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Philipp Müller and Hervé Joly, eds., *Les espaces d'interaction des élites françaises et allemandes, 1920-1950*. Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2021. 210 pp. €24.00 (pb.). ISBN 9782753582170.

Review by Talbot Imlay, Université Laval.

The subject of Franco-German relations boasts a lengthy and distinguished pedigree in France. One thinks of Alfred Grosser who began publishing in the 1950s, of Raymond Poidevin and Jacques Bariéty, whose influential theses were published in 1969 and 1977 respectively, and of several subsequent generations of scholars—Georges-Henri Soutou, Geneviève Maelstaff, Jean-Paul Cahn, Corine Defrance, Sylvain Schirmann and Christian Baechler, among others. Hervé Joly belongs very much to this group. A prolific scholar, Joly is an expert on French and German economic history, perhaps best known as the director of a ground-breaking, multi-year research project on French businesses under German occupation during the Second World War. Reflecting Joly's research interests but also that of much of French scholarship on Franco-German relations, *Les espaces d'interaction des élites françaises et allemandes* examines the tumultuous decades between the end of the First World War and the creation of the European Economic Community in the late 1950s. Edited with Philipp Müller, a professor at Hamburg's Institute for Social Research and author of a recent monograph on French and German capitalism between 1920 and 1950, the book, a product of a colloquium in 2017, brings together an impressive group of early-career and more established scholars, all of whom have worked and are working on Franco-German relations.

Not surprisingly perhaps, the book focuses on elites, and on business elites in particular. Indeed, only two of the eleven chapters, those by Joly and Gilles Morin, veer from this focus. Following a first-rate introduction by Müller, which emphasizes the dual theme of border-crossing (between Germany and France and between the state and the economy), Anna Karla looks at a neglected aspect of reparations: the involvement of German companies in the construction industry in the payment of reparations "in kind." These companies viewed reparations not as a burden but as an opportunity, seeking contracts in France which could then be booked against Germany's reparations account. As Karla shows, there was much more to reparations than the politics of confrontation and crisis. Somewhat similarly, Marion Aballéa examines the economic activities of the French embassy staff in Berlin before 1933, highlighting its role as an intermediary between mid-level French companies and German clients. Once again, the practical aspects of economic collaboration are at the forefront of the story. Equally intriguing in this regard is Jakob Zollmann's chapter on German legal experts in France (Paris) between the wars who were active in the mixed arbitration tribunals established to resolve economic disputes between French and

German actors arising from the First World War. As Zollmann argues, one result was a blurring of the distinction between private law and public international law, which became institutionalized in 1920 with the creation of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) in Paris. Regarding the latter, Müller in his chapter recounts how the ICC developed not only into a site for international cooperation between business elites but also into a workshop for the articulation of novel conceptions of state-economy relations, which he terms, borrowing from Étienne Clémentel, “organized liberalism.”

Other chapters address the wartime and post-war years. Cédric Perrin discusses the enduring influence of a German model of artisanship in France which, in the context of the Poujadiste flare-up in the 1950s, would prompt the government to look to Germany for possible policy solutions. In his chapter on the wine industry, Sébastien Durand also highlights continuities as French and German actors, bound together by mutual interest, successfully adapted their relations in the face of “political and geopolitical ruptures” (p. 108), not to mention the lopsided relations of power during the occupation. As Durand remarks, this continuity was embodied in numerous individuals who were active across the interwar, wartime and postwar periods. Continuities are also major theme of Martial Libera’s chapter on cross-border chambers of commerce in the Rhine-Moselle region, which after 1945 contributed to the transition from a Franco-German framework to a larger Western European one as part of the process of economic integration. A similar function is evident in Sylvain Schirmann’s chapter on two peak associations lobbying for Franco-German economic collaboration: the Association française des intérêts et participations en Allemagne during the 1930s, and the Deutsche Vereinigung zur Förderung der Wirtschaftsbeziehungen mit Frankreich after 1945. Principally under U.S. pressure, the latter advocated for a more liberalized European economy as opposed to the cartel-oriented vision of the interwar years. An earlier chapter by Gérald Arboit on the Luxembourgish industrialist, Émile Mayrigh, who died in 1928, reminds us that cross-national business networks can be traced back to the pre-1914 years.

As mentioned, two of the chapters deal with political more than economic relations. Joly offers a sociological portrait of the Comité France-Allemagne, founded in 1935, which became a prominent pro-collaborationist voice during the occupation. As Joly shows, it is difficult to generalize about the committee’s membership, even if its overall profile leaned more towards conservative than extreme right. Gilles Morin arguably has an easier task in his similar chapter on the Cercle européen which was more clearly pro-fascist and anti-Semitic, but he also recognizes that practical considerations—contacts, contracts and other benefits (ample food)—motivated several members to join. Taken together, Joly and Morin’s chapters confirm what has become a mainstay of scholarship on occupied France—the difficulty of assigning individuals and organizations to distinctly separate categories.

All told, this is a valuable collection, indicating that the subject of Franco-German relations during the twentieth century remains as vibrant as ever. Clearly, inter-state relations are important to the story but, as many of the chapters demonstrate, economic actors in particular found ways to maintain, adapt and develop cross-border relations despite—and sometimes even because of—the tensions, crises and conflict in the political realm. The relatively smooth transition from a Franco-German to a larger European framework is particularly intriguing, underscoring the centrality of the *couple franco-allemand* to the project of European unity. The collection suggests the rewards which come from studying an ever-wider range of economic actors.

Finally, a comment on two relative absences. One is the United States which receives little attention, especially for the interwar and wartime periods. Given the place of the United States in recent scholarship on conceptions of Europe, it might be interesting to explore what, if any, role it played for various French and German actors. The other absence is empire. The focus of the collection is very much continental—on trans-border relations and exchanges. Yet empire sometimes loomed large in interwar, wartime and postwar conceptions of Europe. Accordingly, it would be interesting to know more about what the different elites covered in Joly and Müller's collection thought about the subject.

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