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Une Crise d'Identité

The Use of Institutional Systems to Build Nationalism in Alsace and Lorraine following the First World War, 1918-1925

Catherine B. Griffin '18

“Back to the Motherland: Behind our lines, all through reconquered Alsace... the joy of the people was profoundly impressive. They had gone back to the bosom of the motherland absolutely.”¹

Over the last century, the regions of Alsace and Lorraine, on the eastern border of France, have witnessed a series of historic forces that have produced complex nationalist projects. First, Alsace and Lorraine underwent a tumultuous social-cultural change in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when Germany wrested their control away from France. The above quote, published in the *London Times* on November 14, 1918, symbolized the joy and the hope the people of the region had for the Alsatians return to the “motherland.” Little were they aware of the problems that awaited them in the impending transition. The governments of both France and Germany institutionally invested to promote their own brands of nationalism on the hesitant population. This essay explores the complex and competing forces of divergent national projects in Alsace and Lorraine. In doing so, it sheds light on key questions of nationality and citizenship. Who has the right to define national identity, citizenship and who can identify who is a citizen and who is not, on what criteria? In what ways can a state promote nationalism? What is a state’s reasoning behind implementing policies to enforce nationalism?

Alsace and Lorraine were historically under French control up until the end of the Franco-Prussian War in 1871. As a part of the Treaty of Frankfurt in 1872, the local population was given a choice to immigrate to France or remain in the region but become German. These areas remained part of Germany until the end of World War I in 1918. Following the War, Alsace and Lorraine were returned to France. But after the rise of the Nazi regime in the 1930s, they again came under the German control. Finally, at the conclusion of World War II in 1945, the regions again became part of France and have remained since.² This paper focuses primarily on the years

Author's note: This paper was written for “History 401: Fascism” and served as my capstone paper for the History Major. I would like to thank Professor Theresa McBride for serving as my advisor throughout the process of this research and Jennifer Whelan, Coordinator of Research, Teaching & Learning for Holy Cross Libraries, for her assistance in tracking down several of the sources highlighted in this paper.

¹ “Joy In Alsace,” *Times* (London, England), 14 Nov. 1918: 6. *The Times Digital Archive*. Web. 30 Oct. 2017.

² Carolyn Grohmann, “The Problems of Integrating Annexed Lorraine into France, 1918-1925,” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Sterling, 1999), 2-36.

following the First World War (1918-1925) and investigates the attempts by the French government to enforce uniform nationalism and allegiance to the French state.

It is important to consider nationalism and identity in the broader context of European society during this period. Fascism came to power in Italy and Germany around the same time when Alsace and Lorraine were in the process of being reintegrated back to France. Fascism stems from a multi-faceted form of government that revolves around one mass party government. Historian Cardoza writes that, “the Duce [Mussolini] emerged as the first of the twentieth-century dictators to rely not only on coercion, but also on new means of mass communications to consolidate his power and mobilize his people.”³ Just as Mussolini mobilized Italians under a Fascist regime, the French government employed methods of mass communication to mobilize the people of Alsace and Lorraine to re-identify with France, and eliminate those who were not French citizens. The main characteristics associated with Fascism—“antiliberal, anticommunist regime based on a single mass party that combined repression of democracy with nationalist mobilization and ambitious social welfare projects”—relate back to the core question of citizenship.⁴ Who is a citizen in a Fascist regime? What constitutes citizenship? Alsace and Lorraine struggled to find their own national identity in the midst of the rise of Fascist governments. The transition of Alsace and Lorraine, through the years of 1918-1925, offers glimpses into challenges these nations experienced in defining or redefining their national identity.

Rogers Brubaker, in *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*, argues that the idea of citizenship dates back to the French Revolution in 1789. He categorizes “the invention of citizenship” emerging through four distinct but inter-related developments: a) the bourgeois revolution, b) the democratic revolution, c) the national revolution, and d) the bureaucratic, state-strengthening revolution.⁵ Brubaker argues that “the development of the modern institution of national citizenship is intimately bound up with the development of the modern nation-state. The French Revolution marked a crucial moment in both.”⁶ The French Revolution did not just change the way France defined citizenship, it redefined the idea of citizenship across Europe. The new idea of what constitutes citizenship, of how citizenship is defined, affected movements of populations and policies across the continent. For the French government, the chief question therefore was how to “Frenchify” a region that had been under German control for fifty years and promote French nationalism. For Alsatians, the question was how, or if, they could embrace

³ Anthony Cardoza, *Benito Mussolini: The First Fascist* (Pearson Education, 2006), 164-165;

⁴ Cardoza, 164.

⁵ Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 39.

⁶ Brubaker, 49.

French identity after all those years living under German control.

Interestingly, one of the biggest proponents of French nationalism was none other than the French fascists. There were a few different fascist parties in France in the 1920s and early 1930s. According to Goodfellow, “the Action Française [a French fascist party] played a significant role in shaping France’s view of Alsace and Lorraine.”⁷ The French fascist groups were active in both regions and offered a public face of assimilation in the Alsace region. The groups shared many of the same beliefs as pro-German autonomists, who eventually turned to the Nazi party. In 1926, the Action Française had between 2,000 and 2,500 members. Alsace and Lorraine had one of the strongest regional presences in the party. Extremist nationalist parties tended to succeed in Alsace because they tackled questions of identity. Goodfellow gives a new definition of fascism, writing that, “Fascism was not, as is often argued, simply hyper-nationalism, but instead it advocated integrally linking local, and even familial, identity and regional identity with national identity.”⁸ The support for Fascism in Alsace stemmed from the obvious need for belonging and community in the region. In the eyes of Alsatians, Alsace was at the core and Paris was at the periphery. Eventually, to move forward, the people in the region “had to accept the definition of itself having a dual identity.”⁹

The French government strategically utilized language, the education system and citizen classification to promote nationalism in the regions of Alsace and Lorraine following the First World War. The government used French language for all local matters with an explicit intent to override the German language and other regional dialects. Similarly, the French government took advantage of the public education system to instill unity and French allegiance amongst the youth. It classified the local population of the regions into various categories, to determine who was a truly born French person and who was a foreigner. This classification, complete with individual identity cards, led to various kinds of discrimination, elimination, and a form of modern-day “purging” in the region.¹⁰ The Catholic Church played an important role in the initial annexation of Alsace and Lorraine to Germany, as well as a loyal unit when the regions were eventually reallocated to France.

Methodology

There are many sources relevant to the issue of national identity in Alsace and Lorraine during this period. My research began with Stephen Harp’s work, *Learning to be Loyal: Primary Schooling as Nation Building in Alsace and Lorraine, 1850-1940*. Initially,

⁷ Samuel Huston Goodfellow, “Autonomy or Colony: The Politics of Alsace’s Relationship to France in the Interwar Era,” in *Views from the Margins: Creating Identities in Modern France*, eds. Kevin J. Callahan and Sarah A. Curtis (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 148.

⁸ Goodfellow, 151.

⁹ Goodfellow, 153.

¹⁰ Alison Carrol, “Regional Republicans: The Alsatian Socialists and the Politics of Primary Schooling in Alsace, 1918-1938,” *French Historical Studies* 34, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 299-325.

my focus was on investigating the role of the education system during the transition. As the research progressed, I broadened the focus on the state institution as a whole, rather than just the education. The questions of language, religion, education, and categorization or “purging” appeared repeatedly in many secondary sources. I started to examine how these questions were connected.

Rogers Brubaker’s book has particularly helped to frame the scope of this essay by historicizing questions of nationalism and national identity. The most important contribution of Brubaker’s work, in the context of my essay, is his distinction between how the French and German definitions of citizenship. According to Brubaker, the French “understanding of nationhood has been state-centered and assimilationist, the German understanding has been *Volke*-centered and differentialist.”¹¹ This interpretation helps to illuminate some of the key differences between the French and German processes of integration and assimilation in Alsace and Lorraine.

Primary sources were difficult to find but insightful to help understand the regional issues at the time. A few primary sources particularly relevant were news articles written in the *London Times* during the reintegration. These articles were able to provide a relatively unbiased perspective on the transition phase. A schoolteacher’s journal from 1918 was helpful in comprehending how the education system was designed. A photo of Alsatian children in traditional dress, while not necessarily directly relevant, offered interesting insights on the nationality of the region and the symbolic idea that Alsace and Lorraine had its own distinct regional identity. Similarly, a 1924 article about the national identification card policy in France was helpful in understanding some of the purging that took place in Alsace and Lorraine. While the policy was published slightly later and does not include anything on identification cards in Alsace in particular, I found it interesting to help frame the larger picture of how citizenship was perceived in France at the time.

The piece of the puzzle I was not entirely able to place together was how the Alsatians felt throughout this transition. Given the difficulty of finding primary sources that I could interpret, which was already a challenge as many were in French and German, it was difficult to find any sources on the feelings of those who were living through the transition. I wished I would have found a diary entry or had better access to a local newspaper. Unfortunately, given the resources and semester-long time constraint, I had to work primarily with Gallica for primary sources in French, which was tricky to navigate. My argument would have been more nuanced with personal testimonies and locally generated sources.

Le français ou l’Allemand? The Question of Language

An article published in the *London Times*, just one month after the end of the

¹¹ Brubaker, 1.

war, expressed the joy felt in Alsace to be French again: “In spite of the large number of German *immigrés* in Alsace and Lorraine, Lorraine and Metz and Strasbourg and Alsace are French to the core, and will never live happily under any other rule.”¹² While some people may have felt this feeling of relief and excitement, the evidence did not indicate that most residents of the region shared this sentiment. One of the most debated issues during the transition was the question and status of language.

Language historically united people of a nation-state. Alsace and Lorraine were no exception to this. After the French Revolution in 1789, the French government utilized the French language to promote nationalism in the region. By 1808, French was the primary language of instruction in high schools and local universities in Alsace. In the second part of the nineteenth century, also known as the Second Empire (1850-1870), “there was an intensive systematic propaganda campaign on behalf of the use of the French language.”¹³ The French government pushed to intensify French instruction, “to the point of almost completely ousting German.”¹⁴ The churches wanted to keep German language instruction because they thought it was essential to the identity of the region. This offers a longer history of the use of language from earlier time periods.

Alsace and Lorraine came under German control after the Franco-Prussian War in 1871. However, the transition was not as drastic. While instruction in schools was in German in an attempt to assimilate, the change was slow and many schools in Alsace and Lorraine were able to keep much of their schooling in French for the first few years. The building of a German university in Strasbourg, the capital of the Alsace region, which created “the greatness and the superiority of German culture and scholarship...was also intended ‘to assimilate Alsace,’ an assimilation which appeared to progress steadily.”¹⁵ According to the regional censuses from 1900, 1905 and 1910, over ninety percent of the population identified the German language as their ‘mother tongue.’ Many people saw economic and cultural benefits of the German rule.¹⁶

In summary, the slower transition turned out to be beneficial for the German government; there is evidence from the census just thirty short years later. This more gradual transition could be attributed to Germany’s definition of citizenship, outlined by Brubaker, that is *Volk*-centered and differentialist. The emphasis on the *Volksgemeinschaft*, or the people’s community, may be why the government was more lenient on language instruction from the beginning. It is clear that the people of the

¹² “French Heart Of Alsace,” *Times* (London, England), 13 Dec. 1918: 8. *The Times Digital Archive*, accessed 27 Oct. 2017.

¹³ Helga Bister-Broosen & Roland Willemyns, “French-German Bilingual Education in Alsace,” *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 1, no. 1 (1998): 5.

¹⁴ Bister-Broosen & Willemyns, 5.

¹⁵ Bister-Broosen & Willemyns, 5.

¹⁶ Bister-Broosen & Willemyns, 6.

regions were more receptive to a slower transition.¹⁷

On the other hand, when Alsace and Lorraine were returned to France after the Treaty of Versailles, the French government took a more interventionist approach with language to reintegrate them into France. In an article published in the *London Times*, Millerand highlighted that language was pivotal to the transition from the beginning. “She [France] finds this difference of language one of the greatest obstacles in the path of assimilation today.”¹⁸ The regions went through the process of “Frenchification” under harsh measures. Utilizing the education system as one of the primary means of reintegration, the French government initially developed strict policies, wherein “French was to be the sole language of instruction. Local teachers were forced to complete training periods in the ‘intérieur’ in order to obtain, or keep, their teaching license.”¹⁹ The ‘intérieur’ refers to the internal country of France. In addition, the French government implemented a ‘*méthode directe*,’ which essentially deemed the Alsatian students in the same position linguistically as the rest of France. Most of the local political parties opposed these harsh policies and did everything in their power to try to compromise with the French government. As a result of these developments, many felt a sense of linguistic insecurity in the region. “An Alsatian member of the French Senate described the situation in the following way: ‘the children are taught a language they don’t understand, and the language they do understand is not taught.’”²⁰

Historian Alison Carrol has also highlighted the centrality of language in the French reintegration. Carrol emphasizes that under fifty years of German control, the Alsatians were educated primarily in German and spoke German or a dialect of German at home. People could not even read the French newspapers. Carrol writes, “political meetings were held in Alsatian; external speakers needed either to speak German or to have their speeches translated from French.”²¹ Carrol articulates that the SFIO, or Section Française de l’Internationale Ouvrière, wanted primary school lessons to be in German so that the students could understand the lesson, rather than suffer because they could not speak French. In addition, the students would learn French in school in a class for just a few hours a week, rather than exclusively being taught in French.²²

Various linguistic policies were continuously implemented throughout the years of transition. However, there remained no official policies for preserving dialects, nor has there been policies to regulate the official language of the region in day-to-

¹⁷ Brubaker, 1.

¹⁸ A. Millerand. "Alsace-Lorraine." *Times* (London), 6 Sept. 1919: 40. *The Times Digital Archive*, accessed 30 Oct. 2017.

¹⁹ Bister-Broosen & Willemys, 6.

²⁰ Bister-Broosen & Willemys, 6.

²¹ Carrol, 306.

²² Carrol, 309.

day life. Historian Grohmann writes, “indeed, both French and German administrations banned the use of the ‘other’ language in certain areas, but this never took the form of a blanket policy or law.”²³ In fact, the linguistic policies contained a lot of loopholes. With all of the issues surrounding language, it is easier to understand why dialects fell through the cracks. Because the language remained such a national identifier, bilingualism was seen as “a means of watering down...their [France or Germany’s] respective national cultures, as well as weakening their overall control of the populations concerned.”²⁴ Overall, knowing the language of the country, in the circumstances after 1918, French, gave the citizen a power to prove their allegiance to France.

By 1920, the French government had enforced the French language to be instructed at all times in the Alsace and Lorraine schools. The students only received three hours of instruction in German per week, starting in the fourth grade. One exception to this method was religious education, which was permitted to be orally in German when students could not understand the French instruction. One historian argues that the majority of the population was educated in a foreign language. However, despite the discomfort felt by many Alsatians due to their lack of knowledge of French, there were benefits seen to teaching the whole population in one language. Samuel Huston Goodfellow writes that an adoption of a complete French instruction was probably the best method for the government to enforce the French language. The language was a major topic of debate through the transition, but ultimately the French method worked and within a decade, many people in the region were speaking French again.²⁵

Les écoles primaires: A Vehicle for Reintegration

Alongside the issue of language was the topic of education. The Alsace and Lorraine school systems were the first logical place to start for reintegration in 1918. While Alsace and Lorraine were under the rule of the German government, France had fully adopted the principle of “laïcité” or the absence of religion in government and public affairs. In the 1880’s, France adopted a policy-making primary education “free, secular and compulsory.”²⁶ Carrol writes that the Alsatian education system, when returned to France, was very different from the rest of the country. As a result of the political and social elite retreating to France in 1871, “many priests took on a political role” to help in the transition.²⁷ Fifty years later, when Alsace was returned

²³ Grohmann, Carolyn, 126.

²⁴ Grohmann, 129.

²⁵ Samuel Huston Goodfellow, “Autonomy or Colony: The Politics of Alsace’s Relationship to France in the Interwar Era,” in *Views from the Margins: Creating Identities in Modern France*, ed. Kevin J. Callahan and Sarah A. Curtis (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 135-157.

²⁶ Carrol, 304.

²⁷ Carrol, 305.

to France, the political and social elite at the time returned to Germany, leaving the region with no strong leadership. Carrol argues that the local socialist party, the SFIO, took a firm stance to eliminate religious education from school systems as a means towards reintegration. By transitioning to secular educational curriculum, the SFIO thought that the region would reintegrate quickly with the homeland.²⁸

The other thought differently about the importance of secular education. The French government was more concerned about the French language and history at the time of the transition, rather than secularizing schools. Historian Stephen L. Harp writes that the two largest conflicts between the French government and the Alsace Lorraine regions were religion and language. While France had secularized all schools in the early twentieth century, Alsace-Lorraine worked hard to keep religious education in the school system. Harp notes that the French government, “soon realized that the introduction of secular schools was, at least for the moment, far too ambitious.”²⁹ After resistance from clerical leaders and untrained French teachers attempting to take on positions in the region, there was far too much opposition to secularize schools properly. Harp writes, “in a word, the divisive issue of confessional schools ran the risk of alienating Alsace-Lorraine from France. Long-term national integration was more important than immediate, absolute legislative assimilation.”³⁰ The administration eventually decided that the integration of the French language in schools was a better way to spread French nationalism than implementing secular education immediately.³¹

Abandoning the initial idea to secularize schools in Alsace and Lorraine, the French government decided to focus on assimilation through the language and French history instead. Harp acknowledges that appointing French administrators and teachers who were loyal to France and had some knowledge of French history was important to this transition. The next portion of the process was to establish a base for the education system in the region, Strasbourg, and evaluate all of the schools to make sure they were up to government standards regarding curriculum. Harp writes that “in late 1918, the national and professional reliability of inspectors underwent close scrutiny... German inspectors were overwhelmingly Alsace-Lorrainers.”³² The government replaced all but five inspectors with Frenchmen. Due to the realities of the war and the French government’s desire to keep up with the school systems, most of the original teachers were able to keep their jobs from 1919-1920 in Alsace but were forbidden from teaching French history. Harp argues, “in accordance with the Treaty of Versailles, all persons born to German parents and

²⁸ Carrol, 299-306.

²⁹ Stephen L. Harp, *Learning to Be Loyal: Primary Schooling as Nation Building in Alsace and Lorraine, 1850-1940* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1998), 193.

³⁰ Harp, 194.

³¹ Harp, 195.

³² Harp, 187.

not Alsatians or Lorrainers, even if born in Alsace-Lorraine, did not receive French citizenship and were forced to emigrate.”³³ Many teachers eventually lost their jobs because of their identity and very few German citizens were permitted to naturalize as French citizens and keep their teaching positions.³⁴

Teacher’s salaries and benefits were another interesting component of the education system as a means of reintegration. Harp reveals that the teachers in Alsace and Lorraine received much higher wages, pensions, and promotions due to seniority versus their French counterparts. It was not until 1923 that, “the special status of Alsace Lorraine teachers guaranteed, and they continued to receive all of their pension and seniority rights. New teachers, those who began teaching after 1920, joined the French cadre.”³⁵ The disparity in benefits created competition among teachers and it took years for the system to achieve equality in benefits between the Alsatian teachers and the French teachers.³⁶

Quelle lettre êtes-vous? The Local System of Classification

The question of language remained a challenge for years to come in the region, as well as the transition of the education system. In addition to these institutional systems, the French administration attempted to “purge” Germans from the region. The purging took place between the end of the war, November 1918, until the official enactment of the Treaty of Versailles at the beginning of 1920. French officials had a difficult time purging because it was hard to identify who was German versus who was a native Alsatian. The goal of the purging, or so the administration claims, was to eliminate Germans and those who were a threat to France to help facilitate the reintegration of the Alsace Lorrainers into France.³⁷ The plan to remove foreigners from the populations in Alsace and Lorraine began very quickly after the end of the war. In an article published in the *London Times* on December 12, 1918, a reporter had already begun to describe how the administration was tackling foreigners, specifically Germans in the region. The article noted that children and grandchildren of French citizens would immediately be accorded French citizenship. German landowners and workers were instructed to return to Germany, for they were inherently German and now aliens.³⁸

Additionally, a categorization system was put into play as a method of organizing those who remained. Historian Boswell writes, “The purges were designed to

³³ Harp, 188.

³⁴ Harp, 186-188.

³⁵ Harp, 191.

³⁶ Harp, 192.

³⁷ William Shane Story, “Constructing French Alsace: a State, Region, and Nation in Europe, 1918-1925,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Rice University, 2001), 92-93.

³⁸ “The Recovered Provinces,” *Times* (London, England), 13 Dec. 1918: 7. *The Times Digital Archive*, accessed 29 Nov. 2017.

uncover those who had denounced ‘good Alsatians.’ Restoring the province to the patriotic purity so dear to the myth meant cleansing it of German influences and indigenous traitors.”³⁹ Due to fear, expulsion, or lost jobs, over 110,000 Germans returned to Germany between 1918 and 1920 and many of the Germans felt as though their Alsatian neighbors had turned on them. Boswell argues that for most Alsatians, turning on the Germans was easier than confronting the struggles of transition they were about to face.⁴⁰

In the midst of the purging, the new French administration in the region began to issue identity cards to “all Alsace and Lorraine residents over the age of fifteen.”⁴¹ The identity cards placed people in categories, A, B, C, or D. The categories mostly relied on the birthplace of the resident or their parentage. Prott writes, “‘A’ was for inhabitants who were born in Alsace-Lorraine before 1870, ‘B’ for offspring resulting from mixed marriages, ‘C’ for foreigners of neutral countries, and ‘D’ for enemy aliens, that is, Germans.”⁴² The category a person was given determined their eligibility for jobs; ability to move in and out of the region and the exchange rate one was given for the French franc. Prott details the statistics of how many people were placed in each category in the region and notes that over sixty percent of the population was considered to be class ‘A’ citizens. In addition, Prott notes that the classification system was variable and that the main goal of this categorization was to get rid of undesirable German ‘immigrants.’ Eventually, the identity cards became a hassle and sparked lots of confusion, so the administration did away with them just a short time.⁴³

While the cards were only a temporary way to distinguish people, and mostly a method of eliminating Germans, there were many negative feelings surrounding the cards. Card A was seen as the only legitimate card, making card B embarrassing for residents of that status. The identity cards sent a powerful message to residents about citizenship. Boswell writes, “the classification of the population was a divisive issue in the postwar years, because it was thought, not without reason, that identity cards would have a direct bearing on citizenship in the future.”⁴⁴ The cards brought about a question: “What constituted Frenchness?” Nationality was more than just ethnicity in Alsace and Lorraine. Ultimately, the purges were seen as a failure, as Boswell notes, “sorting people on the basis of their national worthiness and their ethnicity— weakened social structures and severely compromised the inhabitants’ perception of

³⁹ Laird Boswell, “From Liberation to Purge Trials in the ‘Mythic Provinces’: Recasting French Identities in Alsace and Lorraine, 1918-1920,” *French Historical Studies* 23, no.1 (Winter 2000): 140.

⁴⁰ Boswell, 140-142.

⁴¹ Boswell, 142.

⁴² Volker Prott, *The Politics of Self-Determination: Remaking Territories and National Identities in Europe, 1917-1923* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), 154.

⁴³ Prott, 154-156.

⁴⁴ Boswell, 143.

the Republic.”⁴⁵ The identity cards were intended to help, but instead divided residents of Alsace Lorraine into categories and created tensions between Alsace Lorraine and the established nationhood of France.

Another interesting component of this system of categorization was the self-run *commissions de triage* [triage commissions] led by the French military. These commissions were created to “sort through the local population to determine national loyalties and in some cases expel potential troublemakers.”⁴⁶ Historian Fischer outlined the makeup of these commissions. Each was assigned two civilians and one military member, all who were supposed to know German and Alsace languages. Alsatians who chose to live in France covered the Alsace language component, or the ability for a member of the committee to speak Alsatian, of the commission; the German language piece was often overlooked. The commissions were flawed and aimed their focus on four main groups: German labor leaders, former civil servants or state employees, “cultural mediators” (teachers, religious leaders etc.) and Alsatians who were tipped by other Alsatians. Fischer notes that over eleven thousand cases were heard between November 1918 and October 1919. The punishments ranged from local surveillance to expulsion, but “almost one-half of the cases were dismissed due to lack of evidence.”⁴⁷ The actions of the commissions left adverse impact on the French economy. Most of the Alsatian industries, such as the railway systems and mines, fell under French control. In combination with the post-war slowdown, the economy took a hit, which increased the resentment towards the French and the transition itself.⁴⁸

Un Ami loyal: The Role of the Catholic Church in Alsace

In the midst of the turmoil resulting from transition, the Catholic Church became one of the most significant political actors in Alsace. The Catholic Church had played a crucial role in the region during the first transition in 1871. After Alsace and Lorraine were given to Germany, many key political figures returned to France. The Catholic Church and its leaders became a grounding force in the region. The church’s active influence made it difficult for many Alsatians to separate their faith from the regional identity. After over two decades in the German Reich, the region was losing hope of returning to France someday and started to accept their future in Germany. Historian Gaines writes, “the energies of regional politicians and activists, many of whom were Catholic priests, focused more and more upon attaining

⁴⁵ Boswell, 158.

⁴⁶ Christopher J. Fischer, *Alsace to the Alsatians?: Visions and Divisions of Alsatian Regionalism, 1870-1939* (New York, N.Y: Berghahn Books, 2010), 131.

⁴⁷ Fischer, 132.

⁴⁸ Fischer, 132.

statehood for Alsace-Lorraine.”⁴⁹ The quest for statehood reinforced the region’s local identity and even promoted the Catholic religion. The Catholic Church continued to grow and connected people across Alsace and into Germany and Poland throughout the annexation. “The Centre, the national Catholic Party, had the singular capacity to create bridges between the German Catholic minority and the Catholic majorities of Poland and Alsace-Lorraine.”⁵⁰ The Centre maintained independence from the German Catholic party but remained involved in creating community in Alsace-Lorraine throughout the region’s time in Germany.

Religion had historically played a major role in the region. High proportions of the population in both Alsace and Lorraine unwaveringly practiced their faith, whether Catholic, Protestant or Jewish for the most part, in all areas of the region, rural and urban. Many say that the Catholic Church played a huge role not only in leadership and stability but a role in preserving the memory of France. The Church took on an important role during the 1918 transition. In 1918, the people were not immediately concerned with how the transition would take place with the Church into secular France. Many thought it would not change at all and became concerned with issues of language or education. The *Concordat*, the original 1801 agreement between Napoleon and the Catholic Church to preserve Catholicism in France, continued to regulate Church-state relations in Alsace, after the French government abolished the *Concordat* in 1905. The French government’s goal of assimilation immediately wanted to remove the *Concordat*, replacing it with the law of France “intérieur.” There was pushback from political parties in the region on the removal of the *Concordat*, so they postponed the issue.⁵¹

When major political leaders came to Strasbourg in 1919 to discuss policies of the transition, the leaders realized the power of the clergy would be an obstacle in the transition. What would come to be known as the ‘the Alsatian malaise’ was first introduced in the regional Catholic press in January 1919. The French government’s desire for complete control over the reintegration of Alsace and Lorraine contributed to the “political disease.” “The malaise... was characterized by a pervasive sense of frustration and impotence among people who had only shortly before expected a partnership between Alsace and France, not a French annexation to replace the German one.”⁵² The new French administration in the region became very unpopular and the fate of Alsatian Catholicism was brought into question. For the next five years, the Catholic party in Alsace wanted to win over the trust of the French government, without much regard to the other important issues of

⁴⁹ Jena M. Gaines, “Alsatian Catholics Against the State, 1918-1925,” *Contemporary European History* 2, no. 3 (Nov. 1993): 208.

⁵⁰ Gaines, 209.

⁵¹ Grohmann, 130-133.

⁵² Gaines, 215.

bilingualism and the parochial schools. The five primary years of transition (1919-1924) were a challenge for all.⁵³

The initial postponement of the *Concordat* returned in 1924 when the first official “direct attack on the religious status of the region was made.”⁵⁴ After deliberation, disagreements between political parties in the region and pressure from the French government, the President of the French Council, Herriot, announced that the *Concordat* would remain in place. This announcement was made in January of 1925. The proposal made by Herriot “triggered an outpouring of regionalist emotion, which drew attention to all areas of dissatisfaction felt among the population... as well as changes to legislation affecting the region.”⁵⁵ To this day, policies from the *Concordat* remain in place in Alsace and Lorraine. Because of the very active role of the Catholic Church, Alsace remains frozen in a system that is paradoxically more German than French.

Conclusion

While Alsace and Lorraine struggled to define their identity following the First World War, amidst outside influence from both France and Germany, they held to a strong regional character, particularly in Alsace. One historian writes that the “expression of ambivalence [toward France and Germany]... aptly characterizes Alsatian identity throughout the 1920s, 1930s, and into World War II.”⁵⁶ France and Alsace and Lorraine had different expectations and hopes for the future of the region’s reunification. Millerand wrote in an article in the *London Times*, “Alsations and Lorrainers hold tenaciously to their customs... they are deeply attached to their own little country.”⁵⁷ Many people identified as Alsatian, rather than explicitly French or German. Alsatian dialects across the region were common and preferred at home to whichever national language was spoken, German or French.⁵⁸ The school systems attempted to remain religiously affiliated, even after the secular French government officially took over in 1919. Lastly, the regional classification system was illegitimate, and a questionable way of eliminating those who were not French. Alsace and Lorraine remain regions defined by their past, united by their language and identified by their unique architecture.⁵⁹

The four factors discussed in this essay—language, schools, categorization of citizenship, and Catholicism—heavily influenced subsequent nationalism in Alsace and Lorraine from 1918 to 1925. The language, seen as one of the most significant problem by most, connected to the language of instruction in school, or the age at

⁵³ Gaines, 211-215.

⁵⁴ Grohmann, 133.

⁵⁵ Grohmann, 136.

⁵⁶ Goodfellow, 132.

⁵⁷ A. Millerand. “Alsace-Lorraine.”

⁵⁸ Bister-Broosen & Willemyns, 3-17.

⁵⁹ Carrol, 301.

which to start teaching of German or French. Alsatian Catholics were much concerned about preserving religious schools and maintaining a robust religious identity in the region. The categorization system affected employment, especially for schoolteachers, and relied on language proficiency. There were many ways that the French government worked to integrate French national ideals in the regions of Alsace and Lorraine. The government worked tirelessly to write and enforce policies to promote French allegiance. However, despite the French administration's best efforts, Alsace and Lorraine remain, even today, are defined by their local identity and their past.