Moving People during the Great Patriotic War: A Comparative Perspective

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Abstract

Moving people during war is what states do and have done since there have been states. This article attempts to specify what was peculiar to the Soviet state in moving its own civilian population during the Great Patriotic War (1941–45). It focuses on two categories of civilians defined by the state according to its determination of loyalty and utility to the war effort: evacuees and deportees. The article proceeds along the lines of three comparisons. The first is between tsarist and Stalinist approaches to ‘total’ war. The second comparison is between evacuees and deportees on the experiential level. The third and final comparison compares those whose voices are present in the sources and those who are silent, posing questions about the discursive relationship between migrants and state authorities in the context of the Great Patriotic War.

Keywords

evacuees – deportees – migration regimes – Stalinist – Soviet – Second World War – First World War

Introduction

Moving people has been fundamental to the prosecution of war, conquest, and occupation. It is what states do and have done since there have been states. Particularly in the twentieth century, the development of weapons and

* I wish to thank the two reviewers and Leslie Page Moch for reading this article and providing suggestions for its improvement.

mechanical transportation technologies meant ever more rapid and efficient deployment of soldiers, even while partisans, guerrillas, and other irregulars on the move sometimes blunted their effectiveness. For a long time, scholars of migration tended to ignore soldiers as well as their non-uniformed combatants. As one historian archly noted in 2005, 'historians of migration have been even less receptive to the notion that soldiers can be analyzed as migrants than historians of armies have been to the idea that soldiers can be analyzed as murderers.'¹ Fortunately, the migration church has exhibited some signs of greater ecumenism in recent years.²

The present article situates itself in the Second World War. Rather than considering soldiers and partisans, though, it attempts to define what was peculiar to the Soviet state in moving its own *civilian* population. It focuses on two categories of civilians defined by the state according to its determination of loyalty and utility to the war effort: evacuees and deportees. Each has been the subject of considerable research, both in Russia and outside that country, but never on a comparative basis. The paper proceeds along the lines of three comparisons. The first is between tsarist and Stalinist approaches to total war, that is, between Imperial Russian and Soviet evacuation and deportation policies practiced respectively during the First and Second World Wars. The argument here echoes the old Hegelian notion of quantity becoming quality, as the scale on which the Soviet state moved people around was so much vaster than during the First World War as to constitute a qualitative difference. The second comparison is between the experiences of the two categories of people on whom this article focuses: evacuees and deportees. Many evacuees, though rescued from the clutches of the Nazi invaders, could be forgiven for thinking they were being punished as deportees; though hardly pampered, deportees in their turn figured as both settlers and evacuees, at least in official documents. The third and final comparison is more methodological and speculative. It compares those whose voices are present in the sources and those who are silent, posing questions about the discursive relationship between migrants and state authorities in the context of the Stalinist state's prosecution of the Great Patriotic War.

1 Joshua A. Sanborn, 'Unsettling the empire: violent migrations and social disaster in Russia during World War I', *Journal of Modern History* 77 (2005) 290–324, 291.

2 See for example Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen, 'From mobility transition to comparative global migration history', *Journal of Global History* 6 (2011) 299–307; Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Leslie Page Moch, *Broad is my native land: repertoires and regimes of migration in Russia's twentieth century* (Ithaca 2014) chapter 5.

MAP 1 *Map of Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic and the fifteen other states that made up the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*

The First World War as Prelude to the Second World War

It is well known that Hitler would have done anything to ensure that the German people did not suffer from food shortages during the war. 'The most important issue in German foreign policy after 1870–71,' he wrote in 1928, 'had to be the question of solving the sustenance problem.' 'Already in prewar times,' he added referring to the period before 1914, 'the future of the German people was a question of solving the food supply problem.'³ In Hitler's mind, the *Kaiserreich* had failed miserably to solve that problem and the 'Turnip Winter' of 1916–17 proved its comeuppance. Thus, as Richard Overy has written, the Nazis' food policy during the Second World War 'was not to maintain a high level of living standards or peacetime standards, but to establish the *Existenzminimum*

3 Gerhard Weinberg (ed.), *Hitler's second book: the unpublished sequel to Mein Kampf* (New York 2006) 54, 74.

below which living standards should not be permitted to fall. This was to avoid at all costs another Turnip Winter.’⁴

If the ghost of food policy-past haunted Hitler, did refugees pouring into the Soviet interior spook Stalin? During the First World War, some six million people, both what were known as ‘voluntary refugees’ and expellees took to the road, clogged railroad trains and otherwise added to the strain on Imperial Russia’s infrastructure. Although not a direct cause of the tsarist regime’s downfall, the refugee problem unquestionably weakened the regime’s ability to resolve the related questions of food and fuel supply, troop movements, and urban pacification.⁵ Or, as a Soviet official put it in 1928, refugees had ‘blocked military roads and interrupted the free movement of troops, spread various diseases, and frequently served to demoralize the rear’ creating ‘political, economic, and strategic’ disasters. I could find no statement by Stalin about refugees analogous to Hitler’s on food supply, but when the Red Army’s General Staff drafted the Soviet Union’s first refugee statute in 1928, it did so ‘on the basis of the experience of the war of 1914–18.’ According to Rebecca Manley, the expert on Soviet evacuation during the Second World War, the General Staff sought ‘to avoid the mistakes of the previous war by organizing refugee movement and providing aid to those in need.’⁶

Over the course of the next ten years, however, even this departure would be replaced by the far more ambitious objective of banning refugees altogether in favour of moving selected ‘human contingents’ in a controlled fashion. As Manley herself emphasises, what fuelled such ambitiousness was the ‘more heavy-handed approach to population circulation’ that accompanied Stalin’s Great Turn toward industrialisation and the collectivisation of agriculture. While only partially successful, the organised recruitment of workers, deportations of wealthy peasants (kulaks) and later unreliable nationalities to the north and east, the introduction of internal passports to control migration to cities and other stringent measures adopted during the 1930s provided state institutions and their personnel with valuable experience.⁷ The new ‘statute on evacuation’ drawn up in 1938 correspondingly expanded the scope of evacuation

4 R.J. Overy, *War and economy in the Third Reich* (Oxford 1994) 281. See also Mark Mazower, *Hitler’s empire: how the Nazis ruled Europe* (New York 2008) 274–275, 282, 284–285.

5 This is the argument of Peter Gatrell, *A whole empire walking: refugees in Russia during World War I* (Bloomington 1999).

6 Rebecca Manley, *To the Tashkent station: evacuation and survival in the Soviet Union at war* (Ithaca 2009) 13. Quotations from the General Staff’s report are taken from Manley.

7 On the logistics of these operations, see *inter alia* *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni: Kollektivizatsiia i raskulachivanie: Dokumenty i materialy v 5 tomakh, 1927–1939*. V.P. Danilov, R. Manning and L. Viola, eds. 5 vols. (Moscow 1999–2006); V.N. Zemskov, *Spetsposelentsy v SSSR, 1930–1960*

while restricting areas to which evacuees would be relocated. And in June 1941, a few weeks before the *Wehrmacht's* invasion, a revised version directed the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) to ensure 'that no evacuations take place outside the general plan' and to 'liquidate' any unauthorised departures.⁸

But if before the war Soviet authorities believed they had learned from the mistakes of their tsarist predecessors and developed better policies for handling the civilian population, they quickly were disabused of this belief after 22 June 1941. As the *Wehrmacht* penetrated ever more deeply into Soviet territory, unauthorised departures – the flight of refugees – became the norm. Already on 5 July 1941, a decree 'on the order of evacuation of the population in wartime' indirectly acknowledged this fact by expressing concern over 'the penetration of evacuees *and refugees* into Moscow', which the NKVD was enjoined to stop by setting up screening points at railroad stations and highway checkpoints and by checking all passenger trains bound for the capital. Mindful of the First World War, fear that the sight of refugees would demoralise Muscovites seems to have driven the measure.⁹

In at least two crucial respects Soviet wartime policies – War Stalinism, if you like – did not so much depart from, as build upon and magnify what Tsarism had done. One was the evacuation of industrial plants and personnel from areas vulnerable to occupation; the other was the deportation to the interior of ethnic groups whom authorities considered unreliable. I shall summarise each in turn.

The tsarist state's evacuation effort started slowly. Despite urgings from officials at various levels to act sooner, it was not until the summer of 1915 that things really got underway. But once they did, the number of enterprises dismantled, loaded onto convoys and reassembled in the rear was substantial. From the Polish provinces they amounted to 237 (153 from Warsaw and vicinity including the 'model firm' of Rudzskii & Co. which found a new home in Ekaterinoslav); from Riga alone nearly 400 were sent to the rear including 24 large metalworks plants. One third of Riga's enterprises wound up in the Moscow

(Moscow 2003); N.L. Pobol' and P.M. Polian (eds), *Stalinskie deportatsii 1928–1953* (Moscow 2005).

- 8 Manley, *To the Tashkent station*, 18–21. Manley also stresses the development of war technologies, including aerial bombardment, as a contributing factor to the rethinking of plans for evacuation.
- 9 Emphasis mine. The relevant parts of the decree are in V.N. Kaustov, V.P. Naumov, and N.S. Plotnikov (eds), *Lubianka: Stalin i NKVD-NKGB-GUKR 'Smersh', 1939 – mart 1946* (Moscow 2006) 294–295. It would be interesting to know how many people the security forces did corral and what proportion of all refugees they constituted.

region, 30 went to Petrograd and others reached Khar'kov, Ekaterinoslav, and the Donbass.¹⁰ Essential personnel including skilled workers and their families accompanied these enterprises. They, along with railroad employees and their families, were entitled to free railroad transportation and provision of subsidies, loans, and housing upon arrival.¹¹

How many received such treatment is impossible to say with any degree of accuracy, mainly because there is no way of distinguishing between evacuees and refugees (those who left home of their own accord) or deportees. Estimates are as high as 1.2 million evacuees, and that is for only 'Russian' railroad employees, bureaucrats, priests, armaments workers, and teachers evacuated from the Polish provinces during the first year of the war.¹² But that seems too high. It also is not possible to know exactly how many enterprises found new homes in the Russian interior. One recent study notes that among the more than 1,000 supposedly evacuated, there is definite information on only 446 of which a mere 112 were restored to production.¹³ Finally, it bears noting that the tsarist state never adopted an evacuation plan, although military personnel and public organisations proposed several, and thus, in the predictably ungenerous assessment of a Soviet-era historian, 'evacuation of industry proceeded chaotically (*stikhiino*) in 1915 with neither plan nor leadership from the state.'¹⁴

When it came to internal deportation, rather than evacuation, of people in wartime, the tsarist state acted with greater alacrity. Less than a month into the war, the Ministry of Internal Affairs announced its intention of deporting

- 10 A.L. Sidorov, *Ekonomicheskoe polozhenie Rossii v gody pervoi mirovoi voiny* (Moscow 1973) 213–223.
- 11 See 'Svedeniia ob evakuatsii linii i Upravleniia Polesskikh zheleznnykh dorog po chasti, vkhodivshei v Severo-Zapadnyi front. 1915 g.' Belorusskii nauchno-issledovatel'skii tsentr elektronnoi dokumentatsii, 2006–2015 at Arkhivy Belorusi, <http://archives.gov.by/index.php?id=602707> (20 January 2016). For an account of the evacuation of Riga's Provodnik factory and its reassembly in Moscow, see Eduard M. Dune, *Notes of a red guard*, trans. Diane P. Koenker and S.A. Smith (Urbana 1993) 5–17.
- 12 Konrad Zielinski, 'The evacuation of Russians from the Kingdom of Poland in 1915', paper presented at conference on 'Russia in the First World War', at the Higher School of Economics, Moscow, 3–5 June 2014.
- 13 S.N. Mikhalev and V.A. Zolotarev, *Voennaia strategii. Podgotovka i vedenie vojn novogo i noveishego vremeni* (Moscow 2003) 628. For slightly different figures, see G.I. Shigalin, *Voennaia ekonomika v pervuiu mirovuiu voinu (1914–1918 gg.)* (Moscow 1956) 148–149.
- 14 Sidorov, *Ekonomicheskoe polozhenie*, 228. Mikhalev and Zolotarev (*Voennaia strategii*, 628) are no more generous: 'The evacuation of industry and supplies of raw material ... proceeded in a disorganized fashion'.

German and Austrian males aged 18 to 45, roughly 50,000 individuals. In succeeding months, all subjects of countries at war with Russia, including women and children who resided in areas under the control of the Russian military, became liable for deportation. According to Eric Lohr, Russian internment of enemy subjects exceeded in scale and speed 'nearly every other country by a substantial margin', totalling some 250,000 to 300,000 individuals. Moreover, military authorities extended the same policy to those of the Imperial Russian state's own subjects they considered potentially disloyal – some half a million Jews and another 250,000 ethnic Germans. Armed military or police detachments supervised the journeys to Siberia of some 200,000 ethnic Germans.¹⁵

The resemblance to the Soviet government's policies in the Great Patriotic War is unmistakable. If we ask what then made the latter Stalinist, the answer should be obvious. It was the scale of the respective operations and the assumption by the Soviet state of the entirety of tasks associated with removing people from their homes, sending them somewhere else, provisioning them en route, and situating them at destination. To take evacuation, the numbers are truly staggering. Most estimates are in the range of ten to seventeen million people sent eastwards on journeys of hundreds but more often thousands of kilometres, and all within a mere eighteen months – from the formation of the Council for Evacuation (*Sovet po evakuatsii*) two days after the German invasion until the end of the Nazis' second advance in late 1942.¹⁶ Even low-end estimates far exceed the five or six million peasants from European Russia who settled in Siberia between 1880 and 1914; they also surpassed the number of prisoners sent to labour camps (Gulags) and corrective labour colonies in the

15 Eric Lohr, *Russian citizenship: from empire to Soviet Union* (Cambridge 2012) 121–122; Gatrell, *A whole empire walking*, 18. Research by Gatrell in particular casts doubt on the assertion of Pavel Polian that only 'hostile countries' nationals' ... were subject to deportations.' See P.M. Polian, *Ne po svoei vole ... Istoriia i geografiia prinuditel'nykh migratsii v SSSR* (Moscow 2001) 103.

16 For summaries of the estimates, including explanations for their wide variations, see Manley, *To the Tashkent station*, 50; M.N. Potemkina, 'Evakonaselenie v ural'skom tylu: Opyt vyzhivaniia', *Otechestvennaia istoriia* 2 (2005) 86–98, 86–87; Vadim Dubson, 'Toward a central database of evacuated Soviet Jews' names, for the study of the Holocaust in the occupied Soviet territories', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 26 (2012) 95–119, 96, 99–101. Dubson argues the administrators systematically inflated the numbers; on the other hand, Kristen Edwards explains why the Resettlement Administration's figures are low in *Fleeing to Siberia: the wartime relocation of evacuees in Novosibirsk, 1941–1943* (Stanford 1996) Thesis Stanford University, 50.

1930s, and they dwarfed the number of deportees and exiles both during the 1930s and in the war years.¹⁷

Neither before nor since has any state ever attempted (and executed!) a feat of this scale. Soviet authorities quite clearly regarded evacuation as a key component of wartime strategy. The decree on evacuation issued by the USSR Council of People's Commissars and the All-Union Communist Party's Central Committee on 27 June 1941 gave first priority to those operating machinery and equipment essential for the war effort, *viz.*, 'qualified workers, engineers, and employees with enterprises evacuated from the front', as well as 'youth fit for military service [and] Soviet and party leadership cadres'.¹⁸ But, and this is a theme pursued below, the very prodigiousness of the relocation effort put enormous and ultimately impossible demands on state agencies and personnel to provide for the needs of evacuees. What Soviet rhetoric and historiography typically represented and celebrated as a state-organised operation, distinguished from the tsarist response to the First World War by its organised character, many evacuees experienced as deprivation, which in some respects resembled the travails of earlier refugees and in others the conditions to which the second major category of civilians on the move – deportees – were subjected.

Deportations, conducted overwhelmingly by the NKVD as secret operations against specific national groups, also exceeded tsarist-era actions, although not to the same extent. Among the groups targeted in 1939–41 as security risks were Poles, Finns, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Romanians and others in the western border regions annexed by the Soviet Union in 1939–1941 as well as ethnic Germans in the Volga region. Punitive operations conducted in 1943–1945 in the wake of the *Wehrmacht's* retreat affected virtually all Chechens, Ingush, and four other peoples of the north Caucasus, as well as the Crimean Tatars, and smaller numbers of ethnic Greeks, Bulgarians, and other diaspora nationalities inhabiting the Black Sea littoral. Like many evacuees, deportees were sent to Central Asia and Siberia, albeit not the major cities. The relative proximity of the two groups turned out to be not only geographic.

17 For peasant settlement in Siberia, see A.A. Kaufman, 'Pereselencheskaia statistika', *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar' tovarishchestva 'Br. A. i I. Granat i Ko.'* (Moscow: 7th ed., 1910–1948) 31, 1–2. For preliminary estimates on the Gulag population and corresponding methodologies, see J. Arch Getty, Gabor Rittersporn, and Viktor N. Zemskov, 'Victims of the Soviet penal system in the pre-war years: a first approach on the basis of archival evidence', *American Historical Review* 98:4 (1994) 1017–1049. For an estimate of 5.5 million internal deportees between 1930 and 1945, see Polian, *Ne po svoei vole*, 239.

18 Manley, *To the Tashkent station*, 34.

Stalinism and the Mutability of Its Categories

Although coded as nearly polar opposites – evacuation intended to safeguard people endangered by the foreign enemy; deportation intended to isolate people considered dangerous or traitorous – the two operations had much in common on the experiential level. When the authorities first began to discuss among themselves preventative measures against Soviet Germans and Finns living in border regions, they referred to their ‘eviction’ (*vyselenie*) but also to their ‘obligatory evacuation’. The other term that crops up particularly in the succession of decrees covering ethnic German descendants of the Mennonites, who arrived in the Volga region in the eighteenth century, was ‘resettlement’ (*pereselenie*).¹⁹ Over a million Soviet Germans thereby joined Russian and Ukrainian kulaks, borderland Poles, Finns, and other diaspora nationalities as ‘special settlers’ (*spetsposelentsy*).

Lynne Viola, who wrote specifically about deported kulaks, characterised the use of this linguistic sleight of hand as ‘a terrible euphemism cast in layers of secrecy, deceit, and human cruelty’.²⁰ The archives contain some evidence of the extent of the deceit. Although evacuation personnel typically listed Germans arriving by the trainload in Kazakhstan as ‘settlers’ rather than evacuees or deportees, the mere fact that the exiled Germans appeared in the same dossiers as evacuees arriving from Leningrad, Moscow, and ‘the front’, meant that they often received similar if not identical treatment.²¹ On the one hand, Germans could request ‘places of settlement’ from evacuation officials – and receive their support; on the other, collective farm leaders displayed what a disapproving official described as an ‘unfriendly attitude toward evacuees, equating them to exiles.’²²

19 For ‘eviction’ and ‘obligatory evacuation’, see *Stalinskie deportatsii*, 323–325; for decrees referring to ‘resettlement’, see 287–322. For a memoir recalling deportation under the guise of evacuation, see Berta Bachmann, *Memories of Kazakhstan: a report on the life experiences of a German woman in Russia* (Lincoln 1983) 9.

20 Lynne Viola, *The unknown gulag: the lost world of Stalin’s special settlements* (Oxford 2007) 2.

21 United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Record Group [USHMM RG] 74.002, Tsentral’nyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Almaty [TsGA A], f. 1137, Reel 4, op. 9, d. 141, l. 93. Even the archivists seem to have been fooled, for they labelled the file containing this and similar documents as ‘inquiries, memoranda and information concerning the arrival and distribution of *evacuees* [emphasis mine] in the Kazakh SSR (3 July 1941 – 22 January 1942)’.

22 USHMM RG 74.002, TsGA A f. 1137, op. 6, d. 1279, l. 191; op. 6, d. 1278a, ll. 20–21.

Even some deportees succumbed to the confusion. One was the future Yale University professor Wolfgang Leonhard, who as a boy had accompanied his mother, a political refugee from Nazi Germany, when she arrived in the Soviet Union in 1935. Enrolled as a student in the Foreign Languages Academy and a member of the Komsomol, Wolfgang was informed in mid-September 1941 that all Germans living in Moscow would be spending the war in Kyzyl-orda, a dusty town in south central Kazakhstan, as a 'necessary precaution'. He assumed that upon arriving in Kazakhstan he could rejoin the academy, which was about to be evacuated to Alma-Ata.²³ Another surprised deportee was Server Akimov, who as a soldier at the front and then while recuperating from a leg injury, thought that the order to deport his fellow Crimean Tatars only applied to collaborators. After demobilisation, he managed to locate his parents in Uzbekistan's Andizhan oblast, got a job near them and like them, had to check in with the local commandant as a special settler every month.²⁴

As for evacuees, those who were not Anna Akhmatova, Sergei Eisenstein, Sergei Mikhalkov, or other members of the cultural elite placed in Alma Ata or Tashkent could be excused for wondering if they in fact were being sent into exile. Crowded into *teplushki*, the same form of converted boxcar used to accommodate deportees and Gulag-bound prisoners, they might have had difficulty imagining how evacuation to some unknown, godforsaken *kolkhoz* could be preferable to staying put in the relative comfort of one's own apartment or house. Besides, as Rebecca Manley has noted, only a few years had passed since 'the same state that now proclaimed its desire to protect' members of the intelligentsia had whisked large numbers of urban dwellers away in the dead of night.²⁵ Those who arrived without a sponsoring employer – primarily the wives of Red Army officers and Soviet and party officials, their children, and the elderly – had the most difficulty, as they tended to be accommodated outside cities.

23 Wolfgang Leonhard, *Child of the revolution*, trans. C.W. Woodhouse (Chicago 1958) 126–162. Leonhard did make it to the Karaganda Educational Institute and by July 1943 was back in Moscow. For the decree of 6 September 1941, see *Stalinskie deportatsii*, 330–331.

24 'Server Akimov', <http://iremember.ru/partizani/akimov-server.html>, 1–2. (23 April 2013). This web-based collection of interviews with veterans of the Great Patriotic War is a rich source of recollections about personal experiences of migration before, during, and after the war. For the decree of 13 April 1944 'On measures to purge the territory of the Crimean ASSR of anti-Soviet elements', and the more sweeping resolution 'On Crimean Tatars', of 11 May 1944, see *Stalinskie deportatsii*, 494–495, 497–499.

25 Rebecca Manley, 'The perils of displacement: The Soviet evacuee between refugee and deportee', *Contemporary European History* 16:2 (2007) 495–509, 498.

In theory, the advantage that evacuees had over refugees lay in the planned and coordinated nature of evacuation as opposed to the relative spontaneity of individual and familial flight. Unlike both deportees who generally were kept in the dark about their destinations and refugees who could not count on prior arrangements, evacuees benefitted from state-mandated transport, accommodation, and employment arrangements. However, the advantages often proved elusive in practice. Many evacuees assigned to a particular destination wound up somewhere else thanks to what frustrated higher authorities referred to as 'irregular' (*samovol'nye*) reassignments by regional personnel. In January 1942, for example, Sverdlovsk regional officials 'readdressed' a convoy of 750 Leningraders to Omsk rather than accommodating the evacuees. Omsk in turn readdressed the same convoy to Petropavlovsk, 200 kilometres away in northern Kazakhstan. Sometimes, reassignments stemmed from more legitimate causes, as in the summer of 1942 when the Germans launched their second offensive that penetrated all the way to the Volga. But legitimate or not, authorities at the receiving end scrambled to provide for unexpected arrivals.²⁶

Sometimes, they scrambled *not* to provide. The extent to which the placement of evacuees resulted from negotiation among officials at different levels of the Soviet bureaucracy is nicely (or tragically!) illustrated by the attempts of a resettlement official to persuade regional personnel via telephone to accept evacuees from Leningrad. Four of the seven regional (*oblast*) officials who were contacted agreed to take some, although only one, from Novosibirsk, would accommodate the full complement of 40,000. Two others, pleading food shortages and an epidemic, refused to take any, and at Syktyvkar, the capital of the Mari Autonomous Republic (Mari ASSR), nobody answered the phone.²⁷

Repertoires of Migration

The Stalinist approach to internal migration consisted of a set of state practices aimed at controlling who could migrate and on what terms. Such practices depended on the utilisation of certain technologies – not only the railroad, but also telegraph, telephone, and postal services. Accompanied by corresponding vocabulary and rhetorical justifications, they were constitutive of *regimes* of migration. But like all such regimes, they both engendered and responded

26 USHMM RG-22.027, Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii [GARF] f. A-327, Reels 48, 46, op. 2, d. 68, l. 15; op. 2, d. 50, ll. 33, 103–106.

27 USHMM RG-22.027, GARF f. A-327, Reel 46, op. 2, d. 50, ll. 24–25. The negotiations occurred in May 1942.

to 'migrants' own practices, their relationships and networks of contact that permitted adaptation'.²⁸ That adaptation could reinforce but also seek to compensate for the limitations and objectionable features of the regimes to which migrants were subjected.

Certain repertoires of migration sustained both evacuees and deportees in the process of moving as well as after arriving at their destinations. I already noted exiled Germans requesting places of settlement. This was, of course, more characteristic of evacuees. Those with connections in high places pulled strings to receive coveted space aboard an airplane (or, failing that, a berth on a train) to a desired location. Others deluged authorities with letters seeking to be sent to where they had relatives. Indeed, both state authorities and would-be evacuees relied heavily on the institution of the family, the various state agencies to relieve themselves of the burden of providing accommodation and food, and the evacuees themselves for emotional and material support.

Fortunately for future researchers, writing letters to authorities was an essential part of would-be evacuees' repertoires. Leningraders desperate to be rescued from their besieged city crafted their letters in such a way as to put the onus for their survival or that of their relatives on the recipient of their desperate appeals. 'If in the next few days I am not able to leave', wrote a 49-year old male factory worker seeking to be evacuated to Stalingrad in February 1942, 'I will die.' 'Help me decide the question of life', wrote a 32-year old Leningrad shipyard forewoman to the city's party secretary. 'I want to live!' she added, including a telephone number where she could be reached 'because the post takes time'.²⁹ Competing with this strategy for the attention of the authorities were those emphasising one's past contributions to the cause (such as the fourteen single-spaced typewritten pages that one letter-writer used to describe his 'about one hundred inventions'), or the precious talents of one's child.³⁰

Communicating with authorities in this fashion, evacuees were partaking of a practice that predated the Soviet Union. Peasant migrants to Siberia who wrote to the tsarist Resettlement Administration in the early years of the century seeking redress for the inferior land assigned to them were apt to describe themselves as hard-pressed and deserving. Soldiers' parents and dependents,

28 Siegelbaum and Moch, *Broad is my native land*, 5.

29 USHMM RG-22.033, Tsentral'nyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv St. Petersburg [TsGA St.P.]. f. 330, op. 2, d. 83, l. 11; op. 2, d. 81, ll. 128–130.

30 USHMM RG-22.033, Tsentral'nyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv St. Petersburg [TsGA St.P.]. f. 330, op. 2, d. 22, ll. 36–47. For a letter in which a father extols his 23-year old son as 'one of the most talented young poets of Leningrad', see USHMM RG-22.033, Tsentral'nyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv St. Petersburg [TsGA St.P.]. f. 330, op. 2, d. 82, l. 95.

hoping to receive the state's assistance above and beyond what the law of 25 June 1912 stipulated, did likewise during the First World War.³¹ Even more similar and chronologically proximate were letters to authorities that peasants, workers, and members of the intelligentsia (including party members) wrote in the 1920s and 1930s.³² In her analysis of letters written between 1926 and 1936 by disenfranchised Soviet citizens appealing for reinstatement of their rights, Golfo Alexopoulos interpreted the more desperate as engaging in a ritual of lament. 'Through lamentation', she noted, '*lishentsy* [the disenfranchised – LS] present an image of self as pitiful, weak and helpless'. Much like the letters from blockaded Leningraders, their 'narratives of appeal' were designed to elicit from their recipients a sense of responsibility for their fate.³³

What could deportees do to mitigate their dire situation? In the early 1930s, ex-kulaks had escaped from special settlements in large numbers, but neither archival nor published sources that I have consulted mention escapees among the ethnically identifiable wartime deportees. Emphasising loyalty and sacrifice in the war effort emerged as part of the repertoire of a group of families from the Karachai autonomous region in the North Caucasus. According to the decree of 12 October 1943 they and the entire Karachai population numbering some 75,000 were to be deported to the Kazakh and Kirgiz republics and their autonomous region liquidated as punishment for collaboration by 'many' of them during the Nazis' occupation of their territory between August 1942 and January 1943. By December 1943, nearly 16,000 Karachai families containing more than 68,000 individuals had been deported. But in January 1944, the NKVD's director of special settlements in the Kazakh SSR wrote to Moscow to enquire about how he should respond to a petition requesting release from the settlements. The petition came from Karachais who claimed to be families of officers at the front; decorated war invalids; those who joined partisan units during the period of occupation; Russians, Crimean Tatars, and others not of

31 See respectively Lewis H. Siegelbaum, 'Paradise or just a little bit better? Siberian settlement "fever" in late Imperial Russia', *The Russian Review* 76:1 (2017) 22–37, 34–35; Emily E. Pyle, 'Peasant strategies for obtaining state aid: a study of petitions during World War I', *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 24:1–2 (1997) 41–64.

32 Such letters from these decades are the main sources for Andrei K. Sokolov, *Golos naroda: pis'ma i otkliki riadovyykh sovetskikh grazhdan o sobytiyakh 1918–1932 gg.* (Moscow 1997); Andrei K. Sokolov, *Obshchestvo i vlast' v 1930-e gody: povestvovanie v dokumentakh* (Moscow 1998); Lewis Siegelbaum and Andrei Sokolov, *Stalinism as a way of life: a narrative in documents* (New Haven 2000).

33 Golfo Alexopoulos, 'The ritual lament: a narrative of appeal in the 1920s and 1930s', *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 24:1–2 (1997) 117–129, 124.

Karachai nationality; and Karachais possessing documents from local authorities attesting to their right to return home.³⁴

Failing a successful outcome to petitions, two survival strategies are evident. One was transplanting to the new environment as much of home as possible; the other was assimilating into the new environment, sometimes by marrying among indigenous or more commonly earlier deported peoples. Such seemingly contradictory strategies, pursued simultaneously by different people and successively by the same individuals, became part of the fabric of Soviet life in the post-war and eventually, the post-Stalin years. The high rate of inter-ethnic marriage among Poles living in Kazakhstan – more than half according to one source – is suggestive.³⁵

Finally, it is important to note that initial destinations were often way stations to somewhere else. The peripatetic condition of so many evacuees and deportees was yet another way in which definitional boundaries of migrants became blurred in practice and also how both kinds of migrants employed repertoires to their advantage. Nearly a third of all Soviet German deportees served in work colonies, more popularly known as labour armies. They were housed in tents and other temporary shelters because they moved around so often cutting timber, laying railroad tracks, and digging coal. Initially only men aged from 17 to 50 served, but in October 1942 the age range was extended to include 15 to 55 year-old men and 16 to 45 year-old women, excluding those pregnant or with children under the age of three. Crimean Tatars, Finns, and other 'punished peoples' also were enrolled in such work battalions. Treated as if prisoners of war, some labour soldiers confounded the imputation of disloyalty by exceeding Soviet work norms, much as former POWs and other repatriates did after the war.³⁶

For evacuees, travelling on from an initial destination could have been due to family reunification. Eighteen-year old Genya Batasheva, who with her friend Manya escaped the clutches of death at Babi Yar, made it to unoccupied Soviet territory and from there travelled east as far as Tashkent. Assigned to a labour collective (*artel*) southwest of the city, they soon fled to escape a typhus epidemic. Eventually, Genya established contact with an aunt who

34 *Stalinskie deportatsii*, 393–394, 403, 409. Unfortunately, the reply from Moscow is not included.

35 See Kate Brown, *A biography of no place: from ethnic borderland to Soviet heartland* (Cambridge MA 2004) 176, 190–191.

36 See A.A. German and A.N. Kurochkin, *Nemtsy v SSSR v 'Trudovoi armii', 1941–1945* (Moscow 1998) 136–142; 'Tokhlu Amet Ali', <http://iremember.ru/memoirs/grazhdanskie/tokhlu-amet-ali>, 3. (27 January 2016).

had been evacuated to Omsk. Both she and Manya settled there and started working in a shipbuilding factory evacuated from Leningrad. With the liberation of Kiev in November 1943, Manya set out for home but Genya reunited with her father in Rubtsovsk, a town in the southern Altai region of Siberia to which the Khar'kov Tractor Factory that employed him had been evacuated two years earlier.³⁷ Batasheva's peripatetic existence during the war derived not only from her own 'self-evacuation', but also the mutual support provided by her friend and the state's evacuation of key industries and personnel who happened to be related to her.

Less extraordinarily, evacuees became prime candidates to settle agricultural and forested lands depopulated as a result of deportations and to expand the fishing industry in far-flung parts of the country. The Resettlement Committee under the Council of People's Commissars ran both of these operations on the basis of quotas. For the fishing industry, it chose as areas of recruitment fourteen different territorial units (five autonomous republics and nine oblasts) within the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR). It assigned quotas to each, leaving it to regional officials to subdivide them among districts (*uezdy*) and even further down the chain of command to individual collective farms and village soviets. Territorial governments bore responsibility for publicising the opportunity for resettlement and associated benefits, also emphasising that the expansion of the fishing industry was 'an important state task' vital to the war effort. Some of the same areas served as recruiting grounds to repopulate collective farms in Saratov oblast (previously inhabited by Volga Germans), the Crimean peninsula (from which Tatar, German, and other national groups were deported) and Groznyi oblast (homeland of the Chechens).³⁸

In each case, the majority of recruits – sometimes the vast majority – turned out to be evacuees. Why? None of the relevant resolutions issued by the Council of People's Commissars so much as mentioned evacuees as potential recruits for settlement. They did specify that recruits should be 'able-bodied' (*trudosposobnye*). Yet, 'as you can see', wrote one local official from Irkutsk in his report on the arrival of settlers to assist with the fishing industry on Lake Baikal, 'the majority of families have many young children and only one able-bodied adult [...] There are even 123 families in which nobody is

37 USHMM RG-50.226.0008, Oral History Interview with Genya Batasheva (April 1992), part 6, 28:00–49:00.

38 Siegelbaum and Moch, *Broad is my native land*, 52–53, and for the deportations, 316–319, 322–325. For articles in some regional newspapers, see USHMM RG-22.027M, GARF f. A-327, Reel 303, op. 2, d. 386, ll. 56, 70, 219.

able-bodied.³⁹ Irkutsk was not unique. In January 1945, a Moscow-based functionary in the resettlement administration chastised a regional official for ‘selecting settlers [...] for Saratov oblast who, *despite the resolution of the RSFSR’s C[ouncil of] P[eople’s] C[ommissars]* of 14 September [1944], are from families of evacuated citizens unfamiliar with agricultural work, clerical workers, and also the disabled.’⁴⁰ Part of the explanation for why such families predominated among settlers may lie in the desire of collective farm chairmen and other officials from the recruitment areas to hold onto ‘their own’ local people rather than the typically more needy, recently arrived evacuees.

But only part, for evacuees did have a say in the matter. They could choose to uproot themselves once again. In this respect at least, they were not like deportees. Little wonder that many rural-based evacuees volunteered to resettle, for they were not in an enviable position. As a former schoolteacher in Odessa wrote in March 1943 from a village in the Tatar ASSR, ‘I am here without work and cannot go on living here. Conditions are awful.’⁴¹ His words were echoed in a letter from a 21-year old woman, also from Odessa, requesting a ‘permanent place of settlement’ for her and her two-year old son, ‘in view of the fact that I can’t expect to return home soon and live very badly.’⁴² Seven families applied collectively to leave their rural refuge in the Mordovian ASSR because ‘they don’t provide us with products.’ Whoever wrote on behalf of the families seemed unfamiliar with their proposed destination, rendering it as ‘Erkutsk’ rather than Irkutsk.⁴³

Naked and Barefoot

‘They don’t provide us with products’ is a revealing statement. It suggests a degree of penury that some other letter-writing evacuees described in more vivid terms: ‘I am naked-barefoot’ (*golaia-bosaia*), wrote a woman who claimed to

39 USHMM RG-22.027M GARF f. A-327, Reel 44, op. 2, d. 42, l. 2.

40 Emphasis mine. GARF A-327, op. 2, d. 601, l. 94. An accompanying letter (ll. 95–96) from the assistant chairman of the Saratov executive committee notes that of 140 families recruited from the Chuvash autonomous republic, 68 consisted of evacuees from Karelia, Leningrad, Moscow, and other oblasts.

41 USHMM RG-22.027M GARF f. A-327, Reel 303, op. 2, d. 386, l. 168. It is unclear whether the application from this self-described invalid to resettle in Buriatia, east of Lake Baikal, was accepted.

42 USHMM RG-22.027M GARF f. A-327, Reel 303, op. 2, d. 386, l. 169.

43 USHMM RG-22.027M GARF f. A-327, Reel 303, op. 2, d. 386, l. 102.

have been evacuated first from Kiev to Stalingrad and then to a rural district in the Chuvash ASSR. 'I am alone [...] I have five brothers at the front and don't know anything about them. I am completely barefoot and naked (*bosaia i golaia*) and ask you to give me a pair of boots', wrote another woman, evacuated from Gomel and writing from the same Chuvash district. 'We all are *golye i bo-sye* and also sick', so a native of Khar'kov described himself, his wife, and three children, as they languished in the Mordovian ASSR.⁴⁴

Repeatedly coming across this '*golyi i boso!*' in the archives presents to the researcher a couple of methodological and interpretive challenges. The first is how to assess the literalness of the complaint. Was the condition of these evacuees as desperate as, say, the besieged Leningraders who pleaded with authorities to evacuate them? Likely, the repetition of the phrase in widely dispersed areas by people from different parts of the country meant it was part of the cultural repertoire of Soviet citizens. Evidence of its earlier appearance crops up among the letters cited by Alexopoulos: the family of a letter-writer from the North Caucasus 'walked around in the winter barefoot and hungry'.⁴⁵ Like 'I am starving', the claim of wartime evacuees may have indicated inadequacy rather than complete nakedness and shoelessness.

What is indisputable is that '*golyi i boso!*' – like 'I beg you to help me' and other such appeals – comprised part of the discourse between Soviet citizens and officialdom. This was a discourse of supplication strikingly different from one invoking such concepts as the rule of law, inalienable rights, the rights of workers in a socialist society, or those granted to all Soviet citizens.⁴⁶ Was this merely circumstantial – the result of sudden dislocation, dispossession, and dependency – or had the war irrevocably changed how citizens addressed authorities? Perhaps the key here is in recognising whom the 'naked and barefoot' evacuees were addressing: local officials with presumed access to supplies

44 USHMM RG-22.020 Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv Chuvashskoi Respubliki [GIACHR] f. R-835, op. 1, d. 354, l. 113, 14, 37; *Evakuatsiia v Kazakhstan: iz istorii evakuatsii naseleniia zapadnykh raionov SSSR v Kazakhstan, 1941–1942*, I. Grinberg, G. Karataev, N. Kropivnitskii (eds) (Almaty 2008) 33.

45 Alexopoulos, 'The ritual lament', 123. I have reversed word order in the quotation.

46 These silences are in marked contrast with the early 1930s when, 'it is clear that the language of workers' rights in a socialist state was involved', and later in that decade when the promulgation of a new constitution indicated 'a characteristically modern sensibility in which the rights of person figured prominently'. See Siegelbaum and Sokolov, *Stalinism as a way of life*, 12, 17. For more on the expression of workers' rights, see Jeffrey Rossman, *Worker resistance under Stalin: class and revolution on the shop floor* (Cambridge MA 2005).

of clothing, footwear, and other 'products'. For the sake of comparison, when in March 1942, a Cheliabinsk regional party functionary with a wife and son stuck in Leningrad wrote to the first secretary of that city's party committee, he argued that his eight years of work in the party organisation and involvement in the evacuation effort 'gives me the right, in my view, to more attention to my family's situation.'⁴⁷

A second challenge is to compare letter-writers with those who did not communicate with authorities in this fashion or whose letters are not preserved in the archives. To engage in this comparison is to confront a host of questions. Were those who wrote objectively more needy than those who did not write? Or, perhaps motivated by the strangeness (or unfriendliness) of their new environments, were they seeking to overcome their difficulties by appealing to authorities who were not physically present? How telling is it that the overwhelming majority of letters came from rural locations, many written by individuals evacuated from cities?⁴⁸

Over and above these issues, how are we to interpret the silence of so many evacuees and deportees? To even begin to answer this question, we need to abandon assumptions that our subjects behaved exclusively on an individualistic or familial basis. Recent work on the war years suggests that rather than relying exclusively on the state, millions of Soviet citizens established informal networks among workmates and neighbours to obtain scarce items, services, and information. Many of the associated activities including bartering, pilfering, and hoarding were at best semi-legal and therefore difficult to document, but using such sources as diaries and police records, we can reconstruct the dimensions of these networks, if not the degree of reliance on them.⁴⁹ It seems more than likely that both evacuees and deportees organised similar networks behind the backs of officials, as it were. They too belonged to evacuees' and deportees' repertoires of migration, part of how they responded to a state that

47 USHMM RG-22.033 TsGA St. P. f. 330, op. 2, d. 86, l. 1.

48 Partial data suggest that the majority of evacuees lived in rural areas – roughly two-thirds of the total in the Saratov, Gor'kii, and Kirov regions; more than four of every five in Penza, but less than 40 per cent in Novosibirsk. Figures are for April 1943 except for Novosibirsk, which are from January 1943. See USHMM RG-22.027 GARF f. A-327, Reel 42, op. 2, d. 26, ll. 25, 35, 49, 73; Edwards, 'Fleeing to Siberia', 231.

49 For example, Natalie Belsky, 'Forms and mechanisms of self-organization on the Soviet home front'; Aaron Hale-Dorrell, 'The kolkhoz market and provisioning the home front during World War II'; and Andrei Kabatskov, 'Sovetskii tyl: strategii vyzhivaniia, 1943–1944 gg. (po dnevnikam rabochego)', papers presented at conference on 'Stalinism and War' at the Higher School of Economics, Moscow, 24–26 May 2016.

had rounded up, transported, deposited far from home, but then all but abandoned them.

Conclusion

In the concluding chapter to the standard narrative of the Second World War, the millions of surviving soldiers who had traipsed across Europe or fought in Asia and the Pacific eventually returned home to help rebuild cities and towns the war had destroyed. But especially in the case of the Soviet Union, soldiers were as likely to rejoin their families – if they still had one – somewhere else than where they had left them. To an unprecedented degree, the war and the Soviet state's response to it uprooted millions of families, depositing them across the vastness of the country. Some went willingly and with gratitude; others were perplexed or apprehensive; and still others reacted with bitterness. Many – both evacuees and deportees – assumed they would be returning within months of their departures, and brought with them only as much in the way of clothing to last that long. The vast majority who survived the ordeal in fact stayed away for years, some (especially in the case of deportees) for more than a decade, and some for the rest of their lives.

Of the two regimes of migration imposed by the Soviet state on the civilian population during the war, evacuation was entirely new, although evacuation officials did have before them the (largely negative) example of their Imperial Russian predecessors. The NKVD, by contrast, had a wealth of its own experience to draw upon from the 1930s in deporting whole groups and thus proved quite efficient at doing so. Its exiling of nearly half a million Chechens to Kazakhstan, for example, was a well-oiled operation conducted essentially over a 24-hour period on 23 February 1944. The ways that both evacuees and deportees responded to their displacement repeated the practices of earlier migrants not due to any direct sharing of information, but rather because a similarity of circumstances produced similar responses.

These wartime experiences had significant long-term consequences, and not only for the displaced. The temporary residence in the Central Asian republics of so many elite institutions and personnel evacuated from Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, and other major cities profoundly altered scientific and cultural endeavours, although not without some colonialist overtones and grumbling from locals. German and Chechen deportees had difficulty defining their own territory on the northern Kazakh steppe, all the more so in that it also accommodated indigenous Kazakhs, special settlers from the 1930s, and eventually in the 1950s, Virgin Land settlers. Diaspora communities cherished the

notion of returning to the homeland one day even as individuals inter-married with people from other communities.⁵⁰ So many and so varied were the evacuees and deportees displaced by the war, that they could not help but compare themselves to others they encountered in their new locations. The experience of living far from home thus may not have made them any less national, but it did tend to make them more Soviet.

50 See Michaela Pohl, 'The "planet of one hundred languages": ethnic relations and Soviet identity in the Virgin Lands', in: Nicholas Breyfogle et al. (eds), *Peopling the Russian periphery* (London 2007), 238–261; *Evakuatsiia v Kazakhstan*, 2–21; Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: forging a Soviet city, 1930–1966* (Pittsburgh 2010) 73–74, 165–66; Erina Megowan, 'Evacuated theaters, wartime mobilization and the development of Soviet culture in the regions, 1941–1945', paper presented at annual conference of the Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies in San Antonio, 22 November 2014.