DISCUSSION

DEPORTATION AND THE CRISES OF [EARLY MODERN] EUROPE: A BRIEF HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

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1

Paradise is lost and golden ages are rare. Instead mankind, most of the time, seems to be stumbling from one crisis into another. Shortages of all kinds. Shortage in food, in housing, in commodities. And on the other end: affluence. Too much of everything and, accordingly, everything devalued. Thus, crisis at times emerges in slim and feeble features, at other times as fat and greasy.

The ultimate form of crisis is war. Battles *for* food, *for* houses, *for* commodities. Or, battles *against* the world itself, in praise of total extinction. Wars to end all wars. And then to start them all over again.

2

For years we have heard much about foreigners standing in front of "our" borders. And borders are coming ever closer. Soon each garden fence will be a border. And we hear about foreigners shipwrecked in an otherwise friendly Mediterranean Sea, which did not prove friendly to them.

Those who manage to cross are not welcomed. Not any more. After a summer of backslapping "welcoming culture" in 2015, an old hydra is raising her head again – deportation. The old conveyor belt. Deportation from A to B, from B to C, from C to Greece, from Greece to Turkey and from Turkey to the No-Man's-Land.

3

If historians think about deportation, they quickly end up in a cabinet of mirrors, in which pasts and presents most unpleasantly meet. Sometimes these pasts and presents are congruent, at other times they are distorted, but in any case they are entangled.

Politicians are giving a voice. Politicians are raising a voice. "A voice [that] comes to one in the dark. Imagine. / To one on his back in the dark" (Beckett 1989: 5). Politicians are preparing us for worst case scenarios. And we can be sure they mean them. Deportation in their conception of the world is not just a scenario, but a somnambulant dream. A dream of man transformed to human cargo.

4

Deportation is commonly perceived as a phenomenon that is supposedly deeply rooted in the twentieth century. National Socialist and Stalinist measures of such kind are seen as the embodiment of how masses of people can be shifted hither and yon, scattered all over the place or annihilated on the road. History memorizes these events, but sometimes memory plays tricks on us. And also in this case, as deportation has a history that reaches far beyond those roughly 100 years that are usually remembered. Deportation is in fact a crucial instrument of population policies that were shaped already in the late Middle Ages and had its first heyday in the early modern period (Steiner 2014, 2015a, 2015b).

5

It was a historical moment when in 1417 Portugal reached out to the African shores, to Ceuta on the other side of the Strait of Gibraltar. This is what true trajectories are about: Reconquista coming to an end and conquista setting in. In other words, colonialism got started and in its wake a modern type of deportation got shaped. It was totally revolutionary when Portugal came up with the idea of using its territorial expansion also for the export of segments of population that were unwanted. Banishing the so-called "scum" out of the dungeons and prisons of the metropolis into the overseas colonies was an avant-garde policy that soon found its imitators all over Europe. And here is the crisis that

backgrounds this drastic measure: a new approach towards criminality brought more and more people into jail; jails were overcrowded and not a pretty sight, so why not dump these people far away from the motherland? And even more: why not make them work? The penal colonies were thus evolving. Portugal in the centuries to come made abundant use of mass deportations of undesirable elements in the population – they were chiefly sent to Angola, Mozambique, and Brazil. The so-called *degredados* (people forced into exile) comprised highly different groups: convicts, Jews, New-Christians, Gypsies, and lepers were among the early victims of these coercive measures. Between 1550 and 1755, about 50,000 persons were shifted back and forth within the Portuguese sphere of influence. This practice was at long last abolished not in 1754, not in 1854, but in 1954. The mere fact that the *degredado* system was retained for more than 500 years makes the close connection between the epochs abundantly clear.

6

Whereas the question of religion in the Portuguese case played just a minor role, it was paramount in the following. In sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Spain, the so-called Moriscos became the target of a far-reaching population transfer. After the unquestionable military triumph of the Reconquista, its protagonists tried to expand their victory to the ideological frontline. Everything Islamic had to be wiped out and thus the Moors had to become Moriscos, forcefully Christianised human relics of a once flourishing civilization. These converts were further on under permanent – and in most cases quite rightful – suspicion of clandestinely still adhering to the Quran. Afraid of a major uprising, the Spaniards first, in 1570, dispersed the Moriscos all over Spain, and between 1609 and 1614 deported nearly all of them to North Africa or France. 275,000 people were forced to leave the country – a number almost unbelievably high, but all well documented in the sources. More than a quarter of a million people leaving a country over the course of only five years – not only in the pre-modern context a massive intervention into population structures and also economic developments.

Moreover, after the expulsion of Jews in 1492, this was already the second time for Spain to eliminate an entire, undesirable and/or recalcitrant segment of the population. What we see here is a crisis of faith amalgamating with a new form of extremism in demographic policies, a scaring reminder of a longue durée of the idea of "cleansing" a territory by relocating people.

7

Portugal and Spain were by far not the only early European countries that used deportation as an innovative and, in their eyes, promising approach towards solving the many demographic problems of pre-modernity. France, England, the Netherlands, and Russia – they all made use of this new instrument on a broader scale, and also the Ottoman Empire developed distinct methods of population transfers. Thus, from the seventeenth century on, large portions of Europe attuned to a kind of deportation frenzy that was finally echoed by phantasies about cleansing the nation states from unwanted elements at the turn of the nineteenth century and by so far unseen atrocities committed during the twentieth century.

8

One last example of an early modern deportation comes from a rather unexpected context of the Habsburg Monarchy, which as a state without colonies nevertheless found ways of population transfers on a larger scale. One of the Habsburg Empire's major actions goes under the strange name of *Temesvarer Wasserschub*, rudimentarily translatable as *Deportation to Timişoara on the Waterway*. This expression stands for a coercive measure that was carried out for almost 25 years, which makes it the most extended deportation *ever* executed on an institutionalised basis in Central Europe. Twice a year, deviants of all sorts were herded onto boats that took them down the Danube River until they were finally dumped in the very periphery of the Banat of Timişoara, today divided between Serbia and Romania. This region was the place designated for putting the deportees either into the local workhouse or else compelling them to work as domestic servants.

   The *Deportation on the Waterway* started out in 1744 as an all-out attack on Viennese women of "bad reputation" and over time became an instrument for "cleaning up" the whole empire from beggars, poachers, drunkards, prostitutes, and losers of all sorts. For many of them their journey ended in an early death, mainly due to the bad living conditions in the workhouse. The lesson these delinquents learned was that if you were born in poverty and lived in distress, then you were also condemned to die a miserable death. Those who survived got harder in return, more relentless, cleverer in their attempts to trick the state authorities. Rumour had it amongst the authorities of the time that the delinquents were coming back to Vienna sooner than their wardens.

Howsoever, the pointless struggle of the state in order to find a drastic and draconic solution to the crisis of poverty failed dramatically – and all that right at the approach of the Enlightenment period of all things.

9

Considerably more could be said about early modern deportations and their specifics. In the context of major crises in society, as can be seen from the three examples presented, deportation was very often viewed by the state authorities as a viable instrument of banning the problem by making it disappear in the external or internal colonies of various empires. But far from being a solution, deportation almost always turned out to be part of a bureaucratic, logistic, but also moral problem, which emerged simultaneously with its execution.

Research into deportations in the early modern period confronts us with a unique memory of collapse, as a number of phenomena that surround us today are prefigured in these pasts: speaking in psychoanalytic terms, one might call it the repressed recurring (*das wiederkehrende Verdrängte*) that we have to face in order to understand how we came to where we are.

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