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‘Refugees, Forced Migration and Henry VIII’s Conquest of France, 1544-6’

Neil Murphy

In the summer of 1544, the English monarch Henry VIII invaded France with an army of almost 40,000 men and launched a brutal campaign against the civilian population of the Boulonnais. By the end of 1544 the region had been almost entirely depopulated. Many civilians were killed in direct attacks, though the bulk of the population was driven out of the Boulonnais by a scorched earth policy which was designed to transform the region into an artificial desert – devoid of people, buildings and sustenance. Initially taken for defensive considerations to protect his conquest of the town of Boulogne, with the conclusion of the war in the summer of 1546 Henry VIII introduced a colonial policy into these conquered lands and sought to re-settle them with his English subjects. This chapter focuses on fates of the tens of thousands of refugees who were driven out of the Boulonnais as a result of the Tudor monarch’s ambitions in France. It concludes with some reflections on the wider significance of this material for later colonial projects.

While a large body of literature examines the links between war and forced migration in the ‘Century of Refugees’ which followed First World War in Europe, comparatively little work has been done on this topic for the pre-modern period.[1] The bulk of the works on the links between war and early modern refugees focus on

[1] This literature on warfare and refugees in twentieth-century Europe is vast. For prominent recent studies, see: Therr and Silijak; Bessel and Haake; Frank and Reinisch; Cohen; Ingram; Kushner.

religious exiles, including the forced expulsions of groups such as the Sephardi Jews and Moriscos from Spanish Habsburg lands and the flight of religious groups such as the Huguenots and Anabaptists.[2] There has been a reluctance by historians of pre-modern Europe to employ terms such as 'ethnic cleansing', an expression which came into wider usage in the 1990s following the atrocities in the Balkans and is used to describe actions taken to clear a territory of its people (or a particular group of people).[3] Such twentieth-century manifestations of ethnic cleansing are typically seen as a direct product of modernity and thus not especially applicable to earlier ages: Norman Naimark, for instance, described ethnic cleansing as 'a product of the most "advanced" stage in the development of the modern state').[4] Yet Henry VIII employed methods similar to those used in campaigns of ethnic cleansing in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries – including the burning of homes, hunting down of refugee populations, and

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[2] Kaplan, *Alternative Path*, *Religious Communities*; Kaplan, 'Legal Rights'; Wieglers and Garcia-Arenal; Terpstra; Muller; Janssen, *Dutch Revolt*, 'Republic of Refugees'; Lachenicht, Hugenotten, 'Empire Building', 'Refugee Protection', *Religious Refugees*; Van der Linden; Israel; Magdelaine. Notable exceptions to this are recent works on the fate of the Jewish community in Poland-Lithuania during the 1648 Khmelnytsky rising and that of Protestant settlers in Ireland during the 1641 rebellion see: Teller; Darcy, Margey and Murphy; Ó Siochrú and Ohlmeyer.

[3] In this way it is different from genocide, as forced removal rather than extermination is the aim of the violence – though there can be an overlap between the two. See: Lieberman.

[4] Naimark, 4.

destruction of archives – for essentially the same purposes: that is, to clear a territory of its indigenous population.

While the histories of pre-modern refugees – especially poor refugees such as the peasants who formed the bulk of those affected by Henry VIII's invasion of France in 1544 – can be hard to reconstruct due to a lack of written records, the wide range of contemporary sources detailing the English war in France allows us to study in detail the experience of refugees displaced from their homes for an extended period. In addition to the abundant Tudor sources, a range of continental materials provide further perspectives on the fate of the displaced population of the Boulonnais. The records of French towns lying on the edges of the English conquest provide us with information about the influx of refugees into these places, while the records of the French crown highlight the impact the war had on the population of the Boulonnais. Most valuable amongst these are the records which reveal the effects on the rural population, particularly the inquests detailing the impact of the war on dozens of villages.[5] Sources from the neighbouring Low Countries describe the consequences of the war for civilians, particularly those written by individuals living close to Saint-Omer, which lay on the edge of the conflict zone and was one of the principal reception centres for refugees from the Boulonnais.[6] Finally, we have a direct testimony from at least one of the Boulogne refugees, Antoine Morin, in addition to a journal kept by Welsh soldier and member of the Calais garrison Elis Gruffydd, who fought in the conflict and wrote a

[5] AN Série J 1016 and 1017; Brésin, 275–334.

[6] Brésin; Rosny, 'Documents'.

detailed first-hand account of the war.[7] Despite being an English soldier, he was sympathetic to the impact the conflict had on the population of the Boulonnais and he provides graphic accounts of the realities of war for the peasantry, which are so often absent from the military memoirs of this period, typically written by nobles concerned with glorifying their exploits in war. Beginning with a short discussion of the character of English violence in France during Henry VIII's invasion of 1544, this chapter will use this range of evidence to examine the effects which the conflict had on the population of the Boulonnais. It provides new insights on the actions taken by men, women and children in response to the pressures placed on them during times of conflict. This information is especially valuable because – in contrast to the extensive information available to historians of modern conflicts – materials documenting these shadow agents of war, especially those from the lower social classes, are scantier for earlier eras of history.

Violence

Henry VIII pursued a military strategy in France in the 1540s designed to inflict the maximum amount of damage on the peasantry of the Boulonnais. This was achieved in

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[7] Morin; Gruffydd, 'Boulogne', *Enterprises*. Unfortunately, though, despite this variety of contemporary documentation, we get little sense – even in the testimony left by the refugees themselves – of how they constructed their own narratives of identity, rootedness, homeland and exile. For these aspects of the modern refugee experience, see: Malkii.

part through direct violence and we find a number of massacres of villagers, especially in the early days of the conflict. For instance, men, women and children from the villages of Audinghen and Petinghem who had sheltered in their churches were killed by Henry's soldiers.[8] Yet direct killing only affected a minority of the population of the Boulonnais and it was the implementation of a scorched earth strategy which caused widespread death and deprivation. While the burning of crops and villages was a long-standing part of warfare, the scale on which the English employed it in the sixteenth century went beyond contemporary standards. The destruction of the land was carried out by English commanders such as Thomas Howard, duke of Norfolk, whose campaign in northern France in 1522 was so destructive that seventy years later peasants still remembered it as 'the year of the great fires'. In the following year, he was appointed king's lieutenant for the war against Scotland and set about employing the methods he had used in France to deliberately depopulate targeted parts of the borders.[9] Following Howard's systematic wasting of the Scottish borders in 1523, Cardinal Wolsey observed that Teviotdale and the Merse were so entirely 'devased and distroied … that ther is left neither house, forteress, village, tree, catail, corn, or other s[ucc]or for man', with the result that the population would be forced to flee the region and be reduced to begging or else remain and die of starvation.[10] The implementation of this type of warfare reached its apogee under Henry VIII in France during the 1540s, when it was employed

[8] Deschamps de Pas, 123; Rosny, 'Documents', 404–5; Brésin, 179-180.

[9] Rosny, 'Enquête', 364.

[10] TNA SP 1/28, fol. 184v (*LP*, iii, no. 3281).

on an extensive scale to make the Boulonnais (a highly fertile and densely populated part of France) uninhabitable.[11]

Civilians were not simply passive victims of violence. Rather, they utilised a range of strategies to insulate themselves (and their families, friends and communities) from violence at the hands of soldiers. Certainly, the population of the Boulonnais acted in response to the English invasion of their lands. First, some peasants resisted the soldiers in the early stages of the war when it looked as if the English were only campaigning for the season and not attempting a longer conquest. However, this typically led to the killing of the villagers who were not equipped to defend themselves against large groups of soldiers. Second, peasants could seek to mitigate the violence by collaborating with the English and act as guides or sources of local information. Some peasants offered information such as details about routes across the land and locations where other villagers had concealed their goods. One Tudor soldier notes that men from the village of Alquines, the population of which was threatened with death, 'were a great help in directing the host from there towards Montreuil', while another English soldier noted how some 'French Boyes' helped the Spanish mercenaries fighting for Henry VIII find 'greate botyes hydde in the grounde'.[12]

Yet the English went beyond seeking information about the location of goods to plunder (an action common to all warzones of the period) and sought instead to find out the remote locations to which villagers had fled. This was unusual behaviour as while peasants regularly fled to remote locations to hide from invading armies, soldiers did

[11] This impression is confirmed in contemporary accounts of the region: Morin, 260; Deseille, 46.

[12] Gruffydd, *Enterprises*, 15; Leslie, 192.

not normally go to the effort of pursuing them. It was not in soldiers' interests to slaughter fleeing villagers given that pillaging was the principal motivation behind their attacks. It was easier to loot goods from deserted villages because there was no resistance to deal with. Yet in 1544 English soldiers took great efforts to hunt down and kill or drive out populations who had fled to remote places. They found many of the villages deserted, such as Wacquinghen where they found 'the inhabitants fled…leaving the houses and mansions empty'.[13] In some case, the elderly or infirm had been left behind undoubtedly because they were unable to travel or survive the privations of living in woods. These people were thus especially vulnerable and the English pressed them for information about the locations to which their fellow villagers had fled. Elis Gruffydd reports that coming upon a village 'they found only an old woman who told them after much trouble' where the rest of the villagers had gone, possibly suggesting the use of force against her to obtain that information.[14] Gruffydd also went on to note that Howard had a 'sick crippled old man' brought to him in a cart so that he could learn how to gain entry into the cave network where the villagers were sheltering.[15]

Displaced Populations

[13] Gruffydd, 'Boulogne', 52.

[14] Gruffydd, 'Boulogne', 48.

[15] Gruffydd, 'Boulogne', 49. On refugees sheltering in caves during times of war, see: Bowd, 96-7, 95, 175.

Upon abandoning their villages, peasants could escape to a castle, though anything short of a major fortress could not hope to hold out against the scale of the English military presence in the region. Yet even flight to strong castles was perilous during wars of conquest. When Henry sought to extend his conquest further into France in May 1545, peasants who fled to the major stronghold of Hardelot found themselves at the mercy of the English when the castle fell.[16] Fleeing to anywhere but a well-fortified major town was perilous. In 1544, the population of the Boulonnais fled to towns in neighbouring parts of France and the Low Countries such as Amiens, Arras, Saint-Omer and Senlis. Yet rural populations had to live close enough to a major urban centre to ensure that they could reach the security of its walls before being caught by the invading army. As such, escape to a well-defended town was impossible for many. Moreover, it was desirable to ensure that the town to which they fled did not itself come under attack. Numerous people from the eastern Boulonnais sought shelter in Saint-Omer, which was filled with refugees during the summer of 1544. This town was ideal because it lay in the emperor's dominions and thus was unlikely to be attacked by the English as Charles V was then allied with Henry VIII (although English soldiers did attack numerous imperial villages in Artois and the Boulonnais during the war). Many people left for the Somme towns of Abbeville and Amiens and those in Oise such as Senlis. Rather than abandon the region, other peasants poured into Boulogne which for many was the closest major fortified urban centre.[17] During *chévauchée* style campaigns, when armies progressed

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[16] TNA SP 1/210, fols. 6r-6v.

[17] Le Roy, 22; Archibold, 504, 506; Gruffydd, *Enterprises*, 55. Peasants also died while guarding the walls of Boulogne, along with women, children and members of the clergy: *Morin*, 142.

rapidly through a territory in their drive to destroy as much as possible in a short space of time, flight to urban centres generally sufficed, as these expeditions were driven by speed and armies passed by places which could not be captured quickly. Yet whereas many believed at the beginning of the invasion of 1544 that the English would just launch another short campaign lasting a matter of weeks (as had happened in 1522 and 1523), in fact Henry was intent on achieving a lasting conquest of the Boulonnais which meant that it was necessary to capture the region's major towns.[18] To this end, Henry's armies spent months besieging Boulogne and Montreuil. While he failed to capture Montreuil, Boulogne surrendered to him personally on 13 September 1544 (Henry had joined the siege of Boulogne in July 1544), placing both the townspeople and the large number of peasants who had fled there at the mercy of the English monarch.[19]

Even beyond the risk that their chosen town of refuge would fall, refugees were in a precarious situation. They had to provide for themselves and their families, which was difficult because the panicked nature of flight from war zones meant that there was often little time to gather up goods and possessions – many of which, as we saw above, were buried in the hope of being able to return quickly. Indeed, the experience of war in northeastern France meant that migrations were typically only short-lived, with peasants expecting to be able to return to their villages within weeks or months. Beyond this consideration, the burying of goods was common because refugees were prime targets for plunder. There were tens of thousands of soldiers in the Boulonnais in

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[18] For the initial view by the French that Henry VIII was only there for a short campaign in 1544, see: Gruffydd, *Enterprises*, 18.

[19] For capitulation of Boulogne, see: TNA SP 1/192, fols. 71r-73r (*LP*, xix, pt. 2, no. 222); *Morin*, 255; Bertrand, I, 109; TNA E30/1480; *LP*, xix, pt. 2, no. 218.

September 1544, English and French, as well as thousands of mercenaries from across Europe, who were fighting on either side of the conflict. During the war of 1544, French soldiers pillaged the populations of villages in the Boulonnais, many of which had already suffered at the hands of the English. While Henry VIII granted mercy to the population of Boulogne when he captured the town and permitted its inhabitants to leave with their goods, these people were later attacked and plundered by Henry's soldiers as they made their way to Abbeville, where they were then driven away (probably because they were now destitute and unable to support themselves).[20] Even those who escaped plunder could have to abandon their goods in the water-soaked roads and fields of the Boulonnais, which was afflicted by especially severe weather at the very time when the bulk of the refugees were on the road.[21]

Many peasants had little food or money to bring with them in the first place. This situation was made worse because food prices rose during times of conflict, particularly when, as happened in 1544, the English destroyed crops and slaughtered livestock, while the French king ordered the harvest in the surrounding regions to be gathered early or destroyed. Although relief ships with supplies of food were sent to Étaples, these were for French soldiers rather than the general population. Further strain was placed on local food supplies when the English then launched an attack on Étaples specifically to destroy these relief ships.[22] The Saint-Omer chronicler Louis Brésin noted that the price of grain had risen steeply in the area surrounding the conflict zone, which intensified the effects of the burnings because towns in this region were filled with

[20] Morin, 63, 143, 245, 248, 252, 256.

[21] TNA SP 1/192, fol. 137v (*LP*, xix, pt. 2, no. 270).

[22] TNA SP 1/207, fol. 59r (*LP*, xx, pt. 2, no. 264).

refugees from the Boulonnais.[23] 270 out of the 300 houses in the village of Verton were destroyed by Irish kern (light infantry) during the war 'and the inhabitants had been taken or killed by the enemy, others were dead from disease or poverty and the rest constrained to go and beg in neighbouring towns'.[24] The village of Rollencourt was destroyed by the English in July 1544 and the population fled to Saint-Omer, leaving the village abandoned.[25] As food supplies ran low, the prices increased and put it beyond the reach of many. In these circumstances displaced populations had to find other ways to find sustenance. During the siege of Boulogne, for instance, peasants were forced to come out of the town at night to forage for food, with the result that many were caught and killed by the English.[26]

The influx of hundreds or thousands of people placed pressure on urban populations which were already suffering from the impact of the war, a situation which could led to refugees being refused admittance to towns.[27] As we saw above, families who fled to Abbeville following the fall of Boulogne were driven away from the town. Abbeville lay on the edge of the theatre of conflict and the English had burned right up to its suburbs, which may have made its population less keen to accept further people. Certainly, the scale of the refugee crisis in northeastern France in the mid-1540s created major problems for towns across the region. At Amiens, the influx of refugees

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[23] Brésin, 190.

[24] Brésin, 293.

[25] Brésin, 286.

[26] Archibold, 504, 506; Gruffydd, *Enterprises*, 55.

[27] For the pressure the war placed on Amiens in the summer of 1544, see: AM Amiens BB 25, fols. 50r-67r.

from the Boulonnais led to the collapse of the city's poor relief system and caused the municipal council to organise a procession of the poor so that the 'inhabitants of the said town can see and understand the great number of them [the poor] and have compassion for them'.[28] Town governments and other civic institutions were left to deal with this refugee crisis on their own and there was no macro-level institutional response to the crisis from either the French crown or the Church, a situation which stood in contrast to the situation in earlier conflicts. For instance, during Edward III's wars in France in the mid-fourteenth century, which were also highly destructive and aimed at civilian populations, both the French monarch and the Church supported displaced peoples. Philip VI compensated those expelled from Calais in 1347 following its fall, while Pope Benedict XII funded emergency relief schemes to feed the inhabitants of the parts of northern France that the English destroyed in 1340.[29] In contrast to the papacy's actions in the fourteenth century, individual religious institutions were left to respond to the refugee crises in the 1540s. For instance, the *Soeurs Grises* of Amiens were given money by the town council to help provide food and shelter for people from the Boulonnais who had sought refuge with them.[30] Beyond financial pressure of having to deal with large numbers of poor refugees without additional support, there were other reasons to turn refugees away. In particular, the armies fighting in the Boulonnais in 1544 brought a severe outbreak of plague in their wake which persisted in the region throughout the decade. Certainly, Amiens' municipal deliberations show that cases of plague first appeared in the town by October 1544 and soon developed into a major

[28] AM Amiens BB 25, fol. 137v.

[29] Carolus-Barré.

[30] AM Amiens BB 25, fol. 84r.

outbreak, which necessitated the implementation of further expensive measures to combat the disease.[31]

Refugees were especially susceptible to disease because of the dire conditions in which they were forced to live. Upon the English invasion in 1544, flight to fortified towns was not an option for many rural dwellers for a variety of reasons and instead they fled to the woods and set up makeshift camps, as seen in the example of the village of Groffliers. Oudart du Biez, admiral of France, who was leading the defence of the Boulonnais, wrote that the combined effects of French, English and Irish soldiers in 1544 had forced the population of the village of Groffliers to live in the woods 'like wild beasts'.[32] His account is confirmed by the official investigations made into the impact of the conflict on peasant communities after the war, which describes how the inhabitants of Groffliers fled to the woods and sheltered in huts. Those who had not been killed by English and soldiers died from starvation or disease, leaving fewer than five people from the village's population alive.[33] The experiences of the people of Groffliers were typical of those of villages right across the region. Even in circumstances in which populations situated on the edges of the warzone were able to return to their villages because they English had not marked them out for conquest, conditions remained very difficult. For instance, the village of Clarques had fewer than ten people by 1545, and they were living in huts because their houses had been wrecked. The villagers were

[31] AM Amiens BB 25, fols. 86r, 106v-107r.

[32] Potter, *Picardy*, 213.

[33] Brésin, 293.

unable to provide food for themselves because the land and livestock had been destroyed.[34]

Yet for the population of the Lower Boulonnais – the highly fertile lowland region which the English had marked out for conquest (in contrast to the poorer Upper Boulonnais) – returning to their homes in early 1545 was not possible because the war was ongoing and the English kept this region barren and depopulated. During the conquest, English soldiers searched remote hiding places in the woods specifically to drive out the populations hiding there, with one soldier noting that he had 'clensed the Woode' of the people residing there – in other words the population had been killed or driven out.[35] The villagers of Alquines turned a cave system into a hidden refuge. While this could be effective for a short period while an army passed through a region, it was of limited use in a war of conquest – which we see clearly when we compare the English invasion of the Boulonnais in 1522 with that of 1544. When Thomas Howard invaded the Boulonnais in 1522, he marched quickly through the region destroying as much as he could. While the villages Howard burned in 1522 were deserted, he took no efforts to pursue their inhabitants as he sought to progress through the territory quickly. In contrast, when he returned to the Boulonnais at the head of another army in 1544 and again found deserted villages, he took his time to hunt down the communities and drive them from their hiding places. For instance, Howard halted his entire army specifically to spend three days trying to assault, smoke out and then mine the population of the small village Alquines from their hiding place in the caves. Similarly, residents of the Scottish Borders, a region which was lacking in walled towns, fled to remote hiding

[34] Brésin, 329.

[35] Leslie, 189.

spots in the hills where they waited until the English had finished burning their villages. Yet the wars Henry VIII launched in this region were also aimed at depopulation and in 1523 Thomas Howard employed six hundred border horsemen from Northumberland to hunt the Scots in their remote hiding places and kill or drive them away.[36] In 1542, Sir Ralph Eure wanted to attack Coldstream Priory specifically to kill the men, women and children who had fled there from the surrounding region.[37] Similarly, in France in 1544 the peasants of the Boulonnais fled to their village churches and many were killed as they sought shelter. A monk from the abbey of Cysoing (which lay close to the conflict zone) recorded that during the English invasion of 1544 'in many places the poor people were burned in their bell towers'.[38]

As a result of the English drive to depopulate the Boulonnais, the population was forced from their homes and hiding places, and refugee columns traversed the roads leading out of the region. The Welsh soldier and member of the Calais garrison Elis Gruffydd, who was sent from the siege of Montreuil back to Boulogne, provides a graphic account of the appalling conditions amongst the refugees he passed on the road, which is worth quoting in full:

'we saw a young and old people at two or three points along the road, who cried piteously in God's name for the help of a piece of bread to keep alive some of little ones who were dying for want of food. One of the men who was with me went towards one of the women who was able to stand on her feet and offered her money telling her to go with it to buy bread until God sent more, to which she replied "God in heaven what

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[36] BL Cotton MS Caligula B/VI, fols. 374r-374v (*LP* iii. pt. 2, no. 3321).

[37] Bain, I. xciii.

[38] Rosny, 'Documents', 405.

should I do with money or anything else but bread and only a little of that so that we can eat it now, because we do not dare to store it for fear of the wild men, who if any of them get any bread or money from any of us beat us and batter us so that it would be better for us to be buried alive than to hear this banishment and live in this wretchedness. Therefore, I pray God to take us from this world in time or for the earth to open and swallow us alive". After this we rode to the township of Neufchatel passing two or three in the same state on the way who gave us the same answers. Their words and appearance would have made the hardest heart melt in tears from pity at seeing as many as a hundred people, old and young, with not one healthy man among them, but all shivering with ague, and death in their faces from the scarcity and lack of bread to strengthen them.'[39]

Gruffydd also provided a vivid account of the impact adverse weather had on these refugees, who were without shelter and exposed to the elements. He states that

'there was a pitiful look on many sober men and women [walking along the road from Etaples] who were in great sadness, anger and affliction, conveying what good they had with them and especially their children of whom there was a large number, some so young that their parents had to carry them in their arms and on their backs, others fainted while walking because it was so wet that there had not been one dry hour for ten days. I was looking at them going on their way along the road leading from Etaples to Abbeville which lies four miles to the west of the camp at Montreuil. We came here from the camp and watched them going each as best he could and they lay down for the

[39] Gruffydd, *Enterprises*, 28.

night in the ruins of a church and village which we had burnt a short time before. Many both old and young died there of cold'.[40]

Gruffydd's first-hand account of the effects on war on civilians is borne out by numerous other contemporary sources.[41] For instance, Antoine Morin, one of the Boulogne refugees, writes that they were unable to find any shelter from the incessant rainfall because of the total destruction of the buildings in the region, while the Saint-Omer monk Louis Brésin writes that the refugees passed through a land that had been entirely burnt and depopulated, while many refugees drowned in rivers swollen by the heavy rains.[42]

A range of contemporary sources clearly show the disproportionate effect that war had on the women, children and old people who were especially prominent in the descriptions of the groups of refugees. According to the laws of war (and the *Statutes and ordynances* issued to English soldiers in 1544), these people were beyond

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[40] Gruffydd, *Enterprises*, 67.

[41] As a Welsh soldier who knew well the impact of the English conquest of Wales under Edward I in the late thirteenth century, Gruffydd may have felt particularly sympathetic portrayal towards the civilian population of the Boulonnais. More widely, he consistently displays a compassionate attitude towards the poor in his journal. See: Gruffydd, *Enterprises*, 2.

[42] Morin, 260. This is confirmed by Thomas Howard who notes that refugees going from Boulogne to Étaples drowned as they attempted to cross rivers swollen by heavy rains: TNA SP 1/192, fol. 137v (*LP*, xix, pt. 2, no. 270).

violence.[43] Yet the conditions of the war the English waged in the sixteenth century saw entire populations labelled as rebels who were resisting their rightful king, Henry VIII. Thus peasants who barricaded their village church against English soldiers could be slaughtered, as could towns and castles which did not surrender when called upon to do so (we have numerous accounts of English soldiers – several of them written by the perpetrators themselves – killing women and children during the Tudor monarchy's wars in France, Ireland, Scotland and the Low Countries). Yet the extent to which these laws of war covered refugees was uncertain. Despite the fact that Henry VIII had permitted the population of Boulogne to exit the town at its surrender and thus spared them the violence of a sack, they were attacked further along the road by the English monarch's soldiers. Women and girls, in many cases forming the bulk of refugees, were especially vulnerable and there are numerous accounts of rapes of displaced peoples. Women who exited Boulogne with other refugees were raped along the road to Etaples and Abbeville.[44] Sexual violence was not restricted to English soldiers. For instance, women and girls from the imperial village of Humereuil died as a result of the injuries they sustained while being raped by French and Italian soldiers during Francis I's conquest of the region in 1537.[45]

Beyond the actions of individual soldiers or groups of soldiers in attacking refugees, there is also evidence that it was wider English policy to attack displaced persons. A monk from Cysoing (a village lying just beyond the conflict zone) wrote that numerous refugees fled there in 1544 because of a rumour that the English

[43] *Statutes and ordynances*. For the laws of war and civilians, see: Bowd, 115-45.

[44] Bertrand, 101–2; Paradin, 290.

[45] Brésin, 279.

commanders had ordered the killing of men, women and children in the Boulonnais.[46] He states that when the English recruited soldiers in the Low Countries they made these men take an oath to kill women and children.[47] While it is easy to dismiss such reports as exaggerations or rumours, the nature of the warfare prosecuted in the Boulonnais meant that soldiers were ordered to kill traditional non-combatants, including women and children. From the perspective of English commanders in France there could be compelling reasons to kill women and children, particularly when they were supporting the enemy's war effort, and there was a prevalent view that the populations living in camps in the woods were helping French soldiers, which further encouraged English soldiers to hunt them down and drive them out of the region. This highlights that these refugees were not just the passive victims of violence at the hands of soldiers but were employing their own strategies against the English invaders. Evidently, the English feared the threat from these populations and were thus determined to use violence to remove this threat. Certainly, the English had long encountered significant resistance to their invasions of France from peasant populations, including during Henry V's occupation of Normandy in the early fifteenth century.[48]

Yet the desperate condition in which refugees found themselves placed them under threat from all soldiers (English, French and Imperial) and they provided information to all parties in a bid to avoid violence. For instance, a French woman (who had first been expelled from Calais in 1543 along with all those deemed to be ethnically

[46] Rosny, 404.

[47] Deschamps de Pas, 123; Rosny, 405.

[48] Allmand, 229-40; Wright, 87.

French, and then forced to live in the woods of the Boulonnais when war broke out there in 1544) was discovered by a band of English troops, following which she advised them 'to beware of going any further into the wood or the country, because every bush and brake in that district was full of soldiers who had come there suddenly from the Dauphin'.[49] As peasant women were particularly vulnerable to molestation at the hands of soldiers, the provision of information gave them a means to seek to avoid assault.

Returnees and Newcomers

By the end of 1544, the English had driven the native population out of the Lower Boulonnais. They kept this region depopulated and devastated until June 1546, when an Anglo-French peace brought an end to the war and confirmed Henry VIII's possession of the lands he had conquered in the Boulonnais, which were now annexed to his English crown and became as much a part of England as Northumberland or Hampshire (this was in contrast to his actions in 1513 when he conquered Tournai and ruled it for five years as king of France). As noted above, the wars which afflicted this region in the mid-sixteenth century, while causing major displacement to local populations, had typically been of the kind which allowed peasants to return to their villages after a short period. Yet English policy towards the region meant that this dislocation lasted for years. It is difficult to trace systematically the places where the population of the Boulonnais fled to during this time. Some of the wealthier members of Boulogne established themselves in the town of Desvres, and it is likely that other wealthy merchants were able to

[49] Gruffydd, *Enterprises*, 30.

relocate elsewhere. We know that fishermen from coastal settlements of the Boulonnais moved to Dieppe and Rouen and tried to establish themselves there. Yet it was difficult for refugees to begin new lives in new lands, and following the peace of June 1546 the fishermen from the Boulonnais appealed to the Tudor regime at Boulogne to be able to return to their former homes and take up their own trade again in return for becoming subjects of the English crown.[50]

With the conclusion of the war in June 1546, attention returned to the status of the original population of this land. Margaret of Savoy, regent of the Netherlands, reminded Henry VIII that even in circumstances in which territory had changed hands it was customary at the conclusion of a war for the original inhabitants to be permitted to return to their homes. She gave the example of Hesdin and its surrounding territory which Francis had conquered from Charles V in 1537 and then permitted the native population to return.[51] Yet the English replied that Henry held the Boulonnais by the right of conquest and was not obliged to restore them to their former owners 'such being the custom of England'.[52] As Henry VIII wanted to create an English colony in the lands he had conquered in France, he refused pleas for the native population to return and began leasing out the lands he had conquered to his English subjects.[53] However, economic necessity eventually forced Henry to modify his goal of having an entirely

[50] TNA SP 68/13, fol. 54r (*CP*, 301).

[51] TNA SP 1/219, fols. 118r-118v (quote on 118v) (*LP*, xxi, pt. 1, no. 950).

[52] *CSPSp*, viii. 449. To which Margaret instructed her ambassador to respond 'that 'if such has been the custom in England itself, it cannot be allowed to extend to this side of the sea, where a different custom prevails': *CSPSp*, viii. 449.

[53] *StP*, xi. 181, 185, 193.

ethnically English colony. This was largely because the prospect of relocating to lands on a military frontier initially proved unpopular with his English subjects, while the commercial farmers who did take up lands in France required a labour force to till the fields. Accordingly, Henry permitted some of the native peasantry to return to the Boulonnais in the summer of 1546, though this was only a fraction of the original population. Out of a pre-conquest population of perhaps 50,000 people, 462 French peasants were readmitted to the Boulonnais by 11 August 1546.[54]

The opportunity to return to their farms was undoubtedly attractive as many of those who survived the war of 1544–6 would have been living a precarious existence. The English commissioners responsible for over-seeing the resettlement of the Boulonnais emphasised that the French were prepared to pay considerably higher rents than the English for land in the Boulonnais.[55] While the French would pay higher prices because they hoped to have the farms they had held before the conquest returned to them, the English gave them no say in the matter. For the privy council, the return of the French was unavoidable if these lands were to be farmed; yet, the preferred outcome was for Henry's English subjects to settle this territory. The privy council told the Boulogne commissioners that 'the best husbandry is to get willing Englishmen to replenish the ground' and that 'the Picards [the blanket name the English gave the native population of northeastern France]… shuld be placed not at ther desier' but as the commissioners think best 'and then making ther othe to the kings majestie for want Englishmen to have land at suche price as the comissioners can bargeine with them'.[56]

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[54] TNA SP 1/223, fol. 88r (*LP*, xxi, pt. 1, no. 1444).

[55] TNA SP 1/223, fols. 88v-89r (*LP*, xxi, pt. 1, no. 1444).

[56] TNA SP 1/223, fol. 95v (*LP*, xxi, pt. 1, no. 1444).

In other words, the commissioners were to extract as much rent as possible from the French in return for lands they did not choose, in addition to which they were expected to take an oath to a monarch who had driven them from their properties in the first place. Moreover, the English introduced strict ethnic laws into the Boulonnais in 1546 restricting the movement of the French and covering aspects such as marriage and the naming of children.[57] These ethnic laws formed part of a wider concern to anglicise the frontiers of kingdom under the Tudor monarchs, with similar measures being adopted in both France and Ireland. The linguistic colonialism (which was imposed on the 'Picards', i.e., the members of indigenous population who permitted to return to work the land for English masters in 1546) the Tudor monarchy pursued in France and Ireland was similar to that proposed for other European imperial states such as Spain, with Antonio de Nebrija arguing in 1492 that the Castilian language and the kingdom's laws should be imposed on conquered populations.[58]

English settlers were concentrated in the western part of the Boulonnais, which was furthest from the frontier. As such, they were less likely to have their crops and houses destroyed during border raids. As well as farming highly fertile lands and having easy access to the coast, this was the most defensible part of the Boulonnais and it was where the English placed the bulk of their fortifications. In contrast, the French were placed along the eastern and southern land frontiers with France. As this was the most vulnerable part of the Boulonnais, the people living there could be expected to take the brunt of any French attacks. Certainly, the violent conduct of Valois soldiers towards the

[57] These were based on the 1529 laws of Guînes, which operated in the English county of Guînes in the Calais Pale: TNA SP 1/52, fols. 197v-205v.

[58] Greenblatt, 22-50; Nebrija, 3.

rural population of Boulonnais following Henry II's reconquest of the region in 1549 shows that the inhabitants of these lands could not expect to be spared molestation because they were ethnically French. Many of these soldiers harassed French peasants and pillaged their goods. From the perspective of Henry II's soldiers, these people were the subjects of an enemy monarch. As such, the laws of war gave Valois soldiers the right to attack these French peasants and take their goods. Certainly, Henry II's commanders found it difficult to restrain their soldiers from attacking the French population of the Boulonnais even after English rule came to an end in the Boulonnais in 1550.[59] While these French peasants had suffered considerably at the hands of the English and were now being used as a bulwark against attacks from their former master, the king of France, the opportunity to return to their lands would undoubtedly have been attractive despite the dangers, especially given that those who survived the war would have been living a precarious existence after having been driven from their homes.

Conclusion

The experience of the people displaced and driven from their homes during the Anglo-French war of 1544-6 formed one part of the conflicts which devastated this region between the 1520s and the 1550s. The populations of Artois, Picardy, the Boulonnais, Hainault and southern Flanders were the principal victims, and their populations were frequently forced out of their homes to flee for safety in other towns and remote

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[59] Hauttefeuille and Bénard, i. 286–7.

places.[60] Yet the English interventions in the war, first in 1522-3 and then again in 1544-6, produced some of the most severe examples of war against civilians in this region. When Thomas Howard first invaded the Boulonnais and Picardy in 1522, the Imperial commanders who fought with him were uncomfortable with the severity of the scorched earth strategy he used against the region's peasants, while Charles de Bourbon, duke of Vendôme, who led the defence of the Boulonnais, condemned Howard for waging a 'very fowle warre'.[61] Yet the war the English launched in the 1540s was even more severe and was aimed at achieving the entire depopulation of a region. While refugees were a common product of warfare, the scale and duration of the forced migration of the native people of the Boulonnais by the English was longer and more extensive than other conflicts in the region. Typically, an army would pass through the territory and populations of settlements on the route would flee to woods or neighbouring towns for weeks and then return to their villages again when the campaign was over. Yet the English achieved destruction of a much wider scale than these other campaigns and the war lasted years rather than weeks, in addition to which Henry's commanders depopulated the region and kept it depopulated for years, which meant that hiding in the woods was not sustainable. Moreover, England's colonial strategy meant that even after the war only very limited numbers of the original population were able to return and even then they could not go back to their homes but were given the worst lands in the most-exposed part of the region.

Henry VIII's children employed in Ireland the model their father had used in France in the 1540s. Expansion into the midlands of Ireland from 1549 led to the

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[60] See: Potter, *Picardy*, 200-32.

[61] BL Cotton MS Caligula D/VIII, fols. 271v-272r (*LP* iii. pt. 2, no. 2541).

depopulation of Laois and Offaly and the influx of English settlers. While Scotland was not targeted for colonisation, nonetheless thousands of families from the borders were forced out of their homes by a military strategy that was designed to target civilians. The English crown employed other methods of forced migration during this time. In 1549, Protector Somerset deported 1,000 peasants who had taken part in the rebellions that year to the colonies in France, while a similar scheme was proposed for Ireland.[62] By the early seventeenth century, the crown was ordering the forced emigration of 'unruly' populations of the far north of England to the colonies then being implemented in Ireland.[63]

Henry's actions in the sixteenth century meet the typology of twentieth and twenty-first century forced migrations put forward by Michel Agier in his influential study of modern refugee crises.[64] Certainly, the methods the English employed in France continued to be used to cause depopulation and forced migration right through to the modern era. For instance, the influx of large numbers of Russian soldiers into population of East Prussia during the First World War forced the native population to flee the region or else hide in makeshift camps in woods and marches.[65] To take a more recent example, the burning of villages, destruction of crops, use of scorched earth by a large occupying force, atrocities, mass expulsion and flight (first to remote places such as forest and then to neighbouring territories) all occurred in the late 1990s with the

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[62] TNA SP 10/9, nos. 47, 56 (*CSPDEd*, 150, 157). For these deportation schemes, see also: TNA SP 10/8, fol. 11r (*CSPDEd*, 122).

[63] Spence, 'Pacification', 'Graham Clans'.

[64] Agier, 3-4.

[65] See also the severe destruction of the region under the Red Army in 1945: Clark.

Serbian invasion of Kosovo.[66] Indeed, we saw earlier a Tudor soldier employ the word 'cleansed' to describe his actions in using violence to drive out the indigenous population of the Boulonnais in 1544. Moreover, in the same way that Serbian soldiers followed up their conquest by obliterating the written records of the native people by destroying archives, Henry VIII systematically burned all the records he found in the Boulonnais to erase written traces of French rule.[67]

Historians have seen many of the key episodes of the post-First World War forced migration of peoples by warfare as a consequence of state formation, whereby nation states were established behind fixed linear borders and those not part of the 'nation' were expelled. While the sixteenth-century context was in many ways very different from that of the twentieth century, nonetheless a similar process of state formation was occurring from the 1540s under the Tudor monarchy which was leading to major instances of forced migration. Whereas Henry VIII was happy to rule the French as the rightful king of France during his early campaigns in France (1512, 1513 and 1523), by the 1540s he had abandoned these efforts and instead annexed land to his English crown and established overseas colonies. While the development of linear frontiers is typically seen as a product of the later seventeenth century, Henry VIII sought to achieve this in the Boulonnais by making use of the latest scientific techniques in mapping. A line was drawn on a map of the Boulonnais and all the land behind it became part of England. Henry wanted this land populated entirely by his English

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[66] Bade, 320-3. On this type of violence and depopulation, see also: Kushner and Knox; Snyder, 334-58.

[67] AC Boulogne-sur-Mer 714, 973; Hauttefeuille and Bénard, i. 247; Haigneré and Deseille, i-ii.

subjects and only reluctantly admitted French peasants to return (and then in very limited numbers).[68]

Finally while the existing historiography on early modern forced migration tends to stress England's role as a 'terre d'exile' which welcomed refugee populations from across Europe – whether this be the Dutch Protestants who crossed the Channel during the Eighty Years War or the Huguenots who fled to London following the 1685 Edict of Fontainebleau – an examination of Henry VIII's wars reminds us that English monarchs were responsible for driving tens of thousands of people from their homes and creating major refugees crises in France, Scotland and Ireland during the sixteenth century, using methods which they would subsequently export to the New World.[69]

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[68] BL Cotton MS Augustus I/II, fol. 77r.
[69] Cottret; Parker; Esser; Gibbs; Pettegree.

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