

ABSTRACT

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IDENTITIES OF ALSATIAN JEWRY
BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS

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This thesis looks at the Jewish community of Alsace and Lorraine between 1918 and 1940 and its attitudes towards France and Germany. The paper argues that while Jews living in Alsace and Lorraine by and large expressed political loyalty to France, they nevertheless expressed a unique cultural identity that resulted from their particular position of living in a contested borderland. The Jews of Alsace and Lorraine spoke both French and German in their daily lives, remained religiously and culturally conservative, and welcomed in refugees from Eastern Europe and Nazi Germany during the interwar period without concern about social or political repercussions. Alsatian Jews clearly manifested pro-French political tendencies, however unlike their fellow Jews in France, Jews in Alsace and Lorraine remained distanced from the ideological connotations of being French citizens. Thus, this thesis illustrates how political loyalty, and religious and cultural identities manifested themselves differently depending on specific locations.

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BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS

By

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents who taught me to love learning.

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I would like to thank my professors at the University of Maryland, particularly my advisor, Professor Marsha Rozenblit who taught me to read, think, and write critically. I greatly appreciate the assistance of my masters thesis committee members, Professors Bernard Cooperman and Katherine David-Fox. My fellow graduate students at the University Maryland provide a supportive and stimulating environment in which to study, and for that I am grateful. Additionally, I thank my former professors at Indiana University who taught me to appreciate and treasure history and Jewish Studies. Finally, I would like to thank my family for their unfailing love and support.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“Hello to Alsace and to Lorraine!” read the jubilant headline of the November 22, 1918 edition of *L’Univers israélite*.¹ A correspondent for the weekly Parisian-Jewish newspaper, stationed in the provinces France regained after its World War I victory over Germany, recounted his impressions of the parades celebrating the return of the land to its “rightful owner” back to his co-religionists in Paris. The headline and subsequent article capture all Alsatians’ excitement with this reunion. The return of the region’s numerous residents, who just a generation earlier had been French citizens, compounded the thrill of this territorial reunification. Alsatians of all backgrounds – Catholics, Protestants, Jews, as well as soldiers and officers – poured out onto the streets, proud once again to be on French territory. The celebratory attitude of *L’Univers israélite*’s correspondent in Alsace-Lorraine, pen name Alsaticus, is undeniable. Amidst the parades and festivities he wrote of hearing “the voice of a happy France, of a France that has recovered its children of the East.”² He clearly articulated the natural and familial bond between Alsace-Lorraine and France. The euphoria of victory in World War I as well as the territorial reunification of Alsace and Lorraine with France gave everyone a chance to unite and show their joy and patriotism. Alsaticus discerned no difference between Parisian Jews’ (including his own) attitudes towards the reunification and the attitudes of those Jews living in Alsace Lorraine. According to him, *all* French Jews rejoiced.

¹ All translations that appear in this work are my own.

² “Bonjour à Alsace et Lorraine,” *L’Univers Israélite*, 22 November 1918, 1.

What is missing from the analysis in *L'Univers israélite*, as well as from other contemporary periodicals, is a serious inquiry into Alsatian Jews' own reactions to reunification. The Jews of Alsace-Lorraine changed citizenship without even leaving their homes, yet very little is known about them in the decades after they returned to France. Propaganda aside, the extent of their celebration is unknown, as is the exact numbers of celebrants. Furthermore, little is known about their feelings both towards France, *la Patrie*, and towards Germany, their homeland for nearly fifty years, ever since France lost the territory to Germany in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. This paper will look at Alsatian Jews in the decades after the "return" to France in an attempt to understand their attitudes towards France and Germany. What soon becomes clear is that Jews living in these provinces conceived of loyalty and national identity differently than did their co-religionists in other parts of France. They by and large supported French political and civic ideals such as equality, freedom, and camaraderie, yet conceived of their own role within the nation quite differently than did their co-religionists in Paris and elsewhere in France.

While the majority of Alsatian Jews during the interwar period identified politically with France, they articulated French identity in qualitatively different ways than other French Jews. The ways Alsatian Jews manifested their French and Jewish identities showed a keen awareness of events occurring in Paris, as well as an understanding of Parisian Jews' attitudes and preoccupations. Nonetheless, Alsatian Jews did not feel pressured to behave in a similar fashion. By and large they did not feel compelled to mimic the behaviors and attitudes of their co-religionists in Paris. Alsatian Jews did acculturate, both overtly and by more subtle means, but they

acculturated to local Alsatian practices and influences. They were cognizant and in fact proud of their uniquely Alsatian identity, which consisted of political fidelity to France, cultural fidelity to Jewish tradition, and fortitude deemed necessary to live in a tumultuous border region.

This paper will examine facets of this particular identity by looking at Alsace-Lorraine's Jewish community during the interwar period and their attitudes towards France and Germany. The ways in which Alsatian Jews viewed both France and Germany will also help explain how a substantial percentage of Jews living outside of Paris understood nationhood and their role in these nations. An examination of this sort underscores the need for regional and localized studies. Alsatians of all backgrounds faced a different daily reality than their Parisian counterparts. To quote French historian Laird Boswell, "In France, perceptions of nationhood at the grass roots did not necessarily coincide with the civic conception embedded in law; national identity was also profoundly ethnic and cultural in nature."³ Although Boswell is referring to the general populace of Alsace-Lorraine, his insight nonetheless also applies to the Jewish communities of the region.

A focus on the region of Alsace-Lorraine also necessitates rethinking ideas about early twentieth century identity. Those residents who occupied these borderlands thought about their lives and homes in manners different than their counterparts elsewhere. Alsace-Lorraine became much more than territory; it served as a symbol for both German and French aspirations. During the interwar period, Germans viewed Alsace as intrinsically connected to Germany; Alsatians were part of

³ Laird Boswell, "Franco-Alsatian Conflict and the Crisis of National Sentiment during the Phoney War," *The Journal of Modern History*, Volume 71, Number 3 (September 1999), 555.

the German *Volk* and necessarily demanded reunification with Germany. On the other side, French politicians and scholars viewed the region of Alsace-Lorraine as irrevocably French in spirit and loyalty. The years under German rule merely reinforced residents' desires to return to the French nation and leaders assumed that after 1918 Alsatians would automatically revert to French cultural affinities.⁴ In reality, Alsatian Jewish loyalty proved more complicated. Although Alsatian Jews largely supported a return to France, years under German rule shaped their loyalties and views profoundly.⁵

Secondly, and just as importantly, an examination of the attitudes of the Jews of Alsace-Lorraine will complicate the portrait scholars have drawn about twentieth century French Jewish life. Jewish communal life in Alsace and Lorraine had different characteristics than in Paris. In fact, although interwar Alsatian Jews were largely loyal to the French state, they manifested this fidelity in qualitatively different ways than other French Jews. Because of their specific geographic, political, and social situation, Alsatian Jews were staunch members of the French *state*, but they conceived of French *nationhood* in uniquely Alsatian Jewish ways. They expressed political attachment with the ardor of true French citizens, yet they differed from fellow French citizens on several key issues. Mostly, they saw the state as custodian of their right to lead lives as they saw fit, especially as a distinct minority. They did not see a contradiction in speaking both French and German in daily life, socializing mainly with other Jews, or remaining in traditional Jewish professions. Furthermore,

⁴ Samuel Goodfellow, *Between the Swastika and Cross of Lorraine: Fascisms in Interwar Alsace* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1999), 16.

⁵ Caron, *Between France and Germany: The Jews of Alsace-Lorraine, 1871-1918* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 178-179.

they expected France to be a refuge for those fleeing political persecution in Poland and Nazi Germany. Thus, although Alsatian Jews saw themselves as politically French, they saw themselves as culturally Alsatian.

The attitudes of the Jews of Alsace-Lorraine deserve a more thorough examination. Studies of French Jews based on the experience of the Jews in Paris do not explain the specific and unique situation of these Jews in the recovered provinces. Sean Martin's study of interwar Cracow Jewry provides some assistance here. He cogently argues in his introduction, "For minority groups, multiple identities are possible, and perhaps preferable, when the minority confronts systemic changes, such as those after the First World War. More importantly, separate minority conceptions of national identity are not necessarily destabilizing for the majority government or society."⁶ Applying this argument to Alsace-Lorraine, located far from Paris, it becomes clear that although the Jews of Alsace-Lorraine lived daily as both Jews and French citizens, they remained far removed from the ideological tensions of being a Jewish member of the French state. Alsatian Jews were more influenced by local social and economic conditions rather than by Parisian Jewish political concerns. Alsatian Jews fashioned a unique identity that made it possible to survive and thrive in their particular situation. They remained politically loyal to France, however they spoke both French and German in their daily lives and continued with traditional Jewish religious and ethnic practices. Furthermore, because Alsatian Jews lived far from Paris, they were able to fashion their own type of French-Jewish identity that did not necessarily pose an acute threat to Parisian Jews who consistently felt the need to extol France's virtues and prove their own worthiness as French citizens.

⁶ Sean Martin, *Jewish Life in Cracow, 1918-1939* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2004), 13.

Alsace and Lorraine became a symbol of French strength and unity for Parisian Jewish and non-Jewish leaders who were by and large not attuned to the actual Alsatian cultural and social climate. Practically, this meant that Alsatian Jews could adapt various modes of survival, without fear of destabilizing the situation of all French Jews.

Moreover, it is worth pointing out that at the dawn of the twentieth century, Jews with origins in Alsace made up ninety percent of the Parisian Jewish population.⁷ Furthermore, by 1939 Jews from Alsace comprised approximately eighteen percent of all French-born Jews.⁸ Thus, while this paper deals with the attitudes of those Jews living in Alsace and Lorraine, it is still important to remember that many Jews elsewhere in France were their relatives or at the very least from the same region. The fact that Jews with similar backgrounds adapted different modes of political and cultural expression necessitates studying the specific influences on the formation of religious and ethnic identity. The crucial distinction between Jewish identity in Paris and Alsace supports an examination of specific locales and insular influences. In other words, given that many of these Jews had similar backgrounds and origins, one must account for at times contradictory attitudes towards France. One possible explanation for the differing ideologies of people with very similar backgrounds is the influence of specific, contemporary societal conditions, or what Vicki Caron refers to as the formation of a “localist identity.”⁹ Jews in Paris were in

⁷ Leni Yahil, *The Holocaust: The Fate of European Jewry, 1932-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 228.

⁸ This percentage represents those Jews loyal to France who left Alsace for France after the German victory in the Franco-Prussian War. Jacques Adler, *The Jews of Paris and the Final Solution: Communal Response and Internal Conflicts, 1940-1944* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 4.

⁹ Caron, *Between France and Germany*, 138.

closer proximity to the larger French political and ideological system. Jews in Alsace-Lorraine, however, were not only geographically distant from Paris, but also dealt with more parochial and regional questions. They acculturated and acclimated to a region very different in nature than Paris and its immediate environs. Rather than seeing themselves as French *Israélites*, as Caron put it, Jews in Alsace saw themselves specifically as “*Israélites and Alsatians*.”¹⁰

There is a rich historiography dealing with the Jews of France during the period between the two world wars.¹¹ These studies tend to focus primarily on the Jews of Paris. While these works contribute much to an understanding of French Jewry’s mindset and attitudes, they nevertheless ignore Jews outside of Paris. For example, several crucial studies have focused on the confrontation between native Jews and immigrant Jews, specifically immigrants from Eastern Europe in the 1920s and from Germany after 1933. Scholars have seen expressions of tension as a formulation of French Jewish identity, insecurity, and the limits of French emancipation. Many French Jewish leaders felt that immigrant Jews were incapable of adapting Franco-Judaism. Nonetheless, one must wonder if such tensions existed between immigrants or refugees and “native” French Jews outside Paris. Substantial numbers of Jewish immigrants found themselves in Alsace-Lorraine, yet as will be described later, the Jews there did not express the same fears and tensions as did their

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Some prominent examples include: Paula Hyman, *The Jews of Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) and *From Dreyfus to Vichy: the Remaking of French Jewry, 1906-1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), Vicki Caron, *Uneasy Asylum: the Jewish Refugee Crisis, 1933-1942* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), Pierre Birnbaum, *Jewish Destinies: Citizenship, State, and Community in Modern France* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000) and idem., *The Jews of the Republic: A Political History of State Jews in France from Gambetta to Vichy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), and David H. Weinberg, *A Community on Trial: The Jews of Paris in the 1930s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).

Parisian co-religionists. Studying the attitudes and outlook of Jews outside of the urban center will hopefully raise questions and provide some answers about crucial questions of Jewish national identity in the early twentieth century.

Chapter 2: Background

Scholars have also long realized the importance of examining the Jews of Alsace-Lorraine, although as of yet there are no works that deal specifically with the period between 1918 and 1940.¹² General studies of Alsace-Lorraine in this specific period often look at the territory in its political and cultural contexts, yet rarely examine specific religious or cultural groups within it.¹³ In a traditional, conservative environment such as Alsace and Lorraine it is necessary to examine important group mentality shaping institutions separately as well as in tandem with each other. In other words, it is not only important to examine political and ideological changes, but also the institutions and communities that stood to benefit or suffer from these changes.

In her book on Alsatian Jews in the nineteenth century, Paula Hyman argued that despite the French government's hopes and the Parisian Jewish leadership's aspirations, Jews in Alsace-Lorraine maintained traditional lifestyles and cultural separateness well after political emancipation during the French Revolution in 1791. Using a variety of sources, Hyman illustrated how local economic and social concerns influenced Jews living in Alsace and Lorraine more effectively than overarching political ideals. These Jews continued to live in small towns and villages

¹² See Hyman, *The Emancipation of the Jews of Alsace*, and Caron, *Between France and Germany*.

¹³ For example, see: Goodfellow, *Between the Swastika and the Cross of Lorraine* and "From Germany to France? Interwar Alsatian National Identity," *French History*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (1993): 450-471; David Allen Harvey, "Lost Children or Enemy Aliens? Classifying the Population of Alsace after the First World War," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (October 1999): 537-554; Laird Boswell, "Franco-Alsatian Conflict and the Crisis of National Sentiment during the Phoney War," *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 71, No. 3 (September 1999): 552-584; and Stephen Harp, *Learning to be Loyal: Primary Schooling as Nation Building in Alsace and Lorraine, 1850-1940* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1998).

and persisted in their traditional economic roles, acting as commercial middlemen in the rural economy. Furthermore, they continued to use the Yiddish language and follow traditional religious practices, at least in part because of the persistence of anti-Semitism in the region. According to Hyman, the growth of cities and Jews' economic roles in the burgeoning urban centers of Strasbourg and Metz in the middle of the nineteenth century led to the modernization of Alsatian Jewry. The modernization did not occur drastically, nor did it completely follow Paris's lead, but rather occurred slowly and largely as a result of economic factors. Prosperous Jews moved to Paris, while those who remained behind still flocked to cities like Strasbourg and Metz. Jews who remained in rural areas of Alsace and Lorraine remained largely poor.¹⁴

Vicki Caron has analyzed the Alsatian Jewish community following the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, when Alsace and Lorraine became part of Germany. She found that in the immediate post-war years the most ardent Francophile Jewish elites opted to leave Alsace-Lorraine for France while others moved there for economic opportunities. Those Jews who remained behind, however, continued to hope for reunification with France; they subtly and overtly supported French political ideals such as liberalism and continued to educate their children in the French language. Families maintained contact with relatives in France, Jewish religious institutions' ceremonies continued to utilize the French language. Aware of persisting French loyalties as well as fears of another French-German war in the late 1880s, the German government increased its efforts to generate German support in

¹⁴ Hyman, *The Emancipation of the Jews of Alsace*, 94.

Alsace and Lorraine.¹⁵ As the years, progressed, however, and as German authoritarianism lessened, many Alsatian Jews came to accept German rule as tolerable. Aware of the Dreyfus affair in France and a failed Alsatian-Jewish and Alsatian-Catholic alliance, many Alsatian Jews came to terms with German rule. The Dreyfus Affair in particular led to disillusionment among those Jews who continued to uphold French revolutionary ideals. In the Affair's aftermath, those Jews who had been loyal to France, now began to look to Germany to protect Jewish rights.¹⁶ Moreover, some Alsatian Jews briefly aligned themselves with Alsatian Catholics, who had emerged as the major force behind the movement protesting German rule. What soon became clear, though, was that the Jews, who upheld French revolutionary ideals, and the Catholic monarchical group, who sought a return to the *ancien régime*, were unable to work together. The religious anti-Jewish undertones of the protest movement isolated those Jews who were ardently pro-French.¹⁷ Further complicating this situation were relatively large numbers of German Jews who immigrated to Alsace in the late nineteenth century and promulgated German culture and political appeasement. Nonetheless, latent French patriotism persisted and manifested itself openly in the First World War, when German leaders once again adapted authoritarian rule in Alsace and Lorraine. Jews in Alsace and Lorraine seemed willing to adapt themselves to the government that preserved their rights and offered security. These allegiances, though, were largely devoid of national attachment.

Both the French and German governments had utilized education to secure political loyalties. In Alsace in general, as Stephen Harp has shown in his book on

¹⁵ Caron, *Between France and Germany*, 103.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 122-123.

primary education, *Learning to be Loyal*, theoretical definitions of nationality ultimately mattered little. Instead, both France and Germany utilized similar alternating methods of freedom and control in order to exert authority over the region. Instead of crucial differences between French and German rule, or competing nationalisms, primary schools altered as a whole with changing assumptions regarding the nation, national language, and the perceived importance of knowing the national past.¹⁸ According to Harp, the material hardships of World War I, as well as a repressive German civilian administration, led many Alsatian residents to become pro-French, regardless of pre-World War I loyalties.¹⁹ On the whole then, Alsatians reacted more to contemporary political concerns than to more abstract ideological notions of loyalty to a particular state. Primary schools reflected the two states' desires to win public support by raising young generations of pro-French or pro-German youth.

Thus, Jews in Alsace and Lorraine held complicated views towards the French and German states. Jewish leaders often linked the French state with emancipation and liberalism, and viewed it as their protector. Nonetheless, events of the late nineteenth century forced many Jews to reconsider their loyalties, or at the very least, learn to live with German rule. By the time World War I ended, Jews in Alsace and Lorraine once again saw the French state as ideal. As opposed to Jews in Paris, however, Alsatian Jews brought a certain wariness and reserved attitude to their French loyalty,

¹⁸Harp, x.

¹⁹Ibid., 161.

The revolution of 1789 posed a conundrum for officials of the nascent modern French state. If the Enlightenment ideals of this fledging nation were truly liberty, equality, and fraternity, then officials had to come to terms legally and politically with its 40,000 Jewish inhabitants by either emancipating or expelling them.²⁰ Consequently, France became the first European nation to offer citizenship to its Jewish citizens. Implicit in this offer, though, was an expectation of improvement and civic betterment, catchphrases of Enlightenment ideology. French Jews were expected to abandon those practices and behaviors, perceived clannish ritual behaviors that might continue to keep them separate from the larger society. The new, enlightened French nation gave Jews citizenship with the expectation that the Jews would take full advantage of citizenship's opportunities for self and group improvement. From its very inception, then, the French state and its Jews held a contractual relationship of sorts. This relationship was simultaneously called into question and further clarified under Napoleon's rule, when, in 1806 he convened an Assembly of Jewish Notables to answer certain pressing questions regarding the Jews' relation to the modern state. In the end, Jewish leaders articulated a view that became a platform of sorts for French Jewry. In essence, they took out the ethnic conception of Jewish identity, and defined themselves as Jewish only in the religious and ritual sense. They shared a supreme allegiance with their fellow French citizens to the French state, rather than a kinship and loyalty to Jews in other nations. In sum, the Jews were no longer a separate polity, but rather a religious group within France, at least in theory.²¹ In an attempt to abolish the appearance of any particularist

²⁰ Population figure taken from Hyman, *Jews of Modern France*, 18.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

tendencies, French Jews prioritized French civil law over Jewish law and reformulated the traditional role of the rabbi.²²

Napoleon also provided a new institutional framework for French Jews in 1808. He ordered the establishment of Jewish consistories in any department or group of departments with over two thousand Jewish inhabitants.²³ A Central Consistory in Paris oversaw the different regional consistories, which in turn were to oversee religious and philanthropic life in the different communities and synagogues. Moreover, government authorities expected the consistories to assist Jewish residents in becoming better French citizens, or to use Enlightenment terminology, to help “regenerate” Jews and Judaism in France.²⁴ Consistorial leaders and ideologues proceeded to formulate a complex theory of Franco-Judaism, a particular type of religion that would allow Jews in France to remain Jewish while fully taking advantage of the modern nation’s opportunities.

In general, French Jewish identity was predicated on the need and desire to continually prove Jews’ worthiness as French citizens. French Jews generally saw themselves as politically and culturally French, and Jewish only in a narrowly conceived religious sense. In fact, by the mid-nineteenth century, French-Jewish leaders had cultivated an ideology of Franco-Judaism, the presentation of Jewish ideals within a more secular framework, predicated on the desire for assimilation. Traditional Jewish concepts were reformulated so that Jews could simultaneously remain Jewish and become like their fellow French citizens. Jewish leaders emphasized that Jewish messianic hopes were satisfied in the post-Revolutionary and

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 44.

²⁴ Ibid., 45.

post-Enlightenment French setting, thereby rendering a traditional desire to return to Palestine obsolete.²⁵ Jewish ideologues such as Théodore Reinach, James Darmesteter, and Joseph Salvador emphasized that while Jews still had a special mission in the world, French Jews no longer had to work alone to achieve this mission. Because France had been transformed by the Revolution of 1789, French Jews and non-Jews could now work together to promote universal ideals such as peace and justice.²⁶ Jewish precepts and enlightened French ideals co-existed naturally and easily, thereby allowing formerly segregated communities to exist and work together for a better society. This reformulation of French-Jewish identity and religious ideology went beyond mere expression of political loyalty and allegiance. According to Michael R. Marrus, Franco-Judaism “shaped the essence of Judaism to fit the essence of the France of the Third Republic.”²⁷ Thus, French Jews fully identified as French in every way. They were Frenchmen of the “mosaic persuasion.”

²⁵ Vicki Caron, *Between France and Germany*, 8-9.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Michael R. Marrus, *The Politics of Assimilation: A Study of the French Jewish Community at the Time of the Dreyfus Affair* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 100.

Chapter 3: The Jews of Alsace and Lorraine

In Alsace-Lorraine a unique situation presented itself. Daily political and social affairs necessitated a more complicated formulation of identity. After the French Revolution, Jews in Alsace persisted in a group solidarity that focused on Jewish tenets of charity within the Jewish community, philanthropy, and raising money for Palestine.²⁸ While Jews in the provinces did indeed adapt certain folk customs of their non-Jewish neighbors, they nonetheless continued to practice traditional Judaism, devoid of the ideological shifts taking root elsewhere.²⁹ Even after Napoleon's Council d'État in 1806 paved the way for formal French-Jewish organization and a distinct Franco-Judaism took shape, Jews in Alsace and Lorraine remained distant.³⁰ The resilience of traditional Jewish practices in the early nineteenth century resulted at least in part from the impossibility of Jewish social mobility. Assimilation into larger society remained impossible in Alsatian villages as pre-emancipation notions of community and society, both among Jews and non-Jews, remained prevalent.³¹ As Paula Hyman has cogently argued, the Jews of Alsace in the nineteenth century deflected ideological changes from above and ended up shaping a community of French Jews who respected Jewish tradition, even after economic shifts in the mid-nineteenth century resulted in some Jews' upward social mobility and lessening observance.³² In the middle of the nineteenth century Jews largely abandoned small villages in Alsace and Lorraine and moved to larger urban

²⁸ Paula Hyman, *The Emancipation of the Jews of Alsace: Acculturation and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 71.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

³⁰ Paula Hyman, *The Jews of Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 40.

³¹ Hyman, *The Emancipation of the Jews of Alsace*, 70.

³² *Ibid.*, 155.

centers such as Strasbourg and Metz for economic opportunities. While these Jews became acculturated to Alsatian urban ideals, religious separation and tension, for example anti-Jewish riots that broke out in different Alsatian towns during the 1848 Revolution, kept even these urban Jews distinct from their fellow non-Jews. Economic need proved more alluring than enlightenment ideology, and Jews “modernized” in a particularly Alsatian context.³³ Therefore, in contrast to those French Jews who sought actively to become part of the French nation and civic culture, Alsatian Jews saw the French state primarily as a guarantor of their ethnic and religious rights, including the right to practice Jewish religion and culture openly, as well as an end to economic or religious discrimination. This attitude toward the state allowed Jews in Alsace and Lorraine to adapt to the change in government that resulted from the Franco-Prussian War.³⁴ The distance from political ideology and investment in the state allowed Jews in Alsace and Lorraine to maintain a specific Jewish identity that allowed it to survive political changes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The Jewish population of Alsace numbered approximately 22,500 at the time of the French Revolution, over half of the nation’s 40,000 Jewish residents.³⁵ Thus, from the modern state’s creation, the Alsatian Jewish community made up a relatively small, but substantial proportion of the overall French Jewish community. The Alsatian Jewish community was religiously observant, culturally conservative, and

³³ Ibid. Also see: Hyman *The Jews of Modern France*, 56.

³⁴ According to Vicki Caron, the question of Alsace-Lorraine after the Franco-Prussian War highlighted the “tremendous gulf” of competing nationalisms that existed between the Jewish elites of France and of Germany. Each side produced a large body of rhetorical literature that sought to prove Alsatian Jews’ true loyalties. Caron, *Between France and Germany*, 40.

³⁵ Population figure taken from Hyman *The Emancipation of the Jews of Alsace*, 5 and Susan Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), 7.

spoke a particular dialect of Yiddish called Judeo-Alsatian, a linguistic blend of German and Hebrew languages that bore some resemblance to Alsatian dialects spoken by non-Jews.³⁶ Instead of adopting vague “French” ideals articulated by Jews in Paris, Jews in early nineteenth century Alsace adapted the folk customs of their neighbors to fit Jewish life.³⁷

Alsatian Jewish communities during the interwar period, furthermore, were largely impoverished. Between the two world wars at least sixteen Jewish communities in the Department of the Moselle were officially dissolved.³⁸ Many synagogues went into a state of decline as residents moved to larger cities, either Strasbourg or Metz, elsewhere in France or Germany.

In the period between the two world wars, Alsatian Jews remained largely concerned with local affairs, and especially how to continue to live a traditional Jewish life. Despite press coverage of events elsewhere, it was not until international affairs physically encroached on Alsace-Lorraine that communal attention truly shifted. Indeed throughout the interwar period, aside from coverage of immigration and growing anti-Semitism throughout Europe, questions of Jewish continuity and practice received the largest amounts of attention in the Alsatian Jewish press. Specifically, Alsatian Jewish newspaper writers focused their energy on making the synagogue an inviting and dominating force. As late as 1933 a Jewish author wrote, “We feel instinctively that this is the last fortress that we defend for the conservation

³⁶ Indeed, well into the 1930s *La Tribune Juive* featured advertisements for *shadchens*, Jewish matchmakers. One telling example (written in German) from 1934, assured the reader that the matchmaker had connections to the “best Jewish families.” This example of religious traditionalism in France, as well as the use of German language, perhaps best illustrates the religious traditionalism and linguistic pluralism characteristic of Alsatian Jewry during the interwar period.

³⁷ Hyman, *The Emancipation of the Jews of Alsace*, 69.

³⁸ Hyman, *From Dreyfus to Vichy*, 62.

of Jewish life.”³⁹ In another context an author observed, “It’s no longer the family, it’s the temple that is the center of actual life.”⁴⁰

That the Jews of Alsace and Lorraine focused on local concerns illustrates much about their communal identity and governance. Even after reunification with France, the provinces’ Jewish communities remained under the authority of the system established under Napoleon I. Although the French government had introduced separation of church and state in 1905, leaders in Alsace and Lorraine protested to such an extent after World War I that the law never took effect in the provinces. The state, be it Germany or France, had previously paid the salaries of communal religious leaders, and Alsatian Jews feared the end of this system. Furthermore, Jews feared that their rabbis might become too secular and that Jewish social and charitable institutions might suffer if state funds were no longer offered.⁴¹ Parisian Jewish leaders were cognizant of Alsatian Jews’ particular form of loyalty. In an interview given shortly after reunification, Israel Lévy, assistant Grand Rabbi of the Central Consistory, stated, “To apply today in Alsace the system of separation of Church and State, that would be to risk engendering regrets [about the return to French rule], and France would certainly not wish that.”⁴² Thus, Alsatian Jews saw the French state as protector of religious and cultural institutions. They wanted to continue in their own traditional way of life with the assistance of a free and liberal state like France. Additionally, the quote underscores the cultural difference and differing political attitudes between Parisian and Alsatian Jews. Alsatian Jews were

³⁹ “La Communauté et l’Office Religieux,” *La Tribune Juive*, 21 December 1934, 1.

⁴⁰ “Contre la Crise Morale/La Récréation Religieuse,” *La Tribune Juive*, 9 March 1934, 1.

⁴¹ Caron, *Between France and Germany*, 185.

⁴² *Ibid.*

loyal to the French state, however wanted the state to continue to preserve a traditional way of life.

Oftentimes authors framed religious identity and devotion as coterminous with fidelity to the French state and French ideals. In an article published in *La Tribune Juive* in 1930 Lucien Dreyfus unequivocally equated Judaism and France by stating, “A good Jew is, by definition, a good citizen.” He went on to expound on French notions of citizenship and Jewish loyalty, “One knows that an Alsatian Jew is two times French, and we are proud of that title that we well acquired under the German regime.”⁴³ Thus, at least according to Dreyfus, Jews were openly and proudly loyal Frenchmen, even during the years under German rule. Although there were certainly those who disagreed with this statement, and almost just as certainly those times when staunchly pro-French residents hid their loyalties, Dreyfus’ statement still illustrated the prevailing Alsatian Jewish attitude that Alsatian Jews professed gratitude and loyalty to the French state, albeit in more subtle terms than their Parisian co-religionists.

Jews also manifested loyalty to the French state in other contexts. In 1923, the Association of French Rabbis held its annual meeting in Strasbourg, the first time since the armistice that the meeting took place in Alsace. One rabbi proclaimed, “Even during the political separation from their nation, the Alsations never stopped vigorously nourishing French Judaism by their blood, their vitality, and their ideas.”⁴⁴

Nonetheless, Alsatian Jewish communal leaders and writers expressed concern that modernization held adverse consequences for Jewish life. Therefore,

⁴³ “Patriotisme,” *La Tribune Juive*, 6 June 1930, 1.

⁴⁴ “Le congrès des Rabbins,” *La Tribune Juive*, 22 June 1923, 282.

despite loyalty to France, some leaders articulated fears about the effects of French emancipation and assimilating forces. They argued that the French Revolution, despite its wonderful aspects, took many Jews away from traditional Judaism. “We are, at this time, in the presence of Judaism’s imminent disappearance.”⁴⁵ Alsatian Jewish leaders saw themselves as the vanguard of French Judaism and were more than willing to communicate with the authorities and with their co-religionists in Paris to protect their status as guardians of traditional lifestyles. Lucien Dreyfus cogently articulated the limits and dilemmas of Jewish assimilation in his diary. “Alone among all animals and people, the Jew remains impermeable to influences from the country where he is born...Is this to say that a French Jew does not feel any of the effects of his origins? It would be silly to pretend this; the ghettos have not been open for a long time, even in France.”⁴⁶ Certainly Jews had adopted much secular culture; however this acculturation had its limits. According to Dreyfus, French Jews could only discard so much of their Jewish identity. The effects of generations of separation were not easily washed away despite the liberal nature of the French state. Jews in Alsace and Lorraine by and large recognized the impossibility of completely leaving behind Jewish cultural and religious practices. In a region such as Alsace-Lorraine, religion formed a crucial component of identity.

Collective decisions also manifested a concern with the future and tenor of the Jewish community. In 1939 the Strasbourg Jewish community elected a new Chief Rabbi, René Hirschler of Mulhouse. The announcement, officially proclaimed on May 21, 1939, touted Rabbi Hirschler as one of the most brilliant rabbis of the

⁴⁵ “Le Danger et son remède,” *La Tribune Juive*, 8 May 1925, 206.

⁴⁶ Lucien Dreyfus Diary, Lucien Dreyfus Collection, 12 April 1928, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

younger generation, one of the “highest leaders of French Judaism...an incomparable leader; the youth of Mulhouse found in him a friend, an adviser, and a self-assured guide.”⁴⁷ The writer editorialized, “In choosing Mr. René Hirschler, the Jewish community of Strasbourg placed confidence in one of its own sons, marked with a divine gift for carrying out the spiritual task that will fall on him in Strasbourg.”⁴⁸ It is worth noting the emphasis placed on youth. A crucial component of Hirschler’s attractiveness to communal authorities was his own youthful energy as well as his ability to connect to future young people.

Unlike Jews in the rest of France, the Jews of Alsace-Lorraine often manifested overtly Zionist ideals. Again, this can be explained at least in part by the nature of the region itself. In a sense, the conservative environment allowed Jews more freely to practice Judaism and support Jewish political causes. Although an actual move to Palestine seemed out of the realm of possibility for most Alsatian Jews, they nonetheless were more than willing to ideologically support Zionism and its religious and political connotations.⁴⁹ Lucien Dreyfus cited Theodor Herzl in his diary, recording that Jews in France did not support Zionism because the situation is still too secure. Dreyfus added in parenthesis, “Has the situation worsened since then?”⁵⁰ For Jews in the provinces, then, Zionism provided a sense of security, an alternative vision to any hardships that may have existed at the time. Whereas French Jews by and large did not overtly acknowledge insecurities, Alsatian Jews were cognizant of potential problems. For many Jews, the ability to take part in a Jewish

⁴⁷ Bas-Rhin Consistory Records, “Dernieres Nouvelles de Strasbourg” 24 May 1939, Reel 25, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Caron, *Between France and Germany*, 133.

⁵⁰ Lucien Dreyfus Diary, 27 April 1928.

national political movement without the fear of internal anti-Semitism proved alluring as well as a source of pride.

Chapter 4: World War I and its Aftermath

For many Europeans, the legacy of World War I cast a dark shadow over the following years. Indeed, many contemporary press accounts simply referred to the war as The Great War (in French, *la Grande Guerre*). Only German sources referred to the war as a world war (*der Weltkrieg*) from the outset. The appellation, world war, gained more acceptance in the early 1920s as it seemingly confirmed people's fears that the war left unanswered questions and lingering apprehensions.⁵¹ Some scholars even posited that World War II was in fact a continuation of this first bloody, deadly war, the interwar years merely a brief interlude between battles.⁵² However one chooses to name the war years, they overwhelmed European society.

The French victory in World War I meant that the territories of Alsace and Lorraine, lost to Germany after the Franco-Prussian War, now once again became part of France. Undeniably, many Alsatian Jews visibly demonstrated their undying loyalty to the French state. Especially after the violent World War I years, coupled with increasing German restrictions and suppressions, Jews were thrilled to again be a part of the nation that had emancipated them over a century earlier. Marta Appel, born in the Lorraine city of Metz in 1897, recalled that after the armistice was announced, French flags appeared almost instantaneously in most windows. "A wave of enthusiasm intoxicated the Lorrainers. Strangers kissed each other, French songs

⁵¹ Michael Howard, "First World War Reconsidered," in Jay Winter, Geoffrey Parker, and Mary R. Habeck (eds.) *The Great War and the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 14.

⁵² Historian Michael Howard argued that the military battles waged by Germany in 1939-1940 were a continuation of the war for European dominance, necessary before Hitler could carry out the Holocaust and Final Solution. Raymond Aron characterized the twentieth century wars as *Guerres en Chaîne*, separate wars that were nonetheless inextricably linked to each other. Michael Howard, "First World War Reconsidered," in *The Great War and the Twentieth Century*, 15.

sounded from everywhere and all the streets were filled with laughing, shouting people.” Moreover, “German street signs had already been removed and the firms had put out the old French signs that they had displayed before the war.”⁵³

Renée Barth similarly recounted the excitement that filled the air following the French victory. “Two veterans from the 1870-1871 war were standing near the war memorial in their old uniforms – one of them, my grandfather. The French general dismounted from his horse and kissed each of the veterans on both cheeks; and the tricolor fluttered in the wind. It was the high point of my grandfather’s life.”⁵⁴ Barth also recalled the symbolic and overt ramifications of this French victory and reunification. Indeed during World War I, with German troops quartered at the family home in a small Alsatian town, Barth’s grandmother remained staunchly mute, refusing to speak German with the soldiers in her home. Needless to say, the excitement at being able to openly celebrate and speak French on the streets became palpably exhilarating for the Barths and for other pro-French Alsatian Jews.⁵⁵ Other people expressed similar feelings of excitement and relief at being reunited with France.

Perhaps just as importantly, the Treaty of Versailles denied citizenship to those born to German parents, even if the subject in question was born in Alsace or Lorraine. Those denied citizenship were forced to emigrate.⁵⁶ Thus, one may characterize the political affiliations of Alsatians during the interwar period as either staunchly pro-French or largely indifferent. Nonetheless, celebrations marking the

⁵³ Marta Appel, unpublished memoir, Leo Baeck Institute, New York, 52.

⁵⁴ Renee Barth, “A Born Refugee,” unpublished memoir, Leo Baeck Institute, New York, 2.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵⁶ Harp, 188.

end of a horrific war and the return to France marked a time of political and social change in Alsace and Lorraine.

In the postwar years Jews in Alsace and Lorraine expressed their devotion to France using similar symbols and language to Jews in other parts of France. Recalling the war became a clear, safe way for Jews to express devotion to France. Additionally, Alsace Lorraine's symbolic value was not lost on either its residents or on other Jews in France. The 1921 publication of *The French Fidelity of the Israelites of Alsace and Lorraine(1871-1918)* illustrates this sentiment. This booklet, authored by the Alsatian Jewish politician, Sylvain Halff, went to great lengths to illustrate the unflinching loyalty of the province's Jews, as well as portray them as ready and willing to serve the French state. Clearly a work of overt propaganda, the book utilized grandiose and idealistic language that may or may not have been wholly accurate. According to Halff, the Jews living in Alsace-Lorraine joined their fellow citizens of various faiths in expressing unflinching loyalty to France during the years under German rule. Followers of the provinces' three major confessions remained devout in religious practice and French civic ideals. Most importantly, despite forty-seven years under German rule, Alsatians never failed to inculcate the next generation with pro-French sentiments.⁵⁷

While Halff's characterization of the Alsatian Jewish community largely reflected real sentiments, it is nonetheless naïve, or at the very least somewhat overstated. In fact, Jews by and large continued to view France as the nation that first offered them emancipation and continued to yearn for a return to French sovereignty.

⁵⁷ Sylvain Halff, *La Fidélité Française des Israélites d'Alsace et de Lorraine (1871-1918)* (Paris: Librairie Durlacher, 1921), 22.

At the same time, they grew more isolated from fellow Alsatians, and (by necessity) their French political education. Thus, perhaps Halff's assertion that the two words "French Fidelity" said it all and spoke for itself was a bit overstated and not quite the reality. Nonetheless, in the early postwar years, books like his established Jews firmly within traditional modes of French Jewish ideological expression.

Halff emphasized the link between the Jews of Alsace and Lorraine and France by characterizing the relationship between the two provinces and the nation in familial terms. He cited anonymous German thinkers who acknowledged that "the penchant of Alsatians for France is a filial piety analogous to the love of a child for his parents. The relationship of Alsace with Germany resembles a marriage of necessity – concluded without love – between two people of a mature age, each with its own experiences, traditions, and habits."⁵⁸ The message is self-explanatory; Germany's annexation of Alsace-Lorraine was akin to wresting a child from its parents. Behind the propagandistic nature of this analogy, however, is a fundamental assumption. Halff presupposed that he spoke for the majority of Alsatian Jewry when he proved their fidelity. For it is not only the Jews who demonstrated their loyalty by moving into France's interior, but also the Jews who remained behind were just as intensely loyal to France. Although Jews remained in the provinces following Germany's annexation, the Jews nonetheless remained loyal to France.

What is particularly telling about this portrait is Halff's insistence that Alsatian culture was merely a form of French culture. He thus acknowledged

⁵⁸ Ibid., 4. Halff is not unique in his utilization of familial terms to describe communal attitudes and relationships. Other publications of the time, including *l'Univers israélite*, often characterized the relationship between Alsace and the French nation in terms of an orphaned child being returned to its mother.

potential differences between Alsatian Jews' attitudes and the attitudes of those located in France's center, but was still adeptly able to categorize these differences as simple variations of overall French Jewish culture. He articulated similarities in experiences, traditions, and behaviors that did not always manifest themselves in one unified manner.

In the immediate post-World War I period, loyalty to France also permeated synagogue services, most often expressed in rabbis' sermons, which co-opted religious terminology for political ends. Pro-French sentiments that remained latent now openly found expression. Marta Appel, whose family had remained in the pro-German minority, remembered feeling distinctly uncomfortable and unwelcome in the Metz temple where she and her family prayed. "Our rabbi had always been pro-French. Everyone had known it, though he had given wonderful talks on each German holiday. But now he thanked God for the deliverance of his fatherland with such exultation that I could not stand hearing it anymore."⁵⁹ Thus, according to Appel, her family's rabbi merely aped pro-German sentiments during the years under German rule, and openly expressed pro-French sentiments after reunification. Furthermore, the pro-French Jewish majority made families such as the Appels feel distinctly uncomfortable in the years after World War I. Ultimately, Marta Appel's family felt compelled to move to Germany. Her story simultaneously sheds light on the pro-German minority in Alsace and Lorraine, as well as the pro-French political loyalties that ultimately dominated the region during the interwar period.

The prolonged violence that had characterized World War I allowed Jews from all over Europe to demonstrate their loyalty to their particular nations through

⁵⁹ Appel, 56.

military service. In France, sacrificing for *la Patrie* proved similarly enticing.⁶⁰ For example, one of the most famous (and utilized) illustrations of this phenomenon is the life, death, and subsequent memorialization of David Bloch. Bloch was born in the Alsatian town of Guebwiller in 1895, and he spent a number of years working in France. Because his parents still resided in Alsace, Bloch was called up for German military service at the outbreak of World War I. He steadfastly refused to serve and instead enlisted in the French military. While on a reconnaissance mission to Alsace, Bloch was captured by the Germans and charged with treason. Standing before the executioners' rifles, Bloch apparently proclaimed, "My *patrie* will revenge me."⁶¹

The story of David Bloch took on almost mythic proportions in Alsatian, and especially in Alsatian-Jewish, lore. This was not merely a young Jewish man who fought and died for his country, but one who loudly and proudly proclaimed his French affiliation up until the moment of his death. There were undoubtedly other young men who sacrificed for their countries, but this expression of unfailing French patriotism and fidelity galvanized those who sought a concrete example of French pride in the provinces.⁶² Indeed, the French government did take note. Authorities unveiled a statue in Bloch's memory in 1923. The statue, an austere, well-dressed

⁶⁰ Although it is unclear how many Alsatian Jews served in the French army during World War I, their willingness to join the military echoed trends found among their non-Jewish neighbors in the provinces, despite lingering memories of the Franco-Prussian war. For many Alsatian residents, serving in the military in order to defend their homes became more of a rallying cry than abstract ideals of nationalist enthusiasm or overwhelming patriotism. Howard, 17.

⁶¹ *Un Héros Alsacien: David Bloch* (Colmar: Société Alsacienne d'Édition S.A., 1923). In the book, the author answers Bloch by noting, "The country did revenge him!" The "revenge" included a French victory in World War I as well as the return of Alsace and Lorraine to France. Also see Caron, *Between France and Germany*, 181.

⁶² Indeed, David Bloch's final letters to his parents were published in the book *La Fidélité Française des Israélites d'Alsace et de Lorraine* in 1921. What is perhaps most noteworthy about their inclusion is the relatively small amount of detail given about Bloch. Conceivably, then, most of the book's readers knew who Bloch was, at least that he was a Jewish soldier who died for France. The book's author did editorialize, however, that David Bloch was a model of morality and French patriotism, a true "young martyr."

young soldier atop a concrete base, contained the epitaph: “David Bloch, Shot by the Germans.”⁶³ This inscription is in and of itself important. Those who saw the monument may or may not have been familiar with David Bloch’s story, but they recognized the motif of French patriotism against the German enemy. In other words, the most important aspect of David Bloch’s legacy, at least for the creators of this monument, was the fact that the Germans killed him. One may argue that this was a conscious decision to emphasize the loyalty of Alsatians and Alsatian Jews to France by emphatically stating what they were not, namely Germans.

For Alsatian Jews in particular, David Bloch became a symbol of Jewish patriotism. Abbé Wetterlé reminded Jewish youth that at the time of his heroic death Bloch was merely twenty years old. What was his real crime? Wetterlé answered, “He loved France too much.”⁶⁴ In the memorial book written to commemorate the unveiling of his monument, the mere name David Bloch was fused with the history of Alsace, and the book itself was meant to serve as a model for other Alsatian Jewish youth. Military service for the French nation singularly proved one’s allegiance to France, especially for the young.⁶⁵ In fact, to emphasize the point yet again, the image of the Bloch statue contained a caption beneath that read, “Dead for France. A model for future generations of young people.”⁶⁶ The emphasis on youth, both on its potential, and on its loss, was no small matter. The question of molding future

⁶⁴ *La Fidélité Française des Israélites d’Alsace et de Lorraine*, 9.

⁶⁵ There were other examples of Jewish soldiers who sacrificed for *la Patrie*. Sources heralded the patriotism and bravery of one Camille Lévi, a general in the French army who commanded the 25th infantry division in World War I. One citation in particular championed him not only as a brave soldier with all its connotations, but also as a man of “high culture, a celebrated military historian and author.” Halff, 31.

⁶⁶ *Un Héros Alsacien*.

generations became a crucial and defining issue for Alsatian Jewry during the interwar period.

Public celebrations continued throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Civic commemorations continued as an overt yet heartfelt way to demonstrate fidelity to the French state. Notably, however, Jewish communities' celebrations often took place in the synagogue setting. This indicates a different societal dynamic from Parisian Jews. In Paris, civic holidays were seen as a way to co-mingle with fellow French citizens. In Alsace and Lorraine – where religious communities remained largely separate from one another – national holidays were celebrated in the religious public sphere. Nonetheless, communities spared no expense for celebrations. French flags and other decorations adorned synagogue walls. Jewish leaders encouraged their followers to partake in festivities commemorating events such as the armistice, memorializing Jewish soldiers who died for *la patrie*, and as well as celebrating other important French holidays, such as the national holiday of July fourteenth.⁶⁷

World War I continued to serve as a symbol for Alsatian Jewish French patriotism throughout the interwar period. In a humorous, yet still illustrative example, a letter of complaint written to the Editor in Chief of *La Tribune Juive* in October 1938 was signed, “Léon Berman, Chief Rabbi, War Veteran, always ready to be mobilized.” Although seemingly out of place, the appellation nonetheless demonstrates his show of patriotism. Rabbi Berman’s pride in serving the French

⁶⁷ Bas Rhin Consistory Records, 21 October 1936, 1 July 1937, Reel 25, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

nation ably shows through even when he is writing to admonish the newspaper for seemingly endangering the Alsatian Jewish community's precarious safety.⁶⁸

Additionally, various communities requested funds from the Bas-Rhin Consistory to erect monuments to war dead well into the 1930s. In a letter to the president of the consistory in Strasbourg, the head of the Committee for a Monument to the War Dead in Illkirch-Graffenstaden related that his committee was able to raise 33,000 francs by going door to door in the Jewish community. Nonetheless, despite the "honor" displayed by the community's inhabitants, economic concerns came into play and the committee needed to ask the Consistory for supplemental funds. In a carefully worded plea, the committee head explained, "Knowing the interest that you take in the cause of war veterans and victims of the war, we hope that our call to your generosity will not be in vain."⁶⁹ This appeal apparently struck a sympathetic chord with different Bas-Rhin consistory officials. In a number of memos, members firmly established that there were no funds available for communal monuments, but individual officials were to take up a collection plate among themselves and attempt to raise the necessary money.⁷⁰

This incident illustrates the emphasis placed upon communal World War I commemoration. Nearly twenty years after the war, committees still attempted to erect memorials as a show of loyalty. Furthermore, and perhaps just as importantly, officials wanted to help with the cause although no official funds were available. This example depicts the important physical and symbolic value placed on World

⁶⁸ Bas Rhin Consistory Records, 6 October 1938, Reel 25, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

⁶⁹ Bas Rhin Consistory Records, 16 September 1936, Reel 25, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

War I and the resulting relationship between Alsace-Lorraine and France.⁷¹ By and large Alsatians remained loyal to the French state and continued to perpetuate its memory in the public sphere.

⁷¹ In the end, Consistory officials suggested to the Committee that they affix their memorial to the one already erected in Strasbourg. Correspondence, 2 October 1938, Reel 25, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Chapter 5: Language Issues

Debates over the usage of French or Yiddish, which were a basic component of interwar Parisian Jewish life and belied the tension between French Jews and East European Jewish immigrants, were almost universally absent from interwar Alsace and Lorraine. This suggests that the political and social insecurities that plagued Jews in Paris were fundamentally absent in Alsace-Lorraine.⁷² These insecurities are explained at least in part by rampant anti-German sentiments among French citizens in the years following the Franco-Prussian War. French Jews, who often came from Alsace, were subject to suspicion because of their Germanic accents or their German ancestors. Jews thus internalized concepts of cultural homogeneity and worked hard to prove themselves as loyal French subjects. In Paris, language became a marker of ethnic identity. Despite native Parisian Jews' attempts to distance themselves from their East European Yiddish speaking co-religionists, anti-Semites persisted in linking the two groups together. Indeed, during World War I, the Paris Consistory demanded an end to Yiddish sermons in a new, independent immigrant synagogue in Paris because of the language's Germanic origins and fears of resulting violence or persecution.⁷³ Alsace-Lorraine, even after its return to France, remained a region of multilingualism, a province where interwar East European immigrants' usage of Yiddish mixed with others' usage of German, French, and Alsatian dialects. There is no evidence in the Jewish community of specific debates over the merits of the French language, and just as importantly, there is no indication that Alsatians were

⁷² Zuccotti, 12.

⁷³ Hyman, *From Dreyfus to Vichy*, 118-119.

even cognizant of linguistic differences or the superiority of one language over the other.

Moreover, because of their specific geographic and socio-political situation, the Jews of Alsace-Lorraine tended to be bilingual and utilized two or more language in their everyday lives. Marta Appel characterized her birthplace, Metz, as containing “a peculiar charm...where two great nations had to live together, where two languages claimed to be at home.”⁷⁴ People used French and German interchangeably. Most often there was a differentiation between home and business, although this distinction was by no means simple or clear. The newspaper of the Strasbourg Jewish community, *La Tribune Juive*, continued to utilize both French and German interchangeably in its weekly publications until it ceased publication in 1939. Previous generations spoke a Yiddish dialect called Judéo-Alsatian, although by the twentieth century this dialect had by and large disappeared. By the interwar period Jews spoke both French and German.

One should not lose sight of the fact that Alsatian Jews were not alone in using several languages in daily life. In fact, in this porous border region, employment of more than one language was not uncommon or a cause for stigmatization. Artist and author Tomi Ungerer, born into an Alsatian Protestant family in 1931 recalled in her memoirs that her family spoke three languages – French, German, and a specific dialect that she referred to as Alsatian.⁷⁵ Similarly, Robert Redslob, a non-Jewish resident of Strasbourg and professor of political science at the University of Strasbourg, recalled that although the decision to speak

⁷⁴ Marta Appel, unpublished memoir, Leo Baeck Institute, New York, 7.

⁷⁵ Tomi Ungerer, *À la Guerre Comme À La Guerre: dessins et souvenirs d'enfance* (Strasbourg: La Nuée Bleue, 1997) 27.

French or German was often predicated on political affiliations, individuals nonetheless deftly moved between the linguistic groups and utilized both languages.⁷⁶ Although Jews were less assimilated in this region than they were in Paris, they nonetheless acculturated with regards to language. Official documents issued to residents of the region by the French state were printed in both French and German. For example, a Certificate of Residence issued to Dr. Hermann Picard in 1921 by the Department of the Bas-Rhin contained French legal language on the left side, and the exact same passage in German on the right.⁷⁷ While the use of both languages in this document may be attributed to its early date, state documents throughout the period continued to employ both French and German. For instance, an income tax form from 1938-1939 utilized both languages.⁷⁸ What is perhaps just as noteworthy is the apparent leeway the state allowed in language of response. Hermann Picard, the respondent on the tax form, filled in the forms using both languages interchangeably. He obviously understood both languages and saw no problem using both in daily life.

Likewise, a booklet published in 1936 by the Department of Religion in Alsace-Lorraine utilized both French and German as a way to inform as many residents as possible of the possibility of German aerial attacks. Religious groups widely publicized and distributed this booklet. While Alsatian Jewish leadership itself did not publish the booklet, it nevertheless disseminated it widely. What the booklet and its circulation suggest is a general acknowledgement and acceptance of the fact that people used both languages. Indeed, clearly the government had

⁷⁶ Robert Redslob, *Entre la France et L'Allemagne: Souvenirs d'un Alsacien* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1933). Biographical information on Professor Redslob was taken from "Le Principe des Nationalités," *La Tribune Juive*, 29 March 1931, 1.

⁷⁷ Julius Picard Family Collection, Leo Baeck Institute, New York.

⁷⁸ Julius Picard Family Collection, Leo Baeck Institute, New York.

resigned itself to reality. Publications that had to reach as many people as possible thus had to be published in multiple languages. Moreover, it is worth noting the oddity of the Department of Religion publishing a booklet on military and civilian preparedness. It may be that religious channels proved the most effective for conveying messages in a timely manner.⁷⁹

Similarly, in primary schools students received formal training in both French and German, although this curriculum did not always proceed peaceably. Interwar literacy rates in Alsace-Lorraine were lower than prewar rates as schools struggled to adapt to a new national “ideology” and pedagogy.⁸⁰ In the early 1920s French schools could not and did not immediately give older children a solid, lasting knowledge of French, although by 1930 all students began schooling in French, thus improving the next generation’s French language abilities.⁸¹ A point of contention between Alsace and Lorraine and Paris arose after Léon Blum’s educational decree of 1936. This promulgation mandated an extra year of schooling for children in Alsace-Lorraine. Authorities deemed this as appropriate because of the time taken out of the school week for religious instruction (four hours) and German instruction (three hours weekly beginning in the fourth semester).⁸²

Throughout France language served as a marker of one’s origins. For many Jews, speaking French became an articulated symbol of French identification. They

⁷⁹ French authorities published the 1936 booklet in response to Germany’s remilitarization of the Rhineland. Furthermore, the booklet’s publication also sheds light on the region’s overall mindset in the interwar era. The devastation wrought by World War I, as well as the unsettling nature of the Versailles Treaty, left the French government particularly preoccupied with German attacks on the eastern provinces. A.S. Kanya-Forstner, “War, Imperialism, and Decolonization,” in *The Great War and the Twentieth Century*, 251.

⁸⁰ Harp, 199.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 195.

attempted to mask their heritage to more easily fit into the host community, to prove themselves worthy French citizens. In Alsace and Lorraine, however, people utilized German and French interchangeably, most often without considering the ramifications. For Jews and non-Jews alike, the facility of alternating between languages outweighed any overt psychology or consciousness of its possible implications. While at times linguistic choices did indeed connote political affiliations, most often mere practicality and education determined linguistic choice. As such, the Jews of Alsace-Lorraine continued to articulate fidelity towards the French state utilizing both French and German languages. They thus did not feel that loyalty to France required them only to speak French or to give up part of their heritage.

Chapter 6: Alsatian-Jewish Attitudes Towards France

Alsatian Jewish attitudes toward the French state must be framed against a backdrop of pervasive anti-Semitism. Traditional anti-Jewish sentiments as well as racial anti-Semitism played a crucial role in Alsatian Jews' group identity and communal activities. Anti-Semitism permeated all levels of Jewish life in the provinces. Agitation increased dramatically and in intensity throughout the 1930s as homegrown anti-Jewish activity became permeated with German racial ideology.⁸³ Arson, vandalism, and physical attacks against synagogues, communal institutions, and individuals became increasingly commonplace.⁸⁴ By 1938 the president of the Bas-Rhin Consistory felt it necessary to recommend to presidents of constituent communities that they accurately inventory and appraise their synagogues' value in case of arson or vandalism.⁸⁵ The president of the Bas-Rhin Consistory also kept the prefect of the Bas-Rhin apprised of ongoing anti-Semitism reporting thefts, vandalism, and other anti-Jewish activities.⁸⁶

What is missing from these letters, however, is vocal adoration of the French state. These Alsatian Jewish leaders appeal as French citizens to secular French authorities to help protect them, but do not display the same unwavering, outspoken

⁸³ For example, a letter by the Secretary-General of the Bas-Rhin Consistory, Manfred Dreyfus, included his opinion that certain specific phrases and ideas disseminated in anti-Semitic pamphlets had to be imported from Germany to stir up vitriolic and hateful propaganda. Bas-Rhin Consistory Records, Correspondence, 3 January 1939, Reel 26.

⁸⁴ In an undated and unsigned letter to the President of the Union Sauvegarde Israélites in Paris (although presumably from 1938 or early 1939), a Bas-Rhin Consistory official lists a substantial increase in distribution of anti-Semitic tracts, attacks on Jewish stores (especially those owned by naturalized foreigners), and Star of David graffiti, Correspondence, Bas-Rhin Consistory Records, Reel 26.

⁸⁵ Correspondence, Bas-Rhin Consistory Records, 15 February 1938, Reel 26, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

⁸⁶ Correspondence, Bas-Rhin Consistory Records, 7 November 1938, Reel 26, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

loyalty to France as their Parisian co-religionists do. This suggests a more distant relationship with the French polity. In other words Alsatian Jews were willing to approach the authorities for help and protection, but did not feel the need or have the desire to adapt the specialized vocabulary and sentiment of the rest of French Jewry. Furthermore, they felt justified in approaching secular authorities to seek justice.

Jewish organizations and leadership in Paris were highly cognizant of provincial anti-Semitism. Communications between Alsatian and Parisian Jews remained open and uninterrupted. What soon becomes evident from examining correspondence between the two communities is an attempt by Jewish authorities in Paris to impose – sometimes overtly and other times quite subtly – their own values and modes of response on Jews in Alsace-Lorraine. This becomes even more evident in the middle and late 1930s as Jews in Paris belatedly acknowledged pervasive French anti-Semitic attitudes. In a letter dated September 17, 1938, the president of the Union et Sauvegarde israélites, Général Weiller, told the president of the Bas-Rhin Consistory of his awareness of rampant anti-Semitism, and he promised that the agencies would work together to “shake-off” and rid the region of the hate spreading among the French. Nonetheless, Général Weiller concluded the letter with the hope that he could “count on your patriotism, your impartiality, and your love of Justice and Truth.”⁸⁷ For whatever reason, the letter writer felt it necessary to remind Jewish leadership in the provinces of French patriotic values. In an undated memo Weiller expanded on his ideas about the French state and provincial anti-Semitism. What stands out first and foremost is Weiller’s characterization of Alsace-Lorraine as a

⁸⁷ The capitalization of the words “justice” and “truth” were in the original. Bas-Rhin Consistory Records, Correspondence, 17 September 1938, Reel 26, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

“frontier region and invulnerable bastion of the fatherland (*Patrie*).”⁸⁸ Again, there is the perception of the region as a distant, perhaps even untamed territory that nonetheless remained loyal to France and could not be swayed by foreign elements. Moreover, he blamed anti-Semitism on foreign elements who had ulterior and sinister motives and sought to create a division between Frenchmen by spreading hate. He concluded his memo with the dire warning that as long as the nation fully protects all of its citizens, the “just laws of *la Patrie* will finally catch up with them [anti-Semitic elements].”⁸⁹

Other communications similarly invoked symbolic language of the nation when dealing with anti-Semitism. Bernard Lecache, president of the French section of the International League against Racism and Anti-Semitism, encouraged his co-religionists in Strasbourg to take the lead in a plan of patriotic resistance.⁹⁰ Four days later he proudly announced in a follow up letter that he obtained an Alsatian official’s promise to suppress rigorously anti-Jewish actions in the provinces.⁹¹ Lecache’s misplaced optimism notwithstanding, the insistence upon unfailing devotion to the French state revealed much about Parisian Jewish attitudes towards France. Conversely, the absence of this trope in Alsatian Jewish letters and documents is also revealing. Alsatian Jews saw France as a legal entity, a state that existed to protect their well-being and security. In terms of culture and society, though, religious

⁸⁸ Bas-Rhin Consistory Records, undated memo, Reel 26, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Bas Rhin Consistory Records, Correspondence, 26 September 1938, Reel 26, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

⁹¹ Bas-Rhin Consistory Records, Correspondence, 30 September 1938, Reel 26, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. According to Michael R. Marrus and Robert O. Paxton, Lecache articulated similar warnings to Jews throughout France in the early days of October, 1938, telling Jews to avoid all political conversations. Michael R. Marrus and Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews* (New York: Basic Books, 1981) 40.

groups comprised their own networks. Jews did not expect the state to provide for their social experiences; they did not feel the need to assimilate into the larger culture.

In a somewhat surprising manifestation of pro-French sympathies at the expense (or ignorance) of growing anti-Semitism is a letter by Baron Robert de Rothschild to Edmond Israel, a member of the Bas-Rhin Consistory in Strasbourg.⁹² Rothschild related a meeting he had with an unnamed non-Jewish religious leader (in his words a “judeophile”) who brought to his attention anti-Catholic rhetoric appearing at the time in a Jewish publication in Nancy. He asked Israel to utilize his connections and ask the publication’s editors to tone down its inflammatory speech.⁹³ There does not seem to be any substantial coverage of the publication’s discourse in other Alsatian periodicals, suggesting that criticizing Catholic teachings did not inflame passions among the Jewish community of Alsace-Lorraine. Nonetheless, for a highly assimilated, secular, and extremely prominent Jewish figure such as the Baron de Rothschild, the passage required a response as well as disavowal. The anti-Catholic rhetoric that proved embarrassing and disconcerting to Rothschild apparently did not have similar repercussions in Alsace and Lorraine. This example highlights the general differences between theories of secularism in France and the persistence of overt religion and conservatism in the provinces.

Refugees also served as a major source of contention for French Jewry. Large numbers of East European and later German immigrants posed similarly unnerving question for many French Jews. By the time of the German invasion in 1940, among

⁹² Baron Robert de Rothschild (1880-1946) was a member of the prominent European Jewish banking family and ran the bank’s French branch in Paris with his cousin.

⁹³ Bas-Rhin Consistory Records, Correspondence, 28 October 1938, Reel 26, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

the approximately 300,000 Jews living in France were hundreds of thousands of East and Central European immigrants who came during the interwar period. Although an exact population figure is difficult to determine due to the transitory nature of refugee life, it seems that around 150,000 Jews entered France between 1918 and 1940.

Three-fourths were from Eastern Europe, mainly Poland. Approximately two-thirds of the remaining immigrants came from the Balkans and Asia Minor, and the remaining one-third divided between German Jewish refugees and North African Jews.⁹⁴ While most immigrants settled in Paris, cities and towns in Alsace and Lorraine also became home to many East European immigrants in the period between the two world wars.⁹⁵ Nonetheless, the tension that marked refugees' arrival in Paris remained largely absent in Alsace and Lorraine. Of course there is the disparity in sheer numbers; Paris played host to many more refugees than did Alsace. That being said, though, fundamental differences in attitudes also existed. As the Jews of Alsace-Lorraine remained largely unassimilated, immigrants did not pose a threat to their social status. Immigrants simply became part of the Jewish community. This is not to say that relations were always peaceful and cordial; however, the debates over immigration and the resulting cultural impact, which raged in Paris, were by and large lacking in the provinces.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Hyman, *From Dreyfus to Vichy*, 68.

⁹⁵ The numbers of Jewish refugees who came to Paris is really quite staggering. Of the 150,000 Jews in Paris at the outbreak of World War II, East European Jews numbered around 90,000 and German Jews around 10,000. Differences in identity and the resulting conflicts becomes much more clear when one considers the large numbers of immigrants that Jews were faced with during this time. Hyman, *From Dreyfus to Vichy*, 85.

⁹⁶ This argument contradicts the hypothesis set forth by Freddy Raphael and Robert Weyl in their article "Les Juifs d'Alsace entre la France et l'Allemagne (1870-1914)," *Revue d'Allemagne et des pays de langue allemande*, Volume XIII, Number 3 (July-September 1981), 480-494.

La Tribune Juive's front-page article of 1926 entitled "Light comes from the East" postulated that Polish Jewish immigrants would not only add sheer numbers to the French Jewish community, but would also infuse a sense of vitality and traditionalism into a community "decimated by apostasy, mixed marriages, and voluntary sterilization."⁹⁷ This view is very different from the attitudes held by many native French Jews in Paris who, fearing anti-Semitism, often saw immigrant Jews as a threat to the entire community's well being. Native Jews were willing to help less fortunate co-religionists from elsewhere, but sought these immigrants' swift adaptation to French culture and society.⁹⁸ By contrast, Alsatian Jews who were preoccupied with the survival of traditional Judaism saw East European immigrants as augmenting a traditional Jewish lifestyle, oftentimes similar to themselves. In a region such as Alsace-Lorraine where assimilation and acculturation manifested themselves differently than in Paris, East European immigrants did not pose a threat to the status quo, and more importantly, would enrich and promote a traditional Jewish lifestyle in France. Despite persistent anti-Semitism in Alsace and Lorraine, Jews there did not feel compelled to change their attitudes or practices.

In a 1927 letter to the Bas-Rhin prefect, consistory officials asked for a visa for a Romanian rabbi, Isaac Runes, to live and work in Alsace-Lorraine. They outlined the growth and status of the East European immigrant community in the

⁹⁷ "La lumière vient de l'Orient," *La Tribune Juive*, 2 July 1926, 393.

⁹⁸ See Vicki Caron, *Uneasy Asylum: the Jewish Refugee Crisis*, Paula Hyman, *The Jews of Modern France* and *From Dreyfus to Vichy: the Remaking of French Jewry, 1906-1939*, and David Weinberg, *A Community on Trial: The Jews of Paris in the 1930s*. The conflicts, both real and imagined posed by an influx of East European immigrants was not unique to France. For studies in this native-immigrant relationship in the German context, see Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: the East European Jew in German and German-Jewish Consciousness, 1800-1923* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982); Trude Maurer, *Ostjuden in Deutschland, 1918-1933* (Hamburg: H. Christians: 1986); and Jack Wertheimer, *Unwelcome Strangers: East European Jews in Imperial Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

region and argued forcefully that they had a moral obligation to speak out on behalf of East European co-religionists. They reiterated the fact that they were speaking on behalf of a specific Jewish communal organization that was willing to pay for this rabbi to come to Alsace, so that the immigrant would be not be a financial burden to the state. What is just as noteworthy, however, is the emphasis the letter writers placed on Rabbi Runes' virtue. They praised him most sincerely. The letter writers described the shortcomings of the French Jewish community and noted the revitalization this rabbi would provide. More specifically, they eloquently lamented the dearth of adequately trained native French rabbis. Jewish officials clearly felt at liberty to criticize the Jewish community in a letter to secular authorities. They saw as their duty to revitalize French Judaism, and they sought state help to bring over persecuted co-religionists to help in that pursuit.

This was not the only example of individual and communal sponsorship in the provinces. Alsatian Jews viewed assisting less fortunate co-religionists as a specifically Jewish *and* French obligation. They defined their relationship to the state in terms of the protection it afforded and the freedoms it allowed. Hence, a communiqué of 1927 informed residents of the Consistory's decision to financially assist international Jewish students at the University of Strasbourg. It reminded residents of the numerous hurdles Jews faced in educational pursuits in other nations. It also made a specific appeal to their hearts and minds, "Is it not our duty as French Israélites to show them hospitality and to demonstrate to them a testimonial of Jewish solidarity?"⁹⁹ Thus consistorial leaders saw themselves as protectors of traditional Jewish unity, as well as models for how Judaism could survive and thrive in a modern

⁹⁹ Bas-Rhin Consistory Records, Correspondence, 21 February 1927, Reel 42.

nation like France. Assisting less fortunate co-religionists by bringing them to France made up a central component of Alsatian Jewish identity. Just as importantly, they identified themselves as Israélites, similar to their Parisian co-religionists.

Moreover, Alsatian Jewish leaders financially attempted to help immigrants as much as possible. A resident of Strasbourg, Jules Albert Jacques Abrahamson, wrote to the Bureau of Foreign Affairs Monitor of Foreigners in November 1938 to inquire about bringing his brother and two sisters to France from Germany. In an impassioned plea, Abrahamson intimated that his sisters were quite ill, and that his brother, who took care of them, was recently notified of his expulsion by German authorities. Abrahamson noted that he would be able to provide financially for his siblings, and that his rabbi, Rabbi Brunschwig of Strasbourg, offered to cover the remainder of the costs.¹⁰⁰ It is unclear how many times incidents such as these occurred, however, given other available information, it seems that Alsatian leaders were by and large willing to provide moral and financial support for Jewish immigrants to France.¹⁰¹

Alsatian Jews, while not unique in viewing charity as a central tenet of French Judaism, nonetheless differed from other French Jews. Native French Jews in Paris during the interwar period may have attempted to unify all Jews living within the French state, but nevertheless two separate Jewish communities existed: a native Jewish community and an immigrant one, each with its own institutions. Yet in the cities and towns of Alsace-Lorraine relationships among Jews of different

¹⁰⁰ Bas-Rhin Consistory Records, Correspondence, 14 November 1938, Reel 25.

¹⁰¹ Furthermore, in the face of bureaucratic delay, Strasbourg Jewish leaders wrote letters on behalf of Jules Abrahamson and his family impressing upon leaders in Paris the necessity of expediting necessary papers and assistance. This particular case's outcome is uncertain. Bas-Rhin Consistory Records, Correspondence, 6 January, 1939, Reel 25.

backgrounds seemingly progressed and coalesced without incident. Leaders actively sought to integrate foreign elements and utilize fellow Jews to benefit the entire community. They worked on combining institutions, rather than how to subsume one under the other.¹⁰² Similarly, leaders recognized the judicial issues involved with multiple Jewish communities. Leaders recognized that legally they had to merge the two communities. In any case, this merger took place without animosity or palpable concern. Correspondence used the tone of bureaucratic necessity. As all Jews had to live under the Consistory's authority, leaders understood by the mid-1920s that this required merging resources.¹⁰³

Alsatian Jews also viewed Eastern Europe and immigration in ways that reflected local concerns with Jewish continuity. In a 1933 front-page article entitled "The Price of Dejudaisation," the author argued that as Jews assimilated and acculturated into French society, they lost their sense of national Jewish unity. This loss of Jewish unity did not occur in Eastern Europe. The author held an extremely prescient view of the situation. He never once suggested that France was a bad place in which to live, but rather articulated the notion that Jews living there must work to re-strengthen their communal Jewish identity. At least this author, a patriotic Frenchman, expressed no scorn and disdain for Eastern Europe or Jews, instead admiring their religiosity and piety. Furthermore, he expressed a desire to have these religious beliefs in France. Rather than urging East European Jews to modernize and

¹⁰² A letter of 1927 stated as much when it called for suggestions as to how to utilize East European Jewish resources alongside Alsatian Jewish ones. The letter reminded the president of the consistory that there were numerous worthy East European orators and leaders, and that there had to be a way that all could live together and benefit under the French Jewish communal structure. Bas-Rhin Records, Correspondence, 21 October, 1927, Reel 42.

¹⁰³ Bas-Rhin Consistory Records, Correspondence, 7 November 1938, Reel 42.

reap the rewards of an enlightened, current state, he instead sought to infuse French Judaism with Eastern Europe's religiosity. This was not the sole example of admiration towards Eastern European Jewry. One anonymous author lauded the infusion of conservatism into Alsatian Jewish life, a force that counterbalanced fears over growing assimilation.¹⁰⁴

Alsatian Jews similarly welcomed German Jewish refugees who fled to Alsace-Lorraine after Adolf Hitler's rise to power in 1933. Just as Alsatian Jews welcomed other Jewish refugees, they accepted German Jews as persecuted co-religionists. The language barrier and hostility towards the German language that existed elsewhere in France did not exist in Alsace-Lorraine. Additionally, it seems that Alsatian Jews did not view German Jewry as draining regional resources. Indeed, *La Tribune Juive* carried only one major instance of anti-German Jewish hostility. Noticeably, though, the record is one of rebuke. The anonymous author of the article called on Alsatian Jews to act with humility towards their German-Jewish co-religionists, reminding them, "Jews are inextricably united by blood ties."¹⁰⁵ The choice of vocabulary was telling, not solely for its adoption of racist language, but just as importantly for its conception of Judaism and Jewish identity. The author emphasized ethnic ties, not just religious ties between Jews. Trans-national Jewish ties were seemingly just as significant, if not more so, than national French or German identities. In other words, Jews had to help other Jews *because* they were all Jews, not because they were primarily French citizens helping German citizens.

¹⁰⁴ "Le tribut de l'assimilation," *La Tribune Juive*, 17 February 1933, 97.

¹⁰⁵ "Billet Strasbourgeois," *La Tribune Juive*, 5 May 1933, 262.

In fact, Alsatian Jews viewed German Jews as somewhat similar to Parisian Jews, who had given up their Jewish identity for their German one. While they never suggested a correlation between German-Jewish assimilation and the rise of Nazism, Alsatian Jews were aware that, in the words of one author, “German Jews sacrificed their Judaism for their *patrie*.”¹⁰⁶ This example may be seen as a muted condemnation of French Judaism. By referring to Germany as a *patrie*, the author invokes the political language of France. Alsatian Jewish leaders and authors certainly felt that French Jews overall had become too secular.

In a more general appeal, the Secretary-General of the Bas-Rhin Consistory, Jean Lévy, called on the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* to take decisive action with respect to immigration and growing hardships throughout Europe especially after the devastation caused by *Kristallnacht* on November 9-10, 1938. He cited a telegram received by Strasbourg Jewish officials from their Polish counterparts attesting to brutal treatment and expulsion of approximately 18,000 Polish Jews living in Germany. Lévy then wrote to *Alliance* officials, “We must, with all urgency, come to the aid of these poor victims. We must also give assistance to the infinitely more numerous others.” After all, he noted, “Jewish charity must defray the costs of the undertaking.”¹⁰⁷ This correspondence underscores two important points. First, Polish-Jewish officials apparently had connections with officials of the Bas-Rhin Consistory and felt obligated to contact them rather than the officials of the Central Consistory in Paris. One may assume that at the very least something made Polish-Jewish officials believe that they would receive a more favorable response from

¹⁰⁶ “L’Apport des Juifs d’Allemagne à la civilisation allemande,” *La Tribune Juive*, 27 October 1933, 723.

¹⁰⁷ Bas-Rhin Consistory Records, Correspondence, 20 November 1938, Reel 25.

Strasbourg officials than from Parisian Jewish authorities. Second, and just as significantly, Lévy's letter to the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* exhibited impatience and urgency in its appeal to officials' consciences. Lévy does not merely forward the Polish officials' telegram, but he also calls on his co-religionists in Paris to fulfill their mission as human beings and as Jews by immediately coming to the assistance of Polish Jewry.

The disparity between Parisian and Alsatian Jewry's attitudes towards immigrants belies a more fundamental point, namely radically different definitions of French Judaism and what it meant to be a member of the French state. The immigrants' religiosity was not the sole example of this disparity. Perhaps just as important were debates over education. France had ratified the principle of church and state separation in 1905. After World War I, state authorities faced a conundrum with regards to Alsace-Lorraine, a region that staunchly believed in primary school religious instruction. Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish leaders all spoke out in favor of maintaining religious instruction and confessional school, although the latter two faiths kept relatively low profiles throughout the interwar period.¹⁰⁸ To avoid conflict, French authorities allowed Alsatian schools to continue religious education. Thus throughout the interwar period, the three major faiths in the provinces maintained separate schools and curricula.

That the French state gave into this request belies a more fundamental governing principle in the provinces, namely religious education's central and defining role in identity and relationships. Gaby Cohen, a young Jewish teenager living in a small Alsatian town in the late 1930s, thus recounted that her "non-Jewish

¹⁰⁸ Harp, 193.

friends and neighbors used to scold us if we didn't respect and observe the holidays."¹⁰⁹ Cohen's experience reveals a lack of hostility between Jews and non-Jews. She socialized with non-Jews who were aware of her religious background. Second, and just as importantly, social relations in day to day life often revolved around religious functions, or at the very least, religious ideals and a sense of separate religious cultures. Alsatians of all backgrounds seemingly did not separate spheres of religion and polity as easily as their fellow French citizens elsewhere in France.

Thus, for many Jews living in Alsace and Lorraine, day to day social interactions occurred mainly among co-religionists. This especially appeared to be the case for the young. Simone Weil Lipman, born in 1920 in the Alsatian town of Ringendorf, recalled attending a Talmud Torah throughout her youth. She and her brother were also extremely active in the Jewish scouting movement; both were members of *Les Éclaireurs Israélites de France*, the Jewish Scouts of France.¹¹⁰ Leadership in the provinces – as perhaps elder generations all over are wont to do – expressed concern over the next generation's education and values. Jewish leaders placed an emphasis on providing Jewish youth with proper Jewish socializing and religious upbringing.

¹⁰⁹ Gaby Cohen, interview by Susan Zuccotti. Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*, 28.

¹¹⁰ Simone Weil Lipman, interview by Linda Kuzmack, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, July 3, 1990.

Chapter 7: Attitudes Towards Germany and Hitler

Alsatian Jewish attitudes towards Germany varied throughout the interwar period. As mentioned earlier, openly pro-German Jews in the immediate post-World War I era were by and large expelled from their homes and forced to move to Germany. For those Jews who remained in Alsace-Lorraine, attitudes towards the German nation mainly depended on the political situation at the time. In the early and middle 1920s, for example, the Alsatian Jewish press often overlooked the situation in Germany. *La Tribune Juive* carried little to no coverage of events occurring in Germany. Just as importantly, when one excludes historical references, the mention of German affiliation with the region of Alsace and Lorraine and its cultural legacies also remained absent in Alsatian Jewish discourse.

The Alsatian Jewish press often utilized the trope of World War I and its effects in analyzing the current European situation and expressing its attitude to Germany. Indeed, the repeated references to the war in different contexts underlined its lasting effects and significance in public dialogue. In a 1926 front-page book review of a work by French theologian Raoul Patry that dealt with religious life in Germany, Lucien Dreyfus forcefully drew a connection between religious fervor and the rise of reactionary political parties. Dreyfus saw a dangerous coalescence between the emotional and oftentimes non-rational qualities of spirituality and the growth of political parties that drew on these passions. According to Dreyfus, the latter grew significantly as a result of World War I. These political parties asserted that the bad luck that befell Germany during the war could not be the work of military or political defeat, but rather had to be the work of sorcerers, in other words, the

Jews.¹¹¹ Dreyfus reminded his readers, “The Jews of Alsace know better than anyone else that Germany was always the elected nation for religious hate.”¹¹² He characterized the German nation as the birthplace of racial ideology, the home of vitriolic figures such as Houston Stewart Chamberlain.¹¹³ Subsequent issues of *La Tribune Juive* did not contain refutations of this contention. Dreyfus’ characterization of Germany must have carried at least tacit support from the paper’s readers. At the very least, nobody felt it necessary to disprove these ideas. Especially after World War I Alsatian Jews viewed Germany as fundamentally bad, and by extension, France as good.

A marked shift occurred in press attitudes towards Germany immediately preceding and following the Nazi takeover in 1933. The reason for this shift is obvious. First, Adolf Hitler openly expressed his anti-Semitic animosity and racialist ideologies. Jews in Alsace-Lorraine harbored no illusions about Nazism’s virulence. Second, as the geographic borderland between Germany and France, Alsace-Lorraine soon became a safety zone for German Jewish refugees. Alsatian Jews could not remain ignorant of the situation with the flood of people coming over the border. Contact with Jewish immigrants necessarily led to a subtle reappraisal of Jews’ own position in France. Alsatian Jews became more pro-French during the 1930s as the political and social reality of Hitler’s actions in Germany became more widely understood. Thus, throughout the 1930s, and in particular after 1933, *La Tribune*

¹¹¹ “Dans la Patrie des penseurs et poètes,” *La Tribune Juive*, 16 April 1926, 217.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855-1927) was a British racist and anti-Semitic author who chose to live in Germany after marrying a daughter of composer Richard Wagner. Chamberlain works on racial ideology proved very influential for National Socialist ideology, and in fact, Chamberlain was an admirer and friend of Adolf Hitler. Geoffrey G. Field, *Evangelist of Race: the Germanic Vision of Houston Stewart Chamberlain* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

Juive published numerous stories on Germany and German Jews. *La Tribune Juive* made its stance clear and its political affiliations apparent. After Adolf Hitler's election in 1933, the paper condemned him: "We Jews of Strasbourg, happy citizens of a country of liberty where all beliefs are respected, we energetically rise against the attacks of which Jews and Judaism are the object and victim today in Germany."¹¹⁴ This statement simultaneously condemned the rise of anti-Jewish violence in Germany, as well as reaffirmed Jews' attitudes and loyalty to the French state.

At times Jews articulated a specific Jewish identity in direct relation to German events. An article from 1933 characterized Jews as "above all pacifists." In the same paragraph the author asserted that Germany would suffer if it persecuted the Jews.¹¹⁵

The presence of traditional anti-Semitism in the region, as well as geographic proximity to Germany gave Alsatian Jews a front row view to the rise of Adolf Hitler and the growing threat of Nazism to the rest of Europe. First, as discussed earlier, Jews in Alsace and Lorraine dealt with an ingrained traditional anti-Semitism in their daily lives. As a result of having to cope with this on an ongoing basis, they understood political developments differently than their co-religionists further west. They were thus quickly able to differentiate between cultural or religious anti-Semitism and a more ominous and virulent form as demonstrated in Germany.

Additionally, geographic and cultural closeness to Germany afforded Alsatian Jews a unique opportunity to analyze the growing threat. After all, Alsace and Lorraine were officially part of Germany just a generation earlier, and the region was

¹¹⁴ "À la Population Juive," *La Tribune Juive*, 31 March 1933, 190.

¹¹⁵ "Billet Strasbourgeoise," *La Tribune Juive*, 19 May 1933, 302.

the first – if not last – stop for German refugees. Jews in Alsace viewed growing anti-Semitism and the rise of the Hitler regime in terms of its totalitarian character, and they were concerned from the early 1930s onward about Nazism’s potential spread. One notable characteristic of Alsatian Jewish writing during this time is the general mistrust towards non-Jews who might be susceptible to German racial ideology.¹¹⁶ The Chief Rabbi of Lille, Léon Berman, questioned how *La Tribune Juive* could publish articles detrimental to the Jewish community in a time “full of political agitation, a lampoon which can only serve to increase anti-Semitic propaganda.”¹¹⁷ Even earlier, in January 1931 Lucien Dreyfus had recorded in his diary that the “German monster is wild with the spirit of power that animates it.”¹¹⁸ He characterized this monster as cold-blooded, containing an inaccessible heart full of moral disarray, who sees in disaster and havoc the chances of a better fortune.

The Parisian Jewish press in the 1930s analyzed the Hitlerian regime, but always while simultaneously affirming the freedoms and liberties provided by France. By contrast, the Strasbourg Jewish press did not draw such a sharp dichotomy. Throughout the 1930s it referred not only to Hitler’s threat in Germany, but also to his supporters within France. The emphasis on safety reflected the ongoing preoccupation with local concerns, anti-Semitic agitation and the like.

Moreover, *La Tribune Juive* often carried articles condemning Germany’s abandonment of liberal principles and its trend towards reactionary violence. In one

¹¹⁶ Indeed, these were not unfounded fears. In addition to traditional Alsatian anti-Jewish religious sentiments, it seems that specific German propaganda agents increased in substantial numbers in the 1930s. In fact, French police identified the city of Strasbourg as a distribution point for German anti-Semitic materials to be distributed elsewhere. Michael R. Marrus and Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews* (New York: Basic Books, 1981) 45.

¹¹⁷ Correspondence, Bas Rhin Consistorial records, 19 October 1938, Reel 25.

¹¹⁸ Lucien Dreyfus Diary, USHMM Archives

particularly hostile article of 1931, notably titled “German Ingratitude,” the author decried Germany’s short-term memory. German citizens, he charged, easily forgot their loss in World War I, “Oh! German anti-Semites, you want to be patriots, but you are only ingrates!”¹¹⁹ Similarly, a poem that appeared in *La Tribune Juive* specifically questioned Nazis’ Germanness and again reminded them of their World War I loss.¹²⁰ These admonishments belied the primacy placed on World War I and its memory, as well as an association of liberalism with peace and prosperity. By abandoning democratic principles, Germany was necessarily setting up a situation similar to that of World War I. Furthermore, Alsatian Jewish authors repeatedly spoke of Germany’s betrayal of its Jewish citizens and supposedly liberal values.

Germany’s relationship to its Jews received similar analyses. Alsatian Jews often saw the German people’s abandonment of its Jews as analogous to German short-term memory of its World War I legacies. Editorials and articles periodically appeared that reminded its readers of German Jews’ contributions to German culture and civilization. In a backhanded compliment of sorts, some authors even commented that German Jews’ Judaism suffered as a result of their overwhelming devotion to the German state. One such writer wrote scathingly, “German Jews sacrificed their Judaism for their *patrie*.”¹²¹ In another example, an anonymous editorial attacked German Jews shortsightedness, charging that they too easily forgot their past.¹²²

¹¹⁹ “L’ingratitude allemande,” *La Tribune Juive*, 17 March 1933.

¹²⁰ “Aux Nazis,” *La Tribune Juive*, 24 March 1933.

¹²¹ “L’Apport des Juifs d’Allemagne a la civilisation allemande: Der Anteil der Juden an der deutschen Kultur,” *La Tribune Juive*, 27 October 1933.

¹²² “Le chaos en Allemagne: Qui doit etre le chef?” *La Tribune Juive*, 30 June 1933.

Sentiments such as these do not appear only in newspapers. Lucien Dreyfus wrote in his diary on August 1, 1934 that although the threat of an anti-Semitic takeover seemed highly unlikely in France, there was, nonetheless a necessity for a vocal Jewish response. “We don’t fear them [anti-Semitic movements]. But our silence permits them to gain a disproportionate influence in relation to their moral and political importance.” He then sounded a call for his fellow Jews to take action, “We should denounce their maneuvers, that will be the best way to make them disappear.”¹²³ Thus, in contrast to those who remained silent on the issue, Dreyfus, and others in Alsace-Lorraine desired to stop Nazism’s spread. Again, he felt safe in France, yet geographic proximity allowed a certain fear and uncertainty to encroach on feelings of security.

Furthermore, Dreyfus seemed at a loss for words when attempting to analyze people’s attraction to Hitler and Nazism. As a theologian, he wrote that to understand Germany, “one must be a theologian; she has become an immense mystical barrack.” He went on to characterize German society as attracted to militarism and Hitler able to “galvanize their militarist fanaticism.”¹²⁴

Alsatian Jews also expected their Consistory actively to speak out against anti-Semitism in all of its forms. An especially heated interchange occurred between a certain Dr. Eugène Braunberger, resident of Strasbourg, and consistorial officials in October 1935. Dr. Braunberger wrote an emotional appeal to the Consistory demanding collective punitive actions against Germany for enacting the Nuremberg Laws. In a similarly expressive response, an unnamed consistorial official

¹²³ Lucien Dreyfus Diary, USHMM Archives.

¹²⁴ Lucien Dreyfus Diary, USHMM Archives.

nevertheless intimated dismay with regards to the letter writer's request. The official said that there had not been any directives from the Central Consistory in Paris for a collective protest against the Nuremberg Laws. Thus, as far as this official was concerned, no meetings were called to discuss the matter in the Bas-Rhin Consistory.¹²⁵

While the interchange between Dr. Braunberger and the Consistorial authorities appeared relatively benign, there are certain conclusions that one may draw. First of all, Dr. Braunberger fully expected to hear back from Consistorial officials with a response. While it is unclear exactly who he was in the community, he received cordial correspondence from authorities. That his letter demanded overt, collective action is no less important. He demanded and expected that the Jewish authorities in Alsace-Lorraine would organize a collective, decisive protest against anti-Semitic actions in nearby Germany. Finally, the response by the Consistorial official is similarly illustrative. The official essentially responded that his hands were tied, that the Central Consistory in Paris did not issue any directives on the matter. It is difficult to know whether or not he responded in this way to merely deflect blame, or whether he had sincerely looked into the matter and was prohibited from stepping out of line. Nevertheless, the interchange between the two men reveals that at least one person in the community wanted to take decisive and overt action, but the central Jewish authorities in Paris refused to acquiesce. Furthermore, this reaffirmed the contention that it was the state's job to protect all of its citizens, as well as speak out against injustice.

¹²⁵ Correspondence, Bas Rhin Consistorial records, October 1935, Reel 25.

For the minority of Jews who remained loyal to Germany in the years following World War I, Hitler's rise to power as well as Germans' acceptance of his rule, proved devastating. Those who lauded the prosperity and peace under German rule felt betrayed. Marta Appel, whose family had been forced from their Metz home following the German defeat, sadly recalled the days following Hitler's election in March 1933. The Appel family had been driven from their home in Alsace because of their German loyalty. Now they were driven out of German society because of the Nazis. "With all our hearts we had loved this German fatherland; we had held fast to it in its deepest distress...The same love for Germany, the same wish to see it great and strong, was pulsing through our minds, and yet the events of one day were sufficient to make us pariahs in our homeland."¹²⁶ These sentiments, which echo the feelings of many German Jews who faced the animosity of their non-Jewish neighbors, is nonetheless noteworthy for its particularities in the Alsace-Lorraine situation. The Jews who chose to remain loyal to Germany now faced a double betrayal; first they were betrayed by their own neighbors who opposed any pro-German sentiments, and now Germany persecuted them.

Although Alsatian Jews varied in their attitudes towards Germany, by and large they remained staunchly pro-French. For the Jews of Alsace-Lorraine, concepts such as language did not play a determining factor in forming group identity. Thus, they could speak German in their daily lives while still remaining loyal to the French polity. Adolf Hitler's rise to power posed a number of problems for Alsatian Jewry, as well as for Jewry throughout France and the rest of Europe. Jews in Alsace, however, remained keenly aware of how quickly vitriolic hatred could spread and

¹²⁶Appel, 189.

worked diligently to stop its encroachment on French soil. They espoused pro-French views, but attempted to utilize the French government to stop Nazism's spread.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

French military defeat by Germany in World War II dealt a horrific blow to French and French Jewry's collective psyche. Following the military victory and the subsequent armistice signed on June 22, 1940, Germany divided France into three zones. German forces occupied northern France, while southern France remained unoccupied, administered by the officially neutral (although actually collaborationist) Vichy government headed by Marshal Henri Philippe Pétain. Germany annexed Alsace-Lorraine and placed it under the administration of two Nazi *Gauleiters*, or district leaders.¹²⁷ The Third Reich quickly set about expelling 22,000 Jews from Alsace and Lorraine into the Vichy zone, as well as over 3,000 Jews to unoccupied France.¹²⁸

During the war, Nazis deported over 77,000 Jews from France. These Jews by and large later died in death camps, including Auschwitz. Nonetheless, around 75 percent of those Jews who lived in or fled to France in 1939 survived the war years. After the end of World War II, then, the French Jewish community reestablished itself, albeit in manifestly different ways than in the prewar era.

Less than a decade after the Holocaust's end, the Jewish community of Strasbourg erected a statue to their persecuted co-religionists. The unveiling ceremony, held on September 29, 1951, counted in attendance national and departmental heads. It seems somewhat ironic, given the above analysis, that Charles Ehrlich, the president of the Jewish community of Strasbourg, included in his remarks

¹²⁷ Zuccotti, 42.

¹²⁸ Yahil, 177; Marrus and Paxton, 7. Although Jews were forcibly expelled, it seems that a considerable number of Alsatians, around 40% of the total population, fled to France's interior in the wake of German military success. See, Goodfellow, 149.

language reminiscent of Parisian language in the interwar period. In his introductory statement he stated, “Among us were a number of co-religionists who gloriously gave their lives after having heroically fought for the liberty, justice, and fraternity of all the children of the same God. They will have their names perpetuated on the walls of the new consistorial temple.” Underscoring the traditional nature of Alsatian Jewish society, the record of the event appeared in a *Yizkor Bukh*, a Memorial Book to commemorate a destroyed Jewish community. This genre, existing since the Middle Ages, composed by survivors after the Holocaust, was most common in Eastern Europe. *À Nos Martyrs* is one of the few memorial books written in Western Europe, and one of the few written in a language other than Yiddish or Hebrew. It seems particularly fitting that a traditional community such as Strasbourg, struggling with the simultaneous pulls of custom and modernity, utilized a traditional form of commemoration to situate their place in French history.¹²⁹

Given the Holocaust’s horrors, it may come as no surprise that surviving Jews adopted patriotic French mantra in the immediate postwar period. The majority of Alsace-Lorraine’s Jewish citizens had counted themselves staunchly pro-French throughout the interwar period, but now they had no other options for loyalty. Even for the minority loyal to Germany earlier, this loyalty was no longer an option. The effects of the Holocaust on Alsace-Lorraine, and its role in public memory and commemoration are certainly worth further academic consideration. Did the Jews of Alsace adopt similar methods of memorialization as their co-religionists in the rest of France? How did the Jews of Alsace understand and interpret their experiences

¹²⁹ *À Nos Martyrs* (Strasbourg: Communauté Israélite de Strasbourg, 1951).

during the Holocaust, especially as it relates to the French state and the Vichy government.¹³⁰

Alsace-Lorraine thus presents the historian with an interesting case study for the extent and limits of Jewish emancipation, assimilation, and acculturation. For despite almost unwavering support for the French state, Alsatian Jewry had very different notions of what it meant to be part of the French nation. As a community, they espoused rhetoric of fidelity and gratefulness, but did not waver in traditional modes of life. Unlike the Jews of Paris, the Jews living in Alsace and Lorraine did not acknowledge a burden between Jewish expression and loyalty to the French state. They did not deem it necessary to alter traditional practices, but instead saw themselves as a formidable complement to Parisian manifestations of Judaism.

The history of the Jews of Alsace and Lorraine during the interwar period reveals that communal religious identity and nationalism do not necessarily manifest themselves uniformly throughout a nation-state. Oftentimes, local conditions and concerns played a greater role in determining attitudes than prevailing national political conditions. The Jews of Alsace and Lorraine did indeed acculturate to their surroundings but this acculturation depended on local surroundings and influences, rather than pressures from other Jews to adapt Parisian modes of life and religious expression. In the case of twentieth century French Judaism, alternatives to the urban-centric model are necessary to breakdown generalizations or at the very least complicate the portrait of French Judaism. At the very least, French Jews displayed

¹³⁰ Studies such as these would complement an already rich historiography on public memory, the legacy of Vichy, and the Holocaust in France. The seminal work in this field is Pierre Nora's *Les Lieux de Memoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984). Also see Henri Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991) and Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*.

complicated allegiances to the first European nation-state that offered them emancipation.

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