1939–1945: Une démographie dans la tourmente

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Following an analogous publication on World War I (Rohrbasser 2014), this collection is unique for its inclusion of articles written both shortly after the war and over the next half-century. It also showcases some of the early work done at France's Institut National d'Etudes Démographiques (INED), itself founded in 1945.

With a preface by Henry Rousso, the edited collection consists of eighteen chapters of previously published articles. Ten of the chapters were published in the first three volumes of INED's *Population* in 1946–48, and two others were in the 1988 and 1995 volumes. The six remaining chapters were published in other places between 1947 and 2005. The four sections in the collection treat: (i) war losses, (ii) nuptiality and births, (iii) childhood, and (iv) deportations, exterminations, and displaced persons.

The demographic counts are mind-boggling: victims of combat, civilian losses, extermination of targeted populations, deportations, and displaced persons. Rousso gives the total deaths at 38–40 million in Europe and 55–62 million in the world. This is about four times the number of deaths in World War I. The total associated population movements, refugees, displacements, and forced migrations up to 1951 amounts to 40 million people. The authors observe that 40 million was the size of the population of France at the time of the Second World War.

While the focus is on the population counts, the demographic turmoil (*'une démographie dans la tourmente')* had broad geopolitical consequences, of interest to historians and political scientists. The deliberate decimation of certain populations, eviction of specific minorities from areas where they had lived for generations, and associated refugee movements and resettlements caused the uprooting of long-established relations across ethnicity and class. Some authors speak of Europe as a whole becoming a *continent of refugees*, while others speak of the *disappearance of minorities* as postwar states became more ethnically homogeneous.

By country, the total losses were by far the largest in the former USSR, estimated by Alain Blum and Sergej Maksudov at 26 million (not counting the 0.6 million persons who left the USSR; p. 102). In an estimate published in 1947 by Paul Vincent, the figure of 17 million had been used for the USSR (p. 26), but this did not include the victims of the Stalinist regime itself, during the war and in the aftermath of the upheavals caused by the war. The Blum and Maksudov chapter is based on a text by Sergej Maksudov that was smuggled out of the Soviet Union and published in *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* (Maksudov 1977). The estimate of 26 million includes 10.6 million military losses (9.7 million Red Army deaths in combat, in hospital, or in captivity, plus 900,000 deaths of Soviet Partisans and civilians engaged in militias), 8.3 million civilian losses (1.0 million killed in combat, 0.9 million died in the siege of Leningrad, 2.7 million Jews exterminated by the Nazi regime, and 3.8 million in excess mortality caused by German occupation), and 7.0 million losses in territories not under German occupation (1.6 million as prisoners of the gulag or as higher mortality in populations relocated by Stalin, as well as 200,000 soldiers executed by Stalin, 300,000 losses due to conflicts between the Red Army and insurrectionist movements in territories annexed in 1939–40, 1.0 million in the 1946 famine, and 3.9 million in excess mortality of the civilian population in territories not under German occupation; p. 102).

As a percentage of the 1939 population, the loss estimates by Paul Vincent, published in 1947, showed the highest figure being for Poland, at 13.7 per cent, followed by Yugoslavia at 10.6 per cent (p. 26). The estimate for Poland includes 3.1 million Jews, or 93 per cent of the pre-war Jewish population. However, using the Blum and Maksudov figure of 26 million for the USSR, this represents 15.1 per cent of its 1939 population—even higher than for Poland. Thus, given the changing borders during and after the war, rather than citing a specific counry as suffering the highest losses, it is safer to conclude that this Eastern European region had the highest war deaths. Snyder (2010) appropriately calls these the "bloodlands" of WWII.

In comparison, the losses for France, now estimated at some 425,000 (including 5,000 French losses in German uniform and 11,000 *épurations* 'purifications') represent 1.0 per cent of the 1939 population. For Germany (using the 1937 borders), the total losses were estimated in 1947 to be 3.3 million, or 4.7 per cent of the population (p. 26). Among the European countries, Germany is the only country where military losses (2.8 million) far outnumbered the civilian losses—which, at 500,000, were mostly from the bombardments at the end of the war (not including the genocide of German Jews and other persecuted groups).

The chapter by Jean-Pierre Azéma, "Bilan d'une œuvre de destruction," first published in 2003, is emotionally the most difficult to read. The author seeks to summarize the deliberate exterminations brought about by Hitler and the Nazi regime. In Germany and in countries occupied by the Wehrmacht, a total of 11 million men, women, and children were pursued, persecuted, and killed or executed (p. 323). The author divides these into three categories, depending on the processes by which victims were put to death. Hitler and the Nazi party had a strong role in the extermination of Jews, persons classified as mentally ill or sexual deviants, Polish persons who had occupied positions of authority or who could form a resistance, the Polish intelligentsia, members of the Soviet Communist Party, and others classified as political enemies (Jehovah's Witness, religious orders, members of the Social Democratic Party, and communists). In the second category, responsibility for the extermination is placed more on technocrats and the repressive camp machinery itself: extermination of Jews and Gypsies, and concentration camp executions of sick persons and of categories of common-law detainees who were systematically deported as of 1943. In the third category he places Soviet prisoners during the first months of the German invasion, where responsibility lies more with the racist indifference and contempt of the Wehrmacht toward Slavic people.

The 11 million executions are subdivided as follows: 5,100,000 to 5,860,000 Jews, 3,700,000 Soviet prisoners, 240,000 Gypsies (35 per cent of the estimated 700,000 pre-war population), 1,100,000 "other detainees in concentration camps," and 200,000 "other victims of euthanasia." By country, the largest numbers killed were in Poland (almost 6 million, or 15 per cent of the population) and USSR (6.6 million, including 3.0 million military died in captivity, 2.7 million Jews, 600,000 in civil militias, and 300,000 Soviet Partisans). Of the 3,300,000 Soviet prisoners taken, after six months of combat 2 million had already died as of January 1942: summary executions, death by exposure to frost, starvation, and sickness (p. 330). The author adds another 15 million civilian victims of repression, or of life conditions in territories occupied by Nazis (p. 325).

Without doing justice to the question of population movements, it is useful to quote again the summary figure of 40 million displacements by 1951, including forced migrations, relocations, and refugees (p. 17). These movements occurred during the war and its aftermath. As of 1 January 1946, 5 million Germans had left Poland, but 3.5 million remained there (p. 346). Conversely, there were some 7 million refugees from Eastern Europe, mostly in Germany, who were classified as Displaced Persons (DPs). In the USSR, as of 1 January 1946, there were 1.4 million persons in gulag camps and colonies (pp. 84–5). Many of these movements involved minority populations, to the point that Jacques Doublet speaks of the war and its aftermath as producing a "disappearance of minorities." For instance, Czechoslovakia sought to bring its population back from Germany, while also undertaking an exchange of Hungarians and Slovaks with Hungary. Germans were expelled from Poland and Czechoslovakia, and the eastern border of Germany was moved west.

It is important to document these tremendous losses, forced migrations, and population movements of various kinds. Equally valuable are the insights, as seen in the immediate postwar period, on the future of fertility and international migration.

For France, Vincent makes the demographic observation that the Great War not only involved more deaths (1.3 to 1.4 million), but this earlier war took place in a period of fertility decline. In contrast, and to the surprise

of many, births increased over the period 1943–46. Vincent further observes: the increase in marital fertility observed in France during the war is not only a most remarkable phenomenon, but this increase also occurred in a fairly large number of countries, be they neutral or at war, be they occupied or not, be they countries with previously higher or lower fertility.

Other chapters, also written in 1946–48 by Jean Bourgeois-Pichat and Alfred Sauvy, comment on this rise in fertility, along with the interplay with nuptiality. Sauvy has an extensive treatment, written in 1948, on the increase in fertility in the world, its causes and probabilities of persistence. He looks at 18 countries with crude birth rates (CBR) under 20 per 1,000 population in the 1930s. All but two had rates over 20 in the mid-1940s. Canada is included in this set of countries, with a CBR of 19.8 in 1937 and 27.5 in 1947. Sauvy observes that fertility reached its lowest levels during the economic crisis of the 1930s, but the sharpest declines were typically in the 1920s, and thus an explanation through economic factors is insufficient.

To get a broader sense of the possible future, INED undertook a survey of demographers and vital statistics statisticians in 1947. A total of 154 questionnaires was sent to persons in eleven countries, and 52 usable replies were analyzed (including from J.T. Marshall and O. Lemieux at the Canadian Dominion Bureau of Statistics). Many of the experts expected the fertility increase to be short-lived, following the postwar increase in marriages and first births; thus, they did not expect total births per couple to increase. However, others noted the role of positive economic prospects, and some noted the influence of policy factors: benefits allocated to returning soldiers, as well as food or family allowances introduced in several countries. Others noted changes in attitude that may have been enhanced by these family-friendly policies: the desire to form a family, to have descendants, and sometimes for a family of four rather than two. In his conclusion, Sauvy expects, at the very least, that the earlier trend to lower fertility has largely run its course, and that strong employment prospects and family-friendly policies could well sustain childbearing at higher levels.

The chapter by Jacques Doublet, written in 1947, provides interesting insights into the future of international migration. Among the European countries, only Italy is thought to have a surplus population. Other countries are seen to have labour needs for postwar recovery and economic growth. By a decree dated 8 March 1947, Portugal disallowed emigration. Other countries like Denmark, Sweden, and Norway were taking measures to discourage emigration. The author is concerned that Europe's labour supply could be compromised if countries across the Atlantic attracted a labour force that was needed on the continent. Thus, the treatment of international migration is essentially in terms of labour shortages in Europe.

This book is strongly recommended—for its documentation of the human toll of the Second World War, for providing the demographic bases with which to appreciate the long-term geopolitical implications, and for the views expressed on the future of immigration and fertility in the postwar era.

References

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