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Youth Movements in Alsace and the Issue of National Identity, 1918–1970

Abstract: *This chapter studies the youth organizations of Alsace, a region located at the crossroads of Europe, between France and Germany. More specifically, it will concentrate on the period between 1918 (since most of these organizations were born out of the Great War) and the early 1970s (when they entered into a pattern of decline). It will particularly focus on five phases of development of these organizations, periods during which young Alsatians experienced specific forms of involvement: (i) 1918–1932, at a time of re-appropriation of the French lifestyle; (ii) 1932–1939, with the rise of regional separatism; (iii) 1940–1945, with the annexation of the region to Germany; (iv) 1945–1958, with the process of local reconstruction within a thoroughly ‘French’ environment; and (v) 1958–1970, when young Alsatians were affected by profound social and cultural changes taking place. This study aims to show that ultimately, youth organizations in Alsace contributed to the affirmation of young people, specifically on the dialectic region/nation plan. This was done in a manner that was always relatively specific. However, this regional specificity did not lead to the establishment of particularisms, but rather helped situate a history in which singular patriotic, religious and political stakes were deeply interwoven.*

Introduction

In the first half of the twentieth century, many countries throughout Europe witnessed the creation of original groups and organizations dedicated to supporting young people in their physical, mental and spiritual development outside of school hours. Collectively referred to by historians as ‘youth movements’, these organizations brought together young people who were actively involved in group projects while at the same time learning to be autonomous¹. These youth movements were

1 We refer here in particular to the following works: Michael Patrick Fogarty, *Christian Democracy in Western Europe, 1820–1953* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1957) ; Richard G. Braungart, ‘Historical and generational patterns of youth movements: A global perspective’, *Comparative Social Research*, 7.1 (1984), 3–62 ; John O. Springhall, ‘The boy scouts, class and militarism in relation to British Youth Movements 1908–1930’, *International Review of Social History*, 16(02) (1971), 125–158 ; Herbert Moller, ‘Youth as a Force in the Modern World’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 10/3 (1968), 237–260 ; Walter Laqueur, *Young Germany: a history of the German youth movement* (New York: Basic Books, 1962) ; Aline Coutrot, ‘Youth

indeed groups created *for* and *by* young people. They differed, for example, in terms of the age of their members, some of them targeting children and teenagers, while others were aimed more at students and young adults. One of the characteristics of these movements was precisely the vague notion of youth that they maintained. However, they all shared a noble goal, namely that these ‘young people’ should experience teaching methods deliberately removed from normal academic standards, within organizations that represented original venues of expression, action and creativity, where young people could learn to take more responsibility for themselves. In a nutshell, these groups sought to enable young people to assert themselves, and over the past century, many of their members went on to become prominent personalities in the worlds of politics, culture and the economy.

How did such movements become established in the lives of young people? No doubt they were attracted to the principles of commitment these organizations conveyed: commitment to others, to their social background, to religion and to the nation. How then did these organizations attract young people in those European regions with unique social and political situations in the first half of the twentieth century? Was it a question of local specificity at the heart of these movements, on the themes, for example, of the State or the nation? This is the question posed in this paper, which focuses more particularly on one part of Europe with a very specific historical trajectory, namely Alsace, located as it was between 1850 and 1950 ‘between France and Germany’.² This classic and very accurate expression by Alfred Wahl and Jean-Claude Richez refers to a certain hesitation or indecision at the heart of a region historically steeped in the culture of both these nations, and where, unfortunately, European history was often made. Indeed, from 1871 on, Alsace was alternatively annexed by Germany (between 1871 and 1918, and again from 1940 to 1945) and re-annexed by France (during the inter-war period from 1918 to 1940, and since 1945). It is reasonable to assume that, within this context, the different youth movements in Alsace conveyed a very varied perception of the issue of national identity.³

Movements in France in the 1930s’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 5/1 (1970), 23–35 ; Reuven Kahane, *The origins of postmodern youth: Informal youth movements in a comparative perspective*, 4 vol. (Berlin/New York : De Gruyter, 1997).

2 Alfred Wahl, Jean-Claude Richez, *L’Alsace entre France et Allemagne, 1850–1950* (Paris : Hachette, 1993).

3 This approach represents an unusual and original means of understanding the history of the youth movements in this region. In this sense, it effectively complements the approach of these youth groups from the educational and religious perspectives put forward in the book published on the basis of my PhD (*Toujours prêts ! Scoutismes*

In France, historians have taken an interest in the ‘youth movement’ phenomenon since the 1980s, following the famous study in 1979 by Maurice Crubellier⁴ and based on the pioneering work of authors such as Jeanne Caron on the French political and religious movement *Le Sillon* or Charles Molette on the *Association catholique de la jeunesse française* (Catholic Association of French Youth), published in the late 1960s.⁵ Since the 2000s, it is fair to say that youth organizations have ‘gone down in history’, to quote Gérard Cholvy,⁶ with the publication of numerous works on the subject of a particular group, on federations, on the relationships between socio-educational institutions and the Church or the State, or on the methods, ideologies, or leaders. In France today, there is much literature on these topics⁷. However, it should be noted that the vast majority of these works are monographic studies in that they recount the history of only one type of movement or one association. Moreover, on the rare occasion that this is not the case, the research often appears to be ‘situated’ historically, i.e., focused on a specific period. We believe that the study of youth movements in such a politically- and culturally-specific border region as Alsace may allow a wider, more general approach. Indeed, it is our hypothesis that between the end of the First World War (when most movements were created in their modern form, became well-recognized associations, and clarified their projects and methods) and the 1970s (when they experienced an upheaval in their initial projects and their statute as

et mouvements de jeunesse en Alsace, 1918–1970 (Strasbourg : La Nuée Bleue, 2007)). This text notably attributes importance to some sources that were not exploited in this thesis.

- 4 Maurice Crubellier, *L'enfance et la jeunesse dans la société française, 1800–1950* (Paris : Armand Colin, 1979).
- 5 Jeanne Caron, *Le Sillon et la démocratie chrétienne, 1894–1910* (Paris : Plon, 1967) ; Charles Molette, *L'Association catholique de la jeunesse française (1886–1907) : une prise de conscience du laïcat catholique* (Paris : Armand Colin, 1968).
- 6 Gérard Cholvy, ‘Les organisations de jeunesse entrent dans l’histoire’, *Revue d’histoire de l’Eglise de France*, 217, 2 (2000), 347–361.
- 7 Among the best known works, we can notably mention: Arnaud Baubérot, *L’invention d’un scoutisme chrétien, les éclaireurs unionistes de 1911 à 1921* (Paris : Les bergers et les mages, 1997) ; Marie-Thérèse Cheroutre, *Le Scoutisme au féminin. Les Guides de France, 1923–1998* (Paris : Cerf, 2002) ; Christian Guérin, *L’utopie Scouts de France* (Paris : Fayard, 1997) ; Alain Michel, *Scouts, Juifs et Français. L’histoire des EI de 1923 aux années 1990* (Jérusalem : Elkana, 2003) ; Nicolas Palluau, *La fabrique des pédagogues. Encadrer les colonies de vacances, 1919–1939* (Rennes : Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2013).

legitimate training bodies was called into question), youth movements in Alsace shared many common points, notably in terms of national identity, that allow for considering and studying them together.

At first glance, to undertake the history of all these movements between 1918 and 1970 may appear to be quite a challenge. How indeed can we group together organizations that claimed their own specificity through the diversity of their teaching practices and their ideological positions? Traditional definitions of youth movements can explain this viewpoint. First of all, it should be noted that this study addresses the main youth movements of the time: the different scouts movements, the youth hostels movement, as well as all of the movements falling under 'specialized' religious or secular actions (Young Catholic Workers and Young Catholic Farmers, French Student Christian Federation, Jewish Youth Federation, Student Youth, etc.). These were 'socio-educational' groups, and can be clearly distinguished from 'political youth organizations', which, due to their subordination to a political party, constitute more a part of the history of socialism or communism than the youth movements *per se*.⁸ These socio-educational youth movements spread an original perception of non-formal education. They differed from the traditional charities and youth clubs of the late nineteenth century in that they set up a more specific pedagogy and built themselves around the myth of the self-management of young people, following here in a sense the German *Deutsche Jugendbewegung* of the early twentieth century.⁹ The movements were thus fundamentally built around the triple educational, activist and community paradigm. They therefore shared a common language, even though different inflections and intonations could be heard.¹⁰ Our purpose here is not to reduce the diversity of youth movements, but to seek to go beyond it, as in the approach taken by Aline Coutrot¹¹. Given the vicissitudes of Alsatian political history, it would indeed seem that local movements tended to encourage their convergence, in order to assert their role as actors in the defence of French interests and/or Alsatian characteristics.

8 Joachim Raschke, 'Zum Begriff der sozialen Bewegung', in Roland Roth, Dieter Rucht, eds., *Neue soziale Bewegung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1987), 19–29.

9 Philippe Laneyrie, 'Le mythe du "Jugendbewegung" dans les représentations du "mouvement de jeunesse" en France', *Cahiers Jeunesses et Sociétés*, 14 (1991), 77–99.

10 Rémi Fabre, 'Les mouvements de jeunesse dans la France de l'entre-deux-guerres', *Le mouvement social*, 168, 3 (1994), 21.

11 Aline Coutrot, 'Le mouvement de jeunesse, un phénomène au singulier?', in Gérard Cholvy, ed., *Le patronage, ghetto ou vivier* (Paris : Nouvelle Cité, 1988), 110.

This question can be addressed from different points of view. Three key issues are specific to the youth movements of Alsace – interdenominational relationships, relationships between private initiatives and public policy, and the region/nation dialectic – in each of which it is possible to identify a true regional particularity. In an area characterized by the coexistence of three religious communities (Catholic, Protestant and Jewish), the case in very few other regions, youth movements oscillated during the twentieth century between cooperation and competition in the field of religion.¹² Moreover, the Alsatian movements tended to be rather indifferent with respect to national public youth policies, an attitude they justified by the long tradition of local associations in the region. But it is the third issue which particularly interests us in this paper. How did the perception of the idea of nation and national identity evolve within the Alsatian youth movements? Did they assert themselves as French after 1918, even though they had inherited a share of the local associations that had existed prior to the Great War when Alsace was a *Reichsland*? To what extent did they affirm their regional uniqueness in order to distance themselves from the French centralizing republican model? How did their positioning with respect to the French nation evolve from 1939–1940 onward?

In our opinion, these questions are fundamental if we are to understand the citizens' agenda that drove the Alsatian youth movements. We will see that in this region, with its undeniable relative proximity with Germany, the 'country of student corporations',¹³ the population cultivated a strong 'regional feeling'.¹⁴ Structured primarily around the idea of cultural boundaries, this feeling was the opposite of the German concept of nationality as defined by Brubaker, i.e., socio-geographical in nature, based on the notion of a people and operating on the principle of national differentiation.¹⁵ Within this context, the very sensitive theme of nationality permeated the youth movements, the ideological positioning of which relayed strong political rationales that echoed the identity issues of the populations. We will therefore focus on five phases of development of these organizations, during each of which young Alsatians experienced a very specific

12 Julien Fuchs, 'Concurrences et ententes au sein des mouvements de jeunesse. Le cas alsacien (1918–1960)', *Vingtième siècle. Revue d'Histoire*, 119, 3 (2013), 113–126.

13 Gilbert Gillot, 'Les corporations étudiantes: un archaïsme plein d'avenir (Allemagne-Autriche, 1880–1914)', *Le Mouvement social*, 120, 1982, 45–75.

14 Peter Sahlins, *Frontières et identités nationales. La France et l'Espagne dans les Pyrénées depuis le XVII^e siècle* (Paris : Belin, 1996), 15.

15 Rogers Brubaker, *Citoyenneté et nationalité en France et en Allemagne* (Paris : Belin, 1997).

form of involvement: between 1918 and 1932 at a time of re-appropriation of the French lifestyle; from 1932 to 1939 with the rise of regional separatism; between 1940 and 1945 with the annexation of the region to Germany; from 1945 to 1958 due to the local reconstruction within a thoroughly 'French' climate; and finally between 1958 and 1970, when young Alsatians were affected by profound social and cultural changes. Alsace differed from the rest of France in that it was much more familiar with the world of clubs and associations. Dating back to the middle of the nineteenth century, this way of life was encouraged by the specificity of the region's urban network, its population density and its topographical characteristics. But it also owed much to the fundamental role played by the churches in everyday life, as well as a local cultural background marked by a desire for 'regionalization' and the demand for recognition of a specific identity, through a regional dialect and collective sociability.¹⁶

This choice of demarcation of the subject is relevant with respect to the sources used for this study, the main corpus of which consists of archives, written and iconographic, public and private, French and German. These include the legal archives of the organizations, the archives of the religious authorities, and the internal archives of the youth movements, the consultation of which is not necessarily easy for the post-1970 period.¹⁷ It should be further noted that the nature of these archives, many of which come from religious bodies or government departments, confirms our theoretical decision to study what united the youth movements rather than what separated them, insofar as most of these sources provide an overview of all of the movements rather than just one specific organization. This study also draws on the testimonies of key players involved in the youth movements of the time. This approach naturally accompanies the history we have undertaken to portray: the vitality of the Alsatian youth organizations primarily inherited the militant convictions of those who established them, drawing on imaginations and beliefs, and as such can only benefit from an analysis of the discourses.

16 Gabriel Wackermann, 'Associations', in *Encyclopédie de l'Alsace* (Strasbourg: Publitotal, 1982), 372–373.

17 Julien Fuchs, 'Sources et archives des mouvements de jeunesse. Préalables méthodologiques à une recherche sur l'univers associatif', *¿Interrogations?*, 6, 2008, available at <http://www.revue-interrogations.org/Sources-et-archives-des-mouvements>, 248.

The 'relearning' of France by youth movements in Alsace, 1918–1932

At this time, daily life in the region was organized around the local law in Alsace-Moselle, a legal system operating in parallel with French law, inherited from the German period. The reintegration of Alsace within the French nation in 1918 was thus necessarily problematic. Since 1870, the population of Alsace had forged a 'mythical' image of France as a democratic country. It firmly believed that France would respect its language, culture and religious specificities, and grant the region the power and even the specificity that Germany had always denied it. It believed that the terms of the Concordat of 1801, an agreement that recognized religious freedom and privileged relationships between the Church and the State, would be maintained. As Paul Smith puts it, it was thought at this time that this 'small country' would be able to 'negotiate with the assimilative thrust of the nation-state'.¹⁸ However, the refusal of France to recognize Alsace as a national minority was manifest. It fed the development of what historians modestly call the 'Alsatian malaise'.¹⁹ To what extent was it possible to aspire to the respect of regional characteristics while belonging to a republican country? This paradox was strongly felt within the youth organizations of the time. Their development must thus be understood in a dialectic of uniformity and individuality, between promoting patriotism and defending local specificities.

The first half of the nineteenth century saw the development of a craze for socio-recreational activities in Alsace (evening gatherings, games, theatre, etc.), reflecting a real 'spirit of association [...] meeting all the needs of the social and intellectual life: charities and other organizations promoting instruction and the raising of moral standards',²⁰ giving rise to a very dense breeding ground for associations throughout the towns and villages of Alsace. This vitality, already identified by Maurice Agulhon and Maryvonne Bodiguel in their work on the history of sociability in rural areas, was all the more evident in this region, as in Provence and in Flanders, than in other French provinces, the border regions appearing to

18 Paul Smith, 'À la recherche d'une identité nationale en Alsace (1870–1918)', *Vingtième siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 49 (1996), 24.

19 Geneviève Baas, *Le malaise alsacien, 1919–1924 (Strasbourg : Développement et Communauté, 1972)*.

20 Charles-Frédéric Faudel, 'La Société Alsato-Vosgienne et le Schwarzwaldverein', *Bulletin de la Société d'histoire naturelle de Colmar* (1868), 1.

be more conducive for its development.²¹ The newly-formed associative network structured itself around the *Wirtschaft*, genuine melting pots of social solidarity, where all of the associations held their meetings. The annexation of Alsace to Germany in 1870 did nothing to stifle this vitality, contributing instead to accentuate its uniqueness. Indeed, this integration of Alsace within the *Reich* and the subsequent Germanization policies further strengthened the bonds of solidarity and community spirit. Within this context, the Alsatian associations of the period (including brass bands, study circles, choirs, hiking and gymnastics clubs, etc.) became groups and organizations involved in the consolidation of a regional identity, most of them claiming a real distance with the German authorities. In the field of youth work, this process took the form of the creation of numerous youth circles and organizations for children, usually established by local parishes and often referred to as 'youth clubs'.²²

These youth clubs sought to attract young people through fun activities, theatre, gymnastics and the first sports activities, immersing them within a framework of morality and belief. They were especially involved in spreading a strong local feeling, fuelled in particular by the question of the preservation of religious differences. One notable example is that of the *Avant-garde du Rhin*, originally founded under the name *Elsässischer Turnerbund* (ETB), a major Catholic sports association (with nearly 12,000 members in 1914) that united many youth wings. Created in July, 1898 in Ingersheim by a layman, the aim of the ETB was to bring together Catholic youth to encourage their development through physical activity. But the association also immediately took a very political stance with a resolutely pro-France attitude. Founded only one month after the *Fédération gymnastique et sportive des patronages de France* (FGSPF, a gymnastics and sports federation of French youth clubs), and although it originated while Alsace was a Reichsland, the ETB claimed a regional league status as part of the FGSPF, i.e., as an association with French ties. At the same time, its leaders refused to be affiliated with *Deutsche*

21 Maurice Agulhon, Maryvonne Bodiguel, *Les associations au village* (Le Paradou : Actes Sud, 1981), 14.

22 Just before the First World War, Alsace numbered 95 youth groups affiliated to the *Fédération des cercles catholiques d'hommes et de jeunes gens d'Alsace* (Federation of Catholic men's and youth groups in Alsace), 48 Protestant young men's groups and 33 young women's groups, as well as around 10 Jewish groups (Archives of the Bishopric of Strasbourg, ORDO, 1914; Archives of the Board of the Augsburg Confession of Alsace-Lorraine Lutheran church, directory of the Protestant churches of Alsace and Lorraine, 1919).

Turnverein, the German Gymnastics Federation, earning the ETB a few run-ins with the local authorities.

The Alsatian scout movement, coming only a few years after the German *Pfadfinder* movement created in 1909 and structured around the *Christlicher Verein Junger Männer* (CVJM), the German counterpart of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), was also France-oriented right from the outset. It was founded just before 1914 in the French-speaking sections of the Protestant Reformed and Lutheran unions of the *Elsass-Lothringischer Evangelischer Jünglings-Mädchenbund*, local versions of the CVJM, and which comprised at the time both French- and German-speaking sections. It is likely that during the Great War these groups were involved in covert activities against the German authorities (sabotaging of telephone lines, publishing of underground newspapers), as attested in certain archives of the *Éclaireurs unionistes de France* (Unionist Scouts of France).²³ In all cases, the representation of an Alsatian scout movement was built around these first initiatives, and in accordance with its motto, 'In all things, serve God and country', served the motherland lost in 1871. As such, it can be compared with the patriotism at the origin of the Boy Scout movement, founded in 1907 by Robert Baden-Powell.

From 1918–1919 onward, the scout movement in Alsace grew in a very homogeneous way around the Protestant parishes, whereas it was generally more heterogeneous in the rest of France. The originality of the scouting life attracted young people from all denominations within this Unionist (Protestant) and fundamentally cosmopolitan movement. In Strasbourg, Guebwiller and Colmar, teenagers from lay and Catholic communities joined the Unionist units, as no Catholic structure or local version of the *Éclaireurs de France* (non-religious scout movement) had as yet been created in Alsace. Indeed, in the immediate post-war period, there was broad consensus on the idea of developing activities around the already structured Unionist movement. This coexistence of Protestant, Catholic, Jewish and secular scouts within the same units posed no problem for either the young people or the officials, primarily excited by the spread of the Scout ideal: 'In 1920, Protestant scouts [...] invited me to join them [...] and explained what this experience would involve and how they would help me start up a *Scouts de France* troop,' said Jean Burklé, founder of the first Catholic *Scouts de France* troop in Guebwiller in 1922.²⁴ In Mulhouse and Strasbourg, the first Jewish scouting

23 Archives of the *Éclaireurs unionistes de France* (Paris). Jean Beigbeder Collection, card B1.

24 Cité par Charles Keller, Christian Stoecklé, *Scouts de France Guebwiller, 1922–1987* (Guebwiller : Art'Real, 1987), 3.

initiatives were also located within the Unionist sections. Gradually, the Alsatian scout movement diversified and strong interfaith conflicts arose. The Catholic scout movement, for example, was founded in 1920 at the express request of the Bishop of Strasbourg, in order to counteract the influence of the Protestant and secular scout movements, while the secular scouts faced competition from the Protestant scouts to become recognized with the authorities. However, in terms of their relationship to the nation, it was the idea of an Alsatian scouting movement united around a pro-French base that was built, including in the Protestant parishes of northern Alsace, often considered more pro-German than the rest.

The success of scouting in Alsace constituted the first sign of a deeper trend: the development of a diversity of youth movements. In the same way that they spread at national level, the youth movements in Alsace experienced remarkable growth locally from 1920 on. With the return of Alsace to France, these movements spread thanks to the dense breeding ground of associations that had existed in the region's towns and villages since the mid-nineteenth century. Different branches of scouting were founded and made a lasting impression. These included the *Scouts de France* (Catholic Scouts) in November 1920, the interdenominational *Fédération française des éclaireuses* (French Girl Guides Federation) in January 1922, the secular *Éclaireurs de France* scouts in October 1922, and the *Éclaireurs israélites de France* (Jewish Scouts) in October 1929. They inspired other activities such as summer camps and countless parish and youth groups where physical exercise and nature outings were organized in addition to Bible studies. The principle of these groups was unique: they allowed young people to experience life in a community and to gain autonomy, thereby revealing their desire to differentiate themselves.²⁵ For Alice Gillig, team leader in the Catholic Girl Guides, the scout movement represented a 'real breakthrough' for young girls, a 'means of going out and seeing the world'.²⁶ But they also encouraged commitment of a more political nature, and in Alsace this politicization led to a reconciliation of the organizations when they felt their specificity was threatened. Thus, while the movements were united in proclaiming their ties with France, its people and its culture, they also simultaneously lined up to defend the regional character of Alsace.

This was particularly the case in 1924, when the government of Édouard Herriot began to repeal local civil legislation to absorb Alsace within the French Republic. In line with the bishopric, and like the majority of Alsatian members

25 Antoine Prost, 'Jeunesse et société dans la France de l'entre-deux-guerres', *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 13, 1 (1987), 42.

26 Interview with Alice Gillig (April 16th, 2002).

of parliament and senators, the steering committee of the *Fédération des cercles catholiques d'hommes et de jeunes gens d'Alsace* (Federation of Catholic men's and youth groups in Alsace) denounced the heavy-handed francization policy. This Federation was widely supported by the *Association catholique de la jeunesse française* (Catholic Association of French Youth), whose intention was to unite the young Catholic troops in the defence of the interests of the Church, which felt threatened 'in these times of triumphant anticlericalism'.²⁷ Comprising influential members of the *Action populaire nationale d'Alsace*, a Liberal Catholic party, the aim of this steering committee was to bring together the different youth organizations to 'protest in the strongest terms' against this attack on the 'most sacred rights'.²⁸ The struggle, relayed for example in the *Les jeunes d'Alsace*, a newspaper with a French title but published in the Alsatian dialect, mobilized groups well beyond the Catholic sphere (see Fig. 11) Indeed, although largely inclined to spread French culture,²⁹ the Young Men's Christian Associations in Alsace-Lorraine, and notably the Unionist Scouts, brandished the local culture through songs and sketches in Alsatian. The use of the local dialect thus took on an identity meaning.³⁰

From 1918 on, these very diverse movements came together around the idea of the reintegration of Alsace within France, but based on the respect of local specificities. Initially caught up in the euphoria that followed the end of the First World War, they started to become more careful about joining the French model towards the mid-1920s. This nevertheless remained an obvious choice, particularly in 1925 and 1926, at the time of the first separatist upsurge of the inter-war period. Indeed, following the withdrawal of the Herriot legislation, regionalist tendencies started to emerge, dividing public opinion on the status of Alsace within France. The publication in May 1925 of *Zukunft*, a newspaper that demanded independence from France in the name of the 'Alsatian people', followed by the *Heimatbund* in June 1926, a manifesto inciting all Alsatians faithful to their 'country' to unite in order to achieve full independence, crystallized tensions in the region. Despite the fact that the youth movements generally refrained from taking partisan positions, the Catholic movements, in line with the Bishop of Strasbourg, as well as the vast majority of the Protestant and Jewish movements declared themselves strong opponents of regional independence, potentially radical and anti-French. Their

27 Alain-René Michel, *Catholiques en démocratie* (Paris : Cerf, 2006), 52.

28 Archives of the *Avant-garde du Rhin* (Strasbourg). *Les jeunes d'Alsace*, 23 June 1924.

29 Catherine Storne-Sengel, *Les protestants d'Alsace-Lorraine de 1919 à 1939 : entre les deux règnes* (Strasbourg : Société savante d'Alsace, 2003).

30 Anne-Marie Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales : Europe, XVIII^e-XX^e siècles* (Paris : Seuil, 1999).

activities thus took on a very patriotic aspect, as clearly evidenced by the organization of pilgrimages to the emblematic battlefields of the First World War (Verdun and Hartmannswillerkopf, also known as the Vieil Armand), or the sponsorship of Alsatian units by such leading figures of the time as General Lyautey, honorary president of the Catholic Scouts, Captain Guynemer, who gave his name to a Unionist Scouts troop in Mulhouse, and General Gouraud, liberator of Strasbourg and a guest at the provincial camp of the Unionist Scouts in Obernai in 1928.

Youth movements and the regional issue, 1932–1939

By the early 1930s, Alsace boasted a varied landscape of youth organizations. The movements had become even more rooted in the lives of the young population. The different scout movements (Catholic, Unionist, Jewish and, to a lesser extent, secular) boosted the local fabric of associations by intensifying outdoor activities. The parish circles asserted their position as guarantors of the local culture. But groups of a new kind also started to appear. Youth hostel federations, for which the Vosges represented an ideal venue for their activities, immediately attracted a lot of young men and women who thus discovered a unique lifestyle and a specific mindset: one of strong antimilitarism and a hope in pacifism, an ideal cultivated in French schools as a form of opposition to the Republican moral doctrine of the late nineteenth century, which had led the previous generation to accept the war of 1914–1918 without question.³¹ Germany and France could be friends since their young people fraternized in youth hostels. The youth hostel movement largely contributed here to the dissemination of a political ideal, especially given that it was widely supported, from 1936, by the Socialist government of the Popular Front, a coalition of French left-wing parties. Before the rise of authoritarianism in Europe, this ideal, which transcended religious and Republican divides, found its fullest expression. Among the first French youth hostels created in the early 1930s, the Alsatian hostels, inspired by the German *Jugendherberge* designed by Richard Schirrmann, became preferred vehicles for disseminating an ‘urban hiker habitus’.³² By the mid-1930s, there were some fifteen youth hostels in Alsace. What is known as ‘specialized’ Catholic Action (i.e., specific to a particular social environment) was also born during this period. This included the *Jeunesse ouvrière catholique* (Young Catholic Workers) and the *Jeunesse agricole catholique* (Young Catholic Farmers), created in the 1931–1932 period in the region (1927 and 1929,

31 Mona L. Siegel, *The moral disarmament of France: education, pacifism, and patriotism, 1914–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

32 Wahl, Richez, 273.

respectively, in France), and the *Jeunesse étudiante catholique* (Young Catholic Students) in 1935. These associations, which offered a sociologically differentiated management of young people and encouraged activism, met with great success because they came in answer to a social need. In 1938, these three movements together had no fewer than 99 male sections and 96 female sections in the region.

During the 1930s, the work of youth associations in Alsace was thus multifaceted and effective. All of these movements had their roots in traditional parish circles, from which they progressively emancipated themselves. Initially very local structures, they gradually became regional-scale organizations but whose actions were situated within a broader context. The Alsace Province of the Catholic Scouts, for example, took on the ideological and pedagogical guidelines dictated by the national Scouts federation. The Young Catholic Workers association in Alsace was also fully in line with the policies and actions undertaken by the Parisian structure, for example by following the same campaigns (annual themes of reflection and action) as those launched at the national level.

In this sense, as they developed, the youth movements in Alsace also lost their initial specificity, and even claimed to be local workings of a much broader trend. Thus, little by little, groups of young Alsatians also integrated the beginnings of a public policy dedicated to youth, as it would later be implemented, notably from 1936 on with the Popular Front. In any case, by the end of the inter-war period, the youth movements had grown on a considerable scale, affecting all walks of life. It is difficult to assess the numbers of young people concerned by these movements. According to Antoine Prost, nearly 10% of young people were members of a youth movement in France at this time.³³ In Alsace, where the network of associations that had existed since the late nineteenth century was more developed than in the rest of the country, this figure was even higher: given the total membership of the Alsatian movements, we can estimate that one out of every eight young people was concerned.

While the coherence of the youth movements in Alsace in the 1930s was palpable in terms of the pedagogies implemented and their educational purposes, it was especially greatly enhanced by their consensus when confronted with the separatist threat. Since the mid-1920s, the Alsatian separatist movement had been divided between two tendencies, the one rather regionalist and the other openly pro-German.³⁴ Indeed, faced with the domestic French political crisis and the

33 Antoine Prost, *Histoire générale de l'enseignement et de l'éducation en France*, T. IV, *L'école et la famille dans une société en mutation, 1930–1982* (Paris: Labat, 1982), 497.

34 Christian Baechler, 'L'autonomisme alsacien dans l'entre-deux-guerres', *Revue de l'Association des Professeurs d'Histoire et de Géographie*, 347 (1995), 249–255.

external threat from Germany, the moderate majority of separatists worked on reconciliation with the national parties. But at the same time, other leaders greatly strengthened their positions, even going so far as to proclaim their admiration for the Third Reich. While pro-German regionalist ideas became less and less popular within the separatist parties, they were nevertheless virulent, especially where the youth movements were concerned. Within this context, while the regional sections of the French far-right leagues such as *Jeunesses patriotes* (Patriotic Youth), *Action française* (French Action) and *Croix-de-feu* (Cross of Fire), supported by the German authorities, grew in numbers and encouraged the creation of anti-Semitic committees, the separatist youth movements born in the mid-1920s became more radical.

In 1931, the *Jungvolkspartei* (Young People's Party) was created by Joseph Rossé for 18- to 28-year-olds. It counted among its ranks Georges Spitz, head of the *Jungkreuzfahrer* (Young Crusaders) and secretary of the student association *Alsatia*. But two other prominent Alsatian separatist youth movements are particularly worthy of note. Very active on the political landscape up until the war, the *Jungmannschaft* and *Bund Erwin von Steinbach*, whose memberships increased significantly, were led by two of the most active members of the Alsatian pro-German separatist movement, Hermann Bickler and Friedrich Spieser. The *Jungmannschaft* advocated a community and racist conception of society in which social classes would disappear and where a sense of *Volkstum* would emerge. The association operated in the same way as the Hitler Youth. Its insignia, the red *Wolfsangelrune* on a black background, was none other than the mantrap of the peasant uprisings. In the same vein, the *Bund Erwin von Steinbach* extolled traditions and village life as trustees of ethnic purity, as well as the Alsatian culture and language, purely and simply Germanic. The rock outcrop at Hunebourg, acquired by the organization, was the venue for numerous rituals involving young people converted to Nazism.

The socio-educational organizations in Alsace, which promoted themselves as places of training and responsibility, were forced to take a stand here in the early 1930s. Overwhelmed by the German situation and the echo of pro-German stances relayed throughout the region by the press and Radio Stuttgart, their leaders reacted to the radicalization of the separatist movement. They included many influential intellectuals who taught at the University of Strasbourg, notably historians Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, philosophers Georges Canguilhem and Jean Cavailles, and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. The Jewish youth movements were, of course, in the front line. Grouped together in Strasbourg within the *Mercaz Hanoar*, a kind of community centre for Jewish youth, their members led courageous actions in defence of the status and rights of the Jews when confronted with radical separatist

leaders. Conferences, activities and evening events were organized during which attempts were made to develop an effective scout movement where Jewish children and teenagers would find a more appropriate place in Alsatian society.

From 1932 on, the French Student Christian Federation denounced the danger of a germanization of the movements. The Unionist Scouts of Alsace, led at national level since 1936 by the Rev. John Gastambide, a follower of Karl Barth, also refused the regionalist theme. In 1938, they wrote the Chanson d'Alsace anthem. As if those who were to sing this anthem considered themselves under threat, the score indicated that it should be sung to a 'martial' beat :

Joyeux enfants de la vaillante Alsace / Merry youth of valiant Alsace
 Partons gaiement pour les rudes combats. / Cheerfully we face battle.
 Car nul de nous ne trahira la trace, / For not one of us shall betray the path,
 Qui sous l'effort jamais ne succomba. / And none shall ever fall.
 Que nos voix s'accordent bien ! / May our voices rise in unison!
 Que le cri porte au lointain, / May our cry be heard afar,
 La rumeur de notre entrain. / The sound of our spirit and passion.
 [...]
 Oui, nous t'aimons, ô notre chère Alsace. / Yes, we do love you, our dear Alsace.
 En vain le temps peut égrener son cours, / In vain does time mark off its course,
 Dans notre cœur rien ne prendra la place, / For in our hearts nothing shall replace
 Que nous gardons à ton fidèle amour. / Your constant love for us.
 Que nos bras soient toujours forts, / May our arms always be strong,
 Pour lutter jusqu'à la mort, / To fight to the death,
 Prêts à défendre ton sort. / Ready to defend your fate.
 [...]
 Nous chantons pleins d'assurance, / And we sing out with confidence
 Dans la joie ou la souffrance : / Whether in joy or sorrow:
 Alsace et France! / Alsace and France!³⁵

This Protestant vitality resulted, in 1938, in the establishment of an inter-movement Committee with a view to consolidating the efforts of these associations against Nazism. This Committee would later become the Cimade, an ecumenical association providing assistance and support to people uprooted by war and which is still very active in France today. The Alsatian youth hostel movement also witnessed numerous pacifist and anti-German stances. Finally, communism being a prime target of regionalist extremism, movements such as the Young Christian Workers took clearly anti-separatist positions, stating, for example, in 1938 that they were making every effort to convey a democratic ideal in Alsace.

35 Alain Morley Collection, 'Tisons' EEUF National Conservatory, Schillersdorf (Bas-Rhin).

While the stands taken against separatism and Nazism abounded in the Alsatian youth movements of the 1930s, their activities obviously involved much more than that. Behind the official discourse, these groups especially worked to pursue ordinary activities (multiplying weekends, camps and training sessions until the summer of 1939), without making the fight against extremism a priority in their daily lives. This does not mean that the Alsatian youth groups were not interested in the political cause. On the contrary, through their wish to not necessarily involve their young members in the debate, they actually took a very real stand. By defending above all other concerns an educational ideal and the notion of peace, they attempted to preserve a place of moral education for Alsatian youth.

A new ‘*union sacrée*’, 1940–1945

The outbreak of the Second World War obviously rendered even more palpable the ideological rapprochement between the youth movements in Alsace. In September 1939, the evacuation of 370,000 Alsatians to the ‘France of the interior’ was ordered following the declaration of war. In June 1940, the region was automatically annexed to Germany. Between these two points in time, the vast majority of the youth movements disappeared. Those that remained became ‘active minorities’³⁶ who tried to organize themselves in the face of Nazi brutality. From here on in they followed two different trajectories: one in Alsace where the Nazi yoke choked the majority of them, and the other in the *départements* of their exile. For each of these groups, the goal was not to lose contact with the regional structures (when they continued to exist) or with those at national level, let alone with the leaders and members that had been dispersed. From that point on, the Alsatian movements put their differences behind them and presented a united front.

In Alsace, the few units that did not stop their activities in September 1939 took part in the support process that accompanied the evacuation. Scout troops from Colmar met to carry out liaison duties, population census and the distribution of gas masks.³⁷ Elsewhere in Alsace, members of the Young Catholic Workers and Farmers associations, the Catholic and interdenominational Girl Guides offered their services in hospitals and railway stations. Although deprived of their elders, called up for war, these groups developed a new sense of commitment that was responsive, collective and showed solidarity. Nevertheless, the actions of the youth

36 Olivier Wiewiorka, ‘À la recherche de l’engagement (1940–1944)’, *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d’histoire*, 60, 4 (1998), 59.

37 Departmental archives of the Haut-Rhin (Colmar). 8.AL.2.- Purg. 13107 : Shippings of masks to the populations.

movements in Alsace remained very limited, hampered by Nazi policies. By the Order of 16 August 1940, the youth associations were dissolved. From that point on, any activity on their part could only be underground. Despite the injunction, some groups continued to meet secretly, within the framework of *Bibelstunden* (Bible studies) for teams of the Young Christian Workers,³⁸ or during meetings in all but name for the Temple-Neuf troop of the interdenominational Girl Guides, the Guynemer Unionist Scouts troop of Mulhouse, or the Foch clan of the Catholic Scouts in Guebwiller. Some notable Resistance initiatives were witnessed between 1940 and 1942, such as the *Pur-sang* network courageously run by the Catholic Girl Guides in Strasbourg. In accordance with the principle 'The Girl Guide is the daughter of France and loves her country', six young Alsatian women set up an escape network from Alsace to France, which was used by more than four hundred prisoners and opponents of annexation until it was dismantled in March 1942.³⁹ But aside from these isolated initiatives, the vast majority of the movements had no other choice but to shut down.

It was thus in places of exile that the history of the youth movements in Alsace during the war was written. In the Dordogne, where the inhabitants of Strasbourg and other Alsatian administrations found refuge at the time of the evacuation, certain units reformed in September 1939. These included teams of Young Female Workers who, following a call from the bishopric to revive Catholic Action in the host departments, participated in the *Office catholique des réfugiés d'Alsace* (Catholic Office for refugees from Alsace) in Périgueux. The central committees of the Unionist Scouts and Christian Unions sought to encourage the resumption of activities by specifically Alsatian units as soon as conditions were favourable. Finally, with regard to the Jewish movements, initiatives to maintain contacts between the evacuated youth groups also increased. At Brive-la-Gaillarde, Périgueux and Toulouse, local scout troops were reformed.

Responding in their own way to the temptation of 'one youth' outlined by the new French authorities,⁴⁰ the primary objective of these groups in exile was to cultivate an ethic of solidarity between Alsatians. Within this context, relationships were primarily formed through circulars and newsletters bearing iconic names. The *Quand même* newsletter of the Alsatian Catholic Scouts contained news of

38 Michel Deneken, *L'Eglise d'Alsace, 1940–1945. Une Eglise locale face au nazisme* (Strasbourg : ERCAL-Publications, 1989).

39 Julien Fuchs, 'Le réseau des Pur-Sang. Des Guides de France dans la Résistance en Alsace', in Arnaud Baubérot, Nathalie Duval, ed., *Le scoutisme entre guerre et paix au XXe siècle* (Paris, L'Harmattan, 2006), 167–191.

40 Wilfred Halls, *The Youth of Vichy France* (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1981).

the region, indications of activities to be developed, and calls for reunification. The Unionist Scouts' *Lettre d'Alsace* newsletter was sent to the main places of refuge of its Alsatian leaders in order to maintain a living link. The publication of other newspapers on a smaller scale contributed to uniting Alsatian youth movements in unoccupied areas, the structure of which was symbolically maintained.

In everyday life, these groups persisted through the organization of common actions. These included the camps at Combovin in 1941 and Vieille-Brioude in 1942 for the Unionist Scouts, during which Alsatian scouts from all over France revived the Alsatian atmosphere, the camp at Aiguebelle for the Alsatian Catholic Scouts and Girl Guides, and the camp at Saint-Léonard-de-Noblat for the Alsace province of the interdenominational French Girl Guides Federation in 1942.⁴¹ These movements especially agreed on the issue of rescuing Jews. The Alsatian Unionist organizations, in accordance with their motto 'Enlarge the place of thy tent', allowed the Jewish Scouts to use their badges, uniforms and membership cards. This was the case in July 1942 and July 1943 at the camps at Saurier and Vernet-la-Varenne, led by Thérèse Klipffel, who was appointed Commissioner for the Alsace province of the interdenominational French Girl Guides Federation after 1945. Klipffel went on to take up responsibility at national level for the movement, before becoming a pastor and being elected President of the Reformed Church of Alsace-Lorraine in 1982.⁴²

Between the Alsatian movements, the apparent cooperation, also noticeable at the national level but in a more contrasted way,⁴³ continued to grow as the end of the war approached. From the summer of 1942 on, leaders from all movements met in the clandestine groups of the 'Ballons' in Paris and the 'Hansi' in Lyon. Some important gatherings intensified this profound union. The Puy pilgrimage of 15 August 1942, notably, took on particular significance for the Alsatian movements. It constituted the beginning of effective cooperation between Alsatian Catholic, Protestant and secular leaders in the struggle for the return of Alsace to France.

41 Archives of the French federation of the Scouts (*National and University Library of Strasbourg*). SR2.7. East Region, Collection Elisabeth Klaenschi and Marie-Louise Lévi-Hamburger.

42 Thérèse Klipffel, 'Les archives de la Fédération française des éclaireuses', *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire du protestantisme français*, juillet-août-septembre (1997), 545–551.

43 The creation of the *Fédération du Scoutisme Français* (Federation of French Scouting) in the summer of 1940 allowed for overcoming the antagonisms of the scout movements. In fact, it did not preclude a divergence of their position with respect to the regime (Bernard Comte, 'Les organisations de jeunesse', in Jean-Pierre Azéma, François Bédarida, eds., *Vichy et les Français* (Paris: Fayard, 1992), 412).

It built up around the figure of Bernard Metz an Alsatian resistance network that drew on movements of all persuasions. A similar intention was evident at the camp at Bouchet lake, held in the summer of 1943 by the Unionist Scouts of Alsace. All provincial officials of the Alsace scout movements met here to discuss the reorganization of the Liberation movements. Finally, the 'Carrefour des Tilleuls', which brought together in Clermont-Ferrand Catholic teachers, the Catholic Scouts, Unionist Scouts and Young Christian Students, prepared an action plan for the cultural reintegration of Alsatian youth. At the heart of these initiatives, the commitment on the part of the young people lay in the primary rejection of the occupying forces and the incidental rejection of Vichy France, whose related policies involved treating youth as outcasts.⁴⁴ It was coupled with a united struggle for the denazification of Alsace. In this dramatic context of war, the Alsatian youth movements catalyzed the desires of young people determined to commit to France and Alsace. In other words, they emerged as effective political – or rather civic – action supports.

The 'refrancization' of youth through popular education, 1945–1958

Between late autumn 1944 and early spring 1945, Alsace gradually freed itself from the German annexation. The post-war period was a time of transition and uncertainty, during which a past to be assimilated and a future to be built coexisted. Within this context, the reconstruction of the youth associations, although difficult and painful, was marked with the seal of hope. Various initiatives were identified, either private or public, which sought to boost the restarting of these associations. At the heart of most of the Alsatian movements, a new common goal, once again looking beyond the strife, took on an essential role, namely that of contributing to the return of Alsace to the French nation or, in other terms and to use the words of the actors of the time, the 'refrancization' of Alsace as they were used to say, the 'rebirth' of this region within the French nation.

The ambition was to transform the youth movements into 'schools of the nation', privileged places of learning ways of thinking and values perceived as specifically French. Asserting themselves as links in the chain of integration within the French Republic, the movements thus worked to maintain their communion. Their involvement in the association *Jeune Alsace*, created on 20 January 1945 in order to coordinate their reconstruction with a view to the 'cultural reintegration

44 Olivier Wiewiorka, 'La résistance, une affaire de jeunes ?', in Jean-William Dereymez, ed., *Être jeune en France (1939–1945)* (Paris : L'Harmattan, 2001), 252–253.

of youth within the national context', to quote the official statutes, was significant.⁴⁵ The Catholic Scouts, Unionist Scouts, Catholic Girl Guides, representatives of the French Girl Guides Federation, as well as delegates from the Communist Youth, the Young Christian Workers, the Catholic sports movement and the Christian Unions gathered here at the end of autumn 1944. *Jeune Alsace* was a cooperative structure. Its intention was to act as an independent Alsatian office of youth and popular education. The initiative was supported by the local prefectures, which saw it as a way to relay the national policies in the Bas-Rhin and Haut-Rhin departments. With the help of the photographic service of the army, *Jeune Alsace* started publishing a bimonthly newsletter in February 1945 and produced a 'Quart d'heure de la jeunesse alsacienne' fifteen-minute slot on Radio Strasbourg which gained a large audience. It was the very principle of the association that appealed to so many: the union it symbolized demonstrating the will to be part of the cultural and socio-educational policies established at the national level, while at the same time adapting them to the local context.⁴⁶

Along the lines of *Jeune Alsace*, the majority of the Alsatian movements indeed wished to participate in the establishment of a real public service for popular education and youth, as was being structured at national level at that time.⁴⁷ This involved readjustment on the part of the local youth. While the difficulties involved in moving away from the Alsatian culture were undeniable, especially among farmers and workers movements, the desire to get away from particularism was evident. The lay movements especially wanted to be vectors of this readjustment. It was one of their scouts who designed a famous poster that read 'It's chic to speak French' and that was displayed in the streets, trams and administrations of Alsace during 1945 (see Fig. 12).⁴⁸

45 Archives of the District court of Strasbourg. Statutes of Jeune Alsace (February 7th, 1945).

46 Julien Fuchs, 'Jeune Alsace, école de la nation (1944–1947)', *Agora Débats/Jeunesse*, 40 (2006), 22–36.

47 Françoise Tétard, 'Les avatars d'une administration. L'organisation du "Service public d'éducation populaire"', *Cahiers de l'animation*, 57–58 (1986), 321–324.

48 Departmental archives of the Haut-Rhin (Colmar). 756.W.OD, 24.OD.378. Laic scouts of France (1946–1965).

Illustration 9: Cover of the first issue of the magazine *Jeune Alsace*. The image of loyalty and gratitude (*Jeune Alsace*, n°1, February 1945).⁴⁹



At the same time, the Alsatian youth movements began to take on a more national than local dimension. While seeking to preserve their originality by maintaining a singular memory, they gradually strengthened their ties with the Parisian structures. Here they were encouraged by the Regional Inspectorate of Youth and Sports, which allocates subsidies for this initiative. The Young Christian Workers, Students and Farmers associations notably multiplied contacts with their respective federations during 1947 and 1948 and followed the national yearly campaigns, while the Catholic summer camps, hitherto governed by informal local leaders, joined the French union of summer camps. The majority of the youth organizations of Alsace thus progressed towards the idea of national harmonization, a guarantee of their public legitimacy.

Impacted by the fervour of the popular education current supported by a generation of activists convinced of the need to gather the people around their culture,⁵⁰ the Alsatian movements developed between moments of euphoria and real difficulties. The Catholic and Unionist scout movements enjoyed their new-found freedom, as attested by the national councils of chiefs organized in Alsace between 1945 and 1948 and the buzz around their regional camps. The Young Catholic Workers became a mass movement whose activist dimension was strengthened through the meetings held in the summers of 1946 and 1947. Locally, however, the sections struggled to cope with the absence of their leaders who did not return from the war. Most of the movements restructured gradually, doing their best to deal with the lack of human and material resources. This was the case, for example, of the Young Christian Students and Farmers associations, the Jewish movements and the youth hostels.

The creation of the *maisons des jeunes et de la culture* (youth and cultural centres) between 1945 and 1948, the *foyers ruraux* and *foyers-clubs*, archetypes of popular education, gave impetus to these movements. These new youth institutions, which emerged across France at the initiative, notably, of Protestant socialist and democrat André Philipp, were intended to help citizens gain autonomy and take more responsibility for themselves through participation in cultural activities.⁵¹ They were designed as meeting venues and places for

50 Jean Jousselein, 'Les mouvements et les fins (finalités ou disparitions) de l'éducation populaire', in Geneviève Poujol, ed., *Éléments pour l'histoire de l'éducation populaire* (Marly-le-Roi: INEP, 1976), 115–130.

51 Laurent Besse, *Les Maisons des jeunes et de la culture, 1959–1981 : de l'été des blousons noirs à l'été des Minguettes* (Rennes : Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2008).

sharing for young people, whatever the movements they belonged to. It was therefore important to ensure that links between youth movements were established within these centres.⁵² Based on the principles of participation and secularism, their aim was to bring the movements together within a traditionally compartmentalized environment. Their success confirmed the impression of a profusion, although locally nuanced, of initiatives for the youth of Alsace in the post-war period.

It is true that during the 1950s, the Alsatian movements experienced a golden age. They also cultivated the strong associative tradition of this region, inherited from the nineteenth century. Firmly established, between them they mobilized more than 10% of the Alsatian youth in 1960, when this figure was estimated at only 7% nationally. In a climate of appeasement of local interfaith relations,⁵³ they contributed to the shared project of structuring a coherent public youth policy in Alsace, which effectively relayed the national guidelines of the High Committee for Youth in particular.⁵⁴ Faced with the increasing concentration of resources and power characteristic of post-war France, the Alsatian movements exceeded their oppositions to move towards forms of cooperation that were new for them but already developed at the national level since the 1940s. The local scout associations, for example, met within a Regional Federation of French Scouting. The Protestant Youth Council of Alsace and the Protestant Youth Centre of Strasbourg, founded in 1952, became established as hubs for the unionist movements, in the same way as the Central Organization for Camps and Youth Hostels created in 1957 for Catholic organizations, the Alsatian delegations of the Eastern Jewish Youth for the Jewish movements, and the General Confederation of Secular Works for the coordination of lay movements. Thus grouped within organizations that aimed to support them in the face of social change, the youth movements of Alsace learned public dialogue and abandoned the exclusive search for singularity.

52 Interview with Jean Bézu, Regional delegate of the French Federation of the youth and cultural centres between 1958 and 1972 (January 29th, 2004).

53 Alfred Wahl, 'Vers la fin des conflits interconfessionnels?', in Jean-Paul Willaime, ed., *Vers de nouveaux œcuménismes* (Paris : Cerf, 1989), 117–129.

54 Pascal Ory, 'Les premiers pas d'une politique démocratique de la jeunesse en France, 1944–1958', in Geneviève Humbert, ed., *Jeunesse et État* (Nancy : Presses universitaires de Nancy, 1991), 23–38.

A strained and distant relationship with the nation, 1958–1970

From the late 1950s on, Alsatian youth movements experienced a paradoxical situation. While they sought to innovate to keep up with the young people of the day (introduction of mixed groups of young men and women, educational reforms within the scout movement to make it more technical, emphasis on the new youth and cultural centres, etc.), they also began to experience serious difficulties. Numbers fell significantly in most of the movements. Their structures, their very ideological foundations, started to be virulently contested by the generation of baby boomers who, reaching the age of responsibility, had no intention of conforming to the norm established by their elders.⁵⁵ It was indeed a conflict of generations that essentially questioned the legitimacy of these movements.

The issue of commitment, notably, troubled this age group who struggled with the idea of joining a movement where, despite everything, adults occupied such a central role. Considered modern since the beginning of the century, youth movements thus started to be increasingly seen as backward and old-fashioned. Exposed to the individualistic and consummatory attitudes of young people, they seemed more and more out of step with emerging sensitivities. The gap widened between organizations that claimed to offer collective training and new expectations in terms of leisure, sociability and physical activity, which became increasingly individualized.

Major reports published by the coordination bodies of the movements in the early 1960s attested to this growing incomprehension. In 1960, the report commissioned by the Bishop of Strasbourg, Bishop Weber, on the state of the Catholic movements and the role of faith among young people in Alsace, highlighted certain worrying ‘symptoms’: the threatening progress of materialism and the ‘technician mentality’, the lack of commitment to a cause, the ‘loss of the love of nature and of the mountains, of singing and of music’, the inability of young people to ‘imagine holidays that are spiritually uplifting’, etc.⁵⁶ The report encouraged the movements to redefine the role of the educator and the teaching methods used in order to ‘interest today’s young people, who live in conditions that previous generations have not known’. On the face of it, the discourse of the Catholic Church

55 Jean-François Sirinelli, *Les baby-boomers: Une génération 1945–1969* (Paris: Fayard, 2003).

56 Archives of the Bishopric of Strasbourg, Strasbourg. *Bulletin ecclésiastique*, 1st July 1960.

was one of progressivism. But it struggled to hide the failure of the movements to retain young people. Within the context of increasingly severe competition from other leisure activities (notably the sports movement), the majority of the Alsatian youth movements experienced their most serious growth crisis, as was also the case at national level.

They nevertheless tried to establish themselves regionally as key bodies, representative of the aspirations of young people. Inter-movement cooperation notably achieved a milestone in the 1957–1958 period with the creation of a network of pioneering structures in France: the *Conseils départementaux de la jeunesse* (Departmental Youth Councils). With the goal of getting young Alsations ‘more involved in the life of the department and the city’,⁵⁷ the Departmental Youth Councils united almost all of the youth organizations in the two departments of Alsace, as well as training representatives from trade and professional unions. Henceforth recognized as ‘essential representatives of local associations’ in the words of Claude Marx, troop leader with the Jewish Scouts in 1947 and the instigator, in 1957–1958, of the Departmental Youth Council of the Bas-Rhin which he presided until 1963,⁵⁸ these typically Alsatian structures, which would later spread to the rest of France, assumed a role of training (creating information centres for youth, organizing study days) and even management (distribution of departmental grants). By also communicating on their commitments, particularly the reserved position of the Alsatian movements with respect to the war in Algeria in 1961, the issue of socio-cultural facilities in 1964, or the principle of co-management (effective collaboration between government and youth organizations) in 1966, these coordination structures expressed the political maturity of movements that, regardless of the parties, claimed first and foremost to relay the views of young people. In this sense, the action of these structures homogenized that of the movements and changed their relationship to the State while maintaining their specificity. In a way, these structures allowed the Alsatian youth organizations to come together around common positions, claiming a certain joint local identity, beyond their traditional religious and/or political differences.

57 Departmental Archives of the Bas-Rhin (Strasbourg). 659.D.29. CDJ. Letter from the office of the CDJ to the prefect of the Bas-Rhin, 9 April 1958.

58 Interview with Claude Marx (January 29th, 2004).

Despite this, the relationships of the Alsatian movements with the State inexorably became more distant, which also played a major role in their alienation. Having been constructive since the Liberation due to the willingness of the State to provide a place for local movements within the framework of youth policy,⁵⁹ these relationships gradually became more and more complex. In 1966, with the creation of a real Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sport, the State's aim was to establish itself more firmly in this area and thus no longer recognized the movements as representative of young people. Far from being conciliatory, Minister François Missoffe decided to pursue a policy that also bypassed the coordination bodies of the different movements. The key impact of this change in public youth policy was financial, the youth sector becoming a 'poor cousin' in budgetary choices. Promoting direct intervention, the State alone initiated specific actions, which notably included the creation of the Centres for Youth Information and Documentation (*Centres d'information et de documentation jeunesse*, CIDJ). While the resources allocated to these new structures increased significantly, at the same time those of the movements decreased. Less supported by the government, they nevertheless continued their activities, but undeniably lost their social impact. The youth movements in Alsace thus suffered from a crisis of legitimacy.

Called into question by both young people and the State, the Alsatian youth movements were significantly undermined towards the end of the 1960s. In terms of their content, they were forced to prioritize the individual over the group, the demand over the ideology; a tendency confirmed by the cultural revolution represented by the events of May 1968 in France. They thus abandoned some of their goals. In response, a number of so-called 'traditionalist' movements were created, particularly in scouting (Federation of European Scouts, Scouts and Girl Guides of Saint-Georges). These groups demanded a return to authentic scouting, considering that contemporary scouting misrepresented the original values of the movement. In terms of their place in the public eye, the youth movements were no longer in a position to influence the policies in place. Inevitably, they lost their vigour and their ability to oppose, where regional socio-political specificities had previously offered them a way to assert themselves. It was also at this time

59 Patricia Loncle, 'Histoire sans fin. Les jeunes et l'action publique', in INJEP, *Les jeunes de 1950 à 2000. Un bilan des évolutions* (Marly-le-Roi : INJEP, 2001), 255–277.

that they abandoned almost definitively every regional aspect in order to better fit into national moulds.

Conclusion

In this 'small nation' that Alsace constituted between the early twentieth century and the 1970s, its youth groups form part of a unique history. Their relationships with the French government, highly dependent on the local political context, were situated between unconditional enthusiasm for integration into the French nation and a desire to retain local characteristics and specificities. While these latter evolved, they nevertheless remained very structuring for the youth movements, which claimed to train up a moral, critical and committed youth. The historical perspective allows for saying that the Alsatian movements gradually moved closer to the French State from 1918 on, and the trajectories of each of them thus tended to converge. Under the effect of the construction of a public intervention for youth after 1945, for example, the Alsatian movements became part of various national coordinating bodies and thus smoothed out their differences.

In all cases, the Alsatian youth movements played a civic role from 1918 on. They familiarized young people, in very specific ways depending on the time, with a culture, ways of thinking and common references perceived as belonging to all French youth. In this respect, they took on a role of 'schools of the nation', when one considers the nation, like Dominique Schnapper, more as a cultural than a political entity.⁶⁰ In this sense, the history of the Alsatian youth movements demonstrates how the idea of nation was constructed in Alsace, a border region with a pronounced political history and cultural characteristics, between frank enthusiasm and hesitation.

At the end of this paper on the relationships of the Alsatian movements to the issue of national identity, their relationship with the German nation still remains to be addressed. Overwhelmingly pro-France in 1918, the Alsatian youth movements were at first completely impervious to Germany. The emergence of pro-German movements in the mid-1920s, politicized and separatist, only reinforced this attitude, even though the *Deutsche Jugendbewegung*, with *Wandervogel* at the head, had made Alsace and the Vosges an ideal hiking

60 Dominique Schnapper, *La communauté de citoyens : sur l'idée moderne de nation* (Paris : Gallimard, 2003).

terrain between 1890 and 1910,⁶¹ and that links could have been forged. Thus, while the German youth associations or hiking clubs experienced success in territories such as Eupen-Malmedy or Polish Silesia, Alsace remained somewhat impervious to these initiatives. The initial mistrust, which turned into total rejection with the establishment of the Hitler Youth, nevertheless evolved after 1945. While somewhat reserved in the immediate post-war period, the position of the Alsatian youth movements shifted in the early 1950s at the same time as the economic and political construction of Europe. With the building of a genuine 'European Youth Campaign', the Alsatian youth started to be gradually 'educated with respect to the Union.'⁶² If it met with great success at this time, it was primarily because this openness was seen as the key to consolidating the various movements and the Franco-German exchanges as a major development challenge, at a time when the legitimacy of these structures was starting to be called into question. Indeed, the mid-1950s was a time when most of the youth associations, faced with increasing competition from the sports movement, suffered from an outdated image and lost credit and representativeness among young people. Given this context, the opening up to Europe, a factor of progressive internationalization, started to be seen as a necessity within the Alsatian movements. With the creation of the Franco-German Youth Office in 1963, cooperation with the German youth movements became obvious for many.

Finally, what about the current situation of youth movements in Alsace? Some of them were unable to successfully integrate in their operations new societal trends in youth recreation and consumption, and consequently died out or almost during the crisis of 1960–1970. Others, however, made it through. In these cases, they often gave up on attracting as many young people as in the past, but renewed their style and their activities to meet the needs of a society different from that of the first half of the twentieth century. In particular, the majority of the Alsatian youth groups put the desire for regional specificity behind them. And while their methods have evolved, there nevertheless remains an imperative within them, that of the formation of conscience and behaviours. Led by officials convinced that the originality of their pedagogy has virtues which

61 Wandervogel Elsass-Lothringen, Gauverband für Jugendwandern, Satzungen ... für die Ortsgruppen Strassburg-Nord (Strassburg, 1912).

62 Jean-Marie Palayret, 'Éduquer les jeunes à l'Union : la campagne européenne de la jeunesse, 1951–1958', *Journal of european integration history*, 2 (1995), 47.

other educational institutions cannot claim, the youth movements of Alsace have at least the essential merit of 'having been' and of having known, in their time, how to 'fulfil their historic function'.⁶³

63 Yvon Tranvouez, 'L'Action catholique, un échec religieux ? À propos des jacistes du Finistère', in Brigitte Waché, ed., *Militants catholiques de l'Ouest. De l'action religieuse aux nouveaux militantismes, XIXe-XXe siècle* (Rennes : Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2004), 196.



Map 4: Poland's Border Shifts After the Second World War.