

# THE DISENTANGLEMENT OF POPULATIONS

MIGRATION, EXPULSION AND DISPLACEMENT  
IN POSTWAR EUROPE, 1944-9



EDITED BY JESSICA REINISCH  
AND ELIZABETH WHITE



## The Disentanglement of Populations

*Also by Jessica Reinisch:*

PUBLIC HEALTH IN GERMANY UNDER ALLIED OCCUPATION

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*Also by Elizabeth White:*

THE SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE TO BOLSHEVIK RUSSIA

The Socialist Revolutionary Party, 1921–1939

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Migration, Expulsion and Displacement in Post-War Europe, 1944–9

Edited by

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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2011 978-0-230-22204-5

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First published 2011 by  
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

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Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

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ISBN 978-1-349-30756-2

ISBN 978-0-230-29768-5 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/9780230297685

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1  
20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11

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# Acknowledgements

Our thanks go above all to the contributors in this volume for sharing their research on post-war displacement and migration; this collaboration would not have worked without them. Nor would this book have been possible without the support of all our archivists and librarians, or without the many former refugees who were willing to talk to us about their lives.

The editors' thanks also go particularly to David Feldman, who was actively involved with the book from the start and who has offered invaluable advice and encouragement. We are also very grateful to Mark Mazower for his support throughout the Balzan Project. The enthusiasm of colleagues who have participated in the Balzan workshops has been extremely stimulating; in addition to the contributors they include Richard Bessel, Daniel Cohen, Ralph Desmarais, David Edgerton, Orlando Figes, Christian Goeschel, Simon Kitson, Jan Rueger, Lucy Riall, Ben Shephard, Naoko Shimazu, Timothy Snyder, Adam Tooze, Frank Trentmann, Nik Wachsmann, Waqar Zaidi and Tara Zahra. Colleagues at the Department of History, Classics and Archaeology at Birkbeck have helped to refine our ideas at both formal occasions and countless informal ones. Two groups of Birkbeck graduate students have challenged some of our assumptions about population movements in recent European history, and their enviable focus on 'the point' has been very constructive. Palgrave Macmillan's two anonymous readers have made some valuable suggestions which we hope we have done justice to. At Palgrave Macmillan, Michael Strang and Ruth Ireland have shown interest in and encouragement of this project from a very early stage and have been supportive throughout. We are also grateful to Ann Vachon for giving us permission to use her father's photographs. Finally, our sincere thanks go to Eric Hobsbawm, who donated his Balzan Prize to the research of these issues.

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# Introduction

*Jessica Reinisch*

Millions of Europeans were uprooted by flight, evacuation, deportation, resettlement or emigration during the Second World War. These population movements, together with the ethnic policies and genocidal programmes of the 1930s and early 1940s, radically changed the demographic structure of many countries on the Continent.<sup>1</sup> Nor did the end of the war bring an end to these population upheavals. A multitude of refugees and displaced persons (DP) continued to trek through the rubble and ruins well into the post-war era: ethnic Germans fled or were expelled from their former homes in Central and Eastern Europe and moved westwards into the defeated rump of Germany; surviving Jews fled their native countries to seek refuge in western parts or to settle in the US or Palestine; millions of Soviet citizens were moved through state resettlement programmes or deportations to underpopulated parts of the country; Italians were expelled from Yugoslav territory, just as subjects of the former Italian colonies made their way to the 'motherland' in search of housing, work and education; and Poles had to leave the area east of the Bug now no longer part of Poland and populated the new western territorial additions to their country. Millions of civilians were uprooted through organised population transfers with neighbouring states, where national frontiers failed to conform to the distribution of ethnic, linguistic or religious groups. In addition, a whole panoply of people now made their way back to the areas they had considered home before the war, among them disbanded soldiers and prisoners of war, evacuees, liberated forced workers, concentration camp survivors and exile governments – just as the Allied armies moved into place to set up military governments and armies of relief workers began to flood the field to organise refugee camps.<sup>2</sup>

The fourteen chapters in this book examine some of these movements, both forced and voluntary, within the broader context of Europe in the aftermath of the war and its various reconstruction programmes and agendas. They describe how, as these millions of people swept across the war-torn continent, efforts to house and feed them soon gave way to deliberations about longer-term problems, such as their repatriation or resettlement and their lasting integration into post-war societies. Problems of absorption and integration particularly faced the vast numbers of people who now found themselves on foreign soil and for whom

a return to their pre-war homes and lives was unfeasible. They had often been caught directly in the racial conflicts of the previous decades, and their prospects were shaped by high-level political decisions about their countries, national borders and citizenship. But problems of readjustment to peacetime life also affected people who tried to return to their former residences (and whose communities and families had often changed beyond recognition in their absence), or who emigrated in search of a better life. Importantly, many of these movements progressed just as the remarkable post-war economic boom got underway; and the presence of refugees and displaced people significantly shaped their host nations' prospects for economic renewal and reconstruction.

In 1946, when many of these movements were still in progress, George Orwell criticised the extent to which so many commentators used dead and anaesthetised terms to describe these events. 'Millions of peasants are robbed of their farms and sent trudging along the roads with no more than they can carry', he wrote, and 'this is called transfer of population or rectification of frontiers'. Such euphemisms, he argued, deliberately served to disguise the invariably violent nature of the processes and masked their political underpinnings and implications.<sup>3</sup> This book is concerned both with the phenomena themselves (with why and how individuals, populations and borders moved, and with the consequences), as well as with their political and historiographical after-life. This second purpose involves not only turning again to the classic studies on war and post-war ethnic and demographic policies – among them the works by Joseph Schechtman, Eugene Kulischer, Jacques Vernant, Malcolm Proudfoot and Louise Holborn<sup>4</sup> – but also assessing the political uses to which resettlements, transfers and migrations, and the memory of these events, have been put.

In spite of growing academic interest in both the post-war period and in migration in European history there is to date still no consistent historiography that looks at the many different kinds of refugees and dislocated people in the same context. Some national historiographies have by now documented at length their own citizens' experiences, particularly in the German and Italian cases.<sup>5</sup> But this national focus has distorted our understanding of the phenomena and the issues at stake, not least since after the war countries such as Germany and Italy actually housed a range of different nationalities, ethnicities and groups of refugees, and their co-existence was often by no means a peaceful one. The national lens also fails to overcome the problem that other areas and population movements have long escaped academic attention. Many of those individuals or groups who moved between countries



or who failed to acquire champions in the academy often still remain out of sight.<sup>6</sup> The contributors in this volume try to offer possibilities for a broader perspective. Many of the chapters present case studies of population movements and policies in specific areas, which, when seen together, shed light on both parallels and local or national particularities. Some chapters also offer wider, conceptual assessments of population questions and potential solutions in post-war Europe. Together, the contributions provide new opportunities for comparison and for overcoming the widespread limitations of local or national narratives of displacement.

The book has its origins in a conference held in London under the auspices of the Balzan Project at Birkbeck, set up by Eric Hobsbawm with his Balzan Foundation's prize for outstanding achievement. The Balzan Project focused on the years immediately following the Second World War and the often difficult and prolonged transition from war to peace in the devastated and occupied countries of Europe. Indeed, it is thus no surprise that one of the themes that unites the chapters is their concern with war and its social, political and demographic consequences. If war and post-war chaos is a recurring theme of twentieth-century European history, so is, as the chapters show, mass displacement and the appeal of demographic solutions to political problems. The research presented in this volume helps to illuminate the relationship between these intertwined phenomena of war and displacement. Population movements were a central feature of the Second World War and its aftermath, and the chapters portray the roles played by refugees, returnees and other newcomers in the period of post-war rehabilitation and reconstruction. To authorities and local administrators, these dislocated people primarily represented mouths to be fed and bodies to be housed, whose presence demanded the provision of local and state welfare. But their roles far exceeded that of a commonly portrayed drain on resources. Refugees and displaced people became carriers of ethnic and national identities, who at times challenged ideas of nationality and the cultural majority, or represented deliberate means to alter it. At the same time they also made up enormous pools of mobile labour, whose presence enabled – or whose absence hindered – their host states' capacity for rapid reconstruction and economic growth.

The essays in this volume look at the aftermath of war in different parts of Eastern, Western and Southern Europe. There are unfortunately (but unavoidably) some notable gaps in the volume's geographical coverage. Nonetheless, by studying the 'disentanglement of populations' (to use Churchill's phrase) in some of the areas most affected by brutal

military and racial conflict, civil war and struggles for sovereignty, the essays help to show how, in the light of population upheavals, the legacy of war was debated and managed, and whether and how a new 'normality' (or 'normalities') was eventually created. Moreover, a number of authors also use the focus on war and its aftermath to reflect on longer lines of continuity and disjuncture in Europe's twentieth century. They demonstrate that the ethnic tensions, expulsions and relocations of the 1940s often had their direct origins in the political settlements after the end of the First World War. Some chapters also emphasise the importance of the mobilisation of apparent precedents to justify current action, such as the exchange of Greek and Turkish populations agreed at Lausanne in 1923.<sup>7</sup> While some contributors identify a number of broad continuities in twentieth-century thinking about population management, others point to important differences between the two post-war scenarios – not least in the institutional responses and solutions available to the population question and in relief workers' and diplomats' mindsets. Whereas in 1919 the League of Nations system inaugurated a new era of the protection of minorities within multi-ethnic states, political realities and priorities after the Second World War had changed radically: nation-states were now to be rebuilt on nationally and ethnically homogenous lines, an ambition which in some areas could only be achieved through a series of planned resettlements and population exchanges.

The chapters show how population movements during and after the war became central to the construction or re-invention of both nation-states and international organisations after 1945. Moreover, although millions of people were forced to leave their homes during the war, the essays in this volume reflect on the fact that there was often no straightforward 'return' afterwards, since many Germans, Italians, Ukrainians, Poles and Jews ended up in so-called homelands they had never set foot in before. The issue of return was thus complicated by the fact that incoming 'national refugees' were formally of the same nationality and spoke the same language as the natives, but in reality this disguised significant religious, ethnic, economic and cultural divisions. Nonetheless, strategies of integration and absorption of newcomers often began from a question of nationality and drew upon notions of citizenship, entitlement and deserving, even if, as Geoff Eley and others observe in this volume, clear, fixed national identities were often absent.

The language of 'return' itself was crucial. Perhaps taking their cue from Orwell's attack on narcotised words to describe politically loaded processes, a number of the contributors consider the significance of

attempts to find new terms to describe both the population movements and the people taking part in them. As Matthew Frank notes, the notion of 'population transfer' initially carried connotations about its positive outcomes and progressive methods, which distinguished it from coerced processes such as 'expulsion' and 'deportation'. Yet it was precisely the underlying political judgement which led to frequent condemnation of Churchill's apparent callousness in his talk about 'a clean sweep' to end the German problem once and for all. He was, Churchill declared in the House of Commons in December 1944, 'not alarmed by the prospect of the disentanglement of populations, nor even by these large transferences, which are more possible in modern conditions than they ever were before. The disentanglement of populations which took place between Greece and Turkey after the last war [...] was in many ways a success, and has produced friendly relations between Greece and Turkey ever since'.<sup>8</sup> This language implied that the end surely justified the means.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, as Catherine Gousseff observes in her essay, the exchanges between Polish and Ukrainian populations became a process of 'evacuation' for the Ukrainians, but one of 'repatriation' for the Poles (who thus 'returned' to the 'recovered lands'). The terms coined to describe the new arrivals in the Soviet-occupied zone of Germany also had clear implications: here the bedraggled refugees from the East became 'resettlers' or 'new citizens', to underline the permanence of their new circumstances – in contrast to their fellow 'expellees' in the western occupation zones, whose label might have implied a sense of rough justice and potential demands for redress.<sup>10</sup> In all these settings, words could accentuate the apparent legitimacy of the processes and attempt to make them seem normal, permanent, irreversible. At the same time, the refusal by some groups to accept these labels and their fates, and their insistence on seeking national or ethnic salvation, generated their very own terminology.

The memory of previous population movements and past wars (above all the First World War and its aftermath) clearly cast a shadow over possibilities in 1945, but what exactly was remembered and why, and by whom? And to what use was this memory put? In their analyses of both memory and amnesia, the authors build on recent historiographical insights. Bessel and Schuman, for example, have already noted that silence was often a public reaction to the shocks and terrors of the Second World War and its spectacular violence, albeit 'a silence occasionally broken and mixed with selective appreciations of the suffering of specific groups of victims'.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Tony Judt has identified the 'curious "memory hole"' into which collective awareness of past

conflicts, violence and crimes disappeared.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps nowhere was this as visible as in the population movements during and after the Second World War, the memory and remembrance of which was influenced by individuals' attempts to build new, stable, post-war lives – and forgetting, together with a very partial and skewed remembering, often proved the most effective way of achieving that. It also proved invaluable for strengthening groups' identities and claims to recognition. Rainer Schulze comments on the image of treks of German refugees escaping in wintry landscapes, which became imprinted upon German collective memory, 'although it was actually a minority who fled in this manner'. In West German public discourse in post-war decades, he notes, there is clear evidence of 'highly selective acknowledgement and thus a highly selective remembering'. This was followed by a strange 're-discovery' of long-told narratives of expulsion and flight.<sup>13</sup> Corni observes that the 'Exodus' of Italians from Istria and Dalmatia was long repressed in Italian collective memory. As Eley makes clear, the Cold War froze not only ethnic tensions and political disputes, but also shifted priorities of memory and silence.<sup>14</sup>

The chapters in this volume examine problems of population movements, migration and strategies of replacement from a number of different perspectives and viewpoints. At one end of the scale, many contributors analyse national and international frameworks for displacement and reconstruction, and place different national and local contexts side by side. Eley's essay, for example, considers international and global dimensions of post-war recovery and population questions, and reminds us that the subjects of labour recruitment and economic migration, expulsions and flight, transfers and population management were all by definition transnational in character and thus benefit from a broad, comparative perspective. At the other end, a number of chapters illustrate the ways in which individual action was often severely constrained by state policies and Allied declarations and diplomatic decisions. Nonetheless, as Gatrell, Patt, Ballinger and others show in their essays, within these constraints refugees and displaced people actively made decisions about their futures and their needs. Throughout the volume the perspective of institutions and individuals who managed the population upheavals is thus counterpointed by the voices of the displaced, their experiences and memories. Some of the contributors conducted interviews with refugees, others reconstructed their stories through diaries, letters and court files.

The volume is divided into five narrative parts. Part I contains two attempts to present broad, analytical frameworks within which the

subsequent case studies of displacement can be located. Peter Gatrell surveys the literature on post-war population upheavals and identifies the most important 'transformative moments' concerning migration and displacement in Europe. By contrasting the aftermaths of the two world wars he also brings into focus the problem of a 'violent peacetime', a notion which might be usefully applied to many of the subsequent chapters in the book. In Chapter 2 in this section, Matthew Frank then examines the political and intellectual solutions to the refugee problem at the disposal of planners and decision makers. Frank explores the background and post-war context of a number of states' attempts to exchange and transfer their minority populations, but concludes that this procedure ultimately only offered a limited solution to the problems resulting from ethnic heterogeneity. But as Frank shows, the idea that planned exchanges could offer relatively easy and painless solutions to ethnic tensions nonetheless had a significant afterlife. Both chapters lay out the intellectual and historiographical context for the series of case studies developed in the subsequent chapters.

Part II puts three examples of forced population movements side by side. The forced redistribution of ethnic groups in the aftermath of war was unprecedented in scope, and Rainer Schulze demonstrates that the most spectacular result of this movement was the almost complete elimination of German minorities in Europe. He re-examines the chronology of expulsion and the expellees' subsequent integration into post-war West Germany. Gustavo Corni looks at the less well-studied case of the mass departure of Italians from Yugoslavia and shows that a myriad of economic, political and ethnic factors underlay these resettlements. He identifies broad historiographical trends in the study and assessment of the 'Exodus' and the political uses to which these expulsions have been put. Finally, Catherine Gousseff examines the population exchanges between Poland and the Ukraine in the aftermath of the war. Like Corni and Schulze, Gousseff also considers how these forced resettlements or expulsions have been remembered (or rather, forgotten) and explores the role of the archival record, memory and oral testimony for historical research.

Part III offers different perspectives on nationalism and the politics of ethnicity from the perspective of the cities of Trieste, Osnabrück and a variety of DP camps in Germany. Pamela Ballinger focuses on the strategies of absorption and integration of newcomers in the city of Trieste, and contrasts the fate of 'foreign' displaced persons with that of the newly arriving 'Italian' nationals fleeing from Yugoslavia and the former Italian colonies. Ballinger thus picks up directly where

Corni left off, and shows that whereas the Italian newcomers could be integrated relatively straightforwardly and received Italian citizenship, only very few of the foreign refugees could hope for naturalisation. Panikos Panayi, in turn, presents a snapshot of a German city in transition from war to peace. Here, the return of native inhabitants who had fled or were evacuated during the bombing was accompanied by the arrival of German refugees from Eastern Europe (as Schulze has shown), just as the thousands of liberated DPs and POWs were to undertake the opposite journey. Like Ballinger, Panayi explores the brief synchronicity of these very different dislocated ethnic groups. Avinoam J. Patt then turns to the histories of the Jewish DPs in the DP camps in Germany and explains their embrace of Zionism as a pragmatic political choice, which offered most hope for their current material needs and empowered them to take charge of their futures. All three chapters examine the consequences of not just the temporary coexistence of different nationalities and ethnicities in particular localities, but also of the creation of a new 'refugee ethnicity' in post-war Europe in this period.

The three chapters in Part IV assess the significance of the economics of integration and assimilation by looking at the role of labour and employment in the post-war management of refugees. My own chapter focuses on the Soviet zone of Germany and the various efforts to integrate the newly arriving expellees: they were to be given work and tied into reconstruction policies and programmes. Although the focus was here on integration rather than further resettlement, as was the case with DPs in the western German occupation zones, the posited moral and psychological benefits of labour in some respects mirrored British and American assessments there, which are discussed in Salvatici's chapter. However, the integration of the expellees into the workforce proved in practice problematic for many years. Silvia Salvatici, in turn, considers Anglo-American approaches to the DPs in the western zones of Germany. Vocational training and organised employment opportunities appeared central to resettlement schemes for DPs and became instilled with political and moral virtues. Nonetheless, the issue of employment helped to accentuate gender and national inequalities and severely penalised the old and immobile 'hard core' left behind in the DP camps. Johannes-Dieter Steinert then examines some of the consequences of the DP resettlement programmes from the point of view of one of the receiving countries, the UK. He shows that recruitment of foreign workers from the DP camps to jobs in Britain was motivated primarily by economic requirements, but had the effect of racialising potential migrants through the introduction of ethnic and political

selection criteria. Economic demands associated with reconstruction and efforts to integrate the newcomers into their new post-war homes thus presented two overlapping dynamics.

Part V turns to one particular category of displaced people: children. States' concern for their children first expressed itself in the form of war-time evacuation schemes. As fears about a generation of 'feral' or 'war-handicapped' children intensified in the aftermath of the war, children often continued to feature as a special category in state programmes. Elizabeth White's chapter investigates why the Soviet state forbade the return of evacuated children to Leningrad for over a year after the Blockade was lifted in January 1944, and concludes that this stemmed partly from fears over the accumulation of unsupervised children in the destroyed city. These same fears also meant that local authorities made great efforts to reunite biological families and to promote adoption and fostering. Loukianos Hassiotis examines the conflicts between the Greek Communist Party and the Greek government over the fate of the Greek children who were either internally displaced in special 'children's towns' or evacuated (or abducted) from Greece to other People's Republics during the Civil War. The struggles over the representation and sovereignty of Greece were thus played out directly in the struggle over the nation's children.

Geoff Eley's epilogue considers the problems of migration and displacement within the wider context of post-war reconstruction in Europe. He firmly anchors the phenomena in a much broader history of economic transformations, empire-building, population politics and social engineering, which, he argues, extended backwards to the 1880s and forwards to the end of the twentieth century. Eley also reflects on the role of the end of the Cold War on the historiography and historical memory of this problem, and asks why historians have only recently begun to revisit the distinctiveness of the Second World War and its aftermath. Post-war Europe, Eley maintains, was a laboratory for the peaceful coexistence of Europe's ethnically, religiously and culturally divided populations. He also argues for the importance of taking seriously the moment of optimism and belief in genuine change and progress in the years immediately after the war. Like Gatrell, he thus shows that this traumatic period of chaos, deep disruption and transformation should be understood, at least in part, in terms of opportunities and new possibilities. But where Gatrell points to the global scale of post-war displacement, Eley describes a 'genuinely European context' of the post-war reconstruction programmes. Both Gatrell and Eley call for further research, especially on those areas not covered here and on

broad comparative and Europe-wide analyses. This volume will have achieved its purpose if it enables readers to make new comparisons and connections and rouses researchers to plough some of those new fields. Saskia Sassen has noted that '[d]isplaced, uprooted, migratory people seem to have dwelled in the penumbra of European history, people living in the shadows of places where they do not belong',<sup>15</sup> and the editors and contributors hope to have illuminated at least some of those shadowy places in Europe's post-war years.

## Notes

1. Particularly of Poland, Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union. See Jan Gross, 'War as Revolution', in N. Naimark and L. Gibianskii (eds), *The Establishment of Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), pp. 17–40; Jan Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).
2. On the provision of aid and relief to refugees and displaced people in Europe, see the special issue of the *Journal of Contemporary History*, July 2008, which highlights the links between short-term relief and longer-term reconstruction efforts. See Jessica Reinisch, 'Relief Work in the Aftermath of War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 43, No. 3, July 2008, 371–404.
3. George Orwell, 'Politics and the English Language', *Horizon*, April 1946. Also see Mark Kramer, 'Introduction', in: Philip Ther and Ana Siljak (eds), *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944–1948* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 2.
4. See Peter Gatrell's chapter in this volume.
5. See particularly the chapters by Rainer Schulze and Gustavo Corni in this volume, as well as the recent volume edited by Pertti Aho, Gustavo Corni, Jerzy Kochanowski, Rainer Schulze, Tamas Stark and Barbara Stelz-Marx, *People on the Move: Forced Population Movements in Europe in the Second World War and Its Aftermath* (Oxford: Berg, 2008). The state of the Italian scholarship is described in Guido Crainz, Raoul Pupo and Silvia Salvatici (eds), *Naufraghi della pace: il 1945, I profughi e le memorie divise d'Europa* (Rome: Donzelli, 2008).
6. See the chapters by Catherine Gousseff, Gustavo Corni and Pamela Ballinger on long-term neglects in historical scholarship. On the invisibility of the fate of the Sinti and Roma in the historiography of Nazi genocide, see, for example, Michael Marrus, 'Reflections on the Historiography of the Holocaust', *The Journal of Modern History*, 1994, Vol. 66, No. 1, 92–116. Susan Tebbutt (ed.), *Sinti and Roma: Gypsies in German-Speaking Society and Literature* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1998). On Britain's Gypsy Traveller community, see, for example, Becky Taylor, *A Minority and the State: Travellers in Britain in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008).
7. See Matthew Frank's chapter in this volume.
8. Winston Churchill, speech to the House of Commons, 15 December 1944, United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States*



- Diplomatic Papers*, 1943, vol. III, p. 15; Parliamentary Debates (Hansard), Fifth Series, Official Report, House of Commons, vol. 406, col. 1484. Widely quoted, for example, in: Elizabeth Wiskemann, *Germany's Eastern Neighbours: Problems Relating to the Oder-Neisse Line and the Czech Frontier Regions* (Oxford: OUP, 1956), 82. He also talked about the 'disentanglement of populations' on earlier occasions, for example, compare 1 December 1943 (75).
9. Critical readings of this statement are particularly prevalent among those writing about the fate of German refugees; see, for example, Alfred M.de Zayas, *Nemesis at Potsdam: The Anglo-Americans and the Expulsion of the Germans* (London: Routledge, 1977).
  10. See my own chapter in this volume.
  11. Bessel and Schumann, *Life After Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe During the 1940s and 1950s* (Washington, DC: German Historical Institute Washington/CUP, 2003), 4.
  12. Tony Judt, 'Preface', in István Deák, Jan T. Gross and Tony Judt (eds), *The Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War II and Its Aftermath* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), xi.
  13. See Schulze's chapter in this volume.
  14. On the frozen Cold War landscape, see especially the chapter by Geoff Eley in this volume. Also see Tony Judt, *Postwar* (London: Heinemann, 2005), esp. 'From the House of the Dead: An Essay on Modern European Memory', 803–34.
  15. Saskia Sassen, *Guests and Aliens* (London: I.B. Taurus, 1999), 6.



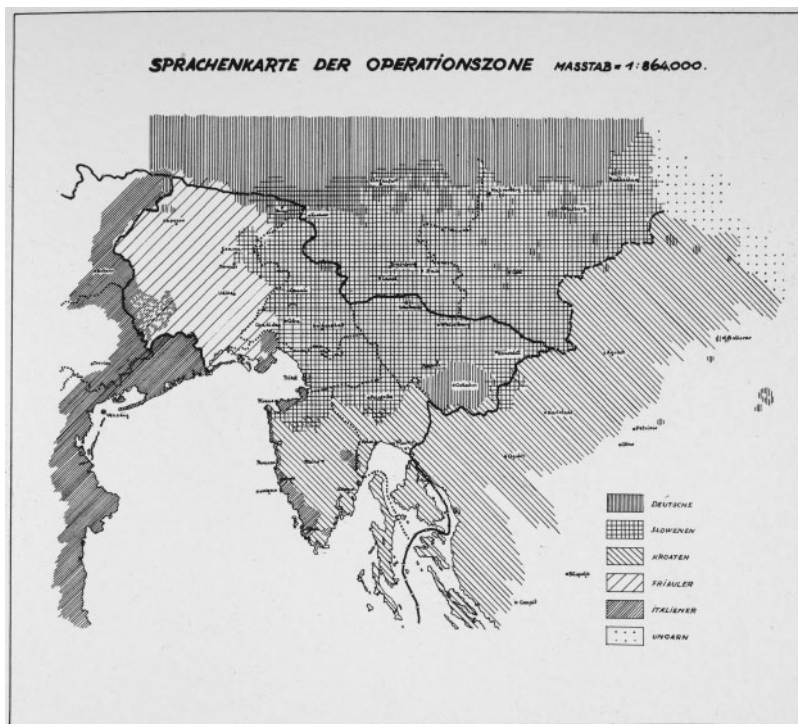


Map 2 'Germany - Zones of Occupation, February 1947'. Department of State, Map Division (Courtesy of the British Library, reproduced with permission)



Map 3 'Julian March – Ethnographic Map', from: *Ethnographical and Economic Bases of the Julian March* (1946) (Courtesy of the British Library, reproduced with permission)

Maps 3 and 4 are original maps which illustrate the complexity of the ethnic, linguistic and national divisions in the border region between Croatia, Slovenia and Italy, known as 'Venezia Giulia' in Italian and 'Juljska krajina' in Slovene and Croatian. The Western Allies adopted the name 'Julian March' as the most neutral name for the region. Since 1947 the Julian March does not constitute a separate administrative region.



Map 4 Linguistic map of the German military zone of the Julian March in 1944 'Sprachenkarte der Operationszone', from: *Ethnographical and Economic Bases of the Julian March* (1946) (Courtesy of the British Library, reproduced with permission)

'The linguistic map of the German military zone of the Julian March in 1944. For the operations against the people of the Julian March, the German Military Government has made a linguistic map, which shows the territories of the Julian March compactly cohabited by Slovenes and Croats. The map was captured in the German military archives in Trieste, May 1945'.

**Part I**  
**Explaining Post-War**  
**Displacement**