Precursors and Precedents:
Forced Migration in Northeastern Europe during the First World War

by Vėjas Gabriel Liulevičius

In northeastern Europe and more generally throughout Europe as a whole, the First World War launched a series of expulsions, dislocations, and mass shifting of populations, which prepared the way for an era of displacements later through the twentieth century. This article explores aspects of forced migration in northeastern Europe. It considers first the deportations organized by the Russian army in occupied Germany (East Prussia in 1914/15) and within the Russian empire itself, especially in the process of withdrawing from the Northwestern Territories in the "Great Retreat" in the spring and summer of 1915. Next, Imperial German plans and policies are treated in projects focused on the occupied territories of Eastern Europe: the Polish border strip project and the military state established in Ober Ost (including parts of present-day Lithuania, Poland, Latvia, and Belarus). Finally, it is necessary to investigate the outlines of the forced migration experience and also the *Rezeptionsgeschichte* of this ordeal – how this historical phenomenon was received and assimilated by societies in northeastern Europe. Considering this theme of forced migrations in the context of the First World War in northeastern Europe shows the increasing routinization of the movement of populations as a thinkable policy option for government, as a modern state practice. Societies and individuals recognized this precisely in their growing apprehensions about this phenomenon. Thus, the forced migrations of the "Great War" were precursors and precedents of a phenomenon which would be central to the troubled history of northeastern Europe in the rest of the century.

From the perspective of general European history, contemporaries recognized that this era was one marked by what Lord Curzon called the "unmixing of peoples."[1] The political philosopher Hannah Arendt came to identify the figure of the displaced person and stateless refugee as a quintessential symptom of the transformations in European politics. In tracing the evolution towards this, it is nec-

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[1] Quoted in Michael R. Marrus, The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century. Oxford 1985, p. 41.

essary to seek to understand how the notion of moving of peoples became increasingly thinkable as a policy option. An important study of the modern refugee phenomenon states, "in 1918 huge masses of refugees appeared in Europe, victims of new-style nation states."[2] But, in fact, the process of forced migration and flight had begun earlier (not only as a result of the conclusion of the fighting and the redrawing of new borders out of the wreckage of empires) during the war itself. The concept of the First World War as the first "total war," though debated and qualified by historians, seeks to capture the quality of new intensity which this modern industrial war had as an all-encompassing struggle, apparently for existential stakes, pitting entire societies against one another, not merely armies in the battle-field. In the process of all-out mobilization for victory in the war, the lines between soldiers and civilians, between the battlefront and the homefront, grew increasingly indistinct and violence against non-combatant populations proliferated. On all the theaters of the war, a variety of forms of displacement, forced movement, and refugeedom resulted. As Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker conclude in a study of accelerating violence during the war, "invasions, occupations, exactions, expressions of racism, atrocities, reprisals, deportations, and the massacre of civilians accompanied the intensification of combat on the battlefields of the Great War. What happened between 1914 and 1918, including the concentration camps, was part and parcel of the process whereby the war became total in the twentieth century... The violence of war was rendered commonplace, and its range grew out of all proportion."[3]

The very concept of "Zwangsmigration" or forced migration in fact covers a multitude of scenarios containing differences: expulsions ordered by occupiers or by one's own authorities, evacuation, flight in response to threats, "voluntary" escape in the face of approaching devastation. In fact, distinguishing between these shadings in particular historical situations can be difficult.[4] Adding to the complexity of definitions is the fact that forced migration also can be (but need not always be) related to two other topics: "scorched earth policy" and the potential for genocide. Scorched earth policy denotes the willful

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[2]   Ibidem, p. 51.
[3]   Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, Annette Becker, 14–18: Understanding the Great War, transl. by Catherine Temerson. New York 2002, p. 89.
[4]   Ibidem, p. 85.

and thorough destruction of territory before it is ceded to an ene-
my, in order to deny the opponent its resources or advantages. Only
desolate, devastated areas are to be left behind. This clearly is not
a modern invention, as it is said to have been used by the Assyrians
and the Romans due to the terror which it evoked (with symbolic fi-
nality in the case of the destruction of Carthage in 146 B.C.). Yet the
mythologized classical reference for this tactic in popular historical
memory is the Russian response to Napoleon's invasion of 1812, as
Russian forces withdrew into the interior, denying the Emperor a de-
cisive set battle, and leaving Moscow itself in flames. The heightened
supply difficulties of an army increasingly reliant on foraging, com-
bined with "General Winter," decimated otherwise victorious French
and allied troops in the depths of Russia.

Thereafter, during the "long peace" of the nineteenth century on
the European continent, the tactic was used in colonial warfare by Eu-
ropeans. As Isabel Hull emphasizes, "Colonial history is much more
central to European history than is often believed."[5] In Hull's inter-
pretation, the colonial wars did not exist as a world apart from Euro-
pean experience, but rather were purer and less restricted expressions
of the "military cultures" of European states. The practices employed
in the colonies were then also put into use in Europe during World
War I. The tactic used in the colonies was "hunger war": "the de-
struction of all dwellings, food stores, domestic animals, and planted
fields."[6] Examples included campaigns in German East Africa, with
significant mortality among the native population as a result, and the
British campaign of "farm burnings" and "laying waste" during the
1899–1902 Boer War, in tandem with the internment of civilians in
camps, intended to quell guerrilla warfare.[7]

Scorched earth policies were also used during World War I not only
by the Russian forces. On the Western Front, this tactic was strik-
ingly executed in the German army's withdrawal to the prepared
positions of the Siegfried Line in Operation Alberich in spring 1917,
leaving destroyed swathes of northern France behind. Earlier in the
war, German forces had also used scorched earth tactics in the retreat
from the offensive towards Warsaw in late fall 1914.[8] In all these cases,

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[5] Isabel V. Hull, Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial
     Germany. Ithaca 2005, p. 3.
[6] Ibidem, p. 155.
[7] Ibidem, p. 155, pp. 183 f.
[8] Imanuel Geiss, Der polnische Grenzstreifen 1914–1918. Ein Beitrag zur deutschen Kriegs-
     zielpolitik im Ersten Weltkrieg. Lübeck 1960, p. 33.

scorched earth policies necessarily implied evacuation or expulsion of the populations living on the land now made uninhabitable. Especially in the context of total war, people would be seen as resources, which like crops or buildings should not fall to the enemy. Scholars have also observed that forced migration, when used as a form of "ethnic cleansing" also often is linked to the potential for genocide: "forced deportation often becomes genocidal... even when forced deportation is not genocidal in its intent, it is often genocidal in its effects," due to the violence used in expulsions, which can tip over into genocide.[9] The cases of forced migration to be discussed here, in northeastern Europe during the First World War, did not realize this genocidal connection, but during the same time period, the 1915 deportations of Armenians in the Ottoman empire did, inaugurating a series of modern genocides.

Forced migration itself as a phenomenon likewise has an ancient history as a state practice, with a variety of possible intentions: assimilation, elimination, the creation of a uniform population, settlement, or punishment.[10] The Assyrians, also practitioners of scorched earth policy, likewise employed mass deportations as a way of integrating new subjects into their empire, and estimates of deportees over three centuries run into the millions. At other times, religious uniformity was to be created through forced migration. In 1492 in Spain, the Jews were expelled, with an estimated 150,000 fleeing. In France, the revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV with the 1685 Edict of Fontainebleau led to the flight of an estimated 200,000 French protestants, the Huguenots. In the Ottoman empire, the institution of forced movement of populations, "sürgün," served dual purposes: to punish groups suspected of disloyalty (Christian and Muslim alike) and to populate areas of strategic importance.[11] In the Russian empire since the seventeenth century, a system of "administrative exile" served similar purposes, and played a role in the settlement of Siberia, with "katorga" forced labor and forced settlers.[12]

In the modern period, forced migration again came to the fore, in the name of the interests of sovereign nation-states. European colonial

[9]   Norman M. Naimark, Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth Century Europe. Cambridge 2001, p. 4.

[10] Ausweisung und Deportation. Formen der Zwangsmigration in der Geschichte, ed. by Andreas Gestrich, Gerhard Hirschfeld and Holger Sonnabend. Stuttgart 1995.

[11] Naimark, Fires of Hatred (see note 9), p. 30.

[12] Anne Applebaum, Gulag: A History. New York 2003, pp. XXIX-XXXIII.

rule made it one of its "standard practices."[13] Indeed, "the internment of large numbers of civilians is a hallmark of colonial fighting."[14] The institution of the "concentration camp" was inaugurated by Spanish authorities seeking to suppress revolt in Cuba in 1896. Deportations were used by the British in confining civilians in internment camps in the Boer War, and German colonial authorities deported African prisoners of war, leading to mass death among captured Nama.[15] Beyond the colonial context, fantasies of mass expulsion played in the imagination of anti-Semites, joined to genocidal impulses. Thus, in Russia, Konstantin Pobedonostsev, chief procurator of the Holy Synod, arrived at the formula that "one-third of the Jews would convert, one-third would emigrate, and one-third would perish."[16] Within the territory of nineteenth-century Europe, wars had already unleashed expulsions and mass movement, as during and after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870/71. The Balkan Wars of 1912/13 were especially notorious for the ethnic cleansing they unleashed, before the experience was overshadowed by the First World War. In this context there also arose formal attempts to regularize the "unmixing" of populations, in the November 1913 Convention of Adrianople between Bulgaria and Turkey, and the Greek and Turkish agreement of May 1914, which were put into effect because of the outbreak of World War I, but did presage similar developments to come.[17] During World War I, forced population movements (apart from those we examine here in northeastern Europe) also became common, part of the spreading totality of the conflict and its effects on civilians. These included: the punitive deportation of thousands of French and Belgians to Germany at the start of the war as collective punishment during the invasion and first stages of occupation; circa 60,000 Belgian workers deported to work in Germany; the notorious deportation of French women from areas close to the front during Easter 1916.[18] Finally, in the clearest case of the linkage of forced migration with the start of genocidal policies, in Ottoman Turkey, deportations of the persecuted Armenian minority began on April 25, 1915, in tandem with executions of notables.[19] Forced marches were organized,

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[13]   Hull, Absolute Destruction (see note 5), p. 131.
[14]   Ibidem, p. 152.
[15]   Ibidem, p. 79 and 85.
[16]   Marrus, The Unwanted (see note 1), p. 29.
[17]   Joseph B. Schechtman, European Population Transfers 1939–1945. New York, pp. 12 f.
[18]   Audoin-Rouzeau, Becker, 14–18 (see note 3), pp. 63 f.
[19]   Ibidem, pp. 64-69.

as two to three million Armenians were deported from eastern Anatolia and sent towards the Syrian desert. By some estimates, a third of Armenians were massacred, a third perished en route, and a third survived. It is estimated that half a million to one million died, killed outright or from exposure in the desert (some estimates run as high as 1.5 million dead).

To put the phenomenon in a theoretical frame, a final point concerns how forced population movements can be instrumentalized by modern states. James C. Scott's "Seeing Like a State" offers a valuable theoretical framework, centered around his concept of "authoritarian high modernism," which has wrought human tragedies and environmental catastrophes on an enormous scale in the last two centuries, forcing societies to conform to utopian blueprints and ideological schemes. Scott contends that "the modern state, through its officials, attempts with varying success to create a terrain and a population with precisely those standardized characteristics that will be easiest to monitor, count, assess, and manage. The utopian, immanent, and continually frustrated goal of the modern state is to reduce the chaotic, disorderly, constantly changing social reality beneath it to something more closely resembling the administrative grid of its observations."[20] This expresses the state's drive to achieve the "legibility" of populations and lands. In the most aggressive version of this state project, "authoritarian high modernism," three elements are fatefully combined: "the aspiration to the administrative ordering of nature and society" to make them legible to the state, "the unrestrained use of power of the modern state," and "a weakened or prostrate civil society that lacks the capacity to resist these plans... the leveled terrain on which to build (dis)utopias."[21] In particular, colonized or conquered territories, or ones which have just undergone a revolution, are then especially vulnerable to becoming "leveled terrain" for modernist projects.

Forced migration in the western territories of the Russian Empire

In the opening stages of the First World War, Russian forces initiated a series of forced migrations in northeastern Europe, first of the

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[20] James C. Scott, Seeing Like A State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed. New Haven 1998, p. 82.
[21] Ibidem, pp. 88 f.

enemy, then of the Russian empire's own subject populations. The population movement that was unleashed was of huge proportions, yet has only recently been studied systematically.[22]

From August 1914, Russian forces moved onto the territory of the *Kaiserreich* with the seizure of two-thirds of East Prussia and, far to the south, occupied the Habsburg lands of Galicia. In East Prussia, terrified civilian populations took flight before the advancing Russian armies, jamming the roads (their numbers were estimated at half a million).[23] The official German history of the war prepared by the Reichsarchiv conceded that prewar preparations had not been made to handle this emergency.[24] In short order, however, German forces under the command of Generals Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff defeated the Russians at the battle of Tannenberg (August 26–30, 1914) and the Battle of the Masurian Lakes (Sept. 7–15, 1914). The men were celebrated as the saviors of East Prussia, but a second wave of invasion took place in October 1914 as Russian forces again moved back into Prussia. It is reckoned that some 350,000 Germans fled this renewed Russian advance, in a more systematically planned withdrawal, with refugees being shuttled westwards to safety, an administrative accomplishment of which Prussian bureaucrats were later proud. Russian troops were at long last finally expelled from Prussia in the Winter Battle of Masuria (Feb. 7–21, 1915).

The Russian invasion was a traumatic event, understood in frequently apocalyptic terms as an elemental onslaught of a foreign world. A contemporary account proclaimed that at the start of the invasion, the ordinary people of East Prussia "setzten ihr festes Vertrauen daran, dass die Russen Menschen, ja Christen und ein Kulturvolk sind. Das war Wahn. Sie sind es nicht."[25] Stories of horror and violence proliferated, carried westwards by fleeing civilians. The incursion was encoded as an ethnic invasion, the assault of an entirely different Slavic world. The elite Cossack horsemen of the Tsarist forces were especially feared as cruel and depraved, and the cry "Kosaken kommen!" unleashed panic. Rumors circulated that Poles in East Prussia had been secretly issued red cards in advance of the

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[22]   Peter Gatrell, A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia During World War I. Bloomington 1999.
[23]   Der Weltkrieg 1914 bis 1918. Vol. 2: Die Befreiung Ostpreussens. Berlin 1925, p. 322 and 329 (with higher estimate, of 800,000).
[24]   Ibidem, pp. 318-321.
[25]   Hermann Braun, Ostpreussen-Chronik. Kriegsbilder aus den beiden Russen-Einfällen 1914/1915. München 1918, p. 101.

invasion, so that they would be spared.[26] Rumors of summary execu-
tions, mass arson, pillaging, rapes, and torture abounded. Yet after the
invasion, these initial terrified stories of systematic massive atrocities
as official policy were not validated by official studies and are met
with skepticism today as a "myth of the harrowing of East Prussia."[27]
Fritz Gause, whose 1931 study investigated the events on the basis
of archival collections that were later destroyed in the Second World
War, concluded: "Die Russen haben sich in Ostpreussen in ganz ver-
schiedener Weise verhalten," with both disciplined units as well as
cases where control had broken down.[28] Nonetheless, statistics col-
lected after the invasion testified to a terrifying scene of chaos, civilian
suffering, and destruction. Contemporary statistics cited some 1,500
civilian deaths, in many cases people suspected by Russian forces of
spying, and the destruction of 39 cities and nearly two thousand vil-
lages. Brutalities apparently increased with defeat and retreat. The
diary of an East Prussian girl reported (of the period shortly before
her arrest and deportation), "Solange die Russen im Vorgehen waren,
war unser Los noch erträglich."[29]

The trauma of this invasion was then carefully cultivated and
elaborated upon in German propaganda. Emphasizing this incursion
seemed to support the government's proclamation that this was a de-
fensive war undertaken by a Germany surrounded by jealous ene-
mies. It underwrote the internal truce of the *Burgfrieden*, especially
cementing the antipathy of Social Democrats toward the Russian au-
tocracy. In terms of worldwide public opinion, the dramatization of
the invasion of East Prussia also served to divert attention from the
brutalities of the German invasion of Belgium and northern France.

Part of civilian experience in East Prussia under Russian occupa-
tion was deportation, called in German by the resonant formulation
of "Verschleppung." Fritz Gause's account of the occupation of East
Prussia counted approximately 13,600 civilians deported from East
Prussia by Russian forces.[30] Interestingly, some contemporary Russian
official statistics ran far higher than this, with one source suggesting

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26 Ibidem, pp. 18 f.
27 John Horne, Alan Kramer, German Atrocities 1914: A History of Denial. New Haven
    2001, pp. 79 ff.; Dennis E. Showalter, Tannenberg: Clash of Empires. Hamden, Conn.
    1991, pp. 159 f.
28 Fritz Gause, Geschichte des Preussenlandes. Leer 1966, p. 78. See also Bruno Schumacher,
    Geschichte Ost- und Westpreussens. 6th ed., Würzburg 1977, pp. 291 f.
29 Gefangen in Sibirien. Tagebuch eines ostpreußischen Mädchens 1914–1920, ed. by Karin
    Borck and Lothar Kölm. Osnabrück 2001, p. 27.
30 Fritz Gause, Die Russen in Ostpreussen 1914/15. Königsberg i.Pr. 1931, p. 236.

50-100,000 deportees from East Prussia.[31] Reasons for the deporta-
tions could include suspicion of spying and the determination not to
allow men of military age to be mobilized for the German army, but
along with orderly arrests there were also confused scenarios of civil-
ians being seized without goodbyes to family or the chance to gather
possessions.[32] Deportees included not only men of military age but
also women, children, and the old. It is estimated that they included
around 4,000 women and more than 2,500 children.[33] The deportees
were moved away from the front areas to the Russian interior under
squalid conditions, most often by rail, and thence to Siberia and other
locations beyond the Ural mountains. The deportees spent the war in
camps and settlements under extremely difficult conditions. The Ger-
man victory on the Eastern front ratified by the March 1918 Treaty
of Brest Litovsk prepared the way for their return, and by the end
of 1918 almost all the surviving deportees returned to Germany.[34]
Statistics from 1919 on the deportees suggested that 1,440 had died
in captivity and that the fate of another 3,855 was unknown (some
8,300 survivors returned to Germany).[35]

Though outside the scope of northeastern Europe, events in Rus-
sian-occupied Galicia from the start of the war to summer 1915
showed patterns of practice that were significant as well, "one of the
saddest records of the military administration."[36] Under Governor-
General Bobrinskij, the military administration was marked by abus-
es of civilians, requisitions, and Russification policies in an area which
was seen as "Galician Rus," a Slavic territory "reclaimed" by the Tsar.
The occupation regime was especially avid in persecution of Galician
Jews, with expulsions, hostage-taking, and pogroms proliferating. In
the varied ethnic landscape of Galicia, the Jews were considered sus-
pect.[37] As a result of their expulsions, "Galicia thereby became the
first major site of mass civilian displacement during the war."[38]

After the eviction of Russian forces from East Prussia, the Eastern

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[31]   Eric Lohr, Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign Against Enemy Aliens Dur-
       ing World War I. Cambridge, Mass. 2003, p. 215 (footnote 25).
[32]   Gause, Die Russen in Ostpreussen (see note 30), p. 238.
[33]   Ibidem, p. 243.
[34]   Ibidem, p. 281.
[35]   Ibidem, p. 282.
[36]   Daniel W. Graf, "Military Rule Behind the Russian Front, 1914–1917: The Political Ram-
       ifications", in: Jahrbücher für die Geschichte Osteuropas 22 (1974), Heft 3, pp. 390-411,
       here p. 397.
[37]   Ibidem, pp. 397 ff.
[38]   Gatrell, A Whole Empire Walking (see note 22), p. 18.

front definitively passed over into the western territories of the Russian empire. In 1915, in an event celebrated by German propaganda as "Der grosse Vormarsch" and mourned by Russians as the "Great Retreat," the disastrous setback for Russia was amplified as a "pattern of defeat was established early in the war."[39] From April 1915, German forces moved forward to capture, by September 1915, a vast territory including Poland, Lithuania, southern Latvia, and western Ukraine, an area the size of France, with 14 provinces and a prewar population of over 35 million.[40] The front had been pushed 300 miles eastwards, with large displacements of populations.

Behind the Russian lines, the Tsarist army's "rule was marked by arbitrariness, confusion, administrative abuses, and outright atrocities unmatched in the record of the wartime regime in Russia proper."[41] The indispensable background to the Russian approach to the retreat had come at the start of the conflict, in a decision made "[i]ronically – perhaps characteristically – ... with little foresight."[42] When Tsar Nicholas II on July 16, 1914 signed the "Regulations on the Field Administration of the Troops in Wartime", the armed forces were given sweeping powers, overriding civilian officials, in extensive areas defined as theaters of operations (the Baltic provinces, Poland, Finland, and even Petrograd itself). As Russian forces were pushed backwards, the army's control extended to areas ever further to the rear, a kind of internal conquest in reverse. The implications of this empowerment of the army, and how such power was employed, turned out to be profound. It "contributed enormously to the enervation of the Russian war effort, sapped the power of the Council of Ministers and the civil bureaucracy, and by exposing the millions of inhabitants of the theater of operations to the vicissitudes of the arbitrary and repressive misrule of the army, destroyed at one stroke Russia's painfully slow evolution toward a society ruled by law and ultimately squandered what little good will the regime still enjoyed in the country," steering toward the breakdown of Tsardom in 1917.[43] Army officials reacted to the reverses at the front with confusion and more or less organized attempts at scorched earth policy ordered by local commanders and the high command.

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[39]   Ibidem, p. 17.
[40]   Ibidem, p. 31.
[41]   Graf, "Military Rule" (see note 36), p. 395.
[42]   Ibidem, p. 390.
[43]   Ibidem, p. 392.

In the process of retreat, civilians were dragooned away in the de-
termination to leave disordered, depopulated territories behind for
the occupier. The flight of civilians could have a range of motiva-
tions, sometimes overlapping.[44] Movement was often ordered by the
military authorities, leaving no choice. Extensive rumors circulated
concerning alleged German atrocities or conscription, spurring fear
of the invader. One Lithuanian observed: "Here various rumors cir-
culate, each more terrible than the last. Some say that the Germans
are taking young men into their army. The fear creates widened eyes.
Thus it is not surprising that with such widened eyes one can some-
times see too much [i.e., things that are not there]. But in any event,
one must flee."[45] Equally, civilians who had lost their farms and prop-
erty whether through combat or by willful destruction might feel no
other choice but to flee. Masses of refugees moved towards the Rus-
sian interior, some experiencing repeated displacement as the front
ground forward. In the Northwestern Territories, infrastructure was
destroyed, and industrial plant shipped eastwards. These actions often
degenerated into chaos, as Šiauliai in the Lithuanian lowlands went
up in flames, Vilnius was evacuated in disorganized ways, and the
deconstruction of Riga's factories turned into a "comedy of errors,"
with much equipment rendered unusable.[46]

In the atmosphere of defeat, subjects of the empire were now scape-
goated for the reverses. In particular, the Jewish minority was target-
ed.[47] The anti-Semitic animus of Chief of Staff General Nikolai Niko-
laevich Ianuskevich, shared by many others in the military hierarchy,
took as axiomatic the notion of a Jewish security threat (the relat-
edness of Yiddish and German presented as but one reason for sus-
picion). Even before the Great Retreat, Jews were massively expelled
from Poland and other western territories. It is estimated that over
half a million Jews had been displaced before the mass deportations
of the Great Retreat.[48] Expulsions of Jews in areas close to the front
were common, as was the taking of hostages from Jewish communi-
ties, who were threatened with reprisals for any suspected betrayal. In

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44   Gatrell, A Whole Empire Walking (see note 22), p. 15.
45   Juozas Kudirka, Kares baisenybes Lietuvoje: Pragyventu valandu atsiminimai [The Terrors
     of War of Lithuania: Memories of Lived Hours]. Chicago 1916, p. 11.
46   Graf, "Military Rule" (see note 36), p. 404.
47   Mark Levene, "Frontiers of Genocide: Jews in the Eastern War Zones, 1914–1920 and
     1941", in: Minorities in Wartime: National and Racial Groupings in Europe, North Amer-
     ica, and Australia during the Two World Wars, ed. by Panikos Panayi. Oxford 1993, pp.
     83-117.
48   Gatrell, A Whole Empire Walking (see note 22), p. 18.

May 1915, Jews in the western parts of Kovno and Kurland provinces (approximately 200,000) were forced from their homes.[49] These expulsions were often accompanied by violence. Other ethnic groups considered suspect were also subjected to brutal treatment and expulsion, even though they were subjects of the empire. These groups included Poles, Gypsies, and subjects of German origins (a very diverse group ranging from Baltic German nobility to settler farmers), often accused of spying.

By the end of the disastrous year of 1915, Russian official statistics put the number of refugees at about 3.3 million.[50] These numbers continued to grow, and by 1917, the number of displaced persons in Russia likely was over six million, representing 5% of the total population.[51]

This tremendous upheaval was a part of a larger wartime campaign within the Tsar's empire as a whole first against "enemy aliens" and then increasingly against subjects of the empire considered to be unreliable on the basis of their ethnic origins. While all the other combatant countries in World War I also moved against the citizens of enemy nations, the Russian campaign took on distinctively different features and a dynamic all its own, outlined in an excellent study by Eric Lohr.[52] The state's campaign was spurred by Russian nationalist calls for throwing off alleged German dominance in Russia's economy and political life, the radicalizing role of the army, and economic motives for the nationalization of commerce, industry, and land (with an eye to the postwar future). The campaign focused first on citizens of the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey), then expanded to include different subjects of the Russian empire, whether naturalized or resident in Russia for centuries: ethnic Germans (numbering over two million), Poles, Jews, Crimean Tatars, Muslims in the Caucasus. As it evolved, the program "resulted in the forced migration of roughly a million civilians, the nationalization of a substantial portion of the imperial economy, and the transfer of extensive land holdings and rural properties from the targeted minorities to favored groups."[53] Even in areas far from the front lines, German settlers and farming colonies were seen as a symptom of an alleged German

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[49]   Ibidem, p. 22.
[50]   Ibidem, p. 3.
[51]   Ibidem.
[52]   Lohr, Nationalizing the Russian Empire (see note 31).
[53]   Ibidem, p. 1.

dominance, and were targeted for expropriation, potentially involving 350,000 people.[54] The campaign changed from "security-based measures applied to front areas to a nationwide program to nationalize the demographics of land ownership by permanently purging enemy aliens from the rural economy."[55]

One sees here clearly attempted instrumentalization of forced migration. As Lohr points out concerning the mass deportations, "it would be a mistake to assume that they were merely an appendage to a scorched earth policy."[56] Rather, planning included a view to the post-war future. The language used in these policies came to include the rhetoric of "total cleansing" of regions ("polnoe ochishchenie"), which had both a military meaning (in the sense of clearing or evacuation), as well as an increasing ethnic significance.[57] In the expropriation of lands from German colonists, plans championed by the army for the settling of these farms by Russian veterans, seen as a reliable population, further underlines this instrumentalization.[58] Despite the fact that the Russian government and army's policies also found many internal critics during the war, the campaign acquired a powerful dynamic (and yet in fact failed to satisfy many of its Russian nationalist supporters).

The war itself produced a general "mobilization of ethnicity" in the Russian empire, breaking sharply with many earlier patterns.[59] Ethnicity took on new significance, as the state's "policies of deportation and expropriation led to a major project to sort, define, and categorize individuals according to their ethnicity, immigrant status, or citizenship, and to determine whether entire population categories were to be considered members of the wartime community or internal enemies. Through this process, nationality and ethnicity were in a sense constituted and ascribed as a function of wartime practices."[60] Beyond this, the policies undertaken during the war by the Russian state had portentous significance in Russian politics and society. They

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54 Dittmar Dahlmann, "Deportationen der deutschen Bevölkerungsgruppe in Rußland und in der Sowjetunion 1915 und 1941. Ein Vergleich", in: Ausweisung und Deportation (see note 10), pp. 103-114; Lohr, Nationalizing the Russian Empire (see note 31), p. 107.
55 Lohr, Nationalizing the Russian Empire (see note 31), pp. 105 ff.
56 Ibidem, p. 133.
57 Ibidem, p. 154.
58 Ibidem, p. 170.
59 Mark von Hagen, "The Great War and the Mobilization of Ethnicity," in: Post-Soviet Political Order: Conflict and State-Building, ed. by Barnett R. Rubin and Jack Snyder. London 1998, pp. 34-57.
60 Gatrell, A Whole Empire Walking (see note 22), p. 3.

embittered millions, discredited the state in the eyes of its subjects, and sharpened ethnic definitions and conflicts within the diverse empire, paradoxically producing the coalescence of new ethnic minority identities, especially among the refugee groups in the depths of exile, constituting themselves as diasporas.[61]

Plans for forced migration in the *Kaiserreich*: the "Polish border strip" and Ober Ost

For their part, the German armies in the vast territories on the Eastern Front captured from 1915 now faced the task of establishing occupation regimes and imposing structures for order. No prewar planning had been done for this huge task. In August of 1915, the administration of Russian Poland was divided between Germany (Generalgouvernement Warschau) and Austria-Hungary, with a district administered from Lublin. The territories northwards, Lithuania, Kurland, eastern Poland, and Belarus, were placed under a strictly military administration, the Land Ober Ost. German policies now confronted a territory that had already been worked over by the ravages of the war and the mass population movements of Russia's Great Retreat. This perspective, of surveying damaged and depopulated areas, would be decisive in shaping the policies pursued in this part of northeastern Europe, as evidenced in the Polish border strip project (polnischer Grenzstreifen) and the military state Ober Ost.

The Polish border strip project developed from the first stages of the war, presented as a natural imperative after the devastation visited by Russian armies on East Prussia. In his classic study of this project, Immanuel Geiss demonstrated how the evolution of the project proceeded on two levels at once: in the urgings of annexationists of many different stripes in pamphlets and memoranda, and in the deliberations of the imperial government, up to the office of the Chancellor.[62] Geiss concludes, "Die deutschen Pläne und Forderungen zur Annexion, und möglichst auch zur Germanisation, eines polnischen Grenzstreifens bildeten einen festen Bestandteil der deutschen Kriegsziele im 1. Weltkrieg."[63] The plan, moreover, was presented as a modest and moderate defensive aim. Different variants of the plan called

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[61]   Ibidem, p. 13.
[62]   Geiss, Der polnische Grenzstreifen (see note 8).
[63]   Ibidem, p. 41.

for the annexation of a length of territory (its intended breadth depending on the appetite of the individual planner) along Germany's eastern border with Poland, as "strategic correction" of the frontier. Many versions of the plan also called for the area to become part of Germany without the populations inhabiting it, with Poles and Jews "evacuated," to be replaced by a transsettlement of ethnic Germans from Russia (numbering over two million) or elsewhere abroad.

In its dimensions of ethnic engineering, the Polish border strip plan was related to decades of earlier Prussian policy in the "Eastern Marches," as German nationalists had grown ever more concerned with the ethnic proportions between Germans and Poles in the borderlands. These earlier concerns had led to forced migration, as in Bismarck's expulsion of some 30,000 Poles and Jews from Germany in 1884/85, and legislation to expropriate Polish land from 1908. During the war itself, the Polish border strip plan was also necessarily tied up with the future of Poland, called the most complicated diplomatic issue of the war.[64] After 1917 and the increasing appeal to worldwide opinion of slogans of self-determination, a naked annexation of these territories and possible expulsion of populations seemed ever more impractical, but by this time the project, which had begun as a civilian initiative within the imperial and Prussian governments, passed under the patronage of the German High Command, now personified by the "heroes of East Prussia," Generals Hindenburg and Ludendorff, who had been elevated to this post in August 1916. In their view, the eastern occupied territories needed to be at the disposal of Germany in the case of the next war, for freedom of maneuver. Only the collapse of the German war effort in the west in fall of 1918 prevented the attempt to realize some form of the plan, however politically disastrous it would have proved.

It is instructive, in the different plans for the settlement of the territory, to observe the process by which recent experiences made the option of forced migration increasingly thinkable. Among those pressing plans on the government for the border strip idea was the Oberpräsident of East Prussia, von Batocki, whose memorandum of December 20, 1914, urged taking a border strip of 36,000 square kilometers, with a current population of two million, and went on to discuss "Umsiedlung" (transsettlement). It is the argumentation that he followed which is significant. His ideas for resettlement were couched in an argument about earlier experience of Russian population move-

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[64] Ibidem, p. 29.

ment (presumably settlement of Siberia), and, in a curious fashion, linked with the recent German evacuation of East Prussia in 1914: "Wenn es Russland trotz der Mängel seiner Verwaltung in den letzten Jahren gelungen ist, ohne Schwierigkeiten und Härten jährlich eine nach Hunderttausenden zählende Bauernbevölkerung über Hunderte von Meilen zu verpflanzen, wenn in Ostpreußen im August 1914 weit über 100 000 Landsleute, ohne die Möglichkeit irgendeiner behördlichen Organisation bei der Flucht zu Wagen über Land mit Pferd und Vieh 30 bis 40 Meilen auf dem Hinwege und ebensoviel bei der sechs Wochen darauf erfolgenden Rückkehr zurückgelegt haben, ohne wesentlichen Schaden an der Person und an der lebendigen Habe zu erleiden, so ist das ein Beweis, daß bei richtiger Vorbereitung auch Umsiedlungen im großen Maßstabe ohne Schädigung der Landbevölkerung möglich sind. Daß diese bei der nichtlandwirtschaftlichen Bevölkerung noch viel leichter sind, liegt auf der Hand."[65] In a dialectic process, the barbarities of war had opened up new possibilities, which planners felt free to explore and urge.

In the occupied Northwestern Territories of the Russian empire, a German military colony was erected, called the Land Ober Ost.[66] Representing in many ways a "military utopia" (and growing in size with later conquests in the Baltic provinces), this territory took its name from Hindenburg's title, the "Oberbefehlshaber Ost." The population of the territory numbered around three million, with a tremendous ethnic diversity, including Lithuanians, Jews, Latvians, Estonians, Belarusians, Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, Baltic Germans, Tatars, and other smaller minorities. The occupation authorities combined an economically exploitative regime with attempts at ethnic manipulation, to create client nationalities for the future, dependent on German sponsorship. Throughout, in the propaganda of the Ober Ost state, the Russian scorched earth policies were deplored, and probably greatly exaggerated, to suggest both that the earlier owners of the territory had thus forfeited their claim to the land and that the German occupation regime had built up on a complete *tabula rasa*, making its achievements all the more significant and establishing title to the area for the future (matching James C. Scott's theory of "authoritarian high modernism"). In his memoirs, Ludendorff announced,

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[65]　Quoted in: Ibidem, p. 76.
[66]　Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, Kriegsland im Osten. Eroberung, Kolonisierung und Militärherrschaft im Ersten Weltkrieg, transl. by Jürgen Bauer, Edith Nerke, and Fee Engemann. Hamburg 2002; Aba Strazas, Deutsche Ostpolitik im Ersten Weltkrieg. Der Fall Ober Ost, 1915–1917. Wiesbaden 1993.

"Ich ... hatte den festen Entschluß, etwas Ganzes zu schaffen."[67] An area of his special interest was German settlement.[68] Ludendorff recalled, "Wir hatten das Gefühl, auf fremder Erde für Deutschlands Zukunft zu arbeiten. Wir wollten namentlich in Kurland deutsches Siedlungsland gewinnen. Ich verbot den Verkauf von Grund und Boden, um hiermit die Grundlage für eine gesunde Boden- und Siedlungspolitik zu erhalten."[69]

On April 27, 1916, Ludendorff issued orders for the collection of information throughout the area concerning the prospects for settlement. This included population statistics, religious affiliation of inhabitants, and land quality and ownership. Plans for settlement and blueprints for model colonies were worked on up to the collapse of the regime in fall 1918.[70] A kind of forced migration already came to exist in Ober Ost in the form of forced labor columns which were shuttled around the territory at the administration's orders.[71] While the occupied territory was to improve the German food supply in a future war, Ludendorff also intimated that "Die erhoffte großzügige deutsche Siedlungstätigkeit und die Sammlung der Auslandsdeutschen in jenen weiten Ostgebieten, wie sie schon im Jahre 1915 der Reichskanzler für gewisse Grenzstreifen erstrebte, konnte uns in der Zukunft einen weiteren Menschenzuwachs bringen."[72] In practice, the German victory on the Eastern Front ratified in the March 1918 Treaty of Brest Litovsk brought new problems for officials, as the front lines grew permeable for returning refugees. By and large, settlement plans remained without effect, but their plausibility seemed to have grown in their very articulation.

Forced migration during the First World War in northeastern Europe: from an emergency measure to routine

Finally, it is important to consider the question of how northeastern European societies received the phenomenon of forced migration during World War I. Most obviously and directly affected were those

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[67]   Erich Ludendorff, Meine Kriegserinnerungen 1914–1918. Berlin 1919, p. 145.
[68]   Robert Stupperich, "Siedlungspläne im Gebiet des Oberbefehlshabers Ost (Militärverwaltung Litauen und Kurland) während des Weltkrieges", in: Jomsburg 5 (1941), pp. 348-367.
[69]   Ludendorff, Meine Kriegserinnerungen (see note 67), p. 161.
[70]   Liulevicius, Kriegsland im Osten (see note 66), pp. 122-126.
[71]   Ibidem, pp. 100-104.
[72]   Ludendorff, Meine Kriegserinnerungen (see note 67), p. 417.

millions who had been displaced and had experienced the agony first-hand. Peter Gatrell's study of the refugee phenomenon in Russia reminds us that the very category of the "refugee" was constructed by the circumstances of the war, and that historians need to be attentive to the voices and agency of the refugees themselves, rather than regarding them as a monolithic, passive problem.[73] Individual cases of refugees recorded in memoirs and biographies testify to both the traumas and creative responses to flight, sometimes including dramatic reinventions of the self.[74] In general, many refugees later felt that their difficult experience had not been written into the narrative of the war, which privileged the heroic suffering in the trenches (in ways this resembled the situation of former prisoners of war).[75] This submerging of the refugee experience was likely most complete in the wreckage of the Russian empire, where the First World War soon blended into the levels of violence of the revolutions of 1917 and the Russian Civil War, what Peter Holquist calls Russia's "continuum of crisis", 1914–1921.[76]

In Germany, the invasion of East Prussia was an important part of wartime propaganda and later memory of the conflict, presented as a trauma of violated national territory. A plethora of popular sources during the war and after recalled and reinforced the trauma. As but one example, the album of drawings entitled "Bilder aus Ostpreussen's Not" showed scenes of devastation and ruin.[77] After the First World War, the situation of East Prussia took on renewed significance for German nationalists as an amputated piece of national soil cut off by the "Polish Corridor." Constant propaganda denounced the Versailles Treaty and Germany's "bleeding borders," while celebrating East Prussia as once again a German outpost in the East. After 1945, the recollection of East Prussia in 1914 and 1915 in collective memory was overshadowed by comparison with events in World War II and the devastation wrought on those same territories by the advancing Red Army. The way in which the mem-

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[73] Gatrell, A Whole Empire Walking (see note 22), pp. 11-14.

[74] Tom Reiss, The Orientalist: Solving the Mystery of a Strange and Dangerous Life. New York 2005; Tania Alexander, Memories of a Lost World. Bethesda, Maryland 1988; Modris Eksteins, Walking Since Daybreak: A Story of Eastern Europe, World War II, and the Heart of Our Century. Boston 1999, pp. 44-91.

[75] Alon Rachamimov, POWs and the Great War: Captivity on the Eastern Front. Oxford 2002.

[76] Peter Holquist, Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914–1921. Cambridge 2002.

[77] Bruno Bielefeldt, Bilder aus Ostpreussens Not. München 1915.

ories of both these invasions came to flow together is illustrated by Michael Freund's description of World War I in a popular history of Germany from the 1970s: "Kosakische Reiterregimenter standen, die Greuel von 1945 fast völlig vorwegnehmend, in ostpreussischen Städten."[78] An overlay of wars and forced migrations helps to explain the paucity of research and awareness concerning 1914/15 today.

In northeastern Europe as a whole, while the First World War raged, keen observers noted a proliferation of rumors that showed the impact which seeing forced migration was having on their societies, and the dawning suspicion that an age of deportations had arrived. As but one example, Lithuanian social activist Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė recorded these rumors in her diary. She noted that when the war began, local farmers were upset by whisperings that the retreating Russians aimed to empty the entire region of people (who would be resettled in Siberia), burning everything in the countryside to the torch, and leaving only "a Sahara" for the Germans.[79] Later, after the Germans established themselves, rumors now announced that the Germans, in turn, were planning similar policies, with deportations of civilians to Germany or scorched earth policies of their own, if they should have to retreat. Stories also circulated anticipating the conscription of young men and deportation of young women to Germany.[80] To ordinary people, these possibilities had become plausible.

After the war, the young "successor states" that emerged newly independent after the collapse of the Romanov and Habsburg empires, these memories took on a different significance. The recollection of the forced migrations of World War I, the experience of military occupation, and the sufferings of the war as a whole were often taken by nationalists as evidence that their own people's sufferings had bought independence and invalidated the role of outside Great Powers, Germany and Russia, which had shown their bankruptcy by underwriting ruthless strategies. Some of the former minority peoples of the Russian empire held to the intuition that the Russian scorched earth policy had been intended to clear the way for mass postwar Russian settlement and afterwards gave it a prominent place in their historiography.[81]

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[78]   Michael Freund, Deutsche Geschichte. München 1979.
[79]   Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė, Karo meto dienorastis [Wartime Diary]. Vilnius 1966, p. 146.
[80]   Ibidem, pp. 469, 452, 462, 564 ff., 487.
[81]   Pranas Čepėnas, Naujuju laiku Lietuvos istorija [Modern History of Lithuania]. Vol. II, Chicago 1976, p. 20.

A final interesting theme related to reception concerns transnational empathy, the common compassion for refugees across boundaries of ethnicity. The Lithuanian activist Petkevičaitė-Bitė recorded her reaction to hearing of the East Prussian deportees: "Among the people talk spreads that Šiauliai is full of people, cows, and horses brought from Prussia ... the animals are being sold by the government for a pittance ... and the people are being transported to the wastes of Siberia ... a chill goes through one, thinking of such misfortunes ... I explain to the children: today Šiauliai must provide for the people torn from their farmsteads in Prussia, and tomorrow we may receive other kinds of refugees ... to push them away, not to share with such unfortunates even the last morsel would be not only a shame, but a great disgrace."[82]

One of the East Prussian deportees, a young girl, recalled the polarized reactions of curious crowds that came to see them as they passed through Białystok: "Tiefes Mitleid, aber auch den häßlichsten Haß lasen wir auf den Gesichtern der Russen."[83] A German painter accompanying troops on the Eastern Front displayed both fellow feeling and "compassion fatigue" in describing Polish refugees he encountered: "Wie oft sahen wir die fliehenden, ziehenden Gestalten und wie oft die Heimgekehrten vor den Brandstellen ihrer Hütten – sie gehören zum Land wie die zerschossenen Wälder, wie die von den zerwühlten Stellungen durchzogenen, zerstampften Felder, wie die Soldaten, die Geschütze und die Toten. Man gewöhnt sich an ihr Aussehen, man kann nicht immer bemitleiden und mitfühlen; man kann sich ihrer nicht annehmen; zuweilen muss man sogar hart gegen sie sein ..."[84] Clearly, witnessing forced migration could exhaust compassion as well, as it became increasingly routine.

The experience of forced migration during the war itself had also a kind of afterlife in the dislocations that continued after the war. Welcoming and settling returned refugees was one of the tasks implicit in the process of state-building which the new polities of northeastern Europe undertook. The realization of national projects earlier existing in "diplomatic cyberspace" now apparently became possible.[85] "Homelands," however, were contested ideals and the border conflicts

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[82] Petkevičaitė-Bitė, Karo meto dienorastis (see note 79), p. 68.

[83] Gefangen in Sibirien (see note 39), p. 31.

[84] Ludwig Dettmann, Ostfront. Ein Denkmal des deutschen Kampfes in Bildern und Tagebuchblättern. Berlin 1938, p. 148.

[85] Aviel Roshwald, Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires: Central Europe, Russia, and the Middle East, 1914–1923. London 2001.

that endured in the region testified to this.[86] Though the nation-state was held up as an ideal venue for self-determination, ethnic complexity did not disappear. After the Paris Settlement, it is estimated, 20-25 million ethnic minorities lived in the Balkans and Central Europe (whereas before 1914, they had numbered 60 million).[87] In the case of Lithuania, with some 350,000 refugees streaming back into the country after 1918, the process was an existential challenge for the new state's self-concept, as "this meant that every sixth citizen was a refugee."[88] The cases of many other of the young republics of the region were similar. Germany itself faced anxieties about the postwar refugees it now received in masses.[89] In the aftermath of the war, one venture would take on significance later: "population exchanges" ratified by the Convention of Lausanne of January 30, 1923 between Greece and Turkey, which had clashed in one of the aftershocks of the global war. These forced migrations were later praised as orderly and efficient, and influenced European thinking in the following decades.[90]

In conclusion, the First World War clearly did not see the invention of forced migration, but did unleash a wave of it in northeastern Europe and the continent more generally, conspicuously contributing to the routinization of such state practices. The longer term implications of this trend are reflected in the historiography. Geiss labels the Polish border strip plan as a "Vorstufe zur Lebensraumideologie des Nationalsozialismus."[91] Recent work in Russian history underlines how state practices (like forced migration) from the war carried over to the Bolshevik regime to follow.[92] The experiences of the First World War proved to be an omen of more to come for the region. Forced migration, diaspora, and expulsion continued to be central to northeastern Europe's experience of the 20th century, with consequences reverberating to the present.

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[86]   Homelands: War, Population and Statehood in Eastern Europe and Russia 1918–1924, ed. by Nick Baron and Peter Gatrell. London 2004.
[87]   Schechtman, European Population Transfers 1939–1945 (see note 17), p. 6.
[88]   Tomas Balkelis, "Nation-Building and World War I Refugees in Lithuania, 1918–1924", in: Journal of Baltic Studies XXXIV (Winter 2003), No. 4, p. 434.
[89]   Ari Sammartino, "Migration and Crisis in Germany, 1914–1922". Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2004.
[90]   Schechtman, European Population Transfers 1939–1945 (see note 17), pp. 16-22.
[91]   Geiss, Der polnische Grenzstreifen (see note 8), p. 150.
[92]   Holquist, Making War, Forging Revolution (see note 76), p. 6 f.