# CLOSE ENCOUNTERS IN WAR

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# Close encounters, displacement and war

## Contents

# Introduction

The Close Encounters in War Journal has reached an important goal that means much for us editors and for the project itself. One year after the publication of the first issue of November 2018, we publish issue n. 2, devoted to the topical theme of displacement. In between, we have taken an important decision for the life of the journal and we have consequently taken a crucial step that represented no minor challenge. We moved the whole journal to a new website of our own design in May 2019. Since then, the journal has been re-designed in accordance with the purpose of providing a complex tool for our readers, consisting in two different but non-exclusive sections: the academic journal that is published on a yearly basis; and the section of news and announcements that is fed year-round. CEIWJ is gaining more and more visitors worldwide and its scientific value is demonstrated by the rate of visits that the journal receives daily. We plan to close 2019 with the official registration for ISSN number, which will permit CEIWJ to gain wider visibility in the catalogues of the major libraries of the world. And last but not least, we are soon going to publish the Call for Articles for our issue n. 3 that will be devoted to the theme of combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder.

Now, a few words about the current issue. Displacement and forced migration represent some of the most worrying issues of the contemporary world: according to data published by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) there are currently 70.8 million forced migrants globally (Figures at a Glance, 2019) and its reports also show that wars, persecutions, violence and human rights violations are among the main causes of current forced migrations. The current crisis is unprecedented and calls for a deep reflection on how to face its urgency, particularly in relation to the situation of the people involved and the humanitarian emergency. In this special issue we look at displacement and forced migration caused by war and conflict in the contemporary era, with a particular focus on the challenges met by those who experienced it.

The five articles collected in the present issue cover a number of case-studies of displacement that vary as to geographical and chronological context, methodological

approach, and specific disciplinary field, as far as they range from oral history to cultural history, and cultural studies.

The author of the first contribution, Christoph Declercq, focuses on the "odd case" of Belgian refugees in the United Kingdom during WW1, a small community of displaced people who were warmly welcomed and rather well absorbed in the British daily life, but who were soon after their repatriation forgotten. As Declercq claims, "the destitute Belgians had been used as a tool of warfare and when the war was finally over, those tools were hastily discarded, and all the stories that came with them suppressed" (*infra*, p. 14), which was one of the reasons why this group of displaced people remained so long forgotten by historians. Actually, as the author shows, the story of this group was more complex than a simple mass movement from Belgium to UK, and the figures of the mobility are therefore analysed thoroughly in order to understand what actual perception the Britons had of this phenomenon of displacement.

In the second article, Simona Tobia presents a number of case-studies deriving from oral history interviews that cover the displacement of Jewish Europeans fleeing from Nazi Germany to the United States before and during WW2, facing very challenging experiences of adaptation and integration. The author opens her article by discussing a number of methodological issues of oral history in order to theoretically frame her work and the use she makes of her sources. Tobia's main concern is the emotional impact that displacement has on those who experience it, which often affects their ability to remember and share effectively the most traumatic aspects of their journey. She therefore claims that any oral history of displacement must take into account not only the cultural issues related to oral narrative but also the emotional impact of being displaced in terms of identity-building and memory, because "the strategies of memory composure that the narrators in these case studies used revolve around cultural knowledge, on the one hand, and emotions and feelings, on the other" (*infra*, p. 44).

The author of the third article, Barbara Krasner, touches upon another rather neglected scenario of displacement, namely that of Polish citizens who were caught between Hitler's and Stalin's regimes in 1939, when Poland was invaded by the *Wehrmacht* from the west and by the Red Army from the east. This form of displacement concerned above all the Jewish population of the town of Ostrova, who found themselves trapped between two invaders who equally threatened their survival. Thus, "the decision to cross or not

cross the border in the first three months of Nazi and Soviet occupation of Poland had longer-term consequences for the Jews of Ostrova" (*infra*, p. 63), which reminds us that displacement is a multi-faceted phenomenon that can be very different from case to case. Displacement can turn itself into a deadly condition for those groups of people that for racial, ethnic, religious or political reasons are particularly exposed to persecution both in the place they flee from and in those they try to enter.

The fourth article by Elisheva Perelman takes us in Japan in 1945, when the country is occupied by the American troops and the encounter between the soldiers and the civilians gives birth to the need for normalizing gendered relationships between America and Japan. To cover this topic, Perelman chooses to focus on a well-known post-war product of American pop culture, i.e. the cartoon *Babysan*, first published in 1951 and depicting the regime of occupation in a palatable way, which means in a sexually hegemonized way. Babysan made thus an ideal ethnographic object through which the Americans could look at defeated and occupied Japan in terms of naivety and objectification. Perleman also shows that the experience of displacement can occur without being removed from one's own place. Babysan depicts a culture that has been displaced by the very glance that the occupiers have cast on it. As a "symbol of occupation and subjugation, of racism and misogyny" (*infra*, p. 81), Babysan reveals much about the complex reality of displacement in war.

The fifth and last article considers a more recent scenario, i.e. the worldwide diaspora of Somali citizens in the wake of the Somali civil war. Natoschia Scruggs takes into account testimonies of Somali displaced people resident in the United States, some of whom, though, have had previous experience of displacement in Europe and other countries in Africa or the Middle East. Once again, this article shows that displacement triggers a long chain of identity-related issues in those who are involved, in particular for people coming from cultural milieus where "clan affiliation and one's immediate family are significant sources of personal identity and security" (*infra*, p. 92). What emerges is that generalisation is not useful when one attempts to understand the impact of displacement on such aspects as identity-building, self-perception, or social relationships, which are largely dependent on the cultural milieu of origin.

We wish to extend a warm thank you to all the people who work with us to realize this project: our Editorial Board, the many scholars who accept to act as peer reviewers, and all those who have supported our project with counsel, criticism and constructive dialogue. And above all, the contributors, who have allowed us the privilege to read and publish their excellent academic work.

The Editors

*Simona Tobia and Gianluca Cinelli*

# The Odd Case of the Welcome Refugee in Wartime Britain: Uneasy Numbers, Disappearing Acts and Forgetfulness Regarding Belgian Refugees in the First World War

By Christophe Declercq

**Abstract**: With about 265,000 Belgian refugees staying in Britain at one time during the First World War, reflections on this transnational and cross-cultural story of welcome and accommodation at times of conflict merits continued attention. This article aims to provide an insight into several warfare-related features that characterised the human experience relating to the Belgians in Britain. A brief literature study confirms the issue of this history having been overlooked for so long. Reception at the time and early perception of the Belgian refugees is studied by means of two publications – the Bryce Report and *King Albert's Book*. These publications in part steered the very history into later silence and forgetfulness. The British host society faced the fatalities of warfare on a scale that history had not seen until then and within this context Belgians refugees were an equally unconventional presence. However, as Belgian men and women became employed in Britain – mainly in the war industry – and as Belgian children were incorporated into several education systems, this presence diminished to the extent Belgians effectively disappeared from view during the war already. Yet, the very nature of the Belgian refugee was a blurred one, as Belgian military sought refuge on British soil too, without seeking to join the forces again. Long-term convalescent Belgian soldiers in Britain often were managed by Belgian refugee committees as well. Upon return to their home nation, British Belgians found a fragmented country in tatters. They were among the prime workforce aiming to rebuild the nation and its infrastructure and yet in post-1918 Belgian history there simply was no place for the chapter of the Belgian refugees in Britain. In Britain as well, the sole representation became a detective with a moustache and mannerisms. All what was left of the history of Belgian refugees was flatlining forgetfulness.

**Keywords**: *Belgian refugees*, *refugee studies*, *memory studies*, *First World War civilians*, *diaspora studies*, *reception studies*

## Introduction

The global war that was the First World War began on 28 July 1914, when – after weeks of crisis triggered by the assassination of the Austrian-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand by a young Bosnian Serb nationalist, Gavrilo Princip – Serbia and Austria-Hungary were at war and through a series of alliances many more countries were dragged into the conflict. Germany declared war on Russia on 1 August in support of Austria-Hungary, and after Germany had invaded Belgium on 4 August, Britain declared war on Germany (De Schaepdrijver, *De*

*Groote Oorlog*: 51-52, 68). The war cost "vast amounts of physical and human capital" (Eloranta and Harrison, *War and Disintegration*: 40) and about half of all the 20 million casualties was civilian (Mougel, *World War I Casualties*: 1). As it was the first global conflict to have unleashed transgressive violence against civilians, the First World War also saw the emergence of an unprecedented displacement of at least 10 million people (Gatrell, *Introduction*: 418). Among them were over 1.5 million Belgian refugees who had fled German atrocities and sought refuge in the Netherlands, France and Britain. Yet, when Britain declared war on Germany over the violation of Belgian neutrality, the support for Belgium was extended to its population and, subsequently, to well over 250,000 displaced Belgians who sought refuge in Britain at some point during the war. The main aim of the article is to analyse the experience of this early 20th century displacement from the perspective of cultural encounters and to articulate several intertwined themes in that history.

The mere fact that this history is still not well-known relates to a large extent to the disappearing from view already during the First World War as well as rapidly becoming excluded from public record and memory afterwards. In addition to that, the overall approach is that the story of the Belgian refugees in Britain is posited in a conceptual framework that does not abide by delineated designations. This is translated firstly into a brief review of work published on the Belgians in Britain during the First World War. This forgetfulness is accompanied by a description of the key experiences of Belgian refugee displacement that also contributed to a disappearance that was already in the process of taking place during the war itself. Secondly, this article acts as an extension of existing literature on the wave of empathy encountered by the Belgians through a further analysis of wartime charity and the role played by propaganda. Lastly, by conveying the difficult issue of numbers of Belgians who stayed in Britain at any one time, the article also reviews common perceptions of the concept of "a Belgian refugee", as it is affected by unclear delineations and, as such, convolutes our understanding of the entire historical chapter of this temporary diaspora. By focussing on the extensive fringes of 'the Belgian refugees' this article counters the assumption applied to their story in Britain during the First World War that Belgians "encompassed none of the extremes of other alien communities" in Britain (Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief*: 3).

Although this article does not aim to provide a comparative analysis between the displacement of Belgians then and the current mass displacements now, nor to provide lessons from history, it does include succinct comparisons with the current-day refugee crisis, or its absence. As Ian Hislop noted in a much praised BBC broadcast (Tanner, *Who Should We Let In?*), the analysis of the sojourn of a

quarter of a million refugees in Britain is important and – often through contrast – provides a context not only for our understandings of the contemporary refugee situation, but also Britain's changed relationship with immigrants and refugees today.

**Little-known history**

The Belgian exile community in Britain already during the war bore the signs of forgetfulness (Declercq, *Belgian Refugees in Britain*, 2015: 328). This concept of forgetfulness was drawn from the English journalist Wickham Steed, a former editor of *The Times*, who in 1923 wrote about his own relation to the then recent conflict, more particularly about having forgotten about the German occupation of Belgium (Steed, *The Belgian Factor*: 18). This concept was then aligned with the history of the Belgians in Britain during that war and further developed over several conference papers and resulting publications, including those by researchers other than the author (Gill, *Brave Little Belgium*) and Ewence (2018) were later to explore aspects of historical forgetfulness in relation to the history of the Belgians in Britain.

In 2016, a special issue on those Belgian refugees, the introductory essay was very clear: "Soon gone, long forgotten" (Jenkinson, *Introduction*: 101). This point of view concurred with what was known in both popular history and academic study: Belgian refugees moved on the periphery of British history, and Belgian history as well for that matter. A.J.P. Taylor devoted only half a page to the Belgian presence in Britain during the war years (Taylor, *English History 1914-1945*: 19-20). Peter Cahalan's more detailed analysis of the half a dozen reasons why the Belgians disappeared from view included the very simple fact that "no other modern European nation […] had received so little attention from English historians as Belgium" and that, therefore, the Belgian refugees in Britain were no more than "little people from a little country" (Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief*: 4). With his 1977 PhD, published in 1982, Cahalan provided the foundation study for the Belgians in Britain. His thesis primarily dealt with the British context and the politics behind the reception of the refugees. Cahalan also brought the philanthropical machinations to the fore. Although Cahalan's work opened avenues, attention to the story remained marginal until the turn of the 20th/21st centuries. If Cahalan presented a full volume, Kushner was limited to the scope of a chapter only, in which he often used insular *petites histoires* (Kushner, *Local Heroes*: 1-28). Kushner's approach was adopted later by several other researchers. Between 2001 and 2003, both Myers (*The Hidden History of Refugee Schooling in Britain*) and Storr (*Belgian Children's Education in Britain in the Great War*)

published several articles on the Belgians in Britain, stressing the importance of women's contributions to the whole history and the relevance of that story today. Still, even in 2005 Proctor concluded that, unlike the Belgian landscape, which was regarded an important part of the Western front, Belgian civilians – among them refugees – were strangely absent from the social histories of the period (*Missing in Action*). Purseigle added to the approach taken by Kushner and Knox by publishing several papers. Focussing on neglected displacement and settlement issues in First World War histories, Purseigle called for the development of Cahalan's foundation study (Purseigle, *A Litmus Test of Wartime Social Mobilization*). Amara's PhD study followed and acts as a second watershed study (Amara, *Des Belges à l'épreuve de l'Exil*). Amara followed nicely on from Cahalan and offered a comparative analysis and grand narrative for the reception and location of Belgian refugees in the three main receiving nations: Britain, France and the Netherlands (Declercq, *Belgian Refugees in Britain*, 2015: 50-51).

The years leading up to the Centenary period of the First World War (2014-2018) increasingly provided an antidote to that forgetfulness. Increased academic attention, numerous local history projects and many larger remembrance events included an element connected with the Belgians in exile in Britain or focused on them entirely. The Centenary coincided with the humanitarian crisis that has seen vast streams of refugees attempting to reach the EU. The commemorations often stressed the warm welcome extended to the refugees, a welcome that stood in stark contrast to today's situation. At the same time, increasing academic output on the Belgians in Britain and a growing number of local research projects on the subject (Folkestone, Glasgow, Laugharne, Rhyl, Richmond/Twickenham and Royal Tunbridge Wells to name but a few) as well as projects with a broader scope (Wales for Peace, Amsab's online exhibition and Tracing the Belgian refugees) have proved that public perception and common knowledge about the Belgians in Britain as well as the sheer size of the community in exile, was still not well known. However, this article claims that a main factor why this history still does not sit well in social history, refugee studies or memory studies, is that the history of the Belgian refugees is thwarted by its own concept of "the Belgian refugee" as well as its own – past – reception.

## Perception and empathy

Initially, the British media coverage of Belgian refugees related to internally displaced persons fleeing the fierce fighting in and around Liège, in east Belgium, or to the relatively few Belgians who were in Germany when war broke out. Soon, these Belgians on the run carried a far more important message. They

contributed – or through press coverage were manipulated into contributing – to the greater good as the victimised civilians of *Gallant Little Belgium*, a nation that prepared to stand up against the German war machine, as well as the ultimate destitute from *Poor Little Belgium*, the nation that needed help: Britain's grand gesture of empathy emerged.[1] In the section "For the Belgian refugees" the *Whitstable Times and Herne Bay Herald* noted that it "is impossible to estimate the debt that this country owes to gallant little Belgium" (14 November 1914: 6).

In order to use the Belgian refugee as a token representative of the reason why Britain had gone to war, a substantial shift in public perception had to take place. In fact, only a few years prior to the war, relations between Belgium and Britain had been rather tense. If in April 1900, anti-British sentiments in Belgium over the Boer wars forced a 15-year old Sipido to an assassination attempt on the Prince of Wales, the future King Edward VII, who was passing through Brussels on his way to Copenhagen, then surely the indignation at colonial misconduct was soon reciprocated. Even though he was a first cousin to Queen Victoria, the excesses of Leopold II's rule over the Belgian colonies in central Africa, in particular in the Congo, scandalised the English nation. Leopold II made a fortune while the Congolese suffered atrocious hardships. The expansion of railway lines and the mass extraction of rubber triggered an exploitation of the native Congolese as a work force. Along with forced labour came human rights abuse, exploitation, enslavement and even mutilation – the cutting off limbs – as a punishment to keep the Congolese in tow, which resulted in the reported deaths of millions of Congolese. There are, however, no definitive figures on the number of Congolese who died because of exploitation and disease in the period between 1876 and 1908.[2] Whether the figures are closer to five or to ten million people, even fifteen, international consternation against Belgian rule in the Congo was justified (Declercq, *Belgian Refugees in Britain*, 2015: 68-71).[3] It was only in 1908, when Leopold was forced to cede the Congo to the state of Belgium, that the inhumane regime was halted. At the outbreak of the First World War, however, a similar practice of mutilation was highlighted as constituting one of the major war atrocities committed by the Germans on Belgian civilians. The practice of cutting off limbs had therefore moved from the oppressor hardly a decade earlier to the oppressed (Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief*, 1982). Mirroring this remarkable shift, several people who had spoken out firmly against Belgium and its activities in the Congo, at the outbreak of war, spoke in favour of the Belgians at the start of the First World War. The most striking example would be Herbert Samuel who had been a leading critic of the Belgian regime in the Congo and who, as President to the Local Government Board, was in charge of Belgian refugees in Britain (Declercq, *Belgian Refugees in Britain*, 2015: 68-71).

Most Belgians had not even left their homes when an early suggestion that hospitality should be offered to Belgian refugees was made in *The Times* on 15 August 1914 by Sir John Brunner, an industrialist and Liberal politician, who had himself arranged accommodation for the families of his friends from Brussels and who suggested others to do the same. Other relief initiatives emerged but none proved so elaborate and crucial in the reception of the Belgians as the War Refugees Committee (WRC). Established during the third weekend of August, the WRC had sprung from late-Victorian and Edwardian political elites and philanthropists. Fundamental to the association of the WRC was Lady Lugard, a former journalist – the only female journalist attending the 1889 Anti-Slavery conference in Brussels – and wife of Frederick Lugard, a former governor of Hong Kong and then governor-general of Nigeria. Lugard was assisted by Edith Lyttelton, the widow of the Liberal politician and former Secretary of the Colonies, Alfred Lyttelton. Edith Lyttelton had also been involved in establishing the Victoria League, a charitable organisation to promote collaboration and peace. The involvement with relief for refugees was well suited to her nature. Lugard and Lyttelton were joined by the Tory politician Lord Hugh Cecil, as chairman, and Lord Gladstone, son of the former Prime Minister, as treasurer. An entire office building in central London had been put at Lugard's disposal by General Accident, an insurance company that had developed an important maritime insurance base in Antwerp in the two decades before the war (Declercq, *Belgian Refugees in Britain*, 2015: 110-111). On 24 August, the War Refugees Committee published a letter in the press, appealing for help and support. There were donations from existing charities, such as the Prince of Wales's National Relief Fund, and increasingly from private charity initiatives too. But more importantly, the general public responded too, and in huge numbers, most of them offering hospitality or donating money and clothing. From the very first appeal onwards and for months on end, offers of accommodation outstripped demand, a characteristic of the history of the Belgians in Britain that is difficult to imagine today.

With Antwerp – a safe haven for nearly one million citizens and internally displaced people – still standing firm in part-occupied Belgium, refugees were not yet arriving in large numbers, but Britain was increasing its framework for their reception and by 9 September 1914 arrangements had already been made for the organisation of local committees in dozens of towns and cities. On that day too, Herbert Samuel officially extended the nation's hospitality to Belgium on behalf of the British government, after which the WRC was aligned with the Local Government Board in the reception and accommodation of the Belgians in Britain. British relief for Belgian refugees multiplied and diversified further. This included event-based proceeds over sustained financial support locally as well

as nationally. Perhaps more strikingly, this also provided for Belgian relief organisations to gain ground in exile, an early sign and important prerequisite of the Belgian community in exile being allowed the space to develop their own activities.

| **Type of relief organisation** | **British**[4] | **Belgian (in Britain)** |
|---|---|---|
| General organisations | • War Refugees Committee<br>• Local Government Board<br>• Metropolitan Asylum Board<br>• Board of Education<br>• Board of Trade | • Comité Officiel Belge Pour L'Angleterre / Officieel Belgisch Comiteit voor Engeland<br>• The Belgian Legation<br>• Belgian Relief Fund |
| Specific organisations | • (Prince of Wales) National Relief Fund<br>• Hostels for Better Class Belgians<br>• [etc.] | • Belgian News Fund<br>• Het Volksbureel<br>• The Belgian Red Cross in Britain<br>• Cercle Esperanza, Dulwich<br>• Belgian Metal Workers Union<br>• Belgian News Fund<br>• [etc.] |

*Table 1. Overview of the main relief organisations for Belgians in Britain, differentiating between British and Belgian actions* (based on Declercq, *Belgian Refugees in Britain*, 2015: 135)

Less crucial to the day-to-day wellbeing of Belgians in Britain, but a noted cultural example of the wave of empathy that swept across Britain, can be found in the publication of various charity books. The main charity book was *King Albert's Book* (KAB). The book – published in 1914 – was an anthology of prose and poetry written by mainly British, authors (such as Thomas Hardy and Rudyard Kipling) and public figures (such as Herbert Asquith, Winston Churchill, Millicent Fawcett and Emmeline Pankhurst). KAB was widely disseminated and sold for the benefit of *The Daily Telegraph* Belgian Fund.[5] *The Times* mentioned the publication of the book on 16 December 1914: this book was published "without parallel in the history of literature". Fittingly enough, "for its subject is the greatest crime in history, met by a heroism which has thrilled the

whole civilized world". Together with another charity book – *Princess Mary's Gift Book*, proceeds of which were also partially allocated to Belgian relief – KAB was one of the most profitable and popular books of the war (Potter, *Boys in Khaki*: 58). The widespread readership of *King Albert's Book* cemented Britain's commitment to Belgium as well as the support for Belgians in Britain.

The entire KAB event – not only its publication, but also its marketing in newspapers and impressive sales figures – featured within the context of Wellington House, home to the British War Propaganda Bureau (WPB) by Charles Masterman. Among the many contributors to KAB were several authors who had committed to the WPB from the very beginning such as Arnold Bennett, G.K. Chesterton and John Galsworthy. Moreover, the main publisher of KAB was Hodder & Stoughton, a publisher also typically aligned with Wellington House and one that established its own War Book department. The propaganda needed to obtain maximum popular support for the war, including playing the Belgian victimisation card, or the heroization of its King Albert. With the Armistice, however, no legacy of the entire King Albert's Book event – and by extension the other charity books, which supported relief for Belgian refugees in Britain – remained in place, and no future reiteration was needed. The height of cultural empathy was effectively expressed through these charity books and, thereafter, the Belgian refugees in Britain were covered under a layer of historic dust at best, or more likely swept under the carpet of past propaganda.

## Cementing empathy through propaganda

Also part of the Masterman propaganda machine, but of an entirely different nature was the report published in 1915 by Lord Bryce on the alleged atrocities committed by the German troops. Across Britain, anti-German sentiment was already high on account of the invasion and subsequent fighting, but the stories of atrocities against civilians were as widespread as the reports of military action and most certainly sparked even more public support for the war effort. On 16 September, Vera Brittain wrote in her diary that the terrible stories of atrocities by Germans continued to come (*Chronicle of Youth*: 103). This was augmented by the numerous stories told by the many refugees who had come to Britain, stories newspapers were very eager to print. However, the veracity of the stories was never corroborated, nor could sources be traced. Authority for the witness reports was granted by the fact that the newspaper itself deemed them worthy of publication and/or by the fact that a noteworthy authority was appearing alongside the testimony. On 23 September 1914 *The Manchester Guardian* recorded that the stories of Belgian families, who had arrived in Manchester and were

welcomed by the Lord Mayor at the Town Hall, "added to the record of the cruelty of which the German troops have been guilty" and that "the stories heard were more convincing proofs of the horrors". No one actually doubted the authenticity of these stories, not least because the newspapers did not stop publishing them. Still, the British government wanted to officialise the stories and have a report produced. On 15 December 1914 a Committee on Alleged German Outrages (CAGO) was appointed. The committee consisted of lawyers and historians and was chaired by the respected diplomat-politician Lord Bryce.[6] Bryce, a former ambassador to the US, added a lot of weight and credibility to the report. Other members of CAGO were luminaries such as Frederick Pollock, Edward Clarke, Alfred Hopkinson, H.A.L. Fisher and Harold Cox.[7] When the Bryce Report was published on 12 May 1915, its contents and conclusions most certainly prolonged and even intensified the anti-German sentiment on either side of the Atlantic. Using hundreds of witness reports and depositions,[8] the Bryce report found German forces guilty of widespread outrage and of "deliberate and systematically organised massacres of the civil population, accompanied by many isolated murders and other outrages", such as "women violated and children murdered" (*Bryce Report*: 60). The Bryce report indeed emphasised a systematic German policy of terrorisation of the Belgian population and recounted, in the words of its witnesses, hostage-taking, the use of human shields, collective executions, punitive arson and other similar acts. According to the Committee, no military necessity could be held accountable for any of the atrocities recounted.[9] The entire German operation became known – later on – as the Rape of Belgium, and yet it had the questionable veracity of witness reports at its core.

Already early on in the production process of the Bryce report, there was much scepticism about the origins of the depositions on which the Bryce report was based. Bryce himself never intended the validity of the depositions to be investigated (Wilson, *Lord Bryce's Investigation*: 373). Moreover, while writing up their report, there was fairly open disagreement between Harold Cox and the other members of the Committee. Cox found it difficult to put his name to a document, which was based on anonymous sources and wanted to interview some of the refugees responsible for the witness reports, or at least to hear the translators who were supposedly present at the interviews.[10] The other CAGO members managed to convince Cox and, indeed, no member of the Bryce committee spoke to a single witness, nor were the accounts recorded under oath. Basically, any story was accepted at face value, leaving plenty of room for grotesque exaggerations to enter the witnesses' tales or, indeed, for fabrication. In 2001, Horne and Kramer published a colossal study of the German atrocities and the complex of myths that contributed the reception of the atrocity stories,

often exaggerations by traumatised refugees who wanted to translate their emotions: "There is nothing absolute or immutable" about war crimes (Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities*: 430). Nonetheless, the Bryce Report was very influential at the time in shaping attitudes and morale in virtually all the countries affected by the conflict (Cunliffe, *The Age of Expansion*: 301). This was in fact the purpose behind the dissemination of the report's findings. The clearest sign of the propagandist aspect of the Bryce Report is that it was published on 12 May 1915, five days after the British ocean liner *Lusitania* was sunk by a German U-boat, claiming nearly 1200 lives (Trommler, *The Lusitania Effect* : 246).

Peculiarly, when it comes to reasons why the Belgian refugees in Britain disappeared from view after the war the Bryce report aligns itself with the cultural representations that were the charity books such as *King Albert's Book*. The destitute Belgians had been used as a tool of warfare and when the war was finally over, those tools were hastily discarded, and all the stories that came with them suppressed. This discarding of perception of "the Belgian refugee" as a wartime concept is furthered by the unclear delineations of that concept.

## Difficult numbers and the uneasy concept of "the Belgian refugee"

One would expect the propaganda effort in support of Belgian relief in Britain still to be in full swing in 1915. True, British companies that were part of the war industry actively recruited Belgian refugees in the Netherlands in the spring and summer of 1915, but looking at the references to Belgian refugees in British newspapers, it would appear that the Belgians were no longer used as a public instrument to galvanise support for the war effort. They were still arriving in substantial numbers when they had already started to disappear from view in the press. While the newspapers focussed on stories of the destitute Belgians coming ashore in Britain, barely 18 months later this attention – measured by means of average number of references per war month – had decreased by a factor of 10.

| | 1914 | 1915 | 1916 | 1917 | 1918 | 1919 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| occurrences | 18,874 | 17,386 | 4,137 | 1,590 | 1,433 | 1,082 |
| per war month (rounded) | 3,775 | 1,449 | 345 | 133 | 119 | 90 |

*Table 2. Search results in the database of British newspapers archive (online, figures 1 June2019). For 1914, five war months were used.*[11]

This disappearance from the British (local) press might have been less significant had the Belgian exile community in Britain dramatically decreased in size over the war period. But it did not.

Key to understanding any refugee movement or displacement and to the initiation and establishment of the relief apparatus is the size of the operation at hand. Although just a figure, the numbers behind it represent the scope of the trauma and relief effort at hand. Whereas current-day appreciations of displacement, relief, refugees and migration go hand in hand with figures that appear to be precise to the smallest unit, this was not the case for the Belgians in Britain during the First World War. The figures relating to the Belgians in Britain needs further clarification, if this is at all possible: although most references in the secondary literature adhere to the figure of 250,000, this was not the only number recorded. Nearly all existing secondary literature assumes that the numbers were lower, or – stressing that registration was fluid in the early stages of the war and that numbers were difficult to chart securely – limited themselves to more refined calculations of the presence of refugees by the end of the war (Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief*: 448; De Schaepdrijver, *De Groote Oorlog*: 113).

*The Times*, arguably the most respected British newspaper of the time, started publishing weekly updates and reports on the war from 27 July 1914 onwards. The 273 weeklies were also collected and published in separate volumes, and appeared as *The Times History of the War* (TTHW). One chapter, published in the fourth volume (1915), concerned the Belgian refugees and was very likely the first serious attempt to try and map the number of Belgians in Britain. The assessment of figures was based on the detailed census by the department of the Registrar-General, then based at Somerset House, London. By early December 1914, the compulsory registration of all Belgians had been put in place. This registration took place alongside the police registers logging every time a Belgian moved location, in line with the 1905 Aliens Act and the 1914 Aliens Restriction Act which required all foreign nationals to register with the police. *The Times History of the War* estimated that the number of Belgians who had arrived in Britain from the very beginning until June 1915 was "approximately 265,000" (TTHW: 459). Just how difficult it was – at the time but also in hindsight – to evaluate the scale of the effort of receiving and accommodating so many Belgians can be drawn from the authoritative 1920 government publication *Report on the Work Undertaken by the British Government in the Reception and Care of Belgian Refugees* (RWU), which contained several consecutive sets of figures, ranging from "upwards of 200,000" over 225,572 to "a rough total of 260,000" (RWU: 4-5). The variation in the figures conceals some of the characteristics of the Belgian exile in

Britain that do not always sit well in comparison with today's humanitarian crisis: the modern-day response to the rough estimates of the number of Belgians in Britain is one of disbelief, either because of the lack of accurate statistics or because of the lack of a similar scope for reception today. Moreover, the Centenary of the First World War coincided with the humanitarian crisis that has seen vast streams of refugees attempting to reach the EU. The commemorations often stressed the warm welcome extended to the refugees, a welcome that stood in stark contrast to today's situation.

*The Times History of the War* also included a reference to a second reason why the community of Belgians in Britain would not sit very comfortable with a current-day Western-European society: included in the figure of 265,000 were 40,000 wounded soldiers. The figure did not include the even larger number of Belgian soldiers who enjoyed leave in Britain. If the wounded soldiers already blurred the existing separation of civilians and soldiers during wartime, then the Belgian soldiers on leave in Britain most certainly provided an element that did not fit the war narrative: British fathers, husbands and sons fought at the Western front, when at the same time Belgian soldiers were visiting their families in Britain, among these the able-bodied men who were employed in the war industry in Britain. There was not much difference between a Belgian refugee who stayed in Britain and a disabled Belgian soldier who participated in workshops across Britain and who produced either garments or munitions for a prolonged period. Moreover, it was not uncommon for the convalescent soldiers to be cared for by the local Belgian refugee committee as well. The confines of the concept "refugee" were also tested by Belgian soldiers. Especially those who had fled to Britain in the early weeks of the war, and those who had come via the Netherlands after the movement war stranded in the trenches along the river Yser. Many among them did not re-enlist and could even be considered deserters (Declercq, *Belgian Refugees in Britain*, 2015: 231-232).[12]

Exercising control over Belgian military subjects in Britain was not easy. The Glasgow Register of Belgians contained more than 8,000 names, with details such as surname, first name, relationship, occupation, gender, age, marital status, Belgian address, arrival date, the address on arrival, the address to which they were moved next (Glasgow Family History). Of the 8,000 names, 735 Belgians were registered upon arrival as soldiers – more than nine per cent. However, hardly any of the earlier mentioned refugee-soldiers were sent to London. Typically, Belgian men who had not yet been a soldier enlisted among some of those who already had. In addition, a fair number of Belgians who joined the military services remained in Britain, working for the Legation and military authorities in London or for the military representatives and Belgian intelligence

services at Folkestone. With 56 out of 137 Belgians aged 16-25 enlisting, the sample provided proof that Belgians did enlist in numbers.[13]

Two more factors convoluted the statistical representations of the Belgian exile community in Britain: those of incomplete data and those of non-Belgians who were included in the figures. TTHW calculated that about 10 per cent of the estimated 265,000 registration cards needed to be treated with care, if at all, because they represented the inevitable gaps in the register, i.e. incomplete, unclear or even unknown registrations. Most likely these concerned the Belgians who had arrived in Britain and left already before proper registration had taken place, or those who registered with false names during the initial weeks – when pressure on resources made accurate notations of personal data not always feasible – but later on registered truthfully. Along with that 10 per cent came another 10,000 Belgians, mainly men, who had returned to Belgium because of a tax that the German occupying authorities had levies on the houses owned by those Belgians who had fled (TTHW: 459-460).

The final characteristic of the Belgians in exile in Britain concerns the fact that larger groups formed part of the overall statistics but were in effect not actually Belgian. Around 15,000 were not Belgian subjects but "mainly Russian Jews engaged in the diamond-cutting industry of Antwerp" (TTHW: 459). Moreover, throughout the war, it was not unusual for a local Belgian refugee committee to take care of Serbian refugees, who had sought refuge in Britain in much smaller numbers. The flawed nationality aspect of the Belgian refugees concludes the string of characteristics of the Belgian exile community in Britain as well as the reasons why those British Belgians are not easily delineated and therefore physically framed. This has indeed contributed to the fact that the Belgian refugee has been relegated to a mere periphery of First World War civilian history. This was also exacerbated by several forms of mobility the Belgian refugees were able to enjoy.

## Mobility

Throughout the First World War the Belgian community in exile was substantially driven by one form of mobility or another. This happened at three different levels: between the different receiving nations, across Britain and in social terms (Declercq, *Belgian Refugees in Britain,* 2015: 318). The first level of mobility was an international one. If for the entire period of the First World War more than 265,000 Belgians had stayed in Britain at some point, with the peak being 172,300, this means that close to 100,000 Belgians arrived in Britain and left again. This transnational mobility was very likely to be happening towards

France, or to a lesser extent the Netherlands, or even via that country back to occupied Belgium. Also, estimates concerning the number of Belgians in Britain by Christmas 1914 – by which time the war was expected to be over and when *King Albert's Book* was published – show that about 100,000 Belgians stayed in Britain then. This means another 165,000 at least had to relocate from somewhere to Britain. The main reasons to move from one host nation to another included reuniting with family (or being closer to the family in occupied Belgium) on the one hand and employment opportunities on the other hand, even making them an early example of economic transmigrants.

A second level of mobility among Belgian refugees was a national one, whereby the nation involved was the receiving society, here Britain. Other than an unsteady representation, the Belgians in Britain were allocated to seemingly random locations. Stories of warm welcomes at railway stations abound, but also of local people waiting in vain for Belgians to arrive. Gradually, Belgian communities began to emerge outside urban centres (Aldeburgh, Milford Haven among many others), but most Belgians remained in the larger conurbations, not least in the greater London area, where one in three settled. However, the mobility of the Belgians was striking. Registration cards kept from public view at the Belgian National Archives in Brussels prove that, on average, Belgians moved at least half a dozen times. This mobility transpires from data contained in the Central Register of Belgian Refugees, held at the Belgian National Archives in Brussels, as well as from a second register which is not yet publicly available.

This geographical mobility was nearly always due to employment. If, early on in the war, employing Belgians was haphazard, the presence of tens of thousands of able-bodied men became an issue in the seemingly everlasting conflict and in a country that sent its own men to the front, whereas the Belgians in exile hardly joined the Belgian army. Friction that arose from this improper use of resources was silenced to a large extent by incorporating Belgian men into the war industry. This happened in several ways. Although most were employed in British factories others were as well but in Belgian factories on British soil. The three most important British employers provided jobs for roughly 9,000 Belgians: Armstrong and Whitworth in Glasgow and Newcastle employed 1335 Belgians, Jackson in Salisbury 1914 and all Vickers plants combined 5797. The three largest Belgian enterprises on British soil together employed well over 3,000 Belgians: General Stores and Munitions in London employed 950 Belgians, Kryn and Lahy in Letchworth 1469, Pelabon Works in Twickenham 1705 (Comité Officiel Belge Pour L'Angleterre, 96-112).

Working long hours on factory premises six days out of seven, Belgian men, as well as a fair number of Belgian women, disappeared from view. This

disappearance also happened with education, when most of the tens of thousands of Belgian children were absorbed into the British educational system. A complete absorption and assimilation took place whereby no accommodation was organised for most Belgian children. They had to adapt to the new situation, adopted English albeit quickly and adapted to the education in wartime to such an extent that after they returned to Belgium their Anglicised exile created a wave of Anglophilia. Another layer of education also existed: nearly ten thousand Belgian children were educated in Belgian schools in Britain, or roughly one in six refugee children. In between those two outer ends of educational opportunities in exile sat a more hybrid form, whereby Belgian children were taught within a British context, but a limited Belgian presence in the curriculum and/or on the premises was allowed. Often this was a local priest passing by to teach matters related to religion in the native language (Declercq 2015). In Folkestone, for instance, the local Belgian Colony organised many of its own activities with the help of the Folkestone Belgian Committee. The Education Sub-Committee helped to establish a college for boys, employing Catholic clergy, so that pupils were able to continue their studies. Adult Belgians were given English classes there too, so that they "forgot the tedium of their exile in their efforts to master irregular verbs" (Carlile, *"Our Belgian Guests"*: 24) and an English-Belgian Literary Circle was formed. For those who had not mastered English, a newspaper in exile was published, the *Franco-Belge de Folkestone*. Above all, mobility of Belgians in Britain coincided with the opportunity of employment and its location first. Employment also created another form of mobility.

A third feature of mobility of the Belgians in Britain that does not sit well with its legacy is a sense of reverse social mobility. This social mobility in exile happened when those who could not fall back on resources were the first to look for employment, whereas those who relied on their own means for the duration of their anticipated short stay abroad eventually exhausted them and had to be employed much later than those who were considered lower class when they arrived (Declercq, *Belgian Refugees in Britain*, 2015: 318). Moreover, some Belgians rose to the occasion and seized the opportunity not to reject their former selves, but to exercise some talent that had been in place, albeit modestly, prior to seeking refuge. Artists of little renown became part of charity relief events: when a concert was organised, the proceeds of which supported Belgian refugee relief, singers and musicians were billed as "famous" – in fact, their fame depended mainly on their performances while in exile. English cultural networks also absorbed Belgian cultured people and typically the latter were willingly invited. However, the fact that the cultural elite were not deprived of self-esteem because of their displacement was also valid for thousands of working class Belgians. No study has yet been undertaken into the intricacies that this brought upon their

return to Belgium. Anecdotal evidence supports the thesis that the relative financial independence enjoyed by working Belgians upon return to their native land was a factor that added to the friction between those who had endured German occupation and those who had not. If, after Armistice, re-establishing the pre-war social construct was a prime concern of authorities in both Britain and Belgium – more in the latter than in the former for that matter – then returning refugees who had made some financial gains out of their hard work while in exile found themselves ostracised from their old neighbours and stamping grounds in that those who had remained in Belgium had endured years of hardship under German occupation. Typically, Belgian enterprises had also been stripped by the Germans, who re-used the hardware for their own war effort. Refugees who returned from Britain had built up some financial reserves that allowed them to rebuild their lives more comfortably than those who had lived through occupation.

In the years and decades after the war, histories of displaced civilians of the First World War did not essentially belong to the narrative of the single nation-victor at that time. That narrative was carried largely – especially in Belgium – by a focus on a renewed social contract through former authority and through celebrating the return of the soldiers. There simply was no place for a refugee chapter in post-war Belgium.

## Conclusion

This article has provided answers to the question why the history of more than a quarter of a million Belgian refugees in Britain had been confined to the margins of history for so long and had remained largely absent from public memory as well as academic research. This forgetfulness is the main characteristic of that history. This was driven by a multiple disappearance act during the war already as well as by a fraught belonging in post-war nationhood. The key characteristics of both the employment and education of the Belgians in Britain relate to the mutual interconnection between host society and the Belgian community in exile, on the one hand, and acting as the framework in which Belgians – men, women and children alike – disappeared from view on the other. Their presence on the streets diminished dramatically. Aligned with a substantially decreased focus in the British press, the foundation for later forgetfulness was already set during the exile itself. This contrasts starkly with current-day refugees who have to go through lengthy application procedures and settlement processes and in official questionnaires continue to have to tick their ethnicity, forced into reiterating their otherness.

Forgetfulness was also furthered by several features of the Belgian exile community that effectively make a clear understanding of what actually constitutes a Belgian refugee very difficult. These features relate to the exact figure of the Belgian community in Britain, the at times haphazard manner of registering Belgians, the presence of other nationalities and the difficult civilian entity that is the Belgian soldier, be it a convalescent one or one on leave in Britain. A second set of factors that affected the concept of "the Belgian refugee" concerns several modes of mobility, including a sense of reverse social mobility, features that are not usually allocated with refugees, most definitely not today. If after a century of trying to belong and striving to be included in the collective memory, the story of the displaced Belgians in Britain still does not resonate well, how can current societies be expected to respond to existing displacement crises?

Surely, popular as well as collective memory should be able to allocate more space to this chapter of displacement in the memory of the First World War than to its most renowned by-product, the fictitious character of Hercule Poirot?[14] His character became almost entirely assimilated, with connotations of its Belgian origins perhaps remaining in place to some extent but still lacking any connection with the refugee(s) that stood as a model for the inspector (Declercq, *Belgian Refugees in Britain*, 2015: 328).

Poirot as a representative of the entire chapter of Belgian refugees in Britain is perhaps missing the point of the entire history. In the end, the Belgian refugee-detective moves in upper class circles, mirroring – at best – the opportunities seized on by the Belgian happy few, but also moving as a one-dimensional character, stripped of his refugee status and allocated mannerisms only, a non-descript caricature nearly. Poirot is peculiar in that he singlehandedly stands among detectives that are otherwise Anglo-Saxon, but he has become so culturally appropriated that the latest BBC instalment of the inspector – portrayed by John Malkovich – is bereft of what made him a character. Without a moustache or accent, Poirot no longer stands out and, according to the producers, has become the ultimate symbol of integration. But now that the history of the Belgian refugees in Britain is increasingly gaining a voice across Britain, through the recent wave of Centenary commemorations paying attention to Belgian refugees as well as through increased academic output, Poirot falls squarely within the remit of where the chapter of the Belgians has remained for so long: flatlining forgetfulness.

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1 "Gallant Little Belgium" first appeared as a full phrase in newspapers on Friday 7 August 1914, in both *The Belfast Telegraph* and *The Western Morning News*. The next day the image resonated in eight more local and regional newspapers. By the end of August 1914, the phrase had been used 59 times in dozens of newspapers. On 7 August as well, further epithets appeared in support of Belgium: "plucky" (*The Heywood Advertiser* and *The Newcastle Evening Chronicle*) as well as "heroic" (*Pall Mall Gazette*) and "brave" (*Daily Gazette for Middlesbrough*). "Poor Little Belgium" first appeared on Saturday 15 August, in both *The Gloucester Journal* and *The Cheltenham Looker-On*. It was only after the War Refugees Committee was established on 24 August that the "poor" phrase and image appeared frequently, even though much less frequently than the "gallant" one. This conveys a noted shift from heroization to victimisation, not least because numerous British households had to be persuaded to take at least one Belgian into their homes, preferably even an entire family.

2 A century later Adam Hochschild reignited historical and public interest in Belgian colonial rule (Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*).

3 Along with the liberal and humanitarian Congo Reform Association, led by the journalist Edmund Dene Morel – who had worked for a shipping company that had a contract for the connection between Antwerp and Boma, Congo – and Roger Casement – a former British consul in the Congo. Other people who also spoke out against Belgian atrocities in the Congo included Mark Twain, Arthur Conan Doyle and Joseph Conrad. Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* is set in Congo Free State.

4 These groups and associations might have a token Belgian on their books, especially the many local committees.

5 *The Daily Telegraph* Belgian Fund was an addition to the already existing Daily Telegraph Fund, which had collected £28,000 for those affected by the Titanic disaster only a few years earlier.

6 Bryce had worked with the Anglo-Irish diplomat Roger Casement to expose the exploitation of Indian peoples on the Amazon by a British rubber company.

7 On 22 January 1915, the historian Kenelm Digby, a friend of Bryce's, was added to the Committee.

8 No mention was made of the criteria for selecting these stories, but nevertheless any selection could have served the purpose, as the stories would not have been new to the public.

9 For a more objective analysis of the events of the time, see John N. Horne and Alan Kramer.

10 Moreover, given the trouble facing British administrators regarding the accurate notation of strange Belgian surnames and locations but their near flawless recounting of those, the presence of these note-takers is indeed questionable.

11 Data from britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk (last accessed on 1 June 2019). For similar findings in Welsh wartime newspapers, see Hughes, *Finding Belgian refugees in Cymru1914.org*, 2016.

12 One such example was Seraphim Balcaem [sic], a Belgian soldier who had been discharged and lived in Weston with a girl to whom he was engaged, when he was killed in a car accident near Stevenage. His funeral was paid for by the Belgian Legation in London and the founders of the Kryn and Lahy factory in Letchworth (*Hertford Mercury and Reformer*, 26 August 1916: 3).

13 The sample provided 56 for the first 1,000 Belgians listed on the register, i.e. between 400 and 450 for the entire list of 8,000.

[14] Poirot is the ultimate representation but ultimately in line with appearances in contemporary writing by Thomas Hardy, Rupert Brooke, H. G. Wells, Virginia Woolf (Declercq, *Belgian Refugees in Britain*, 2014: 60-62), or in more recent tv shows such as *Upstairs, Downstairs* (1974); *Mr. Selfridge* (2014).

# Voicing New Identities. Two Case-Studies of Oral History and Displacement in WW2 and its Aftermath

By Simona Tobia

**Abstract:** The current refugee crisis is unprecedented, and it prompts many questions on how to tackle the emergency and on the mechanisms of international humanitarian aid. The Displaced Persons (DPs) crisis that followed the Second World War anticipated the problems that we are confronting today, and the chronological distance with the late Forties allows us to study the "voices" of DPs, refugees and asylum seekers under many more perspectives, and the lessons learned can contribute to the debates and projects on more contemporary questions. The aim of this article is to contribute to the lively debate on the lived experiences of displacement in the Second World War and its aftermath by looking at two case studies: that of refugees coming to Britain and the United States during the conflict on the one hand, and that of DPs resettled in the same countries in the aftermath of war on the other. The study of oral history interviews conducted by the author and those held at British and American sound archives shows how these participants composed their memory and voiced their identity, a new cultural identity which had been constructed in the decades between the war and the time when they were interviewed, and which is voiced in the interview itself. The analysis also shows that three elements have a deeper impact on the way memory is composed and identity is voiced in these oral history interviews: emotions, relationships and languages.

**Keywords:** *Oral history*, *displaced persons*, *Holocaust*, *WW2*, *memory and emotions*

## Introduction: oral history and displacement

The world is struggling with the worst refugee crisis since the Second World War. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) there are currently 70.8 million forcibly displaced people globally (UNHCR, *Figures at a Glance*, 2019), and the world is witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record. The UNHCR's reports also show that "conflict, prosecution, generalized violence and violations of human rights" are the root causes of the current forced displacement, especially the Syrian conflict and conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa (UNHCR, *Mid-Year Trends 2018*, 2019). The current crisis is unprecedented, and it prompts many questions on how to tackle the emergency and on the mechanisms of international humanitarian aid.

The refugee crisis that followed the Second World War in many ways anticipated the problems that we are still confronting today, and the historical sources that are currently available allow us to achieve a deeper understanding not only of that period but, perhaps more importantly, of the wider issue of displacement as well. Oral history in particular is invaluable in understanding

the lived experiences of those who were there, and left their testimonies decades after these events. Oral history not only records experiences, but also gives a voice to those seeking refuge thereby contributing to the current media and political debates, to re-humanize migrants and displaced persons.[1] The chronological distance with the Second World War allows us to study the "voices" of displaced persons (DPs), refugees and asylum seekers under many more perspectives, and the lessons learned can contribute to the debates and projects on more contemporary questions.

The so-called "victims of war", the hundreds of thousands of refugees, displaced persons, exiles and escapers who had to leave their countries during and after the Second World War are among those who experienced close encounters in war. By the end of the conflict millions of people had been or had felt forced to leave their homes, including over ten million slave labourers who had been deported to work in German factories and mines, those involved in the compulsory population transfers, those affected by the shifts in national boundaries, by Nazi occupation as well as the Third Reich's will to build a new racial order. Millions of Europeans had been concerned, including Germans, Italians, Yugoslavs, Bulgarians, Romanians, Soviets, Hungarians, Czechs and Poles. Malcolm Jarvis Proudfoot, in the first and still extensively cited work on displacement in the post-war period (*European refugees*, 1956), estimated that more than sixty million Europeans were displaced from their homes during the conflict and in its aftermath.

Historical research has concentrated on allied attitudes towards forced migration in the Second World War, especially in relation to policies towards wartime refugees and the issue of internment.[2] However, the problem of displacement in the aftermath of the Second World War has been largely overlooked (with a few notable exceptions, including for example Proudfoot) until the 1990s, when studies on DPs and resettlement policies started to appear (see for example Genizi, *America's Fair Share*), until some more recent studies on post-war reconstruction, relief and humanitarian organizations.[3] As Sharif Gemie and Laure Humber (*Writing History*: 313) have noted, the published studies on displaced persons and relief in the aftermath of the Second World War are largely "top down" histories (especially about the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, UNRRA). A "bottom up" study might allow some access to a more human type of history, examining for example the actors involved and their motivations (see Tobia, *Victims of war*; and Footitt and Tobia, *WarTalk*: 135-155). The available studies on the lived experiences of those involved can be grouped mostly in three clusters: published or unpublished memoirs (the list of which is too long to mention here), often analysed by literary

specialists; works on the living conditions in DP camps; and last by not least the more specific group of works about children's experiences (e.g. Gigliotti and Tempian, *The Young Victims of the Nazi Regime*).

The purpose of this article is to contribute to the lively debate on the lived experiences of displacement in the Second World War and its aftermath, and it looks specifically at two case studies of displacement: the case of refugees coming to Britain and the United States during the conflict, and that of DPs resettled in the same countries in the aftermath of war. The study of both the oral history interviews conducted by the author and those held at British and American sound archives shows how these participants composed their memory (see Thomson, *Anzac Memories*) and voiced their identity, a new cultural identity which had been constructed in the decades between the war and the time when they were interviewed, and which is voiced in the interview itself. The analysis also shows that three elements have a deeper impact on the way memory is composed and identity is voiced in these oral history interviews: emotions, relationships and languages.[4]

Whereas a refugee can be defined as any uprooted, involuntary migrant who has lost the protection of his or her former government after crossing a frontier, with many refugee waves throughout history, the term Displaced Persons, or DPs, is more complex. Today this term is used to explain the forced movement of people from their habitual environment and it is a type of social change which can be caused by many factors, the most common being war. In relation to the Second World War, the term refugee refers largely to those who left Austria, Germany, Italy as well as other occupied European countries between the emergence of Nazism and Fascism and 1945. The expressions related to displacement came into existence when the Allies started to plan the relief operations for the post-war period, in 1942-43, when they were aware of the millions of slave labourers used by the Germans, but concepts such as the Holocaust or genocide had not yet been formulated: "the planners' model was based not on genocide but on the displacement of populations. 'Displaced persons', the shorthand they used for Hitler's victims, became the defining mental construct for the rest of the decade." In the wake of the war, Allied troops liberated millions of forced labourers, prisoners of war and concentration camps inmates and it promptly became apparent that "the war's most important legacy was a refugee crisis" (Shephard, *The Long Road Home*: 2). The military authorities were quick to repatriate the majority of these DPs during the summer of 1945. "Meanwhile, several hundred thousand Germans died in the course of being expelled from Eastern Europe, but those that survived were not categorised as 'displaced persons'; they were 'refugees' and, as such, at the bottom of the

pecking order" (3). Also, a number of these refugees refused to return to their homelands, and were consequently labelled as "non-repatriables" and placed in DP camps in Germany, Austria and Italy, which were administered by Allied authorities and by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), and later by the International Refugee Organization (IRO). The last of these camps, Föhrenwald, was closed in 1957 by the German government.

Scholars generally tend to consider refugees, DPs, asylum seekers and forced migrants more as helpless victims rather than persons, the field of history being no exception (Elie, *Histories of Refugee*: 30). The study of "those involved" in forced migrations and their agency is limited, making the refugee "less an unknown of history than a missing, untraceable and unnameable character of the historiography" (30). The Second World War certainly represents an exception to this rule especially thanks to the practice of oral history that led to the creation of many sound archives on the Holocaust and on the conflict itself. Nevertheless, these archives are still only partially exploited, and the plurality of studies on displacement linked to the Second World War mentioned above focuses on the humanitarian effort. As noted by Nando Sigona, the humanitarian actors' dominant representation of the refugee and DP is that of an "agency-less object of humanitarian intervention" (Sigona, *The Politics of Refugee Voices*: 370), and recognising their "voice" for example through the study of oral history can also respond to their quest for recognition as political subjects. This is particularly relevant in the context of contemporary debates, but in the case of the 1940s the analysis of DPs' voices is significant particularly in relation to the study of the construction of a new cultural identity, and the role of human emotions and relationships in this process. Looking at the way they constructed their identities gives them agency, allowing us to conceive of them as persons rather than helpless victims.

The first step we can take in this direction is to recognise that refugee voices are plural and represent a variety of diverse experiences. Gender, age, race, ethnicity and social class are all part of a range of cultural issues that contribute to the plurality of experiences of refugees. Each person's experience is also at the same time individual and collective, as every subject draws on collective cultural repertoires and memories. In the same way, the testimonies about these experiences are simultaneously rooted in the past and in the present, and we have to take all of these issues into careful account to make sense of the way emotions are narrated and memory is composed to construct and voice a new diasporic identity, based on individual as well as shared memory. As we know memory, as identity, is both socially constructed and culturally specific, but there are examples of memory making practices that are specific to diasporic communities,

such as the Jewish memorial books in which testimonies are collected to create a collective memory of community (375-377). Shared and collective memories (see Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*) connect the private sphere of emotions and relationships to the broader imagined community (see Anderson, *Imagined Communities*) and for this reason it is interesting to analyse available testimonies with a focus on those intimate memories of experiences voiced in DPs oral history interviews.

Empowering those who have traditionally been marginalised both by history and historiography has been one of the main aims of oral history as a methodology of historical research. Memory is not only conceived as a methodologically problematic issue, but as an object of study in itself, with the aim of giving "meaning" to narratives. Alessandro Portelli in 1979 argued that oral histories could help understand the past especially in relation to continuity and change in the meaning of certain events (see Portelli, *What Makes Oral History Different*).[5] Interestingly, Portelli also argues that subjectivity and the subjectivity of memory, among other issues, are part of the strengths rather than weaknesses of oral history. Memory is not only selective, but it re-shapes the narratives into meaningful accounts which are inevitably affected by the subjectivity of the speaker, and influenced by the passage of time, shared histories and collective memory of certain events such as, in the case of this article, the Second World War and the Holocaust. The oral history interviews examined here will thus be considered as active processes of construction of meanings rather than a passive repository of facts (see Portelli, *What Makes Oral History Different*).

Since Portelli developed these approaches, oral history has often been used to voice previously silenced accounts of past experiences, thus becoming empowering for individuals even when it is not involved in truth and justice processes. With regard to displacement for example, some scholars have shown how forms of memory work have been regenerative in communities fractured by diasporas (see Field, *Imagining Communities*) and how these communities can be revitalised through the recuperation of culture and memory (see Impey, *Sound, Memory and Displacement*).

The Holocaust is likely the subject that has generated more oral history interviews and more research with a focus on the memory of trauma. Analysis of oral history interviews with Holocaust survivors in relation to memory and how traumatic events are remembered has focused on the complexity of issues related to concerns for accuracy and the difficulty of remembering an unbearable reality (e.g. Roseman, *Surviving Memory*). For the purposes of this study, however, it is the relationship between memory and identity, beyond the impact of the traumatic experience, that seems more interesting. Alistair Thomson famously

addressed the issue of "memory composure" in his work on Australian First World War veterans, which highlighted the ways in which their identity was shaped by war memories and at the same time how changes in cultural memory impacted his memories of the conflict (see Thomson, *Anzac Memories*). This notion of "memory composure" was first developed by the Popular Memory Group at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, and it relates to the way we construct – compose – our memories in a way which makes us feel comfortable and in alignment with our past, present and future lives. As a result, identity and memory become deeply interrelated.

**Escaping war**

Despite the horrors of war in continental Europe, being admitted to Britain or the United States was not granted for anyone, not even Jewish people. Louise London's study on the British response to the problem of refugees coming to Britain shows how British policy severely restricted refuge during the conflict (and during the Holocaust) and consistently limited admissions on a purely humanitarian basis, considering British self-interest first and foremost: "Alien admissions were severely restricted and evaluated by reference to the requirements of the war. The policy of non admitting refugees – alien or British – to the United Kingdom solely on humanitarian grounds was repeatedly affirmed at Cabinet level." (London, *Whitehall and the Jews*: 173). To be granted entry into the United Kingdom being war refugees or even racial refugees was not enough. One had to fit into the "war effort" category or to qualify on political grounds (178). However, refugees still arrived from Nazi occupied countries even without permission, they had to be dealt with at ports of entry, and the procedures established to manage them were set up mainly for reasons of security and intelligence, rather than for relief or humanitarian concern.

When the exodus of civilian refugees from continental Europe started, the first arrivals reached Southampton and Portsmouth and then proceeded to London. Plans for the reception of these refugees were tardy and badly implemented. The Ministry of Health was in charge of the matter, and together with the London City Council it set up nine reception centres in the city, which was questionable given that at that time Londoners were being relocated to safer areas. At those centres, refugees were "fed, bathed and medically examined before being transferred to the twenty cooperating borough councils for billeting" (Atkin, *The Forgotten French*: 35). Later, when places at reception centres started to become insufficient, refugees were housed in prisons until they could be vetted by the authorities. These "aliens" arriving to Britain had to be thoroughly examined to

make sure they did not represent a threat but also to verify whether they possessed any information that would be useful for intelligence. The refugees were then taken over by the Internment Camps Divisions of the Home Office, and dealt with at a facility called Royal Victoria Patriotic School (RVPS), which opened in January 1941 to manage matters related to the reception of aliens from allied and friendly countries, and later on also from enemy-occupied countries. German and Italian civilian arrivals were sent to other camps, such as Internment Camp 001 and the Oratory Schools in London, where they were treated as "enemy aliens". Soon refugees started to arrive at ports all around the British coastline, and there they were generally kept in prison until they could board the first available train to London (see also Tobia, *Victims of War*: 133-135).

The most remarkable exception to the policy limiting entry into the United Kingdom for refugees was the so-called *Kindertransport* (Children's Transport) programme, which admitted about 10.000 children between 1938 and 1940, about 75% of whom were Jewish. After *Kristallnacht* the British authorities decided to allow Jewish children younger than seventeen to enter Great Britain from Germany and other occupied territories, mostly Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland. The children's care, their education and emigration were paid by private citizens or organizations, and the British government granted temporary visas for them. However, their parents or guardians were not allowed to accompany them, because *Kindertransport* was understood only as a temporary solution, with the children returning to their families after the "crisis", but history had different plans for them. Once in Britain, the children were entrusted to foster families, sometimes after a period of time spent in a camp until a family could be found. About half of the children were allocated to families, whereas the others stayed in hostels or farms throughout the war. Many of these children later became part of the group dubbed the "King's most loyal enemy aliens", and joined the war effort fighting with the Allied forces. After the conflict, they did not go back to their families, who had been wiped out in the Holocaust or the war. Instead, they remained in Britain or emigrated to Israel, the United States or Canada.

Among those who were able to reach Britain, about 75.000 German or Austrian refugees, there was a group of about 10.000 who enlisted in the British forces, generally starting in the Pioneer Corps. They were then made to swear allegiance to King George VI, thus becoming the "King's most loyal enemy aliens", and joined the fighting forces contributing to the Allied victory. After the war the vast majority of them was sent back to their countries of origin to join the occupation and denazification efforts, and they proved extremely valuable especially thanks to their knowledge of the local language and culture. By that time, however, they had already developed a new identity.

The United States did not have a refugee policy, and the American immigration laws establishing quotas which would privilege immigrants from "desirable" countries in Northern Europe and limited less "racially desirable immigrants" (including Jews) were not revised during the conflict. Obtaining a visa to emigrate to the United States was a rather difficult and long process, even for those able to qualify, for example because they had a financial sponsor and were therefore able to prove they would not become a burden to the U.S.. With the conflict, obtaining a ticket across the Atlantic was also increasingly hard as many passenger lines reduced or stopped the numbers of vessels for fear of attacks by German submarines. American immigration laws clearly reflected the interwar climate characterized not only by economic insecurity but also racism and antisemitism. American popular opinion was largely against the idea of accepting more arrivals, despite the emergence of the refugee crisis and the outbreak of the war in Europe. In spite of this climate, there were some private refugee aid organizations, Jewish and Christian, which provided assistance and help, mostly in the form of food, clothing, money, and assistance to find affidavits for those who did not have family or sponsors in the States. The screening of visa applicants was centralized in Washington, D.C. during the summer of 1941 and at that point emigrating from Nazi-occupied territories became nearly impossible. The United States too managed to organize the transport of children, but despite the efforts of a few lobbyists, it never became a governmental project, and it was instead managed by relief organizations such as the German Jewish Children's Aid and the U.S. Committee for the Care of European Children. This last body saw the active involvement of the First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and of the Quaker pacifist organization American Friends Service Committee. All in all, about a thousand children were brought to America between 1933 and 1945, a tenth of those saved by *Kindertransport*.

How do these refugees compose their memories in oral history interviews and construct their identities? If we examine the set of interviews I personally conducted between 2009 and 2010 as part of the "Languages at War" project,[6] as well as pre-recorded interviews held at sound archives,[7] we can identify a series of issues with a profound impact on this process: the specific type of project of which the interview was part, cultural issues such as languages and emotional issues, including relationships and feelings. All of these questions have an influence on how the narrators compose their memories (see Thomson, *Anzac Memories*) and construct their identity.

The narrators who are part of this case study all had very similar experiences:[8] they arrived in Britain or the U.S. as refugees from Nazi oppression to then join the Allied military effort. They spoke German and had to learn the English

language while still refugees or, in the British case, when part of the Pioneer Corps, and were already fluent when they joined the fighting forces. Between the end of the conflict and the occupation of Germany they were eager to join the denazification process, mostly working in intelligence. Their added value to this area of work was not only that they were able to speak both languages fluently, but also that they could perform multiple identities: the German/Austrian identity, the Jewish identity, and their British or American identity shaped presumably by the Allied system of recruitment and training of this corpus of refugees. However, is coming to Britain or the States as a refugee and being recruited and trained by the Allied forces enough to explain such a complex concept as the shaping of a new cultural identity? Language plays a crucial part in shaping the multiple identities of these soldiers with different nationalities, with consequences which would impact on their post war lives. And so do emotions, especially relationships and intimate feelings. The fact that the refugees changed their names during the war years, even if it was done to avoid the treatment reserved to traitors in case of capture by the Germans, shows the extent to which they had to construct new identities (Footitt and Tobia, *WarTalk*: 48-61).

Willy Field[9] was seventeen years old when he had to say farewell to his family at the Bonn railway station, after spending four nightmarish months at Dachau concentration camp (Fry, *From Dachau to D-Day*: 29-43). It was the month of May, 1939, and Willy did not speak any English when he first came to Britain, so he had to make himself understood and learn the language very quickly "and it was not very easy", as he declared in his interview, "but when you are young – he added – it is much easier to adapt yourself to the language."

As he remembered seventy years later, being Jewish was what made him feel welcome "not a stranger" in the UK. All of a sudden, he was part of a community and he narrates that everything became easier for him when he lived in the Jewish area of London. It was there that he was able to develop personal relationships which helped him pull through the hard times, but he did not forget the family that he had to leave back. He kept in touch with them by letter, at the beginning, but even decades later he still remembers the trauma of separation vividly as something that shaped his future. He told me how he had to say goodbye at that station in Bonn to both his parents, his brother and sister and to his uncle: "We always had hope, perhaps we will see each other in two months time". When I asked him if there was a place he could call home, he said: "Not Germany, I had to forget that." His feelings of vulnerability were not openly narrated, but could still be recorded by his oral history interview, and it was through this emotion,

provoked by the memory of separation, that he started to construct a new identity.

Close relationships and the idea of family resurface when he talks about his combat experience: "In fighting everybody, fellow soldiers, became a sort of family." Very quickly he remembered how his experience in the Pioneer Corps was still a sort of identity limbo, shaped this time by the fact that: "We still spoke German, we still carried on speaking German, even in Australia because I didn't have to speak English, that's why it took me so long to become fully fluent." That changed when he was allowed to join the fighting corps, the British unit which would become his family. Emotional ties as well as cultural issues – speaking the English language – are both part of the construction of his new identity:

> Then, when all of a sudden I went to a British unit, I didn't want, couldn't speak German anymore. I forgot my German name, I became Willy Field, and I had and wanted to lose my German identity. When fighting according to the British authorities and in the eyes of everybody else I had lost my German identity, to become a British soldier.

The feelings he relates this time are no longer feelings of vulnerability, but more positive emotions about trust and brotherhood, shaped presumably during training: "We were trained to rely on each other, it was different from Pioneer corps." This became even more evident after the war, when he, like all German speakers, had an opportunity to join the Intelligence Corps. He was offered the chance to go to Brussels and train to become an interpreter, but Willy did not want to leave his fellow soldiers: "I said no, but the commanding officer sent me to Brussels because it was a pleasant location […] and I failed the course. I made sure to play as if I could hardly speak German. I refused because I had such an excellent relationship with everybody" including the other soldiers and the officers. At that time, he was a sergeant.

Willy says that "you will never forget your original culture, no matter what happens in life." However, he also adds that "being a British citizen meant a hell of a lot to me." He feels connected to his origins through the emotional feelings for the memory of his family, but he also constructs his identity as distanced from the German culture which he links to the brutality he experienced when he was a concentration camp inmate, and was interrogated by the Gestapo: "I could never do what the German tried to do, the way they treated you in the concentration camps. I always tried to be correct." Willy went on to live the rest of his post-war life in the UK with his wife and children.

Gerd Miller[10] came to the United States in 1938, after being forced to leave his hometown Cologne. After Pearl Harbor he was quite eager to join the Army, but could not because he was an enemy alien, so he volunteered to be drafted and after about six months actually managed to get drafted. He was sent for intelligence training at a facility called Camp Ritchie, MD, part of the MIS: "The first question he asked me, in perfect, flawless German, 'where did you learn to speak German?' And I told him, 'the same place you did' (laughs) And you know, we spoke, but he had been naturalized, he had been in this country a little longer." In Europe, Gerd followed the frontline from France, working with the French resistance, all the way into Germany, and interrogating prisoners captured at the front line, a first line of interrogation to get strategic intelligence needed immediately in the field. He talks about how his "cultural preparedness" was key in intelligence gathering in the field:

> We had a lot of information. Well don't forget that there were a lot of people, like myself, that had lived there. For instance, in the area around Cologne, we used to ride our bicycles there on weekends and go on day trips. And I knew it like I knew the back of my hand, you know. And there were other people from other parts of Germany that knew the area very well. There was a lot of good information that we got from people who lived there and who knew.

His language and cultural knowledge were what helped him be effective in his military role with the American forces.

In his interview, which was collected as part of a project on liberators of concentration camps, follows the typical format of general "wartime experiences" oral history interviews collected by the Veterans History Project at the Library of Congress, and is therefore not specifically tailored with questions about the construction of identity, Gerd seems to be distancing himself from his German identity. He explains how his knowledge of not just the language, but also the territory, was useful to him in his capacity of intelligence officer, and how he was able to play with his knowledge to trick the prisoners into thinking of him as "omniscient" – that he already knew many things so it was not worth trying to hide information. At the time of the interview, he does not perceive his identity as German anymore – he refers to "those Germans", as if he was not and had never been one of them.

As in Willy Field's case, military and intelligence training probably had much to do with the construction of a new identity. The way both veterans "compose" their memories to reconstruct a past that they can accept, at the time when they are being interviewed,[11] is similar. In both cases languages and cultural

knowledge represent the key for their military effectiveness but also they open the door to their post-war life. In both cases their emotions are key too. Gerd talks at length about the difficulties of leaving his home in Cologne, Germany, and how hard life had become in his home country despite the fact that he came from a Catholic family rather than a Jewish one. He was able to leave with his parents, leaving the rest of the family and their life behind: "It was all so very difficult. Not only we had to get a permit to leave Germany. In fact, my father lost everything we had there". His tale of his trip reflects the feeling of vulnerability created by the loss but also by the unknown they were facing, including arriving in New Orleans and having "to learn a little English and so forth". He remembers the difficulties of going to high school in Texas and having to learn the language there, while his father was working as a cleaner.

The other emotions that resurface in his testimony are those linked to his role in the liberation of concentration camps in Germany, and when those feelings about the past resurface, they are key in the process of "memory composure" which makes him distance himself from his origins and construct a new identity:

> They said, we need every German-speaking soldier to go to Dachau. And I knew right away what Dachau was, because I knew it since I was a kid. But I never suspected to find what we did there. I mean, it was… I can't begin to tell you. It was hell on earth. I mean, it was like Dante's *Inferno*. […] When we approached the village of Dachau, the smell … the smell was so awful. Now, we had all been in combat. And we had all seen and smelled dead soldiers, dead cows, and horses. […] The camp was completely enclosed in high tension wire. And somebody had cut that power out, but we found like half a dozen guys hanging in there. They had committed suicide by jumping on to the live wire. And I tell you, this may sound bad, but they were the lucky ones.

Gerd goes on to talk about the horrors of seeing rotting bodies and survivors who were like "zombies" and this had a profound effect on him. Seventy years after the events what he remembers very vividly are his feelings of helplessness:

> I think that night after Dachau, we all got back to our headquarters there in Munich, and we drank a lot of booze. And you feel so helpless. From what I can remember to this day, that horrible smell and those damn people in the town of Dachau telling us they didn't know anything that was going on there – and you, you could smell it all the way. And you're so helpless.

He distances himself from Germany and from the German people, to compose a memory which he can accept in the present:

> I will never understand. I will never understand – a country like Germany, educated people, you know, how could this happen? I don't know. I don't know to this day how can they be that gullible? How can they be that uninformed? But a lot of them saw things that were going on and looked the other way.

**DPs in the aftermath of war**

The planning to deal with relief operations in the aftermath of the Second World War started largely in 1942-43, when specific institutions were created to help Europe recover after the war. At that time the planners were not aware of the full extent of Nazi policies, but they were monitoring the use of so-called "slave labourers" by the Germans. For this reason the planning was based on the displacement of populations rather than on genocide, at a time when the concept of the Holocaust had not yet been conceived: "The concept of the 'displaced person' determined the shape of the Allied humanitarian effort after the war […] the war's most important legacy was a refugee crisis" (Shephard, *The Long Road Home*: 1-2). During the war, however, priority was always given to military victory over relief, or humanitarian aid to use a more contemporary term. Later on, the countries of Western Europe, the Americas and Australasia saw DPs as potential immigrants and they started to conceive of their policies and operations through the lenses of their "labour needs and philosophy of immigration" (3).

When the war ended the Allied troops set up DPs camps in the territories of occupied Germany, Austria and Italy, where the DPs where housed to wait for the authorities to decide about their future. Many of them either feared to return to their home countries for various reasons, including antisemitism which persisted in some areas, and the trauma they had experienced. Besides the Allied authorities, these DP camps were administered by the UNRRA, later replaced by the IRO, and they existed until 1957 when Föhrenwald, the last camp, was closed by the German government. The DPs who refused to go back to their home countries were called "non-repatriables". Most Jewish DPs wanted to emigrate to Palestine, which was still a British mandate at the time, and many others wished to go to the United States, and remained in the camps until it was possible to leave Europe. However, the States still had quota restrictions and entry in to Palestine remained restricted until the creation of Israel in 1948. At the end of 1945 President Truman signed a directive which made quota restrictions for entry into the U.S. more flexible for persons displaced as a result of the actions of the Nazi regime. Eventually, in 1948 the U.S. Congress passed the Displaced Persons

Act, thanks to which hundreds of thousands of DPs could enter the United States between 1949 and 1952.

Psychology professor David P. Boder from the Illinois Institute of Technology of Chicago undertook an ambitious project in 1946. He travelled to Europe and visited refugee camps to interview Holocaust survivors living there. Carrying a state-of-the-art recorder, he was able to interview 130 DPs, and these recorded interviews represent the first oral history testimonies of the Holocaust. As a psychologist, his first aim was to record and study the impact of trauma on these survivors and their personality, but he also wanted to increase the American public's knowledge about the Holocaust experience, which he thought was extremely limited. In terms of methodology, Boder included in his project subjects from various nationalities and language groups from across Europe, and from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. He generally started by explaining to the interviewees the importance of telling their own story to raise awareness about the Holocaust on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, to then adopt a semi-structured type of interview. After asking some specific details including name, age, date of birth, where they were when the conflict broke out, Boder left his informants the freedom to talk at will about their experiences (for more about the Boder interviews, see Rosen, *The Wonder of Their Voices*, and the Voices of the Holocaust website http://voices.iit.edu/).[12]

More recently, between 2003 and 2006, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Oral History branch was able to collect a series of interviews with a few of the Holocaust survivors who had been interviewed by Boder in 1946, and this set of sources is the one that is of more interest for the purposes of this article, because informants also talk about their life since 1946, and the analysis of these interviews can offer some insights on the question of memory composure and the construction of identity of DPs who were able to enter the United States.[13] Some of these testimonies offer an excellent case study to show that the strategies of memory composure of these DPs were not dissimilar from those that emerge from the interviews of wartime refugees who joined the Allied forces. Clearly, the oral history project involved generic questions on their overall memories, and it was not tailored specifically to study identity, but evidence of the importance of languages and especially emotions still emerges from their recorded memories.

Janine Oberrotman was originally from Poland and she was interviewed by Boder when she was in Paris, hoping to emigrate to America. In her 2004 interview account of her experience of life in the Jewish ghetto and then in hiding is very focused on her relationships.[14] She talks at length about her mother and her feelings for her are very positive and pervade the whole interview: "My

mother is very sweet, if I can say." Later she adds, with sadness: "I was her confidant, and her only child, and I was the apple of her eye. And I never imagined I could live without her. Right. Yeah, such is fate." Janine expresses strong feelings when she talks about the rest of her family, too, because she does not have any information about any of them, apart some cousins:

> There is one little suitcase that's left. And, but, and the good thing is that we found my cousins, and there was a wonderful feeling, to, you know, you cannot imagine somebody is alive. Because when you so concerned you don't even know who's alive and who's dead, cause the other people are dying elsewhere, and you don't know what happened to them, for a long time, maybe never.

Another relationship that is very important in Janine's memories is that of her husband, whom she married when she was still in Europe. In order to emigrate to the States, he too had to obtain a visa and for that reason they had to wait two more years and were only able to sail across the ocean in 1953. She describes him as "a very handsome young man" when showing his picture to her interviewer and they had three children together, one of whom was born in Paris and the other two in the States.

Seeing loved ones for the last time before being carried away is a very common memory among Holocaust survivors, and Alan Kalish[15] remembers his mother and grandmother walking away from him: "And that's the last time I saw them. And I had no idea what was happening to them."

Jack Bass's closest relationship was – and still is at the time of his interview[16] – with his sister, who also reached the States to settle in California. Jack says that he and his sister were very close when they were young, and he adds "we are still close […] I still call my sister almost every week. […] In fact, I just called her prior to leaving, and yeah, we talk on the phone and reminisce, whatever we remember."

The other recurring element in the memories of these narrators, which is key in the composure of their memory and the construction of their identity is their emotions. More specifically, emotions relating to the memories of the time before their migration generally reflect feelings of vulnerability, or even fear. Jack Bass' memory of arriving at Auschwitz Buna labour camp focuses on vulnerability, even though it is not explicitly mentioned: "But we got there, I think it was night time. It was darker now, and they opened up the, these sliding doors, and they told us raus, raus, you know, out, out, out, and beat us up, it… it came as a big surprise, you know, because I had never been beaten up by anybody before."

The informant composes his memory in a way that is acceptable to his present self, and although he does not openly acknowledge how vulnerable he and his fellows must have felt, that emotion surfaces in his voice. As Thomson notes "there are many ways in which our remembered experiences […] may threaten or disturb identities" (*Anzac Memories*: loc. 552), and this is particularly true for memories of traumatic experiences. For example, when the same informant talks about his experience in the camp itself, he insists on the lack of feelings both his own and those of the people who were presumably instilling fear. He repeats "without feelings", "without emotions" "no feelings". And interestingly, he remembers David Boder in the same way: "I had never kind of a close contact feeling with him […] he was like, I don't know, very… without feelings, like you know? Without emotions."

Janine constructs the memory of her emotions in a very similar way, with feelings cantered on vulnerability: "You… what you were afraid of, you were afraid of what you didn't know. You knew they had concentration camps." When she was living in hiding at a time she and her companions became so afraid that they considered committing suicide: "She gave me a bottle of cyanide. So I don't know, I was so… in such a despair that I decided I should… I should do it." That life seemed almost unreal: "For me it wasn't living, it was being suspended, like suspended living." And just like Jack, she has a very negative memory of the interview with Boder. She reminisces: "I have a very neg… a rather negative memory of the interview, because I felt myself be very vulnerable during that interview." Janine refers to her vulnerability of displaced person, waiting in a limbo to find a new home and a destination, very openly.

On the other hand, the memories of going and arriving to the States are quite positive for these informants, marking the role that the trip itself and the reception on the other side of the Atlantic had on the composure of their memory and the construction of their new identities. Janine for example said: "And the reception we received, it was a wonderful reception. […] It was an unconditional positive regard, it was wonderful."

Jack Bass says that he loved being in the States: "I thought it was great", whereas Alan Kalish remembers his trip as "a very nice trip", with good food and good treatment: "We were mixing with the passengers. So it was a very nice ship coming down to – coming to the States […] I was physically recovered. […] I had no idea what to expect in the States" but he was very excited to be there.

However, informants also openly acknowledge the role of memories and feelings about the past on their present self. Janine reminisces:

> You know, and things like that you don't forget, you li… not… you don't forget it, but your unconscious mind doesn't forget them, and it… and it takes over. And I ne… and you make decisions, and you make… and you live according to what you're… yeah, what's dictated to you by your past, in a way. So I would never forget.

For Alan Kalish reminiscing about his past experiences as a Holocaust survivor is much harder. He prefers to negotiate his memories to construct his identity in silence, and when asked about what it was like, he does not want to talk about it:

> I went through all that already, so don't ask me to tell you what happened to me. It happened and it's gone, it's for… forget about it. […] I didn't want to talk about it, no. Even with my family or anybody, I didn't want to talk about it. […] And sometimes I still will choke up, and wi…tear roll down.

Narrators in this set of sources refer to languages and the impact these had on the construction of their identity in a less obvious way compared to the refugee case studies examined above. However, they all mentioned the languages they had to learn, which for some of them included French, German and Hebrew. All of them had to learn English. Janine was lucky enough to develop a personal friendship with a "girl" who for a period of time tutored her in French and English, well before she migrated to the States. Her waiting period was so long that the wait itself became part of her identity. For Alan Kalish things were a bit different as he had to go to school to learn English when he arrived in Manhattan. It is remarkable that in none of the testimonies we can find mention of language difficulties, or problems to integrate themselves in the new country. This is probably due to the way they compose their memory at the time of their interview: they tend to remember more positive aspects of their arrival, therefore they remember having many friends, or being able to go to concerts. The fact of having had to learn the language is taken for granted and no longer problematised.

## Conclusion

In refugees and forced migration studies there is a renewed interest on how we document and preserve the narratives and memories of those involved, because preserving the legacy of migration has become of primary importance, especially during the current emergency. Oral history resurfaces the importance of emotions within the memories of past experiences and dignifies them by inscribing them in the historical record, and re-humanizes the "victims of war".

A comparative approach was taken in this article to examine the way that war shapes identity and participates in the process of "memory composure" with reference to two case studies: interviews with former refugees, or "enemy aliens", who came to Britain and the United States during the war and later joined the Allied fight against the Axis, and a set of interviews with Holocaust survivors who had been part of the group of DPs interviewed by psychology professor David P. Boder at the end of the war, and who had all later migrated to the United States or Australia. Their personal identities are all interwoven with the collective memory of the events they experienced because as Thomson demonstrated "it fulfils our common need for a sense of purpose and a proud collective identity" (*Anzac Memories*: loc. 442-453).

Informants from these two case studies had different experiences of the Second World War, the refugee and the DP experience, but they all deployed similar strategies to compose their memory and therefore construct and identity that they could live with comfortably at the time when they were interviewed at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Sometimes their attempts at composure were not entirely successful, and they were left with "unresolved tension, and fragmented, contradictory identities" (loc. 558), as is the case when remembered experiences threaten the construction of an acceptable identity.

The strategies of memory composure that the narrators in these case studies used revolve around cultural knowledge, on the one hand, and emotions and feelings, on the other. Languages, as well as cultural identity, emerge as a key element in the construction of identity albeit in different ways for the refugees, who explicitly remember using the English language to become accepted by their fellow combatants, and by DPs who take the fact of having had to learn a new language for granted in their testimony.

As to emotions, there are more similarities than differences in the two case studies. Family relationships before separation are remembered fondly, and the separation is mentioned as a time of deep sadness. The prevalent emotions of the time which followed departure is largely a feeling of vulnerability, which is problematic because sometimes it can be inferred from the narration, but it is not openly mentioned.

The recollections of life after arrival in the new country are conversely fond memories of the good reception with which they were met, of the good feeling of being able to have fun, going to concerts, spend time with friends.

In conclusion, each narrator's experience is at the same time individual and collective, as every subject draws on collective cultural repertoires and memories. The testimonies about these experiences are also simultaneously rooted in the

past and in the present, and we have to take all of these issues into careful account to make sense of the way emotions are narrated to construct and voice a new diasporic identity, based on individual as well as collective memory. Much work still needs to be done on this approach, which by taking into account emotions resurfaces the humanity of those who experienced forced displacement. For example, it would be very interesting to compare the interviews recorded by Boder in 1946 to those collected by the USHMM in the early 2000s, which would allow to evaluate the impact of collective memory and the evolution of personal identity, as memory composure is not a static process. A gender approach to the way emotions participate in memory composure would also be very interesting. Again, a study of the impact of memory on personal identity which takes a cognitive framework, would also be very interesting. However, while this preliminary analysis is certainly limited, it can highlight the significance of issues like feelings, relationships and cultural knowledge on the way we negotiate our memory to construct a tolerable identity.

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[1] The Oral History Society has a special interest group on Migration, and the page dedicated to this topic reflects openly on the role of oral historians: "Can we as oral historians play a part in giving a voice to those seeking refuge, and in doing so, help to challenge the existing media

and political discourses associated with them?" https://www.ohs.org.uk/information-for/migration/ (accessed on 14 January 2019).

2 Including Conway and Gotovitch, *Europe in Exile*; Dove, *Totally Un-English*; Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe*; Berghahn, *German-Jewish Refugees in England*; Hirschfeld, *Exile in Great Britain*; Sponza, *The Internment of Italians*; Id., *Divided Loyalties.* The list can in no way be exhaustive.

3 See for example Reinisch, *Relief in the aftermath of war*; Gemie and Humbert, *Writing History in the Aftermath of "Relief"*; Shephard, *Becoming "Planning Minded'*; Shephard, *The Long Road Home*; Gemie and others, *Outcast Europe*; Cohen, *In War's Wake*).

4 The focus of this study is therefore the oral history interview, the narrator's composed memory and voiced identity as they are voiced in the interview. A study on narrators' memory beyond the oral history interview is beyond the objectives of this article, because it would require a different framework of analysis, including for example cognitive theories from studies on behaviour.

5 This essay was first published in 1979 in the Italian language as *Sulla specificità della storia orale*. «Primo maggio», 13 (1979): 54-60. It was later translated as *On the Peculiarities of Oral History*, «History Workshop Journal», 12 (1981): 96-107 and republished several times, including in the three editions of Routledge's *The Oral History Reader*).

6 The "Languages at War" project ran between 2008 and 2011 thanks to Arts and Humanities Research Council funding, and it was based at the University of Reading in the United Kingdom.

7 The sound archives used were those of the Imperial War Museum, London and of the Veterans History Project at the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

8 I collected a total of 16 oral history interviews as part of this project, but in this article I will only refer to the one I deem to be the most exemplary one, due to space limitations. The other interview I refer to in this part of the article, is from the Library of Congress' Veterans History Project and I choose this particular testimony among the many that can be found in the same collection, for the same reasons.

9 Oral history interview with the author, 2 December 2009.

10 Gerd Miller Collection, Veterans History Project Sound Archive, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

11 Gerd Miller's oral history interview was collected on 9 July 2013 by Stephen M. Sloan as part of the project "Texas Liberators of WWII Concentration Camps" to be deposited at the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

12 The recordings of these interviews can be found in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Recorded Sound Research Center and listened to on site in Washington, D.C., and are also available with transcripts on the Illinois Institute of Technology's Voices of the Holocaust website.

13 In the article I will only quote three of the interviews in this body, the most representative ones, having to make choices mostly because of space constraints.

14 Janine Oberrotman was interviewed for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum again on 30 March 2004.

15 Alan Kalish was interviewed for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum again on 24 October 2003.

16 Jack Bass was interviewed for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum again on 17 October 2003.

# Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Crossing between Nazi-Occupied and Soviet-Occupied Poland in 1939

By Barbara Krasner

**Abstract**: In accordance with the von Ribbentrop-Molotov pact, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union occupied Poland in September 1939. Germany took control of the western sector and the Soviet Union the eastern sector. Families considered their options and made critical choices about staying in place or crossing the border. As entry points became more heavily guarded, movement became more difficult. At Soviet request, the Nazis opened the border for fifteen minutes on November 15, 1939. Using Yizkor (memorial) books from the author's ancestral villages of Ostrów Mazowiecka on the Nazi side and Zaręby Kościelne on the Soviet side, this article examines the effect of the early occupation on the people living in these villages and their migrations within the larger historical context. It pays particular attention to the no-man's land the Germans called the *Judenpass*, the Jewish land strip, that both safeguarded and threatened refugees and separated these two villages.

**Keywords**: *World War II*, *border crossings*, *Sovietisation*, *Yizkor books*, *Judenpass*, *no man's land*

In August 1939, fifty-nine-year-old Yankel Dovid Pryzant went about his business just as his ancestors did before him in the Mazovian shtetl of Zaręby Kościelne (Zaromb in Yiddish). His parents deceased, he stood now as the second oldest of the family. The first-born was Icchok, who ran a dry-cleaning business in the larger town of Ostrów Mazowiecka (Ostrova in Yiddish), eighteen kilometres across the fields and lush forests that gave Zaromb its name, *Zaręby*, forests. Their father had come from Ostrova, where Jews had made their home since 1765. Many of Zaromb's two thousand Jews had family in Ostrova, although its own Jewish community dated back to 1681. In Ostrova, Icchok found good company and good business, as the town boasted a population of some twenty-thousand people, eight thousand of whom were Jews (Gordin & Gelbart, *Memorial Book*: 154).

Neither brother or any of the Jewish residents of these two towns would have known that on 23rd August, Nazi Germany's foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and the Soviet Union's foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov signed a Treaty of Non-Aggression to split Poland between themselves. It contained a secret protocol stipulating that the two countries would reorganise the Polish state approximately following the lines of the Pissa, Narew, Wisła, and San Rivers as the boundaries for their respective spheres of

interest (General Sikorski Historical Institute, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*: I, 40). It was amended on 28th September with the German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty to roughly use the Bug River as the demarcation boundary between western Poland and eastern Poland.[1] A confidential protocol to this agreement addressed the transfer of persons of German descent to the Reich and the transfer of those of Ukrainian and Byelorussian descent to the Soviet Union (51).

After the smoke from Nazi bombs cleared, Ostrova became part of German-occupied western Poland. On 17th September, the Soviet army claimed Zaromb and other towns in eastern Poland. The space between the Pryzant brothers and the two towns became a no-man's land. The Pryzants exemplify how fate placed them between a rock and hard place. Should they stay in Ostrova? Stay in Zaromb? Cross from western to eastern Poland? Should they travel farther east into the Soviet Union's interior? Key to responding to these questions are first-hand accounts of survivor testimony in the Ostrova and Zaromb Yizkor (memorial) books and a larger historical context that frames these accounts.

**Ostrów Mazowiecka in Nazi-occupied territory**

The Nazis arrived in Ostrova with swastika-laden tanks and machine-gun-armed motor squads on 8th September after several days of bombing. SS members followed, possibly members of *Einsatzkommando* 2 of *Einsatzgruppe* V (Roth & Schmidt, *Judenmord*: 22). Ostrova's Jews quickly realised this occupation was going to be vastly different from the one they experienced during World War I. The Germans now murdered Ostrova's Jews quickly. As survivor Chana Lewitt observes, "as soon as the Germans arrived in Ostrowa, they began shooting everywhere. They even shot dogs and cats. My friend, who looked out of a small window in the attic of her house thinking that she could see the Germans, but they could not see her, was immediately shot" (512). During that first night, the Germans stole into Jewish homes and grabbed the men. They killed more people. In these first few days, the number of Jews in Ostrova swelled as refugees arrived from neighbouring communities of Ostrołęka, Rozan, Myszyniec, and Komorowo carrying baskets and bundles. The Ostrova Jewish community established a fund to help feed and house the refugees.

On the morning of 10th September, the German Security Police called in Rabbi Jakob Zynger and congregation secretary Tuwia Makower. The two men were forced to cut off each other's beards. Then the police ordered Ostrova's Jewish men between the ages of sixteen and sixty to gather at City Hall at noon. Survivor Jakob Widelec recounts, "those who do not come will be shot immediately. The news spread with lightning speed

through the city and everyone was frightened. Nobody was able to make up his mind whether to go or not" (491). Widelec watched as Nazis began to storm homes by eleven am and drag out the men. By four pm, the old marketplace filled with thousands of men, including the male refugees from surrounding towns, all with hands in the air. They marched en masse to the Polish gymnasium and shooting broke out, killing twenty-one and injuring twelve. The crowd quickly dispersed.

During the following few days, the Nazis looted Jewish businesses, giving away food and merchandise to the local Polish population, who "with beaming faces, stand eagerly waiting to take their share of the stolen goods" (492). The Nazis also desecrated synagogues and study houses. On Rosh Hashonah, the High Holy Jewish New Year celebration, the Nazis coerced many men into labour, breaking the religious law. Several did not return. Others managed to stay put and observed the sacred holiday in cellars.

Movement across the border appeared somewhat unchallenged and fluid during the early days and weeks of Nazi occupation. Noted Israeli historian Dori Levin claims, "the Soviet Union still allowed nearly free access to and exit from the areas under their control" (*The Lesser of Two Evils*: 6). The Red Army assisted refugees. Jews were able to escape to Zambrów, a town of more than twenty-thousand people located thirty-two kilometers east on the Soviet side. Max Mishna, a printer's apprentice, left Ostrów Mazowiecka in early September with his uncle. He recounts that at the border three kilometres away, "the Germans didn't ask nothing. We went through" (USC Shoah Foundation, "Max Mishna": Segments 19-23). Refugees also set out for Szumowo, Zaromb, and farther eastern destinations such as Białystok and Slonim.[2]

On 17th September, some refugees returned with the news that the Russian Army was advancing. Widelec remembers, "the border between Germany and the Soviet Union will be at the Bug River. This means that Ostrowa will belong to the Russians. People were hugging each other and crying tears of joy" (Gordin & Gelbart, *Memorial Book*: 493). But on the night of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, as the more religious Jews began Kol Nidre services, Nazi trucks arrived. They herded these Jews onto the trucks and drove them to the *sadzawke*, the natural pond. The Nazis instructed these men on the holiest night of the Jewish year to clean the trucks using their religious clothing as their washcloths.

Survivor Eliezer Knysinski describes:

> The greater part of the Jewish population had the opportunity to go to Zambrow, that had been taken by the Russians. None of them were eager to leave everything they had work for and run off with small children into the forests, without good reason. A few weeks later,

> when the town was full of refugees from surrounding villages, the Jews began to go across the border that was one kilometer from us. (508)

Chana Lewitt points out that even knowing what the Nazis were capable of, deciding to leave remained a complex consideration. She explains, "everyone still hoped, maybe, maybe. That is why hundreds of Jews did not want to leave Ostrowa where they had always made their home. Families separated" (513). Others believed the war would last only a few weeks.

On 27th September, after more Jews from neighbouring Pułtusk arrived, one member of Ostrova's Jewish community heard on a forbidden radio that the Nazi/Soviet border was to be drawn at the Zambrów forest. Remaining Jews had difficult and heart-wrenching decisions to make. Widelec observes, "the majority of Jewish Ostrowers have decided to leave the city […] The Nazis announced that all inhabitants who come from the eastern provinces under Soviet control are allowed to apply for a special permit in order to travel home" (495). Widelec applied for this permission, lying that he had come from Białystok. He received his permit immediately on 2nd October and traveled to Zambrów.[3]

German historians Markus Roth and Annalena Schmidt submit that escape movements to the east were typical of the border regions in the east of German-occupied Poland. Holding the largest Jewish population in the area, Ostrova attracted refugees. In some places, the local occupation forces coerced Jews to move along. These forces included the SS, police branches, and the Wehrmacht (*Judenmord*: 25-26). The demarcation line between the two occupations remained ill-defined until the German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty finalised it on 28th September in Moscow.

Dwojra Elson and her family escaped from the bombing of their own village to Ostrova where they had relatives. She writes, "the Russians arrived. Then they left and the Germans arrived. People were saying that the Germans would leave and the Russians would return" (517). According to her account, many Jews had managed to flee over the border to the Russians. Some Jews too old and weak or families with small children waited for the Russians to return. In this border confusion, Elson recalls:

> After a month all the Jews were ordered to gather on the square outside town and from there they would be driven to the Soviet border […] About two hundred Jews gathered on the square and were shot to death and some were buried alive. Afterward they paved the square with asphalt and made it a bus station (517).

Shoshana Makovitzky Ron-Fisherman and her family shared a similar experience. On Friday, September 1, 1939, Jewish families prepared for the Sabbath. In the Mazovian village of Kadzidło, Ron-Fisherman's father went to the farm to buy chickens. Her mother was making challah. A vehicle armed with a loudspeaker announced everyone had to evacuate within a few hours. Ron-Fisherman's mother made the decision to throw everything in a wagon and head by foot to Ostrołenka. Her father found them by the bridge there. They journeyed to Ostrova, where they lay in one of the synagogues with many refugees from neighbouring towns and farms, with hunger, and with lice. Ron-Fisherman's father paid some Poles to help them cross the border. She and her brother hid in the hay of a wagon until they reached the city of Lomża on the Soviet side, where her mother had family (USC Shoah Foundation, "Shoshana Ron-Fisherman": Segment 21, Segment 28-31).

It may have been the Hubert family who helped the Makovitzky family. Its home and farm lay close to Ostrów Mazowiecka near the border. The family earned a reputation for helping and never understood how refugees already knew they would actively facilitate escape. Mr. Hubert met the refugees at the border and then provided shelter before escorting them in a horse cart to the Małkinia train station. No names were given. Assisting Jewish refugees came with risks, of course. One day the Nazis discovered four Jewish men in the Hubert barn and took them behind the building. They demanded Mr. Hubert to bring a shovel. They ordered the Jews to strip and dig a pit. Both Mr. Hubert and his wife begged for their collective lives. The Nazis did not shoot, but they took the Jews away. The Gestapo eventually caught up with Mr. Hubert. They arrested him and took him to Ostrów Mazowiecka. Mr. Hubert's ability to speak fluent German undoubtedly helped him. He returned home covered in bruises. But even beatings did not deter Mr. Hubert. He continued to help guide refugees to relative safety while also safeguarding their valuables (Hubert Family).

Not crossing into Soviet territory brought severe consequences and brutality. By 5th November, only about five hundred Jews remained in Ostrova. One survivor account narrates that a business dispute erupted between Polish customer Antak Bezhestak and wallpaper shop owner Berel Tejtel, who no longer had any inventory since the looting of Jewish businesses. In retaliation, the customer set the Tejtel's house on fire and the fire spread. Bezhestak informed the Germans that Tejtel set the town on fire. This was just the excuse the Nazis needed. On orders from SS-Obergruppenfũhrer Friedrich-Wilhem Krũger in Kraków, Fourth Police Commander Colonel Brenner conducted an "investigation" and found the Jews, including women and children, to be guilty of arson. They were sentenced to death. The Wehrmacht and SD personnel forced the remaining Jews – numbers vary from five-hundred-sixty to seven hundred – into the ice cellar of

the Tejtel brewery. Local Poles received compensation of one złoty for each Jew captured. As survivor Chaim Slomka recalls, "there was no lack of volunteers" (Gordin & Gelbart, *Memorial Book*: 505). The Jews remained locked in that cellar for some time, although accounts range from overnight to several days. Then on the afternoon of 11th November, the day of Polish independence and Shabbat, members of the East Prussian police unit loaded the Jews onto trucks headed for the Warszawer Forest two kilometres outside town. The men journeyed first and were stripped naked. They were forced to dig a pit. Machine guns pummeled all but six of them. The surviving six threw the bodies of their family and friends into the mass grave. The Germans blindfolded the women and maneuvered them to the side of the grave. The women were forced to their knees and then shot. Bayonets impaled the children who had fallen from the women's arms. By seven am the following morning, the task now completed, the final six joined the others.[4]

### *Judenpass* – the no man's land

News of Nazi atrocities traveled via refugee word of mouth. Soviet authorities intentionally cut off their occupied Jewish communities from all sources of information about Nazi policies. Polish-born Holocaust survivor and Israeli historian Ben-Cion Pinchuk asserts, "the atmosphere created in the wake of the pact made the Jews less aware of the danger inherent in Nazism" (*Sovietisation and the Jewish Response*: 131). Of Poland's three million Jews, 1,2 million lived in the eastern sector and that number was mushrooming with refugees (Pinchuk, *Shtetl Jews*: 10).

Warsaw refugee Dora Goldszajder Fajgman and her family expected to come into a village after crossing the bridge over the River Bug out of Nazi control. But she remembers, "When we came to the other side, there was this part of land, who didn't belong to them [Germans] and not to them [Soviets], no-man's land" (USC Foundation, "Dora Fajgman": Segment 8). Not knowing exactly what to do, the family carefully watched the others there. One group headed to the forest. The Goldszajders followed and came to Zaręby Kościelne. There they waited a day for the train to Białystok.

Zaręby Kościelne, described by Polish-born writer and Yiddish press editor Mordechai Canin "as big as a yawn" (Gordin & Gelbart, *Memorial Book*: 820), was only eighteen kilometres away. Refugees fled through no-man's land and stories quickly spread to the Soviet side of Nazi atrocities. The forests filled with *bezhenstses*, refugees. Survivor Gershon Liberman believed as many as ten thousand Jews could be found in the Judenpass in December 1939 (Dorfman and others, *Zaromb Journal*: 26-27). Canin calls

special attention to Zaromb. Writing in 1952 when he visited more than thirty Polish villages, he contends this one streetlamp-shtetl became renowned in Poland because:

> During the partition of Poland in 1939, Zaromb became the last outpost before the Soviet border. Zaromb became Soviet, but its neighbour Malkinia (Yiddish, Malkin) was in the hands of the Germans. The five-kilometer area between Zaromb and Malkin was a "no-man's land" and became a dark hell for the Jews who wanted to save themselves from Hitlerism. (Gordin & Gelbart, *Memorial Book:* 821)

The Germans called this no-man's land the *Judenpass* (Dorfman and others, *Zaromb Journal*: 26), the Jewish land strip. According to Canin, hundreds of terrified and beaten refugees remained in "no man's land" with no food. They were afraid to go back home and the Soviets would not allow them to move forward. Canin characterises these refugees as "broken nobodies" (Gordin & Gelbart, *Memorial Book*: 822). He presents the Jews of Zaromb as heroes. He valorises,

> the Zaromber Jews organized rescue expeditions to bring the Jews to Zaromb. The entire village became part of the rescue effort. Using back roads the Jews stole into the forest to get the unlucky refugees, Jews with frozen feet, frozen noses and ears, and especially Jews who were mentally broken…In those days it seems that the Zaromber Jews had a special mission from the 'Lord of the Universe. (822)

News of Zaromber rescue traveled with the refugees as they journeyed farther east within Soviet territory to Białystok. He writes, "the world had never heard of this Zaromb in the sticks…" (822).

Gershon Liberman writes a similar account: "The forests around Zaromb are full of Jews […] Many have been there several nights up to several weeks, waiting their turn to board a train" (Dorfman and others, *Zaromb Journal*: 25). In the forests, the refugees established a rhythm of sorts. Children hunted for kindling so their mothers could cook in their makeshift kitchens. Smoke and smells of different foods in preparation rose to the treetops.

From Zaromb, refugees like the Goldszajders could board trains heading east. Zaromb's train station, built in 1921, lay three kilometres outside town, adjacent to Leshner Forest. Along these tracks the Soviet trains bore large five-pointed Russian stars and operated round the clock. A portrait of Stalin sat above the star while two large red

flags snapped on either side. For the refugees, this sight comforted them, if only initially, issuing "Welcome." The trains were so crowded, a friend of Dora Goldszajder pushed her head first through an open window. Liberman recalls hyperbolically, "this is how hundreds of thousands of Jews got through the Zaromb chapter of their journey. In far away Siberia, Magnitogorsk [sic], Ural, and in all the far corners of the enormous land of the USSR, Polish Jews recalled Zaromb with a blessing on their lips" (25). Small as it was, Zaromb earned a reputation as a major transit station. It, like many shtetl communities "showed greater concern and devoted more energy to helping the refugees than one could find in the larger towns" (Pinchuk, *Shtetl Jews*: 108).

October 1939 stimulated several policy questions for the Soviets. Though its agreement in the Ribbentrop-Molotov treaty carried forth the Soviet claim that it wanted to rescue and free oppressed Belorussians and Ukrainians living in Poland, did the allowance of Jewish refugees to cross the border mean the USSR also wanted to rescue Jews? Pinchuk maintains that it most assuredly did not (105). Still in October, Soviet authorities did nothing to stop wholesale border crossings, such as the entire Jewish communities of Ostrołęka and Brok forced by the Nazis to enter the Soviet side. An account of this border crossing from the Ostrołęka Yizkor book recalls, "the Russians received us cordially, offered us cigarettes and candies" (105).[5]

**Fifteen minutes to run**

However, Soviet patience wore thin by mid-November. On 15th November 1939, the Soviets lodged an official protest against Germans forcing refugees across the border (106; Sierkirski, *The Jews in Soviet-Occupied Eastern Poland*: 112). The Nazis opened the border for fifteen minutes that same day, four days after the mass execution of Ostrova's Jews. Zaromb survivor and refugee guide Gershon Liberman writes:

> People ran. Some were carrying weaker ones on their shoulders. The officers could not control the situation. Young people from Zaromb went into the no-man's land strip and yanked children out of the tightly-pressed mob, bringing them back through the wire fence. They took bundles and threw them over into the Russian side. The people of Zaromb did everything in their power to ensure that as many Jews as possible got through in those 15 minutes. (Dorfman and others, *Zaromb Journal*: 26-27)[6]

Even for the most skilled athlete, running eighteen kilometres in fifteen minutes while carrying burdens would have been a feat.

Polish and Eastern European history specialist Maciej Sierkirski notes that by December 1939, the frontier was nearly sealed, preventing the return or the escape of many central Poland refugees who became disillusioned on the Soviet side (*The Jews in Soviet-Occupied Eastern Poland*: 113). This movement west, which in hindsight appears counterintuitive, receives reinforcement from historian Jan Grabowski, who references the border escapes briefly in his discussion of southeast Polish ghetto in Dąbrowa Tarnowska. He writes, "in the first months of the war, several hundred local Jews fled eastward, under the Soviet occupation. Some of them stayed in the Soviet Union, while others – terrified of the economic and political conditions in the East – trickled slowly back to Dąbrowa during the fall and winter of 1939" (*Hunt for the Jews*, 25). This corroborates the first-hand accounts from the Zaromb memorial book as well as Canin's from the Ostrova memorial book.

Yet, Liberman's account clearly indicates refugees ran east from the Nazi to the Soviet side. Irrespective of direction, Mazovian Jews found themselves caught between a rock and a hard place. But there was more to their dilemma than they knew. They served as pawns in pan-national games.

Germany relied on the Soviet production of raw materials and the return of ethnic Germans living in the USSR. The Soviets wanted to repatriate Belorussians and Ukrainians living in German territories. On 16th November, an agreement between the two countries went into effect wherein their respective ethnic populations could officially migrate "home" (General Sikorski Historical Institute, *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations*: I, 53). However, for the Germans this agreement also provided the means through which they could legally transfer Polish Jews across the Soviet border (Pinchuk, *Shtetl Jews*: 106).

Tensions flared on both sides. In early December, Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel issued a formal complaint about "repeated wrangles" on the border between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany that required German Army intervention. In a 5th December memorandum, Reich State Secretary Ernst von Weizsäcker writes, "the expulsion of Jews into Russian territory, in particular, did not proceed as smoothly as had apparently been expected" (U.S. Department of State, *Documents on German Foreign Policy*: 489). Later that month, the Soviets continued to complain about Germany's deportation of Jews to Soviet land (560-561). Urged to take the Soviet complaints seriously and to hasten the return of ethnic Germans, the Reich practice of forcing Jews into Soviet territory ceased in early 1940.

**Refugees on the march**

By the end of November 1939, the Soviet border closed in Mazovia while it remained open elsewhere into 1940. Pinchuk claims, "the attitude of the Soviet guards differed from place to place. Occasionally hundreds and even thousands were allowed to cross the border" (106). Liberman continues his description of no man's land of December 1939. Małkinia Gestapo or local vandals entered the *Judenpass* to harass and attack the thousands of unprotected and hungry refugees stuck there. Young Zarombers staged stormings of the border on several occasions. They organised the Jews there into rows. With women and children leading the way, they waved a red flag with Stalin's portrait and sang the socialist anthem, the "International." They marched to the border and met up against the Soviet guard. Liberman notes, "the guards were disoriented and frightened. They alarmed their headquarters with an exaggerated report of 'ten thousand marching on us'" (Dorfman and others, *Zaromb Journal*: 26). The Soviets shot in the air. They pushed back against the mob and threatened to shoot to kill. But the refugees pushed forward and managed to get as far as the pine trees of Leshner Forest. Some people had been hit by stray bullets, but the majority of the horde found themselves now safe on the Soviet side.

Additional attempts to storm the border guards proved to be futile, however, as the Soviet units now received reinforcement. Still, the Nazis routinely inspected the *Judenpass* and tried to force Jews back to the side they controlled. This maneuver contradicted other practices to force movement of Jews into Soviet territory and raises questions of motivation and intent. To the Russians, this was a pact violation and they insisted the Nazis leave no-man's land. Liberman writes, "Zaromb was like a boiling cauldron" (26). He notes a telegram from Stalin dictating, "let them [refugees] through" (26). Tensions between the two powers broiled with refugees as pawns.

Border protection intensified to present an ever-increasing physical obstacle. Even non-Jews required a special permit to cross into Soviet land after the USSR absorbed the eastern sector of Poland. Pinchuk cites stringent cases occurring in the Baltics and Belorussia in contrast to a more open border policy in Ukraine. People who could claim Soviet citizenship prior to 1939 gained permission to pass through (*Shtetl Jews*: 124).

**Sovietisation**

Eastern Poland officially became the Soviet Union by 2nd November 1939. Pinchuk posits that the sizable number of refugees from the former Nazi-occupied section of Poland made their presence felt in urban centres "augmenting the numbers of the maladjusted and frustrated among the local Jewish community" (102). Refugees contributed to this aura of despair, feeling restless, uncertain, and always under some

government's watchful eye. Pinchuk estimates about ten percent of Polish Jewry moved to the Soviet Union (103).[7]

By entering the Soviet Union, Polish Jews encountered a different culture. This former eastern Poland for example, rightfully earned the reputation as being economically backward. Historian Jan Gross calls it "the backward half of a backward European county" (*Sovietisation of Western Ukraine*: 64). Nothing could be truer about Zaromb, a wagon-wheel of a shtetl with a market square and four spoked streets, one unnamed and all graveled.[8] To say the "back roads" of Zaromb was to be redundant. Even before World War II, it encountered economic depression, especially when the Poles enacted a boycott of Jewish goods in 1937-1938. Zaromb Jews reached out to the American *landsmanshaft* (émigré/survivor town-based organisation) for relief. In its assessment of the situation, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee reported the town had two-hundred-fifty Jewish families and no good roads to connect it to neighbouring towns.[9] Yet, despite their many troubles, it is clear the Jews of Zaromb felt an obligation to help and save Jewish refugees filling the town and the forests. Many were family and friends. Liberman claims, "Acquaintances got priority over others who were just as desperate" (Dorfman and others, *Zaromb Journal*: 24).

The Soviets stationed near Zaromb made some improvements in stark contrast to when a retreating Russian Army burned down the shtetl in 1914. They enlarged the mills and the roads, providing some employment. They set up tradesmen cooperatives. They built cultural centers, including a club that replaced the burned synagogue, a cinema, a dance hall, a reading room, a theater group, a sports club, and a people's court (28). The poor town came to life in the early months of Soviet occupation.

However, Pinchuk's analysis of more than twenty Yizkor books as well as secondary sources yields a different narrative. While eastern Poland underwent twenty-one months of Soviet rule before Nazi invasion in June/July 1941, Pinchuk maintains, "centuries-old structures of community life, leadership and relations between the individual and the surrounding world were destroyed. By the time Soviet rule came to an end the Jew had been deprived of leadership, communal organisation and age-old methods of dealing with situations of crisis. He faced a threat to his very existence – and stood alone" (*Sovietisation and the Jewish Response*: 124). The Jewish self-government that had been in place for centuries was put to a stop as the Soviets installed their provincial government structure.

The Sovietisation process had clearly begun. From the Soviet perspective, there were still gains to be made through mandatory naturalisation. As Ostrova survivor Miriam Cohen explains, refugees had to register, become Soviet citizens, and receive Soviet internal passports. The Soviets required registration to manage military draft and

deportations. They granted automatic citizenship to all those living in the annexed territories on 29th November 1939 (Poland, Ambassaada, United States, *Polish-Soviet Relations*: 126). To the Soviets, refugee allegiance to their new country proved paramount and attempted to buoy sentiment with newspaper spreads welcoming them to the "Soviet family of nations" (Pinchuk, *Shtetl Jews*: 6). Some refugees received orders to travel further east. Those who chose to remain Polish citizens received punitive orders. For weeks they traveled by cattle car to remote labour camps in places such as the northern Soviet city on the White Sea, Archangel. In this way, Cohen and her married sisters separated (Gordin & Gelbart, *Memorial Book*: 510).

Polish Jewish refugees who refused citizenship, as did of Cohen's sisters, faced the Soviet deportation. Polish historian Andrzej Żbikowski attributes this refusal more to disillusionment with the Soviet system than to allegiance to Poland (Żbikowski, *Polish Jews under Soviet Occupation*: 56). Those particularly exposed to this risk, Pinchuk argues, "showed a particular interest in the developments in the German area, had family connections across the border, had made repeated attempts to sneak through the frontier to visit relatives, and had often expressed the desire to emigrate overseas" (*Shtetl Jews*: 114). Four waves of deportations began in early February 1940 as a means of Soviet social control. A second wave initiated in mid-April 1940. A third wave in June 1940 consisted primarily of Jewish refugees from Nazi-occupied Poland (Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*: III, 382). The first Jews to be deported were those in positions of authority within their respective Jewish communities. Pinchuk observes, "trains with thousands of Jews moved East as deportees, on the very day the German troops crossed the borders" (*Shtetl Jews*: 129).

**The ultimate fate of those who crossed**

Ostrova survivor Awiezer Imber claims most Jews from the town went to the "refugee melting pot" of Białystok. But their relief did not last long. The Soviets ordered all refugees to leave since Białystok was only one hundred kilometres from the border. Imber believes, however, "the real reason was that the Russian administration would be arriving with their families from Russia and needed places to live" (Gordin & Gelbart, *Memorial Book*: 542), in a Slavic interpretation of Nazi *Lebensraum*. From there, Ostrovers moved to Slonim which swelled to a population of forty thousand Jews. They managed to find work or subsist on traded goods.

Operation Barbarossa changed everything. Jews on the Soviet side had to make their choices when the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union on 22nd June 1941: Join the Red Army, flee to the east, or settle with the Germans. Pinchuk asserts, "traditionally in these

regions Russia had the image of a backward, anti-semitic country, while Germany represented European culture, law and order. This image strengthened the natural tendency to stay at home, not to embark upon the unknown trail of flight and the life of a refugee" (*Shtetl Jews*: 132). Most of those who chose to flee were young people who had little to risk.

On-the-spot murders of Ostrova Jews occurred. Ghettoes were established, and some Jews entered forced labour. Others escaped into the forests and took up arms as partisans. Imber numbered among them. Most, however, perished at Treblinka, built twenty kilometres from Ostrova, as well as Auschwitz, and Majdanek. Survivors tended to be those who had moved well into the Soviet interior or served as forced labour in Siberia.

While German troops advanced and the Soviet army retreated during the initial days of the campaign, borders remained highly protected, and restricted the flight of refugees eastward. Pinchuk terms this "a rather bizarre episode" (124). For example, threats of on-the-spot shooting loomed large on signs at the border station of Rodoshkevich en route to Minsk. Meanwhile, the guards themselves, not having received any new orders, saw no other choice but to refuse entry to thousands of refugees. Many refugees chose to wait out the situation in the open fields in the border villages. The delay proved to be costly for many. As Pinchuk observes, "the time wasted near the border while trying to evade the Soviet patrols was used by the German army to move further east, trapping many of the refugees or killing them by air attack" (125).

One of most burning questions is why the Nazis killed the entire Jewish populations of some towns yet forced the Jews of other towns into the Soviet-occupied zone. During an inspection tour of the occupied Polish territories, Security Police Chief Reinhard Heydrich ordered the head of Einsatzgruppe I in Kraków on 11th September 1939 to use rigorous measures to induce Jews in particular to flee to the Russian occupied territories (Curilla, *Der Judenmord*: 28). Holocaust survivor and historian Saul Friedländer asserts that on 27th September, Heydrich informed Reich Security Main Office and Einsatzgruppen heads that the Führer had authorised the expulsion of Jews from German-occupied Poland to the Soviet side (*Nazi Germany and the Jews*: 31). To get these Jews to move might require force. Holocaust historian Raul Hilberg posits that short bursts of violence against Jews, initiated in Germany and Austria, proved useful in occupied Poland to demonstrate to local authorities and Jews the need for law and order (*The Destruction of the European Jews*: I, 189). Further, Hitler indicated to advisor Alfred Rosenberg on 29th September that all Jews including those from the Reich would be "settled" in newly-gained territory between the Vistula and Bug rivers (Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution*: 27). The goal was clear: Clear the countryside of Jews, transfer

them to the cities for ghettoisation as a collection point and then to concentration camps, thereby resolving the Jewish Question and providing the much-needed *Lebensraum* for Germany (26).

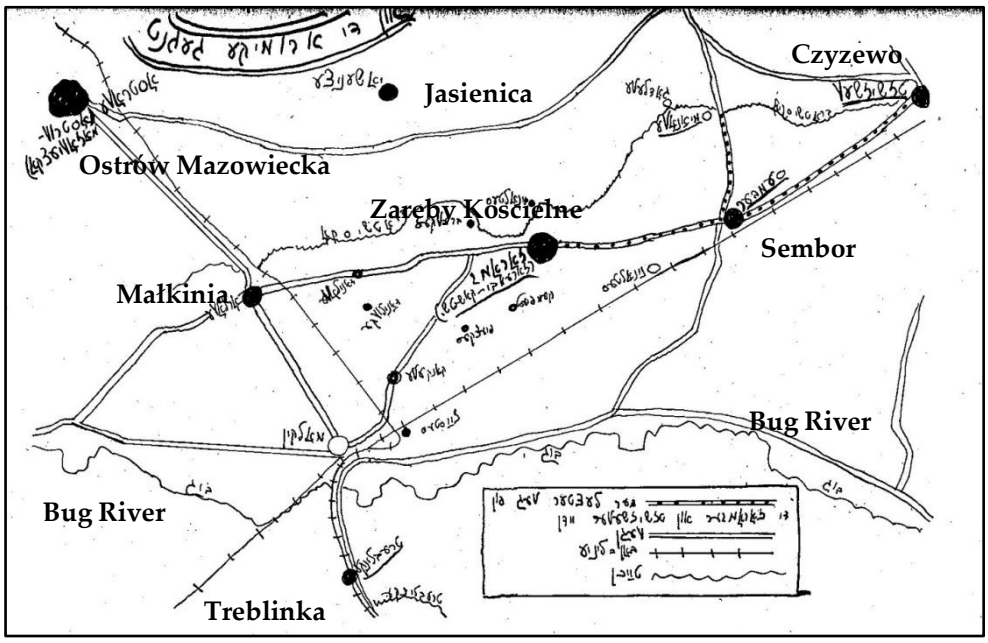
This strategy was not at all clear to Mazovian Jews. Yizkor books of communities throughout the region, an often overlooked and inaccessible set of sources, can provide eyewitness accounts while archival records may also prove useful if they exist. However, distinguished Jewish historian Jacob Shatzky condemns the Zaromb memorial book in particular. While he applauds the historical narrative in the "Destruction of Zaromb" chapter, he finds the remaining pages "no more than a collection of small, incidental, and simple articles," claiming that for the most part, Yizkor book editors had no qualifications to serve as editors. Yet, this source, like other Yizkor books, does "have a positive effect on our historical perspective and on the realistic approach to the past" (*Review of Yizker Books*: Chapter 4). It becomes quite clear that most researchers do not consult memorial books as a source. Writing scholar Rosemary Horowitz historicises these grass-roots books. Typically, the *landsmanshaft* for a community, e.g., United Zaromber Relief, collected articles, essays, and other contributions from its membership. Horowitz asserts that these books maintain the communal record-keeping practice as a final volume. She also believes few scholars have attempted to analyze or write about these town histories, because there are so many towns. She posits, "the basic responsibility for writing the history of the destroyed town seems to have shifted from scholars to descendants from the place" (*Memorial Books of Eastern European Jewry*: Chapter 1). Volunteer Jewish genealogists have been working to fund and produce Yizkor book English translations, making these rich sources more accessible for researchers. To respond to the questions of the role played by the Mazovian no-man's land wedged between the Nazi and Soviet territories, Yizkor book accounts provide the micro-level details and secondary sources provide the macro-level context to frame the accounts. As Pinchuk shows, these books paint a portrait of Jewish movement, hesitation, denial, and justification during tough times. They give the feet-on-the-street perspective of war.

The decision to cross or not cross the border in the first three months of Nazi and Soviet occupation of Poland had longer-term consequences for the Jews of Ostrova. Caught between the vacillating trust and distrust between Germany and the USSR as well as in the forests of no man's land, no single solution proved to be the safest one. A family's or individual's decision to stay or leave was based on available information at that time and in that place without any possible frame of reference to foresee the future. They carefully chose the path that represented to them a lesser evil. In the Polish shtetl, a typical Jewish family had long roots and many branches. So many could not bear to

leave their ancestral homes. Complicating the decision were long-held stereotypes of a civilised Germany and a barbarian Russia. In the generations affected by the occupation, memories of World War I and the occupation during those years blurred the realities of the new war. In both Ostrova and Zaromb, the retreating Russian Army torched buildings while residents hid in their attics and cellars. As the Russians left, the townspeople crawled out from their hiding places and welcomed the Germans. Such memories proved difficult to repudiate.

Icchok Pryzant did not cross the border. He, his wife, and children appear in the Ostrova Yizkor book's necrology. His brother, Yankel Dovid, took a Soviet train east and temporarily resettled in Uzbekistan-Bukhara. After the war, he and his family returned to Poland. Deciding there was nothing left for them there, they created new lives for themselves in Palestine. It is unknown whether Yankel Dovid ever informed his younger brothers in America of his survival. However, the granddaughters of Yankel Dovid and younger brother Avram Mendel (Max) crossed the no man's land of time. They discovered each other in 1997 with the help of the now-defunct Bureau of Missing Relatives in Israel.[10]

**Illustrations**




A hand-drawn map in the Zaromb Yizkor book also appears in the Ostrova book, conveying that such maps were rare. As the map indicates, the Bug River did not bifurcate the Nazi and Soviet territories in this part of Mazovia.

Source: Z. N. Dorfman, N. Lava, Z. Rumianek, and Moshe Shtarkman, eds., *Zaromb – L'zikron olam: Di Zaromber Yidn Vas Zaynen Umgekumen – el Kedosh Hashem* (Brooklyn, NY: United Zaromber Relief, 1947), 15. English-language labels added.

A Jewish family crosses the border near Ostrów Mazowiecka, 1939 (courtesy Stanley Diamond and Hubert Family)

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1 Ostrów Mazowiecka and Zaręby Kościelne are actually located on the same side of the Bug River. See map.

2 For these and other destinations, see Gordin and Gelbart, Eyewitnesses chapter, 497-632.

3 Widelec had resettled in New York by 1946. He wrote a four-week diary detailing the events of the fall of 1939.

4 The USHMM has five photographs of these executions of Ostrova's last Jews.

5 Pinchuk's source is the Ostrołęka Yizkor book, *Sefer kehilat Ostroleka*, published in Tel Aviv in 1963. See also Yad Vashem's *Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities:* 151-152 and "Brok," translated by Ada Holtzman, https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/pinkas_poland/pol4_00151.html (accessed on 17th December 2018).

6 In the original Yiddish version, the term "no-man's land" literally translates to "the neutral land." See also Dorfman et al., *L'zikron olam*: 26.

7 Pinchuk has accepted Bernard Weintryb's figure of three-hundred thousand Jews (Pinchuk, *Shtetl Jews*: 107).

8 This description comes from the author's visit to the town in 2008.

9 The report also noted Zaromb had between fifteen and twenty furriers, four windmill owners, two hosiery workshops, and many oil mills where seeds from local farmers were pressed. A

fire broke out in May 1938 in which 69 people lost everything. JDC Chairman Edward Warburg wrote in June 1938, "never has the population been so poor, and the boycott stronger." See JDC Archives, Collection 1933-1944, file #873.

[10] Avram Mendel Pryzant was the author's grandfather; Icchok and Yankel Dovid Pryzant were her great-uncles. She treasures her grandfather's copy of the Zaromb Yizkor book.

# Babysan's Burden: An Analysis of the American Occupation of Japan through Cartoons

By Elisheva A. Perelman

**Abstract:** Babysan appeared in 1951, arguably intended as an everywoman in Occupied Japan, yet a uniquely American abstraction. Babysan offered a humorous take on the Occupation by one of its own servicemen. But she became a way to approach an indigenous and occupied population and a representation of what occupation does to a former enemy. With enough cartoons to fill multiple volumes, Bill Hume, entertained his compatriots in peacetime. His was a Japan devoid of starvation and devastation. Rather, it was a thriving society of attractive women, enthusiastic to interact with the occupying American servicemen. Indeed, by creating an innocuous and eager feminized image, American soldiers could find postwar Japan nonthreatening and even welcoming in the face of defeat in total war. Yet Babysan was not just a racist and misogynist portrait. What Babysan now tells us about relations between two unequal powers in the aftermath of destruction is far more than that for which her broken English could then account.

Keywords: *Babysan, Japan, America, Military, Cartoon, WWII, Occupation, Hume*

The Occupation of Japan following the defeat of the nation in 1945 marked an unprecedented age for both the defeated and the victor, America. Having never experienced subjugation, Japan had to re-envision itself vis-a-vis its former rival, and the latter had to re-envision itself as protector of its former antagonist. This self-made onus for the United States obviously altered political and martial relations, but so too did it transform the social interactions between the two states. Considerable scholarship has analyzed both the official attempts to normalize gendered relationships between America and Japan during the occupation of the latter as well as egregious failures to do so. Of the former work, one need only examine, for instance, the role of American-promoted pageantry with the "Miss Atom Bomb" contests on both sides of the Pacific (Nakamura, *Miss Atom Bomb*: 117) or the influence of the Occupation's Civil Censorship Detachment on Japanese women's magazines postwar (McAndrew, *Beauty, Soft Power*: 95). To see the failures, the astute student could easily happen upon accounts of frequent rape and sexual assault that the power imbalance of the Occupation engendered (Eiji, *Inside GHQ*: 67; Svoboda, *U.S. Courts-Martial*: 3). But neither the attempts at normalization nor the failures of such attempts reveal the story for most soldiers, and, perhaps, for a number of women. To many involved in gendered relationships during the Occupation, the tale was more nuanced and complicated. By viewing this transformation through the lens of something as innocuous as a presumably humorous cartoon, historians can

analyze the Occupation of Japan in a very atomized, yet truly universal mode. *Babysan*, a cartoon that portrayed "a private look at the Japanese Occupation" was popular enough to transcend its newspaper origins in *Navy Times* and *Stars and Stripes*, the military periodicals widely read by Occupation forces. Ultimately, the portrayals filled more than two books, outsold both Mickey Spillane and Ernest Hemingway, and were insightful enough to be both comprehensible to and comprehensive for service personnel (Clark, *"Art talent"*).

Born in the full blossom of maturity in 1951, Babysan was the creation of William (Bill) Hume, naval reservist in the Damage Control unit of Fleet Aircraft Service Squadron 120 at Oppama during the tail end of the Occupation of Japan. This notwithstanding, Hume was loathed to take ownership of the young, nubile woman, claiming that he "didn't invent Babysan" (Harvey, *Insider Histories of Cartooning*: 162; Hume and Annarino, *Babysan*: 6; and Clark, *"Art talent"*). Whatever her origin story, Babysan was meant to embody the youthful Japanese everywoman – after all, Hume declared, he merely "reported life as it was."

Hume was joined in his work by his colleague, John Annarino, another naval serviceman, who provided the later commentary for some of Hume's volumes on the eponymous Babysan. Translated literally as "Miss Baby," Babysan offers up an attempt at both politeness that Annarino deemed a "necessity and not a luxury" in Japan, and a shot at "speed(ing) up introductions." You get to know her quickly in part because she seems easily knowable in multiple senses. She is neither terribly discerning nor discriminatory, nor is she supposedly complex. Gone is the presumably "mysterious Orient" of times past. Instead, the Japan of Babysan is wholly novel – a "revamped, Americanized Japan" (Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*: 20; Hume and Annarino, *Babysan*: 16).

This was not necessarily the case prior to the Occupation, which began with Japan's defeat, in 1945. But Babysan was, at best, inchoate then. As Annarino and Hume inform the reader,

> in 1945, in the early days of the occupation of Japan, it was a common sight to see American servicemen giving candy to some baby boy or girl. Most of the Japanese kids were shy and this friendly gesture helped win the youngsters over to the side of the Americans. As the years passed, those kids, naturally, grew up. The little boy grew up to be a boy-san and the little girl grew up to be – like Babysan. (Hume and Annarino, *Babysan*: 6)

This meant that Babysan is not only quite young, she is also wholly partial to the Americans – at least according to the Americans, and, as Hume was correct in maintaining, to them, Babysan seemed ubiquitous. Admittedly, so, too, did boy-

san, but the difference is that Babysan became the sole identifier for females – they were not the citizens the Occupation had created, rather, they were "like Babysan." As sociologist Debbie Storrs' mother, a Japanese woman who came of age in Osaka during the Occupation, reported, American servicemen "used to call me Babysan, Babysan. […] I was about fourteen" (Storrs, *Like a Bamboo*: 203). Indeed, Annarino noted, "the serviceman doesn't really care whether she is Emiko or Keiko, Jean or Linda. For him and his *yen* she is the one and only – Babysan" (Hume and Annarino, *Babysan*: 18).

To be like Babysan was to be defined in relation to America. In only one cartoon in *Babysan* is the eponymous woman ever alone. In this image, Babysan, wearing a diaphanous slip, back toward the viewer, gazes over her shoulder toward the viewer, presumably a GI, and pouts, "If you all time look I not undress" (79). Similarly, in the only image of Babysan alone in Hume's second work, *Babysan's World: The Hume'n Slant on Japan*, Babysan, undressing for the Japanese bath, scolds an unseen GI (identified also by the fact that his shoes are visible outside of the dwelling) for complaining about the water temperature (Hume and Annarino, *Babysan's World*: 43). Thus, more often than not, she shares her space, both metaphorical if not literal, with an American GI. Babysan existed solely because of a GI, and continued to do so. As Babysan, while rifling through 17 photographs of different American GIs, informs an older Japanese woman, presumably her mother, who, unlike her daughter, is clad in a kimono, "I think Occupation was dai-jobu" (Hume and Annarino, *Babysan*: 13). Babysan is telling her mother that she thought the Occupation was okay, enjoyable, even. This, in and of itself, is not necessarily noteworthy, although it is odd that she would say so primarily in (broken) English. Indeed, initially at least, not a few individuals found the Occupation a surprising relief following years of sacrifice, hardship, and destruction (Dower, *Embracing Defeat*: 88). But to note this in English, to a fellow Japanese citizen, even after years of exposure to Americans, would have been a truly foreign conceit.

In a way, Babysan also existed thusly. She was a liminal individual. As a Japanese woman, she was part of a defeated nation, yet, to the GIs who now occupied their former enemy state, she transcended race and nation – "She looks Japanese (in her physical features). She looks American (in her dress and composure). Nice, you think. Incongruous, you think. Sexy, you think" (Hume and Annarino, *Babysan*: 10). After all, one GI tells another, as a third dances with Babysan, "she looks just like my girl back home!" (11) Her utility to the Americans was her liminality – and her location. Unlike the American girl back home, "Babysan is here!" (10)

Her liminality was also predicated on her appropriation of American culture. Babysan is keenly attuned to her foreign counterpart, the "girl back home." Babysan, Annarino notes, "is terribly impressed by American movies, American customs, the American way of life" (24). In another cartoon, Babysan, opening boxes of presents from a loved-up GI, smiles at her paramour du jour, imploring, "You speak. Japanese girls different from girls in states?" (29) Of course, for all her adoptions and adaptations, she still exists as a lesser option – albeit the present one. Hume and Annarino joke at Babysan's smaller attributes than those of the Americans ("in the Jane Russell department Babysan is slightly understocked"), but applaud Babysan for her ingenuity and effort, noting that "a girl just doesn't step out of wooden, toe-revealing *geta* into soaring high-heeled shoes without wobbling a little, and she doesn't shed a *kimono* for a skirt and a sweater without looking a little 'artificial.'" They commend her on her artifice, as, after all, "she's trying her darndest (*sic*) to become westernized, more to American liking. […] It merely shows that she is giving her all to please" (26 and 24).

Although Annarino and Hume are quick to inform us that she is "not a gold-digger," as she is "in her strange and unusual way […] sincere," she is accustomed to payment for her company, either in the form of presents, money, luxuries, or necessities, not merely for herself, but for her family, as well (32, 34, 92, 56 and 95). At first blush, perhaps, she seems a prostitute, as she also enjoys the friendship of multiple GIs, both concurrently and consecutively (53 and 123). Yet she expects each of her male friends to be faithful to her, to maintain her as "the *Ichi* ban – number one – girl in her boyfriend's life," or they merit the damning charge of "butterflying," flitting from woman to woman (65 and 48-49).

If Babysan has expectations of her boyfriends, it is because she can. It would be easy to dismiss Babysan as merely a naïve social climber, but it would shortchange Babysan's devotion, limited though it may be. Some scholars have deemed Babysan as purely deceitful, but that would equally shortchange not only Babysan, but Hume (Brandt, *Learning from Babysan*; Storrs, *Japanese Feminine Wiles*: 26). Babysan, in spite, perhaps, of her origins, has more depth than that. She possesses a modicum of power, and only occasionally does it manifest in deceit. Out of the 58 cartoons comprising *Babysan*, in only three does Babysan hide her other paramours from the boyfriend (Hume and Annarino, *Babysan*: 53, 97 and 99). In fact, in other cartoons, Babysan unabashedly flaunts her popularity before her boyfriend (24 and 41). In the sequel, she is even more open about her prior and current exploits (Hume and Annarino, *Babysan's World*: 35, 37 and 61). Babysan is able to maintain both her stable of men, and her insistence on her "ichiban" status, precisely because she is not considered a prostitute. She is

valued because she seems innocent (like the girl back home), in spite of her demand for payment. As one GI tells a second, as they take in a Japanese burlesque dancer, "I'll bet she can't cook worth a damn" (123). Babysan, presumably, can; she exists as a temporary wife to these GIs (Hume and Annarino, *Babysan*: 102). And, as such, she is not embittered, despite the death of her father in the war, save for when the presents disappoint. As she tells Hume in an introductory dialogue in his second work about her, "I remember the war. I was small babysan. I live Tokyo. I remember the big planes come […] war no good, Hume-*san*" (96; Hume and Annarino, *Babysan's World*: 7).

Nevertheless, she is, more often than not, a replacement, albeit transitory, wife for her boyfriend. As *When We Get Back Home*, a book concurrent to *Babysan*'s first volume, notes, the GIs are enamored by blondes, "the one thing it (Japan) does not have." Thus, "when he gets back home and does see a girl with flowing white tresses, he is inclined to stare because she has become a very strange – and a very welcome – sight" (Hume, *When We Get Back Home*: 76). Still, should Babysan get jealous, she need only remember that American women are often supposedly less amenable and subservient to the GIs than are the babysans, their Japanese counterparts. In one cartoon from Babysan's second tome, a Japanese American woman berates the GI who tries, in Japanese, to accost her, "Listen bud – I'm just visiting here, too. I was born and educated in Frisco!" (Hume and Annarino, *Babysan's World*: 49)

Whether or not she remains as a lesser option, Babysan makes life in Japan palatable. "To those who served with the American forces in Occupied Japan," Hume and Annarino mention, "this book will bring many a chuckle in recalling the happiness some little Babysan brought into their lives." Yet, they continue, "to others the book will prove a fascinating account of the mutual problems of the Japanese and American peoples in their first chance to become truly acquainted since the days of Admiral Perry" (Hume and Annarino, *Babysan*: 7).[1]

It is to these problems that I would like to turn. Certainly, Hume and Annarino milk the communication issues, both verbal and psychological, between Babysan and her boyfriend, but there are far more problems inherent in the works that are not truly intentional, but are rather enlightening nonetheless. Babysan's Japan is a world practically devoid of Japanese men. There are none in *Babysan*, and only a scant offering in the background of *Babysan's World*. In fact, the only Japanese man who has his own page to himself, in the latter, is a salaryman saying, "Gomen nasai – not know how I get into this book!" (Hume and Annarino, *Babysan's World*: 56)[2] For a series of works that purports to offer a glimpse into a world in which "the little boy grew up to be a boy-san" (Hume and Annarino, *Babysan*: 6), there are no boy-sans present.

Without men, the American GIs are met solely by individuals against whom they did not, technically, fight. Certainly and ostensibly, many Japanese subjects endeavored to serve the nation during war, but those whose service was martial are lacking in the Occupation of Babysan's world. Thus, American soldier and Japanese woman can agree that "war no good," as Babysan declares, without actually facing up to the realities of it, including its aftermath.

Therefore, Babysan is resilient, and so is the Japan she represents. In *Babysan's World*, the author notes that "no doubt there was some resentment on the part of the older Japanese as an American Occupation serviceman escorted his Japanese girl friend (*sic*) down the street," but quickly reassure the reader that "the guy who concentrates on <u>one</u> girl commands respect and admiration (from the Japanese public)!" (Hume and Annarino, *Babysan's World*: 14) For Hume, the only residual effect of the war among Japanese in Occupied Japan is the sense that American GIs are promiscuous. Even racial tension is easily overcome for the GI who pursues Babysan exclusively, who, in other words, does not butterfly.

It appears, on first blush, that there are no holdovers from wartime or even prewar Japan in Babysan's world. Yet, as Hume and Annarino gained more familiarity with the nation, they broached the more "traditional" aspects of Japan. These are, at times surprisingly so, approached with more depth than the prejudiced vision of Japan in the works would have the reader believe. Indeed, the author cautions the reader, "a geisha is **not** a prostitute. She is – highly respected. Well educated. Proficient in the fine arts like music, dancing, art, social graces, dress, and the sometimes intricate customs and ceremonies of her country. Moral beyond reproach!" (22) In *When We Get Back Home*, Hume and Annarino continue that the *geisha* "is the mistress of song and dance. She is the queen of oriental fashion and etiquette. She does her job, the job of entertaining, with charm and grace. And rightly so, because she has been trained in the ways of an entertainer from the time she was about fifteen years old" (Hume and Annarino, *When We Get Back Home*: 80). But the geisha is unreachable for the GI. Babysan chastises her boyfriend in front of an image of an *oiran*, a traditional and high-ranking prostitute, "you think Japanese girls look like this?" (Hume and Annarino, *Babysan*: 9) And it's true, while mistaking *oiran* for *geisha*, Hume was not incorrect about the nature of both.

It seems that, at times in spite of himself, the boyfriend was rapidly learning about the nation, even if the lens was skewed. Babysan was teaching the boyfriend about many cultural aspects of her country, as she became sole ambassador. Indeed, one would be excused for assuming that the GIs' interactions were exclusively with women, and more specifically with Babysan. Yet this was not without its issues. In *Anchors are Heavy*, yet another Hume

offering, this one from 1955, an American soldier is being awarded a medal in front of a line of men at attention. The medal, another comments to his compatriot, was because "he spent three days in Tokyo without speaking to a woman" (Hume and Annarino, *Anchors are Heavy*: 93). To fail to speak to a woman was commendable to the Americans, yet to fail to interact with Babysan was thought to be problematic to the Japanese.

And, for the most part, it was to the Japanese that Hume and Annarino would bow. After all, Babysan had a proliferation of boyfriends, to each of whom she would convey a modicum of respect for her nation. Thus, Hume includes a glossary in the back of the first volume for "those who never had Babysan for a teacher" (Hume and Annarino, *Babysan*: 124). Moreover, they conclude Babysan's second volume with the note that the American GIs discover "what Japan has meant," and quickly come to realize that "the folks back in the States must be made to understand that the Far East is an integral part of our future, that their culture must make a valuable contribution to ours, and will!" (Hume and Annarino, *Babysan's World*: 126). As the author continues in *When We Get Back Home*,

> outsiders tend to look upon Japan as a strange and unusual country, but the serviceman who has lived in and loved the life of Nippon doesn't see it that way at all. His viewpoint is native. He is magically impressed with the colorful, charming country, and when he gets back to the home he left in America it is apparent that the impression has been a lasting one. (Hume, *When We Get Back Home*: 2)

But it is an appropriated Japan. Just as Babysan adopts American customs and culture to adapt them to her own purposes, so too do Hume and Annarino similarly appropriate Japanese customs and culture to create their own version of the nation – one that is "colorful, charming" enough to be removed from the harsh realities of defeat and destruction. It is also one in which Babysan exists in myriad permutations.

As historian Naoko Shibusawa pointed out, this portrayal was a fiction – "real Japanese women, of course, did not have gravity-defying breasts," but service personnel soon grew to accept the Japanese women that existed (Shibusawa, *America's Geisha Ally*: 39). Like Hume and Annarino they came to envision the nation as one of little girls who had become like Babysan, but unlike Hume and Annarino, they often proved more callous toward their own versions of babysan in reality. As Lucy Herndon Crockett, an American novelist, recorded during her time in Occupied Japan, two American servicemen "on their way back to the United States" bade farewell to their presumed Babysans, one of whom tearfully

pleaded, "When you come back?" Her beau laughed, "Come back? Why, when you – Japs bomb Pearl Harbor again, baby, I'll be back!" (Crockett, 145-146). These were hardly the sensitive, culturally malleable boyfriends of Babysan that Hume and Annarino imparted. Rather, these men were repeating the same racist, misogynistic tropes of *Madame Butterfly*, the girls to be left behind when the opportunity arose (Shibusawa, *America's Geisha Ally*: 38).

Were Hume and Annarino not misogynistic or racist? Babysan is a product of such skewed views, regardless of whether the historical context made such portrayals more acceptable in their time. But neither are they merely misogynistic or racist. They are, of course, naïve, certainly more so than Babysan herself. For Hume, while some cross-Pacific relationships petered out, "there are many serious Japanese-American romances," such that, "when it comes time for him (boyfriend) to pack his bags and head for the States, he finds it hard to leave the charming things he has found in Japan. It is so hard, in fact, that there are some things he just refuses to leave behind" (Hume and Annarino, *Babysan's World*: 62; and Hume and Annarino, *When We Get Back Home*; 6). As one boyfriend, returning Stateside, declares his Babysan at customs, he perplexes the agents, who ask each other, "how much duty does he pay on something he's declared priceless?" (7) If he brings something home, so too does Hume believe that he leaves something of himself in Japan – "a part of him, he knows, will always be in the little country." Hume and Annarino recognize the ambassadorial role boyfriend and Babysan share, even if the power relations are imbalanced. As they note, "over the years Japan has become a home to the visiting serviceman. He has come to understand and to love the people and the ways of Nippon. He has lived a new life, and the new life has made him, the American, Asiatic" (116). Thus, both Babysan and boyfriend exist not solely as ambassador to each other – Hume and Annarino comment that "often the personality and behavior of the guy explains the personality and behavior of the gal […] and vice. (*sic*) versa." – but to their compatriots in their native lands (Hume and Annarino, *Babysan's World*: 14).

As Hume and Annarino note in *Babysan*, more likely than not, "he will never see her again but he will never forget her. He taught her much but she taught him more. His education ceases but hers will continue" (Hume and Annarino, *Babysan*: 120). But, there are more two more books in which Babysan returns, and, not surprisingly, the ambassadorial role in America is of more note in Hume and Annarino's *oeuvre*. After all, they note, "there is much we can learn from those of the Far East – their polite manners, their self-discipline, their peace of mind, their love of life, their adaptability, their sense of humor. Such things we have in

common but perhaps they have mastered the situation a bit better" (Hume and Annarino, *Babysan's World*: 86).

Hume asks if Babysan, a film buff, can differentiate the fiction from the reality. The Japanese, they fear, "get a warped idea of America from such an entertainment diet. Or do they see thru (*sic*) the baloney dished up by crummy movies?" (Hume and Annarino, *Babysan*: 110; Hume and Annarino, *Babysan's World*: 88). As they lament, "there's a lot the Japanese don't know about us," but they follow that by noting that "we know even less about their history, their customs. But the American often seems so conceited that he thinks everyone must know and understand everything that is American" (102).

Not surprisingly, Hume and Annarino do not always see the irony of their warped idea of Japan as they berate the Japanese for their unsophisticated view of America. But they do have the sense to berate their compatriots for their ignorant and hegemonistic views, even when they are complicit in that ignorance and hegemony. As Hume explains, "life in Japan is a fascinating experience for the serviceman. His schooling in the customs of the country knows no recess. He continually learns new rules of behavior." These extend to the bathroom, where Japanese-style toilets flummox him: "Stateside toilets offer no challenge, but a Japanese **benjo** […] is in a class of its own." The former is not challenging, not because of the nature of cultural conditioning, according to the author, but because it is so much more sensible – after all, the American toilet "is chairlike" (Hume and Annarino, *When We Get Back Home*: 62 – emphasis his). Never mind that chairs exist in a myriad of iterations across the globe. The one is an obvious choice for Hume, while the second is the lesser option. Nevertheless, Hume and Annarino maintain, after exposure to Japan, "the serviceman discovers that the folks at home sometimes act in mighty strange ways. **So desu**. (That's right)" (52 – emphasis his). Why not wear *geta*? As an American mother informs the son she shares with her serviceman husband, who marches ahead, outfitted in the footwear, "Daddy was right – he **doesn't** get his feet wet!" The authors, of course, concur: "Shoes get soggy and feet get damp (in the rain), but when resting the feet on the wooden platforms the wearer can roam through puddles with complete Asiatic abandon" (69 and 68, emphasis his).

Much of the presumed preference or appreciation for things Japanese following service abroad smacks of condescension – the serviceman is "stunned" by the athleticism and skill of the "small, harmless-looking people" of Japan (74). Without necessarily meaning to do so, Hume and Annarino fall in line with postwar propaganda, a process that often is seen beginning with the photograph of Supreme Command for the Allied Powers General Douglas MacArthur's first meeting with Japanese Emperor Hirohito on 27th September 1945 at the General

Headquarters of the Allied command of the Occupation (Dower, *Embracing Defeat*: 294). As historian Herbert Bix stated, "the emperor in the photograph was not a living god but a mortal human being beside a much older human to whom he was now subservient. He perfectly exemplified the defeated nation, while MacArthur's relaxed pose projected the confidence that comes from victory" (Bix, 550).

The photograph certainly altered Japanese people's perceptions, but so too did it change Americans'. No longer could the Japanese be thought of as bloodthirsty barbarians or monstrous warriors. Rather, they seemed little, weak, even to the point of being immature and effete (Shibusawa, *America's Geisha Ally*: 97). In the altered version of the American propaganda film, *Our Job in Japan*, in 1946, the finale featured "footage depicting friendly Americans mingling with attractive, earnest Japanese women and children." The narrator would chime in that the American GIs were "here to make it clear to the Japanese brain that we've had enough of this bloody barbaric business to last us from here on in. We're here to make it clear to the Japanese that the time has now come to make sense – modern, civilized sense. That is our job in Japan" (Dower, *Embracing Defeat*: 215 and 217).

Hume and Annarino certainly play into the propaganda – after all, Babysan is nothing if not presented as a harmless ingénue. However, they are surprisingly astute when they highlight that "there are many things that Americans didn't have to teach Babysan. They are characteristics that were always there, and merely brought to the fore by the Occupation" (Hume and Annarino, *Babysan*: 66). Babysan, they claim, is a fully democratic individual – "being democratic is a natural part of Babysan's personality and existence" (66). She "makes sense" of her own accord, and not due to the influence of the Americans with whom she associates. This, despite the U.S. Army's pamphlet *A Pocket Guide to Japan* insisting that the Americans were "trying to teach [an] authority-ridden people the meaning of democracy" (Shibusawa, *America's Geisha Ally*: 18).

Yet, at the end of the day, to her creator, anyway, Babysan seemed uncomplicated. Hume, in an interview with cartoonist and critic R. C. Harvey, noted that his famous character "was an outgrowth of the geisha, who […] were not prostitutes. […] In many cases, they were live-in lovers. Babysan became that; she was a poor man's geisha. Geisha were wonderful things in other times; they were not immoral, as such. They were entertainers and I found – maybe I was all wrong but – I didn't consider it as a moral issue." Instead, "Babysan kept a lot of guys out of trouble – kept them preoccupied and because, theoretically, you were Babysan's friend, you were accepted in various places as long as you were with her. You could go places you wouldn't otherwise be able to go. The babysans rode herd on guys, and I think they did kind of a service. […] All Japanese girls

that I heard about, they were all babysans" (Harvey, *Insider Histories of Cartooning*: 166-167).

The work, it would transpire, would be banned in Tokyo, according to Hume, despite its proliferation. Nevertheless, one female reviewer, according to Hume, would proclaim that the first volume "did more to promote good relations, or explain relations between the Japanese and the Americans, than any other book they'd ever found" (166). Hume acknowledged that these relations often involved "a lot of meanness," so intended his work to offer what he deemed as a look at the other side of Occupation (168). After all, MacArthur proclaimed, in his New Year's message to the Japanese people on 1st January 1948, due to the Occupation, "every Japanese citizen can now for the first time do what he wants, and go where he wants, and say what he wants," and according to Hume, Babysan embodied the fulfillment of that desire (Whitney, *The Philosophy of the Occupation*: xxi).

As it would turn out, there were more than two sides to the Occupation, as there were to Babysan. Both proved far more complicated than originally thought. She is innocent and she is conniving. Babysan is naïve and she is intelligent; she is American and she is Japanese. As a cartoon, she proves more than the caricature for which she was often dismissed, both in her time and to this day.

Nevertheless, though Hume does not claim to offer a comprehensive look at Babysan's world, historian Kim Brandt is correct in pointing out that what the works do not include proves telling. As Brandt asserts, the Japan portrayed in Hume's works, though bifurcated between American and Japanese, is shockingly homogeneous, insofar as there are only white American males and Japanese females. This obscures the heterogeneity of Allied service personnel stationed in Japan (men and women of various ethnicities, races, and nationalities), just as much as it does the fact that Japanese males existed (Brandt, *Learning from Babysan*).

So too does Hume ignore the "meanness" of many relationships that he acknowledged in his interview with Harvey. There was, after all, a vast power imbalance at the heart of the relationship – one half of the pair existed as emblematic of a defeated nation, the other, representative of the victor. It is hardly surprising, though quite unfortunate, that many of these so-called relationships were rooted in objectification at best and cruelty at worst. Annarino obliquely acknowledges this – when dealing with Babysan, who wants to grant your every wish, "let us suggest that your wishes be reasonable," he chastens (Hume and Annarino, *Babysan*: 20). After all, rape was not uncommon during the

Occupation, as were other forms of sexual violence (Svoboda, *U.S. Courts-Martial in Occupation Japan*: 4-5).

In her world, Babysan is the perpetrator, not of violence, per se, but of power. It is she who controls boyfriend; it is she who is permitted to juggle multiple paramours; most importantly, it is she who understands both worlds well enough to exist within the American and the Japanese spheres. She, Annarino maintains, "has grown up with servicemen around her. She's associated with ship sailors and base sailors. She's listened to their wildest ideas and their bawdiest jokes. She even agrees with some of their private theories" (Hume and Annarino, *Babysan*: 70). Additionally, she has proven intelligent enough to play dumb, when need be. "Babysan is smart," Annarino comments, "She may not always seem clever, but she has brains – and uses them. Newcomers to the land of Fuji-san will bluntly state that no girl can outwit them. Such a statement confirms the fact that they are either deluded ignoramuses or that they haven't met Babysan. She will be careful not to appear too brilliant. She may even tell him frankly that she is a little dense, keep her mouth shut, and let him convince himself." In the end, "everything is just the way she wants it" (86).

Furthermore, that she is versed enough to understand ideas, jokes, and theories indicates a level of fluency in English that boyfriend lacks in Japanese. Certainly, he has picked up phrases here and there, but he expects English to be *lingua franca*, and Babysan can comply in ways boyfriend cannot. Moreover, "people like Babysan are tolerant" of Americans' "undeserved feeling of accomplishment" when they master a few words in Japanese and after "they manage to mispronounce three or four words of the Japanese language they are sure they know everything there is to know about it" (88). Babysan and her ilk will proceed "with patience and understanding (to) try to further educate the Americans without being obvious about it" (88). As a proud American boyfriend brags to Babysan, "Of course I can speak your language – I can say BOTH takusan and sukoshi," Babysan politely giggles to herself, rather than call out her ignorant friend on his puffery (89). Besides, if boyfriend "starts comparing qualities […] he may find out that he is the loser" (84).

Her tolerance only extends towards boyfriend's good nature. She is discriminating in other areas. As Annarino insists, in addition to stinginess and butterflies, "Babysan will not tolerate a drunken boyfriend" (92). As Babysan pushes an inebriated boyfriend out the door, she scolds, "sukoshi stinko, maybe okay – takusan stinko, sayonara!" (91)[3] Despite her desire for his support, Babysan is hardly as dependent on each boyfriend as he is on her. In one cartoon, as a curious boyfriend eavesdrops, Babysan converses with her girlfriends, remarking on the arrivals of various ships: "Antietem come 15th – Joe-san on

Boxer come in 17th – takusan sailors on number 32" (99). She is capable of supporting herself, albeit by utilizing the boyfriends. If this is misogynistic, it is only so because society has created it as a way of life, and one that is not necessarily always pursued volitionally. It is not misogynistic in that it exists as a choice. As Hume notes, it exists across the Pacific with "the 'baby' of the chorus line who is showered with gift-wrapped affection from the bulb-eyed gentleman in the front row […] the 'baby' who keeps the pin-striped business-man chuckling and carefree at the annual convention" (28). Nor is this unique to Occupation Japan, as Hume maintains geisha predated Babysan, but as he notes, while "this sort of girl still inhabits Japan […] she is not usually found clinging to a serviceman's arm. In GI circles, Babysan has edged her out of the scene" (36).

Babysan also edges boyfriend out of the scene. Boyfriend always leaves, and, save for the rare occasions when she accompanies him, Babysan remains. As one boyfriend, eying his discharge orders, with a nubile Babysan in the background, perky buttocks facing the viewer, laments, "I hate to go and leave all that behind!" (121) She, however, smiles beatifically. Annarino recalls that,

> When his ship pulls out the boyfriend's thoughts are with Babysan. He wonders how she will manage without him. He wonders if she feels the same sense of loss. Sure, he remembers her soothing words as she smiled up through a trace of tears, "I all time remember," but he wonders. He wonders if she too is lonely.

Meanwhile, in the cartoon, as the ship pulls away from the dock, and Babysan stands, waving at the ship receding in the distance, her attention is drawn to another sailor, walking slowly up the dock towards her (122-123).

Babysan, a symbol of Occupation and subjugation, of racism and misogyny, finds a way to undermine such classifications. She is savvy and aware, culturally flexible and at times, even culturally powerful. Though at her heart she is an American invention, she is meant to be one that reflected reality. Even if the lens is skewed, her presence proves that there were ways to exist under domination and still maintain agency, at least in the wishful thinking of her creator.

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1 American Navy Commodore Matthew Perry is credited with "opening" Japan in 1853 after years of relative international isolationism by the archipelago (Hawks, *Narrative of the Expedition of an American Squadron*: 256).

2 *Gomen nasai* means "pardon me."

3 *Takusan* means "a lot," while *sukoshi* indicates "a little."

# Recollections of War and Displacement from the Somali Global Diaspora

By Natoschia Scruggs

**Abstract:** In June 2018, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that there were 68.5 million people displaced worldwide due to wars, violence and persecution; 25.4 million of them were refugees (Edwards 2018). In 1991, Somalia plunged into civil war, causing a mass exodus. Nearly three decades later, there are large Somali diaspora communities around the world. This article highlights the migration narratives and experiences of ten displaced Somalis who fled their homeland in the 1990s – early 2000s and graciously shared their stories with me during semi-structured ethnographic interviews I conducted in Egypt, the UK and the US between 2003-2010. The reflections shared by these migrants illuminate the tension felt by many displaced peoples when they must occupy differing socio-economic and power positions in their receiving societies as well as when they are confronted with external understandings of their identities that often clash with self-perceptions; they also emphasize the need to disaggregate migrant experiences as migrants take different paths, use different strategies depending on context, and live within diverse host societies.

**Keywords:** *Somalia*, *refugees*, *narratives*, *Africa*, *diaspora*, *migration*

## Introduction

In 1991, Somalia plunged into civil war, causing a mass exodus of much of its population. Nearly three decades later, the country remains principally unstable and there are large Somali diaspora communities around the world. Many people who self-identify as Somali have never been to their ancestral homeland. Nevertheless, Somalia lives on through the stories passed down by, as well as the replicated cultural practices and transnational ties of, those who were old enough at the time of displacement to recollect what life was like before the war. This article highlights the migration narratives and experiences of ten displaced Somali men and women who fled their homeland in the 1990s – early 2000s and graciously shared their stories with me during semi-structured ethnographic interviews I conducted in Egypt, the UK and the US between 2003-2010. Their reflections explain how they found themselves in other parts of Africa (Egypt), the Middle East (Yemen), North America (USA) and Europe (Italy and Norway)

and are interwoven with details on the conditions that led to mass migration, and the effects war, displacement and migration have had on cultural and social practices. The stories shared by Somali migrants illuminate the tension felt by many displaced peoples when they must occupy differing socio-economic and power positions in their receiving societies as well as when they are confronted with external understandings of their identities that often clash with self-perceptions.

**Methods and delimitations**

My decision to use ethnographic methods for my research was deliberate. Ethnography is a holistic method that, among other things, involves firsthand observation and in-depth interviewing (Marcus 1998). Its utility lies in "the delicacy of its distinctions" as it avoids generalizing across cases while seeking to make thick description possible (Geertz 1973). I met each person discussed in this article in one of two ways: through mutual friends who knew of my lifelong interest in the people, customs and cultures of the Horn of Africa, and through volunteering at various nongovernmental organizations (such as the Somali Development Center in Boston, the International Rescue Committee in San Francisco and Africa & Middle East Refugee Assistance in Cairo). Interest in the Horn of Africa and volunteerism fueled my dissertation project, which compared the migration policies of five countries via the exploration of refugee narratives of Somali women who had received citizenship in countries of the global north but chose to relocate to Cairo. Taking an integrative theoretical approach as a framework and employing ethnographic methods allowed me to disaggregate and analyze each woman's migration decisions as well as the sending and receiving countries, from three levels: (1) macro [global economic and structural conditions]; (2) meso [state policies]; and (3) micro [individual agency]. My approach enabled me to shed light on how these women imagined and related to citizenship and mobility while illuminating the social and public policies of their countries of citizenship, juxtaposing the women's ideas about Egypt and the global north along the way. Our discussions flowed effortlessly and the conclusions I came to inform and inspired this article. First, the individual resettlement and integration experiences of refugees are as dependent upon when they migrate from their homeland as what policies are in place when they

arrive at their receiving society. Further, decisions to migrate are based on what are often seen as obvious reasons, such as safety and economic, but also not so obvious factors, such as cultural and social needs (Scruggs 2009). Years later, other scholars, like Cawo Mohamed Abdi in her book *Elusive Jannah* (2015), followed my path and used the same exact theoretical framework and ethnographic methods to examine Somali communities in other locations, coming to the same conclusions. Much has been written about the many communities that make up the Somali Global Diaspora since the initial collapse of the state in 1991 and mass outmigration. To be sure, this article does not attempt to be, or claim to be, exhaustive. The ten Somali voices of men and women who ranged in age from 20 to 51 years included herein are meant to add to the pool of experiences extant, perhaps offering different or more nuanced perspectives of war and displacement that are worthy of being heard.

## The road to civil war: the conditions that led to mass migration

From 1960 to 1969, the Somali Republic functioned as a parliamentary democracy (Ingiriis 2016; Menkhaus 2004). Omar Eno and Mohamed Eno (2007) assert that, after independence from Italy and Great Britain, the national narrative of the Somali state was predicated on "nomadic superordinates and Bantu subordinates", resulting in "deep class stratification […] and the deliberate [exclusion] of the Bantu people" (21-22). Mohamed Haji Abdullahi Ingiriis describes this period as being one in which nationalist activities could be attributed to reactions against European and Abyssinian colonialism. He further rejects the notion of there being a singular Somali nationalism as implied by some scholars (Touval 1963), maintaining that nationalism was a plural process begun in the pre-WW2 era. Nonetheless, the society was divided. There were also divisions among clans that fueled great problems later. In October 1969, President Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke was assassinated by one of his bodyguards amid accusations of widespread governmental corruption. A bloodless coup ensued and Major General Mohammad Siyaad Barre and the army seized power (Lewis 1980). Throughout the Cold War years, the Horn of Africa was strategically significant to the US and the Soviet Union. Both countries sought regional allies to ensure a foothold in the Red Sea basin – a window to the Middle East and Asia. At different points in time, Somalia was the ally of the Soviets and

the Americans. However, until the late-1970s, it was aligned with the Soviets against Ethiopia, whose interests were protected by that country's close relationship with the US (Patman 1990). Somali-Soviet relations soured in 1977, when Somalia invaded the contested Ogaden region of Ethiopia and the Soviets sided with the Ethiopians. Feeling betrayed, Barre expelled the Soviets from Somalia and, from 1978 onward, worked on forging stronger ties with the US, Arab countries and Europe (Darnton 1977; Menkhaus 2004). The legacy of the Cold War period was the militarization of the Horn of Africa and the proliferation of weaponry supplied by the Soviets and the Americans. Much of the weaponry that entered Somalia was used in the country's post-independence civil unrest.

After an unsuccessful attempt was made on his life in April 1978, Barre responded by encouraging clan divisions and retaliation. He especially targeted the Majeerteen, the clan affiliation of those who had organized to kill him and take over the government (Kapteijns 2013). Social tensions had gone progressively from bad to worse, with many dissidents forming opposition movements and plotting to stage coups. By the mid-1980s, Somalia was chaotic and dysfunctional. The Barre administration had degenerated into a dictatorship and the society was rigidly divided along clan lines. Clashes between government forces and opposition claimed the lives of many civilians and prompted the exodus of those who could leave the country (De Waal 1993). In January 1991, Barre's government collapsed, and the president fled to Kenya then Nigeria, where he later died in exile in 1995 (Issa-Salwe 1994; Abdullahi 2001).

With no central government, the country began to splinter off into autonomous segments. The northwest declared itself the independent Republic of Somaliland in 1991 yet remains unrecognized due to "the international community's desire to maintain existing territorial boundaries" (Ismail 2017). In 1998, the northeast remained part of Somalia yet simultaneously declared its regional autonomy as the Republic of Puntland State of Somalia. The former Italian Somalia – the southern portion of the country, including Mogadishu, the capital – has been the most violent and unstable region since the collapse of the central government. Divided and ruled by different warring factions for most of the time, the region has seen varying periods of relative calm only to be followed by renewed outbreaks of violence. When reviewing Somalia's collapse and the

years that followed, Tobias Hagmann warns that too many analyses have "focused predominantly on local actors and internal dynamics to account for the continuous political disorder in the former Somali Democratic Republic since 1991" and argues that Somali and foreign elites, along with international aid and external actors should be understood as integral to the evolving conflicts that have frequently undermined state-building efforts in Somalia (2016: 5). Throughout all that has happened, members of minority clans have particularly suffered. Discrimination and prejudice against Somali Bantus and all people who belong to minority clans was pervasive in pre- and post-independent Somalia due to their lack of clan protection and armed militias (Besteman 2016). These people were targeted during the civil war for the same reason, resulting in disproportionate incidents of rape, assault and murder among them (Van Lehman and Eno 2003). Omar, a refugee member of a minority clan,[1] shared the following story about constant assaults he suffered at the hands of majority clan members due to his perceived inferior status within Somali society:

> Hawiye[2] militiamen hit my house with a missile, killing my family in 1996. After living in our house alone for five days, four militiamen returned and attacked me. They told me if I did not leave, they would kill me. When I told them I had nowhere else to go, they started beating me, telling me that they would kill me at that moment if I did not leave. I began living on the streets of Hodan District, Mogadishu and ended up staying there for two-years. No one would hire me so I would go all around Mogadishu collecting plastic bags. I would clean these bags then take them to markets and sell them to the market owners to use with their customers. All the shop owners liked me but Hawiye clan members constantly harassed me. Once a group of them held a knife to my throat and threatened to kill me. I felt unsafe on the streets and I knew the violence against me would not end because I am Benadiri and did not have any clan protection.

Hiba, also a minority clan member, shared her story of repeated attacks:

> Five armed Hawiye militiamen attacked my house in the Hamar Weyliye District in Mogadishu. They entered the house and asked where we held our valuables. My entire family was at home at that time. They began searching everywhere for goods. They were looking for gold and money. My father told them that we had nothing of value. When he said this, some of the men immediately began beating him while the others beat the rest of my family. They beat us with the butts of their guns until they found some money that my

> father had hidden in the house. They took this money and left. My father died due to the severe beating he received. I was left alone with my mother and small siblings. Several months later, I was kidnapped and gang raped by a group of Hawiye men while walking home. They kept making rude sexual remarks to me from their car and I ignored them. When I refused to get into their car, two of them jumped out and dragged me inside. They took me to a place far from my neighborhood and held me there for three days. Each raped me when he felt like it. They called me names and said that they violated me because I was from a minority clan and I refused their advances. I never told my mother the details of what happened. I could not tell anyone.

In 1992, the United States launched two humanitarian assistance initiatives known as "Operation Provide Relief" and "Operation Restore Hope" to assist Somalis suffering from food shortages and drought in addition to the overall dysfunction caused by the war. The United Nations took over these initiatives in 1993 but withdrew in 1995 "having suffered significant casualties" (CIA World Factbook 2001). Xaaji, a refugee living in Cairo, recalls the arrival and departure of UN Peacekeeping forces:

> When UNOSOM[3] arrived, we moved back to Mogadishu and into our same house that we had left in the Yaqshid District. My father began working for UNOSOM. I am not sure what he did; I just know that he worked for them. Life was good when they were in the country. My family did not experience any bad things at this time. However, after UNOSOM left, things got bad again.

### Making the difficult decision to leave

The period in which Xaaji claims her family began to experience hardships again, Hawa, a single mother whose husband had been killed by militiamen in 1994, found herself having to make a life or death decision:

> Things were so bad that I knew I had to leave. My husband of two-years had been killed in 1994 and I had to find a way to support our infant daughter. As a single parent, I felt the pressure to do whatever was necessary for my child so I left her with my mother. First, I went by car to Ethiopia and stayed there for two and a half months, then traveled to Eritrea, where I stayed for a couple days. From there I took a boat to Yemen.

Many Somalis made the courageous decision to leave their homeland believing they would be resettled to a third country only to find later that it would be far more difficult than they could have initially imagined. Samar, a woman in her twenties, had made it from Mogadishu to Egypt. After learning that she would not be resettled, she decided to pay smugglers to help her reach Italy. Samar, a friend and three strangers they met through the smugglers were taken from Cairo into Libya. The plan was for the five migrants to join a larger group in Tripoli, and then take a boat to Italy's coast. The smugglers kept delaying the trip and demanding more money. When they were finally ready to cross the Mediterranean Sea, Tripoli police intercepted them. Some migrants were able to flee while others were arrested and jailed. Samar was arrested and has no idea what happened to her friend:

> When the police arrived, I was scared to death. I did not want them to send me back to Mogadishu. They grabbed as many people as they could but there were so many of us at the shore that some were able to jump on a boat and take off quickly. I was separated from my friend and two of the strangers that we had met through the smugglers in Cairo. I had assumed they were with us. When we reached the jail, I realized that they were among the people who had escaped. I stayed in jail for 8-months, then was released and returned to Cairo. Around one year later, some Somalis told me that they had heard that my friend had reached Italy and was working as a domestic in Rome. I'm not sure if that is true or not but I think it is. She made it and I did not. I felt foolish.

Hussein and his older cousin survived a perilous journey out of Somalia and parted ways after reaching Egypt. It was a traumatic event because he was only a teenager at the time and felt his cousin had abandoned him, knowing that they only had each other. Hussein suspects that his cousin resorted to paying smugglers as Samar had done, after finding out that resettlement for two single young men was not likely:

> I had an older cousin who was like a brother to me. We decided to leave Mogadishu and try to get recognized by the UN so we could get resettled, get jobs and send money back to our relatives. In Cairo, Somalis warned us that women and children get first priority for

> any type of services and resettlement. Over time we saw that they were correct. My cousin was crushed. We had no money and only survived because Somalis who had arrived before us gave us food, advice and a place to sleep. My cousin could not take the pressure. We argued one day; he walked off and I never saw him again. I cried a lot because, looking back, I was young and scared. But I made friends with Somalis, Sudanese, Ethiopians, and others trapped in Cairo. I learned Arabic and an Egyptian man hired me to work in his shop. I was not paid much but it helped me to get on my feet and have some money to send back to my family.

Neither the threat of danger nor the violent antics of smugglers deter people like Hawa, Samar, her friend and possibly Hussein's cousin from trying to find a better life. As one refugee in Cairo named Suleymaan put it, "What more is there to lose when you have already lost everything?" The desire to start over elsewhere and the pressure to support relatives who cannot support themselves compels many to take risks they would not ordinarily take.

Since 1991, Somalia has experienced "the proxy wars on Somali territory between Ethiopia and Eritrea; the emergence of clan-affiliated religious groups in the name of the Islamic Courts; and, Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia under the cover of fighting Islamic extremism and global terrorism but with the aim of empowering the administration of [the Transitional Federal Government]" (Eno and Eno 2007:29). The Federal Government of Somalia is currently headed by President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed and recognized within the international community. Many Somalis have returned to their homeland to help rebuild and the progress made can be seen in pockets throughout the country (McVeigh 2018). Yet, Somalia's future remains uncertain. The fear of violence is ever-present (Adow 2018). An overall sense of "insecurity […] lack of state protection, and recurring humanitarian crises" are root causes for the large numbers of Somalis who remain internally displaced and those who continue to flee their homeland in search of peace and security (Human Rights Watch 2019).

## Life in the diaspora: the effects of war, displacement and migration on cultural and social practices

Somalis representing every region, clan, educational level and social status departed their homeland. Many of the fleeing families consisted predominantly

of women and children, as men were especially targeted during the civil war. It is estimated that "two-thirds of the global Somali diaspora live in neighboring countries" and "between 1990 and 2015, the total number of people born in Somalia but living outside the country more than doubled" (Connor and Krogstad 2016). The diaspora population will likely continue to grow as Somalia was named one of the top five refugee sending countries in the world in 2018 (Huber and Reid 2018).

**Family dynamics, gender roles and social positioning**

The effects of war, displacement and migration on cultural and social practices vary from one Somali diaspora community, family and individual to another. In Somalia, clan affiliation and one's immediate family are significant sources of personal identity and security. Somalis are patrilineal, tracing their lineage through their male relatives. *Whom* you are from is more important than *where* you are from (Putnam and Noor 1993). There has always been diversity within Somali households. Many were fluid and comprised of extended relatives living together. Yet the typical pre-war household consisted of nuclear families: father, mother and children. The husband/father was expected to care for his family financially and morally, as well as represent them in the community. The wife/mother was responsible for managing every aspect of the household affairs largely "without interference" (Abdullahi 2001: 120). In post-independent Somalia, women were granted rights and legal protections by the state;[4] while they could work outside the home, they were not expected to. The expectation was that men would be the main financial source for their family, and they were judged on how they took care of and represented them in public. These gender roles were reinforced by both societal expectations and Islam.[5] Jamila, a Cairo resident, remembered the role her father played in their home while growing up:

> My family had a good life. We lived in a nice house in the Holwadag District of Mogadishu, near Bakaara Market. My father was a medical doctor who worked in a government hospital and we had no financial worries. We children – my eight brothers, sisters and me – attended good schools. My mother took care of the home. No one worked except my father and he expected us to get good marks, then go to university.

Many Somalis have successfully developed transnational social networks in the places where they have migrated. Stephanie Bjork (2017) masterfully describes how Somalis in Finland navigate life in Helsinki utilizing the social networks they developed. There is still no denying that war has caused a loss of social networks as well as the distortion of traditional gender roles and family dynamics. Men, women and, in some cases, children are placed under enormous economic strain. Many diaspora households are headed by women who have had to take on the role of representing their families in the public sphere and work outside the home while simultaneously handling all household affairs (OCASI 2016). Somalis have struggled with accepting the fact that the social standing they had back in their homeland often has little to no bearing on the social position they occupy in the receiving society of their diaspora community. These experiences are not unique to Somalis. For example, Canadian anthropologist Parin Dossa had the same sentiments of having experienced familial and social status changes expressed to her by Iranian refugee women (2004) and women who fled Afghanistan (2014) and resettled in Canada. Asha left Somalia for Italy before the civil war had started. When it was clear that it was not safe to return home, she had to reluctantly take on a whole new identity in Rome:

> My original plan was to go there to attend university. I was not personally fixated on Italy, but since my country used to be an Italian colony, it was easy to get a visa. Initially, I thought it would be a dream come true. On my plane ride from Mogadishu to Rome, I was imagining the friends I would make and having my degree. Because it is Europe, you know, you think…you think you will be able to live and work easily, without hassle. But this was not the case. I was never able to save enough money or reach the level of Italian language needed to enroll in classes full-time. And when the war started, I could not go home. To support myself, I worked as a domestic for Italian families in Milan. I never thought I would be working as someone's maid.

Asha had the support of her family and the financial means to travel to Italy to further her education. Yet, war in her homeland, and Italy's lack of support for asylum-seekers left her vulnerable. She relied on Somali social capital and networks to find employment:

> The Italian government had no provisions set up for refugees. There were no asylum or resettlement programs that I knew of. All you had access to was a government permit to work, called a *sejournal*. If you stopped working, your permit became invalid and you could be deported. Most times I felt like a lost child but I did have some cousins living in Rome who helped me a bit. And I knew there was a huge community of Somalis in Rome that I could turn to if I needed help – even if they were complete strangers. I found out about domestic jobs in Milan through some Somali women. That's how I ended up there.

In total, Asha worked for four Italian families during her six-years in the country. Although she made peace with her new role as a domestic helper, she demanded to be treated with respect:

> I worked with Filipina, Ethiopian and Somali women. The families I worked for always treated me well. If they were mean, I left. I have no idea what they said about me behind my back, but in my face, they were kind. One woman, a Filipina, told me that her boss had raped her so she ran away from him. I occasionally heard stories like that but nothing of that nature ever happened to me.

Asha's exit out of Italy came in the form of a marriage proposal from her cousin who had received asylum in the US:

> One of my cousins had been living in the US for several years. We used to chat on the internet and sometimes on the phone. It was fun. He made me laugh a lot, which kept my mind off of my worries. One day, he asked me to marry him. I said yes because I knew he was the type of man I wanted. I wanted a family and he did, too. After I said yes, he immediately began working on getting me a visa to join him. I can't remember exactly how long it took, but within two and a half years, we were settled in our new life in Maryland.

Asha and Hawa's experiences were similar in some respects but different in others. Unlike Asha, Hawa was caught up in the war in their homeland and motivated to leave because she felt pressured to support her family financially. As soon as she arrived in Yemen, she registered at UNHCR-Aden. It was clear that resettlement to a third country for a single woman with no children was not a priority for the agency, but that did not bother Hawa. Her goals were to find

employment and build her skills. Ironically, Hawa's exit out of Yemen was due to love, and she and her husband ended up in the US, like Asha:

> After working and studying in Yemen for two years, I met a nice Somali man by surprise. We shared common values and goals: to work hard and send money back home to support relatives there. In 1997, we married and had two sons – one in 1998 and the other in 1999. My husband was studying at the university and I was working as a nurse in a health center. We did not feel it was important to socialize and be around a lot of Somalis; we were too busy working. It was nice to know that there was a big community to be part of if we wanted that, but we were just too busy trying to reach our goals to make friends. My husband found out that there was something called the Diversity Immigrant Visa Lottery Program offered by the US government. One had to fill out an application at the American Embassy in Sa'naa to have their name entered in the lottery. If selected, the visa winner and their immediate relatives would be granted permanent residence in the US. My husband was the first person to apply and the first to learn that he had won when the results were announced. We could not believe it. We were moving to the US!

**Identity, processes of racialization and the development of racial awareness**

The significance of clan affiliation and conceptions of self-identification vary from community, to family, to individual throughout the Somali global diaspora. Some Somalis place emphasis on the importance of the clan system and the reproduction of clan identities (Bjork 2007; Kusow 2007; Bjork 2017; and Jama 2018). Others strongly identify as Somali and/or Muslim and, depending on the context African or simply black, with either no mention of clan affiliation or ambivalence towards it (Scruggs 2004; Kabir 2014). There is indication that Somali identities, especially of those born outside the homeland and who have never been to Somalia, "Become increasingly shaped by the cultures of the settlement country because of their daily interactions" as they gradually lose touch with the culture of their parents and their homeland (Omar 2016: 68). There has been much written about how Somalis who migrated as children or who were born to Somali refugees in diaspora communities across Europe, the UK, North America and Australia struggle to balance their parents' expectations with their own while combatting negative external stereotypes of who they are and navigating the tenuous terrain between adolescence and adulthood (Mulligan 2009; Moore 2010; Stachel 2012; Fellin 2015; OCASI 2016; Boehm 2018; Parveen

2018; and Townsend 2018). Somali Bantu youth in Maine expressed facing an even greater challenge as they have to navigate being Muslim in a predominantly Christian country where being of visible Black African descent has many ascribed negative connotations while also being members of a subgroup within the Somali refugee community that has historically experienced discrimination and hatred based on their heritage and physical features (Besteman 2016). Abdirahman, a young Somali man who moved to Norway as a child, expressed respect for Somali culture while asserting his own ideas about identity:

> My father was always making my brothers and me recite the names of our ancestors, saying we need to know this information. But what good is it? Qabil [the clan system] is the reason Somalia is so messed up now! And what good does this information do for me in Oslo? I respect the old ways of Somalis but young Somalis do not see things the same. Here in Norway, I am down [get along] with all people and I do not see a difference between others and myself, whether Africans, Asians or whatever.

Pre-migration out of their homeland, Somalis have an "incomprehensibility of the idea of skin colour as a meaningful category of social understanding" (Kusow 2006: 18). This is because "identity categories in Somalia are inherently tied to clan-based non-racialized classification systems" (28). However, once they migrate out of their homeland, Somalis are forced to learn and react to new classification systems dependent upon the cultural norms and policies of the host society. It is in the diaspora where Somalis become racialized and made aware of the social consequences tied to having a particular skin color and phenotype. While living in Italy, Asha understood that she and all the women she worked with were viewed as foreign, poor, domestic workers. But she also came to realize that Italians saw her as African, making no distinction between her and anyone else from the African continent. Although Rome and Milan are global cities, Asha concluded that Italians were not open or receptive to foreigners:

> I mostly lived in Milan and spent short periods in Rome. Rome is more cosmopolitan. I felt more at ease there. I knew three Somali women who were married to Italian men. They never had any problems with the police or any financial issues like I did. However, sometimes when we would walk the streets people would tell us to go back to Africa. From the moment I arrived in Italy until the time I left I felt Italians treated me as if I was invisible.

> I was an outsider that they barely noticed. When they did notice me, some would make rude remarks.

What she experienced in Rome and Milan had a profound effect on Asha. Upon deeper reflection, she had this to say:

> I never thought of myself in relation to the entire continent of Africa; I was just Somali. I did not even think about clan much. But in Italy, it seemed Italians could only see me as an African. There were many Senegalese and Ethiopian men and women living in Milan and Rome and we felt close to each other since we were in the same place together. We did not focus on our differences in being from West or East, or Muslim and Christian; we felt our closeness as Africans, as blacks, and we helped each other. We felt we had more in common with each other than we did with Italians.

In this instance, Asha's identity is imposed from outside herself. Italians mark her as "an African" and different, a classification that seems to be mostly based on skin color. Over time, she embraces this identity and turns the difference into something positive. By the time she reached America, Asha had a layered identity that downplayed clan affiliation while pushing forth her Somaliness and Blackness – connection with other people of African descent:

> There were lots of stereotypes and negative images associated with black people in Italy: we were all illegal and criminals or prostitutes. Our dress, food, music and hairstyles were strange. There were also bad images of Muslims. Of course, this was not true. There was diversity among the blacks I knew. There were some African Americans living and working in Italy when I was there and I had good though not well-established relations with them. There were also blacks that had relocated from other parts of Europe. Knowing that people felt this way about us made me rebel against it. I made sure I put my best foot forward and showed that I was educated and self-respecting; we all did. I wanted them to know that I am just as good as they are. Somalis do not like anyone to look down on them! We are very proud! (laughter) I showed them I am proud of myself as an African, and as a Somali.

When asked to describe herself now, Asha says she is black and her clan is Somali. She refuses to breakdown her clan affiliation, insisting, "Clanism caused

our problems […] Somalis are all one." When asked if she ever describes herself as African, Asha smiled but did not reply. Perhaps now that she is no longer in Italy where people constantly classified her as African, the concept of consistently identifying with an entire continent and its multitude of languages, cultures and customs seemed more abstract than the surface acknowledgement of a visual link between herself and others who have brown/black skin. If this assumption is correct, it would not be unique. While conducting research among Somalis in Canada, Kristine Ajrouch and Abdi Kusow (2007) found that racial categories in the receiving community "do inform the identity experiences of Somalis" as Somalis realize that they "have moved from majority status in the homeland to occupying a minority status" in the receiving community; thus, "a visible minority status in Canada supersedes any differentiation that may have existed within the country of origin" (87). Identities are situational.

Though Hawa did not suffer through the same indignities that Asha experienced in Europe, she became more aware of herself as an African while living in Yemen. The incidents she witnessed raised her level of self-awareness:

> Yemeni people are Muslims, just like Somalis. They have a long history of mixing with people from the Horn [of Africa] and they are less racist toward Africans than Arabs in the Gulf, according to my friend who had lived in Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Yemen. Most people were wonderful to me. I found jobs easily and my bosses treated me with respect. Some people would make rude remarks like *abd*[6] about Africans or make a rude facial expression if an African walked by. If you were African, some places would only offer you low jobs. My husband and I escaped lots of this prejudice because we were educated and spoke Arabic. It was harder for people who didn't have these things. We worked all the time and did not have many friends but I always smiled at other Africans when I saw them and tried to help whenever they needed translations or something. Nobody cared about being Eritrean or Somali or Ethiopian because we were all Africans in that country.

The occasional maltreatment she experienced firsthand or witnessed others experience made Hawa cognizant of being "other," no matter how pleasant Yemeni people were to her most of the time. What is striking is that she only refers to Eritreans, Somalis and Ethiopians – people with membership (citizenship) in countries of the Horn of Africa. It is clear that she is speaking about the experiences of recent arrivals, that is, people who claim modern nation-

states as their home, and who self-describe by nationality. When we briefly examine Yemeni society the point I am trying to raise here becomes clearer. It is well known that Yemen has its own black population that has been living in the region for 1000 or more years. Most historians trace their origins back to pre-Islamic era Abyssinian[7] invaders who ruled Yemen from 525 AD to 575 AD (Kour 1981). When the resident Arab tribes received assistance from the Persians and were able to defeat the Abyssinians, the defeated Abyssinians, the story goes, became servants and were systematically excluded from Yemeni society. Their descendants are called *Al-Akhdam* (the servants) and they occupy the lowest rung of the Yemeni social ladder (Worth 2008). As David Keane (2007) explains, why the *akhdam* remain in their current social predicament is baffling to scholars:

> Most researchers are unable to explain why the exclusion of the *akhdam* has been carried on from one generation to another; they believe that this is not based on racial discrimination. There are other Yemenis of African descent, including descendants of slaves, that are fully integrated in Yemeni society. Nonetheless, social and economic exclusion of the *akdham* seems to continue as a hereditary trait. (224)

It is possible that the *akhdam* were as invisible to Hawa as Asha and her friends were to the Italians in Milan and Rome. Because she entered Yemeni society with a higher level of education and skills than the indigenous *akhdam* possess, she was able to live within a social stratum that elevated her above them. Further, since being of African descent does not seem to prohibit social mobility within Yemeni society, Hawa was able to use her attributes to her advantage to secure employment and housing without necessarily having to worry about the effects of her racial heritage. Most importantly, Yemeni people did not associate Hawa with the *akhdam*. This fact is crucial because how migrants are viewed and with whom they are associated by people in the receiving society greatly determines the extent to which integration into the host society will be easy or difficult.

Asha and Hawa's experiences of being racialized in Italy and Yemen changed their worldviews in regard to heritage and race. Asha experienced a more diasporic life in Italy as she was in contact with people of African descent with direct ties to their ancestral societies (Senegalese, Ethiopians and other recent migrants) and those with more removed connections (black Americans, Afro

Caribbeans and other descendants of New World slaves). As a result, Asha adopted a self-identification that incorporated her connection with all people of African descent and with her homeland: Black racially and Somali clan. Hawa's experiences in Yemen were less diasporic as she was "other", yet mostly surrounded by co-ethnics and groups with much shared cultural traits to her own (Eritreans and Ethiopians). To be sure, when she left Yemen, Hawa's way of self-identifying had been altered. Although she still chiefly identified as Somali, she followed it up with African, referring to herself as Somali-African. Hawa expressed that she felt connected to other Africans in a place-specific way more than having developed an understanding or connection to all people of African descent based solely on skin color.

While the cultural norms and expectations of their homeland influenced their self-identification to an extent, the daily lived experiences and processes of racialization undergone by Abdirahman in Norway, Asha in Italy and Hawa in Yemen had the most impact on their understandings of how others viewed them and how they viewed themselves in relation to others in their receiving society. The classifications and gazes projected upon them by others also made each of them either create an image for the first time, or reimagine Africa as a site with a vast diaspora of people who are perceived as linked – regardless of whether they are directly from the continent or descend from people who were human trafficked out hundreds of years ago.

## Conclusion

When Somalia collapsed millions of people fled their homeland, resulting in the development of a modern global Somali diaspora. Locating Somalis within the larger debates around migration and diasporas, this article has posited that the social dynamics within micro Somali communities around the world have undergone changes while the Somali people have expanded their ideas of their culture, social practices and self-identification based on their daily lived experiences and what they remember or were taught about their homeland culture. The recollections of their experiences of war, displacement and resettlement shared by Omar (Egypt), Hiba (Egypt), Xaaji (Egypt), Hawa (Yemen and the US), Samar (Egypt), Hussein (Egypt), Suleymaan (Egypt), Jamila (Egypt), Asha (Italy and the US) and Abdirahman (Norway) emphasize the need to

disaggregate Somali migrant experiences as each migrant has chosen different paths and live within diverse receiving societies. As such, they are faced with political and socioeconomic realities that are influenced by the host society's history and contemporary conditions. These new conditions encountered have the ability to heavily impact the dynamics of old relationships, such as the relationship between Somali Bantus and other Somalis in Maine (Besteman 2016). Generalizations are not useful. It is necessary to examine Somalis – or any migrants, for that matters – as well as the sending and receiving countries from three levels: (1) macro [global economic and structural conditions]; (2) meso [state policies]; and (3) micro [individual agency]. Examining the experiences of individuals at these three levels aids in our understanding of the diverse influence migration has had on their lives. Lastly, these shared migration narratives remind us that the same migrant may use different strategies and make different decisions at different points in time, depending upon the context. Moreover, migrants experience and react differently to being racialized (Dossa 2009; Besteman 2016) just as they remember home and refashion their identities and social networks (Ingiriis 2016; Bjork 2017) based upon the context.

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1 Omar, like most others I spoke with, declined to identify his clan.

2 The Hawiye clan is believed to be the largest clan in Somalia. Located predominantly in the southern and central part of the country, they are the dominant group in Mogadishu. Many minority clans claim that they were/have been targeted by the Hawiye since the outbreak of civil unrest in 1991.

3 Per the United Nations, "UNOSOM I was established to monitor the ceasefire in Mogadishu and escort deliveries of humanitarian supplies to distribution centers in the city. The mission's mandate and strength were later enlarged to enable it to protect humanitarian convoys and distribution centers throughout Somalia. It later worked with the Unified Task Force in the effort to establish a safe environment for the delivery of humanitarian assistance." See "Department of Peacekeeping Operations." UN 2 June 2003. 12 Nov 2004 <www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/co_mission/unosomi.htm>.

4 Women were granted rights in divorce and property inheritance under the Family Law of 1975. They were granted additional rights when Somalia became a one-party socialist state and a new constitution was adopted in 1979. Constitutional articles "provided guarantees of social, cultural and political rights" and specifically promised "equality of the sexes" (Badawi 2000: 2).

5 Somalis are almost always described as being 99.9 % Muslim (CIA World Factbook 2001).

6 This word means slave in Arabic and is used as an insult particularly against people of visible black African descent.

7 Abyssinia is present-day Ethiopia. Some scholars question the validity of this story, wondering if it is accurate or if it is an attempt to "other" a group that is, in fact, just as indigenous to Yemen as the Arab tribes whose origins are never questioned. There is also dispute as to whether the "conquerors" were Abyssinians or Axumites (Worth 2008).

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**Christophe Declercq** obtained his PhD from Imperial College London on the subject of Belgian refugees in Britain during the First World War. He has spoken widely about the subject and has been involved in many commemoration and Centenary projects, both in the UK and in Belgium, including several local community projects (Vredescentrum Antwerpen, Amsab-ISG Ghent, Flanders House London, Wales for Peace, Twickenham, Royal Tunbridge Wells and Tracing the Belgian Refugees). Together with Julian Walker he edited two volumes on *Languages and the First World War* (Palgrave). With Felicity Rash he edited another book for the same publisher, *Beyond Flanders Fields*. With Federico Federici he edited *Intercultural Crisis Communication* for Bloomsbury. Christophe manages several successful social media outlets on the subject of Belgian refugees in Britain as well as on Languages and the First World War. He has had multiple involvements with both BBC and VRT on Belgians in Britain.

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