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# Border Temporalities of an Old Letter: A Hermeneutic Interpretation of Cross-Border Veteran Welfare

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*The article uses the concept of border temporalities to offer a hermeneutic interpretation of an old letter containing a request from a cross-border female migrant from Luxembourg to access French welfare benefits. In doing so, it systematically unravels the way in which time was lived and experienced differently by borderland residents as opposed to French lawmakers. The alternative temporality characterizing the third space of the Luxembourgian-German-French borderlands clashed with the spatio-temporal hierarchy imposed by France in the period after the First World War to exclude the majority of people living abroad from access to social provision. The article concludes its hermeneutic circle with a reflection on how historical research on borders and borderlands is conditioned by the temporality of archives and the temporality of research funding.*

Keywords: Luxembourg; France; Germany; hermeneutics; welfare; veterans; First World War.

## Introduction

On May 22, 1922, an advisor to the Luxembourgian government working in the Department of Foreign Affairs wrote a letter to Armand Mollard, the French Ambassador in Luxembourg.<sup>1</sup> He presented the case of Emile Klein, a soldier from Luxembourg who had died from an illness caused by his military service in the French Foreign Legion towards the end of the First World War, on October 10, 1918, and whose father had applied to French administration to receive financial compensation.<sup>2</sup> The French government indeed offered ascendants of soldiers financial compensation for the loss of their sons. In addition, they could also receive a war pension if they fulfilled certain conditions.

The old letter provides information about three different interpretations of one of these conditions: that of the French Ambassador, the advisor, and the mother of Emile Klein. In the old letter, the advisor to the Luxembourgian government included how Angèle Schmit, the mother of Emile Klein, had introduced him to the case of her son. At the time, welfare applications were filled in and signed by husbands, but although laws and state bureaucracy had made Angèle Schmit invisible as a woman throughout the application procedure for financial compensation, she created a role for herself by visiting the advisor to the Luxembourgian government and expressing her opinion. As the researcher collective

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Mnemo Zin recently observed, archival sources are written according to "predefined categories to institute a particular imaginary of society", and in so doing "they leave parts of the population—women [...]—unable to shape the archived content even when this content relates to and impacts their immediate lives" (2024). The old letter offers us a rare insight into the thoughts of a married woman and mother.

According to French law, an ascendant could only be granted a war pension if (s)he did not hold the citizenship of a country France had been at war with between 1914 and 1918. The fundamental question was whether the parents of Emile Klein were German citizens. As derivative citizenship within marriage automatically granted women the same citizenship as that of their husbands, authorities were only interested in the citizenship status of Emile's father (Venken 2010, 57). The advisor believed that Jean Klein had to be considered as stateless and was, therefore, eligible for the pension. The French Ambassador was more inclined to conclude that, given that Jean Klein had never applied for and received Luxembourgian citizenship, he should still be considered a German national.<sup>3</sup> Jean Klein's wife, in turn, advocated for a broader temporal framework for interpretation. Angèle Schmit highlighted that Jean Klein's great-grandfather was a Luxembourgian national who departed Luxembourg to enlist in Napoleon Bonaparte's army. She cited this aspect of the Klein family history, among others, to argue against the classification of Jean Klein as a German citizen by French authorities.

This article argues that the three viewpoints resulted from different interpretations of the multiple temporalities at play in the borderlands where the Klein family lived. The different understandings of how time was experienced caused Emile Klein's case to remain unresolved for at least three and a half years, despite the fact that the Luxembourgian negotiator clearly documented that the case was urgent,<sup>4</sup> and maybe even longer, as the documentation after May 1922 was never compiled, preserved, or traced by historians.

The article demonstrates how the human-made creation and adjustment of inclusion and exclusion criteria for accessing welfare benefits was a way of controlling, regulating, and limiting their transfer across national borders. It uses the concept of border temporalities to offer a hermeneutic interpretation of the old letter requesting access to welfare benefits. The purpose of a hermeneutic interpretation, as Jens Zimmermann wrote, "is to make sense of a text or situation, to understand what they mean"; "understanding is knowledge in the deeper sense of grasping not just facts but their integration into a meaningful whole" (Zimmermann 2015, 1-2). Hermeneutics, originating from the Greek "hermeneuo", denoting "to interpret" or "to explain", encompasses a broader scope than sole literal analysis. It entails delving into profound layers of also potential

meaning and grasping the contextual backdrop in which a text emerged and was preserved. In this article, an understanding of the old letter is attained by unravelling how multiple temporalities interplayed or clashed when documentation was compiled, both between 1919 and 1922 and over time, preserved in archives, and consulted for historical purposes.

The concept of border temporalities is composed of the words "border" and "temporalities". Hoy defines temporality as "time insofar as it manifests itself in human existence" (2009, xiii). This description makes it possible to analyse temporalities through an interpretation of "accounts" of what has been called "lived time" or "human temporality"—hence, "the time of our lives" (Hoy 2009, xiii). In this article, a border is conceptualized as the spatial and societal consequence arising from the delineation of inclusion and exclusion measures of welfare beneficiaries as encoded in French national law. These measures are considered human-made activities of bordering. Henk van Houtum noted: "To create a border is essentially the creation of an Innerspace of reflection, a narcissian centripetal orientation, a truth in which one can find pleasure and ease [...] A border is an ideology that is believed in, with the walls acting as the fundament of the own temple [...] This active and vigorous understanding of the ontology of a border leads to an ambiguous picture of the supposedly limitless world. It could be argued that the stronger ideologically is believed in the utility and importance of the protection of what is seen as own, the greater the difference is made by the border" (2011, 50-51). The old letter is an example of a bordering activity serving to expose how division materialized within societal domains through engagements among state representatives and local residents across different tiers of decision-making.

Moreover, as Angèle Schmit argued in the old letter, the Luxembourgian-German-French geographical area stretching over 125 square kilometers where the Klein family lived for more than a century possessed a temporality of its own, distinct from the way in which time was perceived by lawmakers in France and Germany. In this article, the lived borderland space of the Klein family is understood as a third space (Bhabha 2005), known to us through references in archival documents pointing at "the space in-between, interstitial, liminal space and hybridity that evoke the in-between of culture, space, temporality, language, identity, and the gap within translation" (van der Haagen-Wulff 2015, 382). It will be demonstrated that Angèle Schmit used the composition and distribution of the old letter as a "struggle for agency and cultural signification within multivalent spatial-temporal hierarchies", causing "a space-time capsule of cultural intermingling" in which "established cultural signs and their corresponding symbols are subsequently undressed and redressed to form new hybrid manifestations of cultural articulation" (van der Haagen-Wulff 2015, 384).

Research has mostly focused on what Little specified as thinking beyond "the widely accepted notion that borders change over the course of time" and investigating "the nature and implications of that change across different bordering practices", thereby stressing "the disorderly manner and the uneven tempo in which change takes place in the real world" (2015, 431). Alena Pfoser goes a step further in calling for an analysis of the multiple "temporal orders that are put forward by borderworkers" (Pfoser 2022, 581). As also demonstrated by Madeleine Hurd, Donnan Hastings, and Carolin Leutloff-Grandits, "[v]arious understandings of the past, present and future may overlap, compete, synchronise, or supplement each other at a given moment" (Hurd et al. 2017, 4). Those who crossed state border lines or witnessed their old state border lines changing course have been particularly exposed to different understandings of time and space: "[i]maged futures coexist with lived presents, with people navigating different temporal regimes across the course of the day in a bordered space of parallel and multiple temporalities" (Hurd et al. 2017, 4). To unravel the complexity of space and time, Chiara Brambilla argues that "researchers need an epistemological 'gaze' that, just like the lens of a kaleidoscope, is able to grasp the 'variations' of borders in space and time, transversally to different social, cultural, economic, legal, and historical settings crisscrossed by negotiations between a variety of different actors, and not only the State" (2015, 14-34).

This article systematically unravels the multiple temporalities of the old letter, ranging from those articulated in the letter itself and its historical contextualization to those related to its conservation and use in academic research. It indeed includes some of the most important components of a hermeneutic cycle of interpretation, such as a deep embedment of the analysis in the relevant historical and social cross-border context, an understanding of the different perspectives of the source creators, and an explicated dialogue of the author with the source through the exploration of also less explicit, inherent meanings (Shklar 2004). The article starts out discussing the temporality of cross-border migration by explaining how citizenship and migration were regulated and practised at different speeds before the letter was written in 1922. It then moves on to examine the temporality of veteran welfare, a post-war phenomenon provoked by the mass conscription of young men to military service during the First World War. This is followed by a look at how the French government used time as a tool to control the transfer of veteran benefits across France's border with Luxembourg. The article goes on to show how the narration of the lived time of the borderland Klein family in the old letter suggests that time was perceived differently from the spatio-temporal order constructed by French lawmakers. The last section includes a discussion of the temporality of archives, looking at how historical documents such as

the old letter were and are preserved for consultation in another time, as well as the temporality of academic research that produces new historical knowledge.

## The Temporality of Cross-Border Migration

Jean Klein was born as a German citizen in the vicinity of Wittlich, a German municipality 45 kilometers from the border with Luxembourg. As a young adult, he moved to the German municipality of Heinert, 50 kilometers to the south-west and eight kilometers from the border with Luxembourg, where he met and married the German citizen Angèle Schmit. In 1882, the family moved 14 kilometers north, crossed the German-Luxembourgian border, and settled in the Luxembourgian municipality of Mertert, situated on the Moselle River which separates Germany from Luxembourg. The family could cross the border without papers and settle without having to declare residence in Luxembourg. On May 17, 1895, their oldest son Emile Klein was born.<sup>5</sup> He travelled from Luxembourg to Charleville-Mézières in France to register as a volunteer for service in the French Foreign Legion on January 13, 1914.

Because the country did not possess its own army, such a career path was not uncommon for young men in Luxembourg. When the First World War broke out in August 1914 and the Luxembourgian authorities decided to steer a neutral course—but nevertheless tolerated the occupation of their country by German troops—enrolment in the French Foreign Legion became even more popular. The number of recruits from Luxembourg in the French Foreign Legion during the war is estimated at between 1,000 and 3,000, depending on whether Luxembourgian citizenship is used as a criterion in the counting. Many Luxembourgian recruits had already been working in France for many years and had exchanged their Luxembourgian citizenship for French citizenship. Moreover, at the beginning of the war, foreign recruits were given the option of applying for French citizenship (Sauer 2019, 66-79). Emile Klein died at the tail-end of the war, at the age of 23. When he died, his parents were still living in Mertert.<sup>6</sup>

The consequences of his death for his family were deeply affected by their migration trajectory and the citizenship status of Jean Klein, who was considered by authorities as the head of the family. Scholars such as Pamela Ballinger and Sabina Donati have already demonstrated how in borderlands, interactions across borders, fluid identities, and state authority and control intersect to produce unique citizenship practices and experiences (2018; 2013). Both Angèle Schmit and the advisor to the Luxembourgian government, as will be demonstrated in this article, proposed unique solutions to meet the needs of the Klein family, but the state authority of France seem to have denied alternative interpretations of its law.

As a German migrant family in Luxembourg, the Kleins had come to the attention of neither Luxembourgian nor German state authorities. Only 11 years after the family had crossed the border did the Luxembourgian government start to pass laws to control the influx of foreign workers. The Act of December 30, 1893, establishing the "Foreign Police" (*Police des étrangers*) and requiring any foreigners arriving in the country to declare their presence, was a device intended to identify the foreign population arriving on Luxembourgian soil.<sup>7</sup> Another law followed in 1913, specifying that foreigners wanting to settle in the country but lacking "sufficient means of subsistence for themselves and their family" or not possessing legal papers may be refused entrance to the country.<sup>8</sup> This may not have applied to Jean Klein, as the old letter stated that he had lived in Luxembourg since his arrival, "without interruption".<sup>9</sup> The Act of October 28, 1920 prescribed that all foreigners should have a passport issued by the authorities in their country as well as a visa from their representation in Luxembourg, but the documents were only checked at border crossing points.<sup>10</sup> In 1934, an identity card for foreigners was introduced, controlling the activities of foreigners who settled in Luxembourg through a two-year reapplication process at their place of residence.<sup>11</sup> However, in 1938, there were still German migrants who were unaware of these developments and did not possess any documents to legitimize their status.<sup>12</sup>

Prior to the unification of Germany in 1871, the area now recognized as Germany comprised a multitude of states with differing policies regarding citizenship and immigration. The process of unification mandated a uniform national strategy to accommodate the amalgamation of heterogeneous populations into the nascent German Empire. One example is a law passed in 1870, prescribing the automatic loss of citizenship after a German citizen had lived abroad for 10 years without re-entering Germany, but there was no procedure to systematically follow up the citizenship status of emigrants.<sup>13</sup> The German Empire also had a little-used procedure for citizens who wanted to renounce their German citizenship when or after they emigrated through the issuing of a *Heimatschein* (certificate of nationality).<sup>14</sup> Luxembourg had a similar law in place: those nationals who settled abroad without the intention to return ("*sans esprit de retour*") were no longer considered Luxembourgian.<sup>15</sup> However, it was not until 1913 that the German Nationality Law was enacted, establishing citizenship eligibility based on descent from German parents (Brubaker 2022, 114).

The question to be answered in 1922 was whether Jean Klein had lost his German citizenship 40 years after he had arrived in Luxembourg. The old letter claimed that he had lost his German citizenship because he had not crossed the German-Luxembourgian border after 1882, a statement that is somewhat difficult to believe for an inhabitant of Mertert. The question did not seem to

have been important for Jean Klein before his son died. He was most probably aware of the fact that he was not a Luxembourgian citizen because he had never actually applied for citizenship, nor was he eligible to participate in national elections or in the widely debated national referendum of 1919, which ultimately acknowledged the country's independence and the continuation of the monarchy after Grand Duchess Marie-Adelaide had ceded the throne to her sister Charlotte (Pauly 2011, 82-85). But was Jean Klein also aware of the fact that he may no longer have been a German citizen? Not many German emigrants knew that they automatically lost their citizenship after a certain period, probably because they never needed to actively prove their citizenship by showing their papers in Luxembourg.<sup>16</sup> When interviewed for the national census in Luxembourg, verbal declarations by foreigners about their citizenship status were still sufficient (Scuto 2012, 68). Additionally, if German migrants did not register with the German Consulate in Luxembourg to vote in the German elections—Luxembourgian authorities did not take the initiative to pass on the personal data of German foreigners to the German Consulate—they would never be confronted with the fact that they may have lost their citizenship.

We may wonder why Jean Klein did not apply for Luxembourgian citizenship. Although just over 50 people applied between 1914 and 1930, not a single naturalization was voted by the Luxembourgian parliament (Scuto 2012, 167). During the First World War, the reason was that Luxembourgian national authorities were confronted with a *de facto* occupation by German troops. After the war, the local population was divided over the kind of bilateral relationship the country should maintain with Germany. As the naturalization of German citizens was an obvious bone of contention, naturalizations were put on hold (Scuto 2012, 168). Other than the political right to vote in national elections, holding Luxembourgian citizenship did not significantly change the lives of inhabitants of Luxembourg. In contrast to the neighbouring countries, the Luxembourgian government played a minimal role in the provision of welfare for its citizens. Ruled by liberal and right-wing parties since 1839, the state continued to act like a philanthropist, only interested in pragmatically repairing the negative consequences of the liberal economy, often by means of one-off payments (Zahlen & Schoos 2009, 31-63; Dittrich 2022). Thus, like most other foreigners in Luxembourg, Jean Klein had never applied for Luxembourgian citizenship, as the chances of obtaining it were low and it would not have changed his life significantly.

Jean Klein lived in a borderland area in which many people's lives were characterized by migration experiences. Luxembourgian citizens had been moving out of their country in great numbers; at the beginning of the 20th century, out of a total population of 220,000 Luxembourgian citizens, an estimated 50,000 lived

abroad (22,000 in France, 15,000 in Germany, and 11,000 in Belgium) (Scuto 2012, 68; Roth 1978). In addition, foreigners were increasingly moving to Luxembourg. The foreign population increased from 33,000 in 1922 to 56,000 in 1930; the latter figure included 23,500 German citizens (Scuto 2012, 68). Germans could be found in various professions, ranging from the nobleman and property magnate Jean-Pierre Schuman (1837–1900)—the father of Robert Schuman (1886–1963), who would later become French Minister of Foreign Affairs—to workers in the steel industry and shepherds like Jean Klein (Erpelding 1984).

In sum, the experience of the Klein family shows how the German and Luxembourgian authorities were not yet aligned when it came to the regulation of cross-border migration. Both countries had regulations in place for emigrants to automatically lose their citizenship after a certain period, but there were no active measures to verify the status of emigrants. The Luxembourgian government had started to develop a control mechanism for the influx for migrants in 1893, but this did not affect the Klein family because they had arrived in Luxembourg much earlier, in 1882. It was only in 1934, when legislation was introduced stipulating that foreigners like Jean Klein had to apply for a foreign identity card at their place of residence—and to that end had to provide documentation from the German authorities indicating whether they still held German citizenship or had lost it—that a cross-border migration regime began to take shape.

### The Temporality of Veteran Welfare

During the First World War, it became painfully clear that social welfare systems were not sufficiently prepared to support the growing number of wounded and injured soldiers or the families of soldiers killed in the line of duty. The total warfare and mass conscription of the First World War had led to a huge number of veterans, creating a cohort on a completely different scale from those of previous wars. Support for needy veterans and their families was regulated by 19th-century laws, which provided a pension in line with what were, at the time, meagre standards of paternalistic poor relief without offering rehabilitation, and also included eligibility criteria that did not correspond to the injuries encountered in the first industrial war, such as exposure to gas warfare (Prost & Winter 2013, 19–20; Geyer et al. 1983, 234). In the aftermath of the war, states had to come to terms with the question of veterans and turn ad hoc wartime initiatives of social provision into a welfare system for veterans and their families. Their decisions, often provoked by pro-veteran mobilizations and negotiated with veteran representatives, widened the contours of social welfare to include men who had been disabled or injured because of military service, as well as the family members of deceased soldiers (Prost 1977; Cohen 2001). As a result, in many European

countries, the modern veteran was codified in legislation in the aftermath of the First World War.

In France, the contractual relationship between the French government and its veterans took the form of a set of laws, decrees, and rules. Already before the war, legislation provided that soldiers who were “the primary breadwinners for their families will be entitled at their request, in peacetime, to a daily government allowance while these young people are serving in the armed forces”.<sup>17</sup> Following mass mobilization, these provisions were extended for the duration of the war to a “daily allowance of 1.25 francs plus 50 centimes for each child under the age of sixteen dependent on the breadwinner”.<sup>18</sup> Although the law did not specify whether family members needed to reside in France, the de facto occupation of Luxembourg made it impossible for the French government to send money across the French-Luxembourgian border.

In the first half of 1919, three French laws were adopted specifying the financial compensation to be paid if a soldier died during military service, with the demobilization bonus depending on the soldier’s military rank and the criteria for pensions paid to veterans and their family members.<sup>19</sup> Before the laws were adopted, family members living in France could apply to receive an emergency advance payment (“*avance à titre de secours*”), also referred to as “immediate relief” (“*secours immédiat*”), of 150 French francs if the deceased or disabled soldier had been the primary breadwinner of the family and the family no longer had sufficient resources to support its needs.<sup>20</sup> Once the Pension Act was voted into law, granting between 400 and 800 French francs to ascendants each year, among other measures, the immediate financial support mechanism was no longer relevant for French citizens living in France. However, it took longer to make most (not all) veteran welfare provisions accessible to veterans of the Foreign Legion and their family members living abroad. The time it took to send money to another country meant that migrant families such as the Kleins needed support for longer; they could not claim veteran welfare in Luxembourg because the government did not see the need to legislate for benefits for veterans as the country did not have an army.

### The Temporality of Controlling Cross-Border Veteran Welfare

The French government used time to control access to or exclusion from its veteran welfare measures for certain people living outside France or with specific past experiences. It introduced a spatio-temporal hierarchy, creating differences between potential recipients of welfare based on geographical criteria as well as on a certain understanding of the past. I will describe the conditions under which French welfare

benefits could cross the French–Luxembourgian border, and respectively discuss financial compensation for deceased soldiers, demobilization bonuses for surviving soldiers, and war pensions for disabled veterans or family members of deceased veterans.

Financial compensation for deceased soldiers was paid to family members regardless of their place of residence before, during, and after the war. The father of Sébastien Kessler, for example, used the published announcement of the death of his son in the August 16, 1918 issue of the newspaper *Luxemburger Wort* in his application for financial compensation in spring 1919<sup>21</sup> and received 1,000 French francs in hand from a courier sent by the French Ambassador to Luxembourg in January 1920 (Sauer 2019, 66–79).<sup>22</sup> Jean Klein also received the same sum of money in January 1920.<sup>23</sup> The decree of February 1919 regulated the demobilization bonus for surviving soldiers of the French Army, and a subsequent decree adopted on September 20, 1920 retrospectively gave the same rights to soldiers who had served in the French Foreign Legion.<sup>24</sup>

The Pension Act, however, prescribed that a war pension could only be paid out under the following conditions: both the soldier and the family members had to be French citizens and had to be living in France before the First World War broke out, regardless of where they lived after the war. In addition, parents of deceased soldiers could not hold the citizenship of a country France had been at war with between 1914 and 1918.<sup>25</sup> As a result, a war pension could only be paid across the French–Luxembourgian border to veterans or family members of the French Army or the French Foreign Legion if they had French citizenship and had moved to Luxembourg after the war.<sup>26</sup> Most parents of deceased soldiers living in Luxembourg did not fulfil this criterion. The Luxembourgian Ambassador to France tried to negotiate a change, and wrote in July 1920 to war widow Weidig-Hermes in Hamm (Luxembourg):

The question of pensions for foreign war volunteers has not yet been approved by Parliament, but a request to assimilate them to the French has been submitted to the Chamber of Deputies and will be voted on shortly. In urgent cases, the French government grants emergency advance payments. I have been told that in specific cases this advance may also be granted to the beneficiaries of volunteers who died on the battlefield.<sup>27</sup>

The French immediate financial support measure for family members of deceased soldiers and disabled veterans was applicable in Luxembourg after the measure had become redundant in France, because it was accessible for descendants without French citizenship or without a French place of residence. Although family members could apply independently, many Luxembourgian family members sought the support of a Luxembourgian state official in their written requests

for financial support. A Luxembourgian government representative, for example, interviewed the father of deceased soldier Joseph Loeven, and explained: “Mr. and Mrs. Loeven-Rausch are in their seventies and own a modest plot of farmland and two cows. The head of the family also used to be a tailor by trade. As Mr Loeven was no longer able to practise his trade, the income from the arable land was not enough to support the old couple, who had no other wealth or income, and their son Joseph was their main breadwinner”. In January 1920, the ascendants received 150 French francs of welfare support.<sup>28</sup>

Although holding German citizenship did not automatically rule out the award of immediate financial support from the French government, the fact that French officials used it as a factor in the evaluation of Emile Klein’s case seems to indicate that it was a strategy to delay a response to the request. The fact that there was no conclusive decision on his citizenship status may have postponed and eventually potentially led to the dismissal of the application.<sup>29</sup> One restriction of the French Pension Act was lifted in 1921: those veterans or family members of deceased soldiers or disabled veterans who possessed Luxembourgian citizenship and had resided in France at the outbreak of the war were now entitled to a pension.<sup>30</sup> However, family members of deceased soldiers from the French Foreign Legion who had not been living in France in August 1914 would never be entitled to a war pension from the French government.<sup>31</sup> Laws in 1927, 1928, and 1929 increased the amount of financial support for ascendants, but applicants were still required to have resided in France before the First World War.<sup>32</sup>

To conclude, the inclusion and exclusion measures for social welfare benefits written into French law in 1919 were based on a re-evaluation of previous practices. These new criteria were contingent on the past situation of veterans and their families and were intended to justify the provision of assistance for them in the post-war period. But by preventing most ascendants from Luxembourg from claiming a war pension following the death of their sons during military service in the French Foreign Legion because they lived in Luxembourg before the war, they significantly reduced the amount of financial support channelled across the French–Luxembourgian border.<sup>33</sup>

## Border Temporalities

After she had waited three and a half years in vain for an answer from the French government, Emile Klein’s mother Angèle Schmit decided to meet an advisor to the Luxembourgian government and express her point of view. The letter written on May 22, 1922 documents how a state official moulded Angèle Schmit’s description of the temporality of her lived space into an administrative request to the French

government. The description of the migrant family's border temporality is juxtaposed with France's practice of using time as a technique to control and differentiate cross-border welfare. Angèle Schmit's rephrased words reveal the different experience of lived time in the German–French–Luxembourgian borderlands (Baud & Van Schendel 1997, 236).

Emile Klein's mother introduced two alternative temporalities. She started out by proposing a longer narration of Klein's family history. Emile Klein's father was indeed born in the German municipality of Wittlich as a German citizen, but his great-grandfather was born in the Luxembourgian municipality of Mamer. Although, formally, the French instructions did not provide for a family's more distant past to be taken into account for inclusion in the French war pension scheme, the letter presented the figure of Emile Klein's great-grandfather as a quintessential case. The man had left Luxembourg to join Napoleon's army, and after his contribution to France's defence, on his way back to Luxembourg, he had met a young woman in Wittlich, married her, and settled in the town of her birth. Under Luxembourgian law, citizens who emigrated and did not intend to come back lost their Luxembourgian citizenship.<sup>34</sup> Emile Klein's great-grandfather had therefore become a German citizen, and his grandfather and father had been born as German citizens.

Her second argument was that the German government had not considered her children as German citizens before or during the First World War. When Emile's older brother, born in Luxembourg in 1891, had turned 18, a secretary from the German municipality of Heinert wrote to him in Luxembourg saying that he was required to present himself for military service, but Jean Klein's response that the family had lived in Luxembourg without interruption since their emigration in 1882 was sufficient for the municipality to drop the case. The same argument was successfully used when Emile Klein's younger brother was called up for German military service by German troops in Luxembourg in 1915.

The letter also included the evaluation and recommendation of its writer, an advisor to the Luxembourgian government. He argued that the French authorities should use the same logic as the Germans: "It seems to follow that Jean Klein, the descendant of a Luxembourgian grandfather, possessed German citizenship but lost it as a result of his emigration from Germany in 1882. The same would apply to his children [...] so that in practice they should currently be considered as stateless".<sup>35</sup>

In the aftermath of the First World War, Luxembourgian government officials started to refer to certain individuals as stateless when negotiating their inclusion in or exclusion from social provisions with neighbouring countries. If a German citizen in Luxembourg, for

example, did not possess the financial means to support himself and relied on social welfare payments from Luxembourg, the Luxembourgian government would be reimbursed the costs of these payments by the German state.<sup>36</sup> Jean Klein was not a French citizen, but by declaring him stateless in the letter, the Luxembourgian advisor hoped that France would pay for the financial needs of Jean Klein and his family. The Luxembourgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs had an interest in requesting support for the parents from France, instead of them having to rely on social welfare payments from Luxembourg, since the German state would clearly not provide support because it had long ceased to consider Jean Klein's two other sons as German citizens.

## The Temporality of Archives

In the 2009 film *Angels and Demons*—based on the novel of the same name and presented as a sequel to the widely popular *The Da Vinci Code*, both written by Dan Brown—Professor Robert Langdon and scientist Vittoria Vetra enter the Vatican Archives where they immediately find Galileo's well-preserved original *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems* (*Dialogo sopra i due massimi sistemi del mondo*) and detect a secret code on a page of the book within a minute.<sup>37</sup> The depiction creates the impression that archives allow you to find whatever you need in a short period of time. Moreover, consulted documents are preserved in excellent condition and full disclosure is guaranteed. As Samantha Cross commented: "This is not true in any way, shape, or form, but it doesn't stop the film and tv industry from doing it because it'll look better on the big and small screens under more dramatic lighting" (Cross 2021).

The archival preservation of the old letter reveals a more complicated picture. Included in a file with collection number "AE-03698", entitled "Décès de volontaires luxembourgeois enrôlés dans l'armée française (Dossiers individuels) 1916-1929" (Deaths of Luxembourgian volunteers who enlisted in the French army (Individual files) 1916-1929), the letter is accompanied by applications for immediate financial support filed by the parents of another 46 soldiers who died during the First World War. These parents had family names ranging from the initial letters KE to RU, and it is unknown whether the applications of parents with family names beyond that range were ever preserved or were destroyed or lost over time. If we believe an archival source dating from 1921, the parents of these 47 soldiers represented about half of the ascendants of deceased soldiers of the French Foreign Legion living in Luxembourg and in need of support.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, the Luxembourgian authorities did not systematically document the responses of their French interlocutors, so we often do not know whether individual applications, including the one submitted

by Jean Klein and Angèle Schmit, were successful.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the fact that no paperwork from after 1924 is included in the file indicates that the cases had been administratively closed by that time.

Another complicating factor is that the inventory metadata for the archival file do not mention the names Emile Klein, Jean Klein, or Angèle Schmit; these names can only be found when consulting the archives on site. This cataloguing practice makes it difficult for researchers to trace information about cross-border migrants within Luxembourg and across national borders, as it requires the time-consuming consultation of multiple archival files with no guarantee that anything useful will be found. The National Archives of Luxembourg hosts a collection of more than a million files from the Foreign Police, containing the personal information of many foreigners who lived in Luxembourg, but I was unable to consult the personal file of Jean Klein as it no longer exists. Because I did not possess the birth date of Emile Klein's father, it took an archivist six weeks to find a trace of a Jean Klein in the collection. He found one file catalogued with the name of Jean Klein. Born on 1 August, 1869 in Dalstein (a village near Thionville in France which became part of Germany from 1871 to 1918 under the Treaty of Frankfurt), this Jean Klein was unmarried and did not live in Mertert during his time in Luxembourg.<sup>40</sup>

A final aspect that makes archival research difficult is the time limits for accessing archival documents in Luxembourg. Researching the history of cross-border welfare for the period after the Second World War, for example, is not currently possible. As Andreas Fickers recently stated: "The time limits for accessing archives laid down in the Luxembourgian Archives Act are by far the longest in Europe" (Archives Nationales de Luxembourg 2023). The 2018 Luxembourgian Act sets out these time limits as follows:

Fifty years from the date of the most recent document included in the file for public archives, one hundred years from the date of the most recent document included in the file for public archives that are covered by tax secrecy". In addition, "for information related to the private, family and professional life or financial situation of an individual, revealing ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs or trade union membership [...], either twenty-five years after the death of the person" or "seventy-five years from the date of the most recent document included in the file, if the date of death is not known or if researching the date of death would entail a disproportionate administrative effort."<sup>41</sup>

The Archives Act, as well as the archival practices of controlling which documents are selected for storage and which are destroyed (or lost), cataloguing the selected documents, and defining rules of access to inventories and documents strongly influenced

the choice of research topic and the way the topic is presented in this article. The article concentrates on the early years after the First World War and it only refers by name to the individuals who are known to have died more than 25 years ago. The restrictions of the law also made me decide to not include a copy of the old letter as an illustration in the article.

Governments have often had a dominant say in how documentation about cross-border activities in the area of welfare provision has been selected for preservation, catalogued, and made available within national collections. These practices have mostly happened according to the imagined logic of a national community, and therefore differ from one country to the next (Anderson 2016). To understand how state welfare provisions affected the lives of borderland inhabitants, researchers must spend several weeks in one national archive and they can count themselves lucky if they find a rare example such as the old letter explaining the lived borderland experiences of a migrant family. Another approach is to trace the past lives of migrants across national borders by consulting multiple archives in the borderlands. Such a research agenda is challenging. Julien Fuchs has described the archives in Alsace, for example, as "diffuse, dispersed and heteroclitic" in comparison with the National Archives he had consulted previously in Paris, but nevertheless unexpectedly found them offering "a wealth of material that has barely been explored" (Fuchs 2007, 165). To conclude, archives can support the acceleration or delay the production of historical knowledge depending on the way in which archivists select and catalogue documents and legislators define the time limits for accessing those documents (Derrida & Prenowitz 1995, 9-63).

## In Lieu of a Conclusion: Temporalities of Research

Historical research is conditioned not only by the temporality of archives but also by the temporality of research funding. Research funding bodies use the temporal feasibility of a research project as documented in research proposals as a crucial criterion during their evaluation process. Because it is difficult to guarantee that investing a significant amount of time to conduct research in borderland archives will lead to new research findings at the end of a research project of limited duration, transnational studies on welfare using a bottom-up approach have rarely been funded and researchers usually conduct research in one archive or archives within a single region or country (Raphael 2018; Camarda 2019, 182-195; Elcheroth 2015). This article offers a first outcome of historical research conducted within an international research consortium financed by the European Research Council, which is one of the few funding bodies to encourage research that contains a high level of risk in its methodology but



may result in significant gains for the advancement of scientific knowledge. A key advantage of the grant is that it offers research funding for five years, significantly longer than most nationally funded research projects. Principal Investigator Laura Lee Downs wrote:

Europe's borderland regions are particularly revealing laboratories for studying the development of social protection, thanks to a dense variety of actors competing for influence over their putative objects of assistance and for access to funding. The focus on local, often parallel structures of social provision—at times cooperating, at times competing—will allow me and my team to examine the interplays between inclusion and exclusion that have long shaped European welfare provision by homing in on those contexts where such developments were particularly visible. The project thus recasts borderland regions not as outliers in welfare histories, but rather as micro-histories that open up onto larger transnational concerns and developments. Indeed, it is our conviction that these regions offer a wide-angle, long-distance lens that illuminates the contested history of Europe's linguistic, ethnic, and religious diversity. (SOCIOBORD 2020)

After innumerable archival visits, it became clear that methodologies such as prosopography or a systematic comparison of how borderland inhabitants experienced welfare measures on either side of the French-Luxembourgian or German-Luxembourgian borders cannot be implemented because of the way in which sources have been compiled and preserved. New historical knowledge has come from the analysis of an old letter demonstrating how time and space were experienced in borderlands. This article concludes that the way time was experienced by local inhabitants such as Angèle Schmit, the mother of the deceased soldier Emile Klein, clashed with the spatio-temporal hierarchy imposed by France in the early post-war period. Using a retrospective reading of the past and passing a moral judgement on the citizenship status of certain ascendants, French government officials prevented parents from Luxembourg whose sons had died as a result of military service in the French Foreign Legion from claiming a French war pension.

Given the scarcity of archival findings about the Klein family and other ascendants of deceased soldiers who lived in Luxembourg and served in the French Foreign Legion, however, epistemic concerns are raised. The evidence is inconclusive given the absence of a French response to the Klein family's application, and to a certain extent it is also inscrutable because of a lack of evidence from Germany (Tsamados et al. 2022, 215–230; Mittelstadt et al. 2016, 4). Whereas the analyses in some previous publications of mine focused on rare documents expressing the voices of borderland inhabitants found after weeks of archival research (e.g., Venken 2021), this article explains how materials were preserved, searched for, accessed, selected, and

published within the constraints of applicable archival laws, practices and research funding, so as to grasp "not just facts but their integration into a meaningful whole" (Zimmermann 2015, 2). We do not do the reader a service by presenting the historical profession as it is portrayed in the film *Angels and Demons*. In all the stages of scientific knowledge production, as well as the hermeneutic cycle of interpretation, attitudes to time play a crucial role.

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## Endnotes

- 1 National Archives of Luxembourg (hereafter ANL). AE-03698. "Décès de volontaires luxembourgeois enrôlés dans l'armée française (Dossiers individuels) 1916-1929". Le Conseiller du Gouvernement à Armand Mollard, Ministre Plénipotentiaire de France, Luxembourg, 22 mai 1922.
- 2 ANL AE-03698. Le Conseiller du Gouvernement au Bourgmestre de la commune de Mertert, Luxembourg, 19 avril 1919.
- 3 ANL AE-03698. Le Conseiller du Gouvernement à Armand Mollard, Ministre Plénipotentiaire de France, Luxembourg, 22 mai 1922.
- 4 ANL AE-03698. Handwritten note: "Urgent. Pécule et secours immédiat. Vérifier toujours la nationalité. Demander la situation matérielle pour secours immédiat", Luxembourg, 1919.
- 5 Ministère des Armées. Service historique de la Défense, Caen. Base Mémoire des hommes. Émile Klein. Mort pour la France le 10-10-1918 (Salonique (ou Thessalonique) – hôpital temporaire no. 5, Grèce) Né(e) le/en17-05-1895 à Schuttrange (Luxembourg); accessible online: <https://archives.cd08.fr/ark:/75583/s0053ec5b5bc150d/53ec5b5bc80bb>.
- 6 1er régiment de marche d'Afrique (1er RMA) in Thessalonique (Archives départementales des Ardennes, Fiche matricule d'Émile Klein).
- 7 Mémorial du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg. Loi du 30 décembre 1893 concernant la police des étrangers, Jeudi, 4 janvier 1894.
- 8 Mémorial du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg. Loi du 18 juillet 1913 sur la police des étrangers, Mercredi, 23 juillet 1913.

- 9 ANL AE-03698. Le Conseiller du Gouvernement à Armand Mollard, Ministre Plénipotentiaire de France, Luxembourg, 22 mai 1922.
- 10 Mémorial du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg. Loi du 28 octobre 1920 destinée à endiguer l'affluence exagérée d'étrangers sur le territoire du Grand-Duché, Mardi, 2 novembre 1920.
- 11 Mémorial du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg. Arrêté grand-ducal du 31 mai 1934 portant règlement d'exécution de la loi du 14 avril 1934, concernant les passeports à l'étranger, l'établissement d'un droit de chancellerie pour légalisations d'actes et d'un droit de timbre sur les certificats de nationalité, Samedi, 2 juin 1934.
- 12 Regional Archives of Rheinland-Pfalz, Koblenz (hereafter LRK). Sachakte, Best. 442 Nr. 17851. Grenzangelegenheiten mit ausländischen Staatsbürgern und Staaten (Gesandtschaften, Außenministerien u.ä.) Luxemburg. Der Polizei-Kommisar Esch a/ Alzette 11.10.1938 an Herrn Landwirt Jakob Hompes in Dahnen Amtsbürgermeister, Daleiden.
- 13 Paragraf 13 Ziff. 3 des Gesetzes über die Erwerbung und den Verlust des Bundes und Staatsangehörigkeit vom 1.6.1870.
- 14 LRK. Sachakte, Best. 442 Nr. 14266. Auswanderung aus dem Landkreis Trier in das Großherzogtum Luxemburg, Band 8, 01.01.1919 - 31.12.1923, Heimatschein für den Aufenthalt im Ausland, Kraemer Margaretha, 7 November 1911.
- 15 ANL, CdD-2007. Die Abänderung des Artikels 17 Nr. 3 des Zivilgesetzbuches (1917), Avis séparé, p. 6.
- 16 LRK. Sachakte, Best. 442 Nr. 17851. Grenzangelegenheiten mit ausländischen Staatsbürgern und Staaten (Gesandtschaften, Außenministerien u.a.) Luxemburg.
- 17 Loi du 7 août 1913 modifiant les lois des cadres de l'infanterie, de la cavalerie, de l'artillerie et du génie, en ce qui concerne l'effectif des unités et fixant les conditions de recrutement de l'armée active et la durée du service dans l'armée active et ses réserves (Publiée au Journal Officiel, p. 7138).
- 18 Loi du 5 août 1914 relative à l'état de siège tendant à accorder, pendant la durée de la guerre, des allocations aux familles nécessiteuses dont le soutien serait appelé ou rappelé sous les drapeaux, Journal officiel de la République française. Lois et décrets no. 0213 du 06/08/1914.
- 19 Décret no. 1 du 6 février 1919, relatif à l'attribution d'un pécule aux familles des combattants morts pour la France; décret no. 2 du 6 février 1919 modifiant le décret du 5 juillet 1918, relatif à l'attribution de hautes payes de guerre et d'indemnités de combat, à l'allocation de primes d'alimentation et à la constitution de pécule aux militaires mobilisés; Loi modifiant la législation des pensions des armées de terre et de mer en ce qui concerne les décès survenus, les blessures reçues et les maladies contractées ou aggravées en service du 31 mars 1919. Promulguée au Journal officiel du 2 avril 1919.
- 20 ANL AE 03698. Loutsch Jules, Circulaire du ministère de l'Intérieur, 26 mars 1918.
- 21 ANL AE 03698. Sébastien Kessler. Gouvernement. Service officiel des Renseignements. Conseiller de Gouvernement à Monsieur Bastin, Consul général du Grand-Duché en France, Luxembourg, 29 janvier 1919.
- 22 ANL AE 03698. Sébastien Kessler. Le Conseiller du Gouvernement chargé des intérêts consulaires français, Luxembourg, 6 janvier 1920.
- 23 ANL AE 03698. Klein. Serv. Off. D. Rensgts. Office...français. Le conseiller du Gouvernement del. à S. Excellence M. Armand Mollard. Paris, 7.2.1920.
- 24 ANL AE-00693. Luxembourgeois, soldats de la France en 1914-1918: Pensions militaires dues aux ascendants des soldats tombés sur les champs de bataille, 1919-1922. Décret du 20 octobre 1920 Instruction pour l'application du décret du 20 septembre 1920, relatif à l'attribution de l'indemnité de démobilisation aux militaires ayant servi dans un régiment de la légion étrangère et aux militaires français ayant servi dans une légion spéciale créée au cours des hostilités, p. 10048.
- 25 Loi modifiant la législation des pensions des armées de terre et de mer en ce qui concerne les décès survenus, les blessures reçues et les maladies contractées ou aggravées en service du 31 mars 1919. Promulguée au Journal officiel du 2 avril 1919.
- 26 Les archives diplomatiques à Nantes (hereafter DN). 390-PO-1-35. Soins aux mutilés. Ministère des Affaires Étrangères. Affaires administratives et techniques. Service militaire. Ministre des Affaires Étrangères à Messieurs des agents diplomatiques et consulaires. Paris, 24 novembre 1919.
- 27 ANL AE-00693. Division des Affaires Étrangères. Le Ministre d'État Luxembourgeois à Madame Veuve Weidig-Hermes à Hamm. Luxembourg, le 31 juillet 1920.
- 28 ANL AE 03698. Joseph Loeven-Rausch. Serv. Off. D. Rens. Office... français. Le Cons. de Gouv. Del. à Monsieur Loeven, Hellange, Luxembourg, 29 janvier 1920.
- 29 ANL AE 03698. Georges Killian.
- 30 ANL AE 00693. Loi du 28 juillet 1921 concernant les allocations prévues aux articles 28 à 34 de la loi du 31 mars 1919, publiée au Journal Officiel du 2 août 1921.
- 31 ANL AE 03698. Jean Krack. Le Conseiller de Gouvernement Luxembourgeois. Pour le Ministre d'État à Monsieur Paul Krack à Bastendorf, Luxembourg, 2 juin 1924.
- 32 DN. 390-PO-1-35. Loi de finances du 9 décembre 1927 (art. 53). Ministère des finances. Caisse centrale du trésor public à Monsieur le Ministre Plénipotentiaire de France à Luxembourg. Application des lois des 30 décembre 1928 et 23 mars 1929, Paris, 1930.
- 33 ANL AE-03698. Décès de volontaires luxembourgeois enrôlés dans l'armée française (Dossiers individuels) 1916-1929.
- 34 ANL CdD-2007. Die Abänderung des Artikels 17 Nr. 3 des Zivilgesetzbuches (1917), Avis séparé, p. 6.
- 35 ANL AE-03698. Le Conseiller du Gouvernement à Armand Mollard, Ministre Plénipotentiaire de France, Luxembourg, 22 mai 1922.
- 36 LRK Sachakte Best. 441 Nr. 21954. Die gegenseitige Übernahme von Staatsangehörigen zwischen Preußen und Luxemburg. Band II. 01.01.1907 - 31.12.1923.
- 37 *Angels and Demons*, film directed by Ron Howard and written by Akiva Goldsman and David Koepp, based on the novel of the same title written by Dan Brown in 2000.
- 38 ANL AE 00693. Division des Affaires Étrangères à Monsieur Ernest Leclère, chargé d'Affaires du Grand-Duché à Paris, Luxembourg, le 14 novembre 1921; In addition, in 1919, there were 150 widows and orphans, 10 disabled veterans, and 100 veterans injured during military service (ANL. ET-DH-009. Les volontaires luxembourgeois de la Grande Guerre 1914-1918 [volume II], page 85).
- 39 ANL AE 03698. Lucien Ries, Philippe Georges.
- 40 ANL, Archives of the Alien Police, J-108-0463793 (1896-1948), Jean Klein.

41 Loi du 17 août 2018 sur l'archivage et portant modification 1° de la loi modifiée du 25 juin 2004 portant réorganisation des instituts culturels de l'État; 2° de la loi électorale modifiée du 18 février 2003; 3° du décret modifié du 18 juin 1811 contenant règlement pour l'administration de la justice en matière criminelle, de police correctionnelle, et de simple police, et tarif général des frais. – Mémorial A no. 706 de 2018, p. 1 © Legilux, 21/08/2018; accessible online: [https://www.stradalex.lu/fr/slu\\_src\\_publ\\_leg\\_mema/document/mema\\_etat-leg-loi-2018-08-17-a706-jo](https://www.stradalex.lu/fr/slu_src_publ_leg_mema/document/mema_etat-leg-loi-2018-08-17-a706-jo).

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