Chapter 6

The National Mobilization of German Immigrants and their Descendants in Belgium, 1870–1920

Frank Caestecker and Antoon Vrints

In this chapter we address the manner by which the Belgian state reacted towards the presence of German immigrants and their descendants on its territory in the half-century between 1870 and 1920.[1] We refer to Germans who migrated to Belgium before the First World War and their descendants as a Belgian ethnic minority and, depending on their citizenship, we call them German Belgians or Belgian Germans. We want to verify whether, due to the war, a biological-essentialist understanding of the German population was developed. Our hypothesis is that while before the war their presence in Belgian society was no issue, the war made them eternally foreign to the Belgian authorities (or ethnic Germans to the German authorities). We look into the attitudes of the Belgian and German states towards this population before and during the occupation of Belgium in the First World War. Central to the paper is whether the policy towards this population changed at the beginning of the twentieth century due to the Great War. The hypothesis to verify is that state policy changed from a civic management of this population to an ethnic treatment. The ways in which the Belgian and German policies towards this group interacted is analyzed.

Immigration from Germany and Austria-Hungary

The 1890 census, when for the first time information was collected on the citizenship of those residing on Belgian territory, indicates that nearly 50,000 Germans were living in Belgium. Subsequent censuses show that the number of Germans in Belgium increased only slightly. These snapshots can be supplemented with information on annual immigration. From 1899, the

[1] With a view to the small number of individuals from Austria-Hungary, and to ease the reading of this chapter, these persons are included in the term 'German immigrants and their descendants' or, depending on their citizenship, Belgian Germans or German Belgians.

immigration of foreigners as collected by the Department of Public Security was structured according to country of citizenship. This data informs us that 95,000 citizens from the German and Austro-Hungarian empires migrated to Belgium between 1899 and 1910, although the number of Germans in Belgium in this period rose only by slightly more than 6000 individuals. While some Germans became Belgian, the slight increase of the German population indicates that only a small minority of the German immigrants finally settled in Belgium.[2]

This German immigration was predominantly urban.[3] The Germans were concentrated in four cities: Brussels, Antwerp, Liège and Verviers. Each of the cities attracted various types of German immigrants. The gender balance shows a slight female prevalence on the national scale. This partly attests to the settled nature of German immigration to Belgium, which expressed itself in family migration. The large number of young German women in domestic service in Belgium also helps to explain this female prevalence. Liège and Verviers attracted mostly young, single males from the Rhineland for semi- or unskilled work, respectively in mining, metal work and the textile industry. Brussels and Antwerp attracted a socially more differentiated German population. In the latter cities (urban) long-distance migration was predominant. This was especially the case in Antwerp, a transit port city of great significance for German exports, which attracted German traders and businessmen. In both Antwerp and Brussels, German immigrants tended to work in economic activities aimed at the German economy. These immigrants were the visible expression of the fusion between the Belgian and German economies in these years of accelerated globalization.

Table 6.1 Number of Inhabitants in Belgium of German or Austro-Hungarian Nationality

	1890	1900	1910
German Empire	47,338	53,758	57,010
Austria-Hungary	1427	2,991	5927

The German communities in Belgium found expression in a great variety of German associations, including schools, churches, a German lodge, associations for mutual assistance, choirs, nationalistic-militaristic associations and professional federations. Liège and Verviers had fewer associations than

[2] Annual immigration figures in *Statistique Judiciaire de la Belgique*.

[3] Marie-Thérèse Bitsch, *La Belgique entre la France et l'Allemagne 1905–1914* (Paris, 1994), 126–31; Greta Devos and Hilde Greefs, 'The German Presence in Antwerp in the Nineteenth Century', *IMIS-Beiträge*, 14(2000), 105–28; Carl Petersen and Otto Scheel et al. (eds), *Handwörterbuch des Grenz- und Auslanddeutschtum*, Vol. I (Breslau, 1933), 346–70.

Antwerp and Brussels. This difference may be explained by the varied social profile of the German immigrants in each of the cities: for higher social groups that were more numerous in Antwerp and Brabant the social functionality of German associations was more important than for workers, who dominated in Liège and Verviers. For example, in the German schools in Belgium, children of merchants were strongly represented as it was considered important for these children to be proficient in German and to be fully aware of German culture with a view to nurturing business contacts with Germany.[4] The expressions of Germanness did not emanate from a closed ethnic community. In Brussels, the German school with instruction in French, English and German had, by 1914, students of very different origin, one quarter of them being Belgians. The school was an elite school for the cosmopolitan higher classes.[5] Also the choice of partner of German immigrants in Belgium shows their openness to the new environment. The German immigrants who settled in Belgium had come young and unmarried to Belgium and often married local women.[6]

Belgium was a cosmopolitan society in the nineteenth century. Germans and other aliens were considered equal to Belgians except for those provisions stipulated by the law. Very few Belgian laws made an exception for aliens. They had access to economic activities, including the labour market, on almost equal terms with citizens. Foreigners could even be public servants, except for the top positions. Public life was organized autonomously and locally, with little intervention from the central state. Even where the Belgian state made a difference, for example, in church–state relations, the foreign nationality of those who resided in its territory was largely irrelevant to the Belgian state. Churches in Belgium could obtain public subsidies; this implied that the salary of a minister of a German Protestant church serving mostly the religious needs of foreigners in Belgium could be paid by the Belgian authorities even if he had foreign citizenship. Even for military service all men in Belgium were equal. They all, to a large extent independent of their citizenship, had to draw lots for military service.

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[4] *Bericht über das 73. Schuljahr der Allgemeinen Deutschen Schule zu Antwerp, erstattet vom Direcktor Dr B. Gaster* (Antwerp, 1913), 4.

[5] Nathan Vanwildemeersch, 'Van "Unserem lieben Köning" tot "Deutschland über Alles": Duitse scholen in België, 1890–1920' (unpublished University of Ghent MA thesis, 2010); Sophie de Schaepdrijver, *'We who are So Cosmopolitan': The War Diary of Constance Graeffe, 1914–1915* (Brussels, 2008), 102.

[6] A sample of 123 German male immigrants who had been living in Belgium in 1914 for at least four years shows that those who chose to settle in Belgium were slightly more likely to be married to Belgian than German women. Frank Caestecker and Antoon Vrints, 'German Immigrants and their Families between Scylla and Charybdis, Belgium (1914–1920)' (unpublished paper).

In this liberal era in which the role of the state was still restricted, citizenship offered few advantages in everyday life. The immigrants from the German Empire and their descendants residing in Belgium mostly did not apply to become Belgians. Becoming Belgian could be advantageous. Belgium did not introduce universal male conscription until 1903, whereas in the German Empire and in particular in Prussia, military service had become part of citizens' duties since the early nineteenth century. Even those in Belgium who drew the lot for military service could, if they were well off, send a replacement.[7] As German law provided that Germans abroad who no longer had contact with a German state lost their nationality after 10 years a considerable number of German emigrants became stateless. This territorial understanding of German citizenship was a legacy of the *ancien régime* conception of state community. From 1871 onwards loss of German nationality could be avoided by having one's name inscribed on a list kept at a German consulate. Still it seems that many Germans in Belgium did not bother about retaining their German citizenship and became stateless after ten years in Belgium.

For most of the nineteenth century very few Germans or former Germans wanted to become Belgians. For first generation immigration this had to be done through the naturalization procedure which was expensive and time-consuming. Between 1830 and 1914 about a thousand people originating from the German Empire had become Belgian by means of naturalization.[8] Naturalized Belgians were considered legally to be second-rate Belgians. For children born in Belgium of a German father, the Belgian nationality laws provided for the possibility of opting for Belgian nationality when they reached adulthood. By a simple declaration of native birth upon reaching the age of majority an individual could acquire Belgian citizenship as of right. Belgians by option were considered fully fledged Belgians and equal to Belgians by descent.[9] Still, deep into the 19th century, the descendants of immigrants rarely used this easily accessible opportunity to acquire Belgian citizenship. Aside from the possibility of participating in political life, being Belgian, German or stateless made little difference in how these immigrants functioned in nineteenth-century Belgium.

The limited importance of citizenship in nineteenth-century Belgium is also illustrated by the lot of the Belgian women who married Germans. These women lost their Belgian nationality and were absorbed into the German nation. Because of the nineteenth-century principle of legal unity within the

[7] Ute Frevert, *Die kasernierte Nation: Militärdienst und Zivilgesellschaft in Deutschland* (München, 2001); Luc De Vos, *De smeltkroes, De Belgische krijgsmacht als natievormende factor, 1830–1885* (Brussels, 1984).

[8] *Annuaire statistique de la Belgique et du Congo Belge*, 1914, 163.

[9] Hubert Otto, *De la nationalité et de l'Indigénat en Belgique* (Brussels, 1911), 57.

family, the state reproduced the patriarchal structure of the family and a married woman followed the (national) status of her husband.[10]

This changed at the very end of the nineteenth century when the state increased its penetration of society and incrementally 'nationalized' it. Universal suffrage democratized politics. Conscription became more generalized in 1903 when one son per family and, in 1913, all young men were drafted. The first steps towards a welfare state were also taken in these years. The expansion of state intervention brought an increasing interest in formal membership in the state as it identified the bearer of the duties and rights to which the expanding state gave rise. The legal tie between the state and the individual acquired a growing importance in social life

The new national order that the state 'imposed' on society was most spectacularly expressed in the political sphere: all male Belgians obtained the right to vote. Thus, for half of the adult population, the tie between the state and the individual became the gateway to political participation. In 1898 organizations that represented professional interests were given a role in a newly designed corporate political economy. However, the board members of these organizations had to have Belgian citizenship. Also, leading positions in the citizens' militia and the army were now reserved for Belgians, whereas earlier foreigners settled in Belgium could be officers.[11]

Disputes over the status of Belgian citizenship rose sharply with the democratization of the right to vote. Many people who had considered themselves Belgian realized to their amazement that they were in fact aliens. Many aliens who had been born in Belgium had neglected to acquire Belgian nationality on reaching the age of majority. They thought, erroneously, that given their long period of residence in Belgium they were Belgian. Not only they, but everyone in their immediate surroundings took these aliens for Belgians. By amending the nationality law the legislative power hoped to circumvent disputes over citizenship, but this reform took more than a decade. Only in 1909 was the acquisition of Belgian nationality radically modified: all aliens born in Belgium were automatically bestowed Belgian nationality if their father was also born in Belgium. With the double *jus soli* the Belgian nation was now defined less ambiguously. The old procedure of nationality acquisition, the mere declaration of native birth at age of majority, remained valid for all aliens born in Belgium. By 1911 successive amnesties allowed 12,000 aliens born in Belgium, who had exceeded the age of majority, to acquire Belgian nationality. Male Belgian-born

[10] Frank Caestecker and Antoon Vrints, 'Getrouwd met de vijand. Hoe na 1918 Duits-Belgische vrouwen van kamp konden wisselen', *Historica*, 33 (2010), 21–24.

[11] Frank Caestecker, 'Vluchtelingen en de transformatie van het vreemdelingenbeleid in België (1860–1914)', *Belgisch Tijdschrift Nieuwste Geschiedenis*, 40 (2010), 360–364; *Journal Militaire Officiel,* 1881, 196.

foreigners who claimed Belgian nationality through these amnesties had to have registered for the draft. They could become Belgian only if they had shared the burden that came with the holding of nationality.[12]

The growing popularity of Belgian nationality was an expression of the gradual nationalization of social life. Claiming Belgian citizenship became, for an increasing number of Germans born in Belgium, particularly if they were male, the ticket to Belgian citizenship. Few women who could opt for Belgian nationality did so.[13] Upon marriage, women still acquired their husband's nationality, thus their own nationality was considered of less importance. Even among the first-generation German immigrants the requests for Belgian citizenship seem to have risen. The rising German–French tensions added to the awareness that to have the nationality of the country where one lived was an advantage. As thirty-year-old Jules Schmalzigaug, whose father had migrated to Belgium in 1866 and who along with his two siblings had been born in Belgium and had claimed Belgian citizenship upon majority, wrote in 1912, 'I want to insist again on the naturalization of father. His rights have to be preserved and it would be good to have the protection of the country where one lives and pays taxes. I mention this because among public opinion here there is considerable irritation on this.'[14]

Also in the German Empire, the thinking on citizenship had changed by the end of the nineteenth century. The German 1913 Law on the Acquisition and Loss of Imperial and State Citizenship, which ended the automatic loss of German citizenship through absence, was an expression of the rise of ethnic thinking in the German Empire. German citizenship could only be lost by acquiring another citizenship abroad. Germans residing abroad promoted to outposts for cultural and economic expansion were allowed to retain their citizenship indefinitely and transfer it to their descendants. These *Auslanddeutsche*, however, had to perform their military duty in the German army, albeit not the full version. The increasing emphasis on descent was also underlined by making it possible for returning emigrants who had been naturalized elsewhere to regain German citizenship by applying for simplified naturalization. This latter change in

[12] Frank Caestecker, 'In het kielzog van de Natie-Staat: De Politiek van Nationaliteitsverwerving, verlies en toekenning, 1830–1909', *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis*, 27 (1997), 323–49.

[13] Most of the descendants of a sample of 160 German immigrants who had arrived before 1890 claimed Belgian nationality when they reached the necessary age. Before the outbreak of the war this figure was 76 per cent for male descendants and only 30 per cent for female descendants, Caestecker and Vrints, 'German Immigrants and their Families between Scylla and Charybdis'.

[14] Museum of Contemporary Art Brussels Archive, Family Schmalzigaug letters 1900–1914, Jules Schmalzigaug to his parents, 1 January 1912; Archives Aliens Department, individual files (henceforth AAD), 698163.

legislation of the German Empire was presented in Belgium and elsewhere as a radical provision for dual citizenship. German legal opposition to dual citizenship had, however, prevented all German citizens who emigrated from retaining their citizenship. The radical ethno-national agitation leading to the German nationality legislation of 1913 was strongly in favour of making all German citizens Germans in perpetuity, independent of the acquisition of a new citizenship. German legal opposition also insisted on the duty of citizenship. It could also convince the German legislative power that it was unacceptable that German emigrants could retain their citizenship independent of performing military service.[15]

By 1914 most first-generation Germans remained of German citizenship. Just like their fathers, children born in Germany, even if they had spent most of their youth in Belgium, rarely applied for naturalization. Like all Germans upon majority, they had to fulfill their national duty and serve in the German army. However, the male descendants of immigrants from the German Empire born in Belgium had claimed Belgian citizenship *en masse* by 1914. The provision of *jus soli* for nationality acquisition in Belgian law meant that the descendant of a German immigrant who was Belgian-born found it much easier to become Belgian than his siblings who were not Belgian-born.

The social functionality of acquiring citizenship as an expression of national identification had been minimal for most of the nineteenth century, but by its end Belgian citizenship had acquired some material advantages. Whether descendants of German immigrants were increasingly willing to become Belgian because of the less heavy citizens' duties or because of the rights they obtained is difficult to judge.[16] It may simply express a symbolic need to formalize identification with Belgium. Still, German immigrants who retained their German nationality despite long-term residence often maintained close and diverse connections with Belgium. Participation in ethnic community life and/or maintaining contacts with the region of origin indicate that this focus on Belgium did not exclude German identification. The combination of German, Belgian, and other forms of identification had an almost casual matter-of-factness for this population group. That the active German community in Belgium was composed of persons having German, Belgian or no citizenship at

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[15] Dieter Gosewinkel, *Einbürgern und Ausschliessen: Die Nationalisierung der Staatsangehörigkeit vom Deutschen Bund bis zur Bundesrepublik Deutschland,* (Göttingen, 2001), 278–329; Eli Nathans, *The Politics of Citizenship in Germany: Ethnicity, Utility and Nationalism,* (Oxford, 2001), 170–8.

[16] According to the German consuls in Brussels and Antwerp, the only reason why Germans in Belgium applied for Belgian citizenship was that otherwise they had to perform their military service in Germany. Bundesarchiv Berlin [henceforth BA]/R1501/108012, Report of German consuls in Brussels and Antwerp to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1910. This reasoning does not explain why earlier Germans did not apply for Belgian citizenship.

all did not, according to the German consul in Antwerp, 'conform to the rules of the national hotheads, but it is in Belgium the historically given situation and its consequences is to the advantage of Germany's national and state interests'.[17]

German Belgians and Belgian Germans at the Outbreak of War

The war was to sweep away the foundations of the social position of Belgian Germans at a single stroke.[18] The combination of German, Belgian and other forms of identification was no longer self-evident. When the Germans invaded Belgium on 4 August 1914, the Belgian military authorities took control of the fortified cities of Antwerp, Namur and Liège. For security reasons all German and Austro-Hungarian nationals who resided in these cities – citizens of enemy nations – were ordered to leave Belgium immediately.[19] The military authorities had been preoccupied with the potential threat to security of the presence of foreigners in the case of war. On 31 July 1914, for example, General Dufour, the military governor of Antwerp, had stressed to the local civilian and military authorities the need to monitor foreigners as there could be spies among them.[20] With the proclamation of the state of siege on 6 August, the military authorities acquired far-reaching competences on a nationwide scale. The targeted group of dangerous aliens was expanded: not only all German and Austro-Hungarian citizens but also Belgian citizens who originally had German or Austro-Hungarian nationality had to leave the fortified area by midnight on 6 August.[21]

An unknown number of German Belgians, especially those living close to the Dutch border, left Belgium on their own. Others left the country in convoys by train, organized by the Belgian authorities. Some Belgian Germans reported themselves to the Belgian authorities and others were arrested from 6 August onwards. All were interned and interrogated: male Germans of military age remained interned while all other Germans were ordered to leave to the neutral Netherlands in order to await the situation there, or to travel on from there to

[17] BA/R1501/108012, German consul in Antwerp to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1910.

[18] Antoon Vrints, 'De "Klippen des Nationalismus". De Eerste Wereldoorlog en de ondergang van de Duitse kolonie in Antwerpen', *Bijdragen tot de Eigentijdse Geschiedenis-Cahiers d'Histoire du Temps Présent*, 10 (2002), 7–41.

[19] As Belgium was not yet at war with Austria-Hungary the latter were not yet enemies.

[20] City Archives of Antwerp (CAA), MA 3499/1, rapport meeting Dufour, mayor, arrondissement commissioners, general, chief of military intelligence, 31 July 1914; Florence Collard, 'Les manifestations anti-allemandes d'août 1914 en Belgique : évolution de l'opinion publique belge à l'égard des résidents allemands à l'aube de la Grande Guerre' (unpublished University of Louvain-la-Neuve MA thesis, 2004), 142–3.

[21] CAA, MA 3499/1, file 119, Declaration Dufour to the Antwerp population, 5 September 1914.

the German or Austro-Hungarian empires. The expulsions occurred on a large scale: in the Brussels region at least one third (5100) of the approximately 15,000 German citizens were interned and expelled to the Netherlands.

A violent popular pressure added to these Belgian German expulsions.[22] This outspoken hostility against Germans was entirely new. The hostility in August 1914 took an ethno-cultural shape and resulted in ethnic violence on a scale unknown in the history of Belgium. Germans were jeered at and their possessions were destroyed and plundered. In particular, the visible German presence in the form of German bars and shops came under attack.[23]

From 9 August onwards, popular hostility took another shape. There were no longer indiscriminate attacks on Germans and their possessions; rather, violence was directed at presumed spies.[24] Spy fever had been present from the onset of hostilities, but it really gathered steam between 6 and 9 August. Popular anger was transformed into popular anxiety. Spy fever, as expressed by thousands of denunciations, became the dominant expression of anti-Germanness.

This shift in popular hostility was concomitant with a more targeted policy. The categorical exclusionary policy towards enemy citizens and even Belgians of enemy descent was significantly moderated in the second week of August 1914. Dichotomous war nationalism pitting Germans against Belgians was questioned first at the local level. How exemptions were made is well documented in Antwerp. Already on 6 August 1914 the Antwerp local authorities drew up a list of 65 trustworthy German families recommended by respectable Antwerp citizens.[25] In the next few days another 22 families were added to the list. These families were exempted from forced departure. On 7 August Dufour ordered another exception to the collective expulsion of Germans: those German or Austrian families with a son in the Belgian army were not to be affected. However, this was not a collective amnesty as families with a son in the Belgian army could still be expelled on a case by case basis.[26] On 7 August the military governor explicitly ordered wives and children of enemy citizens to be expelled, except for the

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[22] On the anti-German riots in 1914: Benoît Majerus, ' "L'âme de la résistance sort des pavés mêmes"? Quelques réflexions sur la manière dont les Bruxellois sont entrés en guerre (fin juillet 1914– mi-août 1914)'; and Antoon Vrints, '"Moffen buiten! " De anti-Duitse rellen in augustus 1914 te Antwerpen': in Serge Jaumain et al. (eds), *Une guerre totale? La Belgique dans la première guerre mondiale. Nouvelles tendances de la recherche historique* (Brussels, 2005), 33–46 and 47–64.

[23] Ö[sterreichisches] S[taatsarchiv], Ministerien des Aussern, Administrative Registrateur, F36, Krieg 1914–1918. Departement 7, Kriegsreklamationen, Nr.48§, declaration witness Albert Plisnier in Brussels in August 1914.

[24] Jan Van der Fraenen, *Voor den kop geschoten: Executies van Belgische spionnen door de Duitse bezetter (1914–1918)* (Roeselare, 2009), 27–45; Collard, *Les manifestations*, 220–64.

[25] CAA/MA2922/6 B.

[26] CAA/MA3499/1, file 120, Head of police to Mayor, 7 August1914.

children who had obtained Belgian nationality.[27] A local policeman, Rousseau, was ordered by the prison director in Antwerp to stop arresting the wives of German men, who, although of German citizenship, were not of German origin. Only the ethnic German women had to leave Belgium. Rousseau got lost in the changing instructions and asked for clear instructions: 'What should we do? First white, then black.'[28] His request was heeded. On 9 August General Dufour told the Antwerp mayor to exempt the following categories from expulsion: foreigners born in Belgium younger than 18, foreigners born in Belgium who had done their military duty in Belgium, the stateless (former German) families of the latter foreigners and also German families who had a soldier in the Belgian army. The last group to be exempted was the one originating from Alsace-Lorraine.[29] The mayor of Antwerp added the wives of Germans of Belgian origin.[30] The next day the Belgian civilian authorities gave new instructions, enlarging the group of trustworthy Germans. The ministers of justice and the interior gave mayors the power to provide temporary residence permits to four categories of Belgian Germans: Germans who had long been established in Belgium and had a good reputation, Germans married with Belgian wives or whose children were born in Belgium, German clerics in established religious communities in Belgium, and German domestic staff of respectable employers.[31] These categories were sufficiently vague to include a considerable proportion of Belgian Germans. This measure was inspired by the idea that established foreigners, because of their strong links with Belgium, posed no security threat. This policy was thus in line with the Belgian liberal tradition. The position of the political authorities was not at all appreciated by the military authorities: for example, General Dufour, in charge of Antwerp, did not feel bound by these instructions. Consequently, the instructions of 10 August were withdrawn and considered 'non avenue'.[32] Still, foreigners born and raised in Belgium who had fulfilled their military duties in Belgium remained exempt and their families, if they were stateless, could stay put. If the family of a Belgian-born foreigner still had German citizenship the litmus test for loyalty was set higher: a son had to serve in the Belgian army. The strong belief in Belgian socialization was not entirely shattered. Also, Belgian Germans could be loyal to Belgium: an explicit legal homogenization was not

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[27] CAA/MA41649, Instructions to the police, 7 August1914.

[28] CAA/MA 3499/1, file 120, Rousseau to his superior, 7 August 1914.

[29] CAA/MA 3499/1, folder 119, Instructions of the police, 9 August 1914; CAA/MA2922/6 B, Military governor to police, 9 August1914 (in the latter letter the exemption for Alsace-Lorraine is added in pencil).

[30] CAA/MA 2922/6 B.

[31] *Recueil des circulaires, instructions et autres actes émanés du Ministère de la Justice ou relatifs à ce département. Année 1914*, 222–3. See also CAA/MA3499/1, folder 119.

[32] CAA/MA 2922/6 B, Gonne, director of the Sûreté Publique to mayors, 14 August 1914.

mandatory. The military authorities required these Belgian-born foreigners to have fulfilled their military duties in Belgium; their being born and raised in Belgium did not protect them (and their family) as such from expulsion. Any foreigner, born in Belgium or not, who had done his military service abroad and thus been exposed to the enemy army, had to leave the country.

German families who were considered loyal to the host country could stay, as could Germans who succeeded in remaining unnoticed as Germans, or who were too old to be considered a danger. Belgian Germans, however, who were not covered by the supposedly reliable categories had to leave. The men among them who might take up arms against Belgium were arrested in August 1914 and interned. With the German army approaching, a total of 587 German citizens, mostly men of military age, were deported to internment camps in France or Great Britain.[33] Although for most of August 1914 the Belgian military and especially the political authorities tried to preserve the combination of German, Belgian and other forms of identification as an acceptable way of being part of the Belgian community, this was no longer self-evident.

Belgian Germans, German Belgians and the Belgian Nation during the War

In spite of the anti-German climate in invaded Belgium, many German Belgians, even as spies and soldiers, sided with Belgium during the invasion and occupation. Two intertwined categories of factors may have been the basis for opting for Belgium. First, there was sincere moral indignation about the German invasion. On the day of the invasion, the Brussels correspondent of the *Deutsche Wochenzeitung für die Niederlande und Belgien*, Paul Dünau, sent a report to the neutral Netherlands suggesting under the title 'Hated, feared and no longer respected!' that German Belgians or Belgian Germans' feelings were clearly anti-German. 'If it had not been the highest German authorities who had declared war on Belgium, they (the Germans in Belgium) would not have believed it ... This country ... a nation of honour ... has always granted the fullest hospitality to the Germans.'[34] Second, there were naturally relationships and ties that the often long years of living in Belgium had generated. These were translated into an attitude of solidarity with Belgian social groups to which these immigrants and their families had started to belong. In this case interweaving with Belgian society ran so deep that a future outside it was beyond imagination. Numerous

[33] Mathy De Spiegeleir, 'Vijand en vreemdeling. Duitse immigranten en hun nakomelingen tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog: Proposografische studie gericht op Duitsers die in 1914 werden opgepakt en geïnterneerd' (unpublished University of Ghent MA thesis, 2007).

[34] *Deutsche Wochenzeitung für die Niederlande und Belgien*, 9 August 1914.

sons of immigrants from the German Empire – in particular those who had become Belgian by option on reaching adulthood and whose mothers were ex-Belgian – reported as volunteers for the Belgian army (or had been mobilized).[35] Those Belgian Germans who were born and bred in Belgium but did not opt for Belgian nationality were less likely to serve in the Belgian army; however, in the period 1915–17 their participation in the Belgian army increased. This rise in the number of Belgian-born Germans serving in the Belgian army is particularly remarkable since the Belgian army responded to their willingness to serve with distrust.

Already in September 1914 the presence of soldiers of German descent was considered a problem by the army command. The army decided that all sons of Germans and Austrians were to be removed from the army, a decision to be repeated in February 1915. They all had to be put in a special *Compagnie de suspects* in the camp of Ruchard, but it seems that resistance was strong and the decision was not implemented. Very few Belgian Germans or German Belgians were indeed removed from the front.[36] However, in January 1916 the authorities became adamant about enforcing their decision. The military security ordered every army unit to draw up a reliability report on every soldier who was the son of Germans. Because of their (presumed) unreliability, but mostly purely because of their origin, they were taken from their units at the front and incorporated into specially guarded platoons. Those Belgian-born soldiers who had claimed Belgian nationality upon majority contacted their municipal administration in occupied Belgium, directly or indirectly, to prove their pro-Belgian choice.[37] Formal citizenship did not protect them against distrust; even Belgian soldiers with a German mother were collectively considered unreliable.[38]

At the end of 1917 there were at least 447 soldiers in these platoons who were sons of Austrians and Germans.[39] The unreliability of these soldiers was not sufficiently substantiated to summon them to court-martial or incorporate them in a penal company. During the period of internment, information was

[35] Among a representative sample of 23 male second-generation German immigrants born in Belgium between 1896 and 1884 and randomly selected on their parents' years of arrival in Belgium (1883–1884), 13 per cent were in the Belgian army between 1914 and 1916. Caestecker and Vrints, 'German Immigrants and their Families between Scylla and Charybdis'.

[36] Army Museum (Brussels), Russian Archive [henceforth AMBRA], box 1663, folder 185-14-4839 (1968), Chef de Cabinet of the Minister of War to Inspecteur Général de l'Armée, 9 June 1916 and his undated reply.

[37] AMBRA, box 1663, folder 185-14-4091, Baron Fallon to Baron Beyens, 25 May 1916.

[38] Dorval Lucien, an indigenous Belgian, was even checked by the military security because his brother-in-law was an Austrian. AMBRA, box 1663, folder 185-14-4091.

[39] AMBRA, box 1663, folder 185-14-4091.

gathered on their contacts with relatives, friends, business acquaintances in the German Empire and, in particular, on whether they had acquaintances serving in the Germany army. Also investigated was whether the relatives remaining in Belgium served the occupier.[40] The military security used an ethnic definition of Germanness, so Poles were exempted from this disciplinary treatment.

The German Occupation

When in the autumn of 1914 the German armies came to a standstill at the Western front that was to remain for years, virtually all of Belgium was occupied. Under the occupation the German authorities appropriated and mobilized the Belgian Germans for both short-term pragmatic considerations and long-term strategic and ideological goals. In the short term, the mobilization of Belgian Germans contributed to the war effort. Already by February 1915 the occupier had directly involved the Belgian Germans in this effort. All male Germans between 17 and 45 years old and considered medically fit had to serve in the German army. In the following years many more Germans had to serve in the German army as the medical selection became much milder and ever older men were called up.[41] To evade military service in the German army, and probably also as a protest against the German occupation, young Belgian-born Germans in occupied Belgium claimed Belgian citizenship when they reached the age of majority. In October 1915 the German governor-general decreed that citizens of the German Empire and its allied states could no longer apply for or claim Belgian citizenship.[42]

The occupier wanted to even widen the target group of potential conscripts beyond those of German citizenship. In the summer of 1916, a number of young Belgian men of German descent were drafted. The occupier claimed them to be German citizens as well. The German authorities justified the enlistment of the stateless, but also of German Belgians by referring to the German nationality law of 1913 which, according to their interpretation, only stripped those German nationals of their German nationality if they had deliberately chosen another nationality. Their Belgian nationality based on the double *jus soli*

[40] AMBRA, box 1663, folder 185-14-4091.

[41] Sammlung der Bekanntmachungen und Verordnungen der deutschen Behörden in Antwerpen, nr. 5,, 86, 17 February 1915; *Les avis, proclamations & nouvelles de guerre allemands affichés à Bruxelles pendant l'occupation du 5 juin au 1er Août 1915* (Elsene, n.d.), 19–21. ÖS, Haus-, Hof-und Staatsarchiv (HHSTa), Konsulatsarchiv Antwerp 1905–1918.

[42] Verordnung Generalgouverneur in Belgien, 21 October 1915, *Gesetz- und Verordnungsblatt für die okkupierte Gebiete Belgiens* (henceforth *GVOGB*), nr.133, 16 October 1915.

probably was not considered a voluntary decision by the German authorities. As Belgian nationality had been imposed on them and as they had never asked to be discharged of their German citizenship, they were considered to still be Germans by the German authorities.

This decision provoked harsh protests; a letter from four Belgian bishops and a petition of members of the judiciary and the political establishment retorted that those 'by Belgium adopted sons' were an integral part of the Belgian community. Due to these protests the mobilization of German Belgians was at least temporarily suspended.[43] Although Belgians were no longer mobilized by the German military, the mobilization of stateless people continued since the German authorities held that the German nationality law of 1913 provided for only an active manner of losing German citizenship.[44] The occupier made grateful use of the knowledge of the German immigrants and their offspring of the terrain, including their knowledge of Dutch and French. Belgian Germans became involved in the administration and in the police forces in occupied Belgium. This way they could escape conscription into the German army.

The German communities in Belgium were also considered of importance for ideological expansionist reasons. However divergent the ideas might have been on the future of Belgium, a strong position of Germanness in Belgium was also considered in the German national interest. The German authorities therefore stimulated the return of Belgian Germans who had fled Belgium in 1914.[45] In the restrictive regulations on mobility in and to occupied Belgium, they obtained an exceptional status. However, the occupation authorities apparently feared becoming saddled with additional burdens, for they only stimulated the return of those who could provide for themselves. In Berlin, the *Berliner Hilfsverein für die aus Belgien vertriebenen Deutsche* was established. With the support of the German authorities in Belgium, this association organized study trips to the occupied areas to persuade the refugees to return. Positive reports were published in the German press to reinforce the message.

[43] Jacques Pirenne and Marcel Vauthier, *La législation et l'administration allemandes en Belgique* (Paris, 1925), 144 ; Fernand Mayence, *La correspondance de S.E. le Cardinal Mercier avec le Gouvernement Général allemand pendant l'occupation 1914–1918* (Brussels and Paris, 1919), 195.

[44] Jules de Thier and Olympe Gilbart, *Liège pendant la Grande Guerre*, IV (Liège, 1919), 112.

[45] National Archives Brussels, Archives de la Commission d'enquête sur la violation des règles du droit des gens, des lois et des coutumes de la guerre (1914–1926), nr. 43; *Reports on the attitude of the German press vis-à-vis the German community in Belgium, 1914–1918*: *Deutsche Wochenzeitung für die Niederlande und Belgien*, 6 February1916; Verordnung Generalgouverneur in Belgien, 1 July 1915, *GVOGB*, nr. 111, 31 August 1915.

The government-general left no stone unturned to ensure the future of Germans in Belgium.[46] The legal rights of Belgian Germans were indemnified and they could obtain, if they had suffered severe economic damage, postponement or some cancellation of Belgian direct taxes.[47] In addition, the German occupier established German *Schiedsgerichte* based on Napoleonic legislation to force the local authorities to pay compensation for the damage caused by the anti-German actions of August 1914.[48] The Belgian municipalities refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of those courts, but were in fact forced to pay the compensation decided by the *Schiedsgericht*. A considerable proportion of Belgian Germans took advantage of this option. Just for the city of Antwerp with its 8346 inhabitants of German nationality in 1910, 863 applications were made during the course of the occupation, often with several individuals being involved in a single appeal.[49] The occupier also set himself up as protector of the physical and moral integrity of Belgian Germans; those who in any way harmed Germans risked severe prison sentences and financial penalties, imposed by German military law courts.[50]

On a material level Belgian Germans benefited from some privileges (such as free public transport or additional provisions) frequently provided via the appropriated German associations, which in the context of scarcity in the occupied country were of great importance. The occupier reserved Belgian game for German officers, but Belgian Germans were also awarded hunting permits.[51] Undoubtedly, such privileges stirred up much bad blood among the impoverished population of the occupied country.

The occupation government also developed a cultural policy aimed at maximizing the influence of Germanness in Belgium in the longer term whatever

[46] Studie en documentatiecentrum Oorlog en Hedendaagse Maatschappij, AB 1720, *Erinnerungen aus dem Weltkrieg 1914–1918 des Generaloberst Ludwig von Falkenhausen*, 239–241; Ludwig von Köhler, *Die Staatsverwaltung der besetzten Gebiete: Belgien* (Stuttgart, Berlin, Leipzig, 1927), 173–7.

[47] Respectievely Verordnung Generalgouverneur in Belgien, 10 November 1914 and 16 January 1915, *GVOGB*.

[48] Verordnung Generalgouverneur in Belgien, 3 February 1915, *GVOGB*, nr. 37, 9 February 1915.

[49] CAA/MA2279–2322; ÖS, Ministerien des Aussern, Administrative Registrateur, F36, Krieg 1914–1918. Departement 7, Kriegsreklamationen, nr. 485, 486, 488.

[50] Verordnung Generalgouverneur in Belgien, 4 September 1915, *GVOGB*, nr. 113, 11 September 1915.

[51] Verordnung Generalgouverneur in Belgien, 11 August 1915, *GVOGB*, nr. 110, 28 August 1915.

the post war political status of the Belgian territories might be.[52] Not only did the occupier want to exploit Belgium economically and master it politically, but he also wanted to reshape it culturally. The German cultural policy in Belgium was directed mainly at German immigrants and their families. The occupier went to great lengths to resuscitate German social life. As a result of this policy, German immigrant organizations in Belgium became completely entangled with the occupier. From the strategic consideration that those who are young hold the future, the occupier focused his efforts on education. Pre-war German schools were re-opened; in 1918 the German school in Brussels reached its highest-ever number of pupils (818), nearly exclusively Germans, and new German schools were founded.[53] The expansion of German education during the occupation was mainly aimed at the German labour population, which had been sending its children to the free Belgian schools and had hardly attended the pre-war German elite schools. In order to attract pupils, the children attending these schools received material benefits, such as free public transport, hot meals at lunchtime, and holiday stays. To be able to Germanize children of German descent who had been alienated from their origin due to domicile in Belgium, some German schools organized preparatory classes in French to teach the children basic German. Children from mixed Belgian-German couples were also targeted. This Germanization campaign established (residential) youth clubs for them.

With regard to various forms of mobilization of the Belgian Germans, it was of great importance to the occupier to get a precise view of this group. In fact, the occupier's policy towards the Belgian Germans seems to have radicalized during the second half of the occupation. Whereas in September 1917 only German citizens (over 14 years of age) had to report for a census, in December 1917 the governor-general decreed that all those of German origin, including the stateless who had been German or whose father was of German origin, had to report to a *Passbureau* in their municipality in the four weeks after 13 January 1918.[54] All these people of German origin had to report their movements to the German authorities.

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[52] Alfred Geiser, 'Deutsche Kulturpolitik im besetzten Belgien', *Das Deutschtum im Ausland*, 34 (1917), 301–3.

[53] *Deutsche Volksschule in Lüttich: Bericht über die drei ersten Schuljahre 1915–1916, 1916–1917, 1917–1918* (Brussels, 1918); Vanwildemeersch, *Van 'Unserem lieben Köning'*, 58.

[54] Bekanntmachung Generalgouverneur in Belgien, 13 December 1917, *Gesetz- und Verordnungsblatt für Flandern*, nr. 2, 5 January 1918. In September 1917 the occupier proclaimed also that all men between 15 and 47 of German descent, but who had become stateless or had Belgian citizenship, had to register for military service. de Thier and Gilbart, *Liège pendant la Grande Guerre*, 112.

This strategy of appropriation and mobilization of the Belgian Germans was fruitful as a number of factors pushed the Belgian Germans into playing the German card. In the first place, there was the bitterness about the anti-German actions and expulsion at the beginning of August 1914 and perhaps principally about the havoc they found on their return to Belgium. In many cases, the direct experience with anti-German violence was likely to be a powerful stimulus for German national identification. A second factor was the wall of distrust they encountered from their Belgian neighbours, colleagues, and acquaintances.[55] The resistance press identified them with the hated occupier, and this perception was undoubtedly shared by broad layers of the Belgian population. In a September 1915 ordinance, the German governor-general reported threats, blacklists, and boycott actions against them.[56] Often they could no longer count on their former contacts so that, from sheer necessity, a number of them sought support from the occupying power. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, there were economic considerations. In the short term, cooperation with the occupier offered opportunities to get hold of additional food or to make a profit. It must have been a tempting perspective in the difficult economic circumstances that characterized occupied Belgium. It could be for bare survival that Belgian German white collar workers who had become unemployed because of the stagnation of the Belgian economy ended up joining the German police forces. Others saw it as a profitable enterprise. In the longer term, if the Germans won, Belgium was to be positioned in the sphere of influence of the empire or perhaps even be annexed by Germany. In such a scenario, Belgian-German businessmen would end up at an exquisite point of departure.

Post-War Expulsion: 'Heraus!'

The mobilization and privileging of Belgian Germans by the occupier heavily discredited their position in the eyes of the Belgian population and authorities. During the war the Belgian government in exile started preparing repressive measures against them. The first measure was to make adopting Belgian nationality impossible for Germans. In February 1916, the possibility for Germans to become Belgians was blocked.[57] Enemy elements did not only have to be prevented from entering the nation, those who had already infiltrated the nation had to be excluded from the nation. Notably, the fact that German Belgians were fighting in the German army caused an early uproar in the Belgian

[55] *Kölnische Zeitung*, 29 May 1915.

[56] Verordnung Generalgouverneur in Belgien, 4 September 1915, *GVOGB*, nr. 113, 11 September 1915.

[57] Parliamentary Documents Chamber, 1919–1920, nr. 422 (2 October 1919)

government in exile. The socialist Emile Vandervelde denounced the treacherous action of German Belgians in the Council of Ministers of 14 October 1916 and insisted that after the war the courts should acquire the power to take action against them.

After the German collapse the vast majority of Belgian Germans realized that their position had become impossible and left with the help of the occupier in the wake of the German army's retreat. With the liberation of Belgium, the departure of Belgian Germans became extremely difficult as means of transportation were scarce and by the end of 1918 Allied-occupied Germany was even closed for them. Belgian military security actually feared that these returning Belgian Germans would reinforce the enemy. Belgian Germans could only return to the non-occupied part of Germany via the Netherlands. This required a passport, and it was only in early 1919 that German citizens could acquire a passport through the Spanish and Dutch consular authorities in Brussels. Only some well-to-do Germans were able to leave Belgium on a 'voluntary' basis and at their own expense to the Netherlands. Some Germans stayed in the Netherlands hoping for better times, others returned to Germany. The 'voluntary' leavers were mainly first-generation immigrants; very few sons and daughters of immigrants, even if they still had German citizenship, left Belgium voluntarily. Most undesirable Germans were forced to wait in Belgium because they did not have sufficient resources to undertake this journey.[58]

The Internment of Germans

An exceptional Aliens Act for wartime – the Royal Decree of 12 October 1918 – gave the minister of justice Emile Vandervelde absolute power over foreigners, but also over Belgians who were born as (enemy) aliens. Denying equal rights to the Belgians who had acquired Belgian nationality when they had reached adulthood on the basis of having been born in Belgium meant a radical breach with the nineteenth-century liberal ideas. These Belgians were demoted to second-rate Belgians, just as the naturalized Belgians had always been. Together with all foreigners these 'inferior' Belgians had to report to the local authorities. About 30,000 individuals reported.

The Belgian authorities set out a clear policy line. German and Austro-Hungarian citizens who reported to the local authorities were collectively

[58] Frank Caestecker, 'Wie was nu de vijand? De constructie van de "Duitser" bij het aflijnen van ongewenste vreemdelingen (1918–1919)' in Serge Jaumain et al. (eds), *Une Guerre totale?* (Brussels, 2005), 519–31.

exhorted to leave the country voluntarily.[59] Every German and Austro-Hungarian citizen who had served in an enemy army or had cooperated with the occupation government, even if forced to do so, or had left the service before the end of the war, was interned with a view to expulsion. In Brussels alone 1051 citizens of German origin were interned.[60] In January 1919, as prisons became overcrowded, many Belgian-German detainees were transferred to an internment camp in Adinkerke. The detention of the Germans and the attempt to force them out voluntarily were emergency solutions, since these undesirable aliens could not yet be expelled to Germany.[61]

In Belgian society, aversion to the Germans who were not leaving the liberated country was on the increase. A black-and-white view was shared by broad layers of society; while intellectual and economic circles also joined this radical anti-German mood. For example, all Germans were excluded from the Antwerp Chamber of Commerce and from freemasonry as well.[62] Interethnic relations became very strained, resulting in anti-German associations, manifestations, and violence.

Because of the severe pressure from below, Vandervelde felt obliged to exert more pressure on the Belgian Germans to leave the country. A more active policy was to make it clear to a population bent on vengeance that the government only tolerated Germans until their deportation could be executed. On 11 January 1919 the minister of justice issued instructions to local authorities to increase their grip on undesirable aliens. They received the order to summon every male citizen of German or Austro-Hungarian nationality between 16 and 60 years of age twice a week to a local control office. Individuals who had apparently lost their original German or Austro-Hungarian nationality and were declared to be stateless had to be summoned as well. Many municipalities decided to insert German nationality on the identity cards of these stateless people of German descent. The district commissioner of Verviers complained that even 'parents of soldiers who have made the war in our ranks saw German citizenship inflicted on them'.[63]

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[59] Nationality of an enemy country referred to the Central Powers: Turkey, Bulgaria, Austria-Hungary and the German Empire, but the Bulgarian and Turkish citizens had the benefit of the doubt. Only if the local police or the state police had information on a benevolent attitude towards the occupier were they interned and exiled. AAD, 214, Vandervelde, Note pour la Sûreté Publique, 26 March 1919.

[60] Parliamentary Proceedings Senate (henceforth PPS), 27 December 1918.

[61] Caestecker, 'Wie was nu de vijand?'.

[62] *Annuaire de la Chambre de Commerce d'Anvers 1871–1926* (Antwerp, 1927), 116; Roger Grignard, 'De Duitse maçonnieke aanwezigheid in België', *Jaarboek Studiekring vzw Trigonum coronatum*, 4 (1996), 76–96.

[63] *Rapport de M. le commissaire d'arrondissement de Verviers* : *Annexes à l'Exposé de la situation administrative de la province de Liège* (Verviers, 1921), 33.

This reporting obligation, twice a week, was envisaged as obtaining an up-to-date overview of the individuals who were liable for expulsion. In this way, they could be removed rapidly as soon as it was materially possible. At the same time, Vandervelde appealed to the local authorities to arrest all suspect foreigners. German and Austro-Hungarian citizens who avoided the control were considered to be suspect by definition. Citizens of enemy states who had served in the enemy army, cooperated with the German political police, traded with the enemy, or had been involved in the occupation administration had to be interned as well. Women who served in the occupation administration should not be spared arrest.

Local authorities enthusiastically applied the measure to check all enemy citizens. In greater Brussels, not only men but also women had to report twice a week.[64] However, the number of arrests by local authorities was minimal. The sharp discrepancy between the enthusiasm of the local authorities in early 1919 for controlling the enemy and the small number of arrests can only indicate the neutral attitude during the occupation of many of these Belgian Germans still in Belgium. Apparently, apart from having the nationality of an enemy state, these Germans could not be accused of anything else. Those who were most tainted had probably already fled at the time of the armistice.

The repression by the Belgian state immediately after liberation was mainly aimed at male German immigrants of the first generation. Spouses and children were far less affected in the arrest wave of the first few months, which indicates that they were apparently considered to be less of a threat. In individual cases the revenge against anything German led to vigorous action. The administrative decisions on arrest as well as expulsion were highly arbitrary and no appeal was possible. The rushed and ill-considered way of working is strikingly illustrated by the arrest or even expulsion of Belgians. The three Belgian brothers S – born in Belgium but of German descent – were interned because they 'had not yet completed their military obligations' and had worked for the occupier. However, they denied the latter most emphatically and, moreover, stated that they had never been in contact with the German occupier. They could not count on any clemency. In the spring of 1919 they were, together with 300 Germans, collectively repatriated to Germany in an operation organized by the Belgian and Dutch authorities. Belgians of German origin who had been disloyal to their new nation were singled out for the most severe punishment a state could inflict upon a national: the banishment from the nation. Originally, the government had provided for the possibility of punishing Belgian collaborators, regardless of the origin of their nationality, by revoking their nationality. However, Belgians by descent were spared this far-reaching punishment. In the final version of the

[64] AAD, 214, Note concernant l'exécution des instructions contenues dans les dépêches de Monsieur le Ministre, 11 January 1919.

law, only Belgians of foreign origin were targeted. In particular, the German Belgians were the focus of this punishment; although legally Belgians, they were considered because of 'their Germanic blood that flows in their veins' to be part of the German race.[65] Similar to the aforementioned Royal Decree of 12 October 1918, for the first time a fundamental difference was made between Belgians by birth or naturalization, and Belgians by descent. Not all Belgians were equal before the law; the punishment for collaboration by 'new' Belgians was much more severe. The so-called naive thrust of the legislature in 1909 had to be remedied. Between 1918 and 1929, the lower courts pronounced 73 verdicts of denationalization, of which 60 were Belgians of German origin, mostly born in Belgium.[66]

The Good Germans: New Allies and Loyal Belgian Germans

Notwithstanding concessions to the hardliners, Vandervelde pleaded for a nuanced policy vis-à-vis Belgian Germans. In this respect, the Catholic church was an important ally. The head of the Roman Catholic church in Belgium, Cardinal Désiré Mercier, rejected blind revenge on the Belgian Germans as repression innate in barbaric regimes. He pleaded for a repressive policy that would only affect the guilty. The attitude of the dominant Roman Catholic church was important support for Vandervelde. Cardinal Mercier had acquired an aura of respect because of his resistance to the occupation, and thus Vandervelde was then able to make a stand for Belgian Germans without risking the label of unpatriotic.[67]

At the beginning of 1919 some citizens of the multinational empires in Central Europe were no longer called enemies. The Versailles treaty that honoured the right to self-determination and divided the Central European empires into nation states resulted in the collective debt of citizens of the enemy states being limited to those who were alleged to belong to the core of these states. The inhabitants of Eupen-Malmédy, the Alsatians and Lorrainians, the Austrian Italians, the Danish from North Schleswig, the Rumanians from Transylvania-Bucovina, the Greeks from Bulgaria, the Syrians, the Poles, the Czechoslovaks and Yugoslavs were thus turned into allies, even though during the war they had been citizens of enemy states.

The Belgian policy regarding enemies living in Belgium was profoundly changed by this new geopolitical reality. The transfer from enemy to friendly

[65] PPS, 17 November 1919, 151.

[66] Théodor Heyse, 'La pénétration allemande en Belgique', *Revue belge des livres, documents et archives de la guerre 1814–1918* (1930), 341.

[67] Caestecker, 'Wie was nu de vijand?', 527–8.

alien was not always that straightforward. In certain cases private committees determined who belonged to these groups and they stated that political loyalty during the war was a criterion in assessing the affiliation of an individual. The Belgian authorities also had a say in this operation and it seems no blank cheque was given. The fact that these allies had joined the enemy army or the occupation administration was mostly glossed over. In spite of themselves, these individuals had been citizens of the Central Powers and had not been able to back out of their incorporation by force into the armed forces of the Central Powers. Their activities during the occupation were minimized because they had belonged to a friendly nation, albeit only virtually. Therefore nothing impeded continued residence in Belgium.

Even among those who remained associated with enemy nations, Vandervelde decided not to oppose the presence in the country of those who had a loyal or neutral attitude during the war. Vandervelde identified four groups to exempt from expulsion: First of all, members of religious orders who provided care, as well as members of closed orders. Secondly, German domestic servants who had resided in Belgium for a long time and who were too old to still earn a living elsewhere or whose care was necessary for older individuals. Thirdly, German women of Belgian origin. These women, who had lost Belgian nationality due to their marriage to a German or Austro-Hungarian citizen, could count on clemency, but only if they were widows or had been separated or legally divorced. Only these former Belgians could be exempted from expulsion. A last group which could be tolerated in Belgium was Germans born in Belgium or who had been residing in Belgium for a long time and who did not have any relationship with their country of origin. Among them Vandervelde also considered German and Austro-Hungarian citizens who had supplied services to the Allied forces or whose sons had fought in the Belgian army. The four groups of trustworthy Germans which Vandervelde enumerated were almost the same ones as the Belgian civilian authorities had listed on 10 August 1914. Still, Vandervelde's list was defined more strictly. For example, the German husbands of Belgian wives were no longer considered loyal to Belgium. Only the women could remain in Belgium, and this under the condition that they had divorced their German husbands. Due to the war experience prima facie loyalty became reserved to a much more strictly defined group.[68]

Not only Belgian Germans in Belgium applied for an exception to the expulsion rule but also Belgian Germans who found themselves outside of Belgium applied for repatriation by evoking their loyal attitude towards Belgium. Numerous Belgian Germans who had fled Belgium at the time of the liberation or even those of military age who had been interned for the whole war period in France in 1914 submitted a request to return after they had been sent

[68] Caestecker, ibid., 528–9.

back to Germany or had fled to the Netherlands or Germany. From Germany they urged the Belgian authorities to be allowed to return to Belgium. The three brothers S., Belgians of German descent who were expelled in early 1919, could thus prove their Belgian nationality from Germany. In this way they were able to exact their return.[69] The gradual moderation of state policy towards Belgian Germans had only a limited influence on the restoration of the Belgian-German community. The census of December 1920 indicated that, at most, 25 per cent of the pre-war population which had been citizens of the German Empire or the Austro-Hungarian monarchy remained in Belgium.

Table 6.2 Number of Inhabitants in Belgium of Foreign, German and Austrian Nationality

	Foreigners	German Empire	Austro-Hungaria	Czechoslovakia	Poland
1910	254,547	57,010	5927		
1920	149,677	7960	714 (A)+ 215 (H)	712	5329

Conclusion

For Belgium as a liberal regime the war experience dramatically changed the perception of German immigrants and their descendants. In nineteenth-century Belgium the dominant liberal view perceived immigrants and their descendants as emigrants who over time became more attached to the country of their choice than to the country which they left. The descendants of immigrants born and raised in Belgium were considered fully fledged members of the Belgian national community. By the end of the nineteenth century these foreigners were increasingly offered the opportunity and even forced to become Belgian. Socially belonging to Belgian society was also increasingly sealed by legally becoming members of the nation.

By the start of the war in August 1914, a radical change can be discerned within the state policy of excluding all Belgian Germans, albeit with considerable hesitation. The impact of national identification took on an urgency previously unknown. From 1916 the Belgian authorities departed from this selection on the basis of citizenship and their mere ethnic origin made all Germans, including the German Belgians, suspicious. In both cases popular pressure added to this radicalization. The decision-making of the Belgian authorities was at least partly a response to the instrumentalization and mobilization of Belgian Germans,

[69] AAD, 383 701.

the stateless of German origin and even some German Belgians by the occupier. As would be the case in Eastern Europe after the Second World War on a far larger scale, the German occupier's mobilization and exploitation of presumed 'ethnic Germans' eventually resulted in a drastic reduction of German presence in Belgium once German power collapsed.[70] Perceived by the Belgian authorities as a fifth column, a safety risk, the departure from liberal views on immigrants and their descendants is obvious after the armistice. A straightforward blind expulsion from the country of all those who could be considered German in any way was quickly rejected. Still, a far larger share of Belgian Germans in 1918 than in 1914 were considered a threat to the national community and had to be removed. It was a far-reaching, but still not blind cleansing of the Belgian community. The post-war Belgian policy went considerably further than a political purge; its ethnic component should not be ignored. The inhabitants of Belgium of German origin were collectively considered suspicious, but not by definition guilty. This caused the status of citizenship of immigrants and their descendants to be devalued compared to citizenship by descent.

As a result of the war experience, descent became more important for the concept of Belgianness, and immigrants of foreign origin had to prove that they had become loyal Belgians. This process of exalting descent would gain momentum in interwar policy of granting citizenship. By the start of the Second World War the exclusion from the Belgian nation due to one's ethnicity would be more outspoken. The First World War had provided the impetus for this ethnic selectiveness. In contrast to Nazi Germany, assimilation into the community of citizens remained in principle still possible for anyone coming to Belgium, and the radical collective exclusion of an ethnic group from among its citizens was never on the agenda.

[70] See, for example, Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Empire: Nazi rule in Occupied Europe* (London, 2008), 539–50.