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Introduction

AS THE WAR ENDED, with Soviet troops occupying east Germany and British and American occupying the western part of the country, one of the most immediate problems was what to do with the hordes of people—a total of up to ten million Allied troops, prisoners of war, German expellees from Eastern Europe, forced laborers and refugees from Eastern Europe, in addition to the normal German population—milling about.[1] The displaced civilians included survivors of Nazi concentration camps and forced laborers brought to Germany during the war, often against their will, from the occupied territories of Eastern and Western Europe. But among them were also Soviet and East European citizens who had retreated westward with the Germans at the end of the war, as well as others who continued to stream out of Eastern Europe after the Allied victory. On the military side, several million Soviet soldiers had ended the war as prisoners in German POW camps. Another substantial group of former Soviet soldiers, recruited from those same camps during the war to fight against the Soviets under German command, found themselves interned after the war, along with the German troops, in Allied camps for enemy POWs.

Sorting all this out was a task of formidable complexity. The short-term solution was to register the civilians, and later the released POWs, as "displaced persons" (quickly shortened to "DPs"—"di-pi" in all languages), delouse and feed them, and put them in camps to await repatriation. But it soon became clear that many DPs, especially from the Soviet Union, were unwilling to repatriate. This created a major diplomatic problem that was to be a bone of contention between the Soviet Union and its wartime Allies, Britain and the United States, in the first years of the Cold War. The Soviets demanded "their" people back; the Western Allies prevaricated, tacitly declining after the first months to cooperate. In 1947, the Allies decided on a solution for the disposal

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of the unrepatriable "hard core" of about a million DPs from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe: they were to be resettled outside Europe in whatever countries would take them, which turned out to be primarily in North America, Australasia, South America, and (for Jewish DPs) the new state of Israel. The Soviet Union was outraged at what it regarded as the "theft" of its citizens by labor-hungry capitalists.

In this book, I tell the story of the "DP question" that confronted the Allies at the end of the Second World War and its resolution, primarily through resettlement, in the late 1940s and early '50s. It is, on the one hand, a story of governments and diplomacy, partly fought out in the newly created United Nations, with the Soviet Union and its Eastern European supporters increasingly at odds with the United States, Britain, and the countries of Western Europe. This story starts at the war's end with what seemed to be an unproblematic concerted Allied effort to return all prisoners of war and forced laborers to the countries from which they came; traces the breakdown of the wartime alliance and the emergence of the Cold War; and ends with the successful implementation of a very ambitious, largely American-financed resettlement program, whose budget the US Congress would never have approved had it not seen the DPs in Cold War terms, namely, as victims of communism.

Conflict over displaced persons was a relatively minor issue in the developing antagonisms of the Cold War but one on which Soviet sensitivities and feeling of grievance were particularly pronounced. It was humiliating, in the first place, that so many Soviet DPs refused to repatriate. To be sure, most of the refuseniks came not from the "old" (pre-1939) Soviet Union but from the territories of the Baltic, Western Ukraine, and Belorussia unwillingly incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1939 as a result of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. As Moscow pretended there was no difference between the two groups, however, its spokesmen could scarcely point this out. Like the Marshall Plan for postwar reconstruction of Western Europe, DP resettlement was seen by the Soviets as an example of indecent amounts of capitalist money being thrown around with the intention of damaging the Soviet Union. But the resettlement of Soviet DPs was an even more bitter blow, since in Soviet eyes it involved the illegal appropriation of Soviet property (its citizens).

Running in parallel to the great power story is the story of the displaced persons themselves, from arrival in the camps to departure to various destinations a few years later. DPs have often been described as "pawns of fate," people who had lost control over their destiny and were at the mercy of the vicissitudes of war and then of great power diplomacy. It is a poignant image, and one that

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appealed to DPs and their children in retrospect, but in fact it is only a partial truth. What happened in the real world is different not only from the story told in institutional archives but also from the story told in memoirs. The closer one looks at DP life in (and out of) the camps, the more striking is the degree of agency, both collective and individual, that the DPs exercised.[2]

Refusing to repatriate was the first great exercise of agency, but that was only the visible tip of the iceberg. DPs were registered by name, age, and nationality—but these were essentially what the DPs themselves said they were: the Allies had no means of checking, any more than they could check an individual DP's claims to be single and not to have collaborated with the Germans during the war. It was collective DP pressure that forced the Allies, against their initial intentions, to allow individual DP camps to assume national identities, and subsequently to accept first "Jewish" and later "Ukrainian" as nationalities. It was individual DPs who decided whether or not to live in the camps (many simply collected their rations there and lived in towns), whether or not to work (it was allowed but not mandated) or continue their education (free tuition at German universities was on offer), or whether, if female, to take advantages of the camps' mini–welfare states and have babies. Once the resettlement program got under way, with different national selection committees open for applications, it was up to the DPs to decide where to try their luck.

Those two parallel stories—great power diplomacy and DP agency—could be told of all the "hard core" DPs left under Western Allied control after the war's end and the large-scale repatriation to various countries that followed in the first months. That would include Poles (the largest group), Jews (mainly from Poland), Yugoslavs, Czechs, and contingents from all the other East European countries, as well as DPs of Soviet origin. But this book is specifically about *Soviet* DPs—or, more precisely, the DPs the Soviet claimed as their own. That group included not only citizens of the pre-1939 Soviet Union—who, by Soviet law, possessed an official nationality such as Russian, Ukrainian, Belorussian, Georgian, Jewish, Tatar, or Kalmyk, in addition to their shared Soviet citizenship—but also residents of the territories incorporated into the Soviet Union under the Nazi-Soviet Pact, namely Latvians, Lithuanians, and Estonians from the previously independent Baltic states; West Ukrainians and West Belorussians who had formerly been citizens of Poland; and even some Bessarabians who had formerly been citizens of Rumania.

The Soviet DPs had several characteristics that make them particularly fruitful objects of study. First, they were the subject of an "ownership" struggle

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between the Soviet Union and the Allies that was one of the foundational conflicts of the Cold War. Second, individual Soviet DPs often went under false identities (Polish, Yugoslav, stateless Russian, and so on) to avoid discovery and forced repatriation. Deceptive practices, always of interest to social historians, are treated in this book as a significant form of DP agency, tacitly condoned by the Western authorities but initiated by the DPs themselves.

The Allies often used "Russian" as a synonym for "Soviet" in a DP context. But the Soviet Union was a multinational state (though with Russian as the lingua franca), whose inhabitants not only held Soviet citizenship but were also classified by nationality. Among Soviet DPs, Russians-by-nationality were only a minority, although a substantial one. To complicate the matter further, Soviet Russians were not the only Russians in the postwar DP population: there were also "stateless" Russians, émigrés who had left Russia after the 1917 revolution and lived in Paris, Berlin, Prague, or Belgrade ever since. The émigrés initially often had difficulty gaining official acceptance as DPs (not least because of suspicion of collaboration with the Nazis), but these were later smoothed over. For a Soviet Russian, a popular way of avoiding repatriation was to declare oneself a stateless Russian émigré. The Russian émigrés, therefore, have to be a part of our story.

Of the Soviet Union's many nationalities, Ukrainians and Belorussians were overrepresented among DPs, largely because the places they had lived were closest to the West, had come under the longest wartime occupation by the Germans, and consequently had supplied the largest number of wartime forced laborers (in addition to those who departed voluntarily with the retreating Germans at the end of the war.) Many of the Ukrainian DPs were in fact "Polish Ukrainians" or "West Ukrainians," not Soviet citizens before 1939; but, as this was a category that the Western Allies generally regarded as nonrepatriable to the Soviet Union, "Soviet Ukrainians" (Central and East Ukrainians from prewar Soviet Ukrainian republic) also claimed it to avoid repatriation. The Ukrainian theme—including the subcategory of "Cossack" favored by many of the most militant Ukrainian-speaking anti-Soviet groups—is a complex and important part of this book's story.

DPs from the Baltic states (Latvians, Lithuanians, and Estonians) were another large DP group that the Soviets regarded as citizens who should be repatriated. That brings them willy-nilly into my story, which in no way implies that I see them in any real sense as "Soviet." Most of them had fled westward in the autumn of 1944, at the time of the German retreat from occupation of their territories, to avoid living under Soviet occupation for a second time.

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Baltic DPs were, in fact, so different in their behavior and reputation from "prewar-Soviet" DPs (mainly Russians and Ukrainians) that I often use the contrast (particularly with the Latvians, the Baltic group I know best) to point out the diversity within the broad category of Soviet-claimed DPs.

Jewish DPs are another group that cannot be left out. For many historians, Jews were the quintessential DPs: their story was one the one that, in 1945–46, first hit the headlines in the United States and set the parameters of understanding for an international public. In fact the majority of DPs were not Jewish but Slavic or from the Baltics. The Jewish DPs did not like the non-Jewish DPs, associating them with their wartime persecution, and Slavic and Baltic DPs often returned this dislike. The Jewish DPs refused repatriation to their countries of origin because those countries had rejected them. In the case of the Slavic and Baltic DPs claimed by the Soviet Union, it was the opposite—it was not that the Soviet Union rejected the DPs but that the DPs rejected the Soviet Union.[3]

It is important to keep the Jewish thread in the story not because it represents all the others but because in important ways it was so different. At the same time, there are intriguing areas of commonality, not least a shared knowledge of Russian. Polish Jews—the largest single Jewish group in the DP camps—had, for the most part, survived the Holocaust by spending the war years in the Soviet Union. This was sometimes a matter of choice, via eastward flight from the Nazis or Soviet evacuation from the newly incorporated West Ukrainian and Western Belorussian territories, and sometimes the result of deportation by Soviet authorities, but the outcome was the same: most (after an amnesty for the deportees) survived, living among Russian speakers during the war and picking up some Russian if they did not already know it. At the end of the war, the Polish Jews (along with ethnic Poles) were allowed to leave the Soviet Union for Poland, from which many quickly moved on to Austria and Germany, becoming late and contested additions to the DP category. As this large group of Polish Jews moved west, a much smaller number of individual Jewish DPs of Soviet origin, some of whose stories will be told in later chapters, were moving east from Germany and Austria as voluntary Soviet repatriates.[4]

Lost Souls, the title of this book, refers not only to the DPs' uprooted state and uncertain future but also to the old Russian use of the word "soul" (*dusha*) as

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a unit of property under serfdom, when a noble landowner's wealth was defined not so much by acreage as by the number of souls (serfs) on his estate. The Russian state, too, was an owner of peasant serfs, and this concept of the workforce as a form of property persisted in subterranean form in the Soviet Union, notably in the Soviet Union's reaction to its loss of almost half a million citizens in the postwar DP camps in Europe.

For the DPs themselves, being "lost" turned out to be only a temporary state, with the great powers offering competitive exit paths, and the DPs themselves weighing the available options. **Repatriation,** the exit path offered by the Soviets, was one of the two major options for DPs. Large-scale involuntary repatriation was a phenomenon only of 1945 and the beginning of 1946, but a small stream of voluntary repatriates continued to flow until the early 1950s. While this was a minority choice, it is an intriguing one—all the more in that Soviet reentry interviews (discovered in Russian archives at an early stage of my research) supply information on DP attitudes and choices not to be found elsewhere. **Resettlement**, the exit path offered by the Western Allies after several years of uncertainty, with the United States, Australia, Israel, and Canada the main destinations, was the option chosen by the majority of those who had not repatriated by the end of 1945. **Remaining** in Germany and Austria, the third and minority outcome, emerged as a last resort at the end of the 1940s, with the closure of the camps after the departure and resettlement of most DPs. For some of those who remained, this was not so much a choice as fate: many were DPs who, because of age, infirmity, security problems, or undesirable (intellectual) professions failed to be selected by any national selection committee for resettlement. Others—including, no doubt, some of the most successful at one of the DPs' basic trades, black-marketeering—preferred to stay.

Repatriation was the explicit mission of the first international refugee organization in charge of DPs, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). Set up during the war by the Allies, including the Soviet Union, UNRRA was a wide-ranging reconstruction and relief agency for which repatriation of displaced persons was only one of a number of charges, several of which were considered more urgent. Once the United Nations Organization (UN) was formed in 1945, UNRRA, while remaining a constitutionally independent and separately funded entity, functioned almost as a part of the UN, with major policy issues debated on the floor of the UN's General Assembly. On repatriation, UNRRA acted in association with the military governments of the three Western occupation zones (American, Brit-

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ish, and French) in Germany and Austria. (The authorities in the Soviet zone did not recognize the category of DPs, simply repatriating such persons with all possible speed from their zone and dispatching anomalous cases for the Allies to deal with.) A truly international organization in its staffing, UNRRA was initially willing to cooperate with the Soviet Union. This won it a reputation as a do-gooding agency, soft on communism, that lost it the confidence of its main financial backer, the United States. The advent of what British prime minister Winston Churchill famously called an "iron curtain" dividing Europe between East and West made the continuation of UNRRA—and in particular the large part of its funding that came from the US Congress—untenable. It went out of business in 1947.

UNRRA's successor was the International Refugee Organization, IRO, still an international body but more effectively under US control and almost fully funded by the US Congress. IRO took resettlement of DPs as its central mission, to the outrage of the Soviet Union, which had declined to join the organization. This institutional switch coincided with the onset of the Cold War, and resettlement was one of the period's early signature policies. While IRO's Cold War orientation was not absolute—it inherited many of UNRRA's staffers, including a contingent of Americans whose prior experience was in President Roosevelt's "New Deal" agencies—it was much more clearly than UNRRA a Western institution implicitly at odds with the Soviet Union. In the latter years of IRO's resettlement program, which ran from 1947 to the early 1950s, the occupation governments of the British, French, and US zones withdrew, handing over authority to the new US-supported Federal Republic of Germany—the western portion of a now divided Germany whose other (smaller and weaker) portion, formerly the Soviet occupation zone, became the German Democratic Republic.[5]

It was during IRO's tenure that the conventional understanding of the meaning of "displaced person" underwent a significant change to fit the new Cold War environment. Initially, "displaced persons"—most of them from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union—had been officially defined by UNRRA as victims of Nazism and war. From around 1947, without any formal change in definition, DPs began to be seen in a different light as victims of communism, whose unwillingness to repatriate to their native lands, now under varying degrees of pro-Soviet communist control, was the essential cause of their displacement. One consequence of this shift was that collaboration with the Nazis, previously a major impediment to the acquisition of DP status (a prerequisite for IRO resettlement), ceased to be much of a problem. Even wartime

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military service under German command by Russians, Ukrainians, and Latvians was now represented as indicative of a desire to fight Soviet communism rather than of any positive sympathy for the Nazi cause.

Sources

The handling of the DP issue by the great powers and the international relief organizations is recorded in their respective archives, which, as usual with state and organizational archives, are particularly illuminating when it comes to bureaucratic conflicts. I have tried to tell the diplomatic story not just from the more familiar Western side but also from the Soviet side, using Russian-language as well as English-, French- and German-language sources, published and archival. Among the resettlement countries, the one whose archives I have used most extensively is Australia (second only to the United States in the number of DP migrants accepted), a necessary strategy for a historian living in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic, when most of this book was written, but one that has the advantage of putting the United States, whose resettlement history is the most familiar, in a comparative perspective.

Archives are generally much better at informing historians about political and diplomatic developments than about individual experience. For the DP experience, in all its variety, historians are bound to rely mainly on memoirs (an immensely valuable source, even though the way people see things fifty years after the event is likely to be different from the way they saw it at the time), supplemented by bureaucratic material such as reports made by UNRRA and IRO officials on conditions in the DP camps. In the West, nobody systematically interviewed arriving DP migrants, although some material from the selection committees is available in the archives of resettlement countries. The Soviet authorities, however, did conduct loosely structured interviews with repatriates that turn out to be surprisingly illuminating about DP attitudes and choices more generally. Another rich source of individual DP lives—which, to my knowledge, has no counterpart elsewhere in the diaspora—is the Australian Russian-language journal *Avstraliada*, which for two decades published memoirs and biographies of Russian DPs resettled after the war in Australia.[6]

Finally, there is a source that has particular significance for me: the papers of my husband, Michael Danos (Misha to me; Mischka to those who knew him in the German years), and his mother, Olga Danos, both DPs from Riga in Germany in the postwar years. When Misha died in 1999 I inherited these

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very rich papers, including diaries and regular letters between the two over the years 1944–51 (fortunately for the historian, they almost always lived in different German cities and DP camps); these are now in Special Collections at the University of Chicago. The letters of the resourceful and entrepreneurial Olga taught me a great deal about DP agency and options that does not show up in other types of documentation. I also learned much from interviews after Misha's death with his Latvian friends and DP contemporaries, who told their parallel stories (along with their reactions to Misha's version!) from their individual perspectives.[7]

As for Misha, it is not only from papers or interviews that I have his story but from intimacy with the man himself at a time, forty years on, when he was finally ready to think about this episode of his youth. Misha is always a presence when I am working on DPs, providing not only the case study I know best but also a kind of running commentary, audible only to me, on the events and circumstances I am writing about. From time to time in this book, I throw in a small quotation from that commentary, to remind the reader that, however detached my style as a professional historian, I have a personal stake in the subject matter of this book.

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