

Male misconduct

Men suspected of misconduct were often high-profile individuals in positions of authority. Municipal, administrative forms of misconduct – roughly analogous to what Nivet calls ‘political collaboration’¹ – were taken seriously by the French authorities after the liberation. Members of the Gendarmerie Nationale and the Commissariat Spécial of Lille carried out time-consuming investigations up to the end of 1919. All but two of these involved accusations of questionable occupation conduct on the part of the Mayor, the Municipal Council, adjuncts to the Mayor, secretaries to the Mairie, or rural policemen (*gardes champêtres*).² Only six of these thirty investigations concluded that the accusations were true, and even among these six there were calls for further investigation.³ The majority of the other investigations contain no official verdict and are thus inconclusive. Despite this, such enquiries provide a rich source base from which to examine popular perceptions of male misconduct and the related phenomena of post-war denunciations of poor occupation behaviour among men. The male specificity within the norms of occupied culture and ideas of misconduct involved an overlap between general forms of misconduct and the political sphere, creating a belief that men in positions of authority had abused their power.

Denouncing misconduct

Post-war investigations were often carried out at the request of inhabitants. M. Albert, an interpreter attached to the British army, arrived in the commune of Eccles on 11 November 1918 and immediately received a verbal complaint from numerous locals accusing three inhabitants of having worked for the Germans as spies and denunciators. He asked for a written, signed complaint, which he received the following

morning.⁴ Such complaints fit Sheila Fitzpatrick and Robert Gellately's definition of denunciations, comprising 'spontaneous communications from individual citizens to the state [...] containing accusations of wrongdoing by other citizens or officials and implicitly or explicitly calling for punishment.'⁵ These post-war denunciations were understood, by the authors and the authorities, as the opposite of denouncing compatriots to the Germans during the occupation. However, the symbolic, linguistic difference between *délation* (perceived as a negative act of betrayal/treason) and *dénonciation* (seen as a patriotic-civic duty) is rarely present.⁶ Denunciation of male misconduct took numerous forms. Most frequently, inhabitants signed petitions, decrying the behaviour of notables during the occupation and calling for further investigations. One example is a petition from inhabitants of the commune of Saint-Rémy-Chaussée to the 'general commanding the French Mission attached to the British army', sent on 11 January 1919:

The undersigned, inhabitants of the commune of St Rémy Chaussée, canton of Berlaimont Nord, have the honour of drawing your attention to the facts and behaviours of the mayor of their commune during the war. They have serious reasons to complain about the vexations to which they were all subjected, and from which (they do not hesitate to add) they suffered just as much as from foreign occupation.⁷

This petition's fifty signatories accused the Mayor of being involved in arbitrary requisitions, of refusing to pay inhabitants the military and other benefits to which they were entitled, and of a 'despicable' personal attitude towards the Germans (including providing them with food and other goods). He was especially criticised for 'The facility with which he delivered [*livrait*] to the Germans men, women, young girls, denouncing them if they refused, and punishing them with fines and imprisonment.'⁸ Yet the subsequent investigation into both the writing of the petition and the Mayor's actions during the occupation highlights the complexity of the situation. Witness testimony was of varying reliability, and the role of public rumour became evident. One M. Raviart stated in his police interview: 'I reproach Mayor Lescaillez for having designated that I work for the Germans, against my will' and remarked that the Mayor had refused to pay his benefits even though his daughter was ill – just one of many similar statements in this file.⁹ Such accusations may indeed be true, but they may also reflect an inability of the general population to comprehend the difficulties facing mayors and municipal administrations, caught between 'a rock and a hard place'. And the way in which some

locals exaggerated the ability of local notables to resist the Germans.¹⁰ Raviart's testimony ended with common phrasing: 'I have heard that this Mayor trafficked goods with the Germans but I cannot give you any information on the subject.'¹¹ Clearly, public rumour surrounding the actions of the Mayor was widespread. Even though Raviart did not know anything of the Mayor's alleged commerce with the Germans, the fact that he had heard people talking about this made it worth mentioning – and almost made it a truth unto itself. Disentangling truth from accusations, as ever, is not easy, but further considering post-war denunciations and investigations provides an insight into the role of men in popular perceptions of misconduct.

Motives: duty, truth, or revenge?

Post-war petitions and letters denouncing occupation misconduct had a variety of motives beyond disdain for such behaviour. In the Lescaillez affair, there is evidence to suggest that more than a sense of patriotic duty lay behind the petition. One M. Bernier stated that the author of the petition, M. Martin, came to his house in March 1919 and asked the family if they would like to sign. Bernier said that he knew nothing of the affair, but Martin added, 'If you say what I want you to say, you will be rewarded.' Bernier maintained that he had nothing to say, so Martin left.¹² This calls into question the validity of the signatures, and possibly even the later witness statements – although this single statement could itself be false, an attempt to defend the Mayor and sully the reputation of Martin. Indeed, it was Lescaillez himself who told the gendarmes that they should interview Bernier.¹³ Overall, the statements are contradictory and confusing, a fact to which a handwritten summary of the case attests.¹⁴

A similar problem can be seen in the investigation into alleged misconduct of the Mayor of Bachy and a local policeman. A letter of complaint signed by numerous inhabitants was sent to the Préfet, but the Commissaire Spécial of Lille noted that the man responsible for the petition had 'a reputation in the commune as a systematic complainer.'¹⁵ Thus, this and other petitions may have been what Sheila Fitzpatrick classifies as 'manipulative' denunciations – a form of vengeance, an attempt at personal gain or political manoeuvring.¹⁶ This was a commonplace defence used by men accused of misconduct. The Mayor of Crèvecœur-sur-l'Escaut was suspected of having close relations with the Germans, putting personal interest before that of citizens and even

threatening them with German punishments. In a letter to the Sous-Préfet of Cambrai, the Mayor denied all wrongdoing, calling the petition 'a veritable collection of lies which cannot survive serious examination' and stating, 'What's more, the electoral campaign has started, led by my political enemies.'¹⁷ These enemies were using the occupation (and the difficult position in which the Mayor found himself) against him, for their own benefit rather than out of any moral-patriotic sentiment. It is unclear whether the French authorities believed this version of events, but they did call for a 'cross-examination' into the Mayor's actions.¹⁸ Frustratingly, no further documents on this affair have been preserved.

Other examples of a political understanding of denunciation existed in Comines,¹⁹ and Ligny-en-Cambrésis – where, in June 1920, the municipality ordered the replacement of the teacher of the local boys' school for general occupation misconduct.²⁰ The Inspecteur de l'Enseignement Primaire argued that the teacher was a pawn in a political game: the new Municipal Council was formed of *poilus* who wanted to 'cause harm to the former mayor', but the latter defended himself and threatened the councillors with sensational revelations, 'So they changed their mind, and they found a scapegoat: the teacher.'²¹ It is unsurprising that the accused denied wrongdoing, and politicians accused their political enemies of being behind such accusations; this was probably the truth regarding some, but not all, post-war accusations.

Men who had been at the front during the war also signed post-war petitions decrying the wartime actions of mayors and municipal councillors. These men, absent during the occupation, could only formulate opinions based on rumour, demonstrating its centrality to local occupied life. This was the case in Bachy and Râches.²² The most striking instance occurred in Denain regarding the conduct of M. Delphien, Adjunct to the Mayor and Acting Mayor from September 1914 until August 1916 (when he was seemingly deported to Germany). In December 1918, the Sous-Préfet of Valenciennes proposed Delphien for a citation in the *Journal Officiel* for his good behaviour during the occupation, notably for resisting German demands; he was cited on 14 July 1919. Yet, the following month, the Sous-Préfet expressed his conviction that Delphien had 'acted very badly during the occupation' and desired to distance himself officially from the citation, which he regretted. In September 1919, the Sous-Préfet proposed to the Préfet that Delphien and his fellow adjunct be dealt with by the military authorities.²³ The Préfet explained to the general now responsible for the 'affaire Delphien' that Delphien and a fellow adjunct were 'the

object of complaints emanating from the “Ligue des Poilus [Soldiers’ League]”.²⁴ In fact, former combatants had led the campaign against the two notables – not only did they write letters to French authorities but they also carried out their own investigations with the aid of local police, gathering considerable witness testimony attesting that these individuals had behaved badly during the war.²⁵ Veterans, local policemen and witnesses accused M. Delphien of overseeing requisitions of workers for the Germans and threatening those who refused to work, providing the occupiers with a list of men of mobilisation age, permitting workers to make sandbags, refusing to provide food to hidden Allied soldiers, showing weakness in the face of the enemy, offering cigarettes to German soldiers and wanting ‘to offer a bouquet of flowers to a German colonel’. Delphien denied and explained away the accusations, but the evidence against him was overwhelming, hence the involvement of the military.²⁶ The fate of Delphien and his fellow mayoral adjunct is not recorded.

This affair demonstrates the strength of feeling among those who did not live through the occupation, for whom the conduct of the occupied population (especially notables) was important. This was often fuelled by the accounts of those who had experienced occupation. In particular, male, political misconduct had to be punished. Whether this emanated from a feeling of solidarity with occupied civilians, a desire to help them right the wrongs of the occupation or, more simply, suspicion of the occupied population held by many soldiers, is unclear.²⁷ What is clear, however, is that these denunciations were understood in terms of civic-patriotic duty, as represented by the justification in Césaire Lemaire’s letter to the Préfet regarding Mons-en-Pévèle: ‘I take the responsibility of writing you this letter to give you some information on the poor administration of the commune [during the occupation].’²⁸ Denunciations were also an expression of outrage that the justice system had not investigated or punished the suspect individuals up to this point.

Anonymous animosity

Anonymous denunciations also existed. This was the origin of the investigation in Crèvecœur-sur-l’Escaut: a postcard sent to the Préfet in late July 1919 showed the Mayor and his family standing in a courtyard with German gendarmes. The message on the back is short and simple: ‘When will you fire this mayor who sold out to the Boches[?]’²⁹ (see Figures 3 and 4). Another copy of this postcard was sent to the Minister of the

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Figure 3 Postcard of the Mayor of Crèvecœur-sur-l'Escaut and his family with German gendarmes (front), sent to Préfet du Nord, 31 July 1919. Archives Départementales du Nord, Lille, France, 9R1193.

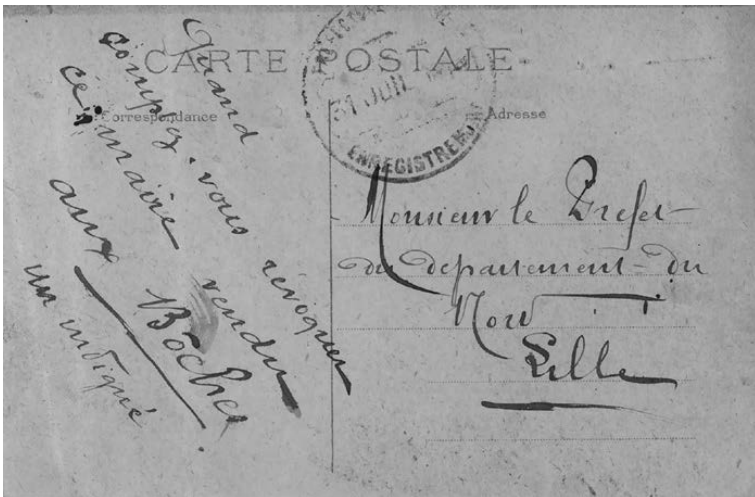


Figure 4 Postcard of the Mayor of Crèvecœur-sur-l'Escaut and his family with German gendarmes (reverse), sent to Préfet du Nord, 31 July 1919. Archives Départementales du Nord, Lille, France, 9R1193.

Interior earlier in the month; also anonymous, it seems to have been written by another person and included a list of what those in the photo had done wrong. The Mayor had ostensibly been too friendly with the Germans, had not paid *allocations* to citizens and had turned his back on French prisoners of war.³⁰

One of the most bizarre anonymous denunciations is a twenty-verse song regarding the actions of the Mayor of Marcq-en-Barœul, a copy of which was forwarded to the Préfet by the commune's *commissaire de police* in September 1919. It was accompanied by a photo showing the Mayor's son sitting down next to a German soldier. In the letter, the Commissaire stated that because of the photo and the song, 'in all likelihood, much will be said about these men during the next electoral period'.³¹ The political implications of occupation (mis)conduct are evident. The song itself is entitled 'Complaint Dedicated to the Mayor of Marcq' and spoke of a village abandoned by its mayor, who, out of fear of imprisonment, 'betrays what responsibility dictates' and 'abdicates authority'.³² One of his sons is mentioned, presumably the one in the photo, who 'gets on well / Alas with the foreigner'.³³ The Mayor was accused of being too friendly with the Germans, of helping them choose hostages and of not resisting German demands (especially regarding the deportations of 1916). The penultimate verse summed up the way a mayor was supposed to have acted during the occupation:

It was necessary to give in
To force, of course,
But first to fight fearlessly
For our unrecognised rights
Because without this resistance
Calm is bought at a high price
It is no longer prudence
And it is cowardice.³⁴

Thus, the author recognised that resisting *all* German demands was impossible during the occupation – but some form of protest was needed *before* the inevitable acquiescence. This attitude was widely understood and accepted (see Chapter 6). Thus, mayors who acquiesced to German demands too readily, without protest, were perceived by adherents of occupied culture as having behaved badly. This was worthy of post-war denunciation to the highest echelons of French power, even if it was not total complicity.

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Many of those who wrote denunciations to the French authorities or who gave statements to investigating gendarmes seemed not to understand the difficult position in which municipal administrations (and aid organisations) found themselves during the occupation. A case in point is the 'affaire Berteaux' in Fourmies. M. Berteaux was the mayoral secretary responsible for coordinating provisioning during the occupation. He was later denounced for having been involved in commerce with the Germans, giving a German officer 400,000 francs, setting up a shop that sold only German goods at prices locals could not afford, and selling the Germans various goods of the Provisioning Committee (Comité de Ravitaillement), which were destined exclusively for the French civilians.³⁵ Further, he allegedly often stated, 'I am neutral' and exchanged gifts with German officers; his wife made German flags.³⁶ The investigating policeman interviewed Berteaux in June 1919 and noted that he did not deny the accusations. Berteaux stated, 'If I gave merchandise to Germans, it's because I was obliged to "oil the machine" [...] Members of the American and Hispano-Dutch commissions will vouch for me.'³⁷ His Comité de Ravitaillement colleagues indeed echoed Berteaux's sentiments. One defended Berteaux in a letter to the CANF's President, stating that the inquiry 'is giving satisfaction to the basest grudges' and 'displays an absolute ignorance of the obligations he faced regarding the Germans, from which he could not free himself without seriously compromising the proper functioning of provisioning.' The letter concluded: 'The case of M. Berteaux is the same as that of numerous other delegates, one seems to ignore the necessity of their rapports with the enemy and the compromises they had to make in the interest of the population.'³⁸

This view was reinforced by the summary of the CRB meeting of 27 April 1919 at Vervins, its first meeting since the liberation, where unanimous support was expressed for Berteaux.³⁹ Indeed, the CRB noted that former delegates had a duty to combat any suspicion, insult or stain against the organisation, especially from non-occupied compatriots who would confuse 'obligatory rapports' with 'complicity' and 'guilt'.⁴⁰ This is an explicit admission that those who did not suffer the occupation would not be able to understand the complexities of the situation, that there was a distinction between administrative relations with the Germans which were necessary for the good of the local area, and outright unpatriotic and morally suspect relations. Yet those who wrote petitions and denunciations, or who gave statements to investigating gendarmes, often do not appear to have believed in such a distinction. This was perhaps

because they were not part of the administration so were not aware of the extreme difficulties faced, but probably also because they genuinely judged certain acts to be morally repugnant, whether there were ‘mitigating circumstances’ or not. This was the uncompromising occupied culture.

Similar accusations were made against other notables. In Saint-Rémy-Chaussée, the Mayor was accused of aiding the Germans in requisitions, of refusing to pay *allocations* or paying them late and of being responsible for forced labour.⁴¹ Perhaps the population was ignorant that municipal coffers had been completely drained by the Germans or of the fact that mayors faced severe reprisals if they did not acquiesce to German demands. The ‘municipalisation of power’ encouraged by the Germans meant that they could ‘apply pressure more easily for the execution of their demands.’⁴² With increased municipal power came increased responsibility and, thus, greater chances of being accused of wrongdoing by the population at large. Indeed, contrary to the protests of the CANF above, the non-occupied French authorities were aware of the complexity of the administrative situation and did stress that dealings with the Germans did not automatically comprise ‘complacency [*complaisance*]’. They understood that sometimes municipalities had to cooperate to avoid reprisals, and this was not a legitimate incrimination against a mayor or civil authority, especially for ‘modest civil servants.’⁴³

Naturally, some accusations are more likely to be true than others, particularly those corroborated by numerous witnesses from all walks of life. Nevertheless, claims that were likely false or proven false provide an insight into the occupied population’s understanding and perception of their experience. They attest to a widespread belief in misconduct and an acknowledgement of the representational and conceptual framework born of occupation and crystallised by the liberation, which the authors of untrue accusations used to their advantage.

Inconclusive conclusions

Whereas investigations into female, sexual misconduct were more numerous, they were also considerably less thorough – reports mostly comprised just a page or two per suspect. By contrast, investigations into the thirty-three male suspects created nearly 800 pages of documentation involving lengthy witness statements and cross-examinations.⁴⁴ This, as well as the content of such enquiries, suggests that male misconduct was

taken more seriously by the French/Allied authorities and was understood as no less treasonous by the former *occupés* themselves. Yet despite the depth of investigations into the misconduct of male figures of authority, many lack definitive conclusions – or hint at evidence that would allow for such conclusions but which is often not preserved. Even when guilty verdicts are present, they rarely state what (if any) punishments the accused faced. In Neuville-en-Ferrain, the investigating gendarme concluded that ‘the rural policemen Walcke seems to have had a servile attitude towards the Germans [...] He was on the best terms with the Kommandantur and German policemen.’⁴⁵ Further investigations were carried out, but the documentation is absent. In the commune of Catillon-sur-Sambre, *Messieurs* Dambrine and Pamart (the Adjunct and the Secretary to the Mayor respectively) were arrested after being found guilty of various forms of *intelligence avec l'ennemi*, but no further information is given.⁴⁶ Judging by Martinage’s study into judicial punishment of ‘collaborators’, it is likely that many such suspects were ultimately not punished at all.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, some conclusions can be drawn. There was a belief among some formerly occupied people that local politicians or notables had engaged in a host of compromising activities, which were frowned upon but not always illegal. Some may be seen by the historian as inevitabilities of the occupation: to preserve what little influence they had left, mayors needed to have good relations with the Germans, in what Robert Vandenbussche labelled a *modus vivendi*.⁴⁸ However, this understanding was largely absent from the hard-line, idealistic norms of occupied culture. This explains, for example, the suspicion of Municipal Councillor M. Defives of Saint-André-lez-Lille, said to have been in constant touch with the Kommandantur and on friendly terms with the Germans;⁴⁹ or of M. Dumontier of Comines, who kept a cinema exclusively for German use, and whose daughter was the fiancée of a German soldier.⁵⁰ Many inhabitants of the occupied Nord understood such actions as inherently symbolic and shameful. Any perceived negative behaviours carried out by men in positions of authority might be considered ‘political’ misconduct. However, this behaviour was never ideological, certainly not a stated policy, and accusations were often unreflective of the complex reality of occupied life – or entirely false. Nevertheless, the actions of which people were accused or suspected are interesting regardless of ‘objective reality’, precisely because some people believe that they *could have* happened. This is equally true of another form of male misconduct.

Commercial and financial misconduct

Men were disproportionately accused of commercial relations with the Germans,⁵¹ ranging from general ‘exchange’ of goods to perceived war profiteering, including explicit ‘gold traffic’ whereby men actively sought out French money and gave it to the Germans for a commission. Some forms of commerce crossed the line into wider criminality and are therefore examined in more detail in Chapter 5. The forms of commercial misconduct examined here mostly comprised illegal *commerce avec l’ennemi* actively aiding the German war effort, although the line between official and unofficial commercial relations was blurred.

Commercial misconduct was the most common accusation laid against men in the repatriation testimony examined: 130 out of 228 suspect men (57 per cent) were accused of this.⁵² British intelligence reports list ninety-five men from across all of occupied France, not just the Nord; thirty-nine are reported as having engaged in traffic or trade with the enemy – in gold, flour, or other goods. Among these was the Mayor of Tainsiers, also noted as having frequently received officers at his house and having been on friendly terms with the Germans,⁵³ or M. Minon of Villers-Sire-Nicole, a clerk at the Mairie accused of traffic with the enemy.⁵⁴ Women were less frequently mentioned as engaging in this sort of commercial exchange – just forty in French repatriation reports (4.9 per cent of all suspect women) – and when they were it was usually considered to also involve a sexual element.⁵⁵

Men suspected of commercial relations with the Germans came from a range of backgrounds. The most common professions among suspects mentioned in repatriation reports include bakers, grocers, merchants, butchers or cattle owners – thus those with better access to goods or money.⁵⁶ A few examples suffice to demonstrate the variety of forms this behaviour could take, as well as its perceived existence across the Nord. A man from Escarmain, nicknamed Mignory, sold horses to the Germans, and even gave the Kommandant flowers and a German flag.⁵⁷ Two men ‘of Spanish origin’ from Anzin worked as *ravitailleurs* for the Germans, buying food in Belgium and selling it at the front.⁵⁸ Baker M. Soyez from Denain was denounced on two separate occasions for gold trafficking, which in this instance meant using gold to buy sugar from the Germans, then selling his products to compatriots at exorbitant prices. He apparently also called the French ‘cowards’.⁵⁹ Forty-five-year-old Arthur Dupas from Walincourt was estimated to have provided the Germans with at least 30,000 francs in gold, made from

selling alcohol.⁶⁰ Two men from Roubaix ‘provisioned’ the Germans and engaged in ‘trafficking gold and paper money’, which they carried out at the Taverne Viennoise, owned by their tout Marie.⁶¹ Other forms of misconduct overlapped: in Sin-le-Noble, M. Vion was alleged to have provisioned the Germans, engaged in gold traffic with them and also prostituted his daughters to them.⁶² Grocer Régis Huard from Fourmies spoke German very well, had close connections with German officers, denounced compatriots, but also sold goods to the population while selling butter to the Germans; he was signalled by his repatriated mistress, but the author of the report stated that she seemed sincere in her declarations.⁶³ Such men supplying the Germans and the wider population in some manner alleviated the harsh conditions of occupied life, even if they profited financially from this. These individuals were nevertheless criticised by many compatriots and perceived as criminals, discussed in Chapter 5.

In a rare avowal, M. Devillers from Gouzeaucourt claimed that he had been evacuated to La Longueville and ‘had been forced by German gendarmes from this locality to go and withdraw, for their personal consumption, food and other goods from the American Comité de Ravitaillement. M. Habille, a teacher charged with these distributions, and the Mayor himself knew about this subterfuge and closed their eyes.’⁶⁴ Similarly, mayors or members of municipalities or provisioning committees were also believed to have been involved in commercial misconduct: the Mayors of Valenciennes, Hautmont, the Adjunct Mayor of Saint-Amand and a member of the Comité de Ravitaillement from Lille were all denounced for this in repatriation testimony.⁶⁵

Conversely, diaries are largely silent on commercial misconduct, with some exceptions. Hirsch recorded in January 1917 that the Allied blockade meant that Germans in Maubeuge had started to buy bread from civilians.⁶⁶ Given that he lived in Roubaix, this information likely comprises hearsay. Blin, writing about Roubaix, hinted at commercial misconduct twice. In April 1915, he drew a connection between financial relations and patriotism: ‘Oh! These shopkeepers! For them, particularly, money has no *patrie*: Would you like some sauerkraut from Strasbourg?’ By September 1917, commercial motives had led to commonplace and, for him, disgusting behaviour:

‘Earn money, lots of money’ is, at this time, people’s obsession. Smuggling, *ravitaillement*, clandestine commerce; everything goes to achieve this. Base behaviours no longer carry weight, moral integrity is dead. It is up to each

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person to empty the pockets of others to fill his/her own. Everything is inverted and perverted; conscience has become the science of mercantilism; conquered country, rotten country.⁶⁷

This suggests that commercial misconduct increased as the occupation continued. Blin was not the only one to object to these behaviours, which were targeted in the clandestine tract *La Liberté*, which appeared in Lille-Roubaix-Tourcoing in November 1915. It contained a lengthy article entitled ‘THE MONEY CHANGERS!’ that began by asking: ‘What to say about these Belgians and French people, these pseudo-Belgians and pseudo-French people, who for months have engaged in the exchange of gold and French paper money for the Germans?’ It continued to speak of ‘their criminal indignity and rapaciousness’, calling them ‘traitors’ and ‘criminals, the worst criminals’ because they provide the Germans with ‘impure metal from which our brothers and sons will possibly die’ or money with which Germany ‘will kill thousands and thousands of our soldiers’. The publication called on the population to desert and boycott the offices of money changers, before concluding:

You are French people, Belgians; they are the worst sell-outs!

But let them watch out for national vengeance. The real patriots watch and document. When the moment comes, they will denounce in the full light of day the bandits who exchange the national wealth for their own profit, for the enemy’s profit. Whether they are bankers or manufacturers[,] cabaret owners or wood-turners, brokers or owners of houses of ill repute, we will pillory them, they and their firms, so that it will not be said that France and the Republic, once the great ordeal has passed, have pushed imprudence and folly so much that they open their arms and heart to the brigands who cash in when their real sons suffered and hoped.

Down with those who sell out the *patrie*!⁶⁸

Outrage at commercial misconduct is understandable: selling or providing goods to the occupiers, or exchanging money with the Germans, comprised *commerce avec l’ennemi* but also deprived locals of much-needed resources. This also explains why *La Liberté*’s prediction was partly true, as detailed investigations were carried out into a few specific allegations of this type of behaviour.

In Catillon-sur-Sambre, mentioned above, the Secretary to the Mayor and Adjunct to the Mayor were arrested, charged with intelligence and commerce with the enemy, including increasing the price of CRB goods and keeping the profit, stealing CRB goods, forgery, use of false documents, swindling and embezzlement.⁶⁹ The key figures in the mayoral

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administration of Râches were likewise accused of engaging in such misconduct.⁷⁰ In Bousois, the Mayor was said to have allowed CRB flour to be used to bake bread for the Germans, contravening international law.⁷¹ According to French military intelligence, in Denain two men constantly exchanged goods with the Germans, making large profits.⁷² In Le Cateau, the former mayor was involved in an 'active cheese trade' with the Germans!⁷³ In Valenciennes, four shopkeepers/food suppliers were engaged in similar activities and were subsequently met with disdain by their compatriots who resented them for giving the Germans what little foodstuffs were available. Both the locals and the French intelligence officer writing the report noted that these men 'deserved to be punished'.⁷⁴ Indeed, two of these men bought wine from the Germans and resold it at a higher price to already poor civilians.⁷⁵ Other such examples exist.⁷⁶

In the Cour d'Assises du Nord, just five men were punished for commerce with the enemy after the war. Louis Bonvarlet from Lille was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment in 1921 for 'serving as a tout for gold and money to the benefit of German *bureaux de change*'.⁷⁷ Adolphe Lamourette from Templeuve had been a German agent and indicator in 1917–18, and in 1917 had provided 'help and money' to the Germans by visiting compatriots who were hiding gold then denouncing them to the Germans.⁷⁸ Paul Duez both made sandbags for the Germans and provided them with weapons and aid in Roubaix in January–June 1915.⁷⁹ Alex Balieu provided the Germans with provisions and food in Avesnes, Valenciennes, Cambrai and Belgium from 1915 to 1918.⁸⁰ Finally, in Avesnes, Jules Bourlion had become 'a veritable agent of the Germans' from 1915–18: as well as denouncing individuals and providing military information to the Germans, he also bought wood for them from Mormal forest.⁸¹ Bourlion in fact appeared in three repatriation reports in February 1917, with his name mistakenly recorded as 'Burillon' and 'Burion'; he was denounced every time for commercial relations and his familiarity with the Germans.⁸² A similar confirmation of a repatriation denunciation came with the verdict for one of the rare women found guilty of commerce with the Germans: Mme Patoir, a widow from Valenciennes.⁸³ This suggests that at least some repatriation testimony was true, and that commercial misconduct was easier to prove than other forms.

Reflections on misconduct

Misconduct was perceived as existing in male and female forms, conflating personal immorality with patriotic perversion. The *occupés* were

permanently suspicious of each other – as the Allied authorities were of the *occupés* themselves – with many seeing any sign of goodwill towards the Germans as a marker of deeper compromise and anti-patriotic tendencies. The dominant occupied culture condemned any breaches of respectable, patriotic social relations, of wartime norms dictating that the enemy must be hated. Of course, not everyone bought into this world view or criticised others, not least those engaging in misconduct. A certain degree of familiarity, fraternisation and accommodation was inevitable, and there are sources attesting to the normalisation of this experience among some locals. However, the frequency and strength of criticisms of perceived misconduct cannot be ignored, and these continued throughout the occupation; this overshadows rarer evidence for eventual acceptance or resignation regarding forced or voluntary interactions with Germans. Thus, while criticisms of misconduct only reflect one part of occupied life, it is an important part that is extremely visible to the historian – and this a central aspect of the occupied culture proposed here.

If the number of men suspected of such behaviours was small, this is in part explained by the lower male population during the occupation; on the other hand, the proportion of men convicted after 1918 was comparatively high given this demographic deficit, even if the overall number remained low. The fact that most men were in positions of authority during the occupation often brought a political or differently symbolic understanding of their breaches of expected norms. This explains both the phenomenon of post-war denunciations and the seriousness with which Allied authorities dealt with the attendant investigations and trials. Ultimately, male misconduct was overshadowed during the occupation and afterwards by the obsession with *femmes à Boches*; certain women in the largely female occupied Nord were understood to have betrayed their brothers, fathers, husbands or sons at the front by their sexual relations with the national enemy. Their treason, like their occupied life, was highly gendered.

The reality of misconduct is hard to gauge, especially in light of the problematic sources that allow us to glimpse this phenomenon. As Sheila Fitzpatrick notes, Diderot's encyclopaedia states that 'One is inclined to think that the delator is a corrupt man, the accuser an angry man, and the denouncer an indignant man.'⁸⁴ Yet this does not mean that all denunciations, or indeed accusatory witness testimonies and mentions of misconduct, are inherently false. There was truth behind at least some of the denunciations, accusations and witness testimonies

studied in the past three chapters; perhaps a greater truth than has previously been present in accounts of this occupation. Misconduct did genuinely occur, as the post-war trials demonstrate – even if their limited numbers suggest that the extent of the phenomenon, legally defined, was small. Perhaps this was precisely the aim of such trials, because the evidence examined here hints at widespread misconduct in the Nord. At the very least, there was an undeniable fixation with misconduct among both the Allied authorities and many *occupés* themselves. For the latter, perceived breaches of the acceptable, respectable norms of war-time society comprised a betrayal which at best undermined the wider claims of dignified suffering and at worst threatened national survival. Both during and after the war, retribution and justice were demanded concerning those ostensibly engaging in such unrespectable actions. However, there were other behaviours carried out by certain *occupés* that similarly undermined the notion of dignified suffering, and which are worthy of further investigation. Two key examples were expressions of disunity among the French, and engaging in criminal activities – the subjects of the next two chapters.

Notes

- 1 Philippe Nivet, *La France occupée 1914–1918* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2011), pp. 395–8.
- 2 ADN, 9R1193 and 9R1229, liberation reports into suspect occupation behaviour.
- 3 The six are: ADN, 9R1193, Crèvecœur-sur-l’Escaut, Denain, Fourmies, Gognies, Neuville-en-Ferrain, and ADN, 9R1229, Catillon.
- 4 ADN, 9R1197, Eccles, procès-verbal, Force spéciale de gendarmerie attachée à l’Armée britannique, Leydet, 14 November 1918 (henceforth listed as commune, name of investigator, report number when relevant, date). Testimony of M. Durand, ‘interprète attaché au 12e [Lançier] Anglais’.
- 5 Sheila Fitzpatrick and Robert Gellately, ‘Introduction to the practices of denunciation in modern European history’, *Journal of Modern History*, 68:4 (1996), p. 747.
- 6 Sheila Fitzpatrick, ‘Signals from below: Soviet letters of denunciation of the 1930s’, *Journal of Modern History*, 68:4 (1996), p. 831. In sources on the Nord, *délation* is rarely used, with *dénonciation* and *dénoncer* used to express both occupation *délation* and post-war *dénonciation*.
- 7 ADN, 9R1193, Saint-Rémy-Chaussée, Affaire Lescaillez, Petition from the inhabitants of Saint-Rémy-Chaussée to Monsieur le Général Commandant la mission française attachée à l’armée britannique, 11 January 1919. Original emphasis.

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- 8 ADN, 9R1193, petition, 11 January 1919. Original emphasis.
- 9 ADN, 9R1193, Saint-Rémy-Chaussée, Affaire Lescaillez, procès-verbal, Gendarmerie nationale, Vernet, 24 March 1919 (henceforth listed as commune, name of investigator, report number when relevant, date). Statement of M. Raviart.
- 10 Sébastien Debarge, 'Fourmies occupée pendant la Grande Guerre', *Revue du Nord*, 80:325 (1998), p. 292.
- 11 ADN, 9R1193, Saint-Rémy-Chaussée, Affaire Lescaillez, procès-verbal, Vernet, 24 March 1919; statement of M. Raviart.
- 12 ADN, 9R1193, Saint-Rémy-Chaussée, Affaire Lescaillez, procès-verbal, 12 April 1919; statement of M. Bernier.
- 13 ADN, 9R1193, Saint-Rémy-Chaussée, Affaire Lescaillez, procès-verbal, Vernet and Hudault, 12 April 1919; statement of M. Lescaillez.
- 14 ADN, 9R1193, Saint-Rémy-Chaussée, Affaire Lescaillez, procès-verbal, handwritten note, n.a., n.d.
- 15 ADN, 9R1193, Saint-Rémy-Chaussée, Affaire Lescaillez, procès-verbal, Bachy, Commissaire Spécial de Lille to Préfet, 11 August 1919.
- 16 Fitzpatrick, 'Signals from Below', p. 863.
- 17 ADN, 9R1193, Crèvecœur-sur-l'Escaut, Mayor to Sous-Préfet of Cambrai, 5 October 1919, original emphasis.
- 18 ADN, 9R1193, Crèvecœur-sur-l'Escaut, Sous-Préfet of Cambrai to Préfet, 17 October 1919.
- 19 ADN, 9R1229, Comines, Procès-verbal, Biarnais, no. 77, 4 July 1919; statement of M. Lesaffre.
- 20 ADN, 9R1229, Ligny-en-Cambrésis, 'Extrait du Registre aux Délibérations du Conseil Municipal de la Commune de Ligny-en-Cambrésis', session of 10 July 1920.
- 21 ADN, 9R1229, Inspecteur de l'Enseignement Primaire of Cambrai to Directeur Départemental, 19 August 1920.
- 22 ADN, 9R1193, Bachy, petition to Delugé Préfectoral, 20 July 1919; petition to Commandant de Place de Bachy, n.d.; petition to Président du Conseil Ministère de l'Intérieur [sic], 27 May 1919; report, Rossey, 29 July 1918; ADN, 9R1229, Râches, procès-verbal, Déburcaus and Hatte, 17 February 1919.
- 23 ADN, 9R1193, typewritten document summarising chronology of Affaire Delphien, n.a., n.d.
- 24 ADN, 9R1193, Denain, Préfet to Général Commandant, 1^{er} Corps d'Armée, 2 October 1919.
- 25 ADN, 9R1193, Sous-Préfet of Valenciennes to Préfet, 23 September 1919.
- 26 ADN, 9R1193, typewritten document, n.a., n.d.
- 27 David Englander, 'The French Soldier, 1914–18', *French History*, 1:1 (1987), p. 65.

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- 28 ADN, 9R1129, Mons-en-Pévèle, Césaire Lemaire to Préfet, 27 April 1919.
- 29 ADN, 9R1193, Crèvecœur-sur-l'Escaut, postcard to Préfet, stamped 31 July 1919, original emphasis.
- 30 ADN, 9R1193, postcard to Ministre de l'Intérieur, stamped 12 July 1919.
- 31 ADN, 9R1229, Marcq-en-Barœul, Commissaire de Police to Préfet, 13 September 1919.
- 32 ADN, 9R1229, Complainte dédiée au Maire de Marcq, first verse.
- 33 ADN, 9R1229, Complainte dédiée au Maire de Marcq, third verse.
- 34 ADN, 9R1229, Complainte dédiée au Maire de Marcq, nineteenth verse.
- 35 ADN, 9R1193, Fourmies, affaire Berteaux, seemingly secrétariat général du Comité du Ravitaillement des Régions Libérées to Préfet, 21 June 1919.
- 36 ADN, 9R1193, Fourmies, Lieutenant Gallissot to Préfet, 12 June 1919.
- 37 ADN, 9R1193, Fourmies, Lieutenant Gallissot to Préfet, 12 June 1919.
- 38 ADN, 9R1193, Fourmies, M. Droulers to Président du CANE, Brussels, 28 May 1919.
- 39 ADN, 9R1193, Fourmies, summary of the session of 27 April 1919 of the 'délégués régionaux de l'ancienne administration CRB réunis en l'Hôtel de Ville de VERVINS'.
- 40 *Ibid.* My emphasis.
- 41 ADN, 9R1193, Saint-Rémy-Chaussée, petition to the général commandant de la mission française attachée à l'armée britannique, 11 January 1919. See also ADN, 9R1193, Denain; ADN, 9R1229, Mons-en-Pévèle.
- 42 Eric Bukowski, 'Cambrai: une ville du Nord occupée lors de la Première Guerre mondiale', master's dissertation (Lille III, 1986), p. 60.
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- 45 ADN, 9R1193, Neuville-en-Ferrain, Commissaire Spécial de Lille to Préfet, 21 June 1919.
- 46 ADN, 9R1229, Catillon, Commissaire Divisionnaire, Chef de la 2e Brigade de Police to Procureur de la République, 28 April 1919.
- 47 Renée Martinage, 'Les collaborateurs devant la cour d'assises du Nord après la très Grande Guerre', *Revue du Nord*, 77:309 (1995), 95–115.
- 48 Robert Vandenbussche, 'Le pouvoir municipal à Douai sous l'occupation (1914–1918)', *Revue du Nord*, 61:241 (1979), p. 445.
- 49 USNA, Record Group 120, Entry 198, I(b) 283, 2 July 1918.
- 50 USNA, Record Group 120, Entry 198, I(b) 349, 7 October 1918.
- 51 See also Philippe Salson, *L'Aisne occupée: Les civils dans la Grande Guerre* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2015), pp. 237–53; Nivet, *La France occupée*, p. 295; Gromaire, *L'Occupation allemande*, p. 171.
- 52 ADHS, 4M513.

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- 53 USNA, Record Group 120, Entry 198, I(b) 290, 12 July 1918.
54 USNA, Record Group 120, Entry 198, I(b) 316, 5 August 1918.
55 See, for example, ADHS, 4M513, repatriation report no. 476, 12 January 1917 (Escarmain).
56 ADHS, 4M513, *passim*.
57 ADHS, 4M513, reports no. 476, 12 January 1917.
58 ADHS, 4M513, report no. 723, 13 February 1917.
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60 ADHS, 4M513, report no. 759, 17 February 1917.
61 ADHS, 4M513, report no. 1263, 27 April 1917.
62 ADHS, 4M513, report no. 1075, 21 March 1917.
63 ADHS, 4M513, report no. 834, 28 February 1917.
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65 ADHS, 4M513, reports no. 728, 13 February 1917; no. 532, 19 January 1917; 22 March 1917; no. 1203, 24 April 1917.
66 Annette Becker (ed.), *Journaux de combattants et de civils de la France du Nord dans la Grande Guerre* (Lille: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 1998), Hirsch diary, 5 January 1917, p. 268.
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72 SHD, 19N1571, X Armée, Deuxième Bureau, 'Fiches de Renseignements sur les Pays envahis par l'ennemi 1914–1916 et sans date', Carton 423, Région du Front – Zone ouest à l'ouest de l'Oise, Denain, Habitants suspects.
73 SHD, 19N1571, Canton de Le Cateau [sic], Commune de Bazeul, suspect.
74 SHD, 17N433, Mission française attachée à la 4^e Armée Britannique, Commissaire Spécial Mollex, procès-verbal no. 397, 3 March 1918.
75 *Ibid.*
76 See SHD, 17N433, *passim*; SHD, 19N1571 *passim*; ADHS, 4M513; ADN, 9R1193; ADN, 9R1229, *passim*.
77 ADN, 2U1/445, CAN, arrêt, no. 13, 17 January 1921.
78 ADN, 2U1/445, CAN, arrêt, 1 March 1921.
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80 ADN, 2U1/448, CAN, arrêt, 12 April 1924.
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- 83 AHDS, 4M513, report no. 780, 20 February 1917; ADN, 2U1/448, CAN, arrêt, 3 May 1924.
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