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CONSTRUCTING FRENCH ALSACE: A STATE, REGION, AND NATION IN EUROPE, 1918–1925

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

Constructing French Alsace: A State, Region, and Nation in Europe, 1918–1925

by

William Shane Story

The French government portrayed its 1918 annexation of Alsace as a liberation of the region from German tyranny and the fulfillment of France’s national destiny. In subsequent purges, French officials deported Germans from the region and confiscated their properties. The purpose of the government’s anti-German policies was to re-integrate Alsace and its native inhabitants into the French national community by severing the region’s ties to Germany and Germans. Alsace became a crucible for the politics of national identity as individuals suffered, exploited, and challenged harsh state policies.

The state and the nation have been long-standing problems in European politics and in historical studies, but only in recent decades—and especially with the rapid development of the European Union—have historians widely recognized the value of emphasizing the region as a lens for understanding the development of the nation-state. This study explores the volatile conflicts between three pressures in Alsace after the Great War: state policies, regional interests, and the politics of national identity. It views the nation in Alsace from many different perspectives. It contrasts the French national myth of Alsatian identity with the profound constitutional dilemmas that stymied both Germany’s and France’s exercise of sovereignty over the region. France’s incomplete anti-German purges revealed many cosmopolitan communities that transcended national
categories. As reintegrated French citizens, Alsatians shaped the commemoration of their German war dead to accord with a dominant narrative of French triumphalism. France’s anti-German policies in Alsace represent an isolated imagining of the national community. This study interprets cultural history as the nexus of the legal, political, economic, and social conflicts that dominated the construction of French Alsace.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank the many individuals and institutions whose material, moral, and intellectual support have made this project possible. The United States Army generously funded my graduate studies, and I am grateful to Rice University and the Department of History for their support of my research and writing. Two Marilyn Marrs Gillet Fellowships funded my work in Alsace and Paris. I will always be grateful for the public and private funds that have made my work possible; my teaching will be a constant effort to pay it forward.

Daniel J. Sherman has been a teacher and a friend. He has suffered my prose and tortured logic courageously, if not stoically, and forced me to think, to say what I mean, and to learn. To Dan I owe a greater clarity of thought, and a more profound perspective on this world that I have striven to comprehend. Dan’s work inspires, and the student admires the master’s skill. Peter C. Caldwell’s incisive criticism was timely and thorough, and guided me to a much better understanding of sovereignty as a constitutional dilemma for Alsace, under both German and French rule. I will always appreciate Peter’s constant encouragement and empathy through the difficult task of writing. The history faculty at Rice have created an engaging atmosphere in which to think and write. My fellow graduate students, particularly Tonya Dunlap and Jim Goode, have been generous with their encouragement and feedback. Trisha Taylor and Lisa, my wife, helped me clarify my thoughts for a broader audience. In my seven years at Rice, Nancy Parker, Paula Platt, Carolyn Paget, and Rachel Zepeda have been administrative guardians and cheerful friends. Verva Densmore as the Graduate Student Coordinator has been a constant friend and a reliable counselor. Thank you all.
Beyond the hedges, I wish to thank the many archivists who worked faithfully to keep their collections and the rules for the sake of providing documents to me. Personnel in the municipal, departmental, and national archives in Colmar, Haguenau, Illkirch-Graffenstaden, Mulhouse, Paris, and Strasbourg were consistently helpful, as were the librarians at the Bibliothèque National et Universitaire de Strasbourg and in the Institute du droit local alsacien-mosellan in Strasbourg. I have heard stories of researchers suffering miserably through monotonous days in remote towns waiting to access rarely-opened archives; I would not know of such things. My months in Alsace and weeks in Paris brought new friends, great menus, and left very good memories. The verdant mountains and the flowing streams of the Vosges created an ideal vista for examining small towns' war memorials. Strasbourg was a wonderful city in which to work. Each morning brought a stroll along the canal on the way to the archives, with little to contemplate but trees, swans, cathedrals, and echoing church bells awakening the city. Only occasionally did I pause at a sidewalk café for strong coffee and a croissant.

My children, Kristen, Kayla, and Austin, have patiently endured my distractions and my ponderous contemplations of faraway places and long-ago things. They bring me constant joy and keep me mindful of the truly important things. My greatest debt is to the one person who has supported me throughout, and who has made it possible for me to have everything: a family, a career, and an opportunity to pursue a calling. Lisa Kimberling Story gave me her hand almost fifteen years ago. From the beginning, she made me better than I am. She has always loved, laughed, and encouraged at just the right times. She gives beyond measure, and I love her dearly. This manuscript is dedicated to Lisa, a great woman.
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Preface

This has been an intensely personal project. It is not really about Alsace in the past. It is about myself, my father, my son, and my patrie in the present. Lanny Story’s father abandoned him in depression-era West Texas. A high school drop-out, my father joined the Army. In the 1960s build up, he went to flight school, became a warrant officer, and flew two tours of duty in Vietnam. He believed in the United States, and that service to the nation was not optional. He returned from Vietnam without comprehending either the war or the turmoil that gripped the country, but committed steadfastly to the nation.¹ He passed away sensing that the nation had been betrayed.

In order to know my absent father, I followed his path into the service of my country, dismissing out of hand the risk of sacrifice. As an officer, I sought to instill, in soldiers and cadets, a spirit of conviction, literally an esprit de corps, a belief that the group, and by extension the nation, warranted the absolute risk of self. And in the corridors of Thayer Hall at the United States Military Academy, where generations of cadets have prepared to fight the nation’s wars, I read Benedict Anderson describe the nation as an “imagined [...] community.” I had sworn and administered oaths to defend the Constitution and to obey the lawful orders of superiors. For a soldier, these things seemed substantive enough to transform the abstracted nation into something real, and yet Anderson wonders at “the attachment that peoples feel for the inventions of their

¹ One of my most striking memories is of my father watching the movie Pattoò, with George C. Scott as the general. In a moment of frustration after the war ended, Patton swore that the United States, rather than disarming the Germans, ought to have been rearming them and helping them to kick the Soviets out of Europe and back to Russia. “Damn right,” my father growled. I did not quite grasp at the time the significance of my first lesson in international relations: nations do not have enduring friends or enemies, only interests.
imaginations” and he gallingly asks “why [are] people ready to die for these inventions?”\textsuperscript{2}

Anderson recognizes, but does not comprehend, the nation’s “profound emotional legitimacy.”\textsuperscript{3} That is why the nation remains irreplaceable, like the mathematician’s unknown variable. That unknown was the beginning of my research. If the nation was not what I had presumed to serve, I had to search out its traits, its boundaries, its use and abuse, and the role it plays as an instrument of political conflict. The French annexation of Alsace in 1918 presented a test case for this search for the nation. When I ask who was excluded, who had rights, how did the state try to manipulate law, and what was the relationship of the state to the region, I am indirectly asking those questions of the United States today. The archives in Strasbourg, Haguenau, Mulhouse, and Paris contained reams of correspondence, secret reports, directives, appeals, and crumbling newspaper clippings. Sometimes, these papers left my hands black from the accumulated dust and dirt of the archives’ cavernous stacks of file boxes. I did not find a nation in those files, but I did find power struggles, ideological contortions, and chaotic events that created a fast-moving blur in contemporaries’ vision. In the monuments that Alsatians built to their fathers, I saw mourning broken by determined assertions of meaning that wind and rain are slowly eroding. The national community still embodies ideas of common identity and essential purposes that are fundamental to our political commitments. This study seeks to offer some perspective for my son—and my daughters—to reevaluate all of the communities we imagine and the justifications we claim for them.


\textsuperscript{3} Ibid., 4.
Introduction

"An Alsatian," Laura Ingalls Wilder explained in 1915, "is a cross between a Frenchman and a German." \(^1\) Wilder, the American pioneer author, gave a commonplace answer to a vital international question, whether Alsatians were rightfully French or German. Early in the Great War, French leaders announced that they were fighting to liberate Alsace from German control. German leaders insisted that Alsace was rightfully German, but suspected Alsatians of having francophile sentiments. Some Alsatians tried to placate the two sides by highlighting the region's mixed legacy of French and German cultural and political influences. Promoting a dual heritage was a way of advocating international reconciliation and suggesting that Alsace should be a bridge between nations rather than a cause for war. The three claims—that Alsace was French, German, or both—were different ways of imagining the national community. Each vision of Alsatian identity emerged from a political cause, and rival claims gave nominal legitimacy to the armed struggles that killed millions in the Great War.

Thinking that Alsace must be French, German, or both makes it impossible to imagine the region as anything other than a national icon. Political borders and "nations," however, are not natural. The region called Alsace should first be thought of as a river valley in the heart of Western Europe, a rough rectangle measuring some 50 miles from east to west and 130 miles from north to south. Its boundaries include the Jura Mountains in the south, the Rhine River to the east, the Lauter River to the north and the Vosges Mountains to the west (fig. 1). The Ill River bisects the valley from north to

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Figure 1. Alsace as a river bordered on the east by the Rhine River, on the west by the Vosges, and to the south by the Jura.
south and feeds into the Rhine at Strasbourg. Farmers, laborers, and manufacturers have prospered in the area thanks to Alsace’s fields, water, and trade routes, and markets fostered the rise of Alsace’s urban centers. Strasbourg is the largest city, and as a trade center has long held the upper hand in competition with Mulhouse in the south, a capital of textile manufacturing. The Rhine is a trade artery, encouraging production and exchange among market communities on both sides of the river and passing through Alsace on its way from the Alps to the North Sea. The absence of political borders, customs posts, and fortifications suggests endless possibilities for how the region might be organized, and this underscores the fact that national boundaries were not foreordained.

For three-quarters of a century, from 1870 to 1945, many people did not think of Alsace as a bounded river valley or a collection of market communities. Alsace was reduced to a pawn in a struggle of nation-states, a Darwinian prize between Germany and France for control of the Rhine and precedence in Europe. This struggle subjected Alsatians to tremendous pressures, and their reactions reflected their fears for the present and their hopes for the future. In 1870–71, Germany defeated France and annexed three of France’s eastern departments, German-speaking upper and lower Alsace and French-speaking Lorraine, and organized them for the first time as the hyphenated region of “Alsace-Lorraine” (fig. 2). France recovered Alsace and Lorraine at the end of the Great War, in 1918. In 1940, Nazi Germany annexed Alsace-Lorraine from defeated France,

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3 This hyphenated region represents one more construction of identity. It should be noted that many Lorrainers, more traditionally Catholic and French-speaking, have long resented being linked politically to the more generally Protestant and German-speaking Alsatians.
Figure 2. The contested region of Alsace-Lorraine, 1919. Reprinted from Craig, Scholarship and Nation Building.
which finally recovered the region in 1945. Governments in Germany and France successively emphasized the importance of assimilating Alsatians into the nation either by persuasion or by force. With each change of sovereignty, and under each government, Alsatians’ rights depended on their abilities to display the loyalties that state officials expected of them. National identity in Alsace was an extremely sensitive political issue.

After France’s 1918 re-annexation of Alsace, the French government inaugurated a policy of Frenchification (*francisation*) to purge Alsace of Germans and German institutions and to integrate Alsatians into France. The policy tested the French government’s ability to turn German-speakers into French citizens and to transform the region’s social institutions so that they were recognizably French. Alsace was thus to be integrated into the French national community. The Rhine River would become a barrier against German civilization while the Vosges would become foothills binding Alsace to France rather than mountains separating the two. Alsace was to be cleansed of its German taint and remade into a model French region.

The French government suspended this effort in 1925. French attempts to transform Alsace faltered because many interconnected communities traversed the region’s borders. Alsace was a pluralistic society in which diverse social, economic, and political interests bound together individuals and groups of all nationalities and classes. The government’s targeting of Germans and German institutions unexpectedly hurt Alsatians and French nationals, because their interests were tied to Germans’ interests. Moreover, French policies devastated Alsace’s economy, and the government could not afford its huge costs. Frenchification did not transform Alsace, but its policies influenced developments in the region and it provided heated rhetoric for diverse political debates. French officials and Alsatians used the idea of “France” and of “French Alsace” as tools in the political and economic struggle for rights, legitimacy, and precedence in the region.
Scholars' conceptions of the nation have changed since the early twentieth century, and most recent works on Alsace have de-emphasized French or German claims on Alsatians' "natural" affiliation. A century ago, the nation was often treated as a natural phenomenon, an essential group of people distinct from all others, comparable to the idea of a race or a tribe, something presumably arising from divine ordinance. Most scholars today regard the nation as a mathematician's unknown variable, as impossible to define as to discard. It is one construction among many that we use to form and communicate ideas. Critical treatment of Alsace has changed from a search for national truths and political legitimacy into an effort to understand the corporative development of the German and French states vis-à-vis the region. The modern formation of Germany and France were power-laden struggles over the distribution of rights, authority, and resources. In both states—but more in France than in Germany—some partisan factions claimed legitimacy in the name of the nation, and state governments justified their policies as being in the national interests. The state became the nation-state, in which governments repressed their domestic opponents in the name of national unity. Various French and German regimes evoked the nation to justify state policies.

Alsace's affiliations with both countries worsened political tensions in the region, and the nation became—in both Germany and France and their dealings with Alsace—the cause célèbre around which diverse political struggles were fought, beginning with the German Reich's rule of Alsace-Lorraine during the annexation of 1871–1918. German leaders generally viewed the inhabitants of Alsace-Lorraine as a recalcitrant national minority, sympathetic to France and resentful of German rule. Dan P. Silverman produced one of the first effective reinterpretations of Alsatians' loyalties in the Reich in *Reluctant Union: Alsace-Lorraine and Imperial Germany, 1871–1918* (1972). Silverman

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challenges national narratives—myths of Alsatians’ eternal love of France—as inadequate to explain their discontent in the German Empire. He does not view Alsace, as so many have, as an international strategic problem, but as a German domestic political and economic dilemma, the nexus of the German states’ constitutional struggles. Contrary pressures encouraged and hindered integration, both in Alsace-Lorraine and elsewhere in the Empire, but these pressures were symptomatic of Germany’s long-standing struggle with federalism. Silverman stops short of concluding that Germany’s policies in Alsace were either a national success or failure. Instead, Alsace-Lorraine presented the Empire with a federalist controversy the continued development of which was sure, although its direction and outcome were not. Germany’s devolution into a military dictatorship during the Great War fundamentally altered the federalist question in Alsace and alienated Alsatians before the state collapsed.

National integration demanded investments, and Germany before 1918 and France afterwards devoted resources to Alsace to further assimilation of the region to the state. John Craig provides the most comprehensive and detailed comparison of Germany’s and France’s efforts in his Scholarship and Nation Building: The Universities of Strasbourg and Alsatian Society, 1870–1939. German forces had destroyed many of Strasbourg’s public buildings with bombardments during the siege of August 1870, including the city library with its renowned collection and the Palais de Justice. In 1872, the German government founded an impressive university in the city, in part to appease Strasbourgers’ latent resentment, in part to create a model German institution that would be a hallmark of the new Empire with an unsurpassed library, facilities, and faculty. After 1918, the French government attempted to transform the university into an icon of French academic excellence and a tool of Alsatian integration into the nation. Craig emphasizes

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the enduring problems of state support of higher education, academic authorities' sense of mission in a national context, and the singular wall of separation that can alienate an academic institution from its host community. The universities that Germany and France funded in Strasbourg functioned better as symbols of sovereignty than as instruments of integration.

Stephen L. Harp focuses on the German and French states’ efforts to educate and indoctrinate Alsace’s youth in *Learning to be Loyal: Primary Schooling as Nation Building in Alsace and Lorraine, 1850–1940.* Harp credits Germany with creating an educational system that promoted linguistic, political, and cultural assimilation and expanded political participation in the region. Loyalty flowed from a kind of social contract in which Alsatians gradually accepted the mantle of German identity as a means through which they could contest and defend their rights and interests. In 1918, Alsatians discarded the German cloak for a French one as the necessary condition for securing the French state’s sympathy for their interests.

Two works on the Jewish community in Alsace advance a theory of modernization through political liberalism. The French Revolution was a crucial turning point for French Jews because it brought them emancipation. For the first time, they enjoyed full civic equality with other Frenchmen, in theory if not in fact. Most French Jews lived in or were from Alsace, and Paula E. Hyman argues that it was the Revolution’s extension of liberty that inspired Alsatian Jews’ enduring embrace of French national identity in terms of language and political culture. Vicki Caron stresses even more strongly Alsatian Jews’ attachment to France. Again, French emancipation remained the key to Jews’ nineteenth-century internalization of French loyalties. In 1871, when Germany annexed Alsace and Lorraine, Jews feared German rule more than

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did other Alsatians, and so Jews emigrated to France in disproportionate numbers owing to their "pro-French patriotism." Hyman notes, however, that German progressive liberalism gradually won Alsatian Jews' loyalties, and their assimilation into Germany was only cut short by the German Empire's conduct of the Great War. In Hyman's view, French national sympathies survived in Alsace and Jews' heartily embraced France after 1918 because they identified the French nation with a liberal vision of the state.

Two other works undergird a broad-based Alsatian embrace of France as a greatly preferred alternative to Germany. Lilianne M. Vassberg's *Alsatian Acts of Identity: Language Use and Language Attitudes in Alsace* explores the language problems that conditioned political, religious, and educational issues in the frontier region. Alsatian elites exploited French as a sign of culture and good breeding in the predominantly German-speaking region, and French state policies gradually enabled French to displace German in the twentieth century. David Allen Harvey takes a different approach, emphasizing France's commitment to liberal republicanism as the key to instilling an enduring French patriotism in Alsatian workers. Harvey's *Constructing Class and Nationality in Alsace, 1830–1945* sees in France the prototypical republican nation, and he argues that Alsatian workers' commitment to republican values ensured their embrace of France in 1945.

In a different approach to modernization and the nation-state in Alsace, Samuel Goodfellow examines the development of fascist ideology in the region between the wars. In *Between the Swastika and the Cross of Lorraine: Fascism in Interwar Alsace*, Goodfellow traces the turbulent development of many strains of fascism among Alsatian

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10 Ibid., 187.
autonomist leaders and ties them to various German and French movements. His greatest contribution is detailing the fusions and schisms among Alsace's diverse political parties.

These various works describe gradual changes in Alsace over many decades of pressure from state assimilation programs. In contrast, I focus on just seven years, from 1918 to 1925, a brief moment when French leaders pursued the policy of Frenchification most diligently through the purge of Germans and the national transformation of public institutions. French bureaucrats, with politicians' tacit approval, largely suspended these efforts by 1925 because the region's myriad complexities could not be molded to fit a preconceived idea of the nation. French policies had considerable influence in Alsace, but the region was part of a dynamic social and economic market that transcended political boundaries. Alsace could neither be isolated from that market nor artificially made French. Frenchmen and Alsatians evoked the idea of the nation throughout the interwar period in contesting rights, authority, regional autonomy and state policies. After 1925, the nation remained a vital political rallying cry. The French government struggled to contain a growing autonomist movement in Alsace, and the government would not concede the limits of its sovereignty or the need for Alsace to integrate into the nation. The mid-1920s, however, marked a turning point in French officials' treatment of Germans in Alsace. French bureaucrats accepted Germans as permanent residents of Alsace, with property rights, and recognized that Alsatian law would have to remain indefinitely distinct from French law. French officials gradually recognized that Alsace was a dynamic community that could not be made monolithically French. The incomplete purge of Germans and the failed redistribution of property and civil rights provide a lens for understanding the use and meaning of the community called national.

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The three parts of the dissertation represent a variety of ways of searching for the
nation as a body of ideas about the composition and spirit of a community and the actions
they inspire. French officials in Alsace in 1919 had few resources and little time to plan,
and Frenchification was a haphazard collection of vague ideas rather than a concerted
operation. Part one of the dissertation contrasts a cultural perception of the nation with
the complexities of constitutional government. This contrast helps to illuminate some of
the political purposes of claims to nationhood. Chapter 1 describes how French writers
developed a national myth after 1871 to displace the shame of defeat with a prideful
assertion that Alsatians' loved France still and thoroughly rejected German rule. During
the Great War, the French government used claims of Alsatians' love of France to
promote French strategic interests. I examine a different problem in chapter 2: the
difficulties that Germany (from 1871–1918) and France (from 1918–1939) faced in trying
to integrate Alsace into their constitutional systems. Alsace remained a constitutional
anomaly within both states. France and Germany's constitutional difficulties vis-à-vis
Alsace contrast sharply with the rhetoric of national unity and homogeneity developed in
chapter 1. Examining how the French conceived and used the idea of Alsace and the
difficulties that Germany and France encountered in organizing constitutional rule over
the region helps us better to distinguish the abstract nation from the corporate state.

Part two explores the conceptual boundaries of the French national community in
Alsace from 1918 to 1925, who belonged and who did not, as French authorities tried to
purge the region of people and institutions that were not French. Chapter 3 focuses on
one year, 1919, and the government's efforts to cleanse Alsace of German sympathizers.
State officials relied heavily on false assumptions, while locals exerted considerable
influence over the exclusionary processes. In chapter 4, I review the administrative
difficulties of reintegrating Alsatians and naturalizing selected Germans into French
citizenship after the war. The acceptance or rejection of Germans for French citizenship
was another means of marking the boundaries of the national community. Chapter 5
examines another complexity that stymied Frenchification, the problem of property and law. French officials attempted to confiscate property rights in Alsace and to replace German laws with French laws. Sovereignty, however, did not grant state officials control over property and law. Many communities of economic interests stood in the way of French policies in Alsace, and the government had to abandon Frenchification. These three chapters are important because of their implications for the many episodes of ethnic cleansing visited upon various populations in the twentieth century. Alsace was a diverse region in which individuals' ethnicity was not clear. But violence, suspicion, and denunciations divided people into perpetrators, victims, and by-standers, categories whose lines were easily crossed.

Part three concludes the dissertation in chapter 6, on Alsatian commemoration of the Great War and its dead. The French government tried to incorporate Alsace into a heroic myth of national victory and liberation, legitimizing Alsatians' roles in the German war effort on the grounds that they had been victims of German militarism. This narrative, the pressures of the purges, and the scramble for civil rights conditioned Alsatian commemoration. French and German commemoration often glossed over the cataclysm of the war by claiming either glory in victory or resistance and resurrection in defeat. Alsatians, in contrast, had neither won nor lost, and Alsatian communities found it equally difficult to evoke glory in the French victory or to mourn the defeat without appearing sympathetic to the widely-despised German Empire. Alsatians in the breech constructed many narratives of the war, often claiming to be victims. Alsatians occasionally defied government conventions and standards to commemorate their roles in the war as legitimate sacrifices of the self for the greater good, not for Germany, but for Alsace.
PART ONE

THE NATION: A CULTURAL IDEA

AND A CONSTITUTIONAL DILEMMA
Chapter One
France and the Myth of French Alsace, 1871–1918

Myth transforms history into nature.
Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*¹

The French myth of Alsace portrayed the histories of France, Germany, and Alsace as a melodrama featuring tyranny, fidelity, and redemption. The myth incorporated a story-book style narrative that began when a stranger kidnapped a little girl from her mother, who was helpless to save the child. As the girl grew into a young woman, she remained pure and faithful to her mother’s memory despite the stranger’s threats and lures. One day, a hero arrived to rescue the maiden and return her safely to her mother. The young woman would never forget the blood-debt she owed her liberator.² Over the half-century from the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71) to the end of the Great War (1914–1918), this myth naturalized the French claim on Alsace, anthropomorphizing France as the loving mother, Alsace as the faithful lost daughter, and Germany as the terrible stranger. Illustrations of Alsatian girls and young women in regional costumes embodied the province for the French imagination (fig. 1-1). The myth in its perpetuation of an idea transformed an assertion into an axiom: Alsace was naturally French.

This myth lent meaning, coherence, and purpose to the turbulent history of the French Third Republic (1871–1940). It brought clarity to chaotic events, masked ignominy with pride, and became an idiomatic weapon in French politics. The myth

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resonated in French culture, and writers found that its fairytale simplicity carried broad public appeal; the myth sold attractive images to an eager French market. Like artists, French politicians found the myth malleable and useful. Its political valence, however, was kinetic, its power subject to the movement of unpredictable events.

The myth's simplistic narrative masked a complicated construction. It began when artists popularized the theme of stolen Alsace as a preferred topic for any study of the tragic events of 1870–1871. The myth promised to restore French pride in the wake of defeat. Politicians avoided most issues connected to 1870–71, including the myth, until the turn-of-the-century, when the myth became a convenient tool of partisan politics within France. The Great War would reveal how important an idea the myth of French Alsace could be, from its molding of pre-war attitudes in Germany and France to its influence on German war plans. After the German invasion of France in 1914, the myth lent crucial legitimacy to French war aims and weighed heavily in the continent's descent into total war. In November 1918, French forces moved unopposed into Alsace after Germany's collapse, and they staged a liberation spectacle that seemed to substantiate French claims that the myth reflected reality. This chapter traces the myth's development from germination to political use and its wartime deployment in French propaganda. The myth changed considerably from 1871 to 1918, but it was constant in one respect. The myth was not about Alsace, it was about France, and French politicians used Alsace and the myth as a proxy battleground for conflicts centered on Paris. The French notion of Alsatian identity illustrates the political and strategic importance of a cultural idea.
Creating the Myth

The early myth was a selective narration of France’s cession of Alsace-Lorraine to Germany in 1871. The theme of the stolen provinces proved more acceptable in France than the many ignoble events connected to the Franco-Prussian War. For centuries the dominant land power in Europe, France in 1870 confronted a German confederation led by the upstart Kingdom of Prussia. Under Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, the Prussian state defeated Austria in 1866, consolidated its influence in central Europe, and challenged French dominance. In the summer of 1870, Bismarck baited Napoleon III, nephew of the first Napoleon and Emperor of the Second French Empire, into foolishly declaring war and mobilizing the French army to invade Germany. The German armies, however, were better trained, better equipped, and more mobile, and they quickly routed the French forces and besieged Paris. The French state collapsed, Napoleon III fled the country, and the French sued for peace. In March 1871, the French National Assembly approved Germany’s demands for an indemnity of five billion francs and the cession of Alsace and a portion of Lorraine. At this price, the French bought peace and the German Armies gradually withdrew from France. Unfortunately, the provisional French government faced resistance in Paris, the Commune, which the government ruthlessly suppressed; French authorities killed thousands of Frenchmen. The French called this period the “Terrible Year” (L’Année Terrible).

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The myth began as a reinterpretation of the disasters of 1870–71, and it offered numerous advantages to French revisionism. In the myth, the French were not incompetent belligerents, but victims of a German crime. One of the myth’s central components was the “Protest at Bordeaux.” When the National Assembly voted to cede the provinces to Germany, it ignored the unanimous opposition of the thirty deputies from the regions, who pledged Alsace and Lorraine’s undying loyalty to France and unswerving rejection of any peace that gave up their region. This protest entered the myth’s lexicon as testimony of Alsatian fidelity. Emphasizing the protest as the crucial event of 1871 helped the myth’s proponents to avert attention from the French Assembly’s willingness to give up the provinces and from the government’s repression of the Paris Commune.

After 1871, French leaders converted their crisis-born emergency measures into the Third Republic’s governing institutions and slowly established the conservative Republic’s legitimacy. While the Republic’s stability remained tenuous, French officials avoided discussing revenge or making controversial statements regarding Alsace and Lorraine. This is important because the myth did not emerge from French strategic planning or state propaganda offices. It developed from artists’ and writers’ scattered

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5 Howard, *Franco-Prussian War*, 449. According to Dan Silverman, the deputies from Alsace and Lorraine had little basis for their claims to be representing the popular will. See his *Reluctant Union: Alsace-Lorraine and Imperial Germany, 1871–1918* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1972), 25–9.


7 The radical leftist Léon Gambetta fought longest and hardest to defeat the German invasion in 1870–71 and led the opposition at Bordeaux in support of the protest against cession of Alsace and Lorraine. Nonetheless, along with conservative politicians after the founding of the Republic, Gambetta subordinated “the cause of Alsace-Lorraine to that of France,” and was pragmatically cautious against any official or even unofficial support of those who wanted to promote revenge and the myth of French Alsace. See Frederic H. Seager, “The Alsace-Lorraine Question in France,” in *From the Ancien Régime to the Popular Front*, ed. Charles K. Warner (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 112–13.
references to Alsace and Lorraine in drawings and compositions that laid a foundation for
the myth's later political deployment. An Alsatian artist, Gustave Doré, contributed an
early image to the myth in his depiction of a young mother, widowed in the war perhaps,
wrapping her orphaned child in the French Tricolor for warmth against the cold German
wind. The mother's black "butterfly" bonnet—a traditional Alsatian headdress—marks
her regional identity, as does the work's title, 1871: Lost Alsace. The image was
sympathetic, but it did not call for revenge.

A young woman wearing the butterfly-winged bonnet became the myth's
principal icon for Alsace. Artists used the image to summon French sympathies, but it
was also important because of the political code the image conveyed. Defenseless
maidens conformed to the myth's projections of the region's helplessness, and the
allegory sustained contemporary paradigms of the feminine character or ideal. First, the
female lacked agency, being subject instead to masculine will, and it was important to the
myth that Alsace went to Germany against her will. Second, the female was faithful.
Despite being subject to German rule, the myth suggested that Alsace had never
surrendered her innocence to the German tyrant but remained hopeful of redemption by
France. The French-Alsatian propagandist Emile Wetterlé, developing the image,
explained that Alsatian wives and mothers were the true guardians of French national
traditions in the region. Alsatian men regretfully compromised their loyalties by
participating in German affairs and society, but the Alsatian woman protected the family
from the corrosive effects of German public life. "Her foyer," Wetterlé wrote, "is an
inviolable domain, where no stranger can introduce new ways. There she keeps the

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8 Bernard Vogler, Histoire culturelle de l'Alsace: Du Moyen Age à nos jours, les très riches heures d'une
région frontière (Strasbourg: La Nuée Bleue, 1994), 357.
language, the ways, the practices of the ancestors." Wetterlé's image both empowered women and constrained them. Although they were barred from the public sphere, Wetterlé imagined that women monopolized essential power, and wielded it to defend Alsace's French identity against German assault.

Before 1870, French literature treated Alsace as a faraway, exotic eastern province. Alsace was the stage for many of the works of the nineteenth-century writing partners Émile Erckmann and Alexandre Chatrian, who together described the adventures of French heroes taming the frontiers. One of their novels, *L'Ami Fritz*, featured the French dandy Fritz Kobus, a man of the world, rich, happy, independent and quick-witted. Fritz's character towered over pretentious Prussian border inspectors. A confirmed bachelor, Fritz was smitten by Sûzel, an Alsatian mountain girl, beautiful, hard-working, skilled and desiring nothing so much as to please Fritz. She mourned his departures and rejoiced at his returns, and their happy marriage was the predictable end of the novel and the utopia of the myth. *L'Ami Fritz* modeled the relationship between France and Alsace as a mutual attraction and shaped that relationship with gendered images and paradigms.

In a short story, *The Last Class* (1872), Alphonse Daudet turned the myth into a morality tale for French educators and students. The story describes the last lesson given by a French teacher in Alsace before being cruelly replaced by a Prussian. Daudet's work was not a call for revenge, but an admonishment for children to work hard in

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10 *L'Ami Fritz*, first published in 1864, was among many of its authors' popular novels that glorified French heroes in the exotic eastern frontiers. After 1871, many of Erkmann and Chatrian's works entered the pantheon of revanchist literature. Émile Erkmann and Alexandre Chatrian, *L'Ami Fritz* (Paris: Omnibus, 1993).
school, to learn the French language better, and in the end—above all—to love France.
Daudet’s other works also disdained revenge while promoting domestic order and
stability, notably *The Death of Chauvin, Paris during the Siege*, and *Glimpses of the
Insurrection*. Daudet wrote to inspire patriotism, and he favored accounts of French
soldiers’ incredible bravery against overwhelming odds and their brave preference for
death over dishonor. In his *The Color Sergeant*, an eternally faithful French soldier,
aghast at his nation’s defeat and the order to give up his unit’s flag to the Prussian
invaders, chose death over the shame of surrendering the colors.\(^{11}\) Such works bore little
connection to specific political programs and did not call for revenge; their authors were
probably less interested in preparing for war than in appealing to French consumers’
vanities.

While the drama of lost Alsace provided French writers good source material, it
obscured Alsatians’ experiences and the difficult choices they faced in the transition to
German rule. The most important decision was whether to stay in German Alsace and
become a German subject or to emigrate to France to retain French citizenship. In either
case, their property rights remained inviolable. In the myth, the choice of Alsatians to
leave their homes became proof of the region’s inherent attachment to the French nation.
In 1871 and 1872, nearly 160,000 Alsatians and Lorrainers declared their intention to
remain French—some ten percent of the population—and these became the myth’s heroic

\(^{11}\) *Oeuvres Complètes de Alphonse Daudet*, Tome II: *Contes de Lundi* (Paris: Alexandre Houssiaux, 1899); Stephen Harp makes it clear that *The Last Class* did not reflect the reality of the educational or linguistic
situation in Alsace or the transition from French to German rule. See his *Learning to Be Loyal: Primary Schooling as Nation Building in Alsace and Lorraine, 1850–1940* (Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1998), 127.
refugees from German tyranny. It was simplistic, however, to use Alsatian emigration as a measure of national loyalties. Alsatians in France encountered overt hostility as German-speaking refugees. In subsequent years, French citizens including Alsatian *optants* made up the largest foreign contingent of immigrants to Alsace in search of work. There was also little indication that Alsatian emigrants preferred France as a destination; many wound up in Algeria and some chose America. Alsatian immigration and emigration before, during, and after 1870–71 continued long-term migratory trends subject to many political, economic, and social variables. The transition to German sovereignty did cause Alsatian emigration to spike, but it is difficult to attribute this principally to Alsatians’ French patriotism.

Another factor thought to demonstrate Alsatians’ love for France was the incidence of young Alsatian men fleeing Prussian conscription in order to serve France by enlisting in the Foreign Legion. After 1871, the Legion’s recruiting rolls indicated a dramatic rise in the number of Alsace-Lorrainers eagerly volunteering to fight and die for France on whatever colonial territory the patrie thought worthy of their blood. By 1896, twenty-six percent of Legionnaires (2635 men) listed Alsace-Lorraine as their place of

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12 According to Dan Silverman, the German government only recognized 50,148 options—decisions to emigrate to France by Alsatians and Lorrainers—as valid, on the grounds that these persons actually moved to France before the October 2, 1872 deadline. It was possible, however, to argue that as many as a half-million people chose France over Germany by adding together natives of the region who emigrated to France before 1870, French immigrants to Alsace who opted to return to France, and invalidated options. Simple manipulation of the statistical base on an extremely politicized issue could support widely divergent arguments. See his *Reluctant Union*, 68.


15 Harvey argues that Alsatian emigration in 1871–72 did represent a preference for France over Germany. Harvey acknowledges, however, that France was “a country whose language and customs remained foreign to many [Alsatians].” See his *Constructing Class*, 71.
origin, with another twenty-five percent from the rest of Germany. The Legion, previously regarded as a wastebasket for France’s surplus of foreigners, seemed to give substantive proof of Alsatians’ continuing love for France.\textsuperscript{16} Numbers, however, do not tell the whole story. From 1871 to 1880, the government restricted enlistments in the Legion to Alsace-Lorrainers, Swiss, and some Frenchmen. Because the Legion had a reputation for individual anonymity and losing or reconstructing identities, it was futile to try to regulate volunteers’ origins. It is more likely that Legion recruiters re-christened their charges to meet the regulations than that they turned away willing recruits.\textsuperscript{17}

Despite government efforts to limit Legion recruitment, both recruiters and recruits had incentives to skirt the letter of the law and to ignore its spirit, and could rest assured that Legion officers were indifferent to the recruits’ origins. In a crisis or under pressure, many people by-passed regulations and created false identities when other interests were at stake. In the spring of 1871, French government forces laid siege to Paris to stifle a rebellion known as the Commune. Desperate people tried to escape the city, its food shortages, and the threat of government assault. The easiest means of escape was to become someone else, and because France had just ceded Alsace to Germany, Alsatians were no longer French, but German. Some Parisians escaped the city using “forged Alsatian papers” to transit check points, because Alsatians were suddenly exempt from French civil conflict.\textsuperscript{18} Counterfeit papers in Paris and the manipulation of Legion recruitments pose challenges to the notion that identities may be either official or


\textsuperscript{17} Legionnaires could freely claim whatever background was required. Douglas Porch notes it is “impossible to know . . . how many [Legionnaires] were Germans who had claimed to be from Alsace.” See his \textit{The French Foreign Legion: A Complete History of the Legendary Fighting Force} (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 290–1.

forged, suggesting the real and the false respectively. Who was Alsatian was not certain in 1871, nor would it be in other years, and it was equally difficult to argue that Alsatians were naturally French.

While the myth was a French construct, it informed popular perceptions of Alsace in both Germany and France. Alsatians, for their part, had to respond to the myth. To avoid civil or social discrimination, Alsatians in Germany had either to deny their supposed "Frenchness" or use it as a means of justifying special protections as a national minority. Conversely, Alsatians in France had to embrace the myth or face the suspicion reserved for outsiders. At the very least, Alsatians had to maintain a prudent silence to sidestep the complicated antagonisms that arose whenever they suggested their loyalties were either conditional or limited. Individuals desperate enough to join the Foreign Legion were unlikely to object when a recruiter distorted their origins to meet regulations. Alsatians' assertions of identity were vested reflections of current interests and ideological aspirations. Individuals communicated their hopes and fears through social constructs that others might understand, appreciate, and reward, or at least not attack. At various times, Alsatians embraced the myth, disparaged it, or qualified it. They ignored it altogether when the construct seemed irrelevant to their daily affairs.

The myth did not demonstrate that Alsatians felt French or loved France, but it was a useful instrument for bolstering French pride, and the French public enjoyed the myth for making them feel superior.19 Paul Déroulède capitalized on French dreams of revenge with poems and songs that insisted French heroism had never wavered in the war. Déroulède's songs "with their simple vocabulary and obvious rhymes, printed in pocket editions for a few sous and in illustrated editions for a few francs, sold by scores

of thousands and fostered the moral convalescence of France.”\textsuperscript{20} The French public bought the myth even as government officials explained that they could not speak of their desires or plans for revenge. Republican leaders deployed a sublime rhetoric of patriotic self-censorship in order to avoid the most controversial of subjects. The French public accepted official silence because the myth was not about renewing the war, but about “moral convalescence.”\textsuperscript{21}

Ernest Renan, a historian of religion who broke with the Catholic Church over the divinity of Christ, constructed one of the most important formulations of the myth in his 1882 lecture, “What is a nation?” This lecture was an apology for the myth in its claim that neither religion, language, nor culture makes a nation, but consent, common ideas, memory, a glorious heritage, and common suffering.\textsuperscript{22} These were all the elements of the myth of French Alsace that presumably tied the province to the French nation. Renan’s audience understood that he was referring to Alsace when he described the nation as a “daily plebiscite,” an image that evoked Alsatian patriots’ presumed immigration to France for love of nation. Most telling were those young heroes who risked jail by fleeing Prussian conscription to serve their true patrie in the French Foreign Legion.\textsuperscript{23} The early myth transformed 1870–71 from a time of French self-abasement into a

\textsuperscript{20} G. P. Gooch, \textit{Franco-German Relations, 1871–1914} (New York: Russell & Russell, 1923), 6-7. Gooch took the myth’s rhetoric seriously as a conscious and enduring French determination to avenge 1870–71 and hence a contributing factor to the outbreak of war in 1914.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.


German crime against France, simultaneously the victim of German perfidy and the hero of Alsatian loyalties.\textsuperscript{24}

The Myth in the National Revival

The treatment and significance of the myth changed toward the end of the century, coincident with the transition of nationalism from left to right. The myth increasingly became a tool of partisan politics as international tensions raised the specter of another war. The myth’s importance as a cultural icon grew in response to French fears of Germany’s military and economic ascendancy. Germany’s population growth and industrialization suggested that country’s approaching dominance of continental affairs and France’s decline. The notion that Alsatians still loved France, however, and preferred France to Germany, enabled the French to imagine that their civilization remained indomitably superior to German culture. Ernest Lavisse, a historian best known for publishing textbooks and popular histories of France, made frequent reference to Alsace and demonstrated the region’s continuing cultural importance in the French imagination. In 1891, he confirmed Alsace-Lorraine’s essential Frenchness but rejected talk of revenge because Alsace needed to be a bridge between nations rather than a battleground.\textsuperscript{25} In 1904, one of Lavisse’s general histories addressed Frenchmen’s fears of national decline by citing Alsace-Lorrainers’ heroic resistance to Germanization as proof that France was not “a decomposing nation.” Only France’s vitality explained

\textsuperscript{24} “To think of revenge... was a way of circumventing the reality of humiliation and vulnerability by imagining a reversal of roles: France would be the victor, her greatness and virtue at last vindicated, her superiority reasserted. But it was always to be in the future, never at once.” Robert Tombs, \textit{France}, 51–54.

Alsatians' unrelenting devotion. The idea that Germany had failed to win Alsatians' loyalties tickled French conceits. Most important, the myth became an unassailable national icon and a useful political tool. French references to Alsace would remain vested reflections on France.

In France, Alsace's political importance derived from some writers' belief that the French image of Alsace could be used to counter French centralization and the separation of Church and state. The nationalist writer Maurice Barrès, a prominent advocate of clericalism and monarchy, perceived Alsace's political utility, and most of his writings after 1903 seemed obsessed with Alsace. Barrès criticized his countrymen for forgetting the suffering of their exiled Alsatian compatriots. Yet Barrès did not call for a war of revenge. Instead, he used Alsace-Lorraine to advocate clericalism and regionalism in France and to criticize the Third Republic for suppressing dialects in the country. In Barrès' Alsace-Lorraine, the natives' love of France fostered the rapid spread of the French language, and the German government's attempts to suppress French were self-defeating. Moreover, the Catholic Church in Alsace-Lorraine—in Barrès' view—had sustained French identity against the Protestant Empire's incursions, so French anticlericals' attacks on the Church undermined France's most faithful ally. The people of Alsace-Lorraine had a strong French regional identity and a political maturity that deserved constitutional protections against centralized tyranny. Barrès saw in Alsace-Lorraine proof that the French nation could prosper only in the region and in alliance

with the Catholic Church. Like others, Barrès adapted the myth to his own purposes without using it to demand war.

The French image of Alsace imposed expectations and constraints on Alsatians living or traveling in France. Politically and socially, the most prominent Alsatians were the bourgeois *optants* who left Alsace in 1871–72. *Optants* used the myth to demonstrate that they were the most self-sacrificing Frenchmen of all. Most Alsatians in France were not *optants* or French citizens. They were economic immigrants, Prussian draft evaders, bohemian writers, and students. Alsatians in France faced an assimilationist society that demanded conformity and integration and was suspicious of both foreign accents and foreign links. Alfred Dreyfus and many of his champions and adversaries in the infamous turn-of-the-century Army scandal were Alsatians, and the burden of demonstrating their loyalty as Frenchmen from Alsace weighed heavily. The affair’s anti-semitism was not far removed from other prejudices that Alsatians encountered. If Alsatians in France were not French patriots, they could ill-afford not to be regarded as such. Many Alsatians in France existed on the margins of the nation, and the consequences of exclusion—as would be seen when war broke out—encouraged them to either remain silent on national issues or to become outspoken advocates of the nation.

Cultural valence and political opportunism jointly contributed to the commemorative surge after 1900 that gave the myth greater coherence. Old men who

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29 Barrès, *Scènes et Doctrines*, 303, 504. I read Barrès’ advocacy of Alsatian regionalism and clericalism as implicit defenses of French decentralization and Church-State reconciliation. They certainly accorded well with his attacks on French centralization and the separation of Church and State.

30 ADBR AL 69, 70. At the same time that the German Reichstag was debating constitutional reforms for Alsace-Lorraine in the Spring of 1911, these French-Alsatians were mobilizing support in Paris to construct a “Monument National aux Alsaciens-Lorrains” in that city. See the article “des Alsaciens-Lorrains à Paris” from April 12, 1911.

had long avoided the shameful defeats of their youth re-remembered the battles, made martyrs of the dead, and became self-effacing heroes. French nationalists argued, reassured by the writings of Déroulède, that despite their defeats, French soldiers had fought just as heroically and skillfully as German forces, perhaps more so. The French Parliament approved a medal for veterans depicting Marianne wearing a Roman helmet and inscribed anachronistically "République Française."32 Notably, one could qualify for the medal only by having served in the Army between July 1870 and February 1871, since the government could not commemorate its subsequent assault on the Paris Commune.33 Alsace-Lorraine became a site of pilgrimage,34 and the French dead of the war became heroes of the Republic, eternally worthy of the nation for having sacrificed their lives for France.35 A private organization, Souvenir Français, helped revitalize the myth of French Alsace when, in 1909, it erected a French war memorial in Wissembourg to the French dead of that 1870 battle.36 Souvenir Français led patriotic efforts to commemorate the war of 1870–71 and built battlefield monuments to the dead in Alsace and within France when German authorities rejected French monuments.37 In a 1911 monument dedication in Bitche, the speaker, Monsieur Savary, absolved France and the Army of responsibility for the defeat of 1870–71: "The Empire fell because it was conquered and its defeat cost us these two admirable provinces."38

32 ADBR AL 87, 561, cover, Le Petit Journal, April 2, 1911.
33 ADBR AL 121, 134, war ministry, 2 November 1911.
34 ADBR AL 69, 462/47, reports on the Souvenir Français, 1911 to 1920.
37 ADBR AL 69, 70, Nouvelliste d'Alsace-Lorraine, 4 September 1911.
38 ADBR AL 69, 70, extract, 28 March 1911.
The myth's iconography and partisan use had little influence on policy-makers. Politicians invoked the myth before nationalist audiences, but they did not prepare for revenge, or calculate the costs or the possibilities, too high and too remote respectively.39 Although Raymond Poincaré, the prime minister in 1912 and the president in 1913, was a Lorrainer who remembered the shame of defeat from his childhood and keenly felt the loss of Alsace and Lorraine, he did not view war as a sensible policy.40 The French Army likewise did not shape its strategy with the object of recovering the provinces.41

Partisans' uses of the myth, however, alarmed some Frenchmen, especially because simmering differences in colonial Africa and conflicts in the Balkans increased tensions between France and Germany. An alliance with Russia made French planners feel more secure, but had the unfortunate effect of making German planners feel more desperate, and in a crisis more pressured to act decisively.42 Among a complex web of causes, Alsace-Lorraine seemed to be the essential dispute between France and Germany, an issue that, if resolved, could greatly reduce international tensions. Many accepted the myth's validity and even French pacifists conceded Alsatians' natural attachment to

39Edward E. McCullough mistook the myth's rhetoric for a national determination to make war on Germany no matter what the cost for the sole purpose of taking back Alsace-Lorraine. In a study of French war aims, he saw only a chauvinistic militarism carrying Europe to war for material gain. See his How the First World War Began: The Triple Entente and the Coming of the Great War of 1914–1918 (London: Black Rose Books, 1999), 197–207. Although the Tiger himself, Georges Clemenceau, resented Germany and was anxious for the future and French military preparedness, he stopped well short of recommending war as a remedy for France's ills or even proposing a military revision of 1871. See his France Facing Germany, trans. Ernest Hunter Wright (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co, 1919); Tombs, France, 476–80.

40William Jannen Jr. calls this a 'neither/nor' sentiment of patriots for whom both forgetting and fighting were equally unacceptable solutions. See his The Lions of July: Prelude to War, 1914 (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1996), 62.


42If the myth did not inspire the French government to pursue revenge, it along with the Franco-Russian alliance contributed to German planners' conviction that in any continental conflict they would have to fight both France and Russia. Links can be drawn then between French icons, French partisan politics, continental alliances, and German strategy.
France. One pacifist argued that despite Alsatians’ preferences for France over Germany, they wanted to help reconcile the two countries. The war would magnify the myth’s political importance exponentially.

The Myth and French War Aims

The recovery of Alsace-Lorraine emerged as France’s principal war aim partly because of the myth’s salience as a cultural idea. More critical, however, was French leaders’ emerging conviction that Franco-German conflict was permanent and that the Rhine River presented the best line upon which to defend France. Tales of German tyranny in Alsace seemed prophetic of Germany’s invasion and occupation of Belgium and northern France in 1914, and the invasion had to be repelled to spare the French the fate that Alsatians had suffered since 1871. The French government had difficulty articulating its war aims because most officials wanted to avoid domestic debates on the war and feared offending allies whose interests varied. The myth had the virtue of encoding a number of diverse French interests in a defensible position that many would not openly challenge and that the allies would not reject outright. Security hawks could demand the return of Alsace-Lorraine to better defend France. Others saw Alsace-Lorraine as partial recompense for Germany’s destruction of French property. French democrats refused to deny Alsatians the right to choose republican France over despotic Germany.44

44 Douglas Johnson’s emphasis on domestic crisis highlights the difficulties French officials faced in determining their war aims in his article “French War Aims and the Crisis of the Third Republic,” in War Aims and Strategic Policy in the Great War, 1914–1918, eds. Barry Hunt and Adrian Preston (London: Croom Helm, 1976), 41–54; T. C. W. Blanning’s discussion of French strategic aspirations on the Rhineland in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century offers a useful context for considering
The German invasion and French strategic concerns led the French government to promote wide adherence to the myth in 1914, and French propaganda services and sympathetic writers magnified the struggle over Alsace on the Rhine into the central conflict of human history. Rénan had once based the French claim on the liberal pillar of consent, but French war propaganda emphasized a cyclical struggle of race and tribe dating back thousands of years. According to the myth's prehistory, the original Alsatians were Celtic tribes, the first people to establish permanent settlements on the Rhine. These Celts, or gaulois, had been germanized by force by invaders from the east before their initial liberation by Louis XIV. The Great War, then, was not an unusual tragedy, but rather part of Frenchmen's destiny to struggle on behalf of Gaul against Teutonic barbarians across the Rhine. Failure in the struggle carried the risk that French civilization would be extinguished. Popular prejudices increased the myth's appeal and eased its conceptualization, and a prehistoric struggle for control of the Rhine made sense to the myth's proponents. Charles de Gaulle later combined the racial mythology with strategic concerns when he explained that nature meant for the Rhine to be the Gauls' boundary. The myth made control of Alsace a Darwinian prize in a struggle for survival between nations.


46 Paolo Solina depicted the Franco-German conflict as the ancient struggle between the latin and germanic civilizations revisited on the Rhine as it was in the Alps between Italy and Germany/Austria. See his *Notes Sur le Roman Patriotique Français de 1870 à 1914* (Rome: Cagliari, 1970), 168–69.

As French propaganda services sacralized the myth, they portrayed French military operations in Alsace as a liberation rather than a conquest. The liberation narrative was essential to the myth, and images of Alsatians greeting French soldiers as saviors carried the weight of this narrative for public consumption. French officials visited occupied Alsatian towns and staged welcomes by native Alsatians. General Joffre’s photographers recorded the requisite scene numerous times in his visits to Alsatian villages on July 14, 1915, as he received flowers from children and young women in Alsatian costumes and the greetings of town officials. Joffre assured the children: “You are French, my children, and you will remain French.”

Photographs of Alsatian women and girls welcoming French officials helped French audiences to imagine liberation and validated the myth for popular consumption while demonstrating its continuing reliance on social expectations of gender. In February 1915, the editors of L’Illustration, a popular French photo-news weekly, used a cover photo of four Alsatian schoolgirls, in regional dress, greeting President Poincaré at the steps of their school (fig. 1-2). Poincaré and the French general with him were stiffly erect and stone-faced. The president and the general recognized their roles in producing the image, and images were critical to their careers, but they seem awkward. The photograph’s tension derives from the schoolgirls’ apparent discomfort. One girl regards Poincaré cautiously, as a stranger. One’s eyes are downcast, one glances away, and one tilts her head, either curious or bored, waiting for the spectacle to be over. A scene

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48 French forces made weak forays into Alsace in August 1914 that quickly led to stalemate and trench warfare on the ridges of the Vosges Mountains for the duration of the war. This left a few Alsatian towns under French occupation. See Harp, Learning to Be Loyal, 161.

49 Collection of photographs in L’Illustration (July 24, 1915), 88–89; a similar scene was organized for President Poincaré in the Alsatian town of Saint-Amarin, L’Illustration (August 21, 1915), 200.

50 See the cover of L’Illustration (February 27, 1915). Some of the girls’ male relatives and acquaintances would have been serving in the German army in accordance with the law, and the fighting in Alsace did not
intended to illustrate Alsatians’ gratitude for Frenchmen’s sacrifices revealed the palpably strained processes by which the President and the general marked their authority as well as how Alsatians indoctrinated their daughters on welcoming official visitors.

War and the French government’s strategic adoption of the myth created particular difficulties for Alsatians wherever they resided and regardless of whether they felt or expressed loyalty to either Germany or France. The question of Alsatian identity became increasingly critical during the war, especially with the development of the idea of national minorities and national rights epitomized by the Wilsonian doctrine of self-determination. That is the context in which it has frequently been asked, with the expectation that some clear answer must be possible, whether at any time Alsatians were truly French or German.\textsuperscript{51} A better way to conceive of the problem of Alsatian identity during the war is to consider the circumstances that Alsatians faced wherever they were, beginning in Alsace itself.

When the war broke out, French and German forces skirmished in the Vosges Mountains, rushing in confusion alternately to attack or defend. Units attacked, suddenly found themselves surrounded, then saw the enemy in their midst, and frequently mistook

\textsuperscript{51} Many people saw dual French-German claims on Alsace as the root of the on-going conflict during the First World War and called for a negotiated settlement in which Alsace-Lorraine would be organized as an independent buffer state. This policy posited, against contrary assertions of Alsatians’ French nature, an independent “Alsatianness.” Camille Jullian challenged the view on behalf of French strategy—the myth—in his \textit{Notre Alsace}, I. Samuel Goodfellow perceives in modern Alsatian history, especially in the interwar period, “a long-term stabilization of Alsatian identity as Frenchmen.” See his “From Germany to France? Interwar Alsatian National Identity,” \textit{French History}, vol. 7, no. 4 (1993), 471; Stephen Harp more cautiously describes Alsatians’ regionally-conditioned Germanness on the eve of the First World War. Harp’s study of education in Alsace considers the effects of the outbreak of the war in Alsace and the incessant nationalistic turmoil that followed. Harp, I think, changes the question from whether Alsatians were more naturally French or German to why we think such a question is appropriate—the original question presumes that nations are natural. See his \textit{Learning to be Loyal}, 159.
friendly and enemy formations. Military operations in Alsace featured unprepared
French and German soldiers trodding and fighting over alarmed civilians’ fields,
speaking a mélange of French, German, and local dialects. The conflict confused
Alsation civilians as much as anyone:

I remember three (Alsation) grenadiers coming from Potsdam. These tall, strong
men put on their mountain costumes and in the dark of night went to their homes
which were in French hands now. After about two weeks they were back and one
gave my father a French gold piece to keep for him. They had earned money
digging trenches for the French. German grenadiers they were, coming from the
most famous German Guard Regiment, these Alsation mountaineers; they came
all the way from Potsdam where ‘old Fritz’ for the first time drilled German
troops ... they came back to the homeland, their Alsace and, to get some money
to spend in Berlin, they went to dig trenches for the French. Then they came to
our town, put on the uniform of the Kaiser, and returned to fight for their
fatherland, Germany.\textsuperscript{52}

Alsatians in the war found themselves in a nonsensical position, with interests and
loyalties equally claimed and suspected by both sides.

Soon after the war broke out, there were incidents of front-line units summarily
executing Alsatians suspected of treachery.\textsuperscript{53} The German government placed Alsace
under martial law and arrested some Alsatians accused of disloyalty; a few fled across the
French or Swiss frontiers to avoid arrest or conscription. Beginning in 1915, the
government transferred Alsation conscripts, most of whom were assigned to Prussian
units and trained in Berlin, to units on the Russian front because of fears that they might
desert to French forces in the west. Alsatians complained of being treated worse than
other German soldiers, and were in fact denied home leave for fear that exposure to

\textsuperscript{52} Oscar Ludmann, \textit{Stepchild of the Rhine: An Autobiography} (New York: Alfred H. King, Inc., 1931),
54–5.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid, 47; Archives Municipal de Mulhouse (AMM), MI N, Monument de Bourzweiller, parchment, 29
July 1919; AMM, extract, 15 August 1919.
conditions in Alsace might breed disloyalty. Alsatians suffered terribly, but material deprivation sapped most Germans’ confidence in the government as economic mobilization diverted production to military demands and the Allied blockade stopped crucial imports. Malnutrition ravaged Germany, and starvation reportedly killed hundreds of thousands.

Some 380,000 Alsatians served in the German military during the war, and many hoped to wrest greater postwar freedoms with their sacrifices. Alsace’s proximity to the front made the war’s difficulties worse, and Alsatians increasingly demanded a postwar order that would free them from Prussian domination through autonomous German statehood. In January 1918, Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points included an ambiguous call for “the wrong done to France by Prussia in 1871” over Alsace-Lorraine to be “righted.” In Alsace, the Fourteen Points excited discussion of various alternatives to German rule, including neutrality and/or possible federation with Switzerland, Luxembourg, and Belgium. In Germany, Alsatians’ discontent aroused the hostility of conservatives and the General Staff, which by 1918 had turned the entire country into a military dictatorship and harshly repressed Alsatians’ complaints. Mutually reinforcing

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58 Silverman, Reluctant Union, 197–98.
repression and resentment led Alsatians into opposition to the German Empire, and by
1918 a great majority was ready to embrace with enthusiasm any alternative to the
Prussian dictatorship.

While German authorities tried to control Alsatians, French authorities tried to
win Alsatians’ sympathies in French-occupied Alsace. The nature of the myth, of course,
called for French benevolence toward Alsatians, and French propaganda required some
substantive, if manufactured, evidence of mutual love and respect between France and
Alsace. Therein lie such things as the staged photographs of Alsatian women welcoming
French dignitaries to “liberated” villages. Although under martial law, French-occupied
Alsace, a sliver of territory comprising a few towns in the Vosges Mountains and
occupied throughout the war, was something of a showcase, and authorities seem to have
generally succeeded in winning local approval of French rule.\(^{59}\)

On the other hand, Alsatians in France fared less well during the war, and
experienced the difficulties of life as suspected enemies of the larger society. After the
German invasion, Alsatian subjects of Germany in France were suddenly the enemy,
surrounded by a fearful population, and Alsatians shared the low opinion that Frenchmen
held of all Germans. Alsatians’ German ties and accents made them inherently suspect,
an experience that recreated some of the prejudices that Alsatian refugees had
encountered in 1872.\(^{60}\) Propaganda about the rape of Belgium and German atrocities

\(^{59}\) Harp, Learning to be Loyal, 162. A caveat arises from the experiences of certain Alsatian notables—
mayors, priests, etc.—whom the French military took as hostages from their villages. These German-
Alsatians found themselves incarcerated in French internment camps along with various Germans civilians
that the French government rounded up on the outbreak of the war. See François Laurent, 1914–1918, Des

\(^{60}\) Wahl, L’Option, 202.
fanned popular hatreds. German nationals were presumed to be spies, or at least inherently malicious, and faced vigilantism, arrest, and imprisonment, as well as the confiscation of their property. One Alsatian’s post-war account of France in 1914 described

Bureaucrats without conscience, police without scruple . . . [who] arrested our unfortunate compatriots, without the least evidence, and under the false pretext of being suspects or spies based on a single calumniuous denunciation. This excess of zeal had the most regrettable consequences . . . Innocent Alsace-Lorrainers were interned in concentration camps, others incarcerated in cells in the citadel of Besancon, etc., where they endured the worst privations. These arbitrary arrests violated the rights of men and liberty! One Alsatian woman, Lina Baer, suffered for being an enemy national in France in 1914. Born French in Strasbourg in 1854, Baer accepted German nationality to remain in Alsace in 1871. In 1905, she moved to Nancy to open a boarding school for Alsatian and German girls learning French. Arrested when the war broke out, Baer “was sent to the concentration camp of Ills-sur-Tille . . . following the orders given by military authorities, which were taken against every German subject.” Her school and belongings were sold “at a pitiful price,” leaving her ruined. Alsatians in France also faced physical assault, because “a distrustful population . . . tended to see in all

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62 ADBR AL 121.98, Association of Alsace-Lorrainers to Deputy Reibel, 22 March 1920; an undersecretary of state estimated that some 1,100 Alsace-Lorrainers were rounded up in this way in 1914. After the war, French officials suspected Alsatians’ complaints of their treatment as signs of disloyalty. See AL 121, 98, undersecretary to Deputy Reibel, n.d.
63 Despite the German Annexation—or perhaps because of it—French in Alsace remained the language of the bourgeois and of social advancement. Those who hoped their daughters would marry well emphasized the importance of fluency in French. Frédéric Hoffet describes this bias and praises it in his *Psychanalyse de l’Alsace* (Strasbourg: Alsatia éditions, 1951), 97.
64 ADBR AL 121, 1056, police to Commissioner General, 30 May 1921.
65 ADBR AL 121, 1056, Baer to Commissioner General, 29 September 1921.
foreigners a spy . . . and lynched some [Alsatians] whose dialect was mistaken for German."  

The benevolence that French authorities practiced in occupied Alsace and the mistreatment to which they subjected Alsatians elsewhere were not deliberately schizophrenic policies. In fact, French officials in 1914 had no policy on Alsatians or Lorrainers. The treatment they doled out to Alsatians in occupied Alsace derived largely from the logic of the myth, while the treatment Alsatians initially received in France reflected how the French state treated Germans generally during the war. After the arrests of August 1914, the government instructed prefects to practice selective leniency towards those from Alsace and Lorraine, Poles, and Czechs—all German minorities who might be potentially sympathetic to the French cause. Leniency, however, reverted to harshness, as the government ordered prefects to take any property left by those who "on the outbreak of war, voluntarily left France or who were expelled or who were sent to concentration camps, making them suspects."  

Flight to avoid mobs or the fact of arrest became prima facie evidence that one was guilty of being suspicious. The invasion crisis drove French officials and the public to extremes in their actions, behaviors, and policies that would have been paranoid but for the reality of the crisis. Alsatians' well-being turned more than ever on their responses to the myth. A cultural idea became a litmus test for Alsatians in France who were attempting to protect their persons and their property. 

While some Alsatians served time in French internment camps, others served in the French Army or in the government and its propaganda offices, spinning the myth

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66 ADBR AL 98, 750, note, 1923.

67 ADBR AL 121, 1051, circular, 18 November 1914.
harder and louder. These included *optants* and their descendants who were French citizens as well as francophile Alsatians—German subjects—who fled Alsace immediately on the outbreak of war to avoid arrest. Some served in the intelligence services and used their bi-lingual skills to interrogate German prisoners. Some judged the loyalties of other Alsatians, touring internment camps to interview Alsatians and to segregate them into groups whose French sentiments were judged “good . . . doubtful . . . or suspect.” Prisoners’ privileges corresponded to such categorizations. One prominent Alsatian refugee, Dr. Pierre Bucher, spent time among Alsatian exiles in Geneva, Switzerland lobbying skeptics to support the French war effort.

The government’s confused acceptance and repression of Alsatians based on ill-defined national sentiment reflected its inability to determine whether the region had to be liberated or conquered. Government officials supported the myth in public—it validated French strategy—while privately doubting its validity and questioning whether Alsace could be won or Alsatians transformed into Frenchmen. Some military critics anonymously questioned the wisdom of fighting for Alsace, one officer noting that because Alsatians spoke “boche”—referring derogatorily to the German language—the troops thought of them and the country treated them as boche. It was hard enough, the officer explained, making Frenchmen die for France without asking them to die for boche.

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68 For example, the Alsatian cartoonist Jean-Michel Walscher, also known as “Hansi.” See Georges Bischoff, “Hansi, Imagier d’une Alsace Tricolore,” *Dossier Maître* 15 (1987–88), 56.
70 ADBR AL 98, 700, file of Dr. Pierre Bucher describes his efforts to promote the myth in Geneva, Switzerland from 1916 to 1918 among Alsatian expatriots.
71 ADBR AL 98, 634, note, 12 April 1923. Committees formed during and after the war to formulate French policy toward Alsace-Lorraine included the Conference of Alsace and Lorraine (1915), the Ministry of War’s Service for Alsace-Lorraine (1917), and the Superior Council for Alsace and Lorraine (1918). These committees’ relative ineffectiveness derived from the extreme contention the terms of a return necessarily aroused.
Alsatis. A general argued that France had changed since 1871, as had Alsace; the
two were no longer compatible, and French Alsace was a myth that France could do
without. A growing cynicism about the conduct of the war and propaganda messages
made the myth easy to challenge.

In efforts to control popular mistreatment of Alsatis, the government ordered
civil and military officials to protect Alsatis from insults and assaults. While French
officials had great difficulty convincing the public to regard Alsatis as their oppressed
countrymen, authorities worried even more about the allies’ war aims. French and
British forces were greatly diminished by 1918, so much so that rapidly expanding
American forces might ultimately carry the fight. If the war lasted much longer,
American policymakers might be in a position to dictate its end to the allies and Germany
alike, and the Americans might not support French objectives. To reinforce its claims
on Alsace and Lorraine, the French government sponsored a nation-wide commemoration
on March 1, 1918 marking the 1871 Protest at Bordeaux. Parliamentary leaders, cabinet
ministers, and the prime minister described Alsatis’ plight under German domination
and their earnest determination to return to France. Maurice Barrès blamed the original
loss of Alsace-Lorraine not on the French Assembly’s cession of the region, but on the
“outside world,” which had failed to act. Premier Clemenceau cited the “cruel
indifference of the nations” as the cause of Alsatis’ sufferings at Prussian hands. The
French government did not order the French to think differently or to believe the myth,
but its crackdown on anti-Alsatan incidents and speech were designed to pacify Alsatan

72 AN AJ 30/109, anon, n.d.
73 AN AJ 30/109, unnamed general, April 1916.
74 AN AJ 30/109, justice circular, 31 January 1918; president to army commanders, 11 February 1918.
75 Gilbert, The First World War, 394.
76 The Inviolable Pledge, 1 March 1871 – 1 March 1918 (Paris: Jean Cussac, 1918), 27, 38.
discontent before it reached American ears. French government policy toward Alsatians and the propagation of the myth for allied audiences represented the continual tending of an orchard of war aims whose uncertain fruit was yet to be secured or harvested.

Coincident with the notion of self-determination, various parties in 1918 speculated on what would be the outcome of an Alsatian plebiscite if one were held as part of a negotiated peace to end the war. It was widely supposed in Germany and Alsace that Alsatians so loathed the German Empire that they would overwhelmingly choose a return to France.\textsuperscript{77} An Alsatian in France argued to the contrary, writing that in a plebiscite of all Alsatians, the "enthusiasm of those still under the Prussian boot to return to France might be nullified by the disenchantment of those Alsatians currently in France."\textsuperscript{78} A plebiscite never would be held, but certain events of 1918 offered telling evidence of Alsatians' truest loyalties.

Working through Swiss intermediaries, the French and German governments had agreed to exchange a number of their respective nationals—civilians—who had had the misfortune to be abroad in 1914 in what overnight became enemy territory. This included Alsatian subjects of Germany who were then interned in France, some gradually being permitted varying degrees of freedom of movement. In the summer of 1918, French authorities allowed a number of Alsatians to choose whether or not to return to Germany and Alsace or remain in France under their current restrictions. In one group of 131 Alsatians, sixty-five agreed to return to Germany while sixty-six asked to stay in France. Most petitioners expressed the reasons for their choices as personal, familial, or economic—relatives in France or in Germany needed them, or job prospects were better

\textsuperscript{77} ADBR AL 121, 906. Anonymous letter to an unnamed M. le Comte, January 28, 1918; Pange, "Conseil National," 916.

\textsuperscript{78} AN AJ 30/01, anon, April 1916.
either in France or Germany—rather than national. Personal considerations weighed more heavily than national preferences.\textsuperscript{79}

The war did not clarify Alsatians’ loyalties. Despite the fact that hundreds of thousands of Alsatians served and tens of thousands died in the German military, German leaders distrusted Alsatians as unrequited francophiles. This was due in no small measure both to French propagation of the myth and to Alsatians’ discontented efforts to win broader civil liberties and constitutional protections, if necessary as a recognized national minority. German authorities’ distrust of Alsatians led to increased repression, which fostered greater Alsatian resentment. French policy-makers for their part struggled simultaneously with the potential security risk of German subjects, the general mistreatment and distrust of Alsatians within France, and the problem of defining and attaining strategic objectives vis-à-vis the allies’ interests. Propagating the myth in France during the war simplified endlessly complex dilemmas, but it was an additional obstacle to a negotiated peace and it fostered fantastic expectations.

Liberation as a coda to the myth

The German Empire’s economic, political, and military collapse of October and November 1918 determined the outcome of the war. Since German forces could not resist further assaults, they accepted French Armistice demands for a complete withdrawal across the Rhine. In Alsace, the Emperor’s abdication heralded the collapse of state and regional authority, although locally-elected municipal governments continued functioning, albeit without police who were agents of the state. From the fall of the Empire to the arrival of French troops, roughly November 9th to the 22nd, no one

\textsuperscript{79}AN F7 12941-3, statistics, 15 July 1918.
exercised clear sovereignty in Alsace. German troops abandoned their units, plundering on their way home, and Alsatians assaulted Germans and German shops in retribution for the war. Severe food shortages and the state’s collapse left many Alsatians anxious and uncertain about the future. Factions competed for control, including makeshift soviets declaring revolution and deputies of the regional Landtag who claimed to have inherited the Emperor’s sovereignty. Alsatian members of the Strasbourg city council—the German members having fled—reorganized themselves and seemed prepared to recognize the governing authority of whoever might be able to end the random violence and pillaging and re-establish order.

French forces marched into Alsace in late November to end the chaos, and the French government dramatized its occupation of Alsace as a sublime liberation. French propaganda posters and Alsatian newspapers announced the liberation and quickly propagated the idiom of the new political order: Days of Joy, Fatherland recovered, unbreakable fidelity, liberated villages, pilgrimages, sacred glory. Debating the situation incurred considerable risks, and one’s choices were limited to oral conformity or silence. One could accept French victory or flee. There was a whiplash effect in the sudden transition, as the repression of anti-German sentiment gave way to the repression of anti-French sentiment. As we shall see, this process involved the proliferation and acceptance of a state-directed narrative of liberation as the final episode in the myth of French

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82 Harvey emphasizes Alsatians’ near unanimity in welcoming the French as liberators. See his *Constructing Class*, 127–29.
83 Pierri Zind’s francophobic polemic likened the French occupation of Alsace to the Soviets’ occupation of eastern Europe in 1944–45. His portrayal of French rule as totalitarian is useful for re-conceptualizing the events accompanying what the French government called the liberation of Alsace. See Zind’s *Elsass-Lothringen/Alsace Lorraine: Une nation interdite, 1870–1940* (Paris: Copernic, 1979), 94.
Alsace, the cautious silence of doubters, and a warning of dire consequences for those who opposed French rule.

Clemenceau emphasized the liberation on November 11 when he appeared before the Chamber of Deputies to announce the Armistice and to proclaim victory, the validation of which was the return of Alsace and Lorraine as the prizes of the war:

In this hour, great and magnificent, my duty is accomplished ... In the name of the people of France, in the name of the French Republic, I send the greetings of France, one and indivisible, to liberated Alsace and Lorraine! (Loud and long applause). 84

Alsace’s return symbolized France’s transitory hegemony, and officials’ exhilaration inspired unrestrained hyperbole. “France,” Clemenceau said, “yesterday the soldier of God, today the soldier of humanity, will always be the soldier of the ideal.” What Clemenceau said, most Frenchmen would long insist on, and the liberation of Alsace proved the significance of French victory. 85

France’s military occupation of Alsace immediately raised questions such as what shape French sovereignty would take in the region, how long martial law would be in force, and how French civil government would be applied. The French government had to gather resources, make plans and decisions, and issue instructions to the French Army on how to govern Alsatians while quickly assembling a civil administration. Equally important, French officials had to reassure Alsatians about their futures in France, and they accordingly posted notices in Alsatian towns to calm the population’s anxieties. 86

84 Duroselle, Grande Guerre, 417.
86 This message repeated liberation propaganda from 1914. See Harp, Learning, 161.
To the inhabitants of Strasbourg... The day of glory has arrived... You, Strasbourgers, Alsatians, have remained faithful to the sacred love of the Patrie, in spite of all vexations, the terrible treatments of an odious yoke. History knows no better example of such admirable fidelity [as yours].... The barrier has fallen... France comes to you, Strasbourgers, like a mother towards her precious child, lost and found. France will respect your customs, your local traditions, your religious beliefs, your economic interests, but she will also heal your wounds, and guarantee, in these difficult days, your food supply.  

This French propaganda addressed directly the fears that Alsatians had about civil order and liberties and, most immediately, food. The message became a central component of the so-called Promise of 1918 that Alsatians later cited as a constitutional guarantee. The French government’s pledge to ensure Alsatians’ material and economic concerns encouraged Alsatians to adopt and proclaim the liberation narrative. 

Alsatian newspapers promoted the liberation, and many supported French rule unconditionally. On November 15, a newspaper in Mulhouse reinforced the message even before French forces arrived:

On the eve of our liberation... when, in a few hours, we will have the satisfaction of embracing our French brothers, they will know that their brothers from Alsace and Lorraine, separated for forty-seven years from the family, have preserved for a France absent from their hearths a faithful affection up until the day where she returns and resumes her place!  

Similar declarations from institutions, newspapers, and public figures indicated some fear of being the last to embrace French sovereignty, and these sentiments dominated public speech in late November 1918.  

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87 Strasbourg Municipal Archives (AMS) Division of Ceremonies, 23-178, Poster “Aux Habitants de Strasbourg” 22 November 1918.  
88 Quoted by Husser, Journal, 152–3.  
Attending the government’s propagation of and Alsatians’ adherence to liberation was the political process of confirming legitimacy through reciprocity. Alsatian municipal officials and French governing authorities recognized one another’s legitimacy, typically with a formal exchange of courtesies that had a deeper political significance.90 The French government recognized most Alsatian municipal authorities as locally elected bodies, but the state-municipality relationship demanded acknowledgement. Appropriately, the municipal council of Illkirch-Graffenstaden sent a telegram to Poincaré expressing its “appreciation for having finally returned forever to the heart of the mère-patrie. The inhabitants of the commune have suffered long and difficult years due to their profound sense of unalterable fidelity to France as well as their republican spirit.”91 The municipality accepted the state, and vice versa.

During the war, Alsatian municipal officials had to conciliate state authorities’ increasing demands for resources while trying to contain local discontent. Grateful telegrams to the new governing authorities and the acceptance of France’s liberation narrative demonstrated Alsatian politicians’ ability to tack with the dominant winds, but not all Alsatian politicians found ready acceptance by French authorities. Alsatian members of the elected lower house of the regional Landtag organized themselves as the National Council of Alsace-Lorraine, claimed to have inherited the Kaiser’s sovereignty, and tried to negotiate the terms of Alsace-Lorraine’s return to France. Clemenceau

90A related process occurred in the mid-1920s, when French governing officials grew increasingly impatient with Alsace as a growing autonomist movement in the region threatened to undermine the state’s sovereign legitimacy. After Première Poincaré issued a stinging rebuke to autonomists before the parliament in 1927, a huge number of Alsatian municipal councils sent telegrams to Poincaré assuring him of their steadfast fidelity to France and applauding his crackdown on the malicious autonomists. Few communes appeared willing to risk government officials’ displeasure by not sending such notes. See ADBR AL 98, 696 “Messages of loyalty, sympathy, and felicitations addressed to President Poincaré, 1927.”

91 Archives Municipal de Illkirch-Graffenstaden (AMIG), Meeting notes of the Municipal Council, December 23, 1918.
refused to receive their notes because he would recognize no regional authority that he
did not appoint. 92 Some Alsatians were tainted by their association with proposals for
Alsatian statehood within Germany or with independent neutrality. Once French forces
arrived, proponents of German federalism or neutrality found themselves isolated in their
inability to reconcile local political concerns with state directives within the context of
the liberation narrative. Both possibilities, of course, had been irretrievably tainted by
their association with cynical, last minute efforts by the German government to avoid
losing Alsace completely to France. 93

In addition to exchanging notes with the French government, Alsatian municipal
officials organized local welcomes for French troops, decorated their towns with the
French tricolor, and erected temporary triumphal arches through which the arriving
heroes could parade. French forces carried food forward to relieve shortages, and troops
brought wine to celebrate victory and peace. Alsatian women, dressed in regional
costume, welcomed French and allied forces and posed for photographs, thereby
replicating the image of Alsace as a young woman being rescued by a heroic soldier and
safely returned to France (fig. 1-3). 94 Many welcomed the victorious French and
demonized Germany and the Germans. 95 Along with validating strategic gains,
confirming local authority, and securing one's place in the community, the celebrations
marked the coming of peace. Abundant food and wine fueled celebrations of the end of
the war's deprivations. The difficulty comes in differentiating the joy of peace from the
manifestation of national enthusiasm indicated by liberation.

95 Richez, "Ordre," 161; Harvey, Constructing Class, 128.
Liberation isolated the other—either the German or the independent thinker—in a form of ideological triage, and there were efficient mechanisms close at hand to enforce the narrative. Just before the French arrived, a young Alsatian, Oscar Ludmann, insisted that Alsace should be neutral. Ludmann’s father rebuked him, saying that no matter what, the French were coming and it was dangerous to think about neutrality, and even more dangerous to mention it in public.96 A bookstore owner, fearing expulsion, assured his neighbors and everyone he met that he was not German, but had been born in Czechoslovakia and had always preferred France to Germany. Whatever the bookseller’s nationality, his words indicate he was a fearful outsider. More important, they were the only proper sentiments to express in Alsace in November 1918, whatever one’s background.97 In another case, the Alsatian teacher Philippe Husser complained frequently about the French in his private journal. But when an Alsatian veteran openly criticized France on the tram, Husser said it “produced a certain sensation and greatly astonished [the passengers],” who thought such complaints were dangerous.98 Between privately complaining about the French and being astonished at others’ open criticism, Husser seemed most disheartened by Alsatians’ ill-treatment of their German neighbors and their sudden obsequious adoration of France: “dancing puppets,” he called them.99 Contrary to the Alsatian veteran who openly criticized France, the tendency of most veterans returning from the German army seems to have been to go to their homes and shut the blinds to keep out a world and a celebration in which they had no place.100 With France victorious, many who had fought for or served the German Empire sensed there

96 Ludmann, Stepchild, 221.
97 Spindler, L’Alsace, 751.
was no point in opposing the victors. Fighting had already cost them too much, and there was little else that made sense while French propagandists announced and confirmed the liberation.

One of the most critical aspects of the myth of French Alsace was the notion that Alsatians internalized Frenchness. This idea dispensed with evidence of language, culture, or religion in favor of a syllogism: France is the land of liberty; Alsatians love liberty; ergo, Alsatians love France. Alsatians’ welcome of French forces in November 1918 seemed to prove their inherent love of France.\textsuperscript{101} One Alsatian veteran made detailed notes of his German military service from the beginning of the war to the end, never professing any desire to die for the Kaiser but determined not to betray his comrades. When the war ended, this veteran cursed the Kaiser for abandoning Germany and fleeing to Holland, and summed up the war as “four years of misery among the dead, for nothing and three times nothing.”\textsuperscript{102} The pointlessness of the war and the destruction of convictions eased the process of embracing any meaning that offered itself. For a brief moment, French propaganda, along with food and wine, rallied Alsatians’ spirits even as Germans became the widely-disparaged cause of all misery. These circumstances magnified the presentation of liberation, and transformed the moment into the climax of the myth.

Conclusion

The myth of French Alsace challenges us to consider the relative importance of a cultural idea, where an idea comes from, how it develops, how it is used, and what it

\textsuperscript{101} L’Alsace Aujourd’hui par un Ancien Combattant (n.p., n.d.), 20.
achieves. This idea, the myth, imposed order on the confused causes and course of the Franco-German conflict. It became an ideological mantle that justified what otherwise lacked structure. France faced crucial questions on Alsace and Lorraine in 1871, during the Great War, and in 1940. In 1871 and 1940, French governments gave up Alsace and Lorraine to Germany with little fanfare and not much opposition. The myth was not a direct cause of the Great War, since France did not arm, plan, or launch a significant operation whose object was to recover the region. The myth influenced strategic thinking, however, because it helped to sustain Franco-German antagonisms. It is unlikely that the French government’s strategic embrace of the myth during the war prolonged the fighting, because German aims went well beyond holding Alsace-Lorraine to expanding both in the east and the west. For the French, demanding Alsace-Lorraine was a bare step beyond the fundamental need to liberate the occupied territories in the north. Had French leaders renounced Alsace-Lorraine early on, there is little reason to believe that Germany would have negotiated peace sooner. It seems more likely that German leaders would have taken French renunciation of the regions as an encouraging sign of French weakness and hence a goad to more grandiose German demands.

The myth gave French officials a structure on which to organize their war-time strategy to advance the French border to the Rhine, the better to defend the state. After the Armistice, French officials tried to reconcile the myth with reality. Officials’ earlier claims that Alsatians were “more French” even than Parisians offered no solutions to the problems of integrating a German-speaking region into the French state.103 French rule of Alsace would entail purges of the population, a redistribution of property, and lead to a quagmire of complex constitutional and legal difficulties. The French government,

103 *Inviolable Pledge*, 11, 43.
French corporations, and French citizens could do little without considering contrary pressures from the German government, the Vatican, and even American public opinion. In any case, French officials had no means of defining what “French” was or how changes in Alsace was to be classified as such. French rule brought Alsatian complaints, frustrating those who thought the myth and the liberation had proven clearly that Alsatians loved France. When a French veteran realized that Alsatians were not the adoring patriots he expected, he lashed out at their betrayal of the millions of Frenchmen who had died “believing in French Alsace.”¹⁰⁴ Neither the love of Alsace, nor a belief in Alsatians’ love of France, sustained the French war effort. The myth, however, brought ideological order to chaotic events before, during, and after the Great War, and served as a well of self-assurance in a world beyond control.

¹⁰⁴ L’Alsace Aujourd’hui, 20.
Figure 1-1. Alsatian woman and girl, about 1904, in traditional regional costume. Reprinted from Barrès, *La Conscience Alsacienne*, 9.
Figure 1-2. Alsatian girls greeting French President Poincaré to their village. Reprinted from L'Illustration, 27 February 1915.
Figure 1-3. American soldier with Alsatian girls celebrating the allied victory. Reprinted from O'Shaughnessy, Alsace in Rust and Gold, 172.
Chapter Two
“The Problem of Alsace”: Constitutional Dilemmas in Germany and France, 1871–1939

At the heart of the modern Alsatian dilemma of national identity is the question of whether the region is fundamentally French or German. Alsatian writers—from Émile Wetterlé in *What is Alsace-Lorraine and what will it be?* (1916) to Frédéric Hoffet in his culturally ambitious *Psychoanalysis of Alsace* (1951)—have tried diligently, if not objectively, to reveal “degrees” of Germanness or Frenchness that marked the region as one or the other or a combination of the two. The question was highly controversial in Germany from 1871 to 1918 and in France from 1919 to 1939 because Alsatian identity threatened to have a decisive impact on each state’s constitution. In dissimilar ways, 1918 brought a reversal of the problems confronting Germany and France in Alsace, as France exchanged its chimerical idea of Alsace for Germany’s practical difficulties of defining the region’s place in the national polity. In each state, political controversies concerning Alsatian identity emerged from conflicts over the state’s constitution. The problem of Alsace’s constitutional status in Germany and France between 1871 and 1940 illustrates the contingent nature of socio-political claims to unity and identity.

Both France and Germany’s constitutional structures represented a tenuous balance of competing forces and interests. Alsace was a late-comer to the constitutional struggles whose hard-fought compromises produced each state—the German Second Reich and the French Third Republic—but Alsace had the potential to tip the balance of each state’s constitutional order decisively. When Germans or Frenchmen discussed Alsace’s place within the nation-state, they faced making fundamental changes to the state’s constitution. The region represented a serious challenge to each state’s
constitution. Elites often ignored Alsace's awkward status in order to avoid such debates. In Germany before 1918, this served to defeat challenges to the constitutional status quo favoring the elites. After 1918, French leaders, with some exceptions, seem largely to have ignored Alsatian questions because the interwar period presented them with a series of pressing national and international crises that over-shadowed the region's constitutional particularities. As a result, French proclamations of national unity and identity obscured fundamental constitutional distinctions between Alsace and the rest of France. Nonetheless, opponents of the government in both Germany and France mounted constitutional challenges to the state, frequently invoking one issue or another concerning Alsace. In this way, cultural ideas concerning Alsatians' essential identities entered directly into regional and national debates on the state's constitution. Unable or unwilling to resolve those debates, each government maintained Alsace's anomalous constitutional situation, and Alsatian identity remained a recurring source of domestic controversy.

Alsace lay at the center of German constitutional debates before 1918 because the Bismarckian system's tense compromises were so finely balanced, its "hastily contrived imperial structure . . . fraught with ambiguity."¹ Alsace and Lorraine, "the area most sensitive to the internal contradictions of the imperial system," became the primary stage on which partisan interests in the Empire struggled over the questions of sovereignty and citizenship in the federation.² French constitutional debates on Alsace seemed less crucial than those in Germany, but perhaps more heated for emphasizing two problems that had long animated French controversies: centralization and the separation of church

² Ibid., 190.
and state. In peculiar ways, governing Alsace proved equally upsetting to Germans before 1918 and the French after 1918. In the French context, partisan factions in France and in Alsace struggled to influence the outcome of a secular, centralized Republic attempting to integrate a clerical region that opposed centralized control. This French constitutional dilemma will focus our attention in most of this chapter.

The French Third Republic cut the state’s historic ties to the Catholic Church in 1905 in a legal process of separation that bitterly divided French clericals and anticlericals. In Alsace-Lorraine, on the other hand, the Catholic Church and Protestant and Jewish congregations retained their official privileges, including their prerogatives in public education; France’s annexation of Alsace would thus inevitably reopen old wounds over separation. Similarly, France was a centralized state, signifying the historical dominance of Paris over the provinces. Alsace-Lorraine under German rule had long been treated as an aspiring sovereign state in a federal system. How then, Alsatians worried, would the centralized state treat their federalist concerns? Alsatian identity provided the idioms within which divided French and Alsatian partisans of multiple issues—centralization and regionalism; clericalism and anticlericalism—struggled to determine what effect the integration of Alsace would have on the republic’s constitutional balance. Ultimately, the status quo of separation in France and establishment in Alsace, centralization and regionalism, survived because change was too difficult and stalemate too convenient. Politicians in Paris faced greater problems—financial decline, then depression, the rise of fascism and Nazi Germany—than the constitutional status of Alsace within France. Both German and French constitutional
struggles contributed to Alsace's unique status and left the region a distinctive constitutional legacy that obstructed each government's attempts to integrate the region.

German Constitutionalism: The Problem of Defining the German State

From the fall of Napoleon to the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, the "German question"—an uncertain pondering of what would become of the area's presumably linked but decidedly diverse regions, cities, kingdoms, principalities and peoples—roiled European political affairs. This "question" concerned both how power should be distributed within any given German state and how the formation of a German state might alter the balance of power in Europe. Various factions promoted or obstructed unification programs to advance or defend partisan ideas and interests. Germans' loyalties were divided between Protestantism and Catholicism; north and south; nationalism and regionalism; and liberalism, democracy, and monarchy. Some Germans aspired to a compact federation led by Prussia from Berlin, others to a bigger, more loosely-bound structure led by multi-national Austria. In many cases, factions were less proponents of one cause than opponents of another, preferring obstruction to construction. Only unusual circumstances could surmount the divisions that separated Germans.

German unity came when Prussian military victories over Austria (1866) and France (1870-71) clarified the internal and external balance of power. In 1871, the Prussian Chancellor Otto von Bismarck brokered an imperial constitution that united the

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4 In the 1848 Frankfurt Assembly's deliberations, Hajo Holborn argues, conservative Catholics "were moved more by anti-Prussian feeling than by any strong attachment to Vienna"—the nominal alternative to Prussia. See his *A History of Modern Germany, 1840–1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 82.
German states in a federation. Bismarck's constitution was a series of compromises that defended the sovereignty of the states' monarchs while organizing a loose imperial structure. The state's monarchs exercised collective imperial sovereignty in a council, the Bundesrat, under the leadership of the Prussian king as Kaiser. A parliament, the Reichstag, was elected by universal manhood suffrage, but its democratic pretensions were undercut by organizational restrictions—deputies could neither be civil servants nor receive salaries—and feeble powers. The constitution recognized three kinds of civil status for Germans within the Empire:

For the whole of Germany one common nationality exists with the effect that every person (subject, State citizen) belonging to any one of the federated States is to be treated in every other of the federated States as a born native and accordingly must be permitted to have a fixed dwelling, to trade, to be appointed to public offices, to acquire property, to obtain the rights of a State citizen, and to enjoy all other civil rights . . . as the natives . . . Every German has the same claim to the protection of the Reich with regard to foreign nations.

Only the German federal states could grant citizenship, thereby preventing all other inhabitants from rising above subject status. Despite the federal constitution's description of civil equalities, or at least potential civil equalities, for all German nationals, each state discriminated against subject minorities as it chose. According to Rogers Brubaker, Bismarck hoped eventually to Germanize Prussia's Poles, elevating them into "loyal citizens of the Reich," and the constitution suggested such a development was possible. Instead, Prussian policy after Bismarck turned toward the suppression of Polish property rights, and Prussia expelled some 120,000 noncitizen

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Poles and Jews—state subjects all—from 1885 to 1914. The imperial constitution ignored religious institutions, leaving church-state relations a matter for individual states to decide. Despite the compromises that it represented, the constitution made reform difficult since it established a weak legislature while brooking no limits to the Bundesrat’s veto powers.

Economic growth and political developments strengthened demands to reform the constitution, even as conservatives blocked reform. One historian describes the Empire as a “pseudo-constitutional authoritarian monarchy” because what reforms there were never challenged the fundamental sovereignty of the Bundesrat, as exercised by the Kaiser. Nonetheless, the German state of the twentieth century could not long be governed by the order of 1871. Industrialization spurred rapid Social Democratic gains in Reichstag elections after 1900. Nonetheless, whatever socialists could accomplish in the Reichstag, they could not trump the imperial executive. Prussia’s three-class voting system disenfranchised most of the state’s population in elections to the Prussian diet, and conservatives’ dominance of state governments nullified socialists’ federal gains.

Polarization characterized German politics on the eve of the Great War, as Social Democrats demanded reforms against conservatives’ strict defense of monarchical sovereignty—a structure that best served conservatives’ interests.

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8 While “Prussianizing” the Empire, the constitution gave specific guarantees—the results of negotiated compromises—to Bavaria, Württemberg, and Baden (Articles 35, 38, 52 et al.). The Empire also compromised when the suppression of Catholics and Socialists gave way to progressive labor legislation as well as limited toleration of the growth of the Socialist Party and the development of the Catholic Center Party as a force in German politics. Events demonstrated the need for a flexible structure and political compromise.
12 Gordon Craig described German domestic pressures as a conflict between the Army and the Constitution
As sovereignty, citizenship, and reform became controversial, the territory of Alsace-Lorraine accidentally became the nexus of German constitutional conflicts. Alsace-Lorraine's 1871 annexation was a mere addendum to the German nation-state, but the region became the central dilemma of the late Empire's war-induced constitutional crisis. Alsace-Lorraine consisted of three provinces (Alsace had northern and southern provinces) newly annexed from defeated France in 1871 and constituted for the first time as a single, hyphenated region. Alsace-Lorraine was neither a state nor a colony; it was a constitutional aberration. The imperial constitution excluded Alsace-Lorraine from the confederation (Article 1) and from its customs union (Article 33). This explains the region's uncertain designation as Reichsland, "Imperial Territory," a Bismarckian innovation that skirted competing Bavarian and Prussian claims by awarding sovereignty over the territory to the Empire as a whole. The Emperor exercised sovereignty in Alsace-Lorraine on behalf of the Bundesrat through an appointed governor, who brought together all executive, legislative, and judicial powers. German rule of Alsace began, then, with the denial of popular or regional sovereignty. Alsatians were not citizens, a civil status dependent on statehood, but German subjects.


14 Silverman, Reluctant Union, 33–35.

15 Mayeur, Autonomie, 13.
Like the Empire itself, Alsace-Lorraine’s governing structure was subject to considerable change. The military occupation of 1870–71 gave way to civil government, and imperial authorities adopted a policy of “Germanization” in the region in order to assimilate the Alsatian population. Alsatians were first allowed to elect deputies to the Reichstag in 1874, and the deputies used their first speeches in the parliament’s chambers to denounce the annexation. In subsequent decades, German policy in the region vacillated between liberal conciliation and reactionary coercion while Alsatians moved slowly from relentless protestation of German rule to demands for statehood, citizenship, and greater rights and liberties. In the late 1880s, concerned that the French government was bent on a war of revenge, the German government restricted civil liberties in Alsace and instituted passport restrictions that hindered Alsatians’ personal and business contacts with French friends, relatives, and partners. As fears of war with France eased, the German government likewise eased restrictions in Alsace and gradually abolished them.\(^\text{16}\)

The course of German policy in the *Reichland* took on national implications because of the hardening of positions among national parties on constitutional reform. The compromises of 1871 seemed increasingly unacceptable to all parties, as conservatives attacked the constitutional pretensions of socialists and socialists attacked the reactionary politics of the conservatives. Both conservatives and socialists came to view Alsace-Lorraine as the crucial battleground for reform of the imperial constitution. In 1903, Chancellor von Bülow recognized the growing need for reform in Alsace-Lorraine, but also thought Alsace-Lorraine’s status was a particularly dangerous political issue within the Empire. He approached the issue “like a man walking on eggs,” before

\(^{16}\) Silverman explains the Empire’s considerable difficulty in choosing between policies of conciliation and coercion in Alsace-Lorraine. See his *Reluctant Union*, 65–90.
refusing to proceed.\textsuperscript{17} By 1911, Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg was more willing than Bülow had been to pursue reform in Alsace-Lorraine, but perhaps miscalculated that "the Reichsland was the ideal place for the government to make concessions; it was the one part of the Reich where constitutional reform would alter neither the basic structure of the empire nor that of any of the German states."\textsuperscript{18} But if such calculations eased the possibility of reform in Alsace-Lorraine, it also encouraged the Social Democrats to see the highly industrialized region as a promising area to create important precedents for nationwide reforms. After all, if parliamentary democracy were to triumph in the Reichsland, how could the Empire deny comparable reforms to German workers everywhere? This is why the German Social Democratic party gave its largest press subsidies to socialist presses in Alsace-Lorraine from 1891 to 1913, and similarly why the German Center Party cautiously courted the Alsatian Center Party.\textsuperscript{19} Various factions saw Alsace-Lorraine as open terrain whose conquest would provide critical leverage for a nationwide struggle between authoritarianism and parliamentary democracy. The resulting struggle for sovereignty and citizenship in Alsace-Lorraine moved the region to the apex of German constitutional conflict.

The pre-war peak in this struggle came in 1911, when Bethman-Hollweg allowed a Reichstag debate on a constitution for Alsace-Lorraine in conjunction with a number of ongoing reform efforts. The problem of a regional constitution was that it would indicate the direction of constitutional development in Germany as a whole. A constitution for Alsace-Lorraine implied statehood, and this threatened the delicate voting balance in the Bundesrat between Prussia and the south German states. More sensitive still,

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 137.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 136.
\textsuperscript{19} Harvey, \textit{Constructing Class}, 93; Silverman, \textit{Reluctant Union}, 133–150.
constitutional sovereignty for Alsace-Lorraine suggested popular sovereignty, since there was no indigenous ruling family to claim executive powers. Most Alsatians wanted popular sovereignty, and they had broad support from the Center Party and the Social Democrats, but Prussian conservatives rejected it as a dangerous precedent threatening Prussia’s restricted franchise.  

The compromise that emerged did not make the region a state but granted it a regional legislature with an upper house composed of both imperial appointees and regional corporate representatives and a lower house that was popularly elected by universal manhood suffrage. The Bundesrat retained its sovereignty. Interestingly, Alsatians frustrated with such marginal progress voted against the constitution in the Reichstag along with Prussian conservatives, who resisted reform for its own sake. It was the Center Party and the Social Democrats who passed the measure.  

Reform trends in Alsace did not alter the constitutional dilemmas of sovereignty and citizenship or the lack of any constitutional protections for reform. The Emperor could revoke, with the support of the predictably reactionary Bundesrat, any reform instituted in Alsace-Lorraine. On the other hand, if Alsatians long suffered politically for their lack of citizenship and constitutional protections, their region prospered as a showcase of the German Empire. Nowhere else in the Empire could a German nationalist sense a common link to all Germans without confronting an intervening state

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20 Ibid., 144-47.  
21 Alsatian parties were as diverse as German parties, but included both socialist and Catholic movements. The Alsatian parties carried on tense relations with the national parties, as regional and national interests and ideas did not always align for either Catholics or socialists. On the issue of the 1911 regional constitution, the regional parties allied themselves in opposition because they sensed regional interests had been betrayed, while the national parties saw the 1911 constitution as an important precedent for national reforms. See John C. Craig, Scholarship and Nation-Building: The Universities of Strasbourg and Alsatian Society 1870–1939 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 167; and Silverman, Reluctant Union, 133-50.  
22 Silverman, Reluctant Union, 147.
such as Prussia, Bavaria, or Baden dividing him from fellow Germans. Individuals who east of the Rhine were Prussians, Badeners, or Württembergers were more easily grouped in Alsace as, collectively, Germans. Unfortunately for the proponents of assimilation, an “us-them” mentality separated German immigrants in Alsace from native Alsatians. Still, considerable public and private investment developed Alsace’s infrastructure, industry, and natural resources, and the region, like the Empire, enjoyed tremendous growth from 1871 to 1914, although this was punctuated by booms and busts.

Alsatians’ constitutional hopes were raised and then dashed in the last year before the Great War. In July 1913, the Reichstag passed a new Law of Nationality that federalized the definition of a citizen while instructing states on how it was to be awarded. Significantly, the statute described Alsace-Lorraine as “a federal state in the sense of this law.” An Alsatian was finally a citizen, and seemed closer to settling one

23 While the absence of statehood in Alsace-Lorraine lent itself to some nationalistic centralization, Alsatians were most unreceptive to pan-German sympathizers. The Pan-German League advocated Prussian absorption of Alsace-Lorraine, alienating both Alsatians and imperial officials in Alsace who felt conciliation alone could accomplish the nation-building project. This of course raised the question of whether the Empire was to be “Prussianized” as conservatives hoped or “nationalized” through democratic liberalism. For the Pan-German League’s lack of support in Alsace, see Roger Chichering’s We Men Who Feel Most German: A Cultural Study of the Pan-German League, 1886–1914 (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984), 138–41.

24 The University of Strasbourg represented a huge public investment for the Empire in Alsace’s future. See Craig, Scholarship. Frédéric Ecard felt that Alsace had participated fully in the German Empire’s rapid economic development. See his “L’Alsace et la Lorraine sous le Commissariat Général et après sa suppression,” Revue politique et parlementaire (1925), 200. In contrast to this positive assessment of German investments in Alsace, Dan Silverman emphasizes Alsatian manufacturers’ declining fortunes under German rule and competition from other German regions as somehow anti-Alsatan. In Silverman’s view, “Strasbourg was clearly sacrificed to the economic interests of other German states.” He does not explain why other German states should have sacrificed their own economic interests in favor of expatriate capital which set up shop in Alsace and which did quite well. See his Reluctant Union, 188.

25 The crucial importance of the federalization and nationalization of the definition of citizenship across the western world in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries can not be overestimated. In this sense, the German law on citizenship in 1913 belonged to much broader democratizing trends that gradually ensured the voting rights of African-Americans and women in the United States. See, for example, Nancy F. Cott, “Marriage and Women’s Citizenship in the United States, 1830–1934,” American Historical Review 103 (December 1998), 1440–1474.

of the key problems that had left the region’s constitutional status unresolved. Quickly, however, a scandal in the Alsatian town of Zabern in November cast doubt on the value of the 1911 constitution or of German citizenship. The flashpoint for this constitutional nightmare was an immature Prussian lieutenant’s verbal abuse of Alsatian recruits and civilians. The incident escalated when Prussian officers and Alsatian civilians publicly insulted one another, and military authorities arrested civilians for disorderly behavior, ignoring local civil and police authorities. The confrontation exposed some Prussian officers’ tendencies to place military authority above civil authority or civil rights. Deputies in the Reichstag demanded that the government censure the offending officers, but the Kaiser and the Chancellor rejected civilian criticism of the Army, which for its part dismissed civilian complaints of officers’ conduct. The Reichstag lodged a passionate but ineffective protest against citizens’ lack of civil rights. 27

The Zabern affair left the impression that Prussian military authorities typically ran roughshod over Alsatians and their rights. A different impression emerges from other anecdotal evidence of the rule of law in the Reichsland. An example comes from the obituary of a renowned Alsatian lawyer who ably defended an Alsatian on murder charges. Only a direct quote does justice to the story’s implications:

An honorable citizen of Colmar shot and killed a Prussian dragoon from the garrison who obstinately, each time that he passed the citizen’s house, soiled the wall. [The Alsatian lawyer] won the Colmarian’s acquittal. 28

Alsace under the German annexation had the appearance of a two-tiered society, with imperial officials, army units, and an immigrant German bourgeoisie that sought not to

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27 Silverman sees the entire Zabern Affair as typical of the crisis of German constitutionalism. See Reluctant Union, 190–207.
integrate with the Alsatian natives but to "modernize" the population on German lines while rooting out the vestiges of French influence. Discrimination and slurs in Alsace often emphasized a sense of ethnic difference between "boche" [pejorative slang used by Alsatians: a German] and "wacke" [pejorative slang used by Germans: an Alsatian]. An Alsatian did, however, enjoy some social mobility and could become a lawyer even if the Prussian-dominated establishment limited his advance. As the trial story suggests, if Alsatians suffered discrimination, a skilled lawyer could also turn a widespread sense of grievance to his client's advantage.

After war came in 1914, the status of Alsace-Lorraine within the Empire grew increasingly pivotal. Conservatives wanted to absorb the region into existing federal states to defend the monarchical authority. Regional parties and German socialists wanted federal statehood, sovereignty, and democracy. Because neither faction could establish a decisive advantage, all sides remained locked in a frustrating and exhausting grip, refusing to yield and unable to advance. When the war increased domestic pressures for constitutional reform, national attention turned repeatedly to the status of Alsace-Lorraine as the test of the imperial constitution's ability to sponsor or resist reform.

The first constitutional crisis peaked in 1917, when the General Staff gained control over the entire war effort and, theoretically, over the country. In April, the Supreme Command insisted that the government commit itself to an extraordinary list of annexation demands. By June, Reichstag deputies were ready to demand peace without

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30 While Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg was tenuously trying to maintain his government amidst growing civil discontent and Socialist demands for a "general peace without annexations or indemnities," the Supreme Command called for "the veiled annexation of Belgium . . . extensive claims against France and
annexations, pitting the parliament against the Army. In a strange gambit designed to strengthen his government, Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg asked Alsace-Lorraine’s Landtag to declare the region’s unconditional loyalty to the German Empire. The resolution’s value was two-fold. It could disarm French propaganda concerning Alsace-Lorraine’s “hostage” status and it would undercut Prussian conservatives’ hostility to democratic institutions. The Landtag’s deputies for their part wanted peace and resented martial law in the region and “Prussian militarism,” and they refused to endorse the government or its prosecution of the war. The Landtag’s refusal to support the chancellor with a public declaration increased his difficulties. The Landtag’s Alsatian president, Eugene Ricklin, vainly tried to rescue the situation with a public statement proclaiming the region’s fidelity and indissoluble union with Germany (offending Alsatians) and calling again for federal statehood (outraging Prussian conservatives). The Army drove Bethmann-Hollweg from office, and subsequent governments ignored Alsatians’ mounting discontent.

The constitutional crisis climaxed in October and November of 1918, with the collapse of the Empire. A provisional government attempted to establish its legitimacy after the abdications of the Kaiser and the state monarchs. Alsatians, including the mayor

Russia . . . new naval stations overseas and the creation of a large German Mittelafrika.” See Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army*, 324.

31 Alan Kramer argues, too forcefully, that war-bred discontent in Alsace-Lorraine demonstrated the region’s “strong regional identity [and] the influence of French republicanism and the legacy of 1789.” The clear resentment of the war and imperial policies expressed in Alsace-Lorraine might be better understood in the context of the social, political, and economic conflicts that bred discontent throughout the Empire leading to the system-wide collapse of October-November 1918. See Kramer’s “Wackes at war: Alsace-Lorraine and the failure of German national mobilization, 1914–1918,” in *State, Society and mobilization in Europe during the First World War*, ed. John Horne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 105–21.

of Strasbourg, were suddenly promoted to the highest-ranking positions in the region. There was widespread talk of autonomy and statehood for Alsace-Lorraine within the reformed Germany, but the fact of German defeat and advancing French armies rendered proclamations of German constitutional reforms moot. Germany's military defeat cut the Gordian knot of Alsace-Lorraine's constitutional status. For decades, authoritarian and democratic pressures had variously loosened and tightened the knot until the crises of the war transformed Alsace-Lorraine into a police state, in the end bringing the region to the point of revolution. Alsace's political fate no longer depended on the German state after the Armistice, and Alsatians who had long agitated for German statehood and popular sovereignty suddenly confronted new constitutional struggles in the French Third Republic.

French Constitutionalism: Parliamentary Sovereignty and the Problem of Alsace

It took the French Third Republic decades to achieve a rough constitutional stability, partly because the constitution did not clearly delineate the structure of government or specify a separation of power between branches. The constitution was a series of basic laws adopted by the French National Assembly in the 1870s, and the letter of the law was less crucial to republican rule than the laws' spirited application. Since the parliament gradually wrested most power away from the executive, the system came to be one of parliamentary sovereignty. The constitution's pliability was not unusual in the context of continent-wide trends: "European constitutions in the nineteenth century rarely constituted a whole machinery of government. They were little more than

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symbolic declarations without any machinery of enforcement outside of popular or parliamentary protest." In France, because the parliament’s power was unfettered, 
any change in political forces … almost inevitably produced a new supreme law … the French people and their political representatives [were unable] to understand and accept that a constitution should be the definition of common rules rather than a partisan weapon.36

When Alsace returned to the fold in 1918, it represented a new factor in French domestic politics, and a potentially crucial one since parliamentary majorities acting alone could change the supreme law. Some Frenchmen worried—or hoped—that the region would tip the scales on important questions, especially state centralization and the separation of church and state, upsetting delicately balanced compromises to reopen fundamental debates in the French polity. In parliament, deputies of both the left and the right debated how to integrate Alsace into France, but their deeper concern was how the integration of Alsace might change France.37

Parliamentary sovereignty in the Republic was based not on the wording of the constitutional laws but on “the conventions and practical devices” that emerged from the first decade of the Third Republic’s political conflicts. Lacking states or competing branches of government, the Third Republic had no institutional means to check the parliament’s exercise of national power. Opposition minorities often accused majority blocks of ruling despotically, but governments were volatile because minor electoral shifts transferred power to new parliamentary coalitions. In practice, constitutional

stability emerged from parliamentary stalemate. Moreover, even when stable parliamentary majorities tried to enact sweeping change in the country, initiatives could still be checked by an informal balance between centralization and the limited state. Republican constitutional stalemate and the limited state’s informal check on centralization would greatly hinder France’s integration of Alsace after 1918.

Centralization was a long-standing controversy in France concerning the organization and concentration of state powers. The Republic inherited the issue and passed it on to subsequent regimes. Centralization’s proponents wanted to enhance the government’s Paris-based control over the nation, while their opponents demanded decentralization, or regionalism, on the grounds that different regions of the country required different policies. Regionalists thought centralization favored particular interests—Paris and Parisians—at the expense of the rest of the country. Language and literacy were typical centralization controversies. French governments throughout the nineteenth century fought long, frustrating battles to spread the French language to areas dominated by dialects and to spread literacy through public education. Equally difficult was the struggle to force nationwide adoption of the metric system by peasants who persisted in using local measures. Language, literacy, and standard measures all facilitated economic development, but locals saw them as unwelcome and alien intrusions on traditional practices. Government officials often could not force peasants to abide by edicts or legislation. Because of this, government prefects often mitigated the effects of

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national laws in the provinces, sometimes by design, sometimes out of impotence.

Stanley Hoffmann notes that "between a society and a political system, there is a crucial problem of transmission belts and institutional arrangements." Insufficient resources, poor communications, and conflicting interests were obstacles between the center and the periphery, and prefects negotiated the conflicts between central authority and regional diversity.

One of the Third Republic's most divisive constitutional issues was the separation of the Catholic Church and the state, hereafter referred to simply as separation, and it illustrates the reach and limits of centralization. Politically and culturally, the issue dates back to the most important separation in French history, that of Louis XVI's head and body on the guillotine in 1793 during the French Revolution. The king's execution was a rebuke to the claim of divine right, the proposition that sovereignty came from God and resided in the king. The Revolution posited instead that sovereignty derived from the people, who, collectively, embodied the nation. The Catholic Church's cosmopolitan aspirations ran contrary to the idea of the nation. In a Catholic country such as France, the Church represented an enduring challenge to the government's claim of national sovereignty. The Republic's constitutional recognition of the Church suggested the limits of sovereignty.42

Separation bound innumerable issues together. The French government's relationship to the Vatican affected French diplomacy around the world. The church/state relationship shaped the resourcing and control of public education, and whether priests and nuns or secular teachers would inculcate the values of the church or

the state in the young. Over centuries of close involvement in French public affairs, the Vatican accumulated a considerable amount of property in France, which gave it both economic and political influence. Republicans associated clericalism with monarchists, and saw it as a threat to republican security and stability. The prefect Paul Cambon, having mitigated separation legislation in Lille to protect some of the congregations—"I had arranged things nicely" he wrote—blamed anti-clerical and clerical demagogues equally for raising crowds, publishing hot-headed polemics, and wanting to fight out the separation issue in the streets rather than make reasonable deals behind closed doors.

Separation controversies grew increasingly strident and peaked with the Republic’s formal abrogation of the century-old Concordat linking France to the Catholic Church in 1905. One of the foremost proponents of the Law of Separation called it "the greatest reform that has been tried in our country since the French Revolution." The law required the government to sever ties with religious orders, to remove clergy from the public budget, to confiscate and liquidate church properties judged to belong in the public domain, and to have lay organizations take responsibility for administering and maintaining church properties. The problem, however, lay in the law’s application, and it was not unusual for prefects and loyal republicans to move cautiously to avoid provoking popular backlashes against the government’s edicts. The sequestration and liquidation

46 Caroline Ford describes a prefect’s warning against harsh application of the 1902 Law on Associations that was intended to close church-run schools in Creating the Nation in Provincial France: Religion and
of church property did not proceed easily, and confusion, incompetence, and corruption finally led the government to suspend its efforts in 1910. Despite separation's limited effects, the process left a legacy of heated rhetoric that gave French domestic politics the appearance of a manichaean struggle between statist Jacobins and clerical monarchists, the latter defending the Catholic Church against the encroachments of the secular state.

Regionalists had little success before 1914 in promoting local interests, whether on the level of the commune, the department, or the still chimerical region—a proposed grouping of departments. The war, however, radically altered debates over centralization and regionalism. Although the government tried to concentrate power to repel the German invasion, the German occupation of the industrialized northern departments and the threatened envelopment of Paris forced the decentralization of both resources and authority in France. Before 1914, the Army had already divided metropolitan France's eighty-seven departments into twenty military regions, each with an assigned army corps. When the war broke out, the government organized economic committees in each military regions to coordinate mobilization. Mobilization was extremely difficult, and crisis, success, and failure fed constant changes in the organization and focus of these regions. In February 1919, the government transferred these committees from the Ministry of War to the Ministry of Commerce to facilitate demobilization and to promote economic recovery from the war. In 1921, the ministry

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47 For the charges of corruption and incompetence in handling church property, see Farrar, Principled Pragmatist, 100–1; for Clemenceau's suspension of the inventories, see Robert Tombs, France, 1814–1914 (New York: Longman, 1996), 469.

48 David Thomson explains the misconceived division of the French polity into two camps wholly dedicated to, respectively, the Revolution and the Counter-Revolution in his Democracy, 37.

organized France’s ninety departments (reflecting the addition of Haut-Rhin, Bas-Rhin, and Moselle) into twenty economic regions. These regions did not represent an immediate threat to the central government, but they raised a crucial question—whence the regions? The Ministry of Commerce organized regional groupings of communes’ chambers of commerce, each headed by a major city, to run the country’s economic affairs. Controversy arose over potential conflicts between the economic interests of Marseille, Bordeaux, Rouen, Paris, and Strasbourg, among others. The constitutional implications highlight the importance of debates on Alsace’s status in France.

Alsace in French Constitutional Debates

France’s parliamentary sovereignty made it difficult to resolve many questions definitively because it fostered uncertainty and compromise rather than decisive policy. Frequently, a political crisis would raise a constitutional question, the question would ignite divisive debates, and officials would find an expedient means of tabling the issue after having resolved, sidestepped, or simply survived the crisis at hand. Republican leaders’ handling of the many questions raised by the reannexation of Alsace largely conformed to this model, even during the war when the notion of Alsace’s return remained theoretical. The French formed a national unity government in 1914 to focus their efforts on defeating the German invasion. When French leaders discussed regaining Alsace, they confronted the problem that Alsace remained under the Concordat,

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51 Ibid., 110–13.
52 The *Union Sacrée* was an important rallying device and it gave Frenchmen a sense of national unity. It did not abolish domestic divisions, but glossed over them, as committees’ deliberations on Alsace would demonstrate. See Jean-Jacques Becker and Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *La France, La Nation, La Guerre: 1850–1920* (Paris: Sedes, 1995), 264–83.
a Napoleonic era (1804) agreement delineating Paris and Rome’s respective rights and responsibilities regarding Church affairs in France. \(^{53}\) Frenchmen remained divided on separation, some believing it to have been a mistake and others convinced it remained incomplete. Alsace’s Concordat raised the issue once again. High-ranking officials formed a committee called the Conference of Alsace-Lorraine in 1915 to plan for Alsace’s return, but it was unable to resolve differences over the Concordat. The committee united diametrically opposed positions in its final report:

The Conference for Alsace-Lorraine, desirous of assuring *religious peace* in Alsace-Lorraine, believes that it is appropriate to apply as soon as possible the law for the *separation of church and state*. The commission estimates that certain controls are indispensable, and that is it necessary in particular to respect the acquired rights of the clergy, and find in a formula for the establishment of lay organizations a procedure acceptable to the Catholic Church. Only *discussions with Rome* make this possible. (emphasis added)\(^{54}\)

The conference tabled the issue by simultaneously advocating religious peace, separation, and discussions with Rome. The notion that separation could follow talks with Rome was chimerical—Rome did not discuss divorce—but it preserved the fiction of unity through the illogical joining of dichotomous policies.

The committee’s adoption of all positions in one proposal was consistent with the demands of crisis-born unity. When French officials spoke to Alsatian audiences, they repeated the assurances of peace, unity, and respect for differences that enabled

\(^{53}\)The Concordat represented the establishment of the Catholic Church as the Church of France and was the focus of many French political controversies in the nineteenth century over sovereignty and education before the Republic finally abolished it in 1905. The return of Alsace in 1918 inevitably opened up many old controversies on the Concordat in France. The problem of the Concordat in Alsace went beyond separation and embroiled together issues of school budgets, education salaries, the language of religious instruction, and the validity of conducting significant public affairs in a language other than French. See Dreyfus, *La Vie Politique*, 64.

government committees to mask opposed positions. French officials pledged all things to all Alsatians in what came to be known as “the Promise,” a vague assurance regarding the government’s intentions in Alsace. Marshal Joffre pledged in 1914 that France would respect Alsace-Lorraine’s “traditions . . . convictions . . . [and] values.” Officials never clarified further Alsace’s constitutional future in France because French policy remained uncertain. Instead, officials repeated and Alsatians embraced Joffre’s vague promise as a constitutional guarantee of French benevolence for Alsatian concerns. An often proposed transitional integration overlooked the fundamental irreconcilability of the Concordat and separation; either the clerical or the secular had to give way for the region to be fully integrated into the state.

When the war ended and French forces occupied Alsace, French officials’ suddenly faced the problems of practical rule. They tried to replace military occupation with civil rule as quickly as possible, but they did not have a constitutional mechanism to guide integration, and they were overwhelmed by problems of debt, devastation, demobilization, and parliamentary division. Reactive expediency rather than policy

55Stephen Harp shows that French leaders were sensitive to Alsatian concerns and interests in their treatment of the population of French-occupied Alsatian towns during the war. See his Learning to be Loyal, 166. A contrasting example of French officers favoring coercion over benevolence during the occupation emerges in Camille Maire’s 1914–1918, Des Alsaciens-Lorrains otages en France (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 1998).
56 Joffre’s words echoed the kinds of assurances that government committees were bandying about in support of unity and commitments to smooth integration. See Dreyfus, Vie politique, 24–29; Harp, Learning, 161.
guided France’s integration of Alsace.\textsuperscript{58} After Germany’s unexpected collapse and the French Army’s occupation of Alsace, Premier Georges Clemenceau on November 15 appointed commissioners to govern the three provinces, with the senior commissioner seated in Strasbourg and reporting directly to the premier. A few days later, Clemenceau organized a new structure around an administrative agency, the General Service for Alsace and Lorraine (GSAL), that would govern the region from Paris. Within weeks, Clemenceau abandoned the GSAL idea and reemphasized commissioners’ roles in each of the provinces. In January, he instructed the commissioners to govern as if they were prefects in a French department.\textsuperscript{59}

By March 1919, this system’s shortcomings prompted a new decree that organized a General Commission in Strasbourg. This body governed the three departments under a General Commissioner of the Republic (CGR), Alexandre Millerand, one the most influential politicians in the Third Republic, Clemenceau’s successor as premier in 1920 and subsequently the president of France. The changes continued, and between 1918 and 1923 Alsace and Lorraine fell under the authority of “seven ministries, undersecretaries or state, or high-ranking civil servants . . . [and had] one High Commissioner, two Commissioner Generals, four prefects in Bas-Rhin and three in Haut-Rhin.”\textsuperscript{60} Before 1918, Alsatians were not satisfied with their German-given

\textsuperscript{58}Clemenceau concentrated power in his own hands and focused single-mindedly on controlling the German threat. Although his decisions shaped Alsace’s constitutional integration, this was by default rather than by design. For Clemenceau, constitutional niceties were irrelevant distractions from the German threat. See Walter A. McDougall, \textit{France’s Rhineland Diplomacy, 1914–1924: The Last Bid for a Balance of Power in Europe} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 35–6.

\textsuperscript{59}ADBR AL 121, 902, premier to high commissioner, 24 January 1919.

\textsuperscript{60}Dreyfus, \textit{La Vie Politique}, 34, 42, 56. These frequent alterations in the French governing structure of Alsace cause no end of consternation in the region, and they contributed to Alsatians’ frustration with French rule. See Frédéric Ecard, “L’Alsace et la Lorraine sous le Commissariat Général et après sa suppression.” \textit{Revue Politique et parlementaire} (1925), 198.
Constitution of 1911, but its deficiencies had seemed clear. In contrast, French administration of Alsace appeared stumblingly chaotic.⁶¹ Early on, French officials faced unpalatable constitutional choices between the state’s secular policies and the region’s clerical practices. Clemenceau had long been an anti-clerical crusader, and he was one of the Republic’s staunchest defenders against clerical assaults, but he also compromised to pacify controversies in the Republic’s pre-war separation from the Church.⁶² The reintegration of Alsace would forced immediate compromises on French officials. The German bishops of Strasbourg and Metz had left with other German officials as French forces arrived, but they retained their canonical ties to the Catholic populations of Alsace and Lorraine.⁶³ The Concordat required state authorities to name replacements, and the Vatican declined to replace the Germans unilaterally. Clemenceau had to either recognize the Concordat in Alsace by naming replacements with Vatican concurrence, or ignore the issue and allow Alsatian Catholics—future citizens of France—to take their spiritual guidance from German prelates across the Rhine. Forcing separation on Alsace would have alienated too many people in the region, and efforts to expand French influence in the Catholic Rhineland counseled against offending the Vatican. Clemenceau compromised, exchanged notes with Rome and named two French bishops while downplaying the significance of the

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⁶¹ René Viviani, a former premier, referred to the problems of French rule of Alsace—"numerous delicate questions, legislation and the French administrative regime . . . Alsatians’ traditions, customs, which have permitted them to conserve their integrity and independence under German domination"—as administrative issues. Louis Barthou echoed Viviani in describing administration as "the regime of laws and regulations . . . political, judicial, social, cultural, educational or fiscal regimes." Both men’s concerns echo what I conceive to be the French government’s problem of what was the "constitutional" rule of Alsace. See Dreyfus, La Vie Politique, 24.


⁶³ Chapter three below describes the processes by which French authorities expelled Germans; chapter four examines who precisely was expelled.
decision. The secular state had accepted the Concordat in Alsace. Clemenceau’s solution would never be undone, but it would provide a recurring flashpoint for factions that argued over centralization and separation and whether France was truly one nation.

When Clemenceau left power in late 1919, his conservative successor, Millerand, inherited the problem of Alsace’s constitutional status. The region’s Concordat remained intact in the secular state while a regional administrative apparatus left Alsace and Lorraine distinct from the rest of France. Debates on the Alsatian constitutional dilemma began immediately after the ratification of the Treaty of Versailles, in January 1920, with the Chamber of Deputies loudly protesting Millerand’s proposal that French regional reforms begin with Alsace and Lorraine. Although French regionalists hoped Alsace would help their cause, many feared Alsatian regionalism would impede the crucial task of de-Germanizing Alsace, a process that entailed expelling Germans from the region, “liberating” their property for France, and advancing linguistic and administrative assimilation. The conservative parliament rejected Millerand’s regional reforms, but it did approve re-establishing diplomatic ties with the Vatican to facilitate French diplomacy in the Rhineland and elsewhere.

Regionalism and separation remained controversial, as political crises repeatedly raised constitutional questions. Officials tabled the issues after debate, or avoided them altogether, as a series of controversies demonstrates. One debate arose in 1923, when the government proposed abolishing the Commissioner General’s office in Strasbourg in order to save money during the budgetary crisis arising from the debacle of the Ruhr

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65 Farrar, Principled Pragmatist, 198.
occupation. Alarmed politicians in Strasbourg debated new proposals to guide French administration of the region. In early 1928, the rise of an autonomist movement in Alsace alarmed both French and Alsatian officials sufficiently that Prime Minister Poincaré traveled to Strasbourg to stamp out autonomist sentiments. At a banquet held in Poincaré’s honor, most of the Alsatian municipal officials pledged undying loyalty to France, and Poincaré threatened dire consequences if patriots did not win the upcoming legislative elections. Poincaré’s strong-arm tactics backfired. Autonomist resentment grew and the elections delivered numerous seats and the Strasbourg municipal council to various autonomist coalitions. The French parliament debated the autonomist threat in Alsace and Lorraine in February 1929, enabling regional deputies to air their grievances. As Frenchmen struggled with Alsatian controversies, partisans of regionalism and separation used Alsace to debate larger French issues. Alsatians differed among themselves on religious, economic, and ideological issues. Alsatian socialists demanded the abolition of the Concordat in Alsace and the removal of priests from classrooms, but they rejected French social legislation because it was less generous than the protections that Alsatians enjoyed as a legacy of German rule. Lorrainers demanded centralization to protect themselves from Alsatian regional dominance, but most Catholic Lorrainers staunchly defended the Concordat. Alsatians in factions and as individuals advocated and opposed different aspects of centralization based on how it accorded with their many diverse interests.

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66 Walter McDougall discusses the French government’s financial crisis of late 1923 in his *Rhineland Diplomacy*, 335–53.
67 ADBR AL 121, 72, Conseil Consultatif PV, 20 December 1923.
68 AMS, Division Centrale, 21–74, speeches of Mayor Petiotes and President Poincaré, 12 February 1928.
Alsatian politicians were always sensitive to issues of centralization and regionalism. Some criticized centralization as nothing more than stultifying bureaucratic inefficiency, seeing in it a reduction of Alsatians to French automatons. On the other hand, its antonym, "regionalism," risked provoking suspicions of disloyalty. Alsatian politicians had to specify what they intended to preserve in Alsace and what they intended to make French. In the 1923 debate, the Alsatian socialist deputy George Weill advocated both separation—which implied centralization—and linguistic and administrative regionalism. His anticlerical regionalism traversed ideological boundaries. He called for the end of the Concordat in Alsace through "the introduction into the three departments of these beneficial laws [separation and secular education] of the Third Republic." Weill criticized the maintenance in Alsace and Lorraine or elsewhere [of] laws entirely different from those that apply in the rest of the land, when it happens to involve questions as important as the separation of church and state and secular education . . . [because] . . . the intellectual emancipation of the population and above all of the proletariat . . . depends on the realization of these laws.70

Weill defended "administrative regionalism," however, by which he meant Alsatians' reliance on the German language and the local dialect—both long-term obstacles to frenchification—as well as local demands for administrative autonomy. The latter issue reflected Alsatians' frustration with French bureaucracy's inefficiencies.

Another speaker in the 1923 debate, the deputy Muller, raised a question that resonated widely in France: were French unity and political pluralism mutually exclusive? Muller criticized the French government for its "secular routine . . . outmoded methods and . . . excessive centralization," and proposed "a remedy in a regionalism that

70 ADBR AL 121, 72, Conseil Consultatif PV, 20 December 1923.
threatens neither French unity nor the intimate fusion of Alsace and Lorraine with the nation.” He argued that Alsace should be a testing ground (champ d'expérimentation) for French social, administrative, and political reforms.\textsuperscript{71} Muller criticized French socialists for letting their anticlericalism blind them to Alsace’s superior social legislation, which would be lost to France if lockstep centralization were to abolish all distinctions between France and Alsace as a result of the socialists’ narrow-minded attack on the Concordat. He cited the French philosopher Boutroux, who said that France was composed not of provinces, but of personalities, “and French unity should not be an abstract unity, but a living unity, a synthesis of all its spirits.” Each of the different parts of France had to maintain their individual vitality in order to fulfill their proper mission, “bringing their own contribution to national life.” Muller also accused Weill of wanting to despoil Church property and impoverish the clergy, charges that Weill immediately denied.\textsuperscript{72}

Muller’s position reflected some sympathy for regionalism across France. The nationalist and clerical ideologue Maurice Barrès campaigned for such causes before the Great War.\textsuperscript{73} Between the wars, regionalism reflected the position of the right-wing Action française and even gained, for the first time, a definition for regionalism in the Dictionnaire de l’Académie française in 1934 (the Academy being itself a markedly right-wing institution). The definition advocated regional identity as a building block of national unity.\textsuperscript{74} Poincaré, in his 1928 speech in Strasbourg, acknowledged the regional

\textsuperscript{72} ADBR AL 121, 72, Conseil Consultatif, 20 December 1923.
\textsuperscript{73} Zeev Sternhill, Maurice Barrès et le nationalisme française (Paris: Armand Colin, 1972), 322–23.
distinctiveness and linguistic rights of Breton, Flemish, and Corsican citizens while lauding their unfailing love for France above all. The idea of national plurality was, of course, easily deployed to defend a variety of causes such as bilingualism and decentralization, especially because it simultaneously posited both patriotism and particularism. One Alsatian deputy, Camille Dahlet, known for his general animosity to French rule, rejected national pluralism as insufficient, and lobbied the League of Nations, unsuccessfully, to force France to recognize Alsatians as a national minority with distinctive rights. Dahlet’s efforts as well as the tense relationship with Germany illustrated the importance of Alsace’s status both to the constitutional structure of France and to international relations.

The relationship of Lorraine to Alsace and to Paris represented a variation on the theme of “one France, many regions.” In short, Lorrainers feared a regionalism that subordinated them to Alsace and hence argued, rather ironically, for their distinctiveness within a centralized French state. In the 1923 debate in Strasbourg, the Lorraine deputy de Wendel opposed regionalism if it meant that the people of Lorraine would be permanently bound to German-speaking Alsatians. De Wendel advocated progressive assimilation, through French adoption of social legislation similar to that in Alsace and Lorraine, but he also insisted the Concordat had to be respected in Alsace and Lorraine. In a similar vein, in the 1929 parliamentary debate, Moncelle, the deputy from Metz, called for pragmatic solutions to resolve legislative problems that obstructed French administration of Alsace and Lorraine. Like Wendel, Moncelle argued that any reform

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75 AMS, Division Central, 21–74, speech, 12 February 1928; Herman Lebovics describes the adherence to these views among the French anti-Republican ultraright in his True France: The Wars over Cultural Identity, 1900–1945 (New York: Cornell, 1992), 143.
76 JO, CD, Selz, 25 January 1929; Dahlet, 29 January 1929.
77 ADBR AL 121, 72, Conseil Consultatif, 20 December 1923.
had to ensure that the people of Lorraine were not absurdly linked to Strasbourg. Both men’s concerns emphasized Lorraine’s separation from Alsace, and favored centralization to counter Alsatian regional dominance.

The issues of centralization, regionalism, separation, and the Concordat did not resonate with all politicians, and rarely evoked popular emotions except in the context of particular grievances. The socialist mayor of Mulhouse, Auguste Wicky, disdained both ideology and the confused advocacy of theoretical positions. He defended decentralization, but not “regionalism”, on grounds of pragmatism and efficiency while advocating administrative reform “from below.” Most higher-level directives frustrated Wicky, regardless of whether they came from Paris or Strasbourg, and he considered both the French government and the General Commission in Strasbourg guilty of extraordinary bureaucratic inertia. This frustrated socialist doubted the efficacy of the state, and complained that the “General Commission... is not truly decentralized; [Wicky] did not want to say that its existence was not justified for other reasons, but in administrative matters it had been completely contrary to simplification.” Wicky ignored ideological rhetoric because he was interested in specific issues, organizational structures, and developing more efficient procedures for solving material problems. As mayor of an industrial frontier city, he wanted assistance but not interference from higher authorities in ensuring his city’s welfare and prosperity.  

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78 JO, CD, 25 January 1929.
79 ADBR AL 121, 72, Consultative Council PV, 20 December 1923.
80 Wicky’s political acumen and constant emphasis on local concerns might explain his long success. His service on the city council, running from 1904 to at least 1934, revealed his particular agility in adjusting to the dominant regime throughout very turbulent times. As mayor in the 1920s and 1930s, Wicky practiced the public rhetoric of national loyalty, but in tense moments he was consistently a force for moderation, fending off calls for harsh repression of subversives. While advancing the cause of laic education in Alsace in small steps, Wicky had no patience with anti-clerical demagoguery and generally did not want to waste the city council’s time in debating national controversies, instead focusing on the city’s daily problems.
Divisions in Alsace over clericalism, anticlericalism, and administrative efficiency mirrored divisions elsewhere in France, fostering widespread arguments about Alsace's constitutional status within France. Reform demands in the 1920s slowly gave way to inertial shrugs, as action in Paris failed to overcome resentment and resistance in Alsace.81 In 1930, a French author asked his fellow Frenchmen to "comprehend and judge not only others, but themselves. The problem of Alsace, is it not also the problem of France?"82 French officials' recognition that the constitutional anomaly of Alsace could be rectified only through a settlement of larger French constitutional issues convinced them to leave well enough alone. French officials could not make Alsace constitutionally French without more clearly defining France, and this they could not do. Centralization and regionalism represented ongoing struggles in the French polity, and no solution could be imposed on Alsace if one could not be worked out for France as a whole. By the early 1930s, demands from Alsatians for regional constitutional protections had evolved into little more than easily secured pledges from successive premiers not to upset the status quo.83

The problems of education and language illustrate how difficult it was to reconcile separation and centralization. French language skills spread slowly in Alsace between the wars. Children first encountered French in their first year of school, and never spoke the language at home to assist their school studies because most parents could not understand French. In most of Alsace, German and the Alsatian dialect

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81 AMH, CM PV, 9 November 1927; 23 December 1927; AMS, CM PV, 8 July 1928; Dreyfus, La Vie, 133; Maugue, Particularisme, 85–93.
83 JO, CD, 30 January 1931; CD, 11 June 1934.
remained dominant, but their use was also politically sensitive. An Alsatian who resisted French linguistic assimilation risked being identified by the government as a German sympathizer. Conversely, an Alsatian who advocated rapid linguistic assimilation risked alienating the majority of adult Alsatians who would never learn French, and hence in a French-speaking society were doomed to second-class status. Such diverse pressures undermined one of the final efforts made by a French government, the Popular Front government in 1936, to accelerate Alsace’s linguistic assimilation.

A considerable portion of Alsace’s school curriculum continued to include religious instruction, in accordance with the Concordat, as well as bilingual instruction in German. Léon Blum, the Popular Front premier, felt these two factors slowed Alsatian youths’ educational progress, leaving them without adequate proficiency in French. The government proposed an additional year of schooling in Alsace to ensure that young people were better prepared in French. Boys would have attended school until the age of fifteen rather than fourteen, and girls until fourteen rather than thirteen. Most Alsatians opposed the government immediately, on the grounds that the legislation threatened the region’s economy, religion, and language. In economic terms, Alsace’s rural population and working families feared losing a year of able bodied labor while teenagers continued in school longer than anywhere else in France. Blum’s reform proposal derived from linguistic concerns, but it touched on religious issues, using the Concordat to justify additional schooling. Competing regional and national concerns, economic costs versus linguistic assimilation, ignited heated rhetoric of patriotism and treachery. An Alsatian deputy declared that the Popular Front government “was not France.” Blum’s

government, beset with greater problems than Alsatian language and education policies, let the matter drop.  

The looming threat of war in the 1930s created the strange contrast of Alsatians clinging more tightly to France while continuing their demands for constitutional protections of regional interests. Prefects in Alsace reported that Alsatians fearful of Germany desired a strong, united France to ward off the threat of war. On the other hand, Alsatians continued to lend strong support to decentralization and particularism, demanding more protection from the vicissitudes of republican politics in Paris. Debates continued, and the constitutional status of Alsace within France defaulted to the dichotomous status quo.

Conclusion

Inertia partially explains why Alsace was not constitutionally integrated into France, but it is also possible to understand the dichotomy of the secular state and the clerical region by focusing on the actual result of separation in France. Rather than the absolute termination of all vestiges of the Concordat in France, the pre-war separation might instead have been simply a peak moment in continuing political, institutional, and ideological conflicts. The separation gave way to a tense accommodation, a modus vivendi that enabled anticlericals to proclaim France secular—for such was the letter of the law—without forcing the final abolition of limited church privileges. The war and

86 AN, F7 13040, report, 18 November 1935.
87 AN, F7 13040, reports, 17 July 1935, 19 September 1935, 18 November 1935.
88 One legacy of the Concordat remained limited Catholic involvement in regional, or provincial,
its *union sacrée* promoted religious peace in France, as Catholics rallied to the Republic, and peace seemed to promise some restoration of church privilege, particularly with conservatives' electoral victory immediately after the war. Illustrating Stanley Hoffmann's description of the centralized but limited state, the French government reconciled its formal separation with informal and limited accommodation of the church.\(^9^9\) In the case of Alsace, however, it was politically impossible to import both formal separation and limited accommodation. The informal transmission belts by which French prefects mitigated centralized control could be applied in Alsace as they were in the rest of France, but the moment to fight a religious battle and apply formal separation had come and gone in the first decade of the century and would not return. French governments had enough problems to deal with without reopening religious wars by imposing formal separation on Alsace.\(^9^0\) Thereafter, the Concordat in Alsace became the public face of the secular Republic's limited accommodation of the Church, a condition reflecting the late Third Republic's proclivity to stalemate.\(^9^1\) The circle was squared, and Alsace remained constitutionally distinct from the rest of France.

While Alsace posed a constitutional challenge to both the German Second Empire and the French Third Republic, a tradition of informal compromise enabled France to bypass the challenge. The German Empire broke down because authoritarian and democratic forces could not reconcile their competing interests in the crisis of war. Alsace was hardly the cause of this collapse, but it was one battleground, and briefly the

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\(^{9^9}\) Paul, *Second Ralliement*.

\(^{9^0}\) The anti-clerical *cartel des gauche* government of 1924 to 1926 failed in its brief effort to impose separation on Alsace, and future governments avoided the issue as needlessly divisive.

major one, on which reactionary and progressive forces in the Empire attempted to shape the German future. In both Germany and France, political rhetoric about Alsace emphasized competing visions of each nation's essential identity. Political processes relied on rhetoric and ideas that implied clear meanings and purposes, and that is why the French myth of Alsace described in the previous chapter rallied various partisans before, during, or after the Great War, regardless of changing circumstances and evolving political questions. Constitutional ambiguities help distinguish between the rhetoric of national identity, self-insistently clear and purposeful, and the daunting challenges of organizing a coherent political and social order. In the next chapter, we will see that the constraints of power and the difficulty of defining German, Alsatian, and French presented other insurmountable to the French government's efforts to make Alsace French.
PART TWO

THE BOUNDARIES OF

THE FRENCH NATIONAL COMMUNITY

IN ALSACE, 1918–1925
Chapter Three
Old Structures/New Constructions:
Exclusion in French Alsace, 1918–1920

The idea of the nation has embedded within it the notion of an essential and
transcendent community that binds its citizens with the authority of nature. Favoring
membership by birth rather than application, this community requires outsiders to
naturalize to gain citizenship. Citizenship is both a confirmation and a contestation of
belonging, and in Alsace up to 1918, as we have seen in the previous chapter, citizenship
was a struggle for legitimacy and rights within a German constitutional framework.
Alsace's transfer to French sovereignty overturned established rights, and French,
Germans, and Alsatians alike scrambled to claim rights. In arbitrary, chaotic processes of
exclusion, some were disenfranchised, some dispossessed of property or jobs, some
temporarily exiled, and some permanently expelled, all in a contestation of belonging.
The new construction of French Alsace was a struggle for legitimacy, rights, and
citizenship within the presumably axiomatic French nation.

The Armistice that ended the Great War began on November 11, 1918 and did not
conclude until January 1920, when the Treaty of Versailles came into force. In these
fourteen months, French authorities in Alsace and Lorraine attempted to purge the region
of unwanted Germans and to prepare native Alsatians and Lorrainers for reintegration as
French citizens. From the beginning, French officials stumbled over the intractable
difficulty of identifying and segregating ethnic Germans, Alsatians, and Lorrainers
among the nearly 1.8 million inhabitants of the regions. During the Armistice, the French
government expelled about 120,000 people from Alsace and Lorraine, most for being
Germans, but also some natives thought to have betrayed France.¹ Tremendous obstacles hindered this process, which relied on old structures of municipal government and and a hastily assembled state bureaucracy. Racist idioms and ideological constructions like “French Alsace” and “recovered provinces” became shibboleths distinguishing the clean and the unclean. The system’s failings exposed the limits of state sovereignty, the endless diffusion of power, and power’s oft-masked weakness—lack of reliable information. Frustrated with their inability to identify and exclude whomever they chose, French officials concentrated their efforts in order to exclude those who posed the greatest threats to France and French Alsace.

The processes of exclusion introduced a regime of denunciations, suspicions, and betrayal that spared no one. Popular histories of Alsace regard the period with varying degrees of regret and revulsion, and they differ only in the degree of culpability they assign to France. Xenophobia dominated the expulsions, which have been variously described as war crimes or “disastrous errors.”² The experiences of one man, Georges Wehrung, offer a striking example of how the French state attempted to transform and integrate Alsace by excluding those who officials thought did not belong in the national community. French authorities hounded Wehrung through the winter and spring of 1919 on charges that he had denounced other Alsatians to German authorities during the war, that he had persecuted francophile Alsatians, and that he had opposed French rule of Alsace. The authorities proceeded somewhat cautiously with Wehrung because of his age, 64 years, and because he was a native Alsatian, but finally decided the circumstances warranted immediate expulsion to Germany. Wehrung pleaded for mercy:

¹ ADBR AL 121, 155, extract from La Republique, 14 April 1921.
I was born French, of a French family, my brother-in-law and my sister and their children are French, and I am happy to be French again, and I have never denounced any person or French family, on the contrary I rendered many services to Frenchmen during the war.3

Ignoring his pleas, French authorities exiled Wehrung to Baden, leaving him destitute in what was for him a foreign land.4 Wehrung claimed by birth, by family, by sentiment, and by service to be part of the French nation; French officials decided he was a traitor. Wehrung was an unremarkable figure, but his case was extraordinary for the investigative resources that French officials devoted to it and the energy with which they pursued the man. A retired small-town teacher, Wehrung shared his exile with prominent Alsatian lawyers and politicians whom the French government feared would agitate for Alsatian neutrality if allowed to remain in the region.

Exclusion marked a national boundary, but its processes were far from clear, and French authorities faced a number of daunting challenges in defining that boundary in Alsace. First, the region’s demographic complexities made identity an artifice, and many individuals could make strong claims of being either German, French, or Alsatian as circumstances required. Second, the project of French Alsace required the participation of established authorities—old structures—including Alsatian municipal officials and French bureaucrats emboldened with state mandates. Third, French Alsace represented a modified construct that relied on rhetoric borrowed directly from the pre-war French myth of French Alsace and French wartime propaganda. The bulk of the chapter will examine the mechanics of exclusion, chronologically from November 1918 to January

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3 Archives Departmental de Bas-Rhin (ADBR) AL 121, 111, Wehrung to military administrator, 10 April 1919.
4 ADBR AL 121, 111, Ligue des Droits de l’Homme to Commissioner General, 6 November 1920.
1920, as French officials prepared Alsace for assimilation into France. Little about this process was orderly or coherent, but the case of Georges Wehrung provides a recurring thread of experience: suspicion, denunciation, fear, exile, and bureaucracy. Wehrung’s case stands out among those of others whom French and Alsatian officials considered for exclusion, and suggests the limits of power in defining the boundaries of the national community.

The Problem of Demographics

French policy was to integrate Alsace’s population into the national community by purging Germans and processing everyone else for French citizenship. The French believed the region’s population was divisible into two distinct groups, francophile Alsatian natives and German immigrants; French statisticians calculated Alsace and Lorraine’s total population in January 1919 as 1.8 million, of which a half million were German immigrants.⁵ The French premier, Georges Clemenceau, instructed French military and civil authorities in Alsace to treat Alsatians carefully and Germans harshly, to expel the latter on the least provocation, and to replace forthwith all Germans occupying public service positions.⁶ There was a sense in France that the liberation of Alsace would not be complete until the last German, as well as any sympathetic Alsatian renegades, had been booted across the Rhine.⁷ One of the most generous formulations held that “all Germans had to leave, with many exceptions; all Alsatians could remain,

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⁶ ADBR AL 121, 902, premier to high commissioner, 24 January 1919.
⁷ Emile Wetterlé, “Jours d’Allégresse,” RDM 48 (1918), 824.
with a few exceptions. Exceptions or not, the first problem was to define German and Alsatian.

Legally, most of the region’s inhabitants were German nationals who were citizens or subjects of various German states. Under German rule, Alsatians received limited rights in a comprehensive national law of 1913 that marginally contributed to the federalization of German citizenship, but citizenship continued in large measure to be subject to state control. Alsatians remained a suspected national minority, their rights derived from imperial grant rather than from any recognition of popular sovereignty.

Alsace’s inhabitants described themselves as being either native Alsatians or Old Germans [Alteutsch]. Imperially minded, this definition stressed the distinctions between those who claimed or were perceived to have roots in Alsace predating the German annexation of 1871 and the immigrant German bourgeoisie who had arrived since that time to govern the region and who occupied higher-level positions in administration, education, industry, and, of course, the military. The francophile artist Hansi specialized in shallow caricatures of Old Germans as brutal, wooden, authoritarian, and pretentious. The great majority of German immigrants, however, had no connections to Imperial authorities and were instead factory workers.

The conception that two linguistically and culturally distinct groups inhabited Alsace was the basis for French efforts to segregate the population. French officials assumed that these differences corresponded to where each individual and/or their parents

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8 Charles Spindler, L’Alsace pendant la guerre (Strasbourg Librairie Treuttel & Wurtz, 1925), 743.
9 I deal with the problem of Alsatian citizenship in chapter two. Also, see Rogers Brubaker, Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 114.
10 While a social and cultural gulf separated the German bourgeoisie from Alsatian natives, Elly Heuss-Knapp’s memoires stressed the two groups’ mutual sympathies and attempts at amicable assimilation. See her Souvenirs d’une Allemande de Strasbourg, 1881–1934, translated from the German by Jean-Yves Mariotte (Strasbourg: Oberlin, 1996).
had been born or lived since before the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71.\(^{11}\) Such
distinctions, however, and the processes of defining and categorizing human beings in
general, frustrated everyone involved. A town councilman in Strasbourg reacted
incredulously to French attempts to identify ethnic nationalities, especially in the
confusing conjunction of biology, genealogy, and geography:

> Who today is pure blooded Alsatian? It is evident that there are no longer very
> many after the numerous promiscuities of these 48 years. . . . It is nearly
> impossible to establish in each case if someone is pure blooded Alsatian, if his
> father or grandmother lived in Alsace before 1870.\(^{12}\)

In January 1919, French statisticians calculated that fifty-nine percent of the
population of Alsace and Lorraine were the children of natives, ten percent had one
native-born parent, twenty-eight percent (510,000 people) had German parents, and three
percent were of French or other origin.\(^{13}\) “German,” however, was an indiscriminate
term. Although German nationals held passports issued by the Empire, their civic
identity derived not from the Empire but from one of the states such as Prussia or
Bavaria.\(^{14}\) French authorities noted the presence of Prussians, Bavarians, Sarrois,
Württembergers, Badeners, Luxembourgers, Belgians, and the new categories of Poles
and Czechoslovaks.\(^{15}\) In appropriate circumstances, the umbrella term of German could

\(^{11}\) Jena Marie Gaines, “The Spectrum of Alsatian Nationalism, 1918–1929,” (University of Virginia,
1990), 139–41.

\(^{12}\) Archives Municipal de Strasbourg (AMS), CM PV, 7 December 1918.

\(^{13}\) Bulletin de la Statistique Générale de la France et du Service d’observation des Prix, 9, October

\(^{14}\) To appreciate the problems of defining a German, consider what is the proper nationality of a native of
the area described in Richard W. Timbs’ Germanizing Prussian Poland: The H-K-T Society and the
Struggle for the Eastern Marches in the German Empire, 1894–1919 (New York: Columbia University
Press, 1941).

\(^{15}\) It is worth noting that in the twentieth century alone, the latter category—Czechoslovaks—included
groups who were at various times in the century identified as Tchecko-slovaks, Bohemians, Moravians,
be applied to each of these groups. Rounding out the lists of foreigners were Serbs, Swiss, Italians—especially as migrant laborers—and Austrians.\(^16\) The catch-all image of German immigrants was mistaken in its projection of a general homogeneity on all those who were not native to the region, fully a third of the population.

Large-scale economic and political trends unrelated to national sentiments shaped Alsatian immigration and emigration.\(^17\) Rapid industrialization drove migration, and Alsace’s manufacturers enjoyed fast growth under German rule thanks to considerable public and private investments. Germany’s entire population increased sixty percent between 1871 and 1914,\(^18\) and rural to urban migration filled factory labor rolls and facilitated increasing trade, Alsace’s location on the Rhine making it a prime beneficiary of these trends. Migrants from the south German states of Bavaria and Baden favored Alsace as a destination, thanks perhaps both to its proximity and its religious (Catholic) and cultural familiarity.\(^19\) The French government distinguished immigrants from natives on the basis of whether they or their forebears had arrived in or been born in Alsace before or after 1870. Migration, however, was a long-term process. In the twenty years before the Franco-Prussian War, the population of industrial Mulhouse doubled to some sixty thousand people, and most of the immigration came from Baden, Bavaria, and

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\(^{16}\) ADBR AL 121, 953, expulsion lists; AL 121, 592, Superior Tribunal to district judges, 26 November 1919.


\(^{19}\) Hajo Holborn’s note that the “the migration from all the southern German states to the [industrializing] north was very small” seems to bolster a bias toward Alsace for south Germans. See his *A History of Modern Germany, 1840–1945* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 370.
Württemberg. In a French novel, an Alsatian character described his countrymen’s “good neighborly relations with Baden and Bavaria, for we’ve all got family or friends across the Rhine.” This immigration apparently grew after 1871, more than offsetting any emigration from Alsace resulting from the German annexation. As industrialization proceeded, waves of migration started, changed directions, settled, and started again, often disregarding national boundaries.

Other factors besides industrialization fed Alsace’s population growth. Throughout the nineteenth century, central European Jews immigrated to Alsace, encouraged by their commercial, religious and marital ties to the region as well as French liberalism vis-à-vis Jewish civil rights dating to 1791. Immigration had likewise come from the west, and Georges Wehrung’s family identified themselves as French Huguenot immigrants to Alsace. The Huguenot diaspora occurred when Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes in 1685, ending religious toleration in the country and forcing the Protestant Huguenots either to convert to Catholicism or to flee. Some went to Alsace because, while the revocation did not specifically exempt the region, neither was it enforced there because of the region’s sizeable Lutheran population.

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22 Migration statistics regarding Alsace are politically sensitive. According to French statisticians, over 300,000 Alsatians and Lorrainers left the regions between 1871 and 1914—presumably for France—but the two regions recouped those losses and added some 300,000 more from German immigrants. I discuss the use of immigration statistics in French national myth in chapter one.
25 His family having been forced to flee France for not being Catholic, Wehrung now faced having to flee Alsace for not being sufficiently French. See ADBR AL 121, 111, Ligue des Droits de l’Homme to Commissioner General, 6 November 1920.
generations, Alsace had experienced an influx of immigrants driven by economic, political, or religious motivations.

Further complicating migration was the tendency of sovereignties to change. If one’s place of birth was a constant, governments and borders changed so frequently that successive generations could owe allegiance to different sovereign powers over time.\textsuperscript{27} The nationality ascribed to an individual in any generation by birthplace might bear little correlation to that of ascendants or descendants born in the same locale. This was a mobile population, whose parentage, birthplaces and assigned nationalities were subject to considerable confusion. Industrialization, economic trends, and political and religious upheaval all shaped migratory trends and fed population growth in Alsace. One other phenomenon also contributed heavily to population growth, to which the Strasbourg councilman alluded: humans’ promiscuous tendency to procreate without checking IDs. Confessional biases seemed to put a check on procreation where national biases did not.

Interruption among Catholics, Protestants and Jews apparently was rare, but within the confessions the marriage market reflected the economic interdependence of the Rhine river region and migrations among predominantly German-speaking communities.\textsuperscript{28} Procreation, of course, was not restricted by marriage, and illegitimacy exacerbated already difficult nationality and citizenship issues.

\textsuperscript{27} To the end of the seventeenth century, according to Franklin L. Ford, Alsace’s administrative organization and French claims of sovereignty remained very much in flux and quite tentative. See Ford’s \textit{Strasbourg in Transition, 1648–1789} (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1958), 40, 62. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, French centralization slowly organized Alsatian affairs while little changing the region’s transnational economic and cultural market. In various ways, French sovereignty often appeared more nominal than actual. See, for example, Geoffrey Ellis, \textit{Napoleon’s Continental Blockade: The Case of Alsace} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981) for Alsatians’ regional exploitation of French economic policy.

Marital status confused the significance of birthplace and parentage, because family ties spanned nationalities. French and German spouses and in-laws enabled people to claim links to each nation as necessary, and created a political space to challenge exclusion by claiming national legitimacy through family ties. The broad demographic spectrum connected individuals, sometimes distantly, to someone toward whom they presumed officials would be more favorably disposed. By emphasizing these links, individuals sought official favors or, at least, protection from official sanctions.

A number of examples illustrate Alsatian families’ multi-national ties. When Adeline Lieberadt appealed to French authorities to release her German husband from jail—the only charges against him were that he was German—she noted that one of her grandfathers had been a French mayor, a brother was French, and a nephew was a French soldier wounded at Sarrebourg. Another woman, Lina Baer, hoped to convince the French government not to sell her property. Baer stressed that although her son had died in the German Army during the war, her father had served in the French army.

Madame Adolf justified her request for a favor by noting that her father was a French veteran of 1870. Besides demonstrating Alsace’s demographic complexity, these women’s appeals suggest that women could not normally appeal to officials as independent agents—literally or figuratively. Each of them based her legitimacy on a connection to a French man and stressed the man’s connection to the state as an official or a soldier.

Demographic complexities made it difficult to examine any given inhabitant and consistently define whether that person was properly French, German, or Alsatian based

29 ADBR AL 121, 906, Lieberadt to high commissioner, 18 December 1918.
30 ADBR AL 121, 1056, Baer to Commissioner General, 29 September 1921.
31 Archives Municipal de Haguenau, (AMH) Adolf to Commission de Classement, 10 March 1919.
on birthplace, parentage, or residence status. Marital and family ties created additional complications, and made it easier for individuals to challenge or avoid exclusion. Individuals used transnational relationships to highlight the links most desirable to the present regime, and stymied bureaucrats’ attempts to categorize and exclude individuals.

Old Structures

The formal processes of exclusion depended on the French government and Alsatian municipalities, and both these structures were crucial to identifying and excluding individuals. While French officials defined the applicable categories, Alsatian officials assigned individuals to those categories. The French government used its sovereign authority to deport individuals and police the borders. Municipal authorities’ control of local records enabled them to control what labels individuals received, and clerks sometimes decided subjectively who was or was not a native. Municipally-assigned labels could determine who would be granted or denied French citizenship.

The state in Alsace consisted of the officers, bureaucrats, and politicians whom the French government sent to govern the region. They arrived emboldened by the confidence of military victory and a self-righteous sense of having rescued Alsace from Prussian tyranny. Many French officials arrived in Alsace with an imperial attitude: they believed in the right of France to rule Alsace and saw Alsatian gratitude toward France as both obligatory and natural. Anti-German prejudice was widespread, and French officials were quick to interpret local objections to their policies as anti-French and pro-German. Clemenceau’s deputy, Undersecretary of State Jeanneney, encouraged official
paranoia in warning French officials to be suspicious in Alsace because "behind the fiction of private rights lurks, living and agitating, the enemy personality itself."\textsuperscript{32}

French bureaucrats gradually assumed responsibility for Alsatian civil affairs from military authorities in the winter and spring of 1919. The French transformed the German Empire's administrative districts of Lower Alsace, Upper Alsace, and Lorraine into the departments of Haut-Rhin, Bas-Rhin, and Moselle, assigning sub-prefects and prefects to each department consistent with the rest of France. Different from the rest of France, however, was the joint governance of the three departments under one Commissioner General (\textit{Commissaire Général}), who reported directly to the Premier in Paris. A number of factors hampered the French government's ability to rule Alsace: the state's general economic exhaustion; its overstretched resources; the drain of the Rhineland occupation; and the need to reconstruct the liberated territories. The dearth of resources demanded rapid military demobilization, which forced French military and civil authorities in Alsace to rely increasingly on Alsatians and, occasionally, even on Germans to run Alsace.

As a rule, French officials did not replace Alsatian municipal authorities, but instead relied on established municipal governments to carry on local administration. Since Clemenceau had insisted that Germans in public service be replaced, the French commissioner in Strasbourg constantly pestered the town's mayor for information about Germans remaining in the city's service and demanded their prompt dismissal. French authorities were incredulous that Germans remained on the city's employment rolls. In December 1918, the commissioner asked the mayor how soon the city's German customs

inspector would be replaced.\textsuperscript{33} French officials wrote to the mayor repeatedly, on 6 and 15 March, and 11 April, asking why the city orchestra still had German musicians or demanding information on specific Germans reportedly still on the city’s payroll.\textsuperscript{34} On 24 May, a French official was astounded to discover that two Germans were still being allowed to work on the city’s electoral lists.\textsuperscript{35} The mayor responded tactfully to each French demand to discharge German employees, noting peculiarities or legal difficulties for individual cases. Some German employees had binding legal contracts that the city could not afford to buy out. Some were married to Alsatian women. The two Germans working in the electoral office were long-time employees who alone understood the city’s election system and could assure its smooth functioning; the mayor promised, nonetheless, that the Germans would be replaced as quickly as possible.\textsuperscript{36} By the summer of 1919, French pressure had led to the discharge of at least 114 Germans from municipal jobs in Strasbourg.\textsuperscript{37} Alsatian villages received less focused attention from French authorities, and less pressure to identify and expel Germans in public service.

Alsatian officials faced intense scrutiny from French authorities watching for signs of disloyalty and from challengers hoping to use French rule to alter local power structures. Many locals weathered the change successfully, although not without turbulent moments. Municipal authorities in Haguenau welcomed French troops in November 1918, renamed major streets in honor of French leaders (Joffre, Foch, Clemenceau), and scheduled French language classes for adults to promote

\textsuperscript{33} AMS, Division Centrale, 40–221, commissioner to mayor, 27 December 1918.
\textsuperscript{34} AMS, Division Centrale, 40–221, commissioner to mayor, 6 March 1919; commissioner to mayor, 15 March 1919; commissioner to mayor, 11 April 1919.
\textsuperscript{35} AMS, Division Centrale, 40–221, Commissioner General to mayor, 24 May 1919.
\textsuperscript{36} AMS, Division Centrale, 40–221, mayor to commissioner, 20 March 1919; mayor to Commissioner General, 24 April 1919.
\textsuperscript{37} AMS, Division Centrale, 40–221, list, 21 July 1919.
assimilation. Mayor Zimmer of Thionville had a more difficult time. Jailed during the war by German authorities on charges of having incited conscripts to desert, he won release on appeal with a letter that swore his loyalty to the Emperor. After the war, one of Zimmer’s rivals tried to discredit Zimmer with the letter. French officials weighed the charges and Zimmer’s contradictory affirmations of loyalty, but decided that he was politically safe and should be left in place.\textsuperscript{39}

In another case, an Alsatian farmer and local politician in northern Alsace, coincidentally named Georges Wehrung like the retired teacher, weathered the transition to French rule quite well. As a village mayor in August 1918, he signed a manifesto declaring that Germany alone could assure Alsace’s national, cultural, and economic interests in the future and rejecting any separation of Alsace from Germany. After the French occupied Alsace, Wehrung gradually convinced the French sub-prefect that his war-time declaration had been under duress, and that he had rallied “in all sincerity to the French cause.” Wehrung gained the sub-prefect’s support and was reelected mayor in 1919 and again in 1922, serving until 1928.\textsuperscript{40}

Alsatian municipal officials relied on their political skills for their survival, but it is not clear whether their experiences taught them deftness or whether circumstances disposed of those lacking natural abilities. Mayor Hunzinger of Gries had been a steadfast supporter of the German Empire. After someone reproached him for his attitude and conduct during the war, Hunziger replied “If I was a good German then, I am a good


\textsuperscript{39} ADBR AL 121, 102, anon to Commissioner General, 29 July 1919.

\textsuperscript{40} Bernard Klein, La Vie Politique en Alsace: Bossue et dans le pays de la Petite Pierre de 1918 à 1939 (Strasbourg: Publications de la Societe Savante d’Alsace et des Regions de l’est, 1991), 55–6.
Frenchman now." Hunziger shared with many Alsatian officials a high regard for order and an intention to survive, and mayor Wicky of Mulhouse may have been the most accomplished in this regard. Over the course of Wicky’s service on the municipal council, Alsatian politicians struggled with tense German constitutional conflicts, war, invasion, occupation, military dictatorship, liberation, French martial law, and conservative and leftist French governments. Wicky, an Alsatian Socialist leader, was first elected to the municipal council in 1904, apparently maintaining his electoral base for the next three decades. In 1914, after French forces briefly occupied Mulhouse, a German colleague denounced Wicky for having welcomed French forces, and German authorities jailed Wicky for three months. Wicky was then incorporated into the German Army and only returned to Mulhouse after the war. He thereafter continued his ascent of local political circles, becoming mayor in the early 1920s. Wicky cautiously supported each new government while avoiding too tight a connection to the ancien régime.

French officials attached particular importance to Strasbourg, and surviving the transition there demanded particular political skills. The successful administration of this city required both a local power base and the approval of the current government. As the war ended, Strasbourg officials scrambled to maintain both order and their own positions by adjusting to the political situation. The socialist party leader Jacques Peirotes succeeded best, after one false start. Elected mayor by the city council on November 10,

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41 ADBR AL 121, 111, "Renseignements concernant M. M. Hunzinger, maire, et Wehrung, secrétaire instituteur, à Gries" PV, 12 May 1919.
42 Harvey, Constructing Class, 118.
43 AMM, CM PV, 12 July 1929.
he declared his support for the revolutionary Soldiers and Workers’ Council as the only force able to establish order in the city. French authorities dissolved the city council on November 29, but reconstituted it with many of the same members and added their own choices. The French chose two successive mayors, but neither enjoyed wide local support and both resigned within a few weeks. Recognizing the need to accommodate local factions, the Commissioner General offered the position again to Peirotes, who accepted. The council voted unanimously for Peirotes, with one member noting they dare not challenge the Commissioner General’s choice. Peirotes’ administration would simultaneously assure the French government of its loyalties, emphasize socialist politics in the interests of the city of Strasbourg, and blunt the impact of French demands to get rid of German municipal employees. He remained the mayor until 1928, when an electoral defeat heralded new party alignments in the city.

New Constructions

Alsatian municipal governments represented old structures, albeit modified by the expulsion of certain members who would not or could not distance themselves from the Empire. A melange of French career officers, bureaucrats, and politicians who had varying degrees of experience in colonial and domestic government represented the French state. French officials organized new governing structures that drew simultaneously on French colonial practices, domestic prefectural experience, and the

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45 Ibid., 918. As the German Empire collapsed in the first half of November, high-ranking officers resigned, monarchs abdicated, parliamentarians declared a Provisional Government, and groups of soldiers and workers proclaimed soviet rule in various cities. This transitional chaos—the “Revolution”—in Strasbourg saw the Soldiers and Workers’ Council declare a Soviet Republic and deploy small-arms to maintain order in the city. It appears Peirotes was less supportive of revolution than he was of calming the situation until French forces arrived.

46 AMS, CM PV, 10 April 1919.

47 Richez, Peirotes, 71.
German imperial structures that Alsatians already understood. The disarray French officials suffered was virtually inevitable, but French officials saw the complaints and local opposition that they sometimes encountered as latent German resistance if not conspiracy. Suspicion, labeling, and exclusion were coincident processes. Labels were propaganda-fed constructions that municipal authorities could manipulate, within limits, to determine who would be excluded from French Alsace.

Local authorities labeled individuals according to state authorities’ evolving criteria. These labels were supposed to differentiate bad Germans from good Alsatians, in order to facilitate exclusion of the former and integration of the latter. Instead, from labeling came a confusing spectrum of identity and exclusions. Exclusion ranged from physical expulsion across the Rhine—sometimes under armed escort—to political marginalization. Labels were tools for determining or contesting exclusion. When officials decided an individual’s fate, his or her assigned label was a principal consideration. A label was to exclusion as a fulcrum is to a lever. A fulcrum is the point on which a lever rotates, and moving this point multiplies or divides a lever’s potential force. Just as moving a fulcrum alters the resultant force of a lever, different labels altered the force and results of exclusion. While being labeled a German in Alsace in 1919 was bad, worse was to be classified a boche, and worse still a dirty boche. Words were not harmless; they carried weight, and they cost people their homes and their jobs.

Labels conveyed hatred. One letter writer felt it sufficient to denounce a man as a “boche of the first order . . . who said that the vermin (population) of Alsace-Lorraine should all be destroyed, and that the French language is spoken only by prostitutes.”48

Avoiding specificity, denunciations often accused individuals of sentiments that were

48 ADBR AL 121, 900, Alex to Police, 1 April 1919.
germanophile or francophile. In his appearance before a triage committee deciding his fate, Pastor Graff, Alsatian, was accused of having German sentiments and having spoken in favor of the German government during the war. The pastor protested that he was a man of the social order and would serve France as faithfully as he had served Germany. When a witness confirmed that Graff "had always been animated by germanophile sentiments," the committee decided to expel Graff.\(^49\)

Individuals often faced charges of having denounced Alsatians to German authorities during the war. Although the charges were often based on hearsay and vague reasoning—triaxe committees never consulted local police records—the burden of proof fell on the accused to prove their innocence, a nearly impossible task.\(^50\) The worst sentiment one could have was to be a "pan-german," which seemed to indicate a magnification of the essence of Germanness and a blood-lusting drive to unite all Germans, to subjugate France, and to control Europe.\(^51\) The Association of Patriots of the city of Haguenau compiled a blacklist of forty-one residents for expulsion, listing twenty-nine as "very dangerous pan-germanists." Others listed were "hostile to France" or had "mistreated Alsatians," and one man along with his daughter was accused of having composed speeches and songs that glorified the Kaiser, Hindenburg, and Ludendorff.\(^52\)

Mutual defense seemed to inspire various groups of men to organize or reorganize themselves into associations that would be amenable to French authorities. Alsatian

\(^49\) ADBR AL 121, 903, Commission de Classement PV, 17 January 1919.
\(^50\) ADBR AL 121, 903, Commission de Classement PV, 9 January 1919.
\(^51\) The term derived from a group that for years had strongly advocated imperial expansion of the state to encompass all Germans and to reshape Europe. The events and the German government's war-aims during the First World War seemed sufficiently clear proof of the threat that pan-germanism represented. See Roger Chickering, *We Men Who Feel Most German: A Cultural Study of the Pan-German League, 1886–1914* (Boston: George Allen & Unwin, 1984).
\(^52\) AMH 1W20, Association of Patriotes of the Ville of Haguenau, 10 June 1919.
members of a German-Alsatian rowing club founded in 1881, the Strassbürger Ruderverein, dissolved the club in December 1918 and reconstituted themselves as a French-Alsatian club, the Cercle Nautique, purging their rolls of Germans and soliciting new memberships from arriving French officials. According to the group’s new president, they “judged the moment favorable for creating a new society conforming to the interests of the new Government.” This change did not impress Strasbourg city officials: the city refused to include the group in the city’s celebration of Bastille Day in 1919. Dr. Charles Frey, an influential municipal councilman and future mayor, accused the group of having previously been too “German,” a charge the group vigorously denied. Bastille Day, on 14 July, was the first French national holiday celebrated in Alsace in 1919, and all the more important politically for that reason. The group’s exclusion from the city’s program was a missed opportunity. Their enthusiastic participation in a national celebration would have aided the members’ efforts to validate their French credentials. The transformation of a rowing club mirrored larger processes. A group discarded old labels for new ones, but was marginalized by an influential Alsatian politician who persisted in tagging the group as “German.” Politics in French Alsace emerged from old structures, new constructions, and struggles for rights and legitimacy.

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53 AMS, Division Centrale, 11–69, Cercle Nautique de Strasbourg to mayor, n.d.
54 AMS, Division Centrale, 11–69, Cercle Nautique de Strasbourg to Kieffer, 5 July 1919.
Power and Exclusion: December 1918 to January 1920

Great confusion surrounded the processes of exclusion. French officials did not adopt any uniform practices or policies and operated under a number of flawed assumptions, and misunderstandings made French efforts to segregate the population more difficult. Officials changed their policies in reaction to problems without perceiving the flaws inherent to their efforts. Alsatians and Germans suffered the effects of the haphazard “system” to which they were subjected, but never understood the process. Georges Wehrung’s case itself was full of the contradictions, changes, uncertainties, and arbitrary acts that marked exclusion from Alsace in 1919.

The German Empire’s collapse brought chaos in November 1918. German soldiers retreated through Alsace, looting freely before crossing the Rhine, and some Alsatians pillaged German stores under the guise of retributive justice. 55 Philippe Husser blamed the pillaging generally on “the population” and noted that his pastor indignantly condemned “the conduct of the pillagers” in his Sunday sermon. The pastor sensed that the French victory was God’s judgment on his people’s faithlessness, so it was a trial that had to be born. The pillaging, however, was a social outrage, and the pastor’s sermon suggested that the congregation either included or knew those in their community who had attacked the Germans’ shops. Such outrages, he declared, were sins against God and the community that had to stop. 56

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55 Jean-Claude Richez, “Ordre et désordre dans la fête: Les Fêtes de réception des troupes françaises en Alsace en November 1918,” Revue des sciences sociales de la France de l’est 12 (1983), 169; AMM, PV CM, 26 September 1930; AMS, PV CM, 4 July 1919. The breadth of the violence committed against German shops is difficult to gauge. In Strasbourg and Mulhouse, some shop owners tried to sue the city for damages for having failed to maintain civil order. In Strasbourg, the council denied its responsibility for the incidents and noted a police report blamed known thieves for some of the incidents.

French military authorities restored order, but they were not certain whether the greatest threat lay in German resistance to French rule, a Bolshevik revolution, or neutralist agitation that might make it difficult for the French government to squelch any allied doubts about French claims to Alsace-Lorraine in the upcoming peace conference. Then, of course, there was the logistical problem of famine relief, as French authorities tried to shift the economic blockade line from the Vosges Mountains to the Rhine, to feed Alsatians while preventing food from crossing the Rhine and easing Germany’s economic plight.

Paris’s first priority was military security, and on November 21, the government ordered French forces in Alsace to “remove far from the occupied zone . . . any person or group of persons who might carry out an attack on the Army . . . [and] proceed to a triage of the undesirable elements of the population.” The government ordered Triage Committees of three people—a military intelligence officer and two Alsatian or Lorrainer civilians, one from France, one a local notable—to identify suspects and undesirables for evacuation and forward case files to headquarters for approval.57 This brief order contained the seed of the triage system, which attempted simultaneously to identify the system’s objectives, which the government had not clearly defined, and to plan and carry out operations. Related decrees magnified confusion, as when a French general on November 28 ordered all German gendarmes to quit the region within forty-eight hours. Alsatian gendarmes protested they were natives and should not be expelled, and the

general modified his order to allow Alsatians to remain. Confusion over triage, French objectives, and identity would grow steadily worse.

In early December, army corps staffs began trying to organize the triage system, designate committees, list the committees’ responsibilities, to identify who was dangerous, and to determine what should be done with suspects. By December 9, classification centers intended to review triage evacuation orders were still not functioning in the area occupied by the Seventh Army and the army staff ordered triage committees to divide their cases into three categories: non-suspects; suspects who were not dangerous; and dangerous suspects, who should be evacuated. On December 15, the Fourth Army in Bas-Rhin instructed committees to divide their cases between non-suspects to be freed and suspects to be evacuated. Two days later, the Fourth Army ordered an end to arbitrary arrests and incarceration of Germans—the jails were full and there were widespread protests—and instructed triage committees to focus their efforts on German officers, those who had denounced Alsatians to German authorities, and “women of light morality” for having had relations with German officials and for continuing their immoral behavior. The orders to begin triage had come from Paris, but each corps headquarters understood triage differently, as did each triage committee. Officials at each level found it difficult to distinguish who was an Alsatian or German, and who was a suspect.

Categorizing an individual’s identity was one of the government’s principal concerns, and French officials planned to group the region’s inhabitants according to the

58 AMH, 1W19, 6th Army Corps, 2 December 1918.
59 ADBR AL 121, 902, 7th Army Corps, 2nd Bureau, 9 December 1918.
60 ADBR AL 121, 902, 4th Army Corps, 2nd Bureau, 15 December 1918.
61 ADBR AL 121, 902, 4th Army, 17 December 1918.
received notion that most were native Alsatians, hence rightfully French, and that many of the rest were German immigrants. The government tried to assign identity cards to each inhabitant based on his or her birthplace and those of the parents, and possibly the grandparents. Card A designated a native Alsatian with two French-born parents; card B a native with one French parent; card C designated foreign—non-enemy—forebears; and card D indicated enemy descent. The problem of demographics, discussed earlier, foreshadowed the overwhelming difficulties this system would encounter. Migrating populations, ever-changing sovereignties, and multi-national family ties defied officials' efforts to qualify individuals' nationality. The system proceeded, nonetheless, and individuals like Philippe Husser, a teacher, had to fill out questionnaires on his background first on December 9, as education authorities swept the schools for German teachers, and again on December 22, to receive an identity card. Alsatians derided the division of the population into the pure-bloods, the mixed breeds, and "les Boches" as ridiculous in theory and unworkable in its application.

The immediate importance of categorizing identity, a fractured and decentralized process, was that it proceeded as French authorities were expelling German policemen, civil servants, and professors en masse, so claiming the right label and avoiding the

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63 Harvey notes that triage committees "granted numerous changes from D- to B- cards or from B- to A-cards," despite specific instructions from Paris that the triage system was not to concern itself with identity classification. See his *Constructing Class*, 134. The problem was two-fold: first, categorizing identity proved an endlessly complicated and contradictory task; and, second, triage was grossly haphazard and the committees did not know the limits of their responsibilities.
wrong one could spare one considerable trouble and losses.\textsuperscript{66} Within a few weeks, some fifteen thousand people were forced out of Alsace-Lorraine.\textsuperscript{67} One Alsatian strongly resented French policies:

For three weeks you have been expelling men and women, both civil servants and merchants. These people generally get twenty-four hours notice to prepare. Needless to say, this time is too short! What duress this brings to families struck by these measures! You have torn from the hearts of families and expelled to Germany old men who can’t care for themselves and who no longer have a patrie, who are foreigners across the Rhine, and without resources. And this in winter . . . . And those who have any means to subsist as refugees are allowed only forty kilos of luggage. . . . those who have resources across the Rhine are not so bad off, but those of limited means are left with nothing! . . . How many expelled merchants have committed no other crime than to have been born in Germany or in Alsace-Lorraine of German parents? . . . Many German men married Alsatian women, whose fathers were French soldiers. These women know nothing of Germany, they only know their Alsace; their children have been raised together with the children of Alsatians. . . . Look at the terrible scenes these poor refugees have suffered . . . insults, outrages, even brutalities have taken place, as they say [perhaps a veiled reference to violence against women?]. . . . These tortures make greater still the gravity of their misfortunes.\textsuperscript{68}

German communities across the Rhine, already poorly supplied, apparently did not welcome new mouths to feed. Makeshift refugee camps spilled across the eastern banks of the Rhine, where a woman described Germans “expelled by the thousands . . . and

\textsuperscript{67} In Pierre Zind’s polemic, the French occupation of Alsace in 1918 was little different than the Soviet occupation of eastern Europe in 1945. Zind recounts extreme atrocity stories: an Alsatian traitor led malicious boys in hurling insults and stones at Germans being forced to flee and “wrenched a baby from its German mother’s arms and dashed it to the ground.” Despite his biases, Zind presents numbers that appear reasonable—certainly not excessive—in placing the total number expelled from November 1918 to September 1920 at 111,915. Although not cited, his information might have been compiled by German refugee offices that seemed to make concerted efforts to account for those who left Alsace and Lorraine. See his Elsass-Lothringen/Alsace Lorraine: Une nation interdite, 1871–1940 (Paris: Copernic, 1979), 113–15.
\textsuperscript{68} ADBR AL 121, 899, anonymous to high commissioner, 13 December 1918.
forced to cross the Rhine bridges on foot. Many good Alsatians followed . . . The fugitives entered poor Germany, where there was . . . neither milk nor honey.\textsuperscript{69}

Denunciations fed expulsions, but understaffed French officials who acted too quickly on malicious statements were stung by criticism that their measures hurt good Alsatians. A report noted that "honorable people, more or less engaged by family relations, by a community of interests, or by secret obligations" kept intervening on behalf of even the worst characters, and that this made it impossible to carry out just measures against German agents and Alsatian traitors. To diffuse both responsibility and criticism, and to ensure that repression struck the proper targets, the report recommended giving local notables more influence.\textsuperscript{70} Centrally-mandated exclusion became a decentralized process. In December 1918, Georges Wehrung had the advantage of being a native Alsatian, and hence qualifying for Card A. His exclusion would hinge on vague denunciations, confused procedures and delays, diligent investigations, and sudden decisions.

\textbf{January to March 1919}

French authorities in Paris and Strasbourg tried to create a governing structure for the region while the population struggled with changing rules, suspicion, denunciations, and retribution. Under the initial military occupation, Alsace and Lorraine were the responsibility of an undersecretary of state in Paris reporting to Clemenceau. The undersecretary supervised the three commissioners responsible for civil matters in Alsace and Lorraine, but the Army exercised preponderate authority as an occupation force, a division of authority that frustrated Frenchmen and Alsatians alike. In Paris, the Higher

\textsuperscript{69} Heuss-Knapp, \textit{Souvenirs}, 92.

\textsuperscript{70} ADBR AL 121, 899, special agent to high commissioner, 19 December 1918.
Council for Alsace and Lorraine, consisting of appointed bureaucrats and prominent francophile Alsatians and Lorrainers, advised the government on regional affairs.\(^7^1\) Frustrated with complaints about these arrangements, Clemenceau re-organized the system on January 24, granting full administrative powers to the civil commissioners, while reserving police powers to the military and calling on the military and civil authorities to cooperate in controlling the population.\(^7^2\) On March 21, Clemenceau again re-organized the governing structure, appointing a Commissioner General to take over all affairs for the region and to govern Alsace and Lorraine from Strasbourg.\(^7^3\) These changes continued for months, as the challenges of organizing regional government while expelling professional administrators overwhelmed the government’s scarce resources.

If the government was uncertain how it should structure its administration in Alsace, the haphazardly organized triage committees were even less certain of their purposes or the scope of their powers. The triage system had two levels. At the first level, thirty triage committees gathered files on suspects and made recommendations on who could be left at liberty and who should be evacuated, typically to internment in the interior of France, or possibly expelled across the Rhine. These committees then passed their opinions along with suspect’s files up to one of three higher committees, each referred to as a Center of Classification (Second Degree), seated in Colmar, Strasbourg, or Metz, respectively, that evaluated the files and issued its own opinion. A military governor or a civilian commissioner was then supposed to authorize evacuation or exile.

\(^{72}\) ADBR AL 121, 902, president to commissioners, 24 January 1919.
based on the higher committee’s recommendation. In practice, triage bogged down in innumerable bureaucratic, logistical, and political complexities.

The triage committees suffered from high turnover among the military officers appointed as their presidents, the result of rapid demobilization, language problems, a lack of judicial training or oversight, and a lack of accountability. In January 1919, a high-ranking commission in Paris asked for reports from all the triage committees to determine how each committee was organized, what it thought its responsibilities were, and how it was in fact operating. A few committees, including the one in Molsheim that handled Georges Wehrung’s case, did not reply, but the rest revealed widely varying conceptions of triage. There was no consensus among the committees as to whether they could recommend or order evacuation to concentration camps in France or exile to Germany, whether they could examine Germans, how they were to gather or judge information on suspects, and whether or how a committee could restrict an individual’s movements. Debates over the report in Paris and new instructions revealed that the French cabinet remained unsure of how triage should proceed or what was to be done with suspects. Marshals Foch and Pétain, the latter in command of the French Army, entered the fray in February, protesting that Alsatian suspects should not be exiled to Germany because arbitrary acts risked offending Alsatian public opinion and because the exiles could serve as fodder for anti-French propaganda. Debates and changes continued, and in early March the Strasbourg Center of Classification (2nd Degree) began

74 ADBR AL 121, 902, Kastler report, January 1919.
76 ADBR AL 121, 902, Kastler report, January 1919.
77 ADBR AL 121, 902, Matter note, 12 February 1919; undersecretary to high commissioner, 18 February 1919.
78 ADBR AL 121, 902, president to Maréchal Foch, 24 February 1919; undersecretary to high commissioner, 27 February 1919.
to reevaluate every opinion it had issued since the first of January to evacuate or expel individuals based on new ministerial instructions.  

Triage committees' confusion echoed that of French officials in Strasbourg and Paris. Some committees treated Alsatian mayors as suspects, and the committee in Erstein relieved three mayors of their duties. The committee in Molsheim, on the other hand, had that town's mayor as its interpreter. Committees did not know the scope of their functions, and investigated both Germans and Alsatians, unaware of their contrary instructions. Committees were supposed to examine only suspects' anti-French sentiments or activities, but some assumed responsibility for the populations' identity cards. In Haguenau, the triage committee routinely approved requests to upgrade cards from B to A. Triage committees were often the most visible sign of French rule. Since committees collected denunciations and recommended evacuation or exile, Alsatians feared them, but increasingly criticized the government and demanded the end of triage.

The Centers of Classification (Second Degree) were supposed to serve as checks on any errors made by local triage committees, but the members of these committees made only cursory examinations of files, lacked judicial training and any sense of procedure, and accorded no rights to the accused. In many cases, confusion over paperwork, authority, and changing instructions delayed the implementation of triage actions, and the committees themselves were not sure if their power was executive in nature or advisory. In January 1919, the Triage Committee in Molsheim found that

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79 ADBR AL 121, 903, Committee PV, 4 March 1919.
80 ADBR AL 121, 902, sub-prefect to prefect, n.d.
81 Spindler, L'Alsace, 756.
82 ADBR AL 121, 902, undersecretary to high commissioner, 18 February 1919.
83 AMH 1 W 54, Adolph to Committee, 10 March 1919; Braun to Committee, 5 August 1919.
84 ADBR AL 121, 903, Committee PV, 9 January, 10 January, 14 January, 1919.
Georges Wehrung, 64 years old, was "undesirable and even dangerous, has always had anti-French sentiments and denounced the Schultz family to the Germans for their French sentiments."85 The higher committee in Strasbourg agreed that "Wehrung is animated by German sentiments as witnessed by the fact that he was employed by the War Auxiliary Service and that he denounced . . . his fellow citizens," and it voted to send Wehrung to a concentration camp.86 Informed of the decision, Wehrung appealed for a hearing to face his accusers, but no one arrested him and he waited anxiously while authorities at all levels wrestled with the problems of triage.

It was easy for people to make denunciations and for triage committees to pronounce harsh judgements, but there were not enough jail cells to hold everyone or enough police to pick every suspect up and hustle him or her out of the region, nor could the police keep the deported from returning. Some treated unexecuted triage decisions as a joke on French competence,87 but less fortunate suspects, and especially prominent individuals whom French officials regarded as considerable threats, were arrested and exiled without delay.88 Philippe Husser felt seriously imperiled because of the large number of teachers whom authorities fired and expelled. Husser wrote in February 1919 that "the sword of Damocles is suspended over my head."89 Even as teachers worried over their fate, the impracticality of either internal exile or expulsion created new

85 ADBR AL 121, 111, CT Molsheim, n.d.
86 ADBR AL 121, 111, CT Strasbourg (2nd Degree), 24 January 1919.
87 Spindler, L'Alsace, 760.
88 ADBR AL 121, 111, Committee des Alsaciens-Lorraines de la Sarre to Commissioner General, 21 April 1919.
pressures on triage committees in early March to find other, less offensive means of controlling the population.90

There was a market in exclusion with both values and liquidity, and people brandished or hid the labels they had received as assets or liabilities. People traded in labels and identity cards, values fluctuated, officials attempted to impose rules and order, and the market defied official control. No one in Alsace in 1919 doubted the value of the identity card A that designated an individual as a native Alsatian, born of French parents. When the police seized a man’s card A on the grounds that he did not meet the necessary qualifications, his wife pleaded earnestly for its return “to spare an entire family a terrible misfortune.” She claimed to know many less deserving people who had card A despite their German background.91 Henry Klee’s mother was a native Alsatian, and hence received card A. His father was German, with card D. Given his paternal link, Klee should have received card B, but he had card A, perhaps with an illicit purchase or through local influence. Klee tried to use the presumption of privilege that attended card A to dissuade the authorities from expelling his German father.92 Confusion and exceptions were too widespread, resources too thin, and control too tenuous for French officials to question why the son of a German man had card A, so they focused instead on whether or not to spare the father.

90 ADBR AL 121, 903, committee PV, 4 March 1919.
91 ADBR AL 121, 900, statement of Mme Finster-Drion, 24 March 1919.
92 AMH 1 W 20, Klee to Commissioner General, 25 August 1919.
April to May 1919

Alexandre Millerand took over French administration in Alsace and Lorraine as Commissioner General in late March.\textsuperscript{93} Millerand undertook a review of all French operations in the region, especially the triage system, which Alsatians were increasingly criticizing. Triage changed constantly as French officials tried to respond to criticism by clarifying procedures and mitigating abuses. When police officials complained they could not track all the suspects who had been placed under administrative surveillance—a process requiring the suspect to report regularly to the police—Commissioner Maringer in Strasbourg lifted the reporting requirement while ordering that all suspects’ identity cards be inscribed “Valid only for the commune of residence.”\textsuperscript{94} Responding to complaints about triage abuses, Maringer ordered triage committees to state precisely the facts of suspects’ offenses, and—reversing earlier instructions—to treat Germans married to Alsatians like Alsatians themselves.\textsuperscript{95}

Public criticism of triage continued to grow, and occupied more of Millerand’s attention. In late April, Millerand directed that “in principle, all the decisions currently rendered by the committees will be executed, however, in cases where the decisions raise particularly grave objections, they should be referred to [Millerand’s office].”\textsuperscript{96} Responding to other complaints, Millerand also insisted that ecclesiastical authorities be consulted in cases involving the clergy. Some committees had sent penniless Alsatians

\textsuperscript{93} Millerand’s title was Commissioner General of the Republic (CGR). Millerand directly supervised three Commissioners of the Republic seated in Strasbourg, Colmar, and Metz respectively. Millerand also headed the General Commission, consisting of ten major staff offices including military affairs, interior, finance, and justice—“like miniature cabinet ministries.” See Dreyfus, \textit{La Vie Politique}, 42–3. The CGR also supervised some of the Army’s handling of occupation duties in Baden and coordinated many issues with the Foreign Ministry having to do with residual German interests in Alsace.

\textsuperscript{94} ADBR AL 121, 902, commissioner to police, April 1919.

\textsuperscript{95} ADBR AL 121, 902, commissioner to Colonel Kahn, 14 April 1919.

\textsuperscript{96} ADBR AL 121, 902, commissioner citing the CGR in instructions to Colonel Kahn, 25 April 1919.
into internal exile to French cities without providing them food, lodging, or protection against Frenchmen who hated German accents, creating "a spectacle that brought no honor to France." Millerand ordered a reduction in triage activities, which had produced more frustration than security.\textsuperscript{97} Public criticism and government pressure would slowly lead to the suspension of triage altogether, but triage remained an unwieldy machine that magnified many times over French officials' own confusion about how to govern Alsace, whom to exclude, and how to treat both Alsatians and Germans.

There was a growing tendency to disavow triage, denunciations, and expulsions. In mid-April, the Commissioner General rejected out of hand a group of Alsatian butchers' demands that their German competitors' shops be closed and the owners expelled across the Rhine. The purpose of triage had been security, and it had veered into retribution, but the government was not about to assist private monopolies.\textsuperscript{98} In late May, as public criticism of triage grew, various Alsatian newspaper editors, politicians, and ecclesiastics met to discuss triage, which "had its adversaries in this meeting, but also its partisans."\textsuperscript{99} On May 25, the Journal d'Alsace et de Lorraine, normally a sychophantic supporter of the government, published a front-page article criticizing the triage committees as "the primary mistake of French policy in Alsace-Lorraine." The president of the Center of Classification (Second Degree) in Strasbourg protested these attacks to the Commissioner General Millerand:

You have recognized, Mr. Minister, that the services rendered by our Commission have been done with a clear conscience of having always acted with perfect impartiality. In the exercise of our functions, we can not respond to press attacks, nor counter such polemics. It is therefore in the name of my Commission and on behalf of all the Triage Committees that we place in your hands the defense of

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{98} ADBR AL 121, 1055, Butchers' Association to CGR, 16 April 1919.
\textsuperscript{99} ADBR AL 121, 902, report, 26 May 1919.
those who have accepted a difficult mission assigned to them by the Government.\textsuperscript{100}

The Strasbourg commission wanted such press criticism censored. In response, Millerand noted with regret that censorship had been considered but found impossible to apply under the circumstances. Millerand reported that he had made a personal appeal to the journal editor’s patriotism, and said he thought there would not be additional attacks in the future.\textsuperscript{101}

Machiavellianism might explain the journal’s article and Millerand’s response. In chapter five, I show that French authorities allowed a French investor to take control of the \textit{Strassbürger-Post} from its German owner in December 1918 and to reopen it as the \textit{Journal d’Alsace et de Lorraine} because the new owner promised the \textit{Journal} would be friendly to the government. The government’s administration in Alsace faced innumerable problems when Millerand took over in March, but Alsatians’ greatest criticisms of French rule focused primarily on the triage system and its abuses. Millerand gained advantages from the \textit{Journal}’s criticism of triage, and it seems the refusal to censor the criticism was simultaneously feigned, politic, and self-serving. It made it possible to heap all criticism of French rule onto the triage committees, for which Millerand bore little responsibility. The criticism in a newspaper closely associated with the government suggested to the Alsatian public that the end of triage was near, while announcing to the triage committees that they had to tread carefully in the future. Triage had to end to assuage public discontent, but without suggesting toleration of Germans and their sympathizers. The non-censored article promoted that end.

\textsuperscript{100} ADBR AL 121, 902, Commission to CGR, 27 May 1919.
\textsuperscript{101} ADBR AL 121, 902, CGR to Commission, 30 May 1919.
Although triage was being scaled down from the beginning of April, the danger to Georges Wehrung inexplicably increased. On April 2, Commissioner Maringer issued an expulsion order for Wehrung to present himself between April 10 and 15 to the French garrison in Kehl, across the Rhine from Strasbourg, and he was authorized to take any possession he could transport along with those family members who chose to join him.\textsuperscript{102} Wehrung, perhaps astonished that he was now to be exiled after having been left alone since January, protested vigorously, insisting that his family was all French, and demanding to face his accuser. He also refused the order to cross the Rhine.\textsuperscript{103} On April 10, seven men signed a denunciation of Wehrung as a boche teacher who had oppressed francophile Alsatians during the war.\textsuperscript{104} Wehrung’s confusion and officials’ suspicion of him continued to grow.

While triage was waning, French officials remained suspicious of possible German agents among the population and concerned that dangerous individuals might be slipping through the system. In response to the latest denunciation of Wehrung, a military administrator ordered an intensive investigation on April 25. On May 12, three agents of the national police went to Gries in Lower Alsace to interview ten witnesses on charges that Wehrung had terrorized the population during the war. Various witnesses confirmed that Wehrung was a “double boche”, had promoted German war loans, could be a spy, was a German fanatic, had profited by black-market speculation on the people’s suffering, and insisted Alsace should be German.\textsuperscript{105} These statements and Wehrung’s file

\textsuperscript{102} ADBR AL 121, 111, Commissioner, 2 April 1919.
\textsuperscript{103} ADBR AL 121, 111, Wehrung to military administrator, 10 April 1919; mayor to military administrator, 11 April 1919.
\textsuperscript{104} ADBR AL 121, 111, statement of Georges Lorentz, et. al., 10 April 1919.
\textsuperscript{105} ADBR AL 121, 111, investigation PV, 12 May 1919.
traveled slowly through dense police and triage bureaucracies while Millerand prepared to end triage.

**June 1919 to January 1920**

The Treaty of Versailles, signed in June 1919, altered identity categorization in Alsace, as well as French perceptions of Alsatians’ rights. The treaty outlined three categories of citizenship in Alsace: first, Alsatian natives would be “reintegrated with full rights”; second, German residents with long-standing ties to the region could “reclaim” French nationality; and third, recent German immigrants could apply for naturalization.  They suggested that German nationals might receive permanent residence without qualifying for French citizenship.  The three citizenship categories allocated political privileges and legal rights in descending order. Whereas early in 1919 Alsatians had brandished the distinction of having card A, they henceforth claimed special privileges for being “reintegrated.”

Reintegration, however, would not be official until the treaty came into force in January 1920, and before that time French officials and municipalities continued to struggle with the problem of categorizing identity. The identity card system, A through D, had proven too unreliable, too open to abuse, and too liquid on the black market. Strasbourg’s mayor complained that the city had spent 200,000 francs on the unbudgeted

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108 Legislation granting veteran’s pension benefits highlights the practical importance of these distinctions. German veterans who were “reintegrated” into French citizenship received French military pensions long before those who were able to “reclaim” French citizenship, who likewise were considerably better off than German veterans who naturalized as French. See ADBR AL 98, 256, prefect to president, 20 February 1928; president, 20 October 1938.
109 The advantages of card A and the dangers of card D ensured the black-market’s premium for both real and counterfeit cards. See AMS, Division Centrale, 11–69, Cercle Nautique to Kieffer, 5 July 1919; ADBR AL 121, 965, police to CGR, 8 September 1919.
expense of categorizing and issuing identity cards to 123,000 inhabitants, and that a third of the population had not filled out card applications through ignorance or confusion, or because they preferred illicit anonymity to giving their names and addresses to authorities. The mayor balked at any additional city expenditures on identity systems unless the state came up with the funds and reimbursed the city for what had already been spent. The expense and difficulty of compiling and alphabetizing lists of hundreds of thousands of people—long before the electronic database—was insurmountable.110 A separate police report agreed that the task of categorically identifying everyone in Strasbourg, much less all of Alsace, was impossible.111 Millerand, for his part, explained the state did not have the funds to reimburse the city or pay for additional processing.112 The city stopped paying for identity cards, and the state stopped demanding them. Central authorities could make endless demands, but it was locals’ willingness and capacity to fulfill those demands that in the end shaped what was done.

In the fall of 1919, French authorities began pondering how Alsatians were to receive French citizenship under the treaty. The process would again be local, but simpler than the identity cards. French officials left it to municipalities to grant reintegration papers based on local records. Reintegration was to be an automatic process, requiring no action on the part of the individual. Those individuals whom the municipalities did not reintegrate would have to apply for naturalization through government nationality commissions. Since municipalities granted reintegration, the

110 ADBR AL 121, 592, mayor to CGR, 6 August 1919.
111 ADBR AL 121, 592, police, rapport, 26 August 1919.
112 ADBR AL 121, 592, CGR to mayor, 29 August 1919.
system encouraged local officials and clerks to exercise discretion. Exclusion was political, and politics remained local.

Georges Wehrung’s case grew more serious even as French officials began dismantling the triage system. It was June before the damning investigative report reached the Commanding General of the 38th Division, who retained approval authority over expulsions. Goaded perhaps by the fear that recalcitrant German sympathizers had slipped through the system, the general ordered Wehrung expelled on June 12 and interned by French occupation forces in Germany. This time Wehrung was expelled. Friends and relatives came to his aid, and the municipal council of Durlisheim voted a resolution affirming Wehrung’s honor and denying that he had ever denounced anyone. Wehrung’s son campaigned for his father, protesting that Wehrung was “the victim of a personal enemy’s hatred, and I can not understand how one strikes so heavily against an old man of 64 years and separates him from his family.”

While age did not save Wehrung, time very nearly did. Only four days after Wehrung’s expulsion, Millerand ordered the suspension of all proposed triage sanctions against Alsatians and Lorrainers, “in consideration ... of the impending signing of the peace treaty, which renders inoperable the measures of evacuation or removal that have been decided up to now against [them].” The belligerents signed the treaty in late June, and Millerand announced that the end of the state of war made it impossible to take

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113 ADBR AL 121, 592, Superior Tribunal to judges, 26 November 1919; AMH 1W54, prefect to mayors, 24 January 1920.
114 The incredible diffusion of responsibility for triage ensured the system’s ease of abuse and well as the French government’s later success in denying that any particular official, military or civil, was accountable for triage. Appointed bureaucrats and politicians had slowly been introducing civil rule in Alsace, but as of June, a general still exercised authority over civilian exiles.
115 ADBR AL 121, 111, Commanding General, 38th Division, 11 June 1919.
116 ADBR AL 121, 111, Durlisheim CM, petition, 12 June 1919.
117 ADBR AL 121, 111, Charles Wehrung to high commissioner, 20 June 1919.
118 ADBR AL 121, 903, commissioner to Commission de Classement (2nd Degree), 17 June 1919.
any further action against Alsatians and Lorrainers "reintegrated into French nationality."
Millerand voided any measures previously ordered but not executed.\textsuperscript{119} He did not, however, revoke the measures taken against those who had been exiled or expelled before June 16. Wehrung with dozens of others remained interned in occupied Germany.

Some Alsatians managed to return from their exiles without specific permission, either because they had been interned under lax supervision or because some French internment officials thought the peace treaty made Alsatians' internment no longer permissible. The day Millerand ordered an end to triage, the \textit{Journal d'Alsace et de Lorraine} informed him by letter that some exiles had returned and asked Millerand to make an announcement on whether all exiles could return, but Millerand deferred the question.\textsuperscript{120} The deportees' prolonged exiles became a recurring issue, without a definitive solution, until the impending legislative elections of November 1919 changed the government's political calculations. Triage had begun as a security operation, and became a tool of retribution against those thought to have persecuted francophile Alsatians during the war. Although the peace treaty ended triage in June, the government continued the exile of prominent Alsatians who might campaign in the elections on an anti-French platform. One of the most prominent was Eugene Ricklin, a former Reichstag deputy and president of the Reichland's Landtag. Ricklin chaffed in internment and insisted that the peace treaty granted him full rights of citizenship as a reintegrated Alsatian; he demanded his freedom to return to Alsace and participate in the elections.\textsuperscript{121} Millerand rejected Ricklin's requests and others, instructing officials to

\textsuperscript{119} ADBR AL 121, 902. Commissioner General to commissioner, 27 June 1919.
\textsuperscript{120} ADBR AL 121, 902. \textit{JAL} to Commissioner General, 27 June 1919.
\textsuperscript{121} ADBR AL 121, 111. CGR to interior, 13 September 1919; report, 26 October 1919; CGR to Ricklin, 29 October 1919; Ricklin to prefect, 17 November 1919.
arrest any exiles who returned and conduct them back across the frontiers from Alsace. The exiles would not be allowed back until the treaty was ratified in January 1920. In the meantime, it was "preferable to keep these Alsatian undesirables out of the region . . . particularly during the preparation for the elections."

Wehrung’s exile was caught up in the government’s larger policy of preventing certain Alsatian notables from participating in the elections.

In the elections, the National Bloc coalition of right-center parties won a large majority both in Alsace and nationwide, and the French government treated this victory in Alsace as a resounding affirmation of Alsatians’ love of France. The government allowed the Alsatian exiles to return in January 1920, and many became steadfast regionalist opponents of French centralization.

Wehrung had not had to wait quite so long. In ill health, Wehrung was hospitalized during his exile in Kehl in November, when his son found him and secretly took him back home to Alsace. The police learned of Wehrung’s return and jailed him. A doctor’s exam revealed a weak heart, and the authorities decided Wehrung was not dangerous and released him.

Alsatians remained resentful of the triage system, and various human rights organizations took up the cause of those who felt they had been wronged. From 1920 to 1922, the Ligue française pour la défense des Droits de l’Homme et du Citoyen peppered French authorities in Alsace with charges that Wehrung, among others, had been framed and demanded his case be reopened, either to justify his exile or provide compensation.

French authorities repeatedly denied any responsibility for the triage system and

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122 ADBR AL 121, 966, commissioner to CGR, 27 August 1919; reply, n.d.
124 ADBR AL 121, 111, police to CGR, 20 February 1920.
125 ADBR AL 121, 111, note, n.d.
explained that the records were not available, so investigations of the triage were impossible. Besides, it was "not a good time politically, at the risk of reviving the antagonisms that had so much diminished since 1919, to re-examine the cases treated by the Triage Committees." The authorities did not reveal that they had looked into Wehrung's case, and were both surprised and embarrassed by what they found.

The initial denunciation of Wehrung might have been wrong or exaggerated, but Wehrung was not framed. After their intensive investigation in May 1919 of Georges Wehrung, a teacher in Gries, authorities exiled another Georges Wehrung, the retired teacher in Dorlisheim. The May investigation was supposed to be handled in the arrondissement of Strasbourg-Campagne, but the statements had mistakenly been sent to the Triage Committee in the arrondissement of Molsheim, which had the open file on Dorlisheim's Wehrung. French authorities never admitted the mistake in Wehrung's case. The teacher in Gries suffered little more than a recommendation that he be transferred, given the strength of local passions against him. Power was not only diffuse in French Alsace, any relative concentration could turn against itself. The appearance of power often masked weakness and ignorance, but this became clear only in retrospect. In later years, Alsatians campaigned for apologies and compensation but were stonewalled both by the Ministry of Justice and by government officials. Alsatian deputies in parliament occasionally introduced bills to compensate Alsatians who had been wronged, but their efforts died in committee.

126 ADBR AL 121, 111, CGR to Ligue Français, a.d.
127 ADBR AL 121, 111, prefect to CGR, 27 June 1921.
128 ADBR AL 121, 111, territorial administrator to CGR, 4 June 1919.
129 Boswell, "From Liberation," 159.
Conclusion

The end of triage had brought no end to exclusion. Hundreds of thousands of German nationals remained in Alsace, with varying economic, political, and social ties both to France and to Alsatians who became French. Among Alsatians, the challenge remained to determine who would be reintegrated as natives, thanks to municipal decisions, and who would have to apply for naturalization. The practical advantages of reintegration led many to mount political and legal challenges, with varying success, when they were not reintegrated, but forced to naturalize. The problems of demographics, the difficulties of categorizing identity, and the limits of state power bedeviled the process. Apart from all others, the problem of categorizing identity strained the French government’s efforts to assert its sovereignty in Alsace. Transforming popular prejudices of us and them, natives and immigrants, into categorized identities was a feeble attempt to create and institutionalize knowledge. The politically charged issues of immigration, naturalization, prejudice, and fear were constant themes in French Alsace during and after the Armistice, suggesting a prototype of modern anxiety toward the ill-defined other. Chauvinists charged the government with tolerating too many boches in Alsace, and demanded more abstract exclusion. People rallied, on the other hand, in defense of individuals, their brother-in-law, cousin, partner, or employee whom the state should leave alone. The political winds of exclusion varied in their strength and direction, and in the next chapter we will consider the broader problem of who French officials did exclude from Alsace between 1918 and 1925, and what this suggested about the community referred to as French Alsace.
Exclusion in French Alsace lends itself to a cultural analysis of old structures and new constructions to qualify identity's images. Another way of considering the challenges of exclusion would point to the crucial problems of space and time: timing is everything; location, location, location. From the beginning of triage through its constant changes and to its end, time radically altered what people experienced. Location was crucial not only to a misplaced file, but to the different treatments meted out by different committees. Frontier life, moreover, altered the experience of the transition from German to French rule for those barely across any given international or departmental border. Space and time, along with cultural analysis, function like the light spectrum. Light's various wavelengths, such as the visual, infrared, and ultraviolet, each reveal different traits in an object, and cultural analysis of exclusion is more profound when read as one wavelength among many.
Chapter Four
"Above all else: No Germans":
Exclusion and the Politics of Power

All corporate bodies look today for their strength not so much to the spiritual
worth of the ideas which they represent and to that of the people who belong to
them, as to the attainment of the highest possible degree of unity and
exclusiveness. It is in this that they expect to find their strongest power of offense
and defense.

Albert Schweitzer, 1931.¹

Albert Schweitzer, the Alsatian missionary and future Nobel prize winner, lamented the
Franco-German power struggle, the vicegrip it held on Alsatians, and its degradations.
France and Germany were models of the nation-state, the pre-eminent corporate body, a
presumably homogeneous group of people whose collective purity demanded either
assimilation or exclusion. Schweitzer witnessed the French annexation of Alsace in 1918
while serving as the acting pastor of a church in Strasbourg. His parishioners underwent
triage in 1919 when French authorities deported suspected German sympathizers.
Alsatians subsequently had to qualify for French citizenship, and those whom the state
rejected were forced to emigrate, losing their homes and property in the process. The
criteria for determining who did and did not belong was one indicator of how French
authorities imagined the national community. The processes of exclusion were rooted in
politics and power.

Schweitzer’s life was bound up in the turmoil of the Franco-German conflict, its
aggressions, suspicions, and recriminations. Alsace’s transfer from Germany to France in
1918 overturned established rights, and alienated many from bonds that they had long
assumed were secure. In a retrospective of 1919, Schweitzer tried to encourage the

¹ Albert Schweitzer, Out of My Life and Thought: An Autobiography, trans. C. T. Campion (New York:
Henry Holt and Co., 1949), 220.
readers of a parish newsletter to renew their faith despite hardship and disappointment.

"You do not know what to think of the old year," Schweitzer wrote in January 1920,

It was a difficult time for all, for you perhaps your most difficult time, for it
denied you what you thought you were entitled to expect from it, and brought you
new distress and anxiety for which you were not prepared. It may have taken
from you your wealth, perhaps even your home, have caused you to lose friends
and to gain enemies, have shaken your faith in humanity, have disrupted the
normal foundations of your life, have torn from you by death those who were
most dear to you, and have delivered you up to the scorn and malicious gossip of
men.²

Schweitzer could have been writing to himself. He was discouraged because what the
war had not destroyed the first year of peace had vandalized, and social upheaval
unleashed humanity’s ignobility. With Germany’s fall and the introduction of French
sovereignty, the legitimacy of Alsace’s hierarchical order had collapsed, and that could
not be easily replaced. A spectacle followed, a year-long brawl of denunciations,
blacklisting, purges and deportations in which individuals and factions scrambled to
claim as their own the rights of place, position, and property that the Empire had
previously regulated. The French government presided over this free-for-all without
controlling it.

Laird Boswell has ably described the expulsions and denunciations of 1918 to
1920 as a racist purification campaign (épuration) foreshadowing France’s purges of
Vichy collaborators after 1944.³ A broader view, however, contextualizes these purges
as part of a general struggle to secure the rights and power that social upheaval had put in
question. Schweitzer avoided assigning blame, ascribing the melee generally to the year

² Albert Schweitzer, Church Messenger for Alsace-Lorraine (3 January 1920), reprinted in Jean Pierhal,
³ Laird Boswell, “From Liberation to Purge Trials in the ‘Mythic Provinces’: Recasting French Identities in
itself, because it seemed too difficult, too dangerous, or too simplistic to pinpoint blame for exclusionary processes in which so many had participated. Nominally intended to purge Alsace of Germans, the processes of exclusion in fact created a power struggle in which Alsatians, Frenchmen, and Germans competed with one another to secure the privileges left dangling in the wake of Germany’s collapse. Less than a tenth of the population left Alsace, but the remainder fought over rights in a nation-state that did not easily recognize the legitimacy of their pasts. French national iconography became crucial in the regional contest for rights and influence. Social prejudices, economic considerations, and uncertain political calculations all contributed to a dehumanizing struggle for privileges. Who belonged in French Alsace, who should own property, and who should have which rights was rarely clear, but the processes of exclusion delimited tenuous imaginings of the national community.

Who, whom, how, and why

Regional histories have emphasized French authorities’ expulsion of Germans from Alsace by force, but exclusion’s agents and objects were considerably more varied than this, and the means more complex. Because exclusion was a political struggle to re-order society, anyone could be its agent, and anyone its object. Some people found themselves excluded quite unexpectedly, such as the so-called optants of 1871. These Alsatians, having opted to immigrate to France after Germany’s annexation of Alsace,

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6 Hoffet, Psychanalyse, 48; Médard, L’Alsace, 149–52.
returned to the region triumphantly with the French armies; they claimed special authority as both natives of the region and certified French patriots. Local resentment of optants' intrusions, however, undermined their pretensions, and they gained little influence. Similar problems beset French politicians from the interior who hoped to compete in Alsace's parliamentary elections of November 1919. Alsatian election committees required all candidates to be of Alsatian origin and to speak the Alsatian dialect, thereby preventing French outsiders from winning Alsatian seats. On the other hand, Alsatians, as German-speakers and former Germans, felt themselves excluded from French society and denied equitable opportunities because they were Alsatians. Exclusion was a relationship of power, and it was polyvalent, diffuse, and unconstrained by rules, formal authority, or expectations.

Exclusion was personal, and could come down to the simple withholding of a favor. A number of Germans facing expulsion sought the help of a mother superior, Sister Marie Aimée, reasoning that she must have influence because French authorities had given her an honorary award. By her own account, Sister Aimée turned all such petitioners away, denying she had any influence, until agreeing to intervene on behalf of a Madame Breur, a woman whose family, social, and moral standing merited strong recommendations and official consideration. Sister Aimée's letter drew an exclusionary line—social, moral, and political—that presumably reflected officially-sanctioned prejudices. She might, perhaps, have lied about having turned people away,

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9 Méard describes the disappointment of the "lost generation" of young to middle-aged Alsatian professionals, fluent in German and embarked on careers in the German system who were suddenly lost and incapable of catching up when French became the language of advancement and centralized bureaucracy the path to success. See his *L'Alsace*, 149. Also, David Allen Harvey, *Construction Class and Nationality in Alsace, 1830–1945* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2001), 144, 154.
10 ADBR AL 121, 906, Sister Aimée to Commissioner General (CGR), 5 August 1919.
in order to bolster her credibility and to underscore the importance of aiding this one woman. Aimée’s stated boundary was the one that she calculated authorities would insist on preserving. Perhaps more important than one’s personal biases, exclusion involved calculating whom others would be likely to exclude, an element crucial to avoiding one’s own exclusion. If Sister Aimée did have influence, she was reluctant to weaken it through overuse.

Exclusion’s mechanisms were diverse, ranging from massive expulsions and summary exiles during the Armistice to the processing of Germans for naturalization, residency, or deportation from 1920 to 1925. Those who wanted to remain in Alsace struggled for recognition, whether as native Alsatians deserving “reintegration,” as long-term German residents deserving naturalization, or as Germans whose family or businesses to Alsatians and French justified their claims to belong in French Alsace. Questions of property rights—as contentious and difficult as civil rights—attended the problems of exclusion and belonging. Exclusion’s forms and outcomes varied: one could be expelled, dispossessed, laid off, marginalized, or ostracized.

Exclusion depended on a variety of factors. French authorities exiled some prominent Alsatians who had risen far under German rule or who challenged French sovereignty, and in later years authorities arrested and tried such individuals for purely political reasons. Authorities excluded the unemployed and those deemed socially unworthy or morally unfit, categories into which officials often lumped single women. Exclusion did not occur at a given point in time; it was a lengthy process in which an

individual faced state sanction and solicited support from neighbors, co-workers, or family to ward off threats or to gain protection.

Individuals lived for years under threat of exclusion, and their circumstances changed. Outcomes were uncertain in their course, timing, and finality, and it was important to lobby continuously for support while authorities evaluated one’s naturalization application. Exclusion played out among Strasbourg’s municipal employees as a hierarchy of privileged Alsatians judged whom among their German co-workers they would try to help with naturalization. The city’s mayor explained that

[a committee] of municipal employees, whose thirty-two members are exclusively reintegrated with full rights [first-class citizens], have examined minutely, on my direction, the attitudes of all their German colleagues from a national as well as a moral point of view. . . [we] have identified a small number of German colleagues whose conduct has been absolutely irreproachable.\(^\text{12}\)

The mayor urged the prefect to ensure that the naturalization applications of these few worthy Germans be approved. Exclusion shaped who was allowed on the committees, their civil status validated their credibility, and “irreproachable” standards constrained their benevolence. City favor did not guarantee state naturalization, but it seemed to help.\(^\text{13}\) While Alsatians were accustomed to processes of exclusion—the German Empire was hardly egalitarian in nature—Frenchification represented a sea change in the formal and informal rules of structural order. New hierarchies replaced old ones as individuals struggled or cooperated with one another to secure social, economic, and political privileges that had been lost or placed in doubt.

\(^{12}\)AMS, Central Division, 40–225, mayor to prefect, 20 October 1922.
\(^{13}\)Harvey describes city officials’ limited success in assisting former German colleagues early in the Armistice in his *Constructing Class*, 137.
Social Exclusion

In many cases, French officials based exclusion on their judgement of a person's social worth, and individuals tried to use the state as a tool of personal revenge, typically through the denunciation of an ex- or alienated spouse. Madame Esswein denounced her husband as a francophobe, hoping that he would be expelled.14 Joseph Grasser denounced his former wife to the triage commission in Strasbourg: "she called me a 'wacke Alsatian,' and a 'dirty Frenchman,' and she insulted France and Alsace."15 Another bitter Alsatian husband told French authorities where his wife and her German lover could be found counterfeiting identity cards.16 As in other times and places, conflict was endemic to Alsatian society. Contending parties exploited the means at hand—defined ephemerally by the state's expulsion policies—to use the state against the objects of their wrath.17

Expulsion became a tool of social engineering for French officials who, preferring working, obedient taxpayers and orderly families, sought to exclude those deemed least capable of contributing to society. An official's favorable recommendation on a family's naturalization application illustrates the kind of citizens French authorities wanted: "a family of peaceful and diligent workers whose attitude from a national point of view has been most correct; the head of the family even worked for three years in the interior of

14 ADBR AL 121, 28, log entry, 7 December 1918.
15 ADBR AL 121, 900, Joseph Grasser to triage commission, 28 March 1919.
16 ADBR AL 121, 965, police to CGR, 8 September 1919.
17 Boswell, "From Liberation," 156.
France after the Armistice.” In contrast, officials excluded another German because he seemed socio-economically worthless. A prefect reported that:

Louis Maushardt, German, is the bastard child of Catherine Kirchhoffer, Alsatian, and a Mr. Maushardt, German. [The father] later married the mother and acknowledged the child was his. . . . Louis Maushardt is of little interest . . . but he is capable of anything and dangerous to public security . . . For the last two years, [he] has been without regular employment or fixed domicile. He occasionally works as a window cleaner, squandering what little money he earns. Maushardt is a brutal individual. He has always treated his mother terribly, and she has pled for his expulsion.  

Illegitimacy brought social condemnation, despite the father’s belated recognition, and—in the official’s view—foreshadowed irresponsibility and waste. The mother’s disavowal seemed to prove Maushardt’s lack of redeeming value. Officials here contrasted the ne’er-do-well brute with the orderly family man, favoring the social organization through which they imagined the national community, and restricting its membership.  

Gender was the basis of powerful social prejudices in French Alsace. Officials treated women as legal appendages of men, and they viewed a woman without a husband, father, brother, or adult son as a social burden and a legal anomaly. Convention forced women to petition authorities as men’s dependents. One Alsatian woman, Madame Bergmann, conformed to these expectations when she begged French authorities to

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18 ADBR, AL 121, 638, application, 16 December 1924.  
19 ADBR AL 121, 966, prefect to commissaire general, 2 March 1923.  
20 Steven C. Hause and Anne R. Kenney attribute this emphasis on the male-dominated family in Third Republic politics to the social theories of Frédéric LePlay. See their Women’s Suffrage and Social Politics in the French Third Republic (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 17.  
21 The Napoleonic Code, promulgated in 1804, thoroughly subsumed wives into their husbands’ civil identities. There is room for a worthwhile debate on whether the Code and Third Republic practices discriminated more against wives or unmarried women. The bulk of the evidence from Alsace from 1918 to 1925 seems to suggest that wives enjoyed more legal rights—and more social protections—than unmarried women, indicating a civic order were men were primary, wives were secondary, and unmarried women were tertiary. See Hause and Kenny, Women’s Suffrage, 23; Paul Smith, Feminism and the Third Republic: Women’s Political and Civil Rights in France, 1918–1945 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). Nancy F. Cott provides a valuable analysis of women’s citizenship issues and a comparison of U.S. and European practices vis-à-vis immigration in “Marriage and Women’s Citizenship in the United States, 1830–1934,” American Historical Review 103 (December 1998): 1440–74.
release her German husband in December 1918. Herr Bergmann, a German veteran, had just returned to Alsace when authorities jailed him with other returning German veterans as a precaution. Madame Bergmann argued that her husband would lose his job if he were not released, ruining the family. She based her credibility on her relationships with three other males: her father was Alsatian and had been a French civil servant before 1870, and her two sons “absolutely want[ed] to become French soldiers.” Madame Bergmann sensed that her legitimacy depended on her being the daughter of a French civil servant and the mother of potential French soldiers.

In the triage system, French authorities treated men as primary security risks and women as secondary risks. In January 1919, the triage commission of Strasbourg examined fifty-two Alsatians—forty-three men and nine women—on various charges carrying the threat of expulsion. Most of the women were relatives of male suspects. Four of the women were not facing charges, but were awaiting the fate of a husband, father, or brother to determine their own. Two women were charged with sharing their husband’s pan-German sentiments. Only three of the nine faced charges independently, and these were for offenses thought typical of the gender’s ill-disciplined tongue: denunciation of Alsatians to German authorities. Triage case lists confirm that roughly eighty percent of all suspects were men, and that officials tended to view women as social problems rather than as security threats.

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22 ADBR AL 121, 899, Mme Bergmann to High Commissioner, 14 December 1918.
23 ADBR AL 121, 903, Strasbourg Triage Committee PV, 9 to 24 January 1919.
24 ADBR AL 121, 903, List of examined cases, Strasbourg Classification Commission, n.d. Later expulsion lists confirm the pattern that men identified for expulsion typically stood for the entire family and were described as “arrogant,” “has a germanophile attitude,” and “pangermanist.” Independent women, on the other hand, were described as “doubtful conduct and morality,” “scandalous life,” and “the cause of discord in an Alsatian household.” See ADBR AL 121, 953, “Propositions d’Expulsion,” n.d.
French authorities presumed that independent women contributed less to society
and undermined social order, and authorities discriminated against single women in
processing naturalization applications. If authorities approved a man’s application for
naturalization, they automatically approved the man’s wife and unmarried daughters.
State authorities treated single women, however, as burdens. The French (Napoleonic)
legal code denied women civil autonomy, and a French woman who married a foreigner
lost her citizenship. The Peace Treaty, however, enabled Alsace’s long-term residents—
men and women—to naturalize as French along with their German spouses. Strangely,
then, according to French experience, a German man could gain French citizenship
through his Alsatian-French wife. French officials, disconcerted by female-led
naturalizations, decided to accept such applications for just one year. If a German
husband missed the deadline or if his application was refused, the civil code could then
revoke the Alsatian wife’s citizenship; she would follow her husband, becoming
German. In 1924, authorities rejected the application of Christopher Lieber’s—a
German man applying through his Alsatian wife—for being too late. In contrast,
authorities approved the German Alice Selzer’s belated application on the grounds that

25 The automatic reintegration of Alsatian natives and the naturalization of other residents proceeded
according to the Treaty of Versailles and particular French directives. The Treaty defined Alsatian natives
as those who “lost French nationality [by the Treaty of Frankfurt of 1871] and who have not since that date
acquired any other nationality other than German . . . [their] legitimate or natural descendants . . . except for
those whose [paternal ascendants] include a German . . . [and those] born in Alsace-Lorraine of unknown
parents, or whose nationality is unknown.” See “Treaty of Versailles,” . . . The French government
directed all Alsatian municipalities to grant French citizenship automatically—“reintegration”—to all such
natives while requiring all other residents to apply for naturalization. ADBR AL 121, 592, Superior
Tribunal to district judges, 26 November 1919.
26 The Treaty of Peace Between the Allied and Associated Powers and Germany,” 28 June 1919, Part III,
Section V, Annex.
27 ADBR AL 121, 98, note for the Directorate of Administrative and Technical Affairs, 23 February 1922.
Official discrimination against women was routine.
28 ADBR AL 121, 638, application, 27 May 1924.
her Alsatian husband had been re-integrated in 1920 and it had only been a bureaucratic oversight that she too had not been re-integrated.\textsuperscript{29} 

Men filed most naturalization applications—roughly three-quarters—on behalf of their entire families. Most applications passed through after cursory examinations, as bureaucratic overload facilitated whole scale naturalizations of men and their families. Authorities might have rejected an application on technicalities or because of the patriarch's reported political views. Where Alsatian women qualified for naturalization, authorities investigated their German husbands to assess their acceptability, and approved or rejected the wife based on the husband.\textsuperscript{30} It was because of the "negative information received regarding her [German] husband's national sentiments" that authorities rejected Christine Vossberg's application in 1924.\textsuperscript{31}

Naturalization underscored officials' expectations of a woman's political responsibilities. Normally, adults included their minor children on a family application and all shared the same fate. A widow, Veronique Erne, absent a man to assume responsibility for her, applied for naturalization but omitted her minor son from the application. Either Erne or her deceased husband had some Swiss background, but the widow wanted French citizenship because it was the only way to access the pension her husband had earned as a teacher in Alsace. It seems likely that Erne left her son off the

\textsuperscript{29} ADBR AL 121, 638, application, 21 August 1925; in a similar case, Marie Louise Wolfelsberger, a Swiss subject, applied four years late for French citizenship as the wife of a re-integrated Alsatian because she thought she had received it automatically when he did in 1920. French authorities treated it as a bureaucratic oversight and quickly granted her citizenship. See AL 121, 638, Tribunal judgement, 9 October 1924.

\textsuperscript{30} ADBR AL 121, 629; AL 121, 638. With hundreds of thousands of cases to process, by hand and without any form of data processing technology, administrators and clerks generally did not record any reasoning associated with individual cases and did not always specify all the family members whose naturalization automatically attended the decisions taken for the father/husband or mother in the case of widows.

\textsuperscript{31} ADBR AL 121, 638, prefect to CGR, 30 December 1924. Authorities also rejected the application of the Vossberg's 35-year-old single daughter, Alice, because they did not regard a single woman as an independent agent, but rather a dependent of her rejected father.
application to help him avoid French conscription when he reached maturity; the war's
destruction was too recent to want a soldier son. The French prefect, however, took a
dim view of the widow's oversight:

The applicant has a minor son whom she did not include in her application in
order to leave him free to determine his own status later. In these circumstances,
the demand for naturalization of the widow Erne holds no interest for us. I have
instructed the sub-prefect to make a separate file for the son when he attains his
majority, which will be in August 1924. I will then make a pronouncement
simultaneously for the mother and the son.\(^{32}\)

The omission was costly. When the young man came of age, he became a Swiss subject
rather than French, depriving the French state of a healthy young body to fill a uniform.
In response, French officials refused to naturalize the widowed mother, thereby denying
her husband's pension.\(^{33}\) Officials did not cite a policy or a regulation to justify the
rejection; no justification was necessary. They did, however, reinforce the idea that it was
a woman's civic duty to offer to the nation the fruit of her womb.\(^{34}\) In the prefect's view,
he had not excluded Erne; Erne had excluded herself by withholding that which she owed
the national community.

Officials suspected single women of undermining public morality, but they never
expressed concern about those women's male partners.\(^{35}\) A woman's behavior might be
treated as scandalous, while a man accompanying her was beyond reproach because his
behavior was natural. This thinking explains the treatment doled out to Hildegard Fisher.

First, a triage committee expelled Fisher's parents, Dr. and Mrs. Fisher, because of the

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\(^{32}\) ADBR AL 98, 245, prefect to CGR, 8 May 1924.

\(^{33}\) ADBR AL 98, 245, prefect to premier, 29 March 1926.


\(^{35}\) Mary Louise Roberts describes French anxieties about *la femme moderne*, although the "independent"
father’s political views. In turning to Hildegard, aged 20, the commission decided that “regarding her morality [she] is not without objections. She promenades today with French officers as she used to with German officers.” Another report noted that she had led “a life of debauchery.”36 Elsewhere, an official judged that Werthe Sulter was a prostitute; she was “well known for being of light morality, had been without employment for many months, and she had been the cause of trouble in an Alsatian family.”37 Authorities did not mind, of course, giving credit where it appeared to be due. Although a naturalization commission rejected 35-year-old Alice Vossberg’s application on account of her father’s politics, officials commended her for “the good reports received regarding her morality.”38

Single women without resources or reputation suffered officials’ ceaseless contempt, particularly in relation to the respect officials gave to German men with jobs or pensions. Three Strasbourg police reports, one on a destitute German woman and two on German family men, bear out the distinction. The reports equated character with socio-economic indicators:

Wenz (Lina) without profession, lives at #5 rue de l’Aimant, twice divorced, born 10 September 1870 in Hattenheim (Germany). Woman of doubtful morality who only lives by expedients and who is animated by sentiments hostile to the cause of France. Clearly undesirable.39

The reports on the male-headed families were more generous:

Zech (Albert Frederic Guillaume) from Trensch-Bablitz (Pomerania) of German nationality, born 29 February 1857, married to the German Mugler (Chretienne) born 26 June 1855 in Sulzbach (Württemberg) . . . . This German is a retired

36 ADBR AL 121, 900, report on Dr. Adolph Fischer, 19 February 1919; Supplement to the report on Dr. Fischer, undated; Identification Bulletin on Hildegard Fischer, 1 March 1919; in another case, an official accused Anna Wald of having “easy morals.” See ADBR AL 121, 965, CGR to depute Regaud, 3 February 1923.
37 ADBR AL 121, 965, CGR to minister, 23 December 1922.
38 ADBR AL 121, 638, prefect to CGR, 30 December 1924.
39 ADBR AL 121, 962, police report, 29 July 1922.
employee of the Tramway Company of Strasbourg. He has no family attachments in France and seems to remain in Strasbourg only to draw his retirement. While he keeps a prudent reserve, his sentiments remain devoted to [Germany].

Waitschitzkny (Hermann Otto) from Grosen by Glogau, pensioner, resides at 83 route de Colmar, born on 20 February 1846, married to the German Burg (Augusta) born in Gismannsdorf (Germany) on 16 January 1849 and is the father of two daughters: 1) Marie, born in Strasbourg on 21 August 1883, who sells hats, and 2) Jeanne, born in Strasbourg, on 26 May 1892. All the members of the family are known for having sentiments clearly devoted to Germany, where they have many ties. They are Germans whose presence in France is undesirable.

Wenz’s destitution seems directly attributable to the social and moral failing of being twice divorced, while the retired men were socially stable and economically secure. The contrast between the subjects’ sentiments, Wenz’s being “hostile to France” and the men’s being “devoted to Germany,” lends the men greater moral legitimacy than Wenz, even if they were all politically unacceptable. Male-headed families escaped the judgmental scrutiny that a twice-divorced woman underwent, although political pressures led to the expulsion of all three. Interestingly, Waitschitzkny’s adult daughters, 39-year-old Marie and 30-year-old Jeanne, escaped the treatment Wenz received because officials viewed them as legal dependents of their 76-year-old father.

Officials respected social connections and reputations for morality, and being German did not hinder a woman who enjoyed high social standing. French authorities thought the Weingartner sisters exemplary:

The [naturalization] commission has a favorable opinion concerning the residence applications of Mlle. Helene Weingartner and her sister Anna. These two appear to be completely absorbed by the Alsatian community; no charge has been raised against either one, from either a political point of view or as regards their sentiments toward Alsatians or the French authorities. In fact, the older sister is

\[40\] ADBR AL 121, 962, police report, 27 July 1922.
\[41\] ADBR AL 121, 962, police report, 28 July 1922.
\[42\] ADBR AL 121, 962, police list, 14 August 1922.
engaged to marry an Alsatian of a good family of whom we have received excellent reports. 43

The impending marriage into a good family testified to both sisters’ morality, while Helene’s engagement assured her legal future. Even Anna benefited from the social and legal cover provided by a prospective Alsatian brother-in-law.

Social exclusion also proceeded in the images and language that dominated French Alsace. Women’s experience of the change from French to German sovereignty seemed secondary, or irrelevant, to men’s definitions of what was important, and men’s themes dominated political controversies. This tendency emerged with the image of liberation itself, the depiction of French soldiers saving Alsatian maidens from their captivity. The celebrations of November 1918 featured costumed Alsatian women dancing with French soldiers in a carnival atmosphere, and some Alsatians condemned women for their licentious enthusiasm. 44 Alsatian veterans expressed jealous rage at Alsatian women’s embraces of French victors. 45 These two images of Alsatian women—the willing prizes of France’s victorious armies or traitors to Alsatian men—dominated their depiction.

Missing from the images of France’s liberation—or conquest—of Alsace was the portrayal of women as victims of sexual violence. 46 There were rare suggestions that women’s lot was not to be envied, or that nature required women to submit to male dominance. Dramatic accounts of the expulsions of December 1918 described refugee

43 ADBR AL 121. 912, commission to prefect, 27 November 1919.
46 While Pierre Zind’s extreme francophobic account of the French occupation of Alsace likens the event to the Soviet occupation of eastern Europe after 1945, Zind pays no attention to women’s experiences as objects of male order. See Zind’s Elsass-Lothringen/Alsace Lorraine: Une nation interdite, 1870–1940 (Paris: Copernic, 1979), 94–100.
columns being forced to cross the Rhine bridges on foot, deprived of all possessions save what they could carry, insulted, assaulted, and spat upon by vengeful Alsatians while French soldiers stood by. A sympathetic Alsatian, distraught at his brother-in-law’s expulsion, complained about the refugees’ treatment, seemingly referring to rape when he charged that “even brutalities have taken place, as they say.”

A later complaint underscored men’s primacy even as victims. When French forces occupied part of Alsace in 1914, they arrested a number of Alsatian civilians and interned them in France. In 1921, some of these former prisoners petitioned the French Parliament for restitution, and stressed their suffering at the hands of French jailers. One petitioner dramatized his complaint, emphasizing both by order of placement and by underscoring those elements he thought most important:

Many of us were mistreated in the prisons and concentration camps, notably in the jail at Belfort, where the chief guard beat prisoners with a baton or struck them in the head . . . until they fell in their pools of blood. In other places, women who would not submit to their guards’ lewdness were raped.

The beatings of generic prisoners, presumably men, warranted both prior mention and greater emphasis than raped women. The relative magnitude of the victimization downplayed the importance of what women experienced.

Dominant social prejudices shaped how officials treated women, and how women viewed women, in the broader project of Frenchifying Alsace. A contemporary German feminist and social activist from Strasbourg, Elly Heuss-Knapp, harbored the

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47 ADBR AL 121, 899, anon to high commissioner, 13 December 1918.
48 ADBR AL 98, 250, Association of Civilian Prisoners of Alsace and Lorraine en France, 1914–1918 to depute, 28 April 1921, emphasis in the original document.
49 Laird Boswell notes that one author blamed “women and the down-and-out” for the anti-German outrages and xenophobia that marked the expulsions of late 1918. See his “From Liberation,” 142. The mass of evidence suggests that women consistently wielded the least amount of influence in society, were the easiest to exclude, and were most easily blamed for society’s failures.
same prejudices as male officials in her writings. She described her efforts to dissuade a woman from denouncing her unfaithful husband during the war on the grounds that he might be sent to the front; Heuss-Knapp counseled wives to be long-suffering. She described how women "quietly, bravely . . . bore their share of misery during the war with a patient heroism," and hinted that the biblical parable of virgins, seven wise and seven foolish, typified the choices women make: foolish women receive their just deserts; wise women bring light to the world and honor to society.50 In many ways, the exercise of power and the practice of exclusion in Alsace merely replicated well-established and difficult-to-challenge patterns of gender discrimination; women were legally subordinate to men and men stood in moral judgment of women. Mary Louise Roberts notes that "postwar discourse on gender [in France] sustained a system of domination."51 Heuss-Knapp's prejudices seem to validate Roberts' suggestion that feminists themselves, while demanding more rights, had great difficulty imagining a social order—a distribution of power—radically different from that with which they were familiar. Gender as a relationship of power was crucial in Alsace, where women depended on men for civil legitimacy and civil rights.

Economics

There were moments when it seemed that all questions of power or exclusion were purely economic, when the only things that mattered were costs and benefits. Just before the Armistice, when Alsatians could not be sure if they would remain German, return to France, or somehow become neutral, an Alsatian schoolteacher recorded his

51 Roberts, Civilization without Sexes, 16.
family's most ardent desire: "Something to eat! That is what we are all wishing for."\textsuperscript{52}

National loyalties sometimes originated in the stomach, and people easily confounded survival and discourse, nation and nourishment, during economic crises:

The poor people of Mulhouse are starving and have no money. They've revolted, and have assaulted stores and markets, stealing merchandise and food everywhere . . . the other day, a French newspaper expressed doubts regarding the patriotic enthusiasm of the Alsatian masses. According to the paper, the cries of "Vive la France!" should be translated as "Vive food!". It only makes sense.\textsuperscript{53}

Starvation ravaged Germany during the war, and Alsace's front-line position made food supplies even more tenuous.\textsuperscript{54} Postwar recovery would necessarily be difficult, and from the moment French forces arrived in Alsace, economic concerns molded the processes of exclusion. Economic worries created a cycle, a market that was both competitive and cooperative, driven by both fear and greed, now increasing exclusionary pressures, now trying to reverse the process to avert disaster.

French officials confronted a number of economic problems in Alsace. A French industrial inspector explained that the economic crisis derived from "the standstill in war industries . . . the demobilization of the armies, and . . . the absolute lack of raw materials . . . the impossibility of obtaining any form of transport," and the mayor of Strasbourg pled with French authorities to avoid "mass firings of workers from completed public works projects."\textsuperscript{55} Premier Georges Clemenceau, who had struggled with labor crises for much of his career, thought the Alsatian problem presented a uniquely promising solution; expelling German workers, whom the French government did not want anyway, should alleviate job shortages for Alsatians. Unemployment was all the more dangerous due to

\textsuperscript{52} Husser, \textit{Journal}, 146.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 179.
\textsuperscript{55} Harvey, \textit{Constructing Class}, 144.
fears that workers' desperation, made worse by inflation, would lead to strike actions and demonstrations. This suggested the worst possible scenario—the government finding itself forced to use troops against strikers or demonstrators in Alsace. Clemenceau instructed officials in Alsace to export unemployment to Germany through expulsions:

The danger that, at this moment, any prolonged unemployment crisis may entail, requires the reduction of the overabundance of German laborers in order to reduce unemployment among Alsatians and Lorrainers. Otherwise the situation will quickly generate troubles. . . . The progressive and rapid replacement of German personnel [in public services by Alsatians and Lorrainers] is definitely required.  

Clemenceau urged ruthless application of the principle.

French officials constantly pressured Alsatian municipal officials to discharge German employees as quickly as possible.  

Alsatian officials, worried about their own expendability, recognized the importance of fulfilling state mandates, but also had to assure steady water, sanitation, and transportation services, some of which required particular Germans' skilled labor. The city of Strasbourg had long-standing contracts with large German-owned firms, but the council now had to revoke the contracts. In a city council meeting, Councilman Meyer implied that the German firms were war profiteers and called for the city to direct its contracts to small, Alsatian-owned enterprises, but also acknowledged the difficulty of determining which businesses and businessmen were German and which were Alsatian. Twice councilmen repeated the guidance French officials had given them on city hiring: "Above all else, no Germans."

The acting mayor, Jacques Peirotes, decided that the city would give priority to Alsatian firms, but would not deny contracts to German firms if that meant laying off the firms' employees.

\[\text{56} \text{ ADBR AL 121, 902, premier to high commissioner, 24 January 1919.} \]
\[\text{57} \text{ AMS, Central Division, 40/225; Eccard to mayor, 13 January 1919; Eccard to mayor, 17 January 1919; Eccard to mayor, 19 March 1919; Eccard note, 19 February 1919.}\]
Alsatian employees.58 City services and Alsatians' jobs both depended on German contractors, and economic considerations would continually obstruct the French government's efforts to exclude Germans from Alsace.

Economics frequently shifted individuals' frames of reference from identity to interests. In November and December 1918, the identity categories of Alsatian, German, and French dominated the Strasbourg city council's discussions. In January 1919, food shortages transformed the councilmen's worries from how to exclude Germans to how to feed the population. There seemed to be a clash between rural and urban interests, between producers' greed and consumers' desperation. Councilmen vilified farmers' and middlemen's exploitation of the crisis to raise prices at the expense of starving urban workers, and there was even a demand that the government expropriate food from rural hoarders. A councilman worried that

Two groups are battling now for preponderance, the consumers and the producers. The merchants claim now the liberty to trade; the peasant by contrast wants to sell his produce for the highest possible price . . . Those who have plenty of money suddenly have everything, while the poor have nothing.59

The food crisis altered perceptions of community from that of national origin or identity to one of material interests.60

French officials' pressure on Alsatian officials seemed to accomplish little in speeding the purge of German employees, and one unemployed Alsatian, Joseph Mack, called for swifter action against the Germans. The city of Strasbourg, Mack's place of residence, hired him during the war as an auxiliary sanitation worker to replace mobilized

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58 AMS, CM PV, 7 December 1918.
59 AMS, CM PV, 3 January 1919.
60 Linguistic and migratory patterns suggest that rural Alsace was more heavily "native" while urban areas contained concentrations of German immigrants who were industrial laborers. If this supposition holds, then Strasbourg's Alsatian municipal officials were decrying rural Alsatian food producers' exploitation of urban German laborers. See Lilianne M. Vassberg, Alsation Acts of Identity: Language Use and Language Attitudes in Alsace (Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters, Ltd, 1993), 31.
reservists. When the war ended, the veterans returned to their jobs and auxiliary workers like Mack were laid off, in keeping with the city's union contracts. Mack demanded that French authorities compel those German workers who had taken jobs from "faithful Alsatians" such as himself. 61 Eager French officials still found it difficult to circumvent the numerous technical, legal, and political difficulties that Strasbourg's city officials cited as extenuating circumstances for the slow pace of firings and expulsions: some workers were married to Alsatian women; some had union contracts that the city could not buy out; and, others had unique skills that were extremely difficult to replace. By the spring of 1919, the time when a city councilman had quaked at a general's warning of "No Germans" had long passed.

French authorities gradually found that expulsions likewise hurt French interests. Such was the case when expelling a German shopowner reduced competition and promoted market monopolies. French authorities rejected a group of Alsatian butchers' demands to close German butcher shops because such a measure would not be in the public interest, which was better served by "more competition" rather than less. French authorities feared that the Alsatian-owned shops would raise their prices if given the chance. 62 Similarly, French authorities refused to act on an Alsatian baker's denunciation of a neighboring German baker because officials did not want to reduce competition in critical food supplies. 63

If authorities let economic concerns temper the drive to expel, under appropriate circumstances they could equally, following the principles set out by Clemenceau, launch

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61 ADBR AL 121, 965, Joseph Mack to CGR, 29 May 1919.
62 ADBR AL 121, 1055, Butchers' Association to CGR, 14 May 1919; commissioner to CGR, 15 May 1919.
63 ADBR AL 121, 900, statement, 18 March 1919.
sustained efforts to expel Germans for primarily economic reasons. This was the case with a wave of expulsions in late 1919. A commission met in Strasbourg in December to cull the population of surplus Germans who might augment the city’s welfare roles in the upcoming winter. The commission decided to expel a Mlle. Eberhardt after the following interrogation:

Question: What is your profession?
Answer: I don’t have one.
Question: Are you single?
Answer: Yes.
Question: What is your means of existence?
Answer: I am staying with a friend, Madame Favre; my brothers have been reduced to the minimum. I have been selling my personal possessions since September. ⁶⁴

Through similar interrogations, French authorities targeted the unemployed and the homeless for expulsion, and one man’s plea that it was cruel to expel people at the onset of winter fell on deaf ears. ⁶⁵

Long before they knew what the limits of expulsions would be, when it seemed that the policy of “No Germans” might reduce the region’s population by a third, Strasbourg officials worried what effects expulsions would have on Alsace’s long-term economic recovery. They estimated some sixty thousand Germans would have to leave Strasbourg, removing skilled and unskilled labor from the city and most of its professionals. Commerce, public services, and the tax base would decline precipitously, destroying attempts to move to a productive, peacetime economy. One council member warned of “a catastrophe” unless Strasbourg recruited professionally qualified immigrants from France as well as England and America. He also recommended

⁶⁴ ADBR AL 121, 912, dossier #358, 19 December 1919.
⁶⁵ ADBR AL 121, 912, dossier #346, 16 December 1919; dossier #352, 16 December 1919; dossier #356, 19 December 1919.
lobbying the French government to make Strasbourg the largest garrison of France—it previously had hosted Germany’s largest garrison—to ensure the city a steady income from government contracts and salaried personnel. In the end, German emigration was not as great as the council feared, which was just as well because France did not have hundreds of thousands of prosperous immigrants eager to move to Alsace to replace departing Germans. In specific cases and in larger, abstract terms, exclusionary policies were subject to economic pressures that sometimes took priority over all other concerns.

Politics: Loyalty and Influence

Factions mobilized what influence they could to control or avoid exclusion. Although officials viewed exclusion as a legitimate political instrument, they calculated the risks of targeting a specific individual, including the possibility of backlash or the intervention of some higher authority. Groups of men formed small societies to vouch for one another and to direct authorities’ attention to others who should be excluded. A group of 150 men—“good Alsatians” they called themselves—formed a Purge Committee in Strasbourg in December 1918 to purge Alsace of the boche, and complained that the municipal authorities were harboring Germans. Another group, the Patriots’ Association in Haguenau, provided similar offices in that town and compiled blacklists for the authorities to speed the expulsion of “dangerous” Germans. In Paris, the Union of Presidents of Alsatian-Lorraine Societies of France later complained that

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66 No mention was made of the fight Strasbourg would have to wage with other French cities no less dependent on garrison income for post-war revenue. See AMS, CM PV, 28 February 1919.
67 Boswell describes this comité d’épuration in his “From Liberation,” 140.
68 AMH, 1 W 20, Association to CGR, 10 June 1919.
authorities in Alsace were allowing too many Germans to naturalize. Such political
groups, with their denunciations and blacklists, sowed fear and suspicion.

The flood of denunciations troubled French officials, who felt they could not
confidently determine who should be excluded from the region. A French police official
in Strasbourg believed exclusion could proceed only under local—Alsatian—control, and
he recommended recruiting a group of “Strasbourg notables, united in a perfect
knowledge of men and things, with the necessary qualities of civic courage, wisdom, and
equity, who could share among many people the responsibility for the decisions to be
taken.” The change of sovereignty transformed common political conflicts over power
by magnifying the consequences of exclusion. The police official who was caught up in
these controversies imagined that there existed an influential political community that
only the proper individuals, “Strasbourg notables,” could demarcate. This community
could determine who did not belong, and if mistakes were made, officials’ passivity
would disperse responsibility. The difficulty of defining this politically influential
community made it easier to target the socially marginal, particularly single, resourceless
women. The marginal, however, virtually by definition were unlikely to abide official
sanctions, operating instead anonymously in crowds or in remote spaces. Some of those
who could not avoid exclusion could probably find ways of ignoring it.

A political act, exclusion was subject to the art of influence, the appeal to
sentiment, and the expression of loyalty. French officials might have suspected many
patriotic declarations of being opportunistic, but they valued the professed love of France

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69 ADBR AL 121, 98, Union of Presidents to Undersecretary of State, 3 November 1921.
70 It is not clear whether the note was suggesting who should control the yet-unformed triage system,
designed to identify security threats among Alsatians, or more generally to the problem of evaluating
Germans for residency permits or expulsion. See ADBR AL 121, 899, police to high commissioner, 19
December 1918.
nonetheless. Many Alsatians disavowed past service to the German Empire and swore loyalty to France, and this often met French officials' requirements for correct national sentiments. Alsatians' status as former German subjects made this a peculiar operation. Until 1914, Alsatians' interests in order, stability, peace, prosperity, and political participation all contributed to form a German "national allegiance" that lent itself to expressed support of the German Empire. Many Alsatians accepted the necessity of German self-defense efforts in the war, and prominent Alsatians publicly supported Germany even though the military dictatorship eroded their confidence in the Empire. Once Germany collapsed, the vast majority of Alsatians disavowed the Empire and denied any responsibility for its actions. French sovereignty required new loyalties, the French state claimed to represent order and prosperity, and most Alsatians conformed to the new standard. Those who wanted to reconcile past loyalties to Germany with present loyalties to France could, like Napoleon's pragmatic foreign minister, Maurice de Tallyrand, dismiss charges of treason as "a matter of dates."  

The war had made professions of loyalty a critical problem for Alsatian mayors, teachers, and pastors. Such local leaders had felt pressured to shepherd the population through the war years by encouraging people to have confidence in the state, and many staunchly defended the rightness of the collective effort. After the war, however, past speeches and sermons became fodder for charges of having loved Germany too much or of having advocated pan-Germanism. Adolphe Schacterle faced this problem, and a

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73 The philosophy of pan-Germanism could range in scope from advocating the unity of all German-speaking populations in one nation-state to a complete re-ordering of the European continent and its economic systems into one market dominated by and serving the interests of the German state, a so-called
triage commission investigated him on charges of advocating "pangermanism and . . .
insulting French soldiers." Despite his denials, the committee determined that Schacterle
"clearly had a germanophile attitude, and had spoken derogatorily of French soldiers,
which reflected the sentiments of a bad Alsatian." Some Alsatians accused of German
sentiments tried to qualify them. Pastor Graff explained that "he respected order, and he
was obliged [to support Germany] in his letters to his parishioners during the war; but
from now on he would serve victorious France as he had served Germany." On the
other hand, some Alsatians refused to compromise their German loyalties. Valentin
Beyer was a successful school director in the German administrative system. Accused of
pan-Germanism, Beyer asserted defiantly that he "was and would remain a German civil
servant." Offended by his "arrogant attitude," a triage committee recommended jail and
exile. The willingness to profess one's loyalty to France would be a crucial element in
French Alsace's political landscape.

Personal connections shaped exclusion as businessmen, parliamentarians, and
officials contested one another's attempts to exclude particular individuals. Officials did
not normally record all the factors that influenced particular decisions, or give the reasons
why one person's demands or influence merited greater consideration than another's.
Such obscurity marked the Commissioner General's (CGR) efforts to expel a Madame
Peters, an Alsatian woman married to an expelled German bank director. According to
the Treaty, Madame Peters had the right to reintegrate into French citizenship, but the

Mittleeuropa. See Peter M. R. Stirk, A History of European Integration Since 1945 (London: Pinter, 1996),
20–21.
74 ADBR AL 121, 903, Strasbourg Triage Committee PV, case #25, 10 January 1919.
75 ADBR AL 121, 903, Strasbourg Triage Committee PV, case #28, 17 January 1919. See also case #31, 14
January 1919; case #15, 17 January 1919.
76 ADBR AL 121, 903, Strasbourg Triage Committee PV, case # 21, 10 January 1919.
CGR was determined to forestall that development by expelling her to Germany and preventing her re-entry, solely for the purpose of circumventing her husband’s efforts to return to Alsace and claim French citizenship. In response to an expulsion order of September 1919, Peters’ personal doctor wrote that she was too ill to travel. Authorities ordered an army doctor to examine her while Alsatian friends intervened on her behalf. 77 A frustrated official acknowledged the wife’s rights to citizenship, but insisted that “her husband is boche by blood . . . he was expelled in spite of . . . pressing interventions.” 78 We do not know if the case ended in expulsion.

Naturalization cases could drag on for years if champions and opponents contested an application, as they did in the case of André Steinlein, a rich German married into an Alsatian family with connections in Paris. Steinlein’s was a difficult case. Many credible sources accused him of having strongly opposed France during the war, having denounced Alsatians to German authorities, having purchased sequestered French properties, and having campaigned for Alsatian neutrality in November 1918. 79 One prefect laid out the case against Steinlein for the CGR, arguing that Steinlein should be expelled, but acknowledging many political complications. He also noted that there were grounds for benevolence in the case. 80 Another prefect initially supported Steinlein but later reversed his position. 81 The municipal council of Boussange in Moselle demanded Steinlein’s expulsion, but others defended him, and one official cautioned that Steinlein was too intelligent and too capable to expel to Germany, where a desire for

77 ADBR, AL 121, 965, military attendant to commissioner, no date; commissioner to CGR, 13 September 1919; CGR to commissioner, 24 September 1919; commissioner to CGR, 30 September 1919.
78 ADBR AL 121, 965, illegible signature, 16 September 1919.
79 ADBR AL 121, 638, report, 20 November 1920.
80 Ibid., prefect to CGR, 28 February 1921.
81 Ibid., director to secretary general, 8 February 1922; prefect to CGR, 25 September 1924.
revenge could make him "a serious danger to France." Steinlein's children had gained French citizenship through their deceased Alsatian mother, and his expulsion would have entailed the sequestration and liquidation of his property—the French children's patrimony. From Paris, Senator Robert Schuman, a Lorrainer, wrote to the CGR: "the expulsion of Steinlein and refusing his naturalization can only be justified by particularly grave motives. The hostility... of some appears insufficient [justification] to me." Steinlein finally won naturalization in 1925. His case combined many elements on which exclusion and power turned in Alsace. He had influential connections, but staunch opponents, and any action taken against him would have hurt some French citizens, in this case his children. It was extremely difficult to isolate individuals from a web of personal, professional, or political ties that linked people across diverse and artificial boundaries, including that of nation-states.

Strategic Designs

Exclusion's origins in French policy subjected it to broad strategic conceptions of the post-war world. Gradually more secure in its sovereignty over Alsace, the French government placed increased emphasis on how French rule of the region was reported in the German, British, and American press. Harsh acts in Alsace risked inciting critical foreign reports, and German propagandists could be counted on to exaggerate the

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82 Ibid., prefect to CGR, 30 May 1921; naturalization committee PV, 15 December 1920.
83 Ibid., senator to CGR, 16 February 1921. It is important to note that Steinlein's children did not qualify for "reintegration with full rights" into French citizenship because of their German father, but they achieved the coveted status just the same, and did not hesitate to exploit that distinction in arguing their father's case, and there is no record that authorities questioned the children's civil status while pursuing the father. This was a primary example of the problem of governing "transmission belts" described by Stanley Hoffmann, the huge distinction between official regulations or directives and common practice. See Hoffmann's "Paradoxes of the French Political Community," in In Search of France (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963): 1-117.
importance of any incident—from the French perspective—and use it to fortify German resistance to France and to turn British and American public opinion against the French. French authorities might have preferred to ignore foreign opinion, but harsh exclusion policies too often caused local resistance and made international diplomacy difficult. Caution increasingly marked French policies in Alsace because bold action proved too difficult and offended too many people.

Two strategic problems that complicated French exclusion policies were French control of the Saar and Germany’s reparations payments. French officials contemplated annexing the Saar Basin, a small, coal-rich region just north of Lorraine, which offered advantages to French heavy industry as well as a gateway to the Rhineland. In November 1918, French officials began collecting reports on Saarlanders’ attitudes towards France, the Allies, and Germany. The French government felt that public opinion in the Saar would be crucial to France’s gaining influence and control over the region. Despite the French occupation, the Saar’s fate depended on the peace negotiations. French officials argued to the allies that history, particularly French sovereignty over the region during the Revolution and the First Empire, validated French claims on the Saar, and French diplomats criticized the territorial settlement of 1815 that had taken the Saar from France. French negotiators also demanded the region’s coal mines as restitution for the damages that German forces had intentionally inflicted on

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84 ADBR AL 121, 104, “Ce que l’on appelle le travail civilisateur de la France sur le Rhin,” G Hute de Cologne, 21 December 1920; “Noel, Blason de la ville de Mannheim: Venez en aide aux pauvres enfants des Alsaciens expulsés et groupés à Mannheim,” unnamed paper, 4 December 1913.


86 ADBR AL 121, 102, ministry to premier, 23 November 1918.
mines in northern France. The allies refused the annexation demands, but the Treaty allowed France to govern the region—and mine its coal—for fifteen years under a League mandate. A plebiscite would then allow the Saar’s inhabitants to vote for union with Germany or France, or a continuation of the League mandate.

The limited mandate and the plebiscitary deadline presented French officials with the challenge of calculating how they could extract the greatest value from the Saar. If there were a reasonable possibility that France could win a plebiscite in fifteen years time, then logic argued in favor of benevolent rule to encourage Saarlanders’ appreciation of France. If the plebiscite could not reasonably be won, then French interests dictated ruthless exploitation of the Saar while the opportunity lasted. French officials in Alsace, Paris, and the Saar disagreed considerably on the chances of winning a plebiscite in the region. The question arose in Alsace because officials there dealt with numerous Saarlander immigrants, and the strategic dilemma forced officials to treat Saarlanders differently from other Germans. For Saarlanders themselves, their rights, treatment, and property were hostage to the French dilemma for the duration of the League mandate. Saarlanders’ relationship to France resembled a strange courtship. While Saarlanders

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88 “Treaty of Peace,” Part III, Section IV, Chapter III.
89 Ibid., Article 45; Cowan, France and the Saar, 123-4.
90 Speaking non-committally of French designs on the Rhineland, aspirations for a Rhine border, and the government’s disappointment with the Versailles Treaty’s frontier provisions, French Foreign Minister Stephen Pichon told a Senate committee in August 1919 that “The wisdom of our administration will determine if we are to extend our frontiers.” The difficulties of extending frontiers or exploiting what was occupied equally bedeviled the French cabinet, the parliament, and French officials reviewing Saarlanders’ files in Strasbourg. The French cabinet apparently never adopted a formal policy of exploitation or benevolence, but left it to each official to deal with issues as they arose. See Archives du Senat, Auditions, 1919, 1873-74, Commission des Affaires Étrangères PV, 14 August 1919, quoted in Walter A. McDougall, France’s Rhineland Diplomacy, 1914–1924: The Last Bid for a Balance of Power in Europe (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 88.
91 One French judge doubted that Saarlanders deserved better treatment than any other boche, but agreed to consider French interests in the Saar in handling Saarlanders’ cases. See ADBR AL 121, 1051, tribunal to commissioner, 23 October 1919.
could ill afford to disabuse French hopes of winning a plebiscite, French officials were divided between those favoring benevolence and those preferring to punish Saarlanders as irredeemable Germans.**92**

Saarlanders practiced exclusion themselves, through the denunciation of rivals as enemies of France and by appealing to French strategic aims to serve private interests. Soliciting French good will, the Committee of Alsatian-Lorrainers of the Saar reported on the political activities of Alsatian exiles in Germany.**93** A widow in Alsace pleaded with French officials to release her property from sequestration on the grounds that her family was "originally from the Saar Basin and I myself was born in Sulzbach (Saar)."**94** In August 1922, French authorities exempted Saarlanders from a wave of expulsions in a sign that the government still hoped France might win their loyalty.**95** The strategic calculation of potential annexation, versus Alsace's actual annexation, long marked French officials' responses to Saarlanders and Saarlanders' resistance to or collaboration with the French government.

Some French officials thought such benevolence toward Saarlanders a waste of effort, a naïve coddling of Germans "in the name of French policy in the Saar."**96** Officials' mutual frustration and disagreements grew as some thought benevolence pointless and others thought harsh exploitation counter-productive. The French president of the Saar Commission, Victor Rault, at one point asked the prefect of the Moselle to lift a Saarlander's property sequestration. Rault wanted to demonstrate French liberality to

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**92** Typical was the appeal launched by the Association of Saarlanders in Lorraine who faced having their properties sequestered and liquidated. They wrote to Clemenceau that such harsh actions undermined French interests in the Saar itself. See ADBR AL 121, 1051, Association to Clemenceau, 8 October 1919.

**93** ADBR AL 121, 111, committee to commissioner, 21 April 1919.

**94** AMH 1W20, Widow Lina Bollinger to regional tribunal, 15 January 1921.

**95** ADBR AL 121, 962, CGR to prefect, 4 August 1922.

**96** ADBR AL 121, 629, prefect to CGR, 5 August 1920.
Saarlanders, but the prefect refused, arguing that "French influence will draw no benefit whatsoever from a favor . . . [accorded] to this individual."97 A disgusted French official in Strasbourg attributed pro-Saarlander policies to French administrators in the Saar who had become overly sympathetic to Saarlanders' concerns. "You know," he complained to a colleague, "that it is the policy of the Government of the Saar to retain and even to draw as close as possible French interests in Saarlander affairs."98 The Saar was a political battleground, not only between France and Germany, but among French officials who differed over the promise of the far-off plebiscite and how that affected French policy in the region. Political considerations forced officials to think differently about how Saarlanders should be treated, and confused the ways in which connections to the Saar encouraged officials to modify exclusionary policies.

Just as French officials weighed strategic interests vis-à-vis the Saar in handling Saarlanders in Alsace, the state's exclusion policies in the region ebbed and flowed with the state's policies toward Germany. In 1921, Germany increasingly proved incapable of meeting its financial obligations, and the reparations schedule collapsed. French leaders were greatly alarmed in January 1922 when the German chancellor announced his government's pending bankruptcy. Raymond Poincaré formed a new government on a platform of strict treaty fulfillment, by force if necessary. In the summer of 1922, an escalating economic crisis and worries that Russia and Britain might betray France's reparations claims increased French leaders' anxieties and their willingness to act unilaterally.99 By August, French leaders felt decisive action was imperative to regain

97 ADBR AL 121, 1056, prefect to CGR, 10 September 1921.
98 ADBR AL 121, 1056, justice to CGR, 8 October 1920.
99 The Soviet Union signed the Rappallo agreement with Germany in April 1922, pointing to French continental isolation. On August 1, the British announced the Balfour Plan, suggesting the British would
the initiative and to force German adherence to the treaty. The French government’s first target would be residual German interests in Alsace.

It was a continual source of frustration to French leaders that many tens of thousands of Germans continued to reside in Alsace and continued to own property in the region despite waves of expulsions and property confiscations. In the so-called “Reprisal” of August 1922, officials tried to end the delays and overcome the inertia that had enabled Germans to escape expulsion. One French official complained about the spirit of resistance and bad faith, general among German authorities and the Germans, due to the politics of disunion, of hesitations, of pusillanimity and of weakness which, for three years, has marked Allied policy toward Germany. Encouraged, Germany has come (only the blind can doubt it) to deny her debts and refuse payment.  

The French government determined to end the delayed cleansing of Alsace by systematically purging remaining Germans and taking their property. The CGR, acting on instructions from Paris, ordered prefects to begin preparing lists of Germans who could be expelled at the rate of five hundred a week beginning on 10 August 1922, with exemptions allowed for “needed workers” and Saarlanders.  

Using police records, the prefects began compiling the required lists, but one warned that more expulsions risked provoking widespread protests:

Most of the Germans whose presence we have tolerated so far are well integrated into the Alsatian population, some by economic interests, some by birth or education. They have many links to French nationals, some by marriage... Mass expulsions risk upsetting many Alsatians, whether in their economic interests or in the empathy that exists between most German residents and local Alsatian families.  

abandon all reparations claims and leaving the French even more economically isolated. See McDougall, Rhineland Diplomacy, 186, 222.  

100 ADBR AL 121, 126, consul Raynaud to CGR, 3 August 1922.  
101 ADBR AL 121, 962, CGR to prefect, 4 August 1922.  
102 ADBR AL 121, 962, prefect to CGR, 6 August 1922.
Anticipating problems, the prefect of Bas-Rhin tried to target the unattached, the socially vulnerable, the economically isolated—those whose expulsion would incite the fewest protests from the rest of the population. Roughly two-thirds of those expelled were women, and many of them were single. Officials sometimes annotated particular justifications for an individual’s expulsion. Some of the men were accused of having socialist or germanophile sentiments, but one was targeted for reasons of poverty. In contrast, women identified for expulsion were listed as having “light” or “doubtful” morality, and one was a prostitute. One list of a hundred and forty-four expellees included thirty-five couples, twenty-seven single men, and forty-five single women, including widows. The attempt to target the isolated and vulnerable was only partially successful, because many of the police records used to compile the expulsion lists were incomplete or out-of-date. The police did not know all individuals’ relationships or residences, and these things changed too frequently for the police to know everyone who had or lacked a support network. Police records could be wrong, and one prefect upbraided a police chief for issuing expulsion orders on the following individuals:

1) Barbe Kostman, born Baas, who you reported as having ‘no direct family attachment in France.’ Now one of her daughters . . . has presented me with a card of reintegration with full rights into French nationality . . . .
2) Ernest Meyer, who you reported has ‘no family attachment’ in France. In fact . . . many of his family members are French . . . .
3) Charles Heimbaecker . . . has many brothers and sisters who have naturalized as French through the Peace Treaty.”

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103 ADBR AL 121, 962, prefect to police, 12 August 1922.
104 ADBR AL 121, 962, statistics compiled from a series of expulsion orders, August 1922.
105 ADBR AL 121, 962, police list, 14 August 1922.
106 ADBR AL 121, 962, prefect to police chief, 12 August 1922.
French officials in Alsace endured heavy criticism as Alsatian and French friends and relatives of the expelled came to their defense.

Temporary exemptions spared some thanks to the intervention of influential people. One prefect bowed to pressure to delay a Monsieur Becke’s expulsion, while demanding additional guarantees of Becke’s sentiments since he was accused of keeping a “prudent silence and . . . socializ[ing] with notorious . . . germanophiles or autonomists.”¹⁰⁷ Becke’s supporters denied that he had political views and called his expulsion a reprehensible act, “from a national point of view.”¹⁰⁸ Even French naturalization did not entitle one to judicial recourse, as a prefect explained in justifying the expulsion of Monsieur Weisbecker, who had naturalized French through his Alsatian wife. The prefect charged that Weisbecker had expressed loyalty to Germany. At least one of Weisbecker’s in-laws approved his expulsion, stating that if “Madame Weisbecker, born French . . . wanted to marry a boche, she would have to take the consequences.”¹⁰⁹ Alsatians’ strong protests against the expulsions, a few chauvinists notwithstanding, convinced French authorities to delay and then cancel additional mass expulsions, while those first targeted gradually returned to their homes.

Exclusion remained an issue while naturalization offices handled treaty-related applications through the mid-1920s, and immigration and naturalization issues remained contentious. Germans denied naturalization were technically subject to immediate expulsion and their property vulnerable to confiscation. In April 1925, French judicial and political authorities discussed whether such individuals should still be expelled despite public criticism. A prosecutor recommended a benevolent hands-off policy

¹⁰⁷ ADBR AL 121, 962, note, 17 October 1922.
¹⁰⁸ ADBR AL 121, 962, Independent Artists of Alsace to CGR, 10 September 1922.
¹⁰⁹ ADBR AL 121, 962, prefect to CGR, 10 October 1922.
toward Germans and their properties unless political authorities ordered sanctions in specific cases. In instructions to prosecutors, the Justice Ministry then implicitly acknowledged that Germans who had been denied naturalization would not automatically lose their residency or property, pending political authorities’ contrary decision. French authorities tolerated Germans’ residence and property rights in Alsace because it often proved too difficult to exclude them or to deny certain rights. Although the French government pursued Frenchification strenuously, it had given up on expelling or naturalizing all Germans in Alsace. Various exceptions reflected French strategic concerns, the desire to secure Alsatians’ loyalties, and the need to minimize economic disruptions.

Conclusion

In the Reprisals of August 1922, French officials exempted one other class of individuals from expulsion, besides Saarlanders and needed workers. These were frontier dwellers (*frontaliers*). French authorities had gradually accepted the existence of a frontier in which the state’s power to exclude individuals was severely limited. A report on the triage system had recognized this problem as early as February 1919:

Some Germans whom we expelled from Sarreguemines and sent to Kehl . . . have shown up in Saarbrücken from which they are separated from their former homes

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110 ADBR AL 121, 1051, ministry to high commissioner, 30 April 1925.
111 ADBR AL 121, 1051, ministry to local prosecutor, 12 May 1925. An anecdote told by Albert Schweitzer about his internment in a French camp for German civilians during the war suggests what might have been a French bureaucratic tradition at work. Whenever the camp governor, a retired police commissioner from Marseilles, was asked whether the camp rules allowed certain things, he typically responded “Nothing is allowed! But some things are tolerated, if you are reasonable.” See Albert Schweitzer, *Out of My Life and Thought: An Autobiography*, trans. C. T. Campion (New York: Henry Holt, 1949), 173.
112 ADBR AL 121, 962, CGR to prefect, 4 August 1922.
only by the Sarre River. They taunt French officials there, and their expulsion has proven to be illusory.\textsuperscript{113}

It proved virtually impossible to exclude frontier dwellers because their communities traversed the border, and they had substantial social, economic, and political connections on both sides of the boundary. To expel someone across such a line had little practical effect in transnational, frontier communities.

One such community lies in Alsace’s northeast corner, at the far eastern point of France’s hexagon. The villages of Scheibenhard, France and Scheidenhardt, Germany are one community separated by the Lauter River, here merely a stream easily crossed by hopping from one bank, to a stone, to another stone, to the other bank—or, of course, walking across the short bridge. If French officials felt compelled in 1920 to expel a German resident from Scheibenhard, he or she doubtless had little difficulty finding refuge with friends and relatives in Scheidenhardt. Moreover, there was little to stop the expelled individual from returning regularly to his or her fields or home in Alsace, because authorities lacked the resources to secure the border from all intrusions. In the south, numerous Alsatian towns existed in the shadow of Basel, Switzerland, a regional hub for German, French, and Swiss trade. The markets that traversed these borders doubtless had little difficulty circumventing French rule. Because frontier expulsions were illusory, French officials exempted the frontier to avoid issuing pointless orders.

This chapter originated in an effort to understand who excluded whom from Alsace, and why, with the goal of describing the social and political boundaries, or character of the ostensible French nation that exclusion from Alsace was supposed to better define. The frontier exception, however, in fact appeared to be standard practice.

\textsuperscript{113} ADBR AL 121, 902, report, February 1919.
Political and economic complications forced, or persuaded, French and Alsatian authorities to modify exclusionary practices. Despite much rhetorical conformity to the idea of a monolithically French Alsace, revealed plurality and diversity instead. On the one hand, of course, social exclusion, discrimination against women and the down-and-out, served a monolithically patriarchal social order, something antithetical to plurality and diversity. On the other hand, this did not represent anything new, and while state officials found it easy to target socially marginal individuals, such persons were also the least likely to abide state sanctions, instead finding ways to operate anonymously and skirting the laws that denied them protections or rights. Citizenship in French Alsace, the product of formal and informal exclusionary processes, was a political fiction.114

Chapter Five
German Laws/French Rules:
Sovereign Incongruities in Alsace

An unexpected obstacle stymied French efforts to transform Alsace; sovereignty gave the state little control over the region's property or laws. Problems as mundane as a couple's divorce carried serious implications for French sovereignty. An Alsatian attorney stymied French officials in November 1919 with a question on handling a case:

I find it necessary to write and ask officially concerning the statute in force in Alsace-Lorraine. On April 26, 1919, Eugene Haegeli filed for divorce in the Civil Tribunal for the district of Moutier against his wife, Marie Haegeli. [Eugene] Haegeli was born in Hilsenheim and on June 13, 1913 married Marie Haegeli, born Gogniat. Our tribunal needs to know what law is currently in force. If French, will the French government recognize the divorce? If German, we need diplomatic intervention with the German foreign office to insure the proper application of the law.¹

The question of whether German or French laws were in force in Alsace posed a number of problems. What law applied to the separating couple depended on whether either or both were citizens of the German region of Alsace-Lorraine or resident aliens and whether either one originally had French citizenship or would qualify for it under the Peace Treaty. French law could not apply in Alsace until the Treaty was ratified in January 1920. In 1919, French officials arbitrarily recognized various German laws' validity in Alsace, but they had no intention of consulting German authorities in handling an Alsatian divorce case. Even after French law came into force, it might incompletely dissolve a marriage based on German law, and that which it could undo, it could not erase. A legacy of German contracts and legal decisions limited French sovereignty because French legal decisions had to build on German precedents.

¹ ADBR AL 121, 98, Robert Jambe to Commissioner General (CGR), 12 November 1919.
The French government’s policy of Frenchification was designed to purge German influences from Alsace and integrate the region into France. A conflict between national security interests and Alsace’s regional economy, however, posed a fundamental dilemma for the government. Property and law were central to the conflict because the integration of the region into the state required the transformation of these fundamental institutions. The problem of determining what statute applied in an Alsatian divorce case in 1919 highlights the difficulties French authorities would encounter in working out politically acceptable solutions to complex legal issues. Property and law sowed contention, and two forces worked against Frenchification: the markets and judicial processes. Property rights were prerequisite to the pursuit of profit, for French nationals as well as Germans and Alsatians. The state’s efforts to claim and transfer property rights in Alsace wrought economic havoc and pitted the state’s policies against most French private interests. The Peace Treaty validated the French government’s right to abrogate all treaties, contracts, and legislation in the region dating to the German regime. Old statutes in the region, however, bound together the rights and interests of Germans, Swiss, Luxembourgers, Alsatians, and Frenchmen in intricate ways. French officials could not strike at Germans’ interests without directly hurting French nationals, and French officials increasingly recognized old German laws and treaties as valid in Alsace.\(^2\) Property and law in Alsace revealed the limits of sovereignty, and they marked a distinct boundary between the governments’ claims of national integration and the reality of complex rights and legal codes.

\(^2\) ADBR AL 98, 636, Minister of Finances to Premier, 3 April 1935; Premier to Minister of Foreign Affairs, 3 May 1935. In many cases, French officials felt they had no choice but to recognize German laws’ extant force in the region.
Frenchification: An Assault on All Things German

Frenchification began as a process of de-Germanization symptomatic both of Alsatians' contempt for the German Empire and of Frenchmen's animosity toward Germany, and it featured assaults on German property, symbols, and institutions. After French forces arrived in the region, a doctor in Strasbourg described how French officers "stood aside without protesting the pillaging of German properties; it was only a question of 'a boche' after all; the word 'German' seems to have disappeared from the French language." In the disorders of November 1918, Alsatians disavowed any connections to or responsibilities for Imperial Germany, suddenly an alien entity that was made solely responsible for the war's horrors and destruction. One grievance against the Empire was that it had confiscated properties belonging to Frenchmen and some Alsatians charged with treason, and lawyers suggested that Alsatian municipalities bore partial liability for the property liquidations. The mayor of Strasbourg denied that the city or its employees had done anything wrong in handling such properties. "It was the Imperial Government alone," the mayor explained, "that was responsible for everything that was done."

French and Alsatian assaults on German symbols were acts of vengeance, retributive vilification of Germans and German institutions as causes of the war. Even before 1914, French national myths had criminalized German control of Alsace and

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1 Chapter one describes Alsatians' increasing resentment to German rule during the First World War and Frenchmen's conception of Alsace as a hostage of German militarism. See Jean-Claude Richez, "Ordre et désordre dans la fête: Les Fêtes de réception des troupes françaises en Alsace en November 1918," Revue des sciences sociales de la France de l'est 12 (1983), 168–70.

4 "Ecrit en November 1918 par un Allemand et date de Strasbourg," L'Alsace Française (November 19, 1921), 754.

5 ADBR AL 121, 1052, mayor to commissioner, 12 December 1918.
depicted Alsatians as long-suffering French hostages of German militarism. The war began with the German violation of Belgian neutrality, and from 1914 to 1918, inadequately supplied German forces used forced requisitions in occupied territories to feed their troops and terrorize civilian populations. The German government’s war aims included controlling Europe, putting a check on Russia’s huge potential, and reducing France to vassalage. In retreat, German forces adopted scorched-earth tactics that might have been sound militarily, but the systematic destruction of French property magnified France’s desire for vengeance. The German Empire seemed determined to destroy what it could not have, and many French regions were devastated beyond reasonable recovery for years to come. The war left France with 1.5 million dead soldiers, millions more wounded, three million refugees, and a nation mired in debt. The sole object of Germany’s largest operation in the war, the assault on Verdun in 1916, was to kill as many Frenchmen as possible. Allied propagandists’ best material came from what German authorities said and what German forces did.

Germanophobia was essential to Frenchification, a collection of policies vaguely formulated to incorporate Alsatians into the French polity, to transform Alsace into a

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6 In chapter one, I discuss the French myth of Alsace, prominent to which was the thesis that the German Empire had stolen Alsace and Lorraine from France in 1871 and cruelly mistreated the faithful French provinces ever since.
bulwark of French civilization on the Rhine, and to use Alsace’s productive capacity to aid the recovery of France’s devastated departments. French and Alsatian grievances against Germans were not proof that Germans were ogres, but these grievances help clarify why Alsatians and Frenchmen treated “German” as a term of derision, an adjective that delegitimized its object. French officials viewed “German” property as something not yet liberated, and “German” law seemed oxymoronic, a tool of oppression rather than civil protection. French officials’ policies in Alsace were designed as much to purge the region of Germanness as to make the region French.

After the unprecedented destruction to which German forces had subjected French property, many Frenchmen viewed German property as ill-gotten and rightful compensation for France. After early protests that the French government was violating private property rights in Alsace, Clemenceau’s deputy Jeanneney shot back that “behind the fiction of private rights hides, living and agitating, the enemy personality itself.”

Despite the French state’s official hostility to German property rights and authorities’ best efforts, the government could not unilaterally confiscate all property or dispossess Germans of all their belongings. In March 1919, a French deputy complained that some Germans were taking property with them as they crossed the Rhine. The deputy called for the confiscation of these goods and their distribution to French sinistrés, the disaster victims in the devastated northern departments. The Commissioner General (CGR) in Alsace explained apologetically that the goods in question could not be seized because the Armistice agreement guaranteed the property of German officers and civil servants.13

13 ADBR AL 121, 1053, deputy to president, 27 March 1919; CGR to president, n.d.
This exception for imperial officials highlighted the precarious situation of other German nationals. In the Treaty of Versailles, the German government ceded all German public and private property rights in Alsace to the French state while voiding Alsatian debts to German institutions and the German state. In theory, the treaty transferred German assets to Alsace while transferring Alsatian liabilities to Germany. Such a relationship was ruinous to Alsace because its economic vitality depended on the free flow of capital, goods, and labor.

The Strategic Dilemma: National Security versus Regional Economy

A strategic dilemma pitted French national security interests against Alsatians' regional economic interests. Security and the economy were, of course, tightly intertwined issues, but French and Alsatian perspectives on the two issues were radically different. The French state, based on its analysis of the German threat, prioritized national security over Alsace's economic recovery, but Alsatians did not view economic stagnation as security. Market forces would ultimately undermine both France's security and its economy.

Controversy over the terms of the Versailles treaty illustrates the large-scale issues that shaped French policies in Alsace. The British economist John Maynard Keynes damned the treaty as a dictate embodying the French government's anti-German policies, which, Keynes felt, were a foolish continuation of the war by economic means. French policies were a continuation of the war, but hardly foolish from the perspective of French Premier Georges Clemenceau. Whereas Keynes wanted to restore economic

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15 Keynes, Economic Consequences, 69–71.
order, Clemenceau’s priority was to guarantee French security against a powerful enemy whose prostration he regarded as only temporary. In fact, Keynes’ proposal for a central European Free Trade Zone was not far removed from the burgeoning Mitteleuropa that German nationalists most desired and Clemenceau most feared.\(^{16}\) Clemenceau opposed German economic recovery, and favored, if necessary, a customs barrier on the Rhine. Clemenceau viewed the Rhine less as a trade artery than as a suitable barrier upon which to defend France from future German assaults.

French fears of German recovery and a future war placed national interests at odds with Alsatian regional interests. Alsatians, of course, wanted security and peace, but the French definition of security could only be had at the expense of Alsace’s economy. From the French perspective, the Rhine River was a magnificent border trench, extremely well-placed to prevent Germany from ever again threatening France, but only so long as France controlled the left bank and policed the river’s use and development. In contrast, Alsatians regarded the river as a vital trade artery, whose development and expanded use were crucial to the region’s future prosperity. Alsatian agriculture, manufacturing, and mining depended heavily on free-flowing trade, and Alsatians would benefit tremendously from continental economic integration. For France, however, economic integration threatened German domination through her

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\(^{16}\) Keynes called for the organization of a Free Trade Union composed of “Germany, Poland, the new States which formerly composed the Austro-Hungarian and Turkish Empires” all of which would be compelled to remain in the union for ten years. See Ibid., 265. Keynes’ ideas corresponded to the German nationalist Freidrich Naumann’s war-time advocacy of Mitteleuropa uniting these same areas in a customs union. See Peter M. R. Stirk, *A History of European Integration since 1945* (London: Pinter, 1996), 21, 286. From the French perspective, and especially from Clemenceau’s, proposals for central European economic integration betrayed the huge sacrifices that Frenchmen had made to turn back the German assault and tie down the German behemoth that threatened to engulf the continent. Clemenceau’s singular aim was “strategic guarantees against Germany,” and he with many Frenchmen were determined—not irrationally—to hamper, not abet, German economic revitalization. See Douglas Johnson, “French War Aims and the Crisis of the Third Republic,” in *War Aims*, 53; and, Christopher M. Andrew and A. S. Kanya-Forstner, *The Climax of French Imperial Expansion, 1914–1924* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981), 175.
superior resources and potential.\textsuperscript{17} Keynes' advocacy of European integration fit perfectly Alsatians' economic interests, but alarmed French leaders.

French leaders hoped to purge Alsace of all German interests and influence and use the revenue from property confiscations to aid French economic recovery. First, the French government would confiscate property in the region from Germans, then sell the property at reduced prices to French citizens. The government would apply the proceeds to reconstruction or replenish the French treasury as credits against Germany's reparations liability. The French acquirer would return the property to productive use through additional investment as necessary, and the dispossessed German could claim reimbursement from the German government.\textsuperscript{18} A French decree of May 23, 1919 organized the sale of these properties under closed bidding, and declared that French laws would not apply to the sales nor would the transactions be subject to judicial review.\textsuperscript{19} Restricting the purchase of these properties to French citizens—or Alsatians and Lorrainers who would become French—had two purposes: it promised compensation to those who had suffered most in the war, the French, and, it protected French security interests by confiscating German capital in Alsace and preventing other foreign capital from exploiting the situation. Closing Alsace to foreign capital severely limited investments in the region, thereby undermining economic recovery after the war. On the other hand, French officials were correct in estimating that German interests would, if

\textsuperscript{17} French leaders and economists recognized the economic dangers their security interests posed, and tried desperately, but ineffectively, to harness German industries to French ones and make German recovery serve French interests. French governments between the wars were continually forced to choose between bad and worse, including French economic and security policies vis-à-vis Germany and Alsace. See Walter A. McDougall, \textit{France's Rhineland Diplomacy, 1914–1924: The Last Bid for a Balance of Power in Europe} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 107, 127–29, 167.

\textsuperscript{18} "Treaty of Peace," art. 53, 55, 56, 60, and 74.

\textsuperscript{19} ADBR AL 121, 1051, decree, 23 May 1919.
allowed, use capital flows to maintain a foothold in regional affairs and try to encourage the development of autonomist sentiment in Alsace.\textsuperscript{20}

The French government’s refusal to allow allied nationals to bid on liquidated properties brought protests from the Belgian and American governments and from the French Foreign Ministry. The Foreign Ministry complained that excluding allies from the sales “risked provoking reprisals prejudicial to our general interests.”\textsuperscript{21} French officials in Strasbourg determined, however, that Frenchification’s importance outweighed allied protests. Similarly, the American State Department complained when French officials nullified an American’s purchase of a house near Saverne. The American, Jacques Morganthaler, had been born to Alsatian parents near Saverne in 1877, had emigrated to the United States before the war and become a citizen, and returned to settle in Saverne in 1920. Morganthaler bid on a sequestered property and authorities, confused by Morganthaler’s nationality and background, accepted his payment but nullified the sale when they realized Morganthaler was an American. Morganthaler lost 22,000 francs when French officials resold the property to a French citizen and only partially reimbursed Morganthaler what he had paid. When the American Consul protested that French-American treaties guaranteed the property rights of Frenchmen and Americans in each county, the CGR explained that French laws and associated treaties did not apply in Alsace because of particular national security concerns; French security demanded that only Frenchmen buy property in Alsace.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{20} David Allen Harvey, \textit{Constructing Class and Nationality in Alsace, 1830–1945} (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2001), 160.
\textsuperscript{21} ADBR AL 121, 1051, Foreign Ministry to CGR, 29 July 1919.
\textsuperscript{22} ADBR AL 121, 1056, Consul to CGR, 28 October 1921; reply, 19 December 1921.
French officials excluded allied nationals from these sales both to prevent Germans from regaining interests in Alsatian properties through third parties and out of concern for the hegemonic potential of American capital. If foreign purchases were allowed, American Standard Oil Company—identified by name in officials' correspondence—could easily outbid French concerns and take control of Alsace's mines and petroleum industry.\textsuperscript{23} French law's requirement for open bidding (competitive bidding without regard to nationality) held the specter of Americanization through the imperial dollar. France's sacrifices in the war would be meaningless if Alsace were bought up by Americans, who were already said to be making trade deals with the Germans.\textsuperscript{24} Nothing would jeopardize French security more than American capital buying up Alsace and expanding trade with Germany. American businessmen seemed all too willing to finance a German \textit{Mitteleuropa} through investments and trade that would revitalize France's mortal enemy while ignoring France's need for debt relief, reparations, and reconstruction. France's security interests ran completely counter to Alsace's economic interests, and the CGR insisted that French interests were more important than French trade laws or allied countries' displeasure.

The dilemma of national security versus regional economy was not a transient issue, and would endure as long as French authorities worried about a potential German threat in the east. The regional economy demanded investments, but necessitated an analysis of risk. In the event of war, any investment in Alsace risked becoming a total loss. Germany might retake the region, factories might be destroyed in the fighting, or the government might expropriate front-line factories for military use. In the mid-30s,

\textsuperscript{23} ADBR AL 121, 1051, CGR to Foreign Ministry, August 1919; note, 20 September 1919.
\textsuperscript{24} ADBR AL 121, 1051, CGR to Foreign Ministry, n.d.
the French government forbade new industrial investments in Alsace. The construction of the Maginot Line presumably alleviated some degree of depression-related unemployment, but it hardly represented an investment in the future or an expansion of productivity. French security interests and Alsatian economic interests would both shape property rights and the judicial process. Although French government policies would hurt regional market activity, the complexities of property and law would place heavy constraints on the government’s efforts to make Alsace French.

Property and Restricted Markets

Property is a legal concept, rather than a transferable commodity. When Germany ceded German public and private property in Alsace to France in the Treaty of Versailles, this was not a transfer of land, buildings and infrastructure, but of legal contracts and rights, albeit with considerable treaty-based modifications. Thereafter, while the title to land or a building in Alsace might be held by a Frenchman or the French government, making it nominally “French” property, the property would continue to be defined according to contracts or legislation dating to the German regime. Only new French legislation could displace old German laws. New legislation designed to integrate Alsace, however, meant new parliamentary battles contesting the rights of property throughout France. France’s cumbersome legislative process made it more likely that new proposals would die in committee than be voted on in the parliament, so French legislation did little to redefine property in Alsace. Also, contracts are as important to property as law. When one party to a contract becomes incapable of fulfilling its terms, the value of property associated with the contract plummets, even if there has been no

change in the capital goods involved. Value is not inherent to objects; it derives from the
ability to fulfill contractual obligations and the protection afforded those obligations by
the law. Market forces, value driven, would wreak havoc with the French government’s
efforts to Frenchify property in Alsace because obligations and the law ill-fit national
categories.

The complex interdependence of German, French, and Alsatian interests was also
a bane to Frenchification. Frenchmen suffered because French property rights were
bound up with German rights in an international market that did not recognize nations or
borders. Property was a bundle of rights that defined relationships among corporations,
owners, workers, landlords, and tenants. The distribution of these rights as contracts,
laws and judicial decisions evolved continually through exchange, challenge, and
compromise. Property in 1918 was not what it had been in 1871, as changing
geographic, economic, social, and political factors conditioned the constant destruction,
creation, and redistribution of rights. French sovereignty represented an additional
redistributive factor, but it could not unilaterally impose a specific distribution. German
sovereignty had shaped, not dictated, property rights in Alsace, and expropriations of
property during the war had enriched certain elites without binding Alsace more closely
to Germany or making the property more “German.”

Property in Alsace was not inherently “German” or susceptible to easy transformation into something “French.”

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Dan P. Silverman, Reluctant Union: Alsace-Lorraine and Imperial Germany, 1871–1918 (University Park,
PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1972), 198; German leaders’ belief in their “right” to expropriate
property in Alsace during the war apparently stemmed from an overwhelming arrogance born of military
success and the suspicion that Alsatians were French at heart. See Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Imperial
Different individuals' rights were involved in any given piece of property. Although the Treaty of Versailles spoke of "German" property rights accruing to the French state, the property in question linked people together across many civil statuses and national categories. Alsatian families mixed spouses, parents, in-laws, and cousins from France, Prussia, Baden, Bavaria, Switzerland, Luxembourg, and Alsace. Confiscating a German's property frequently deprived a French citizen of his or her rights as the German's tenant, landlord, creditor, debtor, or heir. Government officials found it impossible to unbundle these rights, and efforts to confiscate Germans' rights reverberated throughout the economy and hurt Frenchmen and Germans alike.

Two examples demonstrate how easily German property could also be a French patrimony. One Alsatian, Henry Klee, gained French citizenship through his Alsatian mother but had struggled to prevent the state from liquidating his German father's property. In a similar situation, state authorities sequestered and prepared to liquidate an apartment belonging to a German widow, Barbe Kostmann. Authorities had expelled Kostmann because her neighbors denounced her as a francophile shrew. Complicating the liquidation was the fact that Kostmann's daughter Elise and step-daughter Marguerite, both of whom had gained French citizenship through their deceased Alsatian father, continued to live in the sequestered apartment belonging to their widowed mother. Although an Alsatian's wife would have been entitled to French citizenship, an Alsatian's widow was not. This liquidation required not only throwing French citizens into the street, but also depriving French orphans of their inheritance. Even if the French treasury

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28 "Treaty of Peace," art. 74; ADBR AL 121, 1051, decree, 23 May 1919.
29 AMH, 1W20, Klee to CGR, 25 August 1919.
30 ADBR AL 121, 1056, services general to CGR, 28 October 1922; superior tribunal to justice, 20 November 1922.
gained from the sale of the property, it faced throwing two citizens on the public dole. The outcome of the case is unknown, but unattractive alternatives tended to discourage officials from pushing Frenchification too far.

Issues of nationality brought a number of property problems to Anne Strübel. An Alsatian woman of French origin, Strübel married a German in 1899, and lived in Paris from 1904 to 1914. When the war broke out, Strübel and her husband fled France to avoid being sent to a concentration camp, abandoning their furniture in Paris as well as a watch and jewelry shop that Strübel understood were then sold by local authorities. After the war, Strübel qualified for French citizenship automatically, and her husband naturalized as French. French officials sequestered property in Bischwiller that belonged to Strübel’s German father-in-law. Strübel and her husband, having lost their property in Paris for being German in 1914, were now to lose their inheritance in Alsace despite being French. In addition to losing the inheritance, the couple would face having to provide for his destitute German parents if the liquidation went forward.\(^{31}\) A market in Alsace bound together owners, creditors, investors, producers and consumers. Rights were bought and sold, inherited and passed down. Frenchification’s attempts to insert national categories into this market, or to alter valuations based on nationality, put the state at odds both with the markets and with Alsatians’ interests.\(^{32}\)

Frenchification began with sweeping decrees that French officials issued for local authorities to sequester and liquidate Germans’ property without oversight or controls. Lacking resources, French authorities did little to monitor the process, and instead relied on Alsatian officials—primarily holdovers from the German era—to take action and

\(^{31}\) ADBR AL 121, 1056, Strübel to Regional Tribunal, 16 June 1921.
\(^{32}\) ADBR AL 121, 1051, CGR to justice, 23 May 1923.
report progress. In early December 1918, French officials ordered the sequestration of "all German goods and property in Alsace... of whatever nature they may be... All operations relative to these goods are rigorously forbidden. Controllers will take over immediately." The order was self-nullifying, because it was impossible for officials to monitor all economic activity. The crisis circumstances, however, and Germany's wartime efforts at total economic mobilization made the decree seem typical of the war and its aftermath. A subsequent decree authorized the forced sale of all sequestered properties. These two orders did not transfer all German property to French ownership, but they did make it possible to sequester and liquidate many things that the appropriate official cast his eyes upon, and local officials enjoyed broad discretion in applying the decrees.

The hastily designed system to liquidate German property in Alsace had one fatal flaw: France's extreme lack of capital. The war had depleted the French treasury, and the government lacked sufficient resources to leverage its operations in Alsace or to work its will. Individuals could manipulate the government, regulations, and property for easy profits, but the government could not command production. Frenchification's economic gains rarely benefited the French state, and collusion and corruption were endemic to the system as officials and opportunists transformed public policies into private gains. Black-market speculators made great profits at the end of the war from confusion over property. In early December 1918, French carpetbaggers and Alsatian opportunists found

33 ADBR AL 121, 1051, decree, 3 December 1918.
35 ADBR AL 121, 1051, decree, 17 April 1919.
36 Harvey describes the "massive influx of French capital" as an invasive takeover of Alsatian industry. See Constructing Class, 138. Most French capitalists, however, seemed to have arrived in Alsace nearly empty-handed after the war with hopes of restoring their capital from what could be easily exploited.
Germans selling their property at fire-sale prices. The Germans feared that the French
government would expel them at any moment and take all of their property.\textsuperscript{37} Speculation in property and forged identity cards boosted a black market already well
entrenched from war-time deprivations. Currency speculation and counterfeit papers
enabled daring and desperate Germans to profit along with Frenchmen and Alsatians who
were exploiting the turmoil of sudden French sovereignty.\textsuperscript{38} Official controls were
supposed to centralize and monopolize power, but private machinations transformed
public policies into personal profits.

State authorities sometimes assisted private speculations for political reasons, as
in the takeover of the \textit{Strassbürger-Post}, which authorities seized soon after French
forces arrived in Strasbourg. A French investor, Minck, back-dated a sales contract with
the previous German owners to make it appear that the paper was French property before
it was sequestered. Minck, who wanted to reopen the paper as the \textit{Journal d’Alsace et de
Lorraine}, asked French authorities to approve the purchase in confidence to preempt
competitive bidding from other French investors. The commissioner’s staff treated the
question as a political one, and appeared satisfied with Minck’s pledge that the paper
would be “very francophile” and amenable to the authorities. The staff’s
recommendation to dispense with competitive bidding and approve the sale was designed
to serve “political interests.”\textsuperscript{39} Similarly, in January 1919, a consortium of French
industrialists moved aggressively to acquire the just-sequestered tanneries of Adler and

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnote{37} Ludmann, \textit{Stepchild of the Rhine}, 238; Charles Spindler, \textit{L’Alsace pendant la Guerre} (Strasbourg:
Librairie Treuttel & Wurtz, 1925), 749.

\footnote{38} The market for counterfeit French identity cards employed some Germans. See ADBR AL 121, 965,
police to CGR, 8 September 1919. A German factory owner profited from currency conversions that the
French government specifically forbade. See ADBR AL 121, 906, anon to high commissioner, 25 January
1919.

\footnote{39} ADBR AL 121, 1055, note, 28 May 1919.
\end{footnotesize}
Oppenheimer in Strasbourg. Instructions governing liquidations would not be published for another three months, but the group asked officials with whom could they discuss terms immediately; they had no intention of waiting for competitors to join the bidding.\textsuperscript{40}

Closed bidding on properties promoted favoritism. It not only protected Frenchmen from having to bid against Americans, it also protected insiders from having to bid against other Frenchmen. A liquidator, Champigneulle, agreed to sell a property to one Villemin on the condition that Villemin sell the property back to Champigneulle five years later—their private agreement presumably determined the price on both ends of the deal. The reason for the five-year delay was that regulations required purchasers of liquidated properties to retain the property for that period or the sale would be voided. Five years after the liquidation, Villemin sold the property back to Champigneulle. A regional tribunal discovered the transaction and, judging it to have been fraudulent, nullified the original sale. An Appeals Court, however, determined that no extant regulations forbade liquidators from making such arrangements and allowed Champigneulle to take possession of the property.\textsuperscript{41}

Champigneulle's case seems to have been one of the few that made it to judicial review, and if Minck's purchase of the \textit{Journal d'Alsace et de Lorraine} is any indication, the press in Alsace either consistently supported the authorities or was very cautious with its criticism. The nuanced language that one journal, \textit{L'Alsace Française}, used in airing corruption charges against two officials might suggest that the journal was a knowing pawn in a high-level political struggle. In 1921, Estaunié and Coste, respectively the chairman of the Commission of Liquidations and the inspector general of mines, were

\textsuperscript{40} ADBR AL 121, 1055, sub-prefect to high commissioner, 8 January 1919.  
\textsuperscript{41} Cour de cassation, chambre civile, 8 April 1932, \textit{Revue Juridique d'Alsace et de Lorraine} (1932), 521–22.
personally responsible for the "delicate mission" of running liquidations in Alsace. "It is with profound sadness," L'Alsace Française reported,

that we have seen, in particular, placed in doubt the disinterestedness of these two men, with rumors accusing them of having wanted to give the best part [of the liquidations] to certain friends ... the character of Estaunie and Coste, their entire histories, testify to their perfect disinterestedness. ... granted the sequestrations and liquidations have not proceeded without errors. Such is the way of all human endeavors. But the principles they follow have been healthy, and the men they have led have been guided by justice and probity in the most noble sense of the word.\textsuperscript{42}

There were scattered salvos in the press concerning the liquidations and corruption, but authorities generally avoided asking too many questions about particular cases.\textsuperscript{43}

If some individuals turned Frenchification to private gain, however, authorities also stopped manipulations that risked outraging the public. In Strasbourg, for example, French authorities refused to assist an attempt by French and Alsatian butchers to set up a monopoly by driving out their German counterparts. In April and May 1919, a group of Alsatian butchers called for the authorities to shut down German shops as affronts to the national cause, but the CGR rejected their demands as threatening the public interest.

Although French policy supported such expulsions, the government faced considerable labor unrest in Alsace and great difficulty assuaging popular discontent.\textsuperscript{44} A monopoly

\textsuperscript{42} L'Alsace Française (26 February 1921), 137.
\textsuperscript{43} Certain parallels can be drawn to the liquidation of church properties in France earlier in the century. That process was halted after charges of scandal and corruption erupted in the parliament. Interestingly, Alexandre Millerand, the CGR in Alsace from March 1919 to January 1920 and one of the guiding hands of the processes of sequestration and liquidation, had played a prominent role in the liquidation of church properties earlier and had seen his wealth grow considerably in the process. See Marjorie Milbank Farrar, \textit{Principled Pragmatist: The Political Career of Alexandre Millerand} (Berg: New York: 1991), 100. Farrar admits Millerand enjoyed a "substantial income" during the time that he involved himself in the liquidation cases, but Farrar dismisses—I think too lightly—charges by Emile Combes and others of corruption on Millerand's part.
\textsuperscript{44} Harvey, \textit{Constructing Class}, 142-45.
would have enabled the Alsatian butchers to raise prices, and incited popular protests against the government at a most inopportune time.\footnote{ADBR AL 121, 1055, Butchers’ Association to CGR, 16 April 1919; Schwartz to CGR, 14 May 1919; commissioner to CGR, 16 May 1919.}

Private manipulations, French heirs’ protests, and public policy concerns all muddled Frenchification, and contrary to an economist’s assumption, all property in Alsace did not “automatically [become] French in the same manner that it had previously been German.”\footnote{Guy Greer, The Ruhr-Lorraine Industrial Problem: A Study of the Economic Inter-Dependence of the Two Regions and Their Relation to the Reparation Question (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1925), 210.} Many Germans retained their property through difficult, frustrating processes in which French officials sequestered properties, ordered or halted liquidations, lifted sequestrations, lost paperwork, delayed action, and imposed new sequestrations in response to national political crises and reparations problems with Germany. French officials sequestered almost 4,000 properties in Strasbourg by the end of 1922. They canceled a third of these sequestrations under pressure or because the owners naturalized as French. Officials liquidated another third, and in December 1922 still had a third under sequestration. These proportions of sequestrations and liquidations were roughly consistent for all of Alsace.\footnote{JO CD, Lorraine deputy Robert Schuman, 13 December 1923, 6784.}

The CGR was sensitive to charges of corruption and to French citizen’s protests, but he also feared the damage Frenchification did to market activity, investment, and trade. Thus, he wanted to complete the process quickly. In 1919, a member of parliament exposed rumors of liquidation scandals and demanded that the process be halted and control measures implemented, including open bidding and judicial review, all according to French law.\footnote{ADBR AL 121, 1051, Lafont to premier, 6 August 1919.} The CGR countered that the American competitive threat made it
impossible to apply French law in Alsace. Sequestration, the CGR acknowledged, ruined property values, those of factories especially, because bureaucrats lacked the skills, experience, and the personal investment that made private owners effective managers. No one—bureaucrats, the state, and certainly not property owners—invested time, money, or energy in property that was or might be sequestered because the risk was too great. Incompetent administrators mismanaged properties or ruthlessly exploited them for personal gains. Since sequestration was harmful, liquidations had to proceed rapidly, without allowing judicial interference to slow the process. Otherwise, prolonged sequestration threatened "the certain ruin of a great many businesses and industries, without profit for anyone."49 The CGR felt the pressure of the markets, and called for the swift completion of Frenchification so that new French owners could return property to productive use.

The CGR recognized the problems, but could not speed Frenchification, even though property controls prolonged and deepened the region’s economic troubles. The exclusion of rich Americans from the market deprived it of buyers well positioned both to bid high for the properties and to make the investments needed to restore productivity. Americans could pay cash, and the French government desperately needed the revenue. Frenchification, however, ran counter to economic recovery. American investors, or, from the French perspective, carpetbaggers, would have expected burgeoning manufacturing and trade with Germany on the Rhine. Economic recovery on the Rhine

49 ADBR AL 121, 1051, CGR to premier, 21 June 1919; note for the premier, n.d.
represented a booming opportunity for Americans, and an unacceptable security threat to French policy-makers.  

When Frenchification restricted the liquidation market to French nationals, however, it exacerbated economic problems in the region. In contrast to resource-rich Americans, French buyers generally required government loans—actually delays in payment requirements—to purchase commercial properties, and then did not have capital to invest in revitalizing property or improving production. In fact, many “buyers” failed to make their required payments and asked the government to reduce the sums due since the country’s ongoing industrial crisis made recovery or production nearly impossible. The government determined that it could not foreclose on liquidated factories and shops and return them to sequestration for non-payment. Foreclosure would only worsen unemployment and force the government to liquidate the properties yet again, but for even less than the nominal sums that it had still not received.  

A parliamentary report of December 1923 noted that of the 1.3 billion francs in bids accepted on 4,520 liquidated properties over the previous four years, most “was far from being paid.” Something had to be done to improve payment collections while recognizing “the difficult situations of certain acquirers,” but the report offered no solutions.  

The commercial property market in Alsace was not alone in facing ruin. It became apparent in 1919 that the rapid, forced liquidation of much of Alsace’s housing threatened to flood that market. Frenchmen after the war were not flush with cash, far

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50 From the French perspective, European recovery could only proceed within the context of French security and German reparations to France. Undoubtedly, American investors in Alsace would have prioritized capital returns through German commerce and trade rather than French security. For French security and economic policies after the war, see McDougal, Rhineland Diplomacy, 360–66.  
51 ADBR AL 121, 1051, council to CGR, 10 March 1922. Financial losses sometimes seem less painful to ignore than to acknowledge.  
52 JO, CD PV. 13 December 1923, No. 6784.
from it. Huge swaths of the north were devastated and required billions for repair, and the government had repeatedly scraped the citizenry’s savings to fund war loans, which it now faced considerable difficulty repaying.\textsuperscript{53} Prices in Alsace, depressed by the war and by sequestrations, would have to fall further to meet prospective buyers’ very limited capacities. The sales of these properties, whose proceeds were supposed to benefit the French treasury, would yield the state almost no profit after accounting for the expenses of sequestration, administration, and liquidation. In August 1919, the mayor of Strasbourg, a Socialist, fearing that the city’s real-estate market would collapse, insisted that the government suspend the liquidations, which he calculated would involve a third of the city’s housing.\textsuperscript{54} The mayor’s opposition slowed Frenchification even as the CGR feared its delay.\textsuperscript{55}

Sequestrations and liquidations magnified commercial uncertainty, heightened risk and undermined production. An American observer in 1921 thought Alsatian production under French rule was perhaps only half what it had been in 1913 under the Germans, but the comparison was, as the author recognized, quite misleading. Alsace’s recovery depended on both the German and French economies, the former wracked by inflation, the latter unable to rebuild and deeply in debt. Frenchification hurt Alsace because it hindered the region’s trade with its most important markets in Germany, and the sequestrations and liquidations were additional burdens. French policies bore the brunt of Alsatians’ criticism for their economic consequences.\textsuperscript{56} French officials were

\textsuperscript{54} ADBR AL 121, 1051, mayor to CGR, 27 August 1919.
\textsuperscript{55} ADBR AL 121, 1051, CGR to mayor, 20 September 1919.
\textsuperscript{56} ADBR AL 121, 126, extract, \textit{The World} newspaper, 21 February 1921.
sensitive to public protests, and criticism convinced officials to scale back on
Frenchification.

Because Frenchification concerned both economic and security policy, the
political climate shaped authorities' commitment to Frenchification. In chapter four, we
saw that the government's economic concerns—and likewise its political ones—initially
strengthened demands to expel Germans, but exclusion ebbed and surged as
circumstances and conflicting interests and priorities changed. More than in many other
regions or departments, French interests in Alsace grew directly from the government's
foreign concerns, and international crises had a disproportionate impact on
Frenchification. In 1922, French authorities grew increasingly frustrated with Germany's
failure to meet its reparations obligations, and the French government was equally
frustrated with the Soviet Union and Britain, whose efforts to ease reparations to bolster
European economic recovery appeared, in Paris, to ignore France's security concerns and
just claims against Germany.\textsuperscript{57} This frustration inaugurated a renewed commitment to
Frenchification in Alsace, as the French government determined to strike where it could
at German interests. The government launched a new wave of expulsions in August 1922
and attempted a complete seizure of all remaining German capital in the region.

In a hastily organized strike on German interests, French authorities sequestered
all Germans' property in Alsace and froze their bank accounts. The local press soon
protested the orders, and the prefect of Bas-Rhin (Northern Alsace) cautioned that many

\textsuperscript{57} Most of the post-war reparations debate remained hostage to the French strategic dilemma described
earlier, epitomized by Clemenceau's demands for security and Keynes' call for treaty revision to assist
economic recovery. See McDougall, \textit{Rhineland Diplomacy}; M. Trachtenberg, \textit{Reparation in World
Politics: France and European Economic Diplomacy, 1916–1923} (New York, 1980); and, Kent, \textit{Spoils of
War}. For an example of French officials' frustration with Germany in 1922, see ADBR AL 121, 126,
consul to CGR, 3 August 1922.
Alsations were likely to oppose the sequestrations.\textsuperscript{58} Businesses and banks protested that freezing Germans' accounts threatened Alsace's economy. Even if these accounts represented only a fraction of those in the region, freezing them would stop a large number of checks from clearing and leave bills unpaid, threatening both businesses and banks.\textsuperscript{59} On August 10, the company Tanneries de France protested that the frozen accounts prevented it from cashing checks received for merchandise it had delivered to Frankfurt and Cologne. The company demanded a waiver so that it could cash the checks in order to pay its own bills to other French suppliers.\textsuperscript{60} In a separate incident, a Chamber of Commerce pledged its uncompromising French patriotism and support for the government, but protested that the measures severely threatened the regional economy. Alsace and Lorraine's factories depended heavily on exports to Germany, and the seizure of the accounts had frozen most of the region's trade. The region's winegrowers faced disaster, because their seasonal business relied completely on German wine-makers to purchase the upcoming harvest. The Germans refused to purchase the grapes for fear of having their funds and/or the produce sequestered; as a result, the French crop might rot for lack of a market.\textsuperscript{61}

Authorities' commitment to Frenchification wavered as complaints mounted in the press and protests arrived from banks, businesses, city councils, and chambers of commerce. On August 13, the CGR authorized prefects to grant exceptional waivers, insisting that they exercise prudence to protect French interests without weakening the

\textsuperscript{58} ADBR AL 121, 962, CGR to prefect, 4 August 1922.
\textsuperscript{59} The French firm of Costimex delivered fifteen tons of corn to a German businessman in Kehl on July 31 and August 2, 1922, and then found itself unable to cash the buyer's check for 8700 francs because the government had frozen the German's account. See ADBR AL 121, 962, report, 5 August 1922; prefect to CGR, 6 August 1922; CGR to prefect, n.d.; Costimex Strasbourg to high commissioner, 5 August 1922.
\textsuperscript{60} ADBR AL 121, 962, Tanneries de France to CGR, 10 August 1922.
\textsuperscript{61} ADBR AL 121, 1053, chamber of commerce to CGR, 14 August 1922; chamber of commerce to premier, 18 August 1922.
pressure on Germany or Germans. One plea involved a German widow, a shopowner, who could not pay her French creditors since her bank account was frozen. In response to her request for a waiver, the prefect asked obtusely if she did not have other funds somewhere that she might use to avoid the need for an exception. Frustrated prefects, overwhelmed with increasing demands for waivers, delegated waiver authority to sub-prefects. As complaints and waivers spread, the pressure to call off the retaliation increased, and on August 24 the government lifted the sequestrations and freed Germans' accounts. In little more than three weeks, the economic chaos wrought by sequestering property and freezing bank accounts had discredited Frenchification in Alsace.

Frenchification did not culminate with the retaliation of August 1922. Many Germans remained in Alsace pending naturalization, and their property remained sequestrered or under threat of sequestration, since liquidation and expulsion depended on naturalization decisions. By 1925, when authorities moved to sequester or liquidate the property of Germans whose applications had been rejected, popular opposition was so widespread that the justice ministry formally relaxed the rules on sequestration. Only in exceptional circumstances, and only with the explicit authorization of political authorities, would justice officials in the future pursue the sequestration and liquidation of particular Germans' property, even of those who had been refused naturalization. It was neither by decree nor by legislation that Germans regained property rights in Alsace, because the letter of both remained hostile to German ownership. German property rights reemerged because German rights were too difficult to isolate from French and Alsatian

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62 ADBR AL 121, 962, CGR to prefect, 13 August 1922.
63 ADBR AL 121, 962, prefet to sub-prefect, n.d.; prefect to sub-prefects, 24 August 1922.
64 ADBR AL 121, 962, CGR to prefect, 25 August 1922.
65 ADBR AL 121, 1051, justice, 12 May 1925.
rights, and German rights too bound up in regional economic interests for the government to strike Germans without raising howls from Alsatians. French officials relaxed Frenchification because, while it hurt Germany, it was of little benefit to France.

Sovereignty versus Jurisprudence

Anatole Périer, a French jurist appointed director of the Liquidations Service of Alsace and Lorraine, tried to explain in 1925 why the unusual circumstances under which France had regained the regions enabled the government to recreate the law, and accordingly to dispose of all property, as the government saw fit. In recent centuries, Périer wrote, sovereign powers had gradually agreed to respect property as an international right, and had protected property regardless of border changes. The Great War, however, and Germany’s ruthless destruction of French property, nullified Germans’ property rights because they had failed to respect others’ rights.\footnote{A French jurist explained that the nature of the Great War, which was a battle for survival between nations, invalidated previous international commitments to respect private property and law among the European powers. Germany’s deliberate destruction and theft of French property in the occupied territories during the war justified every measure that French officials took in Alsace, and the judiciaries’ role was to validate or ‘regularize’ the process of Frenchification to ensure its complete success. See Périer, Séquestres, 1–4.} Just as market forces and property’s bundling of rights worked against Frenchification, established law—with property as its largest component—proved a huge obstacle to the French government’s efforts to integrate Alsace fully into the French legal system.

If, as Keynes portrayed it, French policy towards Germany after 1918 was to continue the war by economic means, French officials faced the risk that Germany would respond in kind, following a simple strategy of reciprocity. One of the Treaty of Versailles’ fatal flaws was that one party, Germany, had only a momentary interest in abiding by its terms. After that moment passed, France was increasingly unable to
compel German compliance with the treaty. France would then be forced to modify its policies—and its approach to law in Alsace—with a view to how those policies would be received in Germany. In the same way that the French government tried to use Frenchification in Alsace as an instrument to punish Germany, the German frontier states of Baden and the Palatinate could hold Alsatians' interests hostage to French respect for Germans' rights in Alsace. The need for reciprocity forced French officials to back away from Frenchification in favor of the rule of law and German property rights.

The frontier exception, which in chapter four described French authorities' exemption of frontier dwellers from expulsion, applied equally to property. As with expulsion, the property exemption did not arise from the Treaty of Versailles, but from the existence on the frontiers of transnational communities whose political, social, and economic ties—Alsatian, French, and German—spanned national borders. If the French government struck at German interests in the frontier, the governments of Baden or the Palatinate could strike at Alsatian interests in their states. Even if the French government was willing to proceed against German interests, Alsatian municipalities refused to cooperate with the government against German communities across the border with whom they had long-standing ties.

The French government recognized the frontier exception in 1921, when the CGR instructed the Ministry of Justice not to sequester Germans' land within ten kilometers of the border. The acknowledgement of a frontier with a specific depth points to a broader realization that uniform rule did not accompany territorial sovereignty, and good relations with Baden and the Palatinate increasingly discouraged harsh treatment of their citizens'.

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67 ADBR AL 121, 1053, CGR to justice, 4 August 1924.
Alsatian properties. As with expulsions, the commitment to property exceptions fluctuated. In December 1923, the relative failure of the Ruhr occupation and renewed economic crisis led the French government to seek some gain through Frenchification, and the government ordered that all frontier property belonging to Baden municipal governments be confiscated and turned over to Alsatian municipalities. Most of the Alsatian municipalities seem to have balked at the offer, because they would have gained little and lost much by alienating the German communities they depended on for trade. After French authorities seized a forest in northern Alsace that belonged to a German church in the Palatinate, the Alsatian city of Wissembourg complained to the French that the Palatinate government was threatening to seize Wissembourg’s properties in that state. The CGR cancelled the seizure in respect of Wissembourg’s interests, and German property rights in Alsace became more secure. The threatened retaliation violated the Treaty of Versailles, but the German states’ increasing willingness to seize French-owned properties forced French officials to accept reciprocity.

While reciprocity constrained Frenchification with blunt force, judicial precedents provided equally compelling, if more nuanced, limits to French sovereignty. Since French rule began as a military occupation, French officials did not initially view law as a hindrance to their power. They treated the transition to civil rule not as the introduction of civil rights, but as the transfer of absolute authority from military officers to appointed civilian officials. The highest ranking French official in Alsace in 1919, Alexandre Millerand, justified the state’s sequestration and liquidation of German private property

68 AMH. 1W20, CGR to prefect, n.d.; sub-prefect, 25 July 1921.
69 ADBR AL 121, 1053, decree, 18 December 1923.
70 The Dahn church’s forest had been under repeated threat of sequestration since 1919. See ADBR AL 121, 1055, Clemenceau to Cardinal Amette, 5 December 1919; and ADBR AL 121, 1053, CGR to procureur, 4 August 1924.
as inherent to the right of conquest, a philosophy attuned to the mandate issued him by Georges Clemenceau.\textsuperscript{71} As we have seen, Clemenceau’s deputy equated claims of private rights with enemy machinations, and the director of the French Liquidations Service argued that German war crimes justified everything the French state did in Alsace.\textsuperscript{72} These attitudes, however, did not make arbitrary rule possible, and social order forced state officials to recognize the legitimacy of most existing civil, criminal, and commercial codes that Alsatians relied upon in their daily affairs.

The problem that the lawyer in the Haegeli’s divorce case brought up—“what statute is in force”—frequently bedeviled French officials in Alsace in 1919. In some cases, officials found it convenient to recognize German statutes, in others to claim French, and in still others—as in property liquidations—to rely on decrees and deny the applicability of either German or French legislation. The French parliament passed a law in October 1919 that brought some coherence to this process by declaring that until all French laws were introduced in Alsace, the region would be governed according to the legislation and requirements “currently in force.”\textsuperscript{73} This freed French officials to determine which decrees and German-era legislation were extant. German legislation, French occupation decrees, and other French legislation together created a body of jurisprudence that demanded intensive study and excluded many French jurists from practicing in Alsace because of the peculiar corpus of knowledge required.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{71} ADBR AL 121, 1051, CGR to premier, 21 June 1919.
\textsuperscript{72} Périer, Séquestrations, 6–9.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{74} A law professor, J. P. Niboyet, at the University of Strasbourg, provided an introduction to the intricacies of Alsatian law between the wars in Répertoire Pratique de Droit et de Jurisprudence d’Alsace et Lorraine: Lois Civiles-Lois Commerciales—Lois Pénales—Organisation Administrative et Fiscale, Tome Premier (Paris: Recueil Sirey, 1925). Niboyet’s work make it clear that a Paris-trained lawyer would have to undertake a new course of study in order to practice in Alsace. A Paris-trained lawyer would also have
Pharmacy laws presented French officials with a complicated precedent that confounded the problems of Frenchification, legal assimilation, and market forces. Authorities sequestered over sixty pharmacies chartered under a German law of 1877. This law created corporate pharmacies that could be sold or inherited, and a 1903 law made each a local monopoly. Each chartered monopoly was worth far more that the land, building, location, or goods involved, and it was as a chartered monopoly that each pharmacy entered sequestration. French pharmacies were not chartered monopolies, and liquidating the pharmacies as French concerns would ruin their value, reducing the sale proceeds to the French state. After much debate, liquidation officials decided to maintain the German charters intact until the unforeseeable time when parliament would agree to overhaul pharmacy laws throughout France, already regarded as obsolete.\(^75\)

Public contracts created similar problems of precedents. French commissioners badgered Strasbourg city authorities in 1919 to cashier German nationals on the city payroll. Of the city's thousands of employees, French officials asked questions about musicians on the city orchestra, about a customs inspector, and every other employee who came to their attention. Strasbourg officials largely agreed to discharge German workers, but the mayor drew the line when it came to city contracts and municipal regulations. Certain German employees had guaranteed pension benefits because of union contracts that the city would have to buy out at a cost of almost two million francs if they were suddenly discharged. Since neither the state nor the city could afford to fund

\(^75\) ADBR AL 121, 1051, justice to secretary general, 9 October 1919.
a contract buyout, the mayor declined to fire the German employees.76 Many such German-era contracts remained intact because the government could not invalidate them.

One of the earliest and most sweeping attempts to Frenchify Alsace created perhaps the longest-lasting obstacle to that process, and it revealed Frenchification for what it was, rather than for what it was intended to be. Originally an idealistic vision for integrating Alsace’s people and institutions into the French nation by purging the region of Germans and their institutions, Frenchification became another sedimentary layering of influences—social, economic, and political—on the land. Judicial precedent demonstrates this sedimentation through the adjudication of currency exchange and monetary value. In late November 1918, Clemenceau tried to redefine Alsace swiftly by decreeing the exchange of German marks for French francs. The war had placed great strains on the mark, the franc, and the pound equally, but the mark collapsed rapidly after November 11 as inflation spread. Clemenceau instructed Alsatians—but not Germans in Alsace—to exchange their marks at the generous rate of 1.25 francs to the mark in December. Clemenceau also directed that all legal contracts in Alsace were to have their valuations converted at the decreed rate.77 Alsatians appreciated Clemenceau’s generosity, as did currency smugglers of all nationalities.78 Alsatians’ gains were short-lived, however, and the marks that the French government bought fell steadily to as little

76 AMS, Central Division, 40–221, high commissioner to mayor, 27 December 1918; high commissioner to mayor, 6 March 1919; high commissioner to mayor, 15 March 1919; mayor to high commissioner, 20 March 1919; commissioner to mayor, 11 April 1919; mayor to CGR, 24 April 1919.
77 Institut du droit local Alsacien-Mosellain (IDL), Russian Bonds, decree, 26 November 1918. In comparison, the official rate on November 11 had been 0.7 francs to the mark.
78 Philippe Husser, Journal d’un Instituteur Alsacien, 1914–1951 (Paris: Hachette, 1989), 164–65; Keynes criticized the Belgian and the French governments for exchanging their respective francs at generous rates to benefit newly liberated populations as good politics and foolish economics. Both governments apparently were speculating on a subsequent rise in the value of the mark, or at least on their ability to transfer the losses to Germany through reparations. Instead, Belgium and France suffered considerable losses from the subsequent plunge in the value of the marks they had bought. See his Economic Consequences, 123.
as 0.0015 francs to the mark by September 1923. Alsatian courts were inundated with cases of individuals and firms who suffered the disastrous results of Clemenceau's having arbitrarily changed contract values in December 1918.\(^79\) While Clemenceau could decree the official exchange rate of francs to marks, he could not ordain the value of either currency; the decree benefited those who understood how best to exploit public controls for private gains, or at least to minimize private losses. Clemenceau's decree was an extreme form of the war's "politicization of the market" that had turned Alsatians against the German Empire and after 1918 would feed Alsatian resentment against France.\(^80\)

Many individuals and businesses with deposits in German institutions could not access their funds in December 1918 due to German political turmoil and transportation and communications problems. Those who could not retrieve their deposits from Germany missed the favorable conversion opportunity and saw inflation erode their accounts, as the official French rate declined to 2.5 marks to the franc by July 1919, 5 marks in December 1919, and 15 marks by December 1921.\(^81\) As the mark collapsed, so did many Alsatians' German bank accounts, but their debts in francs soared, because so many more marks had to be gathered to support the 1 December 1918 rate. At least one party to every contract faced huge losses, if not bankruptcy.

Contract values became matters of business survival or extinction. A credit union in Metz, Lorraine and an Alsatian bank fought a six-year court battle over the conversion of funds that the credit union had deposited in the bank's Berlin branch in November

\(^79\) Périer, Séquestres, 170–77.
\(^81\) ADBR AL 121, 1051, taux officiel, 22 April 1922.
1918. The credit union sued the bank because the latter, claiming transportation and communications difficulties during the German Revolution, had failed to repatriate the funds to Alsace by December 1918 to convert them according to the French decree. A Metz court found in favor of the credit union, but an Alsatian appeals court overturned the judgement, finding in favor of the bank and handing the loss to the credit union.\textsuperscript{82} Every open contract that existed in Alsace as of 11 November 1918 was subject to litigation. In the battle between the credit union and the bank, the local civil code and the fact that the principals involved "were created under local law" carried as much weight in the court findings as French law. In another case, lawyers for the city of Strasbourg sparred with a German national for years over the exchange rate due on a property the city had acquired from an Alsatian with a mortgage payable to a German.\textsuperscript{83}

One case on a mortgage brought together issues of gender, nationality, currency conversion, contracts, French legislation, and German-era legislation. A Mr. and Mrs. Braun were found liable in francs for a twenty-year-old mark mortgage they owed to a one de Tinseau. Mrs. Braun was a native Lorrainer, and hence originally French, while her husband was German born but naturalized as French as of November 11, 1918. De Tinseau was French. The appeals court in Colmar recognized the original German-based contract and cited the French civil code, the local German-based civil code, the Treaty of Versailles, French occupation decrees of November 1918 and April 1919 and French laws dating to 1790 and 1810 in upholding the currency conversion in the contract. It was Braun's status as a former enemy subject rather than as a naturalized Frenchmen that weighed most heavily in the court's decision. The case, arising out of the policy of

\textsuperscript{82} Société générale vs. Union lorraine, Revue Juridique d'Alsace et de Lorraine (1927), 79.
\textsuperscript{83} AMS, Central Division, 8-113, CM PV 5 July 1926; tribunal PV, 2 June 1927.
Frenchification, became an effective lien on the property until it was resolved in 1930. Frenchification had built upon, but not removed, many earlier precedents, including German contracts, laws, and legal decisions, to continue the evolution of property in Alsace.

Case law in Alsace and alterations in contractual obligations based on the monetary decree of November 1918 weighed down the Alsatian legal system with issues arising from the return to France. The layering of presidential decrees and special parliamentary legislation on top of selectively recognized local laws created a body of jurisprudence that was singularly applicable to Alsace and Lorraine, something that came to be known collectively as droit local, or local law, which the French parliament recognized in October 1919. Droit local was supposed to be a provisional clarification of Alsace’s muddled legal situation. Instead, along with adjudication processes and the power of precedents, droit local became an enduring barrier to French legal codes in Alsace. Between the wars, the French parliament received a succession of legislative proposals to bring various laws in Alsace into accord with those in France, including propositions in 1938 to introduce French pharmacy laws to Alsace and in 1939 to extend certain social legislation there. The parliament passed such proposals off to the Committee for Alsace and Lorraine, where most seem to have been quietly disposed by committee politics. Change had its partisans and opponents in Alsace as much as in France, and action was more easily blocked than accomplished.

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84 Revue Juridique d'Alsace et de Lorraine (5 May 1930), 452.
86 JO, CD, 1938, 3817; CD, 1939, 4710.
Conclusion

Complications, protests, exceptions, compromises, and failed efforts left a legal mosaic in Alsace. Frenchmen owned Alsatian properties the value of which derived from German laws. Some German residents regained their property rights, although many lost their property without compensation. Jurists in Alsace required training in both German and French legal precedents as well as a strong grounding in the provisions and applicability of the Treaty of Frankfurt (1871), the Treaty of Versailles (1919), and the occupation decrees of 1918 and 1919. The population's overwhelming reliance on German was a linguistic barrier to French lawyers. The continued citation of German precedents in Alsatian jurisprudence demonstrated the embedded nature of law and its incompatibility with national categorizations, despite the continued reference to national categories in legal decisions. The French reintegration of Alsace posed tremendous legal problems for Alsatians, and often pitted their interests against one another. Adjudication resolved their differences, but added a layer of jurisprudence to the region that was markedly different from legal issues and property rights as they existed elsewhere in France.

If Frenchification was, as I suggested earlier and as the successive accumulation of legal precedent would indicate, simply an additional layering of influences in Alsatian history, then national transformation from German to French may seem too high a standard to apply in judging its success or failure. At the end of the Great War, and for some time before and after, the nation to many seemed essential. In both Germany and France, many people treated Alsace's complete absorption as a prerequisite to national fulfillment. In France, Clemenceau was determined "to expel Germany completely from
Alsace-Lorraine, thus rupturing at a blow the forty-seven years of integration.\textsuperscript{87}

Modern states consistently struggle over issues of immigration, naturalization, and property and civil rights, and there is little reason to wonder that French leaders focused on those problems as they strove to consolidate French victory over Germany after 1918. French policy on "German" property in Alsace was tied directly to the state's reparations policies and France's need to rebuild. When the CGR ordered the liquidation of all sequestered German property in Alsace on April 17, 1919, the order came simultaneously with the government's announcement that it would undertake immediate reconstruction of the devastated departments without waiting for the flow of reparations.\textsuperscript{88} Revenues from liquidations were supposed to assist the French treasury in beginning reconstruction. As it was, a devastated economy and faltering markets could not undergird the government's political objectives. Property could be taken but not transformed, and judicial processes had to build on local precedents, because they already distinguished property from what existed elsewhere. French policies did not transform Alsace, but they did mark the region's politics of exclusion, its property rights, and its legal processes. If legal transformation did not occur, however, the rhetoric of transformation was a powerful force in Alsatian politics. The final chapter will examine the cultural impact of Frenchification on the processes of commemoration. French policies influenced how Alsatians interpreted the past, and Alsatians' commemoration of the dead of the Great War was a struggle to clarify their places within the nation.

\textsuperscript{87} McDougall, \textit{Rhineland Diplomacy}, 104.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 74.
PART THREE

NATIONALIZING THE DEAD

IN ALSATIAN COMMEMORATION
Chapter Six
"They died with France in their hearts": Alsace, French commemoration, and a German past, 1918–1939

A commemorative platitude holds that soldiers die in war "for their fatherland."

The platitude’s work is metaphysical; it constructs atemporal bonds between a supposed community of people and a bounded territory, which is assigned paternity over the community. Honoring war dead this way elevates the horrific to the sublime and, presumably, eases grief through collective honors. The joint military cemetery in Strasbourg-Cronenburg holds the remains of over five thousand war dead—both German and French—from both world wars. The cemetery’s central monument honors the dead of both countries for having made the ultimate sacrifice for the supreme cause of patrie. Strangely, many interred “Frenchmen” were not from France, and the German state denied that many of its dead were “Germans.” Stranger still are Alsatians, buried sometimes as German, other times as French, and who during their lives repeatedly exchanged those nationalities. Borderland chameleons had difficulty ascertaining their patrie, but they fought and died just the same.

Framing strategies guide commemoration by providing certain boundaries within which conflicts can be understood and interpreted. The cause of the patrie validates death in war as something removed from the common political struggles that beset the community, and exonerates state authorities of having caused the deaths either through aggression or incompetence.1 Commemoration performs cultural work; it “inscribes or reinscribes a set of symbolic codes, ordering discourses, and master narratives that recent

events . . . have disrupted, newly established, or challenged."² The Great War seemed rooted in national causes, but most soldiers died in armies that were not national but federal, imperial, or colonial. Nonetheless, post-war commemorations emphasized "national" codes in attempts to restore order in the cataclysm’s wake. National narratives also dominated commemoration in Alsace, where the challenge of reconciling the region’s German past with French sovereignty required considerable cultural dexterity.

Commemoration in Alsace demanded cultural shifts that set the region apart from both Germany and the rest of France, excepting of course Lorraine. Victory and defeat informed French and German commemoration respectively, while Alsatians endured bipolar sensations of having neither won nor lost. The chaos and confusion of the German collapse and the French “liberation” transformed many Alsatians into stunned mutes.³ Germans, in their collective defeat, disputed which class, party, faction, or group had betrayed the community. France’s victory lent the Republic a hitherto unknown legitimacy that eased government efforts to sponsor commemoration. In the rush to commemorate, Alsatians, Frenchmen, and Germans alike compiled collective memories that were “physical, emotive, pious, and affirmative.”⁴ Under French sovereignty, Alsatian commemoration wrestled, to an extreme degree, with “the instability of meaning, its resistance to attempts to stabilize or pin it down.”⁵ Alsatians sifted through

narratives of victimization, martyrdom, or heroism in search of ways to construct acceptable meanings for the Great War.

Republican struggles for the Nation

National legitimacy was a fundamental component of commemoration in France and Germany, and commemoration provided a sphere in which moral and institutional authority were mutually reinforcing. The French Third Republic and the Weimar Republic demonstrated the success and failure, respectively, of state governments to claim national legitimacy and to demonstrate that legitimacy through commemoration. The Weimar Republic faced intractable opposition from nationalist parties and conservatives who conveniently, but illogically, blamed the Republic for defeat and the harsh peace terms.\(^6\) Weimar officials, for their part, doubted their ability to sponsor national commemorative efforts and made only ambivalent attempts to claim national legitimacy for republican institutions, above all the constitution itself.\(^7\) In contrast, victory briefly enhanced the French Third Republic's national legitimacy.\(^8\) The Third Republic's efforts to sponsor successful, nationwide commemorative efforts reflected the simultaneous exercise and reinforcement of moral and institutional authority. This very process, of course, was likewise the cause of disputes surrounding the sponsorship of commemoration.

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\(^7\) George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars Through the Third Reich* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1975), 124.

\(^8\) What various historians have read as the "republican cult" of the immediate post-war period constituted a singular moment in which victory enabled the Republic successfully to equate itself with the nation. The rhetoric of the republican nation briefly enveloped without quieting broad and fundamental political disputes. The tent was sufficiently large that it could host all manner of disputes. This did not constitute unity, but rather the cultural triumph of particular codes through which disunity functioned. See Sherman, *Construction*, 3–7.
Many German communities just across the Rhine from Alsace made little or no reference to the nation on their interwar commemorative monuments. These monuments emphasized instead the glory of soldiers having made a Christ-like sacrifice. This absence of the nation reflected, to some degree, not only the Weimar Republic’s uncertain national legitimacy, but various German sovereigns’ long-standing tensions with the proponents of nationalism, often identified with liberal and/or democratic tendencies. Prussian kings in the nineteenth century justified the wars of Liberation against Napoleon as Christian rather than national crusades. After the war against France in 1870–71, the Kaiser and the Empire laid better claims to embodying the nation, and a commemorative wave of monument construction through the mid-1880s honored the Kaiser’s leadership in war. Commemoration in the federal Empire remained difficult, however, and limited in its reach, because of various authorities’ reluctance to accord too much credit to ordinary soldiers.

Tensions between autocratic powers and democratic aspirations, and between federal and state governments, continued to embroil German commemorative efforts. When war came in 1914, the Kaiser and the Empire served as focal points of national unity, but when 1918 brought defeat, revolution, and the dissolution of the Empire, no central figures remained to embody the nation. The Weimar Republic was likewise unable to assert itself as the legitimate custodian of national identity or to sponsor

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10 Koshar, *Monuments*, 50. According to Jay Winter, "the culture of popular nationalism in Imperial Germany was essentially Protestant. Sedan Day was to some extent an anti-Catholic festival." Such sectarian divisions made more difficult any attempt to promote national commemorations throughout the Empire. See Winter’s *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 84.
commemorations devoted to the Fatherland.\textsuperscript{12} Indeed, most German commemorative efforts offered future resurrection as a recompense for past sacrifice, while disdaining the present and regarding the Republic as little more than a temporary evil, unworthy of association with fallen heroes.\textsuperscript{13} In lieu of adequate national symbols or sponsorship, decentralized German commemorative efforts turned to Christian symbolism to honor the dead. Villages and cities built and dedicated their own monuments as acts of gratitude from the city to the city's dead, with little to no mention of either the nation or the state.

German commemoration was selective in its evocation of Christianity. There was no hint of the fall of man, of sin, or of the concept that all mankind was a creation of God. Instead, commemoration focused on sublime self-sacrifice and hinted at the promise of resurrection. Monuments depicted German soldiers' deaths as holy, Christ-like sacrifices for the local community, some with inscriptions from scripture, such as John 15:13: "No greater love has any man but that he give his life for his friend."\textsuperscript{14} Commemorative vocabulary sustained the sentiment, as monuments expressed thanks to the fallen heroes, or specifically described the dead's sacrifice as the price of the community's freedom.\textsuperscript{15} This perspective accorded with Germans' view of the war as essentially a defensive struggle against a broad coalition of powers whose object was to crush Germany. Evocations of the horrific devastations of the Thirty-Years' War and the

\textsuperscript{12} The Kaiser and the Second Reich relied heavily on the credibility won in military victories over Austria and France as well as the general economic success attending industrialization, but still faced considerable difficulties asserting their pre-eminent national legitimacy vis-à-vis other competing regional, social, or economic interests in Germany. George L. Mosse describes the Empire's failure to institutionalize national commemoration under its sponsorship through celebrations of Sedanstag, the anniversary of the victory of the French in 1870. See Mosse, \textit{Nationalization}, 91. To an even greater extent, the Weimar Republic distanced itself from the militarism associated with the war, and thereby alienated itself from the "national" cause. It could not subsequently claim to represent the nation, and nationalist parties saw the Republic as their domestic enemy. See Diehl, \textit{Thanks}, 18–19.

\textsuperscript{13} Mosse, \textit{Fallen Soldiers}, 79, 97.

\textsuperscript{14} Freistett, Baden-Württemberg.

\textsuperscript{15} Auenheim, Baden-Württemberg; Wintersdorf, Baden-Württemberg; Am Rhein, Baden-Württemberg; Ichenheim, Baden-Württemberg; Egingen, Baden-Württemberg.
Napoleonic invasions, when foreign armies laid waste to central Europe, gave the Great War purpose; German soldiers' sacrifices had kept foreign armies from again devastating the German homeland.\textsuperscript{16}

Scripture assured the living that death had been little more than a momentary interruption in soldiers' eternal lives of service to the Most High, such as a reference to Revelation 1:18, "I was dead, but see I live in eternity."\textsuperscript{17} Death was not agony, but a beatific transformation, a release from material decay to spiritual transcendence engineered through the complete denial of self. Death did not come from disease, deprivation, the maelstrom of battle, accidents, or friendly fire; whatever pain preceded it passed quickly and harmlessly. Self-sacrifice brought immediate transfiguration and ascension to the heavenly realm rather than a chaotic, bloody, and senseless death, and the dead assured the living that "In God, we live, move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28).\textsuperscript{18}

The monument in Berg, Rheinland-Pfalz captures the moment of transfiguration (fig. 6-1). It features a soldier, his duty complete, his eyes fixed on Christ, focusing on the sacrifice his death emulates. Christ himself has more regret and fear, feeling sympathetically the pain of transformation to which the soldier is oblivious, but Christ likewise focuses on the soldier and the sacrifice. The juxtaposition of Christ and the soldier is a bare step short of their becoming one figure, through the transfiguration of the soldier into the propitiation of sins and the author of new life, evoking typical Christian references to Christ. On a separate monument that the German army built in Alsace in

\textsuperscript{16} Koshar, Monuments, 86.
\textsuperscript{17} Cemetery chapel, Wintersdorf, Baden-Württemberg.
\textsuperscript{18} Allmannsweier, Baden-Württemberg. It is worth noting that the verse comes from the apostle Paul quoting an inscription on a Greek pantheistic monument.
1916, a German soldier actually replaced Christ on the cross. The monument is sixty feet tall, the imposing centerpiece of a military cemetery. The center of the cross features a bas-relief of a bare-chested German soldier looking to the west, toward the trenches and the enemy. The monument evokes the crucifix, but the soldier is not a broken, hanging figure like Christ, but rather a stalwart warrior ready even in death to continue the fight and sacrifice himself again if given the opportunity. As the monument’s iconography ties together the German soldier and Christ’s sacrifice, it also contributes to the forms that post-war German memorials would draw on. The linkage of Christ and the soldier provided German commemorative efforts after 1918 with codes and narratives of sacrifice that were well-suited to defeat.¹⁹

Many Germans treated the Weimar Republic (1919–1933) as a provisional state born of expediency, and the Republic was not able to sponsor or link itself to any nationwide commemoration of the dead. The National Socialist state, in contrast, would fully exploit the idea of nationhood as an instrument of political power. Hitler took power in early 1933 and then quickly dismantled the Republic. The Nazi state, in its claim to be the nation, transformed its opponents into traitors. It adopted earlier Christian and local commemorative iconography as its own and presented itself as the foundation of the German volk whose resurrection was foretold by the war deads’ self-sacrifice.²⁰

Germans’ deployment of Christian iconography in commemoration would endure into the Second World War, and the Nazi state suffered little if soldiers’ families

¹⁹ The German Army built the monument in the German military cemetery outside of Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines in Bas-Rhin using Romanian prisoners-of-war as forced, and severely malnourished, labor. German use of the crucifix in war art was widespread. Great controversy surrounded a Canadian work of art that commemorated an alleged German atrocity in which mocking German soldiers crucified a Canadian soldier. See Jay Winter, Sites of Memory, 92.
²⁰ Koshar, Monuments, 112, 120.
remembered their dead as sanctified warriors. The families of the dead sometimes printed death cards to announce the loss of loved ones at the front. In this way, friends and relatives learned of the death of Johann Biller, killed on the Russian front on August 11, 1942, at age 22. Biller’s family had printed on the reverse of the announcement a picture of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane, his hands folded in prayer and his face lifted up beseechinglly to the Heavenly Father. The caption comes from Matthew 26:39: “My father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

In Biller’s card and earlier memorials, codes of Christian sacrifice linked later wars with earlier ones, policies of one government with another. Traditional icons gave people a means of interpreting the world they experienced.

While narratives of holy sacrifice colored Germans’ remembrances of defeat, victory in France lent itself to republican narratives of national legitimacy. Premier Georges Clemenceau set that tone when he announced the Armistice to the French Parliament on November 11, 1918. In exultation, Clemenceau declared to wild cheering and applause that “France, yesterday the soldier of God, today the soldier of Humanity, will always be the soldier of the Ideal.”

Clemenceau linked the nation with codes that were critically important to all major factions in the country, including clericals and anti-clericals, conservatives and socialists; each could find a place in his words for their own icons. For a moment, the joy of peace, the grief of loss, and the relief of victory

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21 Author’s possession.
suggested that the French nation under the republic had achieved both true unity and glory.\textsuperscript{23}

The moment passed, and France was ill-prepared for the post-war world. Suddenly the dominant land power in Europe, France had suffered one-and-a-half million deaths and faced huge reconstruction costs. The country’s meager resources were overextended between trying to guard against a German resurgence and trying to secure the colonial Empire for manpower, materials, and markets. Some Frenchmen thought fundamental constitutional questions remained unsettled, and many workers had joined the communist movement of the Third International. Agitation would not be constant between the wars, but there would be recurring civil turmoil. Commemoration led to confrontation because it purported to represent the nation and the community. Those confrontations grew larger, louder, and sometimes violent when groups used commemorative projects or events as tools against their opponents in moments of political or economic crisis.

Commemoration of the war’s end, November 11, began in controversy. The government let the first anniversary pass unnoticed in 1919 because it had sponsored a huge, nation-wide celebration of victory on July 14. In 1920, the government marked November 11 by interring the unknown soldier in Paris. In 1921, parliament decided to commemorate the Armistice on November 13, a Sunday, rather than lose a workday on Friday the eleventh. Veterans’ groups protested that the change insulted their sacrifices, and in 1922 the government made the eleventh a permanent holiday. Antoine Prost

\textsuperscript{23} Jean-Jacques Becker and Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau discuss the importance of November 11th and Clemenceau’s careful word choice—his specific failure to mention “the nation”—in \textit{La France, La Nation, La Guerre: 1850–1920} (Paris: Sedes, 1995), 342–343.
credits veterans' grass-roots lobbying with winning the day. As the government added 
this and other holidays to the calendar, French communes constructed war memorials to 
honor the dead. The most prolific inscription on these monuments was an epitaph that 
the war ministry used to honor the uncertain demise of hundreds of thousands of missing 
soldiers: mort pour la France. Local monuments thereby linked the dead to the nation 
and the commune to the state, all under the sponsorship of the Republic. 
Commemoration embodied the glory of France and the hope that "sacrifices without 
limits . . . had . . . not been in vain." Commemoration in time and space, holidays and 
monuments, would become a locus of French domestic disputes. 

French national commemorations grew particularly contentious in the mid-1920s, 
because they transferred intense political struggles from the parliament and the cabinet 
into the streets, and holidays fueled confrontations because workers had the day off. In 
1924, a left-wing coalition, the Cartel des gauches, took power from a conservative 
coalition, the Bloc national, and right-wing street demonstrators challenged the Cartel 
over its anti-clerical policies, especially concerning the national holiday honoring Joan of 
Arc. The Bloc national had created the holiday in 1921, and the Vatican had 
simultaneously canonized the French martyr. Joan was a controversial symbol because 
conservatives easily deployed her for overtly partisan purposes. Clericals hoped the 
martyr's sainthood and holiday signaled France's return to the Church, while anti-
clericals were determined to defend the secular Republic. The May holiday was

24 Based on the Senate debates, Prost interpreted the choice as an economic one, a desire to avoid losing a 
day of productivity for the nation. See his Les anciens combattants et la société française, 1914–1939, 3 
Idéologies, 63–4. An Alsatian teacher interpreted the parliament's delay in recognizing the day as an 
embarrassed recognition that November 11 had been a Pyrrhic victory, perhaps that it had been a terrible 
mistake for French forces to end the war rather than invade Germany, based on subsequent events. See 
25 Becker, La France, 341.
supposed to feature decorations, processions, wreath-laying, and speeches in an atmosphere of national unity, but in 1925 the government prohibited processions in Paris to preempt street demonstrations and civil unrest.\textsuperscript{26} Despite a prohibition on demonstrations in 1926, violence broke out in Paris as police confronted some five hundred demonstrators from the right-wing Action Française.\textsuperscript{27} Police arrested 221 demonstrators, and 118 policemen were injured.\textsuperscript{28}

A few months later, the Cartel fell from power because of its inability to deal with an escalating financial crisis, and conservatives returned to the government to try to save the franc from collapse. Just as the right had used Joan’s holiday in May to oppose the Cartel, the extreme left would use Armistice ceremonies on November 11 to oppose conservatives. Of course, partisan holiday demonstrations were not new, and prefectural reports to Paris in late October tried to anticipate whether demonstrations might be worse than in previous years or whether the holiday would pass uneventfully. In one municipality, the communist mayor forbade Armistice gatherings because a majority of the commune opposed both the holiday and the French tricolor.\textsuperscript{29} Divisions and tense compromises colored the commemoration in Voiron, in the department of Isère:

Monsieur Ravat, mayor, preferred taking no part in the ceremonies and wanted the municipality to leave all the initiative to the competing veterans groups, the [communist] Fédération ouvriers et paysanne (FOP) . . . and the [mainstream] UMAC to hold their own ceremonies at the war memorial. The city council adopted a contrary proposal by a vote of 9 to 7 after three ballots. The mayor and the council would preside over a ceremony, and no incident is feared between the two groups of veterans, who will both march in the cortege. It has been decided that no flags or emblems will be allowed. Nevertheless, the presidents of the two

\textsuperscript{26} AN F7 13306/1, notice, 8 May 1925.
\textsuperscript{27} AN F7 13306/1, interior to prefects, 1 May 1926.
\textsuperscript{28} AN F7 13306/1, extract, Parisien, 10 May 1926.
\textsuperscript{29} AN F7 13305/2, “Interdiction des Manifestations,” Le Petite Gironde, 25 October 1926.
veterans groups will each make a speech. The UMAC has five hundred members, while the FOP has about sixty-five.30

We do not know how the ceremony went, but the prefect may have been overly optimistic in not fearing any incident, given the sensitive planning and prohibition on flags. While Joan of Arc served to rally clericals and anti-clericals against one another, Armistice day brought out many people commemorating France's victory but also significant minorities protesting imperialism, militarism, capitalism, or war itself. To protesters shouts of "A bas la guerre!" ["Down with war!"] others passionately responded "Vive la France!"31

Just as nationwide commemorative efforts aroused controversy in troubled political times, local projects focused local tensions. Issues of budgeting, resources, aesthetics, and purpose encouraged competing factions to champion or oppose particular projects. Control of a project could be the most contentious issue, as municipalities, private donors, or veterans' groups claimed precedence in shaping the commemorative community.32 Despite ideological variations, the vast majority of French communes built monuments that honored the war dead for their sacrifice to the nation. The war memorial in the town of La Petite-Raon, on the western ridge of the Vosges mountains, exemplifies this tendency. The monument, an obelisk, has a simple dedication, "La Petite-Raon à ses Enfants Morts pour la France, 1914–1918." Along with ornamentation of a bas-relief

30 AN F7 13305/2, prefect to interior, 30 October 1926. Prost does not list UMAC in his index, but it presumably was a local group associated with the Union nationale des combattants (UNC), a nationwide, mainstream veterans group.
soldier and palm fronds, it records the names of the town’s dead and, on the base, a small tribute to the dead of the war of 1939–1945, almost a footnote or an afterthought to those of the preceding war (fig. 6-2). Great War commemoration honored the dead with monuments throughout France, and monuments and holidays provided spaces and occasions for Frenchmen to carry on their disputes over the national community.\(^{33}\)

Victimization as a narrative in French Alsace

David Lowenthal describes memory as a confrontation with disorder and an imposition of order on chaos; groups construct histories to define and validate themselves. For Alsatians after the Great War, the past truly was a foreign country.\(^{34}\)

Alsatians found themselves buffeted between two dominant narratives: France’s republican victory and Germany’s holy and sacrificial defeat. In both France and Germany, such national narratives provided a context within which factions waged political battles; controlling the narration of the past was fundamental to gaining control of the present order. Alsatians, like the Germans and the French, used competing narratives to wage political battles among themselves over issues such as language and religious policies. What seemed to differentiate Alsatians’ narratives, however, was a sense of disorientation, of imbalance, a fear that the past, the present, and the future were equally beyond control. Awkward and problematic though it was, the French government’s liberation motif provided Alsatians a simple narrative to which they could cling.\(^{35}\) More appealing to most Alsatians, however, seemed to be a narrative a

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\(^{33}\) Ibid., 105–41.


victimization, an explanation that accorded with the way many had experienced the war under German rule and, even if they were unwilling to admit it, the post-war world under French rule. Wherever fault lay, victimization helped Alsatians to interpret the past in ways that validated claims about the present.

Commemoration in Alsace, in its representation of the community and the nation, was subject to intense national and international scrutiny. Alsatians feared misinterpretation as partisan spectators in Germany and the French interior watched Alsace for signs of French loyalty or discontent, or Germanophile sentiments. Alsatian officials and businessmen negotiated local concerns and power relationships when they sponsored commemorative efforts, but they also worried about the impact that commemorative symbols would have on French authorities, the media, and commercial interests. Self-censorship was more important to Alsatian commemoration than free expression, because commemoration was "a politically expedient way of adjudicating between history and anticipation." 36 History, in this sense, involved wrong passports and old loyalty oaths that became disloyal after the French returned. Anticipation included a striving for French civil equality. Some Alsatians hoped, and others feared, that the French state would accept Alsatian regionalism. Many rejected regionalism and demanded centralization, but only in certain areas (separation of Church and state; secular education) and not in others (language; public finance; social insurance). Commemorative projects in Alsace featured conflicts between proponents of various causes who weighed their words and actions against possible reactions in France and Germany.

36 Koshar, Monuments, 26.
Some of the most important commemorative projects in French Alsace concerned not the war but the reconstruction of the region’s French past. The French government and private organizations, including associations of French Alsatian optants of 1871, sponsored various projects to build monuments around Alsace recalling glorious episodes of French history, including the initial “liberation” of Alsace in the seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{37} One project commemorated Captain Rouget de l’Isle’s 1792 composition of the \textit{Marseillaise} in Strasbourg as Prussian armies prepared to invade France. A group of French Alsatian notables formed a committee in Paris in February 1919 to erect a monument in Strasbourg commemorating the liberation and the \textit{Marseillaise}. Both Clemenceau and President Poincaré agreed to lend their names to the project, but only after having confirmed the connections and stature of the committee members and the viability of the project.\textsuperscript{38} High-ranking sponsorship ensured the monument committee of crucial support against possible opposition from the Strasbourg city council, whose members had their own priorities for the city’s commemorative landscape. The monument, an aesthetic monstrosity of three lunging, grimacing soldiers and the tricolor in concrete, was inaugurated in 1922. Strasbourg became more commemoratively “French,” but the city council’s positioning of the monument in an obscure corner of the Place Broglie ensured that visitors would have to ask for directions to see it.

\textsuperscript{37} ADBR AL 98, 708. The tricentenary of Marshal Turenne’s conquest of the town of Turckheim offended Alsatians who called him a murderer, while francophile groups credited Turenne with inaugurating three centuries of French peace and prosperity in Alsace. Excerpt, 21 September 1932; police to interior, 17 September 1932; report, 10 September 1932; excerpt \textit{Pfälzische Rundschau}, 6 September 1932. French officials combed German papers from across the Rhine for their comments on happenings in Alsace because they were sensitive to how affairs in Alsace would be perceived and reported in Germany.\textsuperscript{38} ADBR AL 121, 1091, committee to commissioner, 10 February 1919; committee to Clemenceau, 10 February 1919; interior to commissioner general, 9 May 1919; cabinet to under-secretary, 21 February 1919; Clemenceau to Dietrich, 24 February 1919.
The ease with which the *Marseillaise* monument was installed in Strasbourg lay in stark contrast to the difficulties attending many other efforts to Frenchify the city, but few aroused as much controversy as the figure of Joan of Arc, which excited considerable partisan emotions throughout France. In 1921, a private committee lobbied the Strasbourg city council to accept an equestrian monument of the French saint to signify “the union of all Frenchmen, without distinction of religion or opinion.” The monument would bear the inscription “To Joan of Arc, Liberator of Alsace and Lorraine.”39 Strasbourg’s city council, dominated by Socialists, responded with cautious skepticism to the idea, finally splitting twelve to twelve “to refuse in principle” to accept a monument to the “Liberatrice.” The mayor politely declined to accept the offer of the monument.40 The private committee continued its efforts to place the saint’s monument in Strasbourg, and a year later won the French government’s permission to place the monument in the state-owned garden of the Palais du Rhin, the old Imperial palace that the French state took over directly from the German Empire for use as a guest residence for high-ranking dignitaries.41 A city councilman later scoffed that the palace garden “had become little by little a place to discard monuments [including Joan of Arc] that Strasbourgers did not want, a sort of dump where one hid the patriotic gifts in stone that successive municipal governments declined to accept.”42

Commemorative concerns included not only the installation of new French monuments, but proposals to remove and replace existing German ones, the most

39 AMS Central Division, 179–979, committee to mayor, 14 June 1921.
40 AMS Central Division, 179–979, committee report, 19 July 1921.
41 ADBR AL 121, 1091, commissioner general to committee, 1 July 1922.
42 AMS, CM PV, 22 June 1931. The councilman’s comments emerged from his frustration over what to do with yet another francophile monument being pressed on the city, this one dedicated jointly to Victor Hugo and Lamartine.
prominent of which was a statue of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. A preeminent German writer, Goethe had studied in Strasbourg in 1770–71. A statue of Goethe sited in front of the University of Strasbourg dated to the Second German Empire and, for some Frenchmen, was an unwelcome intrusion of German culture on French soil. One French family lobbied to replace Goethe with a statue of their illustrious forebear, Charles Adolf Wurtz, an Alsatian-born nineteenth-century French chemist known for his contributions to atomic theory. The Strasbourg city council valued Wurtz considerably less than it did Goethe, and refused, to the family's disappointment, to accept the statue, or to place it on any municipal property, even free of charge.43

Commemoration in Alsace remained controversial throughout the interwar period, because even small things took on outsized importance in the context of Franco-Alsatian and Franco-German tensions, and Alsatians’ connections to Germans and German markets invariably magnified these tensions. At the height of the autonomist movement in Alsace in the late-1920s and early 1930s, the autonomist and clerical dominated Strasbourg city council held many emotional debates about commemorating French national holidays. In 1929, the council barely approved (16 to 14) continuing the illumination of the Strasbourg Cathedral in honor of Bastille Day; the council decided it should not risk offending the French people in order to show its displeasure with the French government.44 In 1930, a long argument broke out in the Strasbourg city council over remarks attributed to the city’s autonomist mayor Charles Hueber during a visit to Fribourg in Baden. Hueber, accused of having failed to challenge a German speaker’s insinuation that Strasbourg under French rule was not a free city, waffled without

43 AMS, Central Division, 185–992, family to mayor, 12 June 1919; 15 January 1921; 12 February 1921.
44 AMS, CM PV, 8 July 1929.
admitting or denying the charge. The councilmen worried that the German press might exploit the event, costing the city political capital in turn with French authorities.45

The victimization narrative freed Alsace from responsibility for the German Empire and the war while assisting Alsatians’ civil struggles in France, but the role of victim also reflected Alsatians’ anxieties about contemporary power politics and future developments. Strasbourg councilmen in little publicized venues might mock the French state, and dismiss certain patriotic commemorative projects as gaudy or inappropriate to their vision of the Alsatian landscape, but in tense moments, commemoration involved a very precise weighing of one’s words. A number of studies of commemoration have examined presumed regional variations in monuments as well as the political conflicts inherent to the process. Alsace sheds light on another process that may attend commemoration—the practice of self-censorship. Commemoration in Alsace was an exercise in identity formation, making connections to the idea of the nation, and using cultural projects to fight political battles. Commemoration involved self-censorship as a present political strategy, and Alsatians sometimes delayed commemorative projects for many years specifically to avoid the airing of discord or uncertainty about the past. Alsatians used victimization as a political tool, but they did not want to provoke French officials’ hostility or encourage German revenge and thus lay the foundation for their future victimization.

The Politics of Alsatian War Memorials

        War memorials challenged French and Alsatian officials’ imaginations as they sought ways to commemorate the Alsatian dead. The problem was that some 250,000

45 AMS, CM PV, 3 February 1930.
Alsatians served in the German army, of whom nearly 50,000 died.\textsuperscript{46} The deads’ friends and relatives wanted their communes to build monuments honoring those soldiers who had made the ultimate sacrifice, but French authorities opposed recognizing those who had fought for Germany. Instead, a French commissioner explained how he tried to shape Alsatians’ commemoration:

The most delicate question, the most burning [is] how to salute the memory of the young men . . . who fell . . . in the ranks of the German army. [I have worked with discretion] . . . to make local mayors understand that the French government has fraternal sympathy regarding those who died in the German ranks, that France mourns with all its heart those of its children whom Germany forced to take up arms against France their patrie, but—all the same!—these unfortunates can not receive the same honors as those who died in the service of France. [I am gently persuading] mayors to place on their plaques or modest commemorative monuments not ‘to the heroes who fell on the field of honor’ but only and sadly ‘to the dead’ or ‘victims of the Great War.’\textsuperscript{47}

The commissioner hoped to prevent Alsatian monuments from honoring dead German soldiers, because this seemed to contradict the French liberation narrative. Fundamental to the French narrative was the notion that French soldiers had died to liberate Alsace; it was incongruous to honor as heroes men who had died in German service to prevent that liberation.

Some Alsatians, of course, had fought for France, and a few communes struggled with how to honor the small number of French dead with the many German dead. French officials advocated collective mourning but wanted to reserve honors for those who were “mort pour la France.” The Commissioner General sought some commemorative rule to distinguish the French Alsatian heroes from Alsatian victims: “While there is no question of separating [the two groups] in a memorial ceremony for all the inhabitants killed

\textsuperscript{47} ADBR AL 121, 133, commissioner to commissioner general, 19 October 1919; commissioner to commissioner general, 17 October 1919; commissioner general to commissioner, 23 October 1919.
during the war, it is certainly not possible to unite them all in words of glorification.\footnote{48} Any idea that French officials had, however, of controlling or shaping Alsatian commemoration was constrained by confusion over the law. Despite French officials’ efforts to police monument construction or to shape how monuments fit into a national narrative, Alsatian communes were largely accustomed to decentralized procedures, and many felt sufficiently autonomous to construct monuments as they saw fit, presenting French authorities with a fait accompli if necessary.\footnote{49} Whether this involved honoring only German dead, or mixing Germans and Frenchmen and mourning them together, local solutions would emerge.

The city of Mulhouse’s monument project reflected the city’s tense political conditions, its sensitivity to external scrutiny, and the commune’s desire to see in its monument “an image of [the] community.”\footnote{50} Mulhouse’s competing factions threatened to create an embarrassing spectacle of divided nationalities if some compromise were not reached. Veterans and the families of the dead on both the French and the German sides, the latter group a substantial majority, confronted one another. The question was whether one municipal monument should honor the dead on all sides—as the Alsatian veterans insisted—or whether the French veterans and the Souvenir français, a national patriotic association concerned with war graves, should be allowed to construct a monument

\footnote{48} ADBR AL 121, 583, commissioner general to secretary general, 13 November 1919.\footnote{49} ADBR AL 121, 583, director of Fine Arts to interior, 9 December 1920. For French officials’ frustration with Alsatian communes’ artistic independence, see ADHR Purg. 6671, sub-prefect to prefect, 3 April 1921; commissioner general to prefect, 17 April 1921. Elsewhere in France, a government subsidy for monument construction enhanced the government’s influence in commemorative projects honoring those “mort pour la France,” a criteria that rarely applied in Alsace. See Prost, “Monuments,” 200. Also, Daniel Sherman notes prefects’ inclination to “conciliation rather than confrontation” in commemorative matters, and that was in keeping with French communes considerable de facto autonomy. See his \textit{Construction}, 244. In the project of French Alsace, the French image of Alsace as a German-tainted region requiring transformation was as important as Alsatians’ image of France as a monolithically centralized state.\footnote{50} Sherman, “The Nation,” 290.
glorifying only those Alsatians who were "mort pour la France." The Souvenir français, with the support of the national organization in Paris, refused to allow the glory of French heroes to be dimmed through their posthumous association with those who failed to flee German conscription and who thus died serving an abhorrent cause. The city council feared competitive fundraising and separate monuments. A French colonel found the association of deceased French heroes with unfortunate German conscripts abominable, but he advocated self-censorship and commemorative unity. He feared that a monument, dedicated solely to the French dead, that neglected the bulk of Alsatian casualties would expose the city to German scorn, and inspire "a campaign of denigration on the other side of the Rhine." Anticipation of negative press, even from across the Rhine, tempered the colonel’s sense of commemorative propriety in favor of an awkward unity.\footnote{AM Mulhouse, MI Mal, Monument aux Morts, anon, 21 November 1921; Comité Provisoire du Monument aux "Alsaciens Morts pour la France," PV 26 November 1921; anon to mayor, 21 December 1921.}

French officials, for their part, viewed competing memorials honoring French and German dead respectively as the worst possible outcome. Such a dual or split commemoration would represent a substantial setback for the project of integrating Alsace into France, signifying division rather than unity. In a compromise, perhaps encouraged by the prefect, the disputants formed a joint committee, under the presidency of the mayor, with one vice-president representing the Souvenir français and the other broader Alsatian interests. The project would be consecrated to the memory of Alsatians "mort pour la France," but at the same time recall the sacrifices of all Alsatians without exception. The French artist who won the design competition, Maxime Réal del Sarte, reconciled the two positions in a monument titled "Deliverance and Peace," in which two
statues simultaneously glorified the liberty bought by the French dead while honoring the peace purchased by the Alsatian dead.52

With a strong-willed mayor who was determined to minimize controversy in the city, Mulhousians found a compromise that pacified contrary commemorative impulses. The monument featured two figures, one glorified, one honored, a difference that interpretation could generally govern effectively. Other communes, however, struggled to construct monuments through which newly naturalized French citizens could honor their lost German dead. In the town of Guebwiller, an editorial criticized the public for not supporting a proposed monument, but the writer admitted that the project was hardly inspiring. It featured

the adieux of an old woman and her son who was leaving for . . . who knows where. The woman wears, it’s true, a vaguely Alsatian headdress, but this is not sufficient to symbolize Alsace or even the village of Guebwiller, and the ribbon that she pins over her son’s heart does not clearly convey the sentiments that should grieve them both: \textit{Bella matribus detestata}, but how much more when the mother is forced to sacrifice her child for a cause that she abhors.

The writer faulted the sculptor for not framing more clearly the liberation narrative and the youth’s cruel martyrdom of forced service in the German Army. The writer insisted on providing the clarity and order he felt the sculptor had failed to achieve. The monument, he wrote, should comfort those who needed “to reflect and to give a pious thought to the children of our village who in spite of everything, died for our deliverance.” He hoped that the monument would secure “the dignity of our village and the dignity of our dead.”53

\footnote{52 \textit{Le Monument aux Mort \textit{de Mulhouse} (Mulhouse, 1927).}

53 AMH, 1W3, article, unknown paper, 9 October 1923. Interpretive latitude often roused commemorative controversies in French monuments. A sculpture’s specificity might offend some as either too militaristic or too pacifistic, but ambiguity roused opposition from those who wanted a monument’s meaning to be clear. See Sherman, “The Nation,” 284–87; Idem, \textit{Construction}, 180–212.
Despite the Guebwiller critic, vague combination and compromise characterized commemoration in Alsace more than simplicity or clarity. The war's meaning had been too ambiguous for many Alsatians to impart clarity to their monuments. Most monuments in Alsace followed one of two patterns. One strategy was to memorialize the Alsatian dead abstractly as "victims of the war." More frequently, communes, perhaps finding it distasteful to refer to their dead as victims, dedicated their monuments instead "To our dead." Prost describes the same inscriptions on monuments in France as either funerary or pacifist and clearly in the minority.

While what Prost describes as funerary monuments—as opposed to patriotic ones—seemed to be the rule in Alsace, there were glaring exceptions, one of the most interesting of which was built in the town of Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines in the Vosges mountains. Ste.-Marie was close to the front, and it served as an operational and logistical headquarters supporting German troops in the area. In 1916, the German army used civilian laborers and Romanian prisoners of war to build a massive stone monument as the centerpiece of the military cemetery located just outside the town (fig. 6-3). In 1921, the town built a monument in the square that fully subscribed to the Liberation narrative (fig. 6-4). It featured a bas-relief of "maternal France," as the mayor said at the dedication, "welcoming into her arms her Alsatian daughter." The monument listed 362 men of the town who died as, collectively, "victims of the war," as well as 49 civilians. The mayor exalted "the glorious dead of whom some had the satisfaction of falling for their true patrie, while the others died as martyrs in a cruel and sad duty imposed upon

54 Bantzenheim, Haut-Rhin; Neuf-Brisach, Haut-Rhin; Heiteren, Haut-Rhin; Balsgau, Haut-Rhin; Wantzenau, Bas-Rhin.
55 Robertsau, Bas-Rhin; Marmoutier, Bas-Rhin; Otterstahl, Bas-Rhin; Rumersheim, Haut-Rhin; Boedelsheim, Haut-Rhin; Fessenheim, Haut-Rhin; Ste-Marie-aux-Mines, Bas-Rhin; Hoedt, Bas-Rhin.
them by a fratricidal war imposed by our enemies." Commemorative words passed over the liberation narrative's distinctions among the dead by making some heroes, others martyrs, and all the dead glorious.

Where Alsatian communes declined to use the funerary models French authorities seemed to prefer, their commemorative imagination seemed nearly boundless. Several communes went so far as to deny even that their men had fought for Germany, one recording that its sons were all "morts pour la France." From a French perspective, the only means for Alsatians to claim honor or glory was in the context of the liberation narrative, in which they had to have fought for either France or as unwilling German soldiers for French Alsace. Martyrdom and victimization remained like categories, but some communes thought both categories insufficiently dignified for their deads' heroic sacrifices. The commune of Dannelbourg honored its sons for having "Died on the field of honor." The townspeople were determined to assert that their sons were not victims, but good men who had followed the call of duty. Similarly, the town of Ittenheim dedicated its monument to the twenty men who had died in German ranks and the two who had died in French service. "They fought," the inscription reads, "for right and for

58 Salmbach, Bas-Rhin. When I asked one of the villagers to explain to me why all of its sons were "mort pour la France" even though they served in the German Army, he explained to me that they had served against their will, had always loved France, and only wanted to serve France; hence, they were "mort pour la France." A similar, post-World War 2 monument in the neighboring town of Schleitahal, Bas-Rhin glorifies its dead of both wars, fifty-nine from 1914–1918 and sixty-five from 1939–45, as all "Mort pour la France" and simultaneously mourns them as "victims des deux guerres." Juxtaposition and categorization are sometimes an insurmountable problem in Alsatian commemoration, as elsewhere. Alsatians' commemoration of World War I, World War II, Indochina, Algeria, the Eastern Front, German and French, heroes and victims, military and civilian often makes it impossible to isolate meaningful representations of one conflict because commemoration tends to conflate many conflicts and limitless categorizations.
59 Dannelbourg, Bas-Rhin.
The town of Haguenau sought meaning without the nation. The mayor's invitation to the monument inauguration explained:

    The hour is finally come, in which those whom you have lost during the war will be equally honored, as they deserve, by the town of their birth and by their fellow citizens; this will be perhaps some small consolation in the great loss that you have suffered because of the war."  

The mayor insisted on honors for the dead, but he presented honor as an obligation of the local community, something for which the nation was dispensable. He did not present France or Germany as a justification or a purpose for sacrifice but simply portrayed the war as an abstract case of horrific loss.

French and Alsatian officials used monument dedications to offer varying interpretations of the monument and the meaning of the war. A common formula interpreted dutiful service to Germany as secret and loyal service to France. The monument committee in Robertsau used that formula in its fundraising, explaining that "While most of [our dead] wore the German uniform, their hearts always fought for France!" Speakers at ceremonies found the image of a French heart beating under a German uniform useful, as General Reibeil demonstrated at a monument dedication in Woerth:

    These unfortunate young men, innocent of the German crime of the world war, seem to us even more lamentable because they served under an abhorred uniform, in an army which was not that of their fathers, for a cause that they secretly disavowed, [hiding] their attachment to the French patrie. They have therefore paid with their life for the liberation of their native land, captive under an odious yoke. They have been a sort of ransom for the return of Alsace to France.

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60 Ittenheim, Bas-Rhin.
61 AMH, 1W17, invitation, 3 November 1926.
62 Sherman, Construction, 261–308.
63 AMH, 1W17, poster, 14 July 1921.
64 AMH, 1W17, extrait, JAL, 9 August 1926.
Another mayor credited the dead with having fallen "on the field of honor" to make it clear that their character and integrity were beyond challenge. A French veteran called Alsatian dead "noble victims of a terrible war, tragically killed in a uniform they did not love"; another official reiterated that these dead fell tragically "in a uniform that they did not choose." French and Alsatian officials cooperated in modifying the Liberation narrative to extend French national honors to the region's German dead.

Commemorating the war dead in Strasbourg proved particularly difficult. Alsace's largest city and the seat of regional administration, Strasbourg was subject to greater outside scrutiny than most Alsatian communes. The French government's purge of the city council in November 1918 and the demotion of a newly-chosen mayor fostered lock-step sycophancy toward the new regime in early 1919. City politicians, mostly Socialists, practiced rhetorical loyalty to the nation and the government while asserting local interests, and occasionally lobbied for the separation of church and state and secular education reforms. Jacques Peirotes, the Socialist mayor from 1919 to 1929, epitomized the negotiation of local concerns and national ideologies during his tenure. A growing Alsatian autonomist movement created a highly charged political atmosphere in the region in the late 1920s, and the French government arrested and tried some of its Alsatian critics on charges of treason. Peirotes, speaking at a banquet for Premier Poincaré in February 1928, tried to diffuse tensions, or at least deflect the premier's suspicions about Strasbourg, by insisting that any problems Strasbourgers had

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65 AMH, 1W17, extrait, JAL, n.d.
66 The city council elected Jacques Peirotes mayor on 10 November 1918 in the midst of the German revolution and the collapse of German authority. As mayor, he welcomed French troops on 22 November but the French government immediately replaced him with a hand-picked francophile. The French choice proved ineffective and unable to garner support on the revamped city council, and Peirotes returned as mayor in April 1919. See Jean de Pange, "Le Conseil National d'Alsace et de Lorraine," Revue des Deux Mondes 51 (15 June 1919), 918; AMS, CM PV, 7 December 1918, 10 April 1919.
encountered with French rule were completely overshadowed by their patriotic fidelity to France. 67

Within a few months, Peirotes lost his council majority—mayors in France are chosen by the city council—after an electoral shift handed the municipality to a strange coalition of clerical autonomists and communists. For six years, the new autonomist mayor, Charles Heuber, declined to interpret French interests as Alsatian interests, and tweaked the noses of French nationalists with his marked disregard for national holidays. Heuber typically absented himself from the city on November 11 and 22, thereby avoiding festivities marking the French victory of 1918 and the return of France to Alsace. He also had no compunction against criticizing French administration of Alsace or even the French victory in the war. 68  A new administration took over the city in 1935, under Mayor Charles Frey, who had a slim council majority of twenty to sixteen over the communist/autonomist coalition. Frey reemphasized French national symbols and Alsatian fidelity to France. 69

Strasbourg’s strained city politics, and the conditions under which a councilman could mock French monuments offered to the city, help to explain the city’s long delay sponsoring official commemoration of the war. City records showed that some 4246 Strasbourg men died fighting in the war, only 53 in the French uniform. 70  For a number of years, the city’s divided politics and dissatisfaction with francophile commemorations made it difficult to rally sufficient support for a monument, and it was only under Hueber’s administration in the early 1930s that a project was undertaken for a monument

67 AMS, 21–74, Peirotes speech, 12 February 1928.
68 AMS, CM PV, 21 December 1931; 19 December 1932.
69 AMS, CM PV, 18 May 1935.
70 AMS, Central Division, 28-252, ill. to mayor, 16 June 1936.
dedicated to Strasbourg’s “victims of the Great War.” Divisions, however, continued and the council suspended the project. After Frey succeeded Hueber as mayor, the council decided to proceed with the monument despite a complaint that the new administration had been saddled with the old administration’s project. A councilman cautioned that many recent commemorative projects had been awkward, embarrassing, and controversial. “The war memorial,” he argued, “should be irreproachable.” Frey, for all his pronounced francophilia, agreed that most recent commemorative efforts had been abysmal. “When one is going to erect a war memorial,” Frey said, “its nature, object, and art should be altogether different from what has been realized since the war, probably for all of Europe.” Frey advocated proceeding with the previous, autonomist council’s project, and the new council voted its unanimous support.

The city commissioned Léon Drivier, a Parisian sculptor and a student of Rodin, to create a monument that would “bring together in the same memory these soldiers who died during the war under different flags and in enemy camps.” Drivier modified a traditional and popular evocation of the passion of Christ known as the Pietà, in which the Virgin Mary cradles in her arms the figure of the dead Christ, just taken down from the Cross (fig. 6-5). This image was popular in Germany, and accorded well with that country’s penchant for equating soldiers with Christ and using religious themes in war memorials. Drivier’s version features not one Christ but two, embodying those Alsatians who fought for Germany and those who fought for France, brothers martyred in fratricide but reunited in death. A critic explained that the monument, inaugurated in

71 AMS, CM PV, 6 April 1936.
72 AMS, CM PV, 6 April 1936.
73 L’Alsace Française (10 June 1936), 152.
75 Winter, Sites of Memory, 90.
October 1936, commemorated all those who died for the liberation of Alsace, regardless of the uniform they wore. Making Alsace the common cause of both French-Alsatian and German-Alsatian dead in order to honor all may seem improbable, but it hardly differs from joint military cemeteries that honor enemy dead equally for their supreme sacrifice to fatherland. The inscription on Strasbourg's monument read simply "A Nos Morts," with the dates 1914–1918. The monument committee debated using a bi-lingual inscription, since German remained the dominant language. The final decision, French alone, was an act of self-censorship; the committee feared that a German inscription would be unnecessarily controversial and would offend French officials.

Conclusion

Alsatian commemoration of the Great War was fraught with unique difficulties and pressures. Germany's descent into dictatorship alienated most Alsatians from that state, and the Empire's collapse eased the disavowal of earlier loyalties. When French armies occupied Alsace, they brought food, a new order, and a discursive liberation. Turbulent times included purges, denunciations, and a scramble for property and rights in a pseudo-Hobbesian state of nature that left resentment and revulsion in its wake. The war and its devastation became the commemorative touchstone through which Alsatians attempted to again set their world aright. The French government's liberation narrative gave many a useful tool with which to legitimize their place in the established order. Victimization was a persuasive theme, because Alsatians during and after the Great War frequently felt themselves to be the victims of great power politics, as would their children and their grandchildren. Then there were Alsatians who refused to brook

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76 Jean Claud, "Le Monument aux Morts de Strasbourg," L'Alsace Française (10 June 1936), 154.
77 AMS, Central Division, 178-971, committee to mayor, 22 June 1936.
victimization as an explanation for the war or their service in it, such as those who
wanted recorded on their gravestones that they had won the Iron Cross, 1st Class. 78

My research into Alsatian commemoration began in the expectation that it would
reveal a distinct topography of memory, that a geographic survey of local monuments
could suggest something like terrain relief clearly delineating French victory, German
defeat, or Alsatian uncertainty. The anticipation imagined that monuments and their
clusterings could be read like forests, plains, or wetlands, or like species of trees, this
being an oak, that one a pine. This notion was hardly without precedent. Jay Winter
describes memorials embodying “local character” and marking national and regional
differences. 79 Central to Prost’s efforts was his attempt to distinguish types of
monuments sited at churches, in cemeteries, or at city hall and to make corresponding
observations on their iconography and inscriptions to suggest the local and regional
ideologies that birthed them, but culminating in a united affirmation of republican
fidelity. 80 Daniel Sherman has most ably reconsidered the commemorative process less
as a sign of identity than as a contestation and reaffirmation of power, a means of
imposing or sustaining order. 81 This study of Alsatian commemoration may offer one
proviso to our efforts to “read” monuments as mere signifiers.

Not simple victims, modern Alsatians nonetheless inhabited a world of geo-
political struggle of which they felt themselves more frequently the pawns than the
authors, and remembering their dead as victims probably offered comfort to many.

Commemoration in Alsace as elsewhere constructed a space for political struggle, but

78 ADBR AL 98, 241, prefect of Haut-Rhin to prefect of Lot, 7 March 1929.
79 Winter, Sites of Memory, 95–8.
81 Sherman, Construction, 331.
power, while diffuse, was not equally so. Anxiety that greater power lay elsewhere, and that too much controversy was dangerous, encouraged Alsatians to compromise, to hide conflicts, and to deny complexities. Self-censorship masked commemoration in Alsace, and it obscures our view of Alsatians confronting tragedy.
Figure 6-1. War Memorial, Berg, Rheinland-Pfalz, 1920s. Photo: Author.
Figure 6-2. War Memorial, La Petite-Raon, Vosges, 1920s.
Figure 6-3. War Memorial, German military cemetery, Ste.-Marie-aux-Mines, Haut-Rhin, 1916. Photo: Author.
Figure 6-4. War Memorial, Ste.-Marie-aux-Mines, Haut-Rhin, 1921. Photo: Author.
Figure 6-5. War Memorial, Strasbourg, Bas-Rhin, 1936. Photo: Author.
Epilogue

Germany re-annexed Alsace and Lorraine in June 1940, after defeating the French Army in a six-week operation. In the next four-and-a-half years, before allied forces liberated the region, Alsatians served, fought, and died by the tens of thousands in the German Army, most on the eastern front and in Russian prisoner-of-war camps. Under German rule, Alsace had its own concentration camp in the town of Schirmeck, in which Alsatian guards watched Alsatian prisoners.\(^1\) Alsatians participated in German atrocities, notably the massacre of 642 civilians, most of them women and children, in the French town of Oradour-sur-Glane in June 1944.\(^2\) After the war, Alsatians faced new trials as French citizens, when they had to account for their actions under German rule amidst new denunciations, treason charges, and purges. Alsatians again feared not being sufficiently French.\(^3\) Alsatian veterans called themselves the *malgré-nous* ("in spite of ourselves") to show that they had been forced to serve Germany against their wills. Alsace, natives insisted, had been a French victim of German tyranny.\(^4\)

National identity grew more sensitive in Alsace after the Second World War as Alsatians denied any culpable association with the Germans, those who had perpetrated the war and who were responsible for its crimes. Albert Schweitzer became more cosmopolitan than ever. His international fame as a pacifist grew and he campaigned against nuclear arms. Schweitzer was multi-talented, a professor, theologian, pastor, organist, Europe’s foremost authority on Johann Sebastian Bach. A fundraiser for

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Christian aid societies, he cultivated an extensive support network around the world and
dedicated his life to building up a mission hospital in the Congo. Schweitzer, however,
disdained nationalism and thought little of the governments of the day. As he wrote in
1931:

The organized political, social, and religious associations of our time are at work
to induce the individual man not to arrive at his convictions by his own thinking
but to make his own such convictions as they keep ready made for him. Any man
who thinks for himself and at the same time is spiritually free, is to them
something inconvenient and even uncanny. He does not offer sufficient guarantee
that he will merge himself in their organization in the way they wish.  

Schweitzer’s lament partially reflected his muted disavowal of Frenchification in Alsace
after the Great War as well as his alienation from Germany and its course. He embraced
individuals, but not national constructs.

Schweitzer, in a strange way, would not remain outside the nation. His
accomplishments won him many humanitarian awards, continuing in 1951 with the peace
prize of the German booksellers association. Schweitzer received the award in St. Paul’s
Church in Frankfurt from the President of the German Federal Republic, Theodor Heuss,
who was also an old friend.  

With the accumulation of awards, Schweitzer became
Alsace’s most revered son, and one Alsatian, Frédéric Hoffet, accused the French
government and the French generally of failing to accord Schweitzer the honors he was
due because Schweitzer was too complex, too insufficiently French. Hoffet noted that in
the United States, Life Magazine and Readers’ Digest had acclaimed Schweitzer as one
of the greatest men in the world. The French, Hoffet charged, ignored Schweitzer

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because he was Alsatian. This changed in 1952, when Schweitzer was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. In September 1952, the German Medical Association awarded Schweitzer the Paracelsus medal. French officials then quickly recognized the world-renowned French citizen, and the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques chose Schweitzer to fill Marshal Pétain's vacated seat. Schweitzer went on to receive the Nobel Prize in 1953.

Schweitzer's experience reveals another crucial aspect of the politics of the nation. Most of this project has concerned exclusion, Frenchification's efforts to recreate France in Alsace and to redefine the national community by excluding Germans and German institutions. These processes of exclusion were intended to mark and defend the boundaries of the community. Schweitzer's sudden recognition within France, however, reveals exclusion's unexpected and unpredictable obverse, appropriation. Generations of French and Alsatians had alternately embraced and excluded one another, always with constant reference to the German state and Germans. They constructed myths for the present, and operated within competitive and cooperative economic and political markets marked by sometimes incalculable risks. The national community was not static or certain, but dynamic and unstable. Schweitzer turned away from the nation in favor of humanity.

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8 Pierhal, *Schweitzer*, 159.
Bibliography

Unpublished Sources

The Archives Nationales in Paris, the Archives Départementales du Bas-Rhin in Strasbourg, and the Archives Municipales in Strasbourg and in Haguenau each contain abundant resources relative to their size for the study of French policies in Alsace after 1918, while fewer documents are available in the Archives Municipales in Mulhouse and Colmar and the Archives Départementales du Haut-Rhin in Colmar. The Institut du Droit Local Alsaciien-Mosellan in Strasbourg is a greatly underused resource for studying law in the region and the state.

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