

## **Internment practices during the First and Second World Wars a comparison**

STIBBE, Matthew <<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7269-8183>> and  
WÜNSCHMANN, Kim

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# Internment practices during the First and Second World Wars

## A comparison

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*Matthew Stibbe and Kim Wünschmann*

The First World War was the first international conflict to witness the mass incarceration of non-combatants on a prolonged, multilateral basis. With at least 800,000 civilians detained in camps in Europe, and a further 50,000 to 100,000 throughout the rest of the world, internment became part of a global war directed against “enemy aliens,” deportees, refugees and “internal enemies.” Internment processes often involved movement over significant distances within and across international borders. Imperial Britain, for instance, developed a number of internment hubs across the world, from the Isle of Man, Gibraltar and Malta to Canada, Australia, South Africa, Egypt, Bermuda, the Caribbean and India. France similarly had hubs in Tahiti, Indo-China, Madagascar, Dahomey, North Africa, Corsica and along its Atlantic and Mediterranean coastlines. In terms of where they could intern enemy civilians, the Central Powers were largely limited to Europe, or in the case of Ottoman Turkey, the Middle East, but detainees could still be moved over vast areas. Meanwhile, Latin American countries were either pressured into interning German vessels and their crews by Allied countries or did so as a matter of state policy. China, which joined the Allied side in 1917, did not order an immediate mass internment of Germans, but nonetheless carried out expulsions in 1919. This followed similar moves by Siam in 1918.<sup>1</sup>

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1 For the worldwide picture, see Matthew Stibbe, *Civilian Internment during the First World War: A European and Global History, 1914–1920* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); and Daniela G. Caglioti, *War and Citizenship: Enemy Aliens and National Belonging from the French Revolution to the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). On British “hubs,” see Stefan Manz and Panikos Panayi, *Enemies in the Empire: Civilian Internment in the British Empire during the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); and on their French equivalents, Mahon Murphy, *Colonial Captivity during the First World War: Internment and the Fall of the German Empire, 1914–1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). On Chile, Argentina and neutral (pre-1917) Brazil, see Stefan Rinke, *Latin America and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 52.

In other ways, too, First World War internment helped forge a new world order. From 1917 onwards, and again at its first post-war conference in 1921, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) campaigned for an end to civilian internment and a convention banning its use in future wars. Having failed in this ambitious aim, the ICRC's second post-war conference, held in Geneva in October 1925, merely suggested that "any civilian who is detained by an enemy state" in a future conflict "should, as a bare minimum, benefit from the protections then in force for prisoners of war."<sup>2</sup> In spite of this, the revised Geneva Convention of 1929, which included new safeguards for military prisoners of war, contained no explicit provisions in relation to their civilian counterparts.<sup>3</sup> True, a draft agreement regulating the treatment of "civilians of enemy nationality" was tabled at an ICRC conference in Tokyo in 1934. However, it was not adopted by the League of Nations or at inter-state level.<sup>4</sup> It was only under the 1949 Geneva Convention that civilian prisoners of war were finally given explicit protections in international law.

This failure to "update" international treaty law before 1949 is striking but obscures other potential continuities between the two world wars and perhaps overstates the importance of the legal at the expense of the political and cultural realms. It suggests that the experience of civilian internment and its use as an instrument of war by belligerent and neutral states between 1914 and 1920 was largely forgotten in the inter-war years, especially by diplomats, League of Nations officials and international jurists. However, in this article, we contend that "lessons" learned from First World War internment did have a significant – if previously overlooked – impact on decisions made by state actors and international policy-makers during the Second World War. We examine this on three levels. First, we look at instances in both conflicts where the principle of reciprocity (*Gegenseitigkeitsprinzip*) worked, or failed to work, to prevent or at least minimise the abuse of civilian prisoners. Second, we address continuities and ruptures in the cultural meanings ascribed by state and non-state actors to internment. And third, we explore the ongoing connections between internment and global inequalities based on class, race and gender. Our conclusions are necessarily tentative, given the disparity that has emerged in recent years between what is now a very rich historiography on First World War internment and the less well-developed state of research on the Second World War. Nonetheless, we see our findings as a useful starting point for uncovering patterns of continuity as well as rupture between 1914–20 and 1939–45.

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2 "Résolutions et voeux votés par la XIIe Conférence internationale de la Croix-Rouge, Genève, 7–10 octobre 1925," *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge* 82 (1925): 814–31, at 824.

3 Stibbe, *Civilian Internment*, 295.

4 Gunner Lind, "Genesis of the Civilian in the Western World, 1500–2000," in *Civilians at War: From the Fifteenth Century to the Present*, edited by Gunner Lind (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2014), 47–82, at 70; see also Caglioti, *War and Citizenship*, 313–19.

## Reciprocity as a means of protecting civilian internees in the two world wars

The lack of formal, codified safeguards in international law for “enemy alien” civilian detainees did not mean that they had no protection at all. Rather, it meant that the protections they did enjoy relied more on political considerations and cultural factors than on universal principles. After 1914, those internees who experienced the least abuse – and, in relative terms, the best conditions – did so largely on the basis of their nationality, although as we will see later, class, gender and race could also play a role. Captor states were unlikely to mistreat the nationals of an enemy state that was holding similar or higher numbers of their nationals. Britain (including its empire) was especially well placed to benefit from the *Gegenseitigkeitsprinzip* as by 1917 it held 36,000 Germans and 11,000 Habsburg subjects, compared to just 3,500 and 200 British subjects held in Germany and Austria-Hungary, respectively.<sup>5</sup>

Until the chaos of the last few weeks of the war, if reciprocity broke down between *powerful* belligerent states, neutral diplomats and international bodies like the ICRC were likely to intervene to de-escalate the situation, and they enjoyed some success when doing so. Neutral states might also broker exchange agreements for particular categories of civilian and military prisoners (such as those with certain health conditions or those of a certain age), as in an Anglo-German agreement signed at The Hague in July 1917 or the even broader Franco-German exchange agreed at Bern in April 1918.<sup>6</sup>

The reverse side of this was that civilian internees from *weaker* states, including countries that had effectively collapsed due to military invasion, enemy occupation and accompanying mass population displacement (e.g. Serbia and Romania), or states that, for other political or economic reasons, were not so invested in the welfare of their interned citizens (e.g. Italy), enjoyed few, if any, protections under the *Gegenseitigkeitsprinzip*. Hundreds of thousands of other civilians, including refugees and deportees, were detained by their own governments and did not even appear on lists of prisoners sent to the ICRC.<sup>7</sup>

Even if it protected some internees before the end of the war, reciprocity as a mechanism for regulating internment broke down completely in November 1918, when the defeated Central Powers were forced to return all Allied military and civilian prisoners in their hands, while Britain, France, Portugal, the United States and

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5 Matthew Stibbe, “Civilian Internment and Civilian Internees in Europe, 1914–20,” *Immigrants and Minorities*, 26 (2008) 1–2: 49–81, at 73.

6 Richard B. Speed III, *Prisoners, Diplomats, and the Great War: A Study in the Diplomacy of Captivity* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 37–42.

7 Alan Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 44–68, 151–2.

a host of other victor powers continued to hold German and Austro-Hungarian nationals both in Europe and around the world. Furthermore, when they were eventually released in 1919–20, many of the German and Austro-Hungarian internees were forcibly expelled from the countries that had detained them, even if they had been residents for years or even decades prior to 1914. Indeed, expulsion was the norm everywhere except the United States, Canada and Brazil, all three of which permitted their ex-internees to remain unless they were identified as threats to national security.<sup>8</sup> Article 220 of the Treaty of Versailles also required that the “German government undertake to admit to its territory without distinction all persons liable to repatriation,” thereby absolving the Allies of any responsibility for making such *Auslandsdeutsche* (“Germans abroad”) homeless or stateless.<sup>9</sup> Similar provisions were written into the Treaty of St Germain with Austria (Article 166), the Treaty of Trianon with Hungary (Article 150), the Treaty of Neuilly with Bulgaria (Article 111) and the Treaty of Sèvres with Turkey (Article 213).<sup>10</sup> By contrast, Allied states faced no such obligations in relation to their nationals released from internment in territories of the former Central Powers. Nor could they be repatriated without their express consent.

Reciprocity, then, was a far from perfect or consistent mechanism for the protection of civilian prisoners in the First World War. So how did it function in the Second World War? In this conflict, reciprocity remained the guiding principle of the belligerents’ policies. It informed the treatment of internees and negotiations about their exchange and repatriation, which again depended on the mediation of protecting powers, most importantly Switzerland, Sweden, Spain, Portugal and, until its own entry into the war, the United States. When it came to humanitarian protection of civilian internees, the ICRC also continued to play a central role. Like the envoys of the protecting powers, the organisation’s representatives conducted camp inspections and compiled reports that, in turn, informed the belligerents’ reciprocal actions. Compared to the First World War, the ICRC now had a stronger mandate as its role in organising humanitarian relief work had been explicitly inscribed into the 1929 Geneva Convention. The same convention also gave the protecting powers, whose good offices had hitherto been based on custom, a formal and universally recognised status.<sup>11</sup>

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8 Matthew Stibbe, “A Forgotten Minority: The Return of the *Auslandsdeutsche* to Germany in 1919–20,” *Studies on National Movements* 5 (2020): 144–83.

9 *The Treaties of Peace, 1919–1923* (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1924), Vol. 1, 118.

10 *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 323, 514 and Vol. 2, 689, 857.

11 “Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War 1929,” Articles 79, 86–88 <<https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/305>> (13 May 2021). See also Index of Protecting Powers Mediating between the Different Enemy States, undated, R 41393, Politisches Archiv des

Although the codification of a civilian convention had to be shelved for the time being, the ICRC campaigned for the provisions of its 1934 Tokyo draft to be respected nonetheless. A first call to do so was sent to the governments of the warring states on 2 September 1939. An ICRC memorandum followed on 21 October 1939.<sup>12</sup> The belligerents, however, preferred to fall back on the 1929 Geneva Convention and negotiated bilateral agreements to observe it in their treatment of enemy civilians as well as POWs. As a result, this convention, which was much more detailed than the 1907 Hague Convention IV respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land, became the key legal text with regard to civilian internment during the Second World War. For example, copies of it were distributed by the US Justice Department to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), which initially administered the country's civilian internment camps, along with a reminder to officials that

[t]he minimum standards of treatment which have been established and which must prevail throughout this Service are based upon the provisions of the Convention between the United States of America and forty-six other Powers [...] The government of the United States has agreed with the belligerent powers to apply those provisions to civilian alien enemy internees wherever applicable.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, the convention became an important yardstick for states to assess an enemy's treatment of their nationals, and as such it also served as a propaganda tool. Belligerents referred to the laws of war not only to justify their policies towards enemy civilians but also to denounce their opponents' alleged violations.<sup>14</sup> There was nonetheless a certain asymmetry here, as liberal democratic states were politically much more beholden than authoritarian regimes to international conventions, not least because of pressure from their own citizens and elected parliamentarians to comply with them. A state's political system mattered, in other words. Adherence to the Geneva Convention could be entirely neglected under dictatorships, as was seen, most strikingly, in the war between National Socialist Germany and the Soviet Union on the Eastern Front between 1941 and 1945.

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Auswärtigen Amts, Berlin (PAAA); H. S. Levie, "Prisoners of War and the Protecting Powers," *American Journal of International Law* 55 (1961) 2: 374–97.

- 12 German Consulate in Geneva to Foreign Office, 20 November 1939, R 41390, PAAA; List of Belligerents that Agreed on Treating Civilian Internees on the Basis of the 1929 Geneva Convention, 15 January 1944, R 41393, PAAA; President of the ICRC to Dutch Foreign Minister, 5 August 1941, 2.05.80, No. 665, National Archives [NA], The Hague.
- 13 US Department of Justice Memorandum to INS, 28 April 1942, quoted in Tetsuden Kashima, *Judgement without Trial: Japanese American Imprisonment during World War II* (Seattle – London: University of Washington Press, 2003), 195–6.
- 14 See Kim Wünschmann, "'Enemy Aliens' and 'Indian Hostages': Civilians in Dutch–German Wartime Diplomacy and International Law during the Second War," *German History* 39 (2021) 2: 263–83.

For the US government, reciprocity was of utmost importance vis-à-vis Imperial Japan. By the end of 1942, while the number of US civilians in German captivity was comparatively small (a mere 1,491 internees – 788 men and 703 women), almost ten times as many (between 12,000 and 13,000, some of whom were not interned) found themselves in territories under Japanese control.<sup>15</sup> The total number of US internees had already been reduced through exchanges in July 1942 (over 1,300 repatriated) and October 1943 (approximately 1,240, plus 260 Canadian nationals and citizens of various Central and South American republics sent home), but according to one estimate about 6,000 Americans were still in internment camps in 1944, “most of them located in the Philippines (four camps), in Shanghai (two camps), or in Weih sien in North China (one camp)”. Another 1,000 civilians were “said to be in hospitals or interned in their own homes.”<sup>16</sup> The total number of Allied civilian nationals in Japanese hands in the Asia-Pacific region is estimated at more than 130,000, including over 40,000 women.<sup>17</sup> The US government included a long list of “deprivations of rights, cruelties, wanton neglect, mistreatment and hardships” in an official complaint it lodged with the Swiss protecting power on 27 January 1944.<sup>18</sup>

## Cultural meanings of internment

Both contemporary supporters and critics of First World War internment located its meaning in concerns about “public safety.” For its supporters, it was a necessary tool against internal subversion and espionage. It also prevented captured men of military age from returning home to join their respective armies and helped to control the flow of refugees. Critics of internment such as the Canadian John Davidson Ketchum, on the other hand, saw it as a reflection of the “ruthless inhumanity of the modern armed state” that practised all manner of “cruelties” in the name of “national

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- 15 Robert R. Wilson, “Recent Developments in the Treatment of Civilian Alien Enemies,” *American Journal of International Law* 38 (1944) 3: 397–406, at 397–8, 401. The number of US internees in Germany remained largely unchanged over the next twelve months. An official German report from 31 December 1943 counted 1,494 US internees. See *Strength Report of North American and British Nationals in German Civilian Internment Camps*, 31 December 1943, R 41393, PAAA. The same report records 10,274 British civilian internees. A year later, numbers had fallen to 632 US and 5,813 British internees. See *Strength Report*, 31 December 1944, R 41393, PAAA.
- 16 Wilson, “Recent Developments,” 397–8, at 397 n. 3. Cogan counts over 5,000 American internees in the Philippines. See Frances B. Cogan, *Captured: The Japanese Internment of American Civilians in the Philippines, 1941–1945* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 1–2.
- 17 Christina Twomey, “Double Displacement: Western Women’s Return Home from Japanese Internment in the Second World War,” *Gender and History* 21 (2009) 3: 670–84, at 670.
- 18 Department of State Bulletin, 12 February 1944, quoted in Wilson, “Recent Developments,” 399.

security.” While state governments were the principal culprits, in Ketchum’s view, internment operations also relied on the “passive acquiescence” of majority populations, who thereby displayed a lack of “imagination, [and an in]ability to feel with and for [their] fellow-men.”<sup>19</sup>

Recent studies by Arnd Bauerkämper and Matthew Stibbe have nonetheless juxtaposed considerations of “security” with those of “humanity.” The prolonged internment practices of the First World War certainly gave rise to new ways of conceptualising what it meant to be human, and new ways of advocating for humanitarian policies in the sphere of international politics. Non-state actors, such as the ICRC, the Quakers and various Swiss and Dutch philanthropic groups, saw their interventions in humanitarian terms and became increasingly skilled at fundraising and garnering publicity for their causes. Neutral states like Switzerland and the Netherlands also projected themselves as pursuing a humanitarian agenda when they agreed to intern certain categories of severely ill prisoners and provide appropriate health-care. In Spain, King Alfonso XIII ordered the establishment of a European War Office, run by his private secretary from the Royal Palace in Madrid, to assist families in locating missing relatives, including those held in captivity. More loosely, the global medical profession shared knowledge about the psychological harm caused by long-term internment, and transnational actors devised new forms of relief that treated internees as rational beings with free will, not as “objects” of charity, still less as “security risks.”<sup>20</sup>

While humanitarianism was to some degree professionalised and redefined during the war, so too was national security. One aspect of this was the effort that imperial states put into devising internment policies that were coordinated across their different metropolitan, dominion and colonial territories. Imperial Britain, for instance, treated Germans, Austro-Hungarians, Turks and Bulgars in all parts of the British-ruled world as “enemies of the empire” and transferred groups of prisoners across land and sea borders, including from East Africa to India, the Caribbean to Canada, Palestine to Egypt and Singapore to Australia.<sup>21</sup> The French

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19 John Davidson Ketchum, *Ruhleben: A Prison Camp Society* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1965), xviii.

20 Arnd Bauerkämper, “National Security and Humanity: The Internment of Civilian ‘Enemy Aliens’ during the First World War,” *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute London* 40 (2018) 1: 61–85; Arnd Bauerkämper, *Sicherheit und Humanität im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg: Der Umgang mit zivilen Feindstaatenangehörigen im Ausnahmezustand*, 2 Vols. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021); Stibbe, *Civilian Internment, 183–237*. On the hitherto little-known European War Office in Spain, see Marina Pérez de Arcos, “Finding Out Whereabouts of Missing Persons’: The European War Office, Transnational Humanitarianism and Spanish Royal Diplomacy in the First World War,” *The International History Review, The International History Review* 44 (2022) 3: 497–523.

21 Manz and Panayi, *Enemies*, 100–10.



government similarly moved civilian prisoners between colonies in West and North Africa and metropolitan France.<sup>22</sup> Finally, there is the question of informal empires or spheres of influence. Britain put pressure on various South American countries, Siam, Greece, China and Portugal (with respect to its African colonies) to treat Germans within their borders as “suspect” populations. The United States did the same with respect to Panama and Haiti, and actually arranged the deportation of Germans from Panama to New York in 1918.<sup>23</sup> Thus, internment reflected new demographic concepts of national and imperial security, merging into and becoming entangled with even more violent land and population policies in the German, Habsburg, Russian and Ottoman spheres.<sup>24</sup>

Comparisons of civilian internment and its cultural meanings in the two world wars were drawn almost as soon as the second conflict had begun. Legal scholars, in particular, grappled with questions of terminology as well as continuities and breaks in the treatment of civilian internees. The German-born, US-based lawyer Robert M. W. Kempner, for example, observed in 1940 that “the usual legal concept of the term ‘enemy alien,’ as it was known in the war of 1914–1918” had reappeared in international discourse since the start of the Second World War. There was, however, “one essential change in its application as compared to previous wars: a totally different circle of persons seen from a political and sociological viewpoint is affected.” During the First World War, those targeted by restrictive measures included a number of “unwilling subjects of their country,” such as “natives of Alsace-Lorraine, Poles, Czechs, Greek, Armenian and Syrian subjects of the Ottoman Empire.” Now, in the Second World War, policy-makers of the belligerent states had to distinguish more sharply between what Kempner – himself a refugee from Nazi Germany living in the United States – termed “real enemy aliens” and “technical enemy aliens.” The “second[,] much larger group” consisted of refugees who had fled National Socialist persecution. Precisely because individuals in this category had often been labelled “enemies” by their country of origin and were in the process of renegotiating (national) belonging, Kempner saw that “[i]n this war [...] it is more important to inquire into the fundamental spiritual loyalties of a person rather than the formal facts concerning his national origin and previous residence.”<sup>25</sup>

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22 Murphy, *Colonial Captivity*, 161.

23 Stibbe, *Civilian Internment*, 36–7.

24 Kramer, *Dynamic*, 47–9, 140–52; Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Christin Pschichholz (ed.), *The First World War as a Caesura? Demographic Concepts, Population Policy, and Genocide in the Late Ottoman, Russian, and Habsburg Spheres* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2020).

25 Robert M. W. Kempner, “The Enemy Alien Problem in the Present War,” *American Journal of International Law* 34 (1940) 3: 443–58, at 443–4, 458. On terminology and the desirability of discontinuing the use of the term “enemy alien” as a designation for all persons from the

Kempner was not the only one detecting “new factors” guiding the belligerents’ policies towards enemy civilians after 1939.<sup>26</sup> Both contemporary and present-day analysts have linked the unprecedented number of refugees among civilian internees in Western Allied captivity to the increasingly important role of political ideologies at work in the Second World War era. Indeed, National Socialist Germany’s expansionist drive for new “living space” and its destructive racial/antisemitic worldview shaped the conduct of this war in ways that were different from the ideological clashes of the earlier conflict.<sup>27</sup> For political opponents, social outsiders and those deemed racial enemies of the “Third Reich,” in particular, these ideologies were life-threatening. The image of the detention site iconic to the Second World War is first and foremost that of the National Socialist camp system or the Soviet “Gulag archipelago.” Their origins preceded the war and, in the case of the Soviet Union, outlived it.<sup>28</sup> However, their entanglement with the civilian internment camp – a phenomenon of the First World War that reappeared in 1939 and exhibited its own lines of continuity with the recent past – is still under-researched in histories of the camp universe of the Second World War.

The much greater scale of exile, expulsion, denationalisation and flight distinguishes the Second from the First World War. National Socialist Germany’s policy of interning some enemy nationals, as well as many of its own citizens, in concentration camps added to the previously experienced trauma – while reinforcing the strongly held anti-fascist convictions – of many refugees who made it to the relative safety of non-German-controlled territory. All three major Western Allied powers attempted to take this into account when devising their internment practices. Tribunals to distinguish “friendly enemy aliens” from “dangerous enemy aliens” were set up, and the option of securing release from internment by enlisting in the armed forces was established. Both policies show that the traditional test categories of nationality and domicile – already surrounded by ambiguities in the practice of internment during the First World War – were of even less use when assessing foreign civilians’ loyalties or enmities during the Second World War.

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territory of the enemy, see Charles Gordon, “Status of Enemy Nationals in the United States,” *Lawyers Guild Review* 2 (1942) 6: 9–20.

26 Robert R. Wilson, “Treatment of Civilian Alien Enemies,” *American Journal of International Law* 37 (1943) 1: 30–45, at 36.

27 *Ibid.*, 30. See also Arnold Krammer, *Undue Process: The Untold Story of America’s German Alien Internees* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997) 13; Rachel Pistol, *Internment during the Second World War: A Comparative Study of Great Britain and the USA* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 5.

28 See Dan Stone, *Concentration Camps: A Short History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 34–79.

Among the three million aliens residing in France in September 1939 there were an estimated 45,000 Germans and Austrians.<sup>29</sup> As it had done in 1914, France started to intern civilian “enemy aliens” in large numbers immediately after the start of the war. Initially, the French government had planned to review each case and conduct a “sieving” (*criblage*) to release harmless refugees and émigrés. On 17 September 1939, however, the Ministry of the Interior ordered that political refugees should not be released but kept under guard, albeit separately from other groups of internees.<sup>30</sup> As in the previous conflict, internment also targeted “internal enemies” – so-called *indésirables français*. Most of these French citizens were left-wing political activists, while others were convicts or ex-convicts. Some of the political *indésirables* were forcibly evacuated to camps in the south in the wake of the German advance in June 1940.<sup>31</sup> By the time of the 22 June armistice, more than 35,000 persons of German and Austrian origin had also been (temporarily) detained: between 15,000 and 18,000 *sujets ennemis* had been rounded up immediately after the outbreak of war, while a further 20,000 had been arrested after 10 May 1940. Civilian internment camps that originally were not too different from those of the First World War now mutated into holding pens from which foreign Jewish internees were deported in 1942–3, most of them via Drancy to Auschwitz, where they were murdered.<sup>32</sup> The example of French camps under Vichy jurisdiction, such as Gurs, Les Milles and Rivesaltes, and in particular agreements to house around 7,000 German Jews deported from Baden and the Palatinate in October 1940 at Gurs, and then to transport them and others via Drancy to the death camps from July 1942, alerts us to the fact that the institutional borderline between civilian internment camps and the National Socialist camp system was sometimes blurred.<sup>33</sup>

Compared to France, three times as many refugees from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia – an estimated 80,000 people – had been admitted to Great Britain before the outbreak of war. Most of them – perhaps 70,000 – were Jews.<sup>34</sup> Instead

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29 Kempner, “The Enemy Alien Problem,” 449. See also Christian Eggers, *Unerwünschte Ausländer: Juden aus Deutschland und Mitteleuropa in französischen Internierungslagern 1940–1942* (Berlin: Metropol, 2002), 50; Denis Peschanski, *La France des camps: l’internement, 1938–1946* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002); Claude Laharie, *Petite Histoire des camps d’internement français* (Morlaas: Cairn, 2020).

30 Eggers, *Unerwünschte Ausländer*, 48–9.

31 *Ibid.*, 48, 221; Kempner, “The Enemy Alien Problem,” 452; Peschanski, *La France des camps*, 90–4, 155.

32 Eggers, *Unerwünschte Ausländer*, 234–5; Bauerkämper, *Sicherheit*, Vol. 2, 784–91.

33 See Peschanski, *La France des camps*, 146, 345–55; Claude Laharie, *Gurs 1939–1945: Un Camp d’internement en Béarn* (Morlaas: Cairn, 2020). See also Maier, Rosenberg and Jahr, this volume.

34 See Louise London, *Whitehall and the Jews 1933–1948: British Immigration Policy, Jewish Refugees and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 12; Pistol, *Internment*, 15.

of ordering immediate mass internment, the Home Office instituted tribunals to distinguish between refugees and potentially dangerous “enemy aliens” among the Germans and Austrians on a case-by-case basis. Within six months, some 120 alien tribunals interviewed more than 70,000 individuals and classified enemy civilians into three categories: A, B and C, with A the most dangerous group, who required immediate detention. The overwhelming majority of cases, an estimated 64,000, were classified as C and thus remained at liberty for the time being.<sup>35</sup>

British internment policy took a U-turn when the attack on the Low Countries and France brought the threat of a German invasion of the British Isles much closer to home. Patterns of mass internment from the previous war re-emerged. The “May panic” overthrew careful attempts to distinguish between dangerous persons and refugees, and tribunal classifications ceased to make much difference when it came to official decisions on whom to intern. What is more, approximately 4,100 Italians, interned after Mussolini had declared war on Britain on 10 June 1940, were not granted the right to tribunal hearings.<sup>36</sup>

The events of summer 1940 set in motion a global mass movement of civilian internees similar to that seen during the First World War. Once again, Britain used its empire to transport enemy civilians between different locations. Between 21 June and 10 July 1940, five vessels were used to deport over 7,000 men to Canada and Australia.<sup>37</sup> In the Asia-Pacific region, British India became an important internment hub, with a number of camps established there, including a site at Ahmednagar that had been used in the First World War and held about 1,200 Germans by September 1942.<sup>38</sup> In 1941–2, Britain’s success in persuading neutral Iran (Persia) to allow the transfer of 800 Germans on its territory to captivity in Australia provided a pretext for Germany’s deportation and internment in camps at Biberach, Wurzach, Laufen and Liebenau of 2,200 or so UK-born residents of the German-occupied Channel Islands.<sup>39</sup>

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35 Kempner, “The Enemy Alien Problem,” 445–6. Kempner calculates 74,233 examined cases within six months: 62,244 Germans and 11,989 Austrians. See also Miriam Kochan, *Britain’s Internees in the Second World War* (London – Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1983), 10, 18; Pistol, *Internment*, 17–18.

36 Pistol, *Internment*, 19, 33.

37 Louise Burleston, “The State, Internment and Public Criticism in the Second World War,” in *The Internment of Aliens in Twentieth-Century Britain*, edited by David Cesarani and Tony Kushner (London: Frank Cass, 1993), 102–24, at 115.

38 Bauerkämper, *Sicherheit*, Vol. 2, 904. On the little-researched history of the almost 2,700 Japanese civilians and colonial subjects interned in British India, see Christine de Matos and Rowena Ward, “Forgotten Forced Migrants of War: Civilian Internment of Japanese in British India, 1941–6,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 56 (2021) 4: 1102–25.

39 Bauerkämper, *Sicherheit*, Vol. 2, 770–4.

The Second World War also saw inter-state transfers of civilian internees. Under pressure from the Roosevelt administration, fifteen Latin American states deported over 6,500 men, women and children categorised as “dangerous enemy aliens” to the United States for internment.<sup>40</sup> Faced with the looming threat of a Japanese invasion of its colonies, the Dutch government, exiled in London, reached an agreement with the British and transported almost 2,000 male civilians from the Dutch East Indies to British India.<sup>41</sup> Civilian internment of white settlers in the colonies led to racial role reversals similar to those that had taken place in the First World War. Internment in overseas possessions challenged a colonial order otherwise based on white “European” dominance. In the British West Indies, for example, the authorities removed a black matron from the Hanover Street women’s camp in downtown Kingston, Jamaica, in response to a German protest about the deployment of non-white guards.<sup>42</sup>

## Internment and global inequalities

During the First World War, internment laid bare global inequalities of class, race and gender as well as some of the intersections between them. White, male, literate civilian prisoners of military age were often treated well. Those who deviated from this supposed norm were either ignored or recategorised as “refugees,” “deportees,” “stateless persons” or various types of “internal enemies.”<sup>43</sup> Captor powers sought to maintain class distinctions both by establishing “privilege camps” and lighter forms of internment (e.g. in private accommodation) for those with the ability to pay and by ensuring that destitute “enemy aliens” were the first to be detained and the last to be released. Several hundred black and South Asian civilians were held in Germany and Austro-Hungary, most but not all of them merchant sailors and most of them British or French nationals. They often faced discrimination from white fellow-pris-

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40 The exact numbers are 4,058 classified as Germans, 2,264 as Japanese and 288 as Italians. Among the deportees were more than 80 Jewish refugees. See Max Paul Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors: The United States Campaign against the Germans of Latin America in World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 2, 11. See also Miller, this volume.

41 See Wünschmann, “Enemy Aliens,” 275.

42 Joanna Newman, *Nearly the New World: The British West Indies and the Flight from Nazism, 1933–1945* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2019), 206. See also Cwik, this volume.

43 On the increasingly blurred but still partly functioning lines drawn between these groups, see Peter Gatrell, “Minorities in and at War: Exposure, Persecution, Reaction,” in *Nations, Identities and the First World War: Shifting Loyalties to the Fatherland*, edited by Nico Wouters and Laurence van Ypersele (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 177–95.

oners, guards and other camp personnel.<sup>44</sup> The ICRC's International Prisoner of War Agency held information on each prisoner's nationality, gender, date of birth and profession, but not their race, which remained hidden from view on its index files.

Officially, belligerent powers did not hold enemy women as internees, so where women were discovered behind barbed wire by ICRC inspectors, it was often claimed that they had "volunteered" to stay in camps rather than accept expulsion/deportation so that they could be with their husbands. Even Britain, which did not intern enemy women in Europe, did so in India and Africa.<sup>45</sup> Imperial Germany held enemy women from occupied territories as hostages, suspected illegal fighters and unregulated prostitutes. In the army staging areas, where ICRC officials were not allowed, German troops sometimes rounded up women and teenage girls as well as men for forced labour.<sup>46</sup> It was in the Austro-Hungarian camps for domestic political suspects and internally Displaced Persons that the highest numbers of women and children were interned, however. Death rates in some of these camps reached catastrophic proportions in 1914–15 and again in 1918.<sup>47</sup>

The wives and children of male internees also suffered in numerous, largely hidden ways. Internment of family breadwinners could mean immediate destitution for some, and a gradual descent into poverty for others. Women who married foreign men automatically lost the nationality of their birth; then, if their husbands became "enemy aliens" on the outbreak of war, they did too.<sup>48</sup> Women internees were less likely to appear on lists sent to the ICRC yet were more likely to be poor and/or to belong to a minority ethnic group, as Stefan Manz and Panikos Panayi have recently shown in the case of at least 663 "refugee" German women and children who were deported to South Africa from German and other African colonies after 1914.<sup>49</sup> In May 1919 the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), meeting in Zurich, was one of the few organisations to bring to light the abuse of female deportees as a key aspect of the internment question. Point 34 in its list of demands to the Allied peacemakers in Paris (all of which were ignored) read:

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44 Stibbe, *Civilian Internment*, 50–2.

45 See Manz and Panayi, *Enemies*, 198–204, 215–23, 238.

46 Kramer, *Dynamic*, 222–4; Matthew Stibbe, "Gewalt gegen Zivilisten: 'Arbeitsverweigerer' im von Deutschland besetzten Nordfrankreich und im südlichen Bayern während des Ersten Weltkrieges", in *Gewaltgemeinschaften? Studien zur Gewaltgeschichte im und nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg*, edited by Sven-Oliver Müller and Christin Pschichholz (Frankfurt am Main – New York: Campus Verlag, 2021), 75–104.

47 Matthew Stibbe, "Gendered Experiences of Civilian Internment during the First World War: A Forgotten Dimension of Wartime Violence," in *Gender and Conflict since 1914: Historical and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, edited by Ana Carden-Coyne (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 14–28.

48 *Ibid.*, 21.

49 Manz and Panayi, *Enemies*, 203.

Mass deportations have become a worldwide phenomenon since 1914 and inflict suffering and death in many forms upon innocent people [...] [T]his subject should receive attention at the earliest possible moment. The expulsion of thousands of innocent people cannot be treated as an internal affair of any of the nations concerned.<sup>50</sup>

The scale of female detention clearly distinguishes the Second from the First World War. During the later conflict, all major belligerent powers interned women who, in many cases, also brought children to the camps. The authorities usually established separate detention sites for women and children. The total number of civilian aliens interned in Great Britain is estimated at around 27,000 people, including some 4,000 women.<sup>51</sup> Female internees were initially held in London's Holloway Prison, and separated from their children. Later, women and children were deported together to the Rushen Camp in Port Erin and Port St Mary on the Isle of Man. In 1941, Port St Mary was turned into a "married persons" camp to unite families.<sup>52</sup>

The largest number of women and children were interned in the United States, where restrictive measures against civilians had a clear racial bias. While the country pursued a policy of "selective internment" for enemy civilians from Europe, men, women and children of Japanese ancestry were targeted collectively on the basis of their ethnic origin.<sup>53</sup> After the attack on Pearl Harbor, initial arrests were conducted on the basis of "ABC" lists prepared by the FBI and the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI).<sup>54</sup> While the majority of those arrested were Germans and Italians, fewer than half of them were interned after their hearings; "[i]n contrast, more than two-thirds of the Japanese aliens remained in internment camps during the war."<sup>55</sup> Overall, more than 30,000 men, women and children of enemy nationality were held in internment camps overseen by the Department of Justice.<sup>56</sup>

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50 WILPF, "Resolutions Presented to the Peace Conference of the Powers in Paris," May 1919 <[http://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/WILPF\\_triennial\\_congress\\_1919.pdf](http://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/WILPF_triennial_congress_1919.pdf)> (10 November 2021).

51 David Cesarani, "An Alien Concept? The Continuity of Anti-Alienism in British Society before 1940," in *The Internment of Aliens*, edited by Cesarani and Kushner, 25–52, at 45. For female internees, see Pistol, *Internment*, 33; Bauerkämper, *Sicherheit*, Vol. 2, 725, 976.

52 Pistol, *Internment*, 35, 43, 45.

53 The term "selective internment" is borrowed from Pistol, *Internment*, 50.

54 Wilson, "Treatment of Civilian Alien Enemies," 42; Charles W. Harris, "The Alien Enemy Hearing Board as a Judicial Device in the United States during World War II," *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 14 (1965) 4: 1360–70; Jörg Nagler, *Nationale Minoritäten im Krieg: "Feindliche Ausländer" und die amerikanische Heimatfront während des Ersten Weltkriegs* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2000), 678 n. 31; Pistol, *Internment*, 31.

55 Peter Irons, *Justice at War: The Story of the Japanese-American Internment Cases* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 24.

56 Krammer, *Undue Process*, x; Pistol, *Internment*, 52; Bauerkämper, *Sicherheit*, Vol. 2, 818.

A special case in the history of civilian detention during the Second World War is that of the almost 120,000 men, women and children of Japanese ancestry who were driven from their homes on the Pacific coast to camps in the interior of the country. These camps were administered by the War Relocation Authority. The term “internment,” which resonated with international legal thinking about the treatment of civilians in wartime, was not used by the authorities for these detention sites. Rather, the repressive measures were described as “evacuation” and “relocation.” They did not target the approximately 58,000 Italians and 22,000 Germans living on the West Coast.<sup>57</sup> About two-thirds of those affected by the eviction, which started in late March 1942, were *Nisei* – American-born children of Japanese immigrants (*Issei*), who, as US citizens, had a constitutional right not to be treated as “enemy aliens.”<sup>58</sup> Although other countries also detained “internal enemies” and “suspect” citizens of neutral or friendly nations – aside from the above-mentioned French measures, almost 2,000 British citizens accused of fascist sympathies were held in the United Kingdom,<sup>59</sup> as were six alleged international communists among the country’s Czech and Slovak political refugees<sup>60</sup> – the scale of racial discrimination in the treatment of Japanese-Americans was unprecedented and eventually resulted in similarly unprecedented post-war restitution for the detainees.

Inevitably, the German regime’s inherent racism and antisemitism created stark inequalities in its application of internment. The outbreak of war in September 1939 turned foreign civilians from enemy states into “enemy aliens,” among them an estimated 40,000 Jews of (former) Polish nationality. The National Socialists either expelled or interned these people, in contrast to their treatment of civilians of Western Allied nations. Some 2,000 Polish or stateless Jews were imprisoned in the SS concentration camps of Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald in 1939.<sup>61</sup> In February 1940, Himmler ordered the release of “enemy alien” Polish nationals from the internment

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57 Pistol, Internment, 7; Arnold Krammer, “Feinde ohne Uniform: Deutsche Zivilinternierte in den USA während des Zweiten Weltkrieges,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 44 (1996) 4: 581–603, at 588.

58 See Irons, *Justice*, 81–103.

59 See A. W. B. Simpson, *In the Highest Degree Odious: Detention without Trial in Wartime Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Aaron L. Goldman, “Defence Regulation 18B: Emergency Internment of Aliens and Political dissenters in Great Britain during World War II,” *Journal of British Studies* 12 (1973) 2: 120–36; Pistol, *Internment*, 135; Bauerkämper, *Sicherheit*, Vol. 2, 724.

60 National Council for Democratic Aid, *Morrison’s Prisoners: The Story of the Czechoslovakian Anti-Fascist Fighters Interned in Britain* (London: Marston Printing Co., 1941).

61 Yfaat Weiss, *Deutsche und polnische Juden vor dem Holocaust: Jüdische Identität zwischen Staatsbürgerschaft und Ethnizität 1933–1940* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2000), 212–13; Kim Wünschmann, *Before Auschwitz: Jewish Prisoners in the Prewar Concentration Camps* (London – Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 225.



camps run by the Wehrmacht. However – in a move that clearly distinguished Germany from the other belligerent countries – he transferred all Poles considered to be threats to national security as well as “all Polish Jews and all stateless Jews of former Polish nationality” from internment camps to the concentration camp system.<sup>62</sup> With the German attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941, Soviet civilians were likewise detained. Even those who were fortunate enough to stay out of the SS-run concentration camp system faced harsh and discriminatory treatment that was often in conflict with the spirit of the 1929 Geneva Convention. For example, British, Dutch, French and Belgians interned in the Wehrmacht-run Wülzburg Camp in Bavaria in the early years of the war fared relatively well and did not have to work. By contrast, when Soviet internees took their place from the summer of 1941 onwards, they had to perform forced labour for local businesses.<sup>63</sup>

In what constitutes a remarkable deviation from Germany’s otherwise heavily ideologically driven internment practice, individual Jews who were considered valuable bargaining chips in negotiations to repatriate non-Jewish German nationals in Allied hands were exempt from the National Socialists’ genocidal project of exterminating every Jewish man, woman and child in Europe. About 2,500 Jews were traded in this way, although implementation of the scheme was anything but consistent. While a few hundred Dutch Jews with dual nationality or Palestine certificates were exchanged for non-Jewish German nationals, around 1,800 Polish Jews who held Latin American identity papers were deported from Bergen-Belsen to their deaths in Auschwitz in October 1943.<sup>64</sup> During the Holocaust, all attempts to administer aid and relief initiated by Jewish organisations, the protecting powers and

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62 Governmental District Executive Aussig to County Executives and Police Offices, 16 February 1940, 1381, Finding Aid 1, File 7, Russian State Military Archives (RGVA). Thanks are due to Jörg Osterloh for pointing us to this source.

63 See Walter König, *Flüchtlingslager Wülzburg: Ankunft und Integration der Heimatvertriebenen in Weißenburg* (Weißenburg: Lühker, 1990), 73; Rainer Kammerl, “Der ‘Russische Friedhof’ im ehemaligen ‘Fallgarten,’” *Villa Nostra – Weißenburger Blätter: Geschichte, Heimatkunde, Kultur* 3 (2010): 19–27, at 19–20.

64 For numbers, see Beate Meyer, “Protected or Persecuted? Preliminary Findings on Foreign Jews in Nazi Germany,” *European Holocaust Studies* 3 (2021): 87–114, at 111–12; Gisela Rothenhäusler, *Reaching across the Barbed Wire: French PoWs, Internees from the Channel Islands and Jewish Prisoners from Bergen-Belsen in Schloss Wurzach (1940–1945)* (Lindenberg: Fink and Jersey: Channel Island Publishing, 2012), 293. See also Yehuda Bauer, *Jews for Sale? Nazi–Jewish Negotiations, 1933–1945* (New Haven, CT – London: Yale University Press, 1994); Alexandra-Eileen Wenck, *Zwischen Menschenhandel und “Endlösung”: Das Konzentrationslager Bergen-Belsen* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2000). Another remarkable exception occurred in the sphere of military captivity, where Western Jewish POWs were mostly protected from antisemitic mistreatment. See Raffael Scheck, *Love between Enemies: Western Prisoners of War and German Women in World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 219–20, 226–7, 338, 359.

the ICRC met their ultimate limits. Indeed, the moral authority of the ICRC in particular was deeply damaged by its failings in the Second World War. Consequently, efforts to re-establish its reputation as the chief guardian of international humanitarian values and provider of assistance to families separated by military conflict and genocide dominated almost all of its activities in the post-1945 period.<sup>65</sup>

## Conclusion

Before the Second World War began, the “lessons” learned from the First World War seemed to have been clear. As early as 1923, Britain’s Committee of Imperial Defence concluded that expulsion rather than the financially much more costly option of civilian internment should be government policy in the next conflict. Similarly, in the United States, Attorney General Francis Biddle “was determined to avoid mass internment, and the persecution of Aliens that had characterized the First World War.”<sup>66</sup> When hostilities commenced in Europe in 1939, the US government duly called on the belligerents not to detain civilians and instead to implement “mutual release and repatriation.”<sup>67</sup> However, noble intentions aimed at more humane treatment did not prevail and mass civilian internment re-emerged in 1939–45, albeit not quite on the same scale as in the previous conflict.<sup>68</sup> In Britain, it proved to be a temporary measure: by August 1942, the number of civilian internees had been reduced to about 5,000, while approximately 4,500 German, Austrian, Italian, Czech and Slovak men, some of them veterans of the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War, had left the camps by virtue of enlisting in the Pioneer Corps.<sup>69</sup> Like mass release for military service, the tribunal system instituted in Britain and the

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65 See Gerald Steinacher, *Humanitarians at War: The Red Cross in the Shadow of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

66 Francis Biddle, *In Brief Authority* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1962) 207. For the British Committee, see Tony Kushner and David Cesarani, “Alien Internment in Britain during the Twentieth Century: An Introduction,” in *The Internment of Aliens*, edited by Cesarani and Kushner, 1–22, at 3.

67 US *aide-mémoire*, 2 October 1939, R 41390, PAAA.

68 Absolute numbers comparable to those established for the First World War are still missing for the Second World War. Counting only civilians in internment camps defined in the narrow sense – i.e. those camps that operated in line with customary standards for civilian internment, including inspections by international humanitarian organisations and the protecting powers – the numbers appear to be lower than during the First World War. However, if all the camps of the Second World War that held civilians are taken into account, there can be no doubt that the numbers were significantly higher than in 1914–20.

69 Kushner and Cesarani and Kushner, “Alien Internment,” 14; Pistol, *Internment*, 80; Detlev Brandes, *Großbritannien und seine osteuropäischen Alliierten 1939–1943* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1988), 100.

United States during the Second World War was a new departure. It reflected both a greater willingness to distinguish between “real aliens” and “technical aliens” and the far greater number of refugees. To be sure, tribunal hearings were far from systematic and at best pseudo-judicial in practice. In particular, they contained inadequate domestic and international safeguards against discrimination on grounds of nationality, race, class and gender.

What, then, had changed between the two world wars? One thing that had clearly not altered was the role of reciprocity in determining the treatment of civilian prisoners.<sup>70</sup> If Britain no longer enjoyed all the advantages of leverage through higher numbers, at least *vis-à-vis* its new enemy after December 1941 – Imperial Japan – alongside the United States it still had the greatest say in how the international diplomacy of civilian internment in the West was managed. On the other hand – and cutting across the question of formal inter-state relations between enemies – the 1939–45 period did see some important shifts in the relationship between internment and both humanitarian and security agendas. Refugees from Central Europe, who comprised the majority of civilian prisoners in the West, were identified by their captors, at least after 1940–41, as potential supporters of the global war effort against the Axis powers. However, security concerns were increasingly entwined with racist agendas, as seen, albeit in very different ways, in the United States and Germany, in particular.

Across the world, women and children were much more likely to be found among civilian internment camp populations in the Second World War compared to the First, but in both conflicts the hidden suffering of those who struggled to survive on the outside while family members were in captivity remains under-investigated in most accounts of the camp universe. Above all, though, it is the internment camps’ ever-increasing and often overlapping functions – from places where adherence to internationally agreed norms could be exhibited, through new forms of imperial, inter-state or continent-wide security, to spaces where genocide, mass purges and mass murder could be committed – that makes the period 1939–45 extraordinary, rather than the number of internees who were held within them.

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70 Bauerkämper, *Sicherheit*, Vol. 2, 708, 736, 754, 980, 997, 1033–4.