunger since the early days of the war. At the same time, a widespread belief that hunger caused political unrest and revolution, and that it was a key factor in the rise of Nazism, meant that German hunger attracted international attention and, eventually, sympathy.

German men and women in all four zones experienced collective and individual hunger as inseparable from military defeat, reconstruction, denazification, and democratization, the processes that marked these years as the transition from a Nazi dictatorship to a capitalist or socialist society. By fixating on their hunger at the expense of other medical, political, and ethical concerns, Germans actively inserted themselves into larger transnational debates over human rights, community development theory, and postwar modernity. Hunger was a visual, medical, and experiential sign, marking Germans variously as victims, non-Nazis, innocent and morally righteous, and as racially and culturally German. Hunger also provided a way for Germans to create a community out of a defeated and divided nation, forging continuity with a shared past within an ethically appropriate and internationally acceptable framework. In their own hungry bodies, Germans saw an expression of their own limitless suffering; at the same

[113]Steinert, *Nach Holocaust und Zwangsarbeit*, 148.
[114]Ivo Geikie-Cobb, *Germany: Disease and Treatment* (London: Hutchinson, 1945), 132.

time, connections to Nazism and the horrors of the war melted away with any and all excess flesh.

The years of occupation are still most commonly known in Germany as the *Hungerjahre*. No single feature defines the transition from World War to Cold War, or from Nazism to Capitalism (in the FRG) and Communism (in the GDR) more than that of widespread hunger. Mass hunger has shaped both popular and academic writings on postwar Germany, explaining successes and failures, and is understood as shaping those who lived through the time in crucial ways. The integration of postwar German hunger into the standard narrative of defeat, occupation, and reconstruction was, however, neither inevitable nor uncontested. By tracing three primary vectors along which debates over German hunger took place, this article has shown that hunger is not something that is simply present or absent in a given society at a given time. The sheer number of voices debating the meaning of hunger, rather than the presence of hunger per se, set occupied Germany apart. Particularly striking is the fact that German civilians were successful in defining their own status in the eyes of the Allies and most of the world. Despite countering assertions by Allied medical authorities, German communists, and Jewish Displaced Persons, German civilian hunger came to absorb the imagination of the postwar world. This success, I argue, was due to a shift away from emphasizing the past and present realities of this hunger and toward a nearly exclusive focus on the future, political consequences of hunger for the world at large. This hunger ironically acquired its particular power in the postwar moment precisely because of the terrifying German past and the weight of German guilt.

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