

'In the Border's Shadow: Reimagining Urban Spaces in Strasbourg, 1918-1939'

On a sunny morning in May 1931, crowds gathered in the gardens of the Rhine Palace in Strasbourg to await the unveiling of a statue honouring the nineteenth century French authors, Victor Hugo and Lamartine. When the moment arrived, academics and politicians made celebratory speeches as the audience waved tricolour flags. The following day, reports in the national press applauded the local population's united display of French patriotism and described the '[echoing] of the Marseillaise through the Kaiser's former palace.'¹ But in Strasbourg such unity appeared to be a world away when the city council discussed the ceremony the following month and the Mayor, Charles Hueber, criticised the monument committee for failing to inform him where it planned to place the statue. In the ensuing debate, councillor Camille Dahlet suggested that the event revealed more than an error of judgement. For Dahlet, the imposition of the monument represented an attempt to enforce a 'Parisian' national identity onto the Alsatian population, and a rejection of the sense of identity that the Alsatians had forged for themselves. The French were thus repeating mistakes made by the Berlin government during the region's annexation into the German Empire between 1871 and 1918. As a result, national governments would be better advised to give the Alsatians 'standardised monuments' with 'detachable heads.' This would remove the need to destroy entire monuments at moments of regime change, and, had it been the case earlier, Strasbourg could have simply replaced the heads of the three Hohenzollern emperors that adorned the main post office with those of their liberators, Marshals Foch, Joffre and Pétain.²

The controversy surrounding the Hugo-Lamartine monument was not an isolated incident. In 1918, Alsace had returned to France after forty-seven years of annexation into Germany, and, in the intervening years, government attempts to introduce the French language, legislation and administrative institutions had met with widespread local resistance.³ After more than a decade of French rule, Dahlet's complaint reflected growing frustration with the imposition of French 'national propaganda' that took no account of local particularities. In this atmosphere, Strasbourg became the site of conflict between opposing views of Alsace, and its relationship to France and Germany. And, the city's urban spaces, and the monuments and festivities that filled them, offered a means to express attitudes towards the region, the nation and the border for local and national elites and for the city's population. What is more, they offered a means of gauging popular opinion in the city for outside observers, who carefully monitored urban politics in Strasbourg. The resulting

¹ 'Le Monument à Victor Hugo et à Lamartine est inauguré à Strasbourg,' *L'Echo de Paris*, 18 May 1931 ; 'Inauguration à Strasbourg du Monument à Lamartine-Victor Hugo,' *Le Temps*, 18 May 1931; 'Le Monument Lamartine-Victor Hugo à Strasbourg,' *Le Figaro*, 18 May 1931.

² Compte rendu du Conseil Municipal de la Ville de Strasbourg, séance du 22 June 1931, 397-9.

³ On the problems of reintegrating Alsace, see Paul Smith, 'A la recherche d'une identité alsacienne', *Vingtième Siècle*, 50 (1996) and the relevant sections in Alfred Wahl et Jean-Claude Richez, *La Vie Quotidienne en Alsace entre France et Allemagne 1850-1950* (Paris, 1994); Stephen Harp, *Learning to be Loyal. Primary Schooling as Nation Building in Alsace and Lorraine, 1850-1940* (DeKalb, 1998); Stefan Fisch, 'Assimilation und Eigenständigkeit: Zur Wiedervereinigung des Elsaß mit dem Frankreich der Dritten Republik nach 1918,' *Historisches Jahrbuch der Görres-Gesellschaft* 117 (1997), 111-128. On the reintegration of the Moselle (annexed Lorraine), see Carolyn Grohmann, 'Problems of Reintegrating Annexed Lorraine into France, 1918-1925,' (Ph.D. diss., University of Stirling, 2000) & Louisa Zanoun, 'Interwar Politics in a French Border Region: the Moselle in the period of the Popular Front, 1934-1938,' (Ph.D. diss., London School of Economics and Political Science, 2009). On Strasbourg between the wars, see Christian Baechler, 'Espoirs et désillusions : l'entre-deux-guerres et l'occupation nazie (1918-1944)' in Georges Livet et Francis Rapp (eds), *Histoire de Strasbourg*, (Toulouse, 1987).

tensions reveal the misunderstandings which developed between the government in Paris and the population in Alsace. Yet the crisis that occurred in interwar Strasbourg cannot be written off as a simple case of regional exceptionalism. On the contrary, it tells us much about the different meanings invested in borders and is revealing of the crisis triggered by the return of Alsace to France.

In recent decades, studies of nationbuilding in Europe have fruitfully focussed upon individual regions as a means to unearth the ways in which national attachment was understood and articulated at grassroots level. Work on French regional identity has presented integration as the product of interaction between the centre and periphery, and the creation of national identity as a process ‘continually in the making,’ rather than the imposition of a fixed set of beliefs.⁴ Research has demonstrated that Germanness was rooted in regional and local experiences, while studies of Spain, Russia and Italy have underlined the reciprocal character of nationbuilding.⁵ Given this ‘regional turn’ it is unsurprising that literature on nationbuilding has increasingly argued for a focus on the role played by borders and borderlands in the construction of nations and identities.⁶ Border regions represent not only the frontier of the national territory, but also a site of contact with populations on the other side of the boundary, where distinct understandings of language, citizenship, culture and religion interact and come into conflict. It is through this interaction that sentiments of nationalism are created from below.⁷ After all, borders are constructed of more than fences and checkpoints, and the study of borderlands can reveal the political construction of borders between two communities which may share a language, ethnicity or may even have been members of the same nation-state.⁸

Case studies have offered different models for understanding loyalties as they emerge in borderlands, suggesting that no single model fits all European border regions.⁹ Work on central and eastern Europe has rejected the assumption that nationalisation is natural or

⁴ Caroline Ford, *Creating the Nation in Provincial France. Religion and Political Identity in Brittany* (Princeton, 1993), 5; Kolleen M. Guy, *When Champagne became French. Wine and the Making of a National Identity* (London and Baltimore, 2003); Timothy Baycroft, *Culture, Identity and Nationalism. French Flanders in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Woodbridge, 2004). Much of this work challenged the dominant interpretation of a centre-outward, top-down model proposed by Eugen Weber in *Peasants into Frenchmen. The Modernization of Rural France* (Stanford, 1976).

⁵ Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor. Württemberg, Imperial Germany and National Memory, 1871-1918* (Chapel Hill, 1997); Abigail Green, *Fatherlands: State-Building and Nationhood in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Cambridge, 2001); Miguel Cabo and Fernando Molina, ‘The Long and Winding Road of Nationalization: Eugen Weber’s Peasants into Frenchmen in Modern European History,’ *European History Quarterly* 39 (2009): 264-286.

⁶ Hastings Donnan & Thomas Wilson, *Border Identities. Nation and State at International Frontiers* (Cambridge, 1998); Henrice Altink & Sharif Gemie (eds), *At The Border: Margins And Peripheries In Modern France* (Cardiff, 2008); David Laven & Timothy Baycroft, ‘Border Regions and Identity,’ *European Review of History- Revue Européenne d’histoire* 15 (2008): 255-275; Timothy Baycroft, Carolyn Grohmann & Paul Lawrence, ‘“Degrees of Foreignness” and the Construction of Identity in French Border Regions during the Interwar Period,’ *Contemporary European History*, 10 (2001): 51-71.

⁷ Laird Boswell, ‘Rethinking the Nation at the Periphery,’ *French Politics, Culture & Society* 27 (2009): 111-126, 120.

⁸ Edith Sheffer, ‘On Edge: Building the Border in East and West Germany,’ *Central European History* 40 (2007): 307-339.

⁹ Timothy Baycroft, ‘Changing Identities in the Franco-Belgian Borderland in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,’ *French History* 13 (1999): 417-38; Annemarie H. Sammartino, *The Impossible Border. Germany and the East, 1914-1922* (Ithaca N.Y., 2010); Peter Thaler, *Of Mind and Matter. The Duality of National Identity in the German-Danish Borderlands* (West Lafayette, IN., 2010); Peter Thaler, ‘Fluid Identities in Central European Borderlands,’ *European History Quarterly* 31 (2001): 519-548; Michiel Baud and Willem van Schendel, ‘Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands,’ *Journal of World History* 8 (1997): 211-242.

inevitable, and encouraged attention to ‘national indifference’ as a category of analysis.¹⁰ Research into the Franco-Spanish border has, on the one hand, revealed the increasingly ‘national’ language used by French and Spanish inhabitants of the eastern Pyrenees in community quarrels, and on the other, suggested that in the western Pyrenees an enduring cross-border sentiment persisted even during wartime.¹¹

Literature on Alsace has underlined the complex nature of identities on the Franco-German border. Elizabeth Vlossak and David Harvey have shown that regional and national loyalties interacted with gender and class, while Christopher Fischer has underlined the pervasive and multifaceted character of regional attachment in Alsace.¹² Christian Baechler and Samuel Goodfellow have stressed the importance of local concerns as a driving force in Alsatian politics, while Laird Boswell has underscored Alsace’s role in the refashioning of notions of Frenchness after 1918.¹³ This research has revealed Alsatian identities to be contested, fluid and frequently oppositional, and critiques the idea that the border is unchanging, uncontested and unproblematic. Yet, it also raises questions over how the meanings invested in borders change over time, and invites further research into how such understandings vary between centre and periphery.

The case of urban politics in interwar Strasbourg offers a neat illustration of this negotiation between centre and periphery and the shifting priorities that affected border rhetoric. During the two decades after Alsace’s 1918 return to France, elite groups in Paris and Alsace debated how the French language, administrative institutions and legislation should be introduced into the region. But, divisions in Paris and in Alsace interacted to stunt this process. The result was that integration in Alsace did not follow the pattern of the two-way interaction identified by Caroline Ford in her influential study of France’s western periphery.¹⁴ Instead it adopted the form of a multi-centred struggle, involving a range of internal and external stakeholders. These debates took place against the backdrop of Franco-German diplomatic rivalry that crystallised on the Rhenish border.¹⁵ France’s concern (and overestimation) of the German threat intersected with the region’s symbolic place at the heart

¹⁰ Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848-1948* (Princeton, 2005); Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation. Activists on the Language Frontier of Imperial Austria* (Harvard, Mass., 2006); James E. Bjork, *Neither German nor Pole. Catholicism and National Indifference in a Central European Borderland* (Michigan, 2008); Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2008).

¹¹ Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries. The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley, 1989); Peter Sahlins, ‘The Nation in the Village: State Building and Communal in the Catalan Borderland in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,’ *Journal of Modern History* 60 (1988): 234-263. See also Celia Applegate’s work on the Palatinate which has shown the importance of the struggle against the French in the emergence of feelings of common identity: Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials. The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley, 1990); William A. Douglass, ‘A Western Perspective on an Eastern Interpretation of Where North Meets South: Pyrenean Borderland Cultures,’ in Thomas Wilson and Hastings Donnan (eds), *Border Identities. Nation and State at International Frontiers*, (Cambridge, 1998): 62-95.

¹² Elizabeth Vlossak, *Marianne or Germania? Nationalizing Women in Alsace, 1870-1946* (Oxford, 2010); David Allen Harvey, *Constructing Class and Nationality in Alsace, 1830-1945* (DeKalb, 2001); Christopher J. Fischer in *Alsace to the Alsatians? Visions and Divisions of Alsatian Regionalism, 1870-1939* (New York & Oxford, 2010).

¹³ Christian Baechler, *Le Parti Catholique Alsacien 1890-1939: Du Reichsland à la République Jacobine* (Strasbourg, 1982); Samuel H. Goodfellow, *Between the Swastika and the Cross of Lorraine. Fascisms in Interwar Alsace* (DeKalb, 1999); Laird Boswell, ‘Franco-Alsatian Conflict and the Crisis of National Sentiment during the Phoney War,’ *Journal of Modern History*, 71 (1999): 552-584; Laird Boswell, ‘From Liberation to Purge Trials in the “Mythic Provinces”: Recasting French Identities in Alsace and Lorraine, 1918-1920,’ *French Historical Studies*, 23:1 (2000): 129-162.

¹⁴ Ford, *Creating the Nation*.

¹⁵ Anthony Adamthwaite (ed.), *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print, Part II, Series F, Europe 1919-1939. Vol. 16 France, March 1919-December 1921*, 17-18.

of the nationalist cult of the ‘lost provinces’ that emerged after German annexation in 1871, with the result that Alsace became one of the most significant borderlands on the European continent.¹⁶ For the French, it was a frontier of ‘Frenchness’, not just of France. Yet Alsatians had experienced forty-seven years of separation from France, and during this period a strong sense of regional attachment had emerged.¹⁷ And, with links to Germany through language, culture, and, in many cases, family ties, in the eyes of Strasbourg inhabitants such as Dahlet, Alsace was a meeting point or a ‘bridge’ for French and German cultures.¹⁸

Using the controversies that surrounded urban politics in interwar Strasbourg, this article re-evaluates the dynamics of grassroots national belonging and reconsiders the relationship between border regions and nation-states. While borders are shared, the focus here falls on France. This perspective connects ideas of the border with understandings of nationhood in a state that has long defined itself by the idea of its historic, natural frontiers: the Rhine, the Alps, the Pyrenees and the ocean.¹⁹ Section one charts Strasbourg’s development prior to its 1918 return to France, before moving on to a discussion of the city’s relations with Paris after 1918. Section two explores the uses to which the city’s spaces were put through festivals, and section three shifts focus to attempts to fix a national and political symbolism with the construction of monuments that reflected Strasbourg’s cultural heritage. The size of the constituencies represented by the individuals and groups that engaged in these discussions varied, but the debates and controversies afford a glimpse into the range of responses to the question of how regional, national and cross-border attachments and relationships should be reconciled. These discussions were dominated by an understanding of Strasbourg as the limits of the French nation. But, this idea interacted with understandings of the city as the heart of a cross-border community and as a regional capital. The rhetoric of the frontier became part of daily life as elite groups and Strasbourg’s population attempted to negotiate the city’s place in France and its role in Europe.

I

Strasbourg lies on the bank of the river Rhine in the region of Alsace. The Vosges mountain range and the French provinces of Lorraine and the Franche-Comté are to the west, while Germany faces the city across the river. In the middle ages, Strasbourg’s position on the Rhine meant that it became a centre of riverboat traffic, and the city diocese covered the left and right banks of the river. After Strasbourg’s incorporation into France in 1681, the city became the first line of defence against attack from the east. As a result, the new French rulers oversaw the construction of a series of military defences culminating in the Vauban fortifications at the end of the seventeenth century and beginning of the eighteenth.²⁰ After 1871, and the annexation of Alsace and a section of Lorraine into the German Empire, Field-

¹⁶ Karine Varley, “The Lost Provinces” in Varley, *Under the Shadow of Defeat. The French War of 1870-71 in French Memory* (Basingstoke, 2008) and Laurence Turet, *Quand la France pleurait l’Alsace-Lorraine. Les ‘provinces perdues’ aux sources du patriotisme républicain, 1870-1914* (Strasbourg, 2008).

¹⁷ On regionalism in Alsace, see Fischer, *Alsace to the Alsatians?*

¹⁸ On Alsatians’ links to Germany, see Irmgard Grünwald, *Die Elsaß-Lothringer im Reich, 1918-1933* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1984). For an example of the use of the idea of the bridge, see *Die Freie Presse*, 25 February 1920.

¹⁹ On the politicisation of ‘natural frontiers’ see Peter Sahlins, ‘Natural Frontiers Revisited: France’s Boundaries since the Seventeenth Century,’ *The American Historical Review* 95 (1990): 1423-1451, on the revolutionaries ideas of France’s natural limits see Jean-Marie Mayeur, ‘A Frontier Memory: Alsace,’ (translated by Richard C. Holbrook) in Pierre Nora (ed.), *Rethinking France. Les Lieux de Mémoire, Vol.2 Space* (Chicago, 2006): 409-440, 418.

²⁰ Michael Howard, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Invasion of France, 1870-1871* (originally 1961, London 1981), 216; Janis Langins, *Conserving the Enlightenment. French Military Planning from Vauban to the Revolution* (Saban Mass., 2004), 74.

Marshal Moltke supervised the construction of fortifications around the city and surrounding area to ensure that it became 'unassailable.'²¹

Strasbourg's position meant that it was not merely the last line of defence, but also an economic, linguistic, cultural and religious meeting point between France and Germany. After its seventeenth century attachment to France, Strasbourg continued to trade with neighbouring German states. French language use increased, but Alsatian dialect remained the language of the majority and Strasbourg intellectuals adopted a key role as translators in the eighteenth century republic of letters.²² The University of Strasbourg attracted students and staff from east and west, including the author Goethe and scientist Louis Pasteur, and the city's theatres hosted troupes from Paris alongside German musicians such as Mozart.²³ Until the Revolution, Alsace was the only part of France where Protestantism was legal, and throughout the nineteenth century Strasbourg remained the site of religious co-existence and interaction.²⁴ It was the seat of the Catholic diocese of Alsace, and the headquarters of the Lutheran Church of France and the Faculty of Protestant Theology as well as the administrative seat of Calvinist and Jewish consistories responsible for regional affairs.²⁵ Strasbourg's Cathedral, remarkable for its single spire, was a notable local landmark and reminder of the city's Germanic past. After 1871, it became a focus for French national sentiment.²⁶

Strasbourg was also an important administrative centre. During the years of German rule, it became the regional political capital for the annexed territories, the Reichsland Elsass-Lothringen.²⁷ Immigrants from across Alsace and Germany swelled its population and encouraged the development of housing and infrastructure.²⁸ The city landscape also changed; streets were re-named to pay tribute to German history, statues were erected to honour German figures, and ambitious building projects were undertaken to showcase German architecture and to signal its position within the new Empire. Strasbourg's Neustadt (new town) was connected to the old city by the Kaiserplatz, a square whose central gardens were bordered by the Imperial Palace, the Landtag (regional Parliament) and University Library. At the centre was a statue of Wilhelm I, and on the outskirts of the square the

²¹ 'Strasbourg. German Plans for Strengthening the Fortifications,' *The New York Times*, 20 July 1872; Philippe Burtscher & Francois Hoff, *Les Fortifications d'Alsace Lorraine 1870-1918* (Paris, 2008).

²² Franklin L. Ford, *Strasbourg in Transition, 1658-1789* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985).

²³ The number of students from France, German and Alsace fluctuated throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. See John A. Craig, *Scholarship and Nation Building. The Universities of Strasbourg and Alsatian Society, 1870-1939* (Chicago, 1984).

²⁴ Thomas A. Brady, *Ruling Class, Regime and Reformation at Strasbourg 1520-1555* (Leiden, 1978); Francis Rapp, *Réformes et Réformation d'Alsace. Eglise et société dans le diocèse de Strasbourg 1450-1525* (Paris, 1974).

²⁵ Anthony J. Steinhoff, *The Gods of the City. Protestantism and Religious Culture in Strasbourg, 1870-1914* (Leiden, 2008): 13.

²⁶ Mayeur, 'A Frontier Memory: Alsace', 413.

²⁷ Dan P. Silverman, *Reluctant Union. Alsace-Lorraine and Imperial Germany, 1871-1918* (London and Pennsylvania, 1972); Hermann Hiery, *Reichstagswahlen im Reichsland. Ein Beitrag zur Landesgeschichte von Elsaß-Lothringen und zur Wahlgeschichte des Deutschen Reiches 1871-1918* (Dusseldorf, 1986); Annette Maas, 'Kriegerdenkmäler und Erinnerungsfeiern im Elsaß und in Lothringen (1870-1918): Von nationaler Konfrontation zu regionaler Versöhnung in einer Grenzregion,' in Sabine Behrenbeck (ed.), *Historische Denkmäler: Vergangenheit im Dienste der Gegenwart* (Bergisch Gladbach, 1994): 55-68.

²⁸ Archives Municipales de la Ville et la Communauté Urbaine de Strasbourg (AMVCUS) Fonds Jacques Peirotes 125Z 39, 12, Propositions en vue de l'amélioration des Lois sur les Habitations à Bon Marché, 11 December 1922. See also Stefan Fisch, 'Planung als Eigentumsbeschränkung in der Obrigkeitstadt: Bemerkungen zur Straßburger Stadtentwicklung, 1871-1918,' in Rainer Hudemann and Rolf Wittenbrock (eds) *Stadtentwicklung im deutsch-französisch-luxemburgischen Grenzraum* (Saarbrücken, 1991): 179-98 and Harold Hammer-Schenk, 'Die Stadterweiterung Straßburgs nach 1870. Politische Vorgaben historischer Stadtplanung,' in Michael Brix and Monika Steinhäuser, *Historismus in Deutschland* (Lahn-Giessen, 1978): 121-141.

central post office was adorned with statues of Kaisers Wilhelm I, Friedrich III and Wilhelm II.

Such attempts at Germanisation were contested by Francophile Alsatians, as Christopher Fischer has shown.²⁹ Their presentation of the city as inherently French found its clearest expression in the musée alsacien, which opened in 1907. Located in a traditional half-timbered house, and filled with displays of woodcarving, metalwork, traditional dress, toys, and household religious objects, the museum attempted to present an image of a timeless, unchanging, and French Alsace. 'French Alsace' was also promoted in the pages of Francophile publications such as the *Revue Alsacienne Illustrée* and popular images d'Épinal, notably those produced by Francophile artist and author Jean-Jacques Waltz, better known as Hansi. In this way, understandings of Strasbourg as the historic western limits of Germany co-existed with and were challenged by ideas of Strasbourg as France's lost frontier.

When war broke out in 1914, Strasbourg's young men entered the German army and the city's civilians experienced the shortages and disruption of life on the home front. As the war neared its end, revolution swept through the city and Soviets debated two possible futures; the first was Alsatian neutrality, the second return to France. It was the pro-French current which triumphed, and France's troops entered the city on 22 November 1918. After regaining Alsace the French government re-designated Strasbourg the departmental capital of the northern Alsatian department of the Bas-Rhin, as it had been before 1871.³⁰ But, it was also named the seat of the General Commission which had responsibility for managing the reintegration of Alsace and annexed Lorraine (the Moselle) into France. French administrators arrived in the city, and many expressed their surprise that most people spoke Alsatian, a dialect that allowed them to understand German, but little or no French. For Alsatians, however, use of Alsatian dialect and German was a natural feature of life in the borderland, and parties from the left to the right of the political spectrum argued in favour of bilingualism in the region.

As the French arrived after 1918, many of the German migrants who had moved to the city since 1871 left. Some did so voluntarily, while others were forced out as a wave of spontaneous purges and officially organised trials, the 'commissions de triage', followed the restoration of French rule.³¹ The departing Germans were replaced by administrators, teachers and soldiers from across the Vosges. These new arrivals were known by locals as 'Français de l'Intérieur', a label which underlined the Alsatians' sense of their own difference. The preferential treatment which these incomers received generated frustrations amongst Strasbourg's population. Other new arrivals, including migrants from the Alsatian countryside and returning optants (those who had chosen to leave the region in 1871 rather than become German) increased the urban population after 1918.³²

The return to France altered the city's political landscape. Politics in the Reichsland had been dominated by three parties; the Catholic Centre, the Liberals and the Socialist Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD). After 1918, the Centre formed a new Catholic party, the Union Populaire Républicaine (UPR), and the Liberals fragmented; some created the conservative Democrat party, while others migrated to the newly formed Alsatian Federation of the Radical Party. The Alsatian Socialists voted unanimously to join the French

²⁹ For more on these initiatives (which are not the subject of this article) see the excellent discussion in Fischer, *Alsace to the Alsatians?*, 62.

³⁰ Stefan Fisch, 'Der Übergang des Elsaß von Deutschland an Frankreich 1918/19,' in Michael Erbe (ed.) *Das Elsaß. Historische Landschaft im Wandel der Zeit*, (Stuttgart 2002): 147-153.

³¹ Boswell, 'From Liberation to Purge Trials'.

³² AMVCUS, Fonds Jacques Peirottes 125Z 39, 5/1, La Crise du Logement à Strasbourg. Rapport au Conseil Municipal. May 1920. On the optants, see Alfred Wahl, *L'option et l'émigration des Alsaciens-Lorrains, 1871-1872*, (Paris, 1972).

Socialist Party (Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière, or SFIO) in 1919, and were finally able to win power in the city in the 1919 municipal elections. German municipal law stipulated that the government nominate all mayors, which meant that the SPD had been unable to translate its strong municipal polling into positions of power on the local council. This changed in 1919, when local SFIO leader Jacques Peirotes was elected mayor of Strasbourg.³³ But, the SFIO was severely weakened the following year when the majority of its members left to form the Communist Party (Parti Communiste Français, or PCF).³⁴

During the 1920s, these parties voiced their increasing frustration with the return to France. Problems in reintegrating the region's economy left large sections of Alsatian society feeling disadvantaged, while the imposition of the French language left many unable to progress in their careers, defend themselves in court, or understand their school lessons. Political leaders from all shades of the political spectrum called for bilingualism, to prevent the 'sacrifice of a generation.'³⁵ The press expressed concern that the introduction of French legislation would lead to the loss of hard-won privileges, notably in terms of welfare and municipal autonomy. And, religious leaders voiced concern that France planned to introduce the laws of separation of Church and State into the recovered departments to make them tally with the rest of France, where separation had been introduced in 1905.

The separation issue proved the catalyst for organised resistance in 1924 when the newly elected centre-left Radical Premier Edouard Herriot announced his intention to separate Church and State in the recovered departments. The declaration provoked widespread and spontaneous demonstrations, leading Herriot to postpone the introduction of the laws. It also united fragmented sections of the Alsatian population in opposition to the proposal, which triggered the emergence of what was to become known as the autonomist movement. This movement argued for bilingualism, regional administration and the protection of regional legislation and culture. It was able to tap into broader, transnational concern for the fate of national minorities in interwar Europe, and some Alsatian militants likened the situation in Alsace to that in south Tyrol or the Sudetenland.³⁶ For others, it would promote understandings of Alsatians as part of a broader, cross-border community, while other autonomists saw it as an attempt to protect regional culture and traditions.³⁷ Indeed, much of autonomism's appeal lay in the wide variety of views that it represented, and autonomist demands ranged from the protection of the region's culture to separation from France and return to Germany. For autonomist voters and militants, however, their shared concern with the defence of local traditions was more important than their differences.

Autonomism's anti-national rhetoric proved particularly worrying to the French government, not least as the movement appeared to reflect German designs on Alsace. In 1920 the University of Bonn created the Institut für geschichtliche Landeskunde der Rheinlande, a regional studies institute financed by the Prussian Higher Education Ministry and Reich Ministry for the Occupied Territories, which headed a new historiography of the Rhineland (including Alsace) and directed its energy towards the 'struggle over frontiers' and the reunification of the German Volk.³⁸ Such academic support was coupled with financial backing that continued after Aristide Briand and Gustav Stresemann signed the Locarno Treaty guaranteeing frontiers in west Europe; by 1927, the Weimar Foreign Office was

³³ Jean-Claude Richez, Léon Strauss, François Igersheim et Stéphane Jonas, *Jacques Peirotes, 1869-1935 et le socialisme en Alsace* (Strasbourg, 1989).

³⁴ This party was initially known as the Section Française de l'Internationale Communiste.

³⁵ Boswell, 'Franco-Alsatian Conflict,' 565.

³⁶ Goodfellow, *Between the Swastika*, 78.

³⁷ Goodfellow, *Between the Swastika*, 14.

³⁸ Peter Schöttler, 'The Rhine as an Object of Historical Controversy in the Inter-war Years. Towards a History of Frontier Mentalities', *History Workshop Journal*, 39 (1995): 1-22, 5-6.

giving 280,000 RM per year to the Alsatian autonomist cause.³⁹ Demonstrations also offered a reminder that Germany hadn't yet given up on its lost borderland. In 1925, the year of the Locarno agreement, German nationalists celebrated the Rhineland's millennium as a German territory in an anti-French festival held just across the border from Strasbourg.⁴⁰

This is not to suggest that German support for autonomism was a driving force of the movement. Indeed, autonomist leaders including Dahlet made it clear that they desired cultural self-determination rather than German statehood and welcomed Locarno as the renouncement of the Weimar Republic's claims on Alsace.⁴¹ Rather, autonomism reflected grievances with the problems in local society that had arisen since the return of Alsace to France.⁴² But, the French government misinterpreted autonomism as the product of German manipulation, and viewed expressions of regional belonging with increasing suspicion. Meanwhile, Alsatian perceptions of French heavy-handedness did little to calm the situation. These problems were the context for attempts by Strasbourg's politicians and population to assert the city's identity through festivals.

II

Popular engagement in festivities reveals the importance of Strasbourg's role as the boundary of French territory. This was particularly notable as the city celebrated its first, and most important new national festival, 14 July (or Bastille Day). This festival had been introduced in France in 1880, and prior to 1918, Francophile Alsatians had used the day as a means to demonstrate their French patriotism by heading for the border to demonstrate.⁴³ So, on 14 July 1919, the city's interim council was keen to put on a striking display. It produced detailed instructions that called upon residents to decorate or illuminate their houses with banners or ribbons 'so that the appearance of the city will correspond with the sentiments that animate its citizens on this memorable day.'⁴⁴ Subsequent Bastille Days saw similar combinations of detailed directives and grassroots enthusiasm, as did other commemorations of French history; in 1920, large numbers turned out to celebrate the anniversary of the entry of French troops on 22 November and the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Third Republic in September.⁴⁵

In this way, the city was able to come together to celebrate 14 July and other national dates. But, as city councillors debated how to mark the new calendar of festivities introduced by the return to France, and as the population celebrated festivals or commemorated important dates in the city's history, understandings of the city as frontier of France came into competition with ideas that it was the heart of a transnational cultural community or a regional capital. Debate over these ideas fed into disunity over the issue of Alsatian reintegration, and questions of which French laws and institutions should be introduced dominated debates at political meetings in Strasbourg. Opposing attitudes towards the religious question spilled out into debate over Joan of Arc day, after a holiday commemorating the Maid of Orléans was introduced by France's conservative government following Joan's 1920 canonisation. On Strasbourg's first Joan of Arc day the council failed to illuminate all of the town's buildings, as it did on Bastille Day and other important commemorations. This provoked harsh criticism of the Socialist council from the Catholic

³⁹ Philip Bankwitz, *Alsatian Autonomist Leaders, 1919-1947* (Kansas, 1978): 22.

⁴⁰ Schottler, 'The Rhine as an Object of Historical Controversy,' 8.

⁴¹ Eric Kurlander, *The Price of Exclusion: Ethnicity, National Identity and the Decline of German Liberalism, 1898-1933* (New York and Oxford, 2006): 316-7.

⁴² Alison Carrol and Louisa Zanoun, 'The View from the Border. A Comparative Study of Autonomism in Alsace and the Moselle, 1918-1929,' *European Review of History*, 18 (2011): 465-486.

⁴³ Archives Municipales de Mulhouse (AMM) Fonds Martin 40TT 8. *Der Republikaner*, 9 December 1918.

⁴⁴ AMVCUS 1AFF. Affiche, 14 July 1919.

⁴⁵ Rapport, Strasbourg, 6 December 1920.

councillor Schies. Mayor Peirotès denied Schies' charge of unpatriotic behaviour, and pointed out that as he had received no instructions from the government on how the festival should be celebrated, the town decorated a number of buildings but avoided wasting money on unnecessary illuminations.⁴⁶

Peirotès's motivations were not as wholly practical as he implied. Since the end of the nineteenth century, the French left had wrestled to prevent the Catholic right's annexation of Joan of Arc and attempted to present Joan as a republican figure.⁴⁷ In many ways, Peirotès' response represented a continuation of this struggle. But, it was also a response to local circumstances as the region's Socialists experienced mounting frustration that their demands for the introduction of the separation of Church and State in Alsace went unheeded in Paris, and, as a result, the Mayor was keen not to celebrate a Catholic heroine with too much enthusiasm. Indeed, refusal to celebrate sent a potent signal about attitudes towards the religious question in the city and Peirotès pointed out that the city's population had not indicated any desire to celebrate the festival.⁴⁸

Peirotès had good reason to treat the day as an opportunity to make a broader statement. For outside observers, festivals in Strasbourg offered a means of gauging popular opinion in the city, a particularly important point given Strasbourg's strategic and symbolic significance. As the first reports of Alsatian discontent arrived at the Interior Ministry in 1921, police officers reassured the government that Strasbourg's population had celebrated 14 July enthusiastically, 'in spite of the developing malaise.'⁴⁹ By the mid-1920s, autonomism gained in momentum and found its first official expression in the Heimatbund manifesto of 1926, a declaration signed by 102 Alsatian and Mosellan notables which demanded the protection of regional legislation and culture. Two months later, the Socialist daily the *Freie Presse* described Strasbourg's 'spontaneous' celebration of 14 July as a 'categorical response' to the autonomist movement and affirmation of the city's patriotism.⁵⁰

As autonomism grew in force across Alsace, Raymond Poincaré's government responded by cracking down on the movement. In 1928, fifteen alleged autonomists stood trial in Colmar charged with plotting against the French state. The prosecutors failed to demonstrate proof of a conspiracy or evidence of funding from Germany, allowing the local press to portray the trial as a farce. Nevertheless, four of the defendants were found guilty, imprisoned for a year and banned from entering Alsace for five years.⁵¹ The announcement of the verdict provoked clashes between supporters and opponents on the streets of Strasbourg. The following year, elections to the city council were won by an autonomist coalition known as the Volksfront and made up of the Communist PCF, Catholic UPR and the Autonomist Landespartei. The Communist Charles Hueber became Mayor.

At first, reports suggested that the Volksfront's victory did not reflect widespread anti-French sentiment. Writing shortly after the elections, Paul Yves Sebillot, editor of *La France Moderne* reported that the tricolour flags at Strasbourg's 1929 celebrations for Joan of Arc were 'as numerous as those on the Ile de France on 14 July'. What is more, some were so old that they were embossed with the imperial eagle, a 'testament', Sebillot noted, 'to

⁴⁶ Compte-rendu du conseil municipal, 50 séance, 11 May 1921, 495-8. Discours de Schies et discours de Jacques Peirotès.

⁴⁷ Michel Winock, 'Jeanne d'Arc' in Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les lieux de mémoire, III: Les Françaises* (Paris, 1992): 675-732.

⁴⁸ Compte-rendu du conseil municipal, 50 séance, 11 May 1921, 495-8. Discours de Schies et discours de Jacques Peirotès.

⁴⁹ Archives Départementales du Bas-Rhin (ADBR) 121AL 855 Rapport sur l'activité des services de police d'Alsace et de Lorraine pendant le mois de Juillet 1921. Strasbourg, 10 August 1921.

⁵⁰ *Die Freie Presse*, 15 July 1926.

⁵¹ The defendants found guilty were Joseph Rossé, Eugène Ricklin, Paul Schall and abbé Joseph Fasshauer.

a half century of loyalty to France.’⁵² The government was further reassured that the council was not as anti-French as feared when, on 14 July 1929, the tricolour flew from the town hall and the city was illuminated as usual.⁵³

The situation had changed by the following year, when the Volksfront cancelled celebrations, and in 1931 it voted against staging a firework display or illuminating the city’s buildings.⁵⁴ The council put this decision down to their poor relations with Paris, although the problems cited by councillors in the discussion reflected political rivalries rather than national concerns. Camille Dahlet argued that because the government had refused to subsidise the city theatre, the council should feel no need to light up buildings to try to prove itself to be a nationalist council.⁵⁵ Communist councillor Mohn put his vote down to the French government’s continued repression and exploitation of the working classes.⁵⁶ As political and national opposition to the government became intertwined, national grievances were expressed in the language of local politics.

The Prefect dismissed the Volksfront’s refusal to celebrate as the result of the Alsatians’ ‘natural tendency towards opposition and criticism.’⁵⁷ However, the council’s Alsatian rivals detected more ‘national’ motives; Socialist Marcel-Edmund Naegelen interpreted the protest as Germanophilia, informing a rally that Mayor Hueber had gone to Germany on 14 July 1930, in a reversal of the pre-war Alsatian habit of heading to France to celebrate the national festival.⁵⁸ This reflected broader concern that the Volksfront was ‘anti-French’, or even ‘boches’ or ‘amis de boches.’⁵⁹ These views were shared by the nationalist monarchist youth organisation the Camelots du Roi, which took action on 11 November 1930 by installing projectors in a building on Place Broglie and illuminating the town hall in protest at the council’s failure to celebrate 14 July. When news of the prank spread, a crowd gathered in the square calling ‘Down with Hueber!’ and ‘Demission.’⁶⁰

That the youth section of the monarchist Action Française should illuminate for 14 July is revealing of the crisis in Alsatian politics triggered by autonomism. Elsewhere in France it was only after 1936 (and then with great reluctance) that the movement put out flags for Bastille Day. But, in Alsace local leaders had long articulated a regionalist platform while not whole-heartedly accepting the association’s monarchism, as Samuel Goodfellow has shown.⁶¹ And, in 1930 these regional specificities spilled out into its rivalry with the Volksfront and fear of the council’s pan-Germanism. In many ways the events of November 1930 are revealing of a negative response to Hueber rather than positive endorsement of the French Republic, but they are also suggestive of the ways in which Alsatian politics were out of step with those across France. And, while the Volksfront’s rivals presented the conflict as a simple case of ‘for or against France’, the divisions were not quite so straightforward. Rather, political debate became focussed on the issue of national attachment, and on this occasion broader ideas about language, religion and politics were articulated in national terms; the dichotomous positions of ‘pro-French’ or ‘anti-French’ came to mask a range of political views, or, as Goodfellow puts it, all political discourse was reduced to the simple

⁵² ADBR 98AL 634 Minister of Interior to Président du Conseil, Paris, 8 June 1929.

⁵³ ‘La municipalité pavoisé aux couleurs nationales’ *Le Journal d’Alsace et de Lorraine*, 4 July 1929.

⁵⁴ *Dernières Nouvelles de Strasbourg* 11 July 1930; ‘La mairie et la fête nationale’ *Dernières Nouvelles de Strasbourg*, 12 July 1930; Compte-rendu du conseil municipal, 52 séance, 6 July 1931, 427.

⁵⁵ Compte-rendu du conseil municipal, 52 séance, 6 July 1931, 425.

⁵⁶ Compte-rendu du conseil municipal, 52 séance, 6 July 1931, Discours de Mohn, 424-6.

⁵⁷ ADBR 286D348 Préfet du Bas-Rhin to Président du Conseil, 16 August 1929.

⁵⁸ *Dernières Nouvelles de Strasbourg*, 1 October 1930.

⁵⁹ Compte-rendu du Conseil Municipal de la Ville de Strasbourg, 18 séance, 3 February 1930, Discours de Staehling, 203.

⁶⁰ *Journal d’Alsace et de Lorraine*, 11 November 1930.

⁶¹ Goodfellow, *Between the Swastika and the Cross of Lorraine*, 49-50.

dichotomy of autonomism versus assimilationism.⁶²

The crisis in regional politics took place as Franco-German relations took a turn for the worse. In 1932, Lucien Febvre, Professor at the University of Strasbourg best known for his role in the *Annales* journal, confided in his colleague Marc Bloch his fears that the 'frontier of the Rhine has become loaded with hatreds and passions once again.'⁶³ That year, Dahlet and Mourer proposed that Strasbourg host the international congress against war, stressing that should war break out the city would be at the heart of the battlefield.⁶⁴ Moreover, having been a 'seed of discontent' in the past, it was likely to find itself in a similar position in the future and should, as a result, take the lead in setting the pacifist agenda.⁶⁵ In proposing the congress, Dahlet and Mourer attempted (unsuccessfully) to stress that the city's role as a bridge could be useful in geopolitical terms as well as in culture.

In 1933, Adolf Hitler's Nazi party seized power in Germany, triggering a flow of thousands of Jewish, political and social refugees into Strasbourg from across the Rhine.⁶⁶ International tension was compounded by economic catastrophe as Alsace felt the lingering effects of the global crisis that followed the Wall Street Crash; investment dried up and unemployment levels rose, and by the middle of the decade, the Alsatian prefects reported that the economic situation had replaced events in Germany as the main worry facing the population.⁶⁷ Economic concerns and fear about German intentions contributed to an anti-Volksfront movement, which secured the city hall in 1935 and the conservative Democrat Charles Frey was elected Mayor. Frey's period in office saw the construction of fortifications which reasserted Strasbourg's identity as a defensive frontier.⁶⁸ And, festivities during Frey's period in office were increasingly planned with an eye on Germany as an attempt to stress Alsatian attachment to France. In 1938, organisers attempted to recapture the atmosphere of November 1918 in the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of Strasbourg's liberation by the French army. Processions marched along the streets, while the surviving members of the Reception Committee reunited, wearing their original armbands from 1918.⁶⁹ The following year, when celebrating the 150th anniversary of the French Revolution of 1789, the press encouraged the population to celebrate with as much fervour as possible, given that Germany would be monitoring events in the city.⁷⁰ By the end of the 1930s, fear of war ensured that presentations of the city as the defensive limits of France took precedence over other ideas of the city's role.

Through use of the city's spaces to celebrate national and political festivals, urban politics played an important role in shaping a locally formed, grassroots sense of attachment. Ideas of Strasbourg as the heart of a cross-border community or a regional capital ran through these debates and challenged the dominant understanding of the city as bastion of Frenchness. But, the changing context created by the return to France and by shifting Franco-German relations meant that it was Strasbourg's place within the French nation that Alsatians tended

⁶² Goodfellow, 'From Communism to Nazism: The Transformation of Alsatian Communists', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 27 (1992): 231-258, 242.

⁶³ Schöttler, 'The Rhine as an Object of Historical Controversy,' 12. On Alsatian concerns about Hitler's seizure of power, see Archives Nationales (AN) F713028 Préfet du Haut-Rhin to Ministère de l'Intérieur, Colmar, 8 August 1934.

⁶⁴ Compte-rendu du conseil municipal, 75 séance, 18 July 1932, 560.

⁶⁵ Compte-rendu du conseil municipal, 75 séance, 18 July 1932, 555-556.

⁶⁶ Martin Alexander, *The Republic in Danger. General Maurice Gamelin and the politics of French Defence, 1933-1940*, (Cambridge, 1992), 181; Harvey, *Constructing Class*, 170-2.

⁶⁷ AN F713028 Prefet du Haut-Rhin to Ministère de l'Intérieur, Colmar, 9 July 1934.

⁶⁸ *Die Freie Presse*, 'Ne construisez pas de mur autour de nous' 6 December 1928.

⁶⁹ *Journal d'Alsace et de Lorraine*, 20 November 1938 ; AMVCUS 81Z 39 Fonds Haug, Survivants du Comité Central de Réception de 1918 (Altorffer, Braun, Hahn, Stephen & Wagner) to Hugo Haug, Strasbourg, 16 November 1938.

⁷⁰ *Journal d'Alsace et de Lorraine*, 15 July 1939.

to stress first, and, when Alsatians did assert alternative visions of their city, they adopted national language to express themselves. Thus, celebrations in Strasbourg were engines for the complex debates about nationhood which were played out after 1918. These debates found further expression in discussions over monuments, as Parisian and Alsatian elites attempted to fix Strasbourg's identity through the construction of a new commemorative landscape.

III

After Strasbourg's return to France, committees, societies, newspapers and individuals from across the globe offered donations of statues, sculptures and busts to the city.⁷¹ These gifts had two interrelated aims; firstly, to fill the empty spaces left by the destruction of German monuments, and secondly to imprint Strasbourg with symbols of French patriotism. Yet debates over the construction and placement of monuments also afford a glimpse into the range of attitudes towards French nationhood and connections with Germany. As was the case with discussion of festivities, debates about monument construction in Strasbourg reveal the co-existence and competition of ideas of the city as an integral part of France, as a regional centre and as the heart of a cross-border community. But they are also suggestive of the redrawing of alliances triggered by reintegration. Individuals mobilised the same ideas about the border for different political purposes, using inconsistent and sometimes contradictory language in different contexts. The major statues to be planned in interwar Strasbourg reflected these rival and intersecting views of regional and national history.

As had been the case with festivities, plans for statues in the city also focussed first upon national history. In the case of Strasbourg's first interwar monument, a statue honouring the Marseillaise, the initiative was taken outside the city when President Raymond Poincaré and Albert de Dietrich, a descendent of Strasbourg's eighteenth century mayor Friedrich de Dietrich, formed a monument committee to commemorate the national hymn's composition in Strasbourg in 1792.⁷² The committee was formed during the war and planned the monument to celebrate Alsace's return to France in the event of a French victory.⁷³ After the armistice, the committee rapidly decided upon a sculptor, commissioned the form of the statue (which depicted three soldiers brandishing the tricolour) and proposed that the monument should be placed in the Place de la République, the former Kaiserplatz and the heart of the German new town, as a highly symbolic replacement to the statue of Wilhelm I, which had been torn down in November 1918.⁷⁴

In May 1919 Strasbourg's council subscribed to the committee as a Founding Member and pledged 100 000 francs to the statue.⁷⁵ The council then chose the construction materials and the statue's eventual site, in Place Broglie close to de Dietrich's former house.⁷⁶ The change of location is suggestive of the different attitudes towards the statue held by the council and by the monument committee. The council rejected the straightforward

⁷¹ AMVCUS, 81 Z 37, Jacques Peirottes to members of the Conseil Municipal, 18 November 1920 ; 81Z 39 Peirottes to Hugo Haug, 8 November 1919.

⁷² AMVCUS 154MW 61 Albert de Dietrich to Jacque Peirottes, Paris, 3 May 1919 ; ADBR 121AL 1091 The Committee was constituted of Pierre Bucher, Paul Helmer, F. Kieffer, Anselme Laugel, Daniel Mieg, Jules Siegfried, Staehling.

⁷³ AMVCUS 154MW 62 Committee de la Marseillaise to Mayor of Strasbourg, Paris, 7 February 1922.

⁷⁴ AMVCUS 154MW 61 Albert de Dietrich to Jacques Peirottes, Paris, 2 May 1919.

⁷⁵ AMVCUS 154MW 61 Président du Conseil Municipal to M. Baron Albert de Dietrich Strasbourg, (nd); 154MW 61 Président du Conseil Municipal to Président du comité national de la Marseillaise, Strasbourg, 17 July 1919; Compte rendu du Conseil Municipal de la Ville de Strasbourg, 20 séance, 20 séance, 20 June 1919, 458 ; Compte rendu du Conseil Municipal de la Ville de Strasbourg, 20 séance, 20 June 1919, 458.

⁷⁶ Compte rendu du Conseil Municipal de la Ville de Strasbourg, 12 séance, 31 March 1920, 480-1.

replacement of the Kaiser by the Marseillaise and instead opted to place the statue in the old town, close to the house in which it was composed. This location underlined the region's role in national history; for the council there was no need to replace one set of national symbols with another, as the city had its own, existing symbolism and history. Similarly, there was no need to impose a French identity onto the recovered region, as Alsatians would be actively involved in the reimagining of their region's place within France.

The filtering of national symbols through local understandings was reinforced at the placement of the first stone in June 1922 when Radical councillor François Oesinger paid tribute to Alsace, which was 'at the forefront of all the great republican and revolutionary movements which made France one and indivisible, and which created the magnificent, democratic France of 1918.'⁷⁷ In speeches and pamphlets the city council presented the monument as the fusion of national and local history, stressing the Strasbourgeois origins of the anthem and the role of Alsatians in the Revolution of 1789. At the monument's unveiling on 14 July 1922, Socialist Mayor Jacques Peirottes took pains to show that while the statue may have been a 'top down' initiative thought up by a Parisian committee, Strasbourg had embraced it as its own. And, the monument became a focus for the celebration of national festivals, as, in its attachment 'to the ideas of liberty and equality that inspired the Marseillaise,' the city shared celebrations of Bastille Day with the rest of France.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, local politics controversies ensured that Peirottes also made reference to the population's continued attachment to all 'republican institutions.'⁷⁹ By this, of course, he meant the laws of religious separation, and by making them part of his speech he transformed the monument into an intervention into the debate about the reintegration of Alsace into France.

If the Marseillaise revealed divergent attitudes towards Alsatian reintegration, monuments could also reveal of a range of attitudes towards the border. In December 1928, Fritz Beblo, Chief Architect of the Bavarian city of Munich and former Stadtbauinspektor of Strasbourg proposed that Strasbourg swap its statue of Father Rhine, which had been installed by the imperial government in 1903, for a monument of the Meiselocker, or 'Bird Catcher'.⁸⁰ The Meiselocker paid homage to an ancient nickname that the Strasbourgeois held in Alsace, and depicted a young boy with a flute, which, according to the legend, he used to attract birds that he then sold at the city's markets. Socialist Mayor Peirottes accepted the offer, and Father Rhine was unveiled in its new position in Munich in 1932. Although Father Rhine had never been a particularly popular monument in Strasbourg, its replacement did not meet with universal approval; the Sculptors' Guild protested at the replacement of the popular 'Vater Rhein' by the unknown Meiselocker, and inhabitants of the Place Saint Etienne, in which the council planned to place the new monument, complained about its aesthetics.⁸¹

Controversy over the statue went beyond its appearance, however. At its unveiling the Volksfront, which had recently won the town hall, attempted to offer the Meiselocker as an alternative symbol for Alsace: one that reflected its position as a bridge between France

⁷⁷ AMVCUS 154MW 62 'Discours de Oesinger'; *Journal d'Alsace et de Lorraine* 17 June 1922.

⁷⁸ *Dernières Nouvelles de Strasbourg*, 15 July 1922; 'L'Inauguration du Monument de la Marseillaise,' *Journal d'Alsace et de Lorraine*, 15 July 1922.'

⁷⁹ AMVCUS 154MW 62 Discours de Oesinger; *Journal d'Alsace et de Lorraine* 17 June 1922; *Dernières Nouvelles de Strasbourg*, 15 June 1922; 'L'Inauguration du Monument de la Marseillaise' *Journal d'Alsace et de Lorraine*, 15 July 1922'; Fonds Jacques Peirottes 125Z 33. Discours prononcé lors de l'inauguration de la statue représentant La Marseillaise, Place Broglie, 14 July 1922.

⁸⁰ AMVCUS 154MW 67 Extrait des délibérations du Conseil municipal de la ville de Strasbourg, séance du 10 décembre 1928.

⁸¹ AMVCUS 154MW 67, Corporation obligatoire des patrons sculpteurs sur pierre et entrepreneurs de monuments du Bas-Rhin to Jacques Peirottes, Strasbourg, 22 April 1929; Résidents de la Place Saint-Etienne to Charles Hueber, Strasbourg, 16 May 1929.

and Germany. Autonomist councillor Heil made a speech which focussed on the need for further cultural exchange with Germany.⁸² This reflected the attitudes of the new council to Strasbourg's role as a border city; three months later Communist-Autonomist Mayor Hueber would stress that 'the Rhine separates countries, not men.'⁸³ But, while this view reflected widely held and longstanding understandings of Strasbourg, Franco-German tension meant that its articulation in 1930 was problematic. The conservative Alsatian press labelled Heil's speech a 'provocation' to the majority of the Strasbourgeois population and a 'challenge' to France, concerns which were echoed both in other Alsatian political circles and in the corridors of power in Paris.⁸⁴

Heil's oratory represented one of the clearest challenges to the idea of Strasbourg as a boundary, while the response he received is revealing of the splintering of Alsatian opinion by the beginning of the 1930s. These differences were crystallised the following year during discussions over the statue of Victor Hugo and Lamartine in 1931. As we have seen, Autonomist councillor Camille Dahlet criticised the monument as an attempt to impose a 'Parisian' sense of national identity onto the population of Alsace. Yet, unlike the Marseillaise or the Meiselocker, the idea for the monument to Lamartine and Hugo came from Strasbourg itself.⁸⁵ The monument's committee was made up of conservative, Francophile Alsatians including University Rector Christian Pfister and Professor Robert Redslob. The committee envisaged the monument as a vibrant national symbol depicting Strasbourg's return to France, and requested Parisian help in financing the project by stressing Alsace's constant loyalty to France during the years of annexation.⁸⁶ The monument would thus be a great French patriotic gesture: a statement that Alsace 'was to be definitively French, and that the German era was forgotten'.⁸⁷ And, like the councillors who had embraced the statue of the Marseillaise, the committee connected the monument with the history of Strasbourg; Hugo had written of the Cathedral, while Lamartine had paid homage to Gutenberg and the Marseillaise.⁸⁸

But, like the Meiselocker, this monument also needed to reflect Strasbourg's position on the border. This gave the city a double duty, firstly to inform and warn France of any potential hostility as and when necessary, and secondly to bring the 'treasures of German culture to France.'⁸⁹ Redslob envisioned the Hugo-Lamartine statue alongside the existing statues of Schiller and Goethe as a signal of Alsace's position as a bridge, and a sign that Strasbourg merited its moniker 'city of roads.'⁹⁰ That Redslob would argue for both the

⁸² 'L'inauguration du Meiselocker a été une manifestation autonomiste.' *Journal d'Alsace et de Lorraine*, 18 November 1929.

⁸³ *Compte-rendu du Conseil Municipal de la Ville de Strasbourg*, 18 séance, 3 February 1930, Discours de Charles Hueber, 204. This was not simply communist internationalism. By this point, Hueber had been expelled from the PCF and embarked upon the political trajectory that would lead to his reinstatement as Mayor of Strasbourg by Gauleiter, Robert Wagner, after the city's annexation into the Third Reich. Thus the label 'Communist Autonomist' reflects his origins in the PCF and commitment to autonomism. See Samuel H. Goodfellow, 'From Communism to Nazism'.

⁸⁴ 'L'inauguration du Meiselocker' a été une manifestation autonomiste.' *Journal d'Alsace et de Lorraine*, 18 November 1929 ; 'Une protestation de groupements d'étudiants' *Journal de l'Est*, 20 November 1929 ; *Journal d'Alsace et de Lorraine*, 20 November 1929.

⁸⁵ AMVCUS 154MW 53 'Pour le monument Lamartine-Victor Hugo.'

⁸⁶ AMVCUS 154MW 55 668 Christian Pfister Recteur de l'Université to M. le Baron Henri de Rothschild, Strasbourg, 23 December 1927; 154MW 53 'Pour le monument Lamartine-Victor Hugo'. Discours de Gaston Kern.

⁸⁷ AMVCUS 154MW 53 Robert Redslob to Jacques Peirottes, Strasbourg, 17 December 1927; 154MW 54, Appel en faveur d'un monument Lamartine-Victor Hugo à ériger à l'orangerie de Strasbourg.

⁸⁸ *Compte-rendu du Conseil Municipal de la Ville de Strasbourg*, 98^e séance, 15 April 1929, 194.

⁸⁹ AMVCUS 154MW 53 'Pour le monument Lamartine -Victor Hugo.' Discours de Christian Pfister.

⁹⁰ AMVCUS 154MW 53 'Pour le monument Lamartine-Victor Hugo.' Discours de Robert Redslob.

erasure of memories of the German era and for Strasbourg as a bridge is revealing of the complexities of the situation in interwar Strasbourg. The same people mobilised different ideas in different contexts. Equally, different people could mobilise the same ideas to support different purposes. Both Redslob and Heil articulated a view of Strasbourg as a cultural meeting point, yet the two men used this idea in very different ways. For Redslob it was an integral part of the region's French patriotism, while for Heil it reflected Alsatian uniqueness and underscored his argument against the introduction of French laws, language and institutions into the region.

By the middle of the 1930s, the international situation continued to interact with local concerns as the council discussed commemoration of the Great War. The city had agreed to erect a monument in the early 1920s, but no statue was erected in Strasbourg until 1936.⁹¹ This was, in part, due to aesthetic concerns and the failure of the council to agree upon a monument. Given complaints about the 'tasteless' war memorials erected elsewhere in the region, it was important that the monument in Alsace's most high profile city would be fitting.⁹² But it is likely that the delay also reflected what William Shane Story has identified as a more general reluctance to embark upon commemorative projects to avoid the airing of discord or uncertainty about the past.⁹³ After all, Alsace had fought for Germany but was now part of France. As a result, the way in which the monument should commemorate the dead was politically sensitive for the city, and indeed for Alsace as a whole. The monument was eventually unveiled in October 1936 and finally filled the space at the centre of the Place de la République, which had been much coveted as a symbolic commemorative space. The monument featured a mother as an allegory for Strasbourg holding her two dead sons in her arms; one son represented the Alsatians who had fought for France and the other those who had fought for Germany.

Elizabeth Vlossak has pointed out that the Strasbourg memorial is unusual amongst Alsatian monuments to the Great War, as most of the region's towns opted to depict either solitary women or female allegories. In these monuments, mothers were not simply a universal figure of collective sorrow. They also allowed the avoidance of the awkward question of whether to depict Alsatian soldiers in French or German uniform.⁹⁴ Strasbourg's monument instead attempted to capture the contemporary pacifist mood through its depiction of two dead soldiers who linked hands in death, with neither wearing his uniform. Its inscription read 'A Nos Morts' without specifying the nation for which the men had died. But, it did not go so far as a bilingual inscription, as the committee feared that this may prove too controversial. The speech delivered by President Albert Lebrun at the unveiling reflected the pacifist tone of the monument; after stressing the historic links between Alsace and France he recalled the tragedy of 1918, when brothers were called upon to fight against each other and appealed 'Let our hands, like theirs, seek and find each other. That they would also reach across borders in a generous gesture, a movement of rapprochement, entente and peace.'⁹⁵ Through the monument, ideas of Alsatian victimhood interacted with understandings of the city's history and with local and international politics. In an

⁹¹ *Compte-rendu du Conseil Municipal de la Ville de Strasbourg*, 19 séance, 6 April 1936, 175. On the construction of memorials see Daniel J. Sherman, *The Construction of Memory in Interwar France* (London, 1999).

⁹² ADBR 121AL 583. M. Le Directeur d'Architecture et des Beaux Arts to M. le Directeur de l'Intérieur, 9 December 1920.

⁹³ William Shane Story, *Constructing French Alsace: A state, region, and nation in Europe, 1918—1925* (PhD Diss, Rice University, 2001), 226.

⁹⁴ Vlossak, *Marianne or Germania*, 166.

⁹⁵ 'Strasbourg en Fête a donné un sens national à la visite de M. Lebrun,' *Le Figaro*, 19 October 1936; 'Le Discours du Président de la République à l'inauguration du monument aux morts de Strasbourg,' *Le Temps*, 19 October 1936

atmosphere of Franco-German tension, the monument signalled more than regional history. It reflected broader, European sentiments and an appeal for peace and unity.

In Strasbourg, the construction of monuments contributed to the reimagining of the city's place within the French nation after its return in 1918. But it also brought into relief the clash that developed over attitudes towards national belonging and the role of the border. Alsatians responded in different ways to the proposals of monument committees to erect statues in Strasbourg. Through such interventions monuments, like festivals, became a means to shape and influence the process of reintegration and to express local attitudes towards Alsace's position on the Rhine. And throughout, the lack of agreement within different groups limited the impact of the symbols that they proposed for Alsace.

As had been the case with festivals, debates over monuments reveal that the meaning invested in the border changed over time. Christopher Fischer's work on regionalism in the period between 1890 and 1929 has shown that ideas of Alsace's dual culture changed from the late imperial period, when they were used in favour of a return to France, to the period after 1918, when they were increasingly used in defence of a cultural national minority.⁹⁶ The interwar years saw further transformation, as ideas of Strasbourg as a regional centre or a cross-border bridge co-existed and competed with the dominant understanding of the city as the limits of France. Divergences of opinion arose within groups of allies, such as the autonomists, whose failure to agree upon appropriate symbols for Alsace hampered their attempts to represent Alsatian specificity. Equally, political enemies like Redslob and Heil used the same ideas in support of different positions, as understandings of Strasbourg's position on the border evolved along with the changing political context.

IV

In 1940, Alsace was annexed into the Third Reich and attached to Baden under the authority of Gauleiter Robert Wagner. Many of the changes that Strasbourg had witnessed between the wars were reversed; Français de l'Intérieur left to be replaced by migrants from the Reich, street names were translated into German, major squares and thoroughfares renamed, and monuments destroyed. The new rules banned expressions of French identity, such as wearing a beret or celebrating 14 July, and placed restrictions upon the movement of people, particularly across the border into occupied France. At the War's end, the French state embarked upon its own projects to reverse the Germanisation of the war years. In 1945, Strasbourg's military governor requested that German Prisoners of War be sent from Alsace to southern France and that Italian POWs be dispatched in their place with the aim of introducing some Latin culture into the city.⁹⁷ Like their wartime and interwar predecessors, the post-war government failed to recognise that in the eyes of many Alsatians, a dual culture was natural in a borderland, not a reflection of the suspect nationalism of its inhabitants.

Urban politics through festivities and monuments in interwar Strasbourg thus afford a glimpse into the complex development of national attachment in Alsace. Alsatians worked with groups and individuals from outside the region in reimagining Strasbourg's urban spaces, yet their relations should not be understood as a two-way interaction. Rather, national integration proved a multi-centred struggle, engaging a range of national and international stakeholders with different visions of the city's past, present and future, and distinct understandings of the ways in which regional and national identity should be reconciled.

⁹⁶ Fischer, *Alsace to the Alsatians?* 174

⁹⁷ Boswell, 'Franco-Alsatian Conflict', 582. See also Thomas Williams, *Remaking the Franco-German Borderlands: Historical Claims and Commemorative Practices in the Upper Rhine, 1940-49* (D.Phil., University of Oxford, 2010).

Nevertheless, in discussions of urban politics, Alsatians adopted the language of frontiers and expressed local understandings in national terms. Thus, the local, the national and the international became inseparable in the city, and such discussions interacted with debates about the border as festivities and monuments became mechanisms used by the city's population to understand the world around them.

Through these discussions the city's population adopted and appropriated existing ideas about the frontier and made them their own, as the dominant idea of Strasbourg as the frontier of France was challenged by ideas of the city as a cross-border bridge or regional capital. The resulting clash between the different expressions of national belonging reveals the divergent attitudes held between the centre and the periphery, but also amongst different groups in Alsace. As we have seen, ideas of the border were mobilised to support a range of causes and individuals sometimes said different things in different contexts. In this environment, allegiances were re-configured not just *across* the border, but also *along* it amongst different groups in Alsace. This produced some surprising political coalitions, from the Communists, Autonomists and Catholics in the Volksfront, to the Socialist-Conservative Democrat group that came together to challenge them. These political realignments reflect the complexity of the situation in the borderland, where individuals outside Redslob's milieu shared his understanding that the city's geographical and cultural situation gave it a unique position as mediator between French and German culture, and where opponents of autonomism agreed with the autonomists Mourer and Dahlet that the city's geopolitical position bestowed upon it the role of peacemaker between the French and German nations. This is not to suggest that either the idea of the 'frontier of France' or 'bridge across the Rhine' was an empty vessel. Rather, both ideas became part of lived experience and were made meaningful by the city's population.

In this sense, this study of urban politics reveals how the multiple meanings invested in the border affected relations between Alsace, France and Germany. The city acted as both a frontier and a point of contact. But, when Alsatians talked about the border, these two ideas did not co-exist peacefully. At moments of political or economic crisis the rhetoric of borders as meeting points evaporated to be replaced by a stress upon the border as a dividing line. And, just as borders themselves are transient and moveable, so the meanings invested in borders are fluid, and change over time. The bridge across the Rhine of the 1920s increasingly became a frontier of France in the 1930s, before becoming an outpost of the German Empire after 1940. In post-war Europe it retained its symbolic importance; by 1949, it had become the agreed site for the Council of Europe and was to become the home to the European Parliament and a city synonymous with changing attitudes towards borders across Europe.