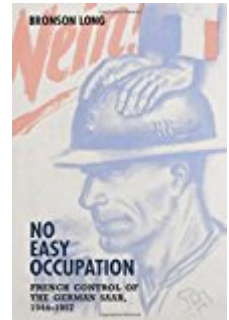


**Bronson Long.** *No Easy Occupation: French Control of the German Saar, 1944-1957.* Rochester: Camden House, 2015. 268 pp. \$90.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-57113-915-3.



**Reviewed by** Julia Wambach

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In *No Easy Occupation*, Bronson Long narrates the rise and fall of the French Saar from the first French claims on the Saar in 1944 to the return of the Saar to West Germany in 1957. Long's book is based on his dissertation submitted at Indiana University Bloomington and is divided into three parts: Part 1 deals with the French military occupation of the Saar between 1944 and 1947. Part 2, entitled "Nation-Making," describes French and Saarlanders efforts to build a separate Saar nation between 1947 and 1952. Finally, in part 3, Bronson depicts the years 1952 to 1957 around the pivotal moment of the referendum in 1955 when the Saarlanders rejected the Europeanization of the Saarland and, consequently, the continued French influence in the Saar. In 1957, the Saar became the tenth West German state in what was called the "Kleine Wiedervereinigung."

Why did France and the Francophile political elite in the Saar lose the territory in 1955? This is the central question Long asks in his book. Long considers the answer to be largely a question of politics, and not economics, as the recent German

literature on the Saar has claimed. [1] Thus, Long's thesis is that the French Saar failed because its political leaders had narrow-minded, wrongheaded ideas about Germany in general, and the Saar in particular, at the end of World War II (p. 9). Two officials, in particular, stand out in Long's book. On the one hand was Gilbert Grandval, French military governor of the Saar between 1945 and 1947, its high commissioner between 1948 and 1951, and finally France's ambassador from 1952 to 1955. On the other was Johannes Hoffmann, émigré during the Nazi period, chairman of the CVP (Christian People Party of the Saar) and between 1947 and 1955 the Saar's first prime minister. Long contends that these two leaders were overly anxious regarding renewed extreme German nationalism, which informed their attempts to de-Prussianize the Saar and detach it from the rest of Germany. Their efforts were unrealistic, asserts Long, because the dangers of renewed German aggression had passed. According to Long, French and West German politicians like Robert Schuman or Konrad Ade-

nauer had much more forward-looking visions for the Saar based on French and German reconciliation, European integration, and the context of the developing Cold War. Those different conceptions of the Saar in Paris and Saarbrücken (and to a certain extent in Bonn) often led to contradictory policies in the Saar. Long asserts that the main problem was the French use of a rhetoric of independence on the one hand but a tight control of the Saarland on the other. Thus French dominance felt increasingly oppressive and colonial to the Saarlanders. According to Long, this is why the leaders of the Saar lost the referendum in 1955, making way for a return of the Saar to Germany. With the Saar conflict resolved, Schuman and Adenauer, however, pursued the path of French and German reconciliation as well as European integration.

Part 1, covering the years 1944 to 1946, presents the historical and economic interests driving the French interest in the Saar. Historically, it had been part of Napoleonic France, and the French had governed the Saar again between 1920 and 1935 under a mandate from the League of Nations. The Saar as a separate territory was a creation of the Versailles System, while most of the territory had belonged to the Prussian “Rhein-provinz” up to the end of World War I. Economically, just like after World War I, the French claimed the Saar in 1944/1945 because they needed its coal and steel resources as reparations for their war-torn economy. Once it was in the hands of the French, Governor Grandval pursued a policy of de-Prussianization, notably with regard to education, religion, and sports: he re-established confessional schools, opened a French lycée, and founded a medical school in Homburg to train doctors for the Saar. French-language acquisition was promoted for old and young, while local soccer teams were to promote a sense of belonging. In order to expunge the Prussian and Nazi elements out of the Saar, Grandval even expelled (albeit temporarily) former Nazis from the territory.

The political elite of the Saar backed Governor Grandval. This elite consisted of many émigrés who had fled Germany after the 1935 Saar referendum that had returned the Saar to Nazi Germany. Among these Francophile émigrés, many went so far as to support a French annexation of the Saar. For the first time since the start of the French occupation, the population of the Saar seemed very favorable to the French presence. Long mentions, for example, the French days in May 1946, when 120,000 Saarlanders, a tenth of the population, celebrated the French roots of the Saarland. Long contends that this embrace of the French Saar was based on economic factors (pp. 51-52).

In part 2, Long covers the years 1947 to 1952 when the French administration around Governor Grandval and his allies in the Saar’s political elite tried to sever ties to Germany and further associate the Saar with France. In November 1947, the *Landtag* approved a Saar constitution, which laid down its independence from Germany and economic attachment to France. The currency became the franc; the customs border to France was dropped; the Saarlanders had their own Saar citizenship, a flag, and a national anthem; and they celebrated Bastille Day. Despite the Saarland’s autonomy, the French remained in control of the mines and High Commissioner Grandval held extensive powers over the police and the French army that remained on the territory. He could veto the *Landtag* and pass laws regulating the economy. Therefore, Long concludes that the French established a protectorate under the guise of an independent state and took over the rule of the Saar from the Prussians whose influence they wished to combat (p. 92).

In this second part of the book, Long takes up the three areas of everyday life, mentioned in part 1, in which the French sought to separate the Saar from Germany: education, religion, and sports. The most successful was education: the founding of the Saar University of Saarbrücken in

1948 ensured that young Saarlanders did not have to go to Germany to pursue secondary studies. As in the 1920s, the French also tried to establish a separate Saar bishopric but failed again to do so. This was due, on the one hand, to the resistance of Bishop Bornewasser of Trier whose diocese included the territory of the Saar and who had already in the 1920s successfully fought for the Saar to remain in his diocese. On the other hand, the Vatican was reluctant to establish a separate Saar diocese.

I found most refreshing Long's subchapter on sports, which specifically examines soccer. Long describes Grandval's efforts to include Saar teams, in particular the successful FC Saarbrücken, in the French instead of the German soccer league. Interestingly, the French soccer association, as well as Robert Schuman, the French foreign minister, refused to include FC Saarbrücken. This was due to the notable hostility of the teams in eastern France, formerly German-occupied Alsace and Lorraine. Another reason was that FC Saarbrücken was a very good team and the thought of a Saar team winning the French championship seemed inconceivable to the French soccer federation. This anecdote sheds light on an aspect that Long neglects to analyze, but which would perhaps relativize his harsh judgment of Grandval, Hoffmann, and the Francophile Saar elite: the French did not want to integrate the Saar into the metropole.

Long ends this second part of the book by introducing two major dynamics of the early 1950s, which would later be decisive for the 1955 referendum. The first is the role of an independent Saar in the context of the European Institutions, such as the European Coal and Steel Community or the European Defense Community. Many Saarlanders saw their future as bound up in these transnational institutions rather than in the nation-state. But Long also shows that the balancing act between an independent Saar state and one under French control, which was increasingly felt

as oppressive, led to the growth of pro-German groups. The latter groups, whose leaders had already been opponents of the 1935 Saar referendum, favored a return of the Saar to West Germany.

Part 3 addresses the years 1952 to 1957, when the contradictions of French rule on the Saar became apparent. Long regards French cultural politics as a failure: Saarlanders increasingly critiqued the new French education system and in particular the early foreign-language education for their children. Saarlanders arrived in elementary school without sufficient standard German and were already forced to learn French. The plan to create a separate Saar diocese failed permanently and relations with a new bishop of Trier were still tense. FC Saarbrücken became a member of the German soccer league, but the Saar participated in the World Cup of 1954 with a separate team (from my perspective a major achievement of Grandval) although the Saarlanders cheered for West Germany after their own team was eliminated in the preliminary round. The Saarlanders did not identify with the new Saar state, concludes Long, because it was "a state without a nation." (p. 182).

Long then turns to the idea of making the Saar a European territory to the council of Europe, a move to preserve the independence of the Saar from Germany. The so-called Van Naters plan built upon the idea of a European District of Columbia that would make the Saar the headquarters of the Council of Europe, the European Coal and Steel Community, and the European Defense Community, under the leadership of a neutral commissioner. This plan required ratification by the Saarlanders, hence the referendum of 1955. While it first appeared as if the Saarlanders would overwhelmingly support Europeanization, the tide turned and 67.7 percent of the Saarlanders rejected this European Saar statute. While the German historiography on the referendum has underlined the cultural Germanness of the

Saarlanders, Long interprets the rejection of the referendum as primarily anti-French. He argues that besides the failure to forge cultural ties to the Saar nation, the economic situation of West Germany looked much more advantageous to the Saarlanders than France. The Saarlanders feared that Europeanization of their territory would only mean continued French dominance. Interestingly, Long asserts that the Saarlanders were also afraid of being drafted for the French colonial wars. At the same time, pro-German parties, allied to a “*Heimatbund*,” ran a verbally violent campaign against the Saar’s prime minister, heavily attacking him as “separatist” and a French puppet. The Catholic Church supported the *Heimatbund* in their rejection of Europeanization. After the lost referendum, former CVP supporters feared for their jobs, and politically motivated persecution by the new Saar government did happen in form of fines and suspension. Long, unfortunately, only mentions this in passing. He also does not further analyze the clashes between pro-Germans and Saar police during the campaign, even though he mentions it at the very beginning of his book to catch the reader’s attention. Long makes a valid point about the referendum as, most importantly, directed against France, but downplays the significance of the pro-German propaganda that explicitly took up the songs, and some of the rhetoric, of the 1935 pro-German campaign. One wonders if this in a way legitimated Grandval’s and Hoffmann’s concerns about the true nature of the Saarlanders.

The Saar returned to Germany in 1957 in exchange for wide-ranging economic concessions to France. The customs border fell in 1959 and the Saarlanders took over the deutsche mark in the same year. The solution to the Saar problem ultimately rested in the hands of France and Germany, concludes Long, not in those of the Saar. France and Germany continued their path to a unified Europe and in 1963 institutionalized their state friendship with the Elysée Treaty, which they reached, Long argues, because of the settle-

ment they had reached over the Saar. The Saar, however, faced economic decline over the next decades and Saarbrücken missed the chance to become a European center such as Strasbourg, Luxembourg, or Brussels.

With *No Easy Occupation*, Long brings the history of the French Saar to the English-speaking world—sixty years after the Saar referendum. He uses archival material in German and French, mostly from the French Foreign Office as well as from the local archives in Saarbrücken, while consulting few German sources outside of the Saar. Additionally, Long used a variety of private papers of the major protagonists from France, the Saar, and Germany. The German reader, however, can access many of his findings from the existing literature on the topic, which Long often cites, notably Armin Heinen’s *Saarjahre Politik und Wirtschaft im Saarland 1945-1955*. Long’s books could have been more carefully edited: city names are misspelled in places, while the list entitled “published sources” is actually the bibliography. At the end of Long’s book, the reader is left wondering about its title. Why is the Saar no easy occupation? Is the Saar between 1944 and 1957 under French occupation similar to the German territory just to the east? Or is it a French colonial style protectorate like Morocco, or perhaps an independent state? And finally, is there such a thing as an easy occupation?

But Long’s book manages to evoke the reader’s interest in this little territory in the southwest of Germany as he describes the complexity of its history. The story of the Saarland between 1944 and 1957 thus contributes to the history of borderlands, French colonialism, German state building, and nationalism, as well as to the history of Europeanization in the wake of World War II. It is reassuring in the current crisis of the European Union that even a failed referendum in the Saar in 1955 incited contemporaries to seek new solutions. It did not hinder the peaceful development

of a European community that today is so often taken for granted.

Note

[1]. Long mentions notably Armin Heinen's Saarjahre *Politik und Wirtschaft im Saarland 1945-1955* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1996).

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