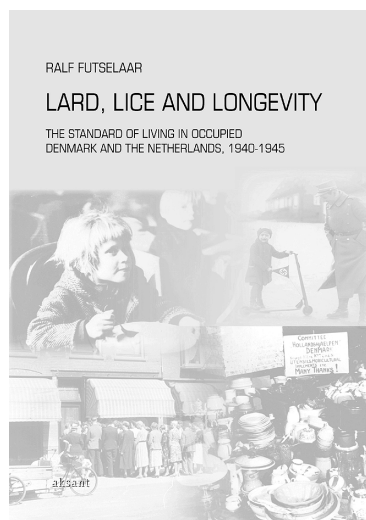


Lard lice and Longevity -an immodest review by the author himself.

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2008 saw the publication of my first book, *Lard, Lice, and Longevity. The Standard of Living in Occupied Denmark and the Netherlands*. This is, understandably I think, a happy occasion, but the book is regrettably not likely to become a bestseller. The subject matter of public health and household economics in two relatively small European countries hardly has global relevance. Nevertheless, I believe it has redeeming features that could make it interesting to historians and other social scientists worldwide.

The Second World War had a great impact on the role of (national) governments in societies in Europe, and in several countries in Asia and America. As Klausen (1998) and others have argued, the waging of war, or even the disruption caused by a war being waged nearby, necessitated states to appropriate a vastly greater part of economic production, and to introduce intrusive controls over production, patterns of consumption, and allocation of resources. In so doing, states became larger and, to thicken the argument almost to the point of parody, came several steps closer to the modern welfare state. The appropriation of economic power had left postwar Western Europe with an economic responsibility to care for its citizens.

The introduction of such measures as rationing, price controls, and other restrictions, had been investigated, in several countries, from a policy perspective. This is highly relevant from a historical point of view, because in many countries legal and institutional continuity into the postwar period proved considerable. But public policies should not be evaluated as institutional constructs alone. From the perspective of a social historian, it is the outcome of policies in society that matters, and that is what this book investigates.

A straightforward comparison lay at the basis of the investigation; the fact that while superficially facing very similar problems and coming up with almost the same solutions, Danish and Dutch public health developed in entirely divergent ways. More precisely, while the Danes appeared to be getting healthier in every year of the war, the Dutch suffered a marked decline of, especially child mortality. Something undermined the health of the Dutch, that did not undermine that of the Danes. But what?

Finding out proved much more difficult than initially thought. To measure the biological standard of living in the country, a reasonably accurate reconstruction of consumption,

for two national populations, was necessary. This seemed simple on the basis of previous literature because, as mentioned above, consumption had come under rigid control, and the archival trail of the policies was extensive. On closer inspection, however, it proved much difficult because the beneficiaries of these policies systematically and often fraudulently strove to adapt them to their needs, aggravating civil servants and corrupting historical data.

Little is as annoying to people, it appears, as living on a ration. They are time consuming to administer, and they reduce budgetary flexibility. In this investigation, I found that the procrustean bed of the ration in caused problems for the rich, who could not buy enough to spend their money and become extremely liquid, and for the poor who found the pattern of consumption forced upon them was too expensive. In both Denmark and the Netherlands this contributed to a lucrative and thriving black market.

It was not, by the way, the black market that had a disastrous effect on the health of the Dutch, but the content of their diet -a rather technical shortcoming that revealed itself late in the investigation. It was not a policy failure that had caused the risen mortality rates in the Netherlands. In fact, with regard to economic allocation, the two countries proved to be very similar.

The conclusions of this book are interesting for those involved in the history of nutrition, and for those interested in the history of the German occupation of North-Western Europe. As I said, this will not in all likelihood make it a bestseller. Neither, I am afraid, will its more innovative attempt to dig below the ordered statistics of government interventions to investigate the strategies of families and their impact on the long-term development of policy and society. But it is this second aspect of the book, I think and hope, that may make it an interesting read to scholars in other disciplines, even those interested in other subjects than war, and other countries than Denmark and the Netherlands.

Klausen, J. 1998, *War and Welfare: europe and the United States, 1945 to the Present*. (Basingstoke: Macmillan).

Futselaar, R. 2008, *Lard, lice and longevity. The standard of living in occupied Denmark and the Netherlands, 1940-1945* (Amsterdam: Aksant).