



RESEARCH NOTE

Population Displacement, Political Space and Social Identity

Nick Baron, University of Manchester

Initial Objectives

In October 1999, Professor Peter Gatrell and I commenced work on a new research project entitled 'Population Displacements, State-Building and Social Identity in the Lands of the Former Russian Empire, 1918-1930,' based in the Department of History, University of Manchester, and funded by the United Kingdom Arts and Humanities Research Board for a duration of five years.¹ The core aim of the project is to develop a new empirical and conceptual account of how population displacement and resettlement interacted with processes of war and peace, imperial collapse and new state-building and the dissolution and reformation of social identities in the emerging polities and societies of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Soviet Russia, Ukraine and Belorussia during the post-war decade. Beyond these intellectual objectives, the project aims to facilitate and enhance international co-operation among historians, and to encourage the establishment of active networks of pan-regional and international scholarship.²

As the project is now in its fourth year, it would be a good time to take stock of our progress to date. At the start of our work, we recruited thirteen researchers in Poland (Kraków and Lublin), Ukraine (Donetsk), Belarus (Minsk and Pruzhany, Brest region), Latvia (two in Riga), Lithuania (Vilnius) and the Russian Federation (Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kazan, Ekaterinburg, Barnaul). Unfortunately, we were unable to identify suitable collaborators in Armenia, although we are fortunate to be able to draw on the expertise of a current Manchester doctoral student on this region. In recruiting the project team, we were very keen to assemble a range of specialists from different fields and disciplines who could offer their own particular perspectives on the themes under consideration. The current team includes expertise in political, social, cultural and economic history, geography, sociology, anthropology and demography.

All project members have pursued three parallel objectives. Firstly, we have attempted to locate key published and archival sources relating to population displacement in each region during the years 1918-1924, and to establish from these sources basic data concerning numbers of migrants; their geographical origins, routes and destinations; their ethnic, social, age and gender profiles; and the political, legal and 'perceptual' frameworks within which migration took place. Secondly, we have sought to elaborate a theoretical framework enabling us to identify key problems and questions relating to the complexity of themes at the heart of the project. This conceptual work, which I discuss briefly below, has focussed our attention on one core difficulty: the inter-relationship between population displacement and the spatial construction of new states.

In the three and a half years of the project to date, we have organised numerous events related to our research topic bringing together project participants and a number of other British, European, North American and Russian academics working in contiguous fields (many of the papers presented on these occasions can be found on our web site):

¹ I gratefully acknowledge Peter Gatrell's contribution to the ideas which inform this essay.

² More information on the Project and our work to date can be found at our website: <http://www.art.man.ac.uk/history/ahrbproj/details.htm>. We have also established an internet discussion list to explore the themes and concerns of our research, and to promote discussion on related subjects. For more details on joining or submitting contributions to the list, please refer to the list website at: <http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/forced-migration-history/>.



- In April 2000, a Dutch-British panel on 'Populations, Passports and Resettlement Policy in the USSR in the 1920s and 1930s' at the British Association of Slavonic and East European Studies (BASEES) Annual Conference at the University of Cambridge, UK.
- In May 2000, a workshop of Russian and UK academics on 'Population Displacement, State-Building & Social Identity: Past and Present' at Manchester University.
- In April 2001, a Ukrainian-Polish-British panel on 'War, Population and Statehood in the East-West Borderlands, 1918-1924' at BASEES, Cambridge, UK.
- In September 2001, a British panel on 'The Long-Term Consequences of Internal Forced Migration in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia' at the European Political Research Consortium (EPRC) Annual Conference in the University of Kent, Canterbury, UK.
- In December 2001, a two-day conference at Manchester University bringing together all project participants to present and discuss their work to date. Papers were organised into four panels: 'Displacement, Deportation and Space in Theory and Practice', 'Refugees, Returnees and Nation State in Latvia and Lithuania, 1914-1924', 'Displacement, Settlement and Control on the Polish-Ukrainian-Belorussian Borderlands' and 'Soviet State-Building: Territorial Planning and Migration in the Urals and Western Siberia in the 1920's and 1930's'.
- In April 2002, a British-American panel on 'Nationalities Policy and National Conflicts in Stalinist Russia', and a Russian-Canadian-British panel on 'Social Catastrophe, Child Displacement and Labour in 20th century Russia and Latvia' at BASEES, Cambridge, UK.
- In September 2002, several project members participated in the conference on 'Forced Migration and Displacement: Causes, Consequences and Responses' at the University of Bath, UK.
- In March 2003, a Russian-British-American panel on 'Mapping Russia: Spatial Perspectives on Imperial, Soviet and Post-Soviet History' at BASEES, Cambridge, UK.
- In August 2003, we shall hold a second two-day project conference at Manchester University, at which participants will present papers on two themes: 'War, Statehood and Population Displacement: State-Centred and Itinerant Perspectives' and 'Child Displacement, Delinquency and Welfare in Twentieth Century Eastern Europe'.

Most of the project's bibliographical work is already available on our web site. Among other internet resources we have developed for the benefit of the academic community, the site offers extensive listings of archival holdings relating to population displacement in Polish and Lithuanian central and regional archives, as well as in archives in Russia (Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kazan', Barnaul), Ukraine (Donbass region) and Belarus (Minsk).

As noted above, the research papers that were presented at the December 2001 workshop fell largely into two groups, though all addressed the general theme of the interaction between space and populations. One set of papers, concerned broadly with the relationship between Soviet territorial-administrative division and population redistributions, is to be published in Russia in 2003 (Glezer et al. 2003). The second set, concerned primarily with questions of refugee resettlement and the establishment of new nation-state borders and communities in eastern Europe, is currently being edited for publication in the UK in 2004 (Gatrell and Baron 2004). The papers that will constitute this volume focus on interactions between displaced groups and state agents at the new state borders in relation to ethnopolitical and geopolitical ideas of national security and social welfare in Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, Latvia and Lithuania during 1918-1924.

During the first two years of the project, participants have additionally written a large number of papers on related themes arising from their independent research, some of

which are posted on our web site, others of which have been published in journals or collected volumes elsewhere (all project publications are listed on the web site). At this interim stage, it will be useful to attempt a brief summation of the direction of our work in progress, the conceptual framework we have adopted, and key topics we have nominated for further research.³

Interim Thoughts

Manchester's AHRB-funded 'Population Displacement' project develops Peter Gatrell's monograph *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War One* (Gatrell 1999). This work deals with the social, political and cultural consequences of the involuntary migration of several million people, both Russians and non-Russians, who were dispersed during the First World War throughout European Russia and Siberia. It ends with the crescendo of revolutionary upheaval during the last years of the war, and the assertion of a new national politics within the unravelling imperial polity. Our new project builds on this work chronologically by exploring firstly the impact of the wartime displacement, diaspora and resettlement of populations on post-war processes of state construction, nation-building and identity formation, and secondly the new displacements and conflicts that these processes brought about in post-imperial space. By aiming to capture the longer-term dynamics of population displacement in relation to imperial collapse and regional transitions to statehood, our current project also develops thematically some of the central ideas of Peter Gatrell's earlier work.

Historians, demographers and specialists in international law have already addressed some of the issues relating to East European population displacements in the post-war period.⁴ We believe, however, that this literature fails to offer a full picture of the political, social, cultural and economic dimensions of these processes. It is necessary to go beyond cataloguing the demographics of displacement, chronicling human hardship and examining legal frameworks to adopt new perspectives on forced migration.

Empirically, as I have noted above, the present project focuses on interactions between nascent states and displaced individuals or groups. We acknowledge the physical and mental trauma of displacement, and the brutal objectification of uprooted populations in imperial and post-imperial policies and discourses. However, we insist that refugees and returnees were not merely passive objects of policy, but often themselves participated in nationalist and state-building projects and in negotiating their status in the new collectives, and it is in this light that we are examining their 'place' in the new states of the region.

In theoretical terms, we aim to construct a new vision of the relationship between population displacement and state-formation through two conceptual 'prisms': firstly, by considering the spatial opposition of *itineracy* versus *sedentarism* (with its temporal correlate of transience versus permanence) in the formation of narratives of self and community; and, secondly, by exploring the nexus of *space* and *power* in defining such notions as 'place' and 'dis-placement,' 'homeland' and 'exile,' 'nation' and 'state.' In the next paragraphs, I shall expand on these ideas in turn.

Drawing on recent work in refugee and migration studies and social anthropology we emphasize the experience and agency of the displaced, on the social margins of the collective, as well as the role of those who define the terms of discourse and who

³ These ideas are elaborated in greater detail, with full references and extended empirical analysis, in Baron and Gatrell (2003). I am grateful to the editors of this journal for permitting me to draw on this text for the present discussion.

⁴ See, for example, Simpson (1939), Lorimer (1946), Kulischer (1948), Marrus (1985), Skran (1995), Poliakov and Zhiromskaia (2000) and Rieber (2000).



manage and distribute welfare at the 'center.'⁵ From this 'itinerant' perspective, we perceive the arbitrary or contingent nature of the distinction traditionally drawn between forced and free population movements. In fact, all migration involves elements of both choice and coercion, although in different measure. Structural factors contributing to displacement may look very different from the point of view of migrant subjectivity, and individual migrant motivation may not correspond to the observer's account of cause and effect. We assert the conditionality of other categories of displacement, too, such as 'refugee,' 'exile,' 'deportee' or 'repatriate.' Such forms of identity are commonly ascribed to individuals or groups in conformity with official classifications and prejudices, and bear little relation to the itinerant's own self-perception. We therefore do not accept these labels as *a priori* of empirical enquiry, but treat them as elements of discourse which demand critical interrogation from the perspective of the displaced. For the historian, this means using sources and methods, for example, diaries, memoirs, material artefacts and visual materials, as well as oral history (when possible), which offer insight into the subjective experience of displacement, permitting migrants to overcome their 'speechlessness.'

The 'itinerant' perspective seems a particularly appropriate approach to elucidating a period of history characterized by flux: massive population displacements, shifting territorial borders and cultural boundaries, and new political and social formations in the process of self-definition and delimitation. It also forces us to acknowledge that for many populations, the experience of flux did not represent an aberration, or new departure, from a sedentary and unchanging normality. From the west of Ireland to east of the Pale of Settlement, Europeans had been 'on the move' under various forms of incentive or coercion for many decades already. What was new in eastern Europe after the First World War was the sudden reconfiguration of power and territory which 'dis-placed' not only those who migrated, but also those who, remaining at 'home,' found that the larger political unit to which they belonged had changed, and with it their 'locus' in social time and space. Understood in these terms, historians should not conceive of population displacement as a pathology of modernity, but as integral to the development and constitution of modern Europe.

Population displacements must also be considered as spatial processes. Migratory impulses, routes and destinations can be seen as functions not only of 'objective' forces and capacities but also of social visions of space and of the meanings given to specific places, landscapes or territories associated with, for example, presence, settlement and security ('home,' 'nation,' etc.) or of absence, transience and threat ('exile,' 'diaspora,' etc.). As a form of spatial 'dis-placement', forced migration may stimulate a longing for 'home' among refugees and serve to intensify a sense of collective identity by promoting a shared 'nostalgia' (literally meaning 'pain for a return home') for a common spatial origin or 'homeland.'⁶ This emotional bond may form the basis for strong in-group solidarity among refugees, striving to optimise individual welfare through collective arrangements.⁷ In some circumstances, diaspora leaders may translate collective nostalgia into nationalist aspirations and resettlement programs, mobilizing displaced persons for the purpose of establishing a national territory or state.⁸ This approach directs us to specific empirical questions relating to the migrant experience of space in exile, the influence of dis-placement on the adoption of new ideas or the strengthening of

⁵ See, for example, Clifford (1988, 1997), Papastergiadis (2000), Malkki (1995), Lucassen and Lucassen (1997) and Camino and Krulfeld (1994).

⁶ For the role of 'fertile landscapes of the mind' in constructing national or ethnic identities in oral cultures, see Del Giudice and Porter (2001).

⁷ On the combination of affective and instrumental motivation in ethnic group formation, see Horowitz (1998).

⁸ The post-1945 expulsion of the Sudeten Germans produced an extensive, highly nationalistic, literature on 'Heimatverlust.' See, for example, Hanika (1957).

pre-existing affective or ideological bonds, and the role of refugee return and resettlement in importing and disseminating new knowledge and ethics of practice.

In established nation-states, affiliations to 'place' formed in exile may be recast as legal, political or scientific discourses defining the identities both of a supposedly 'native' population and of those to be excluded from the national community.⁹ Such discourses assign social values to individuals and groups as citizen/alien; majority/minority; repatriate/refugee; immigrant/interloper; 'healthy cells' of the body politic/ 'bacilli' of social contagion and so forth. Naturally, space and its markers (for example, landscapes and borders) are significant determinants in structuring these schema of difference, since most forms of nationalism aspire to occupy a space designated as the 'homeland' and the nation-state defines itself as this territory's protector and provider. Those who are deemed not to belong by virtue of ethnic, linguistic, religious or other ascribed identity in the bounded national space are figuratively, sometimes physically, 'dis-placed.'

Yet it is important to reiterate that spatial identities are no more 'natural' than other ascribed social labels (or, indeed, of nature itself). Concepts such as 'home', 'homeland' or 'roots', and the notion of 'nation' itself, need to be problematized and 'de-natured' (Malkki 1992). Our notion of an 'itinerant' perspective outlined above aims to reassert the migrant's subjective experience of space and mode of self-identification as valid alternatives to reified 'sedentary' categories.

These ideas have shaped the way we have interrogated our empirical materials. From these perspectives, we have seen how the First World War's massive population displacements simultaneously became a cause and an effect of the collapse of the Russian empire.¹⁰ From an 'itinerant' perspective, we have explored the longing for 'homeland' felt by some refugees and have shown how this 'nostalgia' was sometimes translated into nationalist initiatives. We have also set about establishing an empirical account of the further displacements resulting from post-war reconstruction in the 'nationalizing' states of eastern Europe and the 'revolutionizing' Bolshevik state. We have tried to emphasize that displacement was not merely a by-product, but was a powerful agent of both state collapse and (re)formation. In some instances, refugees and the agencies that promoted their welfare helped to organize and legitimate new states. Invariably, the existence of displaced persons on the territory of aspiring states forced political leaders to examine their attitudes towards 'ideal' communities and spaces. Mass displacement served to sharpen social, economic and national antagonisms, and prompted the authorities to respond with interventionist and often forceful policies of demographic and spatial reordering.

Having considered the interactions of displacement and state-building, it is clear that all the states and proto-states of the region were driven by similar priorities: the need for institutional and economic reconstruction and for structures of social welfare to address the consequences of wartime displacement and loss (for example, abandoned children, refugees and wounded soldiers). Of course, the Soviet definition of the welfare community was governed primarily by socio-economic categories of class, whereas in other states nationality - however defined - took precedence. But the governing regimes in those states which sought to territorialize ethnicity also sought to assert 'class' interests (albeit those of a different class), and in the process asserted their own hegemonic and hierarchical taxonomies of social identity. Beyond reconstruction, both revolutionizing and nationalizing states expended abundant 'social energy' on radical

⁹ Established nation-states might also cast themselves as 'homeland' states promoting or protecting the rights of co-nationals who find themselves (because of border settlements and/or displacement) within another nation-state. See Brubaker (1996: 107-147).

¹⁰ This applies of course to other post-imperial polities as well. On the consequences of the collapse of the Ottoman empire see Hirschon (1989, 2003) and Karakasidou (1997).



projects to transform society. These policies derived in part from what has been termed the modern state's 'impetus to homogenize' (Naimark 2001: 8). They can also be related to an aspiration – also commonly associated with 'modernity' - to realize a more rational spatial order, producing at times an ethnic, at times a social 'unmixing of peoples'.¹¹ Sometimes this spatial reordering also implied homogenisation, by division, exclusion or assimilation, always it generated the 'dis-placement' of certain groups and individuals.

Without stretching matters too far, we believe we are really dealing with parallel projects, driven by similar perceived imperatives of state power, rather than two separate universes. This is clear, for instance, in states' refugee resettlement and demographic redistribution policies. It is also evident in states' strategies of spatial reordering. The Russian revolution strove to recast the spatial ordering of society and the social ordering of space in every sphere, from international relations, through internal administrative and political measures, to the structures of everyday life. Although the new Soviet state was primarily concerned with socio-spatial ordering, but also operationalized national and ethnic categories in various spheres of spatial policy. At the same time, the nascent nationalizing states of the region sought to reform their constituent ethno-spatial relations, but their policies also gave momentum to class-based and other forms of spatial reconfiguration. The bolshevizing project to 'fix' citizens in the new socio-spatial order had its counterpart in the ambitious agendas that took shape in all states during and after the First World War.¹²

Future Directions

During the second half of the project, we have been developing these themes of research, as well as realizing publication plans arising from work already completed.

As noted above, the project organised two panels at BASEES 2002 on 'Social Catastrophe, Child Displacement and Labour in 20th century Russia and Latvia' and 'Nationalities Policy and National Conflicts in Stalinist Russia' (papers available on project web site). The first panel will form the basis of a second project volume, addressing the theme of 'Child Displacement, Delinquency and Welfare in Twentieth Century Eastern Europe'. The papers included in this volume will offer new perspectives both on the attitudes and policies of Eastern European states towards child populations and on children's own 'itinerant' experience of displacement. In accordance with the project's conceptual concerns, the concept of 'dis-placement' itself is defined in a broad sense to include not only traditional notions of forced migration, but all forms of expulsion or escape from the child's normative 'places' of comfort - home, family and childhood itself, understood as a constructed social role (for example, by being forced into 'unchildish' activities). The authors adopt diverse disciplinary and conceptual approaches towards topics such as refugee children and children in exile, the 'nationalisation' of orphans in new nation-states, the penal 'rehabilitation' and re-placement of homeless street urchins, and the role of child workers in post-socialist transitions.

Other project researchers are exploring topics related to the theme of 'refugee identity and subjectivities of everyday life', including criminality among refugees, the experience of migrants in the context of local state-building practices, and first-person accounts of displacement. Some of these papers will be presented at the project conference in August 2003, after which they will be posted on the project web site.

As a separate but parallel venture to the project, Peter Gatrell and Nick Baron in 2002 inaugurated a new multi-disciplinary book series with UK publishers Anthem Press

¹¹ The phrase 'unmixing of peoples' is from Brubaker (1996).

¹² For pan-European dimensions see Mazower (1998: 77-105), Holquist (1997), and Hoffmann (2000).

entitled 'Population Displacement and Political Space.' This series is concerned to explore the interactions between population displacement and the political organisation of space, and, in common with the project, it aims to promote new ways of understanding the spatial development of regions, nations, states and empires as well as the spatial constitution of human identity. However, the scope of the book series is far wider than that of the project. Indeed, we welcome proposals for monographs or other works from any discipline, which may address any relevant historical or contemporary topic, relating to any region or regions of the world or to global processes, and which may be either empirical or conceptual in emphasis. For guidelines on submitting proposals for publications and for contact details, please refer to our web site.

References

- Baron, Nick and Gatrell, Peter, 2003, 'Population Displacement, State Practice and Social Identity after World War One', *Kritika. Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, New Series, vol. 4, no. 1, 51-100.
- Brubaker, Rogers, 1996, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Camino, Linda A. and Krulfeld, Ruth M., eds., 1994, *Reconstructing lives, recapturing meaning: refugee identity, gender, and culture change*. London: Routledge.
- Clifford, James, 1988, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Clifford, James, 1997, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Del Giudice, Luisa and Porter, Gerald, eds., 2001, *Imagined States: nationalism, utopia, and longing in oral cultures*. Logan: Utah State University Press.
- Gatrell, Peter and Baron, Nick, eds., 2004, *War, Statehood and Population Displacement in Eastern Europe, 1918-1924*. London: Anthem Press.
- Gatrell, Peter, 1999, *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War One*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Glezer, O. B., Lappo, G. M. and Polian, P. M., eds., 2003, *Struktura i dinamika regional'nogo rasseleniia Rossiiskoi Federatsii*. Moscow: Institute of Geography, Russian Academy of Sciences.
- Hanika, Josef, 1957, *Volkskundliche Wandlungen durch Heimatverlust und Zwangswanderung: methodische Forschungsanleitung am Beispiel der deutschen Gegenwart*. Salzburg: Müller.
- Hirschon, Renée, 1989, *Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe: The Social Life of Asia Minor Refugees in Piraeus*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Hirschon, Renée, ed., 2003, *Crossing the Aegean. An Appraisal of the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn.
- Hoffmann, David, 'European Modernity and Soviet Socialism', in *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practices*, ed. by David L. Hoffmann and Yanni Kotsonis. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000, 245-60.
- Holquist, Peter, 1997, '"Information is the Alpha and Omega of Our Work": Bolshevik Surveillance in its Pan-European Context', *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 69, 415-50.
- Horowitz, Donald L., 1998, 'Structure and Strategy in Ethnic Conflict', Paper prepared for the Annual World Bank Conference on Development Economics, Washington, D.C., 20-21 April 1998.
- Karakasidou, Anastasia, 1997, *Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood: Passages to Nationhood in Greek Macedonia, 1870-1990*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Kulischer, Eugene M., 1948, *Europe on the Move: War and Population Changes, 1917-1947*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lorimer, Frank, 1946, *The Population of the Soviet Union: History and Prospects*. Geneva: League of Nations.
- Lucassen, Jan and Lucassen, Leo, eds., 1997, *Migration, migration history, history: old paradigms and new perspectives*. Bern: P. Lang.



- Malkki, Liisa H. 1995, *Purity and Exile. Violence, Memory and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Malkki, Liisa, 1992, 'National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees', *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 7, 24-44.
- Marrus, Michael, 1985, *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mazower, Mark, 1998, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century*. London: Allen Lane.
- Naimark, Norman, 2001, *Fires of Hatred. Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Papastergiadis, Nikos, 2000, *The Turbulence of Migration: Globalization, Deterritorialization and Hybridity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Poliakov, Iurii A. and Zhiromskaia, V. B., eds., 2000, *Naselenie Rossii v XX veke. Tom 1: 1900-1939gg*. Moscow: Rosspen, 2000.
- Rieber, Alfred J., 2000, 'Repressive Population Transfers in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe: A Historical Overview,' *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, vol. 16, nos. 1-2, 1-27.
- Simpson, John H., 1939, *The Refugee Problem: Report of a Survey*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Skran, Claudene M., 1995, *Refugees in Interwar Europe: The Emergence of a Regime*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.