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Grenzlandschicksal: Historical Narratives of Regional Identity and National Duty in Gau Oberrhein, 1940-1944

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► **To cite this version:**

Tom Williams. Grenzlandschicksal: Historical Narratives of Regional Identity and National Duty in Gau Oberrhein, 1940-1944. Claus-Christian Szejnmann, Maiken Umbach. Heimat, Region and Empire: Spatial Identities under National Socialism, Palgrave, pp.56-71, 2012, 978-0230391093. hal-03382972

HAL Id: hal-03382972

<https://univ-angers.hal.science/hal-03382972>

Submitted on 18 Oct 2021

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Heimat, Region, and Empire

Spatial Identities under National Socialism

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3 'Grenzlandschicksal': Historical Narratives of Regional Identity and National Duty in 'Gau Oberrhein', 1940–1944

Thomas Williams

'With the defeat of France', the *Gauleiter* of Baden, Robert Wagner, wrote triumphantly to his regional party colleagues in December 1940, 'our *Heimat* [homeland] has finally ceased to be a borderland. Alsace is German once more'.¹ Wagner had recently been appointed as the head of the administration in annexed Alsace and given the task of overseeing the region's integration, in as short a time as possible, into the German national community. The allocation of this task to the regional leadership of Baden was no coincidence; situated directly across the Rhine from Alsace, Baden was considered to share close ties with its neighbour in terms of race, historical development and regional culture. The incorporation of Alsace into the Reich, it was hoped, could be best achieved through simultaneous regional integration within an 'Alemannic' cultural community spanning the Upper Rhine, and the limits of the new administrative unit under Wagner's control (for which the name 'Gau Oberrhein' was gradually introduced) were purported to reflect the ancient cultural boundaries of this single branch of the German *Volk*. 'Baden and Alsace', Wagner concluded his letter, 'this land of identical language and identical blood on the two banks of the Upper Rhine will, in future, be the strongest bulwark of the Greater German Reich in the West'.² Thus, while Wagner could rejoice that his narrow homeland of Baden was no longer to suffer the fate of an exposed and threatened borderland, the new Upper Rhine would still be characterized as a region by its role as the defensive wall of the national community.

During the four-year annexation of Alsace, a wide-ranging programme of cultural and historical propaganda was organized to promote an Upper Rhine regional identity and to demonstrate the historical role of the Alemannic '*Grenzvolk*' (border population) as the military and cultural bulwark of the German Reich in a perpetual conflict against the Latin West. This

chapter examines the National Socialist attempt to instil in the Alsatians an understanding of past, present and future based on the inescapable destiny of geography: the location of the Alemannic Upper Rhine at the threatened and contested periphery of a German national space. In the new 'Gau Oberrhein', it was claimed, regional history was not to be understood as narrow provincialism but as the fate or destiny of the borderland: *Grenzlandschicksal*.

Though drawing on the cultural, linguistic and historical definitions of the national community which had characterized the German claim to the territory of Alsace-Lorraine after the Franco-Prussian war, and firmly rooted in the nineteenth-century myth of Franco-German hereditary conflict, the representations of space and identity in National Socialist propaganda in annexed Alsace can only be understood in the context of nationalist intellectual developments in Germany after the First World War.³ In recent years, innovative research has shed light on the development of theories of contested national space and cultural boundaries in the interwar years and, particularly, on the mobilization of academics in the attempt to lay claim to western borderland territories and the identities of their populations: the phenomenon of '*Westforschung*' (Western Research).⁴ Focusing on Franco-German cultural competition in the occupied Rhineland and the Saar, meanwhile, other studies have demonstrated the importance attached by contemporaries to the uses of historical commemorations and *Heimat* festivals in articulating claims to the historical identity of these contested and threatened border regions.⁵ The cultural-historical approach taken in these studies has yet to be extended to wartime Alsace, despite the primary importance attached by the annexation regime to the promotion of regional 'historical education' and its very clear political manipulation of the notion of *Heimat*. After the concept of *Heimat* had been mobilized during the period 1918–1940 by Alsatian regionalists in opposition to the centralizing demands of the French state, the annexation years witnessed an attempt to 're-nationalize' the understanding of *Heimat* in Alsace, while simultaneously, through the portrayal of a united Upper Rhine homeland, undermining Alsatian particularist claims which could be used to set Alsace apart from the rest of Germany.

Borderland history and contested national space, 1918–1940

Opposition in Germany to the territorial provisions of the Versailles Treaty brought about a shift of political and academic focus towards the German-speaking populations on and beyond the new national boundaries. A number of national institutes were established to stake a German claim to the lost or threatened border regions through historical, geographical and ethnographical research, often grouped together under the broad title of *Raumforschung* (spatial research).⁶ In such research, a conceptual vocabulary

was developed which combined ideas of national culture with those of geopolitical space, producing notions such as *Kulturraum* (cultural space), *Kulturgrenzen* (cultural boundaries) or *Volks- und Kulturboden* (national and cultural territory).⁷ Influenced, in particular, by the geopolitical research of Karl Haushofer, academics such as Max Hildebert Boehm, director of the Berlin Institute for Borderland and Foreign Research, wrote of the border not as a linear barrier but as a zone (*Grenzraum* or *Grenzland*), claiming that the character of the borderland population (*Grenzvolk*) had been forged by the turbulent historical experiences of living in a contested space (*Grenzlandschicksal*).⁸

In the West, a range of regionally-specific research institutes, most notably the Institute for the Historical Geography of the Rhineland, founded at Bonn University in 1920, were established to investigate and reinforce claims to the Germanic identity of a variety of lost or seemingly threatened borderlands.⁹ The loss of Alsace-Lorraine to France, the internationalization of the Saar basin and the inter-allied occupation of the Rhineland increased the perception that these regions were exposed not only to military attack but also to the supposedly destructive influence of French cultural imperialism. Partly in response to French historical propaganda in the occupied Rhineland, which attempted to use cultural and historical claims to the identity of the left bank of the Rhine to encourage its separation from the rest of Germany, the study and commemoration of regional history and the promotion of regional traditions were portrayed as part of a defensive struggle against foreign influence, a struggle described as '*Heimatsdienst*' (service of the homeland) or '*kulturelle Abwehrkampf*' (cultural defensive struggle).¹⁰

Though neither subject to an allied occupation like the Rhineland after 1918, nor internationalized like the Saar, the narrow south-western region of Baden was seen by many to have suffered a similar 'borderland fate'. Roughly half the state fell within the fifty kilometre demilitarized zone imposed by the Versailles Treaty, French troops occupied the bridgehead of Kehl across the Rhine from Strasbourg, and the new national boundary on the Rhine brought a need for profound economic re-adjustment.¹¹ The unnatural division of the Upper Rhine, claimed a report commissioned by the Baden state government on the region's 'borderland distress', had not only cut off the economic lifeblood of the region but even inhibited cultural activity and creativity.¹² The theory that the Upper Rhine was a natural cultural, geographic and economic unit was developed most fully by the geographer Friedrich Metz, who, in his influential 1925 study *Die Oberrheinlande*, claimed that the division of the Upper Rhine plain was 'a sin against the spirit of geography' and that the only possible future for Alsace lay in the German 'life community'.¹³ Metz viewed regionally-focused academic research, including his own, as a means of continuing the struggle against France, claiming that, after Versailles, 'the weapons of iron and steel have been replaced today by those of the intellect'.¹⁴

Alemannic history and culture were promoted in Baden during the interwar years as a means of discrediting the new national boundary of the Versailles Treaty. Cultural ties between Baden, Alsace and Switzerland would be celebrated and promoted, from 1926 onwards, in an annual 'Alemannic Week' in Freiburg, a series of lectures, concerts, small exhibitions of art and handicrafts and theatre productions, coordinated by the 'Badische Heimat' organization and its chairman, Hermann Eris Busse.¹⁵ In 1931, Friedrich Metz helped found the Alemannic Institute in Freiburg, an independent research centre for the historical and cultural study of the cross-border Alemannic cultural space.

While the organizers of the Alemannic Week and the members of the Alemannic Institute initially avoided making direct statements about the location of the national boundaries, the promotion of *Heimat* traditions and regional history was ever more frequently referred to in the militaristic terms of a defensive borderland struggle. After the National Socialists came to power, the political implications of Alemannic regionalism would be made more explicit. Just nine days after the appointment of Adolf Hitler as chancellor, Freiburg's mayor wrote of the need, in a forthcoming Alemannic Week, to 'emphasize the political interests... in a way that brings into view the importance of Freiburg as the defender of the border'.¹⁶ Many regional historical societies in Baden soon followed suit. The annual report of the 'Historical Association for Central Baden' for 1933 cited the claim by local-born National Socialist government minister Otto Wacker that ' "Here in the border march of Baden we have the enormous task of being the protector and defender, shaper and awakener of the German being" ', adding that 'in this mission, the cultivation of *Heimat* history would be a valuable help' insofar as it would create men who 'led back to the soil and to the *Volk*, would love their *Heimat* and therefore defend it'.¹⁷ A 1936 study of the Alemannic people claimed that they had 'the inescapable and unceasing duty, to be the defender of the South Western marches of the German *Volk*' and that raised historical awareness was necessary 'for the greatness of past service to become quite visible, so that it can forge unity and instil a sense of duty in future generations'.¹⁸

The rhetoric of Alemannic struggle was embraced by the National Socialist movement in southern Baden, with Franz Kerber, future mayor of Freiburg, founding the regional party newspaper *Der Alemanne* in 1931. In 1935, the Baden Nazi party held its first 'Alemannic Cultural Convention' (*Alemannische Kulturtagung*), similar in many respects to the Alemannic Week but setting the region firmly within the National Socialist vision of a German *Volksgemeinschaft*. The event was described as a manifestation of the commitment of the Alemannic people to struggle 'for its Alemannic *Volkstum* (cultural identity), for its narrow *Heimat* and at the same time for the Reich and the National Socialist idea' and to act as 'border guard and protector of the German spirit, today as it has for very nearly 2000 years'.¹⁹ Shortly

afterwards, an article in the *Völkischer Beobachter* claimed that the entire question of cultural activity in Baden had to be centred on the fact that Baden was a borderland under constant threat from both French military invasion and the equally destructive 'ideas of western democracies', citing *Gauleiter* Robert Wagner's recent call to transform Baden into a 'spiritual fortress'.²⁰

The mobilization of the regional past in the attempt to instil a sense of duty and historic mission in the borderlands can be observed particularly clearly in the regional activities of the Reich's Labour Service. Labour Service in Baden was portrayed in a 1935 brochure as means of 'transmitting the experience of the border marches' to the 'borderland youth' and, in the process, creating 'spiritual armour plating on the border'.²¹ To reinforce the idea of historic borderland struggle, almost every branch of the Labour Service in Baden adopted the name of a local historical figure who had participated in a broader struggle on the western frontier, ranging from Ariovistus, who had led a Germanic army against the legions of Julius Caesar in 58 BC, to Albert Leo Schlageter, whose 'Alemannic defiance' in opposing the French occupation of the Rhineland made him a hero 'not only of the narrow *Heimat* but of all Germany'.²² These inspirational figures from the past, a souvenir brochure of Labour Service explained, had defended their Upper Rhine homeland with a consciousness of a greater struggle for the Reich as a whole, insisting that 'whoever imbibes deeply the image of the homeland, whoever has history, in all its tragedy and all its greatness, forever in his mind, will not fail to understand the task at hand'.²³

After 1940, the raising of a similar kind of borderland consciousness in Alsace was seen by the *Gau* authorities as one of the most important tasks of the new regime. An extensive campaign of cultural and historical propaganda promoted precisely the ideas of boundaries, cultural space, national consciousness, struggle, duty, fate and destiny that had developed in the western regions of Germany after Versailles. Propaganda in Alsace did not simply assert the claim that Alsace was culturally or historically German, but rather attempted to promote an Alemannic regional identity and raise awareness of the historical destiny of the Alemannic people in the perpetual struggle for the Reich's western frontier.

Heimat, Oberrhein, Fatherland: promoting historical spaces of identification in annexed Alsace

The political construction of *Gau* Oberrhein in the summer of 1940 was accompanied by an attempt to present the Upper Rhine as an ancient historical and cultural region, which, reunited after the defeat of France, could finally fulfil its true potential. In this frequently repeated claim, the annexation of Alsace was justified by the abstract notion that the political unity of the Upper Rhine allowed for the natural force (*Kraft*) of the region to

be unleashed, whether in economic, political, military or artistic terms. In 1940, Hermann Eris Busse, founder of the Alemannic Week, wrote of the historical fate that had tied Alsace to Baden across the centuries: 'when Germany's leadership was weak, the Alsatian paid the penance with war and foreign domination; when Germany was strong, it [the region; T.W.] blossomed as a *Gau* on the Oberrhein.'²⁴ The *Gau* on the Oberrhein had recently become a political reality, an occasion which Busse had marked by officially renaming his Badische *Heimat* organization 'Oberrheinische *Heimat*' and dedicating the 1940 volume of its periodical, similarly renamed, to Alsatian history and Alsace-Baden relations. Writing to local branches of the National Socialist administration in Alsace early in 1941, the Oberrheinische *Heimat* editorial committee expressed its hope that this volume would contribute to the work of Robert Wagner in ensuring 'that the entire Upper Rhine space (Baden-Alsace) would soon develop into a strong, never again to be separated, cultural-politically bounded, *Heimat*-conscious unit within the Greater German Reich'.²⁵

The *Gau* authorities and party organizations attempted to encourage Alsatians to identify with a broader Upper Rhine space through cultural events such as the 'Upper Rhine Culture Days', a series of concerts, film screenings and theatre performances (held in Strasbourg from 14 to 19 November 1940) and the annual 'Upper Rhine Art Exhibitions'.²⁶ After four years of National Socialist rule, the brochure to the 1944 art exhibition claimed, the unity of the Upper Rhine was already bearing fruit; the paintings on display were not only 'rooted in the experience of national struggle' but evidence of the 'creative power of a space which had been torn asunder for centuries by an unnatural state frontier'.²⁷ The argument for the destructive influence of the unnatural division of the Upper Rhine was put forward in grandest style by the exhibition 'German Economic Power: Reconstruction on the Upper Rhine', an event which attracted 500,000 visitors when open in Strasbourg from 29 August to 21 September 1941.²⁸ In the exhibition guide, the Minister of Finance for Baden, Walter Köhler, assured visitors that, while the Versailles boundary had brought great economic misfortune and shown both Baden and Alsace 'the harsh reality of what it meant to be a borderland', the amalgamation of the regions would 'rapidly heal these wounds and usher in a period of great economic flowering in the south-west corner of the Reich'.²⁹ The exhibition also presented the case for the natural cultural unity of the Upper Rhine, using exhibits of traditional handicrafts and needlework in an attempt to demonstrate that 'one people, one blood and one culture' inhabited the two banks of the Upper Rhine.³⁰

Regular articles in the regional press, along with a number of specialist publications, attempted to present the visual similarities between certain features of regional heritage in Alsace and Baden as irrefutable proof of the cultural unity of the Upper Rhine.³¹ Similarly, the images chosen to promote the 'Gau Street Collection' and the 'Winter Help' charity collection drives

almost invariably employed these traditional elements. Images which had so often been used as depictions of Alsatian regionalism were thus rebranded as evidence of Upper Rhine unity. For example, the 1941 poster for the 'Gau Street Collection' depicted, against the background of a map of *Gau* Oberrhein, two women in regional costume – one from Alsace, one from Baden – reaching their hands out to each other across the Rhine. Around them, the coats of arms of three Alsatian towns and three Baden towns were shown.³² By relying frequently on the juxtaposition of similar, though not identical, regional images to support the idea of Upper Rhine unity, attention was also drawn to the degree of difference between the two sides of the Rhine. In order for the intended messages of such images to be communicated, textual explanations often proved necessary. When badges depicting traditional buildings from the two sides of the Upper Rhine were sold for the 'Gau Street Collection' of January 1942, for example, newspaper advertisements explained to readers that 'the emblems of the "Gau Street Collection" are symbols of common *Volkstum*, common history and common destiny on the Upper Rhine'.³³ Messages of historical struggle, a key component of official discourse on the symbols of the *Heimat*, were even less easily communicated in the classic images of regional heritage. The Strasbourg press had to explain that miniature replicas of municipal coats of arms, sold for the January 1941 collection drive for the 'Winter Help', 'bear witness to the history of landscape and to the *struggle* for the Germanness of the Upper Rhine'.³⁴

In the official pronouncements of the regime, Alsatian regionalism was firmly situated within a national framework, and the protection and cultivation of Alsatian costumes, folk traditions and regional dialect were presented as part of a perpetual struggle to protect national cultural space. In a party rally on 20 October 1940, Robert Wagner congratulated the Alsatian people for their untiring defence of German *Volkstum* against French incursions. Their historical struggle, he proclaimed, had meant that 'the German language, German spiritual life and the German soul ... could not be extinguished from the consciousness of the *Volk*', a fact which 'today makes work easy for all of us in Alsace'.³⁵ In an article on 'the defensive force of the Alemannic people', government minister Wilhelm Frick claimed that, 'threatened again and again by foreign influence, the Alsatian had withdrawn to the family, the commune and to the narrow Alsatian *Heimat*' and that regional dialect, in times of French rule, had acted as a 'protective wall'.³⁶ Andreas Hohlfeld, a historian who played a prominent role in the organization of historical education in annexed Alsace, developed this argument, connecting any introspective regionalism in Alsace to a feeling of abandonment by the Reich. When the Reich was weak, he wrote, 'the German of the borderland looked over, full of hurt, at the Reich which, in its adversity, had abandoned him to his fate; he searched in the *Heimat* for the strength that that he no longer found in the Reich'.³⁷

In the weeks following the defeat of France, a number of key figures in the interwar Alsatian regionalist movement, motivated by varying degrees of ideological conviction and political expediency, declared their support for the new regime.³⁸ While the complex relationship between interwar Alsatian 'autonomists' and the Nazi regime cannot be discussed in detail here, it is significant that those prominent figures who did rally to the regime made a clear attempt to portray the interwar regionalist movement as part of an eternal struggle at the western edge of a German national space. Taking up a similar theme to Andreas Hohlfeld, Paul Schall, a prominent member of the autonomist *Landespartei* who was later appointed to the position of *Kreisleiter* of Strasbourg, wrote to his Alsatian compatriots shortly after the annexation arguing that, in future, the Reich could replace the narrow *Heimat* as the primary space of identification:

From the *Heimat* we have come to the Fatherland! Everything which in past years bound us to our *Heimat* ... now extends outwards into National Socialist feeling and thought and unites us with all Germans of the Reich.³⁹

Robert Ernst, a prominent figure in the interwar regionalist movement in exile, appointed as an advisor to the *Gau* regime in 1940 and later mayor of Strasbourg, made a similar claim:

Through their struggle to protect their German character and their *Heimat* against intolerant French cultural imperialism ... the people of Alsace and Lorraine were also playing their part in the great work of German freedom and unity. The difficult sacrifices made in this struggle were Alsatian contributions to the construction of the Reich of Adolf Hitler.⁴⁰

The leader of the interwar autonomist *Landespartei*, Karl Roos, who had been found guilty of treason and espionage by a French court and executed in February 1940, was transformed into a martyr within precisely this regional-national framework. Roos was presented as a model of heroic self-sacrifice for both the narrow Alsatian *Heimat* and the nation as a whole, to be considered on a par with Baden's hero Albert Leo Schlageter.⁴¹ On 19 June 1941, the anniversary of the 1940 'liberation' of Strasbourg, the body of Karl Roos was transported back to Alsace from France amid great pomp and ceremony.⁴² On this day, in a grand tribute on the front page of the Strasbourg press, his party colleague Paul Schall claimed that, even if Roos had given his life for his *Heimat*, it was Greater Germany which was welcoming him home.⁴³ Evoking the memory of Karl Roos and the 'countless martyrs' who had given their lives in the struggle for 'German *Volkstum*', Robert Wagner proclaimed that, in the new Upper Rhine, there would no longer be any contradiction between Alsatian regionalism and German national identity.⁴⁴

'2000 years of struggle on the Rhine': borderland consciousness and war mobilization

Despite claiming that the Alsatians had, for centuries, consciously defended Alsace's German heritage against French cultural imperialism, the *Gau* authorities also identified a pressing need for 'historical re-education' and frequently spoke of a lamentable lack of public awareness about the German past in Alsace.⁴⁵ In order to combat the effects of decades of 'French myth-making', the year 1942 was officially designated as a 'year of historical education in Alsace'. A propaganda report of December 1941, after outlining the range of initiatives for the year, underlined the importance which the *Gau* propaganda division attached to the task of historical re-education, claiming that raised public consciousness of 'the true historical developments' was 'the prerequisite for the complete integration of Alsace into the National Socialist German *Volksgemeinschaft*'.⁴⁶ The messages of the 'year of historical education' were firmly set in the historical framework of borderland struggle. The same report identified the need to emphasize that 'Alsace was always the heartland and the protective wall of the Reich' and that 'an unbroken series of the best Alsatian personalities had stood against France on the side of the Reich'.⁴⁷ Guidelines for one commemoration, sent to every mayor in Alsace, emphasized the connection between historical awareness and a sense of duty in the present, calling on the Alsatians to 'be aware of their great German past at all times, to follow without hesitation the example of those men who, ready for action, acted and fought for the Reich, to obey the call of blood and duty in the current struggle and to work and to struggle with all their strength for victory'.⁴⁸

The year of 1942 saw the fortuitous coincidence of two anniversaries, both of which could be used to lay claim to the 'original' spatial boundaries of Franco-German perpetual conflict. The 2000th anniversary of a battle between the Germanic armies of Ariovistus and Julius Caesar's legions, near present-day Mulhouse in 58 BC, was used to demonstrate the 'original' presence of Germanic tribes on the left bank of the Rhine and to argue that, for 2000 years, Germans had been *defending* Alsace from the Latin West.⁴⁹ Even though the Romans were victorious, it was argued, the vanquished Germans nonetheless began to settle the land: a direct challenge to a French nationalist claim that the Rhine represented a barrier between peoples, nations or races.⁵⁰ The second large commemorative event, the 1100th anniversary of the Strasbourg Oath, was equally used to lay claim to the 'original' boundaries of the French and German worlds. This pact between Louis the German and Charles the Bald, two of Charlemagne's warring successors, was sworn in 842 in early versions of French and German and was considered as a founding moment in the linguistic division of the Carolingian Empire and the birth of the French and German nations. A propaganda report circulated to all district administrators described the oath as 'the first historical witness

to the national division between Germans and French, from which all the political struggles for power in the west had ensued'.⁵¹ Andreas Hohlfeld argued that the Strasbourg Oath also proved unambiguously 'that the Upper Rhine belonged to the German national and linguistic community'.⁵²

On 19 June 1942, the second anniversary of the German 'liberation' of Strasbourg, an exhibition entitled '2000 Years of Struggle on the Rhine' opened at the Schiffmatt exhibition ground in Strasbourg. After laying claim to the original boundaries of the German world in 58 BC, the exhibition presented Alsatian history through the lens of permanent Franco-German conflict, ending with the martyrdom of Karl Roos and the glorious (and final) return of Alsace to Germany in 1940.⁵³ All French influence in Alsace was presented as a brutal attempt to stamp out the heritage and traditions of the Germanic Alsatians.

The historian Alfred Rapp, whose 1937 work *Deutsche Geschichte am Oberrhein* had presented the history of the two banks of the Upper Rhine within the framework of a single historical space, was commissioned to produce a brochure for the exhibition, entitled *Alsace: Heartland and Protective Wall of the Reich*.⁵⁴ Although the intended messages of the exhibition are clear in the text of the brochure, it is difficult to assess how effectively these ideas were conveyed to the average exhibition-goer. In fact, as Hans-Ulrich Thamer has commented with regard to earlier National Socialist exhibitions, it is a matter of some doubt whether the familiar historical artefacts put on display in a historical exhibition of this kind could be used successfully to convey the complex and often somewhat abstract messages of regional-national space and eternal conflict to the public.⁵⁵ Alfred Rapp identified precisely this problem in a report to the *Gau* propaganda department. The particular difficulty of finding suitable visual material for the brochure from among the exhibits of the exhibition, he wrote, was that 'very little was to hand which treated the themes directly' and that he would, instead, have to resort instead to 'indirect illustrations, i.e. images which have no direct political character in themselves but which convey a general impression of a particular period'.⁵⁶ Even though reviews of the brochure would claim, quite to the contrary, that the historical documents 'spoke for themselves', it is clear that the presentation of any ideas of borderland identity and perpetual conflict depended heavily on the text of the brochure.⁵⁷ This being the case, it should be recognized that the majority of those who attended the exhibition would have been unlikely to have seen the exhibition brochure at all. While a daily average of almost 4000 visitors were passing through the exhibition, only around 15 copies of Rapp's brochure were sold each day: roughly one copy for every 200–300 visitors.⁵⁸ It might be safely assumed, nevertheless, that those who attended the exhibition would have left it aware, at least, of the most basic arguments of the 'year of historical education': Alsace should be viewed as historically German and that its history could be summed up by the title '2000 Years of Struggle on the Rhine'.

The messages of the 'year of historical education' were supposed to penetrate every level of Alsatian society. An Alsace-wide essay competition invited high school students to answer questions on regional history and heritage, all encapsulating the issues of hereditary conflict and the historical role of the western borderland. Questions required, for example, a discussion of the history of the western frontier from the Strasbourg Oath to the present, an outline of the 'great tasks' in the history of Alsace 'in Roman times, under French rule, and in the present' and a treatment of the theme 'the Alemannic people as defenders of German unity and culture on the Reich's south-western boundary'. The competition, according to its organizers, was intended to 'raise historical consciousness not just in school but also among parents at home'.⁵⁹

These messages of historical consciousness, perpetual conflict and national duty would become especially pertinent when on 25 August 1942, 24 hours after being granted German citizenship, young Alsatian men were conscripted into the Wehrmacht and Waffen SS.⁶⁰ In propaganda which targeted Alsatian troops, an appeal was frequently made to the history of local anti-French struggles and to the historic duty of the borderland population. Almost every issue of the *Alsatian Soldiers' Newspaper: Letter from the Homeland on the Upper Rhine* contained a historical article about Alsace's 'eternal' struggle against French rule, including 'The valley of Münster in the struggle against the French oppressors', 'The pillage of Strasbourg in 1681' and the story of 'Andreas Ulrich: a fighter for Alsatian *Volkstum* at the time of the French Revolution'.⁶¹ The same messages of perpetual conflict against the French and the duty of Alsace to protect the Reich in the west were present in the exhibition 'Eternal Infantry' which opened in Strasbourg in February 1944, and in an army museum which opened in Strasbourg in May of that year.⁶²

The constant repetition of arguments about hereditary conflict with France and the defence of the Reich in the west seemed, however, to miss a crucial issue relating to the present situation: the war to which the vast majority of soldiers from Alsace were sent was not being fought locally at all, nor against France, but far away on the Eastern front. The conflict in the East was somewhat awkwardly tacked on to the end of a dominant narrative of perpetual conflict over national space in the west, a problem visible, for example, in the fact that, when the army museum opened in Strasbourg, it had a permanent exhibition dedicated to Alsace's eternal struggle against invasion from the west while, in a room for temporary exhibitions, it presented an '*Ost-Ausstellung*' showing the service of Alsatian soldiers in the battle for the Eastern front.⁶³ There were certain ways of getting around this issue, however, most notably an emphasis on following the example of the Alsatian soldiers in the German armies on both fronts during the First World War who, as Robert Wagner put it, 'fought in the same German uniform against the same enemies'.⁶⁴ Other appeals to historical spaces

of identification in propaganda messages for soldiers included attempts to present Soviet Communism as a direct and terrible threat either to the local traditions and heritage of the Alsatian *Heimat* or to 'European civilization' as a whole. Nevertheless, the messages of local borderland struggle were by far the most frequently used. The constant repetition of such anti-French messages, even if it did not apply wholly to the situation from 1940 to 1944, represented an attempt to eliminate the greatest remaining conflict of loyalty on the part of the Alsatian population.

The five years of National Socialist rule had a profound effect on the way the Alsatian population understood its regional identity and perceived the roles and destinies which stemmed from its position as a borderland, but in quite the opposite way to how the National Socialist regime had intended. The collapse of the Third Reich in military defeat, and the brutal experiences of political repression under National Socialist rule (not least in the issue of conscription and the punishment of those who refused to fight) almost entirely discredited the German national claim to Alsace and marginalized the regionalist movements which had lent their support to Nazism. As David Allen Harvey has put it, 'the Third Reich effectively severed any sentimental ties that Alsatians still felt for Germany'.⁶⁵ Under French rule in the post-war years, the historical discourses of perpetual conflict and the role of the borderland would, however, remain prominent, but would instead locate Alsace firmly on the western side of the 'eternal' boundary. The suffering of Alsace under Nazi rule would be put down to its exposed position as borderland, and even resistance to German rule would be worked into a historical narrative of Alsace as the permanent bulwark of French civilization on the Rhine.⁶⁶ Neither did the notion of an Upper Rhine community entirely disappear in 1945. In the context of post-war Franco-German rapprochement and European integration, a vision of an Alemannic Upper Rhine has been reinvented and has gradually re-emerged as a model of 'cross boundary' cooperation, in which the regional cultural and linguistic ties between Alsace and Baden could be used as a means of encouraging cooperation across an increasingly open national boundary, without ever challenging the existence or location of the boundary itself.⁶⁷

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Alfred Toepfer Foundation for supporting the doctoral research project on which this chapter is based.

Notes

1. Archives Nationales (Paris), AJ 40 1408: Robert Wagner, circular letter to NSDAP organizations in Baden, 15.12.1940. (All translations are my own.)
2. *Ibid.*

3. On the notion of hereditary conflict, see Michael Jeismann, *Das Vaterland der Feinde: Studien zum nationalen Feindbegriff und Selbstverständnis in Deutschland und Frankreich 1792–1918* (Stuttgart, 1992).
4. Burkhard Dietz et al. (eds.), *Griff nach dem Westen: Die 'Westforschung' der völkisch-nationalen Wissenschaften zum nordwesteuropäischen Raum (1919–1960)* 2 volumes (Münster, 2003); Peter Schöttler, 'Die historische "Westforschung" zwischen "Abwehrkampf" und territorialer Offensive', in Peter Schöttler (ed.) *Geschichtsschreibung als Legitimationswissenschaft 1918–1945* (Frankfurt/Main, 1999), 204–233. More broadly, see Thomas Müller, *Imaginerter Westen: Das Konzept des 'deutschen Westraums' im völkischen Diskurs zwischen politischer Romantik und Nationalsozialismus* (Bielefeld, 2009). On the application of these theories in the Western *Gaue* of the Reich, see Wolfgang Freund, *Volk, Reich und Westgrenze: Deutschtumswissenschaften und Politik in der Pfalz, im Saarland und im annektierten Lothringen 1925–1945* (Saarbrücken, 2006). On the better-known Eastern equivalent, 'Ostforschung', see Michael Burleigh, *Germany turns Eastwards. A study of 'Ostforschung' in the Third Reich* (Cambridge, 1988).
5. On historical propaganda in the French-occupied Rhineland, see Franziska Wein, *Deutschlands Strom, Frankreichs Grenze: Geschichte und Propaganda am Rhein 1918–1930* (Essen, 2003). On events in the Saar, including the 'Heimattage' see Ludwig Linsmayer, *Politische Kultur im Saargebiet 1920–1932: Symbolische Politik, verhinderte Demokratisierung, nationalisiertes Kulturleben in einer abgetrennten Region* (St Ingbert, 1992), 137–154. On the 1925 'Rhineland Millennium' commemorations, see Dieter Breuer and Gertrude Cepl-Kaufmann (eds.), *Jahrtausendfeiern: das Rheinland nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg* (Essen, 2005); Rüdiger Haude, 'Kaiseridee' oder 'Schicksalsgemeinschaft': *Geschichtspolitik beim Projekt 'Aachener Krönungsausstellung 1915' und bei der 'Jahrtausendausstellung Aachen 1925'* (Aachen, 2000).
6. Such institutes included the *Deutsches Ausland-Institut* (German Foreign Affairs Institute) in Stuttgart, the *Institut für Grenz- und Auslandsstudien* (Institute for Border and Foreign Affairs Studies) in Berlin and the *Stiftung für deutsche Volks- und Kulturbodenforschung* (Foundation for Research into German National and Cultural Territory) in Leipzig.
7. Guntram Henrik Herb, *Under the Map of Germany: Nationalism and Propaganda 1918–1945* (London, 1997), 55–64.
8. Max Hildebert Boehm, *Die deutschen Grenzlande* (Berlin, 1925), 10.
9. Marlene Nikolay-Panter, 'Geschichte, Methode, Politik: Das Institut und die geschichtliche Landeskunde der Rheinlande 1920–25', *Rheinische Vierteljahrsblätter*, LX (1996), 233–262.
10. Willi Oberkrome, ' "Schutzwall Heimat": Themenschwerpunkte und weltanschauliche Prämisse der Westfalentage 1920–1933', *Westfälische Forschungen*, LII (2002), 185–201; Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley, 1990), 122–131.
11. Rudi Allgeier, 'Grenzland in der Krise: Die badische Wirtschaft, 1928–1933', in Thomas Schnabel (ed.), *Die Machtergreifung in Südwestdeutschland: Das Ende der Weimarer Republik in Baden und Württemberg 1928–1933* (Stuttgart, 1982), 150–183, here 152.
12. *Badische Denkschrift über die wirtschaftliche und kulturelle Notlage Badens als Grenzland und besetztes Gebiet* (Karlsruhe, 1929), 15–19.
13. Friedrich Metz, *Die Oberrheinlande* (Breslau, 1925), 268.
14. *Ibid.*, 8. See also Friedrich Metz, *Baden als Oberrheinland* (Berlin, 1937) and Friedrich Metz, *Der Oberrhein und das Elsaß* (Berlin, 1940).
15. Stadtarchiv Freiburg, DSm 2/3 (Alemannische Woche I–III, 1926–1928); Landesverein Badische Heimat e.V., 'Einladung zur Alemannischen Woche vom 1. bis 9. Mai 1926 in Freiburg im Breisgau'; '3. Alemannische Woche 5. bis 13. Mai 1928 Freiburg im Breisgau: Programm der Veranstaltungen'.
16. Stadtarchiv Freiburg, DSm 2/5 (Alemannische Woche 1930–1933); Bürgermeister Hofner, note on 'Alemannenwoche', 8.2.1933.
17. Ernst Batzer, 'Chronik 1932–1933', *Ortenau*, XX (1933), ix– xv, here xiii. On the Historischer Verein für Mittelbaden in this period, see Karl-Heinz Debacher, *Regionales Geschichtsbewußtsein: Historische Vereine am Oberrhein unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Historischen Vereins für Mittelbaden* (Offenburg, 1996), 211–270.
18. Moritz Durach, *Wir Alemannen!* (Berlin, 1936), 189.
19. Eugen Fischer, 'Schicksal des Erbes – Erbe als Schicksal der Alemannen', in Franz Kerber (ed.), *Volkstum und Reich: Ein Buch vom Oberrhein* (Stuttgart, 1938), 181–198, here 198.
20. 'Die Aufgaben der NS-Kulturgemeinde', *Völkischer Beobachter*, 13.10.1935.
21. Arbeitsgauleitung 27 Baden-Pfalz, *Grenzland: Spaten zur Hand* (Karlsruhe, 1935), 9, 35.
22. The names 'Suebenkönig Ariovist' and 'Albert Leo Schlageter' were used by the Reich's Labour Service branches at Kraichgau/Bruchsal (Abteilung 3/247) and Freiburg im Breisgau (Abteilung 4/272) respectively. Eduard Helff (ed.), *Grenzland Baden. Spaten zur Hand! vom Werden und Schaffen des Arbeitsgaues XXVII Baden* (Karlsruhe, 1936), 120, 149.
23. Otto Müller, 'Unsere Heimat am Oberrhein', in *ibid.*, 28–40, here 39.
24. Hermann Eris Busse, 'Das Elsaß im Reich', in *ibid.* (ed.), *Das Elsaß: Jahresband Oberrheinische Heimat* (Freiburg, 1940), 1–43, here 38.
25. Archives Départementales du Haut Rhin, 1AL3 Altkirch (Purg. 195): Oberrheinische Heimat e.V., letter of 14 February 1941.
26. Archives Départementales du Bas Rhin, 125 AL 148: Official programme of 'Oberrheinische Kulturtag'.
27. Robert Ernst, 'Gruß an den Besucher', in Kameradschaft der Künstler und Kunstfreunde am Oberrhein (eds.), *Oberrheinische Kunstausstellung 1944* (Freiburg, 1944), 5f, here 5.
28. Georges Foessel, 'Le Nazisme s'expose', *Saisons d'Alsace*, CXVII (1992), 135–46, here 136.
29. Walter Köhler, 'Einführung', in *'Deutsche Wirtschaftskraft' – Aufbau am Oberrhein: Führer durch die Ausstellung* (Berlin, 1941), 5.
30. *Ibid.*, 45.
31. See, for instance, R. Keller, 'Trachten am Oberrhein', *Straßburger Monatshefte*, VI (March 1942), 135–140; Karl Willy Straub, 'Gleiche Trachten am Strom', *Straßburger neueste Nachrichten*, 24.11.1940. On municipal coats of arms, see Paul Martin, *Stadtbanner am Oberrhein* (Strasbourg, 1942).
32. Bibliothèque Nationale Universitaire de Strasbourg, M.Affiche 378: Poster by Bogislav Groos, 'Gaustrassensammlung am Oberrhein, mit Elsässerin, 4.-5. Januar 1941'.
33. Karl Willy Straub, *Straßburger Neueste Nachrichten*, 17.1.1942, 8.
34. 'Stauferlöwe und Reichsadler: Sinnbilder der Reichstreue am Oberrhein zur Gaustraßensammlung am 4. und 5. Januar', *Straßburger Neueste Nachrichten*, 29.12.1940.

35. Robert Wagner, 'Der elsässische Schicksalsweg', speech of 20 October 1940, reprinted in *Der Aufbruch des deutschen Elsaß! Die erste nationalsozialistische Kundgebung im Elsaß, 20 Oktober 1940 in Straßburg* (Colmar, 1940), no pagination.
36. Wilhelm Frick, 'Von der Abwehrkraft des alemannischen Menschen gegen die westliche Zivilisation', *Straßburger Monatshefte*, VI (February 1942), 65–69, here 67.
37. Andreas Hohlfeld, 'Reichsgesinnung und Heimatbewußtsein im Elsaß', *Straßburger Monatshefte*, IV (October 1940), 118–123, here 119.
38. Lothar Kettenacker, *Nationalsozialistische Volkstumspolitik im Elsaß* (Stuttgart, 1973), 116–127.
39. Paul Schall, 'Das deutsche Elsaß ist erwacht!', in *Der Aufbruch des deutschen Elsaß! Die erste nationalsozialistische Kundgebung im Elsaß, 20 Oktober 1940 in Straßburg* (Colmar, 1940), no pagination.
40. Robert Ernst, 'Vorwort', in Paul Schall (ed.), *Karl Roos und der Kampf des heimat-treuen Elsaß* (Colmar, 1941), 5–7, here 7.
41. Robert Wagner, 'Der elsässische Schicksalsweg', in *Der Aufbruch des deutschen Elsaß!* (1940), no pagination.
42. Archives Nationales (Paris), AJ 40 1408: 'Zur Überführung von Dr Karl Roos am Donnerstag den 19.6.1941 (Zeitfolge)'.
43. Paul Schall, 'Karl Roos kehrt heute ins deutsche Elsaß heim', *Straßburger Neueste Nachrichten*, 19.6.1941.
44. 'Der Chef der Zivilverwaltung im Elsass Robert Wagner: "Es gibt in Zukunft keine elsässische Frage mehr"', *Straßburger Neueste Nachrichten*, 17.7.1940.
45. Andreas Hohlfeld, 'Auswirkungen des französischen Geschichtsunterricht im Elsaß', *Straßburger Monatshefte*, VI (1942), 304–311, here 306f.
46. Archives Départementales du Bas Rhin, 126 AL 1657: Gaupropagandaleiter Adolf Schmid, report entitled 'Jahr der Geschichtserziehung in Elsaß', 5.12.1941.
47. Ibid.
48. Archives Départementales du Bas Rhin, 126 AL 1657: 'Gedankenskizze zu einer Erinnerungsfeier am elfhundertsten Jahrestage der "Straßburger Eide"', 14.2.1942.
49. Ibid.
50. Alfred Rapp, *Das Elsaß: Herzland und Schildmauer des Reiches: 2000 Jahre deutscher Kampf am Rhein* (Strasbourg, 1942), 3–5. These arguments were also put forward in Hans Oppermann, 'Deutschtum und Römertum', *Straßburger Monatshefte*, VI (October 1942), 573–577, and Hans Oppermann (1942) 'Der erste Kampf ums Elsaß und die Entstehung der Rheingrenze: Zur 2000-jährigen Wiederkehr des Kampfes zwischen Cäsar und Ariovist', *Straßburger Monatshefte*, VI (May 1942), 249–255.
51. Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe, 456d 67: Adolf Schmid, circular letter entitled 'Elfhunderster Jahrestag der "Straßburger Eide" am 14.2.42.', 6.2.1942.
52. Andreas Hohlfeld, 'Elfhundert Jahre Straßburger Eide', *Straßburger Monatshefte*, VI (February 1942), 70–73, here 72.
53. See the two exhibition brochures, Alfred Rapp, *Das Elsaß: Herzland und Schildmauer des Reiches* (Strasbourg, 1942) and Wilhelm Teichmann, *Ausstellung '2000 Jahre Kampf am Rhein': Führer durch die Ausstellung* (Strasbourg, 1942).
54. Alfred Rapp, *Deutsche Geschichte am Oberrhein* (Karlsruhe, 1937), 3.
55. Hans-Ulrich Thamer, 'Geschichte und Propaganda: Kulturhistorische Ausstellungen in der NS-Zeit', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, XXIV (1998), 349–381, here 369f.
56. Archives de la Ville de Strasbourg, 7 MW 857: Alfred Rapp, 'Zur Broschüre "Das Elsaß – Herzland und Schildmauer des Reiches"', 7.2.1942.
57. Walter Franke, 'Das Elsaß: Herzland und Schildmauer des Reiches', *Straßburger Monatshefte*, VI (August 1942), 473f, here 474.
58. Archives de la Ville de Strasbourg, 237 MW 42: 'Ausstellung Deutsche Grösse: Vertrieb von Zeitschriften und Katalogen', records kept from 19 June to 13.8.1942.
59. Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe, 456 d 55: Abteilung Erziehung, Unterricht und Volksbildung to all schools in Alsace re: 'Schülerwettbewerb', 25.4.1942.
60. 'Verordnung über die Wehrpflicht im Elsaß vom 25. August 1942', *Verordnungsblatt des Chefs der Zivilverwaltung im Elsaß*, VII (1942), 252.
61. 'Die Müntertaler im Kampf gegen die französischen Unterdrücker', *Elsässische Soldatenzeitung*, No. 3 (February 1943), 3; E. N[orth], 'Der Raub Straßburgs im Jahre 1681', *Elsässische Soldatenzeitung*, No. 11 (October 1943), 4; E. North, 'Andreas Ulrich: ein elsässischer Volkstumskämpfer zur Zeit der französischen Revolution', *Elsässische Soldatenzeitung*, No. 17 (April 1943), 41.
62. 'Ewige Infanterie', *Elsässische Soldatenzeitung*, No. 16 (March 1944), back cover. On the army museum, see Bernadette Schnitzler (2007) 'Le "Heeresmuseum"', un projet de musée de l'Armée en Alsace annexée', *Cahiers alsaciens d'archéologie d'art et d'histoire*, L (2007), 185–194.
63. 'Das Heeresmuseum Straßburg', *Elsässische Soldatenzeitung*, No. 20 (July 1944), 3.
64. Robert Wagner, 'Elsässische Soldaten!', *Elsässische Soldatenzeitung*, No. 1 (December 1942), 3.
65. David Allen Harvey, *Constructing Class and Nationality in Alsace, 1830–1945* (De Kalb, IL, 2001), 210.
66. See, for example, Walter Rinckenberger, *Alsace: Rempart français sur le Rhin* (Paris, 1947).
67. Birte Wassenberg, *Vers une eurorégion? La coopération transfrontalière franco-germano-suisse dans l'espace du Rhin supérieur de 1975 à 2000* (Brussels, 2007).