
Introduction: World Wars and Population Displacement in Europe in the Twentieth Century

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This special issue of *Contemporary European History* is devoted to the impact of the two world wars on civilian population displacement in Europe. Each contributor has brought fresh material to bear on specific instances of involuntary migration that are either unfamiliar or poorly understood. The contributors seek to establish the origins of population displacement and the assistance provided by governments, non-government organisations and individuals and, where possible, also to reflect on the ways in which displacement was understood both at the time and subsequently.

Four developments, three geopolitical and one conceptual, help to explain the upsurge of interest in war and forced migration. Geopolitical factors are the collapse of communism in Europe, the efflorescence of ‘new wars’ and the growth in the number of refugees. The end of communist domination in eastern Europe afforded unprecedented scope for discussion and commemoration of deportations in the Soviet bloc. This was not just a matter of gaining access to hitherto closed archives, although this certainly facilitated research. Particularly contentious was the memory of the Stalin-era deportations – brutal episodes whose legacy continues to fuel political conflict. As recent work has made clear, the practice of deporting national minorities did not originate with the Second World War, but the war provided the pretext for a more concerted and aggressive programme to ‘punish’ entire communities on grounds of their supposed disloyalty. Historians have begun to pay attention to the enduring echoes of these and other forced migrations in modern memory.¹

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¹ Terry Martin, ‘The Origins of Soviet Ethnic Cleansing’, *Journal of Modern History*, 70, 4 (1998), 813–61; Brian Glyn Williams, ‘Commemorating ‘the Deportation’ in Post-Soviet Chechnya’, *History and Memory*, 12, 1 (2000), 101–34; Philipp Ther and Ana Siljak, eds., *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944–1948* (Oxford: Rowman, 2001), Norman Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001); Pamela

According to Mary Kaldor, 'new wars' have been distinguished by their deliberate targeting of civilians. In this interpretation, refugees are not the unfortunate by-product of warfare but rather a key resource, whether as potential combatants or as the object of humanitarian aid that can be siphoned off by military leaders in order to fuel the conflict further. To be sure, the argument overlooks the emergence of paramilitary forces during the two world wars, but it has the merit of highlighting the sometimes disturbing connection between population displacement and humanitarianism. For example, in Cambodia the Khmer Rouge were able to 'tax' food aid after it had reached the refugees for whom it was destined, and Hutu militias in Congolese refugee camps inflated the size of the displaced population in order to secure additional resources from aid agencies.²

The growth of the refugee population during the last quarter of the twentieth century has also made an impact on the historiography.³ Social scientists have produced important work in this field as they seek to understand the growth in numbers and the forms and efficacy of assistance and 'durable solutions' promoted by international bodies such as the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Social anthropologists have shown how refugees negotiated displacement in difficult circumstances, including wartime, demonstrating a capacity for deliberation and inventiveness in the face of myriad forms of bureaucratic intervention. These findings are at odds with interpretations of refugee inertia. We are now more attuned to the possibility that displaced persons (DPs) operate as agents rather than objects of external intervention – acknowledging at the same time the constraints to which they are subject.⁴

Conceptually, the challenge to 'grand narratives' posed by postmodernism has prompted scholars to examine issues that are otherwise difficult to accommodate within the process of modernisation or class formation. One consequence has been a flurry of research on myriad forms of social behaviour and social movements in the modern world, often associated in a general sense with ideas about transnationalism.⁵ How population displacement might be understood as a cultural phenomenon and as a means of constituting new kinds of identity, and not just as something that is

Ballinger, *History in Exile: Memory and Identity at the Borders of the Balkans* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Greta Lynn Uehling, *Beyond Memory: The Crimean Tatars' Deportation and Return* (London: Palgrave, 2004). Older studies retain their value, for example Aleksandr M. Nekrich, *The Punished Peoples: The Deportation and Fate of Soviet Minorities at the End of the Second World War* (New York: Norton, 1978).

² Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organised Violence in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 98–109; Fiona Terry, *Condemned to Repeat? The Paradox of Humanitarian Action* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 114–25, 175.

³ Michael Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Aristide R. Zolberg, Astri Suhrke and Sergio Aguayo, *Escape from Violence: Conflict and the Refugee Crisis in the Developing World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

⁴ Peter Loizos, *The Heart Grown Bitter: A Chronicle of Cypriot War Refugees* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Roger Zetter, 'Labelling Refugees: Forming and Transforming a Bureaucratic Identity', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 4, 1 (1991), 39–62; Richard Black, 'Fifty Years of Refugee Studies: From Theory to Policy', *International Migration Review*, 35, 1 (2001), 55–76; Elizabeth Colson, 'Forced Migration and the Anthropological Response', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 16, 1 (2003), 1–18.

⁵ John Urry, *Sociology beyond Societies: Mobilities for the Twenty-First Century* (London: Routledge, 2000).

inflicted on refugees, has provided a rich field of study.⁶ Another indicator has been the enormous outpouring of work on diaspora. Several studies have shown just how acute was the connection between war and dispossession in diaspora politics. ‘Victim diasporas’ have helped to mobilise support for war-torn homelands, not only in a material sense but also by helping to disseminate images of a ‘nation’ damaged by invasion and occupation; examples include the Palestinian, Kurdish and Tibetan diasporas.⁷

None of this is to discount earlier contributions made by individual scholars, notably Sir John Hope Simpson, Joseph Schechtman and Eugene Kulischer, all of whom shared an interest in war as a mainspring of population displacement. Simpson (1868–1961) served in the Indian Civil Service before becoming vice-president of the Greek Refugee Settlement Commission in 1926. Subsequently he reported on Jewish settlement in Palestine, warning against large-scale immigration until irrigation could bring more land into cultivation. When his report was shelved, Simpson embarked on missions in China and Newfoundland, Canada. However, his lasting legacy to scholarship was a ‘refugee survey’ conducted under the auspices of the Royal Institute for International Affairs. This massive volume, published in 1939, was primarily concerned with the consequences of the First World War and the Russian Revolution, and with the results of Nazi persecution of German Jews. Simpson urged European states to assist White Russian refugees who remained stranded in China. He held out little hope of resolving the Jewish refugee crisis, given the barriers erected by Nazi Germany on the one hand and potential countries of settlement on the other. But by outlining the possibilities of economic progress in eastern Europe, particularly agricultural improvement, Simpson believed that something might be done to discourage antisemitism and alleviate Jewish poverty, thereby helping to stem the potential outflow of refugees.⁸

For Joseph Schechtman (1891–1970), the author of numerous works on displaced populations in the twentieth century, the Greco-Turkish population exchange of 1923 constituted a vital reference point. In his view the provisions and outcomes of Lausanne validated humane and orderly population transfers as a means of preventing a recurrence of conflict between ethnic minorities and the dominant group.⁹ Like Simpson, he adopted a multidimensional approach in which demography was linked

⁶ Liisa Malkki, ‘National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialisation of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees’, *Cultural Anthropology*, 7, 1 (1992), 24–44; E. Valentine Daniel, ‘The Refugee: A Discourse on Displacement’, in Jeremy MacClancey, ed., *Exotic No More: Anthropology on the Frontlines* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), 270–86.

⁷ Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (London: UCL Press, 1997); Dibyesh Anand, ‘(Re)imagining Nationalism: Identity and Representation in the Tibetan Diaspora of South Asia’, *Contemporary South Asia*, 9, 3 (2000), 271–87; Östen Wahlbeck, ‘The Concept of Diaspora as an Analytical Tool in the Study of Refugee Communities’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 28, 2 (2002), 221–38; André Levy and Alex Weingrod, eds., *Homelands and Diasporas: Holy Lands and Other Places* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

⁸ Sir John Hope Simpson, *The Refugee Problem: Report of a Survey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939).

⁹ For a recent outline of the circumstances in which partition may be justified see Chaim D. Kaufmann, ‘When All Else Fails: Ethnic Population Transfers and Partitions in the Twentieth Century’, *International Security*, 23, 2 (1998), 120–56.

to land, investment and reconstruction. Schechtman concluded that population transfer must be done with ‘careful planning . . . involving not only political, economic and psychological factors, but also such practical considerations as transportation, housing and hygiene’. Transfer must be regarded as ‘preventive’ of discord and supportive of the ‘national interest’; ‘to introduce the idea of good or bad [i.e. punishing behaviour] is a distortion of the basic idea of the transfer scheme. The mere suggestion of guilt degrades the transfer to a deportation.’¹⁰

Eugene Kulischer (1881–1956) interpreted interwar instability in terms of frustrated migration; ‘superfluous’ populations were unable to find an outlet for their labour in western Europe or the world beyond Europe. During the Second World War ‘the primitive way of promoting the passage of migratory currents came to be re-established. Frontiers where each immigrant had once been carefully filtered were crossed by millions whose passports were guns and whose visas were bullets.’ According to Kulischer, Hitler’s invasion of Russia ‘destroyed the dam which had barred the human ocean of Eurasia from the rest of Europe’. Kulischer’s anxieties translated into concern about overpopulation in Germany, following the influx of *Völkische* (‘expellees’), and in eastern Europe. Land reform was one solution, but its effects were vitiated by the large number of ‘claimants’. The solution was to encourage birth control and planned emigration – a ‘TVA of human migratory currents’.¹¹

Kulischer’s Malthusian approach soon went out of fashion, but his emphasis on technocratic intervention enjoyed a longer life.¹² Like Schechtman and Simpson he understood that the land–labour ratio made a difference to the prospects of displaced people. In other words, numbers matter. But arriving at precise estimates of the number of people displaced during the two world wars poses immense difficulties. This is partly to do with problems of statistical registration and categorisation. The Polish demographer Leszek Kosinski claimed that 7.7 million civilians were displaced within Europe during the First World War, but this is certainly an underestimate given the scale of displacement in the Russian empire, where a minimum of six million fled their homes.¹³ The legacy of the war was also expressed in terms of population displacement. Madeleine de Bryas arrived at a figure of 9.5 million refugees in Europe in 1926. They include 1.5 million Greeks and Turks who were exchanged under the

¹⁰ ‘If population transfer is deemed unavoidable, there must be no trace of the collective minority existence left, no stuff for the resurgence of the minority problem. There is no third solution.’ Joseph B. Schechtman, *European Population Transfers 1939–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 468; other quotations taken from 476–8.

¹¹ Eugene Kulischer, *Europe on the Move: War and Population Changes 1917–1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948), 255, 290, 319–25. ‘TVA’ refers to the famous Tennessee Valley Authority created by President Franklin Roosevelt in 1933.

¹² Karl Schlögel, ‘Verschiebebahnhof Europa: Joseph B. Schechtman und Eugene M. Kulischer Pionierarbeiten’, *Zeithistorische Forschungen, Online-Ausgabe*, 2, 3 (2005), available at <http://www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/16126041-Schloegel-3-2005>.

¹³ Leszek Kosinski, *The Population of Europe: A Geographical Perspective* (Harlow: Longman, 1970); Nick Baron and Peter Gatrell, ‘Population Displacement, State-building and Social Identity in the Lands of the Former Russian Empire, 1917–1923’, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 4, 1 (2003), 51–100.

Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, 0.3 million Greeks forced out of Bulgaria, 2 million Polish refugees left in Russia (almost certainly too high), 2 million Russian and Ukrainian refugees, 0.25 million Hungarians and 1 million Germans from Alsace-Lorraine, Schleswig, Poznan, Pomerania, Upper Silesia and the three Baltic states.¹⁴

One estimate of population displacement during the Second World War suggests a total of 40 million, 33 million of whom moved within their own (pre-war) territory. Kulischer calculated that 55 million people were forcibly displaced between 1939 and 1947, some 30 million as a result of the Nazi invasion and the remainder as a consequence of the German defeat.¹⁵

These massive shifts of population were concentrated in east-central Europe. Ewa Morawska suggests that around 80 million eastern Europeans alone were forcibly displaced during the twentieth century, if one takes account of ‘expulsions, deportations, exiles and forcible repatriations, compulsory population transfers and exchanges, panic-stricken flights and induced departures’. Her estimate includes 5 million war refugees (1914–18), 10 million displaced following the war (as a result of redrawn borders and ‘administrative transfers’), 9 million war refugees (1939–45), 11 million deportees (Nazi forced labourers), 25 million displaced following the war (including 20 million transferees, 9 million of them German, 4.5 million repatriated DPs and 1.5 million ‘westbound’ DPs), 12 million Stalin-era deportees and resettled people, 4 million refugees from the Soviet bloc, and around 4 million post-communist refugees (including ethnic Russians moving from the ‘near abroad’).¹⁶

Beyond the issue of magnitude, what is now the appropriate point of departure, so to speak, for understanding the nexus between war and population displacement in Europe during the twentieth century? As the Second World War came to an end in Europe, many German observers found an answer to this question in the moment of pure defeat: 1945 amounted to ‘*die Stunde Null*’. Modris Eksteins also refers to the end of the war as ‘zero hour’.¹⁷ Another point of departure might be the end of the 1950s. When four aspiring British politicians and journalists floated the idea of a ‘World Refugee Year’, they had in mind the so-called ‘hard core’ of DPs who continued to languish in camps and settlements in Germany, Austria and Italy a decade and a half after the end of the war, whose physical condition rendered them ‘unsuitable’ for settlement in a third country. World Refugee Year (1959–60) also drew attention to

¹⁴ Madeleine de Bryas, *Les peuples en marche: les migrations politiques et économiques en Europe depuis la guerre mondiale* (Paris: n. p., 1926), 56. Her estimate overlooked Armenian refugees.

¹⁵ Kulischer, *Europe on the Move*, 302–4; see also Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (London: Allen Lane, 1998), 217–28, for a stimulating modern perspective.

¹⁶ Ewa Morawska, ‘Intended and Unintended Consequences of Forced Migrations: A Neglected Aspect of East Europe's Twentieth Century History’, *International Migration Review*, 34, 4 (2000), 1049–87. See also Malcolm Proudfoot, *European Refugees, 1939–1952: A Study in Forced Population Movement* (London: Faber, 1957), 34; Elfan Rees, ‘The Refugee Problem: Joint Responsibility’, *Annals of the American Association for Political and Social Science*, 329 (1960), 20–1.

¹⁷ Modris Eksteins, *Walking Since Daybreak: A Story of Eastern Europe, World War II, and the Heart of our Century* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999). Other groups had a different understanding of how time ‘stood still’ and when the clock restarted; the key moment for German POWs and their families was the date of their return from Soviet captivity.

the 'penniless elderly Russian refugees' who still remained in Harbin and Shanghai forty years after the Russian Revolution. Thus earlier displacements reverberated long after the end of the two world wars.¹⁸

Adopting a broader chronological perspective invites closer comparisons between the two world wars. One set of comparisons relates to state practices. An exclusive focus on the Second World War will miss the fact that deportation practices were also widespread during the First World War. The Armenian case is well known, but it was not an isolated instance of targeting a population on grounds of ethnicity. Stalin's deportation of the Volga Germans during the Second World War had a counterpart in the Tsarist programme of deportation and expropriation. Similarly the violence inflicted on Crimean Tatars, Chechens, Ingushetians and others for their supposed 'treason' during the 'Great Patriotic War' echoed Tsarist military commanders' enthusiasm for targeting Jews, Poles and Germans as fifth columnists. In each instance the state made no distinction on grounds of age, gender or occupation; these were indiscriminate assaults on entire communities.¹⁹ These organised programmes support the view that population displacement was not a sideshow or a disastrous by-product of war, but a constitutive element in war, a project that states and armies practised as an integral element of conducting war and mobilising society. At the same time, displacement was not uniformly disadvantageous, given that property was simultaneously seized and reassigned.²⁰

How did population displacement become a matter for debate at the time and what considerations informed that debate? To be sure, displacement along the eastern front during the First World War had its primary origins in decisions reached by military commanders on the ground. But on examining the Russian refugee crisis one is struck by the frequency with which many eyewitnesses conceived of civilian displacement as a 'spontaneous' event, discounting state action and minimising the extent to which both flight and destination may have been a calculated choice on the part of the refugees. Characterising displacement as spontaneity had a specific political purpose – it relieved the state of primary responsibility for the crisis. But it had broader repercussions. The recurring discourse of 'spontaneity' construed the refugee as a person who had forfeited his or her self-control, the manifestations of which were variously depicted as crime, prostitution or a generalised loss of self-respect. The antinomy of 'spontaneity' and 'deliberation' was evident in postwar policy. The new Soviet, Polish and Baltic authorities shared a dislike for the 'spontaneous' return of refugees. Whether from humanitarian motives or considerations of public order and political stability there emerged a general tendency for official, semi-official and

¹⁸ United Nations Archives, Geneva, ARR 55/0088 File Box 063; Robert Kee, *Refugee World* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

¹⁹ Peter Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War One* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 85–107.

²⁰ Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign against Enemy Aliens during World War I* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003). States did not bear sole responsibility for displacing civilians; 'local interests' also need to be taken into account. See Mark Mazower, 'Violence and the State in the Twentieth Century', *American Historical Review* 107, 4 (2004), 1158–78.

private bodies to manage the refugee population, specifically to 'screen' refugees in order to minimise the spread of infectious disease and prevent the dissemination of unwelcome political beliefs.²¹ At first glance the refrain of 'spontaneity' might seem to be missing during the Second World War, when there is abundant evidence of organised deportation and planned resettlement, for example when Soviet authorities evacuated civilians from Leningrad and settled them in Central Asia. In practice, however, individuals had a way of acting contrary to official plans. That behaviour persisted when the authorities sought to manage the process of returning civilians once the enemy retreated.²²

Beyond Soviet Russia the end of the war encouraged the management of repatriation and, where this became undesirable or impossible, 'planned resettlement'. DP camps and assembly centres came into their own. As sites of administrative convenience, they were supposed to enable protection, identification, inspection, classification and repatriation to take place. The official historian of the International Refugee Organisation, established in 1946, sang the praises of 'clearly established procedures [and] very exact timing', which in her view characterised its efforts to minimize social, economic and political instability. Governments embarked on programmes for managed migration, such as the schemes for recruiting DPs to the United Kingdom as 'Balt Cygnets' and European Voluntary Workers. Generally speaking the entire system subordinated displaced persons to a grand vision of economic reconstruction, with a 'hard core' left high and dry.²³

Meanwhile the camp was simultaneously a site of inaction. The sociologist Edward Shils wrote of 'a widespread psychological regression, i.e. a collapse of adult norms and standards in speech, behaviour and attitude, and a reversion to less mature patterns', resulting from a loss of 'original community and family connections' as well as material deprivation. He was speaking here of the experience of wartime incarceration, but he went on to suggest that DPs remained apathetic, 'cantankerous' and incapable of 'rational political thought'. He expressed particular concern about children who 'live in hordes and live by marauding . . . they promise to become the new gypsies, undisciplined, untrained, ready for any political disorder and without any sense of communal responsibility'. By this account all refugees were infantilised. The diagnosis of 'DP apathy' retained its respectability, supporting in turn an ethos

²¹ See the contributions in Nick Baron and Peter Gatrell, eds., *Homelands: War, Population and Statehood in the Former Russian Empire, 1918–1924* (London: Anthem Books, 2004).

²² Rebecca Manley, 'The Evacuation and Return of Soviet Civilians, 1941–46', Ph.D. thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 2004. For interwar Soviet preoccupation with spontaneous settlement see David Shearer, 'Elements Near and Alien: Passportisation, Policing and Identity in the Stalinist State, 1932–52', *Journal of Modern History*, 76, 4 (2004), 863.

²³ Louise W. Holborn, *The International Refugee Organization: A Specialized Agency of the United Nations, its History and Work, 1946–1952* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 226, 369, 482; Linda McDowell, *Hard Labour: The Hidden Voices of Latvian Migrant 'Volunteer' Workers* (London: UCL Press, 2005).

of professional assistance. The more helpless, apathetic and dependent refugees were thought to be, the greater the justification for external intervention.²⁴

How these questions have been addressed continues to resonate in refugee studies.²⁵ Ethnographic research by Liisa Malkki showed that displacement disclosed opportunities for new kinds of association and social identity. Hutu refugees from Rwanda in Tanzanian refugee camps embraced a nationalist rhetoric; camp life intensified a sense of Hutu-ness.²⁶ This finding corresponds to what we know of the stance adopted by the Polish and Baltic patriotic intelligentsia in Russia during the First World War and by the next generation, including Ukrainians, in the DP camps following the Second World War. To be sure, it is problematic to assume that a 'refugee voice' can readily be accessed by the social historian. Terence Ranger has called on historians to listen to refugees, but he is well aware of the context in which refugees venture to speak or are compelled to give evidence.²⁷ The Israeli psychotherapist Gadi Ben-Ezer uses in-depth interviews to pinpoint the different meanings that refugees – in this case Ethiopian Jews who were airlifted from Sudan to Israel – assigned to their difficult journey from Ethiopia to Sudan. What emerges was not just a strong sense of danger and risk but also a sense of fulfilment, of the refugee journey as heroic self-realisation, as a struggle that was validated in terms of one's Jewishness. Of course Ben-Ezer could not interview those who did not survive the journey or who were not allowed to embark on it; nevertheless, without denying the evident pain of separation and loss he shows in what circumstances it might be transcended.²⁸

In Pamela Ballinger's recent study of the Istrian marches an exiled woman (*esule*) from Fiume who lived in cramped accommodation in a refugee camp in Trieste after 1945 spoke of 'the tragedy of the war [as] a curious adventure: bombs, fires, alarms and flights to the shelter seemed undecipherable episodes that didn't endanger me but rather made my life more interesting'.²⁹ The experience of displacement could also provide an intense political education. But too much 'adventure' could

²⁴ This is an oversimplified summary of a story that has yet to be told in full. Edward A. Shils, 'Social and Psychological Aspects of Displacement and Repatriation', *Journal of Social Issues*, 2, 3 (1946), 3–18; Eduard Bakis, 'DP Apathy', in H. B. M. Murphy, ed., *Flight and Resettlement* (Paris: UNESCO, 1955), 76–88; Judith Shuval, 'Refugees: Adjustment and Assimilation', in D. Sills, ed., *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, 13 (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 373–7; Charles Zwingmann and Maria Pfister-Ammende, eds., *Uprooting and After* (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1973). For a range of more recent views see Renos K. Papadopoulos, ed., *Therapeutic Care for Refugees: No Place Like Home* (London: Karnac, 2002).

²⁵ Eftihia Voutira and Barbara Harrell-Bond, 'In Search of the Locus of Trust: The Social World of the Refugee Camp', in E. Valentine Daniel and J. C. Knudsen, eds., *Mistrusting Refugees* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 207–24.

²⁶ Liisa Malkki, 'Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization', *Cultural Anthropology*, 11, 3 (1996), 377–404. Compare Marc Sommers, *Fear in Bongoland: Burundi Refugees in Urban Tanzania* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2001).

²⁷ Terence Ranger, 'Studying Repatriation as Part of African Social History', in Tim Allen and Hubert Morsink, eds., *When Refugees Go Home: African Experiences* (London: James Currey, 1994), 279–94.

²⁸ Gadi Ben-Ezer, *The Ethiopian Jewish Exodus: Narratives of the Migration Journey to Israel, 1977–1985* (London: Routledge, 2002).

²⁹ Ballinger, *History in Exile*, 201.

be a curse. Polish refugee children had (according to British officials) ‘lived in the Tower of Babel. The scraps of tongues ranging from Russian to Swahili which they had picked up during their transcontinental wanderings could hardly be regarded as suitable entrance qualifications for schools in the public education systems of England and Scotland’.³⁰

We might also entertain other possibilities of writing the history of displacement. One approach is to acknowledge the perspective of the individuals who assume responsibility for the care of displaced persons. There is a rich testimony, for example, from relief workers who were active among Belgian, Armenian and east European refugees during and after the First World War. Simplifying matters, the literature speaks of trial, of arduous and sometimes dangerous physical effort, but also of a kind of romance or thrill. Ultimately these accounts suggest a kind of self-realisation on the part of relief workers. They developed a particular understanding of ‘the problem’ and also an appreciation of their own right to be ‘concerned’. For some relief workers the demonstration of ‘compassion’ was the essential prerequisite to the restoration of ‘moral order’ on the part of displaced persons.³¹ Also at work was the development of professional expertise. Postwar Europe became a vast field for men and women (some of them, indeed, refugees) with a specialised knowledge of medicine, nursing, mental health, psychology, education, social work and welfare, law and engineering. One doctor wrote to his mother from the Baltic coast about the ‘vast camp of refugees *of one sort and another*’.³² There are numerous other illustrations of the paradox of power and powerlessness that their situation entailed. Their encounters with displaced people and the interpretations they placed on their experiences of ‘case work’ must also be threaded into accounts of displacement.

All the above suggests that historians of war and population displacement need to look beyond the mountain of misery on the balance sheet and to show how and by whom that misery has been articulated.³³ It is simplistic to accept the tragedy of displacement at face value, ignoring the interests that are constituted by the articulation of loss and despair. These interests include diaspora groups that claim the refugee for themselves, and international relief organisations and charitable agencies that speak on behalf of the refugee. This doctrine – that refugees cannot act on their own behalf but must be acted upon – has a long genealogy. We see it in the testimony of well meaning individuals in both world wars, as in Louise Holborn’s patronising remark that ‘notwithstanding the generally good work of refugee doctors and nurses, their need of education . . . was often apparent’.³⁴ We

³⁰ Quoted in Keith Sword, ed., *The Formation of the Polish Community in Great Britain, 1939–1950* (London: SSEES, 1989), 280.

³¹ Diane Plotkin, ‘Emergency Care Administered by the Liberators’, in Johannes-Dieter Steinert and Inge Weber-Newth, eds., *Current International Research on Survivors of Nazi Persecution* (Osnabrück: Socolo Verlag, 2005), 53.

³² David H. Clark, *1945: My Crisis Year* (privately printed, 1994), courtesy of the late Dr E. Shoenberg, Cambridge (emphasis added).

³³ The phrase ‘migration of misery’ appears in Edgar H. S. Chandler, *High Tower of Refuge: The Inspiring Story of Refugee Relief Throughout the World* (London: Odhams Press, 1959), 25.

³⁴ Holborn, *International Refugee Organization*, 242.

see it in World Refugee Year, that fascinating episode in postwar history, and in much contemporary practice by governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), notwithstanding critiques by dissident figures in 'refugee studies'.

The contributions that follow engage with neglected instances of population displacement. Matteo Ermacora shows how ethnic Italians either fled Habsburg territory or were expelled by the Austrian authorities at the outbreak of the First World War; others were interned. The disaster at Caporetto led to a crisis of internal displacement affecting half a million Italian civilians. Responding to the crisis, the Italian authorities emphasised the need to maintain 'national security'; relieving distress was less of a priority. Only in 1918 did the state formulate a more systematic programme, at considerable cost to the Treasury; here, according to Ermacora, one sees the adumbration of a new relationship between the state and its citizenry. Meanwhile, the mobilisation of Italian 'polite society' as well as working-class organisations entailed the articulation of a sense of obligation towards displaced people, many of whom portrayed themselves as 'patriots' who fled Habsburg tyranny in order to support the Italian cause. Broadly speaking, wartime mobilisation contributed to the creation of a distinct category of refugees.

Pierre Purseigle also couches his article in terms of 'mobilisation' both of displaced civilians (construed as 'victims') and of people who came to their assistance. In this case the focus is on the four million Belgian and French civilians who fled their homes in the course of the German invasion. Their flight pointed simultaneously to Allied 'civilisation', Belgian 'fortitude' and German 'barbarity'. Belgian refugees embodied civilian suffering; they were also vectors of news from the 'front line'. As time wore on, however, the displacement of civilians was invested with other meanings. The image of a 'tidal wave' dramatised the scale of displacement but also implied that refugees would engulf the host society. Refugees began to attract opprobrium rather than sympathy. Meanwhile, they articulated their own sense of identity and asserted claims to relief. In France, as in Italy, refugees argued that displacement did not deprive them of an entitlement to a decent level of support. In practice, as Purseigle shows, voluntary assistance towards refugees went hand in hand with an extension of state intervention.

Aldis Purs relates population displacement to narratives of Latvian independence and occupation. The First World War displaced large numbers of Latvians (many of whom joined Latvian political exiles in Siberia and the Far East) and encouraged Latvian patriotic leaders to advance the cause of autonomy. In the confused and chaotic conditions that followed the Bolshevik Revolution, Latvian national committees in Vladivostok, far removed from developments in Riga, claimed displaced refugees, soldiers, pre-war settlers and political exiles for the new nation. The occupation of Latvia during the Second World War, first by the Red Army and then by the Wehrmacht, again called statehood into question and resuscitated the issue of 'national survival'. The decision by the German occupation authorities to crush the chief political instrument of Latvian nationalism, the Latvian Central Committee, led its military leadership to take up armed resistance. As Purs demonstrates, these leaders drew upon their experience of and participation in the politics of displacement

in Vladivostok in 1918–19. They formed a military detachment to harass German troops. However, their hopes of repeating the earlier trick – gaining Allied support for Latvian independence – came to nothing.

Tomas Balkelis, a specialist in the history of modern Lithuania, examines a double displacement. One was the flight of Poles from Nazi-occupied Poland to Lithuania. The other followed the incorporation of the disputed Vilnius region into Lithuania, turning its erstwhile Polish citizens into ‘newcomers’ with second-class status. This episode sharpened long-standing tensions between Lithuanians and Poles. Balkelis also draws attention to the shortcomings in Lithuanian policy; the government viewed external aid from the United States and Britain as a means to boost the public coffers rather than provide adequate relief to distressed refugees. Few restraints were placed on Lithuanian right-wing nationalists who targeted Polish ‘newcomers’ in a provocative manner; and the government eventually hardened its attitude to such an extent that many Poles were placed in labour camps on grounds of ‘national security’. According to Balkelis the events in Lithuania in 1939–40 provided the backdrop to the subsequent expulsion of Poles from Soviet-occupied Lithuania in 1945–6, which itself formed part of a broader process of population transfers that took place in central and eastern Europe at the end of the war.

Rebecca Manley’s article is concerned with the social and political significance of the evacuation of Soviet civilians from regions threatened by the Nazi invasion in 1941. She too is interested in state practices, specifically the creation of a new category of ‘evacuee’ that embodied the notion of deliberate and organised departure and resettlement, a programme that also enabled the state to establish a hierarchy of entitlement to evacuation. Furthermore, evacuees constituted a group that could be mobilised in support of the Soviet war effort. Official policy bore some resemblance to pre-war practices of deportation. Local officials distrusted evacuees because the Stalinist state had taught them that ‘uprooted’ civilians were by definition socially marginal and politically suspect. In the maelstrom of war, evacuees feared – with some justification – that they would be treated with scant respect and left to languish far from ‘home’. At the outset, the secret police regarded them as potential spies, deserters or subversives. Even those whose credentials had been established were castigated as having a ‘suitcase mood’ or demonised as vectors of infection. The least privileged evacuees came to think of themselves as discarded ‘elements’. Those who wished to return to their homes at war’s end were prevented from doing so, confronting them with the possibility that their status corresponded to that of the deportee.

My own contribution compares the impact of both world wars on Armenia and Poland. It suggests that widespread population displacement was bound up with deeply embedded ideas of national vulnerability and survival. State-sponsored deportations go a long way to account for the displacement of civilians, but population displacement in turn legitimised intervention by numerous non-governmental organisations and helped to constitute Poland and Armenia as independent states at the end of the First World War, even though in Armenia’s case independence proved to be short-lived. At the same time there is evidence of mobilisation of the diaspora, in which patriotic leaders engaged with ideas of relief, territorial claims and national

'rebirth'. The situation was more complex following the Second World War, when diasporic Armenians and Polish forced labourers were encouraged to 'repatriate'. Armenians found this a more welcome prospect, seeing in Soviet Armenia a guarantee of national survival, whereas Poles, with a longer tradition of independence, were much more reluctant to take this step. Another contrast was the scale of population transfer in Poland following the frontier shifts agreed at Potsdam; no changes were made to Armenia's borders and the displacement of population was correspondingly low.

All authors thus address projects and technologies of population displacement, pursuing some of the themes articulated by Kulischer, Schechtman and Simpson as well as more recent scholars. But they also consider issues that found little resonance in these classic studies, such as the significance that officials, professional experts, volunteer relief workers, diasporas and refugees variously attached to displacement. Put another way, there have been multiple constructions of displacement: as deliberate, targeted and aggressive state practice; as the product of sometimes 'spontaneous' and thus disquieting behaviour, betokening panic on the part of refugees who have lost self-control; as collective national tragedy understood as 'uprooting' but also sometimes as deliverance or escape; and as adventure, providing opportunities for learning about oneself and one's capacity for self development. States and intergovernmental agencies held power over the displaced – coercing them into moving, incarcerating them and determining their resettlement or repatriation. Professional experts and volunteer relief workers also exercised authority. Yet thinking through how displaced persons themselves navigated the myriad flows of power and how they understood the process of displacement remains the most challenging issue of all.