

Unabhängige |||||
Historikerkommission |||||
zur Geschichte des |||||
Reichsarbeitsministeriums
1933 – 1945 |||||

Elizabeth Vlossak (Brock University)

**REGIMENTING UNFREE LABOUR:
ALSACE AND MOSELLE**

Working Paper Series A | No. 9

eds. Elizabeth Harvey and Kim Christian Priemel

Working Papers of the Independent Commission of Historians
Investigating the History of the Reich Ministry of Labour
(*Reichsarbeitsministerium*) in the National Socialist Period

ISSN 2513-1443

© Unabhängige Historikerkommission zur Aufarbeitung der Geschichte des Reichsarbeitsministeriums in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus, 2017

Website: <https://www.historikerkommission-reichsarbeitsministerium.de/Publikationen>

ISSN 2513-1443

All rights reserved. Any reproduction, publication and reprint in the form of a different publication, whether printed or produced electronically, in whole or in part, is permitted only with the explicit written authorisation of the UHK or the author/s.

This paper can be downloaded without charge from <https://www.historikerkommission-reichsarbeitsministerium.de> or from the Social Science Research Network electronic library. Information on all of the papers published in the UHK Working Paper Series can be found on the UHK's website.

After France's defeat in June 1940, Alsace and Moselle (Lorraine), provinces that had been annexed by Bismarck in 1870 but then reclaimed by France after the First World War, were re-annexed *de facto* by Nazi Germany and incorporated into the Third Reich.¹ Alsace was joined with Baden to form the Gau Oberrhein, governed by Robert Wagner, and Lorraine was joined with Saar-Palatinate to become part of the Gau Westmark, run by Josef Bürckel.² These borderlands were considered racially and historically German, and as such underwent an intensive policy of Germanization, de-Frenchification and Nazification, with the goal of assimilating the region and its people as quickly as possible. French legislation was replaced by German laws and the civil code. Virtually every civic, professional, and cultural institution was subjected to a process of *Gleichschaltung*. The German language was declared the exclusive mother-tongue of the Alsatian and Mosellan people, streets and towns were given German names, and by the end of 1940 all French names and surnames either had to be changed to their German equivalents or completely altered, under penalty of deportation to the German interior. Jews, Roma, French men and women who had returned to the regions after 1918, Communists, and other 'anti-German' elements, such as former administrators, were expelled.³ Between July and November 1940, Wagner oversaw the expulsion (referred to as 'evacuation') of 23,790 people from Alsace to the unoccupied zone of southern France, and in Moselle Bürckel simultaneously ejected 47,187 people from roughly the same categories.⁴ Thousands of 'racially fit' but politically-questionable Alsatians and Mosellans were deported to *Umsiedlungslager* in various parts of the Reich as part of Himmler's so-called re-Germanization procedure.⁵

After 1941, Nazi party rallies were held throughout the region. Alsatians and Mosellans were strongly urged, and often forced, to join Party organizations, although numbers remained stubbornly low, much to the consternation of the Gauleiters.⁶ Membership of the Hitler Youth and the League of German Girls was made obligatory in January 1942, and parents faced fines or imprisonment if they kept their children from joining. In the spring of 1941, compulsory service in the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (RAD) was introduced, and applied to young men and women. Approximately 70,000 Alsatians and Mosellans were drafted into the RAD, including 15,000 women. The

¹ Alsace consists of the French departments of Haut-Rhin and Bas-Rhin. The department of Moselle is often referred to as 'German Lorraine', to distinguish it from the department of Meurthe-et-Moselle, the part of Lorraine which was not annexed by Bismarck or re-annexed by Hitler.

² The Gauleiters Wagner and Bürckel were also *Chef der Zivilverwaltung* (head of the civil administration) of Alsace and Moselle respectively.

³ Francis Koerner, *Les transplantations d'Alsaciens-Lorrains dans le Reich (1941–1945)*, in: *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, 226 (2007), pp. 53-68.

⁴ For the figures, see Christopher Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939–March 1942*, Lincoln, NE 2004, p. 90.

⁵ Isabel Heinemann, 'Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut'. *Das Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt der SS und die rassenpolitische Neuordnung Europas*, Göttingen 2003; Bradley J. Nichols, *The Hunt for Lost Blood: Nazi Germanization Policy in Occupied Europe*, PhD dissertation, University of Tennessee Knoxville 2016, pp. 262-275.

⁶ Bernard Le Marec and Gerard Le Marec, *L'Alsace dans la Guerre, 1939–1945*, Le Coteau 1994, p. 54.

recruits were sent to training camps in other parts of the Reich,⁷ and the women often served as labourers on farms, or domestic servants or child minders for middle-class families. Although women's service in the RAD lasted six months, many were immediately drafted into the *Kriegshilfsdienst* (KHD) to work in munitions factories and the Wehrmacht's auxiliary services, including the *Flakartillerie*.⁸ The experiences of these women varied: some relished the opportunity to live away from home and enjoyed the camaraderie they shared with their fellow recruits, while others were subjected to cruel treatment at the hands of RAD leaders and employers, and many later complained of terrible living conditions that had permanently ruined their health.⁹

For the regions' young men, the RAD paved the way for military conscription. In August 1942, in an effort to speed up assimilation, and with casualty rates mounting on the Eastern Front, the order came from Berlin (but based on the recommendation of the local Gauleiter) to make military service mandatory in the annexed regions. Between 1942 and 1945, just over 130,000 Alsatian and Mosellan men served in the German armed forces, primarily in the army, but also in the Luftwaffe and the Kriegsmarine. In 1944, the youngest recruits were drafted into the rapidly depleting ranks of the Waffen-SS. Nearly 40,000 of these conscripts, who after the war became known collectively as the *Malgré-nous* ('in spite of ourselves'), died in the war, primarily on the Eastern Front and in Soviet POW and labour camps.

The introduction of military conscription prompted immediate and widespread opposition throughout the annexed territories. Young Alsatian and Mosellan men who had been called up fled to Switzerland or Vichy France, where many joined organized resistance movements.¹⁰ Others feigned illness or sustained self-inflicted injuries to avoid military service. Young recruits escaped from their training camps, or deserted in the chaos of battle or retreat.¹¹ Deserting or evading the draft came at a very high price—not only was it punishable by death, but the Nazi policy of *Sippenhaft* extended responsibility to families who faced the possibility of incarceration in the 'political re-education' camp Vorbruck, Fort Queuleu in Metz, or the Natzweiler concentration camp.¹² Others were subjected to forced resettlement in the German interior.

⁷ Jean-Noel Grandhomme, *Les Alsaciens et les Mosellans enrôlés de force dans le Reichsarbeitsdienst*, in: *La main d'œuvre française exploitée par le IIIe Reich*, Caen 2003, p. 331.

⁸ Nina Barbier, *Malgré-elles: Les Alsaciennes et Mosellanes incorporées de force dans la machine de guerre nazie*, Strasbourg 2000.

⁹ Elizabeth Vlossak, *Marianne or Germania? Nationalizing Women in Alsace, 1870–1946*, Oxford 2010, pp. 259–261.

¹⁰ Alphonse Irjud, *La résistance alsacienne: Des maquis à l'armée de Libération*, in: *Saisons d'Alsace* 48, 124 (1994), pp. 78–94.

¹¹ Frédéric Stroh, *Les Malgré-nous de Torgau. Des insoumis alsaciens et mosellans face à la justice nazie*, Sarreguemines 2006.

¹² Laurent Erbs, *La Gestapo en Moselle: Pratiques d'incarcération en temps d'annexion*, in: *Revue historique des armées*, 270 (2013), pp. 105–111.



German Gaue with Gau Baden-Elsass and Gau Westmark, about 1941 (source: Wehrmachtsatlas 1941/Morty, Mackler/Wikipedia)

The Nazi civil administration's policy of assimilation extended to the annexed territories' economies, and their rapid integration into the Greater German Reich was a priority for the Gauleiters, whose goals were both to Germanize local industry and to restructure it for the purpose of the war effort. Even before the war, the Germans had hoped to one day be able to take advantage of the region's industry and natural resources. Alsace's wealth lay primarily in agriculture, yet its economy had also been driven by the textile industry, metallurgy, and the extraction and processing of potash, which had begun after 1918, around the same time that crude oil reserves were discovered in Pechelbronn. Electricity production and the chemicals industry (including the development of plastics, synthetic fabrics, paint, and pharmaceuticals), although still relatively small, were becoming increasingly important. The region was also the home of Mathis and Bugatti, two notable names of the French automotive industry. Moselle was also highly industrialized and rich in natural resources: the region produced large quantities of high-quality fruits and vegetables,

iron ore deposits were located in the west along the border with department of Meurthe-et-Moselle, and in the north lay the southern extremity of the Saar coal deposits.¹³

Alsace's economy had gone into significant decline after 1933, a victim of the Great Depression but also of the French policy of *glacis*: following Hitler's rise to power, all public and private investment to the border region was suspended, which led to the exodus of Alsatian businesses to the French interior or even abroad. The crisis was exacerbated by the outbreak of war in September 1939, with the mass evacuation of the borderland. Businesses were shut, and in the countryside, 127 000 hectares of land remained uncultivated. During the French retreat in the spring of 1940, 700 bridges and many factories, including the sugar refinery of Erstein, the oil refinery of Pechelbronn and the power stations of Strasbourg and Kembs were destroyed or heavily damaged.¹⁴

In June 1940, the economies of Alsace and Moselle were first placed under the control of the Wehrmacht's *Rüstungskommandos*, located in Strasbourg and Metz, which were overseen by the *Armeeoberkommando*. After August 1940, however, Alsace and Moselle, having been incorporated fully into the Reich, were now governed by the civil administration within which was created the section for 'Economy, Labour and Agriculture.' Wagner and Bürckel were thus accorded significant power and freedom, given that they were subordinate only to Hitler, although Hermann Göring, responsible for the Reich's Four Year Plan, could intervene in the local economies. Such was the case with Moselle's iron and steel industry: Göring appointed the industrialist Hermann Röchling as the region's general commissioner for iron and steel.¹⁵ In July 1940 Göring's representative and director of the Hermann Göring factories, Paul Raabe, was appointed the *Generalbeauftragter für die Eisenerzgewinnung und -verteilung* for Luxembourg, Moselle and Meurthe-et-Moselle (France).¹⁶

In December 1940, the Gauleiters created the 'Chamber of Commerce and Industry' and the 'Chamber of artisans', aimed at protecting the regions' businesses, but also at bringing them under the control of the state. Thus Nazi officials could at any time incorporate local industries into

¹³ Hans-Erich Volkmann, *L'importance économique de la Lorraine pour le IIIe Reich (Compte tenu particulièrement de l'industrie de la minette)*, in: *Revue d'histoire de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale* 30, 120 (1980), p. 71; Françoise Berger, *Les relations entre les sidérurgies française et allemande de 1870 à la CECA*, in: *Revue d'Allemagne et des Pays de langue allemande*, avril-juin 39 (2007), pp. 163-199; Markus Nievelstein, *Der Zug nach der Minette. Deutsche Unternehmen in Lothringen 1871–1918*, Bochum 1995; Rainer Haus, *Lothringen und Salzgitter in der Eisenerzpolitik der deutschen Schwerindustrie von 1871 bis 1940*, Salzgitter 1991; Johannes Bähr et al., *Der Flick-Konzern im Dritten Reich*, München 2008, pp. 439-441, 462.

¹⁴ Bernard Vogler and Michel Hau, *Histoire économique de l'Alsace*, Strasbourg 1997, p. 291.

¹⁵ Hans-Christian Herrmann, *Hermann Röchling in der deutschen Wirtschaftspolitik gegenüber Elsass-Lothringen, 1940–1944*, MA thesis, University of Saarbrücken 1991; Françoise Berger, "Fall 13". *Das Rastatter Röchling-Verfahren*, in: Kim C. Priemel and Alexa Stiller (eds.), *NMT. Die Nürnberger Militärtribunale zwischen Geschichte, Gerechtigkeit und Rechtschöpfung*, Hamburg, 2013, pp. 464-490. Röchling would also become the head of the chamber of commerce and industry in Metz.

¹⁶ Pierre Sedej, *Les mines de fer de Moselle et la Seconde Guerre mondiale*, in: *Chroniques du Graouilly* 15 (2005), p. 89.

the war effort. In early 1941, the governors of Alsace and Moselle regulated the working conditions in the entire private sector of the economy and aligned it with the laws that governed the rest of Germany. The Gauleiter also fixed work hours, production quotas, salaries, and holidays. Trade unions were banned and replaced with the German Labour Front (DAF), membership of which became compulsory for all workers and managers in July 1942.¹⁷

In order to restart as well as assimilate Alsace's economy, the civil administration began by luring evacuees, the source of much-needed labour, back to their homes. Farmers in particular were enticed back by being given free seed, equipment, and livestock. They soon discovered that their farming techniques and production would be controlled and closely monitored by Nazi officials, although they would become wealthier and occupy a higher social standing than they had prior to the war. By August 1940 approximately two-thirds of the Alsatian evacuees had returned to the region, although thousands had been denied the right of return, and thousands more had been expelled on political or racial grounds. The population of Moselle was even more severely affected due to Bürckel's insistence on Germanizing the region through population transfers rather than forced assimilation. In total, over 100,000 inhabitants were forcibly deported. If we add these numbers to the thousands of Mosellans who fled the region and those who had stayed in south-western France after the evacuation of 1939, it is not surprising that some villages were practically empty. It is estimated that a third of the region's population did not return to Moselle until the end of the war.

The civil administrations of Alsace and Moselle confiscated property, homes and businesses owned by Jews, pro-French Alsatians, French persons who lived in the interior, and Alsatians who had refused to return to the region at the end of 1940. Hundreds of businesses and shops were seized, placed under the control of the *Elsässische Handelsaktiengesellschaft*, then redistributed to German veterans, German industrialists willing to settle in the region, or local Alsatians who were zealous supporters of the Nazi Party. Businesses, resources and equipment that were especially beneficial to the war effort were sold off to large German companies: IG Farbenindustrie AG took over Mulhouse's chemicals company, Junker-Motorenwerke AG made parts for its planes at the Mathis factory in Strasbourg-Meinau, the oil reserves of Pechelbronn were exploited by Deutsche Erdöl AG, and the potash mines of Alsace became a subsidiary of Preussag.¹⁸ The 'service des biens spoliés,' set up in Metz in December 1945, determined that during the period of annexation the German authorities in Alsace had seized and resold 3,408 commercial or indus-

¹⁷ Marie-Joseph Bopp, *L'Alsace sous l'occupation allemande*, Le Puy 1945, p. 115.

¹⁸ Vogler and Hau (note 14), p. 295

trial holdings, nearly 15,000 private properties, as well as the belongings of deportees, for a total value estimated at over 160 million RM.¹⁹

Labour offices were established across the region, and male workers were at first deployed to factories in the Reich to replace German men who had been mobilized. Once the local industry was in operation again, unemployment ceased to exist in the region.²⁰ By September 1940, over 40,000 Alsatian workers had been rehired, in particular to work for firms that had been granted contracts by Strasbourg's *Rüstungskommando*. Factories producing goods deemed non-essential either reduced their output or were shut down completely. Textiles, leather and clothing manufacturers that had contracts with the Wehrmacht fared better, and continued to receive raw material, but by 1943 many workers in these areas were redeployed to munitions factories. In the final months of the war, men between the ages of 15 and 50 who had not been drafted into the Wehrmacht were sent to work in various parts of the Reich, including about 1,000 men from St Die (Moselle) who were sent to Mannheim.²¹

Working conditions for Alsatians and Mosellans in war industries were generally good. Because of their status as *Reichsdeutsche*, they found themselves in a privileged position, especially compared to French STO workers, Italian internees, and Eastern European forced labourers. This was certainly the case at the Junkerswerke which had taken over the Mathis factory in Strasbourg-Meinau. By 1943 it employed 10,000 workers, including Germans, foreign labour, but especially large numbers of Alsatians who had previously worked for Mattis or who had been recruited through the DAF as apprentices.²² But at the Junkerswerke and other factories there were also reports of sabotage, and Alsatian workers were sometimes viewed with suspicion. Concerns that Alsatian workers were not only failing to assimilate but were remaining hostile to the Nazi regime were exacerbated by stories of Alsatians employed at factories in Baden seeking out friendships with French STO workers.²³

The introduction of compulsory service in the RAD in 1941 and military conscription in August 1942 led to labour shortages in the region.²⁴ In Alsace, local industries increasingly relied on foreign workers, prisoners, and women drafted into the RAD. At the Pechelbronn refinery, for example, 38 percent of the labour force consisted of POWs and forced foreign labourers.²⁵ Alsace's potash mining industry had long relied on Polish labourers (who continued to be employed

¹⁹ Jean-Laurent Vonau, *Le Gauleiter Wagner: Le bourreau de l'Alsace*, Strasbourg 2011, p. 121.

²⁰ Léon Strauss, *Les salariés sous contrôle: Avec le Front du Travail*, in: *Saisons d'Alsace* 124, 48 (1994), p. 204.

²¹ Roland Peter, *Rüstungspolitik in Baden: Kriegswirtschaft und Arbeitseinsatz in einer Grenzregion im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, München 1995, p. 335.

²² Isabelle Bogen, *Chronique d'une entreprise en guerre: Les Junkerswerke*, in: *Saisons d'Alsace* 117 (1992), pp. 97-110.

²³ Strauss (note 20), p. 209.

²⁴ Vogler and Hau (note 14), p. 298.

²⁵ Vonau (note 19), p. 119.

and received better treatment than other foreign workers), and after the annexation the total number of foreign workers increased: Polish and Soviet POWs began arriving in March 1941, groups of male and female Soviet *Ostarbeiter* were sent to the mines in September 1942, with another group of Polish civilians arriving in March 1943. Records show that the number of forced labourers deployed to the mines was nowhere near the numbers requested. By the end of 1943, most of the Eastern workers had been sent away and replaced by Italian military internees.²⁶

Although we do not have any exact numbers, it is clear that local businesses, farms, mines and factories in Alsace depended on foreign labour. In 1944, 49 Soviet forced labourers were employed at the Zahnradfabrik (ZF) in Sélestat (Schlettstadt).²⁷ The Daimler-Benz factory in Colmar relied almost entirely on forced labour from the East. Over the course of the war, the number of workers from Poland and especially from the Soviet Union increased dramatically: by 1945, the 2,850 civilian foreigners working there made up 95.8 percent of the labour force.²⁸ The male and female *Ostarbeiter* worked alongside Alsatians, but in vastly different types of labour. Soviet women, in particular, were hired as ‘Mädchen für alles’, and thus did everything from working on the line to cleaning, tidying, and helping in the kitchen. *Ostarbeiter* worked longer shifts, more night shifts, and had fewer days off than Alsatian workers and workers (both voluntary and forced) from Western Europe.²⁹ They were housed in separate barracks that were overcrowded and filthy, and were denied access to washrooms. Food rations were also much lower than for the Alsatian and Western European workers. While contact between the Alsatians and *Ostarbeiter* was prohibited, some Alsatian workers were caught sneaking food to the *Ostarbeiter*, and a group of Soviet women managed to escape in May 1944 and spent the rest of the war in hiding in Colmar.³⁰

There is additional evidence that the local Alsatian population was willing to help *Ostarbeiter* and treated them with kindness. According to a 1947 affidavit regarding the mistreatment of POWs and *Ostarbeiter* at the Krupp Kraftwagenfabrik (Krupp Krawa), German drill operator Conrad Cremer described that after the Krawa plant and most of its German and Eastern workforce were relocated to Mulhouse in April 1943, the situation of the approximately 400 Soviet

²⁶ See tables in Yves Frey, *Polonais d'Alsace, pratiques patronales et mineurs polonais dans le bassin potassique de Haute-Alsace, 1918–1948*, Besançon 2003, pp. 576-577. Roland Peter notes that in 1943 11,000 Italian internees were slated to be sent to work in Baden-Elsass, but that the number that actually arrived is unknown. See Peter (note 21), pp. 334.

²⁷ Christa Tholander, *Fremdarbeiter 1939 bis 1945. Ausländische Arbeitskräfte in der Zeppelin-Stadt Friedrichshafen*, Essen 2001.

²⁸ Barbara Hopmann, Mark Spoerer, Birgit Weitz and Beate Brüninghaus, *Zwangsarbeit bei Daimler-Benz*, Stuttgart 1994, pp. 98-99 and 101.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

workers improved. According to Cremer, the Alsatians ‘backed up the foreigners in every way’ and ‘refused to be involved in any sort of maltreatment.’³¹

Due to Bürckel’s expulsion and resettlement policies, Moselle suffered from an acute labour shortage throughout the war. At the Hobus-Werke in Metz, for example, 80 percent of the workers were local Mosellan women, while the other 20 percent consisted of prisoners from the nearby Woippy (Wappingen) internment camp, which included Russian, Ukrainian, and Polish POWs, as well as young Mosellan draft dodgers.³² The region’s economy relied very heavily on foreign labour from France, Belgium, but especially Eastern Europe. In late 1941, Polish civilians arrived to take up employment on farms, in factories, and in mines.³³ Then, starting in the summer of 1942, thousands of Soviet POWs and civilians, many of whom were young women from Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania, were brought by cattle-car.³⁴ Surviving records from the steel foundry of Hagondange (Hagendingen) indicate that Soviet women performed the same work as men (in addition to more typical domestic chores), a notable contrast to the rest of the Reich where women were rarely employed in mining or heavy industry.³⁵

Housed in camps throughout the region (it is estimated that in Moselle there were 93 Soviet POW camps, at least 60 camps for *Ostarbeiter* and another 13 for French, Belgian and Italian workers),³⁶ the Eastern workers (and the women in particular) became a feature of the landscape.³⁷ While living and working conditions were harsh, in some camps there was a strong sense of community: at the camp in Amnéville (Amenweiler), for example, which housed 1,252 *Ostarbeiter*, workers got married, had children, organized social events, and printed their own newspaper.³⁸ In some cases, whole families had arrived together. Those who worked on farms had more regular contact with locals, and were typically housed on-site. Surviving photographs show Ukrainian workers dancing at the Fort Chabrol in Rosselange (Rosslingen),³⁹ and attending an Easter fair in Sarreguemines.⁴⁰ Although they were segregated from and not allowed to fraternize with the local population, some of the *Ostarbeiter* managed to leave their camps at night to

³¹ Ulrich Herbert, *Hitler’s Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labor in Germany under the Third Reich*, Cambridge 1997, p. 236.

³² Pierre Brasme, *Woippy dans la Second Guerre Mondiale*. Conference paper presented at the Association des Amis du Mémorial de l’Alsace et de la Moselle à Colmar (15–17 octobre 2002). Text available online at http://www.shw-woippy.net/histoire_de_woippy/shw_guerre.htm [accessed 20 June 2017].

³³ Christine Leclercq et al., *Trous de mémoire: Prisonniers de guerre et travailleurs forcés d’Europe de l’Est (1941–1945) en Moselle annexée*, Metz 2011, p. 95.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 97. Nearly 6,000 foreign labourers were employed in the Metz-Campagne area by 1944. See *ibid.*, 99.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

³⁷ Adrien Printz, *Chronique lorraine, 1940–1944*, Paris 1945, p. 79.

³⁸ Philippe Wilmouth, *Chronique de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale dans la Vallée de l’Orne, Hagondange 2001*, p. 118–119.

³⁹ The collection is held at the Association pour la Conservation de la Mémoire de la Moselle (ASCOMEMO) in Hagondange.

⁴⁰ Photograph at the Archives municipales of Sarreguemines, reprinted in Leclercq et al. (note 33), p. 8.

beg for extra food. Others attempted to escape, and those who were caught were sent to the Natzweiler concentration camp.⁴¹

The living and working conditions for civilian labourers were poor, in particular for the Russians who were considered Slavic ‘Untermenschen,’ and it is estimated that just over 300 civilian forced labourers died in Moselle during the war.⁴² Nonetheless, they were not subjected to the same treatment as Soviet POWs, whom we could classify as slave labour, according to the categories set out by Mark Spoerer and Jochen Fleischhacker. The Germans had two POW camps in Moselle (*Stalag XII E* and *Stalag XII F*), which first housed French prisoners who were moved to camps in the Saar and Trier area in 1942, and replaced by Soviet, Serb and Italian prisoners.⁴³ These prisoners were employed primarily in the region’s mines and iron and steel foundries, but also worked in agriculture and small businesses – wherever their labour was most needed. They were housed in cramped barracks near their work sites, received meager rations, were physically abused by prison guards, and many were forced to perform dangerous work which led to fatal accidents. Mortality rates were relatively high: it is estimated that at least 9,000 Soviet and Polish POWs living in Moselle died of exhaustion, disease, and hunger, or were executed.⁴⁴

Although Alsace did not have any POW camps, its economy relied on inmates at the KL-Natzweiler, the only Nazi concentration camp to be built in France. In 1944, the Mathis factory moved part of its manufacturing to the camp itself, where nearly one thousand men built Junker plane parts under the supervision of German engineers.⁴⁵ Most of the slave labour used in the area, however, came from KL-Natzweiler’s vast network of nearly 70 satellite camps.⁴⁶ KL-Natzweiler-Struthof, located in the Vosges Mountains, approximately 60 km south-west of Strasbourg, was opened in May 1941.⁴⁷ It had been built by prisoners held at the nearby *Sicherungslager* Schirmeck-Vorbrück, opened by the Nazis in July 1940.⁴⁸ In March 1942, prisoners began working at the quarry located within a kilometer of the main camp. Prisoners came from across Europe, but Poles, Jews, Soviet citizens, Czechs, Roma and Frenchmen (one quarter of whom were from Alsace and Moselle) were the largest groups held at the camp.

In December 1943, the first satellite camp was opened near Schömberg (Baden) to provide labour to the local armaments factories. In June, Daimler-Benz in Colmar brought in 1,276 prison-

⁴¹ Archives départementales de la Moselle (ADM), 1 W849.

⁴² Leclercq et al. (note 33), p. 249.

⁴³ Philippe Wilmouth, *Les camps de prisonniers de guerre en Moselle 1940–1948*, Saint-Cyr-sur-Loire 2009.

⁴⁴ Leclercq et al. (note 33), p. 249.

⁴⁵ Robert Steegmann, *Le camp de Natzweiler-Struthof*, Paris 2009, p. 162.

⁴⁶ Nikolaus Wachsmann, *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, New York 2015, p. 205.

⁴⁷ The French often refer to the camp as ‘le Struthof.’

⁴⁸ Between 1940 and 1944, an estimated 15,000 men and women were held at Vorbruck-Schirmeck, some for a few days, and others for several months. Political prisoners, enemies of the regime, homosexuals and ‘anti-social elements’ endured hard labour, hunger, harassment, bullying, and physical and psychological torture. Alsations were hired by the camp as technical and service personnel, and two of the guards in the women’s camp came from neighbouring villages and had married German camp guards.

ers from the camps, although by December only 200 remained. While large German companies such as Daimler-Benz and Siemens relied on prisoners from the satellite camps, local Alsatian businesses, such as Elsässische Maschinenbau GmbH, also benefited from the slave labour provided by the concentration camp system. Working conditions for prisoners were notoriously poor, and mortality rates were high.⁴⁹ In the final months of the war, the SS opened three new KL-Natzweiler satellite camps in Württemberg, as part of project ‘Desert’ (*Wüste*), extracting local shale oil for fuel production.⁵⁰ Thousands of prisoners from Natzweiler and other satellite camps died working on the project.⁵¹ Although Jews were the second largest category of prisoner within the Natzweiler camp system, they were primarily held in the satellite camps. Camp commandant Josef Kramer, who would later become the *Lagerführer* in charge of Auschwitz-Birkenau and Bergen-Belsen, transferred many Jews to work as slave labourers in the Natzweiler satellite camps. All the female prisoners at Natzweiler were held in satellite camps. All of them were Jewish, and most had come from Auschwitz. In total, 52,000 men and women were deported to Natzweiler, 35,000 of whom were sent to satellite camps. Nearly 22,000 prisoners (roughly 40 percent) died in the camps.⁵² These workers could be classified as ‘less-than-slaves’, or, to use Marc Buggeln’s category, they were ‘slave labourers with very high mortality.’ Workers on the verge of death from exhaustion were transferred to the Vaihingen-Enz subcamp which became a ‘dying camp’ (*Sterbelager*).⁵³

Historians of Alsace-Moselle tend to describe the wartime experience of the borderland as uniquely brutal, at least in comparison to the fate that befell Nazi-occupied and Vichy France, histories that have dominated the French national narrative. This characterization is not, however, based on perceptions of the labour regime implemented in the annexed territories of Alsace and Moselle. Rather, scholars highlight the violence of the annexation as it was perpetrated against the region’s local population. Most notably, it is the ‘forced conscription’ of young Alsatian and Mosellan men into the Wehrmacht that remains the focal point of the region’s history and memory of the horrors of Nazism. After the war, the so-called *Malgré-nous* fought to be rec-

⁴⁹ Steegmann (note 45), p. 173.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

⁵¹ Wachsmann (note 46), p. 451.

⁵² Facts and figures provided by the official website of the Struthof: <http://www.struthof.fr/fr/le-kl-natzweiler/les-camps-annexes/les-camps-annexes-du-kl-natzweiler-1942-1945/> [accessed 20 June 2017].

⁵³ Marc Buggeln, Building to Death: Prisoner Forced Labour in the German War Economy – The Neuengamme Subcamps, 1942–1945, in: *European History Quarterly* 39, 4 (2009), p. 621 and footnote 75. Cf. Marc Buggeln, *Zwangsarbeit im Deutschen Reich 1939–1945 und die Entschädigung vormaliger Zwangsarbeiter nach dem Kriegsende. Eine weitgehend statistische Übersicht*, Working Paper No. 4 of the Independent Commission of Historians Investigating the History of the Reich Ministry of Labour (Reichsarbeitsministerium) in the National Socialist Period, eds. Elizabeth Harvey and Kim Priemel, Berlin 2017, https://www.historikerkommission-reichsarbeitsministerium.de/sites/default/files/inline-files/Working%20Paper%20UHK%204_Buggeln_0.pdf [accessed 20 June 2017].

ognized as victims of Nazism and to be compensated for their suffering, and in 1979 the West German government agreed to pay an indemnity of 250 million Marks to them. The Entente Franco-Allemande was established in 1981 to distribute the funds, which were made accessible in 1984. The first memorial to the *Malgré-nous* was erected in Obernai in 1956, and since then other monuments, many commemorating not only those who died in combat but also those who perished in Soviet POW and labour camps, have been erected throughout the region. The *Malgré-nous* have been the subject of films, documentaries, websites, and works of fiction (including children's books and graphic novels). One veterans' group organizes bi-annual pilgrimages to Russia to the site of the former Soviet labour camp of Tambov, and the Mémorial d'Alsace-Moselle, a museum built on the site of the former *Sicherungslager* Vorbruck-Schirmeck, is dedicated in part to telling the story of military conscription. In May 2010 French President Nicolas Sarkozy declared that 'the *Malgré-nous* were not traitors' but were instead 'victims of Nazism (...), victims of a true war crime.'⁵⁴

It is not surprising that the *Malgré-nous* have come to symbolize the regions' victimization at the hands of the Nazis. Over 130,000 men from Alsace and Moselle were drafted by force, and nearly 40,000 lost their lives. But military conscription must also be explored and understood within the larger context of Nazi economic and racial policies in particular. Even a brief overview of Nazi economic and forced labour policies in Alsace and Moselle reveals an interesting paradox. Because the Nazis considered Alsace and Moselle to be historically and racially German, workers enjoyed a privileged status. Yet this privilege came at a cost: compulsory service in the RAD, the KHD and the Wehrmacht. Alsatians and Mosellans who refused to assimilate or serve were considered to be 'bad Germans', and punishment was especially harsh. At the same time that thousands of 'racially fit' political dissidents from Alsace and Moselle were being sent to resettlement camps and farms in other parts of the Reich, 'racially unfit' men and women from Poland and the Soviet Union were being sent to work in Alsace and Moselle. This exchange of labour and movement of people highlight tensions between different agencies and personalities within the Nazi Party, and in particular conflicts that arose when the implementation of racial policies threatened economic efficiency and national security interests, and vice versa. In Alsace and Lorraine, Himmler's subordinates in the apparatus of the *Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums* often complained that Wagner and especially Bürckel were undermining their work by deporting scores of 'racially valuable foreigners'.⁵⁵ Further work is needed to explore

⁵⁴ Discours du président de la République, Nicolas Sarkozy, le 8 mai 2010 à Colmar. Full text available online at <http://discours.vie-publique.fr/notices/107001034.html> [accessed 20 June 2017].

⁵⁵ Uwe Mai, "Rasse und Raum". Agrarpolitik, Sozial- und Raumplanung im NS-Staat, Paderborn 2002, pp. 326-327; Heinemann (note 5), p. 309, 318; Lothar Kettenacker, Nationalsozialistische Volkstumspolitik im Elsass, Stuttgart 1973, p. 251.

how the tensions between Speer, Sauckel, and the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* played out in these Western borderlands.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that until the 1990s little scholarly work had been conducted on the RAD, and only with the publication of Nina Barbier's book in 2000, based on the journalist's 1999 documentary, were women's experiences in the labour service finally explored in any detail. In 2009 Alsatians and Mosellans who had been drafted by force into the RAD and KHD, most of them women who had come to be known as the *Malgré-elles* (in spite of themselves), were compensated for their suffering,⁵⁶ and are now increasingly included in official commemorative practices.

But what of the forced labourers sent to Alsace and Moselle, many of whom were also women? Few historians writing about the annexation of Alsace and Moselle make connections between Nazi economic policies in the region and the use of unfree labour from other parts of occupied Europe. The use of foreign civilian labour and POWs in the region has recently received some scholarly attention, but it is limited. The fate of the region's Jewish population also remains under-researched. Alsace and Moselle continue to a great extent to be portrayed as passive victims, and there has been a general reluctance to engage in research that may implicate the community in Nazi atrocities. But it is clear that while many Alsatians and Mosellans suffered greatly during the Nazi annexation, some local businesses and individuals benefited from their association with the regime, and were thus complicit in its horrors.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Janine Rozier, *Projet de loi de finances pour 2009: Anciens combattants, mémoire et liens avec la Nation*, chap. II. C. Malgré l'indemnisation des "Malgré-elles" et la revalorisation continue de la retraite du combattant, certaines revendications du monde combattant restent insatisfaites [archive], 20 November 2008. Document consulted on the French Senate's website: <http://www.senat.fr/rap/a08-103-1/a08-103-15.html> [accessed 20 June 2017].

⁵⁷ Dostena Anguelova-Lavergne, Struthof, in: *Saisons d'Alsace* 44, 93 (2000).