Account for the postwar "population transfer" in europe

War, any war, results in population movements; soldiers mobilizing and invading, civilians fleeing the immediate conflict zones and returning once the battle is over, soldiers demobilizing and returning home. The scale of such movements was often dependent upon the scale of the war itself. A world war must, therefore, by definition involve much greater population disruption. Nevertheless, the movements seen at the end of the Second World War were on a scale that had neither been seen before nor has it been since. Even during conflicts of the extent of the Napoleonic Wars, fought throughout Europe from the Iberian Peninsula to Moscow, or during the mass slaughter of the Great War; or even the recent examples of ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia such disruption and displacement had never been experienced. Why then, was Europe after the Second World War, the scene then of such unprecedented population movements? To analyze the reasons, to appreciate the scale and to identify the groups involved, the movements themselves and the numbers needed to be closely examined. The Nazi Regime moved more than 900, 000 ethnic Germans from eastern European countries back into the Reich in order to repopulate the newly conquered territory. During the attack on the Soivet Union, Germany took up to 5. 7 million Soviet soldiers prisoner and transported them back to the Reich as slave labour. This means that some 15 million had been moved during the war and vast areas of Europe were completely depopulated. 1Hitler's rise to power and his Blitzkrieg set off the Jews, his political and economic opponents and others who were under increasing pressure from the Nazis. Hitler's belief was that Europe was not a geographical but rather a racial entity. He sought stability not through the rule of law but by uprooting peoples. 'In pursuit of racial goals, nations were rearranged and millions of

people were forcible driven from their homes, resettled hundreds of miles away...,(or) forced into labour camps, ...' 2 The Nazi-Regime used predominantly the eastern population, for the German war machine. All manner of Slavic peoples were used in contravention of the Geneva Convention on the treatment of Prisoners of War. In the first months of 1942 as many as 1, 080, 000 Poles were employed in Germany. Most of them were recruited under pressure but others actually volunteered for a lack of a better alternative. 3At the end of the war over 12 million people had fled from the east to west trying to escape the Red Army or as victims of expulsion from the Baltic States, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, mass population movements took place not only internationally but also at domestic level. In countries where the cities had suffered high levels of destruction, such as Germany and Poland, movements on a big scale took place internally. During the heavy bombing raids on the cities people had moved to the comparative safety of the countryside and; in Germany, where the major cities suffered up to 80% destruction, 40% of the countries total living space was lost. This resulted in 25 million Germans being forced to move just to find shelter. 4 Towards the end of the war, the advancing Red Army was perceived by ethnic Germans as a massive threat and triggered a huge wave of refugees, beginning in the Autumn of 1944 and continuing up to the Potsdam Conference in July 1945, from East Prussia and Pomerania and, later on, from Silesia. Those who decided not to leave were interned by the Red Army in labour or detention camps, as too, were millions of captured German soldiers. The German refugees were soon joined by countless Balts after the Soviet Union reoccupied Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. About 46 million people in eastern and central Europe were

uprooted through flight, evacuation, resettlement or forced labour. After Germany's defeat, the Soviet, Britain and the United States met at the Potsdam Conference and agreed territorial matters such as the fate of German territories east of the Oder-Neisse-Line. They were given to Poland and northern East Prussia was passed to the Soviet Union. They decided about ethnic Germans living there as follows: '... the Three Governments, having considered the question in all its aspects recognize that the transfer to Germany of German populations, or elements thereof, remaining in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, will have to be undertaken. They agree that any transfers that take place should be effected in an orderly and humane manner...' 5 The shocking reality is, that two million people died on these " transfers". The Potsdam Conference lead to the largest population movements in the history of Europe as 12-13 million Germans were " transferred". In stark contrast to the Great War, people were physically moved in order to consolidate new political boundaries. More than 7 million refugees from other ethnic groups, namely Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Ukrainians and Balts, were evicted from their homes and resettled. In accordance with the Potsdam agreements, Poland's western border moved to the Oder-Neisse-Line taking in Pomerania, Silesia and southern East Prussia. Eastern Poland became Soviet and the ethnic Germans still left in these territories were " transferred" to a reduced Germany farther west. The Polish communist Gomulka emphasized, 'we must expel all the Germans because countries are built on national lines and not on multinational ones.'6 The Poles of eastern Poland were resettled in the western territories taken from Germany and Soviet citizens repopulated the former eastern Poland. As a result, in 1950 over half the population in the Polish western territories was

made up of recent settlers and migrants from other regions. Nevertheless, in spite of government organized campaigns advertising some depopulated areas and towns remained deserted for many years. In Czechoslovakia the Sudeten Germans, ethnic Germans who had lived there for centuries, were cruelly expelled. Their dispossession and expulsion and the absuse they sometimes suffered were legitimized by the Czechoslovak Parliament in the so-called Benes Decrees. The politician Benes had in 1941, while in exiles in London, declared that, '... if the Allies were to be victorious all Sudeten Germans had to be forced out.' By 1943 England, the Soviet Union and the USA concurred. 7 By July 1945, 2. 3 million Sudeten Germans had fled, were expelled, driven into camps or simply herded across the border. For those who remained, life was made as unpleasant as possible. They were no longer allowed to use public transport and were forced to wear " badges of defeat". 8 Their treatment was clearly revenge for the way the Czechoslovaks had been themselves treated by the Sudeten during the Nazi regime. At the end of the war 3 million German troops were already prisoners of the Allies. After the capitulation of a further 5. 6 million were disarmed and detained by the British, Americans and French and 2. 4 million by the Soviets. About a million were used in west and central Europe as part of reparations as forced labour for reconstruction - 765, 000 for France, 76, 000 for the Benelux, 75, 000 for Poland, 25, 000 for Czechoslovakia and most of the 2. 4 million in Soviets hands marched back to Russia for years of forced labour there. At least 700, 000 of these died in captivity. 9The German defeat not only brought massive population movements and the forced marches of some 2. 4 millions German soldiers east to Soviet labour camps (from which few ever returned) but also resulted in the 'liberation for millions of camp inmates, slave labourers and

foreign workers' within Germany itself. 10 About 10 million people whom the Nazi regime had transported to the Reich (5. 7 million from the Soviet Union alone) were now displaced persons within Germany. As a result in the summer and autumn of 1945 Europe's roads were packed with millions of civilians trying to leave Germany and make their way back to their pre-war homes on foot, in horse-drawn carts or in hundreds of UN-organised transports in all directions. Before the end of that same year, more than 6 million people had been successfully repatriated. Nonetheless, some of the repatriations had proved or were to prove far from voluntary. As fears of communism and of retribution spread increasing numbers of eastern Europeans were reluctant to return to their homelands. Denis Hills, a British officer, when screening Soviet DPs for repatriation at Riccione, Italy, in May 1947 wrote, 'Breaking the news to these families that they were to be repatriated seemed equivalent to delivering a death sentence'. 11Under the terms of the agreement reached by the Allies in Yalta in February 1945, the western Allies had committed themselves to returning all Soviet citizens to Stalin. They complied and so sentenced many to Siberian labour camps or worse. Tragic result of any war, fleeing the immediate theatres desperate for safety and shelter. The main difference at the end of the Second World War was that in previous wars most refugees had been able to return home once peace was established. This time millions could not or would not. Even before the war many had sought refuge abroad. Persecuted German Jews sought to emigrate to the USA and Britain, with some success, especially Jewish children to Britain, and to Switzerland with rather less success as the Swiss proved reluctant to help. European communists looked to the Soviet Union for shelter. When the war began Norwegians sought refuge in Sweden,

French in Spain, and for instance on the eastern front civilians sought desperately to escape the fighting first Russians fleeing east to escape the advancing Wehrmacht then later Germans fleeing from the advancing Red Army. Communists fled Fascists before and at the beginning of the war and the eastern European bourgeois fled the communists after the war. A year after VE-Day German Displaced Persons camps still held 380, 000 Poles. 125, 000 Yugoslavs and 187, 000 other eastern Europeans who were unwilling to go back to their homelands. Most of these were to prove lucky and were allowed to emigrate to Britain, the Commonwealth and the United States under special programmes. The population movement problem thus spread beyond Europe and it had soon become clear to the Allies that the problem would not be easily solved. Many Jewish survivors of the labour and death camps remained in the Displaced Persons camps but were unwilling to remain in a holocaust-haunted Europe. They were soon joined by 220, 000 eastern European Jews who felt they could no longer live in villages which had become Jewish graveyards, full of terrifying memories. Anti-Semitic pogroms in various countries, such as Poland, accelerated this post-war flight, as Ukrainian DP poet Yuri Klen wrote, 'We are ready to go to the end of the world-beyond the oceans, into tropical or polar countries, only not to return home-a phenomenon which is without comparison in history.'12At the end of 1946 and estimated number of 250, 000 Jewish DPs, (185, 000 in Germany, 45, 000 in Austria and 20, 000 in Italy) were desperately waiting for an opportunity to emigrate from Europe. 13 Many set their hopes in the creation of a Jewish homeland in British mandated Palestine. The British Government White Paper of 1939 still restricted immigration into Palestine by Jews and continued to do so until the United Nations Assembly voted of

the 29th November 1947, 'to adopt a plan to divide Palestine into an Arab Sate and a Jewish State, with Jerusalem under international control'. 14 The creation of the State of Israel in 1948 and the Displaced Persons Act of the same year led to an end of the Displaced Persons Camps with two-third of the Jews emigrating to Israel and the rest to the United States. The last Jewish camp in Germany was closed eventually in 1953. Wartime and post-war displacement broke up hundreds of thousands of families across the continent with in just the four countries of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania and the Netherlands 420, 000 orphans. The UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) cared for 50, 000 unaccompanied children in Germany, many of whom had forgotten their identities, 'as late as July 1948 over 4, 000 children being cared for by the United Nations as Displaced Persons were still unidentified'. In 1951 the radio and press still carried long lists of missing persons. 15The reasons for the massive displacement are complex. The scientific and technological advance and the infrastructure improvements meant easier movements of large numbers of people and the technology to move them was available, such as aeroplanes, ships, railways, motorized road transports. Also, never before had civilians been so caught up in the fighting. Thanks to air warfare all cities and towns could be attacked and all civilians were potential targets. Specifically targeted in an effort to terrorize the civilian population to demoralize and possibly forced them into demanding peace from their leaders. And methods like Hitler's Blitzkrieg meant they could be caught up unexpectedly in battles without time to escape. Moreover, the Nazis ideology is found to be different to any of its predecessors. The Nazis under Hitler and the communists under Stalin were bitter enemies and in their leaders possessed with a ruthlessness

that made them ready to commit crimes against humanity on a massive scale to achieve their ends. Their populations and potential victims were in no doubt about their fate if they were defined as an enemy by either the one or the other. Furthermore, the complexity and scale of modern warfare required a war machine on a massive scale and, as mentioned earlier, forced labour was required to maintain it." The Total War", as defined by Goebbels involved everyone. No longer was war a matter for Generals and soldiers but for every man, woman and child, old or young. No exceptions. The reach of modern weapons-aircraft, V1 and V2 rockets, for instance, meant no one was safe and millions were involved. The whole process of the, sometimes, voluntary but in the clear majority of cases forced, uprooting was both cruel and traumatizing. Comparing it with modern day Africa and the nation states drawn up there without regard to ethnic difference and the ensuing and continuing slaughter along ethnic lines, it might be said it was important in stabilizing modern Europe and removing a possible cause of future conflict. Quite probably the only positive to be gleaned from an otherwise endless litany of tragedy.