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Aliens and Internal Enemies: Internment Practices, Economic Exclusion and Property Rights during the First World War

Introduction

1. The First World War broke out at the peak of an era of intense migration flows. Millions of people had moved in the previous decades across the Atlantic and inside Europe.1 Thus, when war began, alongside minorities and diaspora groups like Jews, especially in multi-ethnic empires, there were millions of foreigners resident for many years in the belligerent countries and their colonies. Their numbers continued to rise as other countries joined the conflict.2

Security concerns, nationalist mobilisation and the spread of paranoia and spy fever transformed many of these foreigners into citizens of enemy nationality or into individuals whose loyalty and accountability had to be constantly monitored and scrutinised. Large groups of German migrants or persons of German origin in particular were to be found almost everywhere. The 1910 International Labour Office (ILO) survey showed 317,070 German-born people listed as residents in Britain, France and Russia. Two and a half million citizens of German nationality were registered in the United States of America. Germans were also numerous in South Africa (12,799), Canada (39,577) and New Zealand (4015), while a smaller number were registered in Asia (4153). On the other hand, the same survey indicated that 184,307 French, Britons and subjects of the Russian Empire resided in Germany and Austria-Hungary.3

However, the statistics underestimated the number of migrants and resident aliens. In addition they did not take into account people who, because of their origin, would be perceived and dealt with, also in legal terms, either as enemy aliens or internal enemies in spite of their citizenship status. Moreover, the statistics did not register people who, in peacetime, had shared multiple identities and allegiances; they could not distinguish between naturalised citizens and citizens by birth;4 and

2 Furthermore, the First World War broke out during the summer, and there were people travelling abroad for either pleasure or seasonal work.
4 For example, naturalised US citizens of German
they could not show the numbers of women who had acquired an enemy nationality by way of marriage.\textsuperscript{5} Notwithstanding these inaccuracies, the perception of the dangerousness of foreigners and minorities was so acute that it became impossible for them to hide and live on the margins of society.

The First World War thus became the first conflict during which a complex system of measures against enemy civilians was introduced and minorities were targeted as such. These measures had their roots in a series of political developments that were underway since at least the 1880s. The «ethnicization» of citizenship, apparent for example in the new citizenship laws passed in 1912 and 1913 in Italy and Germany respectively,\textsuperscript{6} the tendency toward a stricter control of migration movements,\textsuperscript{7} the increasing number of expelled undesired individuals,\textsuperscript{8} the introduction of legal tools to reshape the population's composition and distribution, such as the population exchanges legally sanctioned at the end of the Balkan wars,\textsuperscript{9} were all outcomes of the parallel emergence of territoriality and the idea that the state ought to be coherent and homogeneous within its borders.\textsuperscript{10}

In particular, anti-alienism had its antecedents in the idea – already in place in the European countries that had been affected by the first wave of mass migration – that «aliens» constituted a threat to security, welfare and national integrity. In the second half of the nineteenth century debates on nation and loyalty, demographic decline and miscegenation, purity and fear of degeneration, race and eugenics proliferated, as mass migration and changes in the labour market on the one hand, and the increase of public welfare provisions on the other, raised the question of who were entitled to access welfare benefits. Governments were thus urged to adopt strong policies of either assimilation or expulsion and border controls.\textsuperscript{11} At the same time, nation-building, and the introduction of compulsory military service in particular,
made governments think about the loyalty and trustworthiness of specific population groups.

Once the war had broken out, a blood-based conception of citizenship and national belonging gained the upper hand in many belligerent countries. In an upsurge of anti-alienism, foreign nationals were regarded as suspects, even though many of them had spent most of their lives in their countries of residence having taken out naturalisation papers, embraced their new language and habits, and in many circumstances they had shown loyalty to their adopted «fatherland».

Urged by popular protests, the spread of spy fever and the nationalistic press, the governments of the belligerent countries intervened. After a year of war, they had almost «sorted out» the thorny problem of enemy aliens. Thousands of them, men in military age in particular, but also women and children had been interned in camps or confined in remote areas. Thousands had been repatriated or were waiting for repatriation or exchange in the limbo of a transit camp in the territory of a neutral country. Also the sequestration of enemy property was gaining momentum on a big scale. Governments and armies of the belligerent countries had gained successfully the first victories against enemy aliens sanitising the streets of the big cities as well as the borderlands. Yet anti-alienism did not subside. It was regularly re-activated by the explosion of crises with large, international echo like, for example, the sinking of the Lusitania.12 Above all, it expanded well beyond the category of the so-called enemy aliens. Particularly dire crises such as food shortage transformed even friendly and neutral aliens into targets.13

But it was in the multi-ethnic empires where war served, from the very beginning, as a catalyst of anti-alien inspired violence, affecting in particular those individuals and minorities whose loyalty was under scrutiny, although to diverse degrees. Thereby, suspicion towards these groups and individuals would be based on origin, religious belief, former nationality, language or an alleged affinity with the enemy. The number of perceived enemies or enemy groups depended on internal factors (political equilibrium among governments’ parties, pressure imposed by nationalist press and public opinion, tension and competition between civil and military administration) as well as on international factors and of course on the course of the war. But above all, it depended (and not only in multi-ethnic empires) on what Mark von

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For example (and the list could be much longer) Russian Jews in France or Britain were accused to profit of their particular status of «political» refugees to avoid enlistment; Italians, Spaniards and Belgians were blamed for steeling the jobs of the citizens-soldiers; Swiss merchants and entrepreneurs were denounced for unfair competition or for being «disguised» Germans.
Hagen has called the militarisation and mobilisation of ethnicity, that is «the politization of ethnic differences and the overlaying of an ethnic or national dimension to many otherwise non-national political, economic, and social conflicts».

Anti-alienism took many forms and targeted different groups, minorities and individuals in Western, Eastern and Southern-Eastern Europe, and, although to quite diverse degrees and scales of violence, it operated in nation-states and in multi-ethnic empires, in liberal democracies and in authoritarian regimes. Resorting to the rhetoric of public emergency and the constitutional tools of the state of exception, most governments and parliaments distinguished between citizens and aliens, established a loyalty/disloyalty divide – which opposed even fathers and sons, or husbands and wives – and defined ethnic origin as the decisive factor in order to determine the dangerousness of a group. In the name of security, countries at war thus restricted the freedom of the public, persecuted enemy aliens and minorities, broke municipal and international laws, and violated the fundamental rights of their own citizens.

The war thus often became an opportunity to remove «aliens» and to simplify societies by making them more homogenous. By considering how governments and armies took this opportunity and treated enemy aliens and minorities as well as the attitude of public opinion and popular perceptions toward «aliens», it is possible to shed some light on the role of nationalism and its ability to boost mobilisation in and for the war, weaving the banner of patriotism, occupying the entire political scene, marginalising any alternative discourse, reducing almost to silence any form of opposition such as pacifism or universalism, and effacing the outcomes achieved by internationalism and economic globalisation. By analysing policies and discourses on aliens it is also possible to underline the contribution made by the war to migration control and population policies that became standard methods in the twentieth century, as well as the violent practices introduced and tested during the conflict.

However, only in the past two decades historical studies on the First World War have begun to deal with enemy civilians and minorities as part of a general shift of interest from combatants and battlefields to non-combatants and home fronts. The focus on violence against civilians, especially in occupied territories, and on its radicalisation has contributed to a major change in the historiography of the conflict.17

17 For recent examples: A. Kramer, Dynamic of De-
New topics such as occupations, daily life in cities, refugees, forced migrations, deportation, forced labour, internal enemies, internment of civilians, etc. have emerged, and they have been instrumental in the renewal of research on the First World War. This renewal has also taken place thanks to approaches such as gender history, cultural history and transnationalism, which have helped shape the new agenda on the Great War. In particular, research on enemy aliens and their treatment, and more generally on minorities, has seen a surge of studies in the past two decades. Yet this topic remains on the margins of interpretation of the First World War and has not made its way into mainstream research. The issue of enemy aliens and minorities is only rarely mentioned in general interpretations or in textbooks on the First World War, especially those focusing on the Western Front, and even recent comprehensive monographs barely mention this topic. No reference to enemy aliens is to be found in the various encyclopaedias published in the last decade in Germany, France and Italy, and John Horne’s *Companion to WWI* touches upon enemy aliens very briefly, although it devotes more space to minorities, which are also considered with a dedicated chapter by the recent published *Cambridge History of the First World War* edited by Jay Winter. Of course, minorities feature more prominently in studies focused on eastern or south-eastern territories. The subject has been addressed diversely in different countries, but in general the literature on enemy aliens and minorities has suffered from the same limitations that affect historiography on the First World War: too much attention to the Western Front and the predominance of an almost exclusively national perspective.

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In this introduction it is obviously impossible to reconstruct the evolution of research on enemy aliens and minorities, and to draw an accurate map of it. However, by considering the available sources and literature it is possible to indicate some of the major turning points and single out four different phases.
The first coincided with the war and its aftermath, and featured three different kinds of publications. International jurists were then the group of scholars most engaged with the enemy alien problem. They started collecting information and discussing internment, but above all sequestration and confiscation of enemy property as the problems unfolded and governments took action. Between 1915 and the early 1920s, scholarly journals such as *The American Journal of International Law*, the *Journal du Droit International*, the *Revue Générale de Droit International Publique*, or the *Zeitschrift für Völkerrecht* published a number of articles on topics that had not been foreseen by any of the international conventions signed in the previous decades. In particular James W. Garner, jurist and political scientist at the University of Chicago, published under the title «Some Questions of International Law in European War» a series of sixteen articles, three of which were devoted to the «Treatment of Enemy Aliens».

Garner's essays are still indispensable for those wishing to start research on the treatment of enemy aliens in the war, both for the amount of information that they provide and their comparative range. Other international lawyers such as Norman Bentwich, Edwin Borchard, George Cohn, Edouard Clunet, Amos S. Hershey, Hermann Klibanski, Josef Kohler, Baron Boris Nolde, Ronald Roxburgh, Ernest M. Satow, and Jules Valery also paid attention to this issue, and in particular to the aspects concerning private law. While some of these authors continued to criticise and argue against the measures which affected enemy aliens, others, in particular French jurists, shifted from denouncing the violation of international law to full endorsement of the policy adopted by their respective states.

A second type of publication that appeared during the war and its immediate aftermath were the recollections written by enemy civilians interned in internment camps, particularly in Germany, and the inquiries on violence and the practice of civilian internment. A third type were the memoirs of the diplomats involved in the negotiations for the exchange of prisoners or entrusted with the protection of enemy civilians. Many of the books and pamphlets emphasised the cruelty of the enemy or his inhuman behaviour, and were intended to contribute to the propaganda efforts to bring parliaments, governments and public opinion to support the anti-alien campaign or to force the enemy to apply the 1906 Geneva Convention also to civilian internees.

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The best known accounts of this period are probably the reminiscences of the US ambassador in Berlin, James W. Gerard, which were also adapted for the cinema in 1918, apparently with great success, and *Ambassador Morgenthau’s Story*, the recollections and reports by the US ambassador in Anatolia, Henry Morgenthau, who made a large international audience aware of the Armenian genocide. Gerard visited the internment camps where British civilians were interned, in particular the camp of Ruhleben on the north-west outskirts of Berlin. He negotiated the repatriation and exchange of internees, was active in defending the rights of enemy aliens and when the US entered the war, he could recount the hardships he had suffered during wartime in Germany. Morgenthau's recollections, which documented the Armenian deportations and massacres, also touched upon the few enemy aliens – French, British and Italian – still on the territory of the Ottoman Empire at the outbreak of the war, and the many Jews who had recently migrated from the Russian Empire to Palestine.

Besides Morgenthau and Gerard, other US ambassadors – Walter Hines Page, Eric Fischer Wood, Lee Meriwether, Charles J. Vopicka – worked hard during the neutrality period to ensure the fair treatment of the enemy aliens who happened to be in Britain, France or the Balkans, and they mentioned their experiences in their recollections, frequently offering to historians today interesting insights on internment, exchange negotiations, violence and the struggle for making the different governments and armies comply with the rules set out by international conventions.

The second phase, namely the inter-war years, was marked by the intense activity of the International Committee of the Red Cross and of the International Association of International Lawyers, which prepared a convention on the treatment of enemy civilians. The League of Nations for its part was occupied with settling claims deriving from the minority treaty, and several official inquiries on the violations of international law were published. Meanwhile, personal accounts on internment still appeared together with articles and books by jurists who continued to analyse violation of the rights of aliens, in particular with respect to their property rights.

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29 The ICRC was able to present a final draft at the Tokyo Conference in 1934 entitled *International Convention on the Condition and Protection of Civilians of enemy nationality who are on territory belonging to or occupied by a belligerent*. A Draft convention for the protection of civilian populations in time of war was presented in 1937 by the International Law Association.
31 Among others, for example, those by E. Stibbe (1919), H. Pirenne (1920), M. Andina (1921), R. Rocker (1925), P. Cohen-Forheim (1931), and A. Kuncz (1931).
Further personal accounts of diplomats or people involved in humanitarian intervention were also published. The third phase coincided with the aftermath of the Second World War: the scale of internment of enemy aliens during that war was of course larger and involved more countries and their colonies. Law scholars in particular started again to question international law and the behaviour of belligerent countries on issues such as internment of enemy aliens and sequestration of enemy property.

There then ensued a long silence until the fourth phase. It was in the last decade of the twentieth century when historians became interested in the internment and treatment of enemy aliens during the First World War. However, some national historiographies have almost completely neglected the issue. Except for a few books and articles on the internment of enemy civilians, there is almost no research on Germany, France and the Habsburg Empire, and Italian scholars have only recently started to deal with the subject. Captivity has thus far been the best researched aspect. Although there is still a great deal to say and we still lack a reliable estimate of the number of civilians forced behind barbed wire, today we can draw on a marginal larger body of literature that reconstructs civilian internment in specific countries and internment camps such as Ruhleben, Thalerhof and Katzenau, or that deals with humanitarian intervention and diplomacy.

Yet enemy aliens and minorities did not only experience internment or confinement. Internment was just one aspect and not always the worst in the complex tangle of policies targeting enemy aliens and minorities. Besides internment and confinement, each belligerent country adopted a combination of measures encompassing actions such as expulsion, repatriation, displacement, denationalisation, and sequestration of assets, resorting, and in extreme cases, massacre and genocide. Very few books have dealt with the issue in its multifaceted aspects and taken both a top-down (the State, the army) as well as a bottom-up perspective (popular reaction, public opinion).40 Thanks to the increasing interest in migration and ethnic communities, more research has focused instead on the victims, and in particular on the fate of Germans, who formed the largest group of enemy aliens in the countries at war.41

As this special issue shows, in recent years research on enemy aliens and minorities has started to adopt an interdisciplinary as well as comparative and transnational approach. This is most welcome because, on the one hand, the enemy aliens issue raises questions pertaining to international law, human rights, humanitarianism, the status of foreigners, and the ambiguity between citizenship and ethnic belonging. On the other, it is indispensable to consider the discrimination and persecution of enemy aliens and minorities from a comparative and global perspective in order to integrate and compare research on Eastern and South-Eastern Europe with research on Western Europe.

Discrimination, persecution and exploitation affected many, either individually or as part of a specific collective category, because their «nationality» was at odds with their citizenship/subjecthood, regardless of the duration of their residence, their personal stories, their feelings, beliefs and sense of belonging. Armenians in the Ottoman Empire constitute the most prominent example, but the list of those who experienced discrimination and violence was much longer: Jews and ethnic Germans in the Russian Empire, ethnic Italians, Ruthenians/Ukrainians or Serbians in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Alsatians and Lorranians on both sides, to name only the cases that are dealt with in this collection of articles.

In order to respond to the threat – no matter whether real or supposed – posed by enemy aliens and minorities, almost all states which took part in the First World War enacted emergency measures which led to the hasty closure of state borders, the suspension of naturalisation procedures (and later the introduction of denationalisation statutes), and immediately afterwards to limited personal freedom, restricted civil and political liberties and curbed property rights (by the end of 1914, all the
countries at war had already issued the main provisions on internment, deportation, property rights, and civil liberties). As in particular the articles by Lohr and Üngör, Stibbe and my own show, restriction of freedom, removal, displacement or internment were often preconditions for attacking also property rights.

3.

This special issue, which appears on the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, aims at shedding light on the measures adopted and at understanding how anti-alienism developed in the belligerent countries: what discourses and representations supported its spread, how belligerent countries responded to popular reaction against aliens and to the alleged threat they represented. Yet we also focus on the very consequences these policies and actions had for the alleged enemy aliens.

By comparing different belligerent states, the articles demonstrate that, while warring countries shared many features in matters of policies and attitudes, the implementation of these same policies, their consequences, and the way in which they impacted on the lives of the targeted individuals varied enormously. As it emerges from the articles in this collection, the cases of Britain, France and Germany are, for instance, extremely similar to those of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, as far as policies on property rights are considered. In all these countries sequestration and liquidation of enemy (and internal enemy) assets was thoroughly conducted and successfully pursued (Germany of course because of the defeat could not complete the procedures and had to return property to their legitimate owners). On the other hand, if we look at policies of internment and deportation, we also see significant differences with respect to the course of events within specific states – as is underlined by Stibbe – and also between states, as the diverse outcomes of the deportation of Jews in the Russian Empire and of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire demonstrate.

Three themes prove crucial. The first is the increase in hostility towards aliens, enemy aliens, suspect civilians, and minorities. As the war progressed and new countries joined the Entente Powers in 1915, 1916 and 1917, the Central Powers had to deal with «new» groups of enemy aliens: Italians, Romanians, Portuguese, US citizens, and so on. At the same time, the entrance of new countries into the war changed the perception of the dangerousness of certain internal minorities in the borderlands. As Matthew Stibbe’s research reveals, the policies adopted in the Austro-Hungarian Empire against the Ruthenians accused of having affinity with the Russians were adopted also against the ethnic-Italians as Italy entered the conflict in May 1915 (while
Actually, ascertain national identity was particularly difficult everywhere, since there were very few people who could present to officials a passport or any other piece of identification. The chef of the Cabinet de Préfecture de Police in Paris, for example, wrote that almost all the 500,000 foreigners who were in Paris at the outbreak of the war had no passport at all and commented: «Que de difficultés pour reconnaître l’ivraie du bon grain!». H. Maunoury, *Police de guerre* (1914–1919), Paris 1937, 26. Furthermore, some of the countries at war (France, Britain, Italy, etc.) introduced in the anti-alien legislation exceptions concerning certain types of «nationalities», such as Austro-Hungarian Poles or Czechs, non-Turkish Ottomans, thus complicating the task of bureaucracies engaged in the identification procedures.
Empire (Üngör and Lohr.). Campaigns aimed at the economic exclusion of aliens were launched in different countries and pursued with varying degrees of enthusiasm and intensity, and restriction of freedom, removal, displacement or internment were often preconditions for attacking also property rights. Notwithstanding the general agreement on the illegitimacy of any kind of assault on property rights, governments and armies implemented a wide range of measures, which ranged from boycott and discrimination to sequestration, expropriation and eventually confiscation and liquidation of firms, lands, assets, patents, etc. Industrialists, commentators and politicians maintained that the war was an excellent opportunity to «purge» the entire economy, taking everything – public utilities, insurance societies, land, assets, patents, firms, banks – out of alien hands. These measures and policies were frequently anticipated or accompanied by the mobilisation of public opinion. The articles analyse in particular the extent to which nationalism and economic nationalism inspired the measures against enemy aliens and internal enemies, and the ways in which these provisions affected the protection of property rights and the rule of law, challenging both economic globalisation and conventional methods of warfare.

Finally, the articles fill a gap in the vast literature on the First World War by showing that the way in which governments, parliaments and armies dealt with enemy civilians and internal enemies is a good example of the actions by which states at war attempted to regain control of populations, economies and borders, and to re-establish sovereignty especially in key territories and peripheries.

Research conducted so far and the articles collected in this issue clearly demonstrate that wartime measures reversed the idea that every state was compelled to treat aliens in compliance with the principles of the law of nations and to grant them equality with its own citizens before the law as far as safety of the person and property were concerned; and that the measures targeting enemy aliens and minorities impacted on individual rights and in particular on the supposed pillar of the liberal state, that is, property rights.

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