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## REFUGEE HISTORY AND REFUGEES IN RUSSIA DURING AND AFTER THE FIRST WORLD WAR

This article analyses the causes and consequences of mass population displacement in the Russian Empire during the First World War and its immediate aftermath. The wartime refugee crisis in Russia must be understood in broader conceptual and historiographical terms, to which the first part of the article is devoted. There follows a discussion of the origins, scale and impact of the movement of civilians from Russia's western borderlands to the Russian interior, as it was understood by contemporaries and as it has been reflected in the historiography. The article also considers the political implications of the refugee crisis as manifested by the formation of governmental and non-governmental organisations. One particularly significant development was the emergence of national committees whose activities on behalf of ethnic minority refugees including Poles, Latvians, Jews and others, drew attention to ideas of 'national' suffering and persecution under the Tsarist regime. The final part of the article looks at the aftermath of the First World War, including the impact of the October Revolution and Civil War, and the formation of the first international refugee regime under the auspices of the League of Nations. The conclusion recapitulates the main points, emphasising the creation during the war of the category of the refugee as an object both of bureaucratic and humanitarian concern. Refs 75.

*Keywords:* First World War, Russian Empire, Migration, refugees.

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## ИСТОРИЯ БЕЖЕНСТВА И БЕЖЕНЦЫ В РОССИИ ВО ВРЕМЯ И ПОСЛЕ ПЕРВОЙ МИРОВОЙ ВОЙНЫ

В данной статье анализируются причины и последствия массового перемещения населения в Российской империи в годы Первой мировой войны. Беженца во время военного кризиса в России следует понимать в более широком концептуальном и историографическом плане, чему посвящена первая часть статьи. Далее следует дискуссия о происхождении, масштабах и последствиях передвижения гражданских лиц из западных пограничных районов России в центр. В статье также рассматривается политическая вовлеченность беженцев во время военного кризиса. Особо значимым было появление национальных комитетов, а их деятельность в интересах беженцев от имени этнических меньшинств (поляков, латвийцев, евреев и др.) привлекала внимание к идее национального страдания и гонений со стороны царского режима. В последней части статьи представлен взгляд на последствия Первой мировой войны, Октябрьской революции, Гражданской войны и формирования первого международного управления по делам беженцев под эгидой Лиги Наций. В заключении вновь рассматриваются основные аргументы, делающие акцент на создании в период Первой мировой войны категории беженца как объекта и бюрократического, и гуманитарного интереса. Библиогр. 75 назв.

*Ключевые слова:* Первая мировая война, Российская империя, миграция, беженцы.

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## Introduction: historians and refugees

Notwithstanding their huge numbers in the modern world, refugees have attracted remarkably little attention from historians. Tony Judt, for example, began his much-admired *magnum opus* with a discussion of the post-1945 refugee crisis, but omitted to examine the population displacement associated with the Hungarian revolution, the conflicts in Cyprus and Yugoslavia, and the collapse of the Soviet Union [Judt 2005]. Eric Hobsbawm's magisterial history had little to say about refugees [Hobsbawm 1995]. One notable exception was Mark Mazower's interpretive history of twentieth-century Europe [Mazower 1998]. Where refugees do figure in the pages of history books, there is still a tendency to portray them as miserable flotsam and jetsam, as inescapable 'victims' of war or revolution, not as deliberative and dynamic actors. Historians have been slow to wake up to the crucial insight that emerges from scholarship in the social and political sciences, namely that states make refugees, but that refugees can also make states [Soguk 1999; Gattrell 2013; White 2017]. This alone is a sufficiently compelling reason to put refugees into the historiographical mainstream.

To be sure, important contributions were made by specialists around the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Sir John Hope Simpson and colleagues contributed a fundamental overview of 'the refugee problem' in contemporary history. Simpson had served in the Indian Civil Service before becoming vice-president of the Greek Refugee Settlement Commission in 1926. Simpson urged European states to assist White Russian refugees who remained stranded in China following the Russian Revolution. 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 [Simpson 1939].

Two eminent Russian-Jewish scholars were also at the forefront of scholarship at this time. Eugene Kulischer wrote an informative account of population movements in early twentieth-century Europe. He interpreted inter-war 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 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 the Soviet Union '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 German 'expellees' (*Vertriebene*), 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 [Kulischer 1948, pp. 255, 290, 319–325].

Joseph Schechtman brought his knowledge of European history to bear on contemporary population movements in South Asia and the Middle East, with a series of books in the late 1940s through the early 1960s that advocated what he termed 'permanent constructive solutions rather than palliative measures', organised population transfer being one possible 'solution'. Schechtman nailed his colours to the mast by arguing that reset-

tlement and integration rather than repatriation offered the best way forward. (He was particularly dismissive of Palestinian claims to a right of return.) His contribution is interesting on two counts: first, because he argued that history ought not to weigh heavily on the mind of refugees, in other words, refugees should transcend the past in order to concentrate on the future; and, secondly, because of his willingness to provide a global and comparative perspective to population displacement — a way of joining the dots [Schechtman 1946; Schechtman 1949; Schechtman 1963; Ferrara 2011].

This momentum did not continue. Apart from the informative overview by Michael Marrus on the refugee crisis in twentieth-century Europe [Marrus 1985], most of what stood for refugee history in the second half of the twentieth century derived as an offshoot of refugee studies, itself heavily geared towards policy issues [Bakewell 2008; Zetter 2007]. Aristide Zolberg's landmark book, *Escape from Violence*, showed how refugees were associated with some of the transformational moments in modern history, but historians took little notice of it [Zolberg, Suhrke and Aguayo 1989]. Another path-breaking study, notable for the fact that it was a kind of history from below rather than a study of refugee regimes and policy, was Renée Hirschon's ethnography of first, second and third generation refugees from Asia Minor who were compulsorily relocated to Greece following the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. Hirschon pointed not just to the legacy of Lausanne but to the ways in which refugees made a meaningful life in the port city of Piraeus. Her work had the potential to speak directly to social and cultural history, but her book is better known to anthropologists than to historians [Hirschon 1989].

Historians' problem with refugees is perplexing. Conceivably, such neglect reflects the assumption that any refugee crisis is a temporary blip, and that things 'return to normal' after a brief if painful interlude, although this too is puzzling, given what is known about the enduring presence and legacies of refugee populations in the Middle East, South-East Asia, and other parts of the world. Another possible explanation is that historians assume that many refugees had no wish or few opportunities to advertise their status and left few traces behind in the historical record. Yet, as the Palestinian *Nakba* and other events demonstrate, the rich resources that are available have not been well exploited by historians [Chatty 2010; Gatrell 2013].

All the same, it is misleading to dwell too long on the fact that historians have neglected refugees. Specialists have turned refugee history into a growing and dynamic field. Whereas hitherto, pioneering scholars such as Marrus, Tony Kushner and Katharine Knox, Frank Caestecker and others paid close attention to the impact of government policies on refugees, the focus of attention has lately begun to broaden [Kushner and Knox, 1999; Caestecker, 2000]. To take one important example, although the centenary of the First World War has not so far been the occasion to devote attention to pan-European population displacement immediately before, during and after the war, at least one collaborative research project is currently underway. Comparisons can begin to be made between different wartime experiences and between governmental and non-governmental practices that developed in the midst of an entirely unexpected crisis, with immense political repercussions in terms of destabilising powerful continental empires and exposing fault-lines in the state [Gatrell and Zhvanko, eds, 2017]. Another example is the history of Europe's Displaced Persons (DPs) after 1945, which has recently become a growth area following the pioneering work of Wolfgang Jacobmeyer and Mark Wyman [Jacobmeyer 1985; Wyman 1998]. New work locates their experiences of DPs in the history of post-war

central Europe and in the history of international migration and the growth of inter-governmental organisations [Holian and Cohen 2012]. Historians of humanitarianism have also contributed studies of refugee assistance, not least during the First World War [Irwin, 2013; Cabanes, 2014]. There is thus a sea-change in the historiography of twentieth-century refugees and the refugee regime [Frank and Reinisch 2014; Neumann 2015; Madokoro 2016].

### The First World War

During the First World War, civilians no less than military personnel experienced mass displacement. Although most informed observers anticipated a short war, the First World War lasted more than four years. European armies were expected to engage in military manoeuvres, without substantial costs for civilians. This vision quickly evaporated. Civilians no less than military personnel experienced war as displacement, as they were caught up in the fighting across large swathes of territory on the European mainland. This eruption caused non-combatants to avoid enemy occupation including the risk of conscription (or worse) by moving to the interior. In addition, the fraught conditions of prolonged war predisposed states to engage in the mass deportation of civilians who were believed to threaten freedom of military manoeuvre and to undermine the war effort more directly through espionage or other subversive activities. The Austro-Hungarian authorities targeted ethnic Ruthenian, Bosnian Serb, Slovenian and Italian-speaking minorities on the grounds of their imputed disloyalty. In 1914, Russia's military commanders deported from occupied East Prussia much of the German population which had not already fled westward to the German interior [Gatrell and Zhvanko, eds 2017]. In the Caucasus, Turkish military and political leaders targeted hundreds of thousands of Ottoman Armenian subjects as a potential 'security threat'. Justifying their actions in terms of military necessity, the Ottoman state massacred Armenians indiscriminately or deported them to the remote parts of Anatolia and Mesopotamia. The historian Ronald Grigor Suny argues that the Young Turks and their supporters were 'affectively disposed' towards treating the Armenian minority as a threat to the state, and that the First World War provided context and pretext for mass deportation [Suny 2015].

For these reasons, sites of displacement extended from Belgium to Armenia, taking in France, Italy, Austria-Hungary, Prussia, the Russian Empire and Serbia. The German occupation of Belgium, France, Poland and Lithuania prompted the mass flight of civilians, as did Russia's invasion of East Prussia in 1914. In Anglo-American historiography, the war has tended to be informed by images of stalemate on the Western front and the combination of terror and boredom that trench warfare induced. But in other parts of the continent the experience was quite different. Here, armies and civilians were regularly on the move. One important component of this hectic mobility was the refugee crisis that afflicted Russia. Mention has already been made of civilian Armenians, many of whom made their way into Russian territory in order to evade Ottoman persecution.

In the Russian Empire the number of displaced civilians reached three million by summer 1915 and may have climbed to as high as six or seven million by the time Russia left the war in November 1917 [Volkov 1930, pp. 71–72]. As with data on prisoners of war, the figures do not reveal the number of refugees who never made it to safety. Refugees travelled huge distances, many of them venturing to the Urals, Siberia, Central Asia and

the Far East. Nor was this displacement confined to 1914 and 1915; for example, fresh contingents of Latvian refugees arrived on Russian territory in August 1917 and again in February 1918 following the renewed German advance. Refugees accounted for around five per cent of the total population of the Russian empire on the eve of its collapse, and outnumbered the wage-earning population in the industrial economy. Eugene Kulischer suggested that 'in two short years the movement of refugees and evacuees was as considerable as it had been during the migration to Siberia over a 25-year period, 1885–1909' [Kulischer 1948, p. 32]. Most of these refugees did not cross an internationally recognised border; they were and remained subjects of the Tsar. How far the Tsarist state was responsible for their plight and their relief became a defining issue for Russia's wartime politics, and a manifestation of a broad social calamity [Lohr 2003; Sanborn 2005].

In August 1915 Russian government ministers issued a decree stipulating that, 'refugees (*bezhtentsy*) are those persons who have abandoned localities threatened or already occupied by the enemy, or who have been evacuated by order of the military or civil authority from the zone of military operations' (in official parlance these were termed 'forced migrants', *vyselentsy*). The statement added that refugees included 'emigrants (*vykhodtsy*) from states hostile to Russia', testimony to the presence on Russian soil of Ukrainians (*galichane*) from Austrian Galicia, as well as Armenian subjects of the Ottoman Empire [Gatrell 1999, pp. 12–13]. The attempt to identify the refugee population for administrative and legal purposes betrayed uncertainties about the causes of internal population displacement. Was it caused by enemy troops who behaved in an uncivilised fashion, provoking civilians to lose a sense of self-control, or by the Tsar's troops who targeted particular groups? According to one explanation, 'as soon as our troops withdraw, the entire population becomes confused and runs away'. Sometimes 'voluntary' departure was the only alternative to almost certain conscription by the enemy. Civilians were also persuaded to leave their homes by the fear of being terrorised by enemy troops. Nor were these fears misplaced: 'rumours are rife that the Germans have behaved abominably towards the local population'. These verdicts generally supported the view that population displacement was the product of mass panic by civilians; only a minority were believed to have taken a considered decision to leave.

Mass displacement was by no means solely dictated by a fearful civilian response to real or anticipated punitive action on the part of the enemy. The Russian general staff disposed of sweeping powers to enforce the resettlement of civilians, where this strategy was deemed appropriate. Army regulations permitted the military authorities to assume absolute control over all affairs in the theatre of operations. Civilians were sometimes removed indiscriminately from districts close to the front. 'We didn't want to move, we were chased away ... we were forced to burn our homes and crops, we weren't allowed to take our cattle with us', in the words of one group of refugees. In vain did Latvian political leaders and relief workers protest that it made no sense to deport civilians of all ages from the province of Kurland: 'old men, youths under the age of 15, women with young children — none of these groups serve any military purpose and cannot render any assistance to the enemy'. In public, the Minister of the Interior maintained that military behaviour had no bearing on refugedom (*bezhenstvo*), which in his opinion was 'caused by a desire for self-preservation'. Liberal commentators openly accused the army of forcing civilians to leave their homes. Jews, Poles, Germans and other groups were particularly vulnerable, but gypsies too were deported from the vicinity of the front in July and August 1915. The Russian

army also engaged in the deportation of Kazakhs and others from Central Asia, in the wake of the great revolt in 1916, turning them into refugees [Happel 2010]. So widespread were the army's tactics that a leading tsarist dignitary observed that 'refugees' constituted a minority of the displaced population, compared to the hundreds of thousands of those who had been forcibly displaced [Gatrell 1999, pp. 31–32].

### Refugees in Russia: the historiography

It comes as no surprise that historians who conducted research in the Soviet Union contributed very little to our knowledge of refugees. Refugees could not easily be accommodated in the official discourse that privileged the experiences, actions, and consciousness of the proletariat and the poor peasantry. For decades the only publication of note in Russian relating to population displacement in the era of the First World War was a brief and tantalising encyclopaedia entry on 'refugeedom' by Abram Kirzhnits in the first edition of the Soviet historical encyclopaedia [Kirzhnits 1927]. Kirzhnits was at pains to emphasise that civilians quit their homes in Russia's western borderlands on account of enemy invasion in the first phase of the war, but that mass population displacement also resulted from the concerted actions of the tsarist army in deporting civilians from Grodno, Kovno, Kurland and other provinces. Kirzhnits termed this a 'bacchanalia of forced migration' (*bakkhanaliia vysleneniia*) that ensnared Poles, Jews, Latvians, Lithuanians, Belarusians and Ukrainians. Kirzhnits relied upon official and semi-official accounts to paint a picture of the scale of the refugee crisis and the most notable organisations involved in relief work, including the assistance provided by trade unions in Moscow, Riga, Samara, and elsewhere. The sources remained buried in the archives of pre-revolutionary government and non-governmental institutions. But these institutions evaporated — or were eviscerated — and this helped foster historical amnesia about refugeedom.

Little work of note on the refugee crisis appeared in the Soviet era. One exception proves the rule: the memoirs of Evgenii A. Nikol'skii were written in exile and subsequently deposited in the Hoover Institution. His memoirs include around one hundred pages on 'Refugees during the Great War [Nicol'skii 1934]. Nikol'skii had first-hand experience of assisting refugees as they travelled in summer 1915 from the vicinity of Kobrin/Kobryn in Russian Poland, around 25 km from the front line, where many thousands had been kept in temporary refugee camps, to the Russian interior. Shortly afterwards he was engaged by Severopomoshch' ('Northern Aid'), part of the bureaucratic apparatus created by the Ministry of the Interior as a rival to the public organisations that were operating in the vicinity of the front (see below).

Post-Soviet scholars have begun to redress the balance. A. N. Kurtsev contributed a series of articles on the refugee crisis [Kurtsev 1999a; Kurtsev 1999b], and others have followed his pioneering example [Tumanova 2012]. Liubov Zhvanko has provided the first fully-worked out study of the causes and consequences of population displacement in Ukraine during the First World War and the era of revolution and civil war, painting a convincing picture of a society that was turned upside down during the era of war and revolution. She pays close attention to the creation of the category of 'refugee', the actions of the multiple agencies that intervened on behalf of refugees in Ukraine, and the interaction of refugees and host communities across the revolutionary divide of 1917 [Zhvanko 2009; Zhvanko 2012].

However, non-Soviet historians were equally culpable of neglecting refugees in Russia. The 'new social history' of the revolution concentrated upon organised social forces, whose actions impinged directly on the existing forms of state power and whose spokesmen left behind compelling accounts of political struggle. The dominant narratives of revolution in Western scholarship found little room for social activity that could not easily be accommodated within the framework of conventional political organisations. Refugees were overlooked in these narratives; they just did not 'fit in'. Social historians were unwilling or unable to understand the significance of refugees in modern history. Only recently has this begun to be redressed [Gatrell 1999; Siegelbaum and Moch 2014].

The plight of refugees in the Russian Empire first came to the attention of the English-speaking world in 1915 when the Englishman John Pollock published an article in the *Fortnightly Review*. Pollock (1878–1963) belonged by virtue of his privileged background to the British elite. During the First World War he served as chief commissioner of the Great Britain-Poland Fund (originally the 'Great Britain to Poland and Galicia Committee'). In July 1915 he travelled to Kiev under the auspices of the Russian Red Cross. His article described 'a pool of human misery [...] a world apart from anything known before [...] its inhabitants are of one class, one type, one character, and they have but one name. They are the Refugees.' He added that this 'wailing multitude [has] reached the point of complete apathy.' Most of them were Ruthenian peasants from Galicia who 'in everything tend towards Russian culture' (sic). Pollock evoked the idea of the early medieval "wandering of the peoples" as the only equivalent to this mass movement of population. Deploying another cultural reference, he described a baby at its mother's breast; the woman had 'a face like Michelangelo's Delphic Sybil on the Sistine Chapel.' The only crumb of comfort was the delivery of hot meals and baths by a British committee headed by a Yorkshire engineer who had narrowly 'escaped from death on the Galician oilfields.' There was also a promise of help from the Tatiana Committee (see below). In general, Pollock's account was characterised by a patronising tone, reinforcing a sense that refugees might be helped, but could not help themselves. This, and his repertoire of cultural allusions, makes it worthy of note [Pollock 1915].

A more extensive and informative account of refugees in Russia appeared in 1916, penned by British nurse Violetta Thurstan (1879–1978). Thurstan joined the British Red Cross in 1913 and spent several weeks helping the war wounded in Belgium until she transferred to the Russian Red Cross. She wrote of her experiences in two books including a unique account in English, *The People Who Run: the Tragedy of the Refugees in Russia*. After leaving Russia she returned to Belgium, where she was wounded, before taking up a position as a hospital nurse in Macedonia where she remained until the end of the war. After the war she turned her attention to other pursuits, but she did not abandon her interest in refugees. In 1923 she took a post with the Egyptian government as director of Bedouin industries in Arab refugee camps close to Cairo where women were employed in carpet making. In 1937 she worked in Spain helping wounded civilians during the civil war and working on behalf of prisoners. At the end of the Second World War her career in refugee relief continued when she joined the Catholic Relief Programme, evacuating and resettling children, working with prisoners of war and displaced persons in Italy, Egypt, and Austria. She belongs to that large body of British female voluntary aid workers who moved from country to country in the middle years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, gaining expertise in the field as they did so [Oldfield 2006].

*The People Who Run* drew on Thurstan's experiences of the initial Russian retreat to Warsaw and the great retreat in summer 1915 during which she worked in a series of field hospitals. Like Pollock, she revealed a sensitive if somewhat patronising approach to refugees—'some of the saddest people that ever were seen'—whose overcrowded accommodation meant 'the indiscriminate mingling of the decent and the dissolute.' She frequently came into contact with apathetic refugees, but she drew a distinction between lethargy and 'slacking and shamming,' since inertia could not be helped. Refugees had, in her view, lost a sense of self-respect, but they deserved sympathy: 'their sorrow [...] is a vicarious one, for they have suffered and died in order that our homes, our country and our children shall be safe.' She distinguished between men and women:

The old men can be made content with a little tobacco and the company of their old cronies; perhaps, too, they are a little more used to travelling and mixing with the outside world than the women, who seem to miss terribly their accustomed seat near the stove among their familiar household goods [Thurstan 1916, p. 38].

Warming to her theme about population displacement and the consequences attendant on the collapse of patriarchal authority, including what she saw as a loss of moral compass, Thurstan praised female students in Petrograd who 'have done admirable work in keeping the young girls straight and out of temptation' and singled out aid organisations that arranged classes for young boys 'on the Boy Scout principles' who were taught a trade and thereby encouraged to keep out of mischief [Thurstan 1916, p. 72].

Thurstan was also attentive to the impact of the war on ordinary Russians who were confronted by a massive sudden influx of refugees. Poor households in particular faced mounting household bills as the price of food and rents rose. She noted the desperate situation in some provincial cities, such as Kazan, where refugees and locals were also expected to share resources with Austrian prisoners of war and wounded soldiers who were being treated in the university medical school. In these circumstances, she could only express admiration for peasants who treated refugees 'as members of the family' [Thurstan 1916, p. 142–143]. However, her compassion did not extend to Jews in general or to Jewish refugees in particular. Thurstan betrayed her own prejudices when announcing that 'many Jews have on the whole German sympathies.' Nor did Jewish refugees 'suffer so acutely from homesickness [since] they are wanderer by nature or sub-conscious instinct. They settle down more quickly [...] and take more easily to new work.' Another consideration in her view was that their situation was mitigated by 'the extraordinary generosity shown by many Jews to their co-religionists,' by which she meant the financial aid from Jews living overseas [Thurstan 1916, pp. 150–153]. In her view, other refugee groups deserved greater sympathy and attention.

The accounts published by Thurstan and Pollock lend weight to the suggestion that the Russian refugee crisis generated a powerful sense of what has come to be called 'distant suffering' that relied upon graphic representations of distress and allusions to culturally familiar episodes from the past [Boltanski 1999]. Pollock and Thurstan both appealed for donations from members of the British public. To be sure, Thurstan's emphasis on Allied charity was calculated to sustain the commitment of the British public to its Russian ally, but taking a broader view we can also see the articulation of a business-like humanitarian ethos in which considerations of value for money mattered no less than the relief of suffering.

## The Russian cockpit: managing the refugee crisis

A complex pattern of response can be detected in respect of managing the refugee crisis in the Russian Empire. This response included actions taken by central government, by local authorities, by semi-official bodies, and by new national committees. In addition, there is abundant evidence of activism on the part of non-governmental organisations, charities, religious groups and private individuals. Many of these individuals were people of modest means and status. Some were professional social workers, lawyers and educationalists.

Government oversight of the refugee question rested with the new Special Council for Refugees (*Osoboe soveshchanie po ustroistvu bezhentsev*), which was established in August 1915. Like other special councils created in the same month, it was chaired by a cabinet minister, in this case the minister of the interior. It allocated around 200 million rubles in the course of the war, equivalent to more than two-thirds of total expenditure on refugee relief [Kirzhnits, 1927]. The special council was not immune from the effects of the growing economic crisis, and in December 1916 informed the organisations it funded of the need to adjust to a 50 per cent cut in their budget. At the same time, the Tsar's plenipotentiary in the Caucasus instructed relief agencies to enlist refugees in the search for paid work, in order to reduce their reliance on government funds. The question of entitlement emerged in discussions of the arrangements for the registration of refugees at a local level. In Khar'kov, for example, refugees who approached the municipality for assistance had to 'demonstrate that they are actually from areas suffering from military action' [Komitet 1916, p. 453].

The Tatiana Committee (*Komitet Ee Imperatorskogo Vyschestva Velikoi Kniazhny Tatiiny Nikolaevny dlia okazaniia pomoshchi postradavshim ot voennykh deistvii*) occupied pride of place in the operational arrangements for refugee relief. It collected and distributed cash and goods to all refugees. It published lists and photos of refugee children who had been separated from their parents. Although critics accused it of being an establishment entity, this was much less true of the committee's regional branches which, as in Novgorod, included priests, landlords, teachers, lawyers, workers and peasant farmers. It galvanised middle-class women into collecting money, distributing food and warm clothing, arranging temporary accommodation for refugees and finding them part-time work in order to maintain their morale [Komitet 1916, pp. 258–260, 416–417]. The committee supplemented its budget from the central government with private donations and from funds derived from organised campaigns such as those associated with the Tsar's daughter's name-day. Its employees drew no salary, so overheads were low, as its chairman, senator Aleksei B. Neidgardt reminded the Russian public, in a barb directed at the rival public organisations [Gatrell 1999, p. 41].

Early in the war Tsar Nicholas II also approved the formation of the union of zemstvos and the union of towns. Their leaders envisaged closer collaboration between themselves, and in July 1915 they revived the joint organisation, Zemgor, which had briefly seen the light of day during the Russo-Japanese War. In addition to attempting to improve military supplies, Zemgor took steps to support refugees, particularly during the long and arduous journey from the western borderlands to the Russian interior. These self-styled public organisations (*obshchestvennyye organizatsii*) maintained not only that the wheels of officialdom turned slowly and that civic activism outstripped anything that could be ex-

pected from organisations associated with the state, notably the Red Cross and the Tatiana Committee. Like the Tatiana Committee, the public organisations maintained an active profile at a provincial level [Pichon-Bobrinskoy 2005; Tumanova 2012].

Unlike prisoners of war, who were often confined to camps in remote parts of the empire, refugees were concentrated disproportionately in urban settlements. Towns and cities were transformed as a result. By the middle of 1916, more than one in ten inhabitants in some of Russia's largest towns were refugees; in Samara they made up almost thirty per cent, whilst in Ekaterinoslav and Pskov refugees reached around one quarter of the total and in Nizhnii-Novgorod 15 per cent [Gatrell 1999, p. 62–63]. Some early appeals for help made much of the expectation that refugees 'will not be staying long in our midst. The enemy will leave the frontiers of Russia and the refugees will once more return to their own homes'. But few people probably believed this optimistic assessment, which was in any event quickly overtaken by the realisation that refugees would be around for some time to come. As the journal of the union of zemstvos argued in the autumn of 1915, 'we must not lose sight of the fact that refugees are our guests, and not for a brief period either'. Some of them would wish to stay permanently [*Izvestiia* 1915, p. 63].

The refugee crisis was particularly troubling — obviously for the refugees themselves, but also for local municipal authorities as well as ordinary residents. In Moscow public and private buildings alike were commandeered to provide them with temporary accommodation, a reminder that key urban points of contact — railway stations, hotels, hospitals and so forth — need to be included into any discussion of the metropolitan civilian experience of warfare. Municipal leaders in Kiev hastened to move them out of the city and further eastwards. As the refugee crisis lapped at the shores of relatively remote towns and cities in Siberia, hard-pressed local authorities determined the maximum capacity of towns such as Tomsk and Barnaul before encouraging refugees to settle on farmland rather than contribute to the housing and food crisis in urban centres, but refugees were reluctant to take this option.<sup>1</sup>

Many refugees chose or were forced to settle in the countryside. Reports reached Vladimir that the government had plans to settle refugees in deserted peasant dwellings and to encourage peasants to take on others as farm workers. There was even talk, 'in extreme cases', of forcing refugees to move to villages where they would form 'a kind of military colony' (*voennyi postoi*). But the tsarist state never worked out a systematic plan of settlement, leaving this instead to the discretion of provincial governors and local authorities.

Abrupt physical displacement had an uneven impact. It entailed profound social and political consequences for the Jewish population of imperial Russia. In one sense the war liberated Russian Jewry, by forcing the tsarist government to recognize that it could no longer continue to sustain the Pale of Settlement — in other words, that it was more important to defeat the real enemy than to maintain administrative controls over the Jewish population of the Russian empire. As the liberal-minded minister of agriculture put it, 'one cannot fight a war against Germany and against the Jews'. Certainly, Jews continued to suffer all manner of harassment and physical abuse at the hands of the Russian army. However, once it was recognised that the movement of Jewish refugees could no longer

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<sup>1</sup> I draw here on papers by Anne O'Donnell and Olena Betlii presented to the conference, 'Imperial cities in the Great War and revolution (1914–1921)', organised by Alexei Miller and the German Historical Institute, Moscow, April 2015.

be controlled by government agencies, the Pale of Settlement dissolved itself. On 15 August 1915 the government reluctantly conceded that 'Jewish war sufferers' — those who fled and those who had been deported — should be allowed to settle in provincial towns such as Voronezh, Tambov and Penza, although not Petrograd or and Moscow. Consistent with pre-war Tsarist policy, Jewish refugees were forbidden to settle in villages. Leading spokesmen had no illusions that the August circular implied political emancipation, but they were nevertheless impressed by the potential gains that might be made. The practical outcome of this new dispensation for Jewish settlement was that two-fifths of all Jewish refugees moved to areas of the Russian empire that had previously been closed to them. Townspeople in the Russian interior who had scarcely set eyes on Jews now rubbed shoulders with them.

### Representing refugees

Russia's refugees were regarded with a mixture of suspicion and sympathy. On the one hand the refugee was a figure of suspicion whose 'spontaneous' action in fleeing suggested a loss of reason (compared, for example, to the deliberation that was believed to characterise pre-war migration) and testified to the potential to disturb social order in provincial Russia. Fears were expressed about the results of sudden mass displacement in relation to food, housing, public health and criminal behaviour.

Much of the associated iconography emphasised the magnitude of the refugee movement; typical of these was a picture of the throng gathered outside a refugee sanctuary in Petrograd — 'people of the most diverse condition and status (*sostoianie*), now united by the single general term, refugee'. Contemporary representations deployed metaphors of catastrophe, such as 'flood', 'avalanche', and a 'plague of locusts' [Gatrell 1999, p. 197–198, 200]. As Liisa Malkki reminds us, 'these liquid names for the uprooted reflect the sedentarist bias in dominant modes of imagining homes and homelands, identities and nationalities' [Malkki 1995, p. 15–16].

Nevertheless, not all depictions of displacement evoked such disturbing images or carried such negative connotations. A dispossessed refugee might be imbued with the capacity to impart a civilising influence on the backward village, helping for example to demonstrate new farming techniques. A priest in Simbirsk remarked that

Even in this lonely backwater (*zakholust'e*) the refugee movement has brought something new. The refugees who have arrived in the village, no matter how poor they may be, have shown the local population that there are shortcomings in their way of life and daily practices, that it is conceivable to live a better life, that it is possible to work a good deal more productively. Each of these half-starved refugees tells the peasantry that they — the refugees — cannot work as the peasants do here [Simbirskie eparkhial'nye vedomosti 1916, p. 572].

This was reinforced by a sense of superiority on the part of some refugees, such as Latvians who settled in Russia's impoverished central black-earth provinces who boasted that 'we have long forgotten what it means to suffer from a harvest failure or to go without bread' [Gatrell 1999, p. 132]. Their displacement served to reinforce a sense of cultural distance between the virtuous Latvian yeoman and the backward Russian peasant.

Refugees who stayed on quickly exhausted the resources and patience of the urban population. Certainly, plenty of opportunities presented themselves to people who wished to exploit the vulnerability of refugees. Yet there were also reports, as from Riga,

that 'relations between local residents and our comrades are cordial. The ordinary people regard us as sufferers (*stradal'tsev*) who have fled the horrors of war. They give us presents, and ask after those who are most needy. Russian workers look upon us differently, as special mates (*pomoshchniki*) who can throw a shaft of sunlight into their dark barracks. They are very curious about our former living conditions, pay, orderliness, tidiness and so forth'. Moscow workers who belonged to sick clubs reportedly organised a collection for refugees and helped them to find work in the city, notwithstanding opposition from their less 'conscious' colleagues. These efforts were imbued with a less interventionist and authoritarian approach than that adopted by relief agencies and charities [Gatrell 1999, pp. 128–140].

Other images testified to a degree of empathetic understanding on the part of the host population. In its first issue for 1916, the 'family journal' *Rodina* published a drawing of 'Two Flights' (*Dva begstva*), in which the plight of the refugee family was juxtaposed with the flight of Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus to Bethlehem. Accompanying verses urged the refugees not to lose heart [Gatrell 1999, p. 74]. Editors frequently focused upon a single refugee family; some of the poses were clearly contrived to create a genre photograph of the kind that had become fashionable at the turn of the century.

Towards the end of 1916 the Tatiana Committee planned a special exhibition to inform the Russian public about the living conditions and activities of refugees, who were not all 'beggars, idlers and spongers.' Four main themes were to be highlighted: conditions in Russia's borderlands before and during the war (including 'the destruction of settlements, property and artistic monuments'); their 'sorrowful journey', including the background to their displacement, the course of the refugee movement and the assistance given by government and public organizations; the living conditions in their new homes (including 'the work undertaken by refugees and their impact on the local population'); and, lastly, the restoration of normal life in the regions cleared of enemy occupation. Something similar was entertained by Latvian activists at the same time. But nothing came of these elaborate plans [Gatrell 1999, p. 94; Kenins 1917]. In a related initiative the Tatiana Committee sponsored a remarkable project designed to gather first-hand material from refugees about their experiences before, during and after displacement. 'Simple people' were encouraged to describe their experiences in their own words: 'the material that is collected will be collated and organized systematically and will form part of a projected volume on the history of the refugee movement during the world war ... The most important thing is for the description to be sincere and truthful'. In the end, a small selection of published accounts privileged professional people [Gatrell 1999, p. 95].

Perhaps most remarkable in terms of its content were the words of a female eye-witness — unfortunately, nothing of is known of her other than her name and gender. In a contribution to another short-lived journal, *Sputnik bezhentsa* ('The Refugee's Guide') she wrote:

Not so long ago, these people lived a full and independent working life. They had the right to be just like us, that is, indolent, rude and ungrateful. Now they have lost this prerogative; their poverty and helplessness oblige them to be meek and grateful, to smile at people they don't like, to answer each and every question without the right to ask questions of their own, to submit to the authority of people they don't respect and have no wish to know, to accept disadvantageous terms from those who wish to take advantage of their poverty and misfortunes [Vystavkina 1915].

Her observations have surely never been bettered as an eloquent expression of empathy, yet its poignancy and directness of tone only reinforces the point that most testimony is mediated by non-refugees.

### Nationalising refugees

One fundamental decision taken by the tsarist state was to devolve much of the responsibility for the day to day relief of refugees on to new national committees. This had profound consequences for the course of politics in the Russian Empire.

Patriotic elites took the opportunity to mobilise public opinion on behalf of the suffering nation. Non-Russian political leaders constantly reminded their audience that invading troops had lately violated their homeland. Members of the Latvian intelligentsia argued that refugees from the Baltic lands presented a living testimony of German barbarism; their presence brought home to the inhabitants of Petrograd and Moscow the consequences of territorial loss. Occupation was bad enough, but this calamity did not exhaust the fears expressed by national leaders [Liulevičius 2001]. Latvian, Lithuanian and Polish patriots lamented the prospect of 'national dispersion'. W. Grabski, speaking in July 1916 on behalf of the Polish national committee outlined the implications as follows:

Only continuous and close contact with the national group, whether in the distribution of allowances, the allocation of accommodation, the supply of clothing, the search for work, the offer of medical treatment, the satisfaction of all material and spiritual needs — only this can guarantee and secure refugees on behalf of the motherland [Gatrell 1999, p. 156].

When they took to the road, refugees were by definition deprived of membership in a close-knit local community, but displacement offered them an opportunity to gain access to an enlarged national community, built on the foundations of a common sense of loss and the need for collective effort to regain what had been forfeited in wartime. It might even be possible to re-establish contact with those who had left the homeland long before the war: as one Latvian patriot put it, 'the unity of Latvia demands that we register all such settlers and ensure that they do not lose their identity'. The chronicler of Latvian displacement, Kristaps Bachmanis, described how these settlers 'had been left alone with their destiny and so became estranged from the life of our people, our common fate, our grief and our longing for better future'. Fortunately, he went on, 'at last our refugees have enabled us to establish contact with Latvian settlers in Russia. Our purpose should be to do everything to destroy the wall between us and them' [Bachmanis 1916; Gatrell 1999, p. 158]. Displacement provided an opportunity to make amends for previous failures to assert national solidarity. According to Martynas Yčas, the Lithuanian activist who later served as president of the new republic, the LCWC 'prepared the people for future action and created the foundations for a future cultural and political edifice ... It forced even non-Lithuanians to recognise that we ourselves were the *masters of our country*'. He spoke of those 'live corpses of the nation [who] joined in the common work with a new impulse of love for our nation' [Balkelis 2004, p. 76]. Allowing for a degree of retrospective exaggeration, Yčas neatly encapsulated the sense of political mobilisation and the vision of national emancipation that refugeedom now made possible.

Elsewhere, philanthropic relief efforts mobilized Armenian society in the Caucasus. Dozens of committees, some of them active since the beginning of the war, organized pro-

grammes of relief. Although they were frequently accused of acting entirely independently of each other, this charge was not entirely fair. Welfare and relief agencies developed expertise in specific fields. By the end of 1916 the Caucasian Armenian Benevolent Society concentrated on the supply of foodstuffs. The union of towns took charge of public health, screening refugees for infectious diseases and building seven new hospitals to cope with those in greatest need. Orphanages were built and maintained by the Armenian central welfare committee, by the Armenian 'maidens' committee' (*Komitet armianskikh devits*), and by 'Fraternal Aid committees' in Yerevan and Etchmiadzin, the latter under the aegis of the Catholicos. But limited resources were thinly spread. The union of towns was overwhelmed. Erevan, with just one hospital and only a handful of doctors and medical orderlies, was simply not equipped to deal with the thousands of physically and mentally scarred refugees who congregated there in the summer of 1915 [Gatrell 1999, pp. 150–153].<sup>2</sup>

Members of the Armenian elite in Moscow and Petrograd rendered assistance to the refugee population, though they were frequently charged with indifference to their plight. An Armenian committee in Moscow was headed by a member of the Cadet party, Alexander Khatisov. Wartime mayor of Tbilisi (which, like Baku, had a large Armenian population) and leading politician in his own right, Khatisov was joined by other Armenian liberals, including Moisei Adzhemov and M. I. Papadzhyanov, both of them members of the Cadet fraction in the Duma. Nor were the citizens of Tbilisi quite so lethargic as was suggested. Armenian peasants were also praised for their willingness to help refugees, even though their own economic situation was itself precarious. In May 1916 the tsarist government approved the convocation of a special Armenian congress in Petrograd, the first occasion on which the regime had tolerated public discussion of the 'Armenian question' outside the Caucasus itself. Delegates confined themselves to formal discussion of relief efforts, including the care of orphans and the education of refugee children (40 per cent of Armenian refugees were under the age of 17). They also heard a patriotic opening speech from Mamikonian who declared that 'it is better to eat Russian hay than Muslim bread' [Gatrell 1999, p. 154].

Jewish refugees occupied a specific place in contemporary discourse and policy. As already mentioned, the war led to the abolition of the Pale of Settlement, but this unexpected boon did little, according to Kirzhnits, to lessen the prejudice that Jewish refugees faced in the Russian interior [Kirzhnits 1927]. In Petrograd, a group of wealthy Jewish bankers and lawyers established the central Jewish committee for the relief of victims of war (*Evreiskii komitet pomoshchi zhertvam voiny*, ЕКОПО), backed by four influential organisations: the Society for the Propagation of Enlightenment among Russian Jews; the Society for Handicrafts; the Jewish Colonisation Association; and the Society for the Health of Jews. These exclusive bodies came up against a widespread provincial activism, which challenged established modes of conduct and emphasised the need to set aside political differences: 'now, one flag has been raised, the Jewish banner. The wave of refugees has united all shades of Judaism and all languages.' Social and cultural differences between Jews from the shtetl and the Jewish professional intelligentsia had been eroded: 'Jews who hitherto did not know or understand one another have been brought together. Mutual antagonisms have disappeared, to be replaced by excellent fraternal relations.' ЕКОПО maintained that 'small oases have become major centres of Jewish settlement, and

<sup>2</sup> New work as yet unpublished on Armenian refugees in the Russian Empire is currently being undertaken by Asya Darbinyan, Clark University.

the newcomers have demanded the right to participate in communal life'. However, this may have misjudged the extent to which class and status differences persisted — and not just among the Jewish population of the Russian Empire [Zipperstein 1988; Gatrell 1999, pp. 145–150; Budnitskii, ed. 2005].

This feverish activity exposed the inadequacy of the relief efforts made on behalf of ethnic Russian refugees who reportedly found themselves at a disadvantage compared to non-Russians. From Ekaterinburg came the charge that Russian Orthodox refugees had been 'cheated' in comparison with Jewish refugees who received money from several sources. 'The Jewish refugee strolls around in a comfortable suit and in galoshes, whilst the Russian has to make do with cast-offs and felt boots'. Right-wing nationalists drew attention to the prevalence of Russian refugees on the streets of Petrograd, a sure sign that they lacked the relief available to Jews, Poles, and Latvians. How could Russian society tolerate this negligent state of affairs; 'national pride' required nothing less than an adequate provision of relief to the peasant, beneath whose torn coat 'the spark of God is alight and a true Russian heart is beating'. A correspondent in Yaroslavl' found it shameful that Jews and Catholics had devoted resources to the relief of suffering amongst their flock, whereas the local Russian community displayed on such commitment: 'can we call ourselves Christians?'; she asked. It was shameful to call oneself a Russian, but do nothing to help [Gatrell 1999, p. 163].

The situation in Ukraine was a good deal more complicated, not least given the influx of Ukrainian refugees from Galicia, where opportunities before the war for political activity had been more extensive. These refugees were now taken under the wing of the 'Russian People's Council for Carpathian Rus', a shady group whose leaders reportedly had close contacts with the Black Hundreds. The council dedicated itself to the promotion of loyalty to Russia, opening its doors to those 'who willingly disclosed their Russian national consciousness (sic) or in some measure demonstrated that they were well disposed towards Russia and the Russian people'. In reality, relief efforts fell far short of the rhetoric. In Rostov, Ukrainian refugees complained that they were given only cold food, that they were forced to sleep on cold floors, and that allowances arrived erratically. The local organizer of the Russian People's Council, blithely told a visiting journalist that 'these are refugees after all, and they can hardly count on home comforts' [Gatrell 1999, p. 166].

Moderate and extreme Russian nationalists alike pounced on any attempt to draw attention to the Ukrainian-ness of refugees. A proposed Ukrainian society in Moscow aroused the ire of one newspaper editor, who demanded that it be renamed the 'Little Russian society'. To adopt the term Ukrainian meant accepting that they were a 'non-Russian people'. Yet his anger and unease betrayed the fact that the war facilitated the dissemination of pro-Ukrainian views. In an article, 'To flee or not to flee?', the author argued that there might be advantages in staying put if one were Ukrainian:

In favour of remaining behind is the centuries-old culture that previous generations have created there. Not everywhere will become a war zone. Our own culture will remain; so, too, should those people who can preserve it ... Even if the enemy should strike deeper, individuals may be killed and individual property may be destroyed, but the land, its culture ... these will survive [Ukrainskaia zhizn' 1915, pp. 84–85]

Generally speaking, collective action helped to bridge the gap between the educated national elite, refugee members of the national intelligentsia, and the 'common' refugee. It was no longer possible to retain the conventional sharp distinction between members

of the educated intelligentsia and the 'dark' *narod*, because they had all suffered a common exposure to the dehumanising and debilitating consequences of refugeedom. The reiteration of a sense of loss and destruction of 'national' assets acted as a unifying device. Non-refugee members of national minorities bound themselves together with 'taxes' levied on the entire community. By virtue of the disruption caused to other relationships by war, refugeedom created a situation in which nationality could assume a peculiar significance, even becoming prior to other kinds of solidarity. Refugeedom conferred respectability upon the rhetoric of national consciousness and imparted vitality to actions that were couched in a national idiom. Refugees were mobilised for a crusade in support of national regeneration and, ultimately, the creation or restoration of nationhood. This was an ironic outcome of the war. The tsarist state subsidised national committees which repaid its largesse with ultimately subversive political conduct.

### Revolution, refugees, and the aftermath of the First World War

Political changes inevitably affected the administration of refugee relief. In 1917 pressure mounted for reform. On the eve of the February Revolution a progressive newspaper editor wrote: 'the ruling classes and the spokesmen of countless government departments keep telling us that the care of refugees, like the war itself, is a national affair. Well, if this is the case, give the people themselves the chance to speak their mind' [Gatrell 1999, p. 172]. Unsurprisingly, the Tatiana Committee had a hard job countering the call for its democratisation. Its leadership took steps to address its elite character, dropping Tatiana's name, introducing elections to key posts in spring 1917, and inviting refugees themselves to stand for office — a radical departure, given that it has never been common practice to involve refugees in managing their own affairs [*Trudy* 1917, p. 80–87]. There followed a broadly-based congress devoted to refugees in April 1917 at which they were promised personal respect in return for espousing the doctrine of self-reliance, an acknowledgement not only of the new political atmosphere but also of the dwindling resources for refugee relief. Administrative changes did nothing to address the fundamental financial difficulties faced by aid agencies during the worsening economic crisis [Gatrell 1999, pp. 176–178].

Democratisation also influenced the stance taken by national committees. The political activism of the professional intelligentsia enabled them to claim a share in the leadership of the national movements that burgeoned after February 1917. The collapse of the old regime created a political space for Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish and other patriots to articulate a vision of freedom and greater autonomy. But it was heavily qualified, as is evident from the experience of Latvian activists who faced the dispersal of so many potential citizens: as one progressive newspaper put it, 'the only people to have returned are men on the make, spivs and the kind of women who have a bad name ... Latvia is beset by lethargy, military discipline, money and cheap favours. There is only one solution, and that is for the Latvian intelligentsia to go back home'. Unfortunately, the late summer of 1917 brought further disaster. German troops entered Riga on 21 August, Russian forces retreated in disarray, and the number of refugees swelled yet again [Gatrell 1999, pp. 179–187; Bachmanis 1926; Priedite 2004]. The resulting political uncertainty continued after the October Revolution, which drew yet greater attention to divisions between the Bolsheviks, other socialists, liberals and conservatives as to the stance to adopt towards refugees.

Russia and Eastern Europe suffered from a prolonged period of war, revolution and civil war. Violence, economic distortions and socio-demographic upheaval characterised the entire region between 1914 and 1921. The Bolshevik decision to leave the war at the end of 1917 was immediately followed by the outbreak of the Russian Civil War (including Allied intervention) and by the Soviet-Polish War. These brutal conflicts further complicated the already turbulent situation brought about by the displacement of refugees and prisoners of war [Rachamimov 2002].

Post-war population movements were a complex combination of treaties, administrative intervention and attempts on the part of prisoners of war and refugees to undertake a 'spontaneous' repatriation. Between 1918 and 1920 mass migration occurred as a result of a mixture of factors including food and fuel shortages, de-urbanisation, re-mobilisation (the formation of the Red Army), the shifting contours of territorial control, and the emigration of the Bolsheviks' political opponents. As if this were not bad enough, the conclusion of peace between Soviet Russia and Poland coincided with a terrible famine that generated further movements of population. Although the military and political situation stabilised in 1921, it was not until the mid-1920s that these wartime population movements found some kind of resolution. As one university professor put it in 1922, 'we have lived through so much these past seven years that it is a rare citizen of the [Russian] Republic who has not felt like a refugee, at least for a while' [Raleigh 2002, p. 187].

These population movements were in many instances directly related to the political upheavals of the time: the Russian Revolution, but also the redrawing of political borders and projects for colonisation and population exchange. These were inter-related phenomena: drawing new borders implied decisions about the political complexion of neighbouring states. This makes it impossible to study population movements without taking account of the geo-politics of 'peace making'. Ideas of redrawing the map of Europe already gained currency during the First World War, as is clear from the German occupation of the Baltic and the enduring image of reshaping the nexus between land and population [Liulevičius 2000].

In Russia the process of managing the return of Prisoners of war and refugees was managed by the Central Committee for Prisoners of war and Refugees (Tsentroplenbezh), which had a central office and regional offices. In 1920 it was renamed Tsentrevak. Tsentroplenbezh issued refugees with registration documents in the hope of running an organised schedule, but instead found that many refugees ignored the instructions — hence another round of bureaucratic complaints about 'spontaneity' (*samotek*). To complicate matters further, many refugees had lost personal documents. 'Famine refugees' too attracted a good deal of attention. Writing in 1920, a Soviet official in the Urals described 'the nightmare [of] children in the fields eating grass and any roots they can dig up ... people lying for days in railway wagons next to covered corpses. It is hard to imagine better conditions for an outbreak of infectious disease' [Kornilov 2004, p. 169; Utgof 2002].

Refugees along with prisoners of war made their way back home under their own steam during 1918 and 1919. Latvian refugees encountered suspicion on the part of the German military who occupied much of Latvia [Bartele and Shalde 2000]. Soviet officials reckoned that there were around 760,000 refugees on Russian territory on 1 December 1919, but this is certainly an underestimate, because so many refugees had never been registered. Refugees in Siberia and the Urals wanted desperately to return home to Poland or the Baltic States, but their journeys were made hazardous by the continuing mili-

tary struggle between Reds and Whites for territorial control and by infectious disease in 1919–20. Shortages of food and the fuel and transport crisis only added to the problems. Railway stations were overcrowded. Some gave up any hope of travelling westwards and journeyed further east instead. In 1921–22 the Urals witnessed a further influx of people from the famine-struck regions of the Volga; many of these so-called ‘famine refugees’ had already experienced displacement in 1915 [Kornilov 2004, p. 157].

At first sight, it might be thought that the conclusion of the Soviet-Polish War would have eased the plight of Polish refugees who had fled to the Russian interior in 1915. But this was a lengthy and complicated business. Repatriation was certainly not a politically neutral process. Soviet authorities hoped that the returnees would take with them a pro-Communist message and contribute to the creation of a revolutionary situation in Poland. For their part, Polish authorities were equally keen to ensure that returnees would demonstrate a commitment to the new bourgeois state. Around 1.1 million people left the territory of Soviet Russia for Poland between April 1921 and June 1924, including 200,000 from Ukraine. It is not clear how many of them had been displaced during the First World War, but it seems likely that the majority were refugees. This ‘repatriation’ still left a large Polish population, of around 1.5 million, on Soviet soil, including 350,000 in Ukraine, many of whom held jobs in coal mining. By 1925 the total number of Polish citizens who had been repatriated from the Soviet Union stood at 1,265,000, of whom the majority returned to Poland between 1919 and 1922 [Stadnik 2004, pp. 135–136].

In addition to formal agreements between the relevant governments, numerous refugees returned under their own steam. But apart from the practical difficulties that attended ‘repatriation’, the process was complicated by government concerns about the political opinions of the repatriates and the economic collapse that afflicted the entire region. A labyrinthine bureaucracy vetted the returnees to ensure that only those with the ‘correct’ political opinions were admitted, that they were physically fit and preferably that they had practical skills to offer. These discretionary arrangements meant that there was no entitlement to repatriation, and that those who were allowed to return had to spend time in quarantine. Contemporaries described how ‘armed sentries and barbed wire were everywhere ... the food was just enough to survive. For the first time in my life I tasted disgusting bread and coffee.’ This comment draws attention to the collapse of the local Lithuanian economy. Polish returnees from Siberia — many of whom were the children of Tsarist exiles and had never set foot on Polish soil — were asked if they ‘felt Polish’. Ukrainians and Jews were discriminated against; the priority was to provide Polish refugees and Prisoners of war with land. Latvians and Lithuanians too, having been caught up in the maelstrom of the Bolshevik Revolution, faced tough questions from refugee control commissions about their political beliefs. Discrimination against Baltic Jews was commonplace; in February 1920, a conservative Lithuanian newspaper bemoaned the fact that Jews ‘are streaming into our country bringing with them many different dangers and unhappiness to the true citizens of our country [sic] and to the state itself’ [Balkelis 2004, pp. 85, 91].

Thus there were attempts to turn re-evacuation into an orderly process, but the complaints of ‘spontaneity’ and concerns about health and security echoed Tsarist concerns about the initial displacement of refugees in 1915. These complaints will also be familiar to anyone who reads more recent bulletins about refugees’ ‘refusal to obey orders’ and about the bureaucratic mentality that assumes that officials are best placed to manage the consequences of displacement.

The voice of the individual emerges only intermittently in the immediate aftermath of the First World War. In May 1919 a group of Polish teachers in Ryazan' complained of their desperate material plight, but added that their wish to return to Poland was prompted by grander ambitions: 'we have a natural wish to go back to our native country, where a new and brighter future awaits us in free Poland ... we are anxious to re-establish contact with our families who remained behind there, and we have a passionate desire to serve our homeland during the difficult time of its foundation' [Gatrell, 1999: 186]. In a diary entry, Alfreds Goba, a young Latvian refugee who moved back to 'new Latvia' from his temporary domicile in Baku, wrote: 'Now I am working. I am working towards building a *new Latvia*'. Three months later Goba welcomed Germany's readiness to engage in peace negotiations, but hoped that the future would bring freedom from German and Russian tutelage alike:

I don't know if something bad happened in Latvian affairs or if for some other reason Latvia, like me, has to be between Scylla and Charybdis. One master isn't yet gone and already another is near to rule and suckle ... Latvia, Latvia you have lived a hard and slavish orphan life, and still you are like a child. Will you survive? Will you be able to stand on your own two feet?

Goba saw a close fit between the need to establish his family on more secure material foundations and Latvia's search for national liberation.<sup>3</sup> This is a reminder that personal testimony was connected to broader narratives and ambitions.

Refugeedom helped train national elites in the conduct of politics and the practicalities of administration. This became evident in the aftermath of the peace treaties and the creation of the successor states. The first cabinet to be appointed in Latvia included Mikelis Valters (minister of the interior), Janis Goldmanis (minister of agriculture) and Janis Zalitis (minister of war), each of whom had played a prominent role in refugee relief work. Janis Cakste became president of Latvia. The leader of the Lithuanian refugee relief effort in Russia, Martynas Ycas, served as finance minister in the new Lithuanian state (he boasted that the LWC 'unearthed the buried name of Lithuania' and drew attention to the 'separate and distinctive character' of the Lithuanian people). Alexander Khatsov, mayor of Tbilisi and a central figure in the Armenian relief effort, was for ten months prime minister of independent Armenia [Gatrell 1999, p. 186]. Many statesmen had a background in parliamentary politics before the revolution, but their active involvement in refugee relief brought them more closely and prominently before the public.

## The 1920s

During the early 1920s large numbers of Russian and Armenian refugees fled to Western Europe, where they lacked legal status and lived in dire poverty. In August 1921, following an appeal by the International Committee of the Red Cross, the League of Nations appointed Fridtjof Nansen as its first High Commissioner for Russian Refugees, with the task of trying to define their status and to arrange for their repatriation or to assist them in finding employment. League member states gave Nansen a limited mandate and stipulated that he could not provide direct financial support to refugees [Skran, 1995: 98–99]. Initially, he entertained hopes of promoting their repatriation from overcrowded places,

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<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Aldis Purs for permitting me to quote from his translation of the Goba diary (the emphasis in the quotation is mine).

such as Varna and Constantinople, so that they might contribute to Russia's economic reconstruction [Housden, 2010]. But this was not a feasible strategy in view of the size of the refugee population and their aversion to the prospect of returning to Bolshevik Russia. Nansen's main achievement was to provide Russian refugees who could afford five francs with documentation that would permit them to travel to a third country in search of work. The 'Nansen passport', first issued in 1922, became an internationally recognised travel document, although it conferred no right to work or entitlement to education, let alone to citizenship. Its main purpose was to help distribute Russian refugees more 'equitably' among the countries that signed up to the League of Nations [Simpson 1939, p. 191–203].

The Russian refugee crisis in inter-war Europe became a story of self-help and private philanthropy, in which Zemgor (a continuation of the wartime public organisation in the Russian Empire) and the Russian Red Cross played a key role in providing schooling, vocational training, basic medical treatment, and assistance for the elderly. By no means all refugees came from a privileged background, although this was the predominant stereotype. Some found work relatively quickly, and it helped to have had pre-war contacts in France or Germany. French employers sought out Russian and Armenian workers in the refugee camps in Constantinople and Bulgaria — Renault employed Russian refugees at its cosmopolitan factory at Billancourt. The League of Nations had no funds of its own and member states were loath to make substantial contributions to its refugee relief programmes. This reluctance to dig deeper in their pockets was largely financial, but it also reflected a strong degree of government contempt for refugees. The British Under-secretary for Foreign Affairs, Cecil Harmsworth, derided 'Cossacks, Kalmucks, priests, generals, judges and ladies' whom he regarded as 'an intolerable burden.' Certainly Harmsworth was correct in drawing attention to the fact that the composite label 'White Russian' disguised a wide range of outlook, hopes and prospects. The political consequences were seen in apocalyptic terms: refugee children in particular were in danger of becoming 'useless and harmful elements in the Europe of tomorrow' [Simpson 1939, pp. 198–203; Skran 1995, p. 149; Soguk 1999, p. 104].

It is also important to take account of the humanitarian imperative underlying the relief of refugees [Stockdale 2016, chapter 4]. In addition to the aforementioned national committees, considerable relief work was undertaken by the Scottish Women's Hospitals, the Russian Red Cross, and myriad other organisations such as the Russian Babies Fund, the Children of Russia Relief Fund and the Russian Relief Fund in Crimea headed by Lady Muriel Paget. The aftermath of the First World War demonstrated a continuum of humanitarian intervention. The British Society of Friends (Quakers) embarked on fresh relief efforts, along with new organisations such as Save the Children and Near East Relief. This opens up the possibility of a history of humanitarianism that can be set alongside the history of organised violence and pogrom in Eastern Europe, the Balkans and the Middle East, where many survivors of the Armenian genocide found safety. This is not to say that humanitarian intervention was a-political, let alone straightforward: the intervention by the American Relief Administration suggests that various interests were at stake and sometimes in conflict. Nor does it mean that refugees were asked about the kind of assistance that they might wish to receive.

Nevertheless, there was a thread of humanitarian decency that should not be discounted in any study of the prolonged period of warfare between 1914 and 1921. Nansen spoke loftily of international 'reconciliation' as the potential harvest of organised repatria-

tion, in which the League of Nations would be to the fore. Others adopted a more modest tone. People such as Evelyn Sharp, Ruth Fry, Karen Jeppe, Emma Cushman, and Emily Robinson worked on behalf of the Quakers, Save the Children and other organisations [Watenpaugh 2015; Rodogno et al 2014]. Relief workers spoke of trials and tribulations, but also of the adventures of working in difficult conditions and under shifting political regimes, dispensing medicine as well as white bread and hot drinks. Isabel Emslie Hutton found herself working in Dvinsk (Daugavpils) during the Russian Civil War, which was occupied successively by German, Bolshevik, Polish and Latvian forces:

I went through some ticklish times; should not have attempted the frontier business if I had known what it meant, but once there it would not have been possible to turn back — absolutely fatal to let a Pole think an Englishwoman funk'd anything. And as you know, Providence is kind and gets one out of awkward places [Hutton 1928, p. 206].

### Conclusions

The key points emerging from this survey of the 'refugee crisis' in Russia are as follows. First, the years of war, revolution and civil war presented a complicated picture of social upheaval. By the end of the Russian Civil War the displaced population on Soviet territory included industrial workers, agricultural settlers, repatriated Russian prisoners of war, enemy prisoners awaiting repatriation, demobilised Red Army soldiers, and refugees. This upheaval was directly related to the First World War, the collapse and dismemberment of the Tsarist state, and the establishment of a revolutionary regime. The Civil War in Russia rendered the situation even more confusing. The successor states of Eastern Europe confronted a similar situation.

Second, the displacement of refugees raises questions about the short-term impact of large-scale population movements, the elaboration of bureaucratic practices, political rivalries and social experience. We can detect the emergence of a new category, namely the 'refugee'. The mass displacement of civilians had little in common with pre-war migration, which was governed by passport controls, railway timetables and the assessment of economic potential in areas of new settlement. Categorisation brought a distinct set of practices; it tended to homogenise the refugee population, and flattened differences of class, occupation, ethnicity, gender and age.

Third, the displacement of population raised questions about belonging, and about loyalties — to which state and to which political doctrine did one owe loyalty? This question emerged during the First World War, in relation to the policies adopted by the Tsarist state's management of the 'problem' of Russia's large refugee population, where a sense of 'national' hurt was accompanied by ideas around national self-discovery and solidarity. At the same time, divisions along ethnic and class lines had acute political implications when the Russian empire unravelled and the Bolshevik Revolution took place. In thinking about the political stakes, one might ask: did 'nation' ultimately trump class?

Fourth, the mainsprings of humanitarian intervention were both internal and external. Internal relief efforts reflected Russian government imperatives, but also entailed significant action on the part of semi-official, non-governmental and private agencies. External relief efforts reflected the commitment of secular and faith-based organisations that campaigned on behalf of specific constituencies. All of these organisations played a

part in attempting to mitigate the impact of war on civilians. Some of them continued to act on their behalf after the war, both independently and under the aegis of the League of Nations. There was thus a counter-narrative to set alongside the record of ethnic rivalry and hostility that persisted after the war.

Where, then, do refugees belong in history? They are either absent from mainstream historical accounts or else are regarded as the helpless and passive by-product of war. In relation to Russia in the era of the First World War, they were doubly neglected, since they could not be accommodated in the discourse of revolution and communist state formation. This article has shown that the discourse of helplessness and passivity is misleading. In the new millennium, as the word 'refugee' is on the lips of politicians and the public in Europe and beyond, it is time to take refugees from the margins and place them centre stage, and to understand the extent to which they helped shape their own destiny.

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APPENDIX

Table 1. Russian population, 1914–1917 (USSR pre-war territory), millions

1 January	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918
Total population	139.9	142.6	142.3	142.3	140.9
Armed forces	0.4	5.1	7.1	8.0	7.9
On active duty	—	4.2	5.2	5.2	
Non-active	0.4	0.9	1.9	2.8	7.9
Displaced population	—	1.1	4.2	7.8	9.7
including refugees	—	0.9	3.3	6.1	7.4
including POWs	—	0.2	0.9	1.7	2.3

Source: [Volkov 1930, pp. 86–87, 90, 270–271].

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