

the text itself, which is especially problematic since the introductory chapter aims to provide a brief historiography of Jewish resistance in the Netherlands. Naturally, the author is not solely responsible for all these issues, but these low production values detract from what is otherwise an engaging, important history.

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## **The Hunger Winter: Fighting Famine in the Occupied Netherlands, 1944–1945**

**By Ingrid de Zwarte. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. 315. Hardcover \$99.99. ISBN: 978-1108836807.**

Mary Elisabeth Cox

Central European University

The Dutch Hunger Winter at the end of World War II is one of the best-documented accounts of wartime famine and food shortages in the twentieth century. Despite being well-covered in both scholarly and popular literature, there is still a lot to learn about the Hunger Winter, as Ingrid de Zwarte's superb book demonstrates. De Zwarte uses the latest Dutch and international findings to place the Hunger Winter squarely within current medical, social, and economic understandings of famine. Her findings suggest that the Dutch Hunger Winter qualified as an early-stage famine, when "food shortages result in measurable detrimental effects, but supplies are not yet fully depleted" (8–9). De Zwarte argues convincingly that the crisis was not due to the total absence of food supplies in the country. Rather, she argues that the main issue was one of transportation: getting food from the agricultural areas in the north and east to the western parts of the Netherlands. As a result, her book includes significant, nuanced discussions on the geography and chronology of hunger. De Zwarte also considers those who were most vulnerable to food shortages, especially children, and how society and local Dutch communities helped them. In the process, De Zwarte debunks long-held myths about the Hunger Winter, showing the role that Dutch and Allied governments played in both prolonging and reducing hunger, which she argues was not the sole result of the German occupation.

The Hunger Winter is traditionally considered to include the autumn of 1944 and end with Dutch liberation on May 5, 1945, yet De Zwarte extends her study through the summer of 1945. By doing so, she is able to debunk one of the long-standing myths surrounding the Hunger Winter—that the Dutch people survived thanks to Allied airdrops of food. De Zwarte argues that although the Allies negotiated extensively during the German occupation to relieve hunger, Allied food supplies had only a minor impact on reducing hunger. There was tension between military and humanitarian needs and limits placed on shipping from all sides. While the famous airdrops were politically important to the Allies, they resulted in relatively minor alleviation of the food insecurity endured by the Dutch population. Indeed, it was not until *after* liberation that food from outside the Netherlands was consistently transported into the affected regions. Through the immediate months after the war, in the summer of 1945, the Allies were able to quickly transport massive amounts of food into the Netherlands, ensuring that "famine conditions ended not long after liberation" (163).

If the Allies did not provide much food relief during the crisis, what other food sources did people rely on in the Hunger Winter? De Zwarte answers this question through in-depth analyses of crime, visits of city dwellers to the countryside to supplement meagre household supplies, and ultimately widespread community involvement to help the most vulnerable Dutch citizens.

Black market activities during the German occupation differed by location and over time. Most black markets were located in working-class neighborhoods. As the food crisis worsened in the early months of 1945, clandestine activity and prices increased exponentially. This reflected not only the desperation of hungry civilians, but also the scarcity of foodstuffs on the open market. One example: luxury food items had a steady increase in price during the occupation, but they did not keep pace with the prices of staples as a result of diminished transportation infrastructure during the worst months of the famine. Potatoes, bread, and oatmeal had the highest price increases compared to luxury food items such as butter, cheese, and alcohol. Using recently discovered archival sources of letters containing self-reported prices paid for market goods in 1946, De Zwarte demonstrates the folly of averaging food prices in black markets across location and time with the underlying assumption of homogeneity. The difference in prices between urban and rural areas, for example, was often far greater than previous studies account for.

Though widespread, black markets were too expensive for all but the very wealthy to use regularly, serving more as occasional top-ups for working-class urban people. Instead, with supplies from the state too low to support them, those who were able-bodied enough travelled by foot or bicycle beyond their cities, into agricultural areas, where they could purchase food for themselves and their families. These excursions were done largely at the household level, and both Dutch and German authorities looked the other way at these then-prohibited practices, so long as the food purchased was for the personal use of the travelers and their families. De Zwarte analyses a study published soon after the war that surveyed some 1600 people from Amsterdam, who took so-called “hunger journeys” to surrounding agricultural areas. This analysis suggests that 62% of families in Amsterdam participated in “hunger journeys,” with 13.7 average total journeys made and 42kg of food obtained in each journey. Compared to black markets, De Zwarte concludes that “black-market trade was indeed subordinate to these food expeditions as a strategy to obtain extra-legal food supplies” (183). One reason? Cost. For those who had the physical ability to go to the surrounding agricultural areas, food acquired on these expeditions was much less expensive than supplies purchased on the black market. These findings also question the popular image of Dutch women making the majority of “hunger journeys”: in a record kept by a farmer’s family on visitors who stayed the night, males made up a healthy majority. While only estimates, it is clear that women and men both travelled to obtain food for their households. Such journeys, and the farmers who greeted travelers with warm meals and a place to sleep, support De Zwarte’s argument that food distribution was the main issue. Food was available in agricultural areas, but not in cities.

This book adds new information to the Dutch Hunger Winter of 1944–1945. In the process, Ingrid de Zwarte displays the grace with which the Dutch people responded during this challenging time. It was the combination of state actions that “prioritized maximizing consumption levels rather than official rations” (260), hunger journeys to the countryside that increased food supplies in urban households, and community responses, particularly those that moved children from poorer households to homes and groups with more food, that resulted in relatively few deaths during the crisis. Dutch society did not break down during this challenging time, but instead coalesced, successfully, around feeding the most vulnerable in their communities. *The Hunger Winter* should be required reading for policy makers, non-profit leaders, scholars, and others who are interested in the causes and alleviation of hunger throughout the world.