Part I

‘Misconduct’ and disunity

This first part of the book considers French behaviours under occupation that challenge the narrative of dignified suffering and patriotism.¹ There is a temptation simply to label such behaviours ‘collaboration’, as certain historians have done.² I believe that this should be avoided. Only very few members of the occupied population used the word in a negative sense,³ making its use anachronistic – although anachronistic terms can still be useful to historians. Yet the term is too associated in French cultural and historical memory with the Vichy regime, especially with the notion of political or ideological complicity with the occupiers, which was largely absent in the context of the First World War. Of course, underlying ideas related to the notion of ‘collaboration’ are useful, as are reflections on the grey area of ‘accommodation’ or more simply ‘survival’.⁴ The following chapters include certain behaviours that other scholars of the 1914–18 occupation have labelled as ‘accommodation’ or ‘rapprochement’,⁵ but which were subject to criticism during the occupation. Occupied life was complex, defying neat categorisation, and unsurprisingly there existed a fluid, murky boundary between patriotism and treason. Nevertheless, I offer up suggestive analytical categories in my study that focuses in particular on the extremes of the spectrum, with which the dominant occupied culture was particularly concerned.

Central to this culture was the notion of respectability, involving unwritten but widely accepted social mores combined with patriotic expectations, which dictated what was perceived as correct and incorrect behaviour. It informed French interaction with the thousands of German men living alongside them. Many were aware of this moral-patriotic framework and the potential criticism from compatriots for

perceived breaches of the limits of respectability. This was an extension of wider French war culture, outlined by Jean-Yves Le Naour:

At a time when Frenchmen spilled blood for the endangered motherland, it was intolerable that certain individuals ran away from and avoided their duty. Collective surveillance, actually autosurveillance, called individuals to order: all must have irreproachable conduct, otherwise fighting was pointless, the ideal was sullied and victory compromised.⁶

The next three chapters examine perceived breaches of this moral-patriotic framework, and Chapters 4 and 5 consider disunity and criminality, other understudied aspects of the occupation experience. The reality behind accusations of wrongdoing is almost impossible to discern. Although I attempt to assess the ‘actual’ scale of such behaviours, the perceptions themselves are the main subject of study, a doorway into occupied culture. The examination of this difficult topic relies on an engagement with many sources written during or after the liberation but which provide an insight into the occupation experience.

In the following chapters I highlight various forms of negatively viewed behaviours and argue that types of behaviour were criticised which do not fall into the remit of the loaded, anachronistic term ‘collaboration’ and which were not necessarily illegal. Subsequently, I propose a new conceptual category for understanding the ‘dark side’ of this occupation, and perhaps others. That category is ‘misconduct’ (*mauvaise conduite*).

Defining *mauvaise conduite*

On 8 November 1918, the Applancourt sisters from Prisches were under investigation for their occupation conduct. It was alleged they told the Germans that their father was hiding weapons, leading to his imprisonment. They were also accused of having German lovers; one daughter admitted this was true. The episode illustrates the conflation of treason and sexual misconduct, discussed in the first two chapters. It is unclear what the truth is, although their mother spoke of her ‘dishonour’ at her daughters’ ‘relations with the enemy’. The witnesses interviewed did not approve of the actions of the sisters, and the investigating gendarme stated that he was examining their *mauvaise conduite* (misconduct or bad behaviour).⁷ This term does not relate uniquely to occupation behaviour – *mauvaise conduite* existed as a concept before the war, usually denoting sexual behaviour⁸ – and it was not employed particularly frequently. Nevertheless, people from the occupied area did occasionally

use *mauvaise conduite* to describe behaviour that was, to them, deplorable from a moral or patriotic standpoint.⁹ It was interchangeable with the words 'inconduite'¹⁰ or 'méconduite'¹¹ but I opt for *mauvaise conduite*, partly echoing the notion of 'bad elements' (*mauvais éléments*) outlined in the most comprehensive interwar work on the occupation.¹² Its antithesis was *belle conduite*, for which individuals were praised after the war.¹³

This notion provides a springboard from which to launch a new conceptual category. I use *mauvaise conduite* as an umbrella term to describe forms of behaviour not all labelled explicitly under this rubric at the time but perceived in a negative light by occupied, and occasionally non-occupied, compatriots. It refers to any kind of complicity, not just actions which were illegal or harmed compatriots, although the multiple forms of misconduct were intertwined, in perceptions and in practice. Certainly, all actions considered as misconduct received opprobrium whether in diaries, interviews with *rapatriés*, or post-war police reports or trials. Sexual relations were derided as much as denunciations; friendly relations were scorned as much as commerce with the Germans. Some have criticised this definition, which I have outlined briefly elsewhere,¹⁴ as being a catch-all term that is too broad.¹⁵ However, that is precisely the point – for adherents of occupied culture, there was little distinction between behaviours that broke the law and those that breached the expectations of occupied culture.

The 'respectable' behaviour against which *mauvaise conduite* was placed involved acts such as refusing to work for the Germans, remaining hostile to and avoiding all forms of intimacy with the enemy and staying 'dignified' despite daily privations. Against this framework, legal actions such as sexual or friendly relations with Germans or leading a lifestyle considered overly lavish could only be perceived as betraying the community. Misconduct also veered into the illegal, although legal, semi-illegal and illegal misconduct were often conflated – complicity never came alone because of the need to redefine the community as one of suffering, both for the occupied population and the fighting French soldiers. Any affront to the community of suffering, whether sleeping with Germans or actively spying for them, suggested further complicity; the abandonment of the local community for the enemy could never be purely symbolic.

To examine all aspects of *mauvaise conduite*, and to highlight the way in which illegal and legal misconduct was conflated, it is necessary to outline the Third Republic's legal understanding of 'collaboration' (as Renée Martinage calls it). In the only work specifically dealing with collaboration in the First World War, Martinage explains that this emanates from Articles 77–9 of the *Code pénal*, involving the crimes of

‘intelligence’ and ‘commerce with the enemy’.¹⁶ This covered not only passing information of a military or political nature to enemies and carrying out espionage on their behalf but also ‘furnishing enemies with aid, whether men, money, goods or munitions’.¹⁷ Yet, for many, this legal understanding was not the final word. Less clearly defined ‘anti-patriotic’ behaviour, theoretically exempt from punishment and arguably less important in the eyes of French law, was frequently perceived as equally repugnant and worthy of punishment or disdain by locals themselves. Consequently, any sort of ‘relations’ (sexual, friendly, commercial or other) with the Germans could be deemed unsavoury, if not illegal, and thus comprised misconduct. Often legal misconduct was said to occur alongside illegal misconduct. It must be stated that the use of the term ‘misconduct’ does not reflect a judgement on my part – I aim to reflect, as best as possible, contemporary perceptions and culture.

Notes

- 1 The first three chapters of this section are derived in part from an article published in *First World War Studies*, March 2013, copyright Taylor & Francis, available online: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19475020.2012.761382>.
- 2 Philippe Nivet, *La France occupée, 1914–1918* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2011), pp. 293–300; Annette Becker, *Les Cicatrices rouges 14–18: France et Belgique occupées* (Paris: Fayard, 2010), p. 296.
- 3 One instance can be found in AN, 96AP/1, dossier 1, journal de Félix Trépont (1914–1922), 24 September 1914, p. 195.
- 4 The notion of accommodation was developed in Philippe Burrin, *La France à l’heure allemande, 1940–1944* (Paris: Seuil, 1995).
- 5 Nivet, *La France occupée*, pp. 265–92; Becker, *Les Cicatrices rouges*, pp. 249–70.
- 6 Jean-Yves Le Naour, *Misères et tourmentes de la chair durant la Grande Guerre: Les mœurs sexuelles des français, 1914–1918* (Paris: Aubier, 2002), p. 14.
- 7 ADN, 9R1197, Prisches, Mission Militaire Française attachée à l’Armée britannique, procès-verbal no. 231, 8 November 1918. For these and similar files, I will include the author’s name when required to distinguish from other reports of the same date.
- 8 ADN, 9R1196, Lys, Prévôté de la 40e Division, procès-verbal no. 142, 30 October 1918.
- 9 See, for example, SHD, 17N433, Sûreté Générale, 3e Armée Britannique, État-Major, procès-verbal, 21 December 1917, testimony of Henri Duquenne (Courchelettes); ADHS, 4M513, repatriation reports no. 1264, 28 April 1917; no. 675, 5 February 1917.

- 10 See, for example, SHD, 19N547, Grand Quartier Général, État-Major-Général, Deuxième Bureau, Service de Renseignement de l'Armée, 'Note pour les SR d'Armée', 14 August 1916; SHD, 17N433, Mission Française de Sûreté Générale attachée à la 4e Armée Britannique, procès-verbal no. 238, 7 February 1918 (Auby).
- 11 Emmanuel Debruyne, 'Les "femmes à boches" en Belgique et en France occupée, 1914–1918', *Revue du Nord*, 96:404–5 (2014), 157–86.
- 12 Georges Gromaire, *L'Occupation allemande en France (1914–1918)* (Paris: Payot, 1925), p. 334.
- 13 ADN, 15J87, 'Commission Historique du Nord, Questionnaire de la Guerre de 1914, Département du Nord, Arrondissement de Cambrai, Canton du Cateau, Commune de Montay', 1923.
- 14 James E. Connolly, 'Mauvaise conduite: complicity and respectability in the occupied Nord, 1914–1918', *First World War Studies*, 4:1 (2013), 7–21.
- 15 Philippe Salson, *L'Aisne occupée: Les civils dans la Grande Guerre* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2015), p. 179.
- 16 Renée Martinage, 'Les collaborateurs devant la cour d'assises du Nord après la très Grande Guerre', *Revue du Nord*, 77:309 (1995), pp. 99–101.
- 17 *Code Pénal*, article 77, cited in Martinage, 'Les collaborateurs', p. 100.