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**Enemy Aliens, Deportees, Refugees: Internment Practices in the Habsburg Empire,  
1914-1918\***

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In his 1989 book *The Decline and Fall of the Habsburg Empire*, the British historian Alan Sked quotes his Hungarian colleague István Diószegi on the subject of the Austro-Hungarian dual foreign policy since 1867:

The Habsburg Monarchy offers no classical cases to the investigator of world history[...] the historian [...] is unable to discover, however well-intentioned he may be, anything that was pioneering in Austrian history. All that happened in the Monarchy was nothing but a belated, second-hand, and often distorted variant of Western European developments. Nor is Austrian history rich in decisive events transcending national boundaries.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I. Diószegi, *Hungarians in the Ballhausplatz: Studies on the Austro-Hungarian Common Foreign Policy*, transl. from the Hungarian by K. Balás / M. Borsos, Budapest 1983, 9. Cited in A. Sked, *The Decline and Fall of the Habsburg Empire, 1815-1918*, Harlow 1989, 2.

Sked's purpose, quite rightly, is to criticise these claims. At best, he argues, Diószegi is guilty of "presentism", that is of seeing the past only as a "background to the present", rather than studying it as a means to understand "how people lived under different conditions and thought systems". At worst, though, his statement is in danger of normalising the western European model of the nation-state, or conversely, of demonising it by casting it as the "natural" or permanent political form of the modern, post-Enlightenment period.<sup>2</sup> It thus underplays the potential lessons that the Austro-Hungarian experience provides, especially in terms of managing a multi-national and multi-ethnic empire under conditions of modernity.<sup>3</sup>

Sked's critique of Diószegi also has a significant bearing on the history and historiography of civilian internment in the Habsburg Empire during the First World War. Indeed, when we look at the existing literature on this subject, the most striking thing is that Austria-Hungary is the only one of the major combatant powers during the First World War for which there is still no monograph on the treatment of enemy aliens. Leaving aside the not inconsiderable challenges involved in working in archives in a region that has become even more geographically fragmented since the end of the Cold War, and with official and non-official documents written in several different European languages, there are two main reasons for this. Firstly, there is the assumption that the internment of enemy aliens and other outside groups in wartime is largely a reflection of the priorities of the nation-state and its

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>3</sup> One early attempt to consider these lessons by investigating the "mass psychological process of the disintegration of the Habsburg Monarchy" was O. Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy*, Chicago, IL 1929 (here v).

mobilisation strategies during wartime.<sup>4</sup> If Austria-Hungary simply represents a “second hand” imitation of this, then why bother investigating it? Secondly, there is a certain feeling of nostalgia for the Habsburg monarchy, a notion that its passing in 1918 led on to geopolitical instability and ethnic conflicts in central and eastern Europe, to the rise of Hitler and Stalin, and to concentration camp systems that were significantly crueller and more murderous than anything imaginable in the First World War.<sup>5</sup> In other words, if discussed at all, Austrian-Hungary’s treatment of domestic political suspects and enemy aliens during the years 1914-1918 is usually seen not just as a “distorted variant” of Western European practices, but by and large as a more benign one.

The genealogy of this approach is easy to trace. Already in January 1918, before the war had ended, the American jurist James W. Garner published an influential and oft-cited article in the *American Journal of International Law* on the treatment of enemy aliens by the combatant powers. In it, he devoted twelve and a half pages to the situation in Britain, five and a half pages to France, three pages to Imperial Germany, and barely one page to the Habsburg Empire. His conclusion was that, except for its treatment of Italians, Austro-Hungarian policy towards enemy aliens was “especially lenient”. This was all the more remarkable, he noted, given the large-scale arrests of Habsburg subjects in Britain and France.<sup>6</sup> Garner was right on two levels: there was indeed no wholesale internment of enemy

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<sup>4</sup> For a broader analysis see M. Stibbe, “Ein globales Phänomen: Zivilinternierung im Ersten Weltkrieg in transnationalen und internationalen Dimensionen”, in: C. Jahr / J. Thiel (eds.), *Lager vor Auschwitz: Gewalt und Integration im 20. Jahrhundert*, Berlin 2013, 158-176.

<sup>5</sup> On Habsburg nostalgia see Eric Hobsbawm’s insightful essay, “Mitteleuropäische Destinien” (2003), reproduced in Hobsbawm, *Fractured Times: Culture and Society in the Twentieth Century*, London 2013, 84-95 (here esp. 86-88).

<sup>6</sup> J. W. Garner, “Treatment of Enemy Aliens: Measures in Respect to Personal Liberty”, in: *American Journal of International Law*, 12 (1918) 1, 27-55 (here 52).

aliens in either the Austrian or Hungarian halves of the Monarchy during the First World War. It is also true that the Italians were dealt with more harshly than British and French nationals. However, as we shall see below, his claims are also highly misleading in other respects. In particular, most of those who were interned in Austria-Hungary during the war were not enemy aliens at all, but either deportees from occupied territories, or *feindliche Inländer*, internal enemies who belonged to particular subject nationalities of the empire. With the partial exception of the Serbs and the Italians, they did not enjoy the protection of the International Red Cross or of neutral embassies. And their treatment was anything but lenient.<sup>7</sup>

During the immediate post-war period, some of the subject nationality groups who had suffered most under wartime Habsburg rule sought to correct this impression of a mild Austrian policy. In 1920, for instance, the Italian government publicised the findings of its Royal Commission into war crimes committed by the enemy, which included a volume dedicated to the mistreatment of prisoners of war and civilian internees.<sup>8</sup> In the same year Vladimir Ćorović, a former Bosnian Serb political prisoner and now professor of history at the University of Belgrade, published a “Black Book” of wartime atrocities committed by Habsburg troops against the Serb population of Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>9</sup> And later in the

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<sup>7</sup> For further evidence see M. Stibbe, “Krieg und Brutalisierung: Die Internierung von Zivilisten bzw. “politisch Unzuverlässigen“ in Österreich-Ungarn während des Ersten Weltkriegs”, in: A. Einfeld / G. Hausmann / D. Neutatz (eds.), *Besetzt, interniert, deportiert: Der Erste Weltkrieg und die deutsche, jüdische, polnische und ukrainische Zivilbevölkerung im östlichen Europa*, Essen 2013, 87-106.

<sup>8</sup> *Relazioni della reale commissione d'inchiesta sulle violazioni del diritto delle genti commesse dal nemico, Vol. 3: Trattamento dei prigionieri di Guerra e degli internati civili*, Rome 1920.

<sup>9</sup> V. Ćorović, *Crna Knjiga: Patnje srba Bosne i Hercegovine za vreme Svetskog Rata 1914-1918*, Belgrade, Sarajevo 1920 [Black Book: The Suffering of the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Great War, 1914-

1920s, Ukrainian nationalists in Lvov began writing the *Thalerhof Almanach*, an account of the inhumane conditions in which Ruthenian political suspects were kept at the Thalerhof camp near Graz in Austrian Styria.<sup>10</sup> However, none of these works made much of an impact beyond their immediate national/political contexts, and even then the impact was slight.

In Austria itself, silence reigned regarding the extent and scale of atrocities committed against captive civilians and deportees, including Habsburg subjects, during the war. The official view was reflected in an essay which appeared in the two-volume compendium on wartime captivity published by Hans Weiland and Leopold Kern in 1931. Its author was Hans Swoboda, a former Habsburg police official who had been seconded from the Austrian Ministry of Interior to become the Imperial government's chief advisor on civilian internee affairs in 1914. Perhaps not surprisingly, then, Swoboda described Austrian measures against enemy aliens as restrained in comparison to those of other belligerent states, and as having been motivated by concern for the dignity of the persons affected and not by any desire for "revenge". Internment, he argued, was a last resort undertaken only when it was "deemed necessary to protect ourselves". This was underlined by reports from the Red Cross and neutral embassies which – according to Swoboda - confirmed "that civilian internees in Austria were always treated well".<sup>11</sup>

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1918]. On Ćorović see also R. Okey, *Taming Balkan Nationalism: The Habsburg "Civilizing Mission" in Bosnia, 1878-1914*, Oxford 2007, 231-232 and 250.

<sup>10</sup> *Talergofs'kyj al'manach: Propamjatnaja knyga avstryjs'kich žestokostej, yzuvirstv y nasylij nad karpato-russ'kym narodom vo vremja vsemyrnoj vojny 1914-1917 gg.* 4 Vols., Lvov 1924-1932 [Thalerhof Almanach: Book of remembrance to the Austrian atrocities and acts of violence against the Carpatho-Ruthenian people during the World War, 1914-1917].

<sup>11</sup> H. Swoboda, "Zivilinternierte in Österreich", in: H. Weiland / L. Kern (eds.), *In Feindeshand: Die Gefangenschaft im Weltkriege in Einzeldarstellungen*, Vienna 1931, Vol. 2, 229-230.

While concern for defending or denigrating the reputation of the former Habsburg Empire gradually faded over time, after 1945 historical writing on the “camp phenomenon” was dominated, for understandable reasons, by a focus on the Nazi Holocaust and the Soviet Gulag. The first detailed academic studies of First World War internment came only in the 1990s, alongside the growing interest in the history of minority groups in nations and empires at war. Over the last two decades significant monographs and specialist essays have appeared on the treatment of enemy aliens and/or internment practices in Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Romania, Russia, the USA, Brazil, Australia, and New Zealand.<sup>12</sup> Yet the only equivalent for Austria-Hungary comes in the form of unpublished PhD theses and Masters’

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<sup>12</sup> See P. Panayi, *The Enemy in Our Midst: Germans in Britain during the First World War*, Oxford 1991; idem., *Prisoners of Britain: German Civilian and Combatant Internees during the First World War*, Manchester 2013; J.-C. Farcy, *Les camps de concentration français de la première guerre mondiale (1914-1920)*, Paris 1995; C. Jahr, “Zivilisten als Kriegsgefangene: Die Internierung von ‘Feindstaaten-Ausländern’ in Deutschland während des Ersten Weltkrieges am Beispiel des ‘Engländerlagers’ in Ruhleben”, in: R. Overmans (ed.), *In der Hand des Feindes: Kriegsgefangenschaft von der Antike bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Cologne, Weimar, Vienna 1999, 297-321; M. Stibbe, *British Civilian Internees in Germany: The Ruhleben Camp, 1914-18*, Manchester 2008; D. L. Caglioti, “Why and How Italy Invented an Enemy Aliens Problem in the First World War”, in: *War in History*, 21 (2014) 2, 142-169 ; A. Siperco, *Tragedii și suferințe neștiute: Prizonieri de război și internați civili în România 1917-1919*, Bucharest 2003; E. Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign against Enemy Aliens during World War I*, Cambridge, MA, London 2003; J. Nagler, *Nationale Minoritäten im Krieg: „Feindliche Ausländer” und die amerikanische Heimatfront während des Ersten Weltkrieges*, Hamburg 2000; F. C. Luebke, *Germans in Brazil: A Comparative History of Cultural Conflict during World War I*, London 1987; G. Fischer, *Enemy Aliens: Internment and the Home Front Experience in Australia, 1914-1920*, St. Lucia, Queensland 1989; and A. Francis, *“To Be Truly British, We Must Be Anti-German”: New Zealand, Enemy Aliens and the Great War Experience, 1914-1919*, Frankfurt am Main, New York 2012.

dissertations,<sup>13</sup> or exhibition catalogues and booklets produced for the specialist local history market.<sup>14</sup> Even the recent revival of interest in military POWs in the Habsburg Empire, such as Giovanna Procacci's volume on Italians and the work of Verena Moritz and Hannes Leidinger on Russian prisoners pre- and post-1917, has done little to stimulate research into their civilian counterparts.<sup>15</sup>

The aim of this article, then, is to make a start at filling an important gap in the literature. The underlying argument is that Austro-Hungarian policies are a key part of the story of First World War internment, not simply a dull or inconsequential echo of policies pursued elsewhere. To demonstrate this, I will refer to the incarceration of three distinct but partially overlapping groups: enemy aliens, "suspicious persons" deported from war zones, and internally-displaced refugees; and I will draw my examples mainly, but not wholly, from the

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<sup>13</sup> O. Haller, "Das Internierungslager Katzenau bei Linz: Die Internierung und Konfinierung der italienischsprachigen Zivilbevölkerung des Trentinos zur Zeit des Ersten Weltkrieges", Dipl. Arb., University of Vienna 1999; R. Mundschütz, "Das Internierungslager Drosendorf/Thaya 1914-1920: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Behandlung fremder Staatsangehöriger in Österreich während des 1. Weltkrieges", Dipl. Arb., University of Vienna 1993; idem., "Internierung im Waldviertel: Die Internierungslager und -stationen der BH Waidhofen an der Thaya, 1914-1918", D. Phil, University of Vienna 2002.

<sup>14</sup> This is especially the case with Italian internees and refugees in Austria. See e.g. E. Unterveger, *Katzenau: Catalogo edito in occasione della Mostra alla Sala della Tromba di Trento, 16-30 novembre 1980*, Trento 1980; V. C. Tranquillini, *Rovereto Katzenau e ritorno*, Rovereto 1990; D. Leoni / C. Zadra (eds.), *La città di legno: Profughi trentini in Austria 1915-1918*, Trento 1995; M. Eichtha, *Braunau-Katzenau-Mitterndorf: Il ricordo dei profughi e degli internati del Trentino*, Cremona 1999; C. Ambrosi, *Vite internate: Katzenau, 1915-1917*, Trento 2008.

<sup>15</sup> G. Procacci, *Soldati e prigionieri italiani nella Grande Guerra* Turin 2000 [1993]; V. Moritz / H. Leidinger, *Zwischen Nutzen und Bedrohung: Die russischen Kriegsgefangenen in Österreich 1914-1921*, Bonn 2005.



Austrian half of the empire.<sup>16</sup> In the final section, I will show how internment practices in the Dual Monarchy complicate our understanding of the history and violent legacy of First World War captivity as a whole. In particular, it may no longer be appropriate to assume the existence of a standard "western" model of the persecution of alien minorities and subject nationalities in wartime from which one can identify peculiar non-western variants.

### **1. Enemy Aliens**

Like most other belligerent states in the First World War, Austria-Hungary did not allow enemy nationals any period of grace to leave its sovereign territory after the outbreak of hostilities. Restrictions on freedom of movement and police surveillance measures were immediately put into place.<sup>17</sup> Men of military age, but also women and older men, were the targets. Suspected spies were quickly taken into custody, including 95 enemy aliens arrested in Lower Austria and interned at Schloss Karlstein, an uninhabited property owned by Count van den Straten, on 18 August 1914. Among them were 56 Russians, 23 Britishers, thirteen Frenchmen and three Serbs.<sup>18</sup> But otherwise most enemy subjects, including the vast majority

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<sup>16</sup> Although I cannot go into more detail here, it seems likely that a focus on the Hungarian case, with its much stronger emphasis on the Magyar nation as the dominant ethnic group, would produce different results. For a brilliant account of the differences between the Austrian and Hungarian approaches to ethnic heterogeneity in the pre-war period, including comparisons with policies pursued by Britain in its overseas empire, see B. Gammerl, *Staatsbürger, Untertanen und Andere: Der Umgang mit ethnischer Heterogenität im Britischen Weltreich und im Habsburgerreich 1867-1918*, Göttingen 2010.

<sup>17</sup> These measures were already outlined in a letter from the Austrian Ministry of Interior to the *Statthalter* (provincial governor) of Lower Austria, 23 July 1914, in: Niederösterreichisches Landesarchiv St. Pölten (henceforth NÖLA), Präs. P. Zl. 384 SA ex 1914 (Karton 691).

<sup>18</sup> District Commissioner in Waidhofen an der Thaya to the office of the Statthalter of Lower Austria, 20 August 1914, in: NÖLA, Präs. P. Zl. 384 SA ex 1914 (Karton 691).

of British and French nationals living in Austria, remained at liberty in the first weeks of the war. Russians were more likely to be interned, and indeed many more were arrested after 18 August, but even then relatively large numbers were left in freedom, especially those Russian Poles, Russian Jews and Ukrainians considered to be opposed to Tsarism.<sup>19</sup> Even the Russian political emigrant Lenin, who was staying in a country retreat close to the village of Poronin in the Austrian province of Galicia when war broke out and was temporarily held as a “suspicious alien” by the authorities in nearby Nowy Targ, was allowed to proceed to Switzerland on 3 September 1914, largely due to the intervention of the Austrian socialist Victor Adler.<sup>20</sup>

In the autumn of 1914 the mood towards aliens became more hostile, mainly in reaction to news from Britain and France regarding the alleged ill-treatment of Habsburg subjects there. Austrian diplomats also reported enthusiastically on the retaliatory measures being taken in Germany, including the arrest of around 4000 British men on 6 November and their incarceration at the Ruhleben camp near Berlin.<sup>21</sup> Orders issued on 10 and 15 November by the *Kriegsüberwachungsamt* (KÜA), the body charged with coordinating wartime emergency measures in the Austrian half of the empire, called for the more rigorous implementation of restrictions on enemy aliens, even in the Austrian interior, and the order of 15 November made explicit reference to the need to treat the British particularly harshly. Instructions were

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<sup>19</sup> Statthaltereie in Niederösterreich, Instruktion für die Behandlung fremder Staatsangehöriger in Niederösterreich während des Kriegszustandes, n.d. [11 August 1914], in: NÖLA, Präs. P. Zl. 384 SA ex 1914 (Karton 691).

<sup>20</sup> See R. Service, *Lenin: A Biography*, Basingstoke 2000, 223-225.

<sup>21</sup> See e.g. Austro-Hungarian consul in Dresden to the Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count Leopold Berchtold, 17 November 1914, in: Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv (henceforth ÖStA-HHStA), F36, Karton 556, 26/2a, Zl. 15.

also given for the arrest of more Britishers living in Vienna and other major towns and cities, especially those “whose continued residency or employment in our lands is a matter of luxury only”, rather than being considered a “necessity”.<sup>22</sup> The new sanctions were backed up by propaganda accusing the Allies, and Britain in particular, of various misdeeds and cruelties against Habsburg subjects.<sup>23</sup> However, in contrast to Germany, there was no wholesale round-up of British men of military age in November 1914, and indeed the KÜA emphasised the importance of ensuring “that the internment measures do not damage the interests of our native industry and economy, or affect British subjects who are more or less to be regarded as pro-Austrian as a result of long-term residency in the Monarchy or close family ties with subjects of the Monarchy”.<sup>24</sup>

So far, then, official Austrian policy towards enemy aliens was largely reactive and, on the surface at least, remarkably restrained in comparison with Britain, France and Germany. Whereas the latter countries ended up interning almost all male enemy subjects of military age caught within their jurisdiction at the outbreak of war,<sup>25</sup> in Austria this was palpably not the case. Pacifying public opinion, which was largely anti-alien, without pandering to the

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<sup>22</sup> Erlässe des KÜAs, 10 and 15 November 1914. Copies in The National Archives, Kew, London (henceforth TNA), FO 383/5, and ÖStA-HHStA, F36, Karton 556, 26/2a, Zl. 14. On the KÜA more generally see T. Scheer, *Die Ringstraßenfront: Österreich-Ungarn, das Kriegsüberwachungsamt und der Ausnahmezustand während des Ersten Weltkrieges*, Vienna 2010, esp. 137-144.

<sup>23</sup> See k.u.k. Ministerium des Äussern, *Sammlung von Nachweisen für die Verletzungen des Völkerrechts durch die mit Österreich-Ungarn kriegführenden Staaten*, 4 vols., Vienna 1915-1916, esp. Vol. 1, 55-115 and Vol. 2, 33-51.

<sup>24</sup> Erlass des KÜAs, 15 November 1914 (as note 22 above).

<sup>25</sup> M. Stibbe, “The Internment of Civilians by Belligerent States During the First World War and the Response of the International Committee of the Red Cross”, in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 41 (2006) 1, 5-19 (here esp. 7-8).

more extreme elements demanding wholesale internment, was the main objective. As late as May 1915, for instance, the American ambassador in Vienna, Frederic C. Penfield, reported to his counterpart in London, Walter Hines Page, that only 75 out of an estimated 1286 British subjects had been interned in Austria, and only three out of an estimated 512 British subjects in Hungary.<sup>26</sup> In line with its desire to present itself as a civilised, law-abiding state, the Habsburg Empire also furnished lists of enemy alien internees to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Geneva, and allowed inspection of its camps by Red Cross officials and neutral embassies.<sup>27</sup> And yet there were other, more brutal and idiosyncratic features of Habsburg policy which demonstrate that Austria did not simply (and reluctantly) follow a pattern that originated elsewhere, but rather made its own contribution to the dynamics of internment.

Firstly, in 1914 Austria was host to a large number of Russian subjects, especially Poles, who were deserters from the pre-war Tsarist army and in smaller numbers to Italian migrant workers who were in a similar situation.<sup>28</sup> Men on the run from peacetime conscription or military justice in their own countries were not likely to want to return home to join their respective armies in the event of hostilities. However, they posed a threat, not only because they were aliens and therefore a potential security risk, but also because rising unemployment in the first weeks of the war, combined with separation from their families, often rendered them destitute or in danger of becoming so. Some were known to the Austrian police as

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<sup>26</sup> Penfield to Page, 7 May 1915, in: TNA, FO 383/5.

<sup>27</sup> See e.g. *Rapports de MM. G. Ador, Dr. F. Ferrière et Dr. de Schulthess-Schindler sur leurs visites à quelques camps de prisonniers en Autriche-Hongrie*, Geneva, Paris 1915. Copy in: Archives du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge, Geneva (henceforth ACICR), C G1, 432/II/4.

<sup>28</sup> T. Scheer, *Zwischen Front und Heimat: Österreich-Ungarns Militärverwaltungen im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Frankfurt am Main 2009, 156.

socialists or anarchists and were therefore suspected – in wilder moments of panic – of plotting world revolution. Others were accused of being work-shy, or, conversely, of stealing jobs from locals. On the other hand, if they were concentrated in camps, they could be mobilised as labour for the Austrian war effort, and required to carry out work that the indigenous population refused to do. And in effect this is what happened to many of the Russians interned in the Austrian interior in 1914, and to some of their Italian counterparts taken into captivity in May-June 1915.<sup>29</sup>

Secondly, Austria-Hungary contributed to the dynamic of wartime captivity through its distinctive use of confinement as opposed to internment as a means of controlling more well-to-do (*bemittelte*) aliens. Although a version of this policy was also adopted in Italy, where it was already permitted, in pre-war times, as a means of combatting domestic subversion,<sup>30</sup> the Dual Monarchy was the first belligerent power to use it against enemy civilians in the First World War. Essentially confinement meant expelling “dangerous” but financially independent foreign persons from big cities and border regions, and compelling them to live under police supervision in certain towns and villages in the Lower Austrian district of Waidhofen an der Thaya, such as Drosendorf, Raabs, Karlstein, and Kautzen.<sup>31</sup> In this way, until 1917 only the most destitute British, French and Russian nationals ended up in camps. On the surface at least confinement represented an attempt to uphold class privileges in spite of the break in international decorum caused by the war, a policy which in respect to

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<sup>29</sup> Mundschtütz, “Das Internierungslager Drosendorf/Thaya”, 11-12. See also H. J. W. Kuprian, “‘Fronddienst redivivus im XX. Jahrhundert!’: Arbeitszwang am Beispiel von Flucht, Vertreibung und Internierung in Österreich während des Ersten Weltkrieges”, in: *Geschichte und Region / storia e regione* 12 (2003) 1, 15-38.

<sup>30</sup> On the use of confinement or “forced residence” (*domicilio coatto*) against suspect aliens and domestic enemies in Italy after 1915 see Caglioti, “How and Why Italy”, 161.

<sup>31</sup> Mundschtütz, “Internierung im Waldviertel”.

treatment of enemy aliens seems to have been taken further in the Habsburg Empire than in other warring states.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, according to Hans Swoboda, “whole colonies of foreigners were concentrated in particular locations, where they had a thoroughly pleasant time and, depending on their means, had access to every kind of comfort”.<sup>33</sup> Yet for formerly wealthy aliens whose income was drastically reduced by the war, confinement could be as much a hardship as internment itself, especially if it meant being denied access to Red Cross food parcels or being exposed to hostility from local communities. As one British woman who was confined with her elderly parents to the village of Raabs later complained: “[W]e were exploited in every way. It was impossible to get accommodation for three people for less than K. 90 monthly, which equals about £45 a year [...]. Nothing [was] free and nothing cheap. The village shops [had] two distinct charges – one for the inhabitants – one for the interned”.<sup>34</sup>

Thirdly, while all captor powers in the First World War discriminated against or granted favourable treatment to particular groups of prisoners according to their nationality or ethnic background, there were some distinctive features in the Habsburg case. For a while, for instance, British nationals in confinement were given an especially tough time, being subjected to very tight curfews and being forbidden – unlike French and Russian aliens – to enter pubs, coffee houses or restaurants. This was apparently in retaliation for the poor

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<sup>32</sup> Preservation of class privileges can more commonly be seen in the superior treatment afforded to officer POWs by all captor states during World War I. See e.g. H. Jones, “A Missing Paradigm? Military Captivity and the Prisoner of War, 1914-18”, in: M. Stibbe (ed.), *Captivity, Forced Labour and Forced Migration in Europe during the First World War*, London 2009, 19-48 (here esp. 27-28).

<sup>33</sup> Swoboda, “Zivilinternierte in Österreich”, 229.

<sup>34</sup> D. Cocking, unpublished typewritten report, n.d. [March/April 1918], 1-2, in: TNA, FO 383/364. Cf. the similar complaints in: ÖStA-HHStA, F36, Karton 556, 26/2a, Zl. 75.

treatment of Austro-Hungarian nationals in Britain and its overseas dominions and colonies.<sup>35</sup> The decision to rescind this policy in May 1916 reflected the fact that when it came to numbers, Britain had a clear advantage. As it held captive at least 32.440 German and Austro-Hungarian civilians by November 1915, it could not be forced to make any concessions when it came to discussions over prisoner releases and exchanges.<sup>36</sup> Besides, incoming reports from the American embassy in London eventually forced the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the KÜA to admit that by and large Britain treated its enemy aliens well, indeed better than France and Russia.<sup>37</sup> As a propaganda and negotiating tool, Austria's reprisal measures against British civilians were therefore of limited value. While it is possible but unlikely that they led to some minor improvements for Habsburg subjects in Britain and its empire, as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs somewhat optimistically claimed in late 1915,<sup>38</sup> in the long run they simply exposed the Dual Monarchy's weak bargaining position and lack of global deterrent power.

In the meantime, a more serious and prolonged case of discrimination occurred against Italian enemy aliens. To some extent this reflected a deliberate calculation on the part of the Monarchy that it could target Italians without fear of the consequences because of the much smaller number of Habsburg subjects living in Italy.<sup>39</sup> In addition, there were simply too

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<sup>35</sup> See Penfield to Page, 7 May 1915, in: TNA, FO 383/5. According to this report, the reprisal measures had been in force since November 1914.

<sup>36</sup> Panayi, *Prisoners of Britain*, 44.

<sup>37</sup> Austro-Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to KÜA, 6 April 1916, and KÜA to the Austro-Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 4 May 1916, in: ÖStA-HHStA, F36, Karton 556, 26/2a, Zl. 48.

<sup>38</sup> Austro-Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to KÜA, 13 November 1915, in: ÖStA-HHStA, F36, Karton 556, 26/2a, Zl. 40.

<sup>39</sup> The vast majority of the roughly 15.000 enemy aliens still resident in Italy when hostilities began in May 1915 were women, children and older men. As most of the males of military age had already left to join the

many Italian migrants in the Monarchy, many of them poor or destitute, and some of them suspected of holding irredentist or anti-Habsburg beliefs, to make confinement or milder forms of supervision a viable option. One solution was to send them home. Indeed, after 86.500 Italians had already fled across the still open border in 1914/1915, a further 42.216, mainly women, children and older men, were expelled via neighbouring Switzerland in the first weeks of the war.<sup>40</sup> The 3000 or so Italians who remained – mostly long-term migrants of military age and their Austrian-born wives and children – were interned for the duration of the war, without being offered the alternative of confinement.<sup>41</sup>

However, there were more important factors at work in the discriminatory treatment of Italians than mere numbers. In political and cultural terms, Italy's entry into the war in May 1915 was seen as a great betrayal, because of that country's previous adherence to the Triple Alliance. Rome's claims to be fighting a "just" war were held in particular contempt; Russia and even Serbia were considered more worthy opponents.<sup>42</sup> On top of this there was a history of distrust of irredentist groups on the part of Austrian military officials ever since the coming of Italian unity in the 1860s, an enmity which reached its height in July 1916 with the brutal execution of Cesare Battisti, an Italian socialist and member of the Austrian parliament

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German or Habsburg armies, the Austrian authorities had little to lose, even if the Italians did take counter-measures – see Caglioti, "How and Why Italy", 150.

<sup>40</sup> M. Ermacora, "Assistance and Surveillance: War Refugees in Italy, 1914-1918", in: *Contemporary European History* 16 (2007) 4, 445-459 (here 446-447).

<sup>41</sup> Stibbe, "Krieg und Brutalisierung", 95.

<sup>42</sup> M. Rauchensteiner, *Der Tod des Doppeladlers: Österreich-Ungarn und der Erste Weltkrieg*, Graz 1994 [1993], 235; C. Gatterer, *Erbfeindschaft Italien-Österreich*, Vienna, Munich, Zurich 1972, 153; A. Kramer, "Italienische Kriegsgefangene im Ersten Weltkrieg", in: H. J. Kuprian / O. Überegger (eds.), *Der Erste Weltkrieg im Alpenraum: Erfahrung, Deutung, Erinnerung/La Grande Guerra nell'arco alpino: Esperienze e memoria*, Innsbruck 2006, 247-258 (here 257).



(*Reichsrat*) who was captured in Italian uniform on the Alpine Front and sentenced to death by a court-martial in his hometown of Trent.<sup>43</sup> While Habsburg subject Italian irredentists were seen as traitors, *Reichsitaliener* (subjects of the pre-war Kingdom of Italy) were often regarded with equal misgivings. Baron Gustav von Reicher, for instance, the director of a camp set up for enemy aliens at Katzenau bei Linz in Upper Austria in June 1915, was said to have a special disdain for all things Italian.<sup>44</sup> This was in spite of receiving reports from his own military censors which revealed that most of the *Reichsitaliener* who entered his camp were indifferent or hostile to Italian intervention and critical of the government in Rome for its failure to provide them with adequate food parcels and other means of support.<sup>45</sup>

In the years 1915-1917 the Italian civilian prisoners in the Monarchy survived on modest private packages sent from home and gifts from the Italian Red Cross if they were lucky, and basic Habsburg rations if they were not. However, like their military counterparts, in the final twelve months of the war they began to suffer from literal starvation.<sup>46</sup> Many died, particularly among the 16.000 or so deported by Habsburg troops from the occupied parts of

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<sup>43</sup> On Battisti see M. Thompson, *The White War: Life and Death on the Italian Front, 1915-1919*, London 2008, 98-103 and 166 ; and J. Leonhard, *Die Büchse der Pandora: Geschichte des Ersten Weltkriegs*, Munich 2014, 314-315 and 595-597.

<sup>44</sup> See e.g. the evidence offered in *Relazioni della reale commissione*, Vol. 3, 572. Also Haller, “Das Internierungslager Katzenau”, esp. 44-48.

<sup>45</sup> See e.g. Italienische Zensurgruppe B, Spezialbericht, 11 September 1915, and Bericht der Italienische Zensurgruppe B, 5 January 1918, in: ÖStA-KA, AOK/GZNB, Karton 3732, Zl. 1917 and Karton 3756, Zl. 4936.

<sup>46</sup> On the fate of the 600.000 Italian military prisoners in Austria, 100.000 of whom died in 1917-1918, see the somewhat different interpretations offered by Procacci, *Soldati e prigionieri italiani*; and Kramer, “Italienische Kriegsgefangene”.

Friuli and Veneto in the wake of the Italian defeat at the Battle of Caporetto in late 1917.<sup>47</sup> Romanians, who were sent as hostages to Drosendorf and Katzenau after their country was occupied in December 1916, also fared very badly, especially compared to the British and French.<sup>48</sup> The unequal treatment of nationalities in camps was reinforced by a “divide and rule” strategy designed to prevent any feelings of collective solidarity among the internees.<sup>49</sup> Some officials, like Baron von Reicher in Katzenau, even encouraged inmates, especially the Italians, to spy on each other and to report breaches of discipline in what would appear to have been a specifically Austrian contribution to wartime brutality.<sup>50</sup>

Last, but by no means least, Austrian internment policies were complex in the sense that the original measures, drawn up by the KÜA in August 1914, were directed against both enemy aliens and *feindliche* or *verdächtige Inländer*, and were intended to deal with both groups simultaneously. Already by the end of August 1914 3600 “suspicious people”, both *Inländer* and *Ausländer*, had been interned in the Austrian half of the empire for reasons of “military security”.<sup>51</sup> Although Italians were the main targets in May 1915, Serbs were deported to camps in the Austrian and Hungarian interiors in even larger numbers, especially following the successful military invasion in autumn 1915 and again after the Romanian declaration of war in August 1916.<sup>52</sup> The same considerations of “military security” were also behind the suspension of constitutional rights on the home front and the frame-up trials

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<sup>47</sup> See A. Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War*, Oxford 2007, 60-61.

<sup>48</sup> On the treatment of Romanian civilians see the archival sources in: ÖStA-HHStA, F36, Karton 602, 45/2a.

<sup>49</sup> Mundschtütz, “Das Internierungslager Drosendorf/Thaya”, 34-36.

<sup>50</sup> Haller, “Das Internierungslager Katzenau”, 61; Stibbe, “Krieg und Brutalisierung”, 97.

<sup>51</sup> Mundschtütz, “Das Internierungslager Drosendorf/Thaya”, 15-16.

<sup>52</sup> A. Mitrović, *Serbia's Great War, 1914-1918*, London 2007, 228-230.

conducted by military courts against nationalist politicians like Karel Kramář, a Czech member of the *Reichsrat* who was accused – on the basis of no hard evidence – of treason against the empire.<sup>53</sup> Although the army was the driving force behind such measures, as early as 23 July the Ministry of Interior wrote to the District Commissioner for Lower Austria:

It is also important to ensure that untrustworthy or unreliable domestic subjects who are suspected of conspiring with the enemy or who might hamper the mobilisation measures are rendered harmless in the event of a state of emergency or mobilisation order [...]. A pretext for this could be those parts of the criminal law that deal with high treason, espionage [and] threats to public order and peace [...].<sup>54</sup>

The language used here – “to render harmless” or “unschädlich zu machen” – is in itself revealing, both of the mentality behind Austria’s labyrinthine internment system and of its place in a transnational, pan-European and global dynamic of violence. It confirms Alan Kramer’s argument that here was no one model of violence against civilians during the 1914/1918 conflict, but rather several models that interacted with each other to unleash a “radicalisation of war” which extended to “all fronts in Europe and the Near East”, including the home fronts. Only in one state, the Ottoman Empire, did this “dynamic of destruction” get pushed as far as genocide. In others, including Austria-Hungary, the quest for military security had murderous, rather than genocidal consequences.<sup>55</sup> Even so, decisions for internment and the assumptions behind these decisions were often closely linked to how the

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<sup>53</sup> On Kramář see Jászi, *The Dissolution*, 17.

<sup>54</sup> Austrian Ministry of Interior to the Statthalter of Lower Austria, 23 July 1914, in: NÖLA, Präs. P. Zl. 384 SA ex 1914 (Karton 691).

<sup>55</sup> Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction*, 3 and 68.

war was conducted in the fighting zones. In Austria's case, this can be seen most clearly in the evacuation and deportation measures implemented in areas of the Monarchy identified as most vulnerable to enemy infiltration, espionage and subversion.

## **2. Political Suspects Deported from War Zones**

In addition to interning or confining enemy aliens and seizing enemy civilians as hostages in occupied territories, the Habsburg military also deported large numbers of domestic political "suspects" from war zones and volatile frontier districts. Three main ethnic groups were targeted: Bosnian Serbs, Ruthenians or western Ukrainians suspected of pro-Russian sympathies, and, as mentioned above, alleged Italian irredentists. This in turn appeared to contradict the army's own intention to mobilise all Habsburg subjects behind the war effort and maintain the inner cohesion between the different nationalities that made up the Empire. It also forced moderate Slav and Italian nationalists to take up increasingly critical positions, so that the Monarchy began to lose support even among hitherto loyal sections of the population.

After 1918, both erstwhile servants and opponents of the Monarchy exaggerated the role played by Allied propaganda in stirring up nationalist feeling, in effect blaming outside forces, especially the British and French, for Austria's woes.<sup>56</sup> However, in reality the deportations had internal rather than external causes. In particular they were related to the Monarchy's chief strategic aim pre- and post-1914: to enhance the military strength of the empire and especially military security in border regions, while at the same time maintaining a steady recruitment of loyal soldiers from these regions into an ethnically-neutral Austro-Hungarian army. For pessimists among Austria's rulers in particular, the balance between

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<sup>56</sup> The assumptions behind these post-war claims are persuasively challenged and demythologised in M. Cornwall, *The Undermining of Austria-Hungary: The Battle for Hearts and Minds*, Basingstoke 2000.

centrifugal forces (civic and ethnic nationalism) and centripetal forces (loyalty to the Emperor Franz Joseph and his heirs, service in the military and/or imperial bureaucracy) had to be decisively redrawn in favour of the latter if the Habsburg state were to survive in its current form.<sup>57</sup> “Traitors”, whether in the borderlands or in the interior, stood in the way of this.

In the years leading up to the war, “ethnic recognition” began to emerge as an alternative way of imagining citizenship and belonging in the Austrian half of the empire. Under this model the state could acknowledge the existence of separate nations in a civic rather than territorial sense, allowing subjects of the Monarchy to exercise common rights, such as voting or sending their children to school, by identifying themselves individually as members of a legally-constituted national group or community.<sup>58</sup> Reformers believed this policy would strengthen imperial loyalties by meeting the demands of moderate nationalists, but in reality it had a destabilising effect, especially as it was dialectically linked to its opposite, the revival of interest in Habsburg imperial expansion. The army, for instance, not only repeatedly urged preventative war against Austria’s external enemies,<sup>59</sup> but at home remained the bastion of conservative, neo-absolutist values, opposing any accommodation with nationalism and upholding a rigid commitment to ethnic neutrality which it pursued most keenly in relation to the imperial subjugation of the population of occupied Bosnia-Herzegovina – whether Serb, Croat, Muslim, Jew or other – after 1878.<sup>60</sup> Cultural and administrative modernisation

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<sup>57</sup> Gammerl, *Staatsbürger*, 80 and 328.

<sup>58</sup> On “ethnic recognition” see *ibid.*, 95-96. Also T. Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948*, Ithaca, New York 2008, 33-34.

<sup>59</sup> See in particular Günther Kronenbitter’s excellent study *“Krieg im Frieden”: Die Führung der k.u.k. Armee und die Großmachtpolitik Österreich-Ungarns 1906-1914*, Munich 2003.

<sup>60</sup> Gammerl, *Staatsbürger* 151-179.

through the promotion of a supra-national Austrophilism was directed at all of Bosnia's ethnic/confessional groups simultaneously, with mixed results before 1914.<sup>61</sup> More generally, as István Deák has shown, wherever they served in the empire, members of the Habsburg officer corps, from field marshals to career officers of lower rank, still "viewed themselves as 'Austrians'" and "the great majority [...] never admitted to a specific nationality". Rather "their unconditional loyalty was to the emperor".<sup>62</sup>

In the Austrian interior, including border regions before 1914/15, the army and its officer corps admittedly had less direct political influence over what was an increasingly multinational and polyglot (although still very elitist) imperial bureaucracy. For example, it failed to prevent the Moravian Compromise, a series of agreements between Czech and German provincial leaders in 1905 allowing for division along ethnic/linguistic lines, particularly in the spheres of political representation and children's education.<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, conservative forces were able to block the creation of an Italian-speaking university in Trieste, which opponents believed would become a breeding ground for irredentism.<sup>64</sup> And indeed Italian nationalists in the Alpine frontier districts, like Serbs in Bosnia and "russophile" Ukrainian suspects in eastern Galicia, were closely monitored by the secret police and military intelligence.<sup>65</sup> Arbitrary lists were drawn up of individuals to be arrested

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<sup>61</sup> See also Okey, *Taming Balkan Nationalism*, esp. 217-250.

<sup>62</sup> I. Deák, *Beyond Nationalism: A Social and Political History of the Habsburg Officer Corps, 1848-1918*, Oxford 1990, 189.

<sup>63</sup> On the Moravian Compromise see Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*, esp. 32-48. Also Gammerl, *Staatsbürger*, 90-97.

<sup>64</sup> Jászi, *The Dissolution*, 394-397; Gatterer, *Erbfeindschaft*, 77-90 (here esp. 84).

<sup>65</sup> See e.g. Statthalter of Tyrol and Vorarlberg to District Commissioners and the Police Commissioner in Trent, 28 November 1912 and 1 December 1913, in: Tiroler Landesarchiv Innsbruck (henceforth TLA), *Statt. Präs* 1915, 1012/3. Also the memoirs of Austria-Hungary's pre-war and wartime chief of military intelligence – M.

in the event of hostilities with Italy, and plans were laid for the use of detention without trial against presumed internal enemies.

Current literature puts a big emphasis on the fate of Italian subjects of the Monarchy deported as alleged irredentists from Trieste, Gorizia, the Trentino and elsewhere in May and June 1915, 12.000 of whom were sent to internment camps.<sup>66</sup> Among them were many local priests, doctors, lawyers, teachers and government officials; from Trieste alone some 73 persons employed in the state and communal administration were arrested.<sup>67</sup> In fact, though, even greater levels of violence were used against around 7000 suspected “russophile” Ruthenians sent to Thalerhof near Graz during the chaotic retreat from eastern Galicia following the initial Russian advances in autumn 1914. Some 1767 of them died, with most deaths occurring in the winter of 1914/1915. There were also reports of beatings and torture.<sup>68</sup> The deportations of autumn 1914 were accompanied by other acts of violence, including hostage-taking, burning of houses and schools, harassment and even murder of

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Ronge, *Kriegs- und Industrie-Spionage: Zwölf Jahre Kundschaftsdienst*, Zurich, Leipzig, Vienna 1930, esp. 16, 23-24 and 170-171.

<sup>66</sup> See e.g. F. Cecotti (ed.), *“Un esilio che non ha pari”. 1914-1918. Profughi, internati ed emigranti di Trieste, dell’Isontino e dell’Istria*, Gorizia 2001; L. Palla, *Il trentino orientale e la grande guerra: Combattenti, internati, profughi di Valsugana, Primiero e Tesino (1914-1920)*, Trento 1994, 95-113; and G. Pircher, *Militär, Verwaltung und Politik in Tirol im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Innsbruck 1995, 64-69. Also Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction*, 59-60; and Thompson, *The White War*, 145-146.

<sup>67</sup> Gatterer, *Erbfeindschaft*, 139.

<sup>68</sup> See G. Hoffmann/ N.-M. Goll /P . Lesiak, *Thalerhof 1914-1936: Die Geschichte eines vergessenen Lagers und seiner Opfer*, Herne 2010, 34 ff. and 96.

Orthodox priests, and summary hangings of alleged spies.<sup>69</sup> The novelist Joseph Roth later gave a vivid depiction of this in *The Radetzky March*:

Secret informants supplied unverifiable reports on peasants, priests, teachers, photographers, civil servants. There was no time. They were in a hurry to retreat, but also in a hurry to punish the traitors [...] For many days the real or supposed traitors were left dangling on trees in the church squares, as an example to the living. But far and wide the living had fled.<sup>70</sup>

At around the same time similar actions took place in Bosnia in the wake of the failure of initial Austrian military campaigns against Serbia.<sup>71</sup> Hostage-taking and public executions were commonplace. Bosnian Serb “suspects” selected for deportation were sent to terrible camps at Arad, Neszider and Gyöngyös in Hungary where again many died in the winter of 1914/1915. Others were held on starvation rations in camps in Bosnia itself.<sup>72</sup>

Four further points can be made about this group of internees. Firstly, because many of them were Habsburg subjects (or, in the case of Bosnian Serbs, *de facto* colonial subjects) rather than subjects of enemy states, they did not appear on any Red Cross lists and did not enjoy the formal protection of neutral powers. The ICRC also had to work hard to persuade

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<sup>69</sup> See A. Holzer, *Das Lächeln der Henker: Der unbekannte Krieg gegen die Zivilbevölkerung 1914-1918*, Darmstadt 2008. Also Rauchensteiner, *Der Tod des Doppeladlers*, 177-183.

<sup>70</sup> J. Roth, *The Radetzky March*, transl. from the German by M. Hofmann, London 2002 [1932], 347.

<sup>71</sup> Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction*, 140-141.

<sup>72</sup> Mitrović, *Serbia's Great War*, 75-78; J. E. Gumz, *The Resurrection and Collapse of Empire in Habsburg Serbia, 1914-1918*, Cambridge 2009, 34-43. Further evidence of the exceptionally high mortality rates in the Hungarian camps at Arad and Nezsider (Neusiedl) can also be found in: ÖStA-HHStA, F36, Karton 573, 28/2a, esp. Zl. 19 and 37a.



the authorities in Vienna to furnish lists of Serb and Italian nationals held in mixed camps alongside domestic deportees.<sup>73</sup> Secondly, although these measures did not generate as much international publicity as the deportation of Belgians to Germany in 1916,<sup>74</sup> the common Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vienna did receive a number of complaints through private and diplomatic channels, notably from the Vatican, the ICRC and the American and Spanish governments. However, its concern to respond constructively to these complaints was often overruled by the Army Supreme Command (AOK), which continued to insist that harsh measures were necessary to ensure “military security”.<sup>75</sup> As the Austrian parliament, the *Reichsrat*, was suspended from March 1914 to May 1917, there was no internal mechanism for challenging the army in this respect.

Thirdly, a significant proportion of deportees were middle-class professionals and their wives and families, that is lawyers, dentists, doctors, even clergymen and elected *Reichsrat* politicians suspected, often on the basis of malicious denunciations and other inaccurate information, of treasonable activities against the Monarchy. They were interned, in other words, for political reasons and were not systematically used as forced labour. In some instances, though, notably at Thalerhof, the prisoners from middle-class backgrounds, and especially the women, were singled out for particular forms of humiliating treatment that

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<sup>73</sup> *Rapport général du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge sur son activité de 1912 à 1920*, Geneva 1921, 137. See also Baron Spiegelfeld (Austrian Red Cross) to the ICRC, 13 September 1917, in: ACICR, C G1/418/III.

<sup>74</sup> The best study here is J. Thiel, „*Menschenbassin Belgien*“: *Anwerbung, Deportation und Zwangsarbeit im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Essen 2007.

<sup>75</sup> See e.g. note to the Austro-Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs from its representative at army headquarters, 6 March 1916, and note to the same from the Austro-Hungarian War Ministry, 17 July 1917, in: ÖStA-HHStA, F36, Karton 573, 28 2/a, Zl. 113a and Zl. 171. For complaints see *ibid.*, Zl. 19, 104, 156, 181; and Scheer, *Zwischen Front und Heimat*, 112-113.

were designed to destroy their gender and class identities, such as being made to clean lavatories or scrub floors. Photographs were even taken of the women bathing, with the victims forced to pose naked in front of the guards, according to one eye-witness account given to British intelligence officers in northern Italy in 1916.<sup>76</sup>

Finally, the amnesty for domestic political suspects issued by the new Kaiser Karl in May 1917 did at least bring some relief to those of the internees who were Austrian subjects, including political prisoners like Kramář who had earlier faced the death penalty.<sup>77</sup> However, this amnesty was at best a half measure only, because many of those released from camps or prisons were still not allowed to return to their homes in border regions and were in effect confined to the interior. Others were re-arrested in 1918 on suspicion of political agitation. Critics of the wartime regime, in particular nationalist deputies in the newly-recalled *Reichsrat*, immediately interpreted this as a reflection of the unequal treatment of subject nationalities by the military authorities, exposing the hollowness of the army's claim that it had applied emergency state-of-siege measures on an impartial and ethnically-neutral basis. Similar complaints were also made with regard to the Ministry of Interior's policy on refugees, who shall be the final group under consideration here.

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<sup>76</sup> British intelligence report, 23 June 1916, in: TNA, FO 383/123. Similar accusations were made by the Czech deputy Jiří Štříbrný in the *Reichsrat* on 14 June 1917 – see *Stenographische Protokolle des Abgeordnetenhauses des Reichsrates*, XXII. Session, Vienna 1917, 240-250. For a broader discussion see also M. Stibbe, “Gendered Experiences of Civilian Internment during the First World War: A Forgotten Dimension of Wartime Violence”, in: A. Carden-Coyne (ed.), *Gender and Conflict since 1914: Historical and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, Basingstoke 2012, 14-28.

<sup>77</sup> Rauchensteiner, *Der Tod des Doppeladlers*, 451 and 478.

### 3. Refugees from War Zones

Between 1914 and 1918 hundreds of thousands of civilians were forced from their homes by the fighting and driven to seek refuge in the Austrian and Hungarian hinterland. According to the Austrian Ministry of Interior's own statistics there were already 291.459 internally-displaced refugees in the western provinces of the Monarchy by December 1915. However, recent research indicates that the true figure was probably closer to one million.<sup>78</sup> Some of these refugees had fled their homes in war zones, while others had been compulsorily evacuated by the army. Those with independent financial means or with families willing to support them were able to live in relative freedom. However, a growing number of destitute refugees – 130.000 in Austria by the end of 1915 – were crammed into vast *Barackenlager* (refugee camps) set up on the orders of the Ministry of Interior in places such as Braunau am Inn in Upper Austria, Mitterndorf and Pottendorf in Lower Austria, Wagna bei Leibnitz in Styria, Deutsch Brod and Chotzen in Bohemia, and Nikolsburg, Pohrlitz and Gaya in Moravia. Here they were segregated from hostile local populations and generally regarded as a drain on food supplies and a potential threat in terms of disease, especially the Jewish refugees from eastern Galicia and Bukovina.<sup>79</sup>

Although there was a theoretical and administrative distinction between the *Barackenlager* and the *Interniertenlager* and *Konfinierungsstationen* discussed above, in practice refugees

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<sup>78</sup> B. Hoffmann-Holter, „Abreisendmachung“: *Jüdische Kriegsflüchtlinge in Wien 1914 bis 1923*, Vienna 1995, 283; W. Mentzel, “Weltkriegsflüchtlinge in Cisleithanien 1914-1918”, in: G. Heiss / O. Rathkolb (eds.), *Asylland wider Willen: Flüchtlinge in Österreich im europäischen Kontext seit 1914*, Vienna 1995, 17-44 (here 18).

<sup>79</sup> Figure of 130.000 cited in Mentzel, “Weltkriegsflüchtlinge”, 30. See also Mentzel's more detailed unpublished study, “Kriegsflüchtlinge in Cisleithanien im Ersten Weltkrieg”, D.Phil, University of Vienna 1997; and H. J. W. Kuprian, “‘Entheimungen’: Flucht und Vertreibung in der Habsburgermonarchie während des Ersten Weltkrieges und ihre Konsequenzen”, in: Kuprian / Überegger (eds.), *Der Erste Weltkrieg*, 289-306.

were as much prisoners as the civilian internees and could only leave if they were willing to risk losing their jobs and/or state and charitable relief. Those found to have returned to frontier districts without official permits also faced arrest and possible prosecution in a military court. In this sense, Walter Mentzel is correct to say that the *Barackenlager* “were in effect internment camps” (“*waren praktisch Interniertenlager*”).<sup>80</sup> In certain circumstances it was even better to be an internee than a refugee. In the second half of 1915, for instance, huge numbers of Slovene, Croat and Italian refugees, especially children, died in overcrowded camps in the Austrian interior, while the Italian internees in Katzenau were at that time relatively well-fed and well-housed, especially as the camp allowed access to inspection teams sent by the ICRC and the American embassy in Vienna.<sup>81</sup> The Italian Foreign Minister Sidney Sonnino even described the camp director at Katzenau, Baron von Reicher, as a “gentleman” after reading an American inspection report in March 1917.<sup>82</sup> At Katzenau, Drosendorf and other internment camps the inmates were also allowed a certain amount of internal autonomy over their own affairs, including camp finances and the purchase of food, and each nationality present was allowed to elect its own *Vertrauensmann* to represent them on the camp council (*Verwaltungskommission*).<sup>83</sup> By contrast, at the *Barackenlager* at Wagna bei Leibnitz no such representation existed and conditions had got

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<sup>80</sup> Mentzel, “Weltkriegsflüchtlinge”, 29.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 32. See also *Rapports de MM. G. Ador et al.* (as note 27 above). For the very poor conditions and high death rates in refugee camps in 1915 see the disturbing evidence provided in the mood reports of the Austrian army censorship groups, in: ÖStA-KA, AOK/GZNB, Kartons 3732-3737.

<sup>82</sup> Palla, *Il trentino orientale*, 112; Haller, “Das Internierungslager Katzenau”, 45-46.

<sup>83</sup> Mundschütz, “Das Internierungslager Drosendorf/Thaya”, 69-72.

so bad by late 1917 that there was even a riot there after soldiers accidentally shot dead a child.<sup>84</sup>

Other abuses were already well-documented and became the subject of complaints from nationalist deputies in the *Reichsrat* after it was reconvened in late May 1917, forcing the government to back down and introduce a new refugee law which came into effect in December 1917.<sup>85</sup> The army and the Ministry of Interior now found themselves in the uncomfortable position of having their policies probed by representatives of the people acting under the protection of parliamentary immunity. Alcide De Gasperi, the moderate Catholic politician from the Trentino (and future Christian-Democrat Italian statesman) who had run an official charity for Italian-speaking refugees from his involuntary wartime base in Vienna, was one of the most vocal critics. On 12 July 1917, for instance, he condemned what he described as the “spectre of evacuation” (*Evakuierungsgeist*) and “spectre of persecution” (*Verfolgungsgeist*) which had led to the “criminal” incarceration of so many Austrian Italians in “concentration camps” in the days and weeks after the outbreak of war with Italy in May 1915: “Refugees were not treated like citizens, but [...] like administrative units [*Verwaltungsobjekte*][...] They were evacuated, body-searched, dispatched [and] placed in barracks, as if they had no will of their own, and no rights”.<sup>86</sup> In Upper Austria, he continued, “where a particularly harsh approach was taken, the refugees were told: either you agree to go to the concentration camp at Braunau [am Inn] or, if you chose to remain outside, you lose all financial support”.

Only when refugees achieved recognition as war victims with an absolute right to choose between being re-housed in a camp or in a government-approved settlement area would such

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<sup>84</sup> On the “Wagna incident” see Gatterer, *Erbfeindschaft*, 142-146.

<sup>85</sup> Mentzel, “Weltkriegsflüchtlinge”, 28.

<sup>86</sup> *Stenographische Protokolle* (as note 76 above), 916.

abuses come to an end, De Gasperi concluded. In the same speech he also emphasised the much better opportunities that enemy aliens in *Interniertenlager* like Katzenau had for self-administration. Refugees with Austrian citizenship, he argued, should also be able to determine their own affairs and to take part in the administration of camps on the basis of equality and “in line with communal organisations in their homeland”.<sup>87</sup>

In this way, De Gasperi sought to defend the rights of his constituents, namely the 114.000 men, women and children from the Trentino, representing up to one third of the entire Italian-speaking population of Austrian-ruled Tyrol, who had fled or been compulsorily evacuated from their homes since May 1915.<sup>88</sup> His use of the term “concentration camp” was deliberate. Although a Habsburg loyalist, over time his faith in the imperial system and its “impartiality” had begun to waver. Yet even he was taken by surprise by the sudden end of the Dual Monarchy following the German military collapse on the western front in October-November 1918. In the new republic of German-Austria, as in other successor states of the Habsburg Empire, citizenship was defined on a more ethnically-exclusive basis, with German nationality now becoming the main criterion. Large numbers of non-German refugees who had previously regarded themselves as Austrians and patriotic subjects of the Emperor were now reclassified by state administrators as “foreign nationals” or “aliens” (“*fremde Staatsangehörige*” or “*Ausländer*”) who no longer enjoyed automatic residency or entitlement to welfare payments.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 917-918.

<sup>88</sup> Rauchensteiner, *Der Tod des Doppeladlers*, 239; Gatterer, *Erbfeindschaft*, 138.

<sup>89</sup> See Mentzel, “Weltkriegsflüchtlinge”, 33 and 39; and Gammerl, *Staatsbürger*, 328 and 333. Also Interior Ministry of German-Austria to the government of Upper Austria, 25 November 1918, in: Oberösterreichisches Landesarchiv Linz (henceforth OÖLA), Statthaltereie 1850-1926, Bestand Erster Weltkrieg, Schachtel 41.

In the months that followed hundreds of thousands of persons falling into this category left the territory of German-Austria for an uncertain future as citizens of the newly-formed or newly-enlarged nation-states situated beyond its borders, or for a life of permanent refugeedom. Italians were among the more lucky ones, and were able to return to their home regions fairly quickly. Refugees from the East, on the other hand, including those who had fled fresh fighting between Poles and Ukrainians in 1919, were subjected to on-going hostility from the Austrian authorities and many were forcibly expelled. In 1920 the Christian Social politician Leopold Kunschak, in continuity with attitudes that had already developed during the war, publicly demanded that Jewish refugees of non-(German)Austrian nationality who refused to leave voluntarily be held in “concentration camps” pending deportation.<sup>90</sup>

#### **4. Conclusions**

Civilian internment in the First World War cannot be fully understood without taking practices in Austria-Hungary into account. Above all the Habsburg experience demonstrates that there was no single model of internment but several different systems that interacted and overlapped with each other. For instance, there was the internment and confinement of enemy aliens which implied a xenophobic-nationalist (re)mobilisation of the Monarchy, ending the open policy of the pre-war era that had allowed relatively free entry to foreign workers, businessmen and deserters across Austria’s borders. There was also the internment of domestic political suspects which was intended, alongside the suspension of the *Reichsrat*, to bring about a depoliticisation or internal demobilisation of the nationalities question as part of a neo-absolutist resurrection of empire. Allied propaganda, buttressed by the work of exiles, sought to exploit the subsequent nationalist resentments, but, as Mark Cornwall has

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<sup>90</sup> Mentzel, “Weltkriegsflüchtlinge”, 34.

convincingly argued, these “external threats” to the Monarchy’s survival, while important, should not obscure the fact that the real danger “emanated [...] from Austria-Hungary’s own unsatisfactory internal situation”, now made worse by the refusal to consider alternatives to violence and authoritarianism.<sup>91</sup> Last but not least there was the situation in frontier zones when Habsburg troops came into contact with what they saw as hostile, disloyal or treacherous populations. The latter were victims of an imperialist mistrust of internal national movements, especially in border regions, and a desire to uphold a supra-ethnic, militarised vision of empire that ultimately failed.

In all of these cases, the means used to secure the supposed interests of “military security” were draconian and served to replace traditional notions of ethnic impartiality and *Gerechtigkeit*, the very basis of the nineteenth-century Austrian conception of the state and of the Habsburgs’ claim to legitimacy,<sup>92</sup> with very narrow definitions of patriotic loyalty and a more or less open discrimination against particular national groups. The impulse for this came “from above”, especially from the centripetal force of the military and its instrument on the home front, the KÜA. The army’s intention was to safeguard the Monarchy from perceived internal and external threats. However, by feeding into and exacerbating existing national conflicts and ethnic hatreds, the policy also unleashed countervailing centrifugal forces that probably had a more lasting impact after 1918.<sup>93</sup> This “ethnicisation” of politics<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> M. Cornwall, “Disintegration and Defeat: The Austro-Hungarian Revolution”, in: M. Cornwall (ed.), *The Last Years of Austria-Hungary: A Multi-National Experiment in Early Twentieth-Century Europe*, revised ed., Exeter 2002, 167-196 (here 175).

<sup>92</sup> On the importance of these concepts to Habsburg ideas about empire see Gumz, *Resurrection and Collapse*, esp. 10-16 and 68-78; and Okey, *Taming Balkan Nationalism*, 249.

<sup>93</sup> On the dynamic relationship between “centripetal” and “centrifugal” forces more generally see Jászi, *The Dissolution*.

<sup>94</sup> Gammerl, *Staatsbürger*, 329.



can be seen in particular in the increasing hostility between German-, Italian- and Slovene-speakers in all of Austria's Alpine provinces, a phenomenon which pre-dated but was reinforced by the army's evacuation measures in May 1915.<sup>95</sup> It was equally evident in popular demands before and after 1918 for (stateless) Jewish and Polish refugees to be isolated and expelled, even though official Habsburg policy was pro-Polish and pro-Jewish, both groups being recognised as anti-Russian.<sup>96</sup>

However, if Vienna's policy towards enemy aliens and domestic political suspects had certain distinctive features linked especially to its harsh conduct of the war in the frontier zones, there was also a transnational dynamic of internment and related brutalities, which the Habsburg Empire, like other warring states, clearly contributed to. The wave of rapid globalisation and accompanying mass migration of people *and* ideas at the end of the nineteenth century had already served to undermine neat distinctions between "liberal" western and "despotic" eastern models of citizenship, ethnic "belonging" and political rights.<sup>97</sup> This process was further accelerated by the increased concentration of economic and military power and imperialist exploitation of local nationalisms and ethnic grievances on all sides during the Great War and its immediate aftermath, whether in Europe, the Near East or elsewhere. The creation of many new nation-states with redrawn but hardly more secure or

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<sup>95</sup> See e.g. the evidence in Kuprian, "Entheimungen", esp. 291-292; Gatterer, *Erbfeindschaft*, esp. 90 and 143-147; and Pircher, *Militär*, esp. 101-104 and 117-120.

<sup>96</sup> Hoffmann-Holter, „Abreisendmachung“. See also the evidence of resentment in Upper Austria towards Jewish refugees in: OÖLA, Statthaltereie 1850-1926, Bestand Erster Weltkrieg, Schachteln 41-42.

<sup>97</sup> Gammerl, *Staatsbürger*, esp. 344-345.

permanent borders in the peace settlement of 1919-1920, far from reducing these tensions, actually made them worse.<sup>98</sup>

For this reason we may also have to rethink what Robin Okey refers to as the “default demonisation of the ethnic or national element in conflict situations” in the (non-western) world since 1900.<sup>99</sup> The tendency to link inter-ethnic or religious-sectarian violence with supposed deviations from the ideal model of the “liberal”, “tolerant” or “civic-minded” nation-state with stable frontiers and government bound by rule of law has become even more pronounced in the wake of the terrible events in Yugoslavia and Rwanda in the 1990s (and since then in Chechnya, Iraq, Sri Lanka, Egypt, Syria, Crimea, Ukraine and elsewhere). However, such judgements speak more to western assumptions about what is “normal” than to complex historical realities. More revealing, in fact, is to look at the inter-connectedness, perhaps even the dialectical relationship between imperialism on the one hand and ethnic nationalisms on the other. The case of Habsburg Austria in the First World War, its internment policies and quest for military security on its borders, and its reactions to real and imagined social and political threats on these borders pre- and post-1914, is, I would argue, a classic example of this. It was not just a “second hand” echo.

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<sup>98</sup> For an excellent overview see A. Sharp, “The Genie that Would not Go back into the Bottle: National Self-Determination and the Legacy of the First World War and the Peace Settlement”, in: S. Dunn / T. G. Fraser (eds.), *Europe and Ethnicity: World War I and Contemporary Ethnic Conflict*, London, New York 1996, 10-29.

<sup>99</sup> R. Okey, “Echoes and Precedents: 1989 in Historical Perspective”, in: K. McDermott / M. Stibbe (eds.), *The 1989 Revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe: From Communism to Pluralism*, Manchester 2013, 33-52 (here 47).