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Alison Carrol, *The Return of Alsace to France 1918-1939*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. v + 209 pp. Maps, tables, notes, bibliography, and index. \$79.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9780198803911.

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Control of Alsace was a defining centerpiece of the Franco-German rivalry during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The province changed hands no fewer than four times in the period between 1871 and 1945 after the conclusion of successive military engagements. Alison Carrol's book, *The Return of Alsace to France*, examines Alsace from 1918-1939 during its interwar sojourn under French sovereignty. The monograph focuses on a diverse array of subjects such as citizenship, laws, administrative institutions, politics, economics, identity, and landscape in order to study what it meant for Alsace to become French again following the horrendous carnage of the First World War and forty-seven years of German administration. A central goal for Republican authorities after 1918 was the complete removal of German influence from the province. Consequently, the border, specifically its establishment and/or efforts to transcend it, played a constitutive role in the interactions between local people and state officials in Paris. The resultant story is one of transition, evolution, and often tension, as French authorities sought to delineate Alsace territorially and nationally as a "frontier of Frenchness," while local visions saw the potential of the province to act as a bridge between France and Germany and as "the heart of a cross-border community" (p. v). Critically, however, Carrol's book is neither just a history of the relationship between France and Alsace, nor simply a story of a monolithic center intent on imposing uniformity on an indignant and subsequently united periphery. Instead, she emphasizes the multi-noded nature of the clashes that reflected the diversity of both the Alsatian community and French authorities. The battle lines, allies, and antagonists were situationally and temporally dependent and influenced by a variety of local, national, and international factors.

The Return of Alsace is composed of six chapters, a preface, introduction, and conclusion. The first chapter contextualizes the book by introducing the history of Alsace prior to 1918. The region was historically a crossroads for all of Europe, which contributed to the overall diversity of the Alsatian population. Carrol argues that during this period, we can begin to see the coexistence and clash between "border rhetoric" and the populace's everyday cross-border interactions that ultimately shaped both the idea and reality of the border (p. 22). Chapter two focuses on the French government's efforts to reshape Alsace in the realm of citizenship, administration, and juridical matters. Republican authorities' determination to remove all traces of German influence necessitated a concurrent screening of the region's population to define and determine *who* was French, as well as a degree of introspection, as administrative and legal reintegration begged the

question of *what* was French (p. 52). Here the Republican tradition of legal and administrative uniformity clashed with regional particularism that sought to maintain certain elements of the pre-1918 German administration in the region. The third chapter examines politics in Alsace. Republican officials' rigid definition of Frenchness clashed with a local, organic vision of the province as a point of contact between France and Germany. Disheartened by their experience, Alsatians' politics turned inward yet continued to be influenced by national and transnational developments. Rejection of French officials' homogenizing administrative efforts led to the growth of a strong autonomist movement during the 1920s, while conversely, worries associated with the rise of National Socialism in Germany led to the movement's decline in the 1930s. Chapter four studies the Republican efforts to economically reintegrate Alsace into France. The province emerged from the First World War in an economic slump. General issues in the French and global economy compounded the unique economic difficulties of the region and contributed to a sense of difference between Alsatians and their interior French counterparts, even as the introduction of the franc, French customs, and interactions with the cross-border population helped give meaning to the post-1919 boundary. The fifth chapter looks at the evolution of Alsatians' identities after 1918 by focusing on the issues of language and festivities. Despite the multiplicity of their identities, many Alsatians were invested in the notion of their region as possessing a unique "double culture" that represented an amalgamation of German, French, and regional influences. French authorities worried that any cross-border influence might be a potential threat to national security. The clash between the two positions was most evident in the realm of language, where the Republican government's conviction that Alsatians must speak French in order to be fully integrated citizens, collided with the local reality of bilingualism. Chapter six examines the remaking of the landscape of Alsace after 1918. The larger debate over whether Alsace was a frontier or bridge also played a central role in the reconfiguration of the postwar landscape. The results witnessed an effort to remove many markers of the region's recent German past, while at the same time filling these holes in the physical and monumental topography with symbols of French history and culture.

The border, conceived as both a territorial demarcation and point of contact, is a critical element of the book's analysis. Carrol argues that while previous studies have been situated in the geographic location of the borderlands, they have often neglected to appreciate the constitutive role that the border itself played in the return of Alsace to France and on the everyday lives of the region's population (p. 13). The redrawing of the national boundary after 1918 preceded the creation of feelings of difference among Alsatians towards Germany *and* France. The new national boundary did not isolate local populations from one another nor immediately create feelings of otherness. French authorities set the stage to make the border meaningful by introducing a host of French laws, institutions, and practices in order to differentiate their newly acquired territory from the Weimar Republic. Yet it was Alsatians' everyday cross-border economic, political, social, and cultural interactions that gave significance to the geopolitical reality of the border at the local level. Interestingly, of these two, Carrol concludes that the latter was more influential in creating feelings of difference between people who had until recently shared a state, language, and culture. The border thus forged Alsatians' interwar identities even as it simultaneously worked to shape local people and state authorities' perceptions of one another, and ultimately official policy. Carrol contends that this focus on the border and Alsace's return to France, "...allows consideration of how regional and national history is bound up with the transnational past, and encourages the linking-up of local experience to developments on the macro level of international relations and cross-border flows" (p. 14).

Another important contribution of *The Return of Alsace to France* is Carrol's emphasis on the complexity of the Alsatian population and the diversity of responses to their return to France in 1918. While the interwar Republican government perceived issues like national identity and loyalty through the binary lens of pro- or anti-French, Carrol demonstrates that "identities in Alsace were multiple, contested, and in a state of becoming" (p. 11). She calls for historians to situate issues of identity and loyalty in Alsace on a spectrum in order to overcome the dualism of "either/or" and to capture their complexity (pp. 11, 17, 144). This approach is critical because it discourages the notion of a single, monolithic Alsatian response to their return to France in 1918. Instead, it recognizes how the array of preexisting gender, class, confessional, and political divisions in the borderland contributed to the diversity of responses to reintegration, while simultaneously spotting that certain shared regional experiences, such as national instability and annexation, could still create an overarching general attachment to the region and locality among an otherwise diverse population. In the end, conceptualizing Alsatians' response to their return to France on a spectrum captures the internal complexity of the border population, while making allowances for changing positions and, critically, points of commonality, such as the widespread notion that "...Alsace represented a 'bridge' between France and Germany and that this was reflected in its double culture" (p. 143).

Alison Carrol's monograph has elements of rupture and continuity with recent historiography on Alsace. On the one hand, the book's primary focus on the interwar period represents a departure from much of the recent English language works, which focus on tracing different aspects of Alsatian history across successive political regimes.[1] On the other hand, Carrol's efforts to situate Alsatians' response to their return to France in the larger context of Franco-German relations and Europe as a whole also sets it apart from more recent regionally focused French-language publications.[2] The overall strength of Carrol's approach is evident in the depth of analysis in the book's areas of focus. For instance, the detail of her discussion in regard to the development of the French administration after 1918 is particularly impressive (pp. 65-71). The drawback of such specificity is greater difficulty in recognizing continuities and ruptures across political regimes. For example, Carrol does an excellent job of discussing the often-arbitrary post-World War I triage commissions that sought to classify the population of Alsace into categories of "pure" and "mixed" Alsatians, foreigners, and Germans. This latter label was often a precursor to expulsion (pp. 57-65). She limits her analysis of earlier Imperial citizenship practices to mentioning the supposed impracticality of the 1871 citizenship option for most borderland residents (pp. 7, 34). While the cursory treatment of other periods is at one level understandable given the timeframe of the book, it prevents Carrol from situating postwar Republican actions and policies within larger trends. For instance, contrasting the exclusionary, ethnic, post-1918 citizenship policies to the relative freedom of nationality-choice that borderland residents enjoyed after 1871, or the even more radical classification of the population into "racial" categories that occurred from 1940 to 1944, would have been informative and useful.[3] Moreover, in this same vein, it would have been interesting to see if the "cross-border interactions and transgressions" that helped to make the boundary meaningful after 1918 (p. 204) were also present in the periods from 1871-1918 and 1940-1945. Finally, given Carrol's emphasis on the importance of cross-boundary interactions and influences in making the border in the interwar period, I found it a bit surprising that all of the archives she utilizes are located in Alsace or France. The one exception to this is Foreign Office correspondence located at the National Archives, Kew. These thoughts aside, *The Return of Alsace to France* is a well-researched and thorough analysis of the region's return to Republican sovereignty during the interwar period

and is an important addition to the historiography of Alsace and borderland studies, with conclusions that promise to contribute to scholarship far beyond these fields.

NOTES

[1] For some examples of these works see: Christopher J Fischer, *Alsace to the Alsatians? Visions and Divisions of Alsatian Regionalism, 1870-1939* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010); Elizabeth Vlossak, *Marianne or Germania?: Nationalizing Women in Alsace, 1870-1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); David Allen Harvey, *Constructing Class and Nationality in Alsace, 1830-1945* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2001); Stephen L. Harp, *Learning to Be Loyal: Primary Schooling as Nation Building in Alsace and Lorraine, 1850-1940* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1998); John E. Craig, *Scholarship and Nation Building: The Universities of Strasbourg and Alsatian Society, 1870-1939* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Philip C. Bankwitz, *Alsatian Autonomist Leaders, 1919-1947* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1978).

[2] For some examples of these works see: Jean-Laurent Vonau, *Le Gauleiter Wagner: Le bourreau de l'Alsace* (Strasbourg: La Nuée Bleue, 2011); Jean-Noël Grandhomme, ed., *Boches ou Tricolores: Les Alsaciens-Lorrains dans le Grande Guerre*, (Strasbourg: La Nuée Bleue, 2008); Jean-Laurent Vonau, *L'Épuration en Alsace: La face méconnue de la Libération, 1944-1953*. (Strasbourg: La Nuée Bleue, 2005); Jean-Laurent Vonau, *Le procès de Bordeaux: Les Malgré-Nous et le drame d'Oradour* (Strasbourg: La Nuée Bleue, 2003); Eugène Riedweg, *Les «Malgré nous»: histoire de l'incorporation de force des Alsaciens-Mosellans dans l'armée allemande* (Mulhouse: Éditions du Rhin, 1995).

[3] Although both German and French nationalists discussed national differences between their two nation-states in terms of “race” as early as the nineteenth century, their meaning referred to individuals sharing a common descent and had more in common with our contemporary understandings of ethnicity. See Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1992), 211; Dieter Gosewinkel, “Citizenship and Naturalization Politics in Germany in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” in *Challenging Ethnic Citizenship: German and Israeli Perspectives on Immigration*, ed. Daniel Levy and Yfaat Weiss (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002), 60.

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