

The Limits of the Peace Treaties: Minorities in Alsace-Lorraine and the Greco-Turkish Conflict in Comparison, 1919–1923

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On 15 May 1919, Greek occupation forces landed in the Ottoman city of Smyrna, today's Izmir. Their orders were to secure the different parts of this wealthy, multi-ethnic seaport as a base for what was to become the Greek zone in a partitioned Asia Minor. Yet things did not go as planned. After the first two of three Greek military units had secured their sectors of the city, the third unit, which was to secure the Muslim quarter, got side-tracked.¹ As the Greeks faced a hostile crowd at their designated landing area, they sailed north, landing in the city centre. Here, a 'great crowd of excited' local Greeks, including the Greek archbishop of Smyrna, Chrysostomos, welcomed them and led them to the *konak*, the town hall. After a gunshot was fired—according to the report by British Colonel Ian Smith, a civilian had fired on Turkish sailors in a motorboat for no apparent reason—panic ensued. The Greek troops opened fire and seized the *konak* by force. Some Greek soldiers then joint forces with local Greeks to break into and loot Muslim houses and arrest and assault Ottoman policemen and public servants. Looting and assaults continued for several days. According to Ian Smith's report, between 200 and 300 Muslim civilians and three Greek soldiers were killed.² Only then was Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos able to restore order, fearing a major blow to Greece's reputation. The Greek landing at Smyrna in May 1919 was the beginning of a three-year long war between Greece and the nascent Turkish nationalist movement under Mustafa Kemal. The war ended in Greek defeat, the destruction of the European, Armenian, and Greek quarters of Smyrna in a 'great fire', and the expulsion of over one million

¹ Memorandum by British Colonel Ian Smith dated 24 May 1919, National Archives, London (henceforth, NA), Foreign Office (henceforth FO) 608/90, file no. 16074, pp. 448–62, here p. 455, also for the following quotation.

² *Ibid.*, p. 460.

Orthodox Greeks from Asia Minor as a modern Turkish nation state succeeded the Ottoman Empire.³

At the other end of Europe, following the armistice of 11 November 1918, in the hitherto German and now French-occupied city of Strasbourg in Alsace, German residents faced the double threat of harassment by neighbours and military and expulsion by the French authorities. One such case concerned 37-year old Johanna Class. According to her testimony, she was visited on 12 December 1918 by three soldiers, one of whom was Alsatian. The soldiers claimed that they had a warrant to search her house for goods her husband had allegedly stolen from the front.⁴ They then began cracking open boxes that Class had packed for her eventual deportation to Germany, taking a large number of household items, food, jewellery, cigars, and even some of Class's clothes. When Class protested, claiming that none of these items had been stolen, and even produced receipts, the Alsatian soldier merely replied that she should keep silent as 'we are the masters now'.⁵ He also told her that she would be deported to Germany within three days and that she should hurry to sell her belongings. Scared and confused, Class hastily organised an auction four days later, only to find that people hesitated to buy, bluntly declaring that she would shortly be expelled anyway and that they could then obtain everything for free. The officers at the nearest police station were indifferent to her complaints, claiming that 'everything was in order, and that she would be sent over the Rhine within three days anyway'. By the time the Treaty of Versailles was signed on 28 June 1919, over 100,000 Germans had been expelled from Alsace-Lorraine,

³ On the Greek-Turkish war see S. Yérasimos, 'La Question du Pont-Euxin (1912-1923)', *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, 153 (1989), Michael John Llewellyn Smith, *Ionian Vision: Greece in Asia Minor, 1919-1922* (London, 1998), Henri Nahum, *La Grande Guerre et la Guerre gréco-turque vues par les instituteurs de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle d'İzmir* (Istanbul, 2003), and Stavros T. Stavridis, *The Greek-Turkish War, 1918-23: An Australian Press Perspective* (Piscataway, NJ, 2008). On the Greek-Turkish population exchange see Renée Hirschon, *Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe: The Social Life of Asia Minor Refugees in Piraeus* (Oxford, 1989), Renée Hirschon (ed.), *Crossing the Aegean: An Appraisal of the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey* (New York, 2003), Bruce Clark, *Twice a Stranger: The Mass Expulsions that Forged Modern Greece and Turkey* (Cambridge, Mass, 2006), Onur Yıldırım, *Diplomacy and Displacement: Reconsidering the Turco-Greek Exchange of Populations, 1922-1934* (New York, 2006), and Aslı Emine Çomu, *The Exchange of Populations and Adana, 1830-1927* (Istanbul, 2011).

⁴ See the transcript of the statement made by Johanna Class on 28 December 1918 in Archives départementales du Bas-Rhin, Strasbourg (henceforth ADBR), 121 AL 77, also for the following quotations. The file contains numerous other complaints made through the German representative at the permanent inter-allied armistice commission at Spa, mostly concerning cases of harassment, forced separation of families (where German expellees had to leave their Alsatian spouses behind), sequestration of property and furniture, and theft of money and valuables during the journey from Alsace-Lorraine to Germany by French police and military.

⁵ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

many of whom had lost or left behind their property, personal belongings, and in some cases even their family.⁶

Strasbourg was a long way from Smyrna in 1919. Yet both cities were gripped by the same, powerful new historical force that tied national self-determination and minority rights to interstate conflict and ethnic violence. Across Europe and in several parts of Europe's colonial sphere, the quest for sovereignty and self-determination wound up with looting, deportations, massacres, and mass expulsions of minorities.⁷ Robert Gerwarth, John Horne, and others have placed the violence following the armistice of November 1918 in the context of a 'Greater War' that stretched from 1913 to 1923.⁸ If seen from this perspective, the rhetoric of national self-determination had both a stabilising and a destabilising effect: on the one hand, it mobilised Allied forces and populations to bring the fighting to a successful end, but on the other, it infused international politics and nationalist movements with a powerful new idea with which to challenge the territorial status quo beyond the end of the war. As the cases of Alsace-Lorraine and Asia Minor indicate, the resulting dynamics of violence and political strife between 1918 and 1923 cut across simple divisions of a civic, politically unified, and peaceful 'West' versus an ethnically fragmented and violent 'East'.⁹

Building on these recent scholarly advances, this paper aims to take further steps towards a systematic comparative examination of the peace order that followed the First World War. Comparing two different regions affected by the Paris peace settlements, Alsace-Lorraine and Asia Minor, it sets out to examine the respective local conjunctures of self-

⁶ On the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France after the First World War and the deportations of German citizens see D. Allen Harvey, 'Lost Children or Enemy Aliens? Classifying the Population of Alsace after the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 34 (1999), L. Boswell, 'From Liberation to Purge Trials in the 'Mythic Provinces': Recasting French Identities in Alsace and Lorraine, 1918-1920', *French Historical Studies*, 23 (2000), C. Grohmann, 'From Lothringen to Lorraine: Expulsion and Voluntary Repatriation', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 16 (2005), Volker Prott, *The Politics of Self-Determination: Remaking Territories and National Identities in Europe, 1917-1923* (Oxford, 2016), ch. 5, and most recently Alison Carrol, *The Return of Alsace to France, 1918-1939* (Oxford, 2018).

⁷ See J. Böhler, 'Enduring Violence: The Postwar Struggles in East-Central Europe, 1917-21', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 50 (2015), J. Eichenberg and J. Newman, 'Introduction: Aftershocks: Violence in Dissolving Empires after the First World War', *Contemporary European History*, 19 (2010) (and the other articles in the same special issue), and Marcus M. Payk and Roberta Pergher (eds.), *Beyond Versailles: Sovereignty, Legitimacy, and the Formation of New Politics After the Great War* (Bloomington, 2019).

⁸ R. Gerwarth and J. Horne, 'The Great War and Paramilitarism in Europe, 1917-23', *Contemporary European History*, 19 (2010), R. Gerwarth and J. Horne, 'Vectors of Violence: Paramilitarism in Europe after the Great War, 1917-1923', *Journal of Modern History*, 83 (2011), and most recently Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End, 1917-1923* (London, 2017).

⁹ See the studies by Carlile Aylmer Macartney, *National States and National Minorities*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1968) and Richard Hartshorne, 'A Survey of the Boundary Problems of Europe', in Charles C. Colby (ed.), *Geographic Aspects of International Relations* (Port Washington N.Y., 1970). See also the excellent historiographical overview and discussion of the east-west divide in T. Zahra, 'The 'Minority Problem' and National Classification in the French and Czechoslovak Borderlands', *Contemporary European History*, 17 (2008), 141-44.

determination and ethnic violence. The central aim of the paper is to determine which international, national, and local factors fuelled the two conflicts, which more general mechanisms were at play, and how we can explain the diverging dynamics of violence in the two cases.

In view of the striking similarities but also the differences between Alsace-Lorraine and Asia Minor, the paper argues that the ‘Paris system’¹⁰ was indeed a common ideological and political framework that generated a transnational set of concepts, incentives, and mechanisms that operated across diverse regional settings. Yet the paper also finds that the same mechanisms and incentives functioned in highly diverse ways depending on different international, national, and local circumstances. The incentive to use ethnic violence to legitimise and strengthen territorial control, for instance, was nearly ubiquitous in disputed border zones in postwar Europe. Upon closer inspection, however, we find a wide range of cases that range from comparatively peaceful settlements such as Eupen and Malmedy or Schleswig right up to civil war-like situations as in Upper Silesia and the genocidal violence that shattered Asia Minor.

To disentangle and explain this regional divergence, the paper identifies five key factors: a) the (political, geographic, and economic) adequacy of territorial decisions with regard to local conditions; b) the strength of state actors involved in the dispute; c) the degree of international military, political, and economic commitment; d) the nature and strength of local political identities; and e) pre-existing traditions of ethnic violence and conflict resolution.

The paper examines the two case studies, Asia Minor and Alsace-Lorraine, in turn. Both sections will first establish the historical background of the case, analyse it along the lines of the five factors mentioned above, and place it in the wider context of the Paris system. The paper concludes with a few thoughts on the nature of the Paris system as an international order and perspectives for future research.

The Greek-Turkish conflict, 1919–1922

The outbreak of the First World War and the decision of the Greek government under Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos to join the Entente in October 1916 suddenly made a national myth, the ‘Great Idea’ of a resurrected Greek Empire in the Aegean, a diplomatic

¹⁰ E. D. Weitz, ‘From the Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and the Entangled Histories of Human Rights, Forced Deportations, and Civilizing Missions’, *American Historical Review*, 113 (2008).

possibility.¹¹ In view of the crumbling Ottoman Empire, it seemed that Greece could, as a loyal ally of the alliance of liberal and democratic states, resume control of Constantinople and bring Western ‘civilisation’ to the alleged ‘backward’ lands of the Ottoman rulers. Venizelos was particularly apt at cloaking Greek territorial aims in Asia Minor in the parlance of national self-determination. In a pamphlet on Greek territorial claims, hastily written up in Paris in January 1919 after numerous meetings with British, French, and American experts, Venizelos based Greek claims on population statistics and ethnicity, political will, and history, but also alluded to the allegedly superior degree of civilisation of the Greek Orthodox inhabitants:

In the vilayets of Aidin, and Broussa, as in the independent sandjaks of the Dardanelles and Ischmid, live in compact and continuous masses 1,013,195 Greeks. ... They have been established uninterruptedly in this region for three thousand years. ... Agriculturists, traders, manufacturers, workmen and members of the liberal professions, they constitute down to the present day the real backbone of the economic and intellectual life of the country. ... Hellenism in Western Asia Minor represents a total strength of 1,383,333 inhabitants. ... [This number] justifies that a zone should be cut away from Western Asia Minor, and adjudged to Greece. ... It is undoubted that the preference of the Greeks of Asia-Minor would be to be united with their mother country.¹²

Such language fell on fertile ground. It not just aligned with the Allies’ geostrategic vision for a European-dominated Asia Minor, but it also resonated with Romantic notions of the ancient ‘Hellenic civilisation’ shared by many British, American, and French experts, diplomats, and policymakers.¹³ Thanks to the existence of a sizeable minority of Greek Orthodox inhabitants in the city of Smyrna and along the Western coastline of Asia Minor, Greek claims also appeared to be rooted, at least to some extent, in ethnicity, which meant that they could be

¹¹ On the ‘Great Idea’ (*Megali Idea*) see Ioannis Zelepos, *Die Ethnisierung griechischer Identität 1870-1912: Staat und private Akteure vor dem Hintergrund der "Megali Idea"* (Munich, 2002), Marc Terrades, *Le drame de l’Hellénisme: Ion Dragoumis (1878-1920) et la question nationale en Grèce au début du XXe siècle* (Paris, 2005), 27–47, and Doumanis 2010, Nicholas Doumanis, *A History of Greece* (Basingstoke, 2010), 180–85. On the ‘Great Idea’ and the specific diplomatic context in 1919 see Georgia Eglezou, *The Greek Media in World War I and its Aftermath* (London, New York, 2009), 30 and Prott, *Politics of Self-Determination*, ch. 3.

¹² Eleftherios Venizelos, ‘Greece Before the Peace Congress’, in NA, FO 608/37/1, file 19, pp. 1–15, here pp. 15–17. Also available at <http://www.archive.org/details/cu31924027901127>.

¹³ On Western notions of a rebirth of the Hellenic civilisation in the modern Greek nation state, stretching back to Lord Byron and the struggle for Greek independence in the 1820s, see David Ernest Roessel, *In Byron’s Shadow: Modern Greece in the English & American Imagination* (Oxford, New York, 2002).

supported by government census data and visualised in persuasive ethnographic maps.¹⁴ While doubts remained, the decision to award Greece with a portion of Ottoman territory resulted from a momentary conjuncture of inter-Allied rivalry, persistent pressure by the Greek delegation, and ambivalent recommendations emanating from the expert advisers.¹⁵ On 10 May 1919, the ‘Big Three’—Georges Clemenceau, David Lloyd George, and Woodrow Wilson—used the temporary absence of the troublesome Italian allies to green-light the landing of Greek forces in the Ottoman city of Smyrna, ostensibly to protect Christian minorities, but in reality to set in motion the partition of the Ottoman Empire.

The Greek landing at Smyrna and its violent aftermath neither ‘civilised’ the Muslim population of Asia Minor, nor did it anchor Western influence in the region. Instead, it was the spark that ignited the rise of modern Turkish nationalism. As the Turkish nationalist writer Halide Edib, who would soon join Mustafa Kemal in eastern Asia Minor, remarked in her memoirs: ‘Nothing mattered to me from that moment to the time of the extraordinary march to Smyrna in 1922. I suddenly ceased to exist as an individual: I worked, wrote, and lived as a unit of that magnificent national madness.’¹⁶ Kemal himself stated that without the Greek landing, the Turkish movement ‘might have gone on sleeping’.¹⁷ On the day of the Greek landing, Kemal, still in the service of the Sultan, was in the Black Sea region to inspect the 8th army and pacify the region.¹⁸ In July 1919, Kemal was discharged from government service and began mobilising the local Muslim population against the Greek occupation forces, thus setting the fundamentals of a revisionist, anti-Allied Turkish nationalist government.¹⁹

Since their landing in Smyrna in May 1919, the Greek occupying forces found themselves trapped in a predominantly Muslim region without clear geographical, economic, or historical borders. Challenged by recurring attacks of Muslim bands of brigands and the growing force of Kemal’s troops in the east, the Greek army soon pushed further inland in the quest to quell Turkish nationalist resistance and bring the Smyrna zone under control. As Arnold Toynbee and other Western observers noted, the Greek army engaged in mass deportations and attacks against local Muslims with the help of local brigands to change the

¹⁴ On the power of ethnographic maps as a means of persuasion at the Paris Peace Conference see J. W. Crampton, ‘The Cartographic Calculation of Space: Race Mapping and the Balkans at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919’, *Social & Cultural Geography*, 7 (2006).

¹⁵ Smith, *Ionian Vision*, 77–85, Prött, *Politics of Self-Determination*, ch. 3.

¹⁶ Halidé Edib, *The Turkish Ordeal* (London, 1928), 23.

¹⁷ Cited in Philip Mansel, *Levant: Splendour and Catastrophe on the Mediterranean* (New Haven, London, 2011), 207.

¹⁸ See Klaus Kreiser, *Atatürk: Eine Biographie*, rev. edition (Munich, 2014), 134–42.

¹⁹ On Kemal’s activities in the Black Sea region see Yérasimos, ‘Question du Pont-Euxin’, 19–20.

demographics of the territories under their control.²⁰ A keen observer, Toynbee detected the systematic character of this violence. When he visited the military front between the Greek and Turkish forces near Gemlik in June 1921, Toynbee detected ‘a definite “danger line”’ that coincided with the northernmost expansion of the Greek army before it was forced to retreat: ‘The object of the atrocities, on this showing, was to exterminate the Turkish inhabitants of districts which it was no longer convenient for the Greek Army to hold.’²¹

Meanwhile, as the Turkish national forces gained strength and began to reverse the advances of the Greek army, they employed the same social engineering or ‘population politics’ in reverse.²² For the Turkish side, the Greek-Turkish war was as much a struggle for liberation as it was an exercise in violent nation building responding to the new international order.²³ After the defeat of Greek forces near Afyonkarahisar between 26 and 28 August 1922 and the subsequent collapse and disordered retreat of the Greek army, Turkish nationalist forces burned Greek and Armenian houses and deported and massacred thousands of Christian inhabitants on their way to Smyrna.²⁴ Already before, since the Greek landing in Smyrna and systematically from July 1921, the Turkish nationalists had joined forces with local Muslim brigands to terrorise, deport, and kill several tens of thousands of Greek and Armenian citizens in the Black Sea region.²⁵ The reports of Western observers, most often

²⁰ On the Greek army’s use of brigands see Yérasimos, ‘Question du Pont-Euxin’, Nicholas Doumanis, *Before the Nation: Muslim-Christian Coexistence and its Destruction in Late-Ottoman Anatolia* (Oxford, 2013), 161–63, and Prott, *Politics of Self-Determination*, ch. 6.

²¹ Arnold J. Toynbee, *The Western Question in Greece and Turkey: A Study in the Contact of Civilisations*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1923), 315–16.

²² For a discussion of population politics see Peter Holquist, ‘To Count, to Extract, and to Exterminate: Population Statistics and Population Politics in Late Imperial and Soviet Russia’, in Ronald G. Suny and Terry Martin (eds.), *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (Oxford, 2001), Weitz, ‘Paris System’, and Prott, *Politics of Self-Determination*, 24.

²³ Most recently, in a well-researched but also controversial study, the Israeli historians Benny Morris and Dror Ze’evi have argued that the entire period between the Armenian massacres of 1894 and the Greek-Turkish war constituted a single ‘thirty year genocide’ that formed the basis for the modern Turkish nation state. See Benny Morris and Dror Ze’evi, *The Thirty-Year Genocide: Turkey’s Destruction of Its Christian Minorities, 1894-1924* (Cambridge, Mass., 2019). For more balanced views that examine the violence against Christian minorities in the context of the massacres and deportations of Muslims from the Balkans prior to the First World War and highlight the specificity of the period between 1912 and 1923, see E. Ülker, ‘Contextualising ‘Turkification’: Nation-building in the Late Ottoman Empire, 1908-18’, *Nations and Nationalism*, 11 (2005), Clark, *Twice a Stranger*, M. Bjørnlund, ‘The 1914 Cleansing of Aegean Greeks as a Case of Violent Turkification’, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 10 (2008), U. Ümit Üngör, ‘Seeing like a Nation-state: Young Turk Social Engineering in Eastern Turkey, 1913–50’, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 10 (2008), and Taner Akçam, ‘The Young Turks and the Plans for the Ethnic Homogenization of Anatolia’, in Bartov et al. (eds.), *Shatterzone of Empires*.

²⁴ See Smith, *Ionian Vision*, ch. 13 and Prott, *Politics of Self-Determination*, ch. 6.

²⁵ On the Pontic Greeks see Tessa Hofmann, ‘Γενοκτονία εν Ποη - Cumulative Genocide: The Massacres and Deportations of the Greek Population of the Ottoman Empire (1912-1923)’, in Tessa Hofmann, Matthias Bjørnlund and Vasileios Meichanetsidis (eds.), *The Genocide of the Ottoman Greeks: Studies on the State-Sponsored Campaign of Extermination of the Christians of Asia Minor, 1912-1922 and Its Aftermath: History, Law, Memory* (New York, 2011) and Morris and Ze’evi, *Thirty-Year Genocide*, ch. 9.

American relief workers and teachers, have strong reminiscences of the deportations and mass killings that occurred during the Armenian genocide during the First World War.²⁶

The climax of this mass ethnic violence was the burning of Smyrna on 13–14 September 1922. While there is still scholarly dispute over who exactly started the fire and to what extent Kemal and his entourage were implicated,²⁷ the mass of archival evidence in French, British, and American archives points to the systematic spreading of the fire by Turkish soldiers and officers to destroy the Greek, Armenian, and European quarters of the city.²⁸ The result was the estimated death of at least 25,000 people in the night of the fire alone,²⁹ and the exodus of an estimated 1.6 million Greek Orthodox inhabitants of Asia Minor to mainland Greece, which was later reflected rather than stipulated by the Lausanne Agreement of 1923. The Treaty of Sèvres was the first of the Paris peace treaties to be successfully revised by the military might of a revisionist army fighting in the name of national self-determination. How can we explain this violent escalation of the conflict?

First, the Allied decision to award Greece with a zone of occupation around the city of Smyrna was untenable in geographic, economic, and political terms. As notably the American experts of the Inquiry had warned, the lack of a natural or historical border of the Greek zone destabilised it, while the new border cut important economic ties between the Aegean coast and its hinterland. Moreover, even Greek statistics indicated that the Greek

²⁶ See Prott, *Politics of Self-Determination*, ch. 6.

²⁷ While some scholars have refrained from making a definite statement, the majority has placed the blame on the Turks. Only few Western scholars support the official Turkish position, according to which the Armenians and Greeks set fire to their own city. For neutral accounts see Edib, *Turkish Ordeal*, 386, Resat Kasaba, 'Greek and Turkish Nationalism in Formation: Western Anatolia 1919-1922', EUI Working Papers RSC No. 2002/17 (Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, Florence, Italy, 2002), 205, Resat Kasaba, 'Izmir 1922: A Port City Unravels', in Leila T. Fawaz and Christopher A. Bayly (eds.), *Modernity and Culture: From the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean* (New York, NY, 2002), 205, B. Kolluoglu Kirli, 'Forgetting the Smyrna Fire', *History Workshop Journal*, 60 (2005), 32, and Doumanis, *Before the Nation*, 163. For accounts arguing for Turkish authorship see Smith, *Ionian Vision*, 308, Hervé Georgelin, *La fin de Smyrne: Du cosmopolitisme aux nationalismes* (Paris, 2005), 206–7, Clark, *Twice a Stranger*, 23, Giles Milton, *Paradise Lost: Smyrna 1922, the Destruction of Islam's City of Tolerance* (London, 2008), 304–11, and Mansel, *Levant*, 222–23. For the Turkish nationalist view see H. W. Lowry, 'Turkish History: On Whose Sources will it be Based? A Case Study on the Burning of Izmir', *Journal of Ottoman Studies*, 9 (1989) and the critical reflections in L. Neyzi, 'Remembering Smyrna/Izmir: Shared History, Shared Trauma', *History & Memory*, 20 (2008).

²⁸ See the British reports in NA, FO 371/7886, 7894, 7898, 7902, 7949, 7950, French reports in Archives du Ministère des affaires étrangères, Paris, Series E Levant (1918–1929), vol. 55, and American reports in National Archives and Records Administration, Washington (henceforth NARA), Record Group (henceforth RG) 59, file 867.4016/773. For published primary documents on the Smyrna fire see Constantine G. Hatzidimitriou, 'American Accounts Documenting the Destruction of Smyrna by the Kemalist Turkish Forces', in Constantine G. Hatzidimitriou (ed.), *American Accounts Documenting the Destruction of Smyrna by the Kemalist Turkish Forces, September 1922* (New York, 2005), George Horton, *Report on Turkey: USA Consular Documents* (Athens, 1985), 180, and Dora Sakayan, *An Armenian Doctor in Turkey: Garabed Hatcherian: My Smyrna Ordeal of 1922* (Montreal, 1997), 10–11, 14.

²⁹ According to the report by Percival Hadkinson, 20 September 1922, NA, FO 371/7898, file no E10382/27/44, p. 48.

Orthodox population was in a minority, with 33.3% Greeks, 57.4% Turks, and 3.9% Armenians residing in the area claimed by Greece.³⁰ Notably, this figure hardly reflected the actual desires of the local inhabitants, which are difficult to assess with any precision, but appeared to point to a preference for some form of mandate by a disinterested power, possibly the United States. On 11 March 1919, for instance, the American Commissioner in Constantinople, Lewis Heck, reported on his impressions of a recent visit of Smyrna to Secretary of State Robert Lansing: ‘All the Turks were united in declaring that they would welcome American control with open arms. ... In fact, the hopes placed in the United States and its disinterested policy are so high to be almost pitiful in their intensity.’³¹ Heck also warned of ‘bloody consequences’ should the region be awarded to Greece.³² Reports by local Western observers clearly indicated that like in so many other disputed regions, the equation of ethnicity—in this case derived from religious affiliation—with national identity was questionable to say the least. In late August 1922, shortly before the Smyrna fire, the British Lieutenant Intelligence Officer W.E.N. Hawksley Westall characterised the majority of ‘native’ Orthodox and Muslim citizens as different only in religion, while only the upper classes had developed some sort of national identity:

The bulk of the population of Smyrna is, from the racial point of view, homogeneous, and most of the so-called “Greeks” and “Turks” spring from the same Caucasian stock ... The percentage of Mahommedans is higher probably about 60% to 40% Orthodox. Except for the religious question there is but little difference between these two bodies of “natives”. Their mode of life is almost identical, they unite in an intense dislike for both Greeks and Turks ... The upper class “natives” have drawn further apart, and the upper class orthodox “native” had as a rule thrown in his lot with the Greeks. It is also true, though to a lesser extent, that the better class of Mahommedan “native” has joined hands with the Turks. But it should be emphasised that the bulk of the lower and middle class natives are ... as yet almost completely unorganised and are quite capable of massacring each other should anything happen to fire their religious fanaticism.³³

³⁰ See Paul Masson, ‘Smyrne et l’Hellénisme en Asie Mineure: Rapport présenté à la séance du 2 décembre 1918’, in *Travaux du Comité d’études, Tome Second: Questions européennes*, Paris, 1919, pp. 777–823, here p. 799. Masson used the statistics of the Greek Patriarchate of 1912.

³¹ Lewis Heck to Lansing, 11 March 1919, NARA, RG 59, file 867.00/859, p. 4 (in the report).

³² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³³ Report by Hawksley Westall on the political situation in Smyrna, 30 August 1922, NA, FO 371/7885, file no E8734/27/44, p. 1 (in the report). This ambivalent situation corresponds to widespread ‘national indifference’ among European populations in this period. See Maarten van Ginderachter and Jon Fox (eds.), *National Indifference and the History of Nationalism in Modern Europe* (London, 2019) and the literature cited therein.

In addition to an ill-conceived territorial decision at Paris, a second destabilising factor was the weakness of state actors directly involved in the conflict. While the influence of the Sultan in Constantinople was quickly fading, the Greek forces and civilian administration proved unable to provide for security and rule of law across their zone of occupation. Chronic banditry not just continued to plague the region, but the Greco-Turkish conflict further exacerbated the problem. As normal economic activity was severely disrupted or altogether collapsed due to the war, many people saw little choice but to join bands of brigands to survive.³⁴ Moreover, as mentioned above, both the Greek and the Turkish armies co-opted brigands in their attempts to establish control over disputed territories, which usually meant giving them a free hand in looting and destroying entire villages.³⁵ Much of the dynamic of ethnic violence in the Greek-Turkish conflict, including the mass killings and deportations of the Pontic Greeks and the burning of Smyrna, resulted from the interplay between weak state and military actors, on the one hand, and paramilitary units, on the other. The effect of the ‘Paris system’ and its premium on nationally homogeneous territories was to politicise and ethnicise the activities of brigands, who began targeting members of a particular religious group, which most of them had not done before the war.³⁶

The eroding international commitment to the Greek presence in Asia Minor was a crucial factor in the collapse of the Greek Army in August 1922. Even before, it undermined any attempt to enforce the Allied decision of May 1919 and the Treaty of Sèvres of August 1920. From the start, the decision to establish a Greek zone around Smyrna excluded the Italians, and the Americans and French gradually withdrew their support. Neither the Americans nor the Kemalists signed the Treaty of Sèvres, while the French government concluded an agreement with the Kemalists in October 1921 that practically amounted to diplomatic recognition.³⁷ Britain too gradually withdrew its support of the increasingly costly and desperate Greek endeavour.³⁸ Lacking legitimacy, funds, and commitment by the states and great powers directly involved, the Greek occupation was indeed highly vulnerable and fragile.

Two further factors—the nature and strength of local political identities and an existing tradition of state-led violence against religious minorities—help explain the large-scale ethnic violence that accompanied the collapse of the Greek army. As in many other

³⁴ See e.g. Toynbee, *Western Question*, 157, Yérasimos, ‘Question du Pont-Euxin’, and Smith, *Ionian Vision*, 210.

³⁵ For examples see Prott, *Politics of Self-Determination*, ch. 6.

³⁶ See Kasaba, “Greek and Turkish Nationalism,” 15.

³⁷ See Soutou, *La grande illusion*, 344–45.

³⁸ See Smith, *Ionian Vision*, ch. 12.

parts of early twentieth century Europe, the majority of the population in the late Ottoman Empire had little sense of a ‘national’ identity. The predominance of local and religious identities is confirmed by contemporary reports of Western observers, such as the passage by Hawksley Westall cited above. In such a situation of ‘fluid identities’,³⁹ religion became a powerful marker of difference, and ethnic violence was the most effective tool to mobilise and enforce these new ‘national identities’—which explains the seeming contradiction in Westall’s report claiming at the same time that the ‘natives’ were only superficially divided by religion but were nevertheless ready to massacre each other. Moreover, as the systematic attacks by the Greek army against Muslim civilians, mass deportations of Pontic Greeks, and the burning of Smyrna demonstrate, both sides in the war were able to use established forms of state-led violence against religious minorities. More recently, historians have examined more closely the continuities between the deportations, massacres, and population exchanges that occurred or were planned by the Young Turks in the late Ottoman Empire and the policies of the Kemalists between 1919 and 1923.⁴⁰ While the last word has certainly not been said on this issue, it is clear from the evidence that has been gathered thus far that the Kemalists were able to draw on existing models and mindsets that connected ethnic violence with the endeavour of nation-building and forced modernisation.

Taken together, these five factors allowed strategies and decisions that involved mass ethnic violence to take the upper hand in Asia Minor and to determine the nature of the conflict. Deportations, looting and terror, massacres of religious minorities in specific territories, and genocidal violence were hardly held in check by effective state control, international commitment, or a wider legitimacy of Allied decisions. Instead, the Kemalist forces not just defeated the Greek army and revise the Treaty of Sèvres, but they also added the forced exchange of populations, sanctioned in the Lausanne Agreement of 1923, to the repertoire of international politics in an already weakened Paris system.⁴¹

³⁹ On ‘fluid’ identities see P. Thaler, ‘Fluid Identities in Central European Borderlands’, *European History Quarterly*, 31 (2001) and A. Carrol and L. Zanoun, ‘The View from the Border: A Comparative Study of Autonomism in Alsace and the Moselle, 1918–29’, *European Review of History*, 18 (2011), 466.

⁴⁰ See notably Üngör, ‘Seeing like a Nation-state’, 16, Erik Jan Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building: From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk’s Turkey* (London, 2010), 96, 108, Taner Akçam, *The Young Turks’ Crime against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, NJ, 2012), and Ellinor Morack, ‘The Ottoman Greeks and the Great War, 1912–1922’, in Helmut Bley and Anorthe Kremers (eds.), *The World During the First World War* (Essen, 2014).

⁴¹ On the role of the Lausanne agreement as a positive model for the deportations during and after the Second World War, see Clark, *Twice a Stranger* and Matthew Frank, *Expelling the Germans: British Opinion and post-1945 Population Transfer in Context* (Oxford, 2007), ch. 1.

The Return of Alsace-Lorraine to France, 1918–1919

Contrary to Asia Minor, Alsace-Lorraine was a non-issue at the Paris Peace Conference. Towards the end of the war, the French government had successfully persuaded its British and American allies to accept its claim to the region as part of the armistice stipulations of 11 November 1918. From 1915, focussing predominantly on the United States, the French had launched numerous propaganda campaigns and sent several of their experts and diplomats abroad to prove the legitimacy of the French claim from the perspective of national self-determination.⁴² Moulding French claims to suit their American counterparts of the ‘Inquiry’, French expert Emmanuel de Martonne visited Washington, DC and highlighted the deep-seated and unbroken attachment of the Alsatians and Lorrainers to the French Republic since the French Revolution, countering the in his eyes superficial and less important fact that the vast majority of the population spoke German or a Germanic dialect.⁴³ The French line of argument culminated in the claim that the Germans had not only violated the Alsatians’ and Lorrainers right to self-determination in 1871, but that they had also forfeited any possible claim to the region when they had attacked France yet again in 1914. This argument found expression, albeit in a somewhat ambivalent phrasing, in Woodrow Wilson’s eighth point, according to which ‘the wrong done to France by Prussia in 1871 in the matter of Alsace-Lorraine, which has unsettled the peace of the world for nearly fifty years, should be righted, in order that peace may once more be made secure in the interest of all’.⁴⁴

Despite French efforts to align their territorial claim to the new language of self-determination, the silence over Alsace-Lorraine at the peace conference came as a surprise to many contemporaries. In the late nineteenth century, ‘Alsace-Lorraine’ had become, and continued to be, the synonym of an unresolved national dispute. On 19 March 1919, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George expressed his concern about the proposed German-Polish border, claiming that ‘it was very dangerous to assign two million Germans to Poland. This was a considerable population, not less than that of Alsace-Lorraine in 1870.’⁴⁵ At the end of the Second World War, Winston Churchill likewise referred to the negative example

⁴² See Prott, *Politics of Self-Determination*, 69–72.

⁴³ On de Martonne’s visit to the United States see T. Ter Minassian, ‘Les géographes français et la délimitation des frontières balkaniques à la Conférence de la Paix en 1919’, *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 44 (1997) and Prott, *Politics of Self-Determination*, ch. 2.

⁴⁴ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fourteen_Points#Text. Adopting passive voice, Wilson’s eighth point does not specify who or how the ‘wrong’ shall be ‘righted’—it could still mean a plebiscite. See also the discussion in Prott, *Politics of Self-Determination*, 55.

⁴⁵ ‘Secretary’s Notes of a Conversation Held in M. Pichon’s Room at the Quai d’Orsay, Paris, on Wednesday, 19th March, 1919, at 3 p.m.’, in *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference, 1919*, vol. IV, ed. Joseph V. Fuller, Washington, DC, 1943, pp. 413–19, here p. 415.

of Alsace-Lorraine when he advocated forced transfers of minorities as a means to create a stable postwar order.⁴⁶ Lloyd George and Churchill drew on a well-established debate. Usually referred to as the ‘question’ of Alsace-Lorraine, the fate of the borderland was discussed controversially by French and German historians from the 1870s, leading Ernest Renan to his famous definition of the nation as an ‘everyday plebiscite.’⁴⁷ The dispute over the national character of the region preoccupied socialists across Europe, who sought to find an amicable solution of the issue at the Stockholm peace conference in 1917, albeit with little tangible results.⁴⁸ A number of Alsatian writers and politicians such as René Schickele pursued a regional or rather transnational path to overcome the issue, placing emphasis on the benefits of the borderland’s ‘double culture’ and its important function as a bridge between France and Germany.⁴⁹

The refusal of any form of self-determination for the Alsatians and Lorrainers caused uneasiness at the Paris Peace Conference and on the ground. At Paris, the young British historian and member of the British expert team at the Paris Peace Conference, James Headlam-Morley, repeatedly expressed his concern over the silence over Alsace-Lorraine to his French colleagues. On one occasion, he remarked to French diplomat André Tardieu that he considered French policy towards the region to be ‘radically and completely wrong and unjustifiable’.⁵⁰ His chief concern was that the people had had no say in the fate of their region. On the ground, the new French administrators sought ways to sidestep the issue. In early December 1918, French President Raymond Poincaré declared in a speech in Alsace’s capital of Strasbourg to the cheering masses that ‘the plebiscite is done.’⁵¹ While there is strong evidence that the majority of Alsatians and Lorrainers welcomed the arrival of the French troops, recent studies have found that in their enthusiasm, many people expressed relief over the end of the war and the lifting of martial law rather than a preference for French

⁴⁶ Winston Churchill, House of Commons Speech, 15 December 1944, online available at https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1944/dec/15/poland#column_1483: ‘Expulsion is the method which ... will be the most satisfactory and lasting. There will be no mixture of populations to cause endless trouble, as has been the case in Alsace-Lorraine. A clean sweep will be made.’

⁴⁷ Ernest Renan, *Qu’est-ce qu’une nation? Et autres essais politiques. Textes choisis et présentés par Joël Roman* (Paris, 1992), 55. On the Franco-German dispute over Alsace-Lorraine and what constitutes a nation, see M. Heffernan, ‘History, Geography and the French National Space: The Question of Alsace-Lorraine, 1914-18’, *Space & Polity*, 5 (2001), 28–30 and Laurence Turetti, *Quand la France pleurait l’Alsace-Lorraine: Les "provinces perdues" aux sources du patriotisme républicain, 1870-1914* (Strasbourg, 2008), ch. 1.

⁴⁸ See J. Stillig, ‘Das Problem Elsass-Lothringen und die sozialistische Internationale’, *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 23 (1975) and Prott, *Politics of Self-Determination*, 65–68.

⁴⁹ On Schickele see Dieter Lamping, *Über Grenzen: Eine literarische Topographie* (Göttingen, 2001), ch. 2.

⁵⁰ James Headlam-Morley to George Saunders, 12 June 1919, in James Headlam-Morley, *A Memoir of the Paris Peace Conference 1919: Edited by Agnes Headlam-Morley, Russell Bryant, Anna Cienciala* (London, 1972), 143.

⁵¹ As quoted in *Le Temps*, 10 December 1918, p. 2.

rule.⁵² Contrary to the claims of French propagandists, therefore, the situation in the borderland remained confusing. Not a few Alsatians and Lorrainers had supported the German war effort. And although many had departed before the arrival of French troops, there was still a sizeable minority of Germans from the interior, making up between 12 and 18 per cent of the population.⁵³

The French administrators sought to handle this, in their eyes, embarrassingly ambivalent situation by a policy of forced assimilation, ethno-political classification of the population, and mass expulsions of Germans and those Alsatians and Lorrainers who had been deemed politically untrustworthy.⁵⁴ Between November 1918 and June 1919, when the Versailles Treaty was signed, the French authorities expelled at least 100,000 Germans from Alsace-Lorraine.⁵⁵ As the example of Johanna Class cited above indicates, there were cases of looting, denunciations, and sporadic violence against so-called ‘boches’, a derogatory term for Germans from the interior. Local associations called for the arrest and mass expulsion of the entire German population of Alsace-Lorraine.⁵⁶

The scene seemed set for an escalation of the conflict, yet the violence remained remarkably limited. Even before the Versailles Treaty came into force, French administrators began to allow exceptions in the classification scheme.⁵⁷ From March 1919, they began to slow down the pace of expulsions, allowing persons deemed politically inoffensive or of eminent importance for the economy to remain in their homes and jobs. After the treaty of Versailles had been signed, the French government restored rule of law in the provinces, and expulsions almost subsided. In the case of Alsace-Lorraine, we therefore need to identify not just the factors that fuelled the violence, but notably also those that worked to contain it.

In an international order defined by adherence to national self-determination and arbitration, the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France without consultation of the population undermined the legitimacy of the new border. As in western Asia Minor, moreover, the initial

⁵² See Christopher J. Fischer, *Alsace to the Alsatians? Visions and Divisions of Alsatian Regionalism, 1870-1939* (New York, 2010), 121, 128 and more recently F. Grandhomme, ‘Retrouver la frontière du Rhin en 1918: L’entrée des poilus en Alsace et le retour à la France’, *Revue d’Alsace*, 139 (2013). For a more sceptical account cf. Alfred Wahl and Jean-Claude Richez, *L’Alsace entre France et Allemagne, 1850-1950* (Paris, 1993), 251-52.

⁵³ The 1910 census specified the number of Germans from the interior resident in Alsace-Lorraine at 295,436, corresponding to 15.8% of the total population of 1,874,014. See Joseph Rossé et al., *Das Elsass von 1870-1932: IV. Band: Karten, Graphiken, Tabellen, Dokumente, Sach- und Namenregister* (Colmar, 1938), 37, 46.

⁵⁴ See Harvey, ‘Lost Children’, Boswell, ‘Purge Trials’, Grohmann, ‘Lothringen to Lorraine’, and Prott, *Politics of Self-Determination*, ch. 5.

⁵⁵ By contrast, expulsions of ‘native’ Alsatians and Lorrainers probably amounted to less than 100 cases. For numbers see Prott, *Politics of Self-Determination*, 169-70.

⁵⁶ See *ibid.*, p. 159.

⁵⁷ See *ibid.*, ch. 5, also for the following.

territorial decision of the Allies inadequately corresponded to local conditions in that it rested on the fiction of the national unity of an ethnically mixed region. Like in the Greek zone around Smyrna, the mismatch between the imperative of national homogeneity emanating from the Paris system, on the one hand, and a more complex mixture of ethnic and political identities in situ, on the other, produced a strong pull for administrators and parts of the local population to sort the ‘question’ of national belonging out by use of violence. There were strong incentives for administrators and local Alsatians and Lorrainers to forge a new national unity around the expulsion of the German minority and the suppression of anything ‘German’ more generally. This dynamic is reflected in the indifference of police and the various remarks that ‘we are the masters now’ cited in the example of Johanna Class above.

Nevertheless, and contrary to the Greek zone in Asia Minor, the new Franco-German border was firmly rooted in history and public debate around the ‘question’ of Alsace-Lorraine. The return of the ‘lost provinces’ was France’s only public war aim, and there was little illusion among Germans or Alsatians and Lorrainers that French victory would mean the end of the short-lived experiments of local rule that had followed the collapse of the German army.⁵⁸ Although the Allied decision lacked legitimacy, therefore, it had a clear historical precedent and corresponded to the general expectations about Allied policy at the end of the war. Overall, the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France was therefore less disputed and less controversial than awarding Greece with territory in western Asia Minor.

With regard to the second factor, the power of the states immediately involved, we encounter a similar initial asymmetry between victors and defeated as in the Greek-Turkish case. The collapse of the German army not only forestalled popular consultation and negotiation over the fate of the region, but it also deprived German diplomacy and the German minority in Alsace-Lorraine of any real bargaining power. Letters written by Germans in the first couple of months after the end of the war express this feeling of being left at the mercy of the French administration. In one typical case, an inhabitant from Ars-sur-Moselle near Metz wrote that ‘we intend to stay, but this depends on how we will be treated. Our parents were not Lorrainers, but we are, because we were born in this country. I would regret much to leave it. Alas! We cannot do anything if they chase us away.’⁵⁹ This asymmetry of state power allowed French administrators to ignore the recommendation of a

⁵⁸ On the brief period between the armistice and the arrival of French troops in Alsace-Lorraine see Joseph Rossé et al., *Das Elsass von 1870-1932: I. Band: Politische Geschichte* (Colmar, 1936), 488–505 and Stefan Fisch, ‘Der Übergang des Elsass vom Deutschen Reich an Frankreich 1918/19’, in Michael Erbe (ed.), *Das Elsass: Historische Landschaft im Wandel der Zeiten* (Stuttgart, 2002).

⁵⁹ Report of French postal control (Metz) on the period of 1–7 December 1918, 8 December 1918, Service historique de la défense, Paris, 16 N 1464.

gradual policy of integration developed by the central wartime body of experts and diplomats for the region, the Conférence d'Alsace-Lorraine.⁶⁰ Instead, acting under orders from Clemenceau, Under Secretary of State Jules Jeanneney initially pursued a policy of accelerated and complete assimilation while pushing for the mass expulsion of the German minority.⁶¹

However, the asymmetry of state power was balanced by the strength and commitment of the French state to the new border. Facing no noteworthy local, national, or international opposition to their claim to the region, the French government was able to assert control quickly, gradually slow down expulsions and measures of assimilation when they began to have a negative effect on the attitudes of the local population and the economy, and finally restore rule of law and democracy after the signing of the treaty of Versailles in June 1919. In the following years, the French government was able to come to diplomatic terms with Germany over the new border in the Locarno agreements in 1925, an outcome that was diametrically opposed to the full-blown war that resulted from the Greek landing at Smyrna.

At first sight, the lukewarm international commitment to the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France resembled the elusive alliance of the 'Big Three' for a Greek zone in Asia Minor. The uneasiness mentioned above and much of the agitation surrounding the 'question' of Alsace-Lorraine in the interwar period drew on the lack of explicit support that the decision had attracted from France's chief allies, the United States and Britain. Upon closer inspection, however, international commitment to the new border—even if it merely came in the form of acquiescing in taking the issue off the agenda of the Paris Peace Conference—was strong enough to stabilise Franco-German relations in the 1920s. For all its lack of legitimacy, the national and international commitment to the new border brought the benefit of clarity and, along with it, much-desired stability and peace. In a way, the mixture of strong commitment and bilateral agreements between France and Germany resembled the stabilisation of Franco-German relations and Western Europe after the end of the Second World War.

In several ways, the fourth and the fifth factors—local identities and a tradition of ethnic violence—pushed for an escalation of the conflict. The war had polarised and politicised hitherto multilayered, predominantly regional, class-based, and religious identities

⁶⁰ See Joseph Schmauch, 'Préparer la réintégration des provinces perdues: La Conférence d'Alsace-Lorraine et les Services d'Alsace-Lorraine à Paris', in Jean-Noël Grandhomme (ed.), *Boches ou tricolores: Les Alsaciens-Lorrains dans la Grande Guerre* (Strasbourg, 2008) and Prott, *Politics of Self-Determination*, ch. 2.

⁶¹ See Rossé et al., *Das Elsass I*, 559–71, Fischer, *Alsace to the Alsatians*, ch. 5, and Prott, *Politics of Self-Determination*, ch. 5. This policy of forced assimilation quickly aroused fierce opposition from the local population and gave rise to the so-called 'malaise alsacien' that dominated the interwar period in the region.

of local inhabitants across Alsace-Lorraine. After the war, as Alison Carrol writes, it was ‘impossible (or at the very least very difficult)’ for anyone who lived in this disputed borderland to remain indifferent to the issue of national identity.⁶² The classification of the population into ‘native’ Alsatians and Lorrainers and German ‘foreigners’ exacerbated the tensions. Crucially, as the new authorities issued identity cards based on the classification scheme, they created clear markers of difference that lend themselves to discrimination and ethnic violence.⁶³ Likewise, the recent experiences of war and martial law established if not a tradition, then at least precedents of state-led violence against civilians, and there is a case to be made that war-time violence continued into the first months of French rule.⁶⁴

While clear markers of difference and the wartime precedent of state-led violence against civilians increased the potential of ethnic violence, the region’s long-standing tradition of democratic politics and rule of law worked to contain violent escalation. In marked contrast to Asia Minor, Alsace-Lorraine provided its new rulers with a tight-knit web of associations, trade unions, political parties, and a regional parliament that, despite the recent disturbances caused by the war, allowed the French administration to restore law and order comparatively quickly and without the support of paramilitary units and, at least in the longer run, nationalist zealots. While there was strong grassroots pressure to ‘cleanse’ the region of its German minority, state control was effective in taking charge of the expulsion process and forestalling large-scale lawlessness and banditry—unlike the polycratic dynamic of the expulsion of the Greeks from Smyrna in September 1922. The complaints by the German delegation at the Interallied Armistice Commission at Spa, while vociferously decrying the ‘de-Germanisation’ of Alsace-Lorraine, very rarely mentioned serious assaults against German citizens, let alone anything resembling the violence endured by both Christian and Muslim minorities during the Greek-Turkish war.⁶⁵

Overall, in the case of Alsace-Lorraine, the five factors discussed here balanced each other out, leading to the mixed result of a brief and intense initial period of discrimination, dispossession, and expulsion of a significant part of the region’s German minority that soon gave way to policies of stabilisation and the restoration of rule of law and democratic politics. Crucially, strong commitment by the French state and a generally expected and clear, if not fully legitimate, territorial decision meant that the signing of the treaty of Versailles

⁶² Carrol, *Return of Alsace to France*, 17.

⁶³ On the classification scheme and identity cards, see, among many others, Harvey, ‘Lost Children’, 548, Boswell, ‘Purge Trials’, 144, Fischer, *Alsace to the Alsatians*, 149, and Prott, *Politics of Self-Determination*, 154–56.

⁶⁴ See Prott, *Politics of Self-Determination*, 150–51.

⁶⁵ On the work of the interallied peace commission at Spa, see *ibid.*, pp. 172–4.

effectively ended mass expulsions of German citizens and allowed for a process of normalisation that culminated in the Locarno agreements six years later.

Conclusion

The comparison of Alsace-Lorraine and Asia Minor has demonstrated that the same set of factors and mechanisms operated in these highly diverse and geographically disparate settings, albeit in a fundamentally different manner. In both cases, the initial territorial decisions by the Allies proved to be inadequate responses to the complex realities of ethnically mixed regions. The resulting discrepancy between the pretence of national homogeneity and an ambivalent situation on the ground generated incentives for state administrations and local citizens to use violent ‘population politics’ to close the gap between territorial claims and local reality. In both cases, moreover, there existed clear markers of difference among the population that lend themselves to discrimination and targeted ethnic violence. The adequacy of the initial Allied decision and the nature of local identities, in combination with three other factors—state power, international commitment, and traditions of ethnic violence—go a long way in explaining why ethnic violence escalated in Asia Minor but was contained in Alsace-Lorraine (see table 1).

Table 1: Comparison of Asia Minor and Alsace-Lorraine

	Adequacy of territorial decision	State power	International commitment	Local identities and markers of difference	Tradition of ethnic violence	Outcome
Asia Minor	Inadequate, severe lack of legitimacy	Weak, collaboration with warlords and brigands	Temporary and weak, Treaty of Sevres not signed or accepted by national Turkish forces	Fluid identities, religion as clear marker of difference	Tradition of peaceful co-existence of religious groups, but also more recent episodes of genocidal violence against minorities; lack of rule of law and democratic traditions	Gradual escalation: full-blown war, deportations, massacres, genocidal violence, forced removal of populations
Alsace-Lorraine	Inadequate and lack of legitimacy, but generally expected outcome of the war and based on well-established historical border	Strong	Strong, although some ambivalence remained; Treaty of Versailles signed and accepted by both sides	Fluid but recently politicised identities, clear marker of difference	Recent episode of state-led violence against civilians, but longer tradition of rule of law, strong associations, and democratic politics	Temporary escalation (mass expulsions, dispossession, sporadic physical violence) but gradual containment of violence

Thus, the ‘Paris system’ was neither merely a loose point of reference, nor was it a coherent international order. The period between 1917 and 1923 saw the emergence of a common—but highly uneven—global order organised around the ideal of ethnically homogeneous nation states.⁶⁶ Compared to the period after 1945, the ‘Paris system’ was indeed no rigid international order. Yet compared to the period before 1914, it certainly provided a meaningful political, legal, economic, and ideological framework that not only prompted politicians, experts, and local activists to rearrange territories along ‘national’ lines, but it also guided their political action and decisionmaking according to the same fusion of nationality, ethnic homogeneity, and state sovereignty. The Paris system is so hard to pinpoint because it was an emerging international order that was as much about redefining national territories

⁶⁶ The quantitative dimensions of this fundamental shift to an inter-national order is captured well in Figure I.I in Andreas Wimmer, *Waves of War: Nationalism, State Formation, and Ethnic Exclusion in the Modern World* (Cambridge, 2013), 2.

and identities as it was about debating and fighting over the nature of sovereignty and legitimacy of political action.

The contradictions in the system—notably between the universal emancipatory premise of ‘making the world safe for democracy’, on the one hand, and the system’s hierarchies and the limits of Allied power and commitment, on the other—created incentives for violent action, both at the level of diplomacy and on the ground. In disputed areas, depending on the specific local circumstances, politicians and military leaders often saw ethnic violence as an effective tool to create ethnically homogeneous spaces to legitimise their claims of territorial control and state sovereignty. Ethnic violence was less a consequence of ‘flawed’ decisionmaking but a constitutive element of the peace order. Diplomatic and in-situ violence frequently resulted from the limitations and inconsistencies of self-determination and the subsequent frustration by local populations about decisions taken at Paris. More fundamentally, this same violence forced distant lands and politically detached populations into the new international order, both as a resource for politicians and military leaders and as agents who themselves shaped the system.

The conflicts in Alsace-Lorraine and Asia Minor took shape within the same international order that placed a premium on a combination of ethnic homogeneity, clear-cut national borders, and state sovereignty. Within this shared international order, the interplay of several factors and mechanisms determined whether and to what extent the conflicts escalated—not a simple dichotomy between an ethnically mixed and backward ‘East’ and a nationally mature and progressive ‘West’. As we have seen, several—but not all—of these factors cut across the East-West divide. We need further systematic studies of territorial and national conflicts in the aftermath of the Paris Peace Conference to map out the tectonics of the Paris system with greater precision. Such an endeavour promises to provide us with new answers to older but still very much open questions, most notably why and how exactly the interwar international order collapsed. This paper has attempted to take a few tentative steps in this direction.