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To Protect, Defend and inform: The Evacuation of the German-French Border Region During the Second World War

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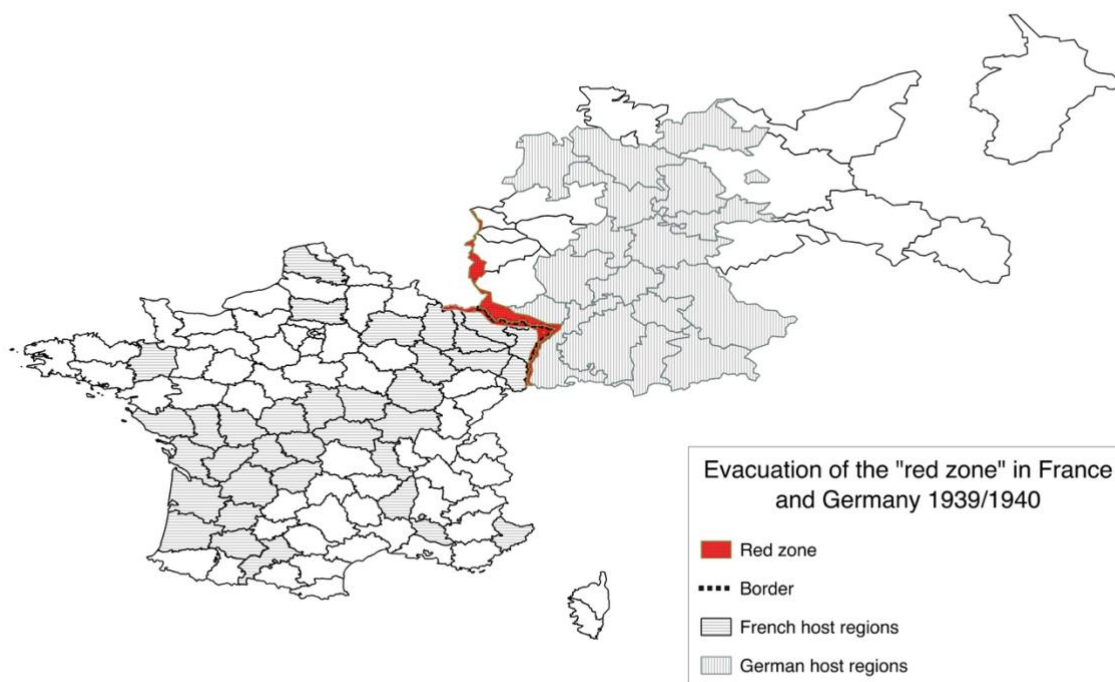
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To Protect, Defend and Inform:

The evacuation of the German-French border region during the Second World War

While on the 1st of September 1939 France and Great Britain were close to declaring war on Germany, more than one million persons along the Franco-German border area (in the red zone) were evacuated. This area is called the “red zone”: it’s the space between the Maginot-Line and the border and between the Siegfried-Line and the border.



The Alsatians and Lorrainers were evacuated to the South-West of France and the people from the Saarpfalz and Baden were evacuated to the internal *Gaue* of Germany. These evacuations were aimed on one hand at giving free space for military interventions on the border zone and, on the other hand, at protecting populations from air and ground attacks¹.

¹ Fabian Lemmes, Johannes Großmann, Nicholas Williams, Olivier Forcade, Rainer Hudemann, *Evakuierungen im Europa der Weltkriege - Les évacuations dans l'Europe des guerres mondiales - Evacuations in World War Europe.*, (Metropol-Verlag, Berlin 2014), 17.

These movements of population, called ‘evacuations’ shall be distinguished from other type of displacement, such as expulsions, exodus or deportations. The evacuations of 1939 correspond to four criteria: They are provisional, both coercive and protection measures, organised and supervised by civilian and military authorities and they concern a moving population in its own country². However, like all movement of population, the evacuation of September 1939 led to disorganisation and rupture in the everyday life of the concerned people on cultural and material levels. This displacement of population led to the confrontation of two groups of individuals, which have different traditions and way of life, in the same country. How did they live together and handle with their differences? How managed the state to control the population and could it solve the problems? This contribution aims to draw the confrontation emerged through the evacuation between these two groups in France and Germany and the communications strategies that both states instore to counter these problems on national and regional level.

In the first part, I will draw the situation following the evacuation in the host regions in both Germany and France, focussing on material and cultural matters. In the second part, I will analyse the communication in regard to the evacuation on the national level through the national media and discourses of politicians. In a third and last part, I will focus on the state communication on the local level, which aimed in particular the evacuees.

I The evacuation: Uprooting and Disorientation evacuated populations

A- The material problems during the evacuation

During the Interwar Period, the French and German militaries authorities developed evacuations plans of the border region but at different time. After thinking in the 1920’ about the evacuation of material resources needed for the war, both country developed in the mid’ 1930 plans for the evacuation of civilians. In France these plans emerged in 1933, whilst in Germany, the first plan came in 1938³. The evacuation was ordered in France on the day of the general mobilisation, on the 1st of September 1939, whereas Hitler hesitated and gave his command on the 3rd September⁴.

² Ibid., 16.

³ Nicholas Williams, ‘Les évacuations de 1939 en Moselle et en Sarre : cadres et plans stratégiques pour la prise en charge des populations civiles’, in *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d’histoire*, 2015, 91–104, 95.

⁴ Ibid., 97–98.

On both sides of the border, the evacuations led to difficult and exhausting situations for the evacuees. In France and Germany, most people travelled by train without knowing the final destination of the journey⁵. In some places, where there was no train station, the evacuees began their journey by step or by bus to the next train station, bringing their belongings alongside. In France, the evacuees had the right to bring 30 kg luggage with them, whereas in Germany only 15kg were allowed⁶. The trip was long and could take more than one week. In trains, they had no privacy. They couldn't take a shower or go to the toilets:

“Dans les wagons-cages, pas de toilettes et bientôt les premiers besoins se font sentir. Il faut improviser... La solution du trou dans le fond du wagon est le plus souvent adoptée. Une couverture déployée donne son intimité au petit coin.”⁷

However, during the journey, the Red Cross and the *National-Sozialistische Volkswohlfahrt* (NSV) in Germany took care of the population, looking after their hygiene and giving them soup, bread, water and milk for the kids⁸. In France this task was taken care of by the Secours national and the Croix Rouge⁹. One of the biggest worries of the population was the loss of one member of the family on the road and, as a matter of fact, a lot of families were split during the transport¹⁰.

In France as well as in Germany the evacuees were exhausted and worried as they arrived in their assigned host cities. The local authorities, which were confronted in both countries with a higher wave of evacuee than expected, get lots of complaints related to the housing: the evacuees had no furniture, sometimes no bed and just straw as mattress, no heating system nor kitchen¹¹. In France, the mayor of the city tried to house the evacuees by requisitioned private homes or public buildings¹²; in Germany the evacuees were in some case host by private persons¹³. In these houses, the cooking furniture were almost always missing. At first, the evacuees could get their meals from the NSV in Germany and the Secours national

⁵ „Im Elend“ Wernsdorf, 28.10.1939, in *Familienchronik Maas*

⁶ Williams, ‘Les évacuations de 1939 en Moselle et en Sarre’, 100.

⁷ Louis Henrion, *Journal communal de Malling*, quote in: *Un exil intérieur : l'évacuation des Mosellans de septembre 1939 à octobre 1940*. (Editions Libel, Lyon 2009), 30.

⁸ „Im Elend“ Wernsdorf, 28.10.1939, in *Familienchronik Maas*

⁹ Daniel Hadwiger, “Une patrie secourable? Organisation, mise en œuvre et mise en scène de l'assistance aux évacués en Allemagne et en France, 1939/40”, in Olivier Forcade (ed), *Les évacuations de La Région Frontalière Franco-Allemande 1939/1945.*, (PUPS, Paris forthcoming 2016).

¹⁰ „Im Elend“ Wernsdorf, 28.10.1939, in *Familienchronik Maas*; *De l'Est à l'Ouest, List of lost evacuees*

¹¹ Birgit Arnold, *Die Freimachung und Räumung der Grenzgebiete in Baden 1939/40*, (C. Winter, Heidelberg 1996), 100; Archives Départementales (following AD), Dordogne, 3 X 28, “Mission du Bas-Rhin à Périgueux, M. Clas, Chef de la division chargée de la Mission du Bas-Rhin au Préfet du Bas-Rhin”, 19.09.1939.

¹² Catherine Kremer and Joseph Schaff, *Gros-Réderching. Chroniques charentaises 1939-1940*, (Confluence, Sarreguemines 1993) 16.

¹³ Staatsarchiv Bamberg (following StB), K8, Nr. 9205 II, “Gendarmerie-Posten Eggolsheim (gez. Gend. Meister) an Landrat in Ebermannstadt, Betreff: Lagebericht”, 27.09.1939.

in France¹⁴. After a few days, public kitchens emerged in both countries, where the evacuees cooked and ate together¹⁵. These kitchens disappeared gradually when the evacuees, helped by the government, got their own flat and kitchen¹⁶.

Clothing was after housing and eating the third major problem for the evacuees. As they were evacuated, the evacuees took minimum clothes for a week or two and mostly some which were meant for summer weather. With winter approaching, the evacuees needed warm clothes. The NSV in Germany and in France the Secours national and the different churches dispatched freely clothing items that they get from public solidarity appeals for the evacuees¹⁷. But it wasn't enough. In both countries, some of the evacuees decided to go back to their evacuated house to take their clothes and other items of first necessity¹⁸. Faced with this situation, both states took initiatives to provide the items for the evacuees by selected people. The government and the military authorities in Germany and France wanted to stop abundant illegal penetration into the military zone¹⁹. Their efforts weren't successful. Both states couldn't stop the flow of evacuees going to their own house.

To live, the evacuees became money from the state²⁰. In some cases, this created some tensions with the host population like a German Gendarme reported:

„Durch das Verhalten der Rückwanderer wird unter der Bevölkerung grundsätzlich der Eindruck erweckte [sic.] und wurde dieses auch bereits geäußert, als ob die Rückwanderer eine Arbeit nicht aufzunehmen bräuchten und die Unterstützung an sie zum Lebensunterhalt ohne Verpflichtung ausbezahlt erhalten [...]“²¹

In France, like in Germany, the host population saw the evacuees, doing nothing, and buying expensive things on the market. Moreover, the incoming of the evacuees increase the prices, so

¹⁴ Stadtarchiv Saarbrücken, OB 2-3659, “Der Reichsminister des Innern, Schnellbrief”, 11.09.1939; Hadwiger, „Une patrie secourable ?“

¹⁵ StB, K8, Nr. 9205 II, „Gendarmerie Posten Muggendorf an Landrat Ebermannstadt, Betreff: Lagebericht für den Monat September 1939“, 26.09.1939; Catherine Schunk and François Schunk, *D'Alsace en Périgord, histoire de l'évacuation 1939-1940*, (Alan Sutton St Cyr sur Loire), 76.

¹⁶ Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv Staatsarchiv Wolfenbüttel, 128 Neu Fb2 Nr. 4470, “Wirtschaftskammer Niedersachsen an den Herrn Landrat, Beschaffung von Haus- und Küchengeräte für Rückgeführte”, 23.04.1940; AD, Gers, R 1436, “Le Vice-Président du Conseil, Service Central des Réfugiés”, 13.02.1940.

¹⁷ StB, K8, Nr. 9205 II, “Landrat Ebermannstadt an Regierungspräsidenten Ansbach, Betreff: Lagebericht, Geheim!”, 31.07.1940, Hadwiger, “Une patrie secourable ?”

¹⁸ Landesarchiv Stuttgart, Sammlung Sterz, “Sold. Arnold Nüssle, 35 015 = 2.Kp./Inf.Div. Nachr. Abt.196, 96. Inf. Div”, 14.10.1939; Archives Nationales (following AN), F 23 /228, “Ministère des finances, Palais de justice à Périgueux, Observation résumées d'un rapide voyage de Saverne à Strasbourg le 11 novembre 1939”, 15.11.1939.

¹⁹ AN, F 23 /228, “Préfecture de la Haute-Vienne, à Messieurs les maires du département et à messieurs les maires alsaciens”, 05.12.1939 ; Hauptstaatsarchiv Darmstadt, G 15 Alsfeld Nr. 0133, “Anlage zu Nr. III (L.S.) 1818/39 vom 12. Oktober 1939, Richtlinien über Räumung und Bergung von Bekleidungs- und Wäschestücken aus dem Freimachungsgebiet”.

²⁰ The “Familienräumungsunterhalt” in Germany and the “allocation aux réfugiés” in France.

²¹ StB, K8, Nr. 9205 II, “Gendarmerie-Posten Ebermannstadt an Gendarmerie-Kreisführer in Ebermannstadt, Betreff: Lagebericht für Monat Dez. 1939”, 27.12.1939.

that the population became envious and angry with the evacuees²². In the South-West of France, this situation had a very negative influence of the cohabitation between evacuees and host:

„Au marché, jeudi dernier, une dame marchande un poulet 34 frcs et ne l'achète pas. Arrive une réfugiée en loques, jupe fendue, traînant un moutard sans fond de culotte. „Je le prends', dit-elle. Elle le paie et le met dans son cabas où étaient déjà des pommes, des oranges et des bananes. [...] Toute cette vermine qui vit que pour la gueule.“²³

These feelings reinforced the clichés that the population already had on the Alsatians and Lorrainers, which majority based on cultural differences.

B- Cultural Differences and Integration Problems

Next – but also linked – to these material problems emerged some cultural difficulties in the host regions which create in some places an atmosphere of suspicion towards the evacuees. In both countries the people of the border had a special image due to their atypical history in the country. In France, the Alsatians and Lorrainer were between 1870 and 1918 part of the German Empire²⁴. In Germany, the Saarländer weren't member of the Reich between 1920 and 1935, but part of the Territory of the Saar Basin under a League of Nations mandate²⁵. So, the evacuees were from the beginning a special type of French or German people.

In France, the major clash between the evacuees and their host was the language. A important part of Alsatians and Lorrainers didn't speak French but German and Alsatian or Franconian languages, which sounds like the language of the enemy²⁶. Communication with their host was also difficult, which reinforced suspicion. Host populations called Alsatians and Lorrainers “Boches”²⁷ and suspected them of spying for Germany. Lots of denunciation for defeatist, autonomist or pro-German propaganda happened in the host regions leading to inquiries by the police²⁸. In Germany, the language and history of the region wasn't so

²² StB, K8, Nr. 9205 II, “Gendarmerie-Posten Hollfeld an Landrat Ebermannstadt, Betreff: Lagebericht für Monat September 1939”, 26.09.1939; AD, Haute-Vienne, 187 W 25, “Président de la Délégation spéciale”, 03.02.1940.

²³ AN, Fond Moscou, 20010216 /279, “Rapport n°10, CCP de Rodez”, N/PH,01.01.1940.

²⁴ Thomas Höpel, ‘The French-German Borderlands: Borderlands and Nation-Building in the 19th and 20th Centuries French-German Borderlands’, *EGO* (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu>).

²⁵ Gabriel Clemens, *Mandatsgebiet des Völkerbundes.*, in Hans-Christian Hermann, Johannes Schmidt (Ed.), *Das Saarland. Geschichte einer Region*. (Röhrig Universitätsverlag, St. Ingbert 2012), 217–260.

²⁶ 44 Percent of Alsatians spoke only German or dialect. Laird Boswell, ‘Fissures dans la nation française : les réfugiés Alsaciens et Lorrains en 1939 - 1940’, in Max Lagarrigue (ed.), *1940. La France du repli, l'Europe de la défaite*, (Privat, Toulouse, 2001), 197–208, 200.

²⁷ AD, Dordogne, 3 X 28, “En Dordogne, Aux alentours de Vergt”, 16.01.1940.

²⁸ For example: AN, F 7 /14685, “Le contrôleur general de la sûreté nationale à Monsieur le Directeur Général de la Sûreté National”, 28.03.1940. Other enquiries could be find in AD Bas-Rhin 98 AL 283 and some juridical cases in BB/ 18.

problematic as in France, even if in some cases, the Saarlander were called “Frenchhead”²⁹ (“*Franzosenköpfe*”), because of the past of the region and its proximity to France.

The second cultural problem was religious. In Germany, some problems linked to the religion emerged when Catholics arrived in protestant cities or the contrary, as wrote this German in a report:

„Die weltanschaulich konfessionelle Haltung der Menschen zwischen hüben und drüben blieb im Quartierverhältnis nicht ohne Folge. Dem stoischen Katholiken drüben waren unsere Katholiken oft noch nicht genug. Noch schlimmer, wenn Protestanten auf hartgesottene Katholiken stießen und das Gebetsgemurmel nicht mitmachten.“³⁰

The months passing, they learned to work together, so that some Mass could join the protestants and Catholics³¹. In the host regions the French weren’t religious, and in some cases anticlerical, whereas the majority of the Alsatians and Lorrainers were practising Protestants and Catholics³². An example for a such crisis is the mass for Christmas in Artassense (Landes):

“A l’offertoire, huit jeunes gens et hommes âgés de 20 à 50 ans, entrent à l’église, en sabots, cigarette à la bouche, montent à la tribune et y font durant toute la messe un vacarme inhumain, continuant de fumer. [...] Après la cérémonie, ces huit individus continuent leur sauvagerie devant l’église; ils insultent les réfugiés, les nomment ‘sales allemands’, et dissent par rapport à moi: ‘Quelle saleté, c’est le plus grand con etc.; on va lui faire son affaire, on va le passer à tabac.’”³³

Next to these frictions inside the population, some happened between the local institutions and the priests. Because of the occupation of the Alsace and Lorraine from 1870 to 1918, the people and the administration in these two regions had not become secular in 1905, unlike the rest of France. By 1939, the Alsatians and Lorrainers schools were still bound with the Church: The priest could teach religion and other disciplines at school³⁴. In France, priests were excluded from schools and weren’t allowed to teach in public institutions. As the evacuees arrived in the southwest of France, the government agreed to give them the right to have religious courses in

²⁹ Landesarchiv des Saarlandes (following LA Saar), LRA IGB 54, „Reg.ref. Hemmer an Reichskommissar für das Saarland, Bericht über die persönlichen Eindrücke im Bergungsgebiet“, 02.01.1940

³⁰ Landesarchiv Speyer (following LA Speyer), T 65, Z3422, „An Propagandaleiter Pg. Trampler, Bericht und Stellungnahme zum Problem Räumung und Bergung“, 31.10.1939.

³¹ The same situation happened in France, because of the lack of priest who can speak German. Archive Episcopale de Strasbourg, Guerre 1939-1945, Le doyen Jos. Früh (Hte Vienne) to the Bishop of Strasbourg, 15.09.1939.

³² Françoise Passera, Jean-Luc Leleu, Michel Daeffler (ed.), *La France pendant la seconde guerre mondiale: Atlas historique*, (Fayard, Paris 2010), 26.

³³ Archive Episcopale de Strasbourg (following AES), Guerre 1939-1945, Aug. Meyer, curé de Niffer to the bishop of Strasbourg, 08.01.1940.

³⁴ The Concordat from 1801 signed by Napoleon and the Pope, which declared that Catholicism is the religion of the majority of the French and that the state should financially provide for the priest, still count for the Alsace and Lorraine.

public schools³⁵. This rules didn't please the anticlerical elements of the host regions and some crisis emerged between the schools, the prefect and the priest³⁶.

Next to language and religion, others differences emerged, like the alimentation³⁷ and the way of life:³⁸

“Ebenso böß wirkte sich aus der Unterschied der wirtschaftlichen Verhältnisse zwischen Heimat und Bergungsraum, der Unterschied im Lebensstandard. Das ist ja nun gewiss ein Punkt, der kaum zu ändern war, aber das primitive Leben dort drüben wirkte furchtbar abstoßend auf unsere Menschen: Sauberkeit, Küche, Küchengeschirr: Knödel, Knödel, Knödel!”³⁹

These differences of standard of living are the same in France, where the Alsatians and Lorrainers, who were used to the toilets inside their home, didn't find the toilets in their apartments in their host regions⁴⁰. This situation led to the reinforcement of clichés on both sides and make the living together difficulty.

II Evacuations and Propaganda: issues of national and regional level

A- Evacuation in the national and regional discourse: National unity and solidarity

The evacuation led also both in France and Germany to conflict between the evacuees and their hosts, which both governments described as a threat for the national unity in the host department and had to be handle⁴¹. On national scale, one of the solution to reinforce the national unity was for the state to use the media and diffuse a positive discourse about the evacuation. As soon as the war broke out, the French government began to collect information about the population through postal censorship⁴², reports from the Institute of European Studies⁴³ and the prefects through the *Centre Départementaux à l'information*. These were the regional agencies of the

³⁵ “Régime spécial applicable aux populations repliés des départements du Haut-Rhin, Bas-Rhin et de la Moselle”. *Journal officiel de la République Française*, 07.09.1939, 11181–11182.

³⁶ Maude Williams, ‘La communauté catholique d’Alsace-Lorraine face aux évacuations (septembre 1939 - juin 1940)’, in *Annales de l’Est*, 2, 2014, 203–224, 214–216.

³⁷ EDEFFA, Memories, Müller F, Die Evakuierung 1939 (sept1939– Juli 1940), 6.

³⁸ Landesarchiv Speyer, T 65, Z3422, “An Propagandaleiter Pg. Trampler, Bericht und Stellungnahme zum Problem Räumung und Bergung”, 31.10.1939.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Interview of Georges Harm, in Christine Guth, ‘La première évacuation de la population de l’arrondissement de Thionville Est: de l’arrivée dans le département de correspondance de la Vienne au retour en Moselle annexée de fait (septembre 1939 à Novembre 1940)’, unpublished Mémoire de Master 2, Université Paul Verlaine, 58–59.

⁴¹ Bericht zur innenpolitischen Lage (Nr.13), 08.11.1939, in Heinz Boberach, *Meldungen aus dem Reich. Die geheimen Lageberichte des Sicherheitsdienstes der SS 1938–1945*, Bd.2, (Pawlak, Herrsching 1984) 438–441; AN, F 23 /220, “Vice Présidence du Conseil, Service Central des Réfugiés”, 24.11.1939.

⁴² Postal censorship war an inheritance from the First World War and war controlled by the army.

⁴³ The Archive of this institution are in the AD, Bas-Rhin, 98 AL 649–659.

Commissariat Général à l'Information, led by writer and diplomat Jean Giraudoux, which collected and summarised their information. To exert influence on the French media, the *Commissariat* sent weekly reports – the *Bulletins hebdomadaires à l'information* – to the newspapers⁴⁴ and made sure through its censorship office that classified information was not published. The reports gave the journalist the view of the government about general topics, such as the evacuation. Yet unlike in Germany, the French journalist could ignore the state's recommendations.

Regarding to the evacuation, the state discourse in these reports aims to counter rumours about the indifference of the French about the problems of the evacuees, which were dispatched by German propaganda in France. In one of these newsletters, the *Commissariat* wrote:

The refugees driven from their homes by the war, notably the Alsatians and Lorrainers, were able to celebrate Christmas, thanks to the efforts made by the government and private initiatives. The public needs to be informed about these efforts, which prove German propaganda wrong, according to which the people from central France are indifferent towards the people from our eastern borderlands.”⁴⁵

This instruction was meant to highlight actions taken on the part of the government in support of the evacuees for Christmas. But before this report was distributed to the newspapers, the journalists already wrote about the Christmas party for the evacuees. However, they spread the same view on the event. In various national and regional newspapers about the organisation of Christmas parties for evacuees the national unity and solidarity was celebrated⁴⁶. Like during the First World War⁴⁷, the French journalists were inclined to draw an image of a united nation, where people help each other. Even the newsreels picked out the solidarity of the nation at war as a central theme. For Christmas they spread a newsreel, which showed the solidarity of the French women and children, who gave their time and toys to the evacuated children⁴⁸. This newsreel was supposed to be a proof of the French solidarity as well as an appeal for the population to give more toys for the evacuees.

The concept of national identity hid a more problematic reality. As explained, Alsatian and Lorrainer dialects were a cause of suspicion in the southwest of France. The state authorities, aware of these problems, tried through different media to inform and bring the host

⁴⁴ These reports could be found in the Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine, delta res 0057.

⁴⁵ National Archives London, FO 371/24315, Bulletin hebdomadaire à l'Information, no 12, 06.01.1940.

⁴⁶ *Le Petit Parisien*, “Quand les Alsaciens fêtent la Noël dans le Périgord”, 25.12.1939; *La Petite Gironde*, “La fête de l'arbre de Noël”, 03.01.1940.

⁴⁷ Olivier Forcade spoke about a “national consensus” to describe the attitude of the French journalist during the Great War. Olivier Forcade, ‘1. Dans l'œil de la censure: voir ou ne pas voir la guerre’, in Christophe Prochasson and Anne Rasmussen (eds.), *Vrai et faux dans la Grande Guerre*, (2004), 33–54, 50.

⁴⁸ Archives Gaumont-Pathé, 951 GJ 00008, Gaumont, *Journal Actualité*, 21.12.1939.

population to understand their cultural differences with the Alsatians and Lorrainers. Several newspapers ran articles on the Alsatian dialect to explain to the hosts that Alsatians were French too, even if they spoke another language. On the 14 October 1939, the deputy of Bas-Rhin, Michel Walter, published an article in the biggest newspaper of Southwest of France, *La Petite Gironde*, about the Alsatian dialect:

“The dialect became what we could call our national language; the first symbol of protestation against a wrongful annexation [German annexation of 1870/1] and of a deeply fidelity to the French nation [...] If to your ears, our dialect sounds like the German language, remember that it was for us during forty-eight years a strong bond to France and that it is for us the sign of our fidelity and loyalty. [...]”⁴⁹

With his article, the deputy offered a very nationalistic interpretation of the Alsatian dialect, which stylise the Alsatian dialect as the symbol of Alsatian resistance against the German from 1870 until 1919. This interpretation became common as three days later, the same article were published in another newspaper⁵⁰ and then, two weeks later, related on the wave by Jean Giraudoux in his speech from 10 November⁵¹.

Through these medial campaign, which insist on the national solidarity and union, both the journalists and the states tried to avoid the troubles in the host department by influencing the thinking and the behaviour of the evacuees and their hosts. Without being even influenced by the Commissariat, the media on their own initiative spread voluntary a national spirit of unity and solidarity, making of the media a tool for “social engineering”⁵² in France.

B- Between silence and exploitation: The evacuation as tool for Nazi propaganda

In Germany, the media were under different rules than in France. After the “Gleichschaltung” from 1933 to 1936, the media were all in the hand of the party, so that other political tendencies couldn’t be easily expressed⁵³. The national media should follow the daily directives of the Ministry for Propaganda led by Joseph Goebbels⁵⁴. Concerning the evacuation, the topic was

⁴⁹ *La Petite Gironde*, „Les Français d’Alsace. Notre dialecte“, 14.10.1939.

⁵⁰ *Le Courrier du Centre*, “Pour mieux comprendre nos frères d’Alsace”, 17.10.1939.

⁵¹ “Sur le dialect alsacien”, 10.11.1939, in Jean Giraudoux, *Messages du continental: allocutions radiodiffusées du commissaire général à l’Information (1939-1940)*, (Grasset, Paris 1987), 80–84.

⁵² About “social engineering” see: Thomas Etzemüller, *Die Ordnung der Moderne. Social Engineering im 20. Jahrhundert*, (Transcript, Bielefeld 2009).

⁵³ Norbert Frei and Johannes Schmitz, *Journalismus im Dritten Reich*, (Beck, München 1989).

⁵⁴ The influence inside the MoP are based on many concurrencies. Joseph Goebbels isn’t the only one to play a role in the directive, but also Otto Dietrich influenced the propaganda guideline. Aristotle A. Kallis, *Nazi Propaganda and the Second World War*, (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstocke 2006).

officially taboo and shouldn't be mediatised⁵⁵. There are two reasons for this attitude: The first argument is of military nature. The Military claimed to keep silence on the movement of the population, which was part of the military strategy⁵⁶. The second has to do with the German propaganda and self-image. The German government didn't want to portray the evacuation as a sign of weakness. They wanted to convince their own population - and other European countries - that the army and the population on the border defended the country and that there were no reasons to be afraid by the French army⁵⁷. Like in France, the media should be a tool to manage the population, but in the German case, through keeping silence about the evacuation.

The analysis of the national and regional press shows that differences emerged concerning the real influence of the Ministry of Propaganda on these two levels. On the one hand, the national papers (*Reichszeitungen*), the Newsreels (*Die Deutsche Wochenschaun*) and the Radio didn't portray the evacuation until June 1940, following Goebbels' instructions. They published only administrative information aimed to aware the evacuees on their status but never explain the measure of evacuation and its consequences. This silence about the evacuation, which concerned more than 600 000 dispatched in Germany, is a sign of the strong potential of the authoritarian communication system in the NS-Regime on the national level. On the other hand, the mention of the evacuation in the regional press didn't automatically follow Goebbels instructions. Their mention depended more on the politics of the *Gau* (administrative region under the Third Reich) and the power of the *Gauleiter* than on the guideline of the RMVP. The Ministry itself gave power to the *Gaupropagandaämter* (its regional offices) to decide on their own about the publication of a topic and the way to present it in the regional press⁵⁸. Concerning the evacuation topic, the difference emerged geographically. Whereas in the host regions the newspapers published rare reports about it and only in their local parts, the newspapers of the evacuated regions were more talkative, especially the *NSZ-Rheinfront*.

This was the newspaper of the NSDAP in Saarpfalz, where the majority of the evacuees came from. The *Gauleiter*, Joseph Bürckel, wanted to make of this newspaper, which he owned, a bridge between the *Gau* and its evacuated population⁵⁹. Without having the permission of the

⁵⁵ Bundesarchiv Berlin (following BA), R 55/ 3840, "Anw. Vom 4.9.1939, Seite -2-zur V.I. Nr. 199/39", 04.09.1939.

⁵⁶ BA, R 55 /20937, "Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda, Rundschreiben, Streng Vertraulich, Betr.: Zensur", 26.08.1939.

⁵⁷ BA, R 55/ 3840, "Anw. V. 3.9.1939, Blatt 2 zur S. I. 213/39", 03.09.1939.

⁵⁸ Bundesarchiv Berlin (following BA), R 55/ 3840, "Anw. Vom 4.9.1939, Seite -2-zur V.I. Nr. 199/39", 04.09.1939.

⁵⁹ LA Speyer, T 65 Z 3422, "Reichspropagandaamt Saarpfalz, Kostenlose Zeitungslieferung an Rückwanderer, an die Kreisleitung der NSDAP Landau, Landau", 07.10.1939.

ministry of Propaganda, the newspaper published 239 articles about the situation of the evacuation between September 1939 and June 1940⁶⁰. Some of these articles reported about the new life of the evacuees and praised the efforts of the Party in helping the evacuees to be integrated in their new regions⁶¹. Others stressed the feeling to be part of a same community, linked by the same destiny and sacrifice⁶². All of these articles didn't express critics about the organisation of the evacuation and spread a positive image of the evacuation. The goal of the articles was to calm the families which had some evacuated friends or family members. Some of these spoke for example about the sentences against pillars so that the population could think that the houses were well guard and the commodities intact⁶³.

In June 1940, this unregularly mention of the evacuation in the country came to an end. On the 25th June, the evacuees learned through an appeal from Adolf Hitler, published in almost every newspaper, that they will be allowed in a few to go back to their home⁶⁴. The journey to the "red zone" were intensively dramatized by German propagandists in the newspapers as well as in the newsreels. The *Deutsche Wochenschau* spread images of these journeys home, showing happy evacuees, who were welcome with music and flowers by Soldiers at the train station. Following the national-socialist ideological gender role allocation, the *Hitlerjugend* helped the evacuees to go to their home, take care the luggage, whereas the *Bund Deutsche Mädel* were cleaning the houses. These images were accompanied by following commentary:

„Der deutsche Soldat trug den Krieg, den die westlichen Plutokraten uns aufgezwungen hatten, tief in Feindesland hinein. So konnten die Bewohner der westdeutschen Grenzbezirke, die aus Sicherheitsgründen geräumt werden mussten, jetzt in ihre Heimat zurückkehren. Empfang in Merzig. Mit Musik geht es wieder in die Stadt hinein, die dank dem Führer und seine Soldaten nun nicht mehr vom Feind bedroht ist.“⁶⁵

These returns were the occasion in the German newsreels, but also for the press in all the country⁶⁶, to praise the Party, the army, the "Führer". They were used as a symbol for "Volksgemeinschaft"; a "people's community" where the collective need became more important than the individual. This "imagined community"⁶⁷ – like the united nation in France since September 1939 – made the evacuation a tool of her promotion.

⁶⁰ *Der Führer* (43), *Freiburger Zeitung* (2), *NSZ-Rheinfront* (186), *Pfälzer Anzeiger* (7), *Hamburger Tageblatt* (1)

⁶¹ *NSZ-Rheinfront*, "Jungmädel schaffen für die Grenzabwanderer", 11.11.1939.

⁶² *NSZ-Rheinfront*, "Bei unseren Grezabwanderern", 26.1.1939.

⁶³ *NSZ-Rheinfront*, "Krasser Fall von Plünderung", 05.10.1939; "Tod den Plünderern!", 06.10.1939; "Keine Milde für Plünderer", 27.10.1939.

⁶⁴ *Braunschweiger Zeitung*, "Rückkehr der Evakuierten", 26.06.1940; *Der Führer*, "Heimkehr der Rückgeführten. Der Führer verfügt die Rückkehr der Bevölkerung in die geräumten deutschen Gebiete", 25.06.1940.

⁶⁵ BF, Die deutsche Wochenschauen, Nr. 516, 22.07.1940, [9:12min. –10:57min.]

⁶⁶ *Braunschweiger Zeitung*, "Fünfhunderttausend kehren heim", 18.07.1940; *Hannoverscher Kurier*, "'Nix wie Hemm!' ist die Parole", 19.07.1940; *Völkischer Beobachter*, "Glückliche Heimkehrer", 28.06.1940.

⁶⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (Verso, London 1991).

III – The evacuees, the media and the state

A- The French state support through press, broadcast and events

These discourses didn't really target the evacuees themselves, but more the national population and the persons, who are indirectly concerned by the evacuation such as the hosts and the neighbour of the red zone. As the French state tried to resolve cultural problems instructing the hosts through the media, he tried to influence the moral and behaviour of the evacuees. In the first weeks of the evacuation, they were cut from their usual information sources: no regional newspapers, no radio station. Moreover, the Alsatians and Lorrainers who couldn't read French Newspapers were uninformed. Furthermore, during the evacuation they lost contact with friends, family and neighbours, so that in the first weeks they didn't know their address, couldn't write or visit them. To counter the negative influence of this uprooting, the state became active. It worked for the evacuees to get more information and entertainment but also tried through the media to control the behaviour and opinion of these population.

The influence of the French state of the evacuees worked mostly through the press and the radio. On regional scale the prefects became involved in the support of the evacuees through the press. Using the experience of the First World War, as newspapers for the evacuees emerged on private initiative⁶⁸, two prefects of the host departments created official newspapers dedicate to the evacuees⁶⁹. They were written in German so that all the evacuees could understand the information. To help the evacuees to find their relatives or friends, these newspapers published list of evacuees who was looking for their families. They contained news about the war, the French national and international policy but also specific information for the everyday life of the evacuees⁷⁰ and reports about the culture of the host departments, so that the evacuees could learn the culture of their hosts⁷¹. They were free and dispatched in all town which welcome evacuees. these newspapers can also be seen as tools of the prefects to control the behaviour of their population by publishing positive articles about the government and its engagement for

⁶⁸ Philippe Nivet, *Les réfugiés français de la Grande guerre, 1914-1920: les 'Boches du Nord'*, (Economica, Paris 2004), 157.

⁶⁹ The prefect in the department Landes created on the 16 september 1939 the *Bulletin d'Informations des Réfugiés dans les Landes* and the prefect in departement Charente-Inférieure, *De l'Est à l'Ouest. Bulletin de Renseignements pour les Evacués – Auskunftszeitel für Ewakuirte* on the 3rd october 1939.

⁷⁰ *Bulletin d'informations des réfugiés dans les Landes*, "Circulaires préfectorales", 21.10.1939.

⁷¹ *Bulletin d'Informations des Réfugiés dans les Landes*, "Comment les Alsaciens peuvent se représenter les Landes", 07.10.1939.

the evacuees. Next to these own newspapers, the state support and encourage the resettlement of Alsatians and Lorrainers newspapers in the host region⁷². *Le Républicain Lorrain* and *Les Dernières Nouvelles de Strasbourg* decided in October 1939 to open a new agency in Bordeaux and print special editions for the evacuees helped by the printing company of *La Petite Gironde*. These two newspapers spread information about Alsace and Lorraine, but also about the life in the host department⁷³. The way to speak about the evacuation was nuanced, focussing more than the national press on the difficulties of the evacuees⁷⁴ and the regional specifics⁷⁵, but the state was never hardly criticized.

The French government created two programs for the evacuees, which were spread in the south-west of France. The first one began in October 1939 and spread every Sunday at 11 am catholic and protestant services⁷⁶. Every Friday was the Judaic service⁷⁷. The second program consisted in entertainment for the evacuees and began in November 1939⁷⁸. These shows were hold by Alsatians who spoke in dialect and spread Alsatian songs and poetry such as “S’Elsass unser Ländel” or “D’r Hans in schnokeloch”⁷⁹. Letters from evacuees to the radio show that these programs were very liked by the evacuees⁸⁰. They thanked the broadcast for the joy that they gave them through these programs and asked for more Alsatians songs, which reminded them to their home.

In parallel to the media support, the prefects and major organised entertainment events for the evacuees. For Christmas they organised a Christmas party during which they gave the evacuated children gifts like sweets, toys and clothes⁸¹ and sung Alsatians⁸², patriotic and Christmas songs such as La “Marseillaise” and “Mon beau sapin”⁸³. These events were well mediatised by the press and became, as we saw, a very symbolic solidarity event on the national scale. Moreover, the prefects organised with the *Secours national* the distribution of books⁸⁴

⁷² About the Alsatians and Lorrainers press in exil, see: François.-Yves Moigne, ‘La presse mosellane de l’exil 1939-1945’, In *Société d’histoire et d’archéologie de la Lorraine*, 1983, 87–127.

⁷³ *Le Républicain Lorrain*, “Herbstfahrt in die Gironde”, 11.11.1939.

⁷⁴ *Les Dernières nouvelles de Strasbourg*, „Flüchtlingsleben in Ajat“, 21.–22.01.1940.

⁷⁵ *Le Républicain Lorrain*, “Brief aus dem schönen Lothringerland”, 23.03.1940

⁷⁶ AES, Guerre 1939-1945, “Archevêché de Bordeaux, M. Douvier à l’évêque de Strasbourg”, 06.11.1939.

⁷⁷ AD, Bas-Rhin, 98 AL 833, “Présidence du Conseil, Administration de la Radiodiffusion nationale, Procès-Verbal de la deuxième séance du Comité Alsacien et lorrain”, 16.01.1940.

⁷⁸ ⁷⁸ *De l’Est à l’Ouest*, “M.C. Chautemps parle aux évacués Alsaciens et Lorrains”, 15.11.1939.

⁷⁹ There are two Alsatians folklore lyrics from the 19th century. AD, Bas-Rhin, 98 AL 833, “Lettres d’auditeurs reçues à la suite des Emissions destinées aux Alsaciens et Lorrains”, o.D.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ AN, F 23 /226, “Le Vice Président du Conseil à Monsieur le Préfet des Landes”, 02.12.1939.

⁸² Georges Forlen, *Saint-Louis-Lecture: récits de l’Évacuation 1939-1940*, (Bieler, Huningue 1969), 56.

⁸³ *La Petite Gironde*, “La fête de l’arbre de Noël”, 03.01.1940.

⁸⁴ AN, 382 AP 26, “Œuvre du Secours National, séance du comité de direction, 26 janvier 1940”, 3, quote In Hadwiger, „*Une patrie secourable ?*”

and provide free gardens where the evacuees could plant vegetable to approve their way of living⁸⁵. Through these newspapers, broadcast and events for the evacuees, the state wanted to offer a support of entertainment and information to them, but also to control their behaviour so that the war potential of the nation and the quietness in the host department weren't damaged by internal problems.

B- The German support

The German authorities organised similar events on local scale, but they weren't organised in all host regions. Christmas parties and gifts for the children happened for example where the Party was actively involved for the evacuees. Unlike France, the state didn't give instructions to help and control the evacuees so that the actions on local level depended on the local authorities, which had a scope of action. Because the evacuation shouldn't be mentioned in the media, these action for the evacuees weren't mediated in the national press and in those in the host region⁸⁶. The *Gauleiter* of the evacuated regions, Joseph Bürckel (Saarpfalz) and Gustav Simon (Koblenz-trier) preferred to use private channel of communication, like letters⁸⁷. For Christmas almost all evacuated families got a letter from their *Gauleiter*, in which they found a 10RM Voucher that they could use to buy some clothes by the *Winterhilfswerk*⁸⁸. The *Gauleiter* expressed in their letters their compassion and gave hope to the evacuee to be soon in their home. Joseph Bürckel insisted that the evacuation was necessary and tried to justified problems which appeared during the evacuation⁸⁹. Through these letters and gifts, the party tried to give a positive image of its work and counterbalance the negative management of the evacuation. The evacuees were happy to get these letters and hoped that these word will soon become true.

In comparison with the French evacuees, the German evacuees didn't get the support of the media. No special newspaper nor broadcast programs for evacuees were created. To communicate with them, the party and the government use notices in form of a leaflet, on which

⁸⁵ AD, Landes, RS 1037, "Œuvre du secours national, Commission des œuvres rurales, Mars 1940".

⁸⁶ In the host region only one report could be found in the press (*Anhalter Anzeiger*, "Weihnachten der Saardeutschen in ihrer zweiten Heimat", 27.12.1939). The newspapers of the evacuee regions were more talkative about it; for example, *NSZ-Rheinfront*, "Bescherung im Bergungsgebiet", 23.12.1939.

⁸⁷ Landesarchiv des Saarlandes, Andreas 8, "Josef Bürckel Gauleiter, Kriegsweihnacht 1939"; Landeshauptarchiv Sachsen-Anhalt, Magdeburg (following LHASA, MD), C 30 Jerichow II 1, Nr. 341, "Gustav Simon, Gauleiter, Koblenz, Weihnachten 1939".

⁸⁸ Meldung aus dem Reich (Nr.32), 22.12.1939, in: Boberach, *Meldungen aus dem Reich.*, Bd.2, 595.

⁸⁹ LA Saar, Andreas 8, "Josef Bürckel Gauleiter, Kriegsweihnacht 1939"

some rules and important information were written⁹⁰. Only the *NSZ-Rheinfront* tried to be a bridge between the evacuees and the rest of his *Gau*. In October they sent 600 copies to the host region, *Gau Bayerische Ostmark*, but this project couldn't be continued because of the cost for the distribution of the newspaper for the evacuees⁹¹. Like the press, the broadcast also mostly kept the evacuation quiet and didn't offer the evacuees entertainment. Only one program could be found through a contemporary witness, who testified that a beloved program of the *Saarländischer Rundfunk* before the war continued to be broadcast during the evacuation ones a week. He also stressed the fact that the evacuees were bound through this program⁹². His testimony should be nuanced. No other witness nor official sources reports this program, so that the echo of this show can be judged as minimal. Because of Goebbels' order, it was impossible for the media to be a support for the evacuees and the absence of general party guideline to organise some events for the evacuees in every host region led to the feeling to be abandoned by the government by the evacuees. As consequence of this policy, they questioned the myth of "Volksgemeinschaft"⁹³, that promoted the party and the government.

Both in France and Germany, the state attempted to organise and maintain control of the evacuation scheme and also of the evacuees themselves. In both countries, the risk was to lose the control of approximately 600,000 people who were affected by the evacuation and let troubles grow in the host regions. In using the media as tools to influence the behaviour and attitudes of the population, both states put "social engineering" into practice. Even if the evacuation caused similar material and cultural problems on both sides of the border, there are some differences in how the German and French authorities managed through their communication the evacuation. The German government wanted to keep the evacuation quiet until the evacuees can return, whereas in France, they are used in the media to praise the state assistance of the evacuees. However, both types of discourse aimed to support the concept of "national unity" in France, and the "Volksgemeinschaft" in Germany. Whereas in France the local authorities could follow general governmental guideline, the German authorities on the local scale weren't supported by their government and had to find alone a way to manage the

⁹⁰ LHASA, MD, C 30 Jerichow II 1, Nr. 341, "Merkblatt für die Volksgenossen aus dem Freimachungsgebiet", o.D.

⁹¹ LA, Speyer, T 65 Z 3422, "Reichspropagandaamt Saarpfalz, Kostenlose Zeitungslieferung an Rückwanderer, an die Kreisleitung der NSDAP Landau, Landau", 07.10.1939.

⁹² Interview, Ferdinand Müller, EK.

⁹³ EDEFFA, Letter of P. L., Mühlheim-Heicksen, 11.1939.

evacuees. This missing of a united communication policy led to a large scope of action but also to an unregularly support to the evacuees in the host region. This statement opens the question about the reality of a totalitarian character of the NS Regime on the local scale.