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Child Assistance and the Making of Modern Refugee Camps in Austria-Hungary during the First World War

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Abstract

This article explores the development of modern refugee camps in Austria-Hungary during the First World War by looking at the organization and implementation of child assistance in the camps. The article argues that a state-driven mobilization of relief and rehabilitation was organized to alleviate the plight of refugee children. It points particularly to children's health care and the organization of education as instances that marked a shift in the scope of refugee camps in wartime Austria-Hungary. At first, camps represented a temporary measure to immobilize and control displaced populations. As the war progressed, they became a permanent feature of refugee policy and a microcosm of agendas of state consolidation. Ultimately, the case of child assistance shows that the organization of refugee camps in wartime Austria-Hungary was a fluid and gradual process that meshed technologies of population containment with humanitarian and welfare practices.

Keywords: Habsburg empire; World War I; refugees; assistance; children

Introduction

In 1916, Filomena Boccher, an Italian teacher from Trentino, jotted down in her diary from her shack in Mitterndorf, a refugee camp in Lower Austria: "I have been called by the school to sign up female students for second grade. God! God! How much misery one can see [painted] on the little faces of those poorly dressed girls, and on the ashen faces of their broken mothers! The withered lips of many poor women tremble from much anguish and from such a painful rage [while] they are imploring for a little dress for their kids!"¹ This was one of many lamentations that Boccher captured in her daily notes over the course of the three years she spent in Mitterndorf. Accounts of starvation, run-down housing, as well as recurrent abuses at the hands of on-site administrators or local people were leitmotifs of what she told of life in the camp. She witnessed the physical and the mental struggles of many of her students, both inside and outside classrooms set up in the barracks that housed many of Austria-Hungary's refugees. Boccher's testimony painted a picture of devastation regarding the fate of refugee children; in the snapshots recorded in her diary, children barely survived, were deprived of proper food and clothing, and were profoundly homesick. However, Boccher's lamentations and the reality she chronicled clashed with state officials' claims of the growing mobilization of existing resources to assist refugees placed in camps. At the time, the government designed and managed encampment² as a process that first

¹ Filomena Boccher, *Diario di una maestra in esilio nel "Lager" di Mitterndorf* (Trento: Cassa Rurale, 1983), 42–43.

² I use the term *encampment* in order to designate the construction and the evolutive management of refugee camps; I make a distinction from the concept of "internment," used primarily in relation to civilian internees.

included quick responses to the plight of refugee children and their urgent needs; authorities also envisioned their role as citizens in a projected postwar Austria-Hungary.

This article tells the story of the planning and implementation of child assistance in the contained spaces of the refugee camps established in Austria-Hungary during the First World War. The organization of children's assistance gives an insight into the development and the scope of these refugee camps. Authorities' approaches to children's physical vulnerability and to the shaping of their economic or intellectual potential show that refugee encampment in Austria-Hungary linked the immobilization of people on the move to humanitarian responses and related welfare policies. Officials used military technologies of containment and designed refugee camps as tools to halt the movement of displaced people coming from the peripheries of the empire. The camps were ad-hoc constructions, established as quick responses to mass displacement as comported with authorities' expectations of a short war. However, as the conflict raged on, refugees' placement in camps became a fixture of the home-front landscape. Addressing refugees' suffering—their hunger, disease, and poverty—as well as their prospective roles as social and economic actors, became the crux of state policies pertaining to displacement control amid the continuous war.

In recent years, historians have produced exceptional work on the refugee crisis in Austria-Hungary in the context of the First World War. Much of this literature has focused on the effects of the war on various groups of refugees³ in particular regions and cities of the monarchy.⁴ These narratives point to the management of the displacement crisis as symptomatic of the state's often abusive stance toward some of its citizens, coupled with an inability to respond to civilian needs as political and economic capacity dwindled amidst a lost war. In this expanding literature, Austria-Hungary's camps are treated as failed tools for managing displacement rather than as the backdrop of refugees' experiences in local contexts. My intention here, however, is different: I place refugee encampment in Austria-Hungary and its transformation at the center of my analysis. In this way, I point to Austria-Hungary and the First World War as the space where and the moment when refugee camps shifted from haphazard and ad-hoc shelters to regulated spaces of population confinement.

Anthropologist Michel Agier has argued that refugee camps were “conceived originally with other project than that of simple survival, or the provisional stationing of a displaced and controlled population.”⁵ This was true as refugee numbers grew exponentially during the First World War, and the confinement of people on the move became a tool in displacement management. In Austria-Hungary, authorities implemented a practical separation between refugees and potential host communities. There, the containment and control of refugees, and not easing their integration into an urban setting, was the initial impetus for displacement management. Some scholars have asserted that modern refugee camps

³ On Galician refugees, see Kamil Ruszała, *Galicyski Eksodus. Uchodźcy z Galicji podczas I wojny światowej w monarchii Habsburgów* (Krakow, Poland: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2020); on Italian refugees, see Francesco Frizzera, *Cittadini dimezzati: I profughi trentini in Austria-Ungheria e in Italia (1914–1919)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2018); on Slovenian refugees, see Jernej Kosi, “Less than ‘Verwaltungsobjekte’? Testimonies of the Slovenian-Speaking Inhabitants About the Retreat to the Austrian Hinterland During the Battles of the Isonzo,” in *U sjeni Velikoga rata. Odras ratnih zbivanja na život istarskoga civilnog stanovništva*, ed. Mihovil Dabo and Milan Radošević (Pula, Croatia: Istarsko povijesno društvo—Società Storica Istriana—Istrsko zgodovinsko društvo, 2019), 327–45; on Jewish refugees, see Rebekah Klein-Pejšova, “Beyond the ‘Infamous Concentration Camps of the Monarchy’: Jewish Refugee Policy from Wartime Hungary to Interwar Czechoslovakia,” *Austrian History Yearbook* 45 (2014): 150–66; on Roma refugees, see Tara Zahra, “‘Condemned to Rootlessness and Unable to Budge’: Roma, Migration Panics, and Internment in the Habsburg Empire,” *The American Historical Review* 22, no. 3 (2017): 702–26.

⁴ See, for example, Friederike Kind-Kovács, *Budapest's Children: Humanitarian Relief in the Aftermath of the Great War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022); Maureen Healy, *Vienna Falling: Total War and Everyday Life in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); David Rechter, “Galicia in Vienna: Jewish Refugees in the First World War,” *Austrian History Yearbook* 28 (1997): 113–30.

⁵ Michel Agier, *Managing the Undesirables: Refugee Camps and Humanitarian Government* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 53.

represent spaces of regulated mobility and control.⁶ Refugee camps established in Austria-Hungary during the First World War were, indeed, also physical constructions intended to immediately halt and isolate seemingly unwanted populations and their often chaotic movement. However, they were also spaces where state officials, as well as philanthropic and voluntary associations, configured assistance schemes that addressed the emergency needs of refugees suffering from the war. Refugee camps in Austria-Hungary saw a gradual transformation of their purpose, as state officials designed aid practices with post-war state consolidation in mind.

The case of Austria-Hungary is indicative of shifts in the scope of refugee encampment during the First World War. Much of the literature has situated the making of modern refugee camps in the era of the Second World War; it was then, various scholars have claimed, that camps became arenas of professionalized assistance, as well as political and juridical technologies in displacement management.⁷ More recently, however, the literature has turned its attention to the era of the First World War as a chronological watershed in the history of refugee encampment. Much of the attention has focused on the aftermath of the war and on the new national and international bureaucratic and administrative tools established to assist and govern refugee movements in this period.⁸ However, the systematic development and use of refugee encampment *during* the war in Austria-Hungary has remained relatively marginal in this scholarship. Thus, I suggest a rethinking of wartime Austria-Hungary as a site for the development of modern refugee camps, as the state gradually meshed emergency containment with professionalized humanitarian assistance and welfare policies.

Refugee encampment in wartime Austria-Hungary entailed the use of experts, administrators, or educators, some external to and some living within the barracks. State officials used encampment as an abrupt measure of population containment from the outset. This was a rather reductionist agenda, however, anchored in the conditions created by the early days of the war. As the conflict dragged on, refugee numbers grew, and the misery in the camps generated official policy responses. Encampment thus also required the organization of refugee assistance through a primarily state-driven humanitarian response and through the organization of welfare. State authorities focused not only on measures designed to relieve hunger and disease on an emergency basis, but they also enabled long-term rehabilitative assistance, to educate and cultivate children's potential as human capital, on behalf of an envisioned postwar reconstruction.

Historian John Deak has argued that, in Austria-Hungary prior to 1914, "a series of actions by a vigorous and expanding state apparatus" developed in order "to push the envelope of state-sponsored modernization further."⁹ I argue that the refugee camp saw the

⁶ See, for example, Diana Martin, Claudio Minca, and Irit Katz, "Rethinking the Camp: On Spatial Technologies of Power and Resistance," *Progress in Human Geography* 44, no. 4 (2020): 743–68; Jennifer Hyndman, *Managing Displacement: Refugees and the Politics of Humanitarianism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Liisa Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

⁷ A few studies that mention the establishment and use of refugee encampment after the Second World War are Hannah Arendt, "We Refugees," *Menorah Journal* 31, no. 1 (1943): 69–77; Liisa Malkki, "Refugees and Exile: From 'Refugee Studies' to the National Order of Things," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 495–523; Agier, *Managing the Undesirables*; Michael Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Gerard Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Jordanna Bailkin, *Unsettled: Refugee Camps and the Making of Multicultural Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Pamela Ballinger, *The World Refugees Made: Decolonization and the Foundation of Postwar Italy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020).

⁸ The Middle East has received most attention in studies on refugee camps in the era of the First World War. See, for example, Michelle Tusan, "The Concentration Camp as Site of Refuge: The Rise of the Refugee Camp and the Great War in the Middle East," *Journal of Modern History* 93, no. 4 (2021): 824–60; Benjamin Thomas White, "Humans and Animals in a Refugee Camp: Baquba, Iraq, 1918–20," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 32, no. 2 (2018): 216–36.

⁹ John Deak, "The Great War and the Forgiven Realm: The Habsburg Monarchy and the First World War," *Journal of Modern History* 86, no. 2 (2014): 369–70.

implementation of this apparatus during the war. From state officials' vantage point, camps gradually turned into arenas where citizens of the empire's peripheries could be civilized through control of refugees' bodies and minds. At the same time, they became spaces of state-driven assistance designed to protect people in the heightened crisis of the war and thus legitimate the imperial state in their eyes. Therefore, refugee policy became part of wartime state-making in Austria-Hungary. I assert here that the shifts and turns in managing child assistance within the camp space give an insight into the way the state sought to solve internal problems in order to maintain its legitimacy among the population under its care.

Children's relief and their rehabilitation have been associated with the narrative of humanitarianism in the Second World War, mostly due to the creation of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) as the core body of refugee assistance.¹⁰ However, the genesis of the UNRRA and post-Second World War relief work on behalf of children were rooted in the humanitarian mobilization during and after the First World War.¹¹ At that time, European children represented the quintessential receivers of humanitarian assistance. As the war ended, various international organizations such as the American Red Cross (ARC), the American Relief Administration (ARA) through its European Children's Fund (ECF), the American-Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), and the British Save the Children developed child-specific programs to target food relief, infrastructure building for childcare, and fundraising to provide clothing for the orphaned and the poor.¹² During the war, the bulk of international assistance was directed to belligerent countries on the Allied side, as well as in neutral areas, such as Belgium.¹³ This was arguably due to the growing power of the United States as a humanitarian actor. During that time, the Central Powers' governments and societies were, for the most part, in charge of aiding their own war sufferers. In Germany, the Allies' blockade and the acute hunger crisis among children and women provoked an interventionist approach from the state, as it assisted its civilian population through food rationing and price controls.¹⁴ State officials in Austria-Hungary similarly had to create their own means to address the suffering of civilians, in the context of a dwindling financial capacity heavily invested in an ever-diminishing military power.

Before the war, children's protection in the Austro-Hungarian empire was dependent on the family and on religious organizations for the most part. It was the war that led to the

¹⁰ See, for example, Jessica Reinisch, "Internationalism in Relief: The Birth (and Death) of UNRRA," *Past and Present* 210, supp. 6 (2011): 258–89; Tara Zahra, "'The Psychological Marshall Plan': Displacement, Gender, and Human Rights after World War II," *Central European History* 44, no. 1 (March 2011): 37–62; Katherine Rossy, "The (Bio)politics of Relief: UN Food Policy Towards Displaced Children in Post-war Germany (1945–49)," in *Child Migration and Biopolitics: Old and New Experiences in Europe*, ed. Beatrice Scutaru and Simone Paoli (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 51–63.

¹¹ On continuities and connections from relief to rehabilitation in history of humanitarianism, see Silvia Salvatici, *A History of Humanitarianism, 1755–1989: In the Name of Others* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019); Davide Rodogno, *Night on Earth: A History of International Humanitarianism in the Near East, 1918–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

¹² On various humanitarian organizations and the conceptualization of child aid, see, for example, Dominique Marshall, "Children's Rights and Children's Action in International Relief and Domestic Welfare: The Work of Herbert Hoover between 1914 and 1950," *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, no. 2 (2008): 351–88; Julia Irwin, *Making the World Safe: The American Red Cross and a Nation's Humanitarian Awakening* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Jaclyn Granick, *International Jewish Humanitarianism in the Age of the Great War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Emily Baughan, *Saving the Children: Humanitarianism, Internationalism, and Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021).

¹³ Branden Little, "An Explosion of New Endeavours: Global Humanitarian Responses to Industrialized Warfare in the First World War Era," *First World War Studies* 5, no. 1 (2014): 1–16.

¹⁴ Mary Elisabeth Cox, *Hunger in War and Peace: Women and Children, in Germany, 1914–1924* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 71–83.

state's explicit involvement.¹⁵ Still, the state's intervention in childcare differed considerably in its implementation across the Dual Monarchy. In Hungary, for instance, children without means and orphans became significant objects of state policy. Furthermore, welfare offices emerged with the specific agenda not only to relieve children's suffering through material means, but also to help them develop morally and financially.¹⁶ In Austria, as late as 1917, the newly created Ministry for Social Welfare included a Youth Council, charged with developing a new centralized imperial policy on youth welfare. Until then, child welfare had been in the hands of various nonstate religious or secular associations. In linguistically homogeneous regions, municipal or provincial authorities, alongside religious charities, stood at the forefront of child protection. At the same time, nationalist child welfare activism grew and claimed to believe in the development of young people's physical and moral health to support nation-building.¹⁷

The distress and fate of refugee children became an early focal point of relief work among displaced populations. This focus bridged private and public institutions in assisting children in need. In the big cities, such as Vienna, Prague, or Budapest, a plethora of relief societies and related charity work emerged, with attention firmly on feeding, clothing, and curing the suffering of refugee children.¹⁸ Soup kitchens, provision of kosher meals for Jews, building orphanages, emergency infant and mother care, and provision of clothing were among the staple activities of a rising network of associations focused on the relief and rehabilitation of children.

Although private charity to alleviate refugee children's suffering was key in urban areas, the state emerged as the chief agent of humanitarian mobilization in camps. Many children coming from populations unable to provide for themselves arrived poorly clothed, malnourished, and suffering from various viral and bacterial infections. Furthermore, officials deemed many refugees, including children, illiterate, and expressed concerns regarding the war-generated hiatus of schooling. In this context, it was the state that took on the responsibility for educating children placed in refugee camps. Not only were they extremely vulnerable within the war's maelstrom, but authorities also believed that they could not be left "to their own devices" and had instead to be integrated into a state welfare scheme.¹⁹

A 1915 document published by the Ministry of Interior, the institutional body in charge of the management of displaced populations, described state welfare policies regarding refugees. In this document, the government explained a series of child-specific measures for those living in the barracks. Child relief and rehabilitation were not distinct programs for state authorities. However, perceptions that children's helplessness had been amplified by war, as well as perceptions of malleability in their formation as future citizens, informed authorities' displacement management in refugee camps. This led to a series of measures predominantly focused on healing, feeding, and schooling refugee children. In specific

¹⁵ Friederike Kind-Kovács and Machteld Venken, "Childhood in Times of Political Transformation in the 20th Century: An Introduction," *Journal of Modern European History* 9, no. 2 (2021): 159–61.

¹⁶ Friederike Kind-Kovács, "The Heroes' Children: Rescuing the Great War's Orphans," *Journal of Modern European History* 19, no. 2 (2021): 183–205.

¹⁷ Tara Zahra, "'Each Nation Only Cares For Its Own': Empire, Nation, and Child Welfare Activism in the Bohemian Lands, 1900–1918," *The American Historical Review* 111, no. 5 (2006): 1378–402.

¹⁸ For various descriptions of refugee assistance in the large cities of Austria-Hungary, see *Zehn Jahre Arbeit des Vereines Soziale Hilfsgemeinschaft Anitta Müller* (Vienna, 1924); Marsha Rozenblit, *Reconstructing a National Identity: The Jews of Habsburg Austria during World War I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 59–81; K. K. Ministerium des Innern, *Staatliche Flüchtlingsfürsorge im Kriege 1914/15* (Vienna: Aus der k. k. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1915), 15–17; Maureen Healy, *Vienna and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Claire Morelon, "Street Fronts: War, State Legitimacy and Urban Space, Prague 1914–1920" (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2014).

¹⁹ Österreichisches Staatsarchiv (ÖStA), Allgemeines Verwaltungsarchiv (AVA), Ministerium des Innern (Mdi), allg. 19, Karton 1939, Flüchtlingsfürsorge in Salzburg; Anerkennung als Flüchtlingsgemeinde; Subventionierung des Hilfskomitees, July 25, 1915.

terms, the document signaled emergency and preventive sanitary measures. The urgency of alleviating child mortality quickly became a feature of a primarily state-driven humanitarian work in refugee camps. Further, provision of education gradually became a key pillar of refugee management during the war. State authorities claimed that this measure would develop into a form of “cultural welfare” through schooling and education, with particular attention to literacy levels, instruction in German, and, when possible, continuation of curricula taught at home. This article explores these designs for emergency relief for the sick and educational efforts for refugee children as two key dimensions of the process of encampment in Austria-Hungary during the First World War.

Filomena Boccher wrote of protracted suffering among refugees. In her account, a refugee’s experience was seemingly at odds with authorities’ display of refugee aid. Here, however, I do not aim to present stories of success or failure regarding the organization of refugee camps and effects on their architects or on those living there. Rather, the article looks at what the state’s planning to aid refugee children suggests about the meaning and organization of camps during the wartime displacement crisis in Austria-Hungary. In this context, the narrative is anchored in the officials’ point of view. Most of the voices in this article are those of state authorities, inspectors visiting the camp, local administrators, teachers, and medical professionals. It is through their vantage point that I highlight the genesis, the changing scope, and the organizational transformation of refugee encampment in Austria-Hungary during the First World War.

Technologies of Refugee Containment

In 1914, Austria-Hungary’s army fighting in Serbia was quickly deployed to Galicia, to fend off an aggressive Russian invasion that saw the capture of Lemberg/Lvov/L’viv. By 1915, Italy invaded the South of the empire, and this resulted in intense fighting in this region until 1917. These clashes in the East and in the South generated a wave of mass displacement of the population, primarily within the state’s borders. Moreover, authorities implemented a program of forced migration and internment of civilians, as the military forcibly evacuated citizens from war zones.²⁰

More than 1 million refugees were scattered all over the empire during the war.²¹ Their formal relocation was mostly within the Austrian part, as authorities from Budapest claimed that refugees were Austrian citizens, and that they were the responsibility of officials based in Vienna. Although barracks had been built also in Hungary, in the Szatmár/Satu-Mare County in Transylvania, many of those refugees coming from Galicia were relocated in the camp in Nikolsburg/Mikulov, in Moravia.²² However, waves of refugees became a feature of the war in all provinces of the empire. In response, the state employed military techniques and developed a method of controlled reception management through classification and refugees’ eventual placement in barracks far from the war zones.

The containment of civilians represented the main *raison d’être* of the quick establishment of refugee camps in the early days of the First World War. Containment was part of a

²⁰ Walter Mentzel, “Weltkriegsflüchtlinge in Cisleithanien, 1914–1918,” in *Asylland wider Willen. Flüchtlinge in Österreich im europäischen Kontext seit 1914*, ed. Gernot Heiss and Oliver Rathkolb (Vienna and Munich: Jugend und Volk, 1995), 30.

²¹ A clear number is impossible to identify, due to logistical difficulties of tracking all displaced people. See Francesco Frizzera, “Population Displacement in the Habsburg Empire During World War I,” in *World War I in Central and Eastern Europe: Politics, Conflict and Military Experience*, ed. Judith Devlin, Marina Falina, and John Paul Newman (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 62; Julie Thorpe, “Displacing Empire: Refugee Welfare, National Activism and State Legitimacy in Austria-Hungary in the First World War,” in *Refugees and the End of Empire: Imperial Collapse and Forced Migration in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Panikos Panayi and Pippa Virdee (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 102–26.

²² For an analysis of the Hungarian approach to refugee flows during the First World War, see Klein-Pejšová, “Beyond the ‘Infamous Concentration Camps of the Monarchy.’”

broader wartime policy that also saw prisoners of war and civilian internees placed in different, category-specific camps.²³ In this context, refugees were considered to be those displaced people who did not pose a political threat. However, the fear was that their presence would provoke new problems. Therefore, the government justified the creation of refugee camps by arguing that “in big cities or rural areas . . . every type of control, especially those of a sanitary nature, would become impossible.”²⁴ Moreover, officials claimed that the “flood flowing into the hinterland created a new social and ethnic problem, the solution of which depended on much more than just the individual fate of the individual refugees.”²⁵ Authorities preferred a system of barracks to segregate refugees from host communities. As Francesco Frizzera succinctly argued, the camps became a means to avoid potential conflict, as locals perceived refugees as competitors for access to food, feared that they might spread epidemic diseases, and even claimed they were potential spies.²⁶

One dimension of this sought-after “solution” was described in a memorandum dated September 6, 1914. In this document, the Ministry of Interior circulated instructions to the police and provincial authorities setting out the criteria for sorting and classifying refugees at various points in their journey, from their departure via evacuation stations to their eventual arrival at host sites. According to this scheme, refugees deemed to be without means (*mittellos*) were transported to camps, while those who had sufficient means to support themselves were placed in and around various cities and towns of the monarchy. The memorandum followed a few guiding factors regarding economic status: the number of accompanying family members, profession, and general earning capacity. However, the decision was taken on a case-by-case basis and it was often randomly implemented due to the complications caused by war conditions and the state’s related needs.²⁷ For instance, travel conditions separated the families of many evacuees; furthermore, refugee men who had not already been recruited were often taken away from their families at various stations and sent to fight in the army.²⁸ In this context, mostly women and children made up the population in the barracks.²⁹

Refugees registered as *mittellos* were then sorted by nationality and confession. Ruthenians, Christian Poles, Jews, Italians, Slovenians, Croatians, or Romanians were pooled together and placed in camps across Upper and Lower Austria, Styria, Bohemia, and Moravia.³⁰ Housing people of the same nationality, authorities claimed, was “to maintain

²³ On aspects of prisoners of war camps in Austria-Hungary, see Verena Moritz and Hannes Leidinger, *Zwischen Nutzen und Bedrohung. Die russischen Kriegsgefangenen in Österreich (1914–1921)* (Bonn: Bernard & Graefe, 2005); Julia Walleczek, *Hinter Stacheldraht. Die Kriegsgefangenenlager in den Kronländern Oberösterreich und Salzburg im Ersten Weltkrieg* (PhD diss., University of Innsbruck, 2012); on civilian internment camps, see Matthew Stibbe, “The Internment of Enemy Aliens in the Habsburg Empire, 1914–18,” in *Internment during the World War I: A Mass Global Phenomenon*, ed. Stefan Manz, Panikos Panayi, and Matthew Stibbe (New York: Routledge, 2019), 61–83; Matthew Stibbe, *Civilian Internment during the First World War: A European and Global History, 1914–20* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

²⁴ ÖStA, AVA, Mdi, allg. 19, Karton 1921, Instruktion betreffend die Beförderung und Unterbringung von Flüchtlingen aus Galizien und der Bukowina, September 15, 1914.

²⁵ K. K. Ministerium des Innern, *Staatliche Flüchtlingsfürsorge*, 4.

²⁶ Walter Mentzel, *Kriegsflüchtlinge in Cisleithanien im Ersten Weltkrieg* (PhD diss., University of Vienna, 1997), 298–305; Frizzera, *Cittadini dimezzati*, 2068–69, Kindle edition.

²⁷ ÖStA, AVA, Mdi, allg. 19, Karton 1955, Wünsche und Vorschläge betreffend die Staatliche Flüchtlingsfürsorge für Angehörige des Landes Görz und Gradisca; ÖStA, Kriegsflüchtlingsfürsorge (KFL), Archiv der Republik (AdR), Karton 15, Flüchtlingsfürsorge, Neuregelung, August 6, 1917.

²⁸ ÖStA, AVA, Mdi, allg. 19, Karton 1924, Zustände in den steirischen Konzentrationslagern, January 14, 1915.

²⁹ ÖStA, AVA, Mdi, allg. 19, Karton 1921, Protokoll aufgenommen am 26. Oktober 1914 in der Kanzlei des Zionistische Zentralbüros (Hilfsaktion) in Sachen der in Nikolsburg untergebrachten galizischen Flüchtlinge in Gegenwart der Herren k. k. Revisor Rudolf Taussig und Charles Bernhardt, October 26, 1914.

³⁰ Thorpe, “Displacing Empire”; Mentzel, “Weltkriegsflüchtlinge in Cisleithanien, 1914–1918.”

their feeling of *Heimat*.”³¹ This language of belonging and of community-building suggests that authorities framed the refugee camp as an opportunity and as a nexus of trust between the state and its citizens. This claim of inclusion was, however, at odds both with the organization of the camp as a technology of population containment and refugees’ segregation from other citizens. Indeed, for refugees in Austria-Hungary during the First World War, encampment operated at the intersection of belonging and exclusion.

Despite an ostensibly rigid system of categorization organized by state officials, however, encampment was a fluid and often messy endeavor from an administrative perspective. The state’s seemingly unyielding classification ironically generated new mobilities within a system of containment, largely due to flaws in organization and war developments, respectively. Some groups were repatriated if battles subsided in their homelands; however, successive invasions within the empire led to the subsequent replacement of one group of refugees with another. Furthermore, loopholes in the classification system, which was based on nationality, also led to a haphazard placement of refugees in camps. In some cases, refugees claimed a nationality distinct from their preferred language of communication. Complications around faith also appeared, as officials sometimes presumed a refugee’s religion based on name or location of their departure. These complications led to the constant movement of refugees from one location to another to maintain the government’s categorization.

The often chaotic and fluid demographics of camps were also generated by the way officials chose to place those whom they considered suspicious alongside refugees. An in-depth analysis of the relationship between refugee encampment and civilian internment lies beyond the scope of this article. However, an overview of muddled distinctions between categories reveals the often-porous organization of refugee containment. Michael Stibbe has pointed to the multiple definitions of civilian internees in Austria-Hungary during the First World War. Many of them were enemy aliens, namely “enemy civilians caught in the territory of a belligerent state at the outbreak of hostilities.”³² Others were “internal enemies,” believed to be unreliable and potentially dangerous for the state’s political leadership and for society by and large.³³ Civilian internees lived in distinct camps (*Internierungslager*) for the most part, under the control of the military. By contrast, the refugee camps were designed for those displaced citizens whom authorities deemed politically harmless. The camps were organized with military support, but primarily administered by the Ministry of Interior. Despite these initial organizational distinctions, some internees were placed alongside refugees, thus leading to confusion regarding the differences between various categories of displaced people. For example, criminals and prostitutes were among those sent to the barracks where refugees lived.³⁴ The blurring of distinctions concerning who was to be placed in a refugee camp was further evident in the case of Roma refugees. On the one hand, the Roma had been a group that authorities considered to be an enemy of public order. The state had long attempted to contain them and maintain their position at society’s periphery. On the other hand, they were Austrian citizens, displaced by war. Authorities acknowledged the political harmlessness of the displaced Roma population; however, refugee encampment became an avenue to contain them as an ethnic group that officials had long considered impossible to “civilize” or integrate.³⁵

The quick construction of barracks in various camps, as well as the attempted classification of refugees, were both part of an initial policy of control. Bringing movement to a halt, avoiding the spread of disease, as well as avoiding potential ethnic and religious frictions formed state officials’ rationale for constructing a network of refugee camps early in the

³¹ ÖStA, AVA, Mdi, allg. 19, Karton 1921, Instruktion betreffend die Beförderung und Unterbringung von Flüchtlingen aus Galizien und der Bukowina, September 15, 1914.

³² Stibbe, *Civilian Internment during the First World War*, 31.

³³ Stibbe, *Civilian Internment during the First World War*, 31–32; for a further discussion on the conceptual and legal differences and changes regarding refugees and civilian internees, see Thorpe, “Displacing Empire.”

³⁴ Nancy M. Wingfield, *The World of Prostitution in Late Imperial Austria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 215–16.

³⁵ Zahra, “Condemned to Rootlessness and Unable to Budge.”

war. These sites quickly became overcrowded, however, and the overall infrastructure proved incomplete. Refugees were starving, and disease threatened. What followed was an attempted mobilization of existing resources, and the creation of a more robust apparatus of refugee assistance that involved employing inspectors, administrators, experts, and on-site practitioners. Plans to relieve the widespread suffering in camps thus became part of a core refugee policy that involved more than merely immobilizing people on the move. It was in this context that authorities designed and implemented child assistance through health care and education in Austria-Hungary's refugee camps. In this way, these camps need to be understood as having developed from seemingly makeshift sites of population control to ones where intervention via humanitarian action could address emergency needs; in the process, they also became spaces for the implementation of welfare schemes to mold state consolidation by controlling refugees' bodies and minds.

Health for “Child Prosperity”

“Child mortality is the saddest chapter of life in the barracks at Bruck an der Leitha,” wrote Luigi Faidutti, a member of parliament in Vienna and representative of the *Hilfskomitee für die Flüchtlinge aus dem Süden*, a government-backed aid committee for refugees from the South.³⁶ Bruck an der Leitha was one of the first camps established in November 1914; it was initially designed to house Jews coming from Galicia and Bukovina. As in the case of refugees in other camps, however, Jewish refugees were repatriated by 1915. Afterward, Bruck an der Leitha held a large Italian population that had been evacuated from the southern part of the empire. In November of the same year, it was reported that children in the camp were recovering from a measles epidemic that was apparently slowing down. This epidemiological crisis had either been caused by recurrent transports that moved refugees from one camp to another or was a consequence of the mobility generated by repatriation. In his report, Faidutti alerted the authorities that the epidemic was still deadly among children and expressed concerns about it spreading among the adult population unless a specialized intervention followed.

The description found in Faidutti's note and the case of the measles-affected Bruck an der Leitha were, however, not unique instances when it came to the network of refugee camps established in Austria-Hungary. Bureaucrats, politicians such as Faidutti, and health professionals attached to governmental institutions surveyed the state of these camps by interviewing some of the refugees and by directly engaging in observational inspections on the ground.³⁷ Some of the mostly narrative reports that landed on the desks back at the Ministry of Interior signaled a sense of urgency regarding refugee children's health time and again. The containment of potential epidemics generated by refugees' mobility caused lingering anxieties among authorities in the early days of the wartime displacement crisis. In fact, it was the foremost incentive for the use of encampment as a wartime strategy to protect civilians. However, the early misery of the camps and an arguably disjointed governmental response to displacement generated full-blown health emergencies among refugees. Poor transportation conditions, the incomplete construction of the refugee camps, the dire state of food provision, and precarious early disease prevention measures led authorities to refer to as child mortality of “frightening proportions.”³⁸ A few instances regarding the spread of disease in the camps show the health and hygiene conundrum that authorities faced when it came to children's relief.

³⁶ Niederösterreichisches Landesarchiv (NÖLA), Präz “P” 1918, Karton 340, Luigi Faidutti Letter, November 8, 1915.

³⁷ For more on health professionalization and reporting schemes, see Doina Anca Cretu, “Securitized Protection: Health Work in Wartime Austria-Hungary and the Making of Refugee Camps,” in *Out of Line, Out of Place: A Global and Local History of World War I Internments*, ed. Rotem Kowner and Iris Rachamimov (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022), 73–91.

³⁸ ÖStA, AVA, Mdl, allg. 19, Karton 1955, Bericht über den Besuch im Lager von Steinklamm, March 6, 1916.

In the case of Bruck an der Leitha, the constant movement of refugees from one camp to another without proper health and hygiene measures being taken generated a widespread epidemiological crisis. Children were particularly affected. For instance, in March 1915, reports noted that typhus fever was introduced by a Ruthenian girl from camp Wagna, near Leibniz in Styria, to camp Gmünd in Lower Austria, triggering a large-scale epidemic in the spring.³⁹ Later that year, in the same Gmünd camp, a measles epidemic hit many children living in the barracks. Authorities attached to the Ministry of Interior claimed in November 1915 that many children who had measles from Gmünd had been transferred to other camps, without precautionary measures having been taken. By that time, Luigi Faidutti claimed that the measles epidemic had subsided somewhat in Bruck an der Leitha. But by March 10, 1916, the governors in Lower Austria signaled that a measles epidemic had, in fact, exploded in five other refugee camps. They claimed that a transport of 2,400 Jewish refugees between camps in Moravia, from Gaya/Kyjov to Ungarisch-Hradisch/Uherské Hradiště, had led to a worsening of infections.⁴⁰

Although many adult refugees, especially women, were affected by these epidemics, illness affected children most, often due to change of climate, poor clothing, extreme temperatures, as well as malnourishment. Furthermore, the barracks had initially been built for a few hundred people and yet many were eventually inhabited by thousands of refugees; these initially small and contained spaces created an environment rife for the quick spread of disease, and children became the most vulnerable group.⁴¹ Besides measles and typhus, correspondence between the barracks and central management institutions in Vienna also reported cases of cholera, scarlet fever, and diphtheria; furthermore, they noted acute exhaustion of doctors and fear of disease spreading from the refugees living in camps to host communities.⁴² Additionally, many refugees complained that the food provided was essentially inedible. One such grievance came from Sandina Re, a refugee living in Gmünd, who wrote in a letter home: "We live very badly here. Up to 60 children die every day. . . . If no help comes from God, we will all perish miserably. The children cannot tolerate the food that is given here, because the food is worse than what the pigs eat. . . . So I'm afraid that we will get sick because of a major childhood illness. Here you die in 48 hours as if you were slaughtered."⁴³

Much like the Italian teacher Filomena Boccher, Sandina Re's was one of the many refugee voices lamenting the living conditions in the camps. Their misery was caused by authorities' unpreparedness in the early days of war, when camps had to be constructed immediately but the state's shrinking financial capacity impeded sustainable and decent living conditions. As the war went on and the camps became fixtures of the state's displacement management strategy, however, officials responded more comprehensively to emergencies generated by refugees' arrival and the needs they articulated.

The urgency of managing the fast spread of epidemics and a specific focus on child mortality determined what I call a *state-driven reactive humanitarian response* to on-site epidemiological crises. Although population containment represented the heart of encampment policy in the early days of the war, later on health crises became the organizational focus of refugee relief in the camps. This meant imposing and monitoring the maintenance of strict hygiene measures, expanding human and material infrastructure, and placing a growing focus on the medium- and long-term development of children's bodies.

³⁹ Josef Reder, *Das Fleckfieber nach dem heutigen Stande seiner Lehre und nach Beobachtungen in den Epidemien des k. k. Flüchtlingslagers Gmünd* (Leipzig and Vienna, 1918), 83.

⁴⁰ NÖLA, Präs "P" 1916, Karton 710, Barackenlager in Gmünd, Massnahmen zur Bekämpfung der Kindersterblichkeit, November 13, 1915.

⁴¹ ÖStA, AVA, Mdl, allg. 19, Karton 1924, Zustände in dem steirischen Konzentrationslager, January 14, 1915.

⁴² ÖStA, AVA, Mdl, allg. 19, Karton 1924, Zustände in dem steirischen Konzentrationslager, January 14, 1915.

⁴³ NÖLA, Präs "P" 1918, Karton 340, Beschwerden der Flüchtlinge in Steinklamm, Gmünd, Mitterndorf, Bruck a.d.L.

Officials' perception of refugees' "backwardness" infused the organization of health care from the outset. Reports said that camp inhabitants blatantly rejected modern healthcare, refused doctors' treatments, and hid ill children, creating the impetus for interventionist relief measures.⁴⁴ Officials called in response for the quarantining of the ill, strict medical inspections, and military patrols. Furthermore, they called for mandatory reporting of potentially sick children, as they were known to be the main victims of the spread of epidemics.⁴⁵ After these measures were taken, the containment of refugees in the camps was quickly correlated with control of epidemics. In this context, strict hygiene measures became a way of managing refugees' behavior in the name of disease control.

Aggressive measures to resolve the crisis of child mortality should also be understood against a backdrop of lack of infrastructure for both palliative and preventative care. Fast-spreading epidemics that affected children propelled officials to organize sanitary assistance, leading to a reliance on the expertise of medical personnel trained in military medicine.⁴⁶ Although many doctors had already been conscripted to the front in 1914 or remained in Vienna's hospitals, state authorities sent various practitioners to the camps who were to organize and monitor refugees' health and hygiene. The growing on-site professionalization and implementation of medical expertise to relieve children's suffering were manifest in the case of a measles epidemic in the Gmünd camp. This reportedly acute crisis led to the involvement of Vienna-based experts, who inspected the camp in 1915 and attempted to develop programs to cure children affected by measles and to suppress further infections by supplementing infrastructure and through quarantine measures.⁴⁷

In general, the growing use of professional expertise was based on the expansion of health-oriented material infrastructure in the camps. Gmünd, for instance, saw the gradual extension of a health-oriented complex. Its facilities aimed to improve infant care through the establishment of centers focused on assisting breast-feeding mothers, as well as education-oriented counseling centers.⁴⁸ In general, state authorities pushed for the building of more barracks in the larger camps in order to give more space to refugees and thus prevent epidemics as much as possible.⁴⁹ Described as means to modernize hygiene measures, the establishment of orphanages, infant centers, and clinics became part of the logistical mapping of refugee camps. Larger camps held more facilities and more human resources, and when needed, children living in the smaller camps could be transported to these growing medical hubs.⁵⁰

If at the beginning of the refugee crisis in Austria-Hungary there was no distinct program of rehabilitative measures for children living in camps, the increased mortality rates and health and hygiene challenges led to more specific planning. For instance, Gmünd, Landegg, Mitterndorf, and Steinklamm, a network of camps in Lower Austria, were all selected for child-focused assistance, largely due to their practical capacity for appropriate storage conditions of goods. The planning was similarly focused on development of infrastructure, treatment of babies and small children, orphan care, and sanitary care for preschoolers and school children. These measures focused less on immediate curative methods for ill children; rather, they highlighted prevention through organization of material

⁴⁴ NÖLA, Präs "P" 1916, Karton 710, Flüchtlinge aus dem Bezirke Pola, in den Lagern in Gmünd und Leibnitz, Beschwerden, January 13, 1916; Barackenlager in Gmünd, Massnahmen zur Bekämpfung der Kindersterblichkeit, November 13, 1915.

⁴⁵ Barackenlager in Gmünd, Massnahmen zur Bekämpfung der Kindersterblichkeit, November 13, 1915.

⁴⁶ NÖLA, Präs "P" 1916, Karton 710, Präsidium des Allgemeinen Ukrainischen Nationalrates Letter, October 19, 1916.

⁴⁷ Präsidium des Allgemeinen Ukrainischen Nationalrates Letter, October 19, 1916.

⁴⁸ NÖLA, Präs "P" 1916, Karton 710, Die Massnahmen zur Bekämpfung der Sterblichkeit im besonderen der Kindersterblichkeit in den k. k. Barackenlagern.

⁴⁹ ÖStA, AVA, Mdi, allg. 19, Karton 1945, Fürsorge für südliche Flüchtlinge, September 22, 1915.

⁵⁰ ÖStA, AVA, Mdi, allg. 19, Karton 1995, Flüchtlingskinderheim in Wien; Transferierung kranker Kinder in entsprechende andere Anstalten, October 3, 1917.

infrastructure to be used over the long term. Furthermore, this plan highlighted the necessity of nutrition for long-standing “child prosperity.”⁵¹

Food quality and nutrition in general became a central theme of the reports coming from various inspections of life in the camps. The feeding of children was particularly prominent, largely due to many complaints from refugees, who reportedly often ate only bread and water.⁵² At the same time, state-supported inspections also alerted authorities to the fact that a lack of food was affecting children especially, and officials called for practical assistance to alleviate hunger crises in the camps. In the view of various representatives of the Ministry of Interior inspecting the camps, correctives and concrete additions to nutritional schemes were necessary for the sake of the children.⁵³

Nutrition had been a subject of scientific interest in Austria-Hungary before the war. By the end of the nineteenth century, scientific experts sought to understand and adapt the capacity of the human body to the maximization of available food supply. This scientific inquiry was then transferred to studying the realities of the First World War.⁵⁴ As in other parts of belligerent Europe, food distribution and rationalization became part of war-time experience on the home front in Austria-Hungary.⁵⁵ Changes in distribution and rationalization became necessary due to growing scarcity produced by the deterioration of agricultural production and the breakdown of food distribution chains.⁵⁶ In this context, refugee camps became sites of intervention through applied expertise to feed ailing children.

Milk, and its distribution to both mothers and children, was a prominent theme of nutrition planning.⁵⁷ Lack of food was a lingering reality in camps during the war, and the milk situation was no exception. Officials then committed to efforts to provide the necessary milk, considered key for proper physical development. According to state authorities in charge of the camps, individual barrack administrators had to report how much milk was needed per day, with attention paid to a few thresholds: one liter for each child younger than six years of age, half a liter of milk for each child from six to twelve years of age, and an appropriate amount reserved for the sick and those requiring special care.⁵⁸ The quest for milk provision in some cases led to collaboration with local farmers, and thus generated cooperation with host communities.⁵⁹ In other cases, it included the participation and remuneration of refugees themselves, given some had taken milk-producing animals with them when they fled the war zones.⁶⁰

⁵¹ NÖLA, Präs “P” 1916, Karton 710, Die Massnahmen zur Bekämpfung der Sterblichkeit im besonderen der Kindersterblichkeit in den k. k. Barackenlagern.

⁵² ÖStA, AVA, Mdl, allg. 19, Karton 1930, Bernhard Jonas Letter, May 3, 1915.

⁵³ Bericht über den Besuch im Lager von Steinklamm, March 6, 1916.

⁵⁴ For a discussion on prewar scientific inquiry regarding nutrition, see Rudolf Kučera, *Rationed Life: Science, Everyday Life, and Working-Class Politics in the Bohemian Lands, 1914–1918* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), 19–21.

⁵⁵ For an excellent overview of the food and nutrition crises of the First World War and its related historiography, see Emanuelle Cronier, “Food and Nutrition,” in *1914–1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson (Berlin: Freier Universität Berlin, 22 June 2021; https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/food_and_nutrition).

⁵⁶ For a postwar analysis of nutrition regulation, see Hans Löwenfeld-Russ, *Die Regelung der Volksernährung im Kriege* (Vienna: Hölder Pichler-Tempsky, 1926); for analyses of food crises and the effects on war performance, see for example Zdeněk Jindra, “Der wirtschaftliche Zerfall Österreich-Ungarns,” in *Österreich und die Tschechoslowakei 1918–1938*, ed. Alice Teichowa and Herbert Maris (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 1996), 17–50; Max-Stephan Schulze, “Austria-Hungary’s Economy in World War I,” in *The Economics of World War I*, ed. Stephen N. Broadberry and Mark Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 77–111.

⁵⁷ K. K. Ministerium des Innern, *Staatliche Flüchtlingsfürsorge*, 13.

⁵⁸ ÖStA, KFL, AdR, Karton 16, Milchversorgungsplan für Flüchtlingslager und Vorsorge für das Flüchtlingsvieh in den Gemeinden, October 28, 1916.

⁵⁹ ÖStA, AVA, Mdl, allg. 19, Karton 1939, Flüchtlinge italienischer Nationalität, Beschwerden, July 25, 1915.

⁶⁰ ÖStA, KFL, AdR, Karton 16, Milchversorgungsplan für Flüchtlingslager und Vorsorge für das Flüchtlingsvieh in den Gemeinden, October 28, 1916.

Adaptation to dietary regimens also became part of the nutrition-focused organization of resources. Conditions of war forced authorities to struggle to maintain standards of nutrition on the home front. Lack of resources certainly affected the feeding of children in the camps and led to the practical use of scientific inquiry in managing it. In this context, officials turned to experts such as Clemens von Pirquet, a pediatrician and director of the Kinderklinik in Vienna during the war. At the time, Pirquet was in the process of developing a system of child nutrition, which was also tested in the camps. Pirquet's scheme advised adopting a diet that was cheaper and based on less meat. Pirquet claimed that, in this way, refugee children would maintain a healthier appetite and the provision of food would be adapted to war conditions.⁶¹

Adaptation to the refugees' own realities, however, also became part of trialed nutrition schemes. In one example, Luigi Faidutti reported Italian children's contempt toward the food provided in the camps of Gmünd or Wagna. These children, Faidutti noted, were suffering from various gastrointestinal diseases caused by food that was either cooked by locals or by other refugees from Galicia.⁶² In this context, officials called for the implementation of a new way to provide food for children in multiple camps. For example, some functionaries insisted on the preparation of food that encamped populations were used to, cooked in a "local way" by the refugees themselves.⁶³

Finally, officials called for the improvement of nutrition-focused infrastructure. This was the case in the Bruck an der Leitha camp, where a nutrition office was established with the directive to properly oversee the food and the fat intended for cooking. This office had the important task of feeding children a balanced diet made from available produce. One inspector attached to the Ministry of Interior reported that children could eat soups, spinach, milk, polenta, and potatoes; this was the standard, child-specific menu.⁶⁴ Another feature of the growing infrastructure capacity regarding proper food provision was the establishment of child kitchens in some bigger camps. There, refugee women who knew how to cook and were familiar with the mass feeding of children were appointed as heads.⁶⁵ The principle of these kitchens was to provide a variety in food necessary for childhood development and especially deliver fresh vegetables. "With these two principles, a uniformly good nutritional status can be achieved in childhood,"⁶⁶ officials claimed.

Containment of disease was a central motivator in establishing the system of refugee camps. As the war went on and epidemics aggressively hit the population living in the barracks, however, general care became part of the process of encampment. In terms of health, refugee children were reportedly most affected. Owing to this, they became the core objects of state-driven relief and rehabilitation by means of curing disease, building health infrastructure, and standardizing on-site nutrition. The plight of children and the death toll caused by epidemics in overcrowded, confined spaces precipitated the state's reactive humanitarian assistance to refugees living in camps. The response and the gradual organization of resources to alleviate effects of disease revealed the fluid scope of what refugee camps were supposed to be, as they were transformed from sites of mere containment to

⁶¹ NÖLA, PräS "P" 1916, Karton 710, Clemens von Pirquet Report, October 25, 1916; for a recent discussion of Pirquet's professional trajectory, scientific networks, and subsequent relationship with interwar internationalism, see Michael Burri, "Clemens Pirquet: Early Twentieth-Century Scientific Networks, the Austrian Hunger Crisis, and the Making of the International Food Expert," in *Remaking Central Europe: The League of Nations and the Former Habsburg Lands*, ed. Peter Becker and Natasha Wheatley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 39–70.

⁶² ÖStA, AVA, Mdl, allg. 19, Karton 1933, Luigi Faidutti Letter to Dr. Karl Freiherr Heinold von Udynski, June 7, 1915.

⁶³ NÖLA, PräS "P" 1916, Karton 710, Flüchtlingslager in Gmünd, Sanitäre Inspektion, March 20, 1915.

⁶⁴ ÖStA, AVA, Mdl, allg. 19, Karton 1997, Michael Gabrijelčič Letter, October 5, 1917.

⁶⁵ NÖLA, PräS "P" 1916, Karton 710, Die Massnahmen zur Bekämpfung der Sterblichkeit im besonderen der Kindersterblichkeit in den k. k. Barackenlagern.

⁶⁶ NÖLA, PräS "P" 1916, Karton 710, Die Massnahmen zur Bekämpfung der Sterblichkeit im besonderen der Kindersterblichkeit in den k. k. Barackenlagern.

arenas of humanitarian assistance. In responding to child suffering, authorities coupled emergency intervention and rehabilitative aid for child health with medium- and long-term agendas of state consolidation via educational practices.

Toward a New Way of Life

In 1916, the government-backed committee for refugees from Galicia and Bukovina wrote a note to the Ministry of Finance. In this letter, representatives of the committee signaled the need for continuous state assistance for children, with a longer-term agenda: “We believe that we owe it to our damaged refugees [from Galicia and Bukovina], or at least to their children, who have to spend a considerable part of their youth here as a result of the war, to take care of their cultural development in such a way that they can return home . . . after the war is over.”⁶⁷ This call for development mirrored the overall policy that state authorities called “cultural welfare” (*kulturelle Fürsorge*). Its rationale was to present displacement in the empire as an *opportunity* for refugees to “train . . . for various professional jobs that they would perform after they return to their former homes, and in that manner to pave the way for the necessary cultural and economic development of the borders of our fatherland.”⁶⁸ Part of a civilizational agenda in its own way, this policy entailed traineeships and labor work for adult refugees. Yet it was the refugee child who captured the imagination and practical attention of authorities. Thus, the broadly defined “cultural welfare” was tied into a general vision of rehabilitation of refugee children as citizens of a post-war empire.

Throughout Europe, compulsory primary education and the growing schooling infrastructure had generated spaces that were to shape future citizens of states or empires since the nineteenth century.⁶⁹ In the case of the Habsburg monarchy, public education dated back to 1774, when Empress Maria Theresa implemented “general regulations” for schools, which entailed a state-run educational system driven by compulsory school attendance.⁷⁰ From the time of Maria Theresa until the end of the First World War and the eventual demise of the monarchy, officials designed public education with the purpose of molding a productive, hardworking, and well-behaved population. By the end of the nineteenth century, vocational training was added to the already-established civic and patriotic education.⁷¹ In the context of war’s destruction and the mass-displacement crisis, the school emerged, once again, as a tool to shape the future path of the empire. Officials used confinement in refugee camps as a way to shape the minds and overall morality of displaced children through a scheme of rehabilitation via formal education. In this way, children became not only objects of emergency humanitarianism, as seen in the case of health relief, but they were also molded into active social actors.

Christa Hämmerle emphasized the making of a wartime “school front,” which was based on an inherent instrumentalization of childhood as part of the war effort.⁷² Relatedly, Maureen Healy has argued that schools were arenas where Austria’s young “human capital” became a “top priority” for officials, who developed forms of war pedagogy and a militarization of the curricula; this entailed fitness training, volunteerism in government, military agencies, or Red Cross missions, as well as child-generated army labor (e.g., sewing and

⁶⁷ ÖStA, AVA, Mdl, allg. 19, Karton 1969, Hilfskomitee für Kriegsflüchtlinge aus Galizien und der Bukowina Letter to Ministry of Finance, September 8, 1916.

⁶⁸ K. K. Ministerium des Innern, *Staatliche Fürsorge*, 16.

⁶⁹ Machteld Venken, *Peripheries at the Centre: Borderland Schooling in Interwar Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2021), 15–21.

⁷⁰ Scott Moore, *Teaching the Empire: Education and State Loyalty in Late Habsburg Austria* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2020), 17.

⁷¹ Moore, *Teaching the Empire*, 18.

⁷² Christa Hämmerle, “An der ‘Schulfront.’ Kindheit-staatlich instrumentalisiert,” in *Kindheit und Schule im Ersten Weltkrieg*, ed. Hannes Stekl, Christa Hämmerle, and Ernst Bruckmüller (Vienna: New Academic Press, 2015), 112–36.

knitting military garments).⁷³ Refugee children living in camps had, however, a different school experience. There, the adult refugee was the key laborer for the war effort. Some children joined activities, such as shoemaking or agricultural and seasonal work. For the most part, however, state authorities treated refugee children as typical victims of war and objects of rehabilitation rather than proactive individuals in the effort on the home front. Literacy, German-language teaching, and a continuation of the curriculum taught in prewar schools represented the main agendas informing refugee children's assistance within the state-designed cultural policy. In this way, officials aimed to shape the minds of children as part of their idealized vision of the state's future citizens. Furthermore, authorities envisioned a domino effect among *all* refugees, with newly educated children eventually being able to have a positive effect on the adults' way of life.⁷⁴

Much like the case of emergency sanitary measures, the crisis of infrastructure for refugee children's education clashed with official projections. At first, state documents claimed that the barracks themselves could be considered education-oriented hubs. However, the poor state of the camps and the much larger number of refugees living in the extant barracks delayed the organization of schooling. Only a limited number of schoolchildren among the refugees living in camps could benefit from lessons in the early days of their encampment.⁷⁵ In one case, Ferdinand Max Mühlbacher, a teacher in Steinklamm camp, reported to authorities that 360 children could not be admitted to school due to lack of space and limited teaching staff.⁷⁶ As refugee camps became more permanent, a gradual expansion of physical space for schools followed, and barracks and personnel were added.

In general, the organization of schooling for refugee children in the camps intertwined with the methods of classification that authorities used to separate displaced groups based on nationality. Thus, the format of schooling in the camps was based on implementing a policy of bilingualism, already in place in the borderland provinces of the empire.⁷⁷ Authorities organizing schooling preferred to use the native languages of refugee children, coupled with lessons in German.

Very early on, state authorities pushed for the assembly of barracks in refugee camps and a nationality-based classification system, claiming that it would offer a form of psychological protection as an ersatz *Heimat*. The facilitation of community feeling was also the rationale behind the schooling of refugee children in their native language. Practically speaking, authorities believed that this approach was beneficial for children because they would experience less discontinuity in their educational experience. State documents claimed that hundreds of institutions for schooling in the children's mother tongue were established in quick succession in the first months of refugee encampment, mostly out of necessity, as large sites such as Gmünd, Leibnitz, and Chotzen had a significant number of children—approximately 1,500 each.⁷⁸ Additionally, teaching staff was almost always provided by refugees living in the camps, who were granted small remunerations from state funds.⁷⁹

In other instances, the state outsourced assistance for schooling. Supplementation of human and material resources was sustained through collaboration with private associations. Such was the case for Jewish refugees in the camps, as organizations or individual educators took responsibility for maintaining the education of Jewish children. This method was nothing new because assistance for Europe's Jews prior to and during the war had been and

⁷³ Healy, *Vienna and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire*, 241–43.

⁷⁴ ÖStA, AVA, Mdi, allg. 19, Karton 2000, Michael Gabrijelčič Letter to Ministry of Interior, November 23, 1917.

⁷⁵ K. K. Ministerium des Innern, *Staatliche Fürsorge*, 17.

⁷⁶ ÖStA, AVA, Mdi, allg. 19, Karton 1966, Lschkapt. Henkel, Besichtigung des Flüchtlingslagers, August 19, 1916.

⁷⁷ See Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

⁷⁸ K. K. Ministerium des Innern, *Staatliche Fürsorge*, 17–18.

⁷⁹ K. K. Ministerium des Innern, *Staatliche Fürsorge*, 17–18.

remained, for the most part, supported by Jewish associations and communities.⁸⁰ This was also the case in the Austro-Hungarian empire, where the state preferred for Jewish communities to support Jewish children's education. Schooling became a form of assistance for Jewish refugee children of the empire, and at the heart of it was the Baron Hirsch Foundation, an association that was prominently involved in the provision of schooling in Galicia and Bukovina before the war.⁸¹ The Baron Hirsch Foundation built schools in barracks that contained large Jewish populations after the first wave of displacements in Bukovina and Galicia. Furthermore, authorities in charge of the refugee camps requested teachers affiliated with the foundation and who had already worked under its auspices to secure the education of Jewish refugee children. Moreover, a curriculum specifically intended for Jewish children was developed, one that prominently included the study of the Torah and religiously oriented approaches to education, and which was approved by state officials. These officials in turn claimed that the outsourcing of educational support was necessary for the provision of a familiar and beneficial environment, one that would assist in child rehabilitation in the camps.⁸²

Teaching in children's native language had, however, its ambiguities, largely because of the rigidity of the nationality-based structuring of camps. This rigidity required adaptability from the state authorities in charge of camp management. This adaptability can be seen in the case of a group of children from Pola/Pula, aged between six and thirteen, who were living in the Wagna camp, but claimed that there was no possibility for schooling them there. Though Italian speakers, they declared a Croatian nationality; this led to their transfer to Gmünd camp, where many Croatian refugees were placed. However, teaching in Italian did not exist for primary school children in Gmünd. Finally, officials allowed these refugees to request a transfer to the camp for Italians in Potterndorf-Landegg, where primary school teaching in Italian was possible.⁸³ This episode mirrored preexisting dilemmas of language use in children's education. A few decades before the war, in 1884, the Austrian Supreme Administrative Court had ruled that communities must provide a school in a particular language if forty or more school-aged children who spoke that language lived within a two-hour walking distance of the local school. In the following years, the state increasingly emphasized the possibility of language use as an instrument of communication within communities; thus, it left the choice of what language to use and to declare up to the individual.⁸⁴ State officials during the First World War attempted to continue this apparently flexible approach, as schooling became a pillar of a broader vision of child rehabilitation among refugees.

Officials also saw the war and the containment of entire communities as opportunities to bolster bilingualism among the empire's citizens. Thus, a second key dimension of the schooling curriculum for refugee children was the inclusion of mandatory German lessons. Some officials claimed that life in camps was essentially an opportunity for refugee children to learn German and, thus, to open further prospects for them in the postwar period, such as their eventual employment and integration into society when they returned to their homeland.⁸⁵ This was in tune with broader goals designed under the umbrella of the cultural welfare policy: a chance for intellectual and moral development of future citizens. This approach

⁸⁰ For networks of assistance for Jews see Granick, *International Jewish Humanitarianism in the Age of the Great War*.

⁸¹ Theodore Norman, *An Outstretched Arm: A History of the Jewish Colonization Association* (London and Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1985).

⁸² ÖStA, AVA, Mdi, allg. 19, Karton 1933, Flüchtlingsfürsorge in kultureller Hinsicht, Errichtung von Beschäftigungsanstalten für schulpflichtige Kinder in Nikolsburg, Pohrlitz, Gaya, May 28, 1915; ÖStA, AVA, Mdi, allg. 19, Karton 1966, Kulturelle Fürsorge für jüdische Flüchtlinge, September 12, 1916.

⁸³ NÖLA, Präs "P" 1916, Karton 710, Flüchtlingskinder aus Pola im Lager bei Leibniz und in Gmünd, Schulunterricht, December 28, 1915; NÖLA, Präs "P" 1916, Karton 710, Hilfskomitee in Pola Letter.

⁸⁴ Pieter M. Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 310; Hannelore Burger, *Sprachenrecht und Sprachgerechtigkeit im österreichischen Unterrichtswesen, 1867-1918* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1995), 100-10.

⁸⁵ ÖStA, AVA, Mdi, allg. 19, Karton 1945, Fürsorge für südliche Flüchtlinge, September 22, 1915.

was also sustained by a civilizing agenda surrounding the learning of German, as a sign of growing literacy and intellectual development.

From state officials' perspective, children learning German in the camps was associated not only with practical benefits for employment or social mobility, but also with the potential inculcation of a patriotic frisson among refugee children. Ideas of establishing discipline, instilling a fear of God and a reverence for the emperor, and promoting "love of the ancestral nation and common motherland" were some of the motivations surrounding German-language schooling of refugee children living in camps.⁸⁶ The use of patriotic tropes became a feature of the ways officials transmitted the notion of the monarchy's unity among populations of different nationalities and religious creeds. One article published in a contemporary newspaper described the benefits of German courses for refugees as being part of a long-term vision of reconstruction: "And a speaker who knows German more with the heart than with the tongue, stands up and enthusiastically praises German culture. War is destructive, but it reconstructs anew and more beautifully than before."⁸⁷ It was in this context that refugee children became objects of a moral rehabilitation through learning of German.

Camp management enabled a state-driven mobilization for refugee welfare that included children's education as central to postwar reconstruction aspirations. Schooling represented an initiative of assistance designed to bolster children's morale, as well as train and educate their spirit of loyalty to both their *Heimat* and the state itself. In the case of health-oriented aid, children were passive objects of intervention in the confined realm of the camp. At the same time, officials instrumentalized education as a means to instill agency in refugee children for the sake of their potential to contribute to postwar societal change.

Conclusion

On July 21, 1917, Filomena Boccher wrote in her diary: "How many things the war has taught us! And how many things the stay in Mitterndorf has taught us: how many ideas have changed regarding patriotism!"⁸⁸ This account was a decidedly despondent one, capturing Boccher's repeated frustrations regarding her confinement in Mitterndorf. Boccher spent three years in the camp, taking care of her elderly parents and teaching children confined there. In Boccher's eyes, few things changed in Mitterndorf during those three years: poverty and malnutrition prevailed, children succumbed to diseases, and teachers, like herself, were overworked in an overcrowded space. For Boccher, the state had failed its people.

The realities that Boccher experienced in the camp were incompatible with state officials' growing ambitions regarding the care and molding of refugees' lives. Refugees coming from the peripheries were, indeed, outsiders vis-à-vis host communities in the hinterland. They were, however, also citizens of the state. In this context, both their confinement and the assistance rendered to them defined the process of encampment in the broader refugee policy in Austria-Hungary during the First World War.

At the heart of the management of refugee camps lay the fate of children. The urgency to feed and heal children's vulnerable bodies was coupled with a perceived opportunity to construct future human capital and bolster their social, political, and economic role. Refugee children's relief and rehabilitation shows that encampment was a process, determined by conditions of war and related urgencies, but also by state authorities' ambitions concerning postwar reconstruction.

⁸⁶ NÖLA, Präs "P" 1918, Karton 340, Barackenlager Gmünd, Schule und Fachkurse.

⁸⁷ Illustriertes Wiener Extrablatt, September 22, 1915; taken from Martina Hermann, "'Cities of Barracks': Refugees in the Austrian Part of the Habsburg Empire during the World War I," in *Europe on the Move: Refugees in the Era of the Great War*, ed. Peter Gatrell and Liubov Zhvanko (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 145–46.

⁸⁸ Boccher, *Diario di una maestra in esilio nel "Lager" di Mitterndorf*, 146.

The process of assistance to children in camps, from emergency health care to rehabilitation through education, mirrored the transformation of refugee encampment in Austria-Hungary during the First World War. Filomena Boccher's diary entries highlight miserable living conditions with little improvement during the years of the war. However, state policies vis-à-vis refugees living in camps were not linear; they were adapted and ever changing, in tune with refugees' on-site suffering, with the state's logistical capacity to render aid, and with intrinsic ambitions toward postwar consolidation.

This article argues that modern refugee camps in Austria-Hungary were an arena of development in the era of the First World War, defined through the meshing of containment logistics and assistance schemes. The lens of child assistance shows the ways the state configured camps as sites of both control and mobilization of displaced populations. Camps were meant to halt the movement of displaced populations early in the war, but they quickly became sites of suffering and isolation for the refugees living in the barracks. Indeed, the start of the war and the situation of early waves of refugees showed that camps were overpopulated, rife with disease, and sustained by a feeble organizational system. As the war went on, however, refugee camps evolved to become not just sites of outsiders' containment, but rather microcosms of state reconstruction through relief and rehabilitation measures to assist people from the empire's peripheries. These measures involved the mobilization of material and human resources to address crises of body and of mind. Overall, refugee encampment in Austria-Hungary represented the intertwining of the state's confinement agendas, its humanitarian responses, and subsequent welfare policies.

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