

Introduction

The Problem

Despite a strict prohibition and harsh punishments, thousands of western prisoners of war (POWs) and German women started forbidden relations with each other during World War II. An estimated 15,000–20,000 French, Belgian, and British POWs and an equal number of women had to stand trial, and there were undoubtedly many more relations that remained undiscovered or never came to trial. Given their large number and their increasingly lax guarding, French POWs were the predominant “offenders,” with more than 80 percent of all court martial cases.¹ The Belgians, detained under similar conditions to the French, engaged in forbidden relations in an even higher proportion, and the British POWs, once they became more integrated into German work life and were less strictly guarded (in 1943), followed in their footsteps. Many German women, facing a shortage of local men in their age bracket, defied Nazi propaganda that stigmatized the foreign POW as an implacable enemy. They also disregarded the omnipresent warning notices and the public posters and newspaper articles providing detailed accounts of the “shameful,” “unpatriotic” activities and harsh punishments of women who had become involved with a POW. These texts included the full names of the women.

What motivated these international love relations, these “collaborations of the heart,” in the midst of war?² The Belgian officer and historian of captivity E. Gillet reduced it to a simple formula: “Human

¹ Prisoners of war had to stand trial in front of a court martial (*Feldgericht*) of the German reserve army, staffed by a military judge and two assistants. The same courts also sentenced German soldiers on home leave. Following the example of some works on POWs, I use the term court martial, but military tribunal would also be a fine translation. Throughout the book, I also use the terms relation and relationship interchangeably, often adding an adjective to the former for clarification.

² Raffael Scheck, “Collaboration of the Heart: The Forbidden Love Affairs of French Prisoners of War and German Women in Nazi Germany,” *The Journal of Modern History* 90, no. 2 (2018).

nature preserved its rights.”³ The former Belgian prisoner representative in East Prussia, Georges Smets, agreed and, in a television program in 1975, appealed to his audience not to judge these relationships too harshly. Smets’ open discussion of the relationships provoked outrage among former comrades. One of them wrote him an angry letter denying that love relations existed except in the case of a few evil collaborators. Smets answered:

Noble love could very well exist between a Belgian POW and a German woman. Love knows neither boundaries nor races. That is what I tried to explain in the TV program, not more and not less. It would be a serious error to suggest to the wider public that we were all saints. Of course, the opposite is true, and this also applies to quite a few wives of our POWs.⁴

But Smets, a keen observer of the POW psyche and of German wartime society, also stressed other factors than “human nature,” such as the German population’s growing acceptance of Belgian and French POWs (who predominated in his region), its increasing war-weariness, and the indispensability of the foreign POWs, who, according to Smets, were largely in charge of his province by 1944. Smets refused to condemn his fellow prisoners for having loved a German woman; the “Don Juans,” as he called them, were all-too-human, uprooted, and far away from home. Reflecting on this topic in the mid-1970s, Smets saw the love between enemies as an encouraging sign for humanity. Yet, his revelation in the television program caused a scandal. POWs were supposed to have been heroic or stoic victims, fostering a spirit of defiance and always looking for a way to escape and to fool the German guards. At least, that was the tenor in memoirs, fiction, and historical publications.

French postwar works often portrayed the amorous relations as a “conquest,” making up for the defeat of 1940 and the symbolic emasculation of the captured soldiers. Authors took special delight in the thought of having “cuckolded” German soldiers and officers, and they portrayed German women as all-too-eager accomplices.⁵ An early and influential example is the autobiographic novel *Les grandes Vacances 1939–1945* (The Great Holidays, 1939–1945) by French NCO Francis

³ Musée Royal de l’Armée et d’Histoire Militaire, Evere, Fonds Gillet, boîte 1, #4, “Histoire des prisonniers de guerre 40–45.”

⁴ Georges Smets to Mr. Georges Paulus, January 11, 1976, in Musée Royal de l’Armée et d’Histoire Militaire, Brussels, Fonds Hautecler, Farde 34.

⁵ Patrice Arnaud, “Die deutsch-französischen Liebesbeziehungen der französischen Zwangsarbeiter und beurlaubten Kriegsgefangenen im ‘Dritten Reich’: vom Mythos des verführerischen Franzosen zur Umkehrung der Geschlechterrolle,” in *Nationalsozialismus und Geschlecht: Zur Politisierung und Ästhetisierung von Körper, “Rasse” und Sexualität im “Dritten Reich” und nach 1945*, ed. Elke Frietsch and Christina Herkommer (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2009), 184–8.

Ambrière, which won the Prix Goncourt of French literature in 1946. Drawing from a rich collection of stories he heard from comrades, Ambrière gleefully tells of French POWs wearing the uniform of a husband serving in the Wehrmacht or SS while carrying on an erotic relationship with the wife, perhaps surprising the husband with a new baby “in whose procreation the husband had no part.” Ambrière described German women as crude and lecherous beings with “the large, heavy breasts that are the default in this race” and who see French POW camps as studs for their primitive desire: “it has to be said that the compliant and dumb sentimentality of the German women, together with their sometimes bestial sensuality, provided the Frenchmen with prey that they did not need to coerce and that most often sought to surrender themselves.”⁶ Ambrière reverses Nazi racial arrogance by integrating the encounters of French POWs with German women into a narrative of the more refined French who surpass the Germans in everything except brutality. The French POWs, who demonstrate their superior technical expertise in all jobs and make themselves increasingly indispensable, feel equally revolted by the animalistic vulgarity of German women (he once calls them “sows”) as by their cuisine, which cooks all meat in water.

Ambrière may have appealed to a still hateful French public, including many of his former comrades. Portraying German women as animals was his answer to the Nazi propaganda of 1940, which had depicted the French as a “degenerate” and “negroized” race.⁷ It is notable that he consistently depicts German women as the active force in the forbidden relationships. He tells of his own experience bathing in the Rhine River with a few comrades in a sector the guard had allowed them to use. Suddenly, three young German women appeared. Despite the admonishments of the guard, the scantily dressed women smiled at the prisoners and repeatedly swam into “their” sector. After drying off, the three women walked right through the beach area reserved for the prisoners, provoking another confrontation with the guard.⁸ From comrades, Ambrière heard many similar stories, for example of a stout waitress who forced a homosexual French POW into her room and into her bed, and of some farm women who selected one prisoner after the other for their farm primarily to exploit them sexually. Experiencing the vivid

⁶ “... il faut bien dire que la sentimentalité complaisante et niaise des Allemandes, autant que leur sensualité parfois bestiale, rendait au Français des proies qu’ils n’avaient nul mal à forcer et qui le plus souvent conspiraient d’elles-mêmes à se rendre.” Francis Ambrière, *Les grandes Vacances 1939–1945* (Paris: Les Éditions de la Nouvelle France, 1946), 200.

⁷ Raffael Scheck, “La victoire allemande de 1940 comme justification de l’idéologie raciale nazie,” in *La Guerre de 40: Se battre, subir, se souvenir*, ed. Stefan Martens and Steffen Prauser (Villeneuve d’Asq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2014).

⁸ Ambrière, *Les grandes Vacances*, 201.

desire of German women for French men must have been balm for the morale of the prisoners, similar to the frequent requests of German employers for French POWs as workers, but this perspective erases the often very active role of the prisoners.

At least Ambrière acknowledges the forbidden relations. He even considers them to have been extremely widespread and believes that only a small fraction went to trial. He claims that the trials were meant to be less a deterrent for the POWs and the women than a way to reassure German soldier-husbands that the state was watching over the fidelity of their wives or girlfriends while they were serving at the front. Although he points out many collaborators and opportunists among the prisoners, Ambrière weaves the forbidden relationships into an overarching narrative that stresses French resistance and patriotism in captivity, undermining the perception he cynically references in his book title, namely that the time spent in Germany was “the great holidays.”

Although Ambrière insinuates that German employers and guards used the lure of sexual experiences to make POWs work more happily for the German war effort, he recognizes that there were numerous romantic and sincere relationships and that some couples wanted to marry. Despite his demeaning and racist descriptions of German women, he also asks some intriguing questions about their motivation. Did the behavior of German women arise from “an internal revolt against the absurdity and ignominious nature of the Hitler régime? Was this for the women a way to protest in the name of human nature, and to repair with the gift of themselves all the evil of which their race had become guilty?”⁹ Ambrière did not provide a definitive answer, but he suggested that at least in some cases this factor might have played a role.

The motivations for the forbidden relationships are hard to trace, and they can be contradictory and ambivalent. Examples of women who felt compassion for the POWs are indeed easy to find, although it is just as easy to identify prisoners feeling compassion for a woman. The relationships ran the gamut from cursory physical encounters to deeply committed love with marriage plans. Every couple negotiated their relationship in their own way, and often in a dynamic process. A seemingly deep love

⁹ “Cela répondait-il à quelque révolte intérieure contre l’absurdité et l’ignominie du régime hitlérien? Était-ce pour elles comme une façon de protester au nom de la nature humaine, et de réparer par le don d’elles-mêmes tout ce dont leur race se rendait coupable?” Ambrière, *Les grandes Vacances*, 206–7. Antje Zühl raises a similar question with respect to all foreign laborers on German farms: Antje Zühl, “Zum Verhältnis der deutschen Landbevölkerung gegenüber Zwangsarbeitern und Kriegsgefangenen,” in *Faschismus und Rassismus: Kontroversen um Ideologie und Opfer*, ed. Werner Röhr et al. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1992), 352.

could turn into mudslinging once the partners faced a court hearing and were pressed to explain contradictory statements. An apparently superficial sexual contact could reveal a more sincere and caring dimension when it came to trial. The POWs have simultaneously been accused of collaboration for loving enemy women and praised as resisters for seducing them. The women may have engaged in an act of revolt or defiance, but they may occasionally have exploited their position as free civilians in relations with the prisoners. The distinction is sometimes murky, as suggested by Ambrière's experience with the three bathers.

The POWs who became involved with a German woman were sentenced for "disobedience," which suggested an act of insubordination or revolt. Most of the women meanwhile had to stand trial in special courts, which specialized in the ruthless and quick prosecution of political dissent and treasonous acts. Yet, most couples probably did not think very much about the political implications of their actions. A number of POWs punished by the courts martial, especially in 1941 and 1942, had a track record of being avidly pro-German, and some women tried by the special courts were NSDAP (Nazi Party) members and played an active role in the *NS-Frauenschaft*, the party's organization for women. And yet, their personal acts were political not only because they constituted a serious crime under Nazi law but above all because they challenged Nazi policies designed to preserve "racial purity" and a national solidarity defined by exclusion and resentment of all outsiders.¹⁰

The task of this book is to explore and explain the forbidden relationships as well as their legal and diplomatic context. It focuses on amorous liaisons between western POWs and women, although there were also forbidden relations between German women and Polish or Soviet POWs and civilian laborers. But these relationships were even more stigmatized by Nazi propaganda than those with western POWs and led to draconic punishment: while the Polish and Soviet POWs were often executed, many of the women involved with them were sent to a concentration camp, in both cases usually without a trial.¹¹ The book also does not consider the forbidden relations between POWs and German or non-German men that came to trial, with the exception of a short section on homosexual relations. German men could also be sentenced for forbidden contact with a prisoner on other grounds, for example by helping him escape, transporting his letters, or giving him food or cigarettes. The

¹⁰ For a good overview, see Annette F. Timm, *The Politics of Fertility in Twentieth-Century Berlin* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 118–38.

¹¹ See the section "Other Prisoners" in Chapter 1, "The Prisoners of War and the German Women."

POW would hardly be punished for this kind of contact except for homosexual acts, which were severely penalized in Nazi Germany. Nazi legislation and propaganda targeted the relations between POWs and German women because the Nazi regime considered them to be a particular danger to the German home front. As a consequence, the thousands of German women and POWs who disregarded the prohibition at great risk brought to light tensions and contradictory reactions in German wartime society. As Georges Smets explained to his outraged comrade after revealing the love relations in the television program: "I am often asked to write my memoirs, but for this chapter alone I could easily write a volume of 300 pages."¹²

The Literature

The forbidden relations lie at a crossroads of historiographies that are rarely explored comprehensively and in correspondence with each other. A body of literature focuses on the special courts and on the efforts of the Nazi system to prevent and punish German women's relations with foreigners, usually POWs as well as forced laborers. Second, there is a rich literature on German military justice, although rarely with a focus on courts martial against POWs. Third, there are many works on POWs, most with a focus on policy, diplomacy, and the treatment of POWs by Nazi Germany, but only a few that address relations of POWs to civilians.¹³

Aside from some generic publications on the Nazi special courts, which usually judged the women involved with prisoners, most of the works on these institutions are fine local studies, but a forbidden relationship with a POW was only one among many offenses that came before them.¹⁴ The primary interest in these works is typically to explore the role of the justice system in political repression and the latitude of the

¹² Georges Smets to Mr. Georges Paulus, January 11, 1976, in Musée Royal de l'Armée et d'Histoire Militaire, Brussels, Fonds Hautecler, Farde 34.

¹³ Notable exceptions are the works by Yves Durand (noted below), Antje Zühl (noted above), and Jean Marie d'Hoop: Jean-Marie d'Hoop, "Prisonniers de guerre français témoins de la défaite allemande (1945)," *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains* 38, no. 150 (1988); d'Hoop, "Les prisonniers français et la communauté rurale allemande (1940–1945)," *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, no. 147 (1987). See also Edith Petschnigg, *Von der Front aufs Feld. Britische Kriegsgefangene in der Steiermark 1941–1945* (Graz: Verein zur Förderung der Forschung von Folgen nach Konflikten und Kriegen, 2003), and Petschnigg, "'The Spirit of Comradeship'. Britische Kriegsgefangene in der Steiermark 1941 bis 1945," in *Kriegsgefangene des Zweiten Weltkrieges: Gefangennahme, Lagerleben, Rückkehr*, ed. Günter Bischof et al. (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2005).

¹⁴ Gerd Weckbecker, *Zwischen Freispruch und Todesstrafe: Die Rechtsprechung der nationalsozialistischen Sondergerichte Frankfurt/Main und Bromberg* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1998).

judges.¹⁵ A few articles deal specifically with trials against women involved with prisoners. Bernd Boll, for example, analyzes several cases from the court of Offenburg (Baden). He focuses on the trials against women but also looks at a few courts martial against the POWs, as far as they are accessible in local archives.¹⁶ There are similar articles by Eckard Colmorgen and Klaus-Detlev Godau-Schüttke and by Iris Siemssen

- ¹⁵ Freia Anders, *Straffjustiz im Sudetengau 1938–1945* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2008); Klaus Bästlein, “Zur ‘Rechts’-Praxis des Schleswig-Holsteinischen Sondergerichts 1937–1945,” in *Strafverfolgung und Straferzicht: Festschrift zum 125-jährigen Bestehen der Staatsanwaltschaft Schleswig-Holstein*, ed. Heribert Ostendorf (Köln: Heymann, 1992); Helmut Beer, *Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus in Nürnberg 1933–1945* (Nürnberg: Stadtarchiv Nürnberg, 1976); Justizbehörde Hamburg, ed., “*Von Gewohnheitsverbrechern, Volksschädlingen und Asozialen ...*”: *Hamburger Justizurteile im Nationalsozialismus* (Hamburg: Ergebnisse Verlag, 1995); Peter Lutz Kalmbach, “Das System der NS-Sondergerichtsbarkeit,” *Kritische Justiz* 50, no. 2 (2017); Karl-Heinz Keldungs, *Das Duisburger Sondergericht 1942–1945* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1998); Angelika Kleinz, *Individuum und Gemeinschaft in der juristischen Germanistik: die Geschworenengerichte und das “Gesunde Volksempfinden”* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2001); Gertraud Lehmann, “Von der ‘Ehre der deutschen Frau’: Nürnbergerinnen vor dem Sondergericht 1933–1945,” in *Am Anfang war Sigena: Ein Nürnberger Frauengeschichtsbuch*, ed. Nadja Bennewitz and Gaby Franger (Nürnberg: Anthologie ars vivendi, 1999); Michael Löffelsender, *Straffjustiz an der Heimatfront: Die strafrechtliche Verfolgung von Frauen und Jugendlichen im Oberlandesgerichtsbezirk Köln 1939–1945* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012); Hans-Ulrich Ludewig and Dieter Kuessner, *Es sei also jeder gewarnt: Das Sondergericht Braunschweig 1933–1945* (Braunschweig: Selbstverlag des Braunschweigischen Geschichtsvereins, 2000); Nina Lutz, “Das Sondergericht Nürnberg 1933–1945: Eingespielte Justizmaschinerie der gelenkten Rechtspflege,” in *Justizpalast Nürnberg. Ein Ort der Weltgeschichte wird 100 Jahre: Festschrift zum 100. Jahrestag der feierlichen Eröffnung des Justizpalastes in Nürnberg durch König Ludwig III. am 11. September 1916*, ed. Ewald Behr Schmidt (Neustadt an der Aisch: VDS Verlagsdruckerei Schmidt, 2016); Andreas Müller, “Das Sondergericht Graz von 1939 bis 1945” (Magisterarbeit Universität Graz, 2005); Jürgen Sandweg, “Schwabacher vor dem Sondergericht: Der Alltag der Denunziation und die ‘Justiz des gesunden Volksempfindens’,” in *Vergessen und verdrängt? Schwabach 1918–1945*, ed. Sabine Weigand-Karg, Sandra Hoffmann, and Jürgen Sandweg (Schwabach: Stadtmuseum Schwabach, 1997); Bernd Schimmler, *Recht ohne Gerechtigkeit: Zur Tätigkeit der Berliner Sondergerichte im Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: Wissenschaftlicher Autoren-Verlag, 1984); Hans Wrobel, Henning Maul-Backer, and Ilka Renken, eds., *Straffjustiz im totalen Krieg: Aus den Akten des Sondergerichts Bremen 1940 bis 1945*, 3 vols., vol. 2 (Bremen: Bremen Verlags- und Buchhandlungsgesellschaft, 1994); Hans Wüllenweber, *Sondergerichte im Dritten Reich: Vergessene Verbrechen der Justiz* (Frankfurt (M): Luchterhand, 1990); Wolf-Dieter Mechler, *Kriegsalltag an der “Heimatfront”: Das Sondergericht Hannover im Einsatz gegen “Rundfunkverbrecher,” “Schwarzschlachter,” “Volksschädlinge” und andere “Straftäter” 1939 bis 1945* (Hannover: Hahn’sche Buchhandlung, 1997); Gedenkstätte Roter Ochse, ed., “... das gesunde Volksempfinden gröblichst verletzt”: “verbotener Umgang mit Kriegsgefangenen” im Sondergerichtsbezirk Halle (Halle: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung Sachsen-Anhalt, Stiftung Gedenkstätten Sachsen-Anhalt, 2009).
- ¹⁶ Bernd Boll, “‘... das gesunde Volksempfinden auf das Gröbste verletzt’. Die Offenburger Straffjustiz und der ‘verbotene Umgang mit Kriegsgefangenen’ während des Zweiten Weltkrieges,” *Die Ortenau: Zeitschrift des Historischen Vereins für Mittelbaden* 71 (1991).

on trials at the special courts in Kiel and Altona and by Andreas Heusler on Munich.¹⁷ These studies provide important facts and observations on the courts, but they remain limited to a specific area and usually say little about the POWs.

The literature on the expectations and restrictions for German women in relations with foreigners is also rich and helpful but has remained largely isolated from studies on POWs. The book on German soldiers' wives in both world wars by Birthe Kundrus, for example, provides much detail on the social expectations placed on these women, and her article on forbidden love in Nazi Germany highlights the relations between German women and foreign prisoners and laborers, but both works are not concerned with the prisoners' perspective and their diplomatic representation.¹⁸ Silke Schneider's in-depth study of forbidden contacts between German women and foreign prisoners and laborers is very good on Nazi ideas regarding "sexual treason" or "racial treason," but it focuses only on the trials against women and pursues a broader aim insofar as the book also includes relations with foreign civilian laborers.¹⁹ A fascinating case study by Maria Prieler-Woldan follows the fate of an Austrian mountain farm woman, a widow, sentenced for forbidden relations with three French POWs working on her farm or nearby, but it does not contain much information about the prisoners. Moreover, it is difficult to generalize from this one case.²⁰

Cornelie Osborne's article "Female Desire and Male Honor: German Women's Illicit Love Affairs with Prisoners of War during the Second World War" draws from trials against women in front of the special court

¹⁷ Eckard Colmorgen and Klaus-Detlev Godau-Schüttke, "Verbotener Umgang mit Kriegsgefangenen". Frauen vor dem Schleswig-Holsteinischen Sondergericht (1940–1945)," *Demokratische Geschichte: Jahrbuch zur Arbeiterbewegung und Demokratie in Schleswig-Holstein* 9 (1995); Iris Siemssen, "Das Sondergericht und die Nähe: Die Rechtsprechung bei 'verbotenem Umgang mit Kriegsgefangenen' am Beispiel von Fällen aus dem Kreis Plön," in "*Standgericht der inneren Front: Das Sondergericht Altona/Kiel 1932–1945*," ed. Robert Bohn and Uwe Danker (Hamburg: Ergebnisse-Verlag, 1998); Andreas Heusler, "'Strafbestand' Liebe: Verbotene Kontakte zwischen Münchnerinnen und ausländischen Kriegsgefangenen," in *Zwischen den Fronten. Münchner Frauen in Krieg und Frieden 1900–1950*, ed. Sybille Krafft (Munich: Buchendorfer Verlag, 1995).

¹⁸ Birthe Kundrus, *Kriegerfrauen: Familienpolitik und Geschlechterverhältnisse im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Hamburg: Christians, 1995), and Kundrus, "Forbidden Company: Romantic Relationships between Germans and Foreigners, 1939 to 1945," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11, no. 1/2 (2002).

¹⁹ Silke Schneider, *Verbotener Umgang: Ausländer und Deutsche im Nationalsozialismus. Diskurse um Sexualität, Moral, Wissen und Strafe* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2010).

²⁰ Maria Prieler-Woldan, *Das Selbstverständliche tun: Die Salzburger Bäuerin Maria Etzer und ihr verbotener Einsatz für Fremde im Nationalsozialismus* (Innsbruck, Vienna, Bozen: StudienVerlag, 2018).

in Munich. Usborne, who is particularly interested in the history of emotions, highlights the active role of many women in these forbidden relationships, suggesting that a shift in female sexual behavior and expectations occurred in wartime Germany. With reference to findings of Dagmar Herzog, she stresses the destructive effects of the war on traditional constraints and communal controls and the Janus-faced Nazi approach to sexuality, with conservative and prudish messages mixing with more progressive narratives of sexual fulfillment in a popular culture that raised corresponding expectations.²¹ Usborne provides good observations of the behavior and the motivations of German women but does not use the files of the prisoners involved with them, which are often an enlightening corrective to the trial records of the women. Drawing from literature that does not properly distinguish between western POWs and civilian laborers (the prohibition applied only to the former), she concludes that the punishment of POWs, if they were punished at all, was generally lenient.²² Moreover, she takes a critical approach toward the active role of the women, suggesting that these women sometimes were complicit in Nazi racism and even took advantage of it by engaging in erotic relations with men in unfreedom whose punishment could be savage, especially in the case of Poles and Soviet POWs.²³ But the punishment for the women was harsh, too, and the power relation between German women and western POWs, who had some rights and privileges, was highly dynamic and not one-sided. Some POWs, for example by hiding in a woman's apartment after an escape, also brought particularly severe punishments upon the women.²⁴

Older works on German military justice are dominated by the controversy regarding the degree of Nazification of military justice and its role in ensuring discipline and obedience within the German armed forces (*Wehrmacht*) to the last days of the Third Reich. The important study by Manfred Messerschmidt, which argues that the military justice system

²¹ Cornelia Usborne, "Female Sexual Desire and Male Honor: German Women's Illicit Love Affairs with Prisoners of War during the Second World War," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 26, no. 3 (2017): 476–7 and 482–4; see also Dagmar Herzog, "Introduction: War and Sexuality in Europe's Twentieth Century," in *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe's Twentieth Century*, ed. Dagmar Herzog (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 5. For an exaggerated insistence on Nazi prudishness and condemnation of sexual pleasure, see Stefan Maiwald and Gerd Mischler, *Sexualität unter dem Hakenkreuz: Manipulation und Vernichtung der Intimsphäre im NS-Staat* (Hamburg and Vienna: Europa Verlag, 1999), for example 59–60, 103.

²² Usborne, "Female Sexual Desire and Male Honor," 460–1, especially note 19.

²³ *Ibid.*, 486–7.

²⁴ See Chapter 3 on "The Relations," especially the section "Gender Dynamics."

was strongly Nazified, mentions courts martial against POWs only in passing.²⁵ More recently, Peter Lutz Kalmbach, who has also published on civilian courts, has taken a broader perspective by interpreting military justice in the context of Nazi preparations for total war, which required utmost discipline both on the war and home front. Kalmbach addresses the courts martial against POWs involved with German women and reveals that Hitler personally took interest in the matter and pushed for a faster sentencing of the POWs in 1943, which was, however, difficult to achieve because of the delays required by the 1929 Geneva Convention on POWs and the often intricate correlation between the courts martial and the special courts trying the women.²⁶ David Raub Snyder's study *Sex Crimes under the Wehrmacht* deals mostly with trials against German soldiers and argues that military utility and pragmatism, more than ideology, were the guiding criteria of Nazi military justice, which reacted with surprising leniency in many cases of German soldiers having sex with racially stigmatized groups. Snyder suggests that the military tribunals were more lenient and less ideological than civilian courts in this matter, but this impression does not agree with my findings on courts martial against POWs. These cases, however, are outside the scope of Snyder's book, which focuses on sex crimes (not consensual relations) by German soldiers.²⁷ Birgit Beck's study of the Wehrmacht and sexual violence includes a section on forbidden relations between German women and foreign men as a comparative angle to the trials against German soldiers accused of sex crimes. Like Kundrus and Schneider, Beck stresses the double morality of German courts, which harshly punished undesirable relations when German women were involved but was more lenient with Wehrmacht soldiers abroad. She demonstrates how the notion of "sexual honor" was also defined much more restrictively with respect to German women than to non-German women attacked by German soldiers – with important distinctions between western and eastern Europeans. Beck highlights the fact that the judges adjudicating sex crimes of German soldiers treated the soldiers' "sexual

²⁵ Manfred Messerschmidt, *Die Wehrmachtjustiz 1933–1945* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005), 312 and 319.

²⁶ Peter Lutz Kalmbach, *Wehrmachtjustiz* (Berlin: Metropol-Verlag, 2012), 150–3. See also Kalmbach, "Schutz der geistigen Wehrkraft: NS-Strafrechtsreformen für den 'totalen Krieg'," *Juristenzeitung* 17 (2015); Kalmbach, "The German Courts-Martial and Their Cooperation with the Police Organizations during the World War II," *Journal on European History of Law* 8, no. 1 (2017); Kalmbach, "Das System der NS-Sondergerichtsbarkeiten."

²⁷ David Raub Snyder, *Sex Crimes under the Wehrmacht* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 190–200.

need” as a mitigating factor.²⁸ The book on military justice on the “home front” by Kerstin Theis deals precisely with the military tribunals that tried POWs, among many other groups. Theis focuses on the military tribunals in Bonn and Marburg and argues, as Ambrière suggested, that the courts martial for forbidden relations mostly took place to serve as deterrent examples. These two tribunals, however, did not sentence a large number of POWs. Still, Theis provides interesting background data on the judges and procedures of the courts martial on the territory of the Reich – as opposed to the courts martial near the frontlines and in occupied countries.²⁹

There is a rich literature on POWs in Nazi Germany. Rüdiger Overmans, in a chapter for the multi-volume work *Germany and the Second World War*, analyzes German policy regarding POWs of different nations and argues that, with respect to western prisoners, German officials were still to some extent motivated by national conservative, not Nazi, ideas inherited from World War I. These ideas clashed occasionally with Hitler’s desire for a harsher treatment that would have violated the Geneva Convention on POWs of 1929 that Germany had ratified in 1934. Overmans also consistently stresses the economic utility of the POWs as workers.³⁰ Bob Moore provides a helpful overview on the treatment of POWs in the western European theater of war, arguing that the terms of the Geneva Convention were generally upheld, with notable exceptions mostly in the context of the capture of enemy soldiers and at the end of the war, when the German government ceased to exist altogether.³¹

Many studies focus on the POWs from a specific nation. For a long time, the history of British (including Commonwealth) and American POWs in Germany was dominated by a focus on heroic escapes and acts of defiance against petty, dumb, and brutal German guards (“goon baiting”). This focus provided attractive material for films and television

²⁸ Birgit Beck, *Wehrmacht und sexuelle Gewalt: Sexualverbrechen vor deutschen Militärgerichten 1939–1945* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2004), 281–92. Snyder, however, argues that the Wehrmacht administered draconic punishment to German soldiers who raped Soviet women – not out of empathy for the women but because of concerns for discipline and worries about enticing more partisan opposition: Snyder, *Sex Crimes under the Wehrmacht*, 138–44.

²⁹ Kerstin Theis, *Wehrmachtjustiz an der “Heimatfront”*: Die Militärgerichte des Ersatzheeres im Zweiten Weltkrieg (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter/Oldenbourg, 2016), 383–9.

³⁰ Rüdiger Overmans, “Die Kriegsgefangenenpolitik des Deutschen Reiches 1939 bis 1945,” in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, ed. Jörg Echternkamp (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2005), 735–6.

³¹ Bob Moore, “The Treatment of Prisoners of War in the Western European Theatre of War, 1939–1945,” in *Prisoners in War*, ed. Sibylle Scheipers (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

series, but it supported a one-sided and elitist image of captivity. It is the merit of Simon Paul MacKenzie's book *The Colditz Myth* and other thorough studies, such as the books by Arieh Kochavi, Vasilis Vourkoutiotis, Neville Wylie, and Clare Makepeace on British or American POWs, and Jonathan Vance and Peter Monteath on Canadian and Australian POWs respectively, to have replaced this image with a more rigorous analysis of the captivity experience and a deeper understanding of the diplomatic aspects pertaining to POWs.³² Still, romantic adventures seemed irrelevant in this sober and harsh context. Makepeace's book, which analyzes POW memoirs and diaries, does not address them. Midge Gillies' book *The Barbed-Wire University: The Real Lives of Allied Prisoners of War in the Second World War*, briefly mentions some affairs of British POWs, but German women appear mostly as intruders into an all-male camp world: "Prisoners could go for months without glimpsing a woman so that when a female entered the camp – perhaps the wife or daughter of a German guard who had been invited to a concert or display of craft work – they were gawked at like an alien."³³ MacKenzie suggests that many POWs in retrospect argued that hunger made the sex drive go away and tells the story of a beautiful German woman passing in front of the barbed wire enclosing a British POW camp on her way home from the bakery; all the prisoners stared – at the bread. If British POWs did undertake erotic relations, MacKenzie argues, it was mostly with Polish or other non-German women.³⁴ David Rolf, in a study that despite its broad title (*Prisoners of the Reich: Germany's Captives 1939–1945*) deals above all with British POWs, mentions some sexual adventures of

³² Arieh J. Kochavi, *Confronting Captivity: Britain and the United States and Their POWs in Nazi Germany* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Simon Paul MacKenzie, *The Colditz Myth: British and Commonwealth Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Clare Makepeace, *Captives of War: British Prisoners of War in Europe in the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Vasilis Vourkoutiotis, *Prisoners of War and the German High Command: The British and American Experience* (New York: Palgrave, 2003); Vourkoutiotis, "What the Angels Saw: Red Cross and Protective Power Visits to Anglo-American POWs, 1939–1945," *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, no. 4 (2005); Neville Wylie, *Barbed Wire Diplomacy: Britain, Germany, and the Politics of Prisoners of War, 1939–1945* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Jonathan Vance, *Objects of Concern: Canadian Prisoners of War through the Twentieth Century* ([no place]: UBC Press, 1994); Peter Monteath, *P.O.W.: Australian Prisoners of War in Hitler's Reich* (Sydney: Macmillan, 2011).

³³ Midge Gillies, *The Barbed-Wire University: The Real Lives of Allied Prisoners of War in the Second World War* (London: Aurum Press, 2011), 48–9. The title is misleading because the book only deals with (mostly elite) British POWs and not Soviet, American, or other Allied POWs.

³⁴ MacKenzie, *Colditz Myth*, 213–15; for the story of the woman with the bread, see also Petschnigg, *Von der Front aufs Feld*, 232.

prisoners, mostly secret visits to brothels, often with the complicity of guards. But Rolf says little about relations with German women outside the venal context.³⁵ An article by Karen Horn on South African POWs in a camp on the outskirts of Dresden stresses the amicable relations between the POWs and the commander, the guards, and for a while also local civilians. But bombing attacks, especially the devastating raids on Dresden in February 1945, triggered hostility from civilians. Horn mentions that the commander tacitly tolerated an illicit love relation of a POW with a German woman but does not explain whether this case was an exception and if there ever were trials against any of the South Africans from this camp.³⁶

Yet, the archival files show that British POWs did not lose their sexual appetite and that they did end up in front of military tribunals in increasing numbers. It is true that many British POWs sought contact with women who might have appeared to be Polish or Czech, as MacKenzie suggests, but we have to consider that most British POWs were held on the eastern periphery of the Reich where national identity was often ambiguous; many women whose background was partly Polish, Czech, or Yugoslav did in fact have German citizenship, and contact with them was therefore punishable. Moreover, two military district commanders in the German–Polish border areas (military districts XX and XXI), frustrated by these ambiguities, decreed that *all* POW relations to women, regardless of citizenship, were forbidden.³⁷

The key works on French POWs in Nazi Germany are more dated and also say little about the amorous relations, with the exception of the two books by Yves Durand from the 1980s, which provide interesting material on the everyday lives of the French POWs and mention the forbidden relations in the context of POW relations with civilians. Durand did not yet have access to the judicial files for the POWs, however, and he downplays the erotic dimension of the forbidden relations. His discretion is not surprising if one considers that his work was commissioned by the association of former POWs and appeared at a time when most former

³⁵ David Rolf, *Prisoners of the Reich: Germany's Captives 1939–1945* (London: Cooper, 1988), 73, 104–6.

³⁶ Karen Horn, “‘History from the Inside’: South African Prisoner-of-War Experience in Work Camp 1169, Dresden, 1943–1945,” *War & Society* 33, no. 4 (2014): 276, 280–1.

³⁷ Hans K. Frey, *Die disziplinarische und gerichtliche Bestrafung von Kriegsgefangenen. Die Anwendung des Kriegsgefangenenabkommens von 1929 auf die angelsächsischen und deutschen Kriegsgefangenen während des Zweiten Weltkrieges* (Vienna: Springer, 1948), 61. Frey mentions only district XX. For the corresponding order applying to district XXI, see Feldurteil, Posen, April 6, 1944, in BAR Bern, Bestand Vertretung Berlin, 72b.

POWs were still alive.³⁸ A more recent study of the memoirs of French POWs and civilian laborers by Patrice Arnaud argues that the Frenchmen in Germany retrospectively described the love relations as a reversal of the military defeat through erotic “conquests.” Arnaud suggests that, in reality, a reversal of gender roles often took place, given that the woman was a member of the dominant society and the Frenchman a captive soldier or worker. The reversal of gender roles expressed itself in the active part of the woman in the relationships and also in her occasional function as provider of extra food. Many French memoirs, as Arnaud points out, also stress the reputation of French men among German women as excellent lovers.³⁹

Belgian POWs in World War II have received very little scholarly attention. There were efforts in the 1970s and 1980s to produce a comprehensive history of the Belgian POWs similar to what Yves Durand was doing at the time for French POWs. Georges Hautecler and E. Gillet, both retired officers and former POWs, gathered archival documents and testimonies, but nothing substantial materialized, except for a well-researched but short series of articles by Gillet in the Belgian military history journal in 1987–90, an anecdotal book by Hautecler on spectacular prisoner escapes, and an article on the religious life of the prisoners, also by Hautecler.⁴⁰

A few scholarly works have looked at both, the realms of the German women and the POWs. Almost all of these studies reference the path-breaking work by Ulrich Herbert about foreign laborers (both POWs and

³⁸ Yves Durand, *La Captivité: histoire des prisonniers de guerre français, 1939–1945* (Paris: Fédération nationale des combattants et prisonniers de guerre et combattants d’Algérie, de Tunisie et du Maroc, 1982), 414–20; Durand, *Les Prisonniers de guerre dans les Stalags, les Oflags et les Kommandos, 1939–1945* (Paris: Hachette, 1987), 250–4. See also Fabien Théofilakis, “Le Prisonnier de guerre dans l’historiographie française et allemande: Étudier la Seconde Guerre mondiale à front renversé,” *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, no. 274 (2019): 19–20. The older work by Pierre Gascar does mention love relations but is not precise and contains no references: Pierre Gascar, *Histoire de la captivité des Français en Allemagne (1939–1945)* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), 110–16; Gascar also mentions many relations of French POWs with Ukrainian and Polish forced laborers: 149.

³⁹ Arnaud, “Die deutsch-französischen Liebesbeziehungen,” 186–9. See also Patrice Arnaud, *Les STO. Histoire des Français requis en Allemagne nazie 1942–1945* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2010), 241–50 and 441.

⁴⁰ E. Gillet, “Histoire des sous-officiers et soldats belges prisonniers de guerre, 1940–1945,” *Belgisch tijdschrift voor militaire geschiedenis/Revue belge d’histoire militaire* XXVII (1987–8): 227–54, 299–320; 355–79; XXVIII (1989–90): 45–78, 123–66, 217–54, 299–335, 351–82; Georges Hautecler, *Évasions réussies* (Liège: Éditions Solédi, 1966); Hautecler, “La Vie religieuse des prisonniers de guerre Belges (1940–1945). Faits et documents,” *Cahiers d’Histoire de la Seconde Guerre mondiale* 3 (1974). See also the brief article by X. Buckinx, “Belgen in duitse Krijgsgevangenschap 1940–1945,” *Spiegel Historiaal*, no. 11 (1984).

civilians) in Nazi Germany, which presented some information on forbidden relations and efforts of the Nazi regime to negotiate the tension between its desire for racial homogeneity and its dependence on the large-scale presence of foreign laborers.⁴¹ Very useful and insightful is Fabrice Virgili's book *Naitre ennemi*, dealing with Franco-German children born in World War II. Virgili, who had already published a book on the head-shaving of French women accused of "horizontal collaboration" with Germans, examines sexual relations between French and German nationals and the fate of their offspring in both countries during and immediately after the war. As in the book on shorn women, he addresses public concerns about sexual boundaries and gender roles in wartime and postwar societies, showing that Franco-German children grew up in an atmosphere of suspicion, stigmatized as children of treason and shame. Virgili's book is well documented but favors the French perspective and French materials (as he admits). It reveals more about the children of German men in France than about the children of French men in Germany, and it does not consider trials against German women and the numerous local studies available in German.⁴²

The French journalist Jean-Paul Picaper, an expert on German politics, wrote a book about the love relations between French men and German women in Nazi Germany for a popular audience. Picaper found some surviving lovers and their children, interviewed them, and even helped some of the children to track down their missing parent or family. Many families had no idea that they have relatives in the other country. The reunions prompted by Picaper's discoveries could foster warm friendships and bonds, but they could also cause mean-spirited rejection motivated by the fear of rival heirs. Picaper's book focuses on POWs and civilian laborers, and it does not always make the necessary distinctions between them. For example, Picaper repeatedly claims that contacts between French civilian workers and German women were forbidden. Picaper also mistakenly claims that German women involved with French men, and sometimes their French partners, would be sent to a concentration camp if convicted. This was only true for some women involved with Polish or Soviet POWs or eastern laborers. Still, Picaper's

⁴¹ Ulrich Herbert, *Hitler's Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labor in Germany under the Third Reich*, trans. William Templer (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), especially 124–6. The book was originally published in German in 1986.

⁴² Fabrice Virgili, *Naitre ennemi: Les enfants des couples franco-allemands nés pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale* (Paris: Editions Payot, 2009). See also Virgili, *La France "virile": Des femmes tondues à la Libération* (Paris: Éditions Payot & Rivage, 2004), translated into English as *Shorn Women: Gender and Punishment in Liberation France*, trans. John Flower (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2002).

book comes closest to analyzing the lived reality of Franco-German love relations, and it highlights what was often sincere love in very difficult circumstances.⁴³

An inspiring work that connects sexuality to international relations, albeit not with a focus on POWs, is Mary Louise Roberts' book *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II France*.⁴⁴ Roberts touches on similar themes to my book, from sex and race to power in an international framework. She argues that the image of France, especially Paris, as a promiscuous place of sexual adventure featured as a great attraction to American soldiers in 1944–5 and helped motivate them to fight. At least, this worked for white soldiers; black soldiers found themselves easily accused of rape and punished draconically in flimsy courts martial that, I would add in light of the evidence in my book, compared rather badly with the average German court martial, which generally followed rules of evidence and featured engaged defense attorneys. Roberts shows how blaming black soldiers for rapes and the unsavory aspects of the American army presence provided something like a lightning rod appreciated by American army leaders as well as by many French people, who were more racist than African Americans believed them to be on the basis of memories from World War I. Roberts argues that the frequent encounters with desperate French women prostituting themselves instilled, or confirmed, in the American soldiers an image of a decadent and weak France that needed strong American leadership, and she argues that this type of relationship had international consequences insofar as it allowed American leaders to dismiss France as a serious international player. Of course, the relationship between a soldier of a liberating, victorious, and very well-supplied army to a woman from a liberated, humiliated, poor, and relatively powerless country features very different gender dynamics than the relationship between a POW and a woman of the detaining state. Roberts' efforts to tie sexual relations to international politics are inspiring and aspirational, but her book deals mostly with the American push to dismantle the French regulated prostitution system and not with the higher diplomatic level. I would argue that the notion of a weak France (and not only in American eyes) owes much more to France's quick and surprising defeat of May–June 1940 than to the sexual relations of GIs and French women in 1944–5. Also, Roberts focuses almost exclusively on narrowly sexual

⁴³ Jean-Paul Picaper, *Le Crime d'aimer: Les enfants du STO* (Paris: Éditions des syrtés, 2005). For references to concentration camps, see pp. 31, 139, 159, 295, 306.

⁴⁴ Mary Louise Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II France* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).

encounters, while the relations between western POWs and German women encompassed a much broader spectrum and included only very few cases of rape.

The Prison Camp Paradigm and Alternative Reality

One problem that has made it difficult to integrate the different avenues of scholarship is what I propose to call the “prison camp paradigm” of POW history, namely the widespread notion that POWs, unlike civilian laborers, were groups insulated behind barbed wire and separated from German civilian society. Memoirs and psychological research on former POWs have stressed the effects of long-term confinement, popularly called “barbed-wire disease,” arising from years of isolation in an all-male group of comrades. Research on gender roles, homoerotic relations, and female impersonators in POW theaters has provided insights into the creative ways in which POWs coped with this situation, always assuming a rather isolated sphere in which POWs spent their days. The prison camp paradigm was useful to former POWs in their efforts to portray themselves as victims of Nazism qualifying for indemnification because the POW camp appeared to belong to the same spectrum as the concentration camp. It also helped to cover up the degree of freedom many POWs had and the choices they made, especially in terms of love relations. But the prison camp paradigm is misleading and rests on an often implicit focus on the privileged and articulate elites, mostly officers.⁴⁵ The Geneva Convention stipulated that officers did not have to work, and except for a minority who volunteered to work, officers were indeed secluded in camp complexes or castles on forbidding hilltops, such as the famous Colditz castle in Saxony that inspired films and television series.⁴⁶ Much of the literature on the POW experience, especially on the British and Americans, focuses on these officers, their escape plans, their ingenious book projects, their theater productions, and their attempts to fill their idle time through bird-watching, sports, reading, or university-level courses.⁴⁷ Some of the more educated

⁴⁵ For this reason, much of the interesting literature on camps is not useful for my project. See, for example, Bettina Greiner and Alan Kramer, eds., *Die Welt der Lager: Zur “Erfolgsgeschichte” einer Institution* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2013); Joël Kotek and Pierre Rigoulot, *Le Siècle des camps: Détention, concentration, extermination. Cent ans de mal radical* ([Paris]: Lattès, 2000).

⁴⁶ MacKenzie, *Colditz Myth*, 93–4. See also Simon P. MacKenzie, “British Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany,” *Archives* 28 (2003): 184–5.

⁴⁷ For some examples among many: David A. Foy, *For You the War Is Over: American Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany* (New York: Stein and Day, 1984); Makepeace, *Captives of War*, 69–73.

rank-and-file prisoners experienced captivity in similar ways to officers because they were charged with administrative duties in the camps, for example as translators, secretaries, or scribes.

Granted, there were many great artists, scientists, writers, and historians among the POWs, and they deserve attention because the enforced idleness of a POW camp could be a remarkably creative and productive period despite hardships. In *The Barbed-Wire University*, Gillies presents an impressive list of artistic and scientific achievements of British (officer) POWs.⁴⁸ A cursory look at eminent French POWs reads like a who's-who of intellectual and political life of the postwar period. The historian Fernand Braudel, for example, developed his pathbreaking ideas about history as a social science in lectures to his fellow prisoners in an officer camp in Lübeck. For the philosopher Louis Althusser, who worked as a translator and assistant prisoner representative (man of confidence) in various camps in Schleswig-Holstein, captivity also was an intellectual gestation period. He studied, among other subjects, German literature and used his POW diary to formulate new ideas – between reports about passionate soccer matches against Belgian, Serbian, and Polish officers.⁴⁹ The philosopher Emmanuel Levinas spent most of the war in the officer barracks of the POW camp Fallingbommel near Hannover and drafted his work *Existence and Existents* (1947) in captivity.⁵⁰ The philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre spent a few months in the POW camp of Trier and formed a diverse and lively intellectual circle there.⁵¹ The poet, philosopher, and later statesman Léopold Sédar Senghor, the first president of Senegal (1960–80), also experienced captivity – in his case in the midst of French colonial prisoners in German-occupied France – as a transforming period for his ideas about being black, African, and French, although he, like others, tended to mystify his captivity experience in postwar accounts.⁵²

By privileging the experience of illustrious or elite POWs, the prison camp paradigm has tended to suppress the interactions of POWs and

⁴⁸ Gillies, *Barbed-Wire University*, 84–96, 271–304.

⁴⁹ Peter Schöttler, “Der französische Historiker Fernand Braudel als Kriegsgefangener in Lübeck,” *Zeitschrift für Lübeckische Geschichte* 95 (2015); Louis Althusser, *Journal de Captivité. Stalag XA/1940–1945. Carnets, correspondances, textes* (n. p.: Stock/IMEC, 1992).

⁵⁰ Bettina Bergo, “Emmanuel Levinas,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/levinas/ (last visited on 13 May 2019). Yves Durand also recognizes the creative aspect of captivity: Durand, *Captivité*, 289–307; Durand, *Prisonniers de Guerre*, 183–93.

⁵¹ Marius Perrin, *Avec Sartre au Stalag 12D* (Paris: Delarge, 1980), 29–42.

⁵² Raffael Scheck, “Léopold Sédar Senghor prisonnier de guerre allemand. Une nouvelle approche fondée sur un texte inédit,” *French Politics, Culture & Society* 31, no. 2 (2014).

civilians. The able-bodied prisoners without rank all had to work, and this brought them into contact with German civilians. During their long work days (ten to twelve hours, Monday to Saturday), these POWs interacted with the German labor force, including an increasing number of German women and foreigners (interactions between POWs and non-German civilian workers, both women and men, still await a focused exploration). Spontaneous conversations in broken German arose during routine tasks or over breaks. Prisoners might also meet civilians on their way to and from work. On farms, the separation between POWs and civilians was impossible to maintain from the start, as the POW might work alone with a woman in the fields or vineyards and sleep on the farm. A shortage of guards made close supervision of working prisoners nearly impossible, although foremen and farmers were usually contracted as auxiliary guards. Even prisoners who were locked up in sleeping quarters at night could find ways to sneak out and return before daybreak.

Working prisoners, the vast majority, obviously had no problems related to idleness in an isolated all-male sphere, and their living conditions did not favor the outbreak of “barbed-wire disease.” Instead, they shared many of the problems and concerns of German working people. Even Ambrière acknowledged this, speaking about solidarity between French POWs, many of them farmers, and German farmers, all united in an age-old hatred of tax collectors and urban meddlers – “those people who always take and never give.”⁵³ Not surprisingly, most of the women involved with POWs belonged to the working population – employees, industrial workers, and especially farmwomen and maids – although a number of housewives without regular employment, some of them from the social elites, also had to stand trial for a forbidden relationship.

Given the integration of POWs into German work life, captivity slowly turned into an alternative reality. Connections to home and the old life were tenuous, and an end of the new life for a long time seemed distant and insecure, although many prisoners at least initially hoped that liberation would come soon.⁵⁴ Many married prisoners had doubts about the fidelity of their wives, and some knew for sure that their wife or girlfriend was involved with somebody else – for French or Belgian POWs quite possibly a German soldier stationed in their home country.⁵⁵ The daily

⁵³ Ambrière, *Les grandes Vacances*, 193.

⁵⁴ Ibid 197. On the expectation of a quick liberation in the case of British POWs, see Makepeace, *Captives of War*, 42–52.

⁵⁵ Sarah Fishman has explored the paternalistic attention to POW wives by the Vichy government, which appears to mirror Kundrus’ findings about warrior wives in Nazi Germany: Sarah Fishman, *We Will Wait: Wives of French Prisoners of War, 1940–1945* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991); Fishman, “Grand Delusions:

experience of common work with German civilians led them to identify to some degree with their concerns. Most prisoners picked up some German over long years of captivity, and many spoke it quite well. Historian Jean-Marie d'Hoop has shown that empathy developed between French prisoners and the German civilians particularly in the context of the catastrophic German defeat. The research of Durand, based on written and oral testimonies of former French POWs, confirms this impression, as does the study of Württemberg in the Second World War by Jill Stephenson.⁵⁶ Although most prisoners probably missed home and wanted to return, they adapted to a new life in Germany. The two realities co-existed next to each other and without much connection. Many married prisoners, who would probably not have contemplated infidelity or even divorce under normal circumstances, felt driven into passionate amorous entanglements in their present and immediate reality. Many couples wanted to marry after the war, but this was rarely possible because military regulations insisted on prompt repatriation of the POW alone, and the strong public hostility to Germans in France, Belgium, and Britain ruled out acceptance of a German bride for some time.

It was harder for British POWs than for Frenchmen and Belgians to settle into an alternative reality during captivity, and it would seem that their POW lives always remained more provisional. The British army forbade “fraternization” with the enemy, and British POWs faced tighter regimentation and guarding. The German “enemy remains enemy” propaganda found more resonance given that Britain remained in the war and given that new British POWs kept arriving from various fronts. Under these conditions, one would expect to see a higher proportion of superficial erotic encounters of the British POWs, as compared to French and Belgian POWs. Yet, a significant number of British POWs did grow very close to their German girlfriends, and many German–British couples developed marriage plans. Whether this happened more rarely than in relations involving French and Belgian POWs is hard to ascertain. The recollections of British POWs seem to reflect on predominantly hostile “German” civilians (although one needs to consider that many British prisoners stayed on the eastern periphery of the Reich and dealt

The Unintended Consequences of Vichy France’s Prisoner of War Propaganda,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 26, no. 2 (1991). See also Gerlinda Swillen, *De Wieg van WO II. Oorlogskinderen op de as Brussel-Berlijn* (Brussels: ASP, 2016).

⁵⁶ d’Hoop, “Prisonniers de guerre français témoins de la défaite allemande,” 77; Durand, *Captivité*, 401–21; Durand, *Prisonniers de Guerre*, 241–55; Jill Stephenson, *Hitler’s Home Front : Württemberg under the Nazis* (London and New York: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), 279 and 84. See also, albeit with a focus on all foreign laborers: Zühl, “Zum Verhältnis der deutschen Landbevölkerung,” 351–2.

with many people who were German only in a broader sense), but there is much evidence that British POWs were well received in some rural areas, for example in Austria. Historian Edith Petschnigg has discovered only relatively few court cases involving Austrian women and British POWs, but she argues that there were many relations that did not come to trial. While the SS Security Service ascribed the low number of trials to the restraint of British prisoners rooted in national pride, her findings suggest that, as elsewhere, popular acceptance of the POWs led to a cover of silence. She even found a case of an Australian POW who remained in Austria after the war and married his village sweetheart and of a New Zealander who married his Austrian lover and took her home with him after the war.⁵⁷ Some British POWs promised their farming families that they would protect them once Allied troops arrived.⁵⁸

The Sources

The source material for this project is immense. I therefore had to select certain places and source groups. I started with the fifty-five volumes in the German Foreign Office Archives in Berlin dealing with trials against French POWs.⁵⁹ These files contain more than one thousand court martial judgments as well as much contextual material such as diplomatic exchanges between Germany and France and internal German communications about specific policies and judgments, mostly between the Foreign Office and the High Command. For unclear reasons, this collection stops in February 1942, with the exception of a few court martial sentences from a few months later, mostly in cases where the German High Command considered an earlier sentence too lenient and asked for a retrial. Around 75 percent of the cases in this collection concern trials for consensual relations with women. Poaching, resistance to a guard, theft, and political offenses (insults to the German army or leadership), as well as a few cases of rape, child abuse, and homosexual relations make up the remaining 25 percent. The first trials in this collection date from the summer of 1940, but forbidden relations appeared only in late 1940. The same archives also contain much smaller collections for Belgian (five volumes) and British POWs (four volumes). The Belgian files are similar to the French, but the British files contain

⁵⁷ Petschnigg, *Von der Front aufs Feld*, 224–37, especially 225–6, 236; Petschnigg, “The Spirit of Comradeship,” 430, 432–4.

⁵⁸ See, for example, the testimony of the guard Fraebel, February 10, 1945, in Steiermärkisches Landesarchiv (StLA) Graz, Sondergericht, KLVs 250/45 K.3, case against Maria H.

⁵⁹ Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (PAAA) Berlin, R 40860–40914.

mostly courts martial regarding resistance to a guard, theft, and political offenses, and not a single court martial relating to a forbidden relation. The Belgian and British collections, like the French, end in early 1942 and are incomplete even for the period they cover.⁶⁰

The Archives nationales in Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, outside Paris, hold a vast collection pertaining to French POWs and the French agencies that dealt with POW matters, primarily the so-called Scapini Mission, which on December 10, 1940, assumed the role of protecting power for the French POWs, a role normally played by a neutral country according to the Geneva Convention. These materials contain more than 17,000 trial records, correspondence between the Scapini Mission and German defense attorneys as well as French legal advisors in the POW camps, diplomatic documents, internal memos, inspection reports, and eyewitness accounts. Access to some of these materials, especially the court martial records, was for a long time restricted for legal reasons. I obtained permission in 2015 to consult specific files selected by name. The legal restrictions expired not much later, but the material condition of the documents, printed on low-quality paper that tends to disintegrate whenever one turns a page, led to restricted access again. It is therefore impossible to examine these records systematically. But I did explore select files from these holdings, and I extensively analyzed the diplomatic documents and the correspondence of the Scapini Mission, which were in better physical shape and mostly accessible without special permission. A curious mix of files concerning French POWs and German women also exists in the *Bureau des Archives des victimes des conflits contemporains* in Caen, a branch of the French military archives. This collection contains the richest materials on POW trials and also seemingly random files of women from the northwest and south of Germany who became involved with French POWs. This archive also holds a registry of French soldiers, including their POW identity cards, which often provide information on the fate of the prisoner after the court martial.⁶¹

For the Belgian POWs, I consulted five archives in greater Brussels. Although American military trucks dropped off boxes with German court martial files in front of the War Ministry in Brussels in July 1945, this collection was divided up and can no longer be traced in the archives.⁶²

⁶⁰ PAAA, R 40851–40855 (Belgians) and R 40856–40859 (British).

⁶¹ Gaël Eismann and Corinna von List, “Les Fonds des tribunaux allemands (1940–1945) conservés au BAVCC à Caen,” *Francia* 39 (2012).

⁶² See Georges Hautecler, “Sources de l’histoire de la captivité de guerre belge 1940–1945” (1969), in Centre d’études et de documentation guerres et sociétés contemporaines/Studie- en Documentatiecentrum Oorlog en hedendaagse Maatschappij (CEGESOMA), Brussels, AB 270.

Clearly, some files were used, and preserved, in connection with restitution claims by ex-POWs who served time in German prisons or penitentiaries.⁶³ Many papers, however, were destroyed by a fire at the Belgian military archives in Evere outside of Brussels.⁶⁴ The most extensive collection relevant to Belgian POWs lies in the Center for Historical Research and Documentation on War and Society (CEGESOMA) in Brussels. A precious find are the notes of Georges Smets, the man of confidence of the Belgians in Stalag I-A in East Prussia, conserved partly at the CEGESOMA and partly at the Brussels branch of the Royal Museum of the Armed Forces and Military History. Smets' descriptions from the war and his postwar reflections are a humane voice from a POW representative who was centrally concerned with helping POWs accused of forbidden relations.

For the British POWs, the records of the Swiss legation in Berlin, which acted as protecting power for the British after the entry of the United States into the war, contain the richest material. These records are preserved in the Swiss Federal Archives in Bern. They show a proliferation of love-related trials in 1943, getting most intense by early 1945. The Swiss Federal Archives also contain diplomatic exchanges between the governments in London and Berlin pertaining to POW matters as well as inspection reports of military prisons and civil penitentiaries by the Swiss delegates and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The Swiss archives also have material on American POWs, but given the late arrival, stricter guarding, and the more controlled deployment of most American POWs, trials for forbidden relations involving Americans were rare.

In addition, I consulted some smaller collections from the American National Archives in College Park (Maryland) pertaining to French, Belgian, and British POWs when the United States was still their protecting power, and to American POWs in Germany. The German military archives in Freiburg im Breisgau contain some normative material (on the treatment of POWs) and some legal files, which used to belong to a collection of records located in Aachen-Kornelimünster. These collections are very incomplete. A new POW document collection in the British National Archives in Kew is gradually being opened, and I have

⁶³ These documents are part of the collection of the "Service Archives des victimes de la guerre" in Brussels-Anderlecht, Square de l'Aviation 31.

⁶⁴ Among the materials destroyed by the fire in Evere are: Musée Royal de l'Armée et d'Histoire Militaire, Evere, Dossier I, #7 Liste de condamnations; #8 Demandes de diminution de peine, #9 Pièces judiciaires diverses, and Dossier IX #1 Jurisprudence.

consulted it for some specific prisoners, mostly to trace their path after conviction by a German court martial.

The trial materials for the women are much richer than most POW files. They contain denunciation letters, love letters between the POW and the woman, and detailed interrogation reports and reference letters from mayors or police officials. They therefore allow for a closer analysis of the social context of the love affair and its discovery. The women's court files also contain post-trial materials, such as clemency pleas and requests for rehabilitation or indemnification after the war. Some of the women's files include the court martial sentence for the prisoner and interrogation reports of the prisoner and some of his comrades.

Despite significant wartime losses – the Reich Ministry of Justice ordered the destruction of legal documents in 1945 – many state archives in Germany hold extensive collections of trial records from the special courts and from some district courts.⁶⁵ The richness of these collections forced me to select certain archives. I initially was worried chiefly about getting materials from industrial areas as well as agricultural areas, but I found that every collection I used contains a mix of both because the special courts, which normally tried the women in the more severe cases, covered a fairly large area including cities as well as villages, offering a mix of work situations. I therefore had to worry most about geographic variety. I started out with the collections in Schleswig, Nürnberg, and Vienna, a mix of predominantly Lutheran (Schleswig) and Catholic (Vienna) regions (Nürnberg covered a mixed religious area). Given the limits on my time and archival restrictions, I was not able to explore all of these collections completely. In Vienna, for example, the access numbers for the relevant folders have to be searched in the reading room with the help of a three-volume registry written by hand in the late 1940s and including all trials of the special court. Yet, I gathered a diverse sample in terms of date and severity of sentence in these archives. In a second phase of research, I analyzed dossiers in Potsdam (covering the region of Brandenburg-Berlin, including areas east of the Oder River now part of Poland), Oldenburg, Hannover, Bremen, Graz (Austria), Darmstadt, and Wiesbaden. The collections in Oldenburg and Potsdam also contain some materials on efforts to put special court judges on trial after the war and on prisons and penitentiaries, but these files are not very rich.

⁶⁵ On the destruction order, see Martin F. Polaschek, *Im Namen der Republik Oesterreich! Die Volksgerichte in der Steiermark 1945 bis 1955* (Graz: LAD Zentralkanzlei, 1998), 105.

It is difficult to access materials from the eastern periphery of the former Reich, specifically from the areas now part of Poland and from former East Prussia. This is deplorable because it was in this area that many British POWs were tried, and I would have liked to see more files of the women involved with them. Of particular interest was the status of the women because many civilians in the eastern regions had mixed ancestry. Although most of the women tried by the special courts had German citizenship, some could have passed themselves off as Poles or Czechs to the prisoners given their mixed ancestry or their non-German last names. The archives in Wroclaw (formerly Breslau) claim that they lost their extensive collection of special court documents during a flood in 1997. Information from Gdansk (formerly Danzig) was too vague to justify a research trip, but I had the great luck of finding an extremely helpful retired archivist in Katowice (formerly Kattowitz) in eastern Upper Silesia who photographed relevant materials for me. Altogether, while there are a great many more files than I examined, this book includes a sample covering areas with different religious, social, and economic structures.

It is of course risky to rely so much on trial records given that people threatened with severe punishment will likely represent their case in a way that might lead to milder punishment and given the potential of abusive interrogators, especially for the women. But the trial records contain such broad and varied materials that it is possible to qualify the statements defendants made to the police interrogators or in front of the courts.⁶⁶ They include what the Germans call “ego documents” – such as love letters and other documents written not at all in view of a pending trial (although sometimes self-censored because of fear of discovery) – and they contain much material from legal advisors, attorneys, POW representatives, and diplomats who looked at the forbidden relations and the trials from a different perspective. Wherever possible, I have paired the court martial file of the POW with the court file of the woman to gain the most balanced and well-rounded picture.

Confidentiality rules differ slightly in Germany, Austria, France, Britain, Belgium, Poland, Switzerland, and the United States. But generally, I am not authorized to use full names for people on trial who are born less than one hundred years ago or passed away less than thirty years ago. The files usually disclose the birth date, but given that it is almost always

⁶⁶ Cornelia Osborne addresses this concern well, while stressing that even some of the statements recorded by police interrogators can be authentic: Osborne, “Female Sexual Desire and Male Honor,” 462–3.

difficult to determine the date of a person's death, I have changed the last names of the prisoners and the German women who came before the courts. I have tried to select names that reflect the flavor of the original (for example, a Basque French name or the name of Polish–German woman). I apologize if I have selected implausible or, worse, nonsensical last names.