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Josep L. Barona, *From Hunger to Malnutrition: The Political Economy of Scientific Knowledge in Europe, 1918-1960* Josep L. Barona, 2012, From Hunger to Malnutrition: The Political Economy of Scientific Knowledge in Europe, 1918-1960, Bruxelles, Peter Lang, 372 p.

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Revue d'Études en Agriculture et Environnement / Volume 95 / Issue 02 / June 2014, pp 259 - 261
DOI: 10.4074/S1966960714012065, Published online: 19 May 2014

Link to this article: http://necplus.eu/abstract_S1966960714012065

How to cite this article:

Tehila Sasson (2014). Revue d'Études en Agriculture et Environnement, 95, pp 259-261
doi:10.4074/S1966960714012065

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Josep L. Barona, 2012, *From Hunger to Malnutrition: The Political Economy of Scientific Knowledge in Europe, 1918-1960*, Bruxelles, Peter Lang, 372 p.

This book joins the growing literature on the international food regime of the mid-twentieth century. Barona explores the rise of nutritional science and argues that between 1914 and 1960 “a significant transition from hunger to malnutrition took place” (p. 327). According to him, the international crisis of the two World Wars gave political, economic and social priority to food availability and the problems of hunger and diet. International organizations like International Labour Organization (ILO) and the League of Nations’ Health Organization became important “international transmitters of new nutritional knowledge” (p. 85). Their studies linked nutrition science to agriculture, the economy and public health. From the 1930s nutritional scientists sought to find an optimum diet and global standard that ensured the maximum efficiency of the individual and the worker. While the origins of the idea of an optimum diet dated to the early twentieth century, Barona argues that it was only in this period that organizations like the ILO made use of it on an international scale. It became the basis for dietary schedules for armies, schoolchildren and prisoners. It also informed schemes like rationing in the 1940s and later agricultural policies. Nutritional science enabled a standardization of both diet and food quality. Hunger was transformed and reclassified: from nutrition deficiency and undernutrition to malnutrition and starvation.

The crisis of the World War II led to new studies that sought to assess the negative effects of war on the nutrition of Europeans. The nutritional experiments in concentration and internment camps became especially important to the development of new knowledge about malnutrition. On one hand, Barona gives the example of the programs introduced by the Nazis between 1942-44, which aimed to identify the cheapest method of supplying the minimal nutrition needed by active laborers in the camps. On the other hand, Barona discusses how internment camps became a large laboratory for clinical research on the relief of malnutrition led by the League of Nations’ Health Organization. The large influx of inmates between 1940 and 1943 helped boost medical program to study the effects famine had on the bodies of men, women and children in those camps and led to the development of the relief diets. The program developed new knowledge of “famine disease”, through the classification of six clinical forms of famines and their mental and physical effects. According to Barona, medical experts responded to famine disease “as if it were not a social problem provoked by living conditions at the internment camps but a sort of epidemic with a purely medical and scientific perspective” (p. 174). The book, however, ignores the experiment and research done in the British and French empires

in the interwar period. In the British case, for example, the diet developed during the Bengal Famine in 1943 (known as the “f-treatment”) became the basis for the relief methods of Bergen-Belsen in 1945. More broadly, the book does not engage with the ways in which nutrition science was “imported” from the colonies to the continent. Historians like David Arnold (1994), for example, have traced a longer history of nutrition study that he identifies as uniquely within the field of colonial medicine, while others such as Danna Simmons (2008) have shown that the World War II brought a properly colonial style of medicine into the metropole. Doctors in wartime Europe employed techniques of coercive selection and human experimentation in large-scale human experiments, following an established colonial model (for example in the beriberi experiments). The European laboratory of the World War II, therefore, was not detached from the experience of empire but in many cases was based on it.

The book’s strength is in mapping post-war international efforts to end world hunger and malnutrition. As Barona shows, the World War II not only influenced nutritional knowledge, but also inspired agricultural and health policies and affected economic, educational and cultural practices. Barona explores the emergence of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and its origins in the International Institute of Agriculture. As he demonstrates, the FAO strove to create a global body to regulate the international food market through programs like the World Food Board. After these failed, the FAO turned in the 1950s to focus on creating the best conditions for technical relief through the World Food Surveys. These surveys compared and examined the nutritional values of food production and food consumption in world populations, and suggested how to improve nutritional quality rather than merely increase total food supplies. The FAO also conducted similar surveys on the State of Food and Agriculture in Europe, which focused not only on the resources available to stimulate agriculture, improve efficiency and establish channels for food trade, but also improve available foodstuffs with nutritional value. As Barona argues, a global mentality emerged and included the belief that “better-off countries must assist the comparatively poor nations, not merely for humanitarian reasons, but also to safeguard their own living standards” (p. 260). The Joint FAO/WHO Nutrition Committees were one type of such planning, designed to raise level of nutritional education in order to improve nutritional standards.

While the book offers a good survey to the international nutritional schemes led by organizations such as the FAO, it still neglects to account for similar development programs that imperial administrators and experts had initiated in the interwar period and developed in the period of decolonization. Research led by FAO committees on kwashiorkor, for example, clearly examined the emergence as well as the effects of the disease in non-European, colonial and postcolonial territories. It is sometimes unclear what the focus of Barona’s inquiry is, and whether the book is targeted at telling a European or an international story about nutrition. The book often moves between

national, international and European scales, yet fails to provide a clear explanation of how national governments like the United Kingdom (in the case of communal feeding and rationing) and their empires contributed to the rise of the new food regime. While Barona argues that hunger and malnutrition “transformed the European population into a vast laboratory” (p. 328), it is not clear how nutritional experiments in the empire before and after the war influenced Europe in return. Similarly the reader is left wondering why Barona chose to end his story in 1960, when clearly many of these nutritional committees carried their work into the development decade of the 1960s and in the context of the Cold War and decolonization. The international food regime of the mid-twentieth century had a much more complicated relationship to imperial and national food regimes than what Barona accounts for.

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