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## Victim or Collaborator: The Influence of Interwar German Soft Power on France

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**VICTIM OR COLLABORATOR: THE INFLUENCE OF INTERWAR GERMAN SOFT  
POWER ON FRANCE**

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Social Studies  
of Bard College

by  
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York  
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## Dedication

Firstly, I would like to dedicate this paper to my mother Marcia Coné who has never stopped supporting me throughout my academic career and who taught me the importance of critical thinking.

I would also like to dedicate this paper to Bard Track and Field who, over the course of the past two years, has become my chosen family. Throughout the course of my college career and specifically in the past year of writing, these individuals have supported me unconditionally through their compassion, charisma, and grit. You all have helped me become who I am today, and I am and will be forever grateful and indebted to you. Bard on three, family on six!





## Acknowledgements

I cannot express my deepest gratitude for my advisor Ambassador Frederic Hof for guiding me through this historical and political exploration. His knowledge of not only war, but of diplomacy is what led me to my research question and has opened deep fascination for soft power and its many uses.

Additionally, I would like to thank Jonathan Enciso, and Billy Poole-Harris who have been my largest supporters over the course of my academic career at Bard College. Thank you for giving me places to write, to cry, and to laugh throughout the course of this project. Thank you for also supporting me as an athlete and individual. I have grown tremendously over the past two years with both of your guidance and I cannot thank you both enough.



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## INTRODUCTION

### How This Research Arose

This project like many great research projects, came about by chance and by realization. Coming into Bard in 2019, I was sure my path was destined for International Relations, especially a concentration on WWII studies. When beginning my time in the upper college, I had believed my project would discuss Russian anti-Semitism—an aspect of the war and post-war society we often forget. It was not until being accepted into the program however, that I realized my linguistic skills—as French is one of my primary languages—would be most useful in examining France during the War rather than Russia. It had not been long before I realized, in a continuation of my French education, I never thought of France as anything more than a victim of the war. Within the same time frame of that realization, I had taken a World War II seminar with professor (and author) Sean McMeekin, who opened my eyes to the collaborative nature of France at the time. Of course, it is never this black and white, but I was shown nuance in an episode of history I had previously believe to be set in stone by historians who believed in the Gaullist (victim) narrative of post-war France. With this nuance unlocked, my interests were piqued in how France collaborated.

A semester later, my eyes were once again opened. In the Spring of my Junior year, I took an International Diplomacy course with former ambassador Frederic Hof, who taught us through his own experience, and through other sources what it meant to succeed at diplomacy and the attention to detail required. It was through this course that I found a way to investigate Vichy France under a new lens—Joseph Nye’s *Soft Power*. As Nye defines it in his article “Public Diplomacy and Soft Power” power is “the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes

you want”.<sup>1</sup> In his understanding of power, Nye argues that there are three main types of power. Hard power, which is forceful (i.e. occupation, or military involvement). Soft power which “rests on the ability to shape the preference of others” (i.e. the Olympics<sup>2</sup>).<sup>3</sup> Lastly, Nye argues there is a combination of the two, known as smart power (i.e. using popular music to bring about land agreements). As stated, it was soft power that was influential in my thinking, as I wondered what effect Germany may have had on France prior to the war. Had I been overlooking the importance of pre-existing similarities such as anti-Semitism? Simply said, the answer was yes.

During the writing process, however, my question frequently changed, especially while trying to keep a neutral stance on all political actions. How does one write about something one is simultaneously discovering while staying impartial? Originally, this paper was meant to examine how German soft power led to hard power (the occupation of France in 1940), which was leading, and already answerable given the fact it was based in a historical event. One cannot presuppose the use of soft power when clearly there must have been reasoning for the German invasion of France as opposed to another country. It was then clear that to survey soft power, the fine details of France’s political values and systems would be the place to begin answering my question. Therefore, after much research, conversation, and deliberation this paper will be my attempt to answer the question: How (if at all) did Nazi German soft power—the ability to co-opt rather than coerce—facilitate France’s collaboration with Germany after their occupation in 1940, which subsequently helped sustain the fascist (Vichy) government in France?

### **France: Collaborator or Victim:**

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<sup>1</sup> Nye 2008, 94

<sup>2</sup> An example taken from Nye’s book *The Future of Power*

<sup>3</sup> Nye 2008, 95

The question of France's status as collaborationist or victim is highly debated and still relevant in both historical and political discussions today. In attempting to suggest my opinions, I will be doing so neutrally to better show the positive and negative qualities of both the French left and right. This question, as I have learned over the course of the past year, is one that is far too complex to produce one certain answer. On one hand, authors and historians such as Henry Rousso suggest the post war narrative of France placed the nation as a victim of Hitler and the Nazis. As stated by French historian Olivier Wieviorka:

Que les résistants aient, pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale, d'abord et avant tout combattu pour leur pays—ou l'idée qu'ils s'en forgeaient— relève de l'évidence. Les patriotes fusillés criaient, avant que les balles ne les abattent, « Vive la France ! » et non « Vive l'Europe ». Cette vision s'est, par la suite, enracinée dans la mémoire collective grâce aux politiques mémorielles développées par les pouvoirs publics, les partis, ou les associations. L'ensemble de ces forces a en effet tendu à présenter la lutte clandestine comme un processus autochtone et national, sinon nationaliste, une vision qui, dans le même temps, excluait l'aide apportée par les Alliés, Britanniques et Américains au premier chef.<sup>4</sup>

In translation:

That resistance fighters fought first and foremost for their country—or the idea that they formed—during the Second World War is obvious. The soon to be wounded patriots shouted, before the bullets shot them, "Long live France!" and not "Long live Europe." This vision was subsequently rooted in the collective memory due to the policies that developed this narrative through public authorities, parties, or associations. All these

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<sup>4</sup> Wieviorka 2019, 32

forces tended to present the group struggle as an indigenous and national, if not, then nationalist, a vision that, at the same time, excluded the assistance provided by the Allies, British and Americans in the first place.<sup>5</sup>

This quote is influential in attempting to review the narrative of victimization, as it showcases the typical depiction of France during the war. A country unsettled by the Nazi regime, that fought for freedom, and that was not going to let anyone deter people from being patriotic and most importantly French. This message is constantly seen throughout the post war narrative and can even be seen during the war through General De Gaulle's<sup>6</sup> radio broadcasts in June 1940, in which he argues France under the tutelage of Germany would reduce the country to slavery.<sup>7</sup> He continues his speech by expressing that the French people are unhappy and will continue to resist the suppression that an armistice agreement would dictate. Therefore, his speech demonstrates a narrative of victimization and mass resistance—although false—that would be widely accepted after the war.

This key word—nationalism—is fundamental in the discussion of whether France was a “victim” of the war. Nationalism, like any political theory, has a definition that ebbs and flows. This was no different in the interwar years of France as nationalism was a key term both on the socialist left, as well as the conservative right. It is important to also note, that their respective definitions of nationalism were not so different. These two political movements, although very

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<sup>5</sup> Translation done by Sophia Tighe

<sup>6</sup> Charles De Gaulle was born November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1890. He was a soldier in World War I, and was promoted to staff of the Supreme War Council in 1925 by Vichy Leader Phillipe Pétain (see footnote 11). During World War II Pétain left France to see possibilities for military operations in Britian. He would remain in England for the rest of the war due to French threats. Post war, he became president of France from 1959 to 1956 (Britannica).

<sup>7</sup> *OPERATION OVERLORD: BBC GENERAL DE GAULLE BROADCAST 22 JUNE 1940 French TO ENGLISH TRANSLATION*, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AurbsCa-oOM>.

different in approach, had many similarities in terms of their political agendas, for example, enlarging the French population. As seen by Rousso and arguably the French left, nationalism was a push towards better conditions for citizens. Additionally, within the context of the Second World War, nationalism was a signal of resistance—a desire to resist anything that would corrupt the power and authority of France.

The right, although sharing the same definition of nationalism as the left, had very different intentions for France, as they looked to keep France relevant politically and economically as they feared the nation was falling behind. The distinction from the left mainly stemmed from their different views on leadership and authority. The right believed the power of France would come from the purity of the nation that would allow it economic independent from foreigners from the East, or those of Jewish decent—a challenge to the Gaullist narrative.

On the opposing end of the debate, many historians do not doubt that 1933-1945 France collaborated with the German forces. Although not officially an occupied zone until May 1940, it is undeniable that not only France but the world knew what the German nation was becoming under Hitler. People who followed the French right, as stated by academic Cora Sol Goldstein, “were frustrated with what they saw as a decadent and inefficient parliamentary system plagued by scandal and corruption”<sup>8</sup> of the Third Republic. This frustration soon became hostility, as the right believed socialism could not benefit the nation when it ignored more important issues such as economic reform, rather than social. That said, there were splits among leftists as well, as some were frustrated by their own officials and their lack of political agenda.

Moreover, the rise of the Nazis and Hitler lacked of opposition in France as he possessed the ability to provide the stability it wanted which, “certainly energized the French extreme

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<sup>8</sup> Goldstein 2016, 1086

right.”<sup>9</sup> Therefore, in terms of policies towards economics and birth rates, it is no surprise that France took on a German model, using similar incentives to revitalize the nation. It is with the right’s admiration of Hitler in mind that I argue nationalism for the right was a fight for French success and stability. This can be seen by their attempt to push policies that would benefit the nation through population growth and an increased labor reserve. Although different in approach, Goldstein’s research in addition to my own work, confirms a similarity in nationalism between the French right and the left as there is a communal drive for success and stability for the nation, although, presented very differently through their political agendas.

In addition to the debate of whether France was a victim or a collaborator, there is also a smaller, much more nuanced debate that this paper will attempt to resolve—can co-optive soft power have a larger effect on a nation during a period of war, rather than militaristic hard power? This debate as nuanced as it is, is an essential one to recognize as it reflects on whether France can be a victim and still have led its people towards the fascist narrative. In order for this paper to be objective in responding to this debate while still answering its main thesis question (how (if at all) did Nazi German soft power—the ability to co-opt rather than coerce—facilitate France’s collaboration with Germany prior to their occupation in 1940, which subsequently helped sustain the fascist (Vichy) government in France?), it is important to recognize how objective soft power truly is.

*Soft Power*—a concept created by statesmen, academic, and author Joseph Nye—can be related to anything non-political that brings about a desire for political exchange. In the context of interwar France, German soft power could have resulted from a music concert composed by a German prior to even the First World War. We cannot, in analysis, put link a definitive moment

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<sup>9</sup> Goldstein 2016, 1086

to soft power, rather we must examine soft power from a multitude of lenses, as it can exist in different social spheres such as economics, population, and infrastructure. This recognition of soft power, however, is not an attempt to minimize the importance of hard power or the military, as a nation (up until quite recently) can only be as strong as its military forces. It is essential to investigate soft power as it is often forgotten within the political narrative as it is objective and can be a part of many narratives unlike hard power which is seen and recorded more historically, and therefore, its place in politics is irrefutable. It is for this reason, that it is essential we investigate and continue to use soft power as a lens for research, without it, we allow too much of history to be dictated—as De Gaulle did—by the winners or those who, in the case of De Gaulle, were not even present in France during the war.

In using the lens of soft power to explore interwar and Vichy France, we can uncover a different historical perspective than the one I was taught in French elementary school. In attempting to answer how did Nazi German soft power facilitate France's collaboration with Germany prior to its occupation in 1940, which subsequently helped sustain the fascist (Vichy) government in France, it is essential to start the investigation in the interwar years. As presented earlier in the introduction, France prior to the Second World War was in turmoil. The country economically, socially, and infrastructurally was in collapse. Therefore, presenting the weakness of France and the possibility of soft power attainment. However, given the turmoil of the time, I did not find it wise to structure the paper in a way that once again, suggested instability. Rather, I chose to structure the paper through the words of Vichy's leader Philippe Pétain<sup>10</sup> who perpetuated collaborationism and undeniably gave in to German power.

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<sup>10</sup> Henri-Philippe Pétain was born April 24, 1856. He was a soldier in World War I and was given command of his own brigade near the end of the war. Although with little interest in politics, the tensions of the war led him to become a Brigadier-General and a General of Division (Baussan 1918). Given his



During the French revolution, France's creed *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*, was created, and would establish itself firmly into the political agenda of the Third Republic. Vichy, fascism, and Pétain strove for different ideals and therefore a new motto, *Travail, Famille, Patrie*, was created, and kept until the beginning of France's Fourth Republic (1946).

Pétain's new motto aimed to encourage nationalism through a deep love and dedication to the country. He believed like many of his fellows on the right, that France could only be successful by returning to the traditional values, which harnessed on the needs of France when it was in its industrial revolution (1733-1913). Even though Pétain's rebranding of the country seemed dated at the time given the inability for France to ever be the same after World War I, these three words did show the greatest areas of improvement and stability. It is important to note however, these areas of improvement developed attention prior to Pétain holding office in June 1940, and prior to the war as a whole. Nonetheless, my chapters will delve individually into Pétain's three categories in order to showcase where German soft power can be seen both during the Vichy regime and prior as much of France's independent fascist drive was prior to their occupation.

In terms of *Travail* (work), I will investigate how France began to rebuild its nation after World War I. To begin, it will be necessary to investigate the condition of France's workforce prior to the war and determine what pre-war efficiency looked like. Next, the focus will shift into an exploration of interwar France in an attempt to see the effects of gross population reduction and perhaps answer why leftist workers reform failed. In exploring the lowest points and failures of interwar employment and economics, I argue that this collapse led France to idealize the

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work and honor in the first World War, as he had been given title of Marshal, he was asked to take office June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1940 in order to form a new ministry under German forces, which would become Vichy.

reconstruction of Germany's economy quickly after the debt the Treaty of Versailles brought upon them. Lastly, I will look at Vichy during the war through labor and economics as both were controlled by Germany in the occupied zone or France's desire to please Germany in the Vichy zone. The importance of Vichy in this exploration is illustrated by the amount of coal and food France was providing for Germany during their occupation. In terms of soft power, this uplift in economy and production begs the question: was French productivity skyrocketing due to the following of a German model, or due to coercive German enforcement?

In the second chapter *Famille*, I will delve into French fascism and the place of the woman in an era of female repression. First, I will demonstrate how French fascism was directed towards women as female subsections of fascist political groups such as *Le Croix de Feu* were created. These groups allowed women both the chance to participate in politics—a socio sector that had previously been restricted to men—and have conversations amongst themselves of how fascism benefited women as individuals, and women in the home. In this case, soft power is more directly seen as fascism was popularized by the Germans at the time. Additionally, these female led groups helped women want to take on a traditional, motherly role that brought them out of the workplace, and encouraged population growth.

In the second section of chapter two, I will examine the maternal role required of women by the fascist right. In response to trying to push women back in to the home, subsidies—based on German policy models—lured women into the role of mother for their country, rather than for their own desires. Although one may question why French fascism was pushing women into the home rather than continuing to work as they had done during World War I, it is important to note that France's population was smaller than any other major European nation at the time. This made rightist politicians question the nation's ability for growth, and therefore was a major

concern in the left as well. Within the realm of subsidies soft power is present through France mimicking German policies as well as their political rhetoric which would continue during the Vichy regime as well. For example, Pétain reached out not only to mothers but created mother's day to celebrate all women who were aiding their nation's prosperity by having children.

In the last chapter *Patrie* (homeland), I will define what it meant to be a French nationalist on both sides of the political spectrum. In addition, I will argue that pacifism, similarity to nationalism, can be interpreted as a quality of both the right and left's political actions. Looking specifically at World War II rather than the interwar years, the discussion will switch to Vichy and what it meant to be French and a nationalist in an occupied zone. It is in this discussion of Vichy that we will be able to see whether soft power remains present throughout the war and the new government that forms in German borders (Vichy).

By investigating Vichy's motto of *Travail, Famille, Patrie*, we are able to examine the role of soft power more clearly, as each category drastically improved over the span of the interwar years and during the war itself. In examining the role of soft power, not only do we provide a new lens to explore history and politics, but we discover new truths, understandings, and nuance to a previously closed off narrative. Additionally, in looking beyond traditional hard power, we allow ourselves to create our own understandings of history, not only the ones given to us by preconceived notions, or in this case, a widely accepted Gaullist narrative of victimization rather than collaboration.

## **TRAVAIL: WORKING FOR FREEDOM AND FASCISM**

*Il n'est pas de punition plus terrible que le travail inutile et sans espoir.*  
—Albert Camus

### **Introduction**

*Travail.* Work. What does it mean to be a working nation? The definition of what a working nation is has changed a multitude of times throughout France's history, as social and economic reform has followed every French government, as the working class has only continued to gain importance.

In the late 1700s during the French Revolution (1789-1799), the French fought for their voice and freedom against its government that allowed mass suffering and poverty. Not even thirty years later France had another short lived revolution in 1830, better known as the July Revolution (July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1830- July 29<sup>th</sup>, 1830) which and succeeded in overthrowing King Charles X. After his abdication of the throne on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, a new issue arose as the upper middle class<sup>11</sup> gained political power, and secured the ability to rule and control a people that once again, they could not relate to.<sup>12</sup> This bourgeois government lasted only until 1848, as the nation had another revolution due to an economic crisis which led to mass unemployment, contrasting greatly with the prosperous agricultural France of 1840.<sup>13</sup> The revolution of 1848, better known as the February Revolution (1848-1849), was focused on workers' rights as the economic collapse made already poor working conditions even worse. As stated in an article titled "France and

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<sup>11</sup> This new upper middle class government lasted until 1848. It was led by Louis Philippe who was known as the "citizen king" who was forced to abdicate the throne. After his abdication Philippe fled to England. This government was known as the July Monarchy.

<sup>12</sup> "July Revolution". <https://www.britannica.com/event/July-Revolution>

<sup>13</sup> "The July Monarchy (1830-1848)". Brown University Library Center for Digital Scholarship

Freedom” written by the Jeffersonian Republican on April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1849, the revolution was widespread and forceful as,

On one side were abled generals, the prestige of authority, and all the costly and powerful machinery of scientific warfare; on the other, an unorganized, undisciplined multitude, fired by love of liberty and indignant at the perfidy<sup>14</sup> of Louis Philippe.<sup>15</sup>

This passionate revolution would result in the installation of the Second Republic (1848-1852) that would last until its collapse due to Napoleon III as he forced his way from president to emperor. After lifting the militaristic cast over France the Third Republic—a socialist government—would be installed until the beginning of World War II.

In considering the longstanding history of French revolutions brought about by unjust conditions and limited workers’ rights, we must reflect on the ability work has on rebuilding a nation. Moreover the ability to transform a nation in to admiring a fascist regime that stood for everything against what the Third Republic preached. It is necessary to realize worker’s rights post World War I changed fundamentally, as France no longer had the population or the infrastructure to retain the same productivity and prosperity as before. Additionally, not only France but Europe was in an economic crisis including their main ally—Britain—which could not support France’s reconstruction, as it could barely hold its own without the aid of the United States. As France was unable to find foreign aid, the nation had to solve their own economic issues by recreating a working economy. In doing so, France looked to other nations—such as Germany—in an attempt to recreate their models in France.

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<sup>14</sup> Perfidy: Untrustworthy

<sup>15</sup> *Jeffersonian Republican* (Stroudsburg, PA), April 6, 1848, Page 2, Image 2, col. 2

Germany, had quickly rebuilt itself even with its debts that it owed after Versailles (132 billion gold marks which in today's currency is approximately 500 billion dollars)<sup>16</sup> through its remilitarization and a focus on reviving its economy through exporting goods, and social spending. Through the revival of its economy, Germany was not only able to rebuild but was able to catch the eye of France, creating admiration and a degree of jealousy. By studying the reconstruction of both France and Germany, I argue that Nazi Germany and fascism provided an image of a nation thriving in global decay. This success allowed German soft power to succeed, as the French right sought to better their national standing in a way that reflected both Napoleonic grandeur and the industrial revolution. In order to demonstrate the impact of the worker on soft power, I will first present German and French reconstruction during the interwar years in an attempt to understand where both countries thrived and struggled. Secondly, I will investigate France and its workers both under occupation and in the unoccupied, but pro-German Vichy zone in order to determine the effects of German soft power and its possible strength in encouraging French collaboration.

### **Interwar Reconstruction: Germany**

Before examining France, it is important to recognize Germany's ability to produce soft power, and to explain what made Germany attractive in terms of its workforce. Contrary to the image of Germany's mass power in World War II, "Germany's experience of the Great Depression was exceptionally severe. Between the summer of 1929 and early 1932, German unemployment rose from just under 1.3 million to over 6 million."<sup>17</sup> Like many other nations dealing with economic crises at the time, Germany felt the effects of the depression politically as

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<sup>16</sup> Blakemore 2019. <https://www.history.com/news/germany-world-war-i-debt-treaty-versailles>

<sup>17</sup> Dimsdale, Horsewood, and Reil 2006, 778

well as economically. At the time, the German Weimar Republic<sup>18</sup> (1918-1933) was unstable. As German historian Wolfgang J. Mommsen states,

the parliamentary system of Weimar was a sort of emergency solution dictated by postwar necessities—or to put it otherwise, a sort of truce between the different political groupings and their respective client groups in German society, in which the extreme Left and the extreme Right were left on the sidelines.<sup>19</sup>

With no exact recovery plan or strong political leadership in the republic, countless riots took place such as the Hamburg Uprising<sup>20</sup> led by communists as a fight for workers' rights and led to civilian militarization.<sup>21</sup> The Hamburg Uprising provides a phenomenal example of the instability of Germany at the time, as the economic and political grey zone of Weimar allowed citizens to protest against a government that did not seem to care about doing right by its people. This is especially true when considering the Hamburg Uprising was provoked by the brutality of German military officers, as in May 1929 when officers brutally attacked communists for illegal demonstrations in Berlin—known as Blutmai or in English Blood May.<sup>22</sup> This brutality shows a great contrast between not only a unstable country and its citizens, but between citizens as their views of political success differed greatly.

The difference in political opinions unsurprisingly was a contradiction between the political beliefs of the right (socialist and communist) and the left (conservative). On the left,

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<sup>18</sup> The German Republic officially named the German Reich or the Weimar Republic. The republic took over the former monarchy of Germany as Kaiser Willhelm II (emperor to Prussia) abdicated the throne November 9<sup>th</sup> 1918.

<sup>19</sup> Mommsen 1996, 67

<sup>20</sup> The Hamburg Uprising was a political riot organized by Hamburg Communists that fought for worker's rights. In addition, the uprising fought against the militaristic nature of Germany that led to the disarmaments of multiple police stations.

<sup>21</sup> Verlag 1954. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/ulbricht/19xx/hamburg.html>

<sup>22</sup> Bowlby 1986, 137

wishes to restore social order and turn to a more socialist government were most prominent. On the right, the goal was to restore a Germany that had an authoritarian rule rather than democracy. Regardless of their differences, however, both sides of the political system held a “skepticism towards an unrestricted parliamentary rule”<sup>23</sup>, which the Weimar Republic was accused of pursuing. This unrestricted parliamentary rule did not aid itself in terms of economic crisis, as the Weimar Republic’s unemployment rates and subsequent strikes grew exponentially over the course of its rule. As a result, there was a decline in support for parliamentary democracy which resulted in a political shift from the left to the right. This political shift became clear in the elections of July 31<sup>st</sup>, 1932, as the National Socialist party took political control with 37.4 percent of the votes (approximately 13,745,800 people)<sup>24</sup> from the Social Democratic party, which had the majority of voters in prior elections. Therefore, as stated by Mommsen,

the idea was born that the nationalist as well as the anticommunist potential of the National Socialist mass movement might be usefully exploited for the purposes of doing away with the parliamentary government of Weimar altogether and replacing it with an authoritarian regime.<sup>25</sup>

The National Socialist (Nazi) movement did indeed replace the Weimar Republic, and was the main source of change both politically and morally in Germany. This shift resulted in an authoritarian regime that, in its own way, took control over the economy and assisted the nation in its economic reconstruction.

The main source of economic reconstruction came from government spending that reduced unemployment. Although there was no clear plan on how to rebuild Germany’s

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<sup>23</sup> Mommsen 1996, 68

<sup>24</sup><https://www.redhookcentralschools.org/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=6909&dataid=10980&FileName=German%20Election%201920%201930s.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> Mommsen 1996, 73



economy, the National Socialist's continuously pushed for welfare that enabled individuals to work, rather than to remain idle and receive benefits. As stated by academic Thomas E. J. de Witt, "Some basic attitudes and objectives did, however, soon crystallize. Welfare in the form of obligatory state assistance was wasteful and unnecessary."<sup>26</sup> Therefore, social programs such as public work and winter relief funds were introduced in an attempt to rationalize the little money the nation had to spend.

The true policy of public spending for job relief, however, occurred in June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1933 as Hitler introduced the Law for the Reduction of Unemployment.<sup>27</sup> This new law acted in two different ways. The first was to encourage new businesses and funding public-works projects. The second focused on women, in an attempt to have them return home to provide new jobs for men and get married, thereby increasing Germany's depressed population. Additionally, programs were introduced to give veterans larger pensions, and the "dependents of fallen comrades were remembered in the *Adolf-Hitler-Spende* to which the chancellor donated his salary". Fallen workers also had their own programs like the *Stiftung für die Opfer der Arbeit*<sup>28</sup> to take care of remaining survivors.<sup>29</sup>

These programs not only provided financial relief, but aimed to demonstrate that Hitler and his government cared about its citizens by encouraging individuals to rejoin the labor force. Moreover, with these increases the cost of living rose and relief rates could no longer sustain an individual. Therefore, citizens were—by 1936—forced to be employed in one way or another. Although harsh in nature, the National Socialist budgeting of welfare and government spending creating relief programs allowed the nation to regain economic prosperity. "Ultimately, so the

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<sup>26</sup> Witt 1978, 259

<sup>27</sup> Witt 1978, 261

<sup>28</sup> Stiftung für die Opfer der Arbeit: Foundation For Victims of Labour

<sup>29</sup> Witt 1978, 262

dedicated followers hoped, ideology and practice would dovetail in the complete disappearance of publicly financed and organized welfare services.<sup>30</sup>

### **Interwar Reconstruction: France**

The reconstruction of interwar France differed greatly from that of Germany, primarily due to practices similar to the Weimar Republic by French governments during the Third Republic (1870-1940). Unlike Weimar, the postwar Third Republic was dominated by the socialist left, as government and worker strength were high on the political agenda. Yet, France did not pursue government spending or welfare to the extent the left would have liked. Instead, the Third Republic and the right took the different approach. As academic Bernard H. Moss points out, “the social and political factors that contributed to this precocious unionization and to the leading role the public sector played in achieving the Popular Front.”<sup>31</sup><sup>32</sup> Therefore, similarly to the Hamburg Uprising, communist unions in France began to militarize and demand better wages.

Post-World War I, France’s unemployment rate was far lower than Germany’s and wages were more attractive than public welfare stipends. However, France’s revolutionary past created a major difference, as French citizens were focused primarily on the class divide, as there was “social distance between public employees and industrial workers.”<sup>33</sup> This social distance was also reinforced by the simultaneous political divide between these two groups. Public employees found themselves aligning more often with anti-Communist views, while industrial workers aligned more with the revolutionary ideas of the Popular Front.

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<sup>30</sup> Witt 1978, 278

<sup>31</sup> Moss 1994, 338

<sup>32</sup> Popular Front: The coalition of socialist and communist parties

<sup>33</sup> Moss 1994, 339

In an attempt to combat these strikes and unrest in an already damaged France, the Third Republic had to take on more conservative measures, as workers and social reforms were not effective for either party. However, France did not yet have a political figure like Hitler to push the nation in an authoritarian direction. Therefore, for the French left, cuts to welfare were seen as abominable and were avoided when possible. As stated by academic Pierre Martin, the left preferred to participate in protectionism that lent itself to “multiple, ferocious expenditure cuts, particularly in the civil service, to spare the workers, shopkeepers, and farmers the effects of the Depression.”<sup>34</sup> These protectionist measures however could only go on for so long before the nation felt its repercussions.

Although it can be argued—as demographer Alfred Sauvy does—that the economy under the Third Republic and the Popular Front<sup>35</sup> was becoming more stable, it cannot be ignored that there was a loss of opportunity as governments after the Third Republic did not understand which of their policies and choices were making the greatest influence.<sup>36</sup> In not recognizing their strengths, the Third Republic also did not notice its weaknesses as costs on agricultural crop yields were growing, and profit margins for farmers decreased.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, industrial production was soon starting to decline as well resulting in increased unemployment, the need for more social welfare systems, and an overall economic decline. These financial setbacks along

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<sup>34</sup> Martin 1991, 57

<sup>35</sup> The Popular Front was the collaboration of socialist and communists politically.

<sup>36</sup> In his writing, Sauvy alludes to not paying debts to the United States, and not seeing industrial production growth as examples of the Third Republic’s aloofness.

<sup>37</sup> Sauvy 1969, 22

with the Stavisky affair<sup>38</sup> and other economic scandals of the Third Republic led to a right led riot on February 6<sup>th</sup>, 1934<sup>39</sup> that protested the government and its inability to stabilize the nation.

Through the constant shifts of the Third Republic's economic policies, and the large loans taken from the Banque de France (the Bank of France), economic stability would never fully come into fruition. Neither side of the political spectrum was ever fully satisfied, as the left portrayed the idea that workers were interchangeable and not cared for. On the right, a different issue was at play as they could not trust the economic policies of the left as they often focused on social and public wellbeing, rather than paying debts and increasing the economic prosperity of French citizens.

### **Interwar Reconstruction: Soft Power**

In comparing Germany and France's methods of economic reconstruction and labor support, it is undeniable the influence Germany had towards France. The first similarity and instance which soft power can be seen is through their attitudes towards their political and economic systems.

Europe politically was unstable at the time, and the governments of the Weimar and Third Republic did not promote stability as they were not in political and economic consensus. Therefore riots occurred on both ends of the political spectrum. With this similarity in mind, soft power could have initially been created by the sense of likeness between the two countries.

Although, it is difficult to prove this, it is not uncommon for nations to ally or bond over their

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<sup>38</sup> The Stavisky Affair: Political elite Serge Alexandre Stavisky a Russian native turned Frenchman, embezzled millions of Francs with the aid of many other political leaders involved in France's government at the time—the Third Republic ([www.encyclopedia.com](http://www.encyclopedia.com)).

<sup>39</sup> The Riot of February 6<sup>th</sup>, better known as the Veteran's riot took place on the Place de la Concorde. This could be considered the first Fascist attempts to overthrow the Third Republic. 15 demonstrators were killed. (Millington 2010)

shortcomings, which can be seen through Russia becoming an ally of the West after its former partner Germany invaded (Operation Barbarossa) in 1941. As noted by the creator of the term soft power (Joseph Nye), “At the personal level, we all know the power of attraction and seduction”<sup>40</sup>, and therefore having similar pain and triumphs brings both nations and people closer together. In the case of Germany and France, the dual struggle of economic crisis as well as political inconsistency suggests a closer relationship and a mirroring between the two nations who understood that neither was alone, and the world was watching.

Despite both nations unstable politics, soft power can also be seen more clearly by the subsidies created by Germany which France adopted, and the similarity in the riots that proceeded them. In terms of the French, the longstanding revolutionary wind of the nation struck the Third Republic just as hard as any prior regime. Displeased on the left, communist and socialist revolutionaries took to the streets and protested the awful working conditions of France’s working middle class. Additionally, they argued for a push against a private sector to which the French government was heavily indebted. On the right, conservatives argued that the nation was too loose with economic reform and cared very little about its veterans and their wellbeing. In Germany, these protests were being mirrored and led to a political shift away from socialist rule. Starting in 1933, however, Germany and Hitler had calmed the nation and its revolutionary tendencies by introducing social welfare policies that benefitted workers and compensated families of those harmed in the line of work. One of these policies specifically the *Adolf-Hitler-Spende* that was directed towards giving Veterans higher pensions.

The *Adolf-Hitler-Spende* program showcases perhaps the most valuable example of where soft power can originate between nations. In France, right-wing Veterans were rioting in

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<sup>40</sup> Nye 2008, 95

hopes for a more authoritarian, and traditionally French regime to take the place of the Third Republic. This protest although not having a large effect on agenda of French politics, showcased that fascism was rising and helping a cause many French were eager to put in policy. In having a response to a live issue, Germany attracted the attention of France as it portrayed that the two nations cared about the same issues and moreover, the same group of people. This attraction is exemplified in soft power as “soft power is attractive power,”<sup>41</sup> and,

The soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority).<sup>42</sup>

In caring for veterans in an interwar climate, Germany was able—for those on the French right—to appeal culturally by showcasing nationalism and a pride for the work of those who fought to keep their nation intact. Politically, the veterans riot was the beginning of right-wing unrest towards the socialist Third Republic as they hoped for an authoritarian government, which Germany (Weimar) had been overthrown by as well. Lastly, in terms of foreign policies, it can be argued, that caring for veterans not only helps those who have fought, but encourages others to join the service as benefits would be assured. In Germany policies such as the Hitler-Spende program did in fact encourage young men to join and stay in the military rather than working in the labor force. This allowed Germany to remilitarize and have the ability to enforce hard power—the coercive side of state power projection. The national strength which Germany gained after Hitler and the National Socialist party came in to power was all the right in France could ever wish for. It demonstrated a return to traditionalism, power, and stability.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> Nye 2008, 96

The fight of veteran care was one of many similar concerns of both Nazi Germany and the French right. Although France was still led by the Third Republic until occupation in May 1940, it is important to note that soft power manifesting in smaller communities and groups was just as impactful as the right coming to power. In having prior soft power, Germany was able to easily capture and enchant France which proved to be useful in armistice agreements and declaring the Occupied versus Free French zone. Additionally, once France was fully occupied in 1943, having a fascist government—Vichy—proved to be useful to Germany as collaborationism was expected. As stated by Nye, “If I can get you to want to do what I want, then I do not have to force you to do what you do not want.”<sup>43</sup>

### **Collaboration Through the Workforce: Vichy**

Unlike interwar France, stability in Vichy was a key feature of the regime and its economy. Still, like the interwar period there were many Frenchman not happy about the state of their nation, and its authoritarian leadership. In, Vichy however, riots were not possible as Germans were stationed throughout the unoccupied and occupied nation. Vichy for this reason had two different governmental and economic policies—one German and one French. As stated by historian Kenneth Mouré, on one hand “Vichy planning for the French economy emphasized a strong state role and a corporatist economic structure to modernize production and resolve class conflict.”<sup>44</sup> Yet this view of how the economy should run was very difficult given the imposing German forces. German political and economic demands ran French resources dry, as they used “systematic mobilization of French production to meet the needs of the German war economy,”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Nye 2008, 95

<sup>44</sup> Mouré 2007, 111

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

and “intense exploitation of production and labor after the German failure to win a decisive victory in the USSR in 1942.”<sup>46</sup>

In considering the role of *travail* (work) in Vichy France, it is essential to understand the nation both consciously and unconsciously was being directed by German forces and needs. It can be argued that this influence shows the impact of interwar German soft power, and its ability to drastically shift another nation’s political and economic choices.

At the beginning of the occupation and during the Vichy regime, the divide between German labour and economics and that of France became much greater as the guidelines of the armistice agreement were being implemented.<sup>47</sup> After 1942, when German forces took control of the unoccupied zone, the separation between German and France economics and politics were slim to none—France had gone through a full fascist metamorphosis. As stated by academic Joseph Jones, France under Vichy and German control was a nation full of questions. “The first concerned the question of the “relève”, the enlistment of workers to be sent to Germany in return for the release of French prisoners-of-war”<sup>48</sup> in 1943. This shipment of workers poses a question: why did unoccupied France want prisoners of war back in a fully occupied France? As explained by author and historian W.D. Halls, “By early 1942 the war against the Soviet Union had begun to tax German manpower and factories in the Reich were suffering from labour shortages.”<sup>49</sup> These French workers—dispatched to Germany in 1944 at a demanded rate of 90,000 a month—were chosen by Pétain and the Vichy regime without consideration for their preferences, as throughout Europe “troops of puppet allies and foreign mercenaries raised by Nazi sympathizers

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid

<sup>47</sup> The armistice agreement between France and Germany was signed on June 22<sup>nd</sup> 1940. It is within this armistice agreement that French zones were decided.

<sup>48</sup> Jones 1982, 554

<sup>49</sup> Halls 1978, 298



were serving on the Eastern Front.”<sup>50</sup> Therefore, returning prisoners of war to France in exchange for able bodied men allowed France to retain a population and a workforce that it desperately needed. Yet, in sending many men to the Soviet-German Front, France had simultaneously disarmed itself, and further placed itself in a space of inferiority.

Vichy France however, understood that there was a possibility of Germany fully destroying any semblance of a French government in 1940. This can be seen in article three of the armistice agreement:

Le gouvernement français est libre de choisir son siège dans le territoire non occupé ou bien, s'il le désire, de le transférer à Paris. Dans ce dernier cas, le gouvernement allemand s'engage à accorder toutes les facilités nécessaires au gouvernement français et à ses services administratifs centraux afin qu'il soit en mesure d'administrer de Paris les territoires occupés et non occupés.<sup>51</sup>

Or in English:

The French government is free to choose the placement of its office in the unoccupied zone or, if it is desired, to Paris. In this last instance, the German government must provide all necessary facilities to the French government and to its central administrative services so that it is able to continue administration from both the occupied and unoccupied zones from Paris.<sup>52</sup>

This third article is one that is interesting for two different reasons. The first indicates a level of trust between France and Germany as it is stated that if the capital is moved to Paris, the German government will provide all necessary facilities to continue administrative and

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<sup>50</sup> Halls 1978, 295

<sup>51</sup> Michel 1981, 355

<sup>52</sup> Translation by Sophia Tighe

diplomatic services. This trust—stemming from pre-war German soft power—indicates that France believed Germany would assist them in transitioning capitals to the occupied zone and would allow it to continue its work even though technically occupied. The other reason this article provides an interesting narrative into French politics is the fear in which France approached its zoned government. In creating an armistice agreement that protected the power of the Vichy government, it can be inferred that France knew Germany would not uphold peace and truce, but would try to occupy the entire nation—a goal that would be achieved. In providing manpower to Germany and having the possibility to move Vichy’s capital in to fully occupied Paris, France both directly and indirectly, yielded it political authority to its occupier, as they were acting in ways that reflected German political preferences, not their own.

In addition to labor, France was providing Germany with resources like food and coal. The demand for French goods by Germany were so high that men were also drawn to work in German and French factories and labor forces, as France did not have the ability and manpower to provide for the German nation. As estimated by political scientist Robert O. Paxton, “a little over 10 percent of French colonial imports— phosphates, vegetable oils, coffee, etc.—went on to Germany,”<sup>53</sup>. By 1994, “France had shipped 4,127 tons of magnesium and 518,684 ton of bauxite to Germany”<sup>54</sup> which were necessary elements for industrial products, aluminum, and chemicals. Additionally, Paxton notes that the French agricultural industry was heavily drained by Germany, as grain, meat, and wine production rose heavily. Therefore, various French industries were taken control of by Germany and further assistance was provided to Germany by Vichy and Pétain as it aided French security and placed the regime in Germany’s good graces. It is through this constant aid to Germany that France once again reinforced interwar soft power,

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<sup>53</sup> Paxton 2001, 144

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

as—with exception to the small population of resistance members—France did not fight for their rights, and followed German orders meticulously and to its fullest ability as France practically stopped exporting to all other countries. As Franz Richard Hemmen chief economic delegate to the Armistice Commission at Wiesbaden, put it in January 1942, “French workers in industry, railroads, internal shipping and most overseas shipping are working almost exclusively for Germany.”<sup>55</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, work acted as a mode in which German soft power impacted interwar France. Throughout the interwar years both France and Germany’s governments had similar instabilities, as tensions between the conservative right and the socialist left grew. In Germany, the Weimar Republic attempted political unconsensus trying to keep the entire nation pleased. As a result, riots on both ends of the political spectrum ensued and ultimately would lead National Socialism taking control in 1933. In France, a similar situation occurred within the Third Republic, as the socialist regime was filled with economic scandal. Its primarily financial scandals made both socialists and conservatives unhappy with their government. In response, both ends of the political spectrum rioted, as the right sought to replace the republic with an authoritarian regime. On the left, Marxists and socialists were looking for better worker’s rights and socioeconomic conditions. With their similarities in government, France looked up to Germany as it showed a prime example of a nation struggling and becoming successful. In addition, the German model of an authoritarian regime and regaining of social equilibrium encouraged the French right and advanced fascism within the nation. Admiration of German

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid

economic and social success would create and build soft power that would impact France not only during the remainder of the interwar years, but during the war itself.

During the war, France's entire labor sector was dedicated to the needs of Germany, as men and vast amount of resources were sent to Germany daily. Germany would control most of French industry as France sent most of their automobiles, food resources, materials and manpower to Germany. Although the extent to which Germany controlled French labor and production was incredibly high, it is important to note that these relationships were built through interwar soft power. Further, France had not only taken a position of admiration, but wanted to be Germany's right hand man which highlights and reinforces the impact of Germany's interwar soft power.

**FAMILLE: THE EFFECT OF FASCISM IN MATERNAL AFFAIRS AND THE  
FRENCH HOME**

*Je les ai invités à prendre leur point d'appui sur les institutions naturelles et morales auxquelles est lié notre destin d'homme et de Français. La famille, cellule initiale de la société, nous offre la meilleure garantie de relèvement. Un pays stérile est un pays mortellement atteint dans son existence.*

*I have invited them to support the natural and moral institutions to which our destiny as man and as Frenchman are linked. The family, the initial cell of society, offers us the greatest guarantee of recovery. A sterile country is a country that is mortally wounded in its existence<sup>56</sup>.*

—Philippe Pétain, May 25, 1941

**Introduction**

The second term of France's newest motto—*Famille* or family—held perhaps a greater importance in the French attraction to fascism due to its ability to integrate every member of the household into the political regime. As Pétain, the leader of the Vichy government believed, a sterile country is a country that is mortally wounded in its existence.<sup>57</sup> The image of the fascist family that Pétain was hoping to achieve was created in order to offer recovery both in terms of power and wealth after the catastrophic losses of World War I. In this chapter, I will posit that the family not only was used as a way to present fascism as a necessary ideology, but was also used to help France regain social prominence amongst its European counterparts.

The necessity for French family recovery not only came from a desire to evolve, but from a desire to return to France's previous power. As author and historian Edouard De Billy states, "France was one of the most enterprising nations of the world, and developed, in the economic field, the same spirit of self-confidence and audacity that her preceding generation had shown to

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<sup>56</sup> Translated by Sophia Tighe into English

<sup>57</sup> Philippe Pétain, May 25<sup>th</sup> 1941. <http://lhistoireenrafale.lunion.fr/2016/05/24/25-mai-1941-le-marechal-petain-sadresse-aux-meres-de-famille/>. Accessed April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2023.

the world on the battlefields, during the Napoleonic wars.”<sup>58</sup> Therefore, as De Billy suggests, France was a nation used to stability and prosperity which, in the interwar years (Nov. 1918-Sept. 1939), had lost its ability to fully stabilize as the world and the country were completely different. France now stood without the estimated 1,697,800 people who had been killed in the war.<sup>59</sup> Additionally within France’s financial sector De Billy remarks that the nation had lost land during the war that produced goods such as iron, flax, wool and cotton, as they had been occupied by German forces.<sup>60</sup> “In a word, the Germans did their best to annihilate the power of industrial production in the invaded districts and prevent these regions from resuming, for many years to come, their place in the market of the world.”<sup>61</sup>

Due to the great disruptions World War One caused to industry and population, many European nations such as France and Germany attempted to rebuild their nations through their population sizes in order to create a sustainable work force and to remilitarize. Therefore, during the interwar years as well as the beginning of World War II, Pétain’s and other fascist groups insisted on a return to maternity, as a response to France’s lack of growth and its inability to reclaim the international hierarchy post-1918. By delving into the political reliance of the French family in exploring French fascism, I argue that women were used as the primary tool to spread fascism in the nation as rhetoric for women to return to their natural and maternal instincts was heavily emphasized. To show the extent to which women were the center of French family propaganda, I will first present fascism’s attempt to appeal to women. Secondly, I will argue that the subsidies offered by Vichy to women had the greatest effect on population growth and the

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<sup>58</sup> De Billy 1919, 290

<sup>59</sup> REPERES 2009-2011

<sup>60</sup> De Billy 1919, 295

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 3

rebuilding of France as a nation. Lastly, I will explain the roles of the family and where, although initially targeted, women had little place within fascism outside of producing children.

### **Female Directed Fascism: The Leagues**

These attempts to highlight the importance of the family can be seen not only through the discourse of Pétain and other Vichy elites, but through fascist political parties during the interwar years. The examination of these parties such as Le Croix de Feu (1927), Le Faisceau (1925), and La Solidarité Française (1933) are essential not only due to their work in perpetuating fascist ideology throughout interwar France, but through their adoption of German gender ideology—the possibly unintentional track to soft power.<sup>62</sup>

In France, fascist groups argued that their ideology should appeal to all women regardless of age, marital status, or economic position. As academic Daniella Sarnoff states, “by playing on gender ideals, French fascism helped to legitimate and domesticate the fascist message and take advantage of larger social ambivalence about gender roles in the interwar period.”<sup>63</sup> Therefore, not only did fascist groups such as Le Croix de Feu try to appeal to the average Frenchman, but they that made even more effort to integrate their wives, and other young woman. The discovery that women were being used as political vessels is eye opening and surprising given that it is often ignored as a key tool in promoting fascism. Likewise, researcher Magali Della Sudda contributes to this idea as she argues it is necessary to examine gender in the interwar period; and it cannot be ignored. As she states in her article *Gender, Fascism and the Right-Wing in France between the Wars*, “In this debate,” (gender’s participation in fascism) “gender issue was either

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<sup>62</sup> The Cambridge dictionary defines soft power as: “the use of a country’s cultural and economic influence to persuade other countries to do something, rather than the use of military power”.

<sup>63</sup> Sarnoff 2014, 142

never or very marginally addressed by French-speaking male historians.”<sup>64</sup> The lack of research conducted on female inclusion within the fascist movement, and its power through the welcoming and integration of fascism as the leading political ideology, begs the question, how integral were women to the acceptance of the fascist regime? How did women spread this political ideology into the household? Further, was there comfort in fascism that made it appeal to women more than men?

Before delving in to these questions, we must remind ourselves of what the fascist agenda was in France during the interwar and Vichy periods. At the time prior to the invasion of France by German forces in May 1940, France was already in political turmoil. The Third Republic (1870-1940) was, to those politically aligned with the right, not fulfilling the needs of their people who, after the war, longed for economic reform and political power in Europe. Contrary to the beliefs of the right, author and historian Kevin Passmore acknowledges that:

It is an open question as to how much influence governments in the 1930s had on the economy, given the available knowledge and machinery. The Republic’s response to the economic crisis was not obviously worse than that of any other regime, and plausibly parliamentary opposition spared France the extreme deflation that damaged other economies.<sup>65</sup>

In Passmore’s remarks, the complexity of the issue at hand is illuminated as he acknowledges both the perspective of the conservative, fascist right, whilst simultaneously noting that there were positives in the Third Republic’s approach to rebuilding the nation after the Great War.

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<sup>64</sup> Sudda 2012, 5

<sup>65</sup> Passmore 2014, 28.



Still, the Third Republic was submerged in corruption, such as the Stavisky Affair (1934),<sup>66</sup> which only affirmed to the right that a change of government was essential to the success of France as the image and economic situation of the homeland was not being protected, but further harmed.

Although the Stavisky affair was not the only scandal of the Third Republic, it was the most influential in the rise of fascism. As historian Paul Jankowski questions, “The Stavisky affair had compromised at most half-a-dozen deputies and taken only a few insurance companies for a ride: it nearly brought down the regime? Why?”<sup>67</sup> In response to his own question Jankowski remarks we often look to history to find the answers. Not only can we look to history, but we much also recognize the main issue with the Stavisky affair was the Republic’s attempts to hide this massive fraud. In agreement, Jankowski elaborates “The magistrates had allowed Stavisky to escape, people said, the magistrates had put off his court hearing nineteen times, they were covering up the affair.”<sup>68</sup> It is in considering the affair with the tensions of the right that we can begin to discover why the family, especially women, were necessary to the rise of fascism, as a shift to the pre-war societal and familial values were being encouraged. The transparency that the family seemingly provided contrasted the murkiness of the left and their scandals, as the “home” encouraged transparency while politicians encouraged secrecy.

In an attempt to answer the questions listed above, I will begin by determining how women participated in these political parties and aided the spreading of fascism in France. When examining the role of women in the fascist movement, a key term is “nature”. As Sarnoff stated,

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<sup>66</sup> The Stavisky Affair: Political elite Serge Alexandre Stavisky a Russian native turned Frenchman, embezzled millions of Francs with the aid of many other political leaders involved in France’s government at the time—the Third Republic ([www.encyclopedia.com](http://www.encyclopedia.com)).

<sup>67</sup> Jankowski 1992, 60

<sup>68</sup> Jankowski 1992, 60

the main tension of French fascism was constructed around nature: “the nature of politics, the nature of parliament, but also about women’s nature and the nature of the family.”<sup>69</sup> Therefore, nature not only placed women in the household, but through fascism, also allowed them to participate in political dialogues. Contrary to Sarnoff’s feminist argument, these organizations still held traditional views of women. This was not uncommon, as many held these same beliefs at the time, for example, that women were meant for domestic pursuits and were emotionally driven. These aspects of the female make-up, however, fascist groups were not trying to change rather, “They were not asking or expecting women to overcome this nature when they put on the blue fascist uniforms and gave straight-armed salutes; they were asking them to express that nature.”<sup>70</sup> Although believed to be distanced in nature, women often had their own section leaders, wore the same uniforms, and contributed to the growth of a fascist regime as if they were men. This suggests a shift in the mindset of the regime, as it transitioned from an oppressive force to one that was contradictorily inclusive.

In this investigation of female participation, an attempt at what I will call *oppressive equality*—a method in which “equality” is used to reinforce oppressive behavior—was used by French fascist party leaders. Oppressive equality was the strength of female integration in the fascist socio-economic sphere, as it took women away from positions in which they worked during WWI, and encouraged them to return to their oppressed, domestic, and reproductive labor. This mode of creating false equality was also further encouraged by the Catholic church, as both fascist groups and the French Church shared similar messages on the importance of patriarchy, motherhood, and the ways in which to achieve an ideal family status. These fascist

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<sup>69</sup> Sarnoff 2014, 142

<sup>70</sup> Sarnoff 2014, 143

groups provided, although flawed in principle, a sense of equality for women by allowing spaces for them to discuss gender and how it felt to be a woman in the interwar years.<sup>71</sup> This freedom of thought allowed women to perceive their situations in French fascist leagues as liberating—a space to once again hold their own as they once did during the Great War. The fantasy of full socio-economic liberty as well as a choice in participating in reproductive labour,<sup>72</sup> however, was not the case as in agreement with Sarnoff, Sudda elaborates, “gender took a central position in the speeches made by the far right leagues and the Catholic ones”, and therefore,

French fascism which shares in the assignation of women to procreation, in the vision of the social world based on the family, the basic unit of society, and on the sexual hierarchy. However, in the eyes of the Catholics, a fundamental distinction was made between those women who would become mothers through flesh and spiritual mothers. Emancipated from biological motherhood, this elite was supposed to take up guiding positions in the movement.<sup>73</sup>

The striking necessity for motherhood not only in the politically sphere, but within the social and religious sphere only reinforced women to be forced back in to these domesticated roles. In perpetuating traditional femininity, the spaces created for women to be politically active in their own sections of Le Croix de Feu and other fascist parties were focused in motherhood. In agreement with both Sarnoff and Sudda, my own research leads me to believe that motherhood whether biological or through—building off Sudda’s ideal of “spiritual mothers”—spiritual surrogacy, was essential to the strength of fascist leagues as women knew they could perform

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<sup>71</sup> Sarnoff 2014, 143

<sup>72</sup> Reproductive labour: “unpaid activities that reproduce the work force - this includes daily activities as cooking, washing clothes but also bearing children. The term reproductive labour emphasizes the role of those activities within the production process, namely the reproduction of the work-force” (Exploring Economics 2016, “Reproductive Labour and Care”).

<sup>73</sup> Sudda 2012, 185

this task. Further, not only were women aware that they could be mothers, they were being convinced that having children was a form of activism, the only way to save the fallen France from the reign of the socialist Third Republic.

In considering the emphasis on motherhood and women turning to their natural instincts, it is important to note this encouragement came with the expectation that women would have more children in order for France to remilitarize and have an active work force. Additionally, the proposition for women to organize their own sections of the leagues furthered the appeal of fascist family propaganda, as women were given the space to discuss gender, reproductive labor, and the family while still holding a feeling of independence from their male counterparts. As the number of fascist leagues grew, larger groups of women became enthralled by the political message of the league, in turn, creating an army of women able and willing to succumb to motherhood for the greater good of their nation. Although the evidence and criticism presented within the section has primarily been gathered in relation to the interwar period (1918-1939), it is essential to consider that the strength of the maternal fascist ideology only grew once France was occupied (1940), and the Vichy (1940-1944) government was established. The growth of this ideology over time begs one very important question: did female fascist leagues result from soft power? Further what was happening in Germany that might suggest soft power was present?

Soft power's<sup>74</sup> role within gender dynamics is one that is rather nuanced, as it can be argued that soft power does not exist in gender relations, and alternatively that gender cannot be controlled in a hard power sphere. In terms of France and Germany, soft power within gender can be seen through the similarities between both countries, as the push for the maternal was

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<sup>74</sup> Soft Power: co-optive, non-forceful power.

universal in European fascism at the time. The most crucial evidence of soft power's presence derives from the similarity in imagery and diction in both nations fascist rhetoric.

The similarity in rhetoric was illuminated in reading academic Vandana Joshi's article "Maternalism, Race, Class and Citizenship", as she explains Hitler's attempt to reach single, unmarried mothers.<sup>75</sup> In her elaboration of the Fuhrer's attempt to contact these women, she quotes a letter sent to one of them on December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1939. Through reading this artifact, one sentence in particular stood out: "The national socialist movement sees in the family the germ cell of the nation."<sup>76</sup> Throughout this chapter and directly stated in the epigraph, Pétain, Vichy, and the interwar French fascist leagues considered motherhood to be the key to a successful nation. To requote Pétain's May 25<sup>th</sup> speech, "La famille, cellule initiale de la société, nous offre la meilleure garantie de relèvement"<sup>77</sup>—family means everything. For context, Pétain's speech occurs two years after the letter Joshi quotes was written. Therefore, it is clear that French fascism was aware of the German rhetoric and was in agreement with it. This agreement manifests itself as soft power, given it links France and Germany politically, indicating the French had an admiration for the Nazi message as they chose to directly quote them. Additionally, the openness of German fascist governments to accept and assist all mothers regardless of their marital status reiterates the importance of motherhood and child bearing.

In contrast to Germany, the French also gave more freedom to women and their social ability to have children, however remained more conservative than Germany. As stated previously, French motherhood and fascist leagues pushed women to—if not already mothers, become political surrogates for the regime. Although surrogacy does lend itself to this

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<sup>75</sup> Joshi 2011, 835

<sup>76</sup> Joshi 2011, 835

<sup>77</sup> Pétain 1941

comparison, academics such as Barbara Vinken in her book *Die deutsche Mutter*, suggest that unlike the Germans, the French maintained their traditional Catholic ideas.<sup>78</sup> Although the leagues provided a mode to discuss gender and reproductive labour, that mode did not make women equals, once again reinforcing the notion of oppressive equality. Women could discuss gender dynamics, but could not change it, and were forced to succumb to the traditional ideology of the family. Regardless of France's more conservative approach to motherhood, it cannot be denied that women in both Germany and France were pushed to be mothers under their respective fascist regimes. In addition, France translated and restated Nazi propaganda and rhetoric that *la famille sera toujours la cellule de la nation*, the family will always be the cell of the nation.

### **Female Directed Fascism: Subsidized Births**

Contrary to independent female involvement in fascism, the concern for the declining French population had been a prominent conversation and fear for decades. Why were the French so concerned about their birth rate? In answering this question it is important to look into French history, specifically Napoleon and *la Grande Nation* (the Big Nation) which had one of the largest populations France has ever experienced.<sup>79</sup> The large population of Napoleon's France allowed for an overwhelming sense of smart power felt by their neighbors and allies such as France and Germany, who at the time were struggling to grow their populations. Smart power<sup>80</sup> in this situation not only manifested itself through the hard power<sup>81</sup> that a large military

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<sup>78</sup> Vinken 2001, 297-8

<sup>79</sup> Huss 1990, 39

<sup>80</sup> Smart Power: The usage of smart power and hard power together

<sup>81</sup> Hard Power: Forceful power, i.e. invasion and occupation.

provides, but through soft power as well, considering France was thriving economically during their industrial revolution. As confirmed by author Marie-Monique Huss:

French observed, derived considerable power from their population boom: they were able to man a vigorous industrial revolution, colonize and populate new continents, and maintain large armies without any strain.<sup>82</sup>

Given their triumphs, it is less surprising that France's population decline was shocking to the nation, as the people who once gave France its European authority were no longer there. This population disappearance poses the question: where did they go?

Although the exact cause for France's population decline is still in question, one thing is certain, it was a long-lasting problem. Historian E. A. Wrigley suggests that their population decline can be attributed to the decline in what he calls "marital fertility"<sup>83</sup> or the amount of children being born. Marital fertility was not only considered as a cause due to the lack of children being born, but due to the decreased mortality rates as well. With people living longer, the necessity to replenish the workforce was no longer a major concern. Wrigley suggests in part one of his research, that by understanding regional rates of revenue, one might be able to explain the variability in the NRR<sup>84</sup> rate if we use the equilibrium model.<sup>85</sup> Regardless of the exact reasoning for the decline, the numbers were significant enough to prioritize France's pronatalist movement—the incitement to have children—that would create pronatalism focused groups, and push for subsidies and child policies to be at the forefront of France's political agenda. Huss gives us insight into two parliamentary creations in her writing, the first being *La Conseil*

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<sup>82</sup> Huss 1990, 39

<sup>83</sup> Wrigley, "The Fall of Marital Fertility in Nineteenth-Century France"

<sup>84</sup> NRR Rate: Net Revenue Retention Rate

<sup>85</sup> Equilibrium model: A sociological theory that attempts to explain the balance between the needs of a community and the emotions of the community.

*supérieur de la natalité* (1920). She explains that the committee allowed, like female led fascist wings, a space in which people could discuss the declining birth rate in order to raise awareness for the “demographic situation.”<sup>86</sup> The counsel would continue and would be reinstated in the interwar years as the *Haut Comité de la population*.

In addition to the natality centered political groups, France instituted Mother’s Day which, as remarked by Huss, “was significant at the time as the first official state recognition of the job of motherhood.”<sup>87</sup> The idea of the cellular family, or the family being the cell of the nation was not a new idea, as France had tried to combat the issue of high mortality and low birth rates heavily prior to the first World War. The importance of these groups as reiterated by French Historian Françoise Thébaud in her novel *Quand Nos Grand-Mères Donnaient La Vie*, was that: “Ces ligues militent soit pour une procréation généreuse, soit pour la défense de la famille nombreuse”<sup>88</sup>, or in English, “These activist leagues either push for a generous procreation, or for the defense of the large family.” Therefore, the importance of family was one that was quintessentially French and the defense of that family was a main priority. The rapid emergence of French marital pressure groups suggested that, throughout the interwar years, pressures to rebuild France as nation grew as its population size was deemed the most detrimental factor to its success.

During the inter-war years and in the Vichy regime, the response to the French population crisis seemed to be the same as they both provided subsidies. As academic Ute Klammer and Sociologist Marie-Thérèse Letablier explain, the family in France, was “institutionalized as an autonomous branch of the social security system, making of the family a

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<sup>86</sup> Huss 1990, 42

<sup>87</sup> Huss 1990, 43

<sup>88</sup> Thébaud 1986, 11-26



state issue.”<sup>89</sup> As the family was a state issue and a primary focus of the state, it is not surprising that these subsidies came to mothers directly from the French government rather than from a third party source. Originally, pro-natalist groups such as the *Haut Comité de la population* or the *Alliance Nationale* wanted subsidies to only be awarded to large families who were deemed more committed to aiding the repopulation of France. As former officer of MI6<sup>90</sup> and historian Richard Tomlinson remarks the requests of these group included giving:

punitive taxes on bachelors, spinsters and childless couples. More imaginative suggestions included the award of an extra vote to fathers with more than three children, cheaper public transport for large families, and preferential treatment for the same category when allocating public housing.<sup>91</sup>

Although these policy proposals may not seem plausible, in 1913 two pro-natalist policies were put into place. The first was the availability of financial aid for families who had at least three children. The second was focused directly towards pregnant women which allowed for not only a monetary subsidy, but assistance to cover medical costs affiliated with pregnancy.<sup>92</sup> With the beginning of World War I less than a year later, these policies were not as implemented as intended, given the loss of approximately 1,397,800 militants mostly consisting of men.<sup>93</sup> As these policies were no longer in place during war time, the political focus of the family in the inter-war years was an undeniable priority. Despite the massive financial crisis that had loomed over Europe—more extensively over France and England—politicians were still willing to

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<sup>89</sup> Ute and Marie-Thérèse Letablier 2007, 673

<sup>90</sup> MI6: A section of British Secret Service focused on foreign affairs.

<sup>91</sup> Tomlinson 1985, 407

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 407

<sup>93</sup> REPERES 2009-2011

provide subsidies even though social welfare programs were being cut under the Poincaré administration.<sup>94</sup>

Although much evidence may point to the acceptance in France of pro-natalist sentiments, it was not always the case. Despite constant financial difficulties the message of childbearing continued to evolve. As a result, abortion laws were also being legislated, as in July 1920 when laws were passed “repressing abortions and ‘non-malthusian propaganda’.”<sup>95</sup> With these regulations in effect, those who were to perform illegal abortions would, if caught, risk imprisonment (maximum three years) as well as a 3,000 Franc fine. Those providing contraceptives would also undergo punitive actions such as a sentence of six months and a 3,000 Franc fine if caught. Under these laws, however, it was not only those providing services who could be reprimanded, but mothers looking for an abortion could be imprisoned as well.<sup>96</sup> With this in mind, I argue, the closer France is to the Second World War, the more regulations become about control rather than aid. Sadly, it is these inter-war regulations that would not only place France’s subsidy work under the shadow of fascism, but would affect Vichy and post-war France policy as well. For example, the illegality of providing or having an abortion that would not be overturned until 1975.

### **German Soft Power in the French Family**

During the Vichy regime, the focus of the natality movement had shifted closer towards German policy. Therefore, the similarities between the inter-war German and French pro-natality movements can distinctly be seen. It may come as no surprise given the contents of this chapter,

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<sup>94</sup> Tomlinson 1985, 409

<sup>95</sup> Tomlinson 1985, 410

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 410

that the first glimpse of German soft power over France in terms of population protection laws began long before the Second World War, and even prior to World War One.

France sought to compete with Germany on all fronts as they wished to match not only the German population size, but also its military strength. This competition went so far as creating legislation and subsequently conscription to ensure quotas were met. France's fear of falling behind Germany created what is known as the Three Year Law (1913), which mandated three years of active military duty (rather than two) for every soldier increasing their individual service totals to 28 years.<sup>97</sup>

In response to the beginning of World War One, and with a general election underway, the pro-natalist group *Alliance Nationale* distributed posters to emphasize the importance of maintaining France's population size. As Tomlinson explains, the captions on these posters sought to scare the French, as they explained that for "each time two future soldiers were born in France, five were born in Germany."<sup>98</sup> Even when considering France and Germany were on opposing sides of the First World War, it is important to see that the one-sided competition between these two political actors began long before the war. The Germans had not concerned themselves with French natality rates, or population growth. Yet, the French greatly admired the Germans as their population numbers<sup>99</sup> were estimated to be over 20 million people larger.<sup>100</sup> France's obsession with the German nation demonstrates soft power in its truest form, as France found German policy and cultural practices around natality admirable and worth matching.

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<sup>97</sup> Tomlinson 1985, 408

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, 408

<sup>99</sup> In 1910, France was reported to have approximately 39.2 million people while Germany had a population size closer to 64.9 million people.

<sup>100</sup> "Population of the Major European Countries in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Accessed February 21, 2023. <https://dmorgan.web.wesleyan.edu/materials/population.htm>.

Post-World War I, Germany once again rebuilt, and more importantly, remilitarized at blazing speed. This time, however, the French could not only admire German population efforts through their legislation, but through their leadership. At a time where most of Europe was struggling to stay afloat, “Hitler was not only rearming Germany, but also claiming responsibility for a remarkable rise in the German birth rate.”<sup>101</sup> This extraordinary population growth was not ignored by France, or its other European counterparts. On the French front, admiration for the German ability to repopulate and remilitarize was not only shared by German sympathizers but by leftist politicians such as Paul Reynaud and Edouard Daladier who feared for the possible shortages of men for the next war.<sup>102</sup> Once again, the fear and jealousy of German advancement led to another piece of legislation, La Code de la Famille (July 1939) which, like German policy of family allowances and marriage loans,<sup>103</sup> “contained an assortment of measures whose common aim was to raise the birth rate: tax advantages,” and further provide “special assistance for peasant families.”<sup>104</sup> Therefore, in the inter-war years German soft power was demonstrated through admiration of Hitler’s ability to gain control, regrow a nation both culturally and militarily, and policies put in place to continue this growth throughout the entirety of the Third Reich. The influence of soft power also manifests itself through leftist French diplomats recognizing the power of German policy in terms of natality, as “one can find many examples of left-wing politicians who deplored the decline of the birth rate.”<sup>105</sup>

As seen in the first section of this chapter, the similarity in rhetoric of Hitler and Pétain, showcased French admiration for German policy and propaganda even after the occupation of

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<sup>101</sup> Tomlinson 1985, 412

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 412

<sup>103</sup> Under the Law for the Reduction of Unemployment, marriage loans were created to give newlyweds the ability to start their home and family lives.

<sup>104</sup> Huss 1990, 62

<sup>105</sup> Tomlinson 1985, 414

France. Although Vichy politicians did not change the political presence and importance of natality, academic Merith Nichuss explains that Vichy had remained a social welfare state in which many different family aid organizations and programs co-existed. Considering the continuation of Vichy as a social welfare state, it is essential to note that “despite its political and ideological re-orientation, it in practice continued along the same lines”<sup>106</sup> as the Third Republic. As a result, after the occupation by German forces had ended, “there was a sort of zero hour in the welfare state. The entire system of social security was reformed and various branches of insurance were brought together in one central organization.”<sup>107</sup> She later remarks that a very similar reform occurred in Germany after the nation had been split up by the Allies. I point out the collapse of this collaborative force, to demonstrate how interlocked these two countries birth policies truly were. De-natality—the decline in birth rate—was an issue among all European nations, especially after mass casualties of World War I left nations with a thin generation of young, able-bodied men. Still, the similarity in methods to address this issue between the Germans and the French cannot be ignored or mistaken for coincidence. In this instance it is the work of soft power that links these two nations in the natality movement through France’s conscious and subconscious admiration for German reconstruction and re-militarization prior to both World Wars.

## **Conclusion**

Soft power is an essential political tool that can truly change a nation. German soft power not only led the French to admire fascism but to copy policies and subsidies that would increase natality and the overall population of France. This type of power, unlike Nye’s other concepts

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<sup>106</sup> Niehuss 1995, 296

<sup>107</sup> Niehuss 1995, 295

such as hard power<sup>108</sup>, works differently as it is not forceful, but rather co-optive. Therefore, soft power, depending on its strength, can affect not only a nations want to collaborate with another, but can affect the importance of socio-political and socio-economic factors in terms of their political agenda. In terms of France and German soft power as a whole, jealousy played the lead role in its co-option. What was it jealous of? Germany's power.

During the interwar years, fascism in France grew exponentially. At this time, France was, to put it simply, going through an identity crisis as its destruction in World War I overshadowed its place on the winning side of the war. After the collapse of the country and its economy after World War One, much of the nation sought to rebuild in a manner different from their pre-war nation, and closer to one that held traditional, Napoleonic ideals. As France began to rebuild, fascism began to spread, as its political representatives promised that extreme nationalism would guarantee the success of the nation. The ability to attract parts of the French population to fascism also focused on things desperately desired, things the Third Republic was not tending to, such as economic security and a rise in birth rates. In terms of soft power, rather than France copying German policy as we discussed later in the chapter with regard to natality, France chose to adhere to its own rhetoric that the family was the cell of a nation. This cellular metaphor not only promoted fascism through nature and maternal female instinct, but gave women and mothers a seat at the political table that they had never had previously. By placing the family, and more specifically motherhood, at the forefront of the fascist movements, women were allowed a space in which they could grieve and express their own questions and concerns. Simultaneously, the inclusion of national holidays such as *Fêtes des Mères* (Mother's Day), pushed a different political issue—natality. Therefore, German soft power can be seen through

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<sup>108</sup> See note 25 for definition

the French admiration of Germany's ability to change into a successful authoritarian state. Additionally, the influence of German soft power can be seen through France mimicking German natality policy as Germany was able to quickly rebuild their population and remilitarize the nation after World War I.

The family once again took center stage politically through the fear of de-natality and the constant declining birth rate. Unlike the introduction of widespread fascism in France, natality soft power was one that stemmed from jealousy of Germany rather than the desire for political reform. The difference in reasoning for soft power, however, stemmed long before World War II or the inter-war years, as France passed legislation such as the Three Year Law in 1913, that sought to match the number of German military forces even though Germany's population was roughly 20 million people larger than France's.<sup>109</sup> The creation of legislation such as this poses the question, why did population size matter when the First World War had not even started? The answer, stems from French nationalism and the fear of falling behind. The nation that had once been the most powerful in Europe through Napoleon and his vast empire, now in the early 1900s no longer had enough people to support the army or their economy. Post war, the all-time low population due to the deaths caused on the battlefields made the postwar rebuilding of the nation almost impossible. As a response, France although on its own initiative, copied German policies that gave more subsidies for families and newlyweds in an attempt to encourage child-bearing and the subsequent reproductive labor. Therefore German soft power, unlike the spread of fascism, arose in natality from French jealousy, their need to compete, and the fear of being left behind.

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<sup>109</sup> "Population of the Major European Countries in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Accessed February 21, 2023. <https://dmorgan.web.wesleyan.edu/materials/population.htm>.

**PATRIE: THE EFFECT OF GERMAN SOFT POWER THROUGH FRENCH NATIONALAISM**

*Nationalism: An infantile disease. It is the measles of mankind.*

— Albert Einstein<sup>110</sup>

**Introduction:**

*Patrie*. Homeland. What does it mean to be proud of your homeland? This was a continuous question not only during World War II and the interwar years, but throughout the existence of France. As historian K. Steven Vincent remarks, “The seeds of modern nationalism go back beyond the beginnings of our century, however. They date from the era of the French Revolution.”<sup>111</sup> Therefore, nationalism was nothing new to the country, which for centuries prided itself on *Liberté, Égalité, et Fraternité* (Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity). Contrary to what image these three words may evoke, the French—throughout history—believed many ought to be excluded from the freedom this mantra provides.<sup>112</sup> As Vincent explains, French nationalism thrived through exclusion, or the fight to be against things, rather than for them. An example of this tension exists,

During the religious wars of the sixteenth century, for example, [when] both Protestants and Catholics found themselves at times justifying their positions by claiming to be fighting for the nation against the king.<sup>113</sup>

In having someone to be against, amidst poverty and the fight for separation from the monarchy, the French people were able to find a sense of brotherhood in their distaste for their king. Their

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<sup>110</sup> “Albert Einstein: Quotes | Britannica.” Accessed March 1, 2023.

<https://www.britannica.com/quotes/Albert-Einstein>.

<sup>111</sup> Vincent 1993, 434

<sup>112</sup> Ibid

<sup>113</sup> Vincent 1993, 435



distaste not only unified them as people, but aided them in battle as they worked for rather than against each other. In other instances of national unification, the French language was the force for unifying people after

Having survived Celtic, Germanic, and Scandinavian competition (and having absorbed Greek and Arab influences), French became the only language of the political and cultural elite after the conquest of Languedoc.<sup>114</sup>

In Vincent's account, it is the French language that shows the fortitude and strength of the French people and their nation. Therefore, in this chapter I argue the worldwide (of what would then have be considered to be only Europe) recognition of the French excellence allowed for French pride to grow—their own version of soft power. The expansion of national pride over the course of French history would only increase the attitude of elitism and exclusivity throughout nationalist France.

The creation of what I will call *mass nationalism*<sup>115</sup> during each revolution continuously made exclusivity the principal focus of the nationalist movement. This can be seen through the emergence of the term nationalism:

the term “nationalism” first appeared when national consciousness involved the mass mobilization of broad sections of French society, and when this secular attachment to the nation began to override other attachments and loyalties.<sup>116</sup>

It is through the overwhelming sense of attachment and loyalties that Vincent elaborates upon that the average Frenchman develops their own code of morality for what their nation is, is not, and ought not to be. In this revolutionary ideology, it is important to consider that nationalism

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<sup>114</sup> Vincent 1993, 436

<sup>115</sup> Mass nationalism: an overwhelming amount of power, and national allegiance amongst the populous of a certain area or nation.

<sup>116</sup> Vincent 1998, 438

developing after the revolution of 1789 was the first time France had truly claimed its own existence, its sovereignty, and the unification of its people under something much larger than a monarch. For the first time, France did not only need to protect itself from others, but also from its own people and those who threatened and jeopardized France's new-found elitism. Although this nationalism sprang from a revolutionary war in France, it is necessary to recognize that throughout France's history any moment of revolution or turmoil has resulted in nationalistic behavior. About the Third Republic's Franco-Prussian war, Socialist leader and politician Jean Jaurès argued, "A little dose of internationalism may estrange a man from patriotism, but a strong dose brings him back."<sup>117</sup> Therefore, as Jaurès remarked, regardless of the time period, or trouble at hand, a Frenchman knows the value of his country, and the lengths he must go to protect it and its sovereignty.

“Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?”<sup>118</sup> What is a nation? Although the question of nation building began in the French Revolution and through the creation of the First Republic, it, like nationalism, has remained an important question for historians and political scientists alike as it has long list of ever-changing answers. Considering that prior to the First World War, France would reinvent what it meant to be French and the government that led it through the creation of the Second and Third Republic, it is clear the evolution of France was far from finished in 1789. This pattern in French nationalism can still be found today, and was found in pre-World War II society through the push to find and exclude “the other” from what France ought and was destined to be. In considering French nationalism and interwar France this chapter aims to examine the question posed by Godechot of what did it mean to be a nation? What did it mean to be a citizen? What did it mean to be an outsider in a state-building national consciousness?

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Godechot 1971, *Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française*; Vol.43, 481

Further, was France's decided "outsider"—the Jewish community—influenced by Nazi Germany and the Third Reich, or had there been a longstanding discrimination towards Jews that soft power could not have affected?

### **Nationalism in the Interwar Years**

Post-World War I, the socialist Third Republic held political control over the nation. Although this was not the first nor the last republic France would have, it is arguably the most controversial. As discussed in the previous chapter, scandals such as the Stavisky Affair<sup>119</sup> loomed over the Third Republic, casting a shadow that would divide the nation and breach an already weak trust between the government and its people. Although the divide on what should have political priority caused a great deal of inter-national debate, it allowed for German soft power to be palatable to French citizens as the right, looking for stability, preached German models for an economic rebound. This political divide begs the question, what should be considered the true French nationalist perspective of the time? Further, what was each political side truly looking to achieve through their respective interwar politics?

### **Nationalism Under the Left**

To begin, we will look to the left side of French politics, which formally had power until the occupation of France in May 1940. The left socialist government fought for pacifism in France, the idea that stability will come about by social and workers' reform. Although France had lost approximately 10% of its population during the First World War<sup>120</sup>, the left and what

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<sup>119</sup> See footnote

<sup>120</sup> Brown University Library Center for Digital Scholarship, "The Third Republic (1841-1940)".

would become the Popular Front<sup>121</sup> trusted that their nation could still be rebuilt by the men the war had kept alive. I argue that left-wing politics reflected an idealism that was not in touch with the France they were governing. While people were starving and dying due to lack of infrastructure and a crippling economic situation, the left was proposing social reform that in theory was needed, but in practice could have been delayed. In a review of Timothy B. Smith's novel *Creating the Welfare State in France, 1880-1940*, Kristen Stromberg Childers states that "Smith and Dutton in particular take issue with the notion that the interwar years were 'hollow years' of decadence and immobility, at least in the area of social reform."<sup>122</sup> These claims made by Smith and Dutton reiterate the notion that although the left pushed for equity in the workplace and amongst individuals, the post-war climate did not allow for these attempted policies to manifest. Rather, these attempts at workplace reform did the opposite of what the Popular Front wanted, as it pushed right-leaning individuals further towards fascism rather than against it.

Interestingly enough, Smith, contrary to my and his previous claim, does claim that national services peaked during World War I, as communal charities that were previously preferred were crumbling.<sup>123</sup> As stated by Childers,

French social spending was well above the European average, though it lagged behind Germany and Britain. Welfare provisions were expanded and enriched following World War II, but by 1928 a new law would provide millions of people with medical insurance, maternity benefits, modest pensions, and disability benefits.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> The Popular Front: Created in the 1930s, the Popular Front composed of left wing politicians and communists who saw the impending threat of German forces to their progressive and socio-reformist attitudes.

<sup>122</sup> Childers 2006, Vol. 24. 131

<sup>123</sup> Childers 2006, Vol. 24. 132

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

As referenced in the last chapter, many of these provisions were created in order to endorse pronatalism as the country's population decline prior to World War I was substantial. These policies, however, were mostly pushed by the rightists who wanted a return to tradition and family—the components they believed were necessary to a successful nation. It is in consideration of the many players and parties that were involved in this social reforms that I argue, to use Childers's phrasing, that “these works concern often overlooked influences that have shaped the history of in France.”<sup>125</sup> Although it must be noted that social reform did happen under the Third Republic, it must also be acknowledged that many social reform policies that were passed had been social issues fought for decades that were mainly pushed by the opposing political right.

After delving into the politics of the Third Republic and more specifically the left and the Popular Front, I believe nationalism for the left was one of socio-equality and workers' rights. In other words, to be a nationalist of this political stripe, a Frenchman must care about the individuals of the nation, rather than the reputation of the nation itself. This sense of nationalism is one that requires pacifism and the ability to restrain the anger and torment caused by World War I.

### **The Role of Pacifism in Nationalist Rhetoric**

Although the right, conservative politics of France were not in control of the French government, their influence on 1930s France cannot be ignored. It is worth noting that there is a widely believed myth among historians and politicians alike that France was a victim of fascism rather than a contributor. In this section, I look to push back on the De Gaullian, post-war

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

narrative that France was merely subject to the strength of fascism. Rather, I care to examine how France contributed and followed fascist ideologies in the years prior to May 1940. Part of the mythical nature of French victimization stems from what academic Norman Ingram calls, in a contribution to *The French Right between the Wars* (2014), the misunderstanding of the term pacifism. The *Oxford Reference* defines pacifism as “the belief that war and violence are unjustifiable and that all disputes should be settled by peaceful means.”<sup>126</sup> Contrary to the *Oxford Reference* and traditional definitions of pacifism, the term at the time held a very different connotation of Nazism and conservatism. As stated by Ingram,

despite the fact that many First World War and interwar commentators believed in a quite incoherent way that France was a profoundly pacifist nation, nevertheless the term *pacifist* acquired a strongly negative connotation in France following the Second World War because it was assimilated in the popular, and indeed scholarly, mind with defeatism, collaborationism, and hence ultimately in some cases with fascism.<sup>127</sup>

In addition to the definition of pacifism that Ingram provides, this passage showcases the intriguing contradiction that pacifism provides. On one hand, it triggers the atypical depiction that follows a post-war rightist narrative that was focused on social reform, as anti-war sentiments were high. On the opposing end, with the threat of a Second World War materializing in Europe, pacifism embraces the possibility of French fascism and a lack of resistance towards the German threat.

The lack of French fight, however, was not only by those who supported collaboration, as there were many political figures, writers, and philosophers from the left such as Théodore

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<sup>126</sup> Oxford Reference. “Pacifism.” Accessed March 13, 2023

<sup>127</sup> Ingram 2014, 81

Ruyssen<sup>128</sup> who held a great role in vocalizing interwar pacifism. His writing, however, expressed a different story. Although he held his leftist views throughout the interwar and later during Vichy—as he “wrote a small number of articles in the collaborationist newspaper *L’Effort*”, in which he argued for the necessary actions to keep France thriving—he did not retaliate against or criticize the ideas of the right.<sup>129</sup> Ruyssen followed the traditional definition of pacifism as he wanted to be able to “provide the security necessary for nations to accept arms reductions” through arbitration or third-party resolution.<sup>130</sup> It is important to acknowledge the work of Ruyssen and other leftists in the narrative of pacifism as it demonstrates the thin political line that divided France which will be key in understanding rightist nationalism.

### **Nationalism from the Right Perspective**

Nationalism stemming from the right, similarly to that of the left, focused on reform. Their political agenda, however, rather than focusing on the French people, focused on French economics. Prior to delving into the right’s political agenda, it is important to contextualize France economically and the work that was being done by the left to combat their economic crisis. According to the research done by French demographer Alfred Sauvy, signs of a global economic crisis began around February 1929.<sup>131</sup> Sauvy writes, “at that time France had just devalued the franc and was flourishing both financially and economically,”<sup>132</sup> and “there was virtually no unemployment, and retail prices continued to rise until October 1930.”<sup>133</sup> Therefore, France compared to the rest of the world had an economy that was thriving. This was in part due

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<sup>128</sup> Théodore Ruyssen: Former President of the Association de la paix par le droit

<sup>129</sup> Ingram 2014, 84

<sup>130</sup> Jackson 2014, 1

<sup>131</sup> Sauvy 1969, 21

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

to the mass amount of immigration to France that occurred after the First World War. The nation's economic prosperity, however, would not last forever as,

The first signs of hardship soon appeared. Early in 1931 it was quite clear that economic activity had slowed down. Production dropped by 10 per cent from the maximum and there were signs of unemployment.<sup>134</sup>

The drastic shift between 1930 and 1931 demonstrates not only the economic instability of the world—as the United States faced their own depression under President Herbert Hoover—but the political instability as well, as countries faced a decline in all socio-economic spheres. It is with this global disarray in mind that I argue it is the global conditions that impacted France's political and economic strategy the most. This is in part due to the major elections happening in France and in the United States during the early 1930s and the inability of former and future allies to aid the nation's crisis. England, one of France's most complicated external allied relationships provides a key example of the inability of European nations to save each other. As remarked by Sauvy,

The devaluation of the pound sterling in September 1931 further accelerated the rate of decline. For the first time since the war French prices were higher than English prices and those of other countries.<sup>135</sup>

With no external economic assistance, France had to defend itself and try to do best by its nation. Therefore, the elections of May 1932 were extremely important as they would determine the path of resurrection the nation would be on.

Given the economic collapse's effect on all aspects of social life, including industrial production, it is not surprising that the results of the 1932 elections were dominated by the left as

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Sauvy 1969, 22



its officials focused on social reform and creating the best environment for their citizens. Intelligently, in this election leftists also collaborated with Marxists and extreme socialists who prioritized citizen conditions over the political climate of France. The importance of this collaboration comes from the previous feelings that citizens had towards the left as they gave off “un mélange d'égoïsme et de mépris social à l'égard des plus démunis,”<sup>136</sup> or, in English, a mix of egoism and a social disregard of those who were less fortunate. This attitude was partially brought about by Edouard Herriot<sup>137</sup>, who in 1925 argued that the French should not succumb to capitalist corporations who, in his eyes, acted as a “mur d'argent,” a wall of money. As said by Herriot in correspondence to Léon Blum<sup>138</sup> a fellow socialist politician, "the Socialists and the Radicals have fought together against the coalition of money lies."<sup>139</sup> It is important to remark that this opposed the political message on the right, who controlled most of the nation's banking and finances who could provide France the help it needed in terms of securing loans. The message of the left was then not only flawed in trying to aid France given the post-war economic crisis around the world, but was “the victim of its own myths and weakness rather than the putative power of international financiers. Both Herriot and Blum came to power convinced of the evil of resorting to inflation in public financing.”<sup>140</sup> However, neither of them would understand how crucial public financing would be to saving the nation they were harming. The economic failures of the left allowed right-wing nationalism to shine, as it can be argued the

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<sup>136</sup> Lemonde.fr 2012. *1924-1936-1981: la gauche et le “mur d'argent”*

<sup>137</sup> Edouard Herriot (1872-1957) a radical French politician who was held leadership roles under both the third republic as minister, and under the fourth republic as well.

<sup>138</sup> Léon Blum (1872-1950), was the first socialist, Jewish premier of France. He was Prime Minister three times over the course of his life.

<sup>139</sup> Irwin M. Wall 1987, 367

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

conservative right was aimed at saving France, while the left was focused on retaining France's post-revolution spirit and diplomacy.

The right's nationalism, I argue, was completely dependent on the failures and scandal of the left. As shown in the historical account, as well as in Chapter Two, the socialist regime of France was filled with economic scandals like the Stavisky Affair that led individuals to question the economic literacy of the left. In response, the right made their stance on how the future of economic regrowth should proceed in France very clearly, through reform and budgeting.

One of the most influential failures of the left that led to a support of fascism and the right concerned farmers and agricultural economics. It is important to note that "the main victims of the crisis were the farmers, since the prices for their produce had already dropped by 25 per cent (and were to continue to drop by as much as 50 per cent),"<sup>141</sup> showcasing the necessity of economic reform as farming had always been one of the nation's primary sources for income. In addition, peasantry was heavily looked down upon by the left which was seen in their manhandling of the wheat market. During the economic collapse of the 1930s the price of wheat was ever changing, and in response socialist politicians such as Édouard Daladier<sup>142</sup> tried to stabilize wheat prices by setting minimum prices, specific taxes, market freedoms, and even made a National Wheat Office (*Office National Interprofessionnel du Ble*).<sup>143</sup> These attempts at stabilization by the left only made the situation worse for farmers as they were forced to sell their wheat at a cheaper price, making farmers more partial to the right. As said by historian Robert Paxton, "pain and anger throughout all sectors of French agriculture...prepared French farmers

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<sup>141</sup> Sauvy 1969, 22

<sup>142</sup> Édouard Daladier was a radical socialist politician who was the Minister of the Armed Forces of France from 1936 to 1940. He later would become Prime Minister again in 1938.

<sup>143</sup> Paxton 1997

to listen to appeals to violence and to city-country antagonism from leaders like Dorgeres,”<sup>144</sup><sup>145</sup> who advocated for fascist and conservative ideas. Therefore, simply any idea that contradicted the left was highly regarded, as it was clear they were not able to stabilize the agricultural economy making life more challenging for those who depended upon it.

Farming provides a prime example of French nationalism under the right as it demonstrates that they were appealing to those who felt betrayed—as they did—by the Third Republic’s lack of charisma and care for the citizens it claimed to help. “At each attempt,” Sauvy writes, the “fall in budget revenues consequent on the economic depression once again opened the gap in the public accounts.”<sup>146</sup> Nevertheless, Sauvy remarks, “At that time the Popular Front had a considerable political victory within their grasp,”<sup>147</sup> as they had successfully and unconsciously participated in devaluation.<sup>148</sup> It is in this complicated political narrative that we must acknowledge there is no right or wrong way to deal with economic crisis, however, just successful and unsuccessful attempts in rectifying the situation. On one hand, the left refused to give up its traditional values. On the other, the right refused to let the country fail. This once again reiterates my earlier remark that the difference in nationalism between the right and the left are minute in values and goals, but grand in execution. These executionary differences, however, made all the difference as many, like farmers, began to feel an attraction towards the right and

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Henry Dorgères (1897-1985) was a French political activist and founded the first defense committee for the peasantry. He followed right wing politics and was awarded the Ordre de la Francique (an award to commemorate ones dedication to Vichy) by Vichy commander Marshal Pétain.

<sup>146</sup> Sauvy 1969, 23

<sup>147</sup> Sauvy 1969, 28

<sup>148</sup> Devaluation is the process in which a government reduces a currency’s value. This devaluation allows reduced costs for trade such as exports. This is usually used by countries who are economically struggling to rejoin trade markets in an attempt to resuscitate their economy.

their political agenda, which in hindsight demonstrates an alignment towards German ideals—soft power.

When considering nationalism, homeland or *patrie*, and soft power, it is once again critical to understand soft power's emergence through the unrest left by failed attempts and scandal of the Third Republic. These cracks in the Third Republic's regime, although varying in size, allowed the light and success of the German nation to become visible to many who were not politically aware of the Germanic nation's reconstruction. Germany's development became even harder to ignore as, academic Gordon Dutter remarks, "the French government under the Popular Front sought a reconciliation between France and Nazi Germany,"<sup>149</sup> therefore alluding to a sense of collaborationism not only on the political conservative right, but on the socialist left. These were not only discussions of reconciliation, however, as a series of accords designed to ease the burden of both countries' economic crisis (one real, the other created by the burden of the Treaty of Versailles) were signed on July 10, 1937. In these accords,

The French and German governments replaced a defunct clearing system with a less restrictive payment accord, which guaranteed Germany a favorable balance of trade and an even balance of payments with France. As a result of the accord, the volume of trade between France and Germany increased dramatically—particularly French exports, which in 1938 tripled in value over 1936—and Germany's commercial debt to France was erased. The accords also gave Germany favorable terms of trade with the French empire, and a confidential agreement increased the levels of French iron ore exported to Germany and German coke sold to France. Thus, the French government under the

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<sup>149</sup> Dutter 1991, 296

Popular Front not only aspired to but also took a significant step toward reconciliation with Germany.<sup>150</sup>

Given the terms of these accords, it is undeniable that France was unaware of German's ability to rebuild and strengthen its country—something that France regardless of political alliance was aiming to do. As noted by Dutton and myself, these historical agreements are buried from historians, politicians, and civilians alike. It is with the knowledge of documents such as these that soft power is undeniably seen, as Germany had not and would not made any militaristic or forceful moves that would qualify under the sphere of Nye's hard power until the invasion of Poland in 1939. Therefore, unlike the narrative of collaborationism and possible soft power that Germany had, which is traditionally given only to the right, it is clear that the left felt the same draw to Germany's achievements and abilities. This once again, presents the narrative that regardless of political alignment or methodology, the rehabilitation of France was the upmost priority. The socialist party and the Third Republic struggled greatly with national rehabilitation. Though the party never truly resurrected France economically before the end of the regime, there still were many attempts. The acknowledgement of Germany within these economic attempts, like in the previous discussion of French pro-natality attempts, suggest all eyes were on Germany regardless of race, gender, religion, or political beliefs.

### **Nationalism During the War**

In evaluating nationalism and *patrie*, we must investigate its definition during the war as well. At this time, France had been occupied by the German forces and the Third Republic no longer existed. In its place stood a German regime which covered “three-fifths of mainland

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

France: the areas with the most economic potential and the Atlantic and Northern coasts”.<sup>151</sup> The other two-fifths were considered the unoccupied zone—Vichy (see *Figure One*)— which under leadership of Marshal Henri Phillippe Pétain, carried the same political beliefs and rhetoric as the occupied zone. The shared fascist belief system between both French zones would soon be inseparable as in 1942 German forces would cross the armistice lines and take over the unoccupied zone. However,

in order to preserve the illusion of a sovereign Vichy government. These areas were qualified a “military operations zone,” and placed under the responsibility of the Commander-in-Chief of the western front. To administrate them, he named a representative in Vichy, who was supposed to liaise with the French government, and a Commander of the military region of southern France, in order to administrate this sector according to the same directives issued to the Military Commander in the northern zone.<sup>152</sup>

With Germany having occupied all of France, Frenchmen and women alike feared that they too would have to follow German regulations and laws which were stricter given the high intensity of the fascist regime. This fear would become a reality for the French, as citizens could now be subjected to regulations such as forced labor laws. Upset with German restrictions individuals looked to stop German forces as they took away all things “French” about the unoccupied zone. Therefore, in this section we will reexamine what nationalism meant to those within the German and Vichy regime, and those who chose to flee it.

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<sup>151</sup> Thomas 2007

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.



Figure One<sup>153</sup>: A map of France after its occupation on May 10<sup>th</sup> 1940. Illustrated in orange is the Third Reich occupied territory as well as the costal military zone (marked in burgundy). Lavender marks the unoccupied zone until 1942, when Germans invaded the line and dismantled Vichy's armed forces, leaving the nation assetless. That said, Vichy and Pétain would remain in power, yet heavily supervised by German forces.

<sup>153</sup> Britannica.com. *Vichy France*

### **Leftist Nationalism Under Vichy**

The continuation of leftist ideology under the Vichy regime is rather complicated. For starters, although they may have been leftist, there was no room for political debate as the right Vichy and German political system was one that followed authoritarianism. Considering the history presented earlier in the chapter, one question remains: what happened to the strength of the leftist nationalism? According to French political scientist Stanley Hoffman, to the left,

Vichy's clericalism, ruralism, anti-labor corporatism, and elitism were unpalatable, and so were Vichy's big-business connections, whereas the Fascist politicians resented only Vichy's aversion for politics rather than Vichy's social conservatism.<sup>154</sup>

This remark is one that is rather interesting for two reasons. Firstly, it represents all things that made the right and fascism attractive in the interwar years, as it was believed these factors would correct the nation's economic crisis given the failures of the left. In action, it seemed as if those same factors were a detriment to the Vichy regime and its political legitimacy. Secondly, due to the authoritarian nature of the regime and the lack of political conversation about the beliefs of the free zone, many of these left individuals would have been considered a part of the Resistance.

The resistance of World War II France is perhaps one of the most well-known historical narratives of France as it was heavily spread and popularized by Charles De Gaulle during and after the war. Although I will discuss the resistance, I must confess it was less influential than many believe. Contrary to what is argued by Henry Rousso, who has alluded to the resistance not being spoken about more often, I believe it is spoken of perhaps too often to the point we do not remember or know of France's collaborative past to begin with. It is necessary to reflect on the resistance efforts of the French to present a fuller picture of all nationalistic beliefs, as "The

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<sup>154</sup> Hoffmann 1968, 387



narrative of the Resistance is a complex one, not the simple heroic account that General de Gaulle provided in his memoirs.”<sup>155</sup> The strength of what Wieviorka calls the *Internal Resistance* was heightened in 1943 as the possibility of Allied invasion became more probable after the “Soviet victory at Stalingrad in February 1943, the invasion of Sicily, then of Italy, and the fall of Mussolini in July 1943.”<sup>156</sup> The increase in probability of a forthcoming Allied invasion also allowed the resistance to meet and have public forums which had been difficult to do under full German supervision.

Within French resistance, there were those who were always leftists and voiced their resistance from the beginning of the Vichy regime, and then there others such as Henri Frenay who were politically on the right and had great admiration for Pétain, Vichy, and its ideologies. Frenay is an interesting example that academic and historian Michael Scott Christofferson and Thomas Rodney Christofferson both investigate in their book *France during World War II: From Defeat to Liberation*. Frenay, although agreeing with the fascist policies of Vichy, still created the National Liberation Movement which was one of the largest resistance groups at the time. Additionally, he did not agree or even respect what I will call *soviet politics* (i.e., bolshevism), and the Popular Front. The uniting force between Frenay and his surrounding leftists was a deep hatred of Nazi Germany and the lack of autonomy Vichy truly had. The example of Frenay demonstrates a different narrative of resistance than the one widely believed and perpetuated by De Gaulle. In reality, resistance members did not fall on one political side, nor did all they all agree with each other’s moral beliefs.

Resistance groups were beginning to unify in southern France and were even creating literature about their hope for liberation and a free France. The main areas where resistance and a

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<sup>155</sup> Christofferson & Christofferson 2006, 135.

<sup>156</sup> Wieviorka 2016, 221.

difference in nationalistic views were seen in mostly occupied places that had felt the full force of German authority. Although Frenay was in the Vichy zone, not all resistance leaders were this fortunate. It is, however, important to consider the topography of resistance, as it demonstrates the difference in living conditions amongst French people. As stated in Chapter One, most individuals in the German occupied zone were forced to work under German labor laws or for their army. In the mostly rural south, however,

Village life did not change much either. Existing political divisions and quarrels continued in most small towns as though nothing had happened. In addition, Pétain's reassertion of rural values appealed to these groups at first. As a result, very few peasants or rural workers joined the Resistance until the end of the war.<sup>157</sup>

Therefore, one can argue that French resistance was not as widespread as we are now lead to believe. Regardless of size, the French resistance provides a key example of what nationalism was to the left and others who opposed Nazism in their country—unity. Nationalism under this lens was no longer about right or wrong, but about strengthening a people who had lost all autonomy even within their own regime. Although this definition of both nationalism and resistance contradicts what many historians or even De Gaulle would consider to be ideal, these definitions allow us to understand that the perpetual well-being and political autonomy of the nation had always been the priority of the left and the resistance.

### **The Nationalism of Vichy**

Contrary to the nationalism of the left, who primarily focused on resistance or political autonomy, the right of France concerned themselves with affairs of collaborative efforts. Unlike

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<sup>157</sup> Christofferson & Christofferson 2006, 151

previous nationalist movements whose roots expanded from the French Revolution (1789), or even the right's nationalism from the interwar years, Vichy's nationalism was one of conformity and comfort rather than fight and reform. As explained by academic Jacques Szaluta,

Pétain's role is illuminating of French national attitudes in that in his public discourses he preached homilies of a moral masochistic nature. Because of his unconscious anger, Pétain believed that suffering had a regenerative force.<sup>158</sup>

It is with Pétain's moral masochism that France became aggressively French, not only in attempting to keep its own traditions and values, but also in excluding others who did not fit these categorizations, the largest of which being people of Jewish heritage and descent.

Unlike Germany, the French view on its Jewish inhabitants changed greatly throughout the war. Originally, like in many collaborative nations such as Italy, the reprimanding and casting out of Jews was done to those who were not by blood French. Gradually, as the regime strengthened and the influence of Germany became irresistible it did not matter what nationality one held, but their religious beliefs did. When considering the treatment of Jews in France it is essential, as political theorist Gladys M. Kammerer notes, to "keep in mind that the regime was never a free agent, but was sharply circumscribed by the German over-lords in Paris and pushed from one collaboration measure to another."<sup>159</sup> Therefore, even though the French themselves exhibited previous anti-Semitic behaviors dating back to the medieval times, the German influence in policies discriminating against Jewish peoples was and still is undeniable.

While considering nationalism on the right during the interwar years, the key word was rebirth. During Vichy, however, the right's message had once again shifted as the interwar focus

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<sup>158</sup> Szaluta 1992, 113

<sup>159</sup> Kammerer 1943, 407

on rebirth and revitalization changed to a focus on attaining supreme authority. In *L'Oeuvre du Maréchal* (the works of the Marshal), Pétain states,

We shall create an organized France, where the discipline of the subjects responds to the authority of the leaders, in justice for all.... In all ranks we shall adhere to the creation of elites, to confer command upon them without any consideration other than that of their capacity and merit.... The new regime will be a social hierarchy. It will no longer rest upon the false idea of the natural equality of man but on the necessary idea of equality of opportunity, given to all Frenchmen to prove their aptitude to serve. Work and talent alone will become the foundation of the French hierarchy.... Thus will arise the true elite whom the past regime has tried for years to destroy and who will constitute the necessary corps for the development and well-being of all.<sup>160</sup>

The nationalism of Pétain and the right was one of elitism, authority, and a destruction of democracy. It no longer represented the joys of rebirth, but a sense that France—now being economically successful—must now dominate Europe like its German counterpart. In terms of soft power, Vichy provides a clear example of the fortitude soft power can have on nations that truly look up to the diplomatic or cultural stylings of another country. France no longer was satisfied with having a large role on the European political stage, as they wanted the leading role and authoritarianism was needed to play the part.

## **Conclusion**

After having delved into *patrie* both in the interwar years and during the war itself and its subsequent nationalism from the right and the left, it is clear that the definition of nationalism

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<sup>160</sup> Kammerer 1943, 416

continuously changed on all sides of the political spectrum. In the interwar years, the same goal was shared by socialists and conservatives alike—rebirth. Although the methods and concerns in which each party chose to embark on French revival were very different, it cannot be ignored that both the left and right regardless of moral views wanted the best for their nation. During the interwar years as well, soft power is clearly apparent for both sides as the right attempted to reconstruct France in the same fashion the Germans had reconstructed their nation after WWI, and the left went as far as signing mutually beneficial economic agreements with Germany in order to escape their own poverty. In this regard, there is no confusion on how powerful Germany was, and how badly France wished to return to the pre-World War I legacy.

During the war, however, the tides quickly changed for the right as Pétain and other officials tried to move France into a longstanding authoritarian regime. As the right began to focus on total control and promote elitism, the left and estranged members of the right continued to fight for France's autonomy and rebirth of a democratic nation. We must not fall in to the De Gaullian trap of believing that all Frenchmen and women were in the resistance. Rather, although the resistance did have a following, it was mostly in urban areas that were in the occupied zone as early as May 1940. The rural areas who had been a part of Vichy had felt little effect of the German invasion as Vichy remained the puppet of German command. Therefore, unlike what we might like to believe, France was rather divided in its views on collaborationism and resistance. In the Vichy era, Germany's soft power had fully enthralled for the right. No longer was France admiring the work of Germany: Pétain was actively trying to replace and replicate Germany to make France the world's leading power.

Although the shift of nationalism's definition and purpose is not linear, each definition is equally important in not only understanding France's political beliefs and rhetoric, but in

understanding the valuable hold that soft power can exert on nations and their leaders. This case study on nationalism also provides a nuance to soft power as it is not only used for good, as Nye suggests in his example of the Olympics; rather it can be used harmfully and can destroy a nation. This ugly form of soft power led France—which started as a nation composed of mainly immigrants during the interwar years and who prided itself on freedom and equality—to become a nation who othered and discriminated people, who had created and tolerated internment camps, and who forced their own to sacrifice their autonomy and ability to be French.

## CONCLUSION

The role of German soft power in France's World War II collaboration was extremely impactful. Acknowledging the importance of soft power is essential to the understanding of the war and subsequent collaboration, as it presents another image of France. This image goes against the narrative popularized by Charles De Gaulle and presents the nation in a light that is often dimmed. Soft power, unlike hard power, presents a different lens in which we can examine the influence of nation as well given soft power cannot be forced and therefore creates a bond that is inseparable as it is one of admiration. In the case of France and Germany, these bonds were created through similarities in ideals such as work, family, and homeland or in Pétain's terms *travail, famille, patrie*. The instability of World War I led many a nation—France and Germany included—to have unstable, and a temporary government not fully aligned with one party. This political instability led many individuals to lean towards tradition, more conservative ideas that they knew had successful results.

In terms of work, France mimicked Germany heavily, as both countries had similar workers' issues due to their political and economic instability. In the initial interwar years Germany was under the Weimar Republic, which reflected more socialist ideas, and failed to appease the far left communists and the far right conservatives. In France, the Third Republic although significantly more aligned with the left, had the same issues. In both countries riots and other protests of worker's benefits occurred on both ends of the political spectrum. Germany, however, quickly shifted from Weimar in 1933 when Hitler and the National Socialists came to power enforcing conservative, fascist, and nationalist ideals. This new regime coincidentally provided an example of a successful nation under authoritarianism, something that right-wing

elements in France desperately wanted. In addition, policies created under National Socialism not only resuscitated and remilitarized Germany—which France needed—but also targeted groups such as veterans who had been very vocal in French political riots. These similarities, and direct examples of Germany unconsciously responding to French conservative wants and needs, created German soft power. This evolving French admiration of German would later affect the French after occupation, as Vichy would provide Germany labor and resources throughout the war even to its own detriment.

When looking at the soft power created in family, Germany once again set the example for France, as both nations combated issues of decreasing populations. Although different in methodology—as France preserved their religious convictions—both nations once again approached the issue of birth rates in the same way, by providing subsidies and directly addressing newly-weds and young women. It was through subsidizing newly-wed couples as well as providing additional honor and money for having more children that both France and Germany saw an uptick in their populations. It is important to note that France followed Germany's lead on many of these subsidies, as seen through not only the years in which these policies were instituted, but through the political rhetoric of each leader. In Vichy, Pétain used the same vocabulary in addressing mothers that Hitler did, in which they both argued that the family is the cell of a nation, and women have the ability to create that cell. To demonstrate the importance of family, French fascist groups such as Le Croix de Feu (1885-1946), created branches designated only for women. By incorporating women in to these fascist organizations, women were given a place at the political table—a seat that was once reserved only for men. Interestingly enough, although this allowed women to delve into the political sphere, *oppressive equality* was formed. This oppressive equality told women that they had a seat at the table when



in fact, the plan was to push them back into the household in order to give men more economic roles and women more domestic ones.

In the last chapter, I investigated *patrie* or homeland, in which French nationalism once again paralleled that of Germany. It is necessary to acknowledge the fact that conservative, traditional nationalist ideals were not admired by all Germans or all Frenchman, but they were by many. For both nations the instability of their initial interwar parliaments had demonstrated a need for change, as all political parties were in disagreement and fought for very similar things but with different methods. Nationalism on the left, focused on the idea of a democratic, socialist France that concerned itself with the needs of its people as it looked for reform and against corporations. Nationalism on the right also focused on reform but concentrated on stability through authoritarianism, traditionalism, and market economics. Their version of nationalism encouraged the French people to recognize the mistakes and flaws of those on the left in order to demonstrate why the new fully democratic model of France under the Third Republic was not effective. In addition, it did not help that the Third Republic was covered, like many, in scandals, mostly involving fraud and corruption. German soft power in this instance stems from its ability to revive the nation, as even socialist France signed economic agreements with the Germans to lessen both of their debts. Therefore, not only was German success visible and admirable from the French right, but from the French left as well.

During the Vichy Regime nationalism took a different course altogether, as it strictly followed the German model of authoritarianism. Although France was divided into the Unoccupied and Occupied Zone, it is important to remember Germany had, post 1942, forces in all of France making it difficult to escape their politics. Understandably, this was not an issue for Vichy enthusiasts who believed in the rightness of the German model and felt French

nationalism had the same qualities as that of their German master. Yet, those who partook in the French resistance or continued to align with the left throughout the war were less than pleased given France no longer had its own voice, and was now only German's puppet.

Regardless of the socio-political and economic factor we chose to examine, German soft power having influence on the French nation and its population is undoubtable. Many historians such as Rousso and others argue that France was a victim rather than a collaborator. I argue however, that soft power refutes this idea, as the Third Republic was in conversation with Hitler prior to France's occupation. In allowing the perpetuation of the victimization narrative popularized by Charles De Gaulle, one that I was raised with, we continue to turn a blind eye to political truth and nuance. Although we cannot ignore the French resistance and those who did not support fascist and Nazi ideals throughout the war, we also cannot ignore the many who did and those who devoted their lives to that cause. It is with soft power, that these two nations not only were able to develop, but to grow a connection and a bond that would prove to be useful for both nations during the war and the continuation of interwar German soft power throughout French policies and politics today, as the nation still struggles with political unrest. Protests are happening in the streets over increasing the age of retirement in a response to economic inflation. Therefore, the installation of socialist versus conservative policy continues to demonstrate an air of traditionalism within the French nation post World War II.

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