



War, Occupation, and Empire in France and Germany

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“What is a nation?” Ernest Renan’s famous rhetorical question to an audience at the Sorbonne on 11 March 1882 has remained vital for a wide variety of scholars in fields as diverse as history, literary criticism, sociology, philosophy, and political science.¹ Renan initially posed the question barely ten years after the close of the Franco-Prussian War, which had sparked the establishment of the French Third Republic, the unification of Germany under the leadership of Wilhelm I, and the transfer of the disputed territory of Alsace-Lorraine from French to German control in the months between July 1870 and May 1871.² Renan made no overt mention of these events while he was speaking, but he rejected any possible answer to his question that might attempt to base the creation of nations and national identities on shared “race, language, [economic] interests, religious affinity, geography, [or] military necessities.”³ This explicit refusal constituted an implicit rejection of the entire range of German justifications for the acquisition of the two recently French border provinces.

Although Renan’s own political affiliations had been more constitutional monarchist than parliamentary democratic, his final description of a nation as a body that relies on “a great sentiment of solidarity constituted by the sentiment of the sacrifices that one has made and of those that one is still disposed to make again” and that constitutes itself as “a daily plebiscite” came to seem particularly compatible with the ideals of the moderate and radical republicans who had recently wrested control of the Third Republic from the more conservative parties of “moral order.”⁴ In 1921, the editors at the important French publishing firm of Calmann Lévy included Renan’s talk in *Pages françaises*, a selection of Renan’s essays and speeches they published to mark “the most glorious moment of our history”: the moment of the French victory over Germany at the end of World War I, the triumph of the Third Republic over the very Wilhelmine empire that had unintentionally brought it into being forty-seven years before, and the return of Alsace and Lorraine to French control through the Treaty of Versailles.⁵



In the years since Renan wrote and spoke, many scholars of modern European history have focused on the differences between France and Germany in similar terms, especially in their reliance on the contrast between pairs of opposing terms such as “civic nationalism” and “ethnic nationalism”, or citizenship based on “*jus soli*” and citizenship based on “*jus sanguinis*”.⁶ More recently, however, a number of scholars have begun to highlight the similarities between the two countries instead. Even the comparative sociologist Rogers Brubaker, who organized his most influential discussion of “citizenship and nationhood in France and Germany” around the contrast between “French understandings of nationhood” that were “state-centered and assimilationist” and “German understandings of nationhood” that were “ethnocultural and ‘differentialist’,” subsequently noted that the popular distinction between the related categories of “civic nationalism” and “ethnic nationalism” had become more of a “Manichean myth” than a helpful heuristic device.⁷

French historian Patrick Weil’s comprehensive study of French nationality law from 1789 to the present clearly shows that “the equation *jus sanguinis* = ethnic conception = Germany, as opposed to *jus soli* = non-ethnic conception = France, does not hold up to an examination of the comparative history of German and French—and beyond these European—nationality law.”⁸ German historian Dieter Gosewinkel, who has offered his own series of “new observations on an old comparison,” concludes similarly that “ethnocultural and state-political elements in the citizenship law of both countries existed simultaneously” in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁹ Our volume returns to the study of France and Germany, then, with an interest not only in the foreign policies that have pitted them against each other, but also in the variety of beliefs and behaviors that they have held in common. In particular, although Renan delivered his speech to the Sorbonne just before the dramatic late nineteenth-century increase in the pace of French and German imperial expansion, our volume extends the study of France and Germany to include comparisons of their attitudes and activities in the different areas of their colonial empires on the African continent.

While French national and French colonial history initially evolved as separate fields, much of the historical scholarship in these areas in the past fifteen years has stressed the impossibility of understanding either the metropole or the colonies in isolation.¹⁰ The vast majority of scholarship on German racial thinking has focused on the study of Germans, Jews, and the history of the Holocaust, but there is also a growing body of work on the history of the German colonial empire and its significance for understanding the history of Germany in Europe.¹¹ This special issue of *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques*, which builds upon all of this previous work, also makes significant new contributions by considering not only the continuities and contrasts between the French and German colonial occupations of other countries and territories in Africa, but also the French and German military occupations of each other’s countries in their border territories on the European continent.

Despite some notable exceptions, most of the “new imperial history” has tended to focus on the two-part unit that Mary Dewhurst Lewis has described in critical terms as the “presumed closed circuit of metropole and colony”: the study of one country and its colonies, or of one national independence movement and its struggle against one imperial occupier.¹² As we seek to move beyond that “closed circuit” ourselves, we have found the four-way study of France, Germany, and the French and German empires in Africa to be especially fruitful because of the ways in which France and Germany shared intersecting patterns of both national and imperial rivalry in the period between the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870 and that of World War II in 1939.

The first two articles, by Jean Elisabeth Pedersen and Jens-Uwe Guettel, reassess French attitudes towards Germany and German attitudes towards France in the years before World War I by focusing on how important French and German public figures considered the changing relationships between and among competing nations and their associated empires in the period of the First and Second Moroccan Crises. Pedersen highlights the apparently paradoxical ways in which French cultural commentators who opposed the German occupation of Alsace-Lorraine could also support the French occupation of African regions as various as Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Madagascar, and the Congo. Guettel explores the ways in which liberal German observers who prioritized German colonial expansion could nevertheless praise French colonial expansion and cooperate with French empire-building organizations at the same time.

The second two articles, by Julia Roos and W. Brian Newsome, provide new perspectives on French and German experiences of World War I and its aftermath by paying special attention to the presence of colonial themes in French and German responses to military occupation. Roos focuses on the national and international controversy over *Die schwarze Schmach*, a 1921 propaganda film that attacked the “Black Horror on the Rhine”: the French use of Senegalese and other African soldiers in the postwar occupation of the Rhineland. Newsome focuses on French debates over collaboration and resistance as they appeared in response to *Invasion 14*, a popular 1935 novel about World War I that described the situation of French civilians under German military occupation in the Nord in ways that compared their experiences and behaviors to those of Arab and African subjects under French imperial occupation in Algeria and elsewhere.

The final two articles, by Krista Molly O’Donnell and Jennifer Anne Boittin, move from the study of French and German attitudes and behaviors on the European continent to French and German interactions with each other and with the colonized inhabitants of their empires in Africa. O’Donnell explores the intriguing similarities and key differences between the work of the German Colonial Society and the French Colonial Union, two groups that encouraged white German and French women to settle their separate countries’ respective imperial possessions from 1896 onwards.

Boittin turns her attention to the analysis of race, class, and gender tensions as they appear in the case of writer Rosie Gräfenberg, a German reporter who not only attracted the attention of the French police in West Africa in 1929 but also featured at the center of a sensational espionage trial in Germany from 1929 to 1931.

Although the six authors in this issue use different sources, take different approaches, and consider different subjects, there are certain especially important themes and topics that recur throughout the issue. Pedersen and Newsome consider French responses to two different German occupations, for example, but the resulting articles work together to highlight the multiplicity of ways in which French civilian writers and speakers explored perceived continuities and contrasts between German military expansion into France, French imperial expansion into Africa, and the experiences and behaviors of subjugated peoples in both situations. Guettel and O'Donnell are interested in different foreign and domestic policy aspects of the German colonial project, but their articles both approach the comparative study of German imperialism in its larger European context by focusing on the work of national lobbying organizations such as the *Deutscher Kolonialverein*, the *Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft*, the *Frauenbund der Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft*, the *Congrès coloniaux français*, the *Ligue coloniale française*, the *Société française d'émigration des femmes*, and the *Union coloniale française*. Roos and Boittin analyze the controversial representations of race, nationality, and sexuality in two completely different sets of newspapers and archives, but the two authors' articles work together to show how the French use of African troops to occupy the Rhineland in the years immediately after World War I was a topic of discussion and debate not only across Europe and the United States but also in Africa itself.

Focusing on French and German interactions in Europe and Africa in a single analytic framework shows the ways in which identity categories can change depending on time, place, and circumstance. French participants at the Union for Truth and its Open Conversations could think of themselves as part of a larger European civilization and culture, while also drawing vivid contrasts between native French speakers and occupying German speakers in their discussions of Alsace and Lorraine after the Franco-Prussian War. Liberal German colonialists could justify their cooperation with French colonialists in the years between the First and Second Moroccan Crises partially through their shared belief that Europeans were different from Africans and Asians. Once World War I began, however, Allied propagandists stereotyped Germans as barbarians in ways that associated Germans with Africans instead of Europeans, while German propagandists counterattacked against the Allies by criticizing their use of colonial troops. When the German authorities who took control of the Nord in 1914 started expelling some of the French residents into unoccupied France in 1915, these French refugees and exiles faced suspicious criticism from fellow French citizens who characterized them in racialized national terms as “*Boches du Nord*” and “*femmes*”

à Boches". When the French police tracked the presence of foreigners in French West Africa in the 1920s and 1930s, they were more interested in the travelers' national origin as Germans than in their racial identification as white.

Focusing on the shifting use of different identity categories in French and German discussions of war, occupation, and empire can also highlight the unexpected ways in which different speakers could use the same categories but still support different policies. French imperialists all agreed on the importance of the French civilizing mission in Africa and Asia, for example, but Pedersen's analysis of the Open Conversations at the Union for Truth shows that some of the same speakers who supported colonial expansion could also criticize colonial abuse. French and German colonialists both shared a concern about race mixing, but O'Donnell's comparison of French and German national policies and colonial procedures identifies significant differences in the ways in which the French and German empires treated the biracial children of white male colonists and indigenous women of color. Roos's article on the creation and reception of *Die schwarze Schmach* shows how even German public officials and nationalist political leaders, who all opposed the presence of French African troops in the Rhineland, could still come to dramatically different conclusions about whether to support, show, censor, or attack this particularly controversial propaganda film in the years immediately after World War I.

By focusing on the relationships among France, Germany, and their empires in Africa, finally, the articles in this special issue also highlight the possibility of further comparative national, imperial, international, and transnational studies in additional directions. France and Germany both compared themselves not only to each other, but also to England. France and England had colonies not only in Africa, but also in the Caribbean, India, and Asia. The shifting patterns of ethnic, national, and racial allegiance and antagonism that we explore here began well before the Franco-Prussian War and have continued in different ways through World War II. Although it is certainly appropriate for historians, following Renan, to focus on the importance of the nation, we cannot understand the nation without also understanding the region, the empire, the international cooperation and competition between nations and empires, and the transnational circulation of people, goods, and ideas among them.

Acknowledgements

We began our collaboration at the annual meeting of the Social Science History Association in Chicago in 2010, where Julia Roos had organized a session entitled "The Shifting Boundaries of Family, Race, and Nation in Transnational Discourse." The intellectual response to our panel on French and German history was so enthusiastic that it overflowed the limits of our

time in the conference room itself and impelled us to continue the conversation in the coffee shop downstairs. We resumed the discussion at the annual meeting of the German Studies Association in Louisville, Kentucky, in 2011, where Julia Roos, Molly O'Donnell, and I organized a session on "German and French Colonialism in the Twentieth Century: Mutual Perceptions—Rivalries—(Hidden) Exchanges." The overall conference theme of "Germany and the French Empire" provided a second stimulating setting for an additional series of interesting and insightful conversations and comparisons both at our own panel and at many others. Jennifer Boittin joined the project after the first conference, and Jens-Uwe Guettel after the second. Richard Fogarty, who had contributed an important paper for the first panel, also planned a third panel with W. Brian Newsome on "From Occupation to Liberation: Northern France in the Great War" for the annual meeting of the Western Society for French History in Atlanta in 2013. While Rick could not ultimately contribute an article for our special issue, we thank him for his thoughtful participation in every aspect of the project along the way.

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Notes

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1. Ernest Renan, "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?" in Renan, *Pages françaises* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1921), 37. Some especially significant scholarly uses and analyses of Renan's work include Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983); Homi K. Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990); Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny, eds., *Becoming National: A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Herrick Chapman and Laura L. Frader, eds., *Race in France: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Politics of Difference* (New York: Berghahn, 2004).
2. Ernest Renan, "Préface," in Renan, *Discours et conférences* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1887), ii.
3. Renan, "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?," 68.
4. Renan, "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?," 70.

5. "Avant-Propos," in Renan, *Pages françaises*, ii.
6. In addition to the works in note 1 above, see also Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in Its Origins and Background*, 60th anniversary edition with a new introduction by Craig Calhoun (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2004).
7. Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood*, xi; Brubaker, "The Manichean Myth: Re-thinking the Distinction between 'Civic' and 'Ethnic' Nationalism," in *Nation and National Identity: The European Experience in Perspective*, ed. Hans-Peter Kriesl, Klaus Armingeon, Hannes Siegrist, and Andreas Wimmer (Zurich: Verlag Rüegger, 1999), 55–72.
8. Patrick Weil, *How to Be French: Nationality in the Making since 1789*, trans. Catherine Porter (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 173.
9. Dieter Gosewinkel, "Citizenship in Germany and France at the Turn of the Twentieth Century: Some New Observations on an Old Comparison," in *Citizenship and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Germany*, ed. Geoff Eley and Jan Plamowski (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 39.
10. See, for example, Alice L. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895–1930* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997); Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat, eds., *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Post-Colonial Perspectives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Owen White, *Children of the French Empire: Miscegenation and Colonial Society in French West Africa, 1895–1960* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999); Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Richard S. Fogarty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914–1918* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Elisa Camiscioli, *Reproducing the French Race: Immigration, Intimacy, and Embodiment in the Early Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Jennifer Anne Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis: The Urban Grounds of Feminism and Anti-Imperialism in Inter-war Paris* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010); Jennifer E. Sessions, *By Sword and Plow: France and the Conquest of Algeria* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011); Emmanuelle Saada, *Empire's Children: Race, Filiation, and Citizenship in the French Colonies*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).
11. See, for example, Lora Wildenthal, *German Women for Empire, 1884–1945* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Eric Ames, Marcia Klotz, and Lora Wildenthal, eds., *Germany's Colonial Pasts* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005); Renate Bridenthal, Krista Molly O'Donnell, and Nancy Reagin, eds., *The Heimat Abroad: The Boundaries of Germanness* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005); Patricia Mazón and Reinhild Steingröver, eds., *Not So Plain as Black and White: A Multidisciplinary Examination of the Afro-German Experience* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2005); Daniel Joseph Walther, *Creating Germans Abroad: Cultural Policies and National Identity in Namibia* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002); Matthew P. Fitzpatrick, *Liberal Imperialism in Germany: Expansionism and Nationalism, 1848–1884* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008); Michael Perraudin and Jürgen Zimmerer, eds., with Katy Heady, *German Colonialism and National Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

12. Mary Dewhurst Lewis, "Geographies of Power: The Tunisian Civic Order, Jurisdictional Politics, and Imperial Rivalry in the Mediterranean, 1881–1935," *The Journal of Modern History* 80, no. 4 (2008): 798. Key exceptions at the time of Lewis's writing included Julia Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters (Algeria and Tunisia, 1800–1904)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Thomas Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860–1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); and, although Lewis did not mention him herself, Raffael Scheck, *Hitler's African Victims: The German Army Massacres of Black French Soldiers in 1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Additional comparative, international, and transnational colonial and postcolonial work since then includes Kenneth J. Orosz, *Religious Conflict and the Evolution of Language Policy in German and French Cameroon, 1885–1939* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008); Ulrike Lindner, *Nervous States: Britain and Germany in a (Post-Colonial) World* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010); Edward Berenson, *Heroes of Empire: Five Charismatic Men and the Conquest of Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Jens-Uwe Guettel, *German Expansionism, Imperial Liberalism and the United States, 1776–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Deborah J. Neill, *Networks in Tropical Medicine: Internationalism, Colonialism, and the Rise of a Medical Specialty, 1890–1930* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012); Mélanie Torrent, *Diplomacy and Nation-Building in Africa: Franco-British Relations and Cameroon at the End of Empire* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012).