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### **The exile and resettlement of refugees from the Western Front, 1914-1918**

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The invasion of Belgium and France in August 1914 highlighted the civilian dimensions of the First World War and its characteristic ‘totalizing logic’.<sup>1</sup> The subsequent ‘German atrocities’ have attracted attention from historians who distinguish the nature and actuality of war violence from its cultural constructions.<sup>2</sup> However, the experiences of the four million persons who fled their homes before the invasion has been surprisingly neglected, as if historiography and collective memory alike concurred in marginalising the Western Front refugees. Yet the very displacement of this population testified to the age of ‘total war’.<sup>3</sup> Although military operations on the Western Front directly affected a minority of civilians, the refugee experience in 1914-1918 illustrates through ‘the growing, deliberate implication of civilians’ and ‘the erosion of the distinction between the military and civilian society’ a defining moment in the history of warfare which thenceforth implied the submission of the enemy population.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the reception of refugees across Europe highlights another critical change in the character of war that emerged during this conflict: the extensive mobilisation of the home-front whose commitment to the war effort provided the material and ideological support essential to an industrial conflict waged on a global scale.

Ultimately, this work would not only contribute to a better appreciation of the changing character of war but also attempt to rescue the people who, on the road to ‘total war’ ‘have fallen into the cracks of history’.<sup>5</sup>

Since the devastation of that heroic little land [Belgium] began, its inhabitants have turned to England, their only available shelter, and a stream of fugitives, largely destitute, has set in to our shores. At first, it trickled, it now flows strongly, and it may yet become a cataract. Whatever the magnitude, it must not only be received, but welcome and instantly provided for, until this tempest be overpast.<sup>6</sup>

Unaware as yet of the tempest unleashed in Belgium and France by the German troops, the *Times* reporter betrayed the uncertainty that hampered the initial preparations of the British and French governments alike. The incremental organisation of the public services and charities that assisted the refugees and the refugees’ movement within the host countries explain why it is difficult to give an accurate figure for the men, women and children who sought asylum. Nonetheless it is possible to provide an estimate based on reports written by state agencies and voluntary organizations that presided over the reception of refugees in Britain and France. The number of displaced persons who sought refuge in France may have reached nearly three million over the course of the war.<sup>7</sup> At no point during the conflict however did the number of foreign refugees rise beyond 290,000 (see fig. 1).

However sketchy and unsatisfactory the French statistics may be, the British estimates are more fragmentary and limited. The maximum number of Belgian refugees present at any one time in the UK was about 210,000 and as of 1 June 1919, the card index produced for the Central Register listed 225,572 names.<sup>8</sup> Directly related to the advance and retreat of the armies in the field, the influx of refugees to Britain virtually ceased following the occupation of Belgium.<sup>9</sup> Between the evacuation of Antwerp in September 1914 and the first repatriations at the end of 1918, one defining feature of the refugee population in Britain was therefore its relative stability.

Such a considerable movement of population led to an unprecedented encounter between civilians in exile and host communities in the allied nations, mainly in France and Great Britain. This encounter sheds light on the logic and configurations of the social responses to the war. An analysis of the humanitarian response elicited by the refugees’ plight indeed reveals the strengths as well as the tensions inherent in the process of social mobilisation that is inseparable from ‘total war’. In the

wake of the German invasion, the refugees embodied the tragic necessity of the conflict the French and British societies had been plunged into.<sup>10</sup> While their ordeal was deemed to illustrate German 'frightfulness' and 'barbarity', their reception was to symbolize Britain's commitment to uphold the rights of the 'Gallant Little Belgium' and the French determination to fight the enemy off the national territory. However, as the war took its material and human toll, tensions gradually arose between the exiles and their hosts. In some cases, this transfer of population led to confrontations that appeared to belie the cultural mobilization of belligerent societies. While the dimensions of a conference paper can hardly do justice to the scope and complexities of the topic, this paper is intended to fill in some of the gaps left by a relatively sparse body of scholarship dedicated to World War I refugees.<sup>11</sup>

## I- Refugees and wartime cultural mobilization

Recent historiography of the First World War attaches importance to 'dominant representations' in which hatred of the enemy loomed large.<sup>12</sup> This system of representation sustained the cultural, moral, and ideological commitment of each nation to fight an 'uncivilized' and even dehumanized enemy until it capitulated. This narrative, however critical to the cultural mobilization of the British and French populations, was nonetheless constantly reconfigured throughout the conflict. The experience of Western Front refugees provides another illustration of the importance of such plural modes of figuration and organization that determined their reception in home front communities.

Refugees were in many ways the paradigmatic embodiment of the culture of warfare in 1914-1918. By their pre-eminent position in the war narratives they supported a vision of the conflagration as a war for Civilization against Barbarism, waged in confident expectation of lawful reparations. The singularity of their experience obviously contrasted with that of the home front communities that had been spared from the military operations. Rallied under the common flag of a sacred cause, the victims of the invasion found refuge with their outraged 'brothers-in-arms', indignant over the treatment they had received. Refugees thus came across as the beleaguered victims of a cruel conflict, whose sufferings and distress could not be imagined by the population in the rear.<sup>13</sup> As it happened, French and British civilians were fully aware of the disproportionate ordeal the refugees were going through and of the unequal distribution of the burden of war.<sup>14</sup> Albeit victims of the German aggression, refugees were nonetheless considered as heroes whose very presence at the rear was a testimony to the courageous resistance shown towards a fearsome enemy. In wartime Paris, tributes to Belgium and the invaded countries prominently figured in the work of patriotic song-writers thus attesting the significance of the refugee in popular culture.<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, the assistance provided to the Belgian refugees became 'a striking tribute to the country which commanded the world's admiration'.<sup>16</sup> In leaving the combat zones, refugees shaped a system of representation which in the early stages of the conflict had unfurled without the population having had any direct acquaintance with the enemy. Subsequently, the sufferings and distress brought about by the invasion were gradually embodied in the refugee as these 'homeless victims of the barbarian' reached their haven.<sup>17</sup> The impression made on volunteers who went to London railway stations to look out for Belgians found its echo in Paris where inhabitants from the war zones initially sought refuge:

At the Gare de l'Est. ... The exodus from the invaded *départements* is still going on. It is a terrible procession (*défilé*) of poor wretches carrying along all that is left of their belongings. One could hardly witness a sadder scene.<sup>18</sup>

The exiles' experience bred a hatred of the enemy that lay at the heart of war cultures that increasingly focussed on the person of the enemy. The systematic moral condemnation of the foe

was moreover strengthened by a recourse to sacred images and words to invoke the ‘martyrdom’ of the invaded and devastated areas.<sup>19</sup>

Accordingly, the refugees must have found through the welcome at the home-front, the assistance that their eminent position in the contemporary *Weltanschauung* conferred upon them. The positive reception of refugees constituted, according to the London *Times*, the ‘country’s obligation of honour’.<sup>20</sup> Relief was thus conceived as a duty that the authorities in both countries invoked to underline the demands of wartime solidarity.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, translating the cardinal values of the war cultures, the reception of refugees established a link between the ethics of wartime mobilization and the institution of a specific legal regime. In France in particular, national solidarity was not only to provide the basis for the material assistance to civilian victims of the invasion. The moral demand of reparation for the harm done to ‘heroic’ refugees also culminated in the recognition of a right to state relief.<sup>22</sup> Parliamentary debates as well as prefectorial archives disclosed the extent to which the legal protection of the refugee as well as public policies, were suffused with this moral dimension:

In all circumstances, in Parliament or through [the Interior Ministry] administration’s circulars, it has been proclaimed that the assistance to refugees corresponds to a true debt incurred by the nation towards a category of citizens that bore the brunt of the miseries brought about by the war or of the sacrifices entailed by the national defence. It therefore results that such assistance does not constitute a favour that one is at liberty to grant or to deny the claimants in an arbitrary fashion, but a real entitlement (*droit*)....<sup>23</sup>

Undeniably, the reception of refugees also derived great importance from its patriotic character conjured up all along the conflict by the highest authorities of the State.<sup>24</sup> However, the authorities were above all concerned with bolstering the countries’ confidence and propping up civilian morale that the refugees’ fate was likely to undermine.

A legitimate object of the cultural history of the war, the experience of ‘Belgium in exile’ must not be reduced to discourses and symbolic productions that instituted but did not exhaust the reality we are concerned with. A critical issue, underlined by the reception of French and Belgian refugees, lies in the articulation of representations and practices, of the individual and the collective that the historian attempts to reconstruct.<sup>25</sup> In this case, the treatment of the invasion’s victims took on such a symbolic and emotional charge that this undertaking is made all the more difficult. It is therefore necessary to assert and maintain a critical distinction between the experiences of exile in 1914-1918 and the functions performed by the image of the ‘refugee’ in belligerent societies.

The history of the ‘refugee’ is inseparable from the 1914 atrocities which provide the backdrop against which we must approach their representation.<sup>26</sup> On their arrival as well as in the course of their settlement, refugees functioned as vehicles for the dissemination of images of brutality and suffering. Just arrived at the Gare du Nord in Paris, Belgian refugees and their French counterparts, were telling ‘dreadful things’.<sup>27</sup> Refugees’ tales prominently figured in the French and British press that frequently dispatched its journalists to the city’s railway stations in the first weeks of the conflict. While it is difficult to ascertain that newspapers adopted a specific reporting strategy, it is important to note the recurrence of those types of refugees deemed defenceless by virtue of their gender, age, or condition. Victims of the German might, women, children, and even priests regularly featured in those narratives.<sup>28</sup>

Settled in communities spared by the invasion, the refugees brought tales of the invasion reinforced by the authority that their direct experience conferred upon them. Thus, in the French primary schools, as a deputy-prefect put it:

The little refugees quickly become important. They tell what they saw. We gather around them. The teacher shows a bit more of tenderness towards them. They are back from the front. Sometimes one even calls them *les poilus*.<sup>29</sup>

The influx of Belgian refugees brought the settled population face to face with the realities and disasters of modern warfare. Parisian newspapers gave an account of the arrival of the invasion's victims who, as soon as they set foot on the railway station platform, were transformed into 'refugees' in the eyes of others who were deeply affected by the 'painful sight' they offered.<sup>30</sup> Similar scenes took place in Folkestone, the refugees' gateway to Britain, where 'each boat was carrying a contingent always worthier of help and pity.'<sup>31</sup> Across the host communities, refugees provided tangible evidence of the "tragedy of their martyred country", of "the horrors from which they had fled".<sup>32</sup>

During the first weeks of the conflict, when the restriction of information prevented people knowing what was going on at the front, Belgian refugees supplied news about the conduct of war and its impact. The misfortune of war found its expression in the tragedy of separation of family members<sup>33</sup> (poster)

The role played by 'refugees' in mobilising opinion in host nations is suggested by their 'performance' among the population that provided them with shelter. As a mobilisation device, the refugees' distress contributed to consolidating the national community at war. In France in particular, where most refugees were fellow countrymen and women, the idea was to 'create around the war victims a brotherly and affectionate atmosphere'<sup>34</sup>, which would testify to that 'magnificent national unity, which, out of all French souls makes one single enthusiastic and vibrating soul: the very soul of France'.<sup>35</sup> Despite its singularity, the refugee 'experience' partook of a process of national integration. The solidarity that the reception of refugees purported to demonstrate also revealed the negative dimensions of the integration and engagement of the nation at war which braced itself for the onslaught of an enemy that was mythologized as much as it was hated. The Belgian refugees were not only war victims but had also fallen prey to a 'barbaric' enemy. As a matter of fact, when a French local newspaper had set out to compare 'their practices and ours', to castigate 'the breaches of the rule of war', it just had to describe 'how they [were] treating the Belgians.'<sup>36</sup>

In fact, the plight of the refugees reinforced a system of representations according to which the war must lead to the foe's complete capitulation. 'Innocent' targets of a military operation that refused to comply with the traditional laws of war, the refugees were victims of a conflagration understood in social-Darwinist and ethnic terms, as a life and death struggle.<sup>37</sup> In a nutshell, the 'refugees' offered a metonymy of the war, of its stakes, around which a coherent system of representation hinged as well as the social practices that ultimately made up the social mobilisation of belligerent nation.

### **III- A litmus test of social mobilisation**

Surprised, British, Belgian and French commentators were at loss before the flood of refugees and constantly resorted to a maritime trope, conjuring up the 'Teutonic tide' and its 'formidable waves'.<sup>38</sup> The waves of refugees indeed broke against the mobilisation of the allied countries, which struggled to organise a humanitarian response and to determine some organizing principles in the emergency and confusion that characterized the first weeks of the war. National organizations such as the War Refugees Committee (W.R.C.) and the Secours National, supported by the British and French governments respectively laid the institutional and legal foundations of the reception while local refugee committees provided the personnel and showed a 'compassionate' side.

The number of local relief committees in England stabilized at around 1,500 in 1915. In most cases, these committees had been created spontaneously on the initiative of local notables and pre-existent institutions or communities.<sup>3940</sup> Many localities and all levels of society contributed to alleviating the catastrophe. In Paris, the Gare du Nord and Gare de l'Est witnessed the largest arrivals of refugees while their premises and surroundings were the setting of numerous local charitable initiatives.<sup>41</sup>

The private or official organisations that came to the refugees' assistance inferred from the Catholic heritage of the Belgian nation the denominational characteristics of the refugee population. They were therefore anxious to involve local Catholics and their charitable associations, even though local and national organizations soon realized that they needed to call upon other denominational or social groups.<sup>42</sup><sup>43</sup> Moreover, Belgium presented a diversified religious landscape, as illustrated by the charitable work carried out along denominational lines by the Jewish War Refugees Committee.<sup>44</sup> Originated from Russia and Galicia, most 'Belgian' Jewish refugees had fled Antwerp in the wake of the invasion. During the war, 8,000 of them sought refuge in Britain and were taken care of by Jewish relief organizations.<sup>45</sup> In London, the Jews' Temporary Shelter in Whitechapel initiated the community's humanitarian response that developed into the Jewish War Refugees Committee at the end of August 1914.<sup>46</sup> Despite the persistence of social and political tensions within the community, the mobilization of British Jews and their collaboration with local and state authorities enabled them to provide their coreligionists in exile with dedicated refuges across London. Their employment, however, proved rather more problematic than their accommodation. Indeed according to the W.R.C., the strict observance of the Sabbath among these predominantly orthodox Jews raised a serious difficulty that compounded the situation of a largely unskilled population.<sup>47</sup>

The reception of refugees highlights the mechanisms of wartime collective action. Its rhetorical emphasis on unity must however be re-evaluated in the light of the discrimination that occurred, notably in liminal zones of the societies at war such as railway stations.<sup>48</sup> There, upon arrival the exiles were ascribed their identity. Then defined as 'refugees', they fell under a specific category and legal regime signified by agents of the State as well as the mobilization of civil society. In the stations, social mobilisation took on various forms and expressed specific solidarities directly related in some cases to the primary function of the site. The concomitant presence of refugees and commuters for instance encouraged spontaneous and individual acts of solidarity whereby Parisians supported those refugees they had come across on their daily journey<sup>49</sup>

On entering and leaving the cities to be despatched to their wartime shelter in the countries, refugees carried their misfortunes around, prompting episodes of compassion.<sup>50</sup>

The support provided to refugees shows how important specific group solidarities were for the general war effort. The Friendly Association of Primary Teachers exemplified professional solidarity. Among its various initiatives, the association set a special relief fund, the Franc des Camarades Belges, thanks to which the French primary teachers supported their Belgian counterparts.<sup>51</sup> Likewise, the Railway Executive Committee, on behalf of the British Railways decided to offer hospitality to Belgian railwaymen while the National Fire Union held its hand out to Belgian fire-fighters.<sup>52</sup> Civil society thus contributed a formidable effort in favour of the Belgian refugees. However, this massive involvement appeared somewhat paradoxical, since the war simultaneously strengthened state control while the mobilisation of civil society enabled the state to cope with the war ordeals.<sup>53</sup>

Soon, the state indeed had not only to sustain but also to substitute for private philanthropy in cases where charitable energy flagged.<sup>54</sup> Two chronologies must be considered. One is that of the material support to the refugees, the other is of the attitudes towards refugees.

As early as 1915, local and national organisations in both countries noticed a worrying drying up of the financial resources.<sup>55</sup> In Britain, the W.R.C. and the Local Government Board responded by launching a remobilisation campaign.<sup>56</sup> Admittedly, shortages and economic disturbances weighed heavily on private initiative, of which the middle and upper classes were the backbone. But the discrepancy between this chronology and that of the national mobilisations, whose crisis is traditionally deemed to begin in 1916, leads us to pursue the analysis, and to highlight the circumstances that turned the refugees' reception into a paradoxical confrontation.

### III- Solidarity, confrontation, oblivion

Up to the beginning of 1915, refugees symbolized the consequences of barbaric German warfare. Thronging to the rear, they were regarded as the heroic victims of German militarism. Thereafter tensions surfaced and incidents broke out between refugees and their hosts. 'Boches du Nord', 'Dirty Belgians', 'German' and other abuses were hurled at the exiles, prompting their spokesmen to demand greater respect and, where appropriate, to appeal to the courts.<sup>57</sup> In this context, the policing of railway stations and especially of the Parisian Gare du Nord occasionally led to a fierce denunciation of the police. Its indiscriminate round-up of refugees led to their being lumped together by the press alongside ex-convicts and vagrants. It notably prompted a stern protest addressed to the Interior Ministry by M. Deguise, Député for the Aisne in September 1915.<sup>58</sup>

Sources of tensions between the refugees and the host communities varied both in nature and importance. Refugees were party to the 'social relations of sacrifice' that the historiography of the First World War has recently insisted on. The strains generated by the situation on the housing market for example constituted a major bone of contention between refugees and landlords 'of the vulture tribe'.<sup>59</sup>

Even though physical confrontations and clashes remained scarce, an anti-Belgian riot broke out in May 1916 in London when the crowd subjected Belgian citizens and property to the same kind of treatment inflicted on suspected Germans at the outbreak of the war.<sup>60</sup> That local residents identified refugees with the 'enemy' is exemplified in a letter written by a Fulham inhabitant:

The Belgians here are causing a lot of trouble. On Sunday, they nearly murdered a policeman and a soldier and yesterday the English people and kids collected in hundreds in Liller (illegible) Rd where a lot of Belgians have opened shops & last night the scene was beyond description. They have served them like they served Landsowne and the other Germans. Windows & shops smashed up everywhere. With the Irish Germans etc. now the Belgians we have our share of the troubles.<sup>61</sup>

Close examination of private sources and official and charities' reports suggests something of the prejudices, frustrations and sufferings that soured relations between the Belgian refugees and their hosts. The diary of Miss Coules, written in London between June 1914 and November 1915, describes the successive changes of perspective:

Everyone was Belgian mad for a time. Mother helped furnish a home for Belgians & gave a monthly subscription & Mercedes got up a choir of 20 girls – we called ourselves the Black Dominoes, as we wore long black cloaks and masks – to sing the national anthems of the allies in the streets, in aid of the Belgians. We made quite a considerable sum, & it was great fun. But the Belgians are not grateful. They won't do a stroke of work & grumble at everything & their morals...! It may be true enough that Belgium saved Europe, but... save us from the Belgians! As far as I am concerned, Belgianitis has quite abated.<sup>62</sup>

An interesting testimony of the versatility of some sections of the British upper class, this text also indicates the main grievances held against the Belgian refugees: a lack of enthusiasm for work as well as an 'alien' lifestyle. Belgians, Britons or French concurred in admitting to a small proportion of problematic characters and agreed that this ought not to have led to systematic generalizations and condemnations. Instead, citizens were asked to accept that refugees possessed the same mundane qualities and flaws as anyone else.<sup>63</sup>

The attitudes towards the Belgian exiles stemmed to an extent from the home-front ambivalence towards participation in the war effort. Barred from the 'Myth of the War Experience', civilians were fully aware of being ancillaries to the conduct of a war, embodied in the figure of the Tommy and the Poilu. Social practices as well as language and symbolic products were moulded by

a wartime morality – an ‘ethics of mobilisation’ – that undeniably relied on traditional social codes and visions of social order.<sup>64</sup> Accordingly, the frontline soldier stood out as the main character in a narrative that also sought to characterise the ideal civilian comportment. As duty, sacrifice and solidarity governed the soldier’s attitude under fire, the combatant provided the benchmark against which the home front would be deemed worthy of his patriotic sacrifice.<sup>65</sup> However, as the war dragged on, the home front formulated a different part in the national script. Whilst the soldier retained his prominence, the civilian population entered a process of victimization caused by restrictions and hardships and above all, by soaring casualties and the subsequent grief. Reinforced by deep and reciprocal ignorance as well as linguistic or legal marks of otherness, the refugees were therefore no longer granted any special distinction in the system of representation.<sup>66</sup> Now that every family confronted loss and encountered grief, refugees found themselves accused of excessive comfort, idleness and grim opportunism:

How fast do the deaths go; and how many of our Belgian friends seem to have confused and vague memories of what they suffered. Let’s not incriminate these friends. Moreover, they suffer as well, in their flesh, in their heart, in their interests; today, everyone attends to one’s own pain.<sup>67</sup>

The disappointment of the host communities matched the initial investment in the figure of the ‘refugee’. The mobilisation device was eventually turned against the exiles themselves, who became victims of their hosts’ self-delusion, as a French deputy-prefect conceded in 1915:

We tended to make ascetics and martyrs of the refugees. They are men like the others, but they suffered more than the others: this should make us admire their qualities more than we do, and make us more lenient towards their flaws.<sup>68</sup>

Local populations no longer ascribed to them any dignifying quality and increasingly demanded from them a total participation in the war effort. Belgian elites were consequently called upon to defend the reputation of their fellow countrymen for fear of seeing a few ‘black sheep’ compromising refugee relief and undermining Britain’s support to Belgium. In 1917 Madame Vandervelde, a prominent Belgian notable and wife of Socialist Minister Emile Vandervelde, thus set out to tour the country to denounce misunderstandings and abuses.<sup>69</sup> In the speeches she gave throughout the country, she strove to rebut anti-Belgian accusations and rumours of shirking.<sup>70</sup>

Attitudes towards refugees did not change with the dip in morale during 1917 or the military success of 1918. In fact, the reception of refugees and the subsequent tensions reflected the inner strains of the belligerent societies. Again, the prominent position bestowed upon the French and Belgian victims of the military operations by the war cultures did not prove sufficiently resilient to overcome regional tensions and linguistic otherness within the imagined national community. While initially, commentators favourably commented on the unfamiliar traits and voices of the exiles, the strains imposed by the war on the host communities soon led to tensions with refugees whose otherness and idiosyncrasies abetted confusions with enemy aliens.<sup>71</sup> In Alton, Hampshire, a refugee recalled how a Scottish officer had mistaken Flemish for German and therefore proceeded to arrest a group of such suspicious Belgians.<sup>72</sup> In France, the refugees from Alsace-Lorraine and the northern regions actually suffered slanders from their meridional fellow citizens who mistook them for German-speaking persons and hurled at them the infamous abuse: ‘Boche’ (‘Hun’). Evidence garnered from perustration bore out the recurrence of these feuds, suggesting that the ‘gap between the North and the South (Midi) seemed to grow wider’.<sup>73</sup>

Wartime social mobilisation rested on discriminatory processes that turned out to be successively inclusive and exclusive, at the benefit or at the expense of refugees and other war victims. Whilst the evidence presented above is consistent with a gradual shift from solidarity to confrontation, one ought nonetheless to be wary of concluding that bitterness and tensions obliterated the refugees’ gratitude. Undeniably, the British and French communities that welcomed them derived a legitimate and well-founded pride from the help they provided. As a matter of fact,

this national or inter-allied solidarity was celebrated on several occasions even before the refugees' homecoming as in Cardiff in 1916, where the refugees planted a tree in tribute to the city's hospitality.<sup>74</sup>

Yet collective memory enshrouded the singular experience of the refugees soon to be counted among '*les oubliés de la Grande Guerre*'. As the exiles were returning to the now devastated or formerly occupied areas of France and Belgium, the charitable energies that had sustained refugee relief were being channelled into the reconstruction of the localities laid to waste by military operations. The networks of solidarities first tested by the reception of refugees were called upon to help with the reconstitution of combat zones. The French Catholic Oeuvre de secours aux églises dévastées thus invited British Catholic organizations such as the Catholic Women's League to become or find 'god-parents' willing to 'mother the ruined churches' of France.<sup>75</sup> In Britain as well as in France, the fate of the 'martyr towns' that many allied soldiers died defending soon eclipsed the ordeal of refugees. As Annette Becker has pointed out with regard to the occupied populations, civil deportees and prisoners of war, the historiography sanctioned this oblivion through a long-lasting disregard for the complex processes of victimization that operated within the belligerent societies.<sup>76</sup> The experience of refugees is here symptomatic of the travails of memory, which historians must come to terms with:

Soldiers had a chance to become heroes; but no refugee was lionized. Even in death, military and civilian casualties were accorded different treatment. There are no war graves for the thousands of refugees who died en route to a 'place of safety'. The literature of war scarcely paid them any attention. No Owen or Remarque dwelt on their plight; no 'passing-bells' tolled for the refugees who moved – and sometimes died – like cattle. The contrast deserves to be included in the ironies of the First World War.<sup>77</sup>

In this remark, Peter Gatrell underlines a common feature of the predicament of the exiles of the First World War. Indeed, in Belgium itself where the occupation further entangled the commemoration and memorialisation of the war, refugees are conspicuous by their absence.<sup>78</sup> While the transitional nature of refugeedom certainly accounts for the fading memory of the refugees' experience, its relative neglect in academic circles has for too long belied the significance of exile in shaping the impact of war in twentieth-century Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> John Horne, ed., *State, society, and mobilisation in Europe during the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3

<sup>2</sup> John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German atrocities, 1914. A history of denial*, (New Haven - London: Yale University Press, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> In accordance with the most recent discussions of the concept, 'total war' is here understood as an 'ideal type' à la Weber, insofar as it emphasizes specific dimensions of warfare while making possible diachronic and comparative analysis. (Stig Förster and Jörg Nagler, eds., *On the road to total war: the American Civil War and the German Wars of Unification, 1861-1871* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Manfred F. Boemeke, Roger Chickering, and Stig Förster, eds., *Anticipating total war: the German and American experiences, 1871-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Roger Chickering and Stig Förster, eds., *Great War, Total War. Combat and mobilisation on the western front, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., 2000).; Roger Chickering and Stig Förster, ed.,

*The shadows of total war: Europe, East Asia, and the United States, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Chickering, *The shadows of total war*, 2003, 13

<sup>5</sup> Jane Kramer, *Unsettling Europe* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981)

<sup>6</sup> *The Times*, 14 Sep. 1914

<sup>7</sup> This figure included those who had fled the provinces and Paris during the German offensive in the spring of 1918 as well as those who had been repatriated through Switzerland.

<sup>8</sup> *Report on the work undertaken by the British government in the reception and care of the Belgian refugees*. See especially Appendix n°5, 58ff.

<sup>9</sup> G. A. Powell, ed., *Four years in a refugee camp. Being an account of the British government war refugees camp, Earl's Court* (London: Baynard Press, 1920), 28

<sup>10</sup> Recent studies of British public opinion at the outbreak of the war by Adrian Gregory (Pembroke College, Oxford) and Catriona Pennell (Trinity College, Dublin) have challenged conventional notions of "war enthusiasm". Echoing the conclusions of historians of France and Germany, they have persuasively argued that boisterous manifestations of patriotism belied the grim resignation and determination that dominated among the British population in August 1914.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Cahalan, *Belgian refugee relief in England during the Great War* (New York: Garland, 1982); Peter Gatrell, *A whole empire walking. Refugees in Russia during World War I* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999); Michael R. Marrus, *The Unwanted. European refugees from the First World War through the Cold War* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002). Recent works by Philippe Nivet in France and Mickaël Amara in Belgium nonetheless testify to a renewal of interest in WWI refugees. See Philippe Nivet, *Les réfugiés français de la Grande Guerre, 1914-1920: les 'Boches du Nord'* (Paris: Economica, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14-18: Retrouver la guerre* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 131.

<sup>13</sup> Archives Départementales de l'Hérault (thereafter A.D.H.) 2 R 729, *Appel du Ministre de l'Intérieur aux maires de France*, 1 Dec. 1914.

<sup>14</sup> *Le Petit Parisien*, 17 Aug. 1914 ; *Le Petit Méridional*, 2 Sep. 1914 ; *Northampton Independent*, 17 Oct. 1914; *Bulletin mensuel de l'association amicale des instituteurs et institutrices de l'Hérault*, Feb. 1915.

<sup>15</sup> Archives de la Préfecture de Police de Paris (Thereafter P.P.), DB 323, "Les héros de Dixmude", "Vengeons notre beau pays"

<sup>16</sup> *Bulletin mensuel de l'association amicale des instituteurs et institutrices de l'Hérault*, Feb. 1915. Indeed, as far away as New Zealand an ally could pronounce: 'But for these fellows we should be eating sauerkraut and drinking lager already', A.G.R., T.533, 9-16

<sup>17</sup> *The Times*, 10 September 1914; Imperial War Museum, London (thereafter I.W.M.) Essington-Nelson Miss A 86/48/1

<sup>18</sup> *Le Petit Parisien*, 31 Aug. 1914.

<sup>19</sup> Jay M. Winter, 'Propaganda and the mobilisation of consent,' in Hew Strachan, ed., *The Oxford Illustrated History of the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 218; Horne and Kramer, *German atrocities*, 291-325. Elaborated in and across Allied nations, the rhetoric of the 'martyr towns' gave rise, in France in particular, to a small industry of dedicated propaganda. See Albert Robida, *Les villes martyres, Arras* (Paris: E. Baudelot, 1914); Marius Vachon, *Les villes martyres de France et de Belgique* (Paris: Payot, 1915); Gabriel Hanotaux, *Les villes martyres* (Paris: Plon – Revue Hebdomadaire, 1915); and Marcel Augis's postcards of Arras, Ypres, Reims, Albert, Ramscappelle, Meaux.

<sup>20</sup> *The Times*, 14 Sep. 1914

<sup>21</sup> A.D.H. 3 R 30, *Télégramme du Ministre de l'Intérieur aux préfets*, 2 Dec. 1914. See also telegram, 3 Nov. 1914 ; A.D.H. 2 R 729, *Appel du Ministre de l'Intérieur aux maires de France*, 1 Dec. 1914.

<sup>22</sup> A.D.H. 3 R 31

<sup>23</sup> *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, « Instructions portant fixation du régime des réfugiés », 17 Feb. 1918

<sup>24</sup> Idem

- <sup>25</sup> Roger Chartier, *Au bord de la falaise. L'histoire entre certitudes et inquiétude* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998); Antoine Prost, 'Sociale et culturelle indissociablement,' in Jean-Pierre Rioux and Jean-François Sirinelli, *Pour une histoire culturelle*(Paris: Le Seuil, 1997).
- <sup>26</sup> Horne and Kramer, *German atrocities*, 175
- <sup>27</sup> *Le Petit Parisien*, 27 Aug. 1914.
- <sup>28</sup> *Le Petit Parisien*, 27 Aug. 1914
- <sup>29</sup> Ernest Gaubert, 'Scènes et types de réfugiés (notes d'un sous-préfet)', in *La Revue de Paris*, 10, 22<sup>ème</sup> année, 15 May 1915 ; Wallon, *Une cité belge sur la Tamise*; BDIC O 8947 *Reports of the Newport (Mon.) Belgian refugees committee, and forty other Belgian refugees committees in Monmouthshire and neighbourhood*, 1916; William H. Holloway, *Northamptonshire and the Great War* (Northampton: Northampton Independent, c. 1920).
- <sup>30</sup> *Le Petit Parisien*, 29 Aug. 1914
- <sup>31</sup> Armand Varlez, *Les Belges en exil* (Bruxelles – Londres: Librairie Moderne, 1917), 40
- <sup>32</sup> Holloway, *Northamptonshire and the Great War*, 220
- <sup>33</sup> I.W.M. Essington-Nelson Miss A 86/48/1
- <sup>34</sup> A.D.H. 2 R 729, *Appel du Ministre de l'Intérieur aux maires de France*, 1 Dec. 1914
- <sup>35</sup> A.D.H. 10 R 43
- <sup>36</sup> *Le Petit Méridional*, 8 Sep. 1914
- <sup>37</sup> Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, 'Violence et consentement: la 'culture de guerre' du premier conflit mondial,' in Rioux and Sirinelli, *Pour une histoire culturelle*, 259.
- <sup>38</sup> Gaubert, 'Scènes et types de réfugiés'.
- <sup>39</sup> Cahalan, *Belgian refugee relief*, 170-171.
- <sup>40</sup> *Reports of the Newport (Mon.) Belgian refugees committee*.
- <sup>41</sup> *Le Petit Parisien*, 30 Aug. 1914
- <sup>42</sup> Varlez, *Les Belges en exil*, 40 ; Holloway, *Northamptonshire and the Great War*, 220
- <sup>43</sup> I.W.M. Essington-Nelson Miss A 86/48/1. Miss Essington-Nelson recorded in a diary her experiences as a C.W.L. volunteer meeting trains at Victoria and Charing Cross stations.
- <sup>44</sup> The institutional history of the Jewish War Refugees Committees and its relations with the national and governmental agencies is dealt with in Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief*, 142-149.
- <sup>45</sup> *The Times*, 24 Mar. 1919
- <sup>46</sup> *Report on the work undertaken by the British government in the reception and care of the Belgian refugees*, 53
- <sup>47</sup> *Report on the work undertaken by the British government in the reception and care of the Belgian refugees*, 26.
- <sup>48</sup> Adrian Gregory, Emmanuelle Cronier, Jeffrey Verhey, Pierre Purseigle, 'Railway Stations: Gateways and Termini for the Metropolitan experience of war,' in Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert, eds., *Capital Cities at War. Paris, London, Berlin, 1914-1919*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007 forthcoming).
- <sup>49</sup> *Le Petit Parisien*, 29 Aug. 1914
- <sup>50</sup> idem
- <sup>51</sup> A.D.H. Par 2267, *Bulletin mensuel de l'association amicale des instituteurs et institutrices de l'Hérault*, Février 1915
- <sup>52</sup> 'Memorandum (n°2) for the use of Local Committees for the Care of Belgian Refugees', in *Report on the work undertaken by the British government in the reception and care of the Belgian refugees*, 94
- <sup>53</sup> And in the British case, ministers were happy to leave philanthropy to bear the burden of the support needed by the refugee. See the debate held in the Commons on 31 Aug. 1914 and the Prime Minister's response: 'We all have the greatest sympathy with these destitute refugees from a country for which we feel so much as we do at this moment, but there is a certain number of funds which are being raised by private action for the purpose, and I would rather wait and see how that works out before answering the Noble Lord's question.'; see also Herbert Samuel's remarks on 9 Sep. Hansard, Parliamentary Debates, 9<sup>th</sup> volume of session 1914, 66, House of Commons Debates, 18 Sep. 1914. For a broader perspective, see Pierre Purseigle, '1914-1918: Les combats de l'arrière. Etude comparée des mobilisations

sociales en France et en Grande-Bretagne,' in Anne Duménil, Nicolas Beaupré, Christian Ingrao, eds., *Experiences de guerre. 1914-1945* (Paris: A. Viénot, 2004).

<sup>54</sup> *Report on the work undertaken by the British government in the reception and care of the Belgian refugees*, 15

<sup>55</sup> National Archives, London MH 8 / 7 and Cahalan, *Belgian refugee relief in England*, 86ff.

<sup>56</sup> *Report on the work undertaken by the British government in the reception and care of the Belgian refugees*, 99

<sup>57</sup> *Bulletin des Réfugiés du Nord*, 20 Nov. 1915 ; A.D.H. 3R33

<sup>58</sup> *Bulletin des Réfugiés du Nord*, 11 Sep. 1915

<sup>59</sup> *Bulletin des Réfugiés du Nord*, 5 Feb. and 10 Nov. 1915 ; . For the situation on the metropolitan housing market, see Susanna Magri, 'Housing,' in Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert, eds., *Capital Cities at War. London, Paris, Berlin, 1914-1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 374-417

<sup>60</sup> Panikos Panayi, *The enemy in our midst: Germans in Britain during the First World War* (Providence – Oxford: Berg, 1991).

<sup>61</sup> I.W.M., Fernside Mrs E Con shelf & 92/49/1; 23 May 1916

<sup>62</sup> I.W.M., Coules Miss, M 97/25/1

<sup>63</sup> Gaubert, 'Scènes et types de réfugiés', 377

<sup>64</sup> George Mosse, *Fallen soldiers Reshaping the memory of the world wars* (New York – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). Eve Rosenhaft, 'Restoring moral order on the Home Front: Compulsory savings plans for young workers in Germany, 1916-1919,' in Frans Coetzee, Marilyn Shevin-Coetzee, eds., *Authority, identity, and the social history of the Great War* (Providence - Oxford: Berghahn Books 1995); Pierre Purseigle, *Mobilisation, sacrifice et citoyenneté. Angleterre – France, 1914-1918*, PhD thesis (Université de Toulouse – Le Mirail, 2006), 348-424

<sup>65</sup> John Horne, 'Soldiers, civilians and the warfare of attrition. Representations of combats in France, 1914-18,' in Coetzee and Coetzee, eds., *Authority, identity and the social history of the Great War*, 223-49

<sup>66</sup> Cahalan, *Belgian refugee relief in England during the Great War.*, 13ff.

<sup>67</sup> Varlez, *Les Belges en exil.*, 10

<sup>68</sup> Gaubert, 'Scènes et types de réfugiés', 377

<sup>69</sup> A.G.R. T 476 Comité officiel belge pour l'Angleterre

<sup>70</sup> *The Glasgow Herald*, 7 Nov. 1917

<sup>71</sup> 'This invasion has turned London into a city where allied tongues may be heard everywhere. In omnibuses and trains, in the shops and theatres one sees foreigners and one listens to foreign speech.' *The Times*, 10 Sep. 1914

<sup>72</sup> Tony Kushner and Katharine Knox, *Refugees in an age of genocide. Global, National and Local Perspectives during the Twentieth Century* (London: Cass, 1999), 61

<sup>73</sup> Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre, Vincennes 16 N 1536 and 7 N 868

<sup>74</sup> See Cardiff Refugee Committee in *Report on the work undertaken by the British government in the reception and care of the Belgian refugees*.

<sup>75</sup> I.W.M. Essington-Nelson Miss A 86/48/1, unidentified press cutting, probably February 1919

<sup>76</sup> Annette Becker, *Oubliés de la Grande Guerre. Humanitaire et culture de guerre 1914-1918. Populations occupées, déportés civils, prisonniers de guerre* (Paris: Noësis, 1998).

<sup>77</sup> Gatrell, *A whole empire walking. Refugees in Russia during World War I.*, 2.

<sup>78</sup> Stéphanie Claisse, *La mémoire de la guerre 1914-1918 à travers les monuments aux morts des communes d'Etalle, Habay, Léglise et Tintigny* (Bruxelles: A.G.R., 2002).