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New Europe College

Str. Plantelor 21

023971 Bucharest

Romania

www.nec.ro; e-mail: nec@nec.ro

Tel. (+4) 021.307.99.10, Fax (+4) 021. 327.07.74



ERIN CORBER

Born in 1983, in Montréal

Ph.D. in Modern European History, Indiana University, Bloomington, USA,
2013

Dissertation: *L'esprit du corps: Bodies, Communities, and the Reconstruction of
Jewish Life in France, 1914-1940.*

Lydia and David Zimmern Memorial Fellow, Jack and Morton Mandel Center
for Advanced Holocaust Studies

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC, USA

Chercheuse invitée, Centre canadien d'études allemandes et européennes
Université de Montréal, Montreal, QC, Canada

Research Associate, Institute for Canadian Jewish Studies
Concordia University, Montreal, Canada

Papers presented at conferences/workshops: United States, United Kingdom,
Canada

Participation in other research projects:
Member of L'ARCHE: Équipe de recherche en sciences historiques
Université de Strasbourg, Strasbourg, France

Published numerous research papers

LA MARSEILLAISE AND THE MOB : RE/DECONSTRUCTING ANTISEMITISM AND PROTEST AT THE UNIVERSITY OF STRASBOURG, 1937

Abstract

This case study of a provincial protest at the University of Strasbourg is an early reflection on the value of microhistory in understanding antisemitism in late interwar France, a topic which has hitherto remained poorly theorized. The article begins to set up a framework for a broader project studying the social life of antisemitism, too often relegated to the realms of ideology, culture, and national politics – worlds located in Paris. It attempts to move beyond clichéd formulations of a “wave of antisemitism” sweeping across Europe, formulating more interesting and complex proposals regarding perception, behavior, and quotidian interactions in a diverse urban community in a volatile borderland between France and Germany. In exploring holistic visions of ideas’ “lives” in a particular socio-economic context, this approach may also lend insight into the mechanics of the expression of other kinds of prejudice – words and acts – we continue to see across Europe and other societies today.

Keywords: Antisemitism, France, Jews, Economics, Culture, Alsace, Lorraine, Microhistory, Student movements, Protest, University, Strasbourg, Refugee crisis, interwar, 1930s, Leon Blum, Cécile Brunschvicg.

Pierre Auer Bacher, who grew up in a fully integrated Alsatian Jewish family between the world wars, remembered that throughout the 1930s, his parents were active members of social and cultural circles with their Jewish and non-Jewish neighbours. Antisemitism did not impact his everyday world. He wrote in his memoirs that at the time, he believed “nothing [bad] could happen to the sons of a nation that sung *La Marseillaise*.”¹

In the afternoon of 25 February 1937, when a large group of students gathered in front of the Palais Universitaire at the University of Strasbourg to protest the appearance of government minister at a conference on campus, the crowd chanted anti-Jewish slurs and threw firecrackers and stink bombs, and sung the hymn of the French Republic, the battle cry of the Revolution, a call to arms to protect liberty, brotherhood, and equality – *La Marseillaise*.

The following case study of a provincial protest in the late 1930s is an early reflection on the value of microhistory and local/regional histories in understanding antisemitism in late interwar France, a topic which has hitherto remained poorly theorized, depicted with broad “elite strokes,” and using exclusively “Parisian paints.” This case study begins to set up a framework for a broader project studying the social life of antisemitism, too often relegated to the realms of ideology and culture, and in the case of France in particular, to the realm of high and radical politics – worlds located in the capital. It attempts to move beyond clichéd formulations of a “wave of antisemitism” sweeping across Europe, formulating more interesting and complex proposals regarding perception, behavior, and quotidian interactions in a diverse urban community in a volatile borderland between France and Germany. In exploring holistic visions of ideas’ “lives” in a particular socio-economic context, this approach may also lend insight into the mechanics of the expression of other kinds of prejudice – words and acts – we continue to see across Europe and other societies today.

This essay will first lay out a very basic background on the general and French historiographies of antisemitism, and endeavor to piece together productive theoretical models for understanding its everyday life. In addition to helping overcome vague formulations of ideology, this study posits that microhistory can promote a rethinking of the transnational Jewish narrative by embedding Jews – regardless of provenance – in their local contexts.

Next, this paper will examine documents from the departmental prefectures of the Lower and Upper Rhine to suggest the degree to which antisemitism in the Franco-German borderlands of Alsace and Lorraine during the Popular Front was shaped by authorities’ official understandings of and practical approaches to the refugee crisis in its earlier days. Read against the grain, reports and recommendations on refugee requests can help begin to paint a basic backdrop of the authorities’ attitudes toward Jews and other refugees in the 1930s differing considerably from the

anti-Jewish rhetoric increasingly espoused by Alsatian autonomists, and informed heavily by local experiences and considerations.

Against this backdrop, this essay will describe in detail the protest at the Palais Universitaire in February 1937, and attempt to draw out the meanings of the event and its expressions of antisemitism for participants, targets, opponents, and even onlookers. The local authorities' attitudes toward the influx of largely educated and employed Jewish professionals from Germany legitimized the conflation between "Jewish," "refugee," and variety of other perceived threats to order in a moment of acute and multiple crises in the borderlands. This attitude resonated at the University of Strasbourg. Students' utterances and acts drew on more general local vocabularies of antisemitism to articulate frustration with Popular Front policies that they understood as destabilizing to their academic and social environments. Rather than performances of Royalist fascism or Germanophile Alsatian autonomism, expressions of antisemitism could draw from local anxieties about the visible and acute impact of the crises of the 1930s on their frontier community.

In this reflection on approaches, methods, sources, and routes for further inquiry, I will suggest that the "antisemitism" of grand transnational or even national narratives ascribed to the 1930s was often part of a more complex matrix of words and actions best understood in local context, and, when possible, from the ground. An "anatomy" of this story will serve as a case study for the use of deep, descriptive, and local histories to supplement national and transnational narrative, demonstrating the importance of understanding not only *what* happened, but also why it happened as it did. This is the first part of a larger project aimed at this end.

A Vague Wave

"Antisemitism" is often described as a wave, sweeping over vast territories, borders, communities and contexts. This is a powerful image of a force of nature with its own momentum, the mechanics and meanings of which are invisible to those it envelops until after the deluge, which, in the context of the twentieth century, is inevitably the destruction of European Jewry.

There are problems with this metaphor. First, the characterization of the range of ideas and actions comprising "antisemitism" as a "wave" (appropriately translated into French as *vague*) overlooks the multiple

locales in which these ideas and actions develop, and obscures the quotidian experiences, interactions, and vocabularies of ordinary people that may help scholars – as well as activists and policymakers today – understand how prejudice and racism operate in thought, practice, and politics. Second, ‘antisemitism’ has been plucked from a particular historical context and now subsequently serves modern scholars, activists, and policymakers to refer to a range of notions on which these individuals and groups hardly agree.

On the first point, scholars have tended to use the “wave” to describe other broad phenomena in modern Jewish and European histories. For instance, the image of a wave can more accurately be employed when referring to a series of violent pogroms against Jews during the 1848 revolutions, gathering momentum and motivated by diverse anxieties about the disintegration of traditional group identities and the formation of new ones.² Waves of migration often follow, constituting patterns of movement and dispersion motivated by the pull of multiple factors but pushed by brutality and bloodshed. In these cases, this metaphor can enlighten rather than obscure.

In the case of antisemitism the metaphor fails to recognize the multiple locations from and within which these ideas germinate and the different ways they are employed. While typically understood as a product of the Right; of nationalism, conservatism, and chauvinism, the metaphor of a singular force of nature fails to accommodate the emergence of antisemitism on the Left. Brustein emphasizes the complex matrix of ideas that constitute antisemitism as we understand it, while simultaneously enlarging the scope of inquiry to include broader impacts of “modernity” on European societies.³ Further inquiry into case studies like this one demonstrate antisemitism’s range and use in politics and positions in between Left and Right: an important corrective to more general understandings of Right wing nationalism and French variants of fascism.

Next, while I choose to use the term *antisemitism* to refer (for the sake of simplicity) to a cultural and political language of words and acts characterized by negative perceptions of Jews and Judaism, this study and its models also build on crucial insight offered by critics of the study of antisemitism as a historical object. In a significant example of this literature, David Engel critiques the broad efforts on the part of scholars to define it, to locate its roots, and to understand its expression. How can antisemitism be treated as a historical object of study when its architects, adherents, and victims described it (and continue to describe it) in such

diverse ways? Engel's answer is that antisemitism serves as one of many conceptual "filing systems" we (and those in the past) invented and employed to understand complex and seemingly repetitive phenomena. However useful it may be, "antisemitism" has come to impose blinders on great number of interactions, "specific incidents, texts, laws, visual artifacts, social practices, and mental configurations," that don't necessarily fit into this "ready-made category," but that may actually help us build more holistic understandings of the past.⁴

Further complicating its definition are the cleavages between "ideas," "words," and "actions." A recent ADL survey reported that over a billion adults "now harbor antisemitic attitudes." Yet given these enormous numbers, Kenneth Marcus suggests most antisemites are actually *not* "acting on their aversions."⁵ That is to say – while there is a noted rise in violence directed against Jews and Jewish communities in many places in Europe, and in France in particular, these violent acts alone are not sufficient to gauge or understand antisemitism's range of resonances or expressions.

This observation signals the importance of looking *back* to social history of ideas – how notions are accepted, then translated, and articulated in quotidian settings, which may mean a sharp shift away from thinking about culture. In more developed discussions about the sources of German antisemitism, scholars have turned from socio-economic interpretations to cultural and ideological ones, following the 'linguistic turn,' a convention that privileges words over actions.⁶ In his work exploring regional and local debates over east European Jewish immigration and of Jews' place in public schools in Breslau, Till Van Rahden calls to reexamine the complex dynamics of the political and social worlds of antisemites and antisemitism – a project that questions "how antisemitic ideology translated into antisemitic practice" at a local level.⁷ The larger project from which this case study is drawn builds on Van Rahden's approach in attempting to reshuffle the 'moving parts' of antisemitism to discover the connections between words and actions, ideology and practice.

These observations neither diminish the gravity of what the prefect called an "antisemitic protest," nor do they excuse the actions of those who participated in it.⁸ Quite the opposite: by breaking down a blanket understanding – an overwhelmingly (and increasingly singular) vision of ideological and cultural definition – this approach may contribute to a deeper understanding of social, cultural, and political life on the eve of the Second World War. This approach aims to illuminate how ordinary people embraced, employed, experienced, and even resisted against whats

scholars and more popular understandings tend to associate exclusively with the violent rhetoric of Right Wing leagues and abstract intellectuals in Paris. This approach also suggests the degree to which antisemitism in France's tumultuous interbellum period demands a more holistic vision of Jews and other Frenchmen.

Microhistory

My central methodological intervention is that both national and transnational historical narratives are too broad to understand crucial details of the social history of an idea, much less the diverse histories of the relationships between Jews and gentiles. I choose to employ a microhistorical approach that will allow for the recognition of the diversity of ideas, persons, and relationships, and the impact of urban and political space on all three. Microhistory fits well into functionalist interpretations of the Holocaust, but also builds on insight on the diversity of Jewish community. Selecting a microscope instead of a telescope will illuminate relations and experiences within increasingly diverse communities that help us understand how complex and incoherent ideas of antisemitism were often grafted onto particular readings of local situations to give them meaning.⁹

This case builds on the developments in Holocaust historiography. As the intentionalist school of interpretation of the Holocaust has given way to more functionalist visions of the genocide, scholars have come to terms with the question of how exactly six million Jews (and at least another five million others, including Roma, homosexuals, disabled persons, Communists, priests, Jehovah's witnesses, and others) were systematically murdered in a ghettos, prisons, death camps, concentration camps, and killing fields across Europe and the Balkans. Collaboration and resistance became central pieces of a more diffuse picture of violence stretching beyond Nazi Germany and across the continent. Under impacts of approaches deconstructing Nazi hegemony, the discovery of new archives, and broader trends in the field, scholars are increasingly stressing the diverse contexts for antisemitism that made possible collaboration, resistance, and everything in between. This has inevitably resulted in a more complex history of communities and cultures, and moreover, diverse incarnations of Jewish-gentile relations – antipathies, tensions, tolerations, cooperations, and so on.¹⁰

It is from this angle that microhistory will prove enlightening for the purposes of this project. Magnussen and Szijarto ask, “how can we deal with a world which is so complex and multifaceted that it is hard to get a grip of history?” One way is through approaching the past with an eye to fragments and with a slower pace. This set of tools and methods reimagines the picture of the past offered by “investigations about nations, states, or social groupings, stretching over decades, centuries, or whatever *longue durée*,” by reducing the scale from which the historian observes.¹¹ In doing so, one may choose to contribute to the grand narrative, or as Magnussen urges, to ignore it. In the case of the Holocaust, scholars frequently make use of local and individual case studies to add nuance to, supplement, and further understand the grand narrative of genocide.¹² Either way, “if we stick to small units [...] we are likely to gain a better grasp of our subjects, and gain insight into a lost world which would otherwise have remained closed to us.”¹³

Eschewing a top-down narrative, microhistory illuminates the voices, perspectives, and events in and of everyday life for ordinary people who lived within and beyond normative “systems.” In the particular case of the anti-Brunschvicg demonstration in Strasbourg in 1937, students evoked Jews in what amounted to hate-speech, but for more complex reasons than are evident from a distance, from Paris, or within a broader narrative of decline of Jewish-gentile relations into the depths of racial persecution. This observation speaks to what Giovanni Levi has argued about the practice of microhistorians, whose “work has always centred on the search for a more realistic description of human behavior [...]” recognizing man’s freedom “beyond, though not outside, the constraints of prescriptive and oppressive normative systems.”¹⁴ Levi’s approach, clearly shaped by Clifford Geertz’s methodology of thick description, brings ethnography to the practice of history in order to uncover “microscopic observations” that would offer new facets of the past hitherto unseen.

Diversifying stories about antisemitism will give greater depth and clarity to events and their meanings in actual time and concrete space. In the context of the global history of Jews, the transnational people *par excellence*, this is of great significance. When met with broad transnational narratives of decline and destruction, the tools and approaches of microhistory have allowed scholars to tell different stories of Jewish life. As more local studies uncover a rich diversity in Jewish community and identity in the years before the Second World War, so do more local studies of spaces, places and peoples have the potential to enrich our

understandings of Europe and antisemitism during the same period. I submit that microhistory will play a vital role in the process of bringing Jewish and European historical narratives closer together for a more accurate picture of the past.

French Antisemitism or Antisemitism in France? Rephrasings, Reconceptualizations

While on the one hand I argue for contracting the scope of observation, I simultaneously suggest for an expansion of the category I utilize for this study by calling to reorient the discussion about French antisemitism to one about antisemitism *in France*. More than a semantic move, this proposition broadens research questions from a constructed “national” case to one that addresses a more complex zone, in this case a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and long-contested borderland. While indigenous French antipathies and hatreds toward Jews did exist, in this case, a moment of globalization, rapid transfer of ideas, and massive migration across a volatile frontier, it makes more sense to broaden the language addressing the phenomena at hand. The second proposition takes inspiration from critiques leveled against the use of “antisemitism” for lack of uniform definition, anachronism, and general insufficiency. Such critiques look closely at “the wave,” and force us to consider what words and actions constitute the idea.

Scholars often frame antisemitism in a discussion of national politics. Because France was the first European nation to emancipate its Jews, there was no long systemic tradition of discrimination as in Imperial Germany or Russia. Rather, because of the gifts it offered to them, Jews built a committed relationship to the Republic and developed new ways of assimilating into French culture while maintaining their Jewish identities secondary or private (*israélitisme*).¹⁵ This explains a virulent antisemitism in political culture at the time of the Dreyfus affair as a set of discourses mobilized by Right Wing conservatives critical of Liberalism and the Third Republic’s secularizing institutions.¹⁶ Jews became a stand-in for the failures of parliamentary politics, bourgeois decadence, the transnational forces of both capitalism and socialism, and military impotence. On the other hand, some scholars of postmodernism have also interpreted antipathy toward Jews as a problem on the French Left. Hertzberg asserted that in secularizing the Jewish question, the architects of the French Revolution “invented” modern antisemitism; and Horkheimer and Adorno famously

argued that the Enlightenment created the very categories of inclusion, exclusion, and regularization, the modes of thinking of “instrumental reason,” and the structures of violence that made the Holocaust possible.¹⁷

Some of the most interesting work on French antisemitism has reframed it within broader discussions of culture, an approach that takes seriously vernacular articulations of antipathy, discrimination, prejudice, and hatred in the public sphere. Attacks on Jews through Dreyfus served as fodder within what Forth dubs “a crisis of French manhood,” and allowed French culture to respond to broad anxieties about national decline.¹⁸ Significantly, antisemitism served as a cultural language that transcended party politics at a critical moment of national and international crisis.¹⁹ In spite of these intriguing new ways of approaching the topic, “French antisemitism” as a historical object of study tells us very little about France beyond the capital. After all, as David Garrioch points out “Paris is not France.”²⁰ Apart from Birnbaum’s work on the Dreyfus affair in the provinces, antisemitism in provincial contexts has remained largely overlooked.²¹

Also noteworthy in this respect are the differences some scholars have revealed among Jewish attitudes toward antisemitism. This work points out that Jewish responses to antisemitism varied from place to place, reflected both in Jews’ varied assessments of their own safety and in the networks they built to counter antisemitism. While this essay does not cover the responses of the local Jewish community, my larger project will. I am indebted to perspectives that underline the utility of local studies for understanding difference within broad phenomena.²²

Alsace-Lorraine between the Wars

This case is uniquely intriguing in a number of respects: first, its identity and status as a contested territory between France and Germany from 1871-1918; and second, its location along the border during the refugee crisis in the 1930s. First, the region had developed uniquely around its experience as Reichsland Elsaß-Lothringen, an Imperial territory annexed to the German Empire after the Franco-Prussian War until the end of the First World War, frequently referred to by French pro-Republican voices and early Alsatian autonomists, like the Abbé Wetterlé, as a period of survival “under the German yoke.”²³ Second, during these years, and after the region’s reincorporation into the French Republic after 1918,

a powerful regionalist autonomist movement emerged, often led by prominent Catholics like Wetterlé, seeking the “preservation, expression, and development” of their distinct cultural traditions and identities associated with the status of the Church.²⁴ Having escaped the 1905 concordat that separated Church from State in the rest of France, they fought tooth and nail to retain their traditions through the interwar years.²⁵

Autonomism, which developed out of Alsace’s historical and cultural context, also provides us with a background for understanding the development of some forms of Fascism. Goodfellow argues that as a borderland, Alsace figured as one of many European “flashpoint” communities where contested visions of national identity were debated and, and consequently, where fascists could “test their mettle.”²⁶ Significant here is how complex French, German, and Alsatian identity battles ultimately benefited fascist movements generated from either side of the Rhine – groups which advocated “the most simple and accessible answers.”²⁷ Equally important is the history of broader strands of political and cultural regionalism “representing a deep dissatisfaction with their respective rule.” ‘Alsace to the Alsatians,’ Fischer reminds us, was a phrase that held different meanings for a variety of people.²⁸ In the interwar years, Alsatian regionalism developed among many groups of locals as an acrimonious reaction to Paris’ heavy handed cultural and administrative policies designed to assimilate Alsace into the French fold. In the 1930s, this array of autonomist political movements and attitudes often veered into pro-German positions, contributing in the most extreme case to the development of an Alsatian Nazi party.

There were differences in the ways that urban and rural communities were shaped by Alsace-Moselle’s experiences as a Germany territory. Relationships between Catholics, Protestants, and Jews in the Alsatian countryside were variable and highly situational.²⁹ Recent scholarship has underlined the unique degree to which the Catholic clergy in Alsatian rural world, in supporting agricultural credit banks for small farmers as a form of a Christian socialism increasingly widespread under the empire, played a vital role in aggravating antisemitism among their communities.³⁰ Yet, strong ties to tradition appeared in Jewish communities outside the capital industrial cities.³¹ Paula Hyman showed how middle class Jews assimilated less into their secular surroundings than their lower-class coreligionists because of the strictness of religious customs and social conventions existing in these more bourgeois circles, Jewish and non-Jewish. Hyman points out these groups did acculturate – they adopted

German language and Alsatian dialects and also often sent their children to public schools.³²

Jews in the newly-reincorporated departments quickly became an almost exclusively urban community. While many Jewish families chose to leave the new Imperial German territories in order to retain French citizenship, contemporary studies show that after 1871, many Jews moved from villages and towns into Alsatian urban and industrial centres, particularly the capital cities of Mulhouse and Strasbourg, a phenomenon characterized by as “essentially Jewish.”³³ Imperial German investments in urban infrastructure in the Alsatian capital of Strasbourg had transformed it from a medieval city to a modern metropolis, ripe for internal immigration. With a modern university, transit systems, housing, and a brand-new synagogue on the Quai Kléber, Strasbourg continued to attract Jewish migration after 1918. Jewish businesses and homes were found in many parts of the new German urban extensions.³⁴ While postwar narratives about the First World War emphasized Jews’ patriotism and enduring commitment to Republican France, Jewish economic and cultural life in Strasbourg actually experienced considerable development during the Reichsland era, which laid a solid groundwork for the flourishing of the community in the 1920s and 30s.

Second, Alsace-Lorraine’s location on the borderland with Nazi Germany gave a refugee crisis more urgency and expediency than cities in the interior, particularly in its early years. Scholars have pointed out how in spite of increasing pressures imposed by the new Third Reich, many German Jews had difficulty imagining the real dangers posed by new legislation of exclusion and isolation, choosing instead to stay and weather the storm. But archives from as early as February 1933, early SS, SD, and Gestapo arrests and assaults on Jews in Germany under the auspices of the intentionally murky presidential decree for the protection of Volk and State, coupled with subsequent exclusionary decrees for the Law for the Restoration of the Public Service drove an increasing number of Jews with means and connections to seek temporary or longer-term living and working situations in the largely German-speaking French Rhineland.³⁵ Restrictions on Jewish enrollment in Romanian universities due to a Numerus clausus imposed in 1922 also fueled Jewish movement to French university towns, where young adults could pursue their studies. Results of the Saar plebiscite also put additional pressure on the region, making refugees – Communist, Jewish, and both – more present and visible in Alsatian cities than in most other places.

In the years before the Second World War, many French intellectuals, polemicists, and politicians turned toward the extreme Right to rethink the nation, embracing and building on virulent strains of existing xenophobia while articulating a variety of negative visions of Jews and Judaism.³⁶ A Popular Front government led by the Jewish Socialist Prime Minister Léon Blum offered hope for some, or even a villain for others.³⁷ But beyond parliamentary discussions, in “the historic crossroads of Western Europe,” a borderland between Republic and Reich, real antipathy, hostility, and general ambivalence toward Jews, and the idea of Jews, did exist in all kinds of social and professional spaces, exacerbated by the proximity and visibility of refugees, and the immediate local impacts of economic catastrophe.³⁸

While antisemitism was certainly present in political movements in the French Rhinelands – as a method or language for some, and as a central ideological tenet for others – it was also visible in other political positions and contexts. While authorities insisted that “Hitlerist” antisemitism was imported from Germany, it is difficult to ignore the ways in which authorities’ ambivalence toward Jewish refugees in the early years of the crisis set a tone for Alsatians throughout the decade looking to express frustration with the social and economic upheavals of their day. In this respect, antisemitic utterances – in both words and acts – have most to offer the researcher when they are interpreted as homegrown rather than implanted from abroad.

These negative perceptions, ideas, and their variants cultivated within a particular political, social, and economic context, and require careful examination at a close distance. While the image of the wave conjures up long-range communicable feelings and actions of long and monolithic hatreds, a microhistorical perspective can lend insight into local conditions and expressions of these antipathies. This method will suggest some ways in which certain vocabularies were generated, and why and with whom they resonated.

Upset and Upheaval in the Rhineland: Reports and Recommendations at the Departmental Prefecture

Scholars have noted the rise of anti-Jewish antipathy and more general expressions of xenophobia among Alsatian autonomist movements in the interwar period, but less is understood about the local social and

administrative contexts for the expression of these powerful political vocabularies. Official and popular cultures toward the refugee crisis emboldened more radical positions against foreigners, especially Jews, but rather than a singularly defined radical political ideology, antisemitism truly had an everyday life.³⁹ This study, as it will develop beyond this exploratory essay, will draw inspiration from Van Rahden's argument that imperial Germany must be understood as an ethnically and religiously diverse, multicultural society. His reframing of German history reconsiders the well-trodden categories of minority and majority, consequently revealing a range of interactions that transcend the binaries of inclusion and exclusion. A similar approach to interwar Alsace can help us understand the textures of relations between and across local established groups (including Alsatian groups) within a multicultural and, with the influx of refugees from the Saarland, Germany, and other parts of Eastern Europe, via Germany, a truly multinational borderland region.⁴⁰

The university protest took place on a backdrop of particular local experiences and responses to the refugee crisis after 1933, the 1935 Saar plebiscite, and their aftermaths. The discussions over foreign and interior policies reveal crisis in the Ministry of the Interior in Paris.⁴¹ However, along the borders, the Prefects of the Upper and Lower Rhine reported the receipt of great numbers of requests for work and stay authorizations from political refugees as well as those with "Semitic," "Hebrew," "Israélite" backgrounds.⁴² Many German-speaking refugees sought to relocate to nearby towns and cities in the French Rhineland to set up their families and businesses in German-speaking places with established connections.

While prevalent understandings of French refugee policy see it as increasingly restrictive and harsh over the course of the crisis, Vicki Caron cuts through these narratives to argue the respite of the Popular Front truly did make "a considerable difference," by introducing a more "humane tone" and reorienting harsh policies imposed in 1934 and 35 under more conservative Republican governments.⁴³ Caron's important argument about national policy opens up questions about the range of attitudes and implementations through the decade. In the early days of crisis, many reports in the departmental archives show resistance to refugees' entry, and offer insight into local concerns. The crisis was certainly seen by these local authorities in the borderland as potentially catastrophic from the very first requests for visas to settle. But why?

First, in a depressed economy, and mirroring concerns from Paris, local chambers of commerce were concerned with keeping economic

competition at a minimum. As early as 1933-34, local authorities sent reports on local industry and commerce to let the departmental prefect of the Upper Rhine know what kinds of workers were needed (or not needed) and where.⁴⁴ Furthermore, aside from concerns about the economic impact of a refugee influx during a major economic slump, local prefects saw their frontier position as particularly vulnerable, to political and cultural upset. Rather than a refined political ideology or cultural convention, this early vocabulary of economic, cultural, and geopolitical crisis helped lay a groundwork for muddled articulations of anti-Jewish attitudes embedded within other anxieties about local upheavals and crises.

Read against the grain, departmental reports on refugee requests for living and work visas reveal that while the authorities' approaches were hardly humanitarian, they don't seem to have been motivated by a unified and articulate vitriol toward Jews. First, although reports recognized the rise of oppression of certain groups in Germany, it is questionable that those writing the reports had a real sense or knowledge of the dangers faced by those fleeing the Third Reich. The local prefects often used statements about refugees' physical health and wellness to prove that the individual making the request for authorization to enter, work, or live in in the eastern French departments was not legitimately seeking asylum, but simply wanted to better themselves economically in a place where German language was still broadly used. Indeed, authorities envisaged the German-speaking Rhinlands as especially desirable and convenient locations for refugees to set up shop permanently. Rather than open or assumed racial, ethnic, or religious prejudice, antisemitism operated as a set of attitudes and ideas that equated Jews with a variety of upsets to local equilibrium. This set of general and overlapping attitudes, and the context within which they germinated, is crucial to understanding the character and meaning of the student protest in 1937.

Reports tend to ruminate on economic and political impact. This perhaps reflected a poor understanding (or in the worst case scenario, a deliberate disregard) of the declining situation of so-called enemies of the new German regime. It may also show a generally negative attitude toward the plight toward the Jews as a persecuted ethnic/religious/racial minority. In one report, for instance, the refusal of the Chamber of commerce to grant residency to the "non-Aryan" (Jewish) Norbert Bier, from Frankfurt, to settle in Soultz (HR) in 1934 to set up his family's lingerie factory because "there are already similar industries in the region."⁴⁵ Apparently he had left Germany to flee the "antisemitic movement," but, the report was

sure to point out, "he had never been threatened or physically attacked, himself." The prefect agreed that because his life was not in danger, and his settlement would put pressure on the local economic situation, that this was not a legitimate visa request.

Similarly tone-deaf to the state of affairs only a few kilometers from the border, in March 1934, the same prefect signed another report for the minister of the interior, giving a negative assessment of the request of Erich Wertheimer, a Jewish German carpenter who had been living in France for since 1932 on a visa, to establish himself permanently in Huningue (HR) and set up a furniture factory. The report indicated Wertheimer claimed he had to leave Germany because of his "Semitic origins," but, like Bier, he had neither been threatened, nor physically harmed. "All this suggests that he had left his country of origin for purely economic motivations and that he is trying to use the situation of the Jews in Germany to establish himself in France."⁴⁶

It is curious that the report on Wertheimer recommended a refusal. After all, it points out very clearly that a factory of that kind could potentially benefit "a large number of local unemployed carpenters and give work to many wood artisans in the area," therefore contribute to the local economy. However, Leroy continues, the chamber of commerce of Mulhouse opposed the request, citing the large number of carpenters already established in the area. Furthermore, and to the point, the prefect concluded, "for reasons of *general order*, it would be preferable to refuse this foreigner the authorization to settle in a border region..." and, if anything, "invite him to settle instead in a department in the interior where he could practice his trade."⁴⁷ As a threat to "general order," we can guess from the repeated use of this phrase in other reports that it often had to do with the refugee as a foreigner and German-speaker. The department's need to create jobs was trumped by a generally negative attitude toward the Jewish refugee who was trying to benefit economically from a visa in France, and who may, vaguely stated, challenge "general order" on the already economically and political volatile borderland.

Others employ cultural and moral reasonings in their economic evaluations. In December 1933, the prefect of the HR reported that Hermann Meyer, "German political refugee," had opened up a lending library in Saint Louis (HR) containing only German language books. The bookstore was obviously a threat to local French commerce, where only a small number of bookstores and reading rooms were able to operate.⁴⁸ However, it stated, "Mr. Meyer does not even have the decency to offer

French publications." Library members were given library cards to loan German books that had been printed in Germany until the rise of Hitler. Furthermore, these included "immoral, pornographic, pro-German, and communist" tracts. Equating German influence with sexual promiscuity and deviance, the report expressed fear that some of these immoral commodities could find themselves in the hands of youngsters of both sexes, "provoking conflicts of conscience and facilitating a precocious and dangerous eroticism." The spread of immoral German language literature could very feasibly lead to the spread of "German propaganda" in Alsace, especially among centres where the "pro-German elements can be developed," and from which Germany can one day profit.

Strange that this German-speaking refugee, the report noted, would be so eager to propagate the culture in of the land that had rejected him! This statement suggests a strong possibility that Meyer was Jewish, but the report does not make it explicit. His request as a refugee seeking permission to work and settle permanently in the region was assessed among similar lines as were those submitted by explicitly noted Jewish persons, lumping refugees into the same category of seekers of opportunity, and offering little in terms of understanding of the situation of those fleeing the Third Reich and for what reason.

Joining Jewish students from Romania, where a *numerus clausus* had been pushing young men and women westward to France since the early 1920s, Jewish students unable to continue their studies in Nazi Germany applied to enter schools in the Rhineland departments. There were a range of student, faculty, and administrative responses to those who sought to transfer their course credits to institutions like the University of Strasbourg after April 1933, when the Third Reich made its first restrictions on Jewish attendance in public schools and universities. However, the departmental authorities treated these cases with similar trepidation. While relatively high numbers of Jewish refugees from East and East-Central Europe enrolled at institutions of higher learning like the University of Strasbourg, these were mostly in scientific research, medicine, and pharmacology.⁴⁹ Not offering even a visible potential benefit to the economy, assessments for those studying in not "practical" or "scientific" oriented fields had little hope of a positive response.

It is worth mentioning that recommendations often relied on vocabulary relating to physical health and wellness of the person making the request. These factors often figured as barometers for legitimacy. Regarding the 1934 case of Martin Hamburger and his wife, one report describes the

former as “corpulent,” and, perhaps jokingly, says “he would be filled with good intentions for all.”⁵⁰ While Hamburger is a fairly common name among Jews of Ashkenazi or Eastern European background, is not clear from the report that this particular Hamburger was Jewish.⁵¹ Still, in he certainly was assessed along the same lines as most of these applications for “Sémites,” “Israélites,” or “political refugees.” In addition to his big healthy body, Hamburger had supposedly never been physically attacked by the authorities in Germany, but the report indicated, he did not want to go back because at work he had made jokes about Hitler and his regime, and as a result, was under constant surveillance.

In the early summer of 1934, the prefect of the Upper Rhine received a request from Justin Ackermann, a German Jewish student of (Christian) theology living in Mulhouse since the summer of 1933, applying for a visa extension. But, as with the two examples above, Ackermann’s physical body/wellness “had never been threatened or assaulted. His life was never in danger in Germany since he was able to take ten days back in Germany during the Passover holidays, without being worried.” How the prefect knew that Justin Ackermann was not worried, we may never know. But the lack of evidence of physical threat to his safety allowed the prefect to judge that he “could not be considered a political refugee and that this authorization to stay is not justified.”⁵²

Reports from the first years of the refugee crisis offer a front row seat to eastern provincial authorities’ attitudes toward Jews during the early days of the refugee crisis, and the vocabularies they used to process them. Further research will offer more pointed observations about these attitudes, however for the purposes of this first foray into provincial microhistory, it is important to note how visa recommendations demonstrate the degree to which authorities, concerned primarily with maintaining local equilibrium in the borderlands, were able to generate and legitimize vocabularies of antisemitism that often had very little to do with Jews and Judaism, specifically. While it is of course possible that more vitriolic hatreds motivated individual decisions or the institutional “mood,” it is also at least as likely that eastern French authorities were more generally ambivalent toward Jews and other German-speaking refugees, which were typically understood as particular kinds of risks to cities in this borderland. These muddled attitudes toward Jews shaped vernaculars toward upheaval later on in the decade, under new pressures and under the Popular Front.

Alsations, Frenchmen, Antisemites: Words and Actions against Cécile Brunschvicg

Over the course of the 1930s, the international refugee crisis had escalated. The plebiscite in the Saar had resulted in its reincorporation into the Third Reich, and thousands of Saarland Jewish and/or Communist refugees, in addition to those already seeking asylum abroad, suddenly found themselves without a future. The French response to the influx of Saarland refugees was decidedly ambivalent, and debates raged at the national and transnational level over refugees' status in French society.⁵³ As part of what Caron describes as conservative "crackdown" in 1934-35, policies were articulated to halt German immigration completely and begin to drive refugees out, even those protected refugees with Nansen passports, and naturalization statistics dropped.⁵⁴ When the Popular Front came to power in 1936, more liberal and humanitarian policies were introduced, and inspired the Foreign Ministry's creation of a central committee for dealing with the European refugee crisis in 1938.⁵⁵

The protest at the university is an opportunity to examine a context beyond Paris that saw its own version of the upheaval of the 1930s, a story my project will, with more research, begin to tell. For the purposes of this essay, I will note that that the Rhineland departments were often the first to receive refugee requests for visas, or at least saw the situation in this way. One 1934 report noted approximately 30,000 refugees had arrived in Alsace-Lorraine since the end of the summer of 1933.⁵⁶ The proximity to refugees and visibility of strangers was also an important peculiarity, especially in a city like Strasbourg, home to a major refugee camp at the Lizé-Nord barracks. A week after the referendum, 640 refugees, mostly young men between the ages of 20 and 30, and mostly Communists (30 of which identified specifically as "Jews," but there may have been more who identified as Communist), were at Lizé-Nord.⁵⁷

It is worth noting that in spite of the drama of the protest, it escaped the purview of many of its contemporaries and, subsequently, historians. The event has received scant attention in nationally-focused histories, likely because of the enduring power of the image of the wave of antisemitism, or perhaps because of the emphasis on Right wing leagues or antisemitism in intellectual life, also in the capital.⁵⁸ In work specifically on Alsace-Lorraine, some scholars only briefly mention it. In an unpublished piece on the history of antisemitism in Alsace from 1789-1939, historian and Strasbourgeois Léon Strauss briefly makes note of the protest as the

“culmination of a campaign” waged by conservative Catholic elements against the Popular Front’s attempts to impose regulation on the education systems of Alsace-Lorraine that had previously been part of the former Imperial German Reichsland.⁵⁹ In Michele Audin’s book on Jacques Feldbau, the Jewish mathematician, the Brunschvicg affair appears simply as proof of the “advancement of antisemitism in 1930s France.”⁶⁰

More notable is how uniquely this event is labeled in the archives. Even the most cursory foray into the departmental archives can confirm a variety of local quotidian antipathies toward Jews and other refugees during the 1930s. However the folder from which these documents are drawn is one of the only ones in this particular *fonds* described as such. Thus to borrow the terms of microhistorians, this serves us here as a “normal exception” that can illuminate general trends and peculiar specific details that contribute to a better picture of this moment.⁶¹

Pierre Birnbaum’s work on “the antisemitic moment” of 1898, the height of the Dreyfus affair, serves as a model and provides inspiration and rationale for this approach. He writes:

“Ousted by historical consciousness, crushed by the history of the Affair itself, or later, by Vichy, buried in the deepest unsuspected archives that lie dormant, this moment has a few surprises. We know the power of propaganda, the creativity of artists and writers, the explosion of the press, and the fire of men of politics, the depth of prejudices that penetrate though the Republic’s borders. We know nothing about the street, the demonstrations, the parades [...] where celebrations meld into hateful derision, we know nothing about these vociferous human masses unleashed, their cries, their slogans, their songs, their violence [...]”⁶²

In an attempt to recover the “surprises” and details of our moment, this section reconstructs the events of the protest at the University of Strasbourg using a combination of sources prepared for and by the prefecture of the Lower Rhine, student press, and Jewish press: all local. In reconstructing, it also begins to *deconstruct* the words and acts reportedly involved in expressing the antisemitism with which the event was labeled. In doing so, this microstudy reveals the complex and layered nature of the monolithic “wave of antisemitism” of the interwar period.

At 3 o’clock PM on 25 February 1937, Cécile Brunschvicg, undersecretary of state for national education under the Popular Front, an assimilated Jew with an impeccable record of service to the French

state and nation, who had accepted an invitation to attend and present at the fifteenth anniversary of the School of social work, arrived at the Palais Universitaire in Strasbourg. Brunschvicg was not only one of the three female ministers in Léon Blum's Popular Front government in an era before female suffrage; she was also a militant activist for women's right to vote, member (with her husband Léon Brunschvicg) of the Ligue des droits de l'homme.

The report emphasized she attended as a *private individual*. The title of the presentation was "Eight months of social action in the Ministry." A report sent two days later by the Colmar court of appeals to the Guard of the seals two days later stated "... at three o'clock, with [governmental officials], Brunschvicg arrived at the hall, but was met by an assault of whistles and cries, accompanied by the detonation of firecrackers that the crowd was throwing in Brunschvicg's direction. The cries heard in the crowd of some two hundred students were the following: "Hou! Hou! À bas Brunschvicg! À Moscou! La France aux Français! À bas les juifs!"⁶³ Official reports are not clear on the size of the crowd: while a report provided by the Contrôleur Général de Surveillance du Territoire indicated the crowd was 100-200,⁶⁴ the rector of the Académie de Strasbourg reported about 50.⁶⁵ The prefect's report noted 150-200 students. The prefect's official report went on to describe how the dean of the faculty of law tried to shut the hall's doors once Brunschvicg had entered, "but the crowd of angry protesters, but could not. The students had removed one of the gates and the flood of people pushed through the hall singing *La Marseillaise*. More firecrackers were tossed [...] The dean and Gemaehling, law professor, tried to say a few soothing words that were drowned out by the clamors of 'pas chic, doyen!'

While the mob succeeded in disrupting the planned presentation the report did not necessarily characterize the protest as a successful one. Instead, it noted, the talk simply moved elsewhere. The prefect accompanied Brunschvicg over to the Maison des amis de l'Université on Rue Geiler, where she made presentation in front of a welcoming audience assembled for a reception organized by the Committee of the French Union for Women's. Classes resumed after the demonstration, reports indicated, "perfectly calmly."⁶⁶

The local Jewish press was correct to be concerned about the "successes of anti-Jewish propaganda," but may have been quick to categorize this kind of event as the result of misinformation that had somehow spread around Alsace. Antisemitism had its own life at the university, embedded

into students' responses to their rapidly transforming environments. If we take them at their word(s), these students employed antisemitism to articulate identification with the French nation, and protest against the French state. In focusing solely on expressions relating specifically to Jews, and drawing their similarities to foreign examples swept over on the "wave," we risk missing crucial pieces of antisemites' views of their world and how Jews fit into it.⁶⁷

The event is more complex when examined up-close from the perspective of those protesting. Antisemitism appears to have been part of students' expressions of rage at the intrusion of the government onto university spaces – resonating with longer local trends in frustration against redepartmentalization, and further, a fear of radical politics. Jews seemed to be involved with both: Bruncshwicg, a Jew, was part of this Socialist government led by a Jewish Prime minister. From the perspective of Alsatian educated elite, this was not only an administration representative of increasingly humanitarian approaches to immigration policy during the refugee crisis, but also at the centre of local debates regarding the prolongation of schooling in 1936.

Moreover, surveillance records reveal active relationships between Jews of local and foreign provenance, sparking fears of displacement and disorder in the university. Students' frustration and fear about the transformation of their educational space predated Blum's government, percolating since 1930. As far as the protesters were concerned, these phenomena were connected. Following general cues set by departmental attitudes towards Jews and other refugees in the crisis' early hours, xenophobia and antisemitism went hand-in-hand in these students' experiences of their local experiences of the crises of the mid-late 1930s.

“Not an Electoral Hall, not a Synagogue”: Antisemitism and Student Opposition to the Popular Front

Perhaps unsurprisingly, an article supporting the protest in *L'Appel*, Strasbourg's student weekly, lists a bigger group of 300 protesters. While official reports described the crowd as angry and violent, *l'Appel* described it positively as "splendid bedlam."⁶⁸ Noteworthy are the words reportedly used by the crowd: along with the cries and tear gas, and the stink bombs noted above in the official reports at the prefecture, the newspaper article noted students from the massive crowd shouted to

Brunschvicg “À Jerusalem! À Moscou!” The article proudly reported that by these tactics the crowd was able to break up the audience “in good part, Jewish,” within fifteen minutes. In contrast to the official report, the student account announced the whole affair was a raging success. “Victory belonged to the students. This was perfectly visible,” after the room had been evacuated, “when they began singing a vibrant rendition of *La Marseillaise* from the balcony, for all spectators on the University square.”⁶⁹ Though the prefect’s report said things returned to normal, *l’Appel* reported that violence did break out afterwards. “On the stoop, a few antifascist troublemakers tried to protest, but that did not happen without a few well-aimed punches [...]”⁷⁰ The article’s author named a few of these persons, associating them with the arrival of the police. The article singled out a certain Dreyfuss leading the antifascists. The students of Strasbourg, however, had already shown their sentiments. The author signed the article, ironically, “a dirty fascist.”

While antisemitism is frequently swept into either the extreme conservative Right Wing leagues or into pro-German Alsatian autonomist and regionalist groups, words and acts that day in February were examples of neither. In spite of their protectiveness of their Alsace and their university, these students were likely not Alsatian regionalists. In describing the protesters as staunchly Alsatian and “French through our bone marrow!” the chronicler was not allying himself with the typical Alsatian regionalist sympathies commonly associated with regionalist chauvinism, nor with traditional Catholic anti-Jewish sentiments scholars associate with rural attitudes in the eastern departments. Furthermore, although the local Jewish press claimed the crowd was filled with Royalist fascists, there was no explicit evocation of royalism or fascism articulated in these accounts (beyond the self-designation of the journal article’s writer).⁷¹ All accounts reporting on the event describe rousing renditions of *la Marseillaise* outside the Palais Universitaire: a curious performance given the anti-Republicanism and anti-parliamentarianism of leading Far Right movements like *Action Française*.

In the absence of multiple participants’ testimony, this report provides some insight through the mouthpiece of a self-professed “dirty fascist.” A close reading suggests these students identified strongly as French and Alsatian, but were squarely protesting French state and Alsatian authority. In addressing “Alsace,” the article makes it clear that the protest was not only aimed at Brunschvicg, agent of the national government (who, according to the prefecture, was attending as a private individual).

Students were also directing their anger at local authorities. "Alsace" had allowed the Popular Front to enter into La Salle Pasteur, offering it a public voice.

This frustration may speak to the fiery debates that had swept across Alsace-Moselle a year earlier. While French chauvinists and nationalists across France had various reasons for attacking Léon Blum and his Left wing government, Alsatians had only to look to the recent history of redepartmentalization after 1918 that were amped up during the Popular Front. While much of Alsace's school curriculum remained the same as it had been under German rule – religious instruction, and bilingual instruction in German – Blum "felt these two factors slowed Alsatian youth's educational progress, leaving them without adequate proficiency in French."⁷² Propositions to extend required schooling by a year were met with fierce opposition articulated by Alsatians across the political spectrum eager to protect local custom. In a flurry of press coverage, Jewish became conflated with Bolshevik, "a central and antagonistic power," and "secular forces."⁷³ Blum let the matter go. The impact of these debates over the Popular Front's presence in local affairs, in particular, matters of education, were likely not easily forgotten by students in the region. According to the "dirty fascist," the faculty was neither a space for electoral politics, nor was it "a synagogue."

Curiously, the writer described how the crowd attacked Brunshvicg by shouting at her to return *both* to Moscow *and* to Jerusalem, a strange set of contradictory chants to direct at an assimilated Jew with a record of staunch French patriotism and opposition to Jewish nationalism.⁷⁴ It is difficult to draw a comprehensive vision regarding the Jews beyond an ill-articulated conflation between Communism, Jewish nationalism, and religion, but the peculiar recent history of Alsatian encounters with the Popular Front give us some insight into the meanings this vocabulary had for antisemites making sense of their unstable lives and futures as students. Antisemitism animated the crowd on the ground, giving protesters energy and ammunition, but the chronicler ultimately seemed more interested in denouncing the appearance of a governmental minister from Paris at the University of Strasbourg than in expressing an articulate racial, cultural, or economic complaint against the Jewish community in their city. In the article's description of the events, then, the utterances and practices of antisemitism may have functioned as as a code for opposition to the national government and local authority – neither needed, nor wanted, at the University of Strasbourg.

Jews, Friends, and Foreigners: Antifascism at the University of Strasbourg

Microhistory can illuminate another peculiar condition of the university that animated antisemitism in words and acts that day in February: the friendships and networks between local Jews, foreign-born Jewish students, and radical politics. While economic fears were likely not absent among students, antisemitism seems to have resonated among students like those at the protest because of the widespread conflation between Jews, foreigners, and radicals at the University – a microcosm of Strasbourg and of Alsace-Lorraine. That the university and prefecture kept detailed records on these individuals and their relationships demonstrates the degree to which authorities at different levels and many students with various (and potentially disruptive) political interests all shared concerns about Jews and foreigners at the university. The scope of this essay precludes a deep analysis of friendships and political relationships among students, but I want to make note of one particular example clarified by accounts of the Brunschvicg protest.

Without repeating what has already been stated, France's Jewish community doubled in size to over 300,000 between the two wars. While many settled in the capital, eastern European Jews also became a fixture of urban life in Alsace-Lorraine.⁷⁵ Polish Jews founded l'Association culturelle juive de Nancy in 1924, and the flourishing of Polish, Romanian, and Hungarian Jewish communities in Strasbourg prompted the establishment of an "Eastern Jewish" communal structure in 1926. In 1931, foreign-born Jews represented 39% of the total Jewish population of Strasbourg.⁷⁶

At the University of Strasbourg, East European students – especially Jews – were highly visible. *L'Appel* wrote in 1933 that "the University of Strasbourg is becoming a university of foreigners," that the number of foreign students was higher than ever in the sciences, while the total enrolment was dropping.⁷⁷ Special note was made of those (German or Yiddish-speaking) "Jewish students," who, "refused entry into universities in their own countries, come to Strasbourg which [...] offers them the ability to be understood more easily [...] it remains to be seen in what measure these students may prove a burden to the limited number of *stagiaires* or the program of study." Students responding to economic and geopolitical crisis clearly understood the arrival of masses of foreigners from across the border as destabilizing to an environment already under severe pressure. These frustrations percolated through the 1930s.

With the rise of (in the rector's words) "a veritable invasion," of enrolments in this borderland institution after 1933, many from Germany via eastern Europe, the university and the prefecture took measures to survey an ever-rising number of foreign student associations.⁷⁸ This included Zionist, Communist, and foreign students' aid groups of which many Jews were a part. Important to note in the context of student politics is that Jews of various provenances – Polish, German, Romanian, and Alsatian – often mingled and worked together, when they might have remained separate in religious and communal life beyond the university. Conservative-minded students perceived in these relationships destabilizing forces to their academic environment, embedded in a fragile local context. These destabilizing relationships between local and foreign Jews became increasingly visible, progressively irritating, and, judging by the urgency of their language, quite frightening. Antisemitism – pointed at foreigners, but catching broader sections of locals in its net – could be used as a strategy for restating Alsatianness and Frenchness in the face of visible social and political upheaval.

The reference to the antifascist activist "Dreyfuss" offers an example of relationships between locals and foreigner in radical student politics. In regional security archives, Marcel Dreyfuss, law student born in 1912 in Wissembourg (BR), appears in multiple surveillance reports alongside a handful of other local Jewish law students who were all part of the *Front Universitaire Antifasciste de Strasbourg*.⁷⁹ According to detailed surveillance records, Dreyfuss and his Alsatian Jewish law school comrades were all involved with the Jeunesses Communistes and other radical Leftist groups.

While antifascism was a central tenet of the electoral alliance of the Popular Front at the time of the protest, it was also a popular movement largely driven by the working classes.⁸⁰ Local concerns about the relationships between locals, foreigners, and more radical Leftist movements were acute in the Eastern provinces, on the heels of the Saarland plebiscite that brought thousands of refugees (both Jews and Communists) into Alsace and Strasbourg particularly.⁸¹ A departmental inquiry found that Dreyfuss et al was friendly and working on antifascist projects with foreign Jewish students also in the faculty of law: Szaja Kagan (Poland), and Max Gebuhrer and Beno Haimovici (Romania).⁸² Because the law school saw fewer foreign enrollments than departments of medicine and pharmacy, relationships between locals and foreigners are significant in their visibility, but not unique in their occurrence.

Further research on this surveillance will reveal more about the nature of relationships, how these networks were understood by students and administrators. Again – while more pointed Jewish hatreds were likely at work for some, it is also likely that antisemitism may have resonated with many students like those at the protest because it allowed them to articulate muddled frustrations about everyday life at the university - the same anxieties they shared with departmental authorities and university administrators: fears about constrained resources, lack of jobs and competition, anxieties about nearby geopolitical tensions with Germany, xenophobia and general antipathies toward difference. Jews – Dreyfuss and his friends, Brunschvicg, or the “synagogue” of the Popular Front - were the packaging of a more complex matrix of local problems rather than an ideology imported from abroad.

Although it was recorded officially as disruptive, and antisemitism (among other types of specifically “German” propaganda) condemned by authorities at regional and university levels, a closer look at combined surveillance occasionally reveal shared attitudes toward Jews, foreigners, and the state (and in its years, the Popular Front’s) handling of the refugee crisis. While regional surveillance was clearly concerned with the circulation of radical Right Wing antisemitism, fascism, and pro-Nazi German propaganda, the student protest in 1937 allows us to catch a glimpse of attitudes and interactions in French communities beyond the explicitly political realm.⁸³ Most students throwing stinkbombs, singing the *Marseillaise*, and shouting muddled anti-Jewish slurs were likely neither Royalist fanatics, Nazi sympathizers, nor were they Alsatian autonomists. Rather these people were expressing utterances from positions often considered to be legitimate, articulated first by authorities on the frontlines of the refugee crisis, as well as by the university administration throughout the Popular Front.

Conclusions

The protest’s aftermaths are as much a part of the story as the demonstration. They show how individuals and groups resisted or related to these forces. Scott-Weaver has contributed a major study on Jewish lobbyists and activists during the refugee crisis. However, resistance also took place in various forms the university level, among Jews and non-

Jews, who opposed the protest movement and took a variety of actions to voice this disapproval.

The protest politically galvanized students on the Left who, according to a report in the archives, immediately formed a loose “defense organization” of over 200 people.⁸⁴ Yet individual responses were also important. Georges Rennwald, president of the Student Federation in Strasbourg, spoke privately to the rector after the protest, declaring his disapproval the comportment of “a handful of his friends” that afternoon. In refusing to participate, and in issuing a statement denouncing partisan passions, he was given a vote of non-confidence in March. Within a few weeks, this handful of classmates had managed to oust Rennwald from his position, revealing more about the successes and resonances of antisemitism among the student body.⁸⁵ The rector lamented his departure, but did not intervene.

Perhaps it is fitting that our story ends nebulously. With microhistory, we can uncover more perspectives, angles, and additional stories that bring us closer to those for whom the words and actions of antisemitism held meaning. However it may not offer clear-cut answers, definitions, or simple solutions. For the purposes of this essay, this case study aimed to demonstrate that this approach to the past can help historians understand how and why ideology operates in everyday life, and among real people living, working, and studying in shared spaces.

Strasbourg offers a rich example of antipathies, fears, and hatreds that were shaped by the particular environment of a long-multicultural and rapidly transforming metropolis in a tense borderland between two major European powers on the eve of unimaginable catastrophe. Further work on Jewish responses will offer more insight into the experiences of those living through and witnessing the upheavals of the 1930s. In uncovering the stories of individuals whose utterances have become lumped into generic definitions of Jew-hatred, I hope this bigger project exploring the social life of antisemitism in the Franco-German borderlands will intervene in scholarly discussions about the sources, natures, and expressions of other forms of racisms and prejudice.

NOTES

- 1 Pierre Auer Bacher, *Souvenirs d'une période trouble* (Le Manuscrit Eds, 2008).
- 2 Manfred Gailus, trans. Fields, "Anti-Jewish Emotion and Violence in the 1848 Crisis of German Society," in Christhard Hoffmann, ed. et. al, *Exclusionary Violence: Antisemitic Riots in Modern German History* (University of Michigan Press, 2002); Sonja Weinberg, *Pogroms and Riots: German Press Responses to Anti-Jewish Violence in Germany and Russia, 1881-82* (Peter Lang, 2010).
- 3 William Brustein, Louisa Roberts, *The Socialism of Fools? Leftist Origins of Modern Anti-Semitism* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).
- 4 David Engel, "Away from a Definition of Antisemitism: An Essay in the Semantics of Historical Description" in Moshe Rosman, ed. et. al., *Rethinking European Jewish History* (30-53).
- 5 Kenneth Marcus, *The Definition of Anti-Semitism* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 8.
- 6 Shulamit Volkov's argument that antisemitism is best understood as a "cultural code." Volkov, *Germans, Jews, and Antisemites: Trials in Emancipation* (Cambridge UP, 2006).
- 7 Till Van Rahden, "Words and Actions: Rethinking the Social History of German Antisemitism, 1870-1914," *German History* vol 18, no 4 (2000), pp. 413- 438.
- 8 Prefet du Departement du Bas Rhin to Ministre de l'interieur, etc., 25 Feb 1937. Archives departementales du Bas-Rhin (henceforth ADBR) 98 AL 0412
- 9 Sygurdur Gylfi Magnussen, Istvan M. Szijarto, *What is Microhistory? Theory and Practice* (Routledge, 2013), 4
- 10 Signaling new directions in Holocaust studies, see forthcoming collection, Claire Zalc, Tal Bruttman, eds., *Microhistories of the Holocaust* (Berghahn, 2016).
- 11 See Magnussen and Szijarto, introduction.
- 12 Historians also use case studies to understand how resistance worked. For instance, Mark Roseman's study of an individual survivor's experiences illuminated the operation of rescue networks across Europe. Roseman, *A Past in Hiding: Memory and Survival in Nazi Germany* (Metropolitan, 2000).
- 13 Magnussen and Szijarto, 158.
- 14 Giovanni Levi, "On Microhistory," in Peter Burke, *New Perspectives on historical writing* (Polity Press, 1991), 93-113.
- 15 Pierre Birnbaum, *Les Fous de la République* (Fayard, 1992); Jay R. Berkovitz, *The Shaping of Jewish Identity in Nineteenth Century France* (Wayne State University Press, 1989); Michael Graetz, *The Jews in Nineteenth Century France* (Stanford University Press, 1996).

- ¹⁶ Larkin, *Church and State after the Dreyfus Affair: The Separation Issue in France* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1974).
- ¹⁷ Arthur Hertzberg, *The French Revolution and the Jews* (Columbia University Press, 1968); Horkheimer and Adorno, *The Dialectics of Enlightenment* (1944).
- ¹⁸ Christopher Forth, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood*. (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004)
- ¹⁹ That Dreyfus was not only Jewish but Alsatian certainly did not help matters: “Many Alsatian Catholics insisted on Dreyfus’ guilt, notwithstanding the evidence of a massive cover-up by the French army or the incessant anti-Alsatian agitation that French antisemites [...] invoked to suggest that Alsations, like Jews, were all Prussians at heart and could never be trusted.” Vicki Caron, “Alsace” in Richard S. Levy, ed. *Antisemitism: A Historical Encyclopedia of Prejudice and Persecution*, v 1 (ABC CLIO, 2005), 13-15.
- ²⁰ David Garrioch, *The Making of Revolutionary Paris* (University of California Press, 2004), 7.
- ²¹ Pierre Birnbaum, *Le moment antisémite: un tour de France 1898* (Fayard, 1998).
- ²² Paula Hyman, *From Dreyfus to Vichy: The Remaking of French Jewry, 1906-1939* (Columbia University Press, 1979); Meredith Scott-Weaver, “Lobbyists and humanitarians: French Jewish Activism and Networking in Interwar Strasbourg, Nice, and Paris, 1919-1939” (PhD Thesis: University of Delaware, 2011)
- ²³ See work published in the 1920s by Abbé Émile Wetterlé, an Alsatian priest, journalist, and local politician who also served as a deputy to the Reichstag.
- ²⁴ Stefan Wolff, *Disputed Territories: The Transnational Dynamics of Ethnic Conflict Settlement* (Berghahn, 2003), 66-67
- ²⁵ For the classic work on modernization in the Third Republic, see Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford University Press, 1967).
- ²⁶ Samuel Goodfellow, *Between the Swastika and the Cross of Lorraine: Fascisms in Interwar Alsace* (Northern Illinois University Press, 1999).
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ Christopher J. Fischer, *Alsace to the Alsations? Visions and Divisions of Alsatian Regionalism, 1870-1939* (Berghahn, 2010), 18.
- ²⁹ Alfred Wahl, *Confession et comportement dans les campagnes d’Alsace et de Bade, 1871-1939* (Coprur, 1980)
- ³⁰ Vicki Caron, *Between France and Germany* (Stanford University Press, 1988), 124.
- ³¹ Because of its unique history, the rural and “economically fragile,” Jewish community of Alsace, a community fiercely attached to its customs, had trouble transforming intellectually between the Restoration and 1940. The result of these local peculiarities was to leave Alsatian Jewry a community

- that appeared to most to be the “most impoverished and backward.” Freddy Raphael et Robert Weyl, *Juifs en Alsace, Culture, société, histoire* (Editions Privat, 1977), 369
- 32 Paula Hyman, *The Emancipation of the Jews of Alsace* (Yale University Press, 1991).
- 33 Non-Jewish populations of villages and towns remained stable. E. Schnurmann, *La Population Juive en Alsace* (Sireil, 1936), 11-17.
- 34 Erin Corber, “The Kids on Oberlin Street: Space, Place, and Jewish Community in Late Interwar Strasbourg,” *Urban History* (October 2015)
- 35 Other Jews with means and interest sought new homes further afield. Palestine was one location of choice for those seeking “somewhere completely new.” HICEM, a network of international relief organisations aimed to help Jewish refugees find opportunities in different countries in Europe and the US. On diverse Jewish responses to the rise of the Nazis, see Jürgen Matthäus, Mark Roseman, *Jewish Responses to Persecution, 1933-1939* (Alta Mira Press, 2010).
- 36 Robert Soucy argues France’s variant of Fascism was not an import from Germany or Italy, but rather developed within its own nationalist and conservative circles. Interestingly enough, he uses the word “wave” to describe tendencies and trends in interwar politics. Soucy, *French Fascism, The First Wave: 1924-1933* (Yale University Press, 1986), and *French Fascism: The Second Wave: 1933-1939* (Yale University Press, 1997).
- 37 France’s Popular Front’s policy toward Jewish refugees was less harsh than it had been in 1933-34. For more on government policy responses to the refugee crisis, see Vicki Caron, *Uneasy Asylum*, especially 117-141.
- 38 Carole Fink, *Marc Bloch: A Life*, 79. In her biography of Marc Bloch, at the time a professor of medieval history at the University of Strasbourg, Fink argues after 1926, Strasbourg became “more aggressively Christian and Alsatian, causing discomfort to the unreligious and French speakers” like Bloch, who increasingly “oriented themselves toward the nation’s capital,” 100
- 39 Dominique Lerch’s research on the impact of national politics on local Alsatian society and antisemitism in 19th century print culture does help build a local context for the circulation of these ideas. Lerch, «Imagerie populaire et antisemitisme en Alsace au XIXe siècle» in *Revue des sciences sociales*, (2003 no. 31).
- 40 For this section I draw mainly from a large collection of copies of reports from the Prefecture of the Upper Rhine, were copied and kept by the Prefecture of the Bas Rhin.
- 41 See Vicki Caron’s excellent study of the French government’s responses to the refugee crisis, which Caron argues laid the groundwork for Vichy’s anti-Jewish policies. Caron, *Uneasy Asylum*.
- 42 See prefect reports, ADBR 98 AL 688.

- 43 Vicki Caron, 4-5.
- 44 See for instance, letter from President of the Chamber of Commerce of Mulhouse to Prefect of Haut Rhin, 2 Mars 1934 in ADBR 98 AL 688.
- 45 Letter from Prefect du Haut Rhin to Minister of the interior, 19 Jan 1934, ADBR AL 688.
- 46 Ibid, 34 Mar 1934, ADBR AL 688.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 The report notes each religious community – Catholic, Protestant, Jewish – had its own bookshop.
- 49 Lynda Khayat, «Les étudiants juifs étrangers à Strasbourg au tournant des années trente» in *Archives Juives* vol 38 (2005/2), 124-135.
- 50 Letter from Commissaire special of Saint Louis (HR) to Sub-Prefect of HR, Mulhouse, 28 May 1934, ADBR AL 688.
- 51 For more on the Jewishness of names, see “Names: What They Mean and How They Developed,” in Steven M. Lowenstein, *The Jewish Cultural Tapestry: International Jewish Folk Traditions* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 69-84.
- 52 Letter from Prefect du HR to Minister of the interior, 14 May 1934 in ADBR AL 688.
- 53 G. Burgess, *Refuge in the Land of Liberty: France and its Refugees, from the Revolution to the End of Asylum, 1787-1939* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 141-211
- 54 Caron, *Uneasy Asylum*, 43-63.
- 55 Caron, “Unwilling refuge: France and the Dilemma of Illegal Immigration, 1933-1939,” in Frank Caestecker, Bob Moore, eds., *Refugees from Nazi Germany and the Liberal European State* (Berghahn, 2010), 57-81
- 56 Report, 17 Feb 1934 from the *commissaire special de Sarreguemines* to the controller general of police services in Alsace-Lorraine. ADBR 98 AL 415 – Immigration et réfugiés sarrois, 1934-1938.
- 57 The minister of cults was granted a visit to determine if refugees at Lizé-Nord should be given a priest or rabbi. The report he generated indicated that the 30 refugees who identified as Jewish unanimously requested a rabbi for the camp. Report, 23 Jan 1935. ADBR 98 AL 688, boîte 3.
- 58 Excellent work produced on these topics has illuminated important aspects of French antisemitism. Sandrine Sanos’ excellent monograph on intellectuals of the Far Right, for example, demonstrates how these individuals cultivated a language and aesthetics that drew on race, gender, and sexuality to construct a modern French nationalism, and shows the close links between antisemitism and colonialism in these discourses. Sanos, *The aesthetics of Hate: Far Right Intellectuals, Antisemitism, and Gender in 1930s France* (Stanford University Press, 2012).

- ⁵⁹ Léon Strauss, «L'antisémitisme en Alsace de 1789 à 1939» (unpublished, n.d.), shared with the author. Strauss identifies a unique local context for the rise of these ideas and expressions, and understands the rise of antisemitism in the interwar period as part of a longer historical arc of antipathies activated by the conservative tendencies in the Catholic Church and the development of social Catholicism through nineteenth century. For more on the history of the Catholic church in Alsace, see Claude Muller, *Dieu est catholique et alsacien: la vitalité du diocèse de Strasbourg au XIXe siècle* (PhD Thesis, Strasbourg 1986), On interconfessional relations in rural Alsace, see Alfred Wahl, *Confession et comportement...* (1980); on Protestantism in Strasbourg, see Anthony Steinhoff, *The Gods of the City: Protestantism and Religious Culture in Strasbourg, 1870-1914* (Brill, 2008).
- ⁶⁰ Michele Audin, Jacques Feldbau, *Topologe: Das Schicksal eines jüdischen Mathematikers 1914-1945* (Berlin: Springer Spektrum, 2010), pp. 38-39.
- ⁶¹ See the classic essay that discusses this term, coined by Edoardo Grendi, by Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni, "The Name and the Game: Unequal Exchange and the Historical Marketplace," *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe: Selections from Quaderni Storici* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991). Also see Grendi, "Microanalisi et storia sociale," *Quaderni Storici* 35 (1977) pp 506-20, and a more recent essay on the term, Edoardo Grendi, "Ripensare la microstoria?" *Quaderni Storici* 86 (1994), 539-49.
- ⁶² Pierre Birnbaum, *Le moment antisémite: un tour de France 1898*.
- ⁶³ Report, Le Procureur General près la Cour d'appel de Colmar à Monsieur le Garde des sceaux Colmar le 27 Feb 1937. ADBR 98 AL 0412.
- ⁶⁴ Report 25 Feb 1937, "Manifestation à l'occasion de la venue à Strasbourg de Madame Léon Brunschvicg." ADBR 98 AL 0412
- ⁶⁵ Letter from Recteur de l'Académie de Strasbourg to Monsieur le Conseiller d'État, Directeur Général des Services d'Alsace de Lorraine, 26 February, 1937. Report is blurred but probably reads either 1 or 200. ADBR 98 AL 0412.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid.
- ⁶⁷ Michael Mann employed similar techniques to understand the transnational nature of Fascism. Mann, *Fascists* (Cambridge UP, 2004).
- ⁶⁸ «Brunschvicq (sic.) – Aria ou La rosette de Gemahling» in *L'appel: Tribune de l'étudiant français de Strasbourg* (v5, n2) ADBR 98 0412
- ⁶⁹ Ibid.
- ⁷⁰ The local Jewish press noted that the protesters even punched some women who looked like they were "the same race" as Brunschvicg. «Le quinzième anniversaire de l'école de formation sociale à Strasbourg ou le progrès de la propagande antijuive en Alsace,» in *La Tribune Juive*, 3/5/1937.
- ⁷¹ «Le quinzième anniversaire...» in *La Tribune Juive*, 3/5/1937.
- ⁷² William Shane Story "Constructing French Alsace: A State, Region, and Nation," (PhD Thesis, Rice University, 2001), 87-88.

- 73 Press sources in ADBR 98 AL 1083 / 1
- 74 In 1933, for instance, in loudly speaking out against international Jewish organizations as well as Zionism in her denunciation of WIZO (the Women's International Zionist organization), Brunschvicg demonstrated her commitment to her French identity above Jewish particularism. Cécile Formaglio, «Cécile Brunschvicg, femme, féministe, juive, face aux défis de l'intégration et de la neutralité religieuse» in *Bulletin archives du féminisme*, no 9 (Dec 2005). According to Muruel Pichon, she "hardly ever took her children to synagogue." Pichon, «Cécile Brunschvicg née Kahn, féministe et ministre du Front Populaire,» Archives Juives 2012/1 (v 45), 131-134. Also see Brunschvicg, "Français d'abord," *La Française*, 21 Oct 1933.
- 75 David Weinberg, *A Community on Trial: The Jews of Paris in the 1930s* (University of Chicago Press, 1977).
- 76 Jean Daltroff « L'accueil contrasté de Juifs de l'Europe orientale en Alsace 1870-1930), Charlotte Kraus, Ariane Lüthi, eds, «*Halb-Asien*» und *Frankreich: Erlebts und erinnertes Osteuropa in Literatur und Geschichte* (Lit Verlag: 2012) 51-68.
- 77 «Les étudiants étrangers à l'Université» in *l'Appel* no 1 (1933), see student movement surveillance in ADBR 98 AL 687.
- 78 Rector of the Académie de Strasbourg to the president of Faculty of Letters, 18 Jun 1938. ADBR 460 D 22.
- 79 See ADBR 98 AL 687, memos between the Rector of the Académie and the director of public instruction of Alsace and Lorraine, the prefect of the Lower Rhine, and the undersecretary of state, which all take issue with the activity of student interest groups of a political nature, including but not limited to the Front Antifasciste.
- 80 David Berry, " 'Fascism or Revolution!' Anarchism and Antifascism in France, 1933-39," *Contemporary European History* v 8, n1 (1999).
- 81 See for instance the enormous number of requests from Saar refugees in Lizé-Nord to be sent to the Soviet Union, a testament for a huge presence of committed Communists. ADBR 98 AL 688 boîte 3.
- 82 Police report for the Prefect of BR, shared with the Undersecretary of state in charge of Alsace-Lorraine affairs, 5 Aug 1935 in ADBR 98 AL 687.
- 83 This does not ignore the extremist positions – often articulated in regional journals like *La France de l'Est*, *Dernières Nouvelles de l'Alsace*, *Der Républicaner*, and *Der Elsaßer Kurier* – who used the Brunschwig affair to "poison" and "stir up" Alsatians with "hateful excesses." Local authorities were highly concerned with monitoring this kind of press and its effects on readership. letter to Paul Valot, 18 Feb 1937, ADBR 98 AL 0412,
- 84 *Ibid.*
- 85 Letters from rector and Rennwald, 19 Mar 1937, ADBR 98 AL 0412