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Julia S. Torre, *“For Their Own Good”: Civilian Evacuations in Germany and France, 1939-1945*. Oxford: Berghahn, 2010. 269 pp. \$95.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-1-84545-725-9.

Review by Simon Kitson, Institute for Historical Research.

Julia Torre’s study is part of a surge of interest in population movements in World War Two as she explores the policies, philosophies and experiences of population evacuations in World War Two France and Germany. Hanna Diamond and Nicole Dombrowski’s studies of the 1940 exodus, Lynne Taylor’s study of migration in post-war Germany and Laura Downs’s on-going study of wartime evacuation in France and Britain are other examples of recent interest in related topics. Of these only Downs has engaged in the ambitious task of trying to compare two countries’ experiences of wartime population movement. Inevitably with comparative studies there will be accusations that one or other of the examples is better studied or indeed that the situations in France and Germany are significantly different, but Torre has certainly written a well-researched and useful study of the French and German cases. In addition to the over-arching national narratives, Torre also offers two local examples with case studies of Cherbourg, an easy site to hit because of its proximity to the UK and an obvious target since the Germans were using it to shelter torpedo boats, and Witten in the industrialised Ruhrgebiet area which experienced ninety-one bombing raids. France and Germany, we are told, started out with differing ideas on how to prepare for evacuation.

In the 1930s, Nazi theorists, such as the senior civil servant Alfred Giesler, argued that a combination of ‘flak’ anti-aircraft defences and air-raid shelters would make evacuations unnecessary. There were practical and ideological considerations which reinforced this thinking. Germany had a denser concentration of population than the more rural France making it more difficult to find areas to which to transfer besieged populations. Ideologically, the idea of transporting population out of a battle zone collided with Nazi rhetoric: Germans did not run away. The spectre of bombing could be used by the Nazis to extend a military mindset to civilians. It became the duty of each and every German to defend the country from air attack.

Of course there was some dissent amongst the population from this idea that they should be left in areas at high risk of bombing. The journal *Gasschutz und Luftschutz* (*Gas and Air Defence*) favoured evacuations in a series of articles in 1936. The extent to which the Nazi party wished to suppress the idea of evacuations from bombed zones was highlighted when, six months later, this same journal was obliged to carry an addendum written by a Nazi official, General Grimme, which equated evacuations with cowardice. In spite of this, some local municipalities continued to discuss the idea of evacuating populations in the event of Allied bombing, but in the end it was only areas close to the Franco-German border which were authorised to allow evacuations prior to 1940 and this in order to facilitate troop movements.

On the French side, theorists such as Henri Le Wita who accepted the German approach of not evacuating were the exception. General consensus in France was that evacuation would prevent demoralisation and stop civilians from hampering the military. Such thinking had been greatly influenced by the 1914-18 conflict which had been fought mainly on French soil, thereby getting the French used to the idea of evacuating areas in proximity to battles.

Out of fear of alarming the population, preparations for evacuation remained relatively tentative throughout much of the 1920s and 1930s. In the event, pre-war evacuations in France, as in Germany, were mainly limited to the border areas where the concern was not only that civilians might hinder military operations, but memories of World War One resurfaced to remind the French of the risks of enemy occupation. Alsace-Lorraine was particularly affected by these measures. Around 60,000 Alsatians and Lorrainers were forced to leave their homes; Strasbourg was emptied within 48 hours.

Given that French thinking had tapped into the Italian air warfare theorist Giulio Douhet's predictions that, since people would flee at the sound of bombing, it was better to plan for evacuations, it is ironic that the military campaign of the summer of 1940 should have been accompanied by such a free-for-all. Pre-war planning disintegrated as panic set in. Far from an orderly evacuation of the area around the battlefield, France experienced a mass exodus of its population. Somewhere between 6 and 12 million civilians took to the roads. Evreux saw its population drop from 20,000 to just 172 in a matter of days. The eight *départements* surrounding the Massif Central received 1,400,000 displaced persons during the exodus.

Whilst blaming French individualism for the 1940 exodus, the Germans also, Torre claims, changed their own attitude to evacuations partly as a result of this exodus. Germany ended up with evacuation policies which were in many respects similar to those of the French: both, for instance, placing an emphasis on protecting children. Evacuations on either side of the Rhine were beset by similar types of practical difficulties. It was difficult to find suitable transport when evacuations needed to be undertaken at short notice. Re-housing those from bombed-out cities provided a logistical nightmare. Accommodation in host communities was often wretched.

Widespread difficulties between host communities and refugees were experienced. Owing to regional antagonisms, some communities were unwelcome in other parts of the country. This was especially the case of Alsatians and Lorrainers. Laird Boswell has noted elsewhere how the encounter between those from Alsace and Lorraine and their host communities could provide a real challenge for national identity, as a result of their culture and Germanic dialect. City dwellers sent to reside in safer rural areas often faced a considerable culture shock as they were suddenly confronted with an absence of theatres and cafes and sometimes even basic amenities like running water. The industrial population of the Ruhrgebiet had little in common with the farming population of Baden who were to host them. Living in safer areas, hosts couldn't understand the plight of those who had been evacuated because of aerial bombardment. The latter were frequently traumatised by their experience and had lost property and possessions and possibly even loved ones. State propaganda tried to insist on a duty of welcoming refugees from bombed areas: often in vain.

In both national narratives, the population were wont to ignore the instructions of the State. Few listened to Vichy in 1941 when the regime encouraged parents in coastal cities to move children inland until finally, in 1943, the French government had to insist on obligatory evacuations of children. In Witten, women who had been evacuated not only returned to their city, in spite of orders to the contrary, but they also held a street demonstration to protest against the authorities' decision to refuse ration cards to those returning without permission. Local Nazi administrators gave in to their protest.

Both France and Germany had difficulties trying to prevent unauthorised returns of those who had been forcibly evacuated. This became particularly prevalent in the latter stages of the war. In Cherbourg 42 percent of those evacuated between May 1943 and January 1944 returned home without permission. The state tried to use access to allowances or ration cards as a means of controlling movement, although it is not really clear from the text why this means of pressure failed.

In both countries, work was seen as a solution to the problems of evacuations. It would facilitate integration into host communities, thereby limiting the resentment aimed at unemployed evacuees. It

would provide additional labour for the host community and it would take the minds of evacuees off their plight. However, since evacuees were granted allowances it was sometimes difficult to persuade them to work.

Evacuations were politically charged issues. Even the Nazi regime felt the need to help refugees in Germany in order to avoid drops in morale which might undermine the war effort. The Nazi Party sometimes took over from municipalities tasks which could cause it to be seen as a benefactor, leaving local civil servants to take charge of unpopular aspects of evacuation policy. Poor evacuation planning, we are told, helped undermine the reputation of the Nazi Party. In France, both the French and the Germans vied to pass responsibility to each other for unpopular evacuation measures.

For all the similarities, there were significant differences in evacuation practice. France preferred to evacuate over shorter distances and for shorter periods of time. Evacuations in France generally tried to keep the families close to their original home and together. The idea was to evacuate to less than 200 kilometres from home cities. The experience of evacuating Alsations and Lorrainers in 1939 had underlined the problems inherent in moving populations far from their native regions. In France, the value of the family to the individual was stressed and French married women had the same right to stay in a city as their husband. The authorities tried to intervene with the Occupier to limit the separation of families, requesting that they be sent to the suburbs of cities, rather than more distant regions. The Nazi leadership had ambivalent views on families, valuing their reproductive function but fearing that the family might represent a rival pull on their loyalty. By 1944, Nazi leaders began recognising that mass evacuations in Germany had to recognise family ties, something that they had failed to do until that point. In Germany, it initially made sense to evacuate to a distance, as bombings were mainly concentrated in the west until 1943 and ample holiday accommodation was available in the south.

Perhaps the biggest difference between France and Germany was the level of social discrimination involved in evacuation procedures. Once they had decided that evacuation was an acceptable procedure, Nazi authorities tried to ensure that only “worthy” sectors of the community were evacuated. Selection was evident in evacuation procedures from the beginning. Evacuation was not universally available, meaning that anyone not considered part of the national community was to be excluded from evacuations. Torre argues that leaving outcast groups like Jews in endangered areas turned Allied bombs into unwitting weapons of genocide. In Germany, as indeed in France, property of dispossessed Jews was offered as accommodation to bombed-out families. However, the French do not appear to have moved psychiatric patients back into areas likely to be targeted by Allied bombers, unlike the Germans who deliberately moved such populations back into vulnerable cities. Torre demonstrates how the social discrimination dimension to evacuations was less obvious in France than in Germany. Evacuations were an important issue and a central component of how civilian populations in parts of France and Germany experienced the period. By 11 January 1945, around 11 million Germans had been evacuated or had fled and the government was encouraging non-active citizens to move to the countryside. In France, in October 1944, it was estimated that 1.2 million French civilians were still displaced. Torre’s account of these procedures is clear and well-researched. The book makes an extensive use of French and German archives and has generally demonstrated a good knowledge of the existing secondary literature. One might wonder how she seems to have remained unaware of Hanna Diamond’s *Fleeing Hitler*, which should surely have featured in the bibliography. Overall, though, Torre’s text is a welcome contribution to the literature on World War Two.

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