

Hartmann, Heinrich: *Der Volkskörper bei der Musterung. Militärstatistik und Anfänge der Demographie in Europa vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg*. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag 2011. ISBN: 978-3-8353-0835-0; 259 S.

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As Joshua S. Goldstein puts it, 'killing in war does not come naturally for either [men or women]. Yet the potential for war has been universal in human societies. Across cultures and through time, the selection of men as potential combatants (and of women for feminine war support roles) has helped shape the war system'.<sup>1</sup> Heinrich Hartmann in „Der Volkskörper bei der Musterung“ – which elaborates on a growing number of studies on gender, universal conscription, the nation, racism and war in the later half of the long nineteenth century – concentrates precisely on this aspect. That is, he literally analyses the role and implications of gathering and selecting ('musterung in') male European recruits.

The mid 1870s to 1914 is, as Hartmann points out in various contexts, among other things, a time of intensive 'measuring' by (male) professionals: geographers, demographers, engineers, physicians, statisticians, etc. That such measuring may be put to use or, if you will, instrumentalized by scientists and bureaucrats alike, is nothing new; what is understudied, however, is precisely how and to what extent it is done. Based on solid archival research as well as a quite comprehensive use of primary literature (especially papers given at international conferences or essays in specialised journals) as well as secondary literature, Hartmann is able to demonstrate developing interactions between (and also within) the war ministries and civilian society, and in particular between military and civilian scholars and civil servants. What he finds on local, regional and European levels among military doctors and practicing statisticians, for example, is collegiality, competition, and outright rivalry.

After a general, largely theoretical introduction to the subject matter, Hartmann takes up the role of mostly European statisticians and demographers, who especially in the

early days of so-called international congress 'hopping' tended to represent themselves and share their knowledge 'as if national borders did not exist' (p. 19) – nor, one might add, the memory of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. For example, statistical experts would attend conferences in Berlin, St. Petersburg or Budapest and intensively discuss comparative sickness records („Krankenstatistiken“) in European armies (p. 74). Towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, with rising waves of militarism and nationalism, such open exchanges of data became more infrequent.

From the 'worm's' view, the reader is introduced to the annual springtime physical examinations – mostly unpleasant for all involved: large numbers of conscripted young men who have never had to undress in front of a stranger before; families who try to buy their sons out of service; local bureaucrats, who feel coerced to free up (mostly inadequate) space and financial resources; doctors (half military, half civilian), who consider the process beneath their level of professionalism or else express dismay at raised statistical expectations, notwithstanding poor facilities and ambiguous criteria and standards.<sup>2</sup> Those doing the checking were soon required to look beyond the body (for example eyesight, goiter, broadness of chest, flatfeet) towards the psyche (for example nervousness, mental illness or suicidal leanings). Likewise, as nation-states became colonizers, interest in hygiene and combating disease (malaria, typhus, etc.) on the home front increased. Significantly, as Hartmann writes, the status of the military physician in much of Europe changed from the late 1860s to 1900 from that of a cog in the military hierarchy to that of an independent military professional; their part in mustering in fresh recruits was of central importance (p. 114).

Based on these examinations, as Hartmann carefully points out – in my view his best chapters – state officials (willingly or not)

<sup>1</sup> Joshua S. Goldstein, *War and gender. How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa*, Cambridge 2001, p. 9 (emphasis added).

<sup>2</sup> During the First World War, as recent research has shown, psychosomatic debates would continue, often leading to heated conflicts between front-line army medics and their superiors on the home front.

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had collected data on some of the pressing social issues of their time: declining birth rates (of particular importance in Great Britain and France, as discussed by Jacques Bertillon, among others); on the potentials and failings of an industrializing state that was turning peasants into proletarians (for example heated debates led by Max Sering, Lujo Brentano and the lesser known but influential Robert René Kuczynski); on the significance of a fit physique in boys and girls in general, and in a paramilitary sense in particular. Gradually, institutional military perspectives took precedence over academic ones (p. 51), which led at times to scientists distancing themselves from the former.

Hartmann's wide-ranging study, in short, makes for a readable and refreshingly jargon-free addition to new military history.<sup>3</sup> Rather than concentrate on the body or ethnicity or actions of soldiers, officers and strategists (especially during wartime), the author manages to carefully untangle peacetime institutional resources that were employed – especially in France, Germany and Switzerland – to ensure that the nation's 'warrior' was fit for war. It is a successful comparative European history of military ideas, statistics (or the lack thereof) and professional scientific discourse.

My critique is thus minor. For instance, Hartmann articulates sound reasons for choosing to concentrate on France, Germany and Switzerland, not least in that these countries have the most records available (p. 21). Yet Austria-Hungary (discussions of which are largely restricted to essays in the journal „Der Militärarzt“) and Russia have comparable amounts, and the inclusion of at least one of these Great Powers would have enriched the study and undoubtedly increased its benefit to eastern European scholars. I also think a clear definition of 'transnationalism' would have strengthened those many passages in which the term is put forward. Finally, more might have been explored in the exchanges between military physicians and the few peace advocates cursorily mentioned: for example Rudolf Goldscheid (a close collaborator after all of Alfred H. Fried's prominent peace journal „Friedens-Warte“) or the Carnegie Foundation. Likewise, not least after Florence Nightingale's

praiseworthy contributions were established (pp. 68-74), I wondered why the International Committee of the Red Cross (as an institution or personified by any of its national leaders) was absent from the analysis.

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<sup>3</sup> Hartmann's approach in many ways complements Anson Rabinbach's classic intellectual and social history: Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity*, Berkeley 1992, which the author also cites from time to time.