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Old Wine in New Bottles? UNRRA and the Mid-Century World of Displaced People

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By the end of the Second World War, millions of people had been forcibly displaced from their homes. Malcolm Proudfoot, who served in the Headquarters staff of the Allied Supreme Command in Germany, estimated in 1945 that over 60 million Europeans had been involuntarily moved during the war and immediate post-war period.¹ Well over 10 million forced labourers of Allied nationality found themselves stranded on the territory of the defeated German Reich. In addition, around 13 million ethnic Germans were being expelled from countries in Eastern and Southern Europe.² The numbers of uprooted people created by the war exceeded those of any previous crises.

The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration – UNRRA in short – was the first international body set up during the Second World War to make arrangements for the care and return of some of these uprooted people to their home countries. UNRRA was not created specifically as an agency to tackle refugee problems, but its work with displaced persons was crucial to its overall mandate to manage the transition from war to peace and to create the foundations for a new, peaceful world. Throughout the ‘forty years’ crisis’ reviewed in this volume, a series of organisations, set up by both governments and voluntary private groups, attempted to handle refugee problems. By the time of its creation in 1943, UNRRA was the biggest, boldest, best-funded international organisation working on refugee matters the world had seen. In its 5-year lifespan it organised the repatriation of millions of people, provided them with food, housing, welfare and health care, and opportunities for training and employment, and administered hundreds of DP camps – and thereby helped to define and re-define mid-century approaches to rehabilitation, repatriation and resettlement.

The scholarly literature on UNRRA’s work with refugees has grown significantly in the last decade. We have by now a wealth of academic studies, including on experiences by particular national groups and in particular DP camps³, as well as broader surveys.⁴ This chapter draws on

¹ See e.g. The National Archives (TNA), FO 1052/302, Director of DP Branch to HQ, Combined Displaced Persons Executive (CDPX), BAOR, ‘Liaison notes’, 1 September 1945. Malcolm Proudfoot, *European Refugees, 1939-1952: A Study in Forced Population Movements* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1956).

² Different scholars’ figures for these population groups vary greatly. See e.g. Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe’s Twentieth Century* (London: Allen Lane, 1998); Louise Holborn, *Refugees: A Problem of Our Time: The Work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1951-1972* (Methuen NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1975), 23; Michael Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 296-345; J. G. Stoessinger, *The Refugee and the World Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956), 45-48.

³ On particular refugee group experiences, see e.g. Zeev W. Mankowitz, *Life Between Memory and Hope: The Survivors of the Holocaust in Occupied Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Avinoam Patt and Michael Berkowitz (eds), *‘We are here’: new approaches to Jewish displaced persons in postwar Germany* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010). Angelika Königseder and Juliane Wetzel (eds), *Waiting for Hope: Jewish Displaced Persons in Post-World War II Germany* (trans. from the German by John A. Broadwin, Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2001). Lubomyr Y. Luciuk, *Searching for Place: Ukrainian Displaced Persons, Canada and the Migration of Memory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000). Anna D. Jaroszynska-Kirchmann, *The Exile Mission: The Polish Political Diaspora and the Polish Americans, 1939-1956* (Ohio

some of this work and UNRRA's own sources so as to attempt to place the organisation into the framework of the 'forty years' crisis' developed in this volume. UNRRA existed as an organisation in a long line of largely piecemeal and provisional organisations, instruments and mechanisms. The chapter seeks to understand it as one particular solution, or set of solutions, to the seemingly-perpetual refugee problem in Europe, developed at a crucial hinge point within the four decades after the end of the First World War. The chapter discusses how UNRRA's work with refugees was planned and prepared during the Second World War on the back of these earlier efforts, and identifies features that marked it out from both its predecessors and successors.

Planning for Peace

UNRRA was a direct product of Allied discussions about a world after and without war. By the early 1940s, when post-war planning began in earnest, influential assessments ascribed the world's descent into economic depression, famine, ruthless racial conflicts and a second bloody world war to a number of factors. Chief among them was the United States' retreat to isolationism and resulting absence from the international institutions created after 1919. Many analyses pointed to shortcomings not just of existing political institutions of the parliamentary democracies, but of the post-1919 international structures much more generally. The League of Nations had evidently failed to transcend the great powers' national interests, and as a result failed to secure agreement on collective problems such as disarmament and migration. Other factors highlighted by analysts after 1940 included the Allied powers' failure to formulate an effective policy on Germany; European states' failures to manage ethnic heterogeneity, particularly German minorities across Europe; and states' widespread lack of engagement with regional underdevelopment, poverty and food insecurity.⁵

When American and British planning staffs began to prepare for likely post-war scenarios, they were reminded that the mistakes of the aftermath of the First World War were not to be repeated. They rejected the idea of formally resurrecting the old League early on, and instead started to draw up

University Press, 2004). Thomas Lane, *Victims of Stalin and Hitler: The Exodus of Poles and Balts to Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004).

⁴ See particularly Wolfgang Jacobmeyer, *Vom Zwangsarbeiter zum heimatlosen Ausländer: Die Displaced Persons in Westdeutschland, 1945-1951* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985). Mark Wyman, *DPs: Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945-1951* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2nd ed. 1998). More recent works include Anna Holian, *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism: Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany* (University of Michigan Press, 2011), and Ben Shephard, *The Long Road Home: The Aftermath of the Second World War* (London: Bodley Head, 2010). Useful chapters on UNRRA appear in e.g. Marrus, *The Unwanted*; and Peter Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). UNRRA is also discussed in recent essay collections on refugee history, including in Jessica Reinisch (ed), special issue 'Relief in the Aftermath of War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 43, 3 (July 2008). Jessica Reinisch and Elizabeth White (eds), *The Disentanglement of Populations: Migration, Expulsion and Displacement in Postwar Europe, 1944-1949* (Palgrave, 2011); Matthew Frank and Jessica Reinisch (eds), special issue 'Refugees and the Nation-State in Europe, 1919-1959', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 49, 3 (July 2014).

⁵ e.g. influential critiques include John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace (1919)* and E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis: 1919-1939, an introduction to the study of International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1939).

blueprints for a new international organisation that could be created in its place. This new body would have to be supported by the 'Four Policemen': the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain and China. Efforts to commit both big and small powers to a new international organisation were boosted in January 1942, when 26 governments signed the 'Declaration by the United Nations', pledging to uphold the Atlantic Charter and agreeing not to accept a separate peace with the Axis countries. For the rest of the war, the term 'United Nations' described the joint efforts by the Allied nations to defeat fascism and Nazism.

Much of this preparatory work during the war for the post-war era focused on creating a permanent new successor to the League of Nations. In autumn 1944, the Big Four agreed the first blueprint of the new formal United Nations organisation during the Dumbarton Oaks conference. Further details of this new United Nations were debated and finalised at meetings in the following year, and in April 1945 the United States was born in San Francisco. The Preparatory Commission of the United Nations was established a few months later to make practical arrangements for bringing such a vast new body to life. Its Executive Committee met for the first time in August 1945 in London.⁶

But in the course of discussions about the permanent new international diplomatic and peace-keeping structures, it became clear that no collaborative or international effort, however ambitious, could even begin to implement any grand new vision for a world without war while millions of people were still uprooted, homeless, undernourished, sick, and without hope for a better future. With a range of academic studies and data at their disposal, several Allied organisations began to prepare for likely post-war scenarios, and drafted programmes for the immediate emergency phase – expected to last from the moment of liberation of the territories under Axis control until at some point after the armies were demobilised and the majority of civilians had returned to their homes. Most important among them was the Inter-Allied Committee on Post-War Requirements (known as the Leith-Ross Committee, named after its chairman Sir Frederick Leith-Ross), established in London in September 1941, which tabulated the needs and requirements of the liberated territories in Europe.⁷ The Office of Foreign Relief and Rehabilitation Operations of the US Department of State (OFRRO) was established in November 1942 under the leadership of Herbert H. Lehmann (former Governor of New York) to coordinate the provision of basic supplies to civilian populations; some hoped that it would recreate Herbert Hoover's relief missions after the First World War.⁸ OFRRO provided relief in French North

⁶ See e.g. Clark M. Eichelberger, *Organising for Peace: a Personal History of the Founding of the United Nations* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 280.

⁷ Leith-Ross was an eminent British Treasury official: former Economic Adviser to the British government, Director-General of the Ministry of Economic Warfare, after 1945 last British Governor of the National Bank of Egypt (until 1951), chairman of the Standard Bank of South Africa and Deputy Chairman of the National Provincial Bank. Some commentators credited him with a large role in the creation of UNRRA. The British diplomat Frank Ashton-Gwatkin thought that, 'but for Leith-Ross's [generous] impulses and activities, it is doubtful whether UNRRA would ever have seen the light as an international body', 109. See UNA, S-1021-0002-07, F. Ashton-Gwatkin, 'The Work of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration', [1951], 109, footnote 1.

⁸ e.g. A. Nevins, *Herbert H. Lehman and His Era* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), 225. On OFRRO, see e.g. United States, Office of Foreign Relief and Rehabilitation Operations, Division of Public Information, *The Office of Foreign Relief and Rehabilitation Operations, Department of State*

Africa, though on a relatively small scale. A year of this work provided ample evidence that the enormous problems of relief in war-torn areas would require international collaboration on a much wider platform than hitherto present.

UNRRA's immediate origins lay in these deliberations. British and American planners had been coordinating agendas at least since the creation in 1941 of the Combined Chiefs of Staff Committee, responsible to both the American president and British prime minister.⁹ By April 1943, when OFRRO's director Herbert Lehman and his special assistant Hugh R. Jackson went to London to meet with a range of Allied civilian and military representatives, including from the Soviet government, those channels of communication were well established.¹⁰ George Woodbridge, UNRRA's official historian, credits these early meetings with laying the foundations for a 'mutual understanding of the preparations for the postwar relief program on both sides of the Atlantic.'¹¹ Both the Leith-Ross Committee and OFRRO assembled sizeable groups of expert advisers. OFRRO, in particular, proved to be 'a magnet for progressive reformers originally drawn to Washington by the New Deal'.¹²

UNRRA was founded on 9 November 1943 in Washington, when 44 nations formally agreed on the structure of a new relief organisation. Its main tasks were to 'plan, co-ordinate, administer or arrange for the administration of measures for the relief of victims of war in any area under the control of any of the United Nations through the provision of food, fuel, clothing, shelter and other basic necessities, medical and other essential services.'¹³ It was to offer countries assistance in the resumption of urgently needed agricultural and industrial production, and the restoration of essential services. Finally, it was to make arrangements for the return of prisoners and exiles to their homes.¹⁴ The Agreement gave UNRRA the authority to plan, coordinate and implement measures for the relief of war-victims in areas liberated from axis control. In areas still under military control, UNRRA was obliged to obtain consent from the military authorities. Elsewhere, UNRRA had to be invited by the government of the area concerned; UNRRA would then negotiate an agreement, which specified the kinds and amounts of supplies it would bring and the services it would provide. National governments were UNRRA's clients and it worked through and for them, and only at their request.¹⁵

(Washington DC, 1943). On the limits of OFRRO, see e.g. League of Nations Archive (LNA) R5809/50/42186/42186, 'Problems of Training for the Administration of Foreign Relief and Rehabilitation' [18 June 1943]

⁹ see Jessica Reinisch, *The Perils of Peace: The Public Health Crisis in Occupied Germany* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 21.

¹⁰ According to Dean Acheson, Soviet officials were among the first to suggest a new international relief organisation, see Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1969), 65; and Dan Plesch, *America, Hitler and the UN: How the Allies Won World War II and Forged a Peace* (I.B.Tauris, 2011), 121.

¹¹ George Woodbridge, *UNRRA: the History of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), Vol.1, 23.

¹² James A. Gillespie, 'International Organizations and the Problem of Child Health, 1945-1960', *Dynamis: acta hispanica ad medicinae scientiarumque historiam illustrandam*, 23 (2003), 115-142, 123.

¹³ UNRRA Agreement, Articles 1 and 2.

¹⁴ *Helping the People to Help Themselves: the Story of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration* (H.M. Stationary Office: London, 1944)

¹⁵ e.g. Woodbridge, *UNRRA*, Vol.1, 12.

Administratively, UNRRA was an extension of a number of other bodies. Particularly in its infancy in Washington, before the beginning of any practical field work or the growing importance of UNRRA's regional headquarters, the US State Department in general and OFRRO in particular provided UNRRA with staff (not least Herbert Lehman, whom Roosevelt appointed as UNRRA's first Director General), ideas and plans. In UNRRA's Washington headquarters, both the 'layout of offices and of major positions within them' drew significantly on plans drafted by OFRRO staff.¹⁶ OFRRO, in turn, relied on League of Nations' experts – by now a group of them had moved to Princeton – for advice on staff recruitment and the management of relations between the various international organisations.¹⁷ OFRRO bequeathed a 'vast body of material' to the US delegation to UNRRA, which, according to Woodbridge, 'exercised a major influence on the work of the Council in its First Session and subsequent developments within UNRRA, if not directly, at least by virtue of the fact that many of the individuals who worked on its preparation also had key positions on the various committees of the First Session and later in the Administration.'¹⁸ OFRRO was, in essence, UNRRA's 'path-breaker', and soon turned into the US component of UNRRA.¹⁹ Nonetheless, while UNRRA's structural and administrative origins were reasonably clear, the heritage of its ideas about relief and rehabilitation, and, importantly, its refugee mission, were more complex.

UNRRA and the DPs

While the war was still being fought, UNRRA's staff of planners and relief workers in Washington and London spent much of their time anticipating, planning and preparing for likely scenarios, and presenting them at Allied conferences. For as long as much of the continent was still under Axis control they had little to do other than theoretical planning. Planners read academic studies about the state of Europe and its uprooted peoples, along with news, intelligence reports and statistics coming from the occupied territories. By late 1943, a number of detailed studies of the European refugee problem had been published and widely circulated. Among them was a survey compiled in 1938 by Sir John Hope Simpson, former Vice-President of the Greek Refugee Settlement Commission, on behalf of the Royal Institute for International Affairs, which discussed the consequences, in population terms, of the First World War, Russian Revolution and the recent persecution of German Jews. In this and subsequent reports he identified three groups of refugees who demanded attention: those Russians, Armenians and others who had come under the aegis of the original Nansen office; the refugees fleeing Nazi persecution in Germany and Austria who now came under the auspices of the High Commissioner for Refugees from Germany; and Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and other refugees fleeing persecution at home who lacked any kind of international protection and support.²⁰

¹⁶ Ibid, Vol.1, 23, 149. ****

¹⁷ Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920-1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 287.

¹⁸ Woodbridge, *UNRRA*, Vol.1, 23, 149, and Vol.2, 20.

¹⁹ A. Nevins, *Herbert Lehman*, 225.

²⁰ See particularly John Hope Simpson, 'The Refugee Problem', *International Affairs*, Vol.17, No.5, Sept-Oct., 1938, 607-628. Sir John Hope Simpson, *Refugees: Preliminary Report of a Survey* (Royal

In the future, Simpson argued, economic development in rural stretches of Eastern Europe would be a crucial 'prophylactic treatment' for preventing Jewish (and other) emigration from those areas. But for those masses of existing refugees for whom any such economic development would come too late, Simpson argued, the League had to radically extend its scope if it was to continue to be the main refugee agency. One point was clear, he argued: 'the main lesson emerging from a study of League assistance is the overriding necessity to treat the refugee service as primarily technical, and to minimise the political features of its existence. Extraneous political interests have repeatedly invaded the refugee work of the League.' In any future arrangement, divisive political positions of leading officers and 'political sectionalism' had to be avoided. The refugee problem was 'clearly so political in character that it can never be treated as entirely neutral and technical.' But it was 'all the more important for that reason that every administrative and constitutional step possible should be taken to minimise its political associations and to emphasise its technical character.'²¹ This sentiment was to become one of UNRRA's guiding themes. Listening to Simpson lecturing on the subject, Norman Bentwich, a former attorney-general of Mandatory Palestine and director of the League's High Commission for Refugees from Germany, thought that talk had given him 'the strongest impression...that the refugee problem was manageable.'²²

Another scholar offering pertinent insights into the refugee problem in Europe was Louise Holborn, a German-born émigré political scientist who worked as a research analyst for the US Office of Strategic Services during the war, and published a series of papers, including on the League of Nations' arrangements for the protection of certain groups of refugees.²³ In a 1939 survey of the international organisations which took an interest in refugees, she noted that because the League had become 'too weak' to stand up to Germany and Italy, 'the weight of moral and political authority' for the protection of refugees had shifted to the newly-created Intergovernmental Committee for Refugees (IGCR).²⁴ The IGCR was set up in the aftermath of Germany's annexation of Austria in the

Institute of International Affairs, July 1938. Sir John Hope Simpson, *Refugees: A Review of the Situation Since September 1938* (Royal Institute of International Affairs, August 1939). Also see Peter Gatrell, 'Introduction: World wars and population displacement in Europe in the twentieth century', *Contemporary European History*, 16, 4 (November 2007), 415-426.

²¹ Simpson, *Refugees*, 96-97.

²² Discussion of Simpson, 'The Refugee Problem', 622.

²³ Louise W. Holborn (1898-1975) was born in Berlin, and studied at the University of Heidelberg and German Academy for the Advanced Study of Political Science. In 1933 she emigrated to London; in 1934 to the United States, where she earned a PhD at Radcliffe College in 1938. Thereafter she taught history, political science, international relations and international law. In 1942, she was a research analysis for the Office of Strategic Services' Civil Affairs Division. She was active in the US Committee for Refugees, and after the war in IRO, UNHCR and other UN projects. See Harvard University Library catalogue, <http://oasis.lib.harvard.edu/oasis/deliver/~sch01341> [accessed 1 November 2016]. She also played an active role in World Refugee Year, see Peter Gatrell's chapter in this volume.

²⁴ Louise Holborn, 'The League of Nations and the Refugee Problem', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol.203, Refugees, May 1939, 124-135. See also Louise Holborn, 'The legal status of political refugees, 1920-1938', *The American Journal of International Law*, 32, 4 (October 1938), 680-703. She went on to publish big volumes on the IRO and UNHCR. Louise W. Holborn, *The International Refugee Organization: a specialized agency of the United*

previous year, as a continuation of the efforts of the conference at Evian in July 1938 to find solutions for the thousands of Jews in Germany and Austria trying to emigrate.²⁵ It was the first international refugee agency to be created outside of the League's apparatus. It was also the first to be set up on a 'permanent' basis (though finally disbanded in 1947), and the first to include a mandate for 'potential' refugees: people who had not yet been displaced, but whose displacement in the face of ongoing discrimination and ethnic conflict was likely and imminent. Holborn could not yet know that a reorganisation of the IGCR in 1943 would introduce government funding for refugee maintenance 'for the first time in the history of international refugee assistance.'²⁶ But already in 1939 Holborn was hopeful that the IGCR was able to manoeuvre in ways other existing organisations had not been able to. Nonetheless, she went on, the legal apparatus for the status of refugees created by the League remained crucial, and the IGCR could only be successful if it coordinated closely with other existing bodies and drew on 'the experience and accumulated knowledge of those who have been engaged in the work for refugees.'²⁷

The new Allied planning organisations also began to pay closer attention to the problem of refugees as a key component of any post-war scenarios. Among the steady output of papers by the Leith-Ross Committee was a preliminary study of the immediate post-war period, published less than a year after it began to meet, which reviewed a series of issues to consider in the planning of relief operations. One of them concerned population movements. The movements of both war refugees and foreign prisoners in Germany, it proposed, would have to be regulated as soon as hostilities had ceased, 'if serious disorders are to be avoided.' The report provided few concrete details or numbers of likely population movements, but insisted that refugees would have to be treated in the broader context of post-war relief and rehabilitation measures. Its main recommendation concerned the administration of the refugee problem: a new body would have to be created specifically 'to deal with problems affecting expelled persons, recruited labour, and, so far as they are not covered by existing bodies, refugees; in order words, with all those stranded at the end of the war.' In order to be at all effective, such an agency would have to be launched by the 'principal Allied Powers, and authorised (i) to apply to the competent authorities of the Occupation for the necessary supplies and priorities; and (ii) to enlist the cooperation and where necessary coordinate the activities of existing organisations.' A 'Director of international standing' would have to be appointed to lead it, and he would have to be advised by both the Allied Powers and the 'important existing organizations,

Nations, its history and work, 1946-1952 (Oxford University Press, 1956). Holborn, *Refugees, A Problem of Our Time*.

²⁵ On the IGCR, see particularly Tommie Sjöberg, *The Powers and the Persecuted: The Refugee Problem and the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (IGCR), 1938-1947* (Lund University Press, 1999). Also Eric Estorick, 'The Evian Conference and the Intergovernmental Committee', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 203 (May 1939), 136-141.

²⁶ Sjöberg, *The Powers and the Persecuted*.

²⁷ Holborn, 'The League of Nations and the Refugee Problem', 124-135.

voluntary or international... The nucleus of the League of Nations Secretariat remaining at Geneva might perhaps be invited to co-operate in this task.²⁸

A few months after this report was released, a meeting at the Fabian Society in London aired further predictions and proposals by a number of well-known British public intellectuals, among them Harold Laski and Julian Huxley. In the published report, one author, Kenneth G. Brooks, gave dire warnings about the scale of the refugee problem – ‘the biggest human problem with which we shall be faced in re-ordering the world after the end of the war’ – the magnitude of which was ‘such as to cause the heart to sink and beside it the re-organization of the world’s economic life may well seem a simple matter.’²⁹ Although most of those uprooted would wish to return home as soon as they could, Brooks argued, repatriation would have to be strictly controlled, in the interest of preventing both the spread of infectious diseases and transport bottlenecks that could mean starvation for communities dependent on food imports. Like Holborn, Brooks thought about the agencies best placed to manage this crisis, and he concluded that the existing piecemeal, ad hoc organisations were no longer appropriate for a problem of this magnitude. Thirty-nine voluntary organisations dealing with refugees from Germany had been represented at Evian and were in close contact with the League’s High Commissioner for Refugees and the IGCR. However, he went on, ‘the work of the voluntary organisations has been mostly of a case-work nature and although the need for the sympathetic and individual help they have been able to give will continue, it is clear that the time has come for international direction on a governmental level.’³⁰ After the war, the return and re-settlement of the displaced people would best be managed by an inter-allied body ‘working in close conjunction with the Supreme Economic Council which will be set up as the directing authority in the reorganisation of European economy.’³¹ Ultimately, the vast refugee problem was part of an even bigger problem of the rehabilitation of European agriculture and industry. Regardless of whether it could ultimately be solved through repatriation or through ‘colonization and assimilation’, both required significant amounts of capital for rehabilitation and economic development.³²

Perhaps the most influential study available to UNRRA’s planners was Eugene Kulischer’s *The Displacement of Population in Europe*, commissioned and published by the International Labour Organisation in 1943.³³ Drawing on an enormous range of sources, Kulischer estimated that over

²⁸ *Relief and Reconstruction in Europe: The First Steps – an Interim Report by a Chatham House Study Group* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, July 1942). Also see The National Archives (TNA), FD 1/6819, ‘Immediate post-war measures of relief and reconstruction in Europe’, Sir Frederick Leith-Ross (Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House) to Medical Research Council, 9 February 1942; and T 188/255, ‘Outline of post-war Relief Problem’ [July 1942].

²⁹ Kenneth G. Brooks, ‘The Re-establishment of Displaced Peoples’, in: *When Hostilities Cease: Papers on Relief and Reconstruction Prepared for the Fabian Society* (London: Gollancz, 1943), 99.

³⁰ *ibid*, 122.

³¹ *ibid*, 118.

³² Brooks made reference to Roosevelt’s call in October 1939 to ‘draw up world-wide plans for dealing with ten to twenty million emigrants after the war’, and the subsequent work of the President’s Advisory Committee for Refugees, 120 - see Matthew Frank’s chapter.

³³ Eugene M. Kulischer, *The Displacement of Population in Europe* (International Labour Office, Montreal, 1943), 163, 160. Kulischer (1881-1956) was born in Kiev, studied at the University of St Petersburg, fled after the October revolution in 1920 from Russia to Germany. Later he emigrated to

thirty million Europeans had been displaced since the beginning of the war, including at least 6.5 million foreign labourers employed in Germany. To that number had to be added the millions of men serving in the Axis military, many of them stationed abroad or taken prisoner, as well as an un-estimated number of people drafted to work in the fascist-occupied territories, and millions of Germans and Italians evacuated from bombed cities. Elsewhere, Kulischer and others estimated that those around 6.5 million civilian workers were joined by at least 2 million prisoners of war working on German soil.³⁴ 'If all these movements could be properly taken into account', Kulischer continued, 'the result would certainly be a grand total of over forty million.'³⁵ By breaking down this mass displacement into different categories of people on the move, Kulischer hoped to 'indicate.. the magnitude of the task involved in straightening out the population tangle caused by war and occupation.' This was crucial because, he added, the 'permanent resettlement of all these uprooted people will be one of the most urgent tasks of post-war reconstruction. It is an undertaking which will require the greatest possible amount of international organisation and collaboration.'³⁶

Kulischer thought that repatriation would be 'the obvious solution' for most, but would require great effort and coordination of strained transport systems and competing needs of occupation armies, civilians, repatriation and economic rehabilitation programmes. However, if they weren't repatriated, 'the highways of Europe' would be 'blocked by long processions of destitute exiles, enduring every kind of privation in an effort to return unaided to their homes.' Even once returned, repatriates would continue to require assistance to find housing, training and work. As such, repatriation required a long view that was part of a much bigger problem of rehabilitating the liberated countries – comprising of 'not only the reconstruction of the devastated areas, the re-equipment of industry, and restocking with cattle, seed, fertilisers and raw materials, but the reorientation of economic life as a whole.'³⁷ UNRRA took this on almost word for word.

Soon after its formal creation, a number of committees and expert groups were formed within UNRRA and began to make more concrete preparations.³⁸ An early example, which allows glimpses into how UNRRA policy and procedures was taking shape, is a report by the 'Sub-Committee on Policies with respect to Assistance to Displaced Persons' submitted after the first session of UNRRA's

Denmark, in 1936 to Paris, and from there to the US via Spain and Portugal. He became an expert analyst for the Office of Strategic Services, and adviser to ILO, Bureau of Census and Library of Congress. See e.g. Antonio Ferrara, 'Eugene Kulischer, Joseph Schechtman and the Historiography of European Forced Migrations', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 46, 4 (2011), 715-740.

³⁴ Malcolm Proudfoot, table 'Foreign civilian workers and working prisoners of war in Germany, 1939-1944', using data of ILO by E. M. Kulischer and J. B. Schechtman, *International Labour Review*, October 1944, 470.

³⁵ Kulischer, *Displacement of Population*, 164.

³⁶ *ibid*, 166.

³⁷ *ibid*, 166-167.

³⁸ One of them was the Standing Technical Subcommittee on Displaced Persons for Europe, which met in London and oversaw a series of six Expert Commissions, each tackling aspects of UNRRA's work with displaced persons, and producing many papers.

Council – its policy-making organ – in Atlantic City in November 1943.³⁹ The committee brought together well-known experts on refugee matters. Its chair was the Cuban Gustavo Gutierrez Sanchez⁴⁰; other members included the British diplomat Sir George Rendel,⁴¹ and the US State Department's Adviser on Displaced Persons and Refugees, George L. Warren.⁴² The report began by sketching out 'the various categories of persons likely to be affected by the repatriation activities of UNRRA.' They included, as Kulischer had already identified, UN nationals who had left their homes 'because of the war' and were now stranded on liberated or conquered territory, as well as people displaced within their own countries. Only enemy nationals were formally excluded from UNRRA's reach at this stage. The report estimated that in Europe alone there would be 'tens of millions of displaced persons who will need to be repatriated to their homes.' There was no doubt about the urgency of their repatriation. It was likely that the displaced populations would attempt to return home as soon as their current or previous homes had been liberated from enemy control, even before any 'adequate machinery to control or organise it' could be set up. The greatest danger was chaos. UNRRA's most important job was to organise these movements, in liaison with the Allied military authorities, and 'to establish some uniform system of dealing with these persons, during both the military and the subsequent periods.' The other reason for urgency, the report added, came from 'the medical aspect of the problem', already explained in the Leith-Ross findings, and UNRRA's work with the displaced had to proceed 'in the closest association' with that of its medical and health staffs.

³⁹ On the event overall, see Philip C. Jessup, 'The First Session of the Council of UNRRA', *The American Journal of International Law*, 38, 1 (January 1944), 101-106, and Woodbridge, *UNRRA*, Vol.1, 24-32.

⁴⁰ e.g. see Gustavo Gutierrez y Sanchez, *El problema de los refugiados (la política de la UNRRA respecto a las poblaciones desarraigadas, y especialmente a los refugiados que se encuentran en los países de America)* (La Habana: Editorial Lex, 1944)

⁴¹ By 1943, Rendel (1889-1979) already had a significant career as a senior British diplomat behind him. He was of the Foreign Office's Eastern Department from 1930 to 1938. Between 1941-43 he was UK Ambassador to Yugoslavia; 1944-1947, UK Acting Undersecretary of State in Foreign Office and Representative on UNRRA's Committee for Europe; 1945-1947, UK Delegate to UNRRA Council Meetings. e.g. see Imperial War Museum (IWM), 84/47/1, Reference Division (Foreign Economic Section), 'International Reconstruction Series: Britain and European Reconstruction', 22 August 1946. Also see his memoir, Sir George Rendel, *The Sword and the Olive: Recollections of Diplomacy and Foreign Service 1913-1954* (John Murray, 1957).

⁴² George L. Warren (1890-1981) was long-standing US 'Adviser on Refugees and Displaced Persons'. His posts included secretary and consultant to FDR's Advisory Committee on Political Refugees; adviser to the US Representative, Myron Taylor, at the Evian conference; State Department liaison officer to the War Refugee Board; member of US delegations to UNRRA and chairman of UNRRA's Committee on Displaced Persons; US representative to the Intergovernmental Commission on Refugees in Paris and London; delegate to the Executive Committee of the International Refugee Organization; delegate to the Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Status of Refugees and Stateless Persons in Geneva; and US representative to the Council Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration. e.g. see biographical summary of George L. Warren Papers, Truman Library, <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/hstp/warren.htm> [last accessed 18 November 2016] Also see his entry on the war refugee problem, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1959, Vol.XVI, 59, 60.

Overall, UNRRA's purpose was one of overseeing, coordinating and organising mass movements, and bringing people 'home'.⁴³

In the following months, as Allied manuals supplemented these insights with further instructions, they suggested that UNRRA should be guided by a basic division between 'refugees', a label here given to civilians uprooted by war but still within their own countries, and 'displaced persons', or D.P.s – a term in wide circulation by 1943 – as civilian refugees of Allied nationality uprooted and outside their countries.⁴⁴ UNRRA's DP operation was to focus on the latter kind of person, while at the same time, though not spelled out here, UNRRA's missions in the receiving countries were undoubtedly going to encounter the former.⁴⁵

One issue – already raised by Holborn in 1939 and periodically touched on by UNRRA's planners, but far from conclusively solved by 1943 – concerned UNRRA's relationship with the various existing agencies active in refugee work. How could all this work be coordinated, and what was UNRRA's place within it? As one UNRRA memorandum from November 1943 explained: currently there were at least 'four official international bodies and one semi-official agency concerned with the problem of displaced persons': the International Labour Office (sic, ILO) and its Migration Section; the High Commissioner for Refugees coming under the Protection of the League of Nations; the Intergovernmental Committee for Refugees, and the International Committee of the Red Cross. And, it continued, both 'functions and terms of reference of these bodies may at first sight appear to overlap'.⁴⁶

The memorandum went on to demonstrate just how much the refugee problem in Europe had generated piecemeal, fragmented and provisional solutions, and a string of organisations with remits broken down into particular refugee groups as defined by nationality and circumstance. Indeed, it explained, 'the term "refugee" has varied meanings. There are, for instance, the so-called Nansen refugees resulting from World War I, central European refugees who are mostly Jewish and stateless, and war refugees who have fled from military action.' Similarly, the term 'displaced person' included 'prisoners of war, political prisoners, forced laborers, civilian internees, evacuees, displaced populations and eventually residuals of these groups of those for whom new places of settlement must be found.' UNRRA had to grapple with the fact that '[e]ach of these categories of refugees presents a different problem requiring different treatment'; and '[e]ach of the foregoing organizations has come into being to meet a specific need': ILO's main interests lay with migrant labourers' conditions of work. The High Commissioner represented the original so-called 'Nansen refugees' as

⁴³ National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), 840.50 UNRRA-131, Committee IV, Subcommittee 4, Report of the Sub-Committee on Policies with respect to Assistance to Displaced Persons, 25 November 1943.

⁴⁴ See Proudfoot, *European Refugees*, 115. Ben Shephard noted that the precise origin of the term were not clear, but it is likely to have originated in the Leith-Ross committee. See Shephard, *The Long Road Home*, 37. Also see Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee*, 95.

⁴⁵ NARA, 840.4016 DP/8-344, Warren to Acheson, Berle and Dunn, 'Need for action on plan for displaced persons', 3 August 1944. Also see Marrus, *The Unwanted*, 300.

⁴⁶ United Nations Archive (UNA) S-1021-0002-06, 'International Bodies Concerned with Displaced Persons', 2 November 1943.

well as those fleeing Germany, Austria and the Sudetenland. The League had 'always considered its interest in refugees of a temporary nature and with a few notable exceptions has never assumed responsibility for relief to refugees. Its services have been predominantly that of improving the legal status of refugees through provision of Nansen certificates and of securing rights of residence and work and the benefits of social security legislation.' One ad hoc solution led to another: Because the High Commissioner had a restricted mandate of dealing only with refugees already outside of their countries of origin, the Evian Conference then created the IGCR, with its focus on the Jews still inside Germany and Austria and likely to become refugees soon. At this stage, the memo concluded, UNRRA was the 'logical body' to be responsible for all matters of repatriation and provision of relief to refugees, and only the 'residuals' would eventually be passed back to the IGCR. Above all, the current situation demonstrated just how much of a need there was for a new international body charged with 'developing plans which Governments may support.'⁴⁷

The question of UNRRA's relationship with other organisations with overlapping interests in refugees continued to cause confusion, in spite of various further attempts to explain it.⁴⁸ Often the division of responsibilities hinged on artificial remits or technical definitions that were difficult to enforce in practice. Eventually, two principles were established: UNRRA's work was to be defined by a focus on repatriation, and UNRRA was to be given the authority to supervise and coordinate the work of other relevant organisations. The IGCR was to step into action only for those refugees not falling within UNRRA's remit, who could not be repatriated and for whom new host countries had to be found. As Sir Herbert Emerson, Director of the IGCR since January 1939, explained to George Warren, the IGCR was supplementary to UNRRA. 'In countries where UNRRA has not a programme of general relief, but is carrying out special measures of assistance to displaced persons', Emerson explained, 'the definition of a displaced person as laid down by the Council of UNRRA is a person who has been displaced as a result of the war. There are, therefore, many persons displaced before the war who are not eligible for relief by UNRRA, but who do come within the mandate of the Intergovernmental Committee, and are in desperate need of assistance.' Moreover, Emerson added, since UNRRA was likely to be active only in the short-term, IGCR could always pick up again after UNRRA's closure. He seemed to assume that the refugee problem was likely to continue beyond UNRRA's existence.⁴⁹

From its inception, then, UNRRA drew on and synthesised a number of assumptions about the nature of past and present refugee crises, as articulated by Simpson, Kulischer, Holborn and others. A first

⁴⁷ UNA S-1021-0002-06, 'International Bodies Concerned with Displaced Persons', 2 November 1943.

⁴⁸ e.g. on the ILO, see UNA S-1021-0002-06, 'International Labour Office Migration Section', 16 October 1943. On the IGCR, see UNA, S-1021-0002-06, 'The Intergovernmental Committee', 14 October 1943. On the US War Refugee Board, see NARA, 840.50 UNRRA/273 PS/SMS, Acheson to American Ambassador in London, stamp 23 February 1944.

⁴⁹ NARA 840.48 Refugees/7-745, Memorandum, H. W. Emerson to George L. Warren, 3 July 1945. Also printed in *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1945, General: Political and Economic Matters, Volume II*, and online <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945v02/d538>

assumption concerned the fact that any large and disorganised movements of displaced people and refugees would have disastrous consequences. They were likely to harm the ongoing war effort and post-war demobilisation of troops, contribute to the spread of diseases and put millions of lives at risk, and significantly limit any possibility of the rehabilitation, recovery and reconstruction of Europe and the world after the war. By the mid-1940s, nobody had to spell out (but some did) that refugees in general meant trouble and a drain on resources. For these reasons, any refugee movements had to be anticipated, limited and coordinated as much as possible. A single organisation – UNRRA – had to coordinate the work of the myriad of organisations with diverse interests in refugees, and, crucially, provide essential relief, chiefly food, shelter, clothing, medical supplies and transport.

Second, it seemed a necessary consequence that any solution of the refugee problem could not be limited to individual countries, and instead required a broad treatment of the whole of Europe – or indeed the world. Reports by the Leith-Ross Committee were at pains to emphasise that ‘Europe’ would have to be treated ‘so far as possible as a whole from the beginning’, even if such a perspective would ‘demand an important intellectual and moral effort of the more favoured peoples.’⁵⁰ In Washington, George Warren agreed that ‘the problem’ was ‘European in scope and should be dealt with as European. The displaced persons come from most European countries, south and west as well as east, so that a plan which covers only part of Europe will not be a satisfactory settlement as it will leave large numbers of discontented aliens still displaced, a probably source of international disturbance and of political dispute between governments. The problem in western Europe is comparatively manageable to that of eastern Europe where questions of boundaries and confusion with respect to nationality will arise. The desideratum of agreement on a European scale can only be met with the agreement of the Soviet authorities.’⁵¹

Importantly, although to many this appeared to be a clear and convincing tenet, the extent to which such a wide and deliberately ‘non-political’ geographical scope would be feasible in the post-war world of trials, retribution and reparations was still up for discussion. Many relief workers soon pointed to a basic contradiction in UNRRA’s remit: although relief was to be distributed internationally as a means of treating and eradicating causes of poverty, ethnic conflict and war, the nations and nationals politically and geographically at the centre of the war were excluded from its reach. No amount of urging by Simpson, Leith-Ross and UNRRA’s planners that refugees were best dealt with as a ‘technical’ problem and to be kept away from destructive politics, could disguise the fact that the political realities of a defeated Germany were paramount. Similarly, the question of how far multilateral or unilateral action on refugee matters was possible or even desirable, and just how much the United States should not just provide the bulk of funds and personnel but also dictate the terms, remained a matter of debate. George Warren later remembered that he ‘disagreed with Governor Lehman who insisted that this problem of refugees had to be handled through the country

⁵⁰ TNA, FD 1/6819, ‘Immediate post-war measures of relief and reconstruction in Europe’, Sir Frederick Leith-Ross (Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House) to Medical Research Council, 9 February 1942.

⁵¹ NARA 840.4016 DP/8-344, WRB/ George Warren memorandum ‘Need for action on plan for displaced persons’, 3 August 1944

organizations that UNRRA now was setting up. I said, "Governor this is an unusual problem that supersedes any country interest. You've got to handle it with a separate organization, directly responsible to you."⁵² In 1943, Lehman and others won the case for a multilateral arrangement, but the argument was repeated in the creation of UNRRA's successors, with different results.

Third, at least since the Bermuda Conference in April 1943 most planners assumed that the vast majority of those displaced by the war would seek to return home as soon as possible; UNRRA's main function was to oversee their repatriation.⁵³ Although the dream of a mass resettlement of uprooted peoples to new countries and newly colonised land never went entirely off the table, repatriation to their countries of origin appeared to be a more desirable and feasible option for the bulk of refugees under review. The principle of repatriation then became further entrenched by the agreements at the Moscow Conference in October 1944, and again at Yalta in February 1945, that Soviet citizens were to be returned to the Soviet Union at the earliest moment, against their will if necessary, and by a much wider understanding that nation states had a right to demand the return of their citizens, and that it was the moral duty of citizens to return and take part in their country's reconstruction.⁵⁴ As far as UNRRA was concerned, the problem was a logistical one, requiring above all the physical restoration of transport networks and the coordination of different and clashing needs. In practical terms, UNRRA was 'grafted onto' existing arrangements for allocation and procurement of supplies.⁵⁵

To be sure, even in UNRRA's early preparations there were hints at the complexity such an insistence on repatriation would entail, particularly for the Jewish survivors of the war. 'To assume that all displaced persons may desire to return to their countries of origin will undoubtedly prove to be an oversimplification', an early memorandum warned. 'Even though nationality may be restored to the stateless, memories of the horrors and privations of expulsion from their home countries will remain. It is to be hoped that those who find their families scatted in many countries and who desire to rejoin them to start life anew in some other country will not be forced against their will by the operation of rigid procedures to resume residence in a country which offers no attractions or opportunities for them. The opportunities of immigration in the postwar world may admittedly be limited, but it will be a sorry world indeed if places cannot be found for those so situated.'⁵⁶ Others pointed to the host of legal and definition problems involved.⁵⁷ Nonetheless, it was its focus on repatriation that defined UNRRA's

⁵² Truman Library's 'Oral History Interview with George L. Warren' conducted in November 1972, <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/warrengl.htm> [last accessed 10 September 2015]

⁵³ See e.g. Herbert Emerson, 'Postwar Problems of Refugees', *Foreign Affairs*, 21, 2 (1943), 211-220; and Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee*, 95.

⁵⁴ see e.g. Jessica Reinisch, "'We shall build anew a powerful nation': UNRRA, Internationalism and National Reconstruction in Poland", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 43, 3 (2008), 451-476.

⁵⁵ e.g. TNA MAF 128/335, British Food Mission cable, 24 November 1943, notes that UNRRA 'will rely on well established procurement agencies and confine itself to limited development of existing allied system for allocating and procuring supplies.'

⁵⁶ UNA S-1021-0002-06, 'Statement of the Problem of Displaced Persons' [October 1943]

⁵⁷ e.g. NARA, 840.4016 DP-5-1646, enclosure dated 1 May 1946, in response to 16 May 1946, Harold W. Mosely, of State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee, Washington response to enquiry about fate of US citizen of Soviet descent.

mandate and distinguished it from other organisations such as the IGCR. Relief workers were given clear instructions about the agency's remit: it was to gather up the Allied DPs and organise their return; along the way, repatriates had to be fed, clothed and given medical aid, and until transport was feasible, welfare and training and employment would have to be found.

Finally, Simpson, Kulischer and others had begun to suggest just how much the problem of mass displacement was part and parcel of bigger problems of economic development, particularly in Europe, but also further afield, and had to be treated in conjunction. Without the repatriation or resettlement of the mass of uprooted people, no post-war rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes could hope to succeed, and another war would surely be on the horizon. In this way, UNRRA's conception of the refugee problem as ultimately an economic one was quite different from earlier attempts to identify and tackle 'root causes' of migration, which had foregrounded primarily the League's responsibilities to prevent war, protect ethnic minorities and secure certain rights.⁵⁸ In reality, the stipulation, right from the start of UNRRA's existence, that the agency was to be a temporary one, active only in the twilight zone between war and peace, and without the option of assuming 'continuing responsibility' in the longer term, created severe limitations on such broad and ambitious proposals from the start.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, even in its temporary life UNRRA was to take on the refugee problem, as far as it concerned those displaced by the war, as part and parcel of the problem economic development and agricultural and industrial rehabilitation.

Into the Field

UNRRA's work with DPs began in earnest in May and June 1944, when it took over the British-run refugee camps in Egypt, Palestine and Syria, containing mostly displaced Greeks, Yugoslavs and Poles waiting to be repatriated.⁶⁰ In the following spring, just weeks before Germany's unconditional surrender, UNRRA 'spearhead teams' accompanied General Eisenhower's staff (the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, or SHAEF) into Germany, and, after SHAEF's dissolution in July 1945, the individual American or British army groups. As a direct consequence of the geography of the Third Reich's wartime exploitations, the vast majority of DPs found themselves on German soil. By late April 1945, more than 15 UNRRA teams had gone 'into the field' to find them; by June there were 322 teams, ready to start their work.

At the same time and in parallel, UNRRA's country missions made their way into the receiving countries – 16 of them in total in Europe, most of them setting up shop in late 1944 or the first half of 1945. All of them organised the reception and rehabilitation of those DPs who had returned. They, too, encountered other refugees; everywhere, people were 'out of place' and 'not yet returned'. The Polish mission, for example, was heavily involved in the reception of Polish citizens returning from abroad

⁵⁸ Claudena Skran, *Refugees in Inter-War Europe: The Emergence of a Regime* (Oxford: OUP, 1995), esp. chapter 'The Attempt to Deal with Root Causes'. Also see Barbara Metzger's chapter in this volume.

⁵⁹ NARA, 800.4016-DP/1-546, British Embassy Washington to James Byrnes, 5 January 1946

⁶⁰ UNA S-1021-0027-06, report on the Middle East Relief and Refugee Administration entitled 'MERRA, July 1942 – May 1944' by Elizabeth King Simeon [1945]

and their subsequent integration into Polish life. It also assisted the Polish government's efforts to resettle the over one million ethnic Poles from the Eastern Borderlands to the so-called Recovered Territories in the West.⁶¹ Nonetheless, some missions were more preoccupied with explicitly 'refugee questions' than others. Most of the receiving countries' governments went to UNRRA on the one hand for supplies for their home populations (including returned DPs), and on the other for the care and repatriation of their own citizens still abroad – but not for matters which concerned refugees of other nationalities still on their territories. The Yugoslav government, for example, tended to bypass UNRRA entirely in its dealings with the foreign DPs on Yugoslav soil. Its methods were, by one account, 'direct and designed to eliminate camps. The refugees were simply sent to their countries of origin without delay or enquiry beyond that necessary to determine their home place.'⁶²

All parts of UNRRA thus dealt extensively with refugees and the many millions of displaced, uprooted, often homeless people of the war's aftermath. But only UNRRA's DP Operation is usually identified as a 'refugee agency' as such, in that it did not concern itself with other population groups. This DP arm of UNRRA's activities – also the focus of this chapter – was by far most active in the western occupation zones of Germany, but also ran smaller operations in Austria and Italy. It did not operate at all in the Soviet zones of Germany and Austria; no official DP camps were set up there since refugees of Allied nationality were expected to be repatriated quickly. UNRRA's DP headquarters were set up in Hoechst, near Frankfurt, and placed under the command of Lieutenant-General Sir Frederick Morgan, Chief of Operations in Germany and former Deputy Chief of Staff of SHAEF.

For the arriving UNRRA teams in Germany, the first and most urgent task was to begin the process of gathering up the uprooted people of non-German nationality still roaming the countryside, and to take stock of who they were, what category of 'refugee' they fell into, and where they should go next. UNRRA's formal responsibility, as defined initially, concerned those United Nations nationals who had been forced to flee their homes or deported to the Reich during the war, and excluded enemy nationals. Subsequent Council Resolutions extended this eligibility to 'ex-enemy and stateless persons who had been displaced by the action of the enemy "because of their race, religion, or activities in favour of the United Nations"'.⁶³ But most former enemy nationals, including the ethnic German expellees, never became eligible for UNRRA care, nor were those of other nationalities for whom there was evidence that they had collaborated with the Axis powers. In practice, before UNRRA screening boards could get to work to identify their 'DPs' from the others, the mass of displaced humanity had to be moved out of the way of military traffic and congregated into camps

⁶¹ See e.g. UNA, S-1400-0000-0005, PUR Polish Repatriation Office. S-0527-1084-02, Rusek, 'The State Repatriation Office (P.U.R.) and the Question of Repatriation', 15 March 1946. Also see Jessica Reinisch, 'We shall build anew a powerful nation'.

⁶² UNA, S-1021-0025-03, report entitled 'UNRRA Yugoslav Mission – Historical Monograph on Displaced Persons Operation', Dr K. W. C. Sinclair-Loutit, Direct of Relief Services and Health Supplies, Belgrade, May 1947, 1.

⁶³ UNRRA Council Resolution No.60 and No.90 extended eligibility in this manner. UNRRA, Displaced Persons Operation in Europe and the Middle East, Operational Analysis Papers, No.13, December 1946 (London: UNRRA European Regional Office), 1-2.

(formally referred to as 'assembly centres'), where they could be registered, fed, deloused and vaccinated, and their future transport planned. Camps made use of whatever housing facilities were available, and as a result varied greatly in physical size, type of accommodation and DP population.⁶⁴ They were often extremely makeshift in character, 'frequently an euphemism designating an open field, or a bomb-gutted building, or a few tents.'⁶⁵

There is by now an extensive historiography on how these camps came into being, how they were run and eventually – though later than anticipated – dissolved, and how the DPs themselves organised their lives while in UNRRA's care.⁶⁶ For the purposes of this chapter, it is worth noting primarily the sheer size and scale of the DP operation. The numbers of DP camps fluctuated continually, as small units were consolidated into larger ones, and as groups of DPs left and new ones arrived. In December 1945, there were roughly 252 camps in operation in Germany and Austria; a year later the number had risen to 951. By the time UNRRA withdrew from the field in June 1947, there were still 762 camps in operation, including 8 in Italy.⁶⁷ UNRRA was responsible for the majority of these camps. By the end of December 1945 UNRRA supervised about 263 of the total 323 assembly centres, and was responsible for the vast majority – 81.4% – of the camp population, as well as a significant share of DPs not resident in camps.⁶⁸ An enormous staff was required to carry out this work: over 8,000 so-called Class I personnel (those recruited outside Germany) worked at UNRRA's DP operation in its first year in Germany. They were assisted by over 2,000 Class II (locally recruited staff) and Class III personnel (staff loaned from voluntary agencies), as well as over 100,000 displaced persons 'actively engaged in the administration of more than 300 camps with a population of nearly 800,000.'⁶⁹ According to UNRRA's own figures, in July 1945 UNRRA cared for close to 2 million DPs in Germany alone.⁷⁰

In 1945, this was the largest refugee relief programme to date. However, the scale of war, foreign occupation and ethnic conflict had not only convinced planners that an organisation such as UNRRA was vital, but also presented challenges not encountered by previous or subsequent refugee organisations. Some of those challenges were no doubt similar to those faced by other bodies, even if experienced by UNRRA on a different scale. For example, like many of the projects emerging from the Allied war-time planning machinery, UNRRA's work in the field was shaped by a fundamental

⁶⁴ See Wyman, *DPs*, esp. 43-4.

⁶⁵ UNA, S-1021-0080-08, Dr. Sainz de la Pena, History Report No.23 (Health Division), September 1947.

⁶⁶ On the bigger picture, see Wyman, *DPs*, and Shephard, *The Long Road Home*. As an example of DPs' own perspectives, see the remarkable comic strip about camp life by Arnold Sepp and Endel Koks, *Mis teha? Siin ta on = Refugee Life in Pictures* (1st published Augsburg, 1947, republished Tallinn: Eesti Diasporaa Akadeemia, 2014).

⁶⁷ Woodbridge, *UNRRA*, Vol.2, 502.

⁶⁸ *ibid*, Vol.2, 491, 494.

⁶⁹ UNA S-1021-0078-06, C. H .Cramer (Chief Personnel Officer, DP Operation, Germany), preface to 'A statistical analysis of Class I Employees in the Displaced Persons Operation, Germany, March 1945 – May 1946 [August 1946], 31 August 1946.

⁷⁰ Wilhelmina Luten et al, *UNRRA Displaced Persons Operation in Europe and the Middle East*, Operational Analysis Papers No.13, December 1946 (Division of Operational Analysis, UNRRA European Regional Office, London), 6-7.

mismatch between planners' instructions and aspirations on one hand, and the post-war realities they encountered on the other.⁷¹ Part of this mismatch stemmed from the fact that UNRRA's policies contained a number of contradictory impulses. UNRRA was supposed to enact an internationally-coordinated solution to Europe's refugee crises, strictly taken out of the realm of high politics, while at the same time it was subject to political decisions, many already made before 1943, on those refugee categories that were deemed to fall into its remit and those that were not. Other problems arose because many aspects of UNRRA's DP operation didn't seem to have been planned at all, and in practice were the product of an almost constant process of improvisation. This necessarily created a few U-turns. To mention one, although earlier reports had been clear about the undesirability of a reliance on voluntary organisations' limited, 'case-worker' approach, by 1945 UNRRA did not only work with, but also outsourced responsibilities to, precisely such voluntary organisations. Formally, it coordinated the activities of dozens of voluntary welfare agencies, including the Red Cross, the Friends Ambulance Units, the Joint Distribution Committee, the Organization for Rehabilitation through Training, and many others – and by the end of 1945 they were given growing opportunities to work independently.⁷²

But perhaps the biggest source of problems, at least initially, stemmed from the nature of UNRRA's relationship with the occupying armies, or the practicalities of a non-military relief project of this scale in countries under military occupation – and in this feature, UNRRA was unique.⁷³ 'I always did wonder', wrote one frustrated UNRRA worker after almost two years in Germany, 'whether the UNRRA high pontiffs who conceived the plan of forming such heterogeneous teams were most childish optimists, or whether they lacked even the most elementary conceptions of the very special and difficult conditions under which teams in the field would have to work and live.' As a 'civilian undertaking' whose aims were not 'even remotely connected with the military occupation', the commentator went on, problems were inevitable from the start.⁷⁴ In reality, it was less a case of planners' optimism and more one of their attempts to shelve questions that could be dealt with at a later time, but the resulting complications were undeniable.

On paper, the instructions were clear enough. On their way into the field, relief workers were briefed that they and their organisation were subject to the authority of SHAEF in all newly-liberated areas. In areas under Allied military control, UNRRA was to operate 'only for such a time and for such purposes as might be agreed with the military authorities, and subject to their control.'⁷⁵ The

⁷¹ On the mismatch between Allied plans for the occupation of Germany and the reality after 1945, see Reinisch, *Perils of Peace*, esp. 19-58.

⁷² On the work of voluntary organizations in occupied Germany, see Johannes-Dieter Steinert, 'British Humanitarian Assistance: Wartime Planning and Postwar Realities', *Journal of Contemporary History*, July 2008, Vol.43, No.4, 421-435.

⁷³ Compare this section with Jessica Reinisch, 'Displaced Persons and Public Health in Occupied Germany, 1944-1947', in: J. D. Steinert and Inge Weber-Newth (eds.), *Beyond Camps and Forced Labour, Current International Research on Survivors of Nazi Persecution, 60 Years on* (Osnabrück: Secolo Verlag, 2008).

⁷⁴ UNA S-1021-0084-07, letter, [author unclear], Düsseldorf, 25 August 1947

⁷⁵ UNA S-1021-0078-04, 'UNRRA Cooperation with Military Authorities with respect to Displaced Persons Programmes' [1947] On SHAEF's instructions to UNRRA, see e.g. Supreme Headquarters,

assumption that this could not be otherwise, at least for an interim period, had already been made in a series of earlier policy instructions about the armies' role in so-called 'civil affairs', which predated UNRRA. As US Secretary of War, Henry Stimson, explained to Herbert Lehman (as director of OFRRO) in June 1943:

[D]uring the period of military government complete responsibility for all matters within the theatre of operation is necessarily vested in the Commanding General of the theatre. This does not, however, preclude delegation by the Commanding General, at any time in his discretion, of administrative authority to civilian agencies... In regard to supply, transportation and distribution arrangements, there is full appreciation of the fact that these must come under the control of the military, and that all communications during the period of military government must pass through military channels.⁷⁶

The DP camps thus remained formally under military government control, who were responsible for organising the required housing, supplies, and transport.

In practice, this meant a severe limitation of UNRRA's supposedly vast scope and promise, far from the notion of an all-powerful organisation dreamt up as an answer to the problem of mass displacement and the limitations of existing piecemeal solutions. One commentator in 1945 pointed to 'a considerable whittling down in the scope of UNRRA since the days of its planning by American and British officials in 1942 and 1943.' Although UNRRA 'was first conceived of as an agency of more or less supreme authority, empowered to assist in large-scale industrial and agricultural rehabilitation projects', he went on, it was already clear that it 'has only marginal authority, first because it operates only at the request of both military authorities and liberated national governments and, secondly, because it lacks supplies whose allocation must wait upon decisions of national supply agencies and the Combined Boards of the United States and Great Britain.'⁷⁷ In administrative terms alone, this was a difficult undertaking. UNRRA was 'at best a "junior partner"', one relief worker observed in 1947. Field personnel had to take orders simultaneously from the armies' DP-PWX branches and military government detachments, and UNRRA's headquarters. As a result, the 'teams had to serve two "masters"...., a condition that was never resolved in UNRRA's favour...'⁷⁸

UNRRA nonetheless carried out the bulk of practical relief work by providing the personnel for running the DP camps and the so-called 'services' – such as health and welfare, recreation, education and training – which were well out of the military's remit. Relief workers did not just 'clothe and feed

Allied Expeditionary Force, *Guide to the Care of Displaced Persons* (revised May 1945). UNA S-1021-0079-05, L. Doughty, Chief Program Analysis, 'UNRRA, US Zone Germany, History Report No.7, Relations with Military', May 1947.

⁷⁶ Stimson to Lehman, 2 June 1943, CAD files, 334, OFRRO (2-5-43) (1), reproduced in: Harry L. Coles and Albert K. Weinberg, *Civil Affairs: Soldiers Become Governors - United States Army in World War II, Special Studies*, (Washington: Centre of Military History, US Army, 1964), 99. On the US Army's preparations for 'civil affairs' and the creation of the Civil Affairs Division (CAD), see Reinisch, *Perils of Peace*.

⁷⁷ Theodore A. Sumberg, 'Financial Experience of UNRRA', *The American Journal of International Law*, 39, 4 (October 1945), 698-712, 698.

⁷⁸ UNA, S-1021-0084-06, Harold A. Jambor, 'UNRRA in retrospect – comments on 26 months in the British Zone', 1 June 1947.

and house' the DPs, 'as the military might have done', but rather attempted 'to teach them to organize themselves and to build up their interest in life and their sense of self-respect, and to provide and promote education facilities, medical attention, and care of children.'⁷⁹ Some scholars have argued that UNRRA's greatest achievement concerned the institution of a 'system of democratic self-management' within the DP camps.⁸⁰ DPs were recruited from the start to co-run their own affairs, and 'national leaders' were appointed or elected to represent their cohort, giving rise to a fiction of DP camps as 'model community of nations'.⁸¹ Their care became a formidable task once repatriation slowed down and the ranks of the DPs were swelled with new arrivals from countries now under Soviet control.

UNRRA's relationship with the military authorities nonetheless remained strained for the duration of their co-existence. One source of friction, for example, concerned the requirement that all field personnel sent into a military area were required to wear uniform. Army officials were quick to criticise the relief workers' 'lax attitude' (including, in the face of clothing shortages, their mixing and matching of British and US uniforms), while relief workers resented having to comply with army regulations.⁸² From UNRRA's perspective, a constant strain were also the accusations that relief personnel were engaged in black market activities, which became, according to one report, 'a form of folk-lore among military personnel' and 'persisted throughout the operation', even though periodically proven as unfounded.⁸³

Relief workers also resented the military's lack of empathy with the DPs, which seemed to grow in direct proportion with the occupation troops' prospering relationships with the German population. Captain C.E. Jack from the American zone's DP headquarters observed that

through no fault of his own, the D.P. makes a poor outward impression on [a military government] officer. His wardrobe is usually what he wears plus a few pieces of clothing stuffed in a bag. He has developed a defensive attitude as protection against German brutality. He has learned to steal to supplement the German starvation diet. He has learned to distrust promises and pieces of paper. His world revolves around food and shelter. In American slang he looks and acts like a "bum". In contrast, the German is well-dressed, better

⁷⁹ 101-102, UNA, S-1021-0002-07, F. Ashton-Gwatkin, 'The Work of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration', [1951], 101-102.

⁸⁰ e.g. Plesch, *America, Hitler and the UN*, 120, 128. For a more critical account of the often ambiguous status of Class II personnel, see e.g. Silvia Salvatici, "'Help the People to Help Themselves': UNRRA Relief Workers and European Displaced Persons", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 25, 3 (2012), 428-451.

⁸¹ IWM, 98/25/1, "'Practical Christianity": Major Heath's Address on German D.P. Camps' [undated], quoted in: Reinisch, 'We Shall Rebuild Anew a Powerful Nation', 470.

⁸² See discussion about UNRRA's uniforms in e.g. UNA S-1021-0078-04, 'UNRRA Cooperation with Military Authorities with respect to Displaced Persons Programmes' [1947], 21, and S-1021-0079-05, L. Doughty, 'UNRRA, US Zone Germany, History Report No.7, Relations with Military', May 1947, 35.

⁸³ UNA S-1021-0078-04, 'UNRRA Cooperation with Military Authorities with respect to Displaced Persons Programmes' [1947]

fed and is living in a home. He is very correct in his manner when addressing an American Officer.⁸⁴

In this light, UNRRA's field workers in Germany increasingly defined themselves as advocates for the DPs, many of whom had survived horrific treatment at the hands of the Nazis, they pointed out, and now deserved special care. 'The original principle that the DPs were to be given preferential treatment by the occupation authorities was seldom given more than lip service even under terrific pressure from UNRRA', one relief worker noted, 'and quite officially, even though indirectly, this original principle was forgotten.'⁸⁵ At the same time, the army pointed out that their units had 'neither the training or interest in the D.P. problem. Tactical unit Officers were trained for combat and do not consider that it is appropriate for them to be engaged in welfare work. Furthermore, their sole interest is in going home...'⁸⁶ Unlike UNRRA, as Major General Hilldring explained the US State Department, 'the Army is not a welfare organization. It is a military machine whose mission is to defeat the enemy on the field of battle. Its interest and activities in military government and civil affairs administration are incidental to the accomplishment of the military mission.'⁸⁷

The UNRRA-military clashes were perhaps ultimately a problem of UNRRA's own public relations. Although UNRRA considered 'public information' as crucial for its success, and a staff of several hundreds of people were dedicated solely to persuading western taxpayers to keep funding UNRRA, in practice they had a rough ride. Public information officers struggled to bring across the limits of UNRRA's responsibilities and room for manoeuvre. The organisation was repeatedly criticised for shortages and bottlenecks in transport, shelter and supplies over which it had no control. In reality, as one report concluded, a large share of the blame lay with the military authorities, who 'were constantly changing their policies, inviting UNRRA to come in and then countermanding the request, and later, when they did want UNRRA, failing to secure for it the necessary support from the local commanders who controlled transport. At the same time they were always ready to blame UNRRA if anything went wrong and to complain of its inefficiency.' In practice, 'the military authorities found UNRRA a useful dumping-ground for problems – especially that of the Displaced Persons with which they found it impossible to cope.' Ultimately, 'UNRRA saved the military authorities from much work and worry which they were less fitting than UNRRA to perform, but with which, for humanity's sake and for the preservation of order, they would have had to try to grapple if UNRRA had not been in the field.'⁸⁸

There were a string of other problems that periodically threatened to derail UNRRA's DP operation. But perhaps none was as contested and intractable as the issue of repatriation. Initially, the

⁸⁴ Captain C. E. Jack, Headquarters D.P. Section, quoted in: UNA, S-1021-0079-05, L. Doughty, History Report No.7 (Relations with Military), May 1947.

⁸⁵ UNA, S-1021-0084-06, Harold A. Jambor, 'UNRRA in retrospect – comments on 26 months in the British Zone', 1 June 1947.

⁸⁶ UNA S-1021-0079-05, L. Doughty, History Report No.7.

⁸⁷ Hilldring to Assistant Secretary of State Dean Acheson, 9 November 1943, CAD files, 400.38 (2-20-43) (1) sec.3, reproduced in: Coles and Weinberg, *Civil Affairs*, 153.

⁸⁸ UNA, S-1021-0002-07, F. Ashton-Gwatkin, 'The Work of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration'.

main problem seemed to be an organisational, logistical one in a world still shaken by war, with many transport and communication networks still severely disrupted and overloaded by demobilising troops.⁸⁹ However, most of the transport logistics were solved relatively easily through heavy reliance on military resources, and repatriation proceeded very quickly during the first weeks after the end of war. By early July, 2,326,000 of the 5,800,000 counted DPs in Germany had been returned to their countries of origin.⁹⁰ But while the repatriation of western European nationals proved relatively unproblematic, it soon appeared that a sizeable portion of the DPs of Polish, Baltic and Soviet origin refused to be repatriated to areas now under Soviet or Communist control. What was more, during the spring and summer 1945, the DPs already in Germany and Austria were joined by thousands fleeing westwards from eastern European countries and seeking to qualify for the DP status. Faced with the prospect of never-ending streams of newcomers for whom 'repatriation' was patently not a solution, but unwilling to impose a blanket ban on them, UNRRA's mandate was redefined to cover the care and maintenance of those who were 'displaced' by a certain cut-off point in the summer of 1946: all refugees who entered the American occupation zones before 1 July 1946 were granted the DP status if they otherwise complied with the eligibility criteria; in the British zones the cut-off was 1 June 1946.⁹¹

This redefinition resulted in confrontations between the representatives of the Western and Eastern member governments within UNRRA's Council. As one report put it, UNRRA 'was blamed in the West for repatriating displaced persons to what was described as an uncertain fate in Eastern Europe; it was excoriated in Eastern Europe for caring for collaborationists and quislings.'⁹² Soviet representatives insisted on the repatriation of all Soviet citizens, regardless of their arrival dates in Germany or their requests or wishes, reminding delegates that Roosevelt and Churchill had already agreed with Stalin at the Moscow Conference of October 1944 that all Soviet citizens would have to be returned, forcibly if necessary. Other member states pointed out that repatriation was also necessary from a practical and financial point of view, since UNRRA did not have resources to run the DP camps for an indefinite period of time.

Nonetheless, by the summer of 1945, almost 1.5 million refugees had expressed their unwillingness to be repatriated.⁹³ By December 1945, UNRRA still supervised 263 of the total 323 assembly centres in Germany, and had responsibility for 57.4% of all DPs in Germany. It also contributed to the care of 17,000 DPs living in camps administered by the British, and to the cost of

⁸⁹ e.g. see UNA, S-1021-0002-06, 'XVI. Committee on Displaced Persons – Staff Organization on Displaced Persons', 18 October 1943.

⁹⁰ FO 371/51095, Joint Staff Mission, Washington to Allied Military Staff Special Operations, 2 July 1946. Arieh J. Kochavi, 'British Policy on non-repatriable Displaced Persons in Germany and Austria, 1945-7', *European History Quarterly*, 21, 3 (July 1991), 365-382, 365. Also compare with Jessica Reinisch, 'Preparing for a new World Order: UNRRA and the International Management of Refugees', *Post-War Europe: Refugees, Exile and Resettlement, 1945-1950*, online 'Archives Unbound' collection (Reading: Gale Cengage Learning Ltd, 2007).

⁹¹ See e.g. NARA840.4016 DP/4-346, USFET announcement dated 4 March 1946.

⁹² UNA, S-1021-0002-07, F. Ashton-Gwatkin, 'The Work of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration', [1951],

⁹³ Proudfoot, *European Refugees*, 238/9. Kochavi, 'British Policy', 367.

repatriating those who chose to return to Poland.⁹⁴ Twelve months later, repatriation had slowed almost to a standstill. In February 1947, there were still 264,000 DPs in the British zone of Germany, 367,000 DPs in the American zone, and 36,000 in the French zone.⁹⁵ Instructions to UNRRA staff that the repatriation of Soviet citizens was a matter of internationally agreed policy, and had to proceed 'without regard to their personal wishes and by force if necessary', did little to solve the immediate dilemma.⁹⁶ As one order to UNRRA workers in Germany spelled out: 'UNRRA and military authorities are in agreement on the advisability for speedy return of the greatest possible number of displaced persons to their homelands as quickly as possible. This policy represents the substance of resolutions under which UNRRA now operates and is in keeping with the Yalta Agreement, and the projected plans and draft Constitution for an International Refugee Organisation.'⁹⁷ The Soviet authorities claimed that UNRRA assistance in fact encouraged DPs to resist repatriation, and demanded that UNRRA desist from giving aid to those who refused to return.⁹⁸ But even UNRRA's institution of a Sixty Day Ration Plan, according to which all DPs willing to be repatriated were issued with food rations for a period of two months at the frontiers of their home countries, had little effect.

As it became clear that many of the refugees would stay longer than anticipated, relief workers in the DP camps began to emphasise 'care' over 'repatriation' and developed a series of proposals for solving the problem of the non-repatriable refugees.⁹⁹ The camps were turned into more permanent installations and equipped with nurseries, schools, vocational training centres, shops, hospitals and specialists clinics, and UNRRA became a major employer of DPs. DPs no longer took part in educational or training courses to ease their impending integration into their home countries or simply to pass the time, but to make themselves employable and appealing to new countries of resettlement, often with good effect.¹⁰⁰ The tensions between the Soviet Union and the Western Allies on this and other issues eventually led London and Washington to conclude that repatriation was no longer a viable solution to the refugee problem. The only means left open was resettlement, which was out of UNRRA's remit. In response, the International Refugee Organization (IRO) was created as

⁹⁴ Woodbridge, *UNRRA*, Vol.2, 491, 494.

⁹⁵ FO 371/57778, memorandum on 'Refugees and Displaced Persons', March 1947. FO 371/66667, memorandum on 'Displaced Persons in Germany', 21 April 1947.

⁹⁶ UNA, S-0399-0002-06, memorandum from L. S. Ostrander (by command of General McNarney) to Commanding Generals in the American Zone of Germany, 4 January 1946.

⁹⁷ UNA, S-0399-0003-06, UNRRA Administrative Order No.199, from UNRRA US Zone HQ Heidelberg, 11 November 1946.

⁹⁸ TNA FO 371/51098, Paul Mason (head of the Refugee Department), Memorandum, 2 August 1945. Also see Stoessinger, *The Refugee and the World Community*, especially 60-65.

⁹⁹ e.g. TNA FO 371/51128, Lt. Gen. B. H. Robertson, Chief of Staff British Zone, to the Permanent Under-Secretary of State, COGA, 8 December 1945. FO 371/51128, Douglas MacKillop (head of the Refugee Department) to Gottlieb, 22 December 1945. FO 371/5770, 'The problem of non-repatriable refugees', 9 November 1945. FO 945/360, minutes of meeting, 27 June 1946.

¹⁰⁰ On the 'European Voluntary Worker' scheme, see Johannes-Dieter Steinert, 'British Migration Policy and Displaced Persons in Europe', in: Jessica Reinisch and Elizabeth White (eds), *The Disentanglement of Populations: Migration, Expulsion and Displacement in Postwar Europe, 1944-1949* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010).

a new, non-permanent, specialised agency of the United Nations that picked up where UNRRA left off.¹⁰¹

Old wine in new bottles?

UNRRA's work with refugees was marred by a number of problems, most of them already present in some form from the early planning stages. It was a temporary organisation with a limited brief and mandate but an enormous set of tasks; it had to negotiate a crowded field of organisations with overlapping remits; it depended on the goodwill of often unwilling military authorities, to whom it was subordinated; it was supposed to enact a technocratic and internationally coordinated solution to Europe's refugee crises while at the same time subject to political decisions on the refugee categories it was to work with. Its basic brief of repatriating the millions of Allied nationals who had been displaced as a result of the war became rapidly unpopular and unfeasible in the early Cold War frost. Whereas by some measure, UNRRA, 'as a kind of international Santa Claus, was almost above ordinary criticism',¹⁰² its DP operation came under heavy fire almost from its inception. As Woodbridge noted, no part of UNRRA's work received as much publicity (positive or negative) as its work with DPs:

No other field operations were to require the employment of so many people. Yet in no operation was so small a portion of the funds of the Administration used. No operation was so misunderstood within the Administration, by member governments, and by the public. In no operation was the early organizational control of the Administration so unsatisfactory. Yet again in no operation did the members of the Administration show such individual initiative and, it may justly be said, display such heroism.¹⁰³

By some criteria, UNRRA fits neatly into a history of refugee organisations that stretches from the first Nansen office to the UNHCR. UNRRA's work with the DPs in Europe was conceived as an exemplar of a rational, technical, and primarily logistical solution to the problem of mass displacement, which, by shared procurement and distribution of supplies, could supposedly sidestep political minefields and save millions of lives. In this manner, although it conducted this work on what was at the time an entirely new scale, it continued prevalent functionalist approaches to population questions. UNRRA, like its predecessors and successors, also lacked a universal category of 'refugees', but defining refugees as a product of war made the refugee problem appear to be an ultimately temporary and solvable one. This continuity was no coincidence. UNRRA drew on and worked with a sizeable body of refugee and relief experts, and built on their insights. In the headquarters and policy committees, people like George Warren had worked as specialist advisers on refugee matters in a number of different set-ups before advising UNRRA, and continued to do so after UNRRA's demise. On the ground, a significant proportion of relief workers had worked with refugees during and after the

¹⁰¹ On IRO, see esp. Holborn, *The International Refugee Organization*, and Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹⁰² UNA, S-1021-0002-07, F. Ashton-Gwatkin, 'The Work of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration', 106.

¹⁰³ Woodbridge, *UNRRA*, Vol.2, 470.

First World War, and continued to conduct what they perceived as fundamentally similar work with UNRRA.¹⁰⁴

But in significant ways this work was different from earlier and later refugee programmes. The scale and nature of the problems faced by UNRRA – indeed which prompted UNRRA's creation – was without precedent, and so was the political and financial commitment to solve at least one particular set of population upheavals. It is important to remember that UNRRA's overall significance did not lie primarily in its work as a refugee agency. Rather, it lay in its uniquely 'connected' approach, which emphasised that broken infrastructures, economic and agricultural underdevelopment, lack of expert knowledge, and mass displacement were all part of the same set of problems highlighted and magnified by the war. Any solutions had to address them in a coordinated, consolidated manner, based on a 'total plan'.¹⁰⁵ In practice, the connections between the different parts of UNRRA's field missions may not always have been entirely clear to everyone on the ground. Members of various country missions at times accused their colleagues in the DP Operation that their hesitance about repatriation was harmful to 'the long view' that demanded the integration of returned refugees into rehabilitation and reconstruction projects at home. Without the returned DPs, many receiving countries could simply not be rebuilt and developed.¹⁰⁶ But this long view was nonetheless central to UNRRA's entire existence.

Driven by fear about a potentially catastrophic fall-out from the bloodshed, destruction and racial conflict of the war, the Allies poured unprecedented resources into UNRRA. The body became a uniquely large and capacious vessel for 'wartime idealism', as Ben Shephard notes¹⁰⁷, but one that was able to accommodate a range of different priorities, ambitions, and preparations for the future. Many thought that UNRRA represented what the Allies had fought for: 'freedom from fear, and freedom from want'.¹⁰⁸ UNRRA was one particular product of the fantasies that had also brought to life the M Project and other dreams about overcoming the piecemeal, ad hoc approaches to refugees that had hampered work for decades.¹⁰⁹ But unlike other visions, UNRRA was no mere pipe dream. Its implementation was possible only at that brief moment in the last years of the war, after the meetings at Casablanca and Teheran, and during the immediate post-war years, before the wartime alliance was broken up and the tone of all international endeavours fundamentally changed. Unlike its immediate predecessors and successors, UNRRA provided a joint forum for the representatives of big and small nations, including the Soviet Union and the United States. It was explicitly designed as an

¹⁰⁴ e.g. the American relief worker Spurgeon Keeny (1893-1988) is a case in point, see LSE, COLL MISC 845, 'The Reminiscences of Spurgeon M. Keeny (Sr)', Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, 1982, Interview No.1 (13 October 1980).

¹⁰⁵ UNA S-1021-0002-06, 'Staff organization on displaced persons', 18 October 1943.

¹⁰⁶ On these arguments for Poland, see Jessica Reinisch, 'We shall build anew a powerful nation'

¹⁰⁷ Ben Shephard, "'Becoming Planning Minded": The Theory and Practice of Relief, 1940-1945', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 43, 3, (2008), 405-419, 412.

¹⁰⁸ Mr George Thomas (Cardiff Central), Hansard, House of Commons Debate: 'UNRRA (Winding-Up)', 29 November 1946, Vol. 430, cc1979-2018,

<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1946/nov/29/unrra-winding-up> [last visited 1 November 2016]

¹⁰⁹ See Matthew Frank's chapter in this volume.

experiment in international collaboration and as a placeholder for the future United Nations. As William Warbey, Labour MP for Luton, argued in the House of Commons in 1946, UNRRA was 'a working link between East and West.'¹¹⁰

As a result, UNRRA had financial and political resources that dwarfed any previous organisations' budget for refugee work. Whereas in June 1939 Herbert Emerson, less than 3 months before the outbreak of war, still tried and failed to convince the leading powers of the benefits of international collaboration and agreements on the refugee problem¹¹¹, by 1943 that was no longer under question. Emerson had been allotted measly funds that covered only his salary and a small amount for the office and travelling expensive of a small staff in Geneva and London.¹¹² By contrast, UNRRA's DP operation had operating expenses of over \$82 million, and drew on an amenity supply programme of a further \$7.5 million,¹¹³ and this expenditure represented only a fraction of UNRRA's overall budget. Although the financial and material resources could never be enough, and although the United States' unwillingness to continue to fund it meant it had to wind up long before the twilight phase was over, this nonetheless began a new trend of significantly increased funds and political will put at the disposal of organisations working with refugees. UNRRA's resources for DPs were immediately dwarfed by the IRO's annual budget of four times that of the UN, amounting to \$155 million annually.¹¹⁴ This kind of escalation of resources casts in a new light Zara Steiner's observation in this volume that '[n]either individuals nor governments learn from experience. New institutions may be created but they do not generally develop greater competencies than the ones they replace.'¹¹⁵ UNRRA is evidence of a deliberate and concrete (if short-lived) attempt to build on previous institutions and learn from their mistakes, at the key mid-century moment when everything still seemed possible.

UNRRA and its DP Operation were disbanded in June 1947, and with it UNRRA's self-consciously multilateral approach to relief came to an end. Subsequent arrangements were significantly narrower in scope, vision and extent of political support. The various components of UNRRA's activities were broken up: work with (certain kinds of) refugees was parcelled out to the IRO and later UNHCR; health to the World Health Organisation (WHO); children to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); culture and education broadly conceived to the UN's Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); reconstruction to the Marshall Plan; development to the World Bank, and, later, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). IRO initially had fewer than half of UNRRA's member states on board; no Eastern Bloc country or the Soviet Union

¹¹⁰ Mr Warbey (Luton), Hansard, House of Commons Debate: 'UNRRA (Winding-Up)', 29 November 1946, Vol. 430, cc1979-2018, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1946/nov/29/unrra-winding-up> [last visited 1 November 2016]

¹¹¹ LNA, R5635/20A/38364/335482, High Commissariat for Assistance to International Refugees: Missions of Sir Herbert Emerson, Balkans, June 1939

¹¹² LNA, R5635/20A/40563/35482, Herbert Emerson (High Commissioner for Refugees) to S. Jacklin (Treasurer, League of Nations, Geneva), 22 January 1941.

¹¹³ Woodbridge, *UNRRA*, Vol.2, 504

¹¹⁴ Corinne Lewis, *UNHCR and International Refugee Law: From Treaties to Innovation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 9. Holborn, *The International Refugee Organization*.

¹¹⁵ See Zara Steiner's chapter in this volume.

were ever represented.¹¹⁶ It was a Cold War organisation *par excellence*, and in crucial ways very different from UNRRA, particularly on the subject of eligibility. UNRRA differentiated between refugees who were entitled to the DP status and those who fell out of its remit, but did not deny that the Polish refugees arriving in Germany after the cut-off date in 1946, or even the German expellees, were 'genuine' refugees by some measures, even if, for political and financial reasons, they could not be 'DPs'. By contrast, IRO's mandate explicitly identified so-called 'bona fide' or 'genuine refugees and displaced persons', for whom it was to arrange registration, care and maintenance, legal and political protection, transport, repatriation or resettlement into countries that were able to house them – thereby making abundantly clear that there were others who were not 'genuine' or 'bona fide'.¹¹⁷ In these terms, IRO introduced an entirely new approach to eligibility, namely, in Daniel Cohen's words, 'the obligation for asylum seekers to solely bear the burden of proof in their claim of "genuine" political persecution'.¹¹⁸ IRO operations ended in Germany in 1952. The closing of the last DP camps thus coincided with the signing of the 1951 Convention on Refugees, which defined a 'refugee' in explicitly political terms, and enshrined the distinction between 'genuine' political refugees and all others (including those fleeing poverty) in law.

¹¹⁶ IRO was a product of the UN Economic and Social Council resolution of 16 February 1946 to solve the problem of refugees and displaced persons. IRO was officially established on 20 August 1948, when 15 states subscribed to the IRO's Constitution. After several extensions, IRO closed operations on 31 January 1952 and went out of existence on 30 September 1953.

¹¹⁷ Constitution of the International Refugee Organization, adopted by the United Nations at Flushing Meadow on 15 December 1946, entry into force on 20 August 1948, text reproduced in UNHCR, *Collection of International Instruments and Legal Texts Concerning Refugees and Others of Concern to UNHCR*, Vol.1: International Instruments (UNHCR: Geneva, June 2007), 53-65, <http://www.unhcr.org/455c71de2.pdf> Also see Lewis, *UNHCR and International Refugee Law*, 9.

¹¹⁸ G. Daniel Cohen, "Who is a Refugee?" Managing Displacement in the Aftermath of World War Two', in: Matthew Paul Berg and Maria Mesner (eds), *After Fascism: European Case Studies in Politics, Society and Identity since 1945* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2009), 31.