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Elizabeth Vlossak, *Marianne or Germania: Nationalizing Women in Alsace, 1870-1946*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. xvi and 330 pp. Sources, bibliography, index. \$125.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-019956-1117.

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In her expansive introduction, Elizabeth Vlossak notes that much of the work on the history of Alsace, not to mention analyses of national identity in this disputed border region, has focused on the experience of men. Her *Marianne or Germania* is therefore a promising corrective to the historiography of Alsace and a fine contribution to the broader literatures on gender and nationalism. Vlossak seeks to complicate the old mythologized view of the coiffed Alsatian woman resisting German rule only to embrace the return of France in 1918. Instead, Vlossak pursues the complex interrelationships between class, region, confession, region, and nation, arguing that while Alsatian women did eventually come to embrace a French national identity after 1945, the path to that point was anything but straightforward. Vlossak also wants to interrogate the concepts of civic versus ethnic nationalism and contends that neither fully explicates the nature of national belonging in Alsace. Indeed, throughout the work, Vlossak tries to show the ambiguity of the allegedly "typical" notions of French and German nationalism.

Vlossak's opening chapter explores German attempts to shape the national loyalties of Alsatian women. Germans, like the French after 1918, set about reforming the curriculum and teaching corps of the regional schools. These changes represented a positive change for the small group of women who taught in the system, women who attained one of the highest levels of education and profession possible for women at the time. Yet German officials viewed schools as a mixed blessing. On one hand, schools could educate a new generation of Alsatians to be loyal Germans, especially by blending local and national history, some of which was geared toward girls by stressing regional female exemplars such as St. Odile. On the other hand, women were imperfectly Germanized, in part because many left the school system before their male counterparts. Vlossak argues that German nationalism entered the lives of Alsatian women in the guise of journals, especially those geared toward female readers, and which often portrayed good loyal German women as excellent mothers and housewives. Such women's journals focused on entertainment for women and domestic issues. These journals often promoted only limited gains for women's rights, instead supporting more traditional roles for the largely middle class readership of the papers. Their impact on women was limited, in part due to the diversity of journals in the region along linguistic, political, and confessional lines. Vlossak also contends the idealized image of the *Hausfrau* failed to win over either the Francophile Alsatians more generally, whose attention lay across the Vosges, or the average Alsatian woman in particular, who felt drawn to her Alsatian identity.

On this point, it is a shame that Vlossak does not dwell more on the place of gender in the various regional moments, especially given the importance that she places on Alsatian identity alongside confessional, gender, and national identities. While at times (for example in analyzing *Mulhaeser Tagblatt's* supplemental *Der Hausfreund*) Vlossak gives us glimpses into a gendered regional identity, we never get to see how this fits into the larger strands of cultural regionalism either before or after World War I. To take but two brief possibilities: it would be wonderful to have Vlossak's take on the role of

women in the popular German dialect Alsatian theater, an element largely missing from other analyses of the institution.[1] Or to take another example, one that aligns nicely with the image of Alsatian women portrayed in the journals analyzed above: Strasbourg's Alsatian Museum—a museum that celebrated local traditions and objects of everyday life—depicted women and women's roles in Alsace almost exclusively in their domestic setting. One could find further examples in the various artistic, literary, and cultural movements of the 1920s and 1930s in Alsace in which the gendering of regional identity, much like that at the national level, played a significant role. More generally, it is at the level of regional identity that both French and German nationalists worked hard to make a connection with the local population, often trolling the same territory of traditions, culture, and values. Indeed, Alsatian regionalists of various stripes may have disagreed on issues of national belonging, but they agreed broadly on what it meant to be Alsatian.

The ensuing chapter explores the place of women in the associational life of the Reichsland. Here women contributed to a number of organizations, including but not limited to those geared toward women's suffrage. Here Vlossak argues that many of the women's organizations such as the *Deutsch-Evangelischer Frauenbund* or the *Vaterländischer Frauenverein* in Alsace tended toward a conservative view of women's roles, stressing the notion of "spiritual motherhood" over more radical forms of feminism. National women's organizations in Alsace typically drew from the upper middle classes and often from the so-called *Altdeutsche* in the region, while confessional associations for women often failed to link up with larger national institutions. Thus, German associations failed to win over Alsatian women completely, though Vlossak does argue, in a vein similar to historians such as Jean-Marie Mayeur or Daniel Silverberg, that Alsatians were slowly, if steadily, shifting their loyalties to Germany.[2]

Chapters three and four delve into the impact of World War I and its immediate aftermath in Alsace. Near the front and under suspicion by German authorities, Alsatians faced not only the normal privations of war, but an increased security regime and a strengthened program of Germanization. According to Vlossak, German women's patriotic organizations such as the *National Frauendienst* sought to incorporate Alsatian women in its ranks. Yet as Vlossak makes clear from the handful of extant diaries, Alsatian women felt their contributions as women to the war effort largely were unappreciated. German representatives in organizations such as the Red Cross treated Alsatians with disdain, paralleling the treatment of Alsatian soldiers and civilians more generally and eroding whatever goodwill remained among the Alsatian populace toward Germany. The following chapter at first takes up the aftermath of war, when French officials sought to win over Alsatians. Part of this process focused on revising the educational system and met with mixed results. In addition, a variety of associations sought to offer Alsatians a wide variety of cultural outlets (bilingual newspapers, films, et cetera) to introduce Alsatians to France. Such efforts ran into difficulties in part due to strife over language matters. But the larger problem that loomed was a divergence of expectations, as both Alsatians and the French perceived each other through the lens of stereotypes that had emerged during the long years of separation, but did not reflect the realities of 1919. Here Vlossak turns back to wartime propaganda and offers a deft deconstruction of wartime propaganda, including several musicals, which promoted one vision of the Alsatian woman in her *coiffe*, loyal to France, and resistant to Germanization, a vision which clashed with reality: most Alsatian women no longer wore the *coiffe*, few spoke French, and most were far more religious than their French counterparts.

In the ensuing chapter, Vlossak explores the role of women in interwar Alsace. While several women's organizations tried to draw Alsatian women into the larger French suffrage movement, Alsatian women had to deal with problems particular to their region. Alsatian men who were deemed nationally reliable (i.e. those who were not accused of siding too closely with the German administration, engaging in denunciations against fellow Alsatians during the war, or too heavily criticizing the region's return to France) by post-war triage commissions could pass their French citizenship to their children even if married to foreign nationals. Women, in contrast, could find themselves enduring a lengthy process to reestablish their French citizenship, even though born to the region, if married to a foreigner.

Moreover, unlike male Alsatians who more easily retained their French citizenship, an Alsatian woman deemed French still could not pass along French citizenship to her children if her husband was foreign. Vlossak notes that Alsatian women did not complain about the loss of some rights in comparison to German law, an interesting observation given not only the willingness of Alsatian autonomists to make such complaints later in the 1920s, but also given that German women had been granted suffrage in the Weimar constitution. Associational life remained as brisk as before World War I; however, Alsatian women often flocked to organizations with regional and often confessional ties, rather than the local branches of French national associations. The attempts of the Herriot government to impose laicization upon the Alsatian populace sparked strong protests, protests in which many women especially took part, their language and religion under attack, and putting to rest the myth that Alsatian women were loyal republicans. Sounding a Renanian note, Vlossak argues that lack of common memories coming out of the war, combined with regional interests at odds with national policies, demonstrate the difficulty French national identity had overcoming regional and confessional identities.

During the Second World War when Alsace was effectively incorporated into the Third Reich, Nazi officials sought to win over Alsatian women. While some women did join Nazi women's organizations, Vlossak conjectures that Nazi denigration of local customs, the region's French heritage, and religious piety kept many women away. Women also played a role resisting Nazi rule, though here Vlossak argues Alsatian resistance had more in common with its German than its French counterpart given the region's odd legal status during the war. Once the Germans were pushed out of the region, Alsatian women also suffered from street justice, though often at lower rates of incident than in the rest of France. More importantly, women received the right to vote, a right only slowly exercised by the women of Alsace as they had to deal first with the more mundane realities of reconstruction. Vlossak notes that "full citizenship within the French nation nonetheless ushered in the final stage of their nationalization" (p. 288).

Marianne or Germania makes a valuable contribution to a neglected aspect of Alsatian history, while simultaneously, though unintentionally, showing at least one of the reasons for that very neglect. While Vlossak does a wonderful job of teasing out the extant sources such as newspapers, association minutes, and correspondence, as well as the small collection of contemporary diaries, she at times has to work hard to do so. Many of the women's newspapers explored in chapter one, for example, had limited circulations and press runs and at best cover only a fraction of the diverse experiences of Alsatian women. In places, Vlossak relies on comparisons to other cases studies rather than direct evidence, for example in exploring the appeal of language classes to women after World War I. The limited source base often constrains Vlossak. For example during the war, some of the best diarists left the region, pushing Vlossak to rely primarily on a detailed, engaging analysis of a single diary, that of Elisabeth-Esther Fischer. And not surprisingly, the voices of working class women are difficult to recover. However, such observations are not meant as criticism, but rather reflect the strenuous effort taken in this volume, and a wish that future scholars will strive to build on this solid foundation.

Vlossak's work is thus a welcome addition, one that successfully elucidates the complexities of communal identities, comparatively explores the nature of French and German nation-building, and begins to give women's history in Alsace long overdue attention.

NOTES

[1] Neither Bernhard von Hülsen nor Jack Morrison explores this aspect of the theater in any depth. See Bernhard von Hülsen, *Szenenwechsel in Elsass. Theater und Gesellschaft in Strassburg zwischen Deutschland und Frankreich, 1890–1944* (Leipzig: Leipzig Universität Verlag, 2003), and Jack. G. Morrison, "The Intransigents: The Alsace-Lorrainers against the Annexation, 1900–1914" (Ph.D. diss.,

University of Iowa, 1970). The current reviewer also neglected treatment of gender in his own consideration of the theater.

[2] Jean-Marie Mayeur, *Autonomie et politique en Alsace. La Constitution de 1911* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1970) and Daniel Silverman, *Reluctant Union: Alsace-Lorraine and Imperial Germany, 1871-1918* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1972).

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