**Feeding Germany:**

**Food, Land, and the Social Question in Modern Germany, 1871-1923**

**By Carolyn Taratko, 2018 Hunt Fellowship**

The 2018 Hunt Fellowship allowed me to conduct research in Germany that focuses on the development of the idea of food security between 1871 and 1923. My work examines how advances in scientific understanding in nutritional and agricultural sciences tracked alongside political and economic developments to imbue this concept with particular significance in modern Germany. I explore the cultural, social, and environmental dimensions of food and especially the discourse surrounding alimentary scarcity in late nineteenth- and early twentieth- century Germany. Through this research, I hoped to supplement the archival foundations of my project with new sources. In particular, this trip provided an opportunity to complete my research at the Bundesarchiv sites in Berlin and Koblenz and to consulting holdings at two new archives in Dresden and Hohenheim. These latter two sites allowed me to incorporate research beyond the purview of government and ministerial bodies, which have largely formed the focus of my research thus far. I was able to visit these archival sites across Germany and acquire new information to help me to flesh out the final chapters of my dissertation. This research was conducted within the framework of my dissertation, which explores how the concept of scarcity, and particularly anxieties related to food, evolved over the first decades of the twentieth century.

Much of what I found relates to the second part of my dissertation, in which I show how nutritional science functioned as a conceptual tool linking the health of the individual body to the health of the nation. While we often think about nutritional science as providing useful tools for thinking about the health of the individual body, or for aggregate publics, it was also used to make decisions about agricultural priorities. I argue that nutritional science was not just a biopolitical project of reforming bodies, but a geopolitical one of reinforcing sovereignty through control of foodways. Thus, I see the work of founding postwar agricultural settlements, which formed the focus of much of the documentation I consulted during my trip, as a direct response to the crisis of legitimacy and fraught political landscape of the early Weimar years.

My work was carried out at four main archives. My first stop was the Bundesarchiv in Berlin (January 15-February 1), where I spent two weeks consulting files related to agricultural improvement and internal colonization efforts during the 1920s. Internal colonization referred to a range of projects that involved settling previously unsettled land, often by redeeming stretches of land through irrigation and fertilization to bring them under cultivation. Such projects had been undertaken at various points throughout German history. In fact, the legacy of the internal colonization projects of Friedrich the Great acted as a sort of founding myth that later, twentieth-century promoters leveraged to enlist support for their activities. Though the history of internal colonization is a long one, the devastation of World War I the conclusion of the peace in 1919 generated renewed enthusiasm for such ideas. Germany emerged from World War I a broken nation. Military defeat, mass casualties, years of chronic shortages, revolutionary violence, and regime change drew out the transition to “peace.” The new Weimar government set to work trying to rehabilitate the hobbled economy while still stabilizing and attempting to stave off a crisis of legitimacy. The four and a half years during which Germany had been alienated from international trade and operating with an economy totally oriented towards sustaining the war effort defied easy remedy. Engineering a solution for the shortages of food, but also other basic materials including fabrics and building materials, assumedoutsized importance in early political discussions.1 Not only were these items essential to rebuilding the country and fortifying its citizens, but food security was widely recognized as essential to morale.

Somewhat surprisingly, internal colonization projects were floated as a solution to almost all of the problems mentioned above. The files I consulted speak to the promise of internal colonization efforts to offset the worst effects of the war and to put Germany on a path to a food independent future. This entailed a “re-agararization” of Germany which was to take place at multiple scales. While past generations of internal colonization boosters often underscored its importance for enhancing human capital by moving people out of the unhealthy, immoral cities and into the countryside, by contrast supporters of the postwar projects placed a heavy emphasis on the benefit of these projects for reestablishing German food security and economic autonomy.

The Bundesarchiv holds the files of press clippings kept by the Bund der Landwirte, a powerful agrarian interest group whose interests were well represented in parliament. These clippings treat certain themes over a given period of time and create a condensed view of popular opinion from a variety of outlets. Newspapers heightened the hysteria. In one article, “The Loss of Food through the Terms of the Peace,” published in the *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, a conservative leaning daily newspaper, the author published the Statistical Office’s estimates. Enumerating the lost territories in East Prussia, West Prussia, Posen, Silesia and the Rhine Province, the paper reprinted the figures crop by crop.2 Wheat, rye, barley, potatoes, legumes– all the staples–appeared in both *Doppelzentner* and percentages, and made the consequences of the peace intelligible for citizens who previously had little interest in agricultural yields.3 The article continued, drawing together these projected crop losses with mounting population pressure:

The Entente mocks us by saying that these losses of foodstuffs are offset by the fact that we have six million inhabitants fewer to feed with reference to the residents of these separated territories. But this logic is totally flawed, since these territories are agricultural surplus areas, from which the population of many other receiving areas must be fed. Additionally, we expect that a large number of the residents of these lost territories will return to their Heimat, and out of love for the German Fatherland, will try to eke out a new existence on what German land that remains so that they might not fall under the yoke of oppressive foreign governments. These figures presented above are very helpful, they show us emphatically that the loss of these territories, aside from their political significance, will considerably worsen our economic lives.4

The calculus presented here is emblematic of a shift in thinking occasioned by the terms of the peace treaty. Instead of thinking of territory solely in terms of areal loss, Germans came to imagine land in terms of quantities of food that might have assuaged the hunger of the long- suffering population. Publications like the *Tageszeitung* reinforced and promoted this version of a twentieth-century Malthusian trap, popularizing “academically” generated knowledge within economics and fusing it with the legacy of hunger that Germans had faced during the war.

I found many files that spoke to Germany’s challenges in growing and importing food in the early 1920’s. In these years, food security became intimately linked with population politics. Consulting documents from the newly reorganized Reichsministerium für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft also emphasized how the problem of adequate nutrition became one of German agricultural production. Previously, there had been no nation-wide body for administering to food and agriculture. While individual states had their own ministries of agriculture, a coherent, nation-wide ministry was only created out of the remnants of the wartime food organization. In this way, food and nutrition moved from being a somewhat marginal issue, important only to social reformers with concerns about hygiene and health, to the mainstream of governmental duties. The documents I consulted in Berlin will help supplement my chapter on internal colonization and underpin one of my key arguments about the centrality of food security to German domestic policy in the interwar years.

Following my time in Berlin, I traveled to Dresden, where I visited the Hauptstaatsarchiv and Archive of the Hygiene Museum (Feb 2-7). Here my research focused on files related to the International Hygiene Exhibition held in Dresden in 1911. The exhibit drew over five million visitors and provided the foundation for the German Hygiene Museum, founded in 1912 and still standing today. In particular, the meetings and exhibitions dealing with themes in nutritional science drew my attention. Nutrition was seen as an integral part of hygiene, but one that received relatively recent attention of the scientific community. In the foreword to the exhibition catalog welcoming visitors, the organizers recalled that ancient prescriptions on food were accomplished through religious or lay laws, but in modern times these had been forgotten. The paradox of Germany’s economic dynamism over the past decades, they wrote, was that this knowledge which formed the basis for the happiness and welfare of the people had disappeared.

One particularly interesting feature of the exhibition was its reliance on statistics as a means of communicating with the public. As a well-attended event open to both specialists and the public, the reliance on statistics is striking. Detailed presentations of bodily inputs, broken down in terms of calories and macronutrients for different populations around the world were displayed prominently in this section. These statistical snapshots of the bodily economy communicated confidence that specialists could in fact ascertain and prescribe a diet tailored to an individual’s energetic and cultural needs. While numerical presentations affirmed the position of nutrition among the sciences, more creative demonstrations of the relevance and the practicality existed. For example, in Room III, an exhibit on “Nutrition” featured an installation showing all of the food the average man would consume in a single year. The likeness of certain products, like grains and cheese, were displayed to communicate the full dimension of human food needs. An accompanying chart supplied detail on the quantities consumed. This display was not oriented just towards communicating the needs of the individual body, but was also used to scale up and show visitors how much the nation needed in order to thrive.

Another theme that surfaced in the material surrounding the 1911 exhibition was the global orientation of nutrition, and food, research. The exhibition was not just a display about Europe: it had an explicitly colonial bent. The Hamburg Kolonial Institut and the Institut für Schiff und Tropenkrankheit in Hamburg sponsored an exhibition on tropical diseases. Here they presented findings on the nutrition of natives in the tropics (*Die Ernährung der Eingeborenen in den Tropen*) using photographs, samples, and statistics. Medical doctors across Africa and Asia compared their findings on deficiency diseases, such as beri beri and scurvy. While they were interested in the mechanisms behind these diseases, their accounts fit into a larger civilizational narrative. This narrative followed the basic contours that follow: essentially, Europeans, who inhabited temperate zones, were more refined and balanced in their diets. While more “primitive peoples” (Naturvölker) relied on one-sided diets, Europeans had devised ways of managing g their diets to incorporate various groups. Their inherently “higher” civilizational standing meant that they effectively managed diets and were largely unaffected by the diseases of the global south.

The final site for my planned research was the Archiv der deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft in Bonn (Feb 7-10). These files proved less relevant and more meager than I had hoped, so after three days I decided to tag on a trip to Hohenheim (Feb 10-17), just outside of Stuttgart, where I could consult the university archive there. Hohenheim was the site of the premier agricultural university (Landwirtschaftliche Hochschule Hohenheim) from the late nineteenth century on. Hohenheim’s function as a central contact point for German agricultural experts working all over the globe helped me to flesh out the transnational dimensions of my project. In particular, the papers of Adolf Münzinger, a German agronomist who held a professorship at Hohenheim from 1922, were particularly illuminating. Münzinger’s career ranged across different fields of agricultural expertise, but after several years spent managing large estates in Czech lands and Hungary, he returned to his native southwest Germany and became a leading observer of German agriculture. The German southwest was characterized by small farms, and so Münzinger took up problems of efficiency on these sites. After World War I, the fate of these farms was viewed by many agronomists and politicians as the key to national recovery in two senses: first, to solve the immediate postwar food shortages; and second, to reestablish the nation’s economy on an agrarian basis, as mentioned above.

One particularly interesting feature of his work that I encountered in the university’s archive was Münzinger’s engagement in the project of a model village in Häusern, Württemberg. This small farming community was the site of an innovative experiment in agricultural modernization. The machinery was subsidized by the Reichskuratorium für Technik in der Landwirtschaft and a local electricity company, which involved the purchase of costly machinery including tractors, washing machines, and canning equipment to be put at the disposal of villagers. These machines were available to each inhabitant with the aim of greatly reducing the hours of labor and physical burden of agrarian life. The other aim, of course, was to stem flight from the land and make the community largely self-sufficient, and thus resilient. After the prolonged economic crisis of the early 20s and then the subsequent crash of 29, a high degree of independence from national and international market appeared especially desirable.

These plans for self-sufficiency differed noticeably from pre-war ones along two dimensions. First, there is a growing concern with farm management, rather than the application of agricultural sciences and techniques. Increasingly, the success of a farm was judged to be the effect of management in personnel decisions and leadership styles, rather Germany and became a leading observer of German agriculture. The German southwest was characterized by small farms, and so Münzinger took up problems of efficiency on these sites. After World War I, the fate of these farms was viewed by many agronomists and politicians as the key to national recovery in two senses: first, to solve the immediate postwar food shortages; and second, to reestablish the nation’s economy on an agrarian basis, as mentioned above.

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The final site I visited was the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz (Feb 17-21). The main motivation for coming here was to consult the papers of Max Sering, a prominent agronomist and head of the Deutsches Forschungsinstitut für Agrar- und Siedlungswesen founded in 1922. Sering was well-regarded as a professor at the university in Berlin and also provided his expertise to the government before and after the war. In 1919, he was part of the committee formed by the provisional government to address Germany’s food and agriculture crisis and remained influential until 1933. The activity of this committee has often been overlooked by historians, but it shows how fundamental the issue of food security was to the re-founding of the German state. I was able to consult minutes and correspondence of the committee. In contrast to someone like Münzinger, whose work focused on small farming in the region of southwest Germany, Sering had a more national focus. In his view, through a mix of small, medium-sized farms with larger estates Germany would best be able to make itself resilient. Sering’s papers will help me develop my argument about the way that control over Germany’s food supply formed a crucial part of postwar concepts of both state responsibility and sovereignty.

All told, this trip allowed to me to consult and photograph material so that I can bring the project to its conclusion and complete my dissertation in 2019. The Hunt Fellowship supported me by providing time and funding to collect valuable archival materials that I will incorporate into several chapters of my dissertation. In particular, I was able to conduct much of post-1919 research for my project. Emerging from the catastrophe of World War I, these documents lend insight into how Germans struggled to overcome food scarcity and crisis by transforming resourcefulness into a national virtue. In doing so, they mobilized claims about the promise of science, and especially scientific agriculture, to pave the way to future bounty. I am very grateful to the American Council on Germany for providing me with this funding and supporting my project at such a crucial stage.

1 On the economic challenges of demobilization, see Gerald Feldman, “Economic and Social Problems of the German Demobilization, 1918–19,” *Journal of Modern History* 47, no. 1 (Mar., 1975): 1–47. On the naiveté of the Reichsernährungsamt in negotiating provisioning at the end of the war, see Wolfgang Eckart, " ‘Schweinemord’ und ‘Kohlrübenwinter’– Hungererfahrungen und Lebensmitteldiktatur, 1914–1918,” *Medizin, Gesellschaft und Geschichte* 31 (2013): 9–31. On the way that food riots in Berlin in 1918 became politicized, see Belinda Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2000); for Freiburg, see Roger Chickering, *The Great War and Urban Life in Germany: Freiburg, 1914–1918* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); for the state of Westphalia, see Anne Roerkohl, *Hungerblockade und Heimatfront: Die kommunale Lebensmittelversorgung in Westfalen während des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1991).

2 “Die Verluste an Nahrungsmitteln durch die Friedensbedingungen,” *Deutsche Tageszeitung* 297 (Jun 21, 1919) in B Arch 86 5418.

3 *Doppelzentner* is a unit of weight equivalent to about 100 kg.

4 “Die Verluste an Nahrungsmitteln durch die Friedensbedingungen,” *Deutsche Tageszeitung* 297 (Jun 21, 1919) in B Arch 86 5418.