

The Franco-Prussian War: Its Impact on France and Germany, 1870-1914

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Historian Niall Ferguson introduced his seminal work on the twentieth century by posing the question “Megalomaniacs may order men to invade Russia, but why do the men obey?”¹ He then sought to answer this question over the course of the text. Unfortunately, his analysis focused on too late a period. In reality, the cultural and political conditions that fostered unparalleled levels of bloodshed in the twentieth century began before 1900. The 1870 Franco-Prussian War and the years that surrounded it were the more pertinent catalyst. This event initiated the environment and experiences that catapulted Europe into the previously unimaginable events of the twentieth century. Individuals obey orders, despite the dictates of reason or personal well-being, because personal experiences unite them into a group of unconscious or emotionally motivated actors. The Franco-Prussian War is an example of how places, events, and sentiments can create a unique sense of collective identity that drives seemingly irrational behavior. It happened in both France and Germany. These identities would become the cultural and political foundations that changed the world in the tumultuous twentieth century.

The political and cultural development of Europe is complex and highly interconnected, making helpful insights into specific events difficult. It is hard to distinguish where one era of history begins or ends. It is a challenge to separate the inherently complicated systems of national and ethnic identities defined by blood, borders, and collective experience. Despite these difficulties, historians have often sought to gain insight into how and why European nations and identities developed as they did. Any answers gained can offer unique insight into how nation-states, cultural loyalties, and historical conflicts alter international stability. It may seem as

¹ Niall Ferguson, *The War of the World: Twentieth-Century Conflict and the Descent of the West* (London: Penguin Press, 2006), xxxix.

though the political and military conflicts of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe have been examined with a fine-tooth comb; however, modern trends in evaluating this time period have obscured important antecedents.

In recent years, the study of World War One and World War Two has been viewed as a single twentieth century conflict defined by causes dating to the turn of the century. A genuine understanding of twentieth century events cannot be obtained though if the era is isolated from the actions and events which preceded it. This perspective limits genuine comprehension. It misses how far earlier military events, cultural ideologies, and expressions of nationalism drove the instigators of both world wars. In particular, the acute animosity between France and Germany originated in the modern era with the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. Each nation created ideals of national superiority that conflicted with the other's, dwelt on a cultural desire for retaliation known as Revanchism, and established patterns of nationalistic expansionism through unilateral military action. All of these habits defined the culture of both countries well before 1914 and motivated their belligerence in the twentieth century.

Looking back on European history, nations seem christened in part by warfare and the iconic individuals who lead them into it or out of it. Conflict becomes the crucible for understanding Europe and its events. The synchronicity of military parades, the inherent valor of ornate uniforms, and the shine of medals representing battles long past; all held a romantic allure, tragically driving the decision making of Europe's greatest leaders. While there are many reasons why France and Germany went to war in 1870, each side of the conflict viewed it as a military demonstration of their vaunted national power. Napoleon III and Bismarck were undoubtedly among the exemplary European leaders of the late nineteenth century. However, in their eagerness for war in 1870 a blindness to the inherent risks developed that appears myopic in

retrospect. Both men were products of the legacy created by the Napoleonic era when men in gilded uniforms forever altered the face of Europe in battles that were recorded for posterity and remembered nostalgically. Bismarck and Napoleon III each saw war as a means to solidify their nation as a Great Power. They held to the romantic image of warfare that originated with the generations that came before. Both men believed that the 1870 conflict would be a heroic test of national virtue. France and Germany went to war based on false images and incorrect chosen narratives. The hubris and myopia from their leaders set the stage for a world inadvertently transformed by a new vision of what warfare entailed and what its true purpose could become.

The Franco-Prussian War had a profound effect on the development of France and Germany because it occurred during a period when each nation was struggling to form a unified national identity comparable to the modern idea of a nation-state. In the nineteenth century, the concept of building a nation-state became a fundamental orientation of politics as nationalistic movements spread through Poland, Ireland, Italy, and Germany.² These movements for independence and consolidation through the creation of an overarching national culture and political structure radically changed how countries understood themselves. For Germany, the unification process was highly contested by proud principalities, while France struggled to rationalize a national identity beyond a political description like Imperial or Republican. The 1870 conflict sparked a dialogue in each nation on what it meant to be French or German.

The basis for the conflict between France and Germany extended back to the Rhine crisis of 1840 when France renewed its claim to the Rhine River as its natural border. Germany viewed this political move as a threatening escalation and an infringement on their shared border. Both

² Mark Hewitson, *Nationalism in Germany, 1848-1866 Revolutionary Nation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 17.

nations wanted the rich agrarian territory of the Rhine region. The river became a symbolic representation of each nation's cultural and physical autonomy. Max Schneckenburger, a German poet, wrote "Die Wacht am Rhein" during the 1840 crisis to call on the German kingdoms and principalities to set aside old grievances and rivalries in favor of unified defense. The poem evolved into a tune sung in public celebrations at the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War as the German public "gave witness to their enthusiasm for the coming struggle."³ The symbolism of the song continued throughout the war as it was sung by soldiers heading into battle in 1870, imploring "thy sons to watch the Rhine!"⁴ and defend the German Fatherland. The poem turned song clearly delineated between Germans as a "heroic race" and the French as their polar opposite, little better than swine, while emphasizing the Rhine River as the rightful separation between the two. Among German politicians, the conflict with France also emphasized an idea that originated in the 1848 revolution that "The most powerful national groups deserved to create their own states, with the 'right of a group of people to build a state' resting 'on the power to do so.'"⁵ The Franco-Prussian War offered an opportunity to prove the strength of the German state internationally as a military power and as a developing nation-state.

The Franco-Prussian War also had such a marked effect on both France and Germany because, despite Germany being the clear victor, the actual responsibility for the conflict and controversial actions during it became increasingly unclear as the war continued past a few months. France declared war on Germany on July 16th. Hostilities began three days later;

³ Friedrich Wilhelm Nikolaus Karl, *The War Diary of the Emperor Frederick III 1870-1871*, trans. A. R. Allinson, M.A. (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company Publishers, 1926), 6.

⁴ Max Scheckenburger, "Die Wacht am Rhein" *The World's Story: A History of the World in Story, Song, and Art*, vol. 7, *Germany, The Netherlands and Switzerland*, ed. Eva March Tappan (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1914) Accessed in German History in Documents and Images online database, Volume 4. Forging and Empire: Bismarckian Germany. Accessed Oct, 18 2015. http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1784

⁵ As quoted by Julius Fröbel in Mark Hewitson's *Nationalism in Germany*. 19.

however, both countries had been planning for war for several years. Napoleon III's plans for military engagement went back to quiet meetings with his closest military advisors in 1866. However, their proposals were designed as contingencies if Germany crossed the Rhine. They only evolved into offensive plans years later.⁶ Germany, particularly Prussia through Bismarck's leadership, also prepared for war long before it began. These preparations prompted Bismarck to heavily edit the Ems telegram in a successful attempt to draw France into a conflict on his terms.

The Ems Telegram Incident began with the diplomatic crisis occurring over the line of succession for the Spanish throne. Both the French and German people were invested in possible outcomes.⁷ Prior to the telegram being published on July 13th, France and Germany were already heading toward war. French military movements and threatening demands led Germany to respond with an ultimatum requiring France to expressly declare peaceful intentions towards Germany. None of these positions could easily be backed down from. In aggrandized statements to the press after the war declaration, Bismarck claimed to have been dining with Prussian generals Roon and Moltke when he received the Ems telegram. After asking the generals if Prussia was ready for war, and receiving an affirmative response, Bismarck heavily edited the telegram so the published interview concerning the French ambassador was presented as “a calculated insult to German national pride.”⁸

The existence of the Ems telegram, and the ability to manipulate how it was publically perceived, gave Bismarck an ideal pretext for war that fit perfectly with his already planned counter-offensives to a French invasion. The French and German politicians and public reacted

⁶ Vizetelly, *My Days of Adventure*, 34.

⁷ David Wetzel, *A Duel of Giants: Bismarck, Napoleon III, and the Origins of the Franco-Prussian War* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 131-4.

⁸ Carr, *The Origins of the Wars of German Unification*, 196-7.

just as Bismarck hoped, leading almost immediately to the outbreak of war. When France began the war in 1870 it did so under the leadership of Prime Minister Émile Ollivier who stated that France declared war “with a light heart.”⁹ This sentiment underscored the collective initial belief that the country’s victory would be swift and absolute. Prime Minister Ollivier also sought to claim the moral high ground at this point, before the true details of the Ems Telegram Incident were appreciated. He did so by saying that the war had been forced on France and that he and his colleagues had done everything possible to avoid it. Ollivier’s statements fueled public support by showing the nation’s desire to go to war while freeing itself from the moral responsibility attached to declarations of war and the suffering they produce. When assigning blame for the conflict, as Vizetelly asserted in his autobiography in 1914 when Revanchism over 1870 reached new heights, “A trial of strengths was regarded on both sides as inevitable, and both sides contributed to bringing it about.”¹⁰ Despite this, both countries preferred to ignore the shared blame in favor of assigning it to their opponent in the decades that followed.

The Franco-Prussian War had a far more immediate unifying effect on Germany than on France because France was responsible for declaring war and technically instigating the conflict. Germany had to defend its border against invasion in 1870. Bismarck cleverly used this defensive stance as justification for why unification was crucial to all German principalities. France would not feel the effects of the conflict on unifying national identity until several weeks into the invasion when Emperor Napoleon III was captured at the Battle of Sedan. Almost immediately after the onset of the conflict, German politicians, academics, and artists began to emphasize unification as vital to military success against France. Ferdinand Freiligrath wrote a

⁹ Vizetelly, *My Days of Adventure*, 52.

¹⁰ Vizetelly, *My Days of Adventure*, 26.

patriotic poem “Hurrah, Germania!” just days after France declared war. In it, he proclaimed that “Old feuds, old hates are dash’d aside/All German men are one!”¹¹ and “One soul, one arm, one close-knit frame/One will are we to-day.”¹² This language illustrated the immediate effect of the Franco-Prussian War in removing the old barriers to German unification.

For decades, dating back to the Treaty of Westphalia and the Congress of Vienna, Germany had struggled with fragmentation, degrees of unification, and clarifying which regions of Europe were truly ‘German.’¹³ The Franco-Prussian War also provided a public opportunity for many of the southern German states to prove their loyalty to the German idea of the collective acting in unison. In his war diary from 1870 when he was still Crown Prince, Emperor Frederick III expressed how

“who could ever have believed that my Southern Army, whose motley combination of the most splendid troops of South Germany with regiments of many Provinces only embodied in the Empire four short years ago was hardly likely to awaken any real confidence in anyone, should have held such great deeds in reserve.”¹⁴

Even Frederick III, with his elite access to German military intelligence and personal experience leading contingents of German troops, was shocked by the advantages that Germany gained over the course of the war through unification. The 1870 conflict offered a new opportunity to strengthen German kingdoms and principalities by finally solving the ‘German question.’

War with France, justified politically and socially by the attack on Germany, allowed a new generation to emotionalize and participate in this new German national identity. The identity

¹¹ Ferdinand Freiligrath. “Hurrah, Germania”, *The Age of Bismarck: Documents and Interpretations*, ed. Theodore S. Hamerow (New York: Harper&Row, 1973) 96-7. Accessed in German History in Documents and Images online database, Volume 4. Forging an Empire: Bismarckian Germany. Accessed October 18 2015. http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1735

¹² Ferdinand Freiligrath. “Hurrah, Germania.”

¹³ Mark Hewitson. *Nationalism in Germany*. 31.

¹⁴ Friedrich, *The War Diary of the Emperor Frederick III 1870-1871*, 109.

grew in part from an individual's, or a loved one's, military service to Germany. These feelings and experiences would eventually extend to the point of a citizen's loyalty to the nation becoming a secular religion. A translated excerpt from a laborer, Franz Rehbein, who fought in the Franco-Prussian War, illustrated how rural Germans, who would otherwise be loyal to their regional politicians and nobles, found a connection to the 'German Fatherland' through their military service. Rehbein's description of a discussion among veterans from Eastern Pomerania showed this rural nationalism. Endearingly, it mentioned a fellow veteran of the 1870 campaign who "preserved his black hussar's cap, complete with the death's-head, as though it were a sacred relic," as well as other expressions of nationalistic sentiments from older veterans of the 1866 campaigns, the Polish invasions, and the Wars of Liberation.¹⁵

Where the pride of rural regions was once an obstacle to German unification, this journal showed how rural areas became a fundamental part of the nation-state after 1870, taking pride in their role in its creation. Similarly, in France, following the fall of Napoleon III at Sedan, continued loyalty to the Empire based on military service and differing ideals which stemmed from it divided citizens. Soldiers who had fought under the Imperial eagle for the Bonaparte regime in foreign conflicts had to watch as the regime they had honorably defended was torn apart by the will of the people and cries of "Vive la République!"¹⁶

France began the Franco-Prussian War as the Second French Empire under Emperor Napoleon III. Following his capture, Paris revolted and the Third French Republic began. As news of the defeat and Napoleon III's surrender spread, sentiments in the rural regions ratified

¹⁵ Franz Rehbein, *Das Leben eines Landarbeiters* [The Life of a Farm Worker] (orig. 1911), ed Urs J. Diederichs and Holger Rudel. Hamburg: Christians, 1987. Trans: Erwin Fink. 2. From German History in Documents and Images, Vol 4. Forging and Empire: Bismarckian Germany.

¹⁶ Alfred Ernest Vizetelly, *My Days of Adventure: The Fall of France (1870-71)*, (London: Chatto&Windus, 1914) 78.

the revolt. When France declared war on Germany, it did so to address a perceived rising threat to its cultural and political dominance of the European continent. Napoleon III and his government also fell under pressure from the French public and press to respond to the national insult created by Bismarck's alteration of the Ems telegram before it was published in the German press.¹⁷ Alfred Ernest Vizetelly was in Paris the day France declared war. In his autobiography from his time as a British war correspondent during the 1870 conflict, he described how:

“the Emperor was influenced both by national and by dynastic considerations. The rise of Prussia –which had become head of the North German Confederation –was without a doubt a menace not only to the French ascendancy on the Continent, but also to France's general interests. On the other hand, the prestige of the Empire having been seriously impaired, in France itself, by the diplomatic defeats which Bismarck had inflicted on Napoleon, it seemed that only a successful war, waged on the Power from which France had received these successive rebuffs, could restore the aforesaid prestige and ensure the duration of the Bonaparte dynasty.”¹⁸

Napoleon III declared war in part to protect his personal legacy and France's future, but also to protect the preeminent status that the nation had held since the glory of Napoleon I's reign. He was inspired by memories of his predecessor soundly defeating the German kingdoms and establishing French cultural and military superiority over the Continent.

Napoleon III's aspirations were severely undermined by fundamental disconnects between how the French government approached the war, how French citizens viewed it, and the failures of communication among all parties concerning the conflict. In the first months of the war, the French War Minister Palikao, the third War Minister in only fifty days, was “like other fervent partisans of the dynasty, afraid to let the Parisians know the true state of affairs.”¹⁹ When

¹⁷ William Carr, *The Origins of the Wars of German Unification* (New York: Longman Group, 1991), 196-7.

¹⁸ Vizetelly, *My Days of Adventure*, 25-6.

¹⁹ Vizetelly, *My Days of Adventure*, 55.

the Franco-Prussian War began, the militaries of both France and Germany guaranteed victory to political leaders and their populations. Initially France appeared to be the aggressor, but after the initial border skirmishes of the war, Germany immediately began to push the French forces back across the Rhine and into their homeland. Quickly, the German public became “drunk with the unheard-of, unhoped-for success of its arms”²⁰ and once a potential victory became conceivable, the population and Bismarck refused any ideas of consenting to peace without territorial gains. The French people suffered from an inherent lack of understanding over how the war was progressing or the implications the country would face if it lost. Erroneously, they still viewed the conflict as a “promenade to Berlin.”²¹ When the realities of the conflict finally became apparent to the French public, their military had already suffered defeats like the Battle of Wörth. Almost simultaneously the Germans out-marched the French forces and cornered them at Sedan in the Ardennes region of France, leading to the pivotal battle of the war.

In only a few short days, the population within Paris went from expecting victory to facing an imminent siege and in desperate need of good news from the front line. Paris fell into turmoil as the middle-class French citizens capable of removing themselves from danger fled. The poor and families from the Paris suburbs and beyond rushed away from the German advance and crowded the heart of the city, creating a breeding ground for mass panic and paranoia. Foreigners were summarily expelled from the city, suddenly classified as either useless mouths to feed or potential spies. The population became even more panicked as injured soldiers from the disastrous defeat at the Battle of Wörth entered the city.²² This train of bloodied men brought

²⁰ Geoffrey Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German conquest of France in 1870-1871* (New York : Cambridge University Press, 2003), 304.

²¹ Vizetelly, *My Days of Adventure* 56.

²² Vizetelly, *My Days of Adventure*, 61-4.

Parisians face to face with the realities of the failures of the French military and Napoleon III, which furthered the public's rapid disillusionment with the Napoleonic dynasty.

When the first reports of the Battle of the Sedan reached Paris, false claims of a victory spread through the city. It was not until two days later, on September 3rd, that Palikao informed the French Chamber that General MacMahon's forces had been defeated and that Napoleon III had surrendered. That same night, the French Legislative power put forth a motion to dethrone Napoleon III though it was postponed until the Chamber reconvened the next day. Vizetelly described how, as he and his father walked the streets of Paris, news of Napoleon III's surrender began to reach citizens and almost immediately, "imprecations were leveled at the Empire, and it was already suggested that the country had been sold to a foreigner."²³ As anger against the Empire mounted overnight, Paris fractured and troops had to be sent out to disperse the growing crowds that called for revolution. In only a few days, France had gone from a prestigious unified Empire to a country conquered and humiliated by Germany.

France lost its national prestige and superior international status. Even worse, it faced an internal power struggle as German forces continued to march on Paris. In the ensuing confusion, Napoleon III and the Bonaparte dynasty fell. The domestic political desperation and social upheaval resulted in the Third Republic. This name change was more than a shift in who held the reins of power. It was actually a cataclysm that would forever shape the future of France. Particularly within Paris, a new collective was forming. The French world view changed. Ordinary people began to use a changed and national mindset. This paradigm shift seemed the

²³ Vizetelly, *My Days of Adventure*, 67.

best solution to France's woes because "an imperfect nation-state was, in the eyes of most nationalists, preferable to no nation-state at all."²⁴

The belief in the need for a collective French national identity based on republican beliefs and values, widely held, mounted as the failures of the deposed imperial government became known to the public, leaving France desperate for effective leadership. To the despairing French population, republican beliefs based on Rousseau and the ideals of the French Revolution offered a chance for collective success. A new national identity based on the development of a universal citizen, and a new form of government which utilized popular sovereignty rather than imperial rule, might each help France avoid the mistakes of its past.²⁵ France had a long tradition of revolutionary ideas undermining the legitimacy of new regimes. The Third Republic leaders actively sought to avoid this pattern. In a soul-searching, identity-creating process, the newly rising form of France's nationalism became tied to the outcome of the war as slogans such as 'Vive la République!' and 'Mort aux Prussiens!' were scrawled together on the walls of Paris. The air of revolution and despair over the loss of Sedan became replaced by a universal belief that, having rejected the Empire, France would quickly be able to repel the German invaders.²⁶ This hope proved to be naively optimistic. The new national identity of France would be defined only after the Franco-Prussian War ended, with France humiliated, occupied, and deprived of territory and some of its people.

As the Franco-Prussian War progressed, nationalistic sentiments increased with the victories or losses for each side and as the politicians of each country attempted to justify their

²⁴ Ferguson, *The War of the World*, 75.

²⁵ Maurice Cranston, "The French Revolution: Ideas and Ideologies", *History Today* 39. No. 5 (May 1989), Accessed November 9, 2015. <http://www.historytoday.com/maurice-cranston/french-revolution-ideas-and-ideologies>

²⁶ Vizetelly, *My Days of Adventure*, 81.

actions, while undermining the leadership actions of any opponents. Following the fall of Napoleon III and the Second Empire and the start of the Third Republic in France, German politicians speaking before the Reichstag differentiated between French citizens and French leadership by laying the blame for the war and France's hardships with "a small circle of people at the helm of [French] national affairs" who were responsible for "all of the misery that has befallen you [the French people]"²⁷

By the end of the war, when Germany emerged victorious with French territorial concessions of Alsace and Lorraine, the German people viewed this territorial stripping as perfectly just. They remembered Napoleon III began the war flippantly as a 'Promenade to Berlin' with a goal to take the Rhine regions within Germany. To the German leadership and public, Germany was within its rights to do the same after being the victim of attack.²⁸ The discrepancy between how each nation understood responsibility for starting the Franco-Prussian War fueled the unique blend of anger and pride known as Revanchism to the point that it lasted well into the twentieth century. The conflict left France humiliated and without a clear direction, while Germany began to feel unjustly targeted by international politicians and academics who believed that German actions during the war were excessive. Beyond the initial days of victory and the 1871 Treaty of Frankfurt, both countries suffered unexpected repercussions from the war.

The ending of the Franco-Prussian War left Germany with a new unified identity and clear military superiority over France; however, the effects of the war were not all as Bismarck

²⁷ Helmut Hirsch, *August Bedel. Sein Leben in Dokumenten, Reden un Schriften* [August Bedel: His Life in Documents, Speeches, and Written Works], (Cologne and Berlin: Kiepenheuer&Witsch, 1968) 3. From German History in Documents and Images, Vol 4. Forging and Empire: Bismarckian Germany.

²⁸ C.C. Eckhardt, "The Alsace-Lorraine Question", *The Scientific Monthly* 4, no. 5 (1918): 439.
<http://jstor.org/stable/22512>

had intended. Bismarck manipulated of the Ems Telegram Incident to draw France into a military engagement because he, along with other high ranking German politicians, believed that 1870 was the right time and environment to reestablish the German Empire on the global stage. Once victory was achieved, they believed that there could be “no more favorable moment than at this moment when our King stands at the head of the German host as victor over France on French soil”²⁹ to declare the German Empire’s return. Despite the firm belief of German leadership in their righteous and justified action, the international perception of Germany was tainted by Prussian actions during the Siege of Paris, such as the bombardment of the civilian population. Other nations viewed these as an excessive, unjustifiable use of force.

Small segments of the population within Germany began to express sentiments of concern that “the pestilence from which the conquered are suffering may also infect the victors.”³⁰ To this small minority, in victory, Germany exposed itself to a moral depravity and callousness towards mass death and suffering that had previously been foreign to the German people. The documented mistreatment of French civilians along the front lines of the war as it moved into France’s interior became well known throughout Europe by the time that the siege of Paris began. Yet the pillaging and destruction that accompanied the retreat following the Battle of Sedan were perpetrated just as often by French soldiers as by Germans, leaving both sides morally responsible.³¹

To the vocal dissenters within Germany, victory achieved by sacrificing moral righteousness might well undermine the social and political structures of the German nation

²⁹ Friedrich, *The War Diary of the Emperor Frederick III*, 102.

³⁰ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Letters of Jacob Burckhardt*, ed. and trans. Erwin Fink, (London: Routledge&Kegan Paul, 1955) 143-57. Accessed through the German History in Documents and Images online database.

³¹ Vizetelly, *My Days of Adventure*, 167.

when those marauding soldiers, and the generals who allowed them to behave in such a manner, returned home victorious. The actions of French soldiers who turned on civilians could have just as easily been the behavior of Germans on the other side of the Rhine had the tides of the war reversed in France's favor. These valid concerns resurged following the war because some believed that such a victory, at the cost of civilian lives and through establishing dangerous precedents for future conflicts, should not be celebrated: "Just in victory lies defeat; Prussia's sword proves Prussia's scourge."³² By the conclusion of the war, Germany had so effectively defeated France that they had tried "to humiliate the vanquished profoundly in his own eyes, so that he should never again really trust himself to achieve anything."³³ The utter disdain with which Germans viewed France following the end of the conflict, and the extreme lengths to which the German government went to humiliate all of France, together fueled French Revanchism. Throughout the following decades animosity between these two nations undermined their foreign policy action and lead to the easy revival of Revanchism and armed conflict in the twentieth century.

The precedent of expansion within Europe created by the German annexation of Alsace and Lorraine was a radical challenge to the status quo of nations within Europe. If historians and politicians looked far enough into any region's history, any number of competing claims could be made over which nation a given territory belonged to. Europe's convoluted history of monarchies, duchies, free towns, empires, and the innumerable times in which any given territory changed hands and leadership, created a paradox where the legitimacy of many of the defined borders of the nineteenth century could be questioned. As the German socialist politician August

³² Henrik Ibsen, "Ibsen's Balloon Letter- 1870," *The English Review* 18 (Aug.-Nov. 1914), 501-12. Trans. Andrew Runni Anderson. Accessed through the German History in Documents and Images online database.

³³ Burckhardt, *The Letters of Jacob Burckhardt*, 143-4.

Bebel asserted before the Reichstag in November 1870 during the Franco-Prussian War, the same justifications that Germany gave for demanding Alsace and Lorraine could one day be used against Germany as well.³⁴

As the Franco-Prussian War progressed beyond a border skirmish or an overly sensationalized political disagreement, it began to be widely seen as inaugurating a new era of wars and a new operational model for nation-states.³⁵ The press covered the daily developments of the war throughout Europe as it threatened the status quo and stability of the continent and the public followed avidly. The conflict internationally publicized German ideals which dated back to the revolutions of 1848 where power alone justified the right of a group to build a state.³⁶ The pertinent laboratory for testing this theory of power though was war. Suddenly, Germany and all European nations began to contemplate the path laid out by the Franco-Prussian War. Warfare had been transformed into the means to prove the ability to create a desired nation-state.

With the French military defeated and its population left humiliated, the new republican government had to decide how to address French national failures of 1870 while also moving past them. The conclusion of the Franco-Prussian War ignited a collective mindset of ‘never again’ historians classified as Revanchism. The French people and French government devoted themselves to trying to avoid any kind of similar national humiliation in the future. This desire would drive French foreign and domestic policy into the twentieth century, leading toward World War One. The loss of 1871 became deeply engrained in French culture and national identity with the Alsace-Lorraine region taking on the function of the ‘lost provinces’ to be actively mourned by an embittered people. The collective remembrance became a hallmark of

³⁴ Helmut Hirsch, *August Bedel. Sein Leben in Dokumenten*, 3.

³⁵ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Letters of Jacob Burckhardt*, 3-4.

³⁶ Hewitson, *Nationalism in Germany*, 19.

political and media debate. Every year following 1871 until the outbreak of World War One a wreath was placed on the Strassbourg Monument in the Place de la Concorde in Paris while the statue itself was veiled constantly in black “to remind the French of the country’s bereavement.”³⁷ For several decades, France was distracted from these toxic ideas of Revanchism by colonial expansion in Africa and the Pacific region. Alsace and Lorraine, however, remained a part of the nation’s active European foreign policy. Revanchism would resurge with the slightest provocation from Germany or other threats to the French nation.

In the years which followed the Franco-Prussian War, when crafting a public narrative on the loss of 1870, the Paris Commune became crucial to explaining the defeat and the legitimacy of the Third Republic. The famous Commune actually grew out of the Prussian siege on Paris and played a complicated role in the conclusion of the war and in the unification of Republican France. France has always had a precarious balance of power between its leadership and the mass population dating back to the French Revolution of 1789. Historically, regimes never lasted long and leaders were often brought down by the same public who put them in power in the first place. Throughout France’s history, there was a distinct separation between those who saw themselves as ‘Frenchmen’ versus those who saw themselves as ‘Parisians.’ The cause of the distinction, and the anger bubbling underneath it, extended from how the provinces believed that Paris, in its push for centralization, overrode or overlooked the opinions and best interests of the rest of the country. Parisians, on the other hand, saw their desires for modernization impeded by the neediness and backwardness of the rural population. During the Franco-Prussian War, the

³⁷ C.C. Eckhardt, “The Alsace-Lorraine Question.

Germans capitalized on these frustrations as they progressed through the French countryside and fully exploited them once they neared Paris.³⁸

Once the Franco-Prussian War ended, uncertainty still gripped the nation as many Frenchmen questioned both the legitimacy, and the ability, of the Republican government to govern the nation. The Paris Commune underscored these fears as it held the city, and its inherent French heritage, hostage. The violent suppression of the Commune finally proved that the Republicans could maintain order within rebellious France. Through the bloody execution of the Communards, the Republican government legitimized itself to the citizens of Paris and established its hold on the capital city. Strong action also led the French peasantry and rural provinces to begin to overcome their initial qualms and accept the new government. In the decades which followed, the Commune and Communards also became useful scapegoats in a newly created narrative where France had been ‘stabbed in the back’ by a duplicitous imperial government and unpatriotic elements within the citizenry rather than losing due to weakness as a nation.³⁹ Following the fall of the Paris Commune, this mythos elevated the Third Republic, allowing it to maintain its rule over France.

When studying the Franco-Prussian War it may seem as though the physical conflict and ensuing political turmoil addressed the identity issues and division within France and Germany. While 1871 was a pivotal year for both nations, it was only the beginning for the unification and modernization of France and Germany under their new national identities. The German Empire and the French Third Republic that came into existence in 1871, however, both faced an arduous task in their struggle for internal consolidation and stabilization. Nationbuilding had only just

³⁸ Friedrich, *The War Diary of the Emperor Frederick III 1870-1871*, 108.

³⁹ Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War*, 308-10.

begun.⁴⁰ While Germany and France now have illustrious cultural and political histories, it is important to understand that the national identities that were legitimized in 1871 were that of young nations. In the industrializing and globalizing international environment of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries both France and Germany experienced growing pains domestically and internationally. France sought to prove that its humiliating defeat in 1871 was a fluke brought on by Napoleon III mishandling the nation. Germany was simply determined to solidify its position as a new world power. In their urgency to define themselves, France and Germany came to view national identity through either blood, described as sacrifice for the nation or an individual's heritage, or through soil, determined by physical territory and its unique culture as it connects to the collective nation. Blood and soil ideology would come to play a major role in the twentieth century. These concepts were initially understood through the successes and failures of the Franco-Prussian War, shaping prevailing mindsets through the decades which followed.

1871 was not the first time that regime changes or political upheaval reshaped France or Germany. The late nineteenth century period though is unique for how each nation transformed itself using old ideas and heritage and redefining them for a new era using the national identities developed through the Franco-Prussian War. Staying power for the Third Republic would come from "its ability to attract citizens into its fold."⁴¹ By reverting back to the nation's republican heritage and the emotional ties to 'citizen' which originated in 1789, the Third Republic linked the stability and legitimacy of the new governance structure with ideals such as *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. In addition, the cultural permeation of the idea of 'never again' led to citizenship

⁴⁰ James Retallack, *Imperial Germany 1871-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 182.

⁴¹ Paul B. Miller, *From Revolutionaries to Citizens: Antimilitarism in France, 1870-1914* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 3.

being associated with responsibilities to the entire national community. A key inherent responsibility was military service to protect the *patire*.⁴²

For the newly formed German Empire, long term strength came through balancing the dynastic conflicts between the German states, while consolidating them under the imperial banner. Much of the success for this balancing act occurred in the years following 1871 as Bismarck used the military and political strength of Prussia to replace local pride with imperial pride throughout Germany. He also stressed the introduction of liberal principles into the German federal constitution. “To insure union, he gave liberty” and by providing universal suffrage in the newly formed German empire, Bismarck surmounted the petty infighting between dynastic princes that had undermined German unification attempts in 1848.⁴³

By 1871, a single generation of Germans had experienced three victorious wars which inspired an intense pride in German arms and its leadership. This pride crossed provincial boundaries and spread through all German states at a time when France found itself redefined by loss.⁴⁴ Under these environments of liberal politics, militarized leadership, and class unification in France and Germany both countries entered a period of armed peace. Having humiliated France and torn Alsace and Lorraine from the French *patire*, Germany knew it could only maintain its international standing through constant military preparedness. Once France recovered from the defeat of the Franco-Prussian War it too implemented a stance of national preparedness. It eyed their common eastern border with trepidation, expecting an eventual conflict as “not believing in peace, the Germans do not know how to organize peace.”⁴⁵ Late

⁴² Miller, *From Revolutionaries to Citizens*, 3-5.

⁴³ Robert Herndon Fife Jr., *The German Empire Between Two Wars: A Study of the Political and Social Development of the Nation between 1871 and 1914* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916), 102.

⁴⁴ Gordon A. Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army 1640-1945* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1955), 217.

⁴⁵ As quoted in Fife Jr., *The German Empire Between Two Wars*, 72.

nineteenth century in Europe was thus defined by highly patriotic collectivist-oriented societies, which were always a proverbial tinder box once anyone threw in a lit match. In the mean time, nationalistic and militaristic groups undermined stability within each nation leading to almost constant domestic turmoil between 1871 and 1914.

One of the most significant and unique developments of these decades between is the evolution of class structures and identities. Nations are inherently defined by their citizen's worldviews and motivating values. During the interwar period, French and German citizens found new ways to define themselves and their relationship with the state at both an individual and collective level. Prior to 1871 and in the years immediately following, both nations faced inherent divisions between rural and urban populations. More than merely geographic divides, these different daily living experiences created inherent identity conflicts based on heritage, education, economic and political participation. It thus influenced each group's ability to understand the other. Only with the address these divisions could France and Germany ensure their strength internationally would not be hindered by domestic turmoil. Class and land ownership established the nineteenth century social structure in each nation. The middle class, industrialization, and communication altered that social structure without eliminating its role altogether. Finally, writers like Karl Marx were writing during this period about the importance of that social structure, acting as that potential lit match driving turmoil.

Early on in both the Third Republic and German Empire each government had to address the historic divisions within their populations. In France, from before 1789 until 1871, rural citizens viewed urban French, particularly Parisians, as being driven by violence. Prior to modernized communication methods and increased literacy, the typical rural French understanding of Paris came from sensationalized word of mouth accounts of crowds parading

through Parisian streets by torchlight, leaving trails of bloodshed and destruction. The rural population viewed Republicanism as an urban movement which had historically triggered disorder, high taxes, and inflation. The imagery of urban violence was only reinforced by the 1871 Paris Commune when French citizens were as responsible for the upheaval and violence as the invading German forces.⁴⁶ By the time peace was signed in 1871, the rural French population had distanced themselves from the conflict due to their inherent dislike of Republicanism. They had also shifted their understanding of the ‘enemy’ from the invading Prussians to the urban communards in Paris who appeared responsible for destabilizing the nation.⁴⁷

Similarly, rural German populations believed rumors that squalor, poverty, and criminals completely defined urban life.⁴⁸ For urban populations, particularly in France, rural citizens were viewed as a stabilizing force on the nation because of their traditionally-oriented culture and their relative size. In 1870, peasants comprised 75 percent of the French population.⁴⁹ French politicians in particular viewed the peasantry as “the reservoir of French society,” balancing out the urban working class which weighed French society down.⁵⁰ The traditional rural communities within both nations were perceived to be providing a social and moral context for the newly developed national identities. The rural traditions also helped sustain the illusion of historical continuity despite the upheaval that followed the Franco-Prussian War. Until France and Germany addressed these prevailing misconceptions, domestic political and economic divides continued to threaten to tear the transforming young nations apart.

⁴⁶ Michael Burns, *Rural Society and French Politics: Boulangism and the Dreyfus Affair, 1886-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 146-7.

⁴⁷ Geoffrey Wawro, *Warfare and Society in Europe 1792-1914* (London: Routledge, 2000), 121.

⁴⁸ Retallack, *Imperial Germany 1871-1918*, 42-3.

⁴⁹ Wawro, *Warfare and Society in Europe*, 119.

⁵⁰ As quoted in Burns, *Rural Society and French Politics*, 170.

Following the Franco-Prussian War, France and Germany each had to face rapid and drastic population changes, fueling that domestic turmoil. The shift from a dominant agrarian to a majority industrial workforce led both nations to question their assumed notions of what created citizens and tied their loyalty to the nation. As families left provincial territories en masse in favor of factory work in urban centers, the ability for citizens to maintain their physical and emotional connection to the land and soil itself was called into question. Between 1871 and 1914, the population of Berlin alone quadrupled to 3.7 million citizens, many of whom had left rural homes to live and work in crowded, unsafe conditions.⁵¹ In 1882 the rural population employed in agriculture was the largest segment of the population in Germany. By 1895 it would be replaced by industry. Thus by the early twentieth century, only one in four Germans still depended on agriculture for their livelihood.⁵² This transition away from the agricultural and rural dominance with its attendant loss of traditional culture, homogeneous communities, and loyalty to the local ruling family called into question the very tenets of German society.

During the same years, France experienced an exodus from provincial areas to urban centers. This physical shift created a fear among French leadership that a large portion of the population was living without loyalty to a region or the security provided by land ownership. The perception grew that urban workers simply ‘punched a clock’ and did not hold the same stake or responsibility for French society or its stability that their rural counterparts did.⁵³ In addition to the absorption of the rural population into towns and cities, certain regions of rural France showed more deaths than births in an 1883 study of population in France. This study predicted that if the population trends continued it could “in course of time reduce the relative power of the

⁵¹ Retallack, *Imperial Germany 1871-1918*, 64.

⁵² Retallack, *Imperial Germany 1871-1918*, 69.

⁵³ Wawro, *Warfare and Society in Europe*, 119.

French nation to a degree of inferiority such as could never be produced by pestilence or disastrous warfare.” Further, it created a widespread belief that the only hope for the nation lay in “the Frenchman, and, above all, the Frenchwoman, [becoming] so attached to the soil of la belle France” that they would aid its recovery.⁵⁴ The widening division between economic and social groups threatened to undermine the unifying national identities that had been produced by the Franco-Prussian War, even while they still were developing.

The solution for both nations to the ensuing confusion lay in the growth of the middle class, despite being the group most drawn to military service and symbolism, particularly that connected to the Franco-Prussian War. This was the most economically productive group with little to gain and everything to lose should another war occur. Nevertheless its expansion, while it glorified expressions of military strength and glamour in both countries, meant yet more matches were waiting to be struck alight. The Franco-Prussian War irrevocably connected the legitimacy and national identities of everyone in the Third Republic or the German Empire with the actions of their military. Another unexpected result of the war that had a significant role in the twentieth century was a new respect for military service within Paris. During the course of the Franco-Prussian War, the French people went from being too frightened of rebellion to arm their own National Guard troops within Paris to embracing military service as a sign of devotion to the new Republic. After 1871, French citizens ceased viewing soldiers first and foremost as potential thieves and increasingly saw them as “our troops.” Military service became a preferred way to educate and civilize young men.⁵⁵ In fact, more civilians fought in the Franco-Prussian War or were directly impacted by it, than by any other French conflict since the Revolutionary

⁵⁴ “Decay of Population in France,” *The Times* (London, England) January 25, 1883, pg 3, Issue 30726, Accessed February 22, 2016.

⁵⁵ Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War*. 311.

Wars. Once again, this widespread public involvement pulled French civilians from their inherent provincial loyalties and linked them to national interests, bridging the gap between regional and national desires. The conflict had a similar impact on Germany, overriding individual loyalties to the smaller kingdoms or regions and unifying the belief in a greater Germany.

Each nation chose to maintain its stability by deliberately linking the rising middle class to the national identities created through the Franco-Prussian War. “The coherence of an empire cannot be based on an “essence of language, ethnicity, culture, or religion. Empires are held together either by loyalty to an “imperial ideology” or to a ruler”⁵⁶ France and Germany both came to rely heavily on tying citizen loyalty and devotion to an ideology of the nation as a collective, through experiences of military strength and symbolism. As the years since 1871 grew more numerous, politicians and the public alike both in France and Germany forgot the cost of conflict and instead pushed for expansion and prestige. Citizenship in these nations became dependent in part on the individual accepting specific sets of values interpreted through the collective experience of specific events such as the Franco-Prussian War. These collective beliefs came to be viewed as foundational to the national heritage. The late nineteenth century in Europe was the transition period from identities based on ethnicity, religion, or geographic divides to individuals being characterized by the ‘essence’ of a newly created, common national identity.

In France, the complex interplay of individual versus mass politics and the rural versus urban divide in relation to nationalism can be illustrated by General Boulanger’s rise and fall

⁵⁶ Tilman Lüdke, “Pan-Ideologies,” *European History Online (EGO)*, published by the Leibniz Institute of European History, (2012), <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/luedket-2012-en> Accessed February, 14, 2016

from prominence. The Boulangist movement was a cult of personality that revolved around General Boulanger, like other French political movements which had come before. However, the Boulangist crisis became unique due to the ongoing evolution of French society as the newly risen middle class embraced a role in stemming the rise of another military dictator. Boulanger and his followers incited and rallied the political disenchantment of the late 1880s and France's revolutionary tradition as well as feeding the grievances that could not be reconciled without violence, particularly the loss of Alsace and Lorraine.

General Boulanger graduated from political obscurity to folk hero status through a series of popular demonstrations, particularly a military review in July 1886 at Longchamps.⁵⁷ Boulanger's public support came in large part from the rural peasants who still remembered the realities of defeat and violence in 1871, while holding the urban population largely responsible. Desiring peace and prosperity in a climate of looming economic instability they were drawn to Boulanger's propagandized presentation of being a Parisian outsider. The urban French workers largely still viewed the rural population as backwards and uneducated in the nuances of politics. They also remembered that Napoleon III had come to power on the backs of the peasantry. The urban majority therefore shied away from any candidate motivated by mass movement.⁵⁸ Boulanger was the first of many French and German leaders who propagandized the legacy of the Franco-Prussian War to further their political means. German politicians focused on the idea that having been born with the sword, the German Empire must continue to live by it as it worked to ensure its "place in the sun"⁵⁹ through regional hegemony. French politicians focused

⁵⁷ Patrick H. Hutton, "Popular Boulangism and the Advent of Mass Politics in France, 1886-1890," *Journal of Contemporary History* 11, No. 1 (Jan 1976): 85-106, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/260004> Accessed February 23, 2016.

⁵⁸ Burns, *Rural Society and French Politics*, 57.

⁵⁹ Retallack, *Imperial Germany 1871-1918*, 207.

on Revanchism to regain Alsace and Lorraine to ensure that such a “terrible year” as 1871 never occurred again.⁶⁰

By twentieth century standards Boulanger’s propaganda and mass organization attempts would be considered primitive. However, Boulanger’s rise and the ensuing political crisis show how the memory the Franco-Prussian War and popular support could create national environments that broke with the political traditions of the past. Boulanger became an idealized spokesman for “the birth of a noble national vision which could at once provide authority, promote unity, and inspire heroic activism.”⁶¹ Boulanger failed in part due to the nation’s continued distaste for ambitious generals in politics. Once his cult of personality alienated the republican supporters, Boulangism lost the support of the common man which had originally sustained it. France, however, learned from the crisis and continued to strengthen itself domestically under the Republican national identity. Once the French rural, lower classes began to participate in politics and the national dialogue the popular appeal of iconized heroes such as Napoleon I, Napoleon III or Boulanger faded, the nation to begin to heal and modernize. The Boulanger Crisis further strained the atmosphere between France and Germany during the interwar period as General Boulanger’s rhetoric to retake Alsace and Lorraine fueled the beliefs of the German politicians and public that France was only biding its time for revenge.

Because Boulangism was primarily a civilian political crisis despite its use of military symbolisms, its defeat did not destroy the emotional connection French citizens still had to military imagery. This continued affinity was similar to that of the German population who equated the German Empire’s strength with that of the German military. In both nations the

⁶⁰ Fife Jr., *The German Empire Between Two Wars*, 5.

⁶¹ Hutton, “Popular Boulangism and the Advent of Mass Politics in France,” 101.

bourgeoisie middle class established a particularly strong connection to military service and symbols. While rural groups had ceremonies and celebrations tied to the land and heritage and the elite had ceremonies and celebrations connected to the aristocratic traditions and international society, the newly established middle class lacked such formal practices of status or heritage. In addition, the middle class in both nations found itself to be the most complex and fragmented economic and social group. Divided by profession, ideology, and social interests, the bourgeoisie found themselves united by nationalism and “a basic set of cultural commitments.”⁶²

In France soldiers were caught between identifying with the working class and supporting the elite as the French army struggled to adapt to the demographic changes of the nation. The violent suppression of the Paris Commune by the French military left a legacy of military violence against civilians that was difficult for the army to move past. During the 1880s and 1890s there was a sharp divide between how the French public viewed enlisted soldiers versus commissioned officers. Propaganda flyers were often left in barracks to remind soldiers to remember their working class roots and calling on them to revolt against the “decorated bandits” and “repugnant parasites” who were their military leaders.⁶³

Meanwhile, the military itself viewed civilians, particularly rural populations, with apprehension. In 1871, as the Prussian encirclement of Paris strengthened, many urban citizens came to believe that the rural populations had used the upheaval of the transition between the Second Empire and Third Republic as an opportunity to turn their backs on their fellow Frenchman. Those who did not view the inaction of the rural population as an outright betrayal still viewed it as the type of passive collaboration with an invading force which would haunt

⁶² Retallack, *Imperial Germany 1871-1918*, 171-2.

⁶³ Miller, *From Revolutionaries to Citizens*, 28.

France in future decades. The antimilitarist propaganda and division between citizen and soldier was gradually healed as the French politicians worked to link the worker and the soldier by showing how each role was integral to the safety of the nation. In time the annual drawing of lots for military service throughout rural France became a secular ceremony celebrating both the nation and the people who served it. On a designated day in late January or early February young men in rural regions accompanied by sweethearts and families would march from villages and hamlets, carrying bouquets, ribbons, and talismans in a festive atmosphere. The peasant youths would then publically pledge their allegiance to the fatherland and its defense.⁶⁴ By combining rural traditions with celebrations of military service and deference to the nation, the French population slowly worked past the aspects of life and society which had divided them long before the Franco-Prussian War ever began.

In Germany, the involvement of the military in politics and society acted as a legitimizing force to the public. While France had to face divisions between rural and urban populations, the French nation was unified well before 1871. In comparison, the German Empire was comprised of twenty seven distinctive territories with their own histories and structure. The Prussian military imparted a specific set of virtues and culture based on vigilance, discipline, and obedience that crossed all regional divides within Germany, allowing a common culture to develop. “The Franco-Prussian War certified the army as the agent and symbol of Germany’s national destiny, and it ensured that soldiers would enjoy elite status in the state that emerged out of the conflict.”⁶⁵ In the years that followed 1871, “to the extent that there was a central national

⁶⁴ Burns, *Rural Society and French Politics*, 142-3.

⁶⁵ Retallack, *Imperial Germany 1871-1918*, 197.

holiday in the German Empire, it was Sedan Day, the annual celebration on 2 September of the crushing German victory over the French Army in the Battle of Sedan in 1870.”⁶⁶

The symbiotic relationship between German society and the military went both ways as middle class officers influenced the military hierarchy, just as the military impacted the social hierarchy within the Empire. The number of middle class officers within the German Army increased significantly following the Franco-Prussian War; however, it was not until March 1890 that Emperor William II actively sought them out. In a now famous order he announced that

“the improved level of education of our people offers the possibility of widening the circles which will be considered for the expansion of the officer corps. Today the nobility of birth alone cannot, as formerly, claim the privilege of supplying the army with its officers. The ‘nobility of temperament’ must now do its share.”⁶⁷

In the same order Emperor William II called on the sons of “honorable bourgeois families in whom the love for King and Fatherland, a warm heart for the soldier’s calling, and Christian morality are planted and nurtured.”⁶⁸ This quote shows how the German nationalism that was produced by the Franco-Prussian War placed the royal family on an equal standing with nation itself rather than believing that the monarch was the embodiment of the nation as in past centuries. The German Fatherland or *Volk* took on the same role as the French *patrie* in the last decades of the nineteenth century as the nation became a collective lived reality rather than just an idea.

Few areas of Europe have been contested as heavily throughout the centuries as the Alsace and Lorraine regions along the French and German border. These two regions have been vital to whichever nation held them due to their natural resources, arable land, and their location.

⁶⁶ Retallack, *Imperial Germany 1871-1918*, 199.

⁶⁷ As quoted in Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army*, 235.

⁶⁸ As quoted in Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army*, 235.

German and French leadership both rightly believed that Alsace and Lorraine would become the key to border security in the twentieth century and that the Rhine River had untapped potential to create a vast transportation network within Central Europe. Beginning in the nineteenth century, but increasing in importance from 1870 onwards, the Alsace-Lorraine region reinforced a nation's ability to make war. To France and Germany, Alsace and Lorraine offered immense material and commercial benefits, which were still not fully known in 1870. When Germany forced the annexation of the region, it secured the largest deposit of iron ore in Europe and the second largest in the world.⁶⁹ The value and extent of these deposits within Alsace-Lorraine allowed Germany to power its increasing industrialization, increase its wealth, and strengthen its military, naval, and political power in the decades that followed 1870. Iron became the fundamental tool for modernization around the world. Had Germany not won the Franco-Prussian War and annexed Alsace-Lorraine as its prize, the nation would have quickly exhausted its capacity to produce the material for warfare in the nineteenth century and been forced to import iron from abroad in the twentieth century.

The region's natural resources and military significance made holding and controlling it increasingly vital for any nearby country's national security and economic stability. The true "Alsace-Lorraine Problem" stemmed from the larger questions that it exemplified concerning how to define nationality and imperialism within Europe. The region also presented the complex relationship between France and Germany following the war and each nation's relationship with its rural citizens. The nationalistic and militaristic aspirations of Germany in 1870 precipitated the union of Alsace and the Moselle department of Lorraine to form the Imperial Territory of

⁶⁹ Sydney Brooks, "The Real Problem of Alsace-Lorraine," *The North American Review* 206, no. 744, (November, 1917) 695-6. Accessed October 14, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25121684>.

Alsace-Lorraine. This formal legal union was not grounded in the typical purposes for unification, such as historic tradition or the loyalty of the region's residents. Both France and Germany had historically laid claim to the Alsace-Lorraine region. Through Germany's victory in the Franco-Prussian War and the resulting peace treaty, both the region's people and its image as a prize to the Germans or an embarrassment to the French became a microcosm for the opposing French and German ideas of cultural nationalism and Revanchism.

The Alsace-Lorraine region first passed between the principalities that would later form France and Germany beginning with the breakup of the Roman Empire when Clovis became King of the Franks and extended his rule throughout the regions of North France and Germany in 496 A.D. Following the reign of Clovis, his kingdom was divided, leading to several hundred years of changing borders. Following the Treaty of Verdun in 843 A.D., the Alsace and Lorraine regions fell under the jurisdiction of Lothaire I which led to the true expression that "In the beginning, Alsace and Lorraine were neither French nor German, but included in a Middle Kingdom."⁷⁰ After this unified origin that only Alsatians and Lorrainians seemed to recall, the two regions parted to follow separate paths of identity and autonomy, though both Alsace and Lorraine heavily emphasized the importance of independent sovereignty as they developed.

The controversial identities of Alsace and Lorraine came to the forefront of the region's politics in the 19th century when, in the age of imperialism, both France and Germany believed they had a right to claim the regions. Each country stressed the language used and cultural practices of the region to explain why they should be more properly classified as French or German in fundamental character. Over the course of the decades between 1870 and 1914, both

⁷⁰ T.B. Rudmose-Brown, "Alsace-Lorraine: A Problem of Nationality," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 4, no. 15 (1915): 367-8, accessed September 11, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30092570>.

nations placed crucial importance on who actually occupied the Alsace-Lorraine region. For the victorious side it became a source of pride and national superiority to be propagandized against the other. For the nation who lost territory, it was a source of enmity that gave rise to Revanchism and shame. Whether the region was under its control, Germany and France each attempted to use Alsace and Lorraine as a proving ground to define what it meant to be German or French and then spread that identity onto their broader populations.

The Alsace-Lorraine region became established as territory that was German through historic national identity and “by the right of the sword.”⁷¹ In July and August 1870, German historian Theodor Mommsen published letters in a Milanese newspaper addressed to the Italian public to justify Prussian actions in the conflict and to further vilify the French. A French historian, Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, seized on these letters. He took on the cause of defending French actions in a published response to Mommsen in October 1870. Coulanges’ response showed the evolution of French public perception of Prussian actions that would eventually lay the ground work for decades of resentment. He emphasized the collective belief that Prussia had overreached in its desire for expansion and German unification. In his text Coulanges described how Prussia had justified its actions as defensive, but the conflict had obviously become a matter of expansion and conquest focused on Alsace and Lorraine.⁷² Coulanges asserted that beginning in August 1870 the Prussian forces, and Bismarck in particular, did not attempt to hide their intention to take the Alsace and Lorraine territories from France. This territorial grab was not merely a matter of self-defense. Coulanges also emphasized

⁷¹ Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War*. 304.

⁷² Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, “Alsace: Is it German or French: Response to Mr. Mommsen,” *The Journal of Both Worlds* (October 1870). Accessed October 11, 2015, <http://www.bmlisieux.com/curiosa/alsace.htm>.

⁷² Coulanges, “Alsace: Is it German or French.”

that what drove both nations further into conflict was that the military population of Germany and the entire male population of France were driven by the question: ‘Alsace will she [go] to France or Germany?’”⁷³

Coulanges categorizd Alsace and Lorraine as inherently French because he defined nationality by “neither race nor language” but as culture. To him, culture was when “men feel in their hearts that they are the same people when they have a community of ideas, interests, affections, memories, and hopes. That’s what makes the homeland.” Culture then can be seen as the prevailing attitudes, values, and beliefs of people. He asserted that while Alsace might be German by race and language, in reality, “It has nothing in common with you. Country, for her, it was France. The stranger, for her, it is Germany.”⁷⁴ The German perspective emphasized the very elements, language and race, which Coulanges dismissed. These elements were precisely the tools being used to consolidate German identity in the unification period. Their presence alone was deemed sufficient to justify why the territories should be returned to the ‘Reichland.’ Successfully bringing Alsace-Lorraine into the Prussian fold symbolized the unification of the separate German regions into a cohesive, national vision for the future. Its prosperity encouraged other German states to align themselves with Bismarck’s plans for unification. By the conclusion of the war German leadership understood that “the restoration of Alsace and Lorraine is for the German Empire, the only possible guarantee against French ambition, and the national reward of our national struggle and victory.”⁷⁵

While formally peaceful decades passed following the peace treaty granting Germany possession of Alsace-Lorraine, tensions between France and Germany never truly subsided.

⁷³ Coulanges, “Alsace: Is it German or French.”

⁷⁴ Coulanges, “Alsace: Is it German or French.”

⁷⁵ “Germany,” *The Times* (London, England) September 5, 1870, pg 9, Issue 26847. Accessed February 16, 2016.

France mythologized the loss of the war and the Alsace-Lorraine territory into its components of its collective political and cultural identities. Meanwhile, Germany struggled to Germanize the region's culture and the population that had remained after 1871. Alsace and Lorraine came to hold a unique position in the minds of both the French and German public. Each nation considered it to be unique from other rural regions with a greater connection to the nation overall. France and Germany came to agree on the significance of Alsace and Lorraine:

“ardent Francophiles saw it as their *petite patrie*, which was awaiting the French *grande patrie*, Old Germans and strongly germanophile Alsatians regarded it as their regional *Heimatland* (homeland) within the wider German *Vaterland*, and all those who eschewed the Franco-German dichotomy focused on Alsace as a new provider of (proto-)national identity.”⁷⁶

Part of this focus on Alsace and Lorraine came from the unity within the region. In the years following the Franco-Prussian War, Alsace and Lorraine did not experience the extreme class and identity divisions that plagued France and Germany. The common experience of annexation and their isolation from France united the Alsatians and Lorrains, overriding the previous lack of cultural affinity between the two departments.

In the years which followed the annexation of the ‘lost provinces’ an illusion developed within France which increased the propaganda potential of the region. The French public came to believe that Alsace and Lorraine remained unchanged since 1871 and that when France inevitably regained the territory, everything would be as it was. Part of this illusion came from the regions inherent link to ideas from the French Revolution. Alsace and Lorraine began to be described as the heirs to the ideals of 1789, particularly that of self-determination. Alsatians had long cherished the legacy of 1789, particularly its slogan of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*.⁷⁷ When

⁷⁶ Detmar Klein, “Becoming Alsatian: Anti-German and Pro-French Cultural Propaganda in Alsace, 1898-1914,” *French Music, Culture, and National Identity, 1870-1939*, (University of Rochester Press, 2008), 220.

⁷⁷ Klein, “Becoming Alsatian: Anti-German and Pro-French Cultural Propaganda, 216.

Alsace and Lorraine were annexed in 1871 in the midst of a resurgence of Republican political ideas, self-determination for a region to choose to participate in a nation-state seemed like a natural extension of those ideas.⁷⁸ France believed that the population of the region would naturally choose France over Germany and thus should have a right of self-determination.

Alsace and Lorraine also became the ultimate proving ground for national identities because in 1872, inhabitants of the region literally faced a choice of nationality. While many civilians safe behind the Vosges, not personally facing a choice between France and Germany believed that “a true man cannot change his nationality with his coat,”⁷⁹ the choice for those in the annexation region was much harder. For a brief period the inhabitants of the region did have the right to preserve their French nationality. This would require them though to leave the region and establish themselves in France. The ‘choice of nationality’ promised by republican ideals was never a choice allowed to Alsace and Lorraine citizens. They could sacrifice their homes, heritage, and jobs for uncertain futures or they could maintain their place and become German. One blacksmith from Alsace wrote to his former employer after resettling in France saying:

“It is with a sad heart that I left my pretty valley, the cradle of my family, which is an Eden in comparison to the place where I am; but the duty I owe to the country for whose service I wished to educate my children compelled me to resign the comfort and happiness which I enjoyed. It would be impossible for me to bring up my children for the benefit of a cruel enemy that God has raised up for the chastisement of our unfortunate country. God grant that our exile may not be eternal!”⁸⁰

Voting for German nationality was only ever a formality because such a vote was the same as inaction. Alsace and Lorraine citizens only ever had two choices: relocate to France or become a

⁷⁸ Thomas Höpel, “*The French-German Borderlands: Borderlands and Nation-building in the 19th and 20th Centuries*,” *European History Online (EGO)*, published by the Leibniz Institute of European History, <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/hoepelt-2012-en> Accessed February 16, 2016.

⁷⁹ “The ‘Option’ in Alsace-Lorraine,” *The Times* (London, England) October 1, 1872, pg 8. Accessed February 16, 2016.

⁸⁰ “The ‘Option’ in Alsace-Lorraine,” *The Times*

German citizen.⁸¹ Within France, this willingness by some to emigrate proved the continued loyalty of all citizens from the ‘lost provinces.’ One newspaper wrote that:

“from Strasburg and Metz the emigration has been on a very large scale, not only of those who can afford to establish themselves in France, but thousands have left who prefer to give up home and lucrative positions rather than remain under foreign rule. Nor is this great exodus confined to the large towns; there is not a village to which it does not extend.”⁸²

Those citizens who left everything behind were held up to French society as the ultimate example of patriots who chose the *patrie* over self-interest. The perceived unity of émigrés from all classes in loyalty to the French nation became the standard by which other French regions, particularly rural regions, were judged.

Not all who chose participated in this emigration or selection of nationality did so for nationalistic reasons. Many simply felt as if it were the safer option. Many families within Alsace and Lorraine faced a more difficult choice than simply choosing a national identity. They had to choose for their entire family. Many families within Alsace and Lorraine had at least one son serving in the French military at the time of the Franco-Prussian War. Following the annexation, those families with sons just of age or still minors fell under the German universal conscription laws. Families with minors were not even permitted to choose and were forced to become German while facing a reality where they would shortly be “compelled to join an army opposed to that in which brothers who have attained their majority have elected to serve.”⁸³ In an article studying the changes between Alsace in 1871 and 1878, one writer remarked that “the whole number of young men who emigrated in order to escape conscription did not exceed 7,000

⁸¹ “The ‘Option’ in Alsace-Lorraine,” *The Times*

⁸² “Alsace,” *The Times* (London, England) September 28, 1872, pg 7, Issue 27494. Accessed February 16, 2016.

⁸³ “Alsace and Lorraine,” *The Times* (London, England) September 19, 1872, pg 7, Issue 27486. . Accessed February 16, 2016.

or 8,000”⁸⁴ and that many had returned upon realizing that the annexation was likely to be permanent.

As the years since annexation passed, many groups found strength in continuing to develop a third identity based on the culture of both nations. When the annexation occurred, a popular saying had been “I don’t want to be German; I cannot be French; I am Alsatian”⁸⁵ and this idea of a neutral third identity continued to grow as more and more citizens of the region accepted the new status quo. The new acceptance and identity fully developed around 1890 as the population of Alsace and Lorraine realized that they could not return to France without experiencing more violence. At the same time, Alsace and Lorraine occupants came to realize that they were not being treated as an equal participant in the German Empire despite the empire’s ongoing attempts to Germanize them. Twenty years after the annexation, the people of Alsace and Lorraine region remained neither truly French nor German. True stability and identity still came from being Alsatian.

In 1910 Henri Lichtenberger, a writer whose family left Alsace after it fell to the Germans, asserted that France “has always scrupulously observed the treaty binding upon it” that absolutely forbade it from interfering in Alsace-Lorraine in any way. However, “No power on earth can require of France that she is not interested in what happens in a country that was once one of our valiant provinces, which today is still, for his ideas and his culture, a walk French on German soil.”⁸⁶ Lichtenberger’s articles illustrated how the pro-French perspective claimed that

⁸⁴ “Alsace in 1871 and in 1878,” *The Times* (London, England) February 13, 1878, pg 4, Issue 29177. Accessed February 16, 2016.

⁸⁵ Klein, “Becoming Alsatian: Anti-German and Pro-French Cultural Propaganda, 216-17.

⁸⁶ Henri Lichtenberger, “The Alsatian Resistance,” *L’Opinion Newspaper of the Week*, no.11 March (1910), accessed October 11, 2015, <http://www.bmlisieux.com/curiosa/lichte01.htm>

even four decades after becoming a part of the German Empire, the Alsace-Lorraine region was still treated as a “conquered country,” rather than a rightful part of the nation.

By 1910, German possession of Alsace-Lorraine had become a point of pride. This fueled a desire to eradicate all elements that tied the region to France or its historic culture, instigated by both the government and the descendents of the German settlers who had moved to Alsace-Lorraine after 1871. German pride drove the push for Alsace-Lorraine to deny its past and submit “repentant and converted before the superiority of the winner.”⁸⁷ Alsace-Lorraine had been allowed to retain a greater degree of unique culture among the German states in the initial period following the Franco-Prussian War because Bismarck and the German government were more focused on consolidating and homogenizing the core German states first.

Only after the achievement of that unity could the twentieth century push for complete Germanization of Alsace-Lorraine begin. While Germany completed the unification process, Alsace-Lorraine became a symbol for humiliating France and discrediting their military prowess. Once Germany obtained a single national identity and France regained influence in Europe however, the French elements within Alsace-Lorraine became an international embarrassment to Germany. The region also remained a potential national security threat as some within it clung to old French loyalties. By 1910 France had rebuilt its military and was once again a threat to Germany. Rather than becoming a buffer zone to increase security on the French border as Germany intended in 1871, Alsace-Lorraine became the most difficult portion of the shared border to potentially defend in any future conflict. German leadership feared they could not place their faith in the region due to a lack of trust stemming from the divided culture within the local

⁸⁷ Lichtenberger, “The Alsatian Resistance.”

population. So, in 1910, a mere four years before the onset of World War One, Lichtenberger asserted that the unanswered Alsatian question remained “whether we like it or not, a permanent danger to the peace of Europe.”⁸⁸

Thus from 1870 to 1914, the Alsace-Lorraine region retained the potential to reignite international conflict. Rather than being a minor border issue it became a pitting of national identities and varying conceptions of democratic ideals against one another. “It clearly appears that the question of Alsace is not only the result of a conflict between two rival nations, but it can be seen as an episode of the secular struggle [that] continues between the democratic spirit.”⁸⁹ Alsace-Lorraine became a symbol for what it fundamentally meant to be French or German. It was the first place where those newly developed French and German identities truly came into conflict. In their desire to create new fundamental and defining national identities, France and Germany used the desire for revenge against one another, and their believed superiority to each another, to unite their populations.

Prior to the late 19th century and early 20th century, each nation had continued to struggle to address divisions within their populations stemming from local loyalties, conflicting interests between rural and urban citizens, and other internal divides. During the nineteenth century, French and German politicians and academics had both deliberately crafted the specter of the ‘Other’ as a threat to collective security and stability. To either nation, the war of 1870 mitigated the looming threat just across the Rhine. However, the specter was not completely gone and its continued presence justified internal unification and necessitated collective devotion to national goals within France and Germany. As for Alsace-Lorraine itself, to the French, it became the lost

⁸⁸ Lichtenberger, “The Alsatian Resistance.”

⁸⁹ Henri Lichtenberger, “The Autonomy of Alsace-Lorraine,” *L’Opinion Newspaper of the Week*, no. 22 May (1910), accessed October 11, 2015, <http://www.bmlisieux.com/curiosa/lichte02.htm>

provinces at the mercy of the domineering Germans. For the Germans it was the trophy state that would either protect the border or prove to be an unexpected security risk. In the classic role of pawns to greater powers, at no point were the needs or desires of the citizens of Alsace and Lorraine factored into the political manipulations or propaganda of either nation. These civilians did not ask to become symbols of victory or revenge; instead, many still nostalgically looked back to a time when the region was neither French nor German and far more stable.⁹⁰

Examining the various roles served by the Alsace-Lorraine region is crucial to understanding why the Franco-Prussian War had such a profound role on France and Germany. It also allows the modern world to appreciate how the conflict and its resolution impacted Europe well beyond the nineteenth century. The Franco-Prussian War fundamentally altered how all of Europe understood war, national identity, and territory. Germany's annexation of the Alsace and Lorraine territories from France set a precedent in Europe of challenging existing borders based on historical and political narratives rather than the realities of the current environment. No one considered what citizens of Alsace and Lorraine wanted or how they were naturally aligned culturally. Both French and German politicians viewed the region as territory worth fighting a major war for based on their sought after political narratives and national identity. The Alsace-Lorraine region became the trophy or public disgrace that could clinch a new collective national identity. Obtaining and holding the Alsace-Lorraine territory became a lodestone to both France and Germany because its vital economic resources laid the needed foundations for becoming the premier European industrial power in addition to the area's role as a sentimental national rallying cry.

⁹⁰ T.B. Rudmose-Brown, "Alsace-Lorraine: A Problem of Nationality," 371-82.

The years surrounding 1890 were distinctly formative for both France and Germany. While the Franco-Prussian War established particular definitions of what it meant to be ‘French’ or ‘German,’ it was not until 1890 that proof that those identities were being transmitted can be shown as the war generation aged. In the study of national identity in France and Germany between 1871 and 1914, 1890 acts as a watershed year both affirmatively and negatively. 1890 and the years which surrounded it showed the ways in which the nationalism which spread following the Franco-Prussian War shifted from acting as a force for internal unification in France and Germany and began to play a role in international politics through their foreign policy actions.

In Germany, 1890 stands out as a significant year because it is when the modernizing effects of industrialization, urbanization, and social transformation can be seen throughout Germany. It is also when Emperor Wilhelm II successfully established a ‘personal regime’ which solidified the Prussian imperial family’s continued dominion over the German Empire after the turmoil which followed the year of three emperors.⁹¹ Chancellor Bismarck stepped down from his prominent role in German politics and society, which further marks it as a time of transition for the German Empire. Bismarck continued to play a pivotal role in the domestic and international workings of German policy in the years which followed the Franco-Prussian War. Throughout the 1870s and 1880s Bismarck successfully pushed for the implementation of social policies which laid the foundation for what would come to be understood as the welfare state in the twentieth century.⁹² In addition to his documented impact on the German Empire, due in part to his role in the Franco-Prussian War, Bismarck had a unique understanding of the importance

⁹¹ Retallack, *Imperial Germany 1871-1918*, 41.

⁹² Retallack, *Imperial Germany 1871-1918*, 76.

of the memory of the 1871 conflict to the nation's collective consciousness. In 1887 when Bismarck's final years in power were shaped by the Boulanger Crisis across the Rhine River and the movement's calls for a new assault on Germany, Bismarck played a crucial role in unifying German politicians against the potential threat. In front of the Reichstag he declared "Not a single voice in France has resigned hopes of recovering Alsace and Lorraine; at any moment a government may come to the rudder which will begin war"⁹³ and asserted that only when party divides were overlooked could Germany remain victorious against France. Bismarck's brutal truth swayed politicians away from party politics and a wave of patriotism spread, allowing the German Empire to remain unified and resigned to the potential for future attacks from France. Without Bismarck's unparalleled understanding of German politics, foreign affairs, and the threat from France, the German Empire might never have stabilized after 1871, making his departure in 1890 a significant threat to the entire nation.

When the German Empire began to engage in more international actions in the early 1890s it did so because of the rapid growth it had experienced since 1871. Leading up to the twentieth century the German people experienced unparalleled economic successes and industrial growth for their nation to become the second largest exporting nation in the world and the second in the carrying trade.⁹⁴ However, this growth and increase in international economic importance was met by suspicion from the other great powers of the world who saw the growth of the German Empire as a threat. This dichotomy led the German public to feel persecuted and despised on the international stage due to envy over their population growth and trade success. As the German public and its politicians came to define the nation's 'world policy' (*Weltpolitik*)

⁹³ As quoted in Fife Jr., *The German Empire Between Two Wars*, 10.

⁹⁴ Fife Jr., *The German Empire Between Two Wars*, 95.

in the 1890s, their actions were viewed as the evolution of their strength since 1871. One of the architects of this ‘world policy’ remarked prior to the outbreak of hostilities in 1914 that

“We did not plunge into world politics, we grew, so to speak, into our task in that sphere, and we did not exchange the old European policy of Prussia and Germany for the new world policy. Our strength today is rooted, as it has been since time immemorial, in the ancient soil of Europe.”⁹⁵

The Franco-Prussian War defined the concept that a nation’s identity was linked to its military capabilities and its heritage could be represented physically by geographic territory. This nationalism of blood and soil defined the evolution of France and Germany between 1871 and 1914 and equated land and identity.

Blood and soil nationalism fundamentally justified the involvement of the military in national politics and foreign policy making in a manner which would have been unthinkable prior to the Franco-Prussian War. In 1872 France adopted a military service law after the Prussian model which dictated universal male conscription for five years. The concept of universal service waned in the years of the Boulanger Crisis as France narrowly avoided the rise of another military dictatorship. It commenced again in 1889 as the Third Republic reinforced the idea of the military as the means to educate the nation and its population.⁹⁶ Conscription opened a new world of experiences for the educated and cultivated men of France that began to filter into the literature and culture of the republic as the twentieth century began.

While France struggled with varying levels of respect for the military due to the nation’s heritage of mass violence and military dictators in the years between 1871 and 1914, in Germany, deference to the military only grew following their victory in the Franco-Prussian

⁹⁵ As quoted in Retallack, *Imperial Germany 1871-1918*, 53.

⁹⁶ Miller, *From Revolutionaries to Citizens*, 16.

War. In the years which followed Emperor William II's decree on military service in 1890, an officer's commission became a significant symbol of social acceptability throughout the German Empire. By 1906 this level of social deference to the military seemed to reach absurd levels as the story of Wilhelm Voigt created a worldwide sensation. Voigt, a petty criminal having recently been released from prison, visited used clothing stores throughout Berlin until he had assembled the pieces of a captain's uniform for the Prussian Army. While wearing the uniform Voigt managed to commandeer a squad of soldiers off the street and lead them to the town hall of a suburban district of the German capital. Once there he "placed the mayor under military arrest and ordered the cashier to hand over nearly 4,000 marks"⁹⁷ before fleeing with his loot. Wilhelm Voigt was eventually caught. His escapades, however, showed an international audience the degrees to which Germany tied together militarism and nationalism in daily life.

With the increasing awareness of the military within France and the passage of time since 1871 the French public entered a period of self reflection in the 1890s. This allowed the nation to understand the failures in a new light as writers and scholars began to study the conflict. In 1892 Emile Zola published the appropriately titled novel, *The Debacle*, which firmly broke the social taboo of discussing the Franco-Prussian War as a failure of the French military. Prior discussions had focused on Napoleon III's role in the defeat. The incredible success of the novel led Zola's peers to remark that it attested to "the painful self-examination still going on in France after the most traumatic humiliation any country had so far received in modern times."⁹⁸

Despite this ongoing awareness of the Franco-Prussian War, as the twentieth century loomed, forces advocating for antimilitarism increased in both France and Germany. The passage

⁹⁷ Retallack, *Imperial Germany 1871-1918*, 196.

⁹⁸ As quoted in Miller, *From Revolutionaries to Citizens*, 20.

of time and the growth of the middle class had created a section of the population in each nation who rightly felt that they had nothing to gain and everything to lose from any new conflict. Many civilians in France believed that they had more important concerns, particularly in their colonial empire, than fighting to regain 'lost provinces' more than twenty years after their loss. While Revanchism was still active in some aspects of French society, ordinary Frenchmen felt a disconnect to their lost citizens across the Vosges Mountains, leading one writer to state: "Personally, in exchange for these forgotten lands I would give neither the little finger of my right hand: it serves to support my hand when I write, nor the little finger of my left hand: it serves to shake the ashes off my cigarette."⁹⁹

Revanchism in French politics and society resurged, however, in the twentieth century as foreign policy influenced by the military once again increased the possibilities of war with Germany. The 1890s in both nations allowed alterations to the concepts of national identity which had developed following the Franco-Prussian War. The newly prominent generations both adhered to the ideas shaped by the conflict while also modifying them to changes to class, culture, and economics. As "the disasters of battle are soon forgotten in the glow of triumph or the resentment of defeat if the reality be not often brought back to the mind by some real danger"¹⁰⁰ the military would again prove to be integral in politics and society once a crisis drew media and public attention to it.

When studying the period between the Franco-Prussian War and the beginning of World War One, the upheaval to both France and Germany seems to come in a series of waves which disrupt both their domestic stability and foreign affairs, particularly in relation to each other. The

⁹⁹ As quoted in Miller, *From Revolutionaries to Citizens*, 20.

¹⁰⁰ "Now that the War clouds have passed away," *The Times* (London, England), May 17, 1875, pg 11, Issue 28317. Accessed February 16, 2016.

Boulangier Crisis played a significant role in the evolution of class structure and the interactions between the military and government in France, but it was followed by a more significant crisis which played out on the world stage. The Dreyfus Affair reframed French and German relations at the starts of the twentieth century and had immense domestic impacts on both nations. It also brought on a resurgence of militaristic nationalism, linking the honor of the military directly to the honor of the nation.

The Dreyfus Affair began in 1894 as a relatively minor scandal involving the conviction of French Captain Alfred Dreyfus on charges of treason. Over the course of several years events called the charges against Dreyfus into question. Authorities responded by fabricating new ones until the affair turned into a political scandal at the international level, becoming synonymous with injustice. While primarily a French affair, Dreyfus' story drew international attention and tension as it brought new attention to the Alsace-Lorraine region and worsened relations between France and Germany. By the time the scandal was resolved in 1906, the Dreyfus Affair had essentially become a bookend for the nineteenth century, showing its history of waxing and waning crises, warfare between European nations, and fundamental structural changes in politics and society.

At a basic level, the Dreyfus Affair was indicative of the chronic distrust between France and Germany that permeated their affairs between 1871 and 1914. While France had distanced itself from cultural Revanchism internally following the Boulangier Crisis, the wounds from the Franco-Prussian War still governed its dealings with the German Empire. Throughout this period, Germany never truly believed France had given up its ideas of revenge. Groups within the German Empire still held animosity over France's rapid recovery and believed that the nation had "committed an immense blunder when she allowed France to escape so easily after the

war.”¹⁰¹ The Dreyfus Affair introduced a fear of spies and feeling of distrust between France and Germany that strengthened throughout the twentieth century. While the two nations would remain nominally at peace, their interactions became the same style of ‘armed peace’ that had defined the years after 1871. International audiences became aware of the chronic distrust between France and Germany due to the media attention given to the Dreyfus Affair. The mutual animosity was spun as a distrust “founded on centuries of French interference and aggression and refounded upon a great humiliation imposed upon France and forty succeeding years of humiliation.”¹⁰² The European nations surrounding France and Germany had watched the interactions of the two nations with trepidation since the Franco-Prussian War, but the Dreyfus Affair drew new attention from the American continents to the 1871 conflict and its ongoing effects on Europe.

The sheer duration of the Dreyfus Affair produced a profound effect. It drew the attention of international and urban audiences who used the technological innovations of modernization and industrialization to follow the miscarriages of justice as they occurred. The Dreyfus Affair also entered the collective consciousness to such an extreme degree because it was not really about a public trial of a French officer. The affair became a moral assessment of the army because of Dreyfus’ alleged actions and a reflection of the Third Republic as a whole because of the army’s conduct and the prosecutor’s misconduct. The prolonged persecution and trial of Dreyfus became a question as to the status of the honor and virtue of France itself.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ “We print this morning a letter from a French,” *The Times* (London, England) May 6, 1875, pg 9, Issue 28308. Accessed February 16, 2016.

¹⁰² Fife Jr., *The German Empire Between Two Wars*, 23.

¹⁰³ Miller, *From Revolutionaries to Citizens*, 33-36.

The impact of the Dreyfus Affair was also significant because it reminded the French public at the outbreak of the twentieth century of the plight of the ‘lost provinces.’ It fueled the renewed awareness of the French men and women still governed by the German Empire. Captain Dreyfus came from a family that had taken advantage of a clause from the Treaty annexing Alsace and Lorraine. This provision allowed Alsace and Lorraine citizens who moved to the French interior before October 1, 1872 to retain their French citizenship rather than becoming German subjects.¹⁰⁴ Like Dreyfus, many of the major players in the political scandal were these ‘children of the frontier’ or their descendents. Through their ties to the ‘lost provinces’ both Dreyfusards and anti-Dreyfusards “helped to keep the Alsace-Lorraine question alive at a time when memories of the war were beginning to recede into the background of public consciousness- at least for those with no vested interest”¹⁰⁵

When the scandal surrounding Dreyfus reached a fever pitch, he proclaimed the impossibility of ever betraying the *patrie* which he had pledged his loyalty to when he joined the army in 1878, much less betraying France by passing military secrets to German representatives as he was accused of doing. Dreyfus became symbolic of the plight of Alsace and Lorraine as he had enlisted so that his family might have an officer in the French ranks prepared “for the hour of revanche.”¹⁰⁶ Dreyfus publically declared that “I left my position in Alsace in order to come to serve my country with devotion. Today, as yesterday, I am worthy of leading my soldiers into battle.”¹⁰⁷ As the affair continued, Dreyfus and his supporters cited his heritage as the strongest source of proof of his innocence imaginable. In contrast, anti-Dreyfusards cited his divided

¹⁰⁴ Robert Tombs, ed., *Nationhood and Nationalism in France: From Boulangism to the Great War: 1889-1918*, (New York: Routledge, 1991), 50-51.

¹⁰⁵ Tombs, *Nationhood and Nationalism in France*. 56-57.

¹⁰⁶ Tombs, *Nationhood and Nationalism in France*. 52.

¹⁰⁷ As quoted in Tombs, *Nationhood and Nationalism in France*. 52-53.

loyalty to family still in Alsace. They included in the charges against him that “his brother chose to become a German subject when the people of Alsace were called upon to choose their nationality” while Dreyfus himself “was allowed to come and go with a freedom not usually accorded to French officers” when he travelled to the region.¹⁰⁸

The Boulanger Crisis and the Dreyfus Affair each function as finales to the European nineteenth century and its turmoil. Once each scandal unfolded, a multitude of inherent questions and divisions accompanied it. Thus much of what shaped new national identities after the Franco-Prussian War had to finally be addressed. The reaction to both events in France and elsewhere showed the impact unification had had on France and Germany. The similarities between each crisis allow comparisons to be drawn between the media reaction, public awareness, and political impact. The Boulanger Crisis was fundamentally a rural upheaval of society and politics with its impact felt in the provinces of France. The Dreyfus Affair was primarily an urban crisis of social and political structure and legitimacy. Following their conclusions, each scandal altered the prevailing identity of common values, attitudes, beliefs, and expectations held by the impacted public.

The Boulanger Crisis used images and public speakers to incite the masses. The Dreyfus Affair, ten years later, occurred during a time when literacy had become widespread in rural regions. Those ten years were “among the most crucial for the development of agencies of change—including education and literacy—in the countryside”¹⁰⁹ Despite this fundamental change in the rural population’s ability to follow the Dreyfus Affair if it wished, the lack of attention to the scandal in rural regions indicates another evolution in French national identity

¹⁰⁸ “The excitement which has so long prevailed in” *The Times*, (London, England) January 8, 1898, pg 9, Issue 35408. Accessed February 22, 2016.

¹⁰⁹ Burns, *Rural Society and French Politics*, 124.

and culture, namely, hero-worship. When Dreyfus returned to France following his imprisonment in 1899, hundreds of reporters lined the path of his special train. One of them recounted a unique interaction with a bystander. This bystander asked who was aboard the train, to the surprise of the hundreds of urban dwellers who had come to the countryside to watch the train. While the urban reporters, demonstrators, and officials believed for years that the whole country followed the Dreyfus Affair, to rural citizens it was unimportant. They had never perceived it as impacting their personal lives.¹¹⁰ The individual on the train was neither a general nor a politician. The hero-worship of leaders by the rural population and significance of popular imagery faded because the figures had ceased to be relevant, unlike the personally experienced events of the Napoleonic era or the Franco-Prussian War. In the twentieth century more and more rural citizens would turn to the same news sources as their urban counterparts, making the divisions between the two defined by indifference rather than aggressive distrust or hatred.

These two finales of the nineteenth century also laid the foundation for a new resurgence of the Third Republic as it entered the new era. The mutual disinterest of the rural population did not survive long after the exposure to common news sources and widespread literacy. This created exposure in real time to events of the urban centers and the nation as a whole and gradually the rural citizens became familiar with the nuances of modern politics. The experiences of the Boulanger Crisis and Dreyfus Affair and exposure through newspapers and magazines allowed rural French citizens to become better versed in the complexities of the Third Republic. Universal access to common print sources standardized and updated the collective understanding of politics. No longer did the rural population see the urban areas through the lens of the violent revolution of 1789 or the chaos of 1871. Charting the growing pains of the Third Republic

¹¹⁰ Burns, *Rural Society and French Politics*, 170-71.

through the upheaval which periodically arose following the Franco-Prussian War reveals how economic advancement, cultural interaction, and political education all replaced distrust and indifference. The French everywhere developed a clearer and consistent conception of the *patrie* compared to the meaning of this allegiance cultivating term when it first came into existence in 1871.

By 1900, the influence of the 1871 victory on German expansionistic beliefs reached its peak and the profound impact of the war became recognized throughout Europe. In a speech outlining his vision for a future expansionist German foreign policy, Reich Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow stated his belief that the nation's approach in the new century should be based on the success of the Franco-Prussian War. He recognized that the wars of the nineteenth century "resulted in momentous, dramatic, and far-reaching decisions, shaken old empires, and contributed to the ferment in new and dangerous ways."¹¹¹ He believed that Germany as a unified nation must emulate their past successes because, due to the rise of other European nations, "in the coming century, the German people will be either a hammer or an anvil."¹¹² Offense or defense, invade or someone else would try a 'Promenade to Berlin.'

The Franco-Prussian War taught other European nations and leaders that in the twentieth century, politics and foreign relations would be defined by a doctrine of 'might makes right.' The complex calculation and manipulation of the German leadership, especially Bismarck, and the transfer of authority in France from a monarchical Bonaparte Empire to a French Republic, underscored how raw violence and state power had become supreme in matters of foreign policy

¹¹¹ Buchners Kolleg Geschichte, *Das Kaiserreich 1871 bis 1918*, trans. Adam Blauhut (Bamberg: C.C. Buchners Verlag, 1987), 137.

¹¹² Geschichte, *Das Kaiserreich*, 137.

for Europe. Through the Franco-Prussian War, Europe entered into the modern era of brutality and new forms of conflict between nation-states.

The Prussian Army had been prepared for a conflict with France in 1871 in part because their leadership desired that one take place. The German Empire was born through war from their military victory and in the years which followed, the Germans pursued national goals by encouraging the development of demonstrably and aggressively patriotic German society, shaped in part by the values of militarism. Due to the manipulation of society and politics from the outset, Germany never struggled with the divides between rural and urban populations that held France back for several decades. France's international resurgence could only occur once the facets of its military and republican identities had consolidated into one national identity.¹¹³ In contrast, the German Empire proved from its inception that it drew its legitimacy from its military and political leadership as a whole. In the years following the Franco-Prussian War, the nation only had to maintain the prominence which it gained in 1871.

In its early years, the German Empire still had to address the local identities which had defined the separate kingdoms and principalities in the centuries before unification. The new national German identity accommodated these local identities rather than replacing them.¹¹⁴ In the first decade of the empire, repeated demonstrations of national loyalty through German nationalism consolidated those local identities. Rather than immediately implementing a widespread national government, the new role of the German Emperor was simply "first among equals," alongside the other sovereigns of the German states, with his only unique powers being

¹¹³ Tombs, *Nationhood and Nationalism in France*. 240-41.

¹¹⁴ Retallack, *Imperial Germany 1871-1918*, 109-11.

those which concerned foreign policy and warfare.¹¹⁵ The German Empire's expanding domestic political power was undertaken carefully and slowly to ensure that a natural and deep loyalty to the nation developed among its citizens. Continuing the existence of strong federal states within the empire preserved elements of the past principalities that remained essential to the functioning of the empire. Due to this clever political maneuvering, by the 1890s, the political institutions of the empire had acquired a 'national aura' which guaranteed civilian and military loyalty. Then nation became legitimate and sacred with citizens adopting the 'national mission' as a personal vocation.¹¹⁶ Throughout the crises which impacted Germany leading up to 1914, there were never full scale attempts to overturn the regime because the imperial political system was protected by the collective belief in the nation.

The Franco-Prussian War had a significant impact on how European nations redefined their understanding of military tradition and innovation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. As the military took on a larger role in society and national identity, it also evolved significantly in the years prior to World War One. The Franco-Prussian War established what warfare would become in the twentieth century and it placed a business-like emphasis on it which standardized its role. Warfare in Europe following the Franco-Prussian War became a domestic political tool in addition to its inevitable international impact. France under Napoleon III had initiated the conflict in a misguided attempt to maintain its supremacy on the European continent while Germany used the victory to ensure internal unification. In the years leading up to the outbreak of World War One, governments throughout Europe believed they could resort to war for political and social reasons as well as legitimate strategic reasons. In this environment,

¹¹⁵ Retallack, *Imperial Germany 1871-1918*, 32.

¹¹⁶ Retallack, *Imperial Germany 1871-1918*, 44-45.

war became “an acceptable trump to be played in times of political crisis: to rally political opponents and fabricate parliamentary majorities.”¹¹⁷ Fundamentally, the military conflict of the Franco-Prussian War should be separated into the imperial and republic stages. The transition in power and leadership within France in 1870 essentially meant that the French military mounted two separate military engagements and Germany dealt with two separate forces on the defensive. The separation of the military conflict into two separate entities and stages permits better understanding of the successes, failures, and innovations that developed over the course of the conflict.

Appreciating the military environment in Europe prior to 1870 makes it easier to understand why Germany was so successful in the Franco-Prussian War. The short period between 1866 and 1870 was pivotal to the armies of France and Germany and their modernization. This period was viewed as one where “the state of Europe, if it cannot be called the most prosperous Germany has known, was assuredly the most favorable Europe in general ever beheld” because “for the first time France had a neighbor strong enough to balance her in power, and not powerful enough to alarm her.”¹¹⁸ This failure to become alarmed was clear when France and its leadership studied the Prussian army’s victory over Austria in 1866. They criticized the very tactic that gave Prussia its success, its tactical willingness to “break connections between lines and columns on the battlefield to give partial attacks”¹¹⁹ and believed that Prussian forces would not be capable of such a victory again. The Prussian Army had used this tactic with a devastating efficiency to panic and entrap the Austrian forces and rather than

¹¹⁷ Wawro, *Warfare and Society in Europe*, 45.

¹¹⁸ “Public Opinion in Germany,” *The Times* (London, England) September 8, 1870, pg 6. Issue 26850. Accessed February 16, 2015.

¹¹⁹ Wawro, *Warfare and Society in Europe*, 102-3.

trying to understand the significance of this new approach to battle, France instead disregarded it. It took direct experience with the agility of the Prussian Army and the devastating impact of its innovations for France to adapt to the changing understanding of warfare brought home during the Franco-Prussian War. Despite their terrible defeat and the chaos that followed due to occupation and the Paris Commune, by 1872 all French military forces had been reorganized in the model of the Prussian system which had so overwhelmed them. Within a year, many observers agreed that the French army had become stronger through this innovation than in the years prior to the Franco-Prussian War.¹²⁰

The Prussian Army embarked on the Franco-Prussian War in part because it could rely on the good will of the population generated by its victory in the Austro-Prussian War four years prior. Ironically, the Prussian parliament and public had initially been opposed to the reform and expansion of the Prussian army in the 1860s. The victory against Austria in 1866, however, began to evolve the role of the military in Prussian, and by extension, German life and politics that would become key after the Franco-Prussian War. Watching a military parade in May 1870, a spectator remarked on the rapid transformation of respect for the military in a short period of time as he could see “no trace of the former animosity against the military which used to be noticeable among the lower classes. The commonest working man looked to the troops with the feeling that he had belonged or had belonged to them.”¹²¹ The Prussian Army thus began the Franco-Prussian War with the support of all classes of the German people. The German victory guaranteed a continuance of the unifying spirit as long as the military maintained its

¹²⁰ Fife Jr., *The German Empire Between Two Wars*, 5.

¹²¹ As quoted in Wawro, *Warfare and Society in Europe*, 19.

predominance in society and politics. The army became the instrument of change for the German Empire.

This modernization of warfare also radically changed how civilians in France and Germany understood war and its potential impact on them. French villages had been targets for Prussian artillery as the German armies progressed through France. Allegations of sabotage and guerilla tactics from the French villagers were used to justify targeting civilians. In the decades that followed, civilians in war zones would no longer consider themselves protected by international law if they or others aided or simply lived in the vicinity of troops on campaign. Soldiers throughout Europe who previously only envisioned death on battlefields now questioned the safety of their surroundings in any village they travelled through. Suddenly everyone and everywhere was viewed as a potential combatant and combat zone.¹²² A threshold had been crossed. Villagers came to be seen as potential embedded adversaries who could become enemies without warning.

The Franco-Prussian War also modernized expectations of war reparations in a manner that would define post-war relations between states in the twentieth century. Bismarck's desire to ensure that Germany received the five billion francs that it demanded after French officials declared the monetary amount impossible to raise led to a physical occupation of France by Germany.¹²³ This extended for months as Germany worked to ensure it obtained the spoils it viewed as justified by the right of conquest. During the course of the military occupation, German soldiers and leadership harassed and humiliated French civilians and slighted their national culture. The Palace of Versailles became the headquarters of the German military during

¹²² Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War*. 309.

¹²³ Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War*. 305.

the Siege of Paris. Following the end of the war, German leadership remained there and chose the home of the French royal dynasties as the location for the crowning ceremony of Germany's new emperor. Bismarck also insisted on a German victory parade through the streets of Paris to emphasize the defeat of France to the same Parisian civilians who had endured months of warfare and starvation at the hands of the German army.¹²⁴ Germany's demands cost France financially, further bankrupting the nation with previously unimaginable amounts of monetary reparations. The money demanded by the Germans also damaged France socially, wounding its national pride and stimulating Revanchism. Third party observers worried over the precedent reparations set for future conflicts. *The Economist* noted in March 1871 that "to exact huge sums of money as the consequence of victory suggests a belief that money may next time be the object as well as the actual reward of battle. A flavor of huckstering is introduced into the relations between States."¹²⁵

The Franco-Prussian War fueled military tactics and strategy that would be largely detrimental in the long term though the failures would not be properly understood until World War One. The negative effects only became clear when both France and Germany sought to implement their changes on the modernized battlefields of the conflict. The Battle of Sedan was a distinctly significant battle for the Franco-Prussian War and as such a momentous victory, in the years which followed it was studied in great detail and used to justify the 'cult of the offensive.' The German victory at the Battle of Sedan seemed to prove that defensive firepower could be overwhelmed by an offensive envelopment.¹²⁶ The 'cult of offensive' came to be understood as the defining tactic of the Franco-Prussian War for Germany. It became imbued in

¹²⁴ Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War*. 304.

¹²⁵ As quoted in Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War*. 305.

¹²⁶ Wawro, *Warfare and Society in Europe*, 113-15.

the collective German psyche. When the German armies went to war in 1914 they did so remembering the victory at Sedan which guided their offensive goals and the tactics they hoped to use to achieve them. Had faith in the offensive not been so strong in Germany, thousands of lives may have been saved had military leaders not tried to recreate similar results to Sedan.

Industrialization and the development of infrastructure in both France and Germany followed the Franco-Prussian War. This was stimulated in part by modernization, but primarily because the 1871 conflict showed the important role that transportation and communication would play in all future conflicts. As the German economy flourished at the end of the nineteenth century, railroads, steamships, and canals became vital to carrying the necessary material goods throughout the empire and beyond its borders. The postal service and telegraphs ushered in a new era of rapid communication while mass distribution of newspapers allowed for unprecedented level of public literacy, information, and awareness. These revolutions in communication and transportation drove further development of the German national culture while also allowing regional and ethnic identities to remain a part of the imperial identity.¹²⁷

As all this occurred, Germany remained aware that while the nation was technically at peace, it was a precarious one and all its innovations could be used for rapid mobilization should war arise again. The engineers and strategists of the German army held themselves to the same standards as before the Franco-Prussian War and like their politicians and generals, they believed that relations with France required a constant state of preparedness. By the twentieth century they had created a model of how to “mobilize half a million men in forty-eight hours, and without stripping the fortresses on the Russian frontier, hurl a powerful force across the French

¹²⁷ Wawro, *Warfare and Society in Europe*, 77-79.

line between Verdun and Toul, isolating these tremendous fortresses in preparation for the sweep on Paris through Belgium.”¹²⁸ The memory and impact of the Franco-Prussian War meant that, for decades, the German army believed that confronting a new potential conflict with France was “its first and most important theoretical problem.”¹²⁹ This belief would enable the German war machine to begin the First World War as a model of mobility and strength.

In the years following 1900, many European military leaders and scholars looked to “the inner history of the carnage fields of the Franco-Prussian War”¹³⁰ to test and prove their theories. Too few of these men understood that “the war of 1870 was not an absolutely conclusive test of the military procedure at the time most fitted to result in success.”¹³¹ The disconnect between the supposed lessons of the Franco-Prussian War and the impact on warfare in 1914 would only be truly understood as the bloodshed of World War One was well under way. Throughout Europe, militaries and governments implemented innovations stemming from the Franco-Prussian War leading up to the twentieth century. The idea that a citizen’s duty extended to the shared community with an obligation to ensure its defense spread beyond France and Germany. A poisonous combination of nationalistic hubris and patriotism spread throughout France and Germany as domestic elements began to look to warfare as a political tool.

Despite its sabre rattling and displays of militarism, Germany still had a fundamental weakness that continued after the Franco-Prussian War. Despite its annexation of Alsace and Lorraine to create a buffer along the French border, the German empire continued to lack topographic barriers to serve as natural protections. “Germany has nine neighbors, and that is

¹²⁸ Fife Jr., *The German Empire Between Two Wars*, 13.

¹²⁹ Fife Jr., *The German Empire Between Two Wars*, 13.

¹³⁰ “The German Manoeuvres,” *The Times* (London, England) September 23, 1902 pg 6, Issue 36880. Accessed February 22, 2016.

¹³¹ “The German Manoeuvres,” *The Times*

Germany's greatest problem."¹³² These words defined the German states long before unification but once the German Empire was established, they took on new meaning. This, combined with a society shaped by the 'cult of the offensive,' increased the potential for another war of nations on the European continent. Proximity and the ever increasing push for power and resources led to Germany's continuing dominance in the continent's affairs, particularly those of warfare. For centuries, Germany had been the battle ground for "the selfishness and bloodlust of Frenchmen, Dutchmen, Swedes, Spaniards, and the Slavic peoples" and as the empire entered the twentieth century, Germany was determined that conflicts near its soil would occur on its chosen terms.¹³³

In the years following 1900, concepts of warfare and national identity began to change rapidly. While warfare had been an extension of political action for decades, the twentieth century misapplied the biological concept of Survival of the Fittest into social spheres such as warfare. In 1911, Prussian General Friederich von Bernhardt argued that war and international rivalries such as that between Germany and France were natural processes meant to ensure the necessary hegemony of stronger societies. He said: "War is not merely a necessary element in the lives of nations, but an indispensable factor of culture, in which a true civilized nation finds the highest expression of truth and vitality."¹³⁴ Similar leaders in Germany and France connected this idea to blood and soil nationalism and began to view war as a form of spiritual renewal for the morality of a nation. With this erroneous belief spreading, it becomes understandable why the German Empire was willing to expand the army at the cost of domestic stability in 1913.¹³⁵ The empire created through the power of the sword came to require it to maintain a constant state of

¹³² Carole Fink, Isabel V. Hull, and MacGregor Knox, eds., *German Nationalism and the European Response, 1890-1945*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 3.

¹³³ Fife Jr., *The German Empire Between Two Wars*, 73.

¹³⁴ As quoted in Miller, *From Revolutionaries to Citizens*, 4.

¹³⁵ Retallack, *Imperial Germany 1871-1918*, 214.

readiness. In 1913, the domestic turmoil caused by exponential increases in military funding seemed a small price to pay. The German government came to believe that it had to choose between discontent at home or potential weakening on the international stage. Between 1871 and 1914, Germany “had no choice save to keep her matches burning, and that if she was to defend her existence as a nation, she must maintain a powerful army and constantly increase its efficiency.”¹³⁶

Like many political forces, without the guidance of an incredibly skilled guide, such as Bismarck in 1870, militaristic nationalism rapidly spiraled throughout Europe. Internal disharmony and upheaval seemed impossible to address without the greatest of unifying forces: victory. When the military establishment came to dictate foreign policy in both France and Germany, given their historic grievances, violence became inevitable. Field Marshall von Moltke who guided Prussia through their defining conflicts against Austria and France predicted once that the next war “would last for seven years and might last for thirty”¹³⁷ and while the specifics of his prophecy are off slightly, he was not mistaken. Moltke accurately understood the defining ways in which warfare and nations radically changed following the Franco-Prussian War. As he predicted, World War One went on to be a longer and far more violent conflict than most of Europe expected. The forces of militarism, race and ethnic divides, and economic turmoil it unleashed extended into the thirty year period which included World War Two.

The Franco-Prussian War established the idea in Europe, particularly in France and Germany, that individuals should place their loyalty and trust in the nation-state and that national identity was defined by more than physical territory. What it meant to be French or German

¹³⁶ Fife Jr., *The German Empire Between Two Wars*, 80.

¹³⁷ Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army*, 280.

could not simply be defined by borders or governmental decrees, but by inherent qualities, loyalties, and culture. The cultural nationalism and collective belief in national identity initiated in Europe through the Franco-Prussian War in part answers Niall Ferguson's query on why men willingly obey megalomaniacs. Germany, unified through Bismarck's manipulations and in the glory of victory, and France, which pushed past spectacular loss with the mentality of 'never again' to unite under the banner of the 'idea of France,' became leaders in Europe. Dangerously, other nations strove to become like them, setting in motion the far better known cataclysms of the twentieth century.

French historian Jules Michelet prophesized in 1846 that it might be possible to wipe away an entire border, fill in rivers, and flatten mountains and cities. Even so, "the nations are still there."¹³⁸ In the late nineteenth century, nationalism in Europe evolved radically and the Franco-Prussian War was the catalyst that began the process. The Alsace-Lorraine Question was the avenue through which European citizens and leaders were able to truly understand the fundamental basis of national identity. The Franco-Prussian War proved how, by nurturing patriotic sentiments of nationality and igniting the base emotions of Revanchism, any nation-state could become stronger.

"What distinguishes nations, it is neither race nor language. The men feel in their heart that they are the same people when they have a community of ideas, interests, affections, memories and hopes. That's what makes the *patrie*. *Voilà*, why men want to walk together, work together, fight together, live and die for each other. The country is what we love."¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Jules Michelet, *Le Peuple*, (Bruxelles: Meline, Cans: 1846).

¹³⁹ Coulanges, "Alsace is it German or French."

The answer to Ferguson's question on why men obey orders is emotionally developed nationalism. It is the agonizing experiences of the war itself, the resentments created, and the loyalties fostered that explain why individuals risk themselves for the collective.

This collective nationalism established by France and Germany during the late nineteenth century was a toxic brew. It differed from what England or America came to regard as nationalism: pride over existing accomplishments. In France and Germany, nationalism placed the collective above the individual as both countries nurtured a devotion to the 'common good' by emphasizing the pain and loss of prestige during this period. Germany could always hearken back to its own loss of prestige during the Napoleonic losses and say 'never again.' Both nations hyped the necessity of continuing to present a strong unified front while prioritizing revenge at any future opportunity. The nature of nationalism may be intangible and difficult to quantify, as it also evolves constantly, but appreciating its role is vital to modern evaluation of the formation of both collective and national identity and when it becomes toxic to other countries.

Study of the Franco-Prussian War and the Alsace-Lorraine region decreased after World War One as the world turned away from the horrors that had occurred. The unprecedented economic crises and the rise of authoritarian states became the points of emphasis for World War II. The world believed that it had more to learn from World War One and its immediate causes rather than the preceding crucible war that ignited the conditions that blindly fueled it. Historians and politicians focused on the horrific bloodshed and violence on the Western Front rather than understanding that the animosity which motivated it could be traced back to 1870. The importance of understanding the Franco-Prussian War as a catalyst for the twentieth century never faded. Comprehending the role of the earlier conflict is crucial to appreciating how modern

nations and modern wars arise and the manner in which one conflict can precipitate another. Even now, as Western nations face new questions on how to define nations, borders, and national identity, it is important to truly understand what historically made nationalism an accelerant for war rather than a brake on predatory behavior. Whether international leaders understand the basis for the modern rationales or not, the modern understanding of nationalism in Europe stems from the collectivist, resentful version created by the Franco-Prussian War.

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