Throughout the German military occupation of Belgium in the Second World War, German troops and Belgian civilians lived alongside one another and interacted in everyday life, in spite of repeated efforts of the German High Command and Nazi party to incite German men in uniform to avoid contact with locals, and particularly women. Using a wide array of sources from archives in Germany, Belgium, France, Great Britain and the United States, including government and military documents, police reports, court records, draft laws and legislation and official correspondence, this dissertation explores one facet of the German-Belgian encounter between 1940 and 1944: the intimate.

Domains of intimacy – including sexual violence, sex work, marriage and reproduction – were crucial in the shaping and management of German rule in occupied Belgium. The German and Nazi leadership sought to instrumentalize everyday contact and relationships between their soldiers and Belgian women as a means to secure military victory and construct the foundations for a racially based empire in Europe, the New Order. Belgian women’s intimate labour offered a route to secure the morale of German soldiers through the promise of sexual reward; further, women’s emotional, domestic and care labour as wives and mothers could maintain the stability of the occupation by binding Belgians to the occupation and the envisioned Greater Germanic Empire through the deep and lasting ties of the family. Yet even as the German authorities sought to use intimacy to cement occupation policy, they worried about its potentially
destabilizing effects and the unwieldy nature of human contact; in particular, recalling the legacy of World War I and the first German invasion and occupation of Belgium, the German occupiers after 1940 worried about the threat posed by “dangerous women,” such as the erotic female spy, the prostitute, the untrustworthy nurse and others. This study of intimacy in occupied Belgium – one of the “small countries” in Europe – demonstrates the multiple and uneven ways in which gender, sex, politics and race were entangled in official occupation policy.
Acknowledgments

Many people have shared in this project. I would first like to thank my supervisor, Doris Bergen, for her guidance, generosity and enthusiasm; her willingness to share her time and expertise has made me a better researcher, scholar and teacher and her thought-provoking feedback has been invaluable in shaping how I have conceptualized this project. From early on in my graduate career, Jennifer Jenkins has been a source of unfailing support for my research, teaching and professional development. I am grateful to Michelle Murphy for always inviting me to think more critically about the stakes of my research and for directing me to exciting new feminist anthropological and sociological scholarship. I would also like to thank my other committee members, Eric Jennings and Nakanyike Musisi, for offering their support to me in various capacities over the years and for being willing to join the committee at the end. A special thanks to my external examiner, Belinda Davids, whose comments and questions have given me much to think about as I contemplate how to move project to its next stage of development.

I would like to extend my gratitude to Deborah Neill, who first prompted my interest in modern German history when I was an undergraduate student at York University. I owe something to her encouragement and insistence that I pursue a graduate degree (or two, in fact) at the University of Toronto. Special thanks are due also to Valerie Hébert, who has been gracious with her support and remains a source of inspiration as a researcher and teacher of the Holocaust.

Fellowships from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Ontario Graduate Scholarship Program and the German Academic Exchange Service enabled me to conduct extensive research in Belgium, France, Germany, Great Britain and the United States over several trips in 2010-12. At the University of Toronto, the Department of History, Joint Initiative in German and European Studies, Centre for Jewish Studies, Centre for the Study of France and the Francophone World and School of Graduate Studies also provided essential financial support for my research and writing.

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the archivists at the municipal and state archives in Belgium who were excited about my project and slightly bewildered as to why a Canadian graduate student wanted to know about Belgian sex workers during the Second World War. Special thanks must also go to the Interlibrary Loans Office at Robarts Library at the University of Toronto.

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Stephanie Cavanaugh has been with me throughout the development of this project and has offered invaluable intellectual and moral support; as my “third sister,” she has kept my spirits high and has always known exactly what to say and when to say it. Mike Wilcox has lived with this dissertation for nearly as long as I have. I am deeply appreciative of his endless patience, unfailing encouragement and absolute belief that I could and would complete this manuscript; his close reading of numerous drafts has undoubtedly improved the entire project. Finally, to my parents, Jeanette and Tony, and my sisters, Christine and Whitney: though you are not exactly sure what it is I do, you never doubted that I could successfully do it. I dedicate this dissertation to the four of you.
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### Abbreviations

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>AGR</td>
<td>Archives générales du Royaume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AN</td>
<td>Archives nationales de France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVB</td>
<td>Archives de la Ville de Bruxelles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAB</td>
<td>Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA-MA</td>
<td>Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BNA</td>
<td>British National Archives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEGES</td>
<td>Centre d'Études et de Documentation Guerre et Sociétés contemporaines, Studie- en Documentatiecentrum Oorlog en Hedendaagse Maatschappij</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITS</td>
<td>International Tracing Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IWM</td>
<td>Imperial War Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NARA</td>
<td>National Archives and Records Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>USHMM</td>
<td>United States Holocaust Memorial Museum</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abt. IVb</td>
<td>Abteilung IVb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AOK</td>
<td>Armeeoberkommando</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMM</td>
<td>Belgian Military Mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Civil Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSAR</td>
<td>Daily Situation and Activities Reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETO</td>
<td>European Theatre of Operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETOUSA</td>
<td>European Theatre of Operations, U.S. Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FK</td>
<td>Feldkommandantur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gez.</td>
<td>gezeichnet/signed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HCSE</td>
<td>Haut Commissariat à la Sécurité de l’État</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSSPF</td>
<td>Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kdo.St./Mil.Verw.St.</td>
<td>Kommandostab/Militärverwaltungsstab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KK</td>
<td>Kreiskommandantur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leit. San. Offz.</td>
<td>Leitender Sanitätsoffizier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBH</td>
<td>Militärbefehlshaber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP</td>
<td>Allied Military Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MVC</td>
<td>Militärverwaltungschef</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MV</td>
<td>Militärverwaltung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATOUSA</td>
<td>North African Theatre of Operations, U.S. Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSDAP</td>
<td>Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OFK</td>
<td>Oberfeldkommandantur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OKH</td>
<td>Oberkommando des Heeres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OKW</td>
<td>Oberkommando der Wehrmacht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O.Qu.</td>
<td>Oberquartiermeister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ortskdr.</td>
<td>Ortskommandantur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PoW</td>
<td>Prisoner of War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF-SS</td>
<td>Reichsführer-SS, Heinrich Himmler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RKfdFdv</td>
<td>Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums</td>
</tr>
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</table>
A Note on Spelling

Regarding the spelling of Belgian towns, cities and provinces, I use the English-language variant wherever possible – this includes Bruges, Ghent, Antwerp and Brussels. In all other cases, I use place names as they are commonly known in Belgium today.
Introduction: Intimacy and Military Occupation in Belgium

On the night of 12 April 1943, Léon Degrelle, the Belgian founder of the radical nationalist Catholic party, Rex, and a notorious pro-German collaborationist, phoned the German police in Brussels to report that a Luftwaffe officer, Sonderführer Hellmuth Pessl, had committed suicide. Degrelle was well known to German officials in occupied Belgium for his pro-Nazi stance and his participation in the Légion Wallonie, the Walloon contingent of volunteers who fought on the eastern front alongside the Wehrmacht and SS. German police discovered Pessl’s body, with two gunshots to the head and heart, near the Rexist leader’s home. Neither a gun nor any empty cartridges were found near the body, however. There were also reports that a man had fled the scene shortly after the second gunshot. All of this evidence raised doubts about whether Pessl had in fact taken his own life.¹

The twist was that Pessl had been having a sexual affair with Degrelle’s French-born wife, Marie-Paule Lemay, whom he met while writing an article about the Légion Wallonie. After ending the affair, Madame Degrelle confessed her indiscretion to her husband during his leave from the eastern front in March 1943. In a typical display of the Rexist leader’s act-first, think-later mentality, Degrelle decided to challenge Pessl to a duel. The German occupation authorities in Belgium quashed this plan, pointing out that the Führer had outlawed all duels for the duration of the war. Degrelle also seems to have realized that if he took action against Pessl himself, he could endanger the Rexist movement and cause his comrades to fret about the sexual activities of their own wives in their absence.²

Degrelle opted to take legal action against his opponent and hoped to get the SS involved, but events took their own course and resulted in Pessl’s suspicious death.³ The German police concluded that Pessl was probably killed by one of Degrelle’s comrades in collusion with or at the behest of the Rexist leader. But the German military and SS authorities in Belgium and Berlin, including the head of the Reich Security Main Office, Ernst Kaltenbrunner, and the Reichsführer-SS, Heinrich Himmler, decided to leave the matter unresolved, both for political

¹ SS-Gruppenführer und General der Polizei, Dr. Kaltenbrunner to RF-SS and Feldkommandostelle, Betr.: Léon Degrelle, 21 April 1943, BAB NS 19/1555, Bl. 7.
² Ibid; Meldung des Betreuers Degrelles, Major Baumann, 6 April 1943, BAB NS 19/1555, 3-4.
³ SS-Brigadeführer Richard Jungclaus to Chef des SS-Hauptamtes Gottlob Berger, 12 April 1943, BAB NS 19/1555, Bl. 2.
reasons and because Degrelle was assumed to have the moral high ground in the case.\textsuperscript{4} That the saga of the alleged sexual treason of Degrelle’s wife and her murdered German lover reached the eyes and ears of the most senior National Socialist officials highlights the intersection of sex, politics and power at the height of the German occupation of Belgium during World War II. The decision not to punish Degrelle for his crime of passion, or do anything at all for that matter, was related to the fact that the German leadership found the Rex leader too politically useful to sacrifice him in the interests of proving that the Germans, as occupiers, had uncontested sexual prerogatives to any and all women in occupied territory. Madame Degrelle was at once peripheral to the incident, appearing only in the archival record in her confession, and yet was at the core of the political dispute as her body, sexuality and love became contested terrains.

This dissertation teases out these intersections between intimate encounters and the politics of occupation in German-dominated Belgium between 1940 and 1944. It demonstrates the multiple ways in which intimacy, broadly defined to include forms of physical, affective, sexual and institutional contact between German men and local Belgian women, operated as a central component of German policy and the establishment of the New Order in occupied western Europe. Matters of the intimate were not marginal to the establishment of the structures of power or the racial hierarchies upon which the occupation depended but were foundational to its ideological and material terms. The German occupiers mobilized different types of formal and informal intimate arrangements and their consequences as a means to organize, manage and manipulate occupied society to satisfy the interrelated goals of the German military and Nazi party: to secure military hegemony on the European continent and construct a new social order based on racial categories. The regulation of bodies and intimacies served a constitutive function in shaping the very meaning of occupation and the parameters of its political authority.

German officials attempted to control multiple domains of the intimate – sexual violence, prostitution, marriage, reproduction and childrearing – and wrangled with Belgian civil and police authorities to do so. The Germans discouraged fraternization of all types but confronted its necessity in their beliefs about soldiers’ innate sexual urges and the importance of sex as a reward. On an ideological level, the drive to limit certain types of intimate contact and promote others worked to establish the barriers of inclusion and exclusion so crucial to the construction of Nazi racial and gender hierarchies in occupied Europe. More pragmatically, the regulation of

\textsuperscript{4} Kaltenbrunner to RF-SS, 21 April 1943, BAB NS 19/1555, Bl. 7.
close contact between German occupation soldiers and Belgian civilian women served specific objectives, including the maintenance of political stability and consensus (at home and abroad) as well as the exploitation of Belgian resources and labour for the German war effort. Intimate encounters offered multiple returns and had the power to bind ordinary Belgians racially and politically with the Reich through the close and enduring ties of sex, marriage and families.

The German occupiers alternately envisioned prostitution, marriage, reproduction and other sexual, emotional and domestic intimacies as the basis upon which the structures of occupation power could be either secured or undermined. Intimacy operated at times as an unwieldy political tool. If the term “intimacy” suggests a physical and sexual closeness or even familiarity, it also signifies a certain vulnerability – of emotions, bodies, lives and politics laid bare, susceptible and exposed to the power of others. German occupiers were troubled about the unpredictable consequences of contact between their men and Belgian women; they feared that civilian women were “racially inferior,” deliberate transmitters of venereal diseases, agents of espionage, politically disloyal resisters and sometimes all of these at once. Military and Nazi officials thus worried that facilitating intimate relations between occupier and occupied endangered individual German troops and the political integrity and security of the entire occupation. This vacillation between viewing contact with local women as a resource, threat or both frequently destabilized policies relating to fraternization, marriage, sex work and reproduction and provided spaces both for German soldiers and Belgian civilians sometimes deliberately and sometimes inadvertently to circumvent official regulations. Ultimately, the multiple dimensions of intimacy confounded the German occupiers; sometimes visible and sometimes more covert, intimate arrangements frequently superseded the authority of law and domination. Striving to control the uncontrollable realm of social, sexual and affective relations was like trying to catch “fleas in a sieve.”

This study argues that the very practices of occupation were simultaneously contingent on and challenged by the deepest level of human interaction: the intimate. By engaging the abstract concept of intimacy within the concrete period of the German military occupation of Belgium from 1940-44, my research contributes to three broad historiographical areas: first, interdisciplinary studies on politics, race and gender during periods of extreme violence and

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political transformation; second, the politics of intimacy in German-dominated Europe in World War II; and third, the nature of German occupation and the place of Belgium in this literature.

Intimacies, Empires, Occupations and Wars

“Intimacy” as a word is generally taken to refer to romantic or sexual relations, physical and emotional closeness or familiarity. The study of intimacy, and in particular the symbiotic relationship between allegedly “private” intimacies and “public” politics, offers an innovative perspective on the construction and management of empires, occupations and wars by engaging the question of power and its central pivots. This project shifts the analytic from how the German occupation of Belgium affected intimacy, specifically contact between civilians and soldiers, to what the history of intimacy reveals about the politics of war and occupation.

Theoretical and empirical engagements with the concept of intimacy were initially the purview of scholars of empires and colonialisms. In her sweeping study of travel writing and relations between European metropole and colonial periphery, Mary Louise Pratt coined the term “contact zones” to refer to spaces in which people in geographical and historically separate spheres came into contact with each other and established ongoing relations. Historian Sylvia van Kirk provided an empirical study of such a “contact zone” in pre-confederation western Canada, demonstrating that the “tender ties” between European fur traders and indigenous women were essential to the development of the fur trade. To examine sexual relationships, van Kirk contended, was to explore the “human dimension” of fur-trade society and in particular, how crucial the private world of sexual and marital bonds was to the public arenas of work, trade and the colonial venture.

Recent scholarship on the “intimacies of empire” – including sex, affect, sentiment, domestic arrangements, reproduction and child-rearing – in the European colonies in Africa, Asia and North America has highlighted the use of intimacy as a biopolitical form of governance and way of “making” colonial power. Ann Laura Stoler has examined specific sites of intimate...
contact between colonizer and colonized in the Dutch East Indies to provide an alternate understanding of how colonial power and racial categories were created and regulated. She argues that colonizers’ instructions to Javanese nursemaids to hold white children away from their bodies so that the youngsters would not “smell of their sweat” were about much more than concerns about bodily odours; colonizers feared that European children would lose their “Europeanness” if they got too close to the colonized peoples. Focusing on the intimate as a manifestation of Michel Foucault’s “dense transfer point for relations of power,” Stoler pays attention to the ways in which sexual politics grounded and consolidated racial and political inequalities and uneven hierarchies of authority. Intimacy, after all, produced not only “tender” but also “tense” ties between indigenous peoples and European colonizers.

The meaning of such ties between individuals existing within a certain set of power relations intensifies during periods of political upheaval, violence or warfare, when the stakes and threats to life are heightened; this is unsurprising given that the act of killing, of taking life is itself deeply intimate. In The History of Sexuality, Foucault suggested that the wars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were so bloody because they were no longer waged on behalf of an individual sovereign but on behalf of populations seeking survival; the embodiment of power was no longer the right to “take life or let live” but to “foster life or disallow it to the point of death.” This new form of power, what Foucault termed “biopower,” politicized sex and bodies as a means of access to both the life of the body and life of the population (or species).

To give an empirical example of this biopolitical transformation and its relation to modern violence and racism, Jin Park has argued that the Japanese instrumentalized Korean women as “human resources” for the expansion and maintenance of their imperial order between

831. For samples of this vast literature, see the essays in Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds., Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Stoler, ed., Haunted by Empire.
12 In volume 1 of the History of Sexuality, Foucault argues that sexuality operates as a pivot upon which relations of power are rendered and solidified between women and men, the young and old, parents and children, an administration and its population, among other social configurations. He further insists that sexuality, of all of the elements that constitute power and its relations, has the “greatest instrumentality” because it can support, consolidate and manipulate the most varied of political projects. Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, vol. 1, An Introduction, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 103.
13 Stoler, “Tense and Tender Ties,” 832.
1910 and 1945. Lacking the duality between white and non-white peoples characteristic of most other imperial orders, the Japanese empire was framed by racial ambiguity and proximity between colonizer and colonized; as a result, Japanese colonial medicine mobilized the female body, womb, conjugal space and marriage to create and articulate racial classifications. The Nazi imperial project, which sought to colonize and reorder local European societies along racial lines, faced a similar problem of trying to create a hierarchicized empire and social order when in fact the occupied populations did not look so different from the occupiers. As a result, distinctions in racial belonging were alternately constructed through what people did in private – with whom they slept and conceived children, how they arranged their domestic lives and behaved in gender-specific ways.

Feminist analyses of nationalism have long identified the centrality of women and their bodies for ethnic and national processes; women are the biological reproducers of ethnic and racial groups and, as the main socializers of children, participate in the ideological reproduction of collectivities by transmitting their social and cultural values. Aly Weinbaum has suggested that this “race/reproduction bind” – the notion that race and racial formations (including nations) can be reproduced (by women) – operates as the fundamental basis of modernity and its attendant ideologies of racism, nationalism and imperialism. This is precisely why at a practical or policy level, nation-states harness discourses and practices around women and their sexuality to pursue ethnic or racial inclusivity and create notions of genealogical affinity and belonging.

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16 Jin-Kyung Park, “Corporeal Colonialism: Medicine, Reproduction and Race in Colonial Korea” (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2008), 78.
17 Ibid., 83-5.
19 Stoler, Carnal Knowledge, 6.
22 Ibid., 8. The literature on the heightened concern of states with women during social or ethnic conflicts is too vast to list but for some empirical studies of southern and eastern Europe, the Middle East, Central America and Africa, see Floya Anthias, “Women and Nationalism in Cyprus,” in Women-Nation-State, eds. Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1989), 150-67; Cynthia Cockburn, The Line: Women, Participation and the
Recent transnational feminist anthropological and sociological scholarship further invites us to think more broadly about the type of “work” women did (and do) in bolstering structures of power and racial and economic hierarchies beyond their sexual and reproductive labour. This burgeoning literature offers a theorization of “intimate labour,” a form of work that entails bodily or emotional closeness or familiarity and exists along a continuum of service and care labour, from nursing to housekeeping, and includes sex, domestic and personal care work.23 The concept of “intimate labour” is helpful because it enables an examination of Belgian girlfriends, wives, mothers, sex workers, nurses, cleaners and assistants in the same analytical framework and helps elucidate the complex ways in which the construction of the New Order turned on the management of multiple forms and spaces of intimacy, including but not limited to sex.

Considering intimacy as a spectrum of domestic, sexual, economic and affective arrangements further illuminates the artificiality of the divide between the public and private realms. Wenona Giles and Jennifer Hyndman have drawn attention to the very real ways in which public violence invades domestic space, asking what is to be made of soldiers who return from war only to batter their wives and families.24 Cynthia Enloe has repeatedly suggested the necessity of looking to the seemingly “banal” sites of everyday life, including gender roles and relations in civil society, to understand how politics (and war) is enunciated and made possible; the processes and effects of militarizing, she argues, actually take place in numerous sites outside the military proper.25 Collapsing the distinction between ‘private’ intimacies and ‘public’ politics thus challenges traditional chronologies of modern warfare into distinct prewar, wartime and postwar periods and unsettles thematic divisions between war and peacetime.26


24 Giles and Hyndman, eds., Sites of Violence.


26 Elizabeth D. Heineman, “Introduction: The History of Sexual Violence in Conflict Zones,” in Sexual Violence in Conflict Zones, 8. Mutilated bodies and the politics of disability in the First World War and its aftermath have been
Intimacy and Occupation in the Second World War

Histories of German militarism and war have only recently integrated the perspectives and analytical tools of gender, sexuality and emotion, a striking omission given that historians of women’s and gender studies have been interested in war and militarization in other contexts since the 1980s.27 In the early 1990s, the mass rapes perpetrated against women in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda provided the initial impetus for historians in Europe and North America to inquire into sexual violence and other ‘close encounters’ between soldiers and civilians in earlier inter- and intranational and national conflicts.28 The revelations in 2003 about the sexual abuse of prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and ongoing reports of sexual violence in conflicts in Syria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have reinvigorated scholarly attention to the historical relationship among violence, racism, sexuality and gender.29

In the past twenty years, intimate relations or contact (Umgang) has become a topic of intense interest for historians of the Second World War and occupied Europe.30 The first studies of romantic and sexual relationships between German soldiers and local women in northwestern Europe emerged in the 1990s.31 Subsequent monographs and ongoing research by Monika

fruitful sites for questioning the war as a “liminal interval” that divided easily into a before, during and after for combatants. See Joanna Bourke, Dismembering the Male: Men’s Bodies, Britain and the Great War (London: Reaktion Books, 1996); Deborah Cohen, The War Come Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914-1939 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).


29 See, for example, the recent studies on sexual violence in a global frame: Joanna Bourke, Rape: A History from 1860 to the Present Day (London: Virago, 2007); Heineman, ed., Sexual Violence; Carol Rittner and John K. Roth, eds., Rape: Weapon of War and Genocide (St. Paul: Paragon House, 2012).


31 Ebba D. Drolshagen, Nicht ungeschoren davonkommen: Das Schicksal der Frauen in den besetzten Ländern, die Wehrmachtsoldaten liebten (Hamburg: Hoffmann and Campe, 1998); Kåre Olsen, Krigens barn: De norske krigsharna og deres mødre (Oslo: Forum Aschehoug, 1998); Anette Warring, Tyskerpiger under besættelse og retsopgør (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1994). I do not read Danish or Norwegian and thus have consulted only English- or German-language versions of Warring and Olsen’s work. See Kåre Olsen, “Under the Care of
Diederichs, Laura Fahnenbruck, Lulu Hansen, Regina Mühlhäuser and Maren Röger, among others, on intimate interactions between occupier and occupied from the Soviet Union across to the Netherlands show that sex was ubiquitous wherever the Germans were in World War II. Other scholars have focused their research thematically, examining specific forms of intimate contact such as prostitution, sexual violence or the *Wehrmachtshinder*, the children born of German soldiers and local women in occupied Europe.

There is a common feature among all of these diverse “intimate histories” of World War II: they took sixty years to emerge. The delay in scholarship can be partly attributed to the distinctive challenges faced by researchers interested in exploring the possibilities and parameters of intimacy during periods of extreme violence; intimacies are paradoxically ubiquitous yet shrouded in taboo. Wendy Jo Gertjejanssen has documented the pervasive private and public silences that accompanied the experience of sexual violence in eastern Europe between 1939 and 1945, a fact that is lamentable, but unsurprising; even in peacetime, many victims of sex- and gender-based violence are unwilling to discuss or report it.

Other intimate “contact zones,” such as sexual commerce, marriage, reproduction and child-rearing, offer their own set of trials for the scholar. For instance, after 1945, German men concealed or downplayed fraternization in their “war stories,” most obviously because many of them had been married during their time in the occupied territories and thus potentially compromised their personal relationships at home if they openly discussed their wartime sexual

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33 The individual and thematically organized chapters of this dissertation explicitly engage with this literature.


experiences. Perhaps even more crucially for historians interested in the sexual politics of the Nazi empire, silences dominated on the side of the women of occupied Europe. After (and even during) the war, women accused of fraternization with German soldiers were condemned by their compatriots in public, often violent, displays of national vengeance. Because of this hostile postwar atmosphere, it was not socially or politically acceptable for individual women to discuss or remember their wartime relationships – whether fleeting or lasting – with German soldiers.

Numerous women who had given birth to babies with German fathers concealed the identity of the father from relatives, friends and the children themselves, fearing humiliation and degradation if the truth were revealed. Many such children felt unsettled by the secrecy and hostility they faced, even from their own families. In the late 2000s, Gerlinda Swillen, a Belgian historian, conducted interviews with seventy Wehrmachtskinder in Belgium. Her motivation came from her own experience; she was born in 1942 to a young Belgian woman, who had a relationship with a German soldier while working as a nanny in Ghent. Swillen grew up knowing only the first name of her biological father; all other details about the relationship became a “family secret.” Finally, in 2007, Swillen learned her father’s identity, traced her German half-siblings and eventually acquired German citizenship.

The reluctance and hesitation to research and publish on intimate topics thus relates to their highly sensitive nature; the legacies of sex and human relationships did not disappear once German troops, administrators, bureaucrats, SS-men and policemen retreated from western Europe back to the Reich in autumn 1944. The recent organizational impetus to help Wehrmachtskinder uncover their long-hidden parentage and the spate of memoirs and films documenting romantic relationships between German troops and local women in western Europe demonstrate that the physical and affective remnants of the sexual politics of occupation cut across the “zero hour” of 1944-45. The continued resonance of intimacies now more than

38 Two such organizations include the International Network of Interdisciplinary Research on Children Born of War (INIRC); and BOW i.n. (Born of War International Network). For two examples of the recent surge in wartime “love stories,” see Randi Crott and Lillian Crott Berthung, Erzähl es niemandem! Die Liebesgeschichte meiner Eltern (Cologne: Dumont, 2012); Erich Schaake, Bordeaux, mon amour. Eine Liebe zwischen Wehrmacht und
seventy years past suggests that we should understand something about the functions of intimate practices during the war itself.

Across all levels of officialdom, German occupiers concerned themselves with whom their men were visiting, talking, dancing, touching, having sex and fathering children. In a regime in which the personal became part of the political system, everyday intimacies were imperative spaces for the navigation of a broad and comprehensive occupation policy in Belgium. As Doris Bergen has argued, “Having intercourse, getting married, becoming pregnant, seeking an abortion, giving birth to a child – in the context of a system based on hierarchies of race and blood, all of these acts assumed enormous political proportions.”

By examining how the Nazis attempted to instrumentalize intimacy at some moments and restrict it at others, I expose the intensity and scope of the Nazi New Order in one of the “small countries”; this was to be a systematic and systemic reorganization of European society and, most critically, of people. But for all that German leaders harnessed intimate contacts between their soldiers and women in the occupied territories as part of intertwined efforts to secure material and political resources and fulfil their moral ambitions, they were unsettled by the unforeseen effects of intimacy and its potential disruption to those very same goals.

Scholars have emphasized the gaps and slippages between intimate policies and lived realities in occupied Europe. Studies of sexual politics in German-occupied eastern Europe have dispelled the myth that military leaders repressed soldiers’ sexuality with the aim of adhering to Nazi racial ideology, which forbade sexual relations between “Aryans” and “racially inferior” eastern Europeans. Racial classifications in the Third Reich and occupied Europe did not operate independently from other socially constructed categories, including gender and

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*Résistance* (Berlin: List, 2010). See also the documentary film on sexual relationships between German soldiers and women in eastern Europe as well as the “forgotten children” of these unions: *Liebe im Vernichtungskrieg: Die Frauen im Osten und die deutschen Besatzungssoldaten*, directed by Hartmut Kaminski (Lohmar: Circe-Filmproduktion, 1999/2000), VHS.


sexuality. Doris Bergen has shown that decisions about men and women’s applications for recognition as ethnic Germans (Volksdeutsche) often relied on factors such as sexual comportment and reputation because racial status was difficult to prove with hard documentation. Monika Flaschka has similarly argued that in cases of German uniformed men accused of sexual violence against women in the occupied territories, the Wehrmacht courts-martial more frequently invoked gender ideologies – particularly ideas about the ‘proper’ behaviour of women – than racial assessments of the victim in their determinations of punishments.

This dissertation further highlights how race intersected with and at times mapped onto issues of military security, economic interests, political conditions and the dynamics of gender and sexuality. Belgium is and has historically been divided into two linguistic-cultural groups: the French-speaking Walloons, concentrated in the southern half of the country and Brussels, and the Dutch-speaking Flemish in the northern part of Belgium. There is also a German-speaking minority living near Belgium’s borders with Germany and Luxembourg. In Nazi conceptions of the Greater Germanic Empire, the union of the allegedly “Germanic” peoples of Scandinavia and the Low Countries, Belgium had a preferred place because of its shared political and dynastic history with Germany as well as its geographical position as a borderland in west-central Europe. But Nazi racial rhetoric did not unequivocally welcome all Belgians into the Germanic empire and distinguished between the “racially valuable” Flemish and “inferior” Walloons. However, other factors frequently informed how these categories were constructed on the ground in occupied Belgium; German officials, bureaucrats and administrators often articulated their understandings of race in and through gender and sexual identities and ideologies. For example, in the case of female sex workers, German occupiers cared more about their status as women and their sexual health than about whether they were Flemish or Walloon.

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43 Monika Flaschka, “Race, Rape and Gender in Nazi-Occupied Territories” (PhD diss., Kent State University, 2009), 12, 22, 48-9.
44 Ulrich Herbert, Hitler’s Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labour in Germany under the Third Reich, trans. William Templer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 99; Jill Stephenson, “Germans, Slavs and the Burden of Work in Rural Southern Germany during the Second World War,” in Nazism, War, Genocide: Essays in Honour of Jeremy Noakes, ed. Neil Gregor (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2005), 94-5. Mark Mazower has argued that the Nazi attempt to create an empire based on nationalism was not new, but was different and counter-productive in its “insistence on defining nationalism in such completely narrow terms that it precluded most of the peoples they conquered from ever becoming citizens.” Mazower, Hitler’s Empire: 7.
Consent, Coercion and the Politicization of Intimacy

Examining sentiment and sex also offers more nuanced insights into debates about the dynamics of consent and coercion in German-occupied Europe. Elizabeth Heineman, Dagmar Herzog and Annette Timm have encouraged historians to be more attentive to the ways in which the Nazis offered certain sexual and affective opportunities to ordinary Germans as incentives for accepting and participating in Nazi crimes. In addition to allowing their soldiers to plunder and pilfer food and commercial goods from the occupied territories, as Götz Aly has shown, the leadership of the Third Reich also held out possibilities for sexual and emotional pleasure at and behind the frontlines. The Wehrmacht promoted the construction of military brothels in eastern and western Europe, hoping to direct what George Mosse called soldiers’ “sexual intoxication” into a regulated sexual economy and away from “promiscuous” and “diseased” local women. But what about non-Germans living in territories occupied by the Germans? I argue that the German occupiers also used the prospect of intimacy and pleasure to galvanize non-German citizens into supporting the occupation systems in their homelands.

Paying attention to sex as a means of consensus-building should not be misconstrued as an argument that “consensual” relationships between German soldiers and Belgian women existed in any singular understanding of the word or that these relationships were entirely separate from other violent enactments of sex. Notions of “consent” must always be mediated by an understanding of the contingencies of uneven power. I thus follow the lead of Regina Mühlhäuser, who has insisted on situating all forms of intimate encounters within the hierarchical power structures of occupation, which were dominated by the Germans.


46 Aly’s study shows that through plunder, theft and expropriation, Hitler “bought” the consensus of the German people, including fighting soldiers. In October 1940, Hermann Goering abolished the limits on what German troops could buy and send back to Germany as a means of maintaining troop morale. While back in Germany in the fall of 1941, Heinrich Böll, the future Nobel Prize-winning writer, fantasized about the luxuries of Belgium, where he had served in May 1940: “My one great worry right now is whether I can get to Antwerp or not. All the nice things that I want to bring back – coffee, cigars, and cloth, ah, if only it could be.” Böll eventually did get back to Belgium and picked up gifts for his fiancée. Götz Aly, Hitler’s Beneficiaries: Plunder, Racial War and the Nazi Welfare State (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007), 104-5, 135.


48 Mühlhäuser, Eroberungen, 25, 29, 224.
It is perhaps most useful to consider consent and coercion as fluid points on a continuum, rather than as distinct binaries. The 2009 volume *Brutality and Desire* on the relationship between war and sexuality in twentieth-century Europe juxtaposes “brutality” with “desire” as a means to understand the full place of sexuality — in all of its manifestations — in violence and warfare.\(^{49}\) Examining the ways in which “consensual” and “coercive” intimacies occurred concurrently and overlapped (and were sometimes indistinguishable for the participants) opens up new avenues of conceptualizing and connecting multiple forms of intimate contact. What are the implications, for example, if military leaders prohibited sex between soldiers and civilians and sex went “underground”? Were soldiers more likely to rape women they encountered if they could not visit brothels, as in the case of the Red Army?\(^{50}\) Prostitution, sexual bartering and other forms of transactional sex in occupied Europe during World War II have roused the most intense debates over volunteerism and coercion; historians take a stand if they add the word “forced” to the title of their monograph or include prostitution as part of a larger discussion of sexual violence.\(^{51}\) Envisioning the dimensions of consent as a spectrum may further illuminate the overlapping operations and functions of “public” and “private” structures of dominance; regulated military brothels in Belgium and elsewhere, for example, reproduced behind closed doors the social and sexual dominance of German men over indigenous women.

All of this recent scholarship emphasizes that intimacy has “arrived” as a deserving subject of investigation for historians, finally paralleling the massive amounts of attention and paperwork the Germans devoted to the subject during their five-year rule in Europe. During the period of my research in 2012, I observed the contemporary fascination with sex and World War II in the public discussion surrounding American journalist Hal Vaughn’s biography of Coco Chanel. The book, *Sleeping with the Enemy: Coco Chanel’s Secret War*, claimed that the famous Parisian designer not only had a love affair with a German officer, Hans Gunther von Dincklage, but that she was a spy for the Germans.\(^{52}\) What is interesting is the way in which her apparent

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\(^{49}\) Herzog, ed. *Brutality and Desire*.


sexual transgression became synonymous with “anti-national” behaviour; the title emphasizes the sex as the true treason and the spying as its unfortunate outcome. Similar discussions about “horizontal collaboration” emerged with the publication of Agata Tuszyńska’s 2013 biography of Vera Gran, a legendary Polish Jewish singer who survived the Holocaust but was denounced as a traitor and “Gestapo whore” after the war. Though exonerated, she remained shunned as a performer in Poland and Israel for the rest of her life. The ongoing investigation and media attention surrounding former CIA Director David Petraeus’ extramarital affair and the FBI’s concern about the leaking of classified information further suggests that sex has by no means lost its resonance in either a historical or contemporary context.

The lingering legacies of sexual politics force scholars to ask questions about contemporary Europe and public and political memory. Intimacy plays a powerful role in shaping not only wartime societies, but also postwar and peacetime practices of revenge and restoration. By taking the chronological frame of this dissertation up to the period of Allied liberation and the initial phase of political reconstruction from September 1944 through the summer of 1945, the central role of gender, sex and bodies in rearranging political systems and power relations is rendered visible. Historians including Atina Grossmann and Catherine Merridale have documented how the Red Army’s mass rapes of German women in spring 1945 served both as an act of collective vengeance for crimes committed by the Germans in the Soviet soldiers’ homeland and a means for soldiers to reassert their masculine dominance and come to grips with the wartime “betrayals” of their own families, and especially their wives. In a rather different context, fraternization between American GIs and local women in liberated France acted as a site for the negotiation of political authority between the two nations. In 1944-45, the public focus on women’s bodies and concepts of “normative” sexuality and sexual relations worked to purge remnants of the German occupation system and reassign political authority from German men’s hands to Belgian (and Allied) men’s hands. During the Second World War and its aftermath, intimacy served both sides of sovereign power – its construction and deconstruction – first for the Germans and then for the Allied and local European authorities.

Belgium and the History of War, Occupation and Genocide, 1939-1945

Historian Tony Judt has argued that Belgium rarely receives foreign interest of any kind. “When it does,” he noted, “the sentiment it arouses is usually scorn, sometimes distaste.” As one of the “small countries” in continental Europe with approximately 8.5 million inhabitants on the eve of the Second World War, Belgium and its history are envisioned as neither particularly significant nor instructive for understanding modern European history, a view that seems to have been unconsciously inculcated among scholars. This trend is reflected in the relatively limited corpus of English- and German-language scholarship on the German occupation of Belgium during World War II, compared with the voluminous literature in French and Dutch. In part, this is because Belgian history is primarily studied by Belgians and in Belgian academic and research institutions.

The dearth of public or scholarly interest in Belgium’s tumultuous history is also related to the fact that scholars, including Gerhard Weinberg, Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton, have argued that the German administration in Belgium was the least oppressive of the German occupation systems set up after 1939 in eastern and western Europe. Evaluations of the occupation of Belgium as relatively benign or even unimportant compared with those elsewhere across Europe often rely on numbers as a measure of relevance. The war resulted in roughly 90,000 Belgian deaths, including 6,500 civilians during the German invasion, 12,300 political prisoners in prisons or camps, 3,000 members of the resistance and 26,000 Jews. Compared to Poland, where approximately 3 million Jews and 1.9 million non-Jews were killed between 1939

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58 General monographs on the occupation include: Luc De Vos, *La Belgique et la Seconde Guerre mondiale* (Brussels: Racine, 2004); Étienne Verhoeyen, *La Belgique occupée: De l'an 40 à la Libération* (Brussels: De Boeck Université, 1994); Wilfried Wagner, *Belgien in der deutschen Politik während des Zweiten Weltkrieges* (Boppard am Rhein: Boldt, 1974); Werner Warmbrunn, *The German Occupation of Belgium, 1940-1944* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993). See also José Gotovitch and Paul Aron, eds., *Dictionnaire de la Seconde Guerre mondiale en Belgique* (Brussels: André Versaille, 2008). Many other studies focus on different facets of the occupation, including resistance, the Holocaust, collaboration, business and the Catholic Church and will be referenced as required throughout this dissertation.  
60 De Vos, *Belgique*, 327-8.
and 1945, the German occupation of Belgium was considerably less murderous.\textsuperscript{61} Numerical comparisons, however, can only tell us so much about the nature and impact of world war and foreign occupation in Belgium and elsewhere in twentieth-century Europe.

German-occupied Belgium was distinctive among the countries of occupied Europe in that it experienced two invasions and occupations by German armed forces in less than thirty years. Between 1940 and 1944, the real and rhetorical memories of the German occupation of Belgium during the First World War loomed large. This dissertation connects these two periods of violence in continental Europe as well as the period in between by arguing that the first occupation of Belgium played a central role in demarcating the boundaries of the intimate, or, in other words, in shaping what types of close encounters between German troops and Belgian women the military permitted and prohibited in the second occupation. The First World War in Belgium was in no way a “dress rehearsal” for the Second; as Alan Kramer has persuasively argued, the specificities of Nazi racism and antisemitism and the regime’s policies of enslavement and genocide across Europe in World War II had no parallel in 1914-18.\textsuperscript{62} Nevertheless, German occupying forces brought with them in 1940 a set of gendered ideas about Belgian women and sexual mores inherited from the earlier conflict and carried through the interwar period.

Another reason that makes Belgium a compelling area of study is its linguistic, cultural and geographical division between the Walloons and the Flemish. For all of their statements that Flemish and French-speaking Belgians were racially different, Nazi racial experts, officials and administrators never developed a cohesive racial policy against French-speaking individuals, unless of course they were Jewish, Sinti and Roma, gay, or mentally or physically handicapped. Because of this ambiguity, although Nazi officials and racial experts certainly viewed elements


of French and Belgian society as “degenerate,” marred by materialist and liberal tendencies, neither country was slated for subjugation in the same way as Poland and the Soviet Union.⁶³

Belgium was of geopolitical importance as a gateway to Britain, a thoroughfare between eastern and western Europe and an essential resource for raw materials and labour power. This perspective contributes to a growing scholarly inquiry about the extent to which the Nazi state was in fact a “racial state” in which all political, economic and social concerns were subservient to the manifestation of racial ideology in the Third Reich and occupied Europe.⁶⁴ Racial ideology did not determine occupation policy in Belgium during the Second World War; rather, political, military, racial and gendered interests were mutually constitutive, rather than exclusive, components of German policy. Gerhard Wolf and Alexa Stiller have recently reanchored politics and security in their analyses of German racial policy in eastern Europe, demonstrating the flexibility of the criteria with which German “experts” assessed local individuals in the occupied and annexed territories for Germanization.⁶⁵ This study of Belgium suggests that scholars of western Europe likewise need to move “beyond the racial state” by shifting the analytical focus from Nazi ideology to an investigation of how everyday life became politicized and racialized and both served and destabilized racial categories.

Belgium was also the only western European country to be fully under the thumb of the German military, which governed Belgium for 47 of the 50 months-long occupation. The Wehrmacht’s dominance and the relatively small presence of the SS in Belgium stands in marked contrast to the civilian regimes across much of the rest of Europe during the Second World War.⁶⁶ This project thus engages the issue of what exactly the military was doing and how it behaved in western Europe. Much more is known about the actions of the Wehrmacht in the

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⁶⁶ There were also German military governments in the occupied zone of France (and then in the “free zone” of Vichy France from November 1942), Greece and Serbia during the Second World War. Although the occupied zone of France was administered by a military commander, there was a greater SS presence in France than Belgium. On the divergent occupation systems across German-dominated Europe, see Mazower, Hitler’s Empire.
east. Since the 1990s, historians including Omer Bartov, Birgit Beck, Hannes Heer, Manfred Messerschmidt, Ronald Smelser and Wolfgang Wette have challenged the notion of a “clean Wehrmacht,” the illusion of the army as uninvolved in the mass violence committed against non-Jewish and Jewish civilians in eastern Europe.\(^67\) In her work on the occupied Netherlands, Jennifer L. Foray has insistently argued that the myth of the apolitical, “clean Wehrmacht” does not hold up for western and northern Europe any more than it does for the east.\(^68\)

The two geographical spheres of occupation in western and eastern Europe should not be seen as binary or oppositional. German soldiers frequently marched back and forth across the broad front of German-occupied Europe and sought to make sense of their experiences and what they saw. For most German soldiers, east and west were also linked through home – the German Reich – since the Wehrmacht, unlike other armies in occupied Europe, was granted regular home leave. Soldiers’ travel across and between the countries of occupied Europe ensured that the experiences of multiple fronts seeped into and sometimes became entangled with one another. Franka Maubach has suggested that it is impossible to isolate the eastern theatre of war from the context of the much larger world war being fought at the same time; many German soldiers went to the eastern front after serving in Belgium, France or the Netherlands and thus had their “eastern experiences” against this backdrop.\(^69\)

These experiences also operated in the other direction. Omer Bartov’s study of the German military affirms that the brutalization of soldiers in Poland affected their conduct in the west, even though these soldiers held fewer prejudices against the allegedly more “civilized”

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western European populations. Sexual politics is a useful site for engaging comparative histories because it draws attention to the ways in which gender, sex and sexuality cut across other constructed categories, such as race, geography and language. Understanding such categories as fluid and intersectional enables a more nuanced discussion of what was similar and different across western and eastern Europe, without diminishing the historical specificities of each area of occupation.

A Note on Methods, Sources and Language

This study has several interrelated methodological goals: to fill a larger gap in the historiography on the Second World War on one of the “small countries” in western Europe; to provide a workable framework within which to analyze the multiple functions of intimate politics during foreign occupations and wars; and, conversely, to use intimacy as a window into the national distinctions of the Belgian case as well as the linkages between different parts of German-occupied Europe. This dissertation uses a wide array of sources produced by members of the German military administration and Belgian civil authorities, including government and military documents, police reports, court records, legislation and draft laws and correspondence. These archival sources have shaped the parameters of this study in critical ways.

In the first instance, records from military, medical and police agents and agencies existed in an administrative and bureaucratic genre that was interested in individuals, and especially women, as objects of social control. They thus offer little insight into the day-to-day intimate experiences and subjectivities of Germans and Belgians. Instead, I use the rhetoric, discourses and policies circulating within and emanating out of the German occupation administration to investigate how the German military authorities in Belgium instrumentalized intimacy to facilitate and reinforce the project of occupation, as well as the unplanned and contradictory outcomes of this venture. In other words, an examination of the policy record on intimate arrangements and its execution in everyday life allows us to see more clearly the heterogeneity and parameters of German rule in occupied Europe.

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70 Bartov, Hitler’s Army, 67.
71 See Ashwini Tambe’s discussion of lawmaking as a “productive process”, stemming from Foucault’s argument that restrictions on sexuality operate as productive forces (since they construct new categories of sexuality to be legally regulated). Ashwini Tambe, Codes of Misconduct: Regulating Prostitution in Late Colonial Bombay (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), xi-xx. In her work on colonial medicine and women’s bodies in colonial Buganda, Nakanyike Musisi contends that though sources written by colonialist men are undoubtedly problematic, they are deserving of attention by historians because they provide insight into colonial men’s ideas
This project investigates the close encounters that occurred between German men and Belgian women in occupied Belgium, even though Germans and Belgians of both genders interacted in multiple spaces – in Belgium, but also Germany, France and the other countries of northern and western Europe as well as on the eastern front. In August 1944, 250,000 Belgians, including some women, were registered as labourers in Germany. The Nazi regime was acutely troubled by the friendships and romantic interactions between Germans and foreigners (primarily forced labourers and PoWs) that occurred on German soil, although German officials and the wider public were more willing to tolerate relationships between Germans and the Westarbeiter (workers from France and Belgium) than labourers from the east. Nevertheless, this study is for the most part limited thematically to the intimate interactions between German men and Belgian women and geographically to occupied Belgium, because I am interested in understanding the mechanics of sexual politics in a landscape of foreign occupation.

Finally, I focus solely on heterosexual intimacies because these were the encounters the Nazi regime viewed as useful or productive for its purposes. Though same-sex intimacies likely occurred between German and Belgian men, these are largely absent in the sources I consulted, in part because of the nature of the official record. Since same-sex relations between men were criminalized before and during the Third Reich (under §175 of the Penal Code), Nazi and military authorities did not presume to suggest in their reports that intimacies between men in occupied Europe were occurring with any frequency. A notable exception to this absence of documentation on same-sex sexual relationships is the court-martial cases of Wehrmacht soldiers and SS-men tried for violations of §175. Concerns that German soldiers in service would turn to one another to satisfy their sexual urges in fact motivated the leadership to permit some heterosexual contact between German men and local women in the occupied territories.


Herbert, Hitler’s Foreign Workers, 1.


A note on language is also necessary. I am aware of the problems associated with using Nazi racial terminology, such as the designations “Germanic,” “foreign” and “racially valuable,” all of which appear frequently in the dissertation. After their initial usage, these terms will not usually be enclosed in quotation marks in the interests of maintaining the flow and readability of the text. I do not accept the reality or validity of Nazi racial categories or hierarchies; nevertheless, the reproduction of these terms in my analysis of intimacy in German-dominated Belgium is critical to understanding the multiple and often contradictory ideological underpinnings of the occupation and how they shaped the politics of intimacy.

**Historical and Wartime Context**

Belgium’s political history is intertwined with those of its neighbours: France, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. In the early modern period present-day Belgian territory formed part of larger continental empires or was divided into smaller states; in 1830, Belgians revolted against Dutch rule and formed an independent state. The creation of the Belgian state offered Belgium and Germany the opportunity for a new type of political connection, a more familial linkage. In June 1831, the Belgian National Congress elected Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, Duke of Saxony as the first King of the Belgians. Through Leopold’s descendants, the House of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha is still the royal house of Belgium today.

Such continuities in the seats of political power existed in different, and much less amiable, ways as well. In August 1914, the German army invaded Belgium, violating its neutrality enshrined in the 1839 Treaty of London and signalling the beginning of a brutal four-year occupation. Twenty-five years after the start of the First World War, the German army again violated Belgian neutrality on 10 May 1940, as part of the invasion of western Europe. The invasion proceeded with great speed; the Germans took the main Belgian defense line, the Albert canal, on 11 May and Brussels fell a week later. On 28 May, the Belgian government decided to surrender to the Germans. Prime Minister Hubert Pierlot, Foreign Minister Paul-Henri Spaak and

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Footnotes:

75 Politically-oriented by its Catholic identity, Belgium was successively part of the Burgundian Netherlands, Spanish Netherlands and Austrian Netherlands and, following the French Revolutionary wars, became part of France in 1795. After Napoleon’s defeat in 1815, a new United Kingdom of the Netherlands reunited the former Austrian territories with Holland. This history of interaction and struggle with other European empires and states accounts for Belgium’s continued confessional identity and linguistic diversity. For an overview of Belgian history pre-1830, see Georges-H. Dumont, *Histoire de la Belgique* (Paris: Hachette, 1977). For an English-language overview, see Bernard A. Cook, *Belgium: A History* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002).

their government fled to London, while the king, Léopold III, stayed in Belgium against his ministers’ wishes and was comfortably imprisoned in Laeken, just outside of Brussels.\footnote{On the position and role of Léopold III during the occupation, see Michel Dumoulin, Mark Van de Wijngaert and Vincent Dujardin, eds., Léopold III (Brussels: Complexe, 2001); Jules Gérard-Libois and José Gotovitch, Léopold III: De l’an 40 à l’effacement (Brussels: Pol-His, 1991); Jan Velaers and Herman van Goethem, Léopold III: De konig, het land, de oorlog (Tielt: Lannoo, 1994).}

The German High Command of the Army (OKH) had asked Hitler back in October 1939 to authorize a “purely military administration” in the west, requesting the exclusion of party agencies from preparations for the occupations. The High Command wanted to carve out its own sphere of influence in the west to strengthen its position and avoid another situation like Poland, where competing Nazi, SS and police apparatuses dominated the landscape.\footnote{Wagner, Belgien, 108; Warmbrunn, German Occupation, 70; eben, Die innere Sicherheit, 86. Reeder later referred to the tasks of his administration as “purely military.” Eggert Reeder and Walter Hailer, Die Militärverwaltung in Belgien und Nordfrankreich (Darmstadt: L.C. Wittich, 1943), 3.} The Wehrmacht’s Polish campaign had recalled the Imperial army’s invasion of Belgium in August 1914, although the violence against Poles was much more extensive.\footnote{Alexander B. Rossino, Hitler Strikes Poland: Blitzkrieg, Ideology and Atrocity (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), x. For another study of the Wehrmacht’s participation in crimes against Polish civilians and its tense cooperation with the SS, see Jochen Böhler, Auftakt zum Vernichtungskrieg: Die Wehrmacht in Polen, 1939 (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2006). See also Bartov, Hitler’s Army, 61-8.} Several commanders, most famously General Johannes Blaskowitz, Supreme Commander of the occupation forces in Poland, as well as Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, the chief of the Abwehr, and Commander-in-Chief of the OKH, General Walther von Brauchitsch, were concerned about the conduct of the German police formations in Poland and their slaughter of tens of thousands of Jewish and gentile Poles; their unease, however, stemmed from a desire to defend the military’s executive authority in the conquered territories from the encroachment of the SS and not from moral repugnance.\footnote{General Blaskowitz wrote a series of reports in the winter of 1939-40, complaining about the actions of the Einsatzgruppen and arguing that the violence against Polish civilians served enemy propaganda and caused “great political damage.” Blaskowitz Memorandum, 6 Feb. 1940, excerpted in Nazism 1919-1945, vol. 3, Foreign Policy, War and Racial Extermination, eds. Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1988), Doc. 655, 938-40. Raul Hilberg has argued that Blaskowitz was not outraged about the killings, but about the way in which the SS carried them out. Böhler, Auftakt, 238; Raul Hilberg, The Destruction of the European Jews, vol. 1 (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985), 191. Rossino, Hitler Strikes Poland, 58.}

Hitler agreed to the OKH’s October 1939 request, aware that he could reverse his decision at any point.\footnote{Warmbrunn, German Occupation, 70.} On 13 May 1940, before the invasion of the Low Countries was over, the Quartermaster-General, Major-General Eugen Müller, named General Alexander Freiherr von Falkenhausen Military Commander (Militärbefehlshaber) of the Netherlands and those areas of
Belgium already occupied by Army Group B. Born in 1878 in Silesia to a family with a penchant for the German military, Falkenhausen had some familial connections to Belgium; he was the nephew of Ludwig von Falkenhausen, the governor-general of Belgium in World War I from 1917-18. Falkenhausen had a distinguished military career, having fought against the Boxer Rebellion in China and on several fronts in the First World War, including with the Ottoman army. In the 1930s, he served as military advisor to Chiang Kai-Shek, returning to Germany and to active duty as Deputy Commanding General of Military District IV in Dresden. The OKH considered Falkenhausen an ideal candidate to run a military regime in Belgium; nationalist and authoritarian though he was, he supported neither the Nazi party nor the SS.

Within days of Falkenhausen’s appointment as Military Commander for Belgium and the Netherlands, Hitler changed his mind and appointed Reich Minister Arthur Seyss-Inquart as the civilian Reich Commissioner of the Netherlands. The High Command anticipated that Belgium would also be placed under a civil administration (Zivilverwaltung), given Himmler’s urgent requests to Hitler for an “overall solution of the Belgian problem,” but this did not occur in 1940. There were several reasons for the reluctance to institute a Zivilverwaltung. On 18 May 1940, Hitler had already decreed the reincorporation into the Reich of the German-speaking territories of Belgium, the eastern districts (Kreise) of Eupen and Malmédy and the village of Moresnet into the Reich, which Belgium had received after the First World War. The long-term plan for the rest of Belgium, however, remained unclear.

The instructions of the High Command of the Armed Forces (OKW) issued to Falkenhausen in July 1940 stated that “the Führer has not yet made a definite decision with

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82 Wagner, Belgien, 111-2.
83 See Falkenhausen’s published memoirs, Mémoires d'outre-guerre (Extraits): Comment j'ai gouverné la Belgique de 1940 à 1944, ed. Jo Gérard, (Brussels: Éditions Arts et voyages, 1974), as well copies of his memoirs with his notes available at in his Nachlass at the Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv in Freiburg im Breisgau.
regard to the future of the Belgian state.” For the next four years, Nazi officials debated about whether Belgium should be preserved as an independent kingdom with close ties to the Reich; whether Flanders should be incorporated into the civilian administration in the Netherlands (creating a Greater Netherlands region); or whether Belgium should be divided into separate Gaue (Flanders and Wallonia, or Flanders, Wallonia and Brabant, including Brussels). It is also plausible that Hitler was making a gesture of good will to Belgians by not making any further claims to Belgian territory. The presence of the King, who unlike the monarchs of Luxemburg and the Netherlands had not gone into exile and existed as a symbol of the (pre-1940) state, also made it difficult for Hitler dispose of the country as he wished. The establishment of the military command was thus the path of least resistance for the Nazi regime because it kept all options open and disguised long-term intentions to annex parts or all of the country.

The instatement of a military, rather than civilian administration, in Belgium further related to the strategic importance of Belgium as a launching pad and supply hub for the ongoing military operations against France and for the planned invasion of Britain. As the European continent’s first industrialized country, Belgium was also an area of economic importance for the Third Reich, with three areas of industrial production of great value: steel, manufacturing and, most important, coal. Belgium had an estimated 168 coal mines in its small territory; the most significant of these reserves were located in the south and east and produced 28 million tons of coal annually. The Germans also aimed to draw on Belgians as a source of labour power but

87 Keitel an Oberbefehlshaber des Heeres, 14 July 1940, BA-MA RW 36/36. This indefinite stance on Belgium was official German policy throughout the war, in spite of indications that in 1941-42 Hitler planned on enlarging the western frontiers in order to facilitate the division of Belgium and its full annexation into Germany. Klaus A. Maier, Horst Rohde, Bernd Stegemann and Hans Umbreit, Germany and the Second World War, vol. II, Germany’s Initial Conquests in Europe, trans. Dean S. McMurry and Ewald Osers (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 321. In 1942, Goebbels noted in his diary that Hitler intended to expand the borders of the Reich and turn Flanders and Brabant into Reichsgaue. Fröhlich, ed., Die Tagebücher. Teil II: Diktate 1941-1945, vol. 4, April bis Juni 1942, entry 30 May 1942, 406.

88 Himmler favoured the second option because, as Paul Belien writes, “in the political strategy of the SS…there was no place for Belgium.” Belien, Throne in Brussels, 217; Warmbrunn, German Occupation, 67-8.

89 Kroener et al., Germany and the Second World War, vol. V, part 1, 84; Warmbrunn, German Occupation, 97.

90 Wagner, Belgien, 158.

91 John Gillingham, Belgian Business in the Nazi New Order (Ghent: Jan Dhondt Foundation, 1997), 127-8; Warmbrunn, German Occupation, 207. These regions – one that reached from Liège to Charleroi and up into the coal mines near Lille in northern France and another running from Flemish Limburg into Dutch Limburg – had been central to Germany’s aims in the First World War.
strove to do so through voluntary recruitment at least as long as possible, particularly given the high levels of Belgian unemployment at the time of the Westfeldzug.  

The office of the Military Commander for Belgium and Northern France, which included all areas of prewar Belgium and the two French départements Nord and Pas-de-Calais, was the supreme military, political and economic authority. There was no separation of powers between civilian and military authorities as in the Netherlands and Norway, no puppet government like Quisling’s in Norway and no separate states like Marshal Pétain’s Vichy regime in the unoccupied southern zone of France. For the High Command, the establishment of a military government in Belgium was a coup in its struggle for power with the Nazi party and SS, since Poland in 1939 and more recently the Netherlands had already slipped from its grasp. Nevertheless, the occupation featured a constant balancing act between the military’s objectives and those of the SS. The military command knew it could be replaced at any time by a civilian administration and this awareness influenced many of its occupation policies and initiatives.

The military command in Belgium was organized hierarchically; at the top stood Falkenhausen as Militärbefehlshaber, who controlled the two branches of the command: the military staff (Kommandostab), concerned chiefly with military affairs and security, and the military administration (Militärverwaltung), which dealt with civilian affairs, including existing Belgian institutions and issues like the economy. The head of the military administration was Eggert Reeder, provincial governor of Aachen, Cologne and Düsseldorf and member of the Nazi

92 On the Germans’ labour policy, see the proceedings of a 1992 conference, Centre de recherches et d'études historiques de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, De verplichte tewerkstelling in Duitsland 1942-1945: acta van het symposium gehouden te Brussel op 6 en 7 oktober 1992 (Brussels: CREHSGM, 1993). See also Herbert’s Hitler’s Foreign Workers, which includes Belgium but is also a wider study of the Arbeitseinsatz, esp. 192-7; Warmbrunn, German Occupation, 225-38.

93 France was divided in June 1940 into an occupied zone in the north and western areas administered by the German military and a “free zone” fully under the control of the French government at Vichy, headed by Marshal Philippe Pétain (until 1942, when German forces moved into the unoccupied zone after the Allied invasion of Northern Africa). The reasons for the inclusion of two French départements to the German military command operating out of Brussels are unclear, but it seems that the decision was taken in view of military considerations as well as their area’s economic importance as a major coal mining sector and supply hub for Paris’ electrical and water supply. There was also the possibility of using these two départements as “bargaining chips” in negotiations with the Vichy regime, which pushed for those areas to be recognized as French. It is also plausible that the Nazis viewed this region as more Flemish or “Germanic” than French. Wagner, Belgien, 164-79. On France more generally, see Julian Jackson, France: The Dark Years, 1940-1944 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).


95 On Falkenhausen and Reeder’s attempts to balance German military and Nazi political objectives, see Gellar, “The Role of Military Administration,” 99-125.

96 Warmbrunn, German Occupation, 71-4.
party from 1933 and SS from 1939. Reeder assumed his duties in Belgium in June 1940 and served in that capacity until the Germans evacuated their forces and administrators in September 1944. At the local and regional level, the military administration was represented by Kommandanturen, or command posts. Each province had a High Field Command (Oberfeldkommandantur) or Field Command (Feldkommandantur) office; on the next level were the Kreiskommandanturen, which governed between one to four districts. These command posts scattered across the country included specialists and experts in civilian affairs who received and implemented instructions from the main military administration under Reeder in Brussels.

In 1914-18, the German occupiers assumed direct and full responsibility for administering Belgium; this was not possible in and after 1940, because the Germans simply did not have the manpower on the ground to do so. At its peak in September 1941, the German administrative staff in Belgium numbered just under 1200, a marked contrast with the 10 000 of World War I. The military administration thus considered itself only a “supervisory body” that left responsibility for the actual running of the country to Belgian state, provincial and municipal authorities. To meet its central objectives, the maintenance of security and, even more important, economic exploitation, the occupation regime necessarily relied on a cooperative population, including civil servants, industry leaders and ordinary citizens.

For their part, Belgian government officials and business leaders were shocked by the invasion and the rapidity of German victory; recalling the horrors of the First World War, including the 60 000 Belgian civilians deported to Germany for forced labour in 1916-17, and facing a future of German dominance, cooperation with the occupation authorities was widely accepted as the only feasible option. When the Belgian government fled to London in May 1940, it tasked the Secretary Generals, the head civil servants of most government ministries, to

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97 For a biographical sketch of Eggert Reeder, see Wagner, Belgien, 103-4; Warmbrunn, German Occupation, 85-9.
99 Best, Die deutschen Aufsichtsverwaltungen, 29-30; De Vos, Belgique, 199; Libois and Gotovitch, L’an 40, 132.
100 De Vos, Belgique, 201-6; Warmbrunn, German Occupation, 71-4. On the localization of Belgian government during the occupation, see the work of Nico Wouters, including “Localization in the Age of Centralization: Local Government in Belgium and Nord-Pas-de-Calais (1940-1945),” in Local Government in Occupied Europe (1939-1945), eds. Nico Wouters, Bruno de Wever and Herman van Goethem (Ghent: Academia Press, 2006), 83-108; idem, Oorlogsburgemeesters 40/44: Lokaal bestuur en collaboratie in België (Tielt: Lannoo, 2004).
101 De Vos, Belgique, 199; Warmbrunn, German Occupation, 124, 191.
work with the occupying forces. The highest Belgian administrative and political authority during the war, the Committee of Secretaries-General operated on what it termed a “policy of lesser evil” – essentially collaboration – in the interests of maintaining control of the state and serving the interests of the country and its citizens. For the Germans, this arrangement meant savings in manpower and, at least initially, a legitimization of their rule and demands.

The Belgian economic elite also sanctioned the “policy of lesser evil” in the summer of 1940 under the leadership of Alexandre Galopin, the governor of Société générale, the main holding company controlling 40 percent of Belgian industry. In what became known as the Galopin doctrine, the heads of holding companies, banks and industry decided on an economic policy whereby Belgium would keep factories open and produce goods other than direct armaments and munitions for the German war economy. Eschewing the full-scale shut down of industrial production as in World War I, the Galopin doctrine opted to collaborate to ensure that the Germans would import enough food to feed the population and to protect Belgians from deportation to Germany by keeping them employed at home.

The German occupiers considered collaboration largely successful. In early 1941, Reeder boasted that he supervised a territory of more than 12 million inhabitants (including occupied northern France) with only 472 German administrators. However, even as the Germans gave existing Belgian civil agencies greater autonomy than in the Netherlands, the military command intervened considerably in Belgian affairs. The military administration remained in power until 18 July 1944, less than three months before the Allied liberation of Belgium, when it was replaced by a civilian administration under the Gauleiter of Cologne and Aachen, Josef Grohé.

Chapter Outline

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103 On the “policy of lesser evil” and the Secretaries-General, see van den Wijngaert, _Het beleid van het Comité van de secretarissen-generaal in België tijdens de Duitse bezetting 1940-1944_ (Brussels: Paleis der Academïen, 1975).
105 Warmbrunn, _German Occupation_, 74.
The first chapter contextualizes the goals and visions of the German occupation administration in Belgium in the Second World War within the legacy of the earlier occupation of the First World War. Recalling the real and propagandistic elements of the Imperial German army’s “rape of Belgium” in August 1914, the Wehrmacht was determined to win over international and Belgian public opinion after 1940. Endeavouring as well to secure its tenuous position vis-à-vis Nazi organs in Belgium, the German command opted for a policy of moderation – “the velvet glove” – in dealing with civilians and sought to showcase the reserved nature of a new generation of German troops, particularly in regard to local women.

The military administration faced a conundrum; it attempted to limit all public forms of fraternization between German soldiers and Belgian women and yet argued that sex was an important incentive and reward as well as a biological need for German soldiers. The solution to this paradox was the establishment of a regulated sexual economy that theoretically kept sex “behind closed doors.” Chapter two examines the legal wrestling in the first 18 months of the occupation between German military and medical officials and Belgian authorities in the national Ministry of Public Health and municipal governments to inaugurate a regulationist system of prostitution that provided for the civil, medical and police control of all women engaged in or suspected of prostitution. The laws enacted in 1940-41 paradoxically led to the expansion of the sex trade, showcasing the ineffectiveness of the German occupiers’ attempt to differentiate a “private” world of sexual license from a “public” image of sexual reserve.

Chapter three provides more of a social history of prostitution in occupied Belgium. Because of the German military authorities’ unwillingness to challenge German troops’ right to the sexual spoils of war, they necessarily mobilized Belgians – including municipal authorities, police officials, medical professionals, brothel proprietors and even the sex workers themselves – as the de-facto protectors of German men’s sexual health. Continually frustrated with these Belgian actors, the occupation authorities failed to sufficiently consider the fact that the regulation of sexual commerce hinged on the willing participation of the very same people they exploited and dominated. In the end, the struggle to construct a controlled space of intimate interaction reflected the vulnerabilities and unforeseen consequences inherent in a plan that sought to both restrict close encounters between occupier and occupied and direct them in militarily and economically productive ways.
Chapters four and five analyze how Nazi and military officials conceptualized Belgium within the project of establishing the “Greater Germanic Empire” (*grossgermanisches Reich*) in northwestern Europe. These chapters analyze German attempts to create new loyalties and affinities between Belgian civilians and the Reich through the familial, sexual, affective and legal ties of marriage and reproduction. Though the language of race operated as the *lingua franca* of the Third Reich, the instability of racial ideology often made it difficult for Nazi experts and party and military officials to base policies solely on racial classifications; as a result, racial and political ideals, including reliability and allegiance, became enmeshed in the development of German policies regarding the intimate arrangements of domestic life.

Chapter four situates debates and regulations on marriages between German men and Belgian and other allegedly Germanic women within the larger context of the Second World War, arguing that marriage policy expanded when it was expedient for the war effort and contracted when it potentially harmed military security. Chapter five explores German-initiated policies relating to conception, birth and child-rearing in occupied Belgium. An examination of the only Lebensborn home in Belgium, Heim Ardennen, exposes the ways in which attempts to secure “good blood” for the Germanic Empire vis-à-vis young and malleable Belgian children, involved the transformation of everyday, ordinary practices, including care work, eating and having sex. However, the occupier never fully committed to “Germanizing” ordinary Belgians because of the perceived political unreliability of the Belgian population and of civilian women in particular.

The final chapter examines the liberation of Belgium in September 1944 and the presence of British and American forces in the country through the summer of 1945. Like the Germans before them, the Allies and returning Belgian civil authorities envisioned sex and in particular women’s bodies as spheres of political interest requiring intervention. For the Allies, perceived sexual immorality in Belgium affirmed the belief of many soldiers that Europe could no longer manage its own affairs. For Belgians, the attempted repression of female sexuality functioned as a means to “work through” the German occupation and reassert masculine sovereignty. The “liberation” of Belgium in 1944 was incomplete for Belgian women, as they were both central to and marginalized in the rearrangements of power and authority in the postwar period.
Chapter 1
Revisiting “The Rape of Belgium”: Legacies of Occupation and the Place of the Intimate

Several months into the German occupation of Belgium, on 19 November 1940, the Belgian king, Léopold III, met with Adolf Hitler in Berchtesgaden in the Bavarian Alps. The conversation took an unexpected turn when Léopold, in explaining his country’s attitude towards the German occupiers, observed that in a stark contrast to 1914, the conduct of the “new” German army had impressed the Belgian civilian population. Hitler, himself a war veteran who had been wounded in a gas attack in the Ypres salient shortly before the armistice of 11 November 1918, took offence at the insinuation that the Imperial army’s conduct in Belgium in World War I had been anything other than upstanding. Arguing that the new occupying power under General Falkenhausen in Belgium decreed only what was necessary and unavoidable from the point of view of military security, Hitler insisted that the behaviour of the Allied forces in the Rhineland, Saarland and Paltinate after World War I was far worse than anything the Germans had done either in 1914-18 or up to that point in 1940. To illustrate, Hitler claimed that 17 000 rapes of German women by Allied troops had occurred in the occupied Rhineland in the 1920s, something that had never happened in Belgium, where, he asserted, such crimes would have immediately incurred the death penalty under the governing German military.¹

This chapter explores how realities and fantasies of sexual violence linked the legacy of the First World War and its aftermath to German understandings of the pursuit for dominance in Belgium between 1940 and 1944. Central to this linkage was the metaphor of “the rape of Belgium,” which had been employed by Allied propaganda and circulated widely in the Belgian and Allied press, popular literature and government publications during World War I. Though real incidents of sexual violence against Belgian women were part of the German onslaught of August 1914, the metaphor came to stand as a generalized synonym for the invasion and occupation of neutral Belgium and its frontiers. The conflation of “brave little Belgium” with a

violated woman maintained its potency well into the 1940s; for many Europeans after the crushing defeat of 1918, including Hitler himself, to speak about Belgium was to speak about sexual encounters. This chapter argues that the lingering resonance of “the rape of Belgium” ensured concerns about the place of the intimate were already embedded in occupation politics and discourse when German forces invaded Belgium on 10 May 1940.

In 1940, the German occupation authorities intended to avoid a repeat of “the rape of Belgium.” In the minds of Nazi and military leaders, the Allies’ propagandistic shaping of World War I as a sexualized and gendered conflict had poisoned international public opinion against the German Reich and bore at least partial responsibility for the army’s defeat in November 1918. Consequently, the Wehrmacht was determined to win both the propaganda war and the actual war in Europe the second time around. The German military command in occupied Belgium outwardly promoted a policy of moderation, the “velvet glove,” a policy that reached down to the behaviour and comportment of the individual German soldier. The “velvet glove” worked to remedy the failures of the first German occupation by showing Belgians, Germans and the world that the Wehrmacht was a different type of army than its predecessor – this army was one of reserve, rule and order, particularly in its everyday interactions with civilians, the central arenas where this new image was visible and its success measurable.

The politics of intimacy played a central role in this pragmatic strategy. The German High Command of the Army in Berlin and military authorities on the ground in Belgium considered contact (Umgang) with civilians and especially women threatening on at least two levels: first, daily interactions and particularly those that occurred in public spaces threatened the strict barrier separating occupier from occupied; second, and more alarmingly for military leaders, intimate interactions with Belgian women – enemy women – were also potential security breaches. Here again was the imagined legacy of World War I and the twin tales of local Belgian women and girls who had mutilated German soldiers or tempted them into spilling military secrets. Alongside this obsessive fear about the “dangerousness” of women, however, was the memory of the deeply gendered atrocity propaganda of World War I that had portrayed German troops as the sexual violators of individual Belgian women and the nation as a whole. German authorities in Belgium after 1940 remained conflicted over how to treat civilian women who, on the one hand, were possible threats to the integrity of the regime and, on the other hand, had the
power to rouse paternalist and patriarchal international attention (as they had in 1914-18) in their status as symbols of the nation.

The connections between the First and Second World Wars have been well documented and disputed by historians. In their assessment of the long-term impact of the German atrocities committed in Belgium and northern France in August 1914, Annette Becker, John Horne, Alan Kramer and Larry Zuckerman have looked ahead to the Holocaust; they argue that the widespread denunciation and condemnation of Allied wartime propaganda in Britain and the United States in the interwar years worked to fuel skepticism when the citizens of these nations were later confronted by reports of German crimes against Jews and other civilians in World War II. For the Germans, the connection between the 1914 invasion of Belgium and the Holocaust came “full circle” in 1939 Poland and on an even broader scale in the invaded Soviet Union, where the justification for the Einsatzgruppen’s murder of Jews directly recalled the francs-tireurs myth of 1914; German propaganda declared that “Jewish delinquents” had sniped at German troops.

Other historical approaches for understanding the period 1914-1945 draw backwards-looking connections in attempting to understand the particular logic of the German military administration set up after the Belgian surrender of 28 May 1940. Horne and Kramer, as well as Werner Warmbrunn, among others, argue that various realities and imaginings of 1914-18 and the legacy of hate engendered by atrocity propaganda inclined the occupation authorities to go the route less travelled in 1940: compromise and caution. Warmbrunn has referred to this


4 Horne and Kramer, German Atrocities, 406-7; Zuckerman, Rape of Belgium, 270-1.

5 Jules Gérard-Libois and José Gotovitch, L’an 40: La Belgique occupée (Brussels: CRISP, 1971), 132; Horne and Kramer, German Atrocities, 401-5; Wilfried Wagner, Belgien in der deutschen Politik während des Zweiten
philosophy as “the policy of the velvet glove” (Politik der weichen Hand) and argues that of all the German-dominated territories in western Europe, only in Belgium did occupier and occupied have a “known repertoire,” a historical framework against which actions could be assessed.

The mechanics of the velvet glove policy in the actual administration of the country have also received detailed scholarly attention, particularly in regard to the military command’s relationship with high-level Nazi officials and its constant tension with the SS.6 Wolfram Weber has concluded that the military’s apparent commitment to the “rule of law” and moderation ensured that the Belgians had a “relatively lucky fate” during the Second World War compared to the populations in other areas of the occupied western Europe (not to mention the east), a perspective that has become largely mainstream in the historiography.7 These scholarly accounts take seriously the 1943 assertion of Eggert Reeder, chief administrator of the military occupation, that “the military administration has been constantly striving to learn from former mistakes and to avoid them through practical application of the Führerprinzip.”8

What has been largely absent in historical investigations of Reeder’s claim of a learning curve across the two occupations of Belgium has been the ways in which the intermingling of warfare with eroticism and sexuality in World War I propaganda built the politics of intimacy, sex and gender into German conceptions of Belgium specifically and the context of war more generally. That intimacy shaped the logic and expression of German occupation in Belgium is perhaps unsurprising. Belgian history is probably best known for its intimacies and atrocities and the way these have intersected in the country’s relatively short history: first, the Belgian atrocities committed in the Congo Free State under Léopold II’s rule between 1885 and 1908 – Belgium’s imperial “rape of the Congo” – and then, the Belgian nation’s own “rape” at the hands

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8 Eggert Reeder and Walter Hailer, Die Militärverwaltung in Belgien und Nordfrankreich (Darmstadt: L.C. Wittich, 1943), 16.
of the Germans in August 1914. It is perhaps precisely the relationship between the intimate and the atrocious in Belgian history that fascinates scholars and non-scholars alike. It is likely that at least to some degree, the Germans in 1940 conceptualized Belgium in terms of what was widely known at the time: a history of sexualized violence in which Belgians figured first as perpetrators and then as victims.

The general relationship among and interconnectedness of intimacy, sex and violence is similarly to be expected, given feminist scholarship’s longtime awareness of the dual meanings of “conquest,” signifying both domination on the battlefield and in the bedroom. Ruth Seifert has directly referenced the Allied press’ designation of the German occupation of Belgium in World War I as “the rape of Belgium” as symptomatic of the west’s particular “mixture of violence with eroticism or sexuality.” Stemming from these theorizations, I am interested in how intimacy and violence were entwined in the German occupation of Belgium in the Second World War; this chapter teases out the initial threads of this entanglement by reflecting on the earlier occupation of 1914-18. Concern about the intimate was not something new that the Germans brought with them to Belgium in 1940; it was already part of their understanding of the country and the contingencies of occupation.

This chapter opens with an analysis of “the rape of Belgium” in August 1914 as a propagandistic motif and explores its lingering aftereffects into the interwar period. The second part examines Nazi and military officials’ concern about the “reputation” of the German military

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10 An essay by historian Sophie de Schaperdrijver on the place of Belgium in World War I discourse was included in a 2006 volume on why Belgian history is interesting. Sophie de Schaperdrijver, “Champion or Stillbirth: The Symbolic Uses of Belgium in the Great War,” in How Can One Not Be Interested in Belgian History: War, Language and Consensus in Belgium Since 1830, eds. Benno Barnard, Martine Van Berlo, Geert van Istendael, Tony Judt, Marc Reyneneau and Sophie de Schaperdrijver (Ghent: Academia Press, 2006), 55-81.

in Belgium and the calculated development of the “velvet glove” policy against the larger biopolitical goals of the occupation regime to regulate Belgians as labour resources. The military administration argued that violence or even disrespect towards Belgian civilians, and particularly women, in everyday life and in institutional settings like courts could endanger military objectives by adversely impacting the standing of the Wehrmacht in the eyes of the occupied population, the Allies and even high-ranking Nazis in Berlin (who wanted to replace the military with a civilian administration).

It is important to point out, however, that the German occupiers were less concerned with the stringent compliance of the rank-and-file to rules governing their interaction with local civilian men and women than they were about what was witnessed in a public capacity, by other Germans and the local population.\textsuperscript{12} In other words, the decisive factor in German military thinking was the type of contact between German soldiers and Belgian women and its public resonance, not the fact of the contact itself. Nowhere was this concern more evident, as the final part of this chapter explores, than in cases of sexual violence perpetrated by members of the Wehrmacht against civilian women in western Europe.

1914: “The Rape of Belgium”

Within days of the German invasion of Belgium on 4 August 1914, the construction of what became the leitmotif of the First World War – “the rape of Belgium” – was underway.\textsuperscript{13} Reports and rumours of atrocities against Belgian civilians in Aerschot, Dinant, Andenne, Leuven, Visé, Malines, Tirlemont, among many other villages and cities, steadily mounted in international newspapers.\textsuperscript{14} These atrocities included rape, torture and mutilation, executions, pillaging, the use of women and children as human shields and the burning of homes and historical buildings, including the famous library in Leuven, an affluent university town east of Brussels.\textsuperscript{15} Alan Kramer and John Horne have calculated that the German military participated in

\textsuperscript{12} This was also true for eastern Europe. See Stephan Lehnstaedt, \textit{Okkupation im Osten: Besatzeralltag in Warschau und Minsk, 1939-1944} (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2010), 200-1, 238, 242.

\textsuperscript{13} For a general history of Belgium in the First World War, see Sophie de Schaepdrijver, \textit{La Belgique et la Première Guerre mondiale}, trans. Claudine Spitaels and Marnix Vincent (Brussels: P.I.E.-Peter Lang, 2004).

\textsuperscript{14} Both \textit{The New York Times} and \textit{The Times} out of London contained many reports of German crimes against Belgian civilians from their special correspondents abroad in August and early September 1914, showing the long reach of “atrocity stories.” For example: “To Appeal to Neutrals,” \textit{The New York Times}, 14 Aug. 1914; “Brutality as a Policy,” \textit{The Times}, 29 Aug. 1914.

\textsuperscript{15} On the night of 25 August, the German army killed 248 civilians and destroyed one-sixth of the city’s buildings, including the university library and its impressive collection of early books and medieval manuscripts. For contemporary accounts, see: Commission d’enquête sur les violations des règles du droit des gens, des lois et des
the killings of 5521 Belgian civilians in August 1914. Violations were not committed by any single band of soldiers; over half of the 300 regiments participated in 484 separate incidents.16

During the invasion and throughout the rest of the conflict, Belgian, British and American press outlets and governmental officials sensationalized actual German crimes against civilians, promoting starkly contrasting images of a brutish and inhumane German Reich and “brave little Belgium.”17 These reworked “German atrocities” in Belgium followed a pattern in the sense that they were passionate, partisan and determined re-imaginings of real events designed to turn international public opinion against Germany.18 The atrocities became even more mythologized and entrenched once they were the subject of state investigations by Belgian and British officials. Already on 7 August 1914, just three days after the beginning of the invasion, the Belgian Minister of Justice, Henry Carton de Wiart, appointed a Commission of Inquiry to investigate German violations of the rules of law according to the 1899 and 1907 Hague Conventions. A year later, a comprehensive, two-volume version of the Commission’s findings was published, documenting in detail the crimes carried out by the German army against Belgian persons and property. These volumes were issued in French and English, suggesting that interest in the Belgian government’s investigative efforts and the crimes themselves crossed the Atlantic divide.19 In May 1915, the British government published the findings of its own inquiry,
the Report on Alleged German Outrages in Belgium, known colloquially as the Bryce Report after its chairman, Lord James Bryce.20

Sexual and gender-based violence was a central component of the “German atrocities” of 1914.21 Though sexual assaults against Belgian women and girls certainly occurred, British and American government officials, journalists and writers constructed an explicitly gendered and sexualized general image of German atrocity; this rhetoric and imagery configured the entire experience of the German invasion and violation of Belgian neutrality and borders, and not only individual incidents of sexual violence against women, as “the rape of Belgium.” The phrase appeared frequently in the American and British press and advertisements.22 In late 1917, the New York Tribune featured “The Rape of Belgium” as the headline for a running series of excerpts from the recently published journal of Hugh Gibson, First Secretary to the American Legation in Belgium. Alongside the text, advertisements and installments from the book often displayed resonant and repeated imagery, showing, for example, a distraught woman about to be beheaded by a German soldier in full military dress and brandishing a sword.23 Another common image displayed a dead or unconscious half-dressed woman in the grip of an oversized man’s fist; the perpetrator’s wrist was marked with Imperial Germany’s coat of arms (Figure 1).24


24 The image is replicated in issues of the New York Tribune dated 4, 6-12 Nov. 1917.
Figure 1. Advertisement for Hugh Gibson’s *A Journal from Our Legation in Belgium* (1917). Source: *New York Tribune*, undated.
Gender-specific images and motifs of “the rape of Belgium,” in which the nation was configured as female, evoked paternalist sentiments and provided a more urgent “just cause” for the fighting of the war than the violation of Belgian neutrality; the war became a moral crusade, not just a bunch of politicians duking it out over the legality of treaties from the nineteenth century. Put differently, framing German crimes through the lens of sexual menace and the mobilizing discourse of what Cynthia Enloe terms “women and children” provided a moral imperative with which the British could validate their participation in the war and the neutral powers, especially the United States, could question their stance. Many citizens in Europe and abroad received the accounts of German soldiers butchering women’s breasts, bayoneting infants and using the elderly as human shields as indisputable evidence of German brutality and as justification for intervention in the continental conflict.

In his 1914 book, *German Atrocities: A Record of Shameless Deeds*, Anglo-French writer William Le Queux compared the Kaiser and German army to Attila the Hun and his forces; they were all just “one vast gang of Jack-the-Rippers,” referencing the mysterious serial murderer of women in Victorian London. Le Queux was one of many writers, journalists and officials who described the forcible stripping, mutilation and sexual assault of Belgian women by German soldiers. Popular publications intended for public consumption often extracted and reprinted accounts of crimes against women and children from the volumes of the Belgian Commission and the Bryce Report. In one frequently republished account, German soldiers forced a sixteen-year-old girl and her parents out of their home in Corbeek-Loo on 20 August 1914 and took them to a deserted country house. After forcing the girl to drink alcohol, the soldiers raped her...

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27 Le Queux, *German Atrocities*, 8.


repeatedly on the lawn in front of the house and, when she resisted, stabbed her in the breast with their bayonets. The men then left her for dead.³⁰ The Belgian Commission concluded that sexual assaults of Belgian girls and women during the German invasion were common, but that inquiries on specific incidents were often met with “great difficulties”; cases of rape were “naturally hidden by the families [of the victim], and the sentiment which makes them act so has been respected by the Commissioners.”³¹

In Britain, “the rape of Belgium” served as a recruitment initiative. The *Official Book of the German Atrocities*, published in 1915, opened with an appeal for more men to join the army: “It is the duty of every single Englishman who reads these records, and who is fit, to take his place in the King’s Army, to fight with all the resolution and courage he may, that the stain of which the following pages are only a slight record, may be wiped out, and the blood of innocent women and children avenged.”³² Atrocity stories worked to a different end in the neutral United States. At the end of August 1914, Carton de Wiart and four other Belgian officials departed for a visit to London and then the United States to present documentary evidence of German crimes. A *New York Times* correspondent hinted that the mission had the implicit political goal of encouraging American intervention in the European conflict: “There is a secret hope that when the American Government and the American people learn the full truth about what has happened in Belgium there will be a spontaneous outburst of indignation which may bring some definite results.”³³ Englishmen too made appeals to neutral nations on the grounds that this was an unprecedented war. Viscount Bryce chastised the people of the neutral states for “being perhaps too lazy or indifferent” to realize that the war differed from earlier conflicts in its immense scale and in the fact that the moral principles of all nations were at stake; this was not a “traditional” war where both sides of combatants were of the same status.³⁴

Knowledge of German violations against civilians in Belgium did not cause the United States to enter the war in April 1917, but it did play a role in sponsoring a greater willingness or

³¹ *Reports on the Violation*, vol.1, Fourth Report, 18; Eighth Report, 60.
³² “Introduction,” *Official Book of the German Atrocities*.
³³ “Say Germans take Belgians as Slaves,” *The New York Times*, 1 Sept. 1914. See also the Belgian Address to the American President, 16 Sept. 1914, in *The Case of Belgium*, vii.
duty to participate in the conflict. After the United States declared war on Germany, “the rape of Belgium” continued to feature in war bonds advertisements as a device to reinforce popular support for the war at home; one 1918 poster incited Americans to “remember Belgium” and showed a Belgian girl being dragged by a rifle-wielding German soldier against a backdrop of fire and material destruction. Another advertisement in a May 1918 issue of a local paper in Mansfield, Missouri, reminded its readers that only a “thin line of heroes” stood between Americans and the German brutes who had ravaged Europe, implying that the Belgian women and child victims could soon be replaced with American ones.

During and after the First World War, the German army never challenged accusations that they had treated Belgian civilians with undue severity and instead justified their behaviour with the doctrine of “military necessity.” The German White Book of May 1915 insisted on the defensive nature of German actions against Belgian civilians, arguing that even after the Belgian army had retreated, civilians of “every grade, age and sex took part with the greatest bitterness and fury in the fights against the German troops.” These civilians, whom the Germans called francs-tireurs (literally, free shooters), were fighting in a Belgian “People’s War.” The White Book maintained that this “other” war necessitated heavy-handed German retaliations;


37 “Hand him what he needs,” Mansfield Mirror, 2 May 1918.


39 The German Army in Belgium, xiii, xv. The term francs-tireurs dates to 1792, when a number of irregular forces and volunteer levies were raised to supplement the French Republican army in the French Revolutionary Wars.
individuals had to be “cut down.” In part, the notion of a “People’s War” and the obsession with civilian insurrection was inherited from the clashes with armed civilians in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1 and the Herero revolt in German Southwest Africa in 1904-7. Although there were isolated incidences of Belgian civilian resistance in 1914, its scale was never commensurate with German reactions. More important was the belief, or delusion, held by the German army – both the rank-and-file and Supreme Command – that Belgian civilians were engaging in guerrilla warfare to defend their country.

This belief critically framed German civilian and military leaders’ perceptions of Belgium in 1940. In particular, the German army believed it had been “stabbed in the front” in World War I first by alleged Belgian frans-tireurs and then by the Allies, who emerged victorious in their campaign to turn the world against the Reich and its people by sensationalizing and sexualizing “German atrocities.” For all the lip service paid to the “stab in the back” myth (Dolchstoßlegende) by conservative nationalists and the Nazis, among others, in the interwar period, the “stab in the front” legend – whereby the perpetrators were not the Germans at home, but the Allies and Belgians on the battlefront – provided an additional framework within which to locate the origins of the defeat and acquit the Imperial army of its own responsibility. For the Germans, the twin issues of war guilt and guilt for the conduct of the war (and in particular the behaviour of German armed forces in Belgium) were inseparable.

The effects of the real German atrocities of World War I, as well as those embellished by Allied propaganda, maintained resonance well after the signing of the armistice in November 1918. Belgian-German relations remained strained in the first few years after the war, particularly following the departure of the Belgian delegation in the summer of 1921 from the Reichsgericht in Leipzig, the court designated to try Germans defined by the Allied governments as war criminals. The court had dismissed the case of a German officer charged with torturing Belgian boys between the ages of nine and twelve, an outcome the Belgians took as evidence of

40 Ibid., xvii.
41 On the impact of the Franco-Prussian and colonial wars, as well as other factors contributing to the frans-tireur myth of 1914, including the flaws of the Schlieffen plan, the nature of modern warfare and firepower, the development of a military doctrine of Vernichtungskrieg, and militarist nationalism, see Horne and Kramer, German Atrocities, 89-174; Hull, Absolute Destruction, 91-6.
42 Contemporary investigations in 1914-15 argued that there were few grounds for German allegations that Belgian civilians had provoked German troops by firing upon them. See, for example, Reports on the Violation, vol. 1, Preface, xxi-xxii; Twelfth Report, 104. See also Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages, 23; Reply to the German White Book, 7-44.
43 Horne and Kramer, German Atrocities, 375.
the farcical nature of the trials. Literature on and documentation of German crimes also continued to flood the Belgian market in the interwar period. In early 1919, the Belgian government established a second Commission to investigate German war crimes, including those committed in 1914 and the deportation of nearly 60,000 Belgians to Germany for forced labour in 1916-17. The resulting four volumes proved the chief conclusions of the first: there had been no “People’s War.” Popular pamphlets and books also promoted representations of “German atrocities” that glorified Belgian martyrs and vilified the German army.

Although the Allies began to question the veracity of the “German atrocities” already in the 1920s as part of the “pacifist turn,” the narrative of “the rape of Belgium” maintained its potency – perhaps most interestingly – for the Germans themselves. German war crimes sometimes informed and became enmeshed with other issues, such as the alleged acts of sexual revenge perpetrated by Belgian troops in their zone of the occupied Rhineland in the early 1920s. Already in 1919, Rhinelanders feared that Belgian soldiers would exact retribution for the war and occupation on the German woman’s body. Yet, Belgian men’s fantasies of sexual vengeance and German fears of sexual reprisals were largely just that: fantasies and fears that only rarely manifested themselves in actual sexual attacks by Belgian men on German women and girls. Because of the omnipresence of the sensational accounts of wartime sexual assault, sexual violence featured as a central mode through which Germans configured and articulated their difficult transition from wartime conquerors to postwar losers. Former soldiers and military and civilian leaders could not separate their perceptions of the war and defeat from real and fictive

45 Commission d’enquête sur les violations des règles du droit des gens, des lois et des coutumes de guerre, 4 vols., Rapports et documents d'enquête: vol. 1, Rapports sur les attentats commis par les troupes allemandes pendant l'invasion et l’occupation de la Belgique, 2 parts, (Brussels: Albert de Vit/Veuve Lucier, 1922); vol. 2, Rapports sur les déportations des ouvriers belges et sur les traitements infligés aux prisonniers de guerre et aux prisonniers civils belges (Brussels: Albert de Vit/Veuve Lucier, 1923); vol. 3, Rapports sur les mesures prises par les Allemands à l'égard de l’industrie belge pendant l’occupation, 2 parts (Brussels: Albert de Vit/Veuve Lucier, 1921); vol. 4, Rapport sur les mesures législatives, judiciaires, administratives et politiques prises par les Allemands pendant l’occupation – Rapport d’ensemble et conclusions (Brussels: Albert de Vit/Veuve Lucier, 1923).
47 Horne and Kramer, German Atrocities, 366-75; Zuckerman, Rape of Belgium, 267-71.
memories of sexual atrocity. Even in 1940, when Belgium was again dominated by the German army, Hitler himself could not conceptualize the politics of occupation in the present outside of the frame of the intimate violence of the recent past.

1940 and Beyond: Moderation and the Concept of “Reputation”

The German occupiers who invaded Belgium in 1940 were determined to demarcate how this second occupation differed from its predecessor and how German soldiers differed from their Imperial forbearers. Striving to avoid a second “rape of Belgium,” in preparation for the invasion in January 1940, the military instructed Wehrmacht soldiers not to strike back against residents defending their homes and villages in open battle or deliberately torch buildings.\(^49\)

When and where German soldiers encountered civilian resistance, *francs-tireurs* were to be tried by courts-martial and organized volunteers and members of the militia treated as PoWs.\(^50\) A few days after the beginning of the *Westfeldzug*, the invasion of Belgium, France and the Netherlands on 10 May 1940, Reich Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels noted the efforts of his office to deny all accounts of atrocities (*Greuelgeschichten*) committed by German soldiers, which were intended to “stir up the world”: “I most stridently repudiate these by any means possible. This is something we must not give rise to.”\(^51\) He later observed that “The psychological situation at present is conceivably favourable for us. All of the neutral countries are full of admiration. What a change since 1914!”\(^52\)

Members of the German leadership were less interested in the actual crimes committed by their soldiers than they were in making sure that new charges of “German atrocities” did not make international headlines or distract from the war effort. The Wehrmacht remained intolerant of armed combatants and resisters and held steadfast to the doctrine of reprisals in cases of popular insurrection.\(^53\) During the invasion, German soldiers massacred civilians in Meigem, Olsene, Oeselgem, Zulte and most infamously, Vinkt, where they executed 86 people, including

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\(^49\) OFK Kdtur. 570, Besondere Anordnungen Nr. 2 für die Verwaltung und Befriedung der besetzten Gebiete, 15 Jan. 1940, BA-MA RH 36/81.


\(^52\) Ibid., entry 15 May 1940, 113-4.

elderly men and children, following alleged resistance.\textsuperscript{54} For Belgians, the memory of the horrors of 1914, as well as newer fears of aerial bombing, occasioned a national panic; approximately two million civilians, or one-fifth of the population, fled westwards during the invasion.\textsuperscript{55}

Overall, massacres, wanton plunder and destruction of property were the exception rather than the rule in May 1940, marking a clear distinction from the territorial “rape of Belgium” twenty-six years prior. Nevertheless, what the \textit{Westfeldzug} did demonstrate was that it was difficult to fuse together notions of reserve and respectability with the enactment of violence and power; the 1940 invasion would not be the last time the German military in Belgium confronted the contradictions between its ideological frameworks and what it perceived as the realities of war.

The German military’s fixation on its “reputation” in Belgium and abroad influenced the development of occupation policy after the Belgian surrender. Unsettled by the proliferation of enemy propaganda presenting an unsavoury image of German troops, on 5 July 1940 the OKH reminded the military administration of the importance of discipline and order among the occupying forces:

The German soldier is the representative of the German \textit{Volk} in the occupied territory. The eyes of the world remain focused on him. Impeccable behaviour is crucial to help rectify once and for all the distorted image of us that enemy propaganda sought to create. The attitude of the soldier towards the civilian population should be self-assured, but not arrogant. The duty of restraint applies to the female civilian population no less than to the male... Unauthorized seized goods, plunder, vicious and senseless damage to or destruction of other property in the occupied territories, as well as the oppression of the inhabitants, are dishonourable and illegal.\textsuperscript{56}

Hitler personally issued a similar command a few days later, emphasizing the importance of soldierly restraint and good behaviour in interactions with civilian populations in western


\textsuperscript{55} Warmbrunn, \textit{German Occupation}, 46.

\textsuperscript{56} Anlage 4, OKH to MBH, Nr. 1620/40, Richtlinien für den Dienst der Truppen im besetzten Gebiet nach Abschluss der Operationen, 5 July 1940, BA-MA RH 26-208/27. For a sense of how this policy of reserve was received by the Belgian public, see Paul Struye’s discussion of public opinion seven months after the beginning of the occupation. Struye, a lawyer, politician and member of the resistance, argued that Belgians were impressed with the disciplined behaviour of the Germans and notes that there were cases of “true ‘fraternization’.” Paul Struye, \textit{L’évolution du sentiment public en Belgique sous l’occupation allemande} (Brussels: Éditions Lumière, 1945), 17. See also Struye’s daily journal, \textit{Journal de guerre, 1940-45} (Brussels: Racine, 2004).
Europe. The German man was a soldier fighting on two fronts: in one capacity, he battled for victory in Europe and in another he fought to win the public relations war by winning over local civilians and proving the fallacious nature of revived accusations of German inhumanity.

In August 1940, Falkenhausen instructed local commanders to avoid exaggerating minor incidents between Belgian civilians and German soldiers in the interests of the long-term goals of the occupation: “For a while, the power of circumstance and the attitude of our troops have led the population, by and large, readily to work on the Aufbau of the country. It is in Germany’s interest that this development is in no way disturbed.” Chief among the objectives of the military command were the maintenance of order and security in its sphere of command and support the German war effort and the economic exploitation of Belgian resources and labour power. In addition to Belgium’s strategic importance as a launching pad for the planned invasion of Great Britain, the economics of occupation drove the military administration’s emphasis on reputation and the “velvet glove.” The institutionalized “velvet glove” policy was at its core intimate, designed to control and arrange Belgian bodies and extract their labour in the service of the Reich, something the German occupiers had also done in the First World War and for which they had been internationally condemned.

The German military government wanted to maintain a good “reputation” in order to encourage Belgians into supporting the occupation by working (and later, fighting) for it. Only in Belgium did the Germans’ labour recruitment drive in western Europe in 1940-41 have any real success. Belgian civilians working in Germany had increased from nearly 4400 labourers in May 1939 to 121,501 in September 1941 and were the largest single group of workers in Germany from the western occupied territories. Even Falkenhausen remarked on the paradox that Belgium was marked with painful memories of German oppression and yet was the leading exemplar of occupation across Europe: “It is surprising…that particularly Belgium, where the memories of 1914/18 are still alive, has evinced a high wartime economic performance for the benefit of Germany and is the country among all of the occupied territories to preserve the

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60 The number of Dutch workers remained at the same level as the prewar period, while the results of the recruitment campaign in France were sluggish. Ulrich Herbert, Hitler’s Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labour in Germany under the Third Reich, trans. William Templer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 97-8.
quietest attitude."\(^{61}\) The military command considered the “velvet glove” intrinsic to the success of its economic and labour projects and, by extension, political stability.\(^{62}\) The intimate provided a ready site for the policy of moderation through its expression in the close, familiar and institutional encounters between occupier and occupied (and men and women) characteristic of everyday life.

**Soldiers and Civilians, Men and Women**

The High Command attempted to control what exactly “the eyes of the world” would see when they cast their gaze upon German troops in occupied Europe by centering its regulatory energy on soldiers’ interactions with non-German civilians. One strategy of the military command intended to remove the “problem” of close encounters between civilians in western Europe and German occupation forces by prohibiting the opportunities for their occurrence. A leaflet for soldiers stationed in Paris stated, “Keep your distance from the French population!”\(^{63}\) Troops in Belgium were not even supposed to write letters to members of the civilian population.\(^{64}\) Such prohibitions on social contact were only one facet of the German military’s complex understanding of the relationship between everyday intimacies and warfare.

Daily contact between Germans and civilians in Belgium was, of course, inevitable, particularly in view of the German authorities’ reliance on local institutions and individuals to administer the occupation. In some cases, the German authorities’ own policies inadvertently facilitated interaction between Belgians and Germans. In 1942, a twenty-eight-year-old Belgian woman named Adriana started working in Antwerp for the German company Daimler-Benz, which manufactured engines for fighter planes, as a means to support her mother and avoid being conscripted for labour in Germany. It was at Daimler-Benz that Adriana met her future husband,

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\(^{62}\) In 1941, for example, in response to instructions from Nazi and military leaders to sharpen reprisals against Belgian civilians in view of increasing resistance, Falkenhausen and Reeder maintained that the shooting of hostages would work against military goals: “If the occupying power reacted strongly to individual cases of sabotage with hostage-taking in a massive way and possibly with shooting, it would succeed in evoking enemy feelings and hatred not only in the small circle of known enemies but in the whole population and hindering the economic and labour projects in the service of the Reich.” MBH to Oberbefehlshaber West, 5 Aug. 1941, BA-MA RW 36/68, Bl. 111.

\(^{63}\) Merkbblatt für den Aufenthalt in Paris, Kommandanturbefehle, undated, BA-MA RH 36/42. See also another prohibition on interactions with foreign populations in France: Auszug aus dem Dauerkommandanturbefehl der FK 678, 20 July 1943, BA-MA RH 36/301.

\(^{64}\) Ortskdtr. Brüssel, Ortskommandanturbefehl Nr. 37/40, 18 Sept. 1940, BA-MA RH 36/189.
a German precision engineer who had served in the first half of the war but whose skills kept him in the factory and away from the front lines after 1942.  

Nevertheless, in order to decrease the likelihood of social or “free-time” contact between soldiers and locals, rigid rules governed German incursions into Belgian public space. In the summer of 1940, the military command set curfews in Belgium: 10 p.m. for the rank-and-file, 11 p.m. for NCOs and midnight for senior NCOs, all of which were later extended. Public establishments in Belgian cities of over 100,000 inhabitants had to close at midnight and at 11 p.m. in smaller cities, although the hours for places frequented by the Wehrmacht could be extended with special permission. These curfews reflected a central concern of Nazi and military officials regarding their troops: public drunkenness. German leaders considered venereal disease to be the unwelcome bedfellow of excessive alcohol consumption; intoxication, they argued, increased the probability of risky sexual behaviours, such as forgetting to use a prophylactic during sex. Drunkenness was also often the root cause of public brawls between soldiers or between soldiers and civilians, challenging the “impeccable” image of the Wehrmacht celebrated by the High Command. Hitler’s Führer-Erlass of 7 July 1940 cautioned that “inordinate alcohol consumption is unbecoming to a German soldier and the root of uncivil rampages and acts of violence.” In spring 1941, the local commander in Brussels reported an increase in the number of cases of intoxication and requested the “vigorous intervention” of unit superiors to deter further incidents, which “substantially damage the reputation of the Wehrmacht in public.”

Even rude behaviour towards civilians could invite reproach from higher-ups. In France in July 1940, Heinrich H. was sentenced to six days detainment for making rude comments in the presence of two German-speaking refugee families from Luxembourg. While sharing a mid-day meal with the families, Heinrich had held his nose over a cup and commented on the poor quality

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67 Ortsktr. Brüssel, Ortskommandanturbefehl Nr. 16/43, 1 March 1941, BA-MA RH 34/187; see also OFK 672, Verwaltungsschef to Polizeichef, 1 March 1941, AVB Guerre40-45, Box 25.
68 Anlage zur Verfügung des OKH, Nr. 2740/41, 1 April 1941, BA-MA RW 4/300.
69 Führer-Erlass, 7 July 1940, in Moll, ed., Führer-Erlasse, 130.
of the coffee. He had also thrown away part of his lunch, remarking, “No one can eat this grub.” The court of the 6th Infantry Division judged Heinrich’s behaviour as having harmed the public image of German troops, because “it was considered a slight to the civilians who had invited them to dinner.” The court possibly perceived Heinrich’s behaviour to be an affront on two levels: he had insulted the German-speaking families and implicitly suggested that the Reich was unable to provide sufficiently for its own people, including those it intended to welcome as racial brethren. If in eastern Europe, discipline became perverted because unit commanders rarely punished unauthorized crimes against local populations, the opposite was true to some degree in the west, where the distortion of discipline occurred in the other direction. Even seemingly mild offenses prompted strong reactions from local commanders in the interests of safeguarding the military’s standing and the population’s good will or – at least – apathy.

Gender dynamics were key in the Wehrmacht’s public relations war; general incitements against casual contact with occupied populations were heightened and often required special emphasis when they concerned civilians of the female sex. In April 1939, after the German invasion of Czechoslovakia, Himmler issued a directive to members of the SS and police prohibiting them from contact with women of different “racial membership” in eastern Europe. Nazi and military officials further discouraged their soldiers from engaging in any way with local women during the invasion of Poland in September 1939. In mid-November, Wilhelm Keitel, Chief of the OKW, forwarded a memorandum to the heads of the army, navy and air force reminding them, “It is…incompatible with the honour of the German Reich that at present Germans interact with Poles, are together and even dance with Polish women and girls.”

72 Gericht der 6. Inf. Div., 4. (M.G.) Kompanie, Infanterie-Regiment 58, Betr.: Bestrafung des Schützen Heinrich H., 20 July 1940, BA-MA RW 36/458, Bl. 46. In another case in 1941, soldiers were chastised for leaving their rooms in civilian homes and establishments in a disorderly or even squalid state and for taking objects that did not belong to them. This is striking since at the same time, Germans were sending packages of plundered materials and foodstuffs from Belgium and elsewhere back to the Reich. Anlage zur Verfügung des OKH, Nr. 27/40/41, 1 April 1941, BA-MA RW 4/300. See Götz Aly, Hitler’s Beneficiaries: Plunder, Racial War and the Nazi Welfare State (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007), 94-134.
74 Verbot des Geschlechtsverkehrs mit Frauen einer andersrassigen Bevölkerung, 4 April 1939, in RF-SS Hauptamt-SS Gericht, Betr.: Geschlechtsverkehr von Angehörigen der SS und Polizei mit andersrassigen Frauen, 9 Dec. 1942, BAB NS 19/3872, Bl. 27.
Such rebukes against contact between the sexes applied even to the allegedly Germanic peoples of Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway and Denmark. Recall that the July 1940 behaviour guidelines sent by the OKH to the occupation forces in Belgium included a separate sentence stressing the need for “restraint” in soldierly interactions with women civilians.\(^\text{76}\) As earlier in Poland, the military forbade dancing in many public establishments in occupied Belgium, possibly because of the close physical contact it invited between German men and local women.\(^\text{77}\) The larger list of activities prohibited for soldiers in cities in western Europe included linking arms with women in public, inviting them to German-only restaurants and bars and taking them for drives in military vehicles.\(^\text{78}\) These prohibitions reflected official concern about the public visibility of certain activities and their political resonance; dancing, flirting and holding hands with local women challenged the image of the German occupation soldier as aloof and business-like in his dealings with the occupied population.\(^\text{79}\) Contact between occupier and occupied in public also compromised the power barrier so crucial to the hierarchical structures of the German \textit{Besatzungshabitus}.\(^\text{80}\)

Commander-in-chief Walther von Brauchitsch, a notorious panderer to Hitler who had literally sold himself and the OKH to the National Socialist cause in 1938 for a bribe, appealed to German men in western Europe at the end of July 1940 to check their sexual urges: “In line with the generally commanded reserve, which I consider as the correct and proper fundamental philosophy of the German soldier vis-à-vis the French population, I must demand of every single one also self-discipline in the area of sex: this command goes without saying for married soldiers above all.”\(^\text{81}\) The subtext was that wartime was not a free-for-all for sex for German men; sexual

\(^{76}\) Richtlinien für den Dienst der Truppen im besetzten Gebiet, 5 July 1940, BA-MA RH 26-208/27.
\(^{78}\) Auszug aus dem Dauerkommandanturbefehl der FK 678, 20 July 1943, BA-MA RH 36/301; Merkblatt für den Aufenthalt in Paris, undated, BA-MA RH 36/42.
\(^{79}\) Recall Hitler’s insistence to Léopold in November 1940 that the military command in Belgium operated with order and moderation, enacting decrees only in cases considered of military necessity. Velaers and van Goethem, \textit{Léopold III}, 587-8.
\(^{80}\) The concept of \textit{Besatzungshabitus} is taken from Stephan Lehnstaedt’s work on German-occupied Minsk and Warsaw, in which he argues that the core element of the German occupation policy was the preservation of German superiority and prestige. Lehnstaedt, \textit{Okkupation}, 200.
\(^{81}\) OKH, gez. von Brauchitsch, 31 July 1940, BA-MA RH 12-23/1371. See also the guidelines on discipline sent to Belgium and quoted above: Richtlinien für den Dienst der Truppen im besetzten Gebiet, 5 July 1940, BA-MA RH
morality and respectability remained a central component of the overall discipline expected of the German soldiers, SS-men, administrators and employees fighting and working in occupied territory.\textsuperscript{82} The military’s general attitude on wartime sexuality was consistent with that of Nazism more generally. There was no room in Nazi ideology for those individuals who lacked sexual control; those who let their sexual passions overtake them were considered “racially inferior” and “enemies of ordered society.”\textsuperscript{83} This is not to say, however, that the Nazi and German leadership eschewed the value of sexual pleasure and the potential consequences of sexual activity (i.e., reproduction) for its larger racial and political goals; in fact, quite the opposite was true.\textsuperscript{84}

The frequency with which the German leadership repeated prohibitions on contact suggests that the soldiers did not often obey them. Local commanders in Belgium reported many violations of the curfew and Tanzverbot.\textsuperscript{85} Photographs from the occupation further show Belgian women and German soldiers spending leisure time together.\textsuperscript{86} In 1941, the OKH re-emphasized that the troops keep their distance from local women, having “repeatedly observed that members of the Wehrmacht of all ranks indulge in alcohol with French women in public establishments, only to disappear at the onset of the curfew with them to various cheap hotels under the cover of darkness.”\textsuperscript{87} Soldiers sometimes disappeared with women while on active duty or on leave and failed to return to their units.\textsuperscript{88} In August 1943, the deputy chief of staff of the military command issued a search for Private Alwin J., who had disappeared in Liège

\textsuperscript{82} After the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, soldiers were also expected to show restraint towards women in areas occupied by German forces. OKH, Merkblatt für das Verhalten des deutschen Soldaten in den besetzten Ostgebieten, 8 June 1942, in in Anlage 2 zu AOK 18 vom 22 Sept. 1942, BA-MA RH 20-18/1050, Bl. 60-2.

\textsuperscript{83} George L. Mosse, \textit{Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe} (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985), 151.

\textsuperscript{84} See Dagmar Herzog’s discussion of politics and sexual pleasure during the Third Reich, in \textit{Sex After Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 10-63.

\textsuperscript{85} Bulletins d’informations, 29 Nov. 1941, AVB Guerre40-45, Box 25; Ortskdtr. Mons to Mayor of Mons, 8 August 1940, Archives de la Ville de Mons, Guerre1940-1945, Box 8.

\textsuperscript{86} See the photographs in the court case of a German sailor who had a sexual relationship with a Belgian Jewish woman, BA-MA RM 123/15751, and those in Seifert, \textit{Die Frau}. Though the photographers are not known, the images are casual and not staged, suggesting that they were taken by amateurs, such as friends or family.

\textsuperscript{87} Anlage zur Verfügung des OKH, Nr. 2740/41, 1 April 1941, BA-MA RW 4/300.

\textsuperscript{88} See, for example, the search list in Ortskdtr. Brüssel, Ortskommandanturbefehl Nr. 33/40, 29 Aug. 1940, BA-MA RH 36/189; MBH, Besondere Anordnungen für die Versorgung Nr.32, 9 Oct. 1940, BA-MA RW 36/144, Bl. 261.
accompanied by a Belgian woman. If or when he was located, he was to be reported and arrested.\textsuperscript{89}

The intricate detail with which the German authorities endeavoured to control all forms of social and sexual interaction between indigenous women and German troops begs the question of what role such heterosexual contact played, or was perceived to play, in the politics of occupation. Nazi and military authorities in occupied Europe regarded such interaction as potentially detrimental to the construction of the New Order in three ways: it could compromise the pursuit of Nazi racial objectives; jeopardize military security and the success of ongoing operations; and call into question the reputation of the German army.

**Intimacy, Race and Gender**

A useful example of military conceptions about the interactions between race and gender is available in a booklet of instructions on contact between German troops and local civilian women in the occupied territories drafted by the OKW in 1943. The booklet, titled *Der Deutsche Soldat und die Frau aus fremdem Volkstum*, warned that victory in the East and the sacrifices of German troops would be meaningless if members of the German Volk “mixed” with citizens of so-called racially foreign nations: “Spoiled blood is worse than lost blood.”\textsuperscript{90} In Belgium, ideas about the racial status of women were complicated by the division of the country into two groups, the Walloons and the Flemish. Though the concept of the Greater Germanic Empire included Belgium, Nazi ideology and practice did not view all Belgian bodies as equally valuable to the biopolitical projects of the Third Reich. In the forced labour program, for example, the Reich Security Main Office considered Flemish men and women to be “workers of Germanic stock,” while the Walloons and French were “alien [fremdvölkisch] workers.”\textsuperscript{91}

However, the ties between racial ideology and gender were never definitive. Especially in the second half of the war, Nazi officials routinely tinkered with official pronouncements on race in regards to formal arrangements involving the creation and (re)production of families as a means of responding to the contingences of war. More immediately, on the ground in Belgium and other areas of occupied Europe, the fluidity and arbitrary nature of Nazi racial categories

\textsuperscript{89} Anlage Nr. 1 zu den besonderen Anordnungen für die Versorgung des O.Qu.beim MBH, Nr. 48/43, 12 Aug. 43, BA-MA RW 36/133, Bl. 26.


\textsuperscript{91} Herbert, *Hitler’s Foreign Workers*, 99.
ensured that they were of little use in soldiers’ evaluations of non-German women in everyday life. How were soldiers supposed to detect racial differences in women’s appearances when the women did not look much different, if at all, from themselves?

Military and individual assessments of women’s racial status were often constructed through ideas and expectations about language, culture and gender. Der Deutsche Soldat und die Frau aus fremdem Volkstum pointed out that alternative lifestyles and worldviews, confusing social codes and language difficulties were all obstacles facing a soldier considering a relationship with a non-German woman in the occupied territories. In other words, the High Command found it expedient to draw attention to the pragmatic and palpable factors that could impact a budding relationship, rather than to emphasize hazier notions of racial affinity. It was easy for a soldier to decide whether he could communicate with a woman; it was less easy to assess whether she was “racially valuable.” Further, the military considered women from the countries neighbouring and allegedly racially affiliated with Germany (Nachbarvölker) to be unworthy partners for troops, not necessarily because of their “racial ranking” but because they were “often still under the influence of the liberal-materialistic outlook on life,” an attitude commonly associated with the populations of western Europe.92

Perhaps most important, racial evaluations of non-German women were almost always conflated with ideas about gender and sexual morality. The OKW argued that “the girls who so easily fall into relationships with soldiers very often do not belong to the best and most principled of people.”93 The pamphlet offered several examples of questionable women whose behaviour endangered the respectability of the Wehrmacht. One of these was a Walloon woman, Mrs. Paulette R., who was in a relationship with a German sergeant. Mrs. R. was married and had a child, but still considered the sergeant to be her fiancé; she insisted on marrying him once her divorce was settled and had already relocated to Berlin. In an open letter “to a comrade,” the sergeant noted that he could not support his new “wife” and requested that the letter’s recipient provide aid if she were in need “in spite of her Belgian nationality.” He closed by begging this comrade to “fulfill this honourable (!) duty for me.” The text added the exclamation mark to emphasize the striking fact that a German soldier considered it noble to provide material

92 Der deutsche Soldat, 12. The German occupiers frequently commented on and were critical of what they perceived to be the liberal, decadent, individualist and materialist leanings of Belgian civilians and institutions. Jahresbericht der MV für das erste Einsatzjahr, 15 July 1941, BA-MA RW 36/201, Bl. 177; Tätigkeitsbericht der MV für die Monate Januar-März 1943, Nr. 23, 18 April 1943, BA-MA RW 36/192, Bl. 99.
93 Der deutsche Soldat, 11.
assistance to a non-German woman, let alone one with dubious sexual morals. Though *Der Deutsche Soldat und die Frau aus fremdem Volksstum* provides only one expression of the Wehrmacht’s “official” views on the danger of intimate contact between German soldiers and women in the occupied territories, a close reading of the text suggests the importance of understanding race, gender, sex, and culture as intertwined, rather than as discrete and hierarchical categories, in German assessments of a woman’s “value” – or her “danger.”

“Enemy Women” and the Case of Suzanne Vervalcke

Opposition to interaction – sexual and otherwise – between German men and Belgian women was also grounded in real and imagined concerns about the endangerment of German troops vis-à-vis “enemy women.” German occupiers across Europe worried about the potential transmission of important information during intimate moments, when local woman preyed on men’s sexual vulnerability. The 1943 OKW pamphlet pointed out that civilian women in the occupied territories were pivotal to enemy espionage activities, often working to penetrate and destroy the Werhmacht from within. The military’s obsession with the dangerousness of civilian women during wartime was neither new nor particular to the German army. All of the major players in the Second World War assumed that local women were enemy agents, whose loose lips spilled military secrets. A now-famous British poster from World War II warned: “Keep mum, she’s not so dumb! Careless talk costs lives.”

The experience of the First World War lent something distinctive to this pervasive doubt about the reliability of women. Musing on the connection between sexual and verbal intimacy

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94 Ibid., 20.
95 Ibid., 13, 31-2.
96 Historians in a wide variety of fields have exposed the roles of women in intelligence activities during periods of conflict, such as the American Civil War. See, for example, Donald E. Markle, *Spies and Spymasters of the Civil War* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1994); Elizabeth Varon, *Southern Lady, Yankee Spy: The True Story of Elizabeth Van Lew: A Union Agent in the Heart of the Confederacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); idem, *We Mean to Be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998). It was precisely the legacies and the mythmaking surrounding centuries-old incidences of women’s participation in espionage that facilitated the widely shared image of the “enemy woman” as dangerous and subversive in the twentieth century.
97 Keep Mum She’s Not So Dumb! British poster, Second World War, IWM PST 3363. In the occupied Soviet territories, the Wehrmacht considered relationships between Russian women and German troops “a thorn in its side” because of the association between local women and the danger of espionage. Birgit Beck, *Wehrmacht und sexuelle Gewalt: Sexualverbrechen vor deutschen Militärgerichten 1939-1945* (Paderborn: Schönigh, 2004), 280.
during World War I in his 1929 book, *The Sexual History of the World War*, prominent German
sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld observed, “For the sex starved soldier in whom erotic energies
were seething to the point of mania, it was too much to expect that his cloudy senses would be
able to perceive that the crafty female spy was contriving to draw him into her net.”99 The classic
female spy of World War I was, of course, Mata Hari, the dancer who charmed European
officers and politicians and worked for French and German intelligence until the French
executed her in 1917.100 Mata Hari received massive international attention after her death and
inspired two 1931 films, *Mata Hari* and *Dishonoured*, starring two of the most famous actresses
(and rivals) of the period, Greta Garbo and German-born Marlene Dietrich. Thanks to
Hollywood, many Germans would have been well acquainted with the sexualized versions of the
Mata Hari legend by the start of World War II.

The First World War bequeathed a special suspicion of Belgian women to German
soldiers. The German White Book of 1915 singled out Belgian women and children as
perpetrators of “shameful actions” against German troops.101 Soldiers under oath reported
women robbing or firing upon soldiers, while other accounts described incidents of women
poisoning German troops and gouging out their eyes and mutilating their bodies.102 One soldier
testified in November 1914 that in one Belgian village, he had witnessed a group of young girls
hovering around wounded German soldiers lying on the ground. Initially thinking that the girls
were providing medical aid, he claimed that in fact they were using sharp instruments to cut off
the men’s earlobes.103 Notwithstanding the unverified nature of many such atrocity stories, in
which the Germans figured as the accusers rather than the accused, Belgian women had played
important roles as spies and resisters in 1914-18. Approximately 25 percent of Belgians engaged

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103 Ibid., 59-60.
in espionage activities were women, and eight women were among the 1135 Belgians executed by the Germans during the war for working for escape or intelligence networks.104

Two women in particular became symbolic of women’s patriotic, anti-German activity in World War I Belgium. There was the well-known case of the British nurse Edith Cavell, who had lived and worked in Belgium since 1907 and was arrested and eventually shot by the German army in October 1914 for hiding British soldiers. The first court-martial and execution of a woman by the Germans, Cavell’s case was met with international outrage and condemnation, including from the United States.105 Another wartime woman resister was the Belgian Gabrielle Petit, a former saleswoman who spied for the British Secret Service and distributed the clandestine newspaper La Libre Belgique. In February 1916, she was arrested by the German army and executed two months later in Brussels at the age of twenty-three.

In a curious contrast to the widespread attention accorded to Cavell’s execution at the time, Petit was venerated only after the war, when the details of her activities, arrest and death reached the Belgian public and transformed her into a national heroine.106 Petit’s legacy was celebrated less for her achievements as an agent than for her willingness to die for her country and her refusal to give up the names of fellow agents in return for clemency. Refusing to be blindfolded at her execution, Petit reportedly declared, “I will show them how a Belgian woman can die” and cried “Vive la Belgique” as she was shot.107 In May 1919, a state funeral was held in her honour and attended by the Queen of Belgium. The interwar period also saw the production of several films and books commemorating Petit’s distinctly feminine patriotism.108

104 Ypersele, Debruyne and Claissé, De la guerre de l'ombre aux ombres de la guerre, 74; Zuckerman, Rape of Belgium, 118. Women also engaged in other forms of opposition, dissent and disobedience that were less direct and/or explicit. See the account of an elderly Countess who got in a “gentle dig at the Germans” after she was forced to put up a German general and his staff in Hugh Gibson, A Journal from Our Legation in Belgium (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1917), 185-6.

105 See Gibson’s published diary, which included a final chapter on the case of Edith Cavell and his efforts to convince the German authorities to accept a plea for clemency on her behalf. Gibson, Journal, 345-62.


107 Proctor, Female Intelligence, 116.

108 Two of these films were La Libre Belgique/The Heroic Gabrielle Petit (1921, directed by Armand Du Plessy) and Femme belge Gabrielle Petit (1928, directed by Francis Martin).
Alongside the narrative of “the rape of Belgium,” the Wehrmacht thus also brought a suspicion of civilian women with it to Belgium in 1940. Local women were engaged in resistance and espionage activities in various capacities throughout the Second World War. In September 1941, Louise G. was sentenced to eight years in prison by the court of the High Field Command (Oberfeldkommandantur, or OFK) in Brussels for hiding an English soldier and for intercepting an English radio station.109 A few months later, a thirty-three-year-old woman was arrested for a dagger attack on a German soldier; she reportedly confessed to having tried multiple times to kill Germans in the darkness of blackouts.110 The military administration’s “wanted bulletins” sometimes listed women by their names and aliases, along with details on their appearance, if they were suspected of wrongdoing. A woman’s ability to speak German made her especially dubious because she could “pass” in the guise of a friend to the occupiers.111 The number of women varied from one espionage network to another, but they usually made up between 10 and 20 percent of the membership, though rarely in a leadership capacity.112

Belgian women resisters posed a particular problem for the German military authorities precisely because of their gender and the legacy of the sexualized atrocity propaganda of the First World War. One case is instructive here. In January 1942, the third department of the Reich Court-Martial tried twenty-two-year-old Belgian Red Cross worker Suzanne Vervalcke for espionage. Blueprints, maps and sketches of towns, cables and electrical lines, as well as RAF paraphernalia and a letter for someone in England had all been found hidden behind the tiles of the bathtub in her flat. The German police also discovered a friend’s treatise on defensive measures against air attacks, which the court argued Vervalcke intended to sell to England. The court condemned Vervalcke for espionage and attempting to aid and abet the enemy, even though the treatise had not been acquired by the enemy, nor had any acts of sabotage taken place; she was sentenced to death and five years penal servitude on each charge respectively.113

109 Kdo.stab Ia, Kriegstagebuch, Tagesbericht, 8 Sept. 1941, BA-MA RW 36/2, Bl. 410.
111 MBH, O.Qu., Beilage zu den besonderen Anordnungen für die Versorgung (Allgem. Teil) Nr. 44, 14 Nov. 1940, BA-MA RW 36/144, Bl. 173 See also MBH, Kdo.Stab Ia/MVC to OKW/Wehrmachtführungsstab et al., Nr. 1497/43, 18 April 1943, BA-MA RW 36/14, Bl. 225..
German officials in Berlin and Brussels vacillated over whether to issue a pardon because of the potential political consequences of executing a woman. Recalling the experience of the First World War, the justice section of the military command expressed concern that enemy propaganda would exploit the execution as evidence of German inhumanity and glorify Vervalcke “as a national ‘martyr’— as a second Gabrielle Petit.” Already anticipating that the execution of a woman would give fodder to anti-German propaganda and diminish the distance the German command had sought to put between itself and the occupation of 1914-18, the authorities also worried it would rouse even the most politically disinterested of civilians and those “unbiased, objectively-minded Belgians” who agreed with the verdict, but were in principle against the execution of a woman. The hesitation was consistent with the military administration’s reprisal policy against civilians, which considered gender as part of the selection criteria for the taking and shooting of hostages; local commanders were prohibited from taking as hostages women and individuals from other categories considered morally difficult in view of the rules governing warfare – children, PoWs and the elderly.  

The military administration also saw advantages to carrying out the death sentence, including its potential deterrent effect. The execution would demonstrate to Belgians that all forms of resistance would be met “with unrelenting severity,” irrespective of the gender of the perpetrators. There was also the possibility that the population would only be momentarily enraged if Vervalcke were executed: “If in the eyes of anti-German Belgians, the array of ‘martyrs’ is increased by a few members – and this will not be the last time – even this situation may not substantially worsen the hostile attitude of these circles.”

Falkenhausen and Reeder likewise debated the merits of passing Vervalcke’s sentence. On 25 March 1942, Reeder wrote to the General, who conveyed the sentiment, nearly word-for-word, in an activity report a few days later:

As to whether the occupying power enables the enforcement of every death sentence with great severity, in a political sense, on the one hand, the strong inner resistance to the death penalty against women (example of Gabrielle Petit in World War I) and the desirable avoidance of this impact is considered. On the other hand, the pardoning of one of the first Belgian women to be sentenced to death for espionage would undoubtedly...

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114 MBH to OFKs und FKs, Betr.: Geiselhaft, 21 Aug. 1941, BA-MA RW 36/47, Bl. 15. For the criteria regarding the selection of hostages, MBH to OFKs und FKs, Betr.: Geiselhaft, 26 Nov. 1941, BA-MA RW 36/47, Bl. 42-5.

115 MVC-justiz, Betr.: Strafsache gegen Vervalcke u.a., 23 March 1942, CEGESOMA, AA 364, Bl. 275.
have the consequence of an even greater involvement of women in the service of enemy intelligence and could be easily viewed by the population as a sign of weakness... The military administration confirmed that there were no particular “political reasons” to support a pardon for Vervalcke, but in the end, Hitler personally reduced her sentence and that of another woman tried in the case, Marie Coulon, to detention in a penitentiary. The decision was gender-specific; Hitler rejected pardons for the men sentenced to death. The Nazi leadership determined that the harsh treatment of Belgian women would reflect poorly on the occupying forces and have the opposite of the desired deterrent effect; it would look too much like 1914, even if in reality the situation was quite different. Overall, women agents were four times less likely to be executed because of their activities than men; instead, the Germans usually transferred women to the Ravensbrück concentration camp in Germany.

**Sexual Violence in Belgium**

Just as they had in the First World War, German soldiers committed various sexual infractions against Belgian women between 1940 and 1944. Sexual violence ranged from verbal and physical sexual harassment to penetrative rape, though it was not part of a designated strategy to defeat and demoralize the civilian population. Penetrative rape was prohibited in the Wehrmacht under §177 of the German criminal code, classified as a crime against morality.

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118 Debruyne, *La guerre secrète*, 312.
(Sittlichkeitsverbrechen). Soldiers accused of rape were tried before courts-martial. Other forms of sexual crimes committed by Wehrmacht troops, such as sexual harassment and abuse, were also subject to investigation and trial by courts-martial.

Each military unit had its own court, usually presided over by three judges, and convictions required a majority vote. The verdict needed the approval of the Gerichtsherr, the division commander who was the supreme legal authority of the court attached to his unit. Punishments for rape included prison sentences of varying lengths of time or, in severe cases, penal servitude (Zuchthaus), a prison sentence that also meant dismissal from service and a loss of a pay. The maximum punishment was fifteen years penal servitude, and the minimum was one year of imprisonment. Though death sentences for Sittlichkeitsverbrechen were possible, they amounted to less than one percent of sentences.

The massive historiographical attention granted to the treatment of sex crimes within the system of Wehrmachtjustiz since the early 2000s has, to some degree, been disproportionate to the German military’s own interest in prosecuting sex crimes; the military prosecuted sexual assault cases only infrequently. It is also unclear how many of the 17 million German soldiers who served during the Second World War committed sexual assaults against civilian women, since cases of unreported rapes were (and are) higher within the context of foreign occupation than in peacetime. In their analyses of the sex crimes cases in occupied Europe that did reach courts-martial, Birgit Beck, Monika Flaschka and David Snyder have all drawn attention to the ways in which the interplay between military and political interests, racial ideology and expectations about gendered behaviour affected court judgments.
By treating some sex crimes cases with severity in terms of judicial processing and sentencing, the Wehrmacht sought to preserve its public reputation or standing (Ansehen). Although the term “reputation” was widely used in court judgments, it lacked a clear definition. Beck and Snyder argue that the term referred chiefly to the external impact of sexual violence on civilian public opinion and military interests, while Flaschka analyzes how the military’s concern about its reputation operated as a form of internal dialogue within the Wehrmacht about the degree to which a soldier had violated the ideals of military discipline (Manneszucht) and heterosexual masculinity.\(^{127}\)

Examining cases of sexual violence within the context of occupied Belgium requires yet another level of analysis in order to understand why judges and officials believed that sex crimes perpetrated by German troops alienated civilian populations and destabilized military, political and economic operations. In the context of western Europe, incidents of sexual violence had the potential to revitalize all too disturbingly and quite literally the sexualized “German atrocities” of 1914-18 for both the occupier and occupied; the concept of reputation thus additionally factored as a veiled reference to “the rape of Belgium.” In spite of the military’s minimal commitment to prosecuting Sittlichkeitsverbrechen, when cases in occupied western Europe did come to trial, the courts used their judicial muscle to publicly reprimand soldiers to ensure that there would be no reemergence of the barbaric image of the German military and the violated feminized symbol of the Belgian nation so successfully proliferated by Allied propaganda in World War I.

A couple of examples from cases of sexual violence and harassment in Belgium and northern France are useful here. In June 1940, the court of the 251st Infantry Division found Karl J. guilty of raping a French woman in the presence of her husband. The crime and trial proceedings took place in Achicourt and Lille, respectively, both located in the Nord-Pas-de-

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Calais region in France; this region, directly under Falkenhausen’s command, also had a complicated history with the First World War, especially regarding the forced transfer of women and girls from Lille in 1916 to surrounding areas to work for the Germans. The judges in Karl J.’s case considered the fact that the accused had “severely damaged the reputation of the Wehrmacht in enemy territory with his offense” to be an aggravating circumstance that necessitated a sentence of four years penal servitude and the stripping of his right to military service. The court, disconcerted by the number of sexual assaults accompanying the invasion and early days of occupation in 1940, also intended to use the sentence as a “teachable moment.”

The sheer number of incidents of sexual assault in 1940-41 suggests that deterrence was a resounding failure. In Ghent in May 1941, Helmut Z. repeatedly harassed a seventeen-year-old-woman, Celina M., and her sister in their family-run pub. He constantly poked the two women under their skirts with his bayonet and, on one occasion, grabbed Celina M.’s leg and loosened the straps of her dress. She slapped him across the face and bolted from the building. Helmut followed her and the two came across a policeman, who brought them to the station to file a report; the investigation eventually led back to Helmut’s unit.

Helmut’s unit commander wanted to punish him because he had “damaged the reputation of the Wehrmacht in a crude manner through his behaviour in a pub in Ghent,” but was unable to do so in September 1941 because several months had passed since the incident. In the end, Helmut was sentenced to two weeks detention and a curfew of 8 p.m. for three weeks for other infractions committed in the course of the assault: giving his Soldbuch and Feldpostnummer to

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130 Of 46 judgments from France in the Ost Spezial collection in the BA-MA over half were from 1940, and the majority from the months May through August. Beck, *Wehrmacht*, 156.

131 Stadtverwaltung Gent, Polizeirevier 5, Protokoll Nr. 376/Bis., 18 May 1941, BA-MA RW 36/724, Bl. 184-8.

the Belgian policeman and failing to report the incident to his unit. Helmut’s superior had initially wanted to give him a heavier sentence on the grounds of his behaviour towards a female civilian; it was the public nature of the crime that was troubling for the military authorities – it had taken place in a Belgian establishment, possibly in front of other patrons, and spilled onto the street when the victim had fled the scene.

The issue at stake in sex crimes cases was the potential of the violence to poison the impression of an orderly Wehrmacht that the High Command had worked hard to construct among ordinary Belgians in order to support (or at least not resist) the occupation and particularly its war economy; by extension, sexual violence threatened final victory in the world conflict. This connection was made clear in the case of Private Christian S., tried by the court of the 95th Infantry Division in the spring of 1941 for sexually assaulting two civilian women in the area of Solre-le-Chateau in France, less than ten kilometres from the Belgian border. The judgment noted that Christian S. had tried to coerce several other women from the area into sexual intercourse, including a teenager and a mother of three children. The judges focused primarily on the impact of the “abhorrent” offense on Allied propaganda. Justifying the sentence of three years penal servitude and six years disenfranchisement, the court stated,

> With his actions, he has shown that he in no way took the reputation of the German Army into consideration. Through his behaviour, he has aided enemy propaganda in the worst way. He is also old enough to know that in World War I even occasional sexual offenses by German soldiers were exploited by enemy propaganda in the most vicious manner as rabble-rousing against the entire German people.

The Wehrmacht was not particularly concerned about the impact of sexual violence on the victims; rather, it feared the political and economic reverberations of attacks on women in and outside of western Europe. As in debates about the expediency of executing of women resisters, this logic reflected the German military’s struggle to balance the politics of occupation with those of gender both in a local context and in the “eyes of the world.”

A final case of penetrative rape from Belgium in December 1941 elucidates the importance of situating sexual violence within the contingent and long-term context of military and economic aims and occupation governance. On 12 December, twenty-eight-year-old Peter H. was sentenced to two years and six months in prison for the sexual assault of Helene van G., the

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owner of a *Gastwirtschaft* in Jabbeke, a town in West Flanders.\textsuperscript{135} The victim’s husband was working in Germany at the time, leaving her responsible for three children. On the night in question, Peter H. and a comrade went to Helene van G.’s establishment and drank cognac and beer. Later on in the evening, after his friend left, Peter repeatedly tried to kiss and touch Helene. When she resisted, he dealt her such a violent blow “that even after two days a blue- and green-coloured bump was visible.” Peter H. then pushed her to the ground, covered her mouth and raped her. Afterwards, he demanded that she sleep with him for the night; she refused but because he would not leave her alone, she gave him a room out of fear. The next morning, Helene forbade Peter from returning to her establishment, to which he replied that he would tell the whole city that she was immoral and had slept with him willingly.\textsuperscript{136} She later relayed the event to another German soldier with whom she was on good terms, and the incident was reported to Peter H.’s unit commander. The accused was then detained, interviewed and arrested.\textsuperscript{137}

As in the other cases discussed, the court determined that Peter H.’s actions had damaged the reputation of the German army in Belgium and argued that his punishment needed to act as a warning to other soldiers. The judges considered Peter H.’s transgression to be “especially despicable” because “he exploited his superiority as a soldier of the occupying force and the absence of the husband, who works in the Saarland under German employment.”\textsuperscript{138} Peter H.’s behaviour threatened the occupation objectives essential to the continuation of the war and the durability of the military command, projects already compromised due to mounting civilian resistance in Belgium. The court thus implied that his deed was contemptible on a whole other level because it had harmed a Belgian family already economically aiding the Reich.

The court proceedings further demonstrate the ways in which women were (and still are) misrepresented or marginalized in sex crimes cases. Women’s sexual histories and moral characters – especially the degree to which they adhered to expected gender norms – became subjects of intense scrutiny by court judges and were sometimes invoked by defendants like


\textsuperscript{136} Vernehmung, Frau Helene van G., 1 Dec. 1941, BA-MA I 10 Kart Gericht der 306. Infanterie, Personalunterlagen, Bl. 4; Feldurteil gegen Peter H., BA-MA I 10 Kart Gericht der 306. Infanterie, Personalunterlagen, Bl. 42-3.

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 43.

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 48.
Peter H. in defense of their actions.\textsuperscript{139} German soldiers assumed that women in western Europe were promiscuous by nature. Single women or married women whose husbands were PoWS or labourers in Germany were often suspected of either falsely accusing German soldiers or enticing them and thereby provoking rape.\textsuperscript{140}

In his witness statement, Peter H. instigated a slander campaign against Helene van G., insisting that she was sexually provocative. He claimed that she had tried to seduce him by exposing her underwear and letting him kiss her; as another example of her sexual deviancy, he accused her of wanting to have sex standing up, rather than lying down.\textsuperscript{141} Given Peter H.’s accusations, the court of the 306\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division inquired into Helene van G.’s reputation in the local community. Reports circulated that she had made a “bad impression” among the population in Jabbeke even though she had only been a resident for three months.\textsuperscript{142} The police in nearby Bruges provided a statement that she was “nothing more than an unregistered whore.”\textsuperscript{143} A German soldier stationed in the area also testified that Helene had associated with many German men and that she loved dancing so much she chose to ignore her children.\textsuperscript{144}

Even the standing of Helene van G.’s parents came under scrutiny. Police reports from Bruges noted that her father was “work-shy” and her mother had “always left something to be desired and is considered…degenerate.” Her mother stood accused of promiscuity and of having neglected her children, paralleling the accusations launched against her daughter.\textsuperscript{145} As a general rule, courts considered female victims believable witnesses when they were evaluated by local police and the courts-martial judges as hardworking and upstanding members of the community.\textsuperscript{146} The focus on both mother’s and daughter’s parenting as a measurement of sexual (im)morality suggests another level to court evaluations of ‘proper’ feminine behaviour in sex

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\textsuperscript{139} Beck, \textit{Wehrmacht}, 187-88; Flaschka, “Race, Rape and Gender,” 63-78. Women’s nationality, appearance and verbal skills also played an important role in the courts’ deliberations. For a detailed discussion on the role of civilian witnesses in \textit{Wehrmachtgerichte}, see Beck, \textit{Wehrmacht}, 186-207.

\textsuperscript{140} Beck, \textit{Wehrmacht}, 191-3; Beck, “Rape,” 261; Snyder, \textit{Sex Crimes}, 148, 155.

\textsuperscript{141} Vernehmung, Peter H., 1 Dec. 1941, BA-MA I 10 Kart Gericht der 306. Infanterie, Personalunterlagen, Bl. 5. See also his revised statement on 5 Dec. 1941, Bl. 13.

\textsuperscript{142} Anlage 6, Leumundbezeichnung über die Frau Helene G. eines Zivilsten ihres Wohnortes, BA-MA I 10 Kart Gericht der 306. Infanterie, Personalunterlagen, Bl. 18.

\textsuperscript{143} Anlage 8, Belege der Sittlichkeitspolizei Brügge über die Frau Helen van G. und ihre Eltern, BA-MA I 10 Kart Gericht der 306. Infanterie, Personalunterlagen, Bl. 22.

\textsuperscript{144} Anlage 4, Aussage des Uffz. Wilhelm Borchard, undated, BA-MA I 10 Kart Gericht der 306. Infanterie, Personalunterlagen, Bl. 16.

\textsuperscript{145} Anlage 7, Polizeikommissariat der Stadt Brügge, 5 Dec. 1941, BA-MA I 10 Kart Gericht der 306. Infanterie, Personalunterlagen, Bl. 20.

\textsuperscript{146} Feldurteil gegen Werner K., BA-MA I 10 Ost Spezial, Bl. 20.
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crimes cases. Confirmation that women were “good mothers” contributed to their trustworthiness, just as the label of “bad mother” often worked against them.

The court rejected most of Peter H.’s attempts to defame the victim, arguing, for example, that it did not make sense that Helene resisted having sex lying down but was willing do it upright.\footnote{Feldurteil gegen Peter H., BA-MA I 10 Kart Gericht der 306. Infanterie, Personalunterlagen, Bl. 45.} However, the judges never came to a conclusion about the degree to which she had “resisted” Peter, noting in the judgment that questions lingered about whether she could have screamed (louder) despite his threats. In due course, the court ultimately decided that the amount of resistance would not change the facts of the offense.\footnote{Ibid., Bl. 46-7; Beck, Wehrmacht, 202-5.} Other factors also impacted the outcomes of cases of Sittlichkeitsverbrechen, including the character and service record of the perpetrator, concepts of military masculinity and external factors such as alcohol consumption. I have focused here, however, on the multiple dimensions of the concept of “reputation.” In addition to its relation to the debates about military administration and larger political and military forces, ideas about the Wehrmacht’s “reputation” in Belgium also epitomized a historical dynamic as well, one that extended back to both the real and rhetorical experiences of 1914.

Conclusion

During the First World War, General Max von Boehn, Commander of the 9th Imperial Field Army, gave an interview to the New York World’s correspondent in Antwerp, E. Alexander Powell. The General explained German actions against Belgian civilians in 1914 as follows: “Such things are horrible, if true. Of course our soldiers, like the soldiers of all armies, sometimes get out of hand and do things which we never would tolerate if we knew it.”\footnote{“General’s Reply to Belgian Charges,” The New York Times, 14 Sept. 1914. The interview was reprinted in Powell’s Fighting in Flanders (London: William Heinemann, 1914), 125-9. The book also includes other references to von Boehn, as well as photographs of he and Powell together.} The German military in Belgium after 1940 internalized the essence of von Boehn’s claim, attempting to control what was within its realm of visibility and knowledge or, in other words, what could be traced back to it. The High Command wished to avoid the kinds of panicky, brutal and extremely public (re)actions against civilians that had characterized the German invasion of 1914 and helped entrench “the rape of Belgium.” The military administration in Belgium after 1940 was determined to win the propaganda war against the Allies and manage the public image.
of the German army exposed on the world stage and most importantly, to Belgians; rather than occupy through fear and coercion, the Germans hoped to win Belgian public opinion and its willingness to participate in the occupation regime’s planned program of economic exploitation by outwardly showing reserve.

Recalling the conflation of the violated woman with the violated Belgian nation in 1914, the German military command carefully deliberated over its public treatment of the Belgian female population, cautious to avoid the creation of new female martyrs who could provide a locus for anti-German mobilization among the populace and international onlookers. What happened in seemingly private spaces and away from public view, was a different matter. Incitements to self-discipline and regulation in regards to sex never amounted to a full-scale ban on sexual activity for German troops. As early as July 1940, the OKH refused to issue a fundamental prohibition on soldiers’ sexual activity with women in the occupied territories, concerned that such a ban would lead sex-crazed German soldiers to engage in rape or even turn to one another in a violation of §175, the German law criminalizing sex acts between men.\(^{150}\)

Although the military disapproved of public manifestations of intimacy – whether coercive or consensual – between soldiers and local women, it also believed that sexual and emotional fulfilment was necessary for soldiers’ fighting strength and morale. It was this logic that enabled the German military to urge sexual restraint at the same time as it provided soldiers with outlets to satisfy their sexual desires and cravings for intimate contact away from public view, in regulated brothels staffed with Belgian prostitutes. The ways in which the German authorities mobilized women’s bodies not only to labour in the factories and fields of the formal German war economy but also to sustain the occupation through the intimate labour embodied in sexual commerce is the subject of the next two chapters.

Chapter 2
The Politics of Sexual Access: The Belgian Sexual Economy under Occupation, 1940-41

In a memorandum dated 31 July 1940, ten weeks after the Belgian surrender, Commander-in-Chief Walther von Brauchitsch observed that the longer German troops were stationed in occupied Europe, “all the more necessary it was to give the sexual question in all of its circumstances and consequences serious attention.” He argued that a ban on sexual activity in the occupied territories would only lead soldiers to deviate from Nazi sexual norms in order to meet their physical urges and thereby “undoubtedly” increase the incidences of sexual violence and homosexuality. Distressed as well by the recent rise in VD in the west, Brauchitsch considered it more expedient to construct a system of supervised brothelization than to “aid and abet” the German soldier’s surrender to unregulated prostitution.¹ This chapter examines the organization of sex work for German use in occupied Belgium in the first two years of the occupation. For all that the High Command touted discourses of sexual reserve and respectability, it also sought to secure the sexual power of its troops as fuel for the war machine by establishing a system of regulated prostitution.

Sex workers’ bodies and labour in the occupied landscape were critical to this project; prostitutes provided intimate services to German officers, soldiers and bureaucrats including most obviously sexual intercourse and other non-penetrative sexual acts as well as opportunities for dancing, flirting and casual conversation.² In the military’s understanding, prostitutes kept German men sexually and mentally stimulated, provided them with pleasure, relaxation and entertainment and implicitly reminded them of their masculinity and powerful status as occupiers. The German and Nazi leadership thus envisioned the sexual economy as a means to harness the advantages of sexual intimacy for the occupation project and evade its potential detrimental consequences, including the spread of VD, security breaches and long-term relationships and marriages between German men and Belgian women.

When they arrived in May 1940, members of the military command and its medical section were dismayed to realize that Belgium lacked a national law on prostitution. With their perceptions of Belgian society as sexually immoral and recollections of the two million VD-infected German soldiers of 1914-18, military officials and physicians were particularly

² In this chapter and the next, I use the terms “prostitutes” and “sex workers” interchangeably as a means to blur the boundaries between prostitution and other forms of sexual labour.
distressed by the many Belgian women lingering in doorways and open windows and gesturing to passersby in the streets around train stations. The “clandestine prostitute” – a woman who engaged in different types of sexual labour for cash or goods but was not registered or subject to routine medical examinations – roused especial anxiety. To curb clandestine prostitution, in the summer of 1940 the occupiers pressured the remaining Belgian civil authorities to enact legislation providing for the registration and medical and police surveillance of all women actually or suspected to be engaged in prostitution; within eighteen months, this legislation was largely in place. However, the wide scope of the law, which configured all Belgian women as potential clandestine sex workers, revealed the central paradox of regulationism: although traditional practices of registration and medical control were intended to circumscribe the sex trade, the targeting of women who behaved in ways considered divergent from expected norms of female sociability in fact led to a ballooning of the sex industry to such an extent that it became impossible to monitor.

The history of the sexual economy in occupied Belgium provides insight into the sexual and gendered dimensions of foreign occupation in a way that other studies of occupation policy cannot. As Cynthia Enloe has pointed out in her work on militarization and gender, prostitution is deeply related to military policies on sexual violence, homosexuality, pornography and marriage but it is also the sexual area (along with homosexuality) in which militaries have invested the most regulatory effort. If the massive paper trail available in the archival records of the German military administration in Belgium is any indication, sex work preoccupied the occupying authorities perhaps more than any other area of intimate policy.

Classic literature on the relationship between prostitution and the German military in occupied Europe during the Second World War, such as the work by Franz Seidler in the 1970s, has tended to focus on the medico-military regime of prostitution control erected by and for men. This work connects German policies on prostitution to concerns about troops’ physical fitness; soldiers needed to be healthy – and out of hospitals – to fight battles. However, the German

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5 See, for example, the records of the medical section of the military command, available in the French National Archives with the signature AJ40, Box 64. These files are the major sources for this chapter and the next one.
military also had other stakes in creating a sexual economy for its men across occupied Europe. Scholars of sexuality in modern German history, including Annette Timm, Elizabeth Heineman and Dagmar Herzog, have recently drawn attention to how the Nazi regime incentivized sex for Germans at home and abroad in order to achieve their continued consent and participation in the war and racial re-ordering of Europe. In sanctioning the commercial sex trade and brothelization in occupied Europe, the state and military offered German men rewards for their soldierly duties and military prowess. Access to commercial sex also signalled to the troops that they, as occupiers, could partake in “fruits” of their military victory. Enloe further reminds us that the masculine identity of military establishments are reliant on the “purging or marginalizing of women, and most especially in the insinuation that women are whores.”

Sex workers and their bodies in occupied Belgium were necessarily of key interest to the German military because of their impact on shaping the identity and functioning of the occupation regime. It is useful in this sense to understand prostitution as a type of intimate labour that can encompass more than sex; empirical studies of sex work and sexual bartering in different geographical spaces and temporal frames have shown that women frequently provided companionship and domestic services like cooking and cleaning in addition to or even without sex. Conceptualizing prostitution as intimate work enables a broader interpretation of what exactly was being “bought” and “sold” and the meanings of the sexual exchange between Belgian women and German forces. In some cases women provided other experiences that did not necessarily involve sex-based acts. Further, such a theorization helps us understand the

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10 Enloe, *Does Khaki Become You?*, 19
12 Elizabeth Bernstein identifies this paradigm of sexual commerce, in which it is not just sex that is sold and bought, as a feature of post-industrial prostitution. However, I consider what Bernstein calls “bounded authenticity” – clients’ desire for and sex workers’ provision of an “authentic” emotional and sexual connection within the parameters of economic exchange – as useful in analyzing the multiple dimensions of sex work in occupied Belgium. Elizabeth Bernstein, *Temporarily Yours: Intimacy, Authenticity and the Commerce of Sex* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
German occupiers’ interest in regulating prostitution as more than a strategy designed to curb the spread of VD among soldiers, which, of course, it was to a large extent. But sex work also operated as part of a spectrum of intimate work designed to utilize women’s bodies in the service of military, economic and political objectives of the Third Reich; at the same time, however, the diversity of intimate experiences provided by Belgian sex workers threatened the notion of the sex trade as a short-term, contingent and purely physical exchange. The prostitute was a valuable resource only insofar as her body and social mobility could be regulated in authorized brothels.

Historical studies of prostitution raise critical methodological questions because they rely chiefly on official sources – laws, government records, police files – that often mute the voices of prostitutes. Such sources, however, remain useful, not least because their breadth and richness challenge the assumption that the world of prostitutes was hidden, silenced and peripheral. This chapter is concerned primarily with German regulatory interest in sex work and explores the place of prostitution in German rhetoric and policies on the intimate; the following chapter foregrounds a deeper analysis of the everyday actors involved in facilitating and monitoring the sexual economy – the Belgian and German police, administrators, doctors and the prostitutes’ themselves – and highlights how the regulationist system of sex work only presented the appearance of universal surveillance.

I begin here with a discussion of Nazi views and policies related to prostitution and in particular the instrumentalization of the sex trade in the pursuit of military victory and the New Order after 1939. I then analyze how the German occupiers thought about the place of sex in Belgian civil society and suggest that, alongside actual and fictive recollections from the First World War, the judgment of the country as decadent and liberal played a central role in the type of regulationist system that emerged. The third part of the chapter examines the legislation and regulatory policies related to sex work implemented – under pressure and with mixed results – in Belgium in the first eighteen months of the occupation.

Prostitution and VD in Nazi Ideology and Policy

For Hitler and the Nazi party, the interrelated issues of prostitution and VD were central to their racial and imperial long-term projects; this was already evident in Mein Kampf, where Hitler claimed that the health of the German Volk had been poisoned by the ravages of syphilis

13 Ashwini Tambe, Codes of Misconduct: Regulating Prostitution in Late Colonial Bombay (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), xxv-xxvi.
and tuberculosis, two diseases popularly associated because they were assumed to emerge from
the same social circumstances: squalor. Responsible for the venereal “plague” that had befallen
the German nation since even before World War I was, in Hitler’s words, that age-old “disgrace
to humanity,” the practice of prostitution. Aside from its health consequences, prostitution was
“profoundly injurious to man, since the moral devastations which accompany this degeneracy
suffice to destroy a people slowly but surely.” Hitler considered the efforts of his predecessors
in “old Germany” to combat VD and sex work as practical failures because they dealt only with
the disease itself and not its causes. In his critique, he hinted at his own future policies:

…the question of combating syphilis should have been made to appear as the task of the
nation. Not just one more task. To this end, its injurious effects should have been
thoroughly hammered into people as the most terrible misfortune, and this by the use of
all available means, until the entire nation arrived at the conviction that everything –
future or ruin – depended upon the solution of this question.15

In the Kaisereich the legal status of prostitution was contradictory. The German Imperial
Criminal Code, which came into effect in 1871, included §361,6, or the “prostitution paragraph,”
which tolerated prostitution under the system of Reglementierung, or state regulation. This
paragraph provided for the police supervision of registered prostitutes (Kontrollmädchen) and
followed the French system of regulation inaugurated in 1802.16 A second paragraph in the
Criminal Code, §180, made it illegal to facilitate, procure or pimp in the interests of prostitution.
In other words, prostitution may have been legal, but the facilitation of it was not.17

The nineteenth century witnessed a revolution in state policies on and policing of
prostitution, whereby the fille publique, once viewed as a social outcast, became reconfigured as
a threat to public and social health.18 Reglementierung in Germany subjected prostitutes to
physical, hygienic and spatial control, generally carried out by a special uniformed police force,

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1999), 246-7.
15 Ibid., 250, 256. Emphasis in the original.
16 On the history of regulationism in Europe, see Stephanie A. Limoncelli, The Politics of Trafficking: The First
International Movement to Combat the Sexual Exploitation of Women (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010),
23-8. On the French case in particular, see Alain Corbin, Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after
17 Julia Bruggemann, “The Business of Sex: Evaluating Prostitution in the German Port City of Hamburg,” in
Women, Business and Finance in Nineteenth-Century Europe, eds. Robert Beachy, Béatrice Craig and Alastair
18 Harsin, Policing Prostitution, xv. This shift from prostitution as a moral to a public health issue intensified in the
the morals police or vice squad (Sittenpolizei or police des moeurs). Registered sex workers were banned from certain spaces and restricted to living in specific, police-approved lodgings, a policy known as Kasernierung, or confinement. These women required police permission for travel and had to undergo compulsory medical examinations and treatment for VD. This new regulatory system had a self-fulfilling aspect; the morals police could brand any woman a prostitute and thereby turn her into a social pariah, sometimes leading her to enter the sex trade.

In February 1927, the Law for Combating Venereal Disease (Reichsgesetz zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten, or RGBG) decriminalized prostitution and abolished Reglementierung, brothelization and the morals police. The new law targeted VD by targeting individuals; prostitution was no longer grounds for arrest, but the spreading of VD and the solicitation of commercial sex were criminal offences. Suspected individuals were subject to obligatory medical examinations and treatment and, though there was no official register of all infected persons, the law required doctors to report patients who discontinued treatment or seemed likely to endanger others.

Nazi propaganda, including its main mouthpiece, the Völkischer Beobachter, celebrated the old system of regulation, arguing that the morals police could better protect the health of the German people than the “soft” anti-VD law. Jews and “Marxists” were key targets of Nazi rhetoric, accused of sexual and moral degeneracy and running sex trafficking operations in

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20 There was also a second system of regulation known as brothelization (Bordellierung), whereby after registering with the police, women were assigned to live and work in specific brothels. Brothelization was less common than confinement in Imperial Germany (with the exception of cities like Hamburg) because the existence of brothel-keepers seemed to ask for trouble with §180 of the Criminal Code. Bruggemann, “Business of Sex,” 185.


23 RGBl. I, 1927, s. 61-3. On the law and its origins and impact, see Roos’ study, *Weimar Through the Lens of Gender*. She takes the 1927 law as a starting guiding point and demonstrates that although this law was in many ways a “victory” for prostitutes’ rights, it did not signify a full decriminalization of prostitution.

Germany. In the interests of undermining Germany’s new democracy, the Nazis also directed their wrath towards the Weimar state and its socialist supporters, stressing their complicity in the sexual decay of post-World War I German society.

Once in power after January 1933, the Nazi regime catered to both sides of the political, medical and moral debate – on the one hand, religious conservatives who wanted a full criminalization of prostitution and, on the other hand, those who saw the usefulness of state-regulated sex work for public health and masculine morale. This duality translated into a bifurcated policy. Nazi party officials fashioned themselves as the protectors of respectability, intervening in birth control, homosexuality and marital health to promote (and prove) their commitment to racial health and morality. Along with alcoholics, single mothers, gay men, criminals, the homeless and unemployed, sex workers were amalgamated into the category of “asocials” – those Germans who allegedly failed to fulfill their responsibilities to the Volksgemeinschaft because of “idleness,” “weakness of character,” “lack of restraint” and “loose morals.”

The liminal status imposed on prostitutes translated into their legal marginalization. Under the auspices of the February 1933 Decree for the Protection of the Volk and State, by the spring of that year, tens of thousands were rounded up in police raids and sent to workhouses and, according to Gisela Bock, to concentration camps. In May, revisions to the RGBG and §361 of the criminal code intended to “clean” the “streetscape” (Strassenbild) by cracking down on streetwalkers, targeting “anyone who publicly and conspicuously or in a manner likely to

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26 Hitler condemned German society after World War I as a “hothouse of sexual ideas and stimulations.” Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 254-5. The Nazis were not alone in their social critique; conservative and religious groups also feared that the proliferation of prostitution, VD, illegitimacy, pornography and the “New Woman” indicated that Germany was experiencing a moral decline. Roos, *Weimar*, 46-54; Cornelie Usborne, *The Politics of the Body in Weimar Germany: Women's Reproductive Rights and Duties* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 69-101.
annoy the public incites immoral acts or offers immoral services.”

Women’s potential for soliciting was grounds enough for persecution. The Preventive Detention Decree of December 1937 further enabled police to take into “protective custody” individuals believed to be endangering the social order; a previous offense sufficed for detention. “Tramps,” “whores” and “individuals with sexually transmitted diseases” were listed among those who failed “to adapt themselves to the natural discipline of a National Socialist state.” Roundups of sex workers occurred also occurred prior to the 1936 Olympics and at the beginning of the war, suggesting that the Nazi state also viewed prostitutes as eyesores and security risks in moments of political importance and international attention.

Sex Work as Productive Work

At the same time as the regime persecuted some prostitutes, it also worked towards state-regulated prostitution. Already in the fall of 1933, police officials were moving to erect regulated brothels in major urban centres, like Essen, Cologne and Hamburg, in spite of the fact that no official legislation authorized them to do so. The Nazi regime’s open support for regulated prostitution by the mid and late 1930s related to the ongoing preparations for war. In fact, German soldiers were already involved in an armed conflict, fighting in the Spanish Civil War on the side of Franco’s Nationalists after July 1936. That same year, the German military declared the construction of military brothels to be an “urgent necessity” and recommended abstention from the arrest of prostitutes so that these women could supply the brothels.

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34 Roos, Weimar, 216-8; Timm, Politics of Fertility, 177.
35 Domestic politics also facilitated Nazi support of brothelization. Julia Roos argues that the revival of regulationism was related to the declining power of the churches after 1935, while Claudia Koonz has pointed to the demise of the German feminist movement (at least publicly) after 1933 as a partial explanation for shifting attitudes towards sex in the Third Reich. Roos, Weimar, 219; Claudia Koonz, Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987), 175-219.
Before and during the war, the High Command’s most insistent and frequently invoked justification for its support of regulated prostitution – whereby registered prostitutes practiced their trade in a specific location and underwent regular medical testing – related to the need to keep soldiers’ free from venereal infection. The military had a deep investment in German men’s physical fitness, since the Reich needed healthy, agile and strong soldiers to fight and win the coming war for Lebensraum.37 A leaflet issued from the Reich War Ministry first in 1936 and repeatedly throughout the war declared, “A VD-infected soldier is unfit for service. Self-inflicted incapacitation is unworthy of a German soldier!”38 Nazi and military officials expected VD rates to rise among troops during battle and, more importantly, during stationary periods or occupations, when there were more opportunities for contact with local populations. The nature of life in the barracks and at the front – the separation from family, meagre opportunities for local amusement and wide availability of commercial sex – had contributed to the spread of disease in armed conflicts before 1939.39 In the Franco-Prussian War, VD rates remained low in the German army when it was mobile and engaged in battle but by the spring of 1871, as German combatants became entrenched, VD rose to 78 out of every 1000 soldiers. At the end of the conflict, the military reported nearly 34 000 cases.40 World War I saw more than ten times the total infections of 1870-71; two million German soldiers contracted VD between 1914 and 1918.41

Syphilis and gonorrhea were the primary venereal diseases of concern to the German army. In addition to being painful, these infections have serious long-term health implications if afflicted individuals fail to get treatment. Untreated cases of gonorrhea can lead to damage of the urogenital system and cause infertility, and untreated syphilis can cause brain damage, heart disease, blindness, paralysis and death. Before the use of the antibiotic penicillin, which underwent trials during World War II, treatment for VD was lengthy; patients infected with gonorrhea required three weeks for treatment and those infected with syphilis needed to spend up

37 AOK 6, Anlage 3, Richtlinien für die Einrichtung von Bordellen im besetzten Gebiet, 23 July 1940, BA-MA RH 20-6/1009.
38 OKH, Merkblatt “Deutscher Soldat!”, undated, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2. The leaflet was produced in February 1936 but was distributed to soldiers in occupied Europe throughout the war. Seidler, Prostitution, 62.
39 Seidler, Prostitution, 61.
41 Todd, “Sexual Treason,” 52-3; Seidler, Prostitution, 126.
to six months in hospital. During the war, sexually transmitted diseases sapped some of the Wehrmacht’s fighting strength, on average about 14 battalions’ worth; at any given time, 7,000 German soldiers were in treatment for VD and thus not serving on the frontlines.\textsuperscript{42} The long-term effects of VD could be even more damaging for the Reich, according to a medical decree issued by the OFK in Liège in early June 1940: “Sex infection does not only signify for each individual a personal injury, but also creates a danger to his surroundings and untold suffering for his family. Venereal diseases, in most cases, result in the loss of fertility. Infertility means Volkssterben [death of the Volk].”\textsuperscript{43} In 1943, Himmler reiterated to members of the SS and police that VD signified detrimental long-term effects in the national birth rate and the ability of the population to recover from the great losses in the war.\textsuperscript{44}

Though concerns about the sexual health of soldiers operated as the most explicit of the reasons for the Nazi and military leadership’s willingness to tolerate and even facilitate regulated sexual economies in Germany and the occupied territories, providing German men with sexual access to women’s bodies served other, perhaps less overt, but no less important goals of the regime. One such purpose of women’s sexual labour was to reaffirm an explicitly heterosexual form of masculinity for men in police, SS and military uniforms. In 1937, Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler spoke in front of SS leaders, declaring that state-regulated prostitution could prevent homosexuality because it provided more sexual outlets for young men: “One cannot on the one hand wish to prevent the entire youth from migrating to homosexuality and on the other hand, ban every other alternative. That is madness. After all, the barring of every possibility to get together with girls in the big cities – even if it is for money – brings a large contingent to the other side.”\textsuperscript{45} Recall that Brauchitsch’s July 1940 memorandum also argued that issuing a “ban on sexual activity” for German troops in Europe would turn soldiers into sexual deviants.

The commercial sex trade thus provided a route for the Nazi and military leadership to direct soldiers’ sexual energies away from the public arena to the privacy of brothels and away from alleged racially or politically undesirable women towards prostitutes monitored by the

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\textsuperscript{42} Seidler, Prostitution, 126-7, see also 82-98 for more on the various treatments for VD.

\textsuperscript{43} Sanitäts-Befehl, 3 June 1940, AN AJ\textsuperscript{40}, Box 64, Folder 2.

\textsuperscript{44} Himmler to the SS and German Police, Betr.: Verhütung von Geschlechtskrankheiten, 11 June 1943, BAB NS 33/167, Bl. 7.

occupation regime and its representatives. Support for controlled prostitution as a military necessity and moral imperative also reflected a long-standing confirmation of the sexual prerogatives of German men. Sex was considered a physiological “need” of men, one that if left unsatisfied weakened their physical and mental well-being.46 Himmler was a passionate supporter of the German man’s “right” to extramarital sex; in October 1939, he encouraged members of the SS and police not to limit their sexual virility solely to the conjugal bed.47 Himmler’s impact on shaping Nazi policies regarding sex work during the war should not be underestimated; as head of the SS and police, his confidence in the stimulating power of sex played a critical role in the expansion of regulated prostitution in Germany and occupied Europe after 1939. In spring 1941, for example, he ordered the construction of brothels in forced labour camps in an attempt to increase productivity by holding out sex as an incentive to inmates.48

Offering soldiers the temptations of “pleasure and power” engendered in their status as foreign occupiers can also be read as a strategy to solidify uniformed men’s commitment to fighting for Lebensraum and a new Europe dominated by the Reich.49 In this sense, female sex workers in Belgium and elsewhere functioned as an essential part of the occupation’s social, political and economic arteries by providing the harbingers of the New Order – German soldiers, functionaries and SS-men – with opportunities for recreation, entertainment and, not least, sexual desire and fulfillment; in other words, women’s bodies and the pleasurable experiences gleaned from them in the sexual economy reinforced the Germans’ sense of themselves as the ruling elite.


49 The term comes from the recent volume of the same name: Corey Ross, Pamela E. Swett and Fabrice d’Almeida, eds., Pleasure and Power in Nazi Germany (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
Military officials did not consider the staffing of brothels with the very same local women they prohibited German soldiers from having social contact with to be a contradiction in policy; in their minds, the brothel interaction was not an intimate relationship but a simple economic exchange. In the words of one German medical officer:

The relationships of the prostitutes and the changing visitors (sometimes 20-30 a day) are of a functional and economic nature. You do not have the social experience of meeting them publicly on the street, or in the bar or through other forms of becoming acquainted. A social interaction requires a certain degree of mutual respect and spiritual connections, which are not present in the brothels.\textsuperscript{50}

However, sexual intercourse was not in fact the only service women “sold” in and outside the brothel. “Good time girls,” or entraîneuses, for example, frequently flirted with German soldiers over drinks in local bars and clubs.\textsuperscript{51} Sometimes women were employed by bar owners to deliberately engage customers in order to get them to spend more money.\textsuperscript{52} Considered by the German occupiers as clandestine prostitutes, such women did not necessarily perform sexual acts with or on German men’s bodies at the end of the night.\textsuperscript{53}

On the one hand, this type of what we might call “non-sex sex work” could offer soldiers comfort and companionship in their long tour of duty away from home by providing a type of “girlfriend experience.”\textsuperscript{54} On the other hand, the multi-dimensionality of sex workers’ intimate labour beyond the provision of sexual services unsettled German and Nazi officials because it challenged the short-term, contingent and institutionalized aspects of the sex trade that they had considered so useful. It was precisely this concern that spurred the military command in Belgium to attempt to rigidly control – by way of decrees, legislation and other formal processes – interactions between prostitutes and German soldiers.

\textbf{Prostitution in a Time of War: The September 1939 Decrees}

The military’s commitment to providing its troops with sexual access to women inspected and monitored by the police was institutionalized in two decrees that coincided with and were

\textsuperscript{51} See, for example, St. Josse-ten-Noode, Police, 17 July 1942, AGR, Ministère de la Justice, Police des étrangers (I 417), Folder 1440.
\textsuperscript{52} Police, Saint-Gillies, Rapport, 4 Nov. 1940, AVB, Guerre40-45, Box 25.
\textsuperscript{53} Rhacel Parreñas’ recent work on Filipina hostesses working in clubs in Japan has argued that designating such women as prostitutes does not accurately capture the type of labour they do. Most do not have physical contact with their clients and instead engage in flirting and intimations of affection. Parreñas, “Cultures of Flirtation,” 132-47.
\textsuperscript{54} Bernstein describes the “girlfriend experience” as involving a satisfying sexual and emotional connection, whereby a sex worker tries to simulate being a girlfriend by showing desire and providing pleasure to a client. Bernstein, \textit{Temporarily Yours}, 125-30.
responses to the invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939. On 9 September, a directive from the Reich Ministry of the Interior prohibited streetwalking and authorized police-regulated prostitution in “special houses” in the operational area of the Wehrmacht. The decree initially only applied inside the borders of the German Reich, but was extended in March 1939 to the entire territory of the Reich, with the exception of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.\footnote{RMdI, Polizeiliche Behandlung der Prostitution, 9. Sept. 1939, BA-MA RH 12-23/1371.} Nine days later the Ministry issued a subsequent decree on the fight against VD, drawing attention to the historical trend of VD to increase during wartime and urging health officials into action. The decree stressed the importance of strategies already in place, such as the investigation of infectious sources and the examination of individuals suspected of VD infection.\footnote{RMdI, Betr.: Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten, 18 Sept. 1939, BA-MA RH 12-23/1371.}

The directive further extended the scope of police and medical surveillance, enlisting social welfare patrols (Fürsorgestreifen) to monitor individuals labelled as “hwG” (häufig wechselnder Geschlechtsverkehr), a term common in the Weimar period that translates as “frequent changing of sex partners” but was basically a synonym for promiscuity.\footnote{Timm, Politics of Fertility, 171.} In official terms, hwG often referred to sex workers but also included other women considered sexually immoral and promiscuous. The decree also subjected women “who incite or chat, etc., with male guests in restaurants or other similar establishments (so-called Tisch- oder Unterhaltungsfräulein, Eintänzerinnen, etc.)” to routine health monitoring.\footnote{RMdI, 18 Sept. 1939, BA-MA RH 12-23/1371.} In other words, the Nazi regime deemed women who were not engaged in formal prostitution but had social interactions with men as suspicious and requiring surveillance. Both September orders also expanded the 1937 Preventive Detention decree, enabling the “preventive custody” of women who violated these regulations; women could be detained if they were late or missed a required medical examination. These initial wartime laws set a precedent for the control of women’s bodies and mobility that was later extended to the territories of occupied Europe.

At the beginning of the occupation of Poland in September 1939, many of the one and a half million German men stationed there visited “illegal” prostitutes, meaning (as yet) unregistered sex workers. Condoms allegedly covered the grounds of one of Kraków’s main city
parks, the Planty, a known meeting spot for prostitutes and German troops.\textsuperscript{59} Concerned about the rates of VD among their own soldiers and Polish women, the German occupiers in the General Government imposed the death penalty for any non-German who infected a German with VD.\textsuperscript{60} The civil administration also supported a policy of brothelization because it considered brothels safer than unregulated encounters, since soldiers rarely reported brothels as sources of infection.\textsuperscript{61} By early October 1940, brothels were established or planned in most large Polish cities; many of these operated in previously existing brothels or in cheap hotels as well as former Jewish homes, student dormitories and other places from which Jews had been removed.\textsuperscript{62}

**Regulating Prostitution: The Belgian Case**

Occupied western Europe held multiple meanings for German troops – it was a training area, a point of central (re)organization for units on their way to the front, a place of rest, entertainment and a land of material luxury. But to the German authorities, the west was also an epidemic breeding centre (*Seuchenherd*) with licentious sexual morals.\textsuperscript{63} Brussels was a noted centre of debauchery, partly because of its proximity to Paris but also because of the legacy of the “white slave trade affair” (*la traite des blanches*) in 1880-81. The scandal erupted after British newspapers revealed that since 1878, some fifty Belgian and foreign underage women (mainly of British nationality) had been trafficked into some of the city’s regulated brothels. In the subsequent court proceedings, which captivated the international press, approximately fifteen brothel keepers were tried and sentenced for employing minors and the Chief Commissioner of the Brussels police was dismissed.\textsuperscript{64}

At the end of June 1940, German medico-military officials – Dr. Otto of the OFK in Brussels, Dr. Thoma of the city headquarters (Stadtkommandantur, or SK) and Dr. Schött from


\textsuperscript{63} Meinen, *Wehrmacht und Prostitution*, 51-5, 103.

Eggert Reeder’s administration – inspected the streets in the vicinity of Brussels’ train stations. Accompanying them were Belgian representatives from the Ministry of Public Health, the morals police and the local anti-venerable clinic: Dr. Lagrange, Mr. Lambert and Dr. Desneux, respectively.65 A report of the tour noted that “in these streets, almost every house is a locale, restaurant, bar, café, clipjoint or something similar; the prostitutes stand by the doors or sit at the windows and beckon passersby inside.” Signs prohibiting Germans from entering these establishments and streets had little effect; German soldiers, railway workers and members of the Reich Labour Service were all found in these supposedly “off limits” areas.66

Further troubling German officials were the rising rates of VD observed in June 1940, which they correlated to the spread of clandestine prostitution that followed the German advance.67 With the cessation of hostilities in the summer of 1940, the German Feldheer experienced a 170 percent increase in syphilis and a 100 percent increase in gonorrhea.68 The situation did not improve by the end of the year. Activity reports from the military command noted in November that “the concentration and longer stationing of greater numbers of troops in and around major centres makes it necessary to make the fight against VD as intense as possible.”69 Although the German occupation authorities focused almost exclusively on unregulated female sex workers as the carriers of VD, they also worried about Belgian women working in German agencies who could potentially transmit infection to German employees and undermine the effective functioning of the occupation administration.70 Such fears were not unwarranted; this was precisely what happened in a German-run maternity home in the province of Liège in spring 1944, when a domino effect of VD infections hit at least four staff members,
including an administrative head, an SS officer, a typist and a kitchen maid. In addition, reports from the occupation indicate that Belgian men also contracted syphilis and gonorrhea with some regularity.

Any viable plan to institute and formalize a regulated sexual economy had to confront the historical, legal and ideological particularities of Belgium regarding the nature of sex work. The first of these was the memory of the battle against prostitution in 1914-18, which struck fear into German officials in 1940, some of whom had participated in the first conflict. Less than two weeks after the invasion of Belgium, the Reich Ministry of the Interior warned that “the importance of prostitution and venereal diseases for our army in Belgium between 1914-1918 is still in everyone’s memory.” The first German occupation of northern France and Belgium had tolerated prostitution; Paris, Lille, Brussels, Antwerp, Liège and Ghent had all been major centres of the sex trade, in which German soldiers paid for sex in brothels or in estaminets, or small café-bars. Between the spring and fall of 1915, the number of registered prostitutes in Brussels doubled, and doubled again two years later. By the summer of 1917, metropolitan Brussels and Leuven were home to nearly 4,000 registered prostitutes. As Magnus Hirschfeld observed in his 1929 opus on sexuality in World War I, many Belgian women whose spouses had gone into service, “unable to earn a penny, saw themselves compelled to sell their bodies to the hated Germany.” The conclusion to a popular song among prostitutes showcased the relative openness about sexual bartering in occupied Belgium:

We are of Flemish blood
who f--- the Germans good;
for a Kommissbrot [dark German bread] and a franc,
we f--- for hours and hours

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71 Lang to Ebner, 26. April 1944, ITS 2/ 82447732#1.
72 See, for example, Vertrauensärztliche Dienststelle der Landesversicherungsanstalt Rheinprovinz für die Deutsche Krankenkasse in Belgien beim MBH in Belgien und Nordfrankreich, Feb.-June 1944, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 1; and, June 1942, Dec. 1943 -Jan 1944, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 3. The German occupiers may well have been concerned about the transmission of VD between men, although the archival record shows little in this regard.
73 RMdI, Vermerk, 21 May 1940, AN AJ41, Box 64, Folder 2.
75 This increase reflected the intensified Kontrollprogramm as well as the sheer growth in the number of women entering the prostitution industry. Majerus, Occupations et logiques, 62.
77 Hirschfeld, Sexual History, 158.
78 Ibid, 60. Omissions in the original. The original is as follows, although it is unclear whether the Germans are the subject or object of the second line because of the omitted letters in Hirschfeld’s text:
Members of the military command brought with them in 1940 some of their own recollections of western Europe. Dr. Otto recollected that during the First World War, one forty-two-year-old prostitute had told him that she had had sex 62 times in a single day. The head of the anti-venereal clinic in Brussels, Dr. Desneux, countered that a scientific journal from Paris reported on a prostitute who “operated her business” up to 80 times a day.79 The geographical landscape of prostitution in Belgium also looked similar to that of the First World War; Brussels remained the “capital” of the sex industry, home to the largest number of prostitutes, while **quartiers chauds** still existed in the same city spaces, such as around the train station Gare du Nord.80

Occupied Belgium offered German health officials yet another obstacle; the language and cultural tensions that had long plagued the country mapped onto the realm of prostitution control, at least to some degree. The Ministry of the Interior in Berlin described one of the chief physicians in the Belgian Ministry of Health as an “enemy of the Germans,” while the ministry itself was considered “absolutely French-oriented.” Sex workers were also sometimes divided along linguistic lines. Berlin officials observed that political difficulties arose from the fact that many of the women in brothels in Liège were German-speaking, while the majority of the prostitutes in Brussels were Frenchwomen. Especially disconcerting for Nazi and military officials was the discovery that “Jews also play a role, as in Holland, in the realm of prostitution.”81 The 9 September 1939 ordinance and later decrees explicitly forbade Jews from working in regulated brothels, although actual practice defied this rule.82 However, outside of regulations relating to Jewish and other “racially foreign” women and a few vague references to political concerns about whether prostitutes in a given area were French, Flemish or German, the occupiers were largely silent on the issue of race and sex work. This silence is unsurprising; the German authorities in Belgium envisioned the relationship between the soldier and sex worker as

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79 Bericht über eine Besprechung…am 28.6.40, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2.
81 RMdI, 21 May 1940, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2.
a limited, short-term exchange; they did not expect (or want) German troops to meet their future spouses in brothels and so concerns about the racial status of the women mattered little.

A third significant problem in Belgium was that there was no singular or all-encompassing national law in Belgium regarding VD control or prostitution. Already on 21 May, the Reich Ministry of the Interior complained that there were “no adequate legal measures regarding prostitution.” The medical section of the military administration (Abteilung IVb) compared Belgium unfavourably with France, where regulationism was more developed: “The conditions regarding prostitutes are fundamentally different in Belgium than in France. While in France many brothels have always existed, in Belgium, there were officially no brothels and only of late have some been established in the bigger cities.” Because of the absence of a unified policy on prostitution at the national level, the German occupation authorities had to do more work to set up a regulatory regime in Belgium, making it more similar to Poland or the Soviet Union, where the Germans effectively built a prostitution control system “from scratch,” than to its western European counterpart, France.

Although there was no national law, mayors and provincial governors could enact and execute regulations pertaining to the medical and police supervision of registered prostitutes.

Thus a form of decentralized regulationism had a considerable history in Belgium before 1940, although there was no national law, mayors and provincial governors could enact and execute regulations pertaining to the medical and police supervision of registered prostitutes. This lack of a national law governing the regulation of prostitution was similar to France and the Netherlands. As Stephanie Limoncelli has observed in regard to the development of regulationism after 1802 (under Napoleon): “regulation was based on interpretations of a variety of local laws, which benefited its supporters, because a local administrative status allowed considerable flexibility as well as an ambiguity that could obscure its operations.”

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83 Abt. IVb, Betr.: Lage der Bordelle in Brüssel und Antwerpen, 24 May 1940, AN AJ, Box 64, Folder 2; Tätigkeitsbericht, 4 June 1940, BA-MA RW 36/170, Bl. 12; O.Qu. Belgien, Leit. San. Offz., Betr.: Erster Bericht des Hygienikers, 6 June 1940, NARA RG 242, T-501, Roll 116; MBH in Belgien und Frankreich, MVC, Vermerk, Med. VII/3, 7 June 1940, AN AJ, Box 64, Folder 2; Stabsarzt Dr. Schött to Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien, Betr.: Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten, 5 Dec. 1940, AN AJ, Box 64, Folder 2; Lambert, Rapport, 3 Feb. 1941, AVB Dossier de E.L (1952).

84 RMdl, 21 May 1940, AN AJ, Box 64, Folder 2.

85 Dr. Schött, MVC, to Leit. San. Offz beim MBH, Betr.: Untersuchung der Insassen öffentlicher Häuser auf Tbc, received 23 Nov. 1940, AN AJ, Box 64, Folder 2.


87 This lack of a national law governing the regulation of prostitution was similar to France and the Netherlands. As Stephanie Limoncelli has observed in regard to the development of regulationism after 1802 (under Napoleon): “regulation was based on interpretations of a variety of local laws, which benefited its supporters, because a local administrative status allowed considerable flexibility as well as an ambiguity that could obscure its operations.” Limoncelli, The Politics of Trafficking, 25. On prostitution in nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Brussels, the main geographical focus of scholarship on sex work in Belgium, see Colette Huberty and Luc Koenings, “La prostitution à Bruxelles au 19ème siècle,” Les cahiers de la Fonderie, no. 2 (1987): 3-21; Majerus, “La prostitution”; Sophie de Schaeppdrijver, “Regulated Prostitution in Brussels, 1844-1877: A Policy and its Implementation,” Historical Social Research, no. 37 (1987): 89-108.
though its scope depended on the local context. In general, regulatory mechanisms tended to be similar across regions. In interwar Mechelen and Ghent, for example, all women and girls engaged in prostitution were required to register with the police, submit to regular medical exams (usually twice weekly) and carry a *livret* (*boekje* in Dutch) containing their photograph and personal information and documenting the dates and results of their physical examinations. They had to be able to show this booklet at the request of a police agent or doctor. Women infected with VD were immediately sent to a clinic or hospital for treatment, while those with an uncertain diagnosis were required to stay in the hospital for observation.

Nineteenth-century Brussels had had a particularly rigorous system of regulation under the municipal police, one that was stricter than that in Paris. However, by mid-century, the number of official brothels declined at the same time as “illegal,” or clandestine, prostitution increased. By 1877, *Kasernierung* was left by the wayside and prostitutes were free to move around in the city, solicit and meet clients where and when they wished. In some cases, infrastructure relating to prostitution and VD control that did exist in Belgium in spring 1940 was a holdover from World War I. Such was the case with the city of Liège’s morals police, which was constructed based on instructions issued by the German health authorities twenty-five years earlier.

The German occupiers lamented that the only Belgian strategy to combat VD in use was “to convince all sick people that they needed to seek treatment,” a tactic that relied on the supposed voluntary and communal bonds of the social collective and was disadvantageous for precisely that reason. In the German view, Belgian liberalism and “the partisanship of the democratic system” rendered local and state officials incapable of effectively orchestrating and carrying out a system of prostitution and VD regulation. The Germans also blamed liberalism for limiting the Belgian state’s intervention in the arena of public health and for failing to erect a

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88 RMdI, 21 May 1940, AN AJ, Box 64, Folder 2; Tätigkeitsbericht der MV, 4 June 1940, BA-MA RW 36/170, Bl. 12; Limomcelli, *Politics of Trafficking*, 25.
89 Stad Gent, Reglement op de ontucht, 11 May 1931, Stadsarchief Gent IV 353-354; Stad Mechelen, Extrait du règlement sur la prostitution, 14 Nov. 1857. This excerpt was located in the *boekjes* of registered prostitutes (circa 1919-1924). I thank the archivist Willy Van de Vijver for allowing me to examine them. For other examples, see the city of Antwerp’s registry from 28 March 1925 through to 9 October 1946, Stadsarchief Antwerpen MA # 33202.
93 Dr. Schött to Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien, 5 Dec. 1940, AN AJ, Box 64, Folder 2.
nation-wide health service – this was to be part of “the civilizing mission” of the occupier to reform Belgian society.\(^95\) Second-guessing of the Belgian civil authorities’ commitment to controlling prostitution and VD became a feature of German policy after 1940 because, as one German doctor put it, “the Belgians have no experience in this area.”\(^96\)

The final problem facing the occupier in 1940 was that prostitution in Belgium had multiple faces. German and Belgian officials identified four types at their meeting in late June 1940. There were the *Animierkneipe* or clipjoints, which were basically brothels in the form of bars; common in the large cities, these establishments usually housed two to four prostitutes who commuted from the suburbs by bicycle. The furnishings were generally sparse and the hygienic conditions unpredictable. There were also “single lodgings” (*Einzellogis*), or houses with two rooms: a tiny antechamber, where an older prostitute, the *madame*, sat and “supervised” the operation, and then the bedroom. Like the brothel-bars, the German authorities questioned the cleanliness of more individualized operations. A third manifestation of the sex trade took place in establishments disguised as shops, recognizable because of the paper dummies and artificial flowers in the shop windows.\(^97\) Just two weeks after the invasion, German military authorities in Brussels reported that brothels near two major train stations, the Gare du Nord and Gare du Midi, were “masquerading as tobacco shops.”\(^98\) Over in Flanders, city commander Captain Schiffer noted that “there exist in Ghent quite a number of ‘bars’ and everyone knows that they are houses of secret prostitution.”\(^99\)

The fourth form of sex work was the most troubling for German officials in Belgium: clandestine or unregulated prostitution, which was rampant in the major cities of Brussels, Ghent, Antwerp and Bruges.\(^100\) Clandestine prostitutes were individual women who solicited in streets and bars, restaurants, cafés and dance halls and who conducted their affairs without state, medical or police monitoring. In the mid-1930s, municipal officials in Brussels estimated that the city was home to 15,000 clandestine and 500 registered prostitutes, putting the ratio of

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96 Dr. Walter Beckmann to Kriegsverwaltungschef, Dr. Harry von Craushaar, 15 March 1941, AN AJ\(^{100}\), Box 64, Folder 2; Tätigkeitsbericht der MV für den Monat September 1940, Nr. 9, 1 Oct. 1940, BA-MA RW 36/179, Bl. 43; Tätigkeitsbericht der MV für die Monate Januar-März 1943, Nr. 23, 18 April 1943, BA-MA RW 36/192, Bl. 99.

97 Bericht über eine Besprechung…am 28.6.40, AN AJ\(^{100}\), Box 64, Folder 2.

98 Lage der Bordelle in Brüssel und Antwerpen, 24 May 1940, AN AJ\(^{100}\), Box 64, Folder 2.


100 KK 510, Kommandanturbefehl, undated (likely 1943), BA-MA RH 36/401.
unregulated to regulated sex workers at 30 to 1.\textsuperscript{101} Members of the German military command assumed that Belgian streetwalkers and other unregulated prostitutes were riddled with VD and tuberculosis because of poor living conditions and a lack of medical supervision.\textsuperscript{102} The other issue with unregulated prostitution was that it took place largely in public view; the existence of clandestine prostitutes frustrated the German military’s attempt to “privatize” sexual encounters between occupier and occupied by circumscribing them to closed brothels. Occasional prostitutes in Belgium blurred the distinction between the military’s public sexual reserve and private sexual access that sat at the core of the High Command’s apparent resolution of the “sex question.”

**Imposing Legislation: The *Arrêté* of 25 June 1940**

In late May, just as the German administration in occupied Belgium was being established, military and Belgian civil officials were in communication regarding the combating of VD, “because there is no more time to lose for the prevention of VD in the German Wehrmacht.”\textsuperscript{103} On 27 May 1940, authorities in Abteilung IVb sent the Belgian Ministry of Public Health a long “wish list” of measures to be taken against prostitution and the spread of VD, including the confirmation of the personal data and addresses of all prostitutes and the addresses of any and all brothels, the compulsory medical examination of prostitutes and their isolation and treatment if diagnosed with syphilis, gonorrhea or chancroid, an infection characterized by sores on the genitalia. The Germans also wanted Belgian doctors to send reports of cases of VD to the Wehrmacht’s district command centres (Ortskommandanturen), the Belgian Ministry for Public Health and local hygiene inspectors and mayors.\textsuperscript{104} Provincial governors would also be expected to provide regular updates on how many women were added to the registers of prostitutes in their communes.\textsuperscript{105}

\textsuperscript{101} Inspecteur d’Hygiène, Note à Monsieur le Directeur-général, undated (likely 1936-37), AGR Administration de la Santé Publique, Folder 535.

\textsuperscript{102} Heeresarzt, OKH, 16 July 1940, BA-MA RH 12-23/1371; OKH, 29 July 1940, BA-MA RH 12-23/1371; Craushaar to Ministry of the Interior and Public Health, Public Health Section, Betr.: Verordnung über die Prostitution, 4 Nov. 1940, AN AJ\textsuperscript{40}, Box 64, Folder 2; Dr. Schött to Leit. San. Offz beim MBH, received 23 Nov. 1940, AN AJ\textsuperscript{39}, Box 64, Folder 2.

\textsuperscript{103} O.Qu. Abt. IVb to MBH für Holland und Belgien, Betr.: Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten, 30 May 1940, AN AJ\textsuperscript{40}, Box 64, Folder 2. For other local discussions between German military authorities and local administrative and medical officials in the first months of occupation, see the daily reports of the Chef de Cabinet du Bourgmestre in Mons from June and July 1940, Archives de la Ville de Mons Guerre 1940-1945, Box 14.

\textsuperscript{104} O.Qu. Belgien, Abt. IVb, to Ministry for Public Health, Betr.: Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten, 27 May 1940, AN AJ\textsuperscript{39}, Box 64, Folder 2. See a similar list: MBH, 7 June 1940, AN AJ\textsuperscript{39}, Box 64, Folder 2.

\textsuperscript{105} See the memos from the provincial government in East Flanders to the College of the Mayor and Aldermen in the municipalities, dated 15 Sept. 1942, 10 March 1942 and 19 June 1943 in Stadsarchief Gent, IV 353-354.
Transforming this list into legislation required the full support of the Belgian authorities in the executive organ in the municipalities, the College of the Mayor and Aldermen (Collège des bourgmestre et échevins), the Ministry of Public Health and the police, since these agencies would bear the primary responsibility for enforcing any new regulations. The German command also sought the cooperation of the civilian authorities in order to legitimize its goals and secure the loyalty and, perhaps most crucially, the economic productivity of the Belgian population. In the words of Dr. Holm, Oberstabsarzt in Reeder’s military administration:

Our job is, in the first instance, to protect the Wehrmacht from illness and, in the second instance, to prevent significant damage to the mass population, since they affect the economic strength of the country (work loss) and cause significant costs. One can also not abandon with a shrug the upright and serious-intentioned part of the population, who regret the general decadence.

The Germans tried to curry Belgian favour by suggesting that firm interventions into the realms of prostitution and VD served the interests of the civilian population as well as those of the occupying forces. It appears that some local agencies and authorities threw their weight behind the Germans almost immediately; at the end of May 1940, Belgian physicians declared their willingness to unite with the Germans to combat VD. A few days later, according to a German report, the Secretary-General of the Ministry for Public Health, Raymond Delhaye, insisted that stringent measures “would sooner or later have to be introduced.”

Delhaye’s prediction proved correct. On 25 June 1940, the Belgian government passed the Law on the Regulation of Prostitution for “the protection of public health, morality, and order…in the present circumstances.” The law met many of the demands of the Germans, including the generation of centralized registers of “every woman who engages habitually in prostitution” in towns and cities. A complementary directive issued on 22 July 1940 decreed that in cities of more than 10 000 inhabitants, civil servants could automatically register “persons notoriously known to be engaging in prostitution,” establishing ‘notoriety’ and ‘suspicion’ as

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106 Abt. IVb, 27 May 1940, AN AJ\(^{40}\), Box 64, Folder 2.
107 Dr. Holm, Besprechung über Prostitutionsfrage am 7.5.41, 6 May 1941 [sic], AN AJ\(^{40}\), Box 64, Folder 2. This report is dated 6 May 1941, though the meeting took place on 7 May, suggesting an error in the date of the report.
108 Craushaar, to the OFKs mit Abdruckungen für die Feld- und Ortskommandanturen, Betr.: Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten, 8 June 1940, AN AJ\(^{40}\), Box 64, Folder 2.
109 O.Qu., 30 May 1940, AN AJ\(^{40}\), Box 64, Folder 2; MBH, 7 June 1940, AN AJ\(^{40}\), Box 64, Folder 2.
110 Arrêté réglementant la prostitution - 25 June 1940, Moniteur belge des Arrêtés ministériels et autres arrêtés des Secrétaires généraux [hereafter Moniteur Belge], no. 24, 30 June 1940, 30-2. Article 4 stipulated that women able to prove they lived “an existence of good character and morals” could appeal to their municipal council to have their name struck from the register. For examples of redactions, see Stadsarchief Mechelen Secretariaatsarchief, Vak 18, Politiezaken, Folder 14.
grounds for accusations of sexual transgression. The July decree also enabled municipal councils to reserve certain areas for authorized and police-monitored maisons de prostitution. Registered women were only allowed to practice their profession in specified establishments, houses or addresses. A third complementary law, dated 18 September 1940, made it compulsory for an individual to visit a doctor if he or she suspected having or already had VD.

The 1940 laws signified both continuity and break with the prewar period. The legislation formalized at a national level many of the regulations already in place in provinces and towns before the German occupation, such as the biweekly medical examination of registered prostitutes, organized and paid for by their respective local governments. Women could also still choose their own doctor. In some ways, the legislation confirmed a traditional system of regulation that looked similar to those erected in France, Poland and the Soviet Union: registers of prostitutes and forced medical examinations were just a few common tactics to control prostitution across Europe.

Newer to the Belgian populace were the measures providing for the prevention of VD, including the mandatory isolation and treatment of VD-infected patients, and the regulations focusing on maisons de débauche. The penalties for violations of the 25 June law were steep. Doctors who did not report patients failing to complete treatment faced imprisonment from eight days up to one month and/or a fine of 26 to 100 francs. Other infractions of the 25 June 1940 law resulted in fines of 100-10 000 francs and one month to two years in prison. Recidivists faced even harsher penalties, whereby the fines and imprisonment were cumulated and their punishments doubled. In practical terms, this law signified the expansion of the morals police, the special force designated to monitor prostitutes, the expansion of VD clinics and the need for increased medical and nursing personnel to service these institutions.

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113 In cases where the women were not considered poor or destitute, municipalities could take legal action against the patient to recover the costs.
114 On France, see Meinen, Wehrmacht und Prostitution. On the occupied Soviet territories, see Mühlhäuser, Eroberungen, esp. 156-239. On Poland, Latvia, Russia and Ukraine, see Gertjejanssen, “Victims, Heroes, Survivors,” 144-52, 169-70.
115 Arrêté réglementant la prostitution, 25 June 1940.
116 Note pour Dr. Lagrange, 10 July 1940, AGR Administration de la Santé Publique, Folder 538. On the construction of the service des moeurs in Brussels, see AVB, Guerre40-45, Box 76; in Mons, see Archives de la Ville de Mons Guerre 1940-1945, Box 66.
The German files reveal no serious disagreement between the Ministry of Public Health and the military administration, even when the latter sought to impose measures seriously impacting the individual freedom of Belgian (female) citizens. It is possible that the Germans did not keep track of such disagreements or that the relevant documents were destroyed after the war. However, it may well be that a dispute never occurred. Some Belgian authorities were not entirely opposed to the measures because they too were dismayed about the proliferation of prostitution and recommended establishing brothels in centres with high concentrations of troops as a way of herding allegedly dangerous sex workers into a single unit under strict supervision.

Perhaps the remaining Belgian officials had also internalized the Committee of Secretaries-General’s “policy of lesser evil” regarding collaboration. Delhaye had seemingly done so, as evident in his 7 June 1940 request that the provincial governors pressure their municipalities to implement the regulations on prostitution envisaged by the Germans: “This way they will avoid any difficulties with the German authorities in Belgium.”

The arena of sex operated as a politicized sphere of occupation policy whose implications could have powerful reverberations for other facets of the administration, including the collaborative relationship between the Germans and remaining Belgian civil authorities. Some local bureaucrats did not welcome the legislated shift to regulationism. Dr. Thoma in the Brussels command post reported resistance among the suburban mayors to follow suit with the anti-VD and prostitution control mechanisms already enforced in the city centre. In an appeal to the Mayor of Brussels, Frédéric Joseph Van de Meulebroeck, to comply with the 25 June ordinance, Delhaye stressed that “The German military authority considers it indispensable and urgent that the measures imposed for controlling prostitution and curbing the spread of venereal diseases hinge on a single orientation in the large urban agglomerations of our country and

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118 Note pour Dr. Lagrange, 10 July 1940, AGR Administration de la Santé Publique, Folder 538. Further evidence of a “shared interest” exists in the debates in Brussels in 1942 regarding the German request to automatically add women discovered after 12.30 a.m. in public streets to the prostitutes’ register. For the first time, police chief Van Autgaerden rejected the German demand as a “breach of individual freedom.” This reticence was nevertheless discarded when an administrative procedure was added to the plan, in which the occupier would order the medical examination of the suspected woman, but at the recommendation of the Belgian police. This adjustment shows that, in principle, German and Belgian authorities shared similar goals regarding the regulation of prostitutes and unaccompanied women. See Louis Van Autgaerden to Jules Coelst, 8 Sept. 1942, and Coelst to Kriegsverwaltungsassessor Dr. Richter, 11 Sept. 1942, AVB Cabinet du Bourgmestre, Box 845.
119 Delhaye to Provincial Governors, 7 June 1940, AN AJ10, Box 64, Folder 2. Majerus suggests that Delhaye’s letter is misdated and is actually from 27 June, two days after the 25 June 1940 law, but does not offer an explanation of why he believes this is the case, so I have kept the original date. Majerus, *Occupations et logiques*, 232-3.
especially in the Brussels metropolitan area.”¹²⁰ The mayor insisted that Dr. Thoma had mistaken for resistance what amounted to discussion among the suburban leadership. The Conference of Mayors had devised a “practical solution.” Though it agreed with the Germans that treatment for VD infections should be centralized in the Brussels hospital St. Joose-ten-Noode, the mayors wanted to keep suburban medical specialists in charge of the prophylactic measures in their communes.¹²¹ Delhaye rejected this suggestion, pointing out that what the occupiers wanted was not simply a practical solution but a single, centralized solution. Sex work was not an area where the German administration was willing to negotiate; Delhaye cautioned that the Germans would oust any local authorities who failed to take sufficient action in line with the June law.¹²²

In a circular to the Belgian medical profession, Delhaye acknowledged that “the new provisions comprise a radical change in the legislation currently in force in our country.” He justified these measures by articulating a link between a corrupted and “sick” social body and the proliferation of prostitutes and “careless patients” (les malades négligents) who spread disease, concluding:

In a general manner, the experience of 1914-1918 shows how, despite the development of our therapeutic weapons, war remains an exceptionally important factor in the spread of venereal diseases. In exceptional circumstances, it is necessary to provide emergency measures; even if they offend our habits and way of thinking, it is undeniable that they constitute a necessity from the point of view of social hygiene.¹²³

The June law was not particularly innovative, but it did deliver precisely what the Germans had determined Belgium was missing: a comprehensive and national policy on prostitution and VD control. The regulationist regime remained in place until and even after the liberation of 1944. What the 25 June 1940 law did not do, however, was extend beyond the civilian sphere; the official permissibility of Wehrmacht soldiers’ participation in the commercial sex trade in occupied Belgium, especially within brothels, remained largely undefined at that point.

¹²⁰ Raymond Delhaye to Joseph Van De Meulebroeck, 11 July 1940, AGR Administration de la Santé Publique, Folder 538. See also Dr. Craushaar’s letter to Delhaye, 6 June 1940 about the necessity for unified system of regulation in the Greater Brussels area in the same file.
¹²¹ Van De Meulebroeck, 13 July 1940, AGR Administration de la Santé Publique, Folder 538.
¹²² Delhaye to Van De Meulebroeck, 13 July 1940, AGR Administration de la Santé Publique, Folder 538.
¹²³ Delhaye to medical professionals, July 1940, AGR Administration de la Santé Publique, Folder 536.
Days after the promulgation of the June legislation, the German occupiers in Brussels decided that “it seems most useful if the city would decide to open up some larger brothels, in which the prostitutes are confined and in which adequate hygienic conditions with preventive measures against infection could then also be brought about.” On 16 July 1940, the Army Doctor of the OKH, desiring the prohibition of sexual intercourse between German soldiers and medically unregulated women, also recommended brothels as the only logical solution; brothels offered at least some security because the women could be “controlled and monitored.” Within two weeks, the OKH issued an official directive sanctioning the creation of a brothel system and the prohibition of soliciting in streets and public establishments in occupied France and Belgium, which was endorsed by Brauchitsch on 31 July.

Unlike in France, the occupation administration did not open or operate its military brothels and instead delegated this task to local authorities and private individuals. In areas with brothels already in operation, the military planned to select establishments with the highest standards of hygiene for exclusive use by Wehrmacht troops. German authorities marked *maisons de prostitution* with “substandard” hygienic conditions with red placards that in black letters prohibited entrance to members of the Wehrmacht. In other cities, towns and villages, *Wehrmachtsbordelle* had to be erected. Finding appropriate proprietors to open, operate and supervise the brothels was sometimes a challenge because these individuals had to invest significant capital (and potentially take loans) to operate the establishment with no guarantee of financial success.

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124 Following other scholars, I use *Wehrmachtsbordelle* throughout the text, rather than *Wehrmachtbordelle*, as some of the primary documents cited use. In quotations and citations, I have replicated the spelling as in the original text.

125 Bericht über eine Besprechung…am 28.6.40, AN AJ\(^{40}\), Box 64, Folder 2. Insa Meinen has similarly shown that in the case of France, there was discussion about the regulation of prostitution even before establishment of the German administration in France. See Meinen, *Wehrmacht und Prostitution*, 17-8.


129 MBH, MVC, to Ortskdtr. Ath, Vorschriften für belgische Bordelle, 19 Oct. 1940, AN AJ\(^{40}\), Box 64, Folder 2. For a more detailed set of regulations for *Wehrmachtsbordelle* in France, see OKH, 16 July 1940, BA-MA RH 12-23/1371; Feldkommandant, Bestimmungen für Wehrmachtbordelle, undated, BA-MA RH 36/444.

130 See, for example, the police reports from St. Gilles, dated 4 Nov. 1940, 19 Jan. 1941 and 23 April 1942: AVB Guerre40-45, Box 25.

131 Dr. Schött to Verbindungsstab zur königl. Italienischen Luftwaffe, Betr.: Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten, 25 Oct. 1940, AN AJ\(^{40}\), Box 64, Folder 2.
Many buildings required substantial construction to meet the Germans’ hygienic standards. Every room had to have amenities for personal hygiene and prophylaxis, including the possibility of running water with soap and clean towels, as well as a bidet or irrigator for flushing out the genitals after intercourse. Obtaining the required materials for these improvements was not an easy task in wartime. In late October 1940 in Brussels, the shopkeeper Edmond L. refurbished a house on Rue St. Laurent at a cost of 40,000 marks in a short amount of time; he installed central heating and equipped all rooms with sinks and decent furniture. His efforts impressed German medical officers, who reported that Edmond L. “makes a keen impression and has promptly complied with all of the requirements of the German administration.”

Technically, only German NCOs and rank-and-file were permitted to patronize Wehrmacht brothels; German officers had buildings reserved for their rank. Belgian civilian men, foreigners and German Nichtwaffenträger, such as railway and dockyard workers and merchant marines, were generally prohibited access to Wehrmacht brothels. In large urban centres and especially port cities, however, the High Command worked to erect brothels for the Nichtwaffenträger and for non-German NCOs and men enlisted in the Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS. Military patrols routinely inspected brothels to make sure that German troops were the only patrons and that all visiting soldiers were in possession of their identity papers. The price of admission to a brothel included two condoms (provided by the tenancier, or manager) and every room required a sign reminding soldiers that sex without a condom was forbidden. The minimum price for a visit was three Reichsmarks. High-class brothels could apply to the German Field Command (FK) to be able charge up to five marks, although prices were generally kept low. When brothels grew too expensive, clandestine prostitutes benefited because they

133 Vorschriften für belgische Bordelle, 19 Oct. 1940, AN AJ, Box 64, Folder 2; Bestimmungen für Wehrmachtbordelle, undated, BA-MA RH 36/444.
134 MBH, Med. IV/2, to the Wirtschafts-Abteilung, Gruppe Geld und Creditwesen, 21 Oct. 1940, AN AJ, Box 64, Folder 2.
137 AOK 6, Anlage 13, Anweisung für die Heeresstreife, 23 July 1940, BA-MA RH 20-6/1009.
138 Vorschriften für belgische Bordelle, 19 Oct. 1940, AN AJ, Box 64, Folder 2.
139 AOK 6, Anlage 9, Aufzuhängen in den Bordellen (für die Soldaten), 23 July 1940, BA-MA RH 20-6/1009.
offered lower rates for the same services. Alcohol was also permitted for sale in brothels, contrary to Belgian law, in order to make visiting brothels more attractive for troops.

By the middle of October 1940, there was one Offiziersheim in Charleroi and one in Bruges, with plans to erect further brothels for officers in Ghent, Liège and Brussels. Occupied Belgium was home to far more brothels designated for ordinary troops; by autumn 1940, there were two in Charleroi, two in Liège, one in Brussels and five in Leuven. There were also plans to erect more and cheaper brothels for the rank-and-file and for the Italian Luftwaffe, stationed in Belgium during the Battle of Britain. Houses, hotels and even castles, as in the case of a brothel planned for the city of Ath, were converted into functioning brothels. The following chart provides the number of authorized houses of prostitution as of October 1941, though not for everywhere in Belgium.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cities</th>
<th>Maisons reserved for the Wehrmacht</th>
<th>Maisons reserved for civilians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brussels</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liège</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruges</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oostende</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spa</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ypres</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wavre</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menin</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koksijde</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klemserkerke</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namur</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total for the country:</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Authorized brothels as of October 1941. Source: Note pour M. Le Secrétaire General, 9 Oct. 1941, AGR, Ministère de la Justice, Police des étrangers (I 417), Folder 1440.

It is perhaps surprising that Brussels did not have more official Wehrmachtsbordelle. In December 1941 there were five brothels in existence, of which only three were in operation. By the end of the war, only two remained open. Benoît Majerus has argued that small number of

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140 Seidler, Prostitution, 146.
141 The types of alcohol sold in brothels did, however, require approval. Kriegsverwaltungsrat van Randenboroughe, Vermerk, Betr.: Sittenpolizei, 10 Dec. 1941, AN AJ 40, Box 64, Folder 2; Majerus, Occupation et logiques, 235.
142 MBH, MVC, VII/3 and IV/2, Bericht über Dienstreise am 8.10.40, 9 Oct. 1940, AN AJ 40, Box 64, Folder 2.
143 Ibid; Dr. Schött to Verbindungsstab zur königl. Italienischen Luftwaffe, 25 Oct. 1940, AN AJ 40, Box 64, Folder 2; Dr. Schött to Verbindungsstab zur Kgl. Italian. Luftwaffe, 22 Nov. 1940, AN AJ 40, Box 64, Folder 2.
144 Van Randenboroughe, Vermerk, 10 Dec. 1941, AN AJ 40, Box 64, Folder 2.
functioning brothels related to the city’s support of abolitionism in the interwar period and that the difficulty of opening and sustaining brothels was a subtle form of opposition to German regulationism.¹⁴⁵

Brothels tended to cluster in cities and towns, often around the train stations and in and among certain neighbourhoods and streets.¹⁴⁶ In Leuven, there were at least 13 brothels in operation between 1940 and 1944, nine of which existed on just three streets and generally in buildings quite near to each other.¹⁴⁷ Part of the reason for this clustering was the designation of certain areas as “red-light” districts, a label still assigned to the area surrounding the Gare du Nord in present-day Brussels. Another likely explanation concerns the sex trade market and the pursuit of competition. One would-be tenancier in Brussels, Robert H., noted in a letter to Police Commissioner Lambert that in 1914 the Rue St. Laurent had housed four separate brothels; each of these had its own “genre” and operated successfully, but they were, first and foremost, competitors. He argued that such competition was “absolutely necessary,” because “if soldiers know that there are two or, even better, three or four houses, they will increasingly tell one another and thus avoid bars and taverns where they are duped in the price or end up with VD.” The existence of multiple houses along the same or nearby streets also ensured that if one maison encountered problems, such as the difficulties finding enough female employees or replacing those who left for another establishment or returned home, the other brothels could share or absorb the burden and guarantee the economic success of the prostitution industry.¹⁴⁸

Supply and demand for commercial sex in brothels sometimes did not align. Dr. Schött of the military administration complained that there were only two women “available” in a brothel in Menen, a town in West Flanders of approximately 30 000 inhabitants. The maison, reserved for the Germans and the Italian air force, was expecting to employ an additional six women but Dr. Schött still considered the number of prostitutes to be too low to satisfy demand; the mayor of the city was instructed to find at least ten more women to staff the brothel. The brothel’s

¹⁴⁶ See, for example: Lage der Bordelle in Brüssel und Antwerpen, 24 May 1940, AN AJ⁴⁰, Box 64, Folder 2.
¹⁴⁷ There were three brothels on Ravenstraat, four on Maria Theresiastraat and two on Naamschestraat. See an undated handwritten note with the streets and house numbers of brothels in Leuven, 15.662A, Orloog – Prostitutie – Regelmenting, Stadsarchief Leuven. This data was verified in the files of over 100 prostitutes in Leuven during the Second World War, which contained personal information, as well as the addresses of the brothels in which these women worked. See the files 15.661, 15.662A, 15.662B, 15.663A, 15.663B and 25.25g (2-2) in the Stadsarchief Leuven. See also a list of 84 “suspect houses” across 18 different streets in St. Gilles in Brussels. Police, Commune de Saint Gilles, 28 April 1941, AGR Ministère de la Justice, Police des étrangers (I 417), Folder 1440.
¹⁴⁸ Robert H. to Commissaire de Police, E. Lambert, 11 Oct. 1940, AN AJ⁴⁰, Box 64, Folder 2.
proprietor explained that there were twenty registered prostitutes in the city but these women moved freely and solicited in cafés and bars; because they could work where and when they wished and get a higher price for their services, these women, according to the tenancier, did not want permanent employment in a military brothel. Dr. Schött considered the whole situation “undesirable because on one hand it makes the control of prostitution difficult and on the other hand, soldiers are cheated in the price.” In some cases, women were “supplied” from other areas of Belgium and western Europe (chiefly France) or from concentration camps, to work in the brothels.

Though ad hoc brothelization had already been underway in occupied Poland since 1939-40, it was in western Europe that the military devised its official policy on the establishment of Wehrmachtsbordelle. In 1942, concerned about the proliferation of unregulated brothels and casual forms of sexual bartering in the newly occupied Soviet territories, the High Command instituted a system of brothelization modelled on that established earlier in Belgium and France. Back in the west, the practice of Kasernierung in Belgium continued more or less uninterrupted for the duration of the war. Well into 1944, just two months before the Germans were forced to retreat, brothels were still being opened.

Clandestine Prostitution and the 3 January 1941 Law

Even as the OKH organized the system of brothelization in the west to control sexual interactions between its soldiers and local women, it remained preoccupied with clandestine prostitution, which offered, in the words of the Heeresarzt, “the highest risks” because it eluded

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149 Dr. Schött to OFK 570, MVC, Betr.: Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten, 25 Oct. 1940, AN AJ 40, Box 64, Folder 2.
150 Bericht über Dienstreise, 9 Oct. 1940, AN AJ 40, Box 64, Folder 2; Paul, Zwangsprostitution, 106.
152 Insa Meinen has suggested that the July directives operated as “landmark rulings” in the sense that they provided the framework for a system of brothelization and regulated prostitution that remained in place until the liberation of France in 1944. Meinen, Wehrmacht und Prostitution, 17. I would extend Meinen’s thesis to argue that the July directives became the model for the systems of regulationism established in most of occupied Europe as well as Germany itself. The policy of confining prostitutes re-emerged within the Reich in October 1940; paragraph 17 of the German VD law, which had eliminated Kasernierung, was abolished. See RGBl. I 1940, s. 1459, §17.
153 Commissariat de Police, Verviers, Rapport, 3 July 1944, AGR Ministère de la Justice, Police des étrangers (I 417), Folder 1440. See also Province Brabant, OFK 672, Tätigkeitsbericht der Abt. IVb für die Zeit vom 1. März bis 31. März 1944, BA-MA RH 36/122.
Clandestine women were difficult to identify because they operated on their own terms, on their own schedules and in self-selected spaces; they also did not look different from other women and were hard to identify. As a local police inspector reported to the district commander in Brussels, “where women come into question… it is of course almost impossible immediately to determine if they are prostitutes or not.”

Across Belgium, German commanders worried about the “great unknown” of casual or clandestine prostitution because of its seeming infinite nature; there was no way to estimate how many women were actually engaging in sex work in some form, let alone monitor what these women did with the German troops they solicited.

In Ghent, the Stadtkommandant, Captain Schiffer, found it hard to believe that in a city of over 160,000 inhabitants, only 15 women were “official” prostitutes and subjected to medical control. He insisted that the city was home to a large but as yet unknown number of clandestine prostitutes. Over in the province of Limburg, the German occupiers were equally skeptical of the governor’s claim that there were no prostitutes in the entire province. Dr. Holm interpreted this “surprising finding” not to mean that the province was free of prostitutes, but only that no entries had been made in the prostitutes’ register and thus there were no “official” prostitutes.

Meanwhile, in Antwerp, city officials noted that the morals police often ventured out to the city’s suburbs, since almost half of the women – waitresses, barmaids and “good time girls” who were expected to get customers to buy expensive drinks – singled out by the German military command for routinely being caught with soldiers in hotels and boarding houses did not actually live in the city centre.

The German occupiers could not afford to ignore the booming prostitution industry outside of authorized brothels and pressured the Belgian civil authorities in Brussels to take...
action, insisting that the free movement of prostitutes in Belgian public spaces be restricted.\textsuperscript{160} The result was a law promulgated by the civil authorities on 3 January 1941, which combined the 25 June 1940 law with those from July and September 1940.\textsuperscript{161} This legislation was designed to prosecute occasional, casual or clandestine sex workers as well as any individuals suspected of endorsing or participating in the commercial sex trade. Clandestine prostitution was made punishable by law, as was the provision of houses, apartments or rooms for this purpose.\textsuperscript{162} The new law also provided for an intensification of the medical control of prostitutes, adding an annual clinical exam for tuberculosis to the existent sexual health examinations.\textsuperscript{163} Article 6 stipulated that if a prostitute presented symptoms of VD, she was to be isolated in a hospital designed by the provincial governor until fully treated. A third important provision extended this medical control to the tenanciers and staff of brothels, as well as the spouses and concubines, or common-law partners, of prostitutes; all of these individuals became subject to the exact same medical tests for VD and tuberculosis.\textsuperscript{164}

A subsequent law promulgated on 19 June 1941 made “venereal contamination” a criminal offence if a person knew or suspected that he or she had contracted VD and continued to engage in sexual relations with others.\textsuperscript{165} This stipulation was intended to act as an additional hygienic tool to combat prostitution, given the assumption that sex workers were chiefly responsible for spreading VD.\textsuperscript{166} But the legislation had broader gendered implications; because the law explicitly (and purposely) did not refer to prostitutes, it was flexible in its scope and

\textsuperscript{160} Beckmann to Craushaar, 15 March 1941, AN AJ\textsuperscript{40}, Box 64, Folder 2; Leit. San. Offz., OFK 589 to MBH, MVC, Gruppe Med., Btr.: Bekämpfung von Geschlechtskrankheiten, 23 Dec. 1941, AN AJ\textsuperscript{40}, Box 64, Folder 2; OFK 589, Verwaltungschef, Lagebericht für die Zeit von Mitte Februar bis Mitte Mai 1942, 15 May 1942, CEGES AA 524.

\textsuperscript{161} Arrêté revisant et coordonnant les dispositions relatives à la prostitution - 3 Jan. 1941, Moniteur Belge, no. 16, 16 Jan. 1941, 314-6. Not long after the promulgation of the January law in Belgium, French officials in Northern France passed a law regarding VD control that essentially corresponded to the Belgian legislation. Tätigkeitsbericht der MV für den Monate Feb. 1941, Nr. 14, 2 March 1941, BA-MA RW 36/184, Bl. 72.

\textsuperscript{162} Arrêté - 3 Jan. 1941; Craushaar to OFKs and FKs, Btr.: Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten, 22 Feb. 1941, AN AJ\textsuperscript{40}, Box 64, Folder 2; Circulaire, Procureur du Roi, 1 Aug. 1941, AVB Guerre40-45, Box 48.

\textsuperscript{163} This addition to the January law had long been desired by the Germans who assumed the poor lifestyles of prostitutes not only made them likely to be contaminated with VD, but also with tuberculosis. Dr. Craushaar to Ministry of the Interior and Public Health, Public Health Section, Btr.: Verordnung über die Prostitution, 4 Nov. 1940, AN AJ\textsuperscript{40}, Box 64, Folder 2.

\textsuperscript{164} Arrêté - 3 Jan. 1941; Circulaire, Procureur du Roi, 1 Aug. 1941, AVB Guerre40-45, Box 48.

\textsuperscript{165} Arrêté relatif à la prophylaxie des maladies vénériennes – 16 June. 1941, Moniteur Belge, no. 177, 26 June 1941, 4565-7.

\textsuperscript{166} Majerus, Occupations et logiques, 237.
enabled application to categories of “public women” – waitresses, servants, barmaids – whose professions were associated de facto with sex work in Belgium.\(^{167}\)

As Dr. Holm reported, the January law came as “something of a surprise” to the Belgians, who believed that they had already taken substantial measures to curb clandestine prostitution by limiting sex work to brothels.\(^{168}\) In a memorandum to all of the OFKs and FKs, the vice president of Reeder’s administration, Dr. Harry von Craushaar observed that these provisions marked “a complete departure from the up-to-now conventional rules here [in Belgium].”\(^{169}\) The January law and its complements marked a rupture in terms of regulation of prostitution in Belgium in two key ways: first, in its criminalization of all prostitution occurring outside of brothels, it effectively implied that all women had the potential to “provoke debauchery and have sexual relations with soldiers.”\(^{170}\) Second, the law formalized the conviction among German officials that the brothel was not the problem; rather, the hundreds of other commercial and public spaces in a given city facilitated unmonitored interactions between German men and Belgian women.\(^{171}\)

**A Case Study: The Prostitutes’ Registers**

Two illustrative examples of how the legal framework strove to collapse the distinctions between women’s professions and public conduct lay in the prostitutes’ registers, which expanded under the January law to include clandestine sex workers. Because there were no guidelines on how this registration was to be carried out, the resulting procedures were arbitrary. In the spring of 1941, Dr. Craushaar issued a memo to the administrative heads of the OFKs and FKs, noting that their variable reports proved, “the registration of prostitutes is extraordinarily divergent. It varies between a hundred and several thousand.”\(^{172}\) In some provinces, 1500 prostitutes were registered and in others, 150 and fewer.\(^{173}\)

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\(^{167}\) The Germans’ circle of “suspect women” grew larger in other areas of occupied Europe as well as Belgium. On the arbitrary expansion of the supervision and persecution of “suspect women,” who could be targeted purely based on their physical appearance, in the occupied eastern territories, see Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen*, 168-75.

\(^{168}\) Dr. Holm, Besprechung am 7.5.41, AN AJ^40^, Box 64, Folder 2.

\(^{169}\) Craushaar to OFKs and FKs, 22 Feb. 1941, AN AJ^40^, Box 64, Folder 2.

\(^{170}\) Some civil officials argued that the police had targeted women working in a public capacity since June 1940. Police, Commune de Saint Gilles, 28 April 1941, AGR Ministère de la Justice, Police des étrangers (I 417), Folder 1440.

\(^{171}\) Dr. Holm, Besprechung am 7.5.41, AN AJ^40^, Box 64, Folder 2.

\(^{172}\) Craushaar to OFKs and FKs, 6 May 1941, AN AJ^40^, Box 64, Folder 2.

\(^{173}\) Tätigkeitsbericht der MV für den Monat April 1941, Nr. 16, 9 May 1941, BA-MA RW 36/186, Bl. 82. In Brussels, within the first eighteen months of the occupation, the number of registered prostitutes quadrupled from the prewar figure. Majerus, *Occupations et logiques*, 230.
The possibility of incorporating clandestine prostitutes and other female employees of suspicious bars, restaurants and cafés into the central municipal registers had already been a subject of debate among both occupier and occupied. Before the war, municipal officials registered barmaids according to the address of their place of employment because cities imposed a special tax on waitresses, dancers and singers and all establishments that sold alcohol. Shortly after the promulgation of the June 1940 law, the mayor of Mons attempted to pass a regulation requiring tenanciers of bars, tobacco shops and rooming houses with female employees to ensure the registration and medical certification of these women, allegedly at the behest of Feldkommandantur. At the time, Delhaye reproached the mayor for overstepping with the proposed decree, which “far exceeded the powers of the mayor and the provisions prepared in my law from 25 June 1940 regulating prostitution.”

Across the linguistic divide, in Ghent in the summer of 1940, Captain Schiffer had also approached members of the College of the Mayor and Aldermen about the possibility of forcing barmaids to undergo regular medical exams, or “if this measure seems too draconian, to start with the staff of establishments where women hang around at the door or window and attract passersby with winks and other gestures.” He also recommended “spontaneous visits” of suspect cafés; if clients were found in rooms other than the main room, the female personnel would have to submit to medical exams. Finally, he desired that if any soldier testified he had been “contaminated” by a woman in the city and could be somewhat precise about it, the woman be obliged to visit a doctor. The initiatives eventually drawn up in the first half of 1941 aimed to realize a viewpoint held by the Germans, and also some Belgians, since the beginning of the occupation: all members of the female sex were suspect of illicit activity.

In 1941, some Belgian policemen expressed concern about the legal and political implications of adding “suspect” women to the prostitutes’ registers. Entrance onto the official lists signified the curtailment of certain civil rights, including the active (the right to vote) and

174 See the Boek der Herbergmeide, tot 1941, Stadsarchief Mechelen; Police du Grand-Bruxelles, Cabinet du Commissaire en chef, Ordres journaliers, no. 340, Etablissements susceptibles d’être soumis à la taxe, 29 March 1943, AVB Guerre40-45, Box 1.
175 Delhaye declared that he was not aware of any such order issued from the Germans. Mayor of Mons, Arrêté, 3 July 1940, AGR Administration de la Santé Publique, Folder 536; Delhaye to Secretary-General, Ministry of Justice, 19 July 1940, AGR Administration de la Santé Publique, Folder 536.
176 Delhaye to M. le Président de la Députation Permanente du Hainaut, 19 July 1940, AGR Administration de la Santé Publique, Folder 536. For another attempt to target women beyond official prostitutes before the January law, see Hoofdcommissaris van Politie to Stadsadvokat, 11 Nov. 1940, Stadsarchief Antwerp Politiearchief, 731#897.
177 Stad Gent, Dr. Lesselier, Verslag, 13 June 1940, Stadsarchief Gent IV 353-354.
passive (the right to stand for election) suffrage. Perhaps imagining a future in which Belgium was not occupied and in which political rights had real value, local policemen in Ghent hesitated to add waitresses, barmaids, dancers and other women in public life to the city’s register. Their reluctance stemmed from the “considerable legal disadvantages” that would be accorded to such women, “quite apart from the moral condemnation,” including the loss of suffrage and prohibition of certain commercial activities. Occupation authorities dismissed these concerns about legal and economic marginalization and disenfranchisement as inconsequential and insisted that every suspected prostitute be registered.

Rather than focus on the political and economic ramifications of the initiative to group women working in the service industry together with registered prostitutes, the Crown Prosecutor in the Court of Appeal in Brussels articulated his opposition on moral grounds. He argued that not all bars, tobacco shops and rooming houses were deserving of the designation “disreputable” (mal famé); nor should well-behaved salesgirls and chambermaids be “subject in the same way as the fallen girls [les filles perdues] to a shameful medical control.” He feared that targeting the innocent would have the unwelcome reverse effect of actually encouraging them into sex work: “Rather than submit to degrading medical examinations, the interested persons will prefer without a doubt to abandon their livelihood at the benefit of misguided women whose modesty will not be offended by a similar control, and at the risk of some harm to the reputation of institutions, which will have no other recourse but this déclassé personnel.”

One strategy devised by local German commanders in Belgium, including those in Antwerp, Ghent and Mons, Greater Liège, Verviers and Huy, was the drawing up of a second list of suspect women for medical examination to complement the official municipal registers of prostitutes. This second list included women who, as the district commander in Mons put it, “are not prostitutes but nevertheless engage in indiscriminate sexual activity.”

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178 Verwaltungsche OFK 570 to MVC, 29 March 1941, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2.
179 Craushaar to OFKs and FKs, 6 May 1941, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2. Others similarly agreed that irrespective of these legal issues and registration on the official list of prostitutes, all women had to be controlled and regularly inspected. Verwaltungsche OFK 570 to MVC, 29 March 1941, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2.
180 Procureur General, Parquet de la Cour D’Appel, to Secretary-General, 11 July 1940, AGR Administration de la Santé Publique, Folder 536.
181 Dr. Holm to OFK 520, Abt. Volksgesundheit, 28 Oct. 1941, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2. See also the creation of lists in other municipalities; Genesheer-Bestuurder, Gent, Dr. Lesselier aan het Scheppencollege der Stad Gent, 13 June 1940, Stadsarchief Gent IV 353-354; MVC, MBH to OFKs and FKs, Verwaltungsche, Betr.: Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten, 7 May 1941, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2; Dr. Holm, Vermerk, Betr.: Prostitution, 7 May 1941, AN AJ40, Box 64; OFK 589 to MVC, MBH, Betr.: Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten, 13 June
auxiliary registers would be required to present themselves to a physician once per week, in contrast to the biweekly examinations required of official prostitutes. Actual statistics on the dual lists demonstrate that the construction of a second register enabled German military and Belgian civilian authorities to draw more women into the system of medical and police surveillance. In Ghent in March 1941, the official register of prostitutes listed 24 women; an additional list recorded 137 women who required medical supervision. Of these 137, 78 women were obliged by police to undergo examination, while 59 women from certain restaurants voluntarily consulted a physician. In Antwerp, the dissonance between the two lists was even sharper. The number of registered prostitutes in March 1941 was 81, whereas a second list presented the names of 962 “risky women” (gefährdete Frauen).

The creation of a second list was no easy task, since the distinction between the women in question was remarkably difficult. As municipal authorities in Mechelen pointed out, how could policemen and physicians on the ground distinguish between actual femmes publiques, “who make debauchery their livelihood,” and women, “who by the nature of their employment (in particular waitresses in the pubs) run the risk of becoming infected”? The police in Brussels further confirmed that “nothing distinguishes a priori prostitutes from other women.”

City officials in Mechelen suggested that the nature of the establishment was a good indication, though more information was needed: “The fact that certain women have intercourse with German soldiers or visited inns frequented by German soldiers should never be conclusive, but rather, the findings of the municipal authorities about the behavior of some women and the

182 Kreiskommandant Mons to Mayor Cuesmes, 24 May 1941, AN AJ, Box 64, Folder 2; Verwaltungschef, FK 520, to MVC Betr.: Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten, 17 June 1941, AN AJ, Box 64, Folder 2; Prof. Dr Libbrecht to Dr. Holm, Extrait, 17 Sept. 1941, AN AJ, Box 64, Folder 2.
183 Verwaltungschef OFK 570 to MVC, 29 March 1941, AN AJ, Box 64, Folder 2.
184 Leit. San. der OFKdtr. 672 to MBH, Med. IV/2, 18 March 1941, AN AJ, Box 64, Folder 2. A report from the mayor of Antwerp to the Ministry of the Interior and Public Health in Brussels, from February 1941, presents higher numbers of both prostitutes and waitresses who were subject to medical control than the German report of a month later: 103-105 and 900, respectively. Mayor Delwaide to Secretary-General of the Ministry of the Interior and Public Health, 3 Feb. 1941, Stadsarchief Antwerpen Politiearchief 731#897.
185 Dr. Holm to OFK 520, Mons, 28 Oct. 1941, AN AJ, Box 64, Folder 2.
186 Stad Mechelen, C. Neefs to Burgemeesters der aan het Mechelsch Controlecentrum onderworpen Gemeenten, 3 April 1941, Stadsarchief Mechelen Secretariaatsarchief Vak 39, Reglementen, 1941, Folder 2.
187 Cabinet du Bourgmestre, Police, 29 Dec. 1941, AGR Ministère de la Justice, Police des étrangers (I 417), Folder 1440.
reputation of certain inns, regardless of the specific visit.”

The issue of whether or not a woman had had sex with a German soldier was largely irrelevant; instead, the targeting of “suspicious” women depended on gender-specific ideas of sociability and morality and conceptions about the nature of the space in which women were employed.

The city police in Antwerp worried that civil agents were placing women on the list of “risky persons” with little evidence. Kriegsverwaltungsrat Dr. Walter Beckmann wanted to standardize the procedure, so that only women confirmed without doubt to be engaging in sex work were added to the prostitutes’ registers; he further urged that this task be undertaken by the medical section of the German command so as to bolster the legitimacy of the action. He was concerned that a generalized campaign against women would aggravate tensions between occupier and occupied and defeat the goals of the anti-VD campaign:

The inclusion of ‘risky persons’ in the list of Unzuchtfrauen appears highly questionable because it would identify for the rest of their lives a large number of women in other professions, who would be medically examined as prostitutes; as a result, the measures of the military administration would be felt with reason to be hostile and unfair. The purpose of the local mechanisms to monitor continuously the largest possible number of women and to prevent the spread of VD would thus not be achieved.

In a practical capacity as well, the expansion of registries was called into question; some Belgians considered the system to be a futile and politically difficult task with minimal returns. Deputy Commissioner Mattys of the morals police in Brussels informed the German command that he did not see the value of constructing two registers, doubting whether “through a significant expansion [of the register] more individuals could be consulted for a medical examination.” In the end, labeling all women working in public enterprises as “prostitutes” had the opposite of the desired effect. The expansion of the registers and granting of Kontrollkarten in fact worked to turn women into streetwalkers who may not otherwise have entered the profession.

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188 Neefs to Burgemeesters, 3 April 1941, Stadsarchief Mechelen Secretariaatsarchief, Vak 39, Regelmenten, 1941, Folder 2.
189 Beckmann, FK 520, to MVC, 17 June 1941, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2.
190 MVC – Pol., Aktenvermerk, 27 Nov. 1941, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2. See also Police, Commune de Saint Gilles, 28 April 1941, AGR Ministère de la Justice, Police des étrangers (I 417), Folder 1440.
191 Cabinet du Bourgmestre, Police, 29 Dec. 1941, AGR Ministère de la Justice, Police des étrangers (I 417), Folder 1440.
The Limits of Regulationism?

Reservations about the usefulness of the January law extended to its other stipulations as well and even the Germans, who had pressured the Belgian civil authorities to enact it in the first place, doubted its efficacy. Dr. Craushaar argued that the law was neither complete nor comprehensive because it failed to address the issue of tracing the sources of infection and raised problems with the anonymous reporting of cases. Dr. Beckmann in Antwerp deemed the law full of “significant gaps and deficiencies,” partly because it did not consider all of the variables contributing to the spread of clandestine prostitution and VD in urban environments. He noted that Antwerp, one of Belgium’s largest Flemish cities, faced difficulties carrying out the stipulations of the January law because of the sheer size of the city; German specialists as well as the medical officers of the FK could “promise no success of these measures, even if the implementation of the sanctions was enforced.”

Belgian municipal officials shared Beckmann’s view. The police in the commune of St. Gilles in Brussels declared in spring 1941 that “the law is unenforceable,” pointing out that if they were to suspect all women and spaces of participation in the sex trade, there were too many places and people to supervise. Consider, for example, the enforcement of Article 15 of the January law, which required the closure of tobacco shops, bars, taverns, salons and “rendez-vous” houses considered by the police to be suspect “from the point of view of morals.” In St. Gilles alone, an area of less than three square kilometres, the police estimated there were at least 78 such institutions in eighteen streets with up to 150 serveuses and proprietors. Other gaps in the legislation further frustrated German regulatory efforts. “Pimps,” men who facilitated the sex trade, could easily escape charges of procurement if they could prove they had a profession. The Chief Medical Officer of the OFK in Liège reported with frustration that pimps often brought small suitcases full of matchbooks and shoelaces to bars and brothels as evidence that they were peddlers and in this way evaded police and medical control.

In general, shutting down bars, cafés and brothels and the designation of certain streets and areas as “off limits” for German troops were ineffective. The Chief Medical Officer of the

\[192\] OFK 589, Verwaltungschef, Lagebericht, 15 May 1942, CEGES AA 524.
\[193\] Craushaar to OFKs and FKs, 22 Feb. 1941, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2.
\[194\] Beckmann, FK 520, to MVC, 17 June 1941, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2.
\[195\] Police, Commune de Saint Gilles, 28 April 1941, AGR Ministère de la Justice, Police des étrangers (I 417), Folder 1440.
OFK in Liège noted that the closure of a number of “dubious locales” had an adverse effect whereby “hundreds of women are driven onto the street and elude control, which is not the goal of an effective fight against VD.”197 When brothels closed their doors or when women were found engaging in clandestine prostitution and subsequently registered, where were the women to go? In Brussels, existing brothels could accommodate 200 prostitutes – what happened, asked the St. Gilles Deputy Comissioner, to the other 1600? Or what was to be done with elderly or other “undesirable” sex workers?198

In the spring of 1941, certain agencies reported that it was difficult to accommodate all sex workers in brothels or in regular civil work (since prostitutes had to be confined in some way according to the January 1941 law).199 Prohibitions and closures often led to the relocation, not cessation, of the commercial sex trade in towns and cities. As an anonymous Flemish journalist noted, the Inkfetionsherde simply moved to streets where the possibilities for successful soliciting were better and the control mechanisms relatively weak.200 In Brussels, where parts of Schouwbergstraat were forbidden to occupation troops while other sections with “suspicious premises” remained opened, there was debate about whether the surrounding sketchy establishments, including one by the name of “Le Singe d’Or,” should be shut down. A notice prohibiting entrance to German soldiers was put up at the bar but quickly torn down. As the anonymous journalist observed, “The prohibition measures only have the result that prostitution emerged where it had up to now not practiced its mischief.”201

**Conclusion: Results and Contradictions**

The campaign undertaken in the first eighteen months of the occupation to institute regulated prostitution and the medical and police monitoring of all women working in a public capacity provided what the German occupation authority thought Belgian society needed: a national and unified policy on prostitution and VD control. German regulatory investment in sex work stemmed from a recognition that “safe sex” – sex that was monitored, regulated and circumscribed – could be valuable. On one level, the military argued that providing soldiers with

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197 Leit. San. Offz., OFK 589 to MVC, 14 March 1941, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2.
198 Police, Commune de Saint Gilles, 28 April 1941, AGR Ministère de la Justice, Police des étrangers (I 417), Folder 1440.
199 Craushaar to OFKs and FKS, 6 May 1941, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2.
200 Dr. K.P., “Die Bekämpfung der Prostitution in Gross-Brüssel,” 8 July 1940, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2; OFK 672 to MBH, MVC, Med. IV/2, Btr.: Prostituiertenüberwachung, 30 July 1940, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2; Zehntagesbericht, MV, Nr. 1, 22 Aug. 1940, BA-MA RW 36/208, Bl. 10.
201 Dr. K.P., 8 July 1940, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2.
access to women in German-authorized brothels who were regularly examined kept soldiers sexually healthy and curbed the spread of VD among Belgian civilians and German administrative and military personnel alike.

In practice, the results of the 1940-41 laws were varied. The Germans argued that the “formerly quite insufficient” system of detecting sexually transmitted diseases in Belgium had improved significantly with the expansion of the registration and medical control of female civilians. In the summer of 1940, the Belgian police had had a single, outdated list of 18 prostitutes; by the end of the first year of occupation, that list had grown to include 850 women. A similar phenomenon occurred regarding the medical control of prostitutes. Only seven women were undergoing treatment in Brussels at the beginning of the occupation; the Kontrollprogramm increased the number of infected women requiring medical attention to 117. At no point, however, did VD subside considerably in Belgium; infection rates remained notoriously inconsistent, rising one month and falling the next.

Meanwhile, the intensification of regulatory mechanisms facilitated a surge in prostitution outside of brothels. Part of the reason for this reverse effect has to do with what Ashwini Tambe has identified as the productive power of laws and regulations. Laws on prostitution expanded the channels of power, for example, by targeting categories of working women not previously considered prostitutes, like waitresses and dancers. A second reason was that much of the legislation codified centuries-old regulatory practices, such as the creation of prostitutes’ registers and police raids, and necessarily required local initiative and collaboration. The German occupiers needed Belgians to participate, or collaborate, in the regulation of prostitution. Coercion was not politically viable, nor did the military command have the manpower to be able to manage the sexual economy of occupied Belgium on its own. The ways in which management of sex work transposed from the realm of legal politics into the realm of everyday life is the topic to which we now turn.

202 Tätigkeitsbericht der MV für den Monat September 1940, Nr. 9, 1 Oct. 1940, BA-MA RW 36/179, Bl. 43.
203 Dr. Schött to Propaganda-Abteilung Belgien, 5 Dec. 1940, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2.
204 Just a month after the January law, as military divisions became more mobile in preparation for Operation Barbarossa, VD in Belgium increased. Tätigkeitsbericht der MV für den Monat Feb. 1941, Nr. 14, 2 March 1941, BA-MA RW 36/184, Bl. 72. See also the data on the St. Josse-ten-Noode hospital and the anti-venereal clinic on Rue St. Laurent for 1941-2, AGR Administration de la Santé Publique, Folder 540. For VD rates near the end of the war, see the activity reports from the Chief Medical Office, OFK 672, 1 Feb.-31 July 1944, BA-MA RH 36/122.
205 Tambe, Codes of Misconduct, 124.
Chapter 3
Making Sex Safe: Actors and Action in the Fight against the “Venereal Scourge”

In August 1944, two months after D-Day, as Allied tanks were rolling through western Europe, liberating occupied populations as they went, the Chef der Heeresrüstung und Befehlshaber des Ersatzheeres made a crucial admission. “In most cases,” he acknowledged, “sex is uncontrollable.”¹ This had become increasingly apparent throughout the second half of the war in occupied Belgium, where after four years of occupation, sex had not lost its lustre for German troops. Soldiers did not stop having or paying for sex at any point, even as the prospect of active battle returning to the Belgian landscape looked increasingly likely after D-Day. Medical stations attached to the Frontleitstelle of the OFK 672 in Brussels recorded 737 visits by troops in February 1944 and 820 the next month. By July the number of visits had risen to 965.²

The German High Command had long argued that a regulated sexual economy was the best way to provide soldiers in occupied territories with the sexual resources and rewards they “needed” and deserved and, at the same time, maintain control of those resources. But if the female sex worker’s body was intended to contribute to the sustainability of the occupation regime and the Third Reich by keeping soldiers fit, strong and invested in their pursuits, it also required management. What the German occupiers in Belgium did not grasp in 1940-41 when they pressured representatives of the Belgian government to legislate a regulationist system of prostitution control, was that such a system required significant oversight and necessitated an apparatus of enforcement and a regime of popular compliance. This chapter explores how the German command, unwilling to restrict its men from participation in the local sexual economy, instead designated Belgian municipal authorities, police officials, medical professionals, brothel proprietors and even local women as the first line of defense against the spread of clandestine prostitution and VD. Shifting the regulatory campaign from the centre of occupation power to the periphery, however, left a wide margin for error. The military underestimated the unpredictability of human action in Belgium, forgetting perhaps that individuals do not always behave as expected, or as ordered.

In order to secure military victory, the German High Command needed to distribute its human resources, including soldiers, officers, doctors and surgeons, to the front, particularly

after the summer of 1941, when it appeared that the final showdown in the Soviet Union would be protracted. As scholars of the German occupation in Belgium have observed, the military occupation relied on a cooperative population across the board, from the Committee of Secretaries-General to Belgian industry and its main holding company, the Société générale, to the ordinary Belgians supporting the Nazi war economy by labouring for it – for the most part willingly until the end of 1941. This policy of cooperation, or collaboration, with local agencies and individuals reached into the realm of intimacy; even as the German occupiers sought to determine the contours of the Kontrollprogramm erected in 1940-41, they were reluctant to take an active role in prostitution control, a marked difference from the First World War.

This chapter provides insight into this diffuse system of occupation by focusing on the everyday actors and agencies tasked with both harnessing and regulating women’s intimate labour in the Belgian sexual economy. Chapter two examined how the Germans mobilized Belgian law in their pursuit to draw sex workers under their regulatory thumb and monitor the types of services and experiences they sold to German troops in Belgian towns and cities; here I provide more of a social history of prostitution and analyze the individuals affected by the resulting regulatory legislation. The laws of 25 June 1940 and 3 January 1941 assigned the enforcement and execution of prostitution and VD control to local mayors, physicians, policemen and brothel owners. At the core of this system of social surveillance was the sex worker herself, expected to protect German troops by sacrificing her privacy, bodily integrity and free movement. Following Insa Meinen’s observation that real and suspected prostitutes – women targeted solely on the basis of their intimate contact with German troops – have received

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little attention by historians of World War II, this chapter resituates the prostitute as an agent, and not simply an object, of sexual commerce in occupied Belgium. \(^5\)

Shifting the analysis from legislation regarding VD and prostitution to individuals and their responses to policies enacted from above sparks discussion about the possibilities and boundaries of agency, noncompliance and empowerment; we can thus consider ‘old’ questions about collaboration and resistance as well as relations between occupier and occupied in a new frame. For several decades now, feminist historians have pondered the question of whether sex work offered women an opportunity to escape traditional sexual and domestic roles. \(^6\) A growing body of literature on prostitution and sexual bartering in German-occupied Europe in World War II has asked similar questions about agency and the capacity for survival. \(^7\) Regina Mühlhäuser warns against romanticizing or glorifying sexual relations between occupier and occupied as spaces for agency, drawing attention to the inseparability of social relations from the hierarchical power relationships that characterized the occupation. \(^8\)


\(^6\) For example, in her work on prostitutes in Victorian England, Judith Walkowitz argues that though prostitutes still operated within the rigid constraints of a class-stratified and patriarchal society, they were not passive victims and could manipulate their situations in some ways. By contrast, Julia Bruggeman has stressed that sex workers were never empowered by their situations because they continued to be controlled by men, including police, physicians, judges, pimps, brothel owners and clients. See Julia Bruggemann, “The Business of Sex: Evaluating Prostitution in the German Port City of Hamburg,” in *Women, Business and Finance in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, eds. Robert Beachy, Béatrice Craig and Alastair Owens (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 193; Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 31.


\(^8\) Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen*, 8.
I further caution against an automatic reading of incidences of noncompliance by Belgian civilians, including but not limited to sex workers, as either demonstrations of empowerment or acts of resistance. The available source material provides little insight into the motivations of prostitutes, doctors, _tenanciers_, policemen and bureaucrats who failed to follow the rules, making it difficult to determine whether these individuals acted in their own interests or with some larger political agenda in mind. Cases where the occupying authorities accused the Belgians of lying, or vice versa, are similarly difficult to assess and so here disagreements and controversies are analyzed less for their veracity than for what they reveal about the politics of occupation. The frequency of incidents whereby ordinary Belgians disobeyed the official regulations on prostitution and VD control, as well as those incidents of defiance imagined or anticipated by the German authorities, expose the tenuousness of relations between occupier and occupied in everyday life. The uneasy duality between German military and medical officials’ reliance on and suspicion of Belgian men and women exposed the cracks in their own occupation structure. An exploration of how rhetoric and regulations relating to prostitution played out in reality illustrates that the occupation was not as totalizing as the Germans intended it to be.\(^9\)

The first part of this chapter examines the High Command’s attempts to instruct German troops about the importance of “safe sex” with “safe women” and the mobilization of measures such as guidelines on sexual hygiene, the distribution of condoms and the establishment of hygiene stations and VD treatment centres. The military never rigorously enforced such measures because they challenged soldiers’ “right” to access women’s bodies. Part two analyzes the real targets of anti-VD discourse and regulations on the ground in Belgium: female sex workers. This section situates the woman at the center of German insecurity about the nature of the occupation and highlights some of the ways in which women moved within and between the occupational structures designed to oppress them. The final part of the chapter examines the political, civil, professional and everyday actors tasked with leading the charge against clandestine prostitution.

**Reaching Out to German Soldiers**

The High Command considered all fighting troops susceptible to risky sexual behaviour and venereal infection, although generalized statistics disguised the fact that younger soldiers in

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9 I have taken this insight from Ashwini Tambe’s study of prostitution in colonial India: *Codes of Misconduct: Regulating Prostitution in Late Colonial Bombay* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).
mobile divisions had a higher incidence of VD than the stationary divisions of primarily older soldiers.\textsuperscript{10} Warmer weather also correlated to the spread of VD, since it made soldiers more likely to go outside to socialize and opened up spatial opportunities for sexual encounters.\textsuperscript{11} Further, the very presence of troops facilitated the commercial sex industry; in 1942, the medical officer of the 15\textsuperscript{th} Army Command, active along the Atlantic coast in Belgium and northern France, noticed a marked increase in prostitution that corresponded to the arrival of troops from the eastern front, whose ample money purses encouraged a flood of prostitutes from near and far into the billeting area.\textsuperscript{12}

The German military in Belgium designed numerous measures to discourage soldiers from engaging in promiscuous sex, relying foremost on the discourse of sexual restraint. A medical decree issued by the OFK in Liège on 3 June 1940 invited German soldiers to “think about the fact that extramarital sex is always a danger, especially in times of war.”\textsuperscript{13} Two weeks later, the OFK in Mons made a more explicit appeal to abstinence as “the surest protection” against VD, noting that such self-restraint “is by no means as harmful to health as is often assumed.”\textsuperscript{14} Other rhetorical strategies focused on entreat ing soldiers to consider their sense of communal duty and place the collective above their own desires.\textsuperscript{15} The decree from Liège argued that men who let themselves become infected with VD “in a time when the Vaterland struggles for its existence and needs every man” were no different than those who mutiliated themselves to escape military service. Such selfish individuals were undeserving of being called German men and soldiers: “Whoever really believes that he cannot do without sex, think first of all of the comrades who stand at the frontline.”\textsuperscript{16}

To keep soldiers distracted from the temptations of occupied Europe, the German military organized soldiers’ free or off-duty time. As one medical inspector, Dr. Siegfried

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{10}Oberstabsarzt Dr. Holm, MBH, Med. IV/2, Besprechung über Prostitutionsfrage am 7.5.41, 6 May 1941 [sic], AN AJ\textsuperscript{40}, Box 64, Folder 2; Tätigkeitsbericht des Armeearztes 15 vom 1. Januar 1943-30. Juni 1943, BA-MA RH 20-15/158. In the fall of 1940, the military command deemed it especially necessary to construct brothels as soon as possible in cities with high numbers of troops staying for a prolonged period of time, like Ghent. MBH, MVC, VII/3 and IV/2, Bericht über Dienstreise am 8.10.40, 9 Oct. 1940, AN AJ\textsuperscript{40}, Box 64, Folder 2.
\bibitem{12}Tätigkeitsbericht des Armeearztes 15 über das Jahr 1942, BA-MA RH 20-15/157.
\bibitem{13}OFK 589, Sanitäts-Befehl, 3 June 1940, AN AJ\textsuperscript{40}, Box 64, Folder 2.
\bibitem{14}OFK 520, Besondere Anordnungen Nr. 38, 16 June 1940, AN AJ\textsuperscript{40}, Box 64, Folder 2. See also Kreiskommandantur 510, Bruges, Kommandanturbefehl, undated, BA-MA RH 36/401.
\bibitem{16}OFK 589, 3 June 1940, AN AJ\textsuperscript{40}, Box 64, Folder 2. See also OKH, gez. von Brauchitsch, 31 July 1940, BA-MA RH 12-23/1371.
\end{thebibliography}
Handloser, instructed in December 1940: “The leisure time of troops is to be used for relaxation and entertainment and should, through artistic, spiritual and ethical values, strengthen and promote the soldiers in spirit and character. Racy shows and sexually provocative theater or dance events are therefore unsuitable.” In Brussels, Wehrmacht soldiers could enroll in a wide range of courses, including beginner’s French, history, architecture, drawing and photography.

In reality, incitements to abstinence were little more than facades of sexual respectability; the High Command neither expected nor actually wanted German fighting men to heed its warnings. Instead, the military intended to capitalize on soldiers’ sexual desires as an instrument of consensus politics; thus, the task of preventing soldiers from the risk of infection, and not from engaging in the sex act itself, was the military’s primary goal.

Already in December 1939, the German military had enlisted medical officers and troop commanders to commit themselves to a second front: the fight against VD. New recruits, rank-and-file soldiers and officers were all to receive instruction about the basic facts of VD and a copy of the 1936 leaflet “Deutscher Soldat.” Medical and military troop commanders stressed ethics and high moral values as “the best means of education” against hwG (häufig wechselnder Geschlechtsverkehr), or promiscuity. In addition to the distribution of pamphlets on sexual health, films and photo series visibly showcased the debilitating physical and mental effects of VD and acted as “especially impressive” teaching tools. All of these instructional tactics were, to quote a pamphlet for commanding officers, “so often repeated so that no soldier remains unschooled and can plead ignorance in the case of illness.”

Soldiers also received education on protective measures (Schutzmassnahmen), like condoms and other techniques to avoid venereal infection. In November 1942, Reich Health Leader Dr. Conti celebrated the condom as “undoubtedly the best means” to solve two problems plaguing Nazi and Wehrmacht officials regarding their soldiers in the occupied territories: the

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17 Dr. Handloser, der Heeres-Sanitätsinspek, Betr.: Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten, 20 Dec. 1940, AN A10, Box 64, Folder 2.
18 Ortskdtr. Befehl Nr. 16/43, 19. April 1943, BA-MA RH 34/188.
impregnation of “non-German” (fremdvölkisch) women and the spread of VD.\textsuperscript{23} Soldiers could bring condoms to brothels or obtain them there.\textsuperscript{24} In areas in Belgium without accessible dispensaries, the local military command centres provided troops with condoms and packets containing sublimate solution and ointment to use after intercourse.\textsuperscript{25}

The German military authorities repeatedly stressed that “cleaning up” (Sanierung) the sex organs could ward off infection if undertaken within the first few hours after intercourse.\textsuperscript{26} The practice included washing the penis, urethra and foreskin with soap and water and then applying the sublimate solution and ointment.\textsuperscript{27} To ensure that their men would actually follow this post-coital hygiene plan, the OKH called for the establishment of easily findable Sanitätsstellen in areas with high concentrations of troops and in the vicinity of brothels.\textsuperscript{28} A small blue lamp with a red cross marked the medical stations, so soldiers could locate them even in the dark of night.\textsuperscript{29} The stations kept a log of every visitor, although men were noted by assigned numbers, rather than their names, in the hope that the preservation of anonymity would encourage soldiers to seek treatment after sex.\textsuperscript{30} The local Truppenarzt also conducted random inspections, so as to surprise the troops and act as a disincentive for potentially risky behaviours. These raids targeted not only the soldiers in the barracks but also the frontline forces.\textsuperscript{31}

Soldiers who failed to take precautions during and after sex, concealed their illness or gave misleading information about the source of their infection were subject to punishment

\textsuperscript{23} Dr. Leonardo Conti to Himmler, 9 Nov. 1942, BAB NS 19/1866, Bl. 1.
\textsuperscript{24} AOK 6, Anlage 4, Gesundheitliche Vorschriften für Soldaten zur Verhütung von Geschlechtskrankheiten, Richtlinien für die Einrichtung von Bordellen im besetzten Gebiet, 23 July 1940, BA-MA RH 20-6/1009.
\textsuperscript{25} Besondere Anordnungen für die Versorgung Nr. 4, Tätigkeitsbericht, Intendant beim MBH vom 1.7.1940-31.12.1940, 17 July 1940, BA-MA RW 36/132, Bl. 11.
\textsuperscript{26} OFK 520, 16 June 1940 AN AJ\textsuperscript{40}, Box 64, Folder 2; AOK 6, Anlage 3, 23 July 1940, BA-MA RH 20-6/1009; Richtlinien für die Einrichtung von Sanierstellen und Durchführung der Sanierung, Anlage zur Verfügung OKW Nr. 640/43, 25 Oct. 1943, BA-MA RH 12-23/1855; KK 510, Bruges, Kommandanturbefehl, undated, BA-MA RH 36/401.
\textsuperscript{27} For the detailed, step-by-step process of sanieren for soldiers after sexual intercourse, see AOK 6, Anlage 11, Anweisung für die Sanierung von Soldaten zur Verhütung von Geschlechtskrankheiten, 23 July 1940, BA-MA RH 20-6/1009. Women were also expected to clean their sex organs and entire bodies after intercourse. See Anlage 8a.
\textsuperscript{28} OKH, 2 Dec. 1939, BA-MA RH 12-23/1818; OKW, Richtlinien für die Einrichtung von Sanierstellen, 25 Oct. 1943, BA-MA RH 12-23/1855. Usually, if several brothels were clustered together on a single street, the local command constructed a single, shared cleaning station. For Belgium, see Leit. San. Offz., MBH, to Leit. San. Offz der OFK 520, 27 July 1940, AN AJ\textsuperscript{30}, Box 64, Folder 2.
\textsuperscript{29} Seidler, Prostitution, 160.
\textsuperscript{31} Seidler, Prostitution, 107.
The usefulness of disciplinary measures was mixed. The High Command sought to take a hard line against disobedient soldiers whose infections made them “unfit for duty” (dienstunfähig) but also recognized the possibility that punitive actions could aggravate, rather than solve, the problem; fearing punishment, soldiers would conceal infection, avoid treatment and thereby spread disease. In light of this disadvantage, the OKW left sentences to the individual discretion of the unit commander and recommended that disciplinary procedures have “educational value.”

In spite of all of these preventive measures, the High Command considered the soldier’s memory to be the single-most effective weapon in the battle against VD and clandestine prostitution. Contact investigation – the identification and suppression of (suspected) sources of infection (Ansteckungsquelle) – required the close cooperation of soldiers, physicians, civil health authorities and local and German police. Troop doctors attempted to obtain from infected soldiers as much detailed information as possible about the alleged source of their infection, including the name, address and physical appearance of the women. The doctors would pass the information to the Chief Medical Office of the OFK and then to the local police, who were tasked with searching for the women in question. The military authorities and civilian agencies considered contact investigation an essential tactic from the very beginning of the occupation. In June 1943, the Medical Officer of the 15th Army boasted that from a total of 1395 cases, 842 sources of infection were successfully identified.

But in general, tracking women suspected of or denounced for infecting German troops rarely resulted in the 60 percent success rate claimed by the 15th Army. The relative ineffectiveness of contact investigation correlated to soldiers’ poor recall when it came to the women they had sex with.

35 Dr. Handloser, 20 Dec. 1940, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2; Tätigkeitsbericht der MV für den Monat Feb. 1941, Nr. 14, 2 March 1941, BA-MA RW 36/184, Bl. 72; Ortskommandanturarzt Brussels, Besondere Anordnungen für den Sanitätsdienst im Stadtgebiet Brüssel, 10 March 1941, BA-MA RH 34/187; KK 510, Kommandanturbefehl, undated, BA-MA RH 36/401.
36 Craushaar to OFKs, 2 July 1940, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2.
with in occupied Belgium.\textsuperscript{38} In the late summer 1940, a gonorrhea-infected staff sergeant in the reserve sickbay in Leuven remembered some details about his alleged Ansteckungsquelle: the two had met in the bar “Ada” in the Rue de Malines in Brussels, near the Wehrmacht theatre. The woman was blonde, about five feet five with “especially striking” pouty lips. She spoke very good German and wore a dark-coloured dress with a red collar. Even though the sergeant recalled all of these details, the woman’s name escaped him.\textsuperscript{39} Many other soldiers could only state the rough area where they had had sexual contact and offered the following on the source: “woman, name unknown.”\textsuperscript{40} Soldiers’ pitiful memories frustrated doctors and commanders across the European continent. In the occupied Soviet Union, German soldiers could often only offer up the first name of the woman with whom they had sex.\textsuperscript{41}

It is difficult to determine whether soldiers were telling the truth about with whom they had had sex. German men sometimes claimed their sexual partners had spoken “broken German.” Such a claim, though plausible, could also have a self-serving element for an individual soldier. Because he would not have been able to communicate clearly, the soldier could portray himself as an innocent victim.\textsuperscript{42} Other German men perhaps hesitated to say too much about the women with whom they had been intimate in order to protect them, especially if the sexual encounter was not simply a one-off. There was no guarantee that even when military personnel provided accurate information about a suspected source of infection, the civilian and/or military police would be able to locate the woman. While searching for a Belgian woman and a café or brothel with the street number 60 in the town of Lens in December 1940, police and civil officials realized that there were two buildings with that number, neither of which was a café or brothel. Utterly confusing the entire affair was the fact that there were four municipalities

\textsuperscript{38} OKW, 27 Jan. 1943, BA-MA RH 12-23/1212. The German authorities in Brussels frequently received reports on cases of VD from the Ministry of Public Health, stating that the information given by soldiers was “insufficient for tracking down the contaminated person.” J. Moorkens, Ministry of the Interior and Public Health, Public Health Section, to Dr. Holm, 9 May 1942, AN AJ\textsuperscript{40}, Box 64, Folder 3. For more of these types of reports of cases of VD and the denunciations of alleged sources of infection, see AN AJ\textsuperscript{40}, Box 64, Folders 3 and 4, respectively.

\textsuperscript{39} Abteilungsarzt to Leit. San. Offz. beim MBH, 3 Oct. 1940, AN AJ\textsuperscript{40}, Box 64, Folder 4.

\textsuperscript{40} Meldungen, Gefr. Christian H. and Gefr. Erhardt V., Stadtkommandanturarzt Brüssel, 28 Feb. 1941, respectively, AN AJ\textsuperscript{40}, Box 64, Folder 4, Bl. 559 and Bl. 560.

\textsuperscript{41} Mühlhäuser, \textit{Eroberungen}, 197-9.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 199.
called Lens in Belgium, as well as one in France. Eventually, it was ascertained that the police in Tournai had apprehended the woman in question and she was likely in hospital.43

Finally, the High Command also attempted to provide some guidelines to help soldiers identify “risky” women. Military rhetoric generally painted sex workers as women who were frivolous, casual, loose and on the prowl for a good time. A leaflet distributed to soldiers cautioned them to, “Avoid contact with frivolous women: they are almost always suffering from a venereal disease.”44 Men were also to be wary of women who easily fell into sexual relationships with German men; such women, the military argued, usually lacked strong moral characters.45 Ultimately, however, all attempts by the military to preach to German forces in regards to VD and prostitution control were only ever half-hearted because of the High Command’s commitment to letting its German soldiers participate in the sexual spoils of war, at least in brothels. As a result, military officials relied on other actors to keep German men safe, including the women servicing them.46

**Who Were the Prostitutes?**

The Reich Ministry of the Interior’s September 1939 directive defined a prostitute as “a female person, who frequently changes sexual partners for a fee, who incites the public with her behaviour, and through this activity completely or for the most part earns a living for herself or another.”47 But who were these women and how applicable was the 1939 definition in occupied Belgium? Prostitutes themselves left a sparse paper trail for obvious reasons related to the multiple taboos surrounding sexual bartering, prostitution and sexual relationships with the occupying forces during the war. Many of the German files, interested only in prostitutes as simultaneous resources for and hazards to soldiers, retain a certain distance from the individuals to whom they devoted so much bureaucratic attention. As a result, official records present a

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43 Uffz. der Feld-Gend., Bericht, 3 Nov. 1940, AN Aj40, Box 64, Folder 4; Ortskdtr. I/691, Verviers, Bericht, 3 Dec. 1940, AN Aj40, Box 64, Folder 4.
44 OKH, Merkblatt “Deutscher Soldat!” undated, AN, Aj40, Box 64, Folder 2. A slightly different version of this Merkblatt issued by the Senior Medical Officer in Greater Paris stated that 99.5% of all of VD patients received their infection from “wilde Dirnen”: “So be wary of these women!” Leit. San. Offz., Der Kommandant von Gross-Paris, Auszüge aus dem Merkblatt des OKH, “Deutscher Soldat,” undated, BA-MA, RH 36/52.
46 Benoît Majerus and Insa Meinen have similarly argued that the German military never enforced the rules regarding the sexual and hygienic behaviour of German troops with the same rigour as those targeting civilian women in Belgium and France. Majerus, *Occupations et logiques*, 238; Meinen, *Prostitution*, 36-7.
paradox: though the documents are extensively and almost exclusively concerned with prostitutes, they in fact reveal little about the experiences of Belgian sex workers. As a final point, the existing documentation extends primarily from the medical and military police agencies tasked with regulating sex work; such records expose their administrative and bureaucratic genre in their focus on the prostitute as the object of social control.\textsuperscript{48} In spite of these limitations, official records remain useful because they offer mediated glimpses into the world of prostitution. Further, because they were largely produced by those invested in controlling sex workers, they often focus on prostitutes who broke the rules and thus offer insight into the spaces and opportunities for women to slip through or challenge the regulatory regime.

Analyzing the documents pertaining to 123 (suspected) prostitutes in the city archives of Leuven offers some information on the basic demographics of these women.\textsuperscript{49} The average prostitute was twenty-four years old in 1940, while the youngest was fourteen and the eldest forty-one.\textsuperscript{50} Only fifty-eight files specified marital status (single, married, separated, divorced or widowed); of these, twenty-seven women were married, three separated, four divorced, two widowed and twenty-two single. Lack of reference to a marital status is likely to be taken as an indication of singlehood.\textsuperscript{51} In general, it seems that although the majority of prostitutes in Leuven were single, a not insignificant number of women were married.\textsuperscript{52}

Only five sex workers were born and raised in Leuven, suggesting that women came to the city for interim periods of time to earn money.\textsuperscript{53} The majority of the women (40 percent)

\begin{itemize}
\item Majerus, “La prostitution,” 11; Tambe, Codes of Misconduct, xxvi.
\item Of the 123 women, two were found not to be prostitutes after police investigation. See 15.661, 15.662A, 15.662B, 15.663A, 15.663B and 25.25g (2-2) in the Stadsarchief Leuven.
\item The average birth year was 1916. Date and place of birth were available for 117 of the 123 women. My findings are consistent with Sophie de Schaepdrijver’s on the ages of prostitutes in Brussels in the nineteenth century. Sophie de Schaepdrijver, “Regulated Prostitution in Brussels, 1844-1877: A Policy and its Implementation,” Historical Social Research, no. 37 (1987): 99.
\item In an official typed but undated list of prostitutes in Leuven, only four of the thirty listed were married. Lijst der vrouwen die zich aan ontucht overgeven, Stadsarchief Leuven 15.662B, File of Maria-Therese G.
\item Majerus found that the number of married prostitutes in Brussels in World War I was twice as high as that documented by Alain Corbin in nineteenth-century France; the insecurity of war, including the absence of men, pushed more women to enter the sexual economy. Majerus, “La Prostitution,” 12.
\item Approximately 15 percent of the women were born outside of Belgium – usually in France, but also in Hungary, Romania, Austria, Poland and even Colombia. Politie, Stad Leuven, Lijst der vrouwen die zich aan ontucht overgeven, undated, Stadsarchief Leuven, 15.662B, File of Maria-Therese G.; Files 15.661-15.663B, Stadsarchief Leuven. A significant number of women of foreign nationality worked in brothels and public establishments. Commissariat de Police, Verviers, Rapport, 3 July 1944, AGR Ministère de la Justice, Police des étrangers (I 417), Folder 1440; Politie 6e wijk, Antwerp, Verslag, 28 Nov. 1943, AGR Ministère de la Justice, Police des étrangers (I 417), Folder 1440. Data on foreign-born prostitutes is easy to obtain, since local police forces regularly inspected establishments suspected of employing women of foreign nationality and filed reports to the Police of Foreigners in
\end{itemize}
were born in the province of Brabant, demonstrating that, as in the First World War, the geographical area of recruitment was smaller than in the nineteenth century, when prostitutes were more mobile. In the earlier conflict, the reduced mobility of prostitutes reflected the German authorities’ attempt to reduce free movement between regions in order to better control the population, an argument that is plausible also for 1940-44. Even if most women did not travel far from their birthplaces to engage in sex work after 1940, prostitutes exhibited social mobility in other ways; because brothels tended to cluster in small cities, it was possible for sex workers to move from and between different maisons de prostitution, from hospital to brothel and back again, and between cities with relative ease. Indeed, the bulk of the paperwork present in the files on individual sex workers in Leuven deals primarily with sorting out who went where, for how long, and if they returned or where they went next.

Women’s explicit reasons for entering prostitution between 1940 and 1944 are, for the most part, unknown due to the limitation of sources. Nevertheless, it is clear that many Belgian women were driven into the sex trade during the Second World War out of economic necessity and that they moved in and outside of the profession at their discretion. Prostitution demonstrably correlated with the food situation, increasing as the latter worsened, particularly in the first two years of the occupation. The presence of a large number of married women in the commercial sex trade further suggests that many wives and mothers struggled to provide for their

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54 See Majerus’ findings for Brussels during World War I. He found that 50 percent of prostitutes working in brothels were from the province of Brabant. Majerus, “La Prostitution,” 13. On the increased mobility of prostitutes in the nineteenth century, see Alain Corbin, Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); 44-6; De Schaepdrijver, “Regulation Prostitution,” 99-100.

55 Majerus, Occupations et logiques, 63.

56 L’Adjutant Deveux, Gendarmerie de Namur, 29 Oct. 1942, AGR Ministère de la Justice, Police des étrangers (I 417), Folder 1440. Alain Corbin has similarly shown that French prostitutes frequently moved around and rarely stayed in any one brothel for an extended period of time. See Corbin, Women for Hire, 72-6.

57 Judith Walkowitz astutely identified this problem of sources. For historians, explaining why women chose to become sex workers (while others did not) has been an endeavour hampered by the paucity and type of sources; we know little about women’s personalities, characters, sexual history, family and domestic life and interpersonal relationships. These gaps make it difficult to claim any firm explanation of the choice to engage in prostitution. Walkowitz, Prostitution and Victorian Society, 19.

58 OFK 589, Verwaltungschef, Lagebericht für die Zeit von Mitte Februar bis Mitte Mai 1942, 15 May 1942, CEGES AA 524. See also a letter from King Léopold (and his military advisor General Raoul van Overstraeten) to Hitler dated 19 January 1942 that notes how dire the food situation is Belgium, cited in Raoul van Overstraeten, Sous le joug: Léopold III Prisonnier (Brussels: Didier Hatier, 1986), 169-71. See also Guillaume Jacquemyns’ 1946 study of social conditions in Belgium, and particularly the food supply, La société belge sous l'occupation allemande (1940-1944): Privations et espoirs in Paul Struye and Guillaume Jacquemyns, La Belgique sous l'occupation allemande, 1940-1944, ed. José Gotovitch (Brussels: Éditions Complexe, 2002), 299-339.
families, given the food scarcity and the prolonged absences of husbands in Germany as PoWs or forced labourers. The Germans took 225,000 Belgian soldiers captive – approximately 30 percent of those mobilized in 1940 – and sent them to prison camps in Germany. The wives of PoWs were among the chief categories suspected of clandestine prostitution in western Europe. The majority of Belgian PoWs were repatriated by early 1941, although the Belgian government in 1945 reported that 65,000, primarily Walloons, remained in captivity. It can also be argued, then, that the presence of Belgian men in the country in fact contributed to women’s entry into prostitution. The chief administrator of the OFK 570 in March 1941 observed that “many of these women – only because of the war – have come to this way of earning money, as a result of the surplus of men and out of economic need.”

“Honest work,” in the words of the Social Services department at the St. Josse-ten-Noode hospital in Brussels, was hard to find, and the majority of young women found themselves in a precarious economic situation during the occupation. By the beginning of August 1940, approximately 500,000 Belgians were unemployed; almost half of these left Belgium by October 1942 to work in Germany, where wages were higher. Those Belgians who remained had few alternatives to provide for themselves and their families. Social Services reported that some women with little means, often from provincial or rural areas, were “tricked” into prostitution; after responding to offers of employment in newspapers and arriving at the specified addresses, “the proposals made to [the women] are enticing, they try the work, receive le carnet de santé…and then, when they realize what they have done, it is too late – these young girls feel obliged to continue in the profession, for which, quite often, they are not physically suited.”


60 Meinen, Wehrmacht und Prostitution, 101-3.


62 Verwaltungschef, OFK 570, to MVC, MBH, Betr.: Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten, 29 March 1941, AN AJ, Box 64, Folder 2.


64 De Vos, Belgique, 209.

65 Report from Service Social de l’Hôpital de St. Josse ten-Noode, Suppression des articles “Soir,” undated, AGR Ministère de la Justice, Police des étrangers (I 417), Folder 1440; Note for the Secretary-General, 9 Oct. 1941, AGR
The Crown Prosecutor in Dendermonde in July 1940 reported on a fourteen-year old girl who worked in a local café for a pittance – she made three to five francs a day. Although the girl claimed that she had experienced harassment from the male clientele only recently, she testified matter-of-factly that one of her coworkers, a twenty-two-year-old mother of two children, “was a whore.”66 Another woman, a dancer and “good time girl” in the German-only club “Parisiana” in Brussels, and her mother frequented cafés reputed to be hotspots for German soldiers and “attempted by any means to have contact with them, so that they could have drinks bought for them and receive some benefits in terms of food.”67

German and Belgian officials characterized clandestine prostitutes as inconsistent in their practices, women who entered the commercial sex trade on their own terms: “It happens, for example, that a woman, if she would like to have a new fur, becomes a clandestine prostitute in order meet this goal...Then she lives again soundly until the next big desire.”68 This brief assessment of some of the circumstantial and economic motives suggests the importance of making a key semantic and historical distinction: most Belgian women did not become prostitutes or sell their bodies. Rather, they engaged in the selling of sexual services as a deliberate, practical and usually temporary response to the changing economic and social conditions of occupation.69 It is, however, a mistake to uncritically associate prostitution with volunteerism; the concept of “choice” can only be understood within the specific context of foreign occupation and its unequal diffusion of power which intrinsically constrained the nature and range of choices on offer.70

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66 Procureur des konings, Dendermonde, 12 July 1940, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2; Verklaring van M., Maria, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2.
67 Report concerning Elisabeth D., 1 March 1945, AGR Ministère de la Justice, Police des étrangers (I 417), Folder 1440; Francois’ work on underage sex workers in occupied Belgium confirms that prostitution provided young girls with money for food and clothing, or food directly. François, «Une véritable frénésie de jouissance..», 25-6.
68 Bericht über eine Besprechung und anschliessende Besichtigung der Unterkunftsverhältnisse der Prostituierten am 28.6.40, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2.
69 Mühlhäuser also recommends conceptualizing the boundary between women’s participation, on one side, in the professional sex industry and, on the other side, a more opportunistic and situation-contingent form of sexual bartering as fluid and flexible. Mühlhäuser, Eroberungen, 164.
70 Christl Wickert and others have argued against thinking about prostitution solely in terms of volunteerism or willingness. In her work on brothels in concentration camps, Christa Paul points out that it is only with the subject of prostitution that there is debate about whether prisoners volunteered for or were forced into this type of work; no other type of labour arouses this debate. Mühlhäuser, Eroberungen, 25, 29, 224; Paul, Zwangsprostitution, 42-3; Sommer, KZ-Bordell, 27-8, 88-93; Wickert, ‘‘Das große Schweigen’, 92.
Not everyone agreed that economic considerations explained the growing industry of sex work in occupied Belgium. In December 1941, the Chief Medical Officer in Liège argued he had witnessed too many women who had been or were employed in Belgium or Germany continue to register as prostitutes. He contended that the occupation authorities should respond to this trend, “because, apart from the losses in labour power, members of the Wehrmacht are endangered by the spread of prostitution and VD.” The officer assumed that these women’s formal employment gave them sufficient means and implied that their engagement in prostitution emerged from ingrained vice, rather than economic desperation; he was evidently also worried that women’s inclination to use their bodies for sex work, rather than for factory and farm labour, could have dire consequences for the war economy. Such assumptions about women’s immoral predispositions lingered well after the end of the occupation, even and perhaps especially among Belgians. Arguing that scarcity was not the cause of moral decay or an explanation for young women’s sexual behaviour during the war, Belgian sociologist Aimée Racine maintained in her 1961 book that the girls who behaved “shamelessly” with the occupying forces were the same girls who had engaged in sexual “misconduct” with Belgian soldiers during the mobilization of spring 1940.

Overall, little is known about the day-to-day experiences of prostitutes in occupied Belgium and especially about how they perceived their work. Many questions also remain regarding the daily operations of brothels and other establishments at the centre of the sex trade: how many German soldiers visited brothels? Were certain periods of the occupation busier than others for brothels? What were interactions like between German soldiers and Belgian sex workers? How frequent were sexual encounters? In spring 1941 in Liège, twenty-five-year old Elvire D. offered a glimpse into her experience during police interrogation:

From 8 – 28 April I was employed as a waitress at “Café Select,” Maria-Theresiastraat no. 58 in Leuven, run by a woman named “Jose” who lived with her husband. It was a maison de prostitution reserved for German soldiers. My mission was to drink with the soldiers and go into the room with those who asked for it. I usually drank faux port, which the client paid five francs for and from which I received a cut of 1 franc... The drinks were served by a waiter. Four women worked in the establishment... I had to submit to two medical visits a week. These visits took place in a location designated by

72 Aimée Racine, La délinquance juvénile en Belgique de 1939 à 1957 (Brussels: Centre d’étude de la délinquance juvénile, 1961), 57.
73 Regina Mühlhäuser has observed the same absence of knowledge about the everyday life of woman and girls working in German military brothels in the Soviet Union. Mühlhäuser, Eroberungen, 228.
the municipal administration and were monitored by the police. During the three weeks at “Café Select,” on average, I had sexual relations with three German soldiers per day.74

This brief and matter-of-fact account of a day in the life of a prostitute is by no means complete or representative of the experiences of Belgian women who engaged in some form of sex work during the German occupation. It does not, for instance, describe the invasive procedures accompanying the biweekly medical examinations, including swabs from the urethra, cervix and Bartholin’s glands, which could be painful and even cause serious injury.75 The account does, however, elucidate how sex and its trappings, such as flirting, chatting and drinking alcohol, became commodities under occupation. Belgian women were the central component of the sexual market, but their experiences remain the least accessible for historians.

**Prostitution and the Imagined Threat**

Though the Belgian prostitute engendered war and occupation by providing sexual recreation to members of the occupation forces and front-line soldiers on leave from eastern Europe, the German administration envisioned her as an anomaly, a depraved woman whose behaviour both defied gender norms and threatened military security. More often than not, these dual threats were fused together in the German imaginary. In this reversal of occupation roles, women, and particularly sex workers, were the perpetrators and German troops their hapless victims.76 Even some Belgians shared this view; in late 1941, Jules Coelst, only six months into his position as the new mayor of Brussels, evoked an image of Belgian women as predatory creatures who took advantage of uniformed men in his observation that “German soldiers form a clientele of predilection for les filles publiques”77

The German occupiers considered women a “public danger” (öffentliche Gefahr) even if they had not been diagnosed with VD. The military feared that civilian women not only intended to physically debilitate German forces but also to tempt soldiers to shirk their duties and desert their posts.78 Any behaviour that transgressed the short-term, institutionalized nature of prostitution warranted extra attention from both Belgian and German police, who worried

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74 Brigade des Moeurs, Liège, Rapport, 2 May 1941, Stadsarchief Leuven 15.661, File of Elvire D.
75 In one case from Mechelen, two women suffered burns during their medical examinations. Mayor Dessain to Dr. Loncin, 6 Dec. 1940, Stadsarchief Mechelen Secretariaatsarchief, Vak 39, Regelmenten, 1941, Folder 2.
76 OKH, 31 July 1940, BA-MA RH 12-23/1371.
77 Jules Coelst to Police des Étrangers, 29 Dec. 1941, AGR Ministère de la Justice, Police des étrangers (I 417), Folder 1440.
78 Mühlhäuser, Eroberungen, 181.
perhaps about what these women were doing with German men if they were not having sex. In the St. Josse-ten-Noode district of Brussels in the summer of 1942, local police considered waitresses “suspect from the point of view of morality” because they sat down at tables with customers and socialized, even though they could not find any conclusive evidence that the women were clandestine prostitutes.\footnote{St. Josse-ten-Noode, Police, 17 July 1942 and 22 May 1942, AGR Ministère de la Justice, Police des étrangers (I 417), Folder 1440.}

In one mysterious case in the late summer of 1944, Brussels police notified Dr. Tomek that a registered prostitute, Anna H., had not been seen at her apartment for nearly a month (and had not terminated her lease agreement), even though all of her belongings were still there, according to the building’s caretaker. Anna was known to the police for having failed to show up for medical examinations and also because she basically cohabited with an unidentified member of the Wehrmacht. The caretaker further confirmed that a German soldier visited her often and spent the night. Anna H.’s status as a “public danger” thus emerged not only from the supposed threat she posed to public health but also from her transgression of the norms of sex work. Instead of a limited exchange of goods or cash for sexual services, Anna had had a more substantive relationship with a member of the occupying forces. The fact that she was missing in August 1944 and the man’s identity was unknown made the situation even more suspicious – what if they had run off together?\footnote{5me Division de Police, Ville de Bruxelles to Militärverwaltungsrat Dr. Tomek, 29 July 1944, AVB Guerre40-45, Box 39; 5me Division de Police, Ville de Bruxelles, Rapport, 21 August 1944, AVB Guerre40-45, Box 39.}

The intersection of the different “threats” engendered by sex workers’ intimate labour is evidenced in the autumn 1941 case of a German-Jewish woman, Hélène N. accused of engaging in clandestine prostitution and of infecting a German soldier. The Belgian court in Antwerp sentenced Hélène N. to fifteen days in prison and, after her release, civil authorities entered her into the prostitutes’ register. The original plan had been to intern her until the end of the war, but this was scrapped because there was no suitable women’s-only prison. Such a strict sentence for a sex worker was rare, but less unusual if contextualized within Nazi anti-Jewish policies in Belgium. Since 1940, the German occupiers systematically stripped Jews in Belgium of their political, economic and social livelihoods. Within a year of Hélène’s case, by the late summer of 1942, the deportation and murder of Belgian Jewry would commence.\footnote{Dr. Holm to Gruppe Pol., 8 Sept. 1941, AN AJ\textsuperscript{60}, Box 64, Folder 2. Sexual interactions between Jewish women and German troops occurred in brothels and in other contexts (including sexual violence) and could have distinctive

The Germans considered Hélène a “double threat” because she was both a suspected “promiscuous” woman and a Jew. Her case opened up discussion about whether Jewish sex workers should be treated differently in Belgium. The German authorities argued that Jewish women were an especially devious and seductive contingent of their sex. Dr. Holm’s report on Hélène’s case noted, “Jewish women can, as prostitutes, seduce members of the Wehrmacht into committing Rassenschande without their knowledge.” Arguing that a specific law targeting Jewish sex workers in Belgium was unfeasible and might compromise the already existing laws, Dr. Holm suggested that “the most correct and effective thing would be, therefore, to work towards the goal of sending all Jewish women who engage in prostitution to a concentration camp.” Though there is no evidence to confirm that the Germans did in fact intern all Jewish prostitutes, it is probable that Jews who also engaged in sex work may have ended up in concentration camps due to the escalating anti-Jewish policies in Belgium.

On 15 September 1942, Hélène was deported, along with 1000 other Jews, to Auschwitz, where she was likely killed on arrival.

The German military’s association of sex workers with political danger manifested itself across the occupied territories of both eastern and western Europe. German occupiers feared that the very sex workers whom they instrumentalized to maintain the morale of the rank-and-file would prey on sex-starved men in order to serve the enemy. As Magnus Hirschfeld observed of the First World War, “Just as in general criminology, the brothel is always a breeding ground of consequences for the men involved, because any form of sexual contact with Jews was technically a crime of Rassenschande. In such cases, punishment of German men hinged on whether or not the men had known the women were Jewish when they had sex with them. See Birgit Beck, Wehrmacht und sexuelle Gewalt: Sexualverbrechen vor deutschen Militärgerichten 1939-1945 (Paderborn: Schönigh, 2004), 278; Monika J. Flaschka, “Race, Rape and Gender in Nazi-Occupied Territories (PhD diss., Kent State University, 2008), 61-3; Gertjejanssen, “Victims, Heroes, Survivors,” 57-9; Seidler, Prostitution, 181-2; David Raub Snyder, Sex Crimes Under the Wehrmacht (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 190-200.

82 This idea that the German authorities perceived Jewish women living in Belgium as embodying a “double threat” alludes to early historiographical discussions of Jewish women’s experiences of “double jeopardy” during the Holocaust; unlike Jewish men, Jewish women faced both Nazi racism and sexism. The literature on Jewish women’s “double jeopardy” cannot be cited here, but for one of the earliest discussions of this concept, see Joan Ringelheim, “Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of the Research,” Signs 10, no. 4 (1985): 741-62.

83 Dr. Holm to Gruppe Pol., 8 Sept. 1941, AN AJ, Box 64, Folder 2. The notion that Jewish women had special seductive powers was common. In the July 1942 judgment of the Court of the Commanding Admiral of Auxiliary Naval Forces against a corporal in the navy accused of having had a sexual relationship with a Belgian Jewish woman, the court noted that the defendant had been “seemingly carried away…by a strong sexual bondage to the witness.” Feldurteil in der Strafsache gegen den Matr. Ob. Gefr. Karl D., 21 July 1942, BA-MA RM 123-15751, 29.

84 Dr. Holm to Gruppe Pol., 8 Sept. 1941, AN AJ, Box 64, Folder 2.

85 Her name (with her date of birth) is listed in Mémorial de la déportation des juifs de Belgique, eds. Serge Klarsfeld and Maxime Steinberg (New York: Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1982).
crime, so it was in the wider sense a breeding ground for espionage.”

At the outset of the occupation in May 1940, the Reich Ministry of the Interior noted that German troops faced grave danger in Belgium “especially due to the exceptional conditions of prostitution with regard to enemy espionage.”

Prostitutes were distinctly linked with espionage activity because of their obvious proximity to German men and perhaps also because of the assumption that women who sold sex already lacked a moral compass; it was not a stretch to believe that the same women could extract military secrets or harm German soldiers, particularly when men were at “the height of their passion” and physically and emotionally vulnerable.

One problem pertained to a general custom in western Europe: policemen refused to enter the bedrooms of brothels or other establishments after sex workers had entered with clients because of the widespread belief that interrupting a man during sexual activity could psychologically damage him. In collusion with agents working for the British, women in brothels sometimes used this unsupervised time to hide Allied soldiers who had parachuted into the occupied territories and then to help them escape, since the buildings often had concealed doors and secret passageways.

The High Command took special cautions in military brothels because of its concern about spying; photos of members of the Wehrmacht taken by or in the possession of sex workers, for example, had to be confiscated and destroyed. This regulation may have resulted from a desire to protect the privacy of the soldiers who visited the *maisons de prostitution*; in any case, the regulation also worked to ensure that no information about any component of the German military passed through brothel walls or between brothels and the outside world.

Overall, such protective measures did little to assuage fears about the perceived interrelationship between prostitution, sexual health and espionage during the war.

Consider the case of a young married woman, Elvira V., detained in 1941 by the security police in Ghent.

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86 Hirschfeld, *Sexual History*, 249.
87 RMdl, 21 May 1940, AN AJ, Box 64, Folder 2.
88 Hirschfeld, *Sexual History*, 248.
90 Feldkommandant, Bestimmungen für Wehrmachtbordelle, undated, BA-MA RH 36/444.
91 The assumption that some prostitutes and other *hwG* women were “agents in the service of the enemy” was part of the reason a senior physician recommended punishments for soldiers if they could not identify the source of infection, irrespective if they had engaged in post-coital hygiene or not. See Vierteljahresbericht des Beratenden Dermatologen beim Wehrkreisarzt IX über das III. Vierteljahr 1944, 14 Oct. 1944, BA-MA RH 12-23/1926.
for an “indefinite period.” Described by the local German medical officer as an “asocial prostitute who left her family in the lurch and is constantly prowling around,” Elvira had been ill with gonorrhea several times and had also contracted syphilis the year before, for which she failed to get the proper treatment. The officer concluded that “because the woman has infected at least four German soldiers and constantly changes her place of residence, she poses a danger to the German Wehrmacht, both in regard to health matters and as a potential carrier of intelligence.” In other words, the German authorities stressed that Elvira was a possible risk to military security on the grounds of her seemingly poor sexual health and hygiene.

Gendered Assessments and the Legal Marginalization of Sex Workers

One central way in which the German military and local enforcers decided which prostitutes were threatening was based on perceptions and norms of gendered behaviour. Consider the joint forces of German and Belgian policemen who patrolled Belgian streets and raided suspicious-looking locales (e.g., unauthorized brothels, disguised tobacco shops, bookstores and cafés) in search of clandestine prostitutes. Often the patrol consisted of a small band of policemen, usually dressed in civilian clothes to maintain the element of surprise. The police faced on a more practical, everyday level the very same conundrum that had preoccupied bureaucrats in regard to the expansion of the prostitutes’ registers after January 1941: what exactly distinguished suspicious from non-suspicious women? In August 1942, every woman in Brussels found by police in the streets or in a public establishment after 12.30 a.m. (half an hour after the military-prescribed curfew) became the subject of police investigation as to her profession and sexual conduct. Women had to explain where and how they made their living in a “satisfactory manner,” otherwise they were required to undergo a medical examination. If they refused, the police would automatically add the women to a provisional register of prostitutes, which also entailed obligatory physical examination; this was essentially the same treatment the German authorities meted out to women formally charged with having infected German soldiers.

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93 Dr. Holm to OFKs and FKs, Betr.: Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten, 20 Jan. 1941, AN AJ 40, Box 64, Folder 2; Craushaar to OFKs and FKs, Betr.: Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten, 22 Feb. 1941, AN AJ 40, Box 64, Folder 2.
94 Tätigkeitsbericht der MV, Nr. 1, 4. Juni 1940, BA-MA RW 36/170, Bl. 12. See, for example, the reports of the morals police in Mons: Police, Rapport, 12 June 1942, Archives de la Ville de Mons Guerre 1940-1945, Box 66. On Brussels, see MVC, Aktenvermerk, 27 Nov., 1941, AN AJ 40, Box 64, Folder 2.
95 Louis Van Autgaerden to Coelst, 8 Sept. 1942 and Coelst to Kriegsverwaltungsassessor Dr. Richter, 11 Sept. 1942, AVB Cabinet du Bourgmestre, Box 845.
with VD. The High Field Command considered these investigations necessary because “the suspicion that these women lead a kind of dubious lifestyle is not to be overlooked.”

As in the case of the prostitutes’ registers, there were no specific criteria aiding police forces in their judgments of “suspicious behaviour in terms of morals,” thus giving them significant leeway in their assessments. The Brussels Chief of Police, Louis Van Autgaerden, worried that policemen could make critical errors in their judgment. His trepidation was not unwarranted. In Ghent, although raids were feted for their efficacy, the medical section of the military command was also concerned about the potential implications for innocent women who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time: “It is unfortunate, however, that the persons arrested during these raids are taken to a police prison and examined by the Stabsarzt only the next morning. It is strongly advised to have medical examinations conducted immediately in conjunction with the raids, so that the people found to be harmless and healthy, can be immediately set at liberty.”

One November night in 1943, at two in the morning, Belgian police in Brussels stopped three Kasino-Mädchen, Frieda F., Adrienne C. and Louisa B., all of whom worked for the Germans, and ordered them to pay 500 Belgian francs for breaking curfew. Lacking evidence of any wrongdoing, the police considered their public presence after curfew sufficient proof of questionable behaviour and character. Oberstabsarzt Dr. Werner Wachsmuth intervened and recommended that the women be let off with a warning because they earned far too little to be able to pay the fine and because this was their first offense. Wachsmuth also worried about troublesome repercussions if the authorities followed procedure and imprisoned the women for ten days. Perhaps hoping to protect useful collaborators, he made his case to Major Zapp of the OFK: “You know the girls yourself and know that they are diligent and proper. Madame Frieda has been with us since the first days of the occupation of Belgium and has always proven herself to be a faithful soul.” This was one case in which the occupation authorities’ general rule of viewing all women out after curfew as suspect showcased its chief weakness: its indiscriminate nature.

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96 Van Autgaerden to Coelst, 8 Sept. 1942, AVB Cabinet du Bourgmestre, Box 845.
97 See also Majerus’ discussion of the concept of “provocation,” which received such a broad definition that potential clients found it difficult to recognize a prostitute from other women. Majerus, Occupations et logiques, 239.
98 Van Autgaerden to Coelst, 8 Sept. 1942, AVB Cabinet du Bourgmestre, Box 845.
99 Bericht über Dienstreise, 9 Oct. 1940, AN AJ40 Box 64, Folder 2.
100 Oberstabsarzt Dr. Werner Wachsmuth to Major Zapp, OFK 672, 2 Dec. 1943, BA-MA RH 36/401.
Echoing the Preventive Detention decree of 1937 and its expansion in the September 1939 decrees in the Reich, as of December 1941, Dr. Crauhaar authorized the OFKs and FK to intern Belgian women who failed to comply with the health regulations, infected German soldiers with VD or solicited “in a crudely offensive manner in public streets” on the grounds of *Sicherheitshaft*, or detention for security purposes.\(^{101}\) Belgian police could detain a woman for twenty-four hours, according to the general police regulations, and then her case would be passed on to the local Kommandantur for processing and the issuing of the *Sicherhaftsbefehl*. If the local commander determined that a detention in excess of a month was necessary, the arrest warrant needed approval from the *Militärverwaltungschef*, the top branch of the military command concerned with civilian affairs. For longer internments, “depraved, incorrigible and recidivist” women were moved to St. Andries prison in Bruges, a facility that could accommodate around 140 women.\(^{102}\) Throughout the occupation, the Germans invoked the *Sicherhaftsbefehl* against numerous women across Belgium.\(^{103}\)

In Ghent in 1941, the Chief Medical Officer of the local military command recommended to the Representative of the Security Police and Security Service in Brussels that Maria S., an unmarried Belgian woman, be placed in preventive detention (*Sicherheitsverwahrung*) for an “indefinite period” in the women’s section of the city prison. The officer justified his recommendation on the charge that Maria S. posed a “risk to the German Wehrmacht because of her constant venereal infections,” pointing out that she stood accused of suffering from venereal infections on three separate occasions within a single year and of having contaminated two German soldiers.\(^{104}\)

The mobilization of raids, patrols and *Sicherheitshaft* constructed Belgian women – and sex workers in particular – as ‘asocial’ elements whose status, like that of criminals, existed outside the rights and obligations inherent in Belgian citizenship. Nowhere was this more pronounced than in the conflation of criminality and venereal affliction and/or prostitution by German and Belgian officials. In July 1944, the economic section of the military administration

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\(^{101}\) Craushaar to OFKs und FKs, Betr.: Sittenpolizei, 6 Dec. 1941, BA-MA RW 36/236, Bl. 92.

\(^{102}\) Ibid; Dr. Holm to Vizepräsident Froitzheim, 17 Nov. 1941, AN AJ\(^{40}\), Box 64, Folder 2.

\(^{103}\) For example: Dr. Holm to Vizepräsident Froitzheim, 17 Nov. 1941, AN AJ\(^{40}\), Box 64, Folder 2; MBH, MVC, Übersicht über die Arbeitsleistung der einzelnen Gruppen der Militärverwaltung für die Zeit vom 1. Dezember 1941 – 15. März 1942, 16 March 1942, BA-MA RW 36/204, Bl. 63; OFK 589, Lagebericht, 15 May 1942, CEGES AA 524.

\(^{104}\) Der Beauftragte des Chefs der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, Dienststelle Brüssel, Sicherhaftsbefehl für Maria S., 24 Oct. 1941, AN AJ\(^{40}\), Box 64, Folder 2.
claimed, “Indisputable observations have shown that people working in the black market are often affected by infectious diseases.” For the occupier especially, wartime offenses, including unregulated prostitution, theft and participation in the black market, were indistinct from one another and worked to create a criminal social atmosphere in Belgium. 105

The logical extension of labeling prostitutes as criminals was to treat them as criminals. Concerned that prostitutes “set loose” from prisons or regulated brothels would elude medical and police supervision, Dr. Craushaar, Reeder’s deputy in the military administration, suggested that the “ultimate solution” to this problem was the erection of workhouses. He suggested that cheap hotels could be used if necessary, but noted that the eventual goal was to tear these down over time since they were noted hotspots for clandestine prostitution. 106 Several months later, frustrated by the streetwalkers who frequented the main city square in the Belgian capital, Craushaar recommended to Secretary-General Gérard Romsée that since it was impossible to prohibit all civilians from entering the plaza, he “envisaged placing all femmes publiques encountered there in the evening in a concentration camp.” 107 Such a camp would, Craushaar argued, “find sufficient occupancy, including other ‘asocial’ female persons; in particular, prostitutes could be taken there, especially if they have caused conflicts with members of the Wehrmacht, which happens often enough.” 108 However, the practice of interning Belgian prostitutes in concentration camps was neither systematic nor widespread, although it did occur in individual cases. 109

Resistance and Noncompliance

Numerous examples demonstrate that civilian women were not entirely powerless, though sex workers’ and other women’s capacity for agency and manipulation of their circumstances was necessarily dictated by the structures of occupation and surveillance in which they existed. The denunciation of suspected sources of venereal infection, for instance, was not

106 Craushaar to OFKs und FKs, Betr.: Belgische Verordnung über die Regelung der Prostitutio

108 Dr. Holm to Gruppe Pol., Betr.: Deutsche Staatsangehörige Hélène N., 8 Sept. 1941, AN A140, Box 64, Folder 2.
the exclusive prerogative of the German occupation forces. Civilian women could and did denounce soldiers they claimed as responsible for their infection.\textsuperscript{110} Women also sometimes falsely accused men of infecting them with VD, men who were then found to be healthy.\textsuperscript{111} Reports of women breaking the law by abandoning treatment for venereal infection and heading back onto the streets, potentially spreading VD to other parties, were also common.\textsuperscript{112} After the war, such cases led to claims that these were tactics of the resistance in western Europe to subvert the German occupation by incapacitating individual soldiers. These claims, however, proved to be the self-serving justifications of women targeted and prosecuted after 1944 for having engaged in “horizontal collaboration” with German troops.\textsuperscript{113}

Many women, including but not limited to prostitutes, tried to evade medical and police control. The morals police considered clandestine prostitutes to be exceptionally cunning, dodging policemen and hiding in the shadows brought by nightfall.\textsuperscript{114} One of the most common complaints of the local military command centres related to the municipal registers of prostitutes, where women were listed by their addresses.\textsuperscript{115} If and when they moved from that residence, they were expected to inform the civil authorities and re-register with their new address.\textsuperscript{116} Many women, however, falsified their addresses or, like Elvira V, simply did not report changes in address.\textsuperscript{117} Some women even received their identity cards (\textit{Kontrollkarten}, \textit{livrets/cartes de santé} or boekjes) in one commune and then left the area.\textsuperscript{118} This, in turn, made it difficult for Belgian and German police forces to track them. Already in June 1940, the Germans were aware

\textsuperscript{110} For example: J. Moorkens, Ministry of the Interior and Public Health, Public Health Section, to Dr. Holm, 26 Aug. 1942, AN AJ\textsuperscript{40}, Box 64, Folder 3. The German files obviously contain more documentation relating to the denunciations by their troops of Belgian women, rather than women’s denunciations of German soldiers.
\textsuperscript{111} Dr. Wever, Provincial Hygiene Inspector to Secretary-General, Ministry of the Interior and Public Health, 1 March 1944, AN AJ\textsuperscript{40}, Box 64, Folder 3; Dr. Hördemann to Ministry of the Interior and Public Health, Betr.: Bekämpfung von Geschlechtskrankheiten, 14 March 1944, AN AJ\textsuperscript{40}, Box 64, Folder 3.
\textsuperscript{112} See, for example, Dr. Houyet, Hygiene Inspector, Mons, to Secretary-General, Ministry of the Interior and Public Health, 1 May 1942 AGR Administration de la Santé Publique, Folder 540.
\textsuperscript{113} Seidler, \textit{Prostitution}, 176.
\textsuperscript{114} Cabinet du Bourgmestre, Police, 29 Dec. 1941, AGR Ministère de la Justice, Police des étrangers (I 417), Folder 1440.
\textsuperscript{115} Arrêté - 25 June 1940; Arrêté - 3 Jan. 1941.
\textsuperscript{116} Art 3., 4, Arrêté - 3 Jan. 1941.
\textsuperscript{118} KK I 616 to OFK 520, Betr.: Bekämpfung der GK, 13 March 1941, AN AJ\textsuperscript{40}, Box 64, Folder 2.
that women were noncompliant, reporting from Brussels that “it is known that prostitutes in the suburbs frequently change their lodging to escape the clutches of the police.”

In one Brussels brothel in December 1940, a German military patrol’s inspection of the livrets of the female inhabitants, which were supposed to log the dates and results of their medical tests certified with a physician’s signature, showed that most of the women had never seen a doctor. Ignorance alone does not explain these women’s failure to comply with Belgian law. The June regulation had been in place for six months by this point and had merely formalized the biweekly medical examination of sex workers long practiced across Belgium. Many women further failed to show their identity cards when prompted by police, also required by law, suggesting that more was going on than inadvertent forgetfulness or ignorance.

It is difficult to assess whether women knowingly subverted medical surveillance. In the spring of 1942, twenty-six-year-old Rachel D. from Rumbeke in West Flanders was diagnosed with syphilis while working in Hannover. She refused treatment in Germany and was quickly sent back to Belgium. Back in Belgium, however, Rachel did not consult a health counsellor until mid-May, nearly a month after her return. The reason for her delay, she claimed to the Chief Inspector of Public Health, Dr. van Meenen, was that she had already consulted a specialist in Brussels, whose name and address she could not remember, but who gave her a clean bill of health, or so she attested. Rachel promised to consult a physician in Rumbeke and report back with the results. More than two weeks later, Dr. van Meenen had heard nothing; on 4 June, the city physician in Rumbeke even dropped in to see Rachel, but she was not home and her father did not know her whereabouts. By 8 June, van Meenen threatened that he “would feel obliged to take further measures” if he did not receive any word from her. Shortly thereafter, he received confirmation that Rachel had syphilis and had received treatment. Infected while in Germany,
Rachel maintained that she had not exhibited any physical symptoms and never noticed anything wrong.\textsuperscript{123}

Even if Rachel was not lying, which is unlikely given the fact that she was sent back from Germany because she had VD and probably knew her diagnosis from the beginning, she managed to avoid treatment for a considerable amount of time. She was not the only Belgian woman to do so, although determination of the motives of evasion can only be speculative. Women may have eluded medical control because of its physical intrusiveness or to keep their jobs and financial income. They may also have avoided the medical profession because it was convenient and relatively easy to do, since the morals police only conducted raids randomly and medical specialists tended to be overburdened.

Women disrupted other regulations as well and sometimes unabashedly lied to German and Belgian authorities. In July 1944, Dr. Tomek of the High Field Command in Brussels reported that prostitutes in brothels and taverns were concealing German soldiers in their rooms during routine army patrols (\textit{Heeresstreifen}). When asked, the women denied that the men had been with them. Only after tearing apart the rooms did the patrols find the soldiers, usually hiding under the bed or in the closet. While the OFK determined what to do with them, it handed over the women to Belgian police for detention for 24 hours.\textsuperscript{124} Other women manipulated the truth toserve their own purposes. In Charleville in northern France, the German military police arrested a Francophone Belgian woman, Yvonne W., on the grounds of a suspected VD infection. Perhaps aware of the seriousness of her plight, she went the route of full disclosure; she confessed to the military police that she had had sex with several German soldiers, including two different men eight days before her arrest. She also confirmed that she lived in France on the money she earned from having sex with German men. However, Yvonne claimed, “to be sure, I never asked for money. I received the money from these soldiers voluntarily.” Perhaps Yvonne

\textsuperscript{123} Dr. van Meenen, Ministry of the Interior and Public Health, Bruges, to the Secretary-General of the Ministry of the Interior and Public Health, 15 June 1942, AN AJ\textsuperscript{10}, Box 64, Folder 3.

\textsuperscript{124} Militärverwaltungsrat Dr. Tomek, OFK 672, to Chef der Zentraldivision, Oberkommissar Boute, Betr.: Massnahmen gegen Prostituierte, welche von Heeresstreifen festgenommen werden, 10 July 1944, AVB Guerre40-45, Box 39. Service des Moeurs et de la Jeunesse, Le Commissaire-adjoint Mattys to le Commissaire en Chef, 10 July 1944, AVB Guerre40-45, Box 39. The Crown Prosecutor in Brussels, however, declared such detention of women by Belgian police to be an infraction of the Belgian criminal code because the women had violated “a rule of the occupying authority,” without having committed an act punishable by Belgian law with preventive custody. Parquet du Procureur du Roi to Commissaire de Police en Chef, 5 Aug. 1944, AVB Guerre40-45, Box 39.
knew that her fate – and potential punishment – hinged on whether the money she received was a gift or if it was payment for sex.\textsuperscript{125}

This discussion of some women’s challenges to the system designed to regulate them does not mean either that the Germans were correct that Belgian women were dangerous or that sex work provided women with distinct avenues of resistance. What the perceived and real acts of noncompliance and evasion demonstrate is that modicums of occupational and social control were neither complete nor totalizing. Women could sometimes find space to maneuver within the medical, legal and political barriers jointly erected and enforced by their fellow countrymen and the German occupiers. The pervasive female threat imagined by the German authorities further confirmed that those barriers were not strong enough; the occupiers’ fear itself reveals the paradox of attempting to harness sex (and by extension, local women) for military and political goals and yet dreading the possible consequences of this project.

**Bad Belgians? Local Officials, Proprietors and Physicians**

Throughout the occupation, the German military command was frustrated by what it perceived as the “lax approach” of local officials and specialists, including governors, mayors, police and the medical profession, to fight the spread of VD and prostitution.\textsuperscript{126} In the interests of curbing their own direct interventions in Belgian public health, the Germans designated these bureaucrats and professionals to fight the war against unregulated prostitution and VD on their behalf. Dr. Craushaar observed the need for support early on in the occupation in a circular to the OFKs: “Because the battle against VD can only be carried out if the Belgian authorities are cooperative and because, according to the current legal position, coercive measures cannot be executed; the goal can only be achieved through sincere cooperation.”\textsuperscript{127} Although they assumed suspected prostitutes might challenge regulations relating to prostitution and VD, military officials did not anticipate the effects of their reliance on other enforcers of occupation policy.

Very few municipal authorities abided by the legislation of 1940-41.\textsuperscript{128} By March 1941, three months after the January 1941 law came into effect, the district command in Soignies, a Walloon municipality in the province of Hainaut, reported that although the Belgian authorities

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\textsuperscript{125} KK 704, Betr.: Vorläufig Festnahme der Yvonne W. wegen Verdachts der Geschlechtskrankheit, Charleville, 7 March 1941, AN AJ\textsuperscript{40}, Box 64, Folder 4.

\textsuperscript{126} Tätigkeitsbericht der MV, Nr. 10, 2 Nov. 1940, BA-MA RW 36/180, Bl. 46-7.

\textsuperscript{127} Craushaar to OFKs, Betr.: Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten, 8 June 1940, AN AJ\textsuperscript{40}, Box 64, Folder 2.

\textsuperscript{128} Provincial Governor of East Flanders to the Mayors and Aldermen in the Cities and Communes in the Province, 12 March 1941, Stadsarchief Gent SKW 1147.
technically complied with the official legislation, their “practical work” in fighting prostitution and VD left something to be desired. Observing that prostitutes had not yet been registered in some communities, the Kreiskommandant noted, “There is certainly the impression that the competent Belgian authorities do not always work with the necessary diligence.” At the same time, about 40 kilometres away in Charleroi, the German district commander complained that the governor of the province still had not determined the location and times of medical examinations. The Belgian morals police, as a result, “have no leverage at the moment against prostitutes, even those registered on the prostitutes’ list, to force them to undergo examination. Only the fear of punishment makes the prostitutes, who are unfamiliar with this regulation, keep delivering themselves to medical examination.” By early 1942, enough reports of women circulating on Belgian city streets and disobeying the prescribed health regulations of January 1941 had made their way to German ears. Worried about the potential risks posed to their troops, the occupation authorities pressured the Ministry of Public Health to issue a circular to all Belgian mayors, reminding them of their duty to strictly apply the law.

Although the municipal police generally fell in line with the military administration regarding the enforcement of prostitution control, there were instances where the occupying power charged policemen with exhibiting “passive resistance,” doing nothing, for example, as women beckoned to passersby in busy urban plazas and streets. Part of the problem was that morals police forces were often understaffed and well known to the inhabitants of the town or city, making it difficult to carry out surprise patrols effectively. In some cases, the police were just not interested in protecting the health of German troops. An anonymous Belgian journalist warned the German authorities against “relying too heavily on the cooperation of the Belgian police in regards to the control of prostitution in Brussels” on the grounds that many police

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129 KK I/616 to OFK 520, Betr.: Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten, 13 March 1941, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2.
130 KK Charleroi to OFK 520, Betr.: Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten, 11 March 1941, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2. See also the frustration in East Flanders regarding the medical control of prostitutes: Provincial Governor of East Flanders to the Mayors and Aldermen, 12 March 1941, Stadsarchief Gent SKW 1147.
131 Public Health Section, Ministry of the Interior and Public Health, to Secretary-General of the Department of Justice, Annexe: Circulaire à Messieurs les Bourgmestres, 7 Jan. 1942, AGR Administration de la Santé Publique, Folder 539.
132 Leit. San. Offz., OFK 672 to MVC, med. IV/2, 18 March 1941, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2; Lemaire to Director General, 12 Nov. 1941, AGR Administration de la Santé Publique, Folder 538.
133 Leit. San. Offz., OFK 589, to MVC, Betr.: Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten, 14 March 1941, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2. In Brussels, the morals police force was composed of six officers in 1940. By 1942, that number had not increased. Majerus, Occupations et logiques, 244.
commissioners were of questionable morality and unlikely to be expedient in their fight against clandestine prostitution.\footnote{Dr. K.P., 8 July 1940, AN AJ\textsuperscript{40}, Box 64, Folder 2.}

Proprietors of public establishments and brothels caused additional headaches for the occupiers. Since the military had decided not to organize its own brothels, it relied on the cooperation of local tenanciers. In general, the relative independence accorded to brothel keepers made it easier them to neglect official regulations in the interest of increasing their profits. The Germans required Wehrmachtsbordelle in Belgium and elsewhere in the occupied territories to meet numerous operational and security standards. Tenanciers had to send the number and names of all women in their brothels to the district command centres on a weekly basis and make sure their employees were regularly examined.\footnote{AOK 6, Anlage 10a, Anweisung für den Bordellinhaber, 23 July 1940, BA-MA RH 20-6/1009; Vorschriften für belgische Bordelle, 19 Oct. 1940, AN AJ\textsuperscript{40}, Box 64, Folder 2. For a local example of these rules, see Ortskdtr. Mons to the Mayor of Mons, 14 Sept. 1940, Archives de la Ville de Mons Guerre 1940-1945, Box 66.} The tenancier also had a more abstract role as the protector of the German soldier who sought entertainment and pleasure in a brothel or club: “The keeper of the place must prohibit self-proclaimed filles de joie from accosting soldiers and if possible he [or she] should deter them.” Proprietors were also expected to defend their establishment from ‘occasional’ women who entered “this public place only for the purpose of attracting men for sexual relations.”\footnote{Ortskdtr. Mons to the Mayor, 14 Sept. 1940, Archives de la Ville de Mons Guerre 1940-1945, Box 66.}

A few brothel owners sought to showcase their loyalty to the occupying power. The prospective tenancier in Brussels, Robert H., hoping to win support for his venture to open a brothel on Rue St. Laurent, praised the Wehrmachtsbordelle that had existed on the same street during World War I.\footnote{Robert H. to Commissaire de Police E. Lambert, 11 Oct. 1940, AN AJ\textsuperscript{40}, Box 64, Folder 2} Robert H. portrayed himself as a political and racial ally, noting that his female employees could speak German and thus communicate with German soldiers, presumably to satisfy their sexual requests. He also insisted that his family was of German descent.\footnote{Robert H. to Dr. Schött, 24 Feb. 1941, AN AJ\textsuperscript{40}, Box 64, Folder 2. See also the letter of Robert H.’s wife to Dr. Schött, dated 31 Dec. 1940, in the same file.} Robert H. further demonstrated his commitment to the German occupying power by declaring his intention to operate his house with a “firm hand”; he requested permission to fine female employees who behaved “incorrectly” with customers.\footnote{Robert H. to E. Lambert, 11 Oct. 1940, AN AJ\textsuperscript{40}, Box 64, Folder 2.}
More common, however, were the *tenanciers* who sought to capitalize – quite literally – on the presence of German soldiers, whatever the regulations. In 1942, the commander in Brussels forbade Wehrmacht soldiers from entering a café run by Dutchman Piet Van Kempen. Van Kempen, following his dishonest actions during a cycling race, had “acquired an unfortunate reputation in Germany.” In 1941, a Belgian court sentenced him to five months in prison for pretending to offer “good” lodgings for Wehrmacht troops, when his establishment was a known “rendez-vous point for traffickers and women of bad morals.”

Wehrmacht soldiers had listed Van Kempen’s locale as the place of their infection.

Proprietors routinely broke the rules by letting prohibited individuals work in or frequent their establishments. In 1941-42, Belgian civil authorities reported to the military administration “in a tone of indignation” that underage girls were being housed in brothels reserved for occupation forces, which was a violation of the Belgium’s Child Protection Act of 1912. The Germans launched an investigation but no evidence was found to confirm the allegations.

Other contemporary sources confirm that minors under 16-18 years of age often engaged in sex for payment in and outside of brothels. Also among the undesirable individuals discovered in brothels were Belgian civilians. A military patrol from the 16th Army inspected “Haus Diana” in Brussels on 9 December 1940, catching a *Hauptfeldwebel* on the first floor and a Belgian civilian in bed in one of the rooms. The report sent to the OFK noted that the civilian was apparently the owner’s friend and in poor health, but the Germans remained unconvinced, noting that “it is likely that Belgian civilians are also allowed as visitors in the house by the owner.”

*Tenanciers* also failed to comply with the ordinance that they prohibit casual sex workers from entering or working in their establishments. Many employed women were not registered but allegedly “led an irregular life,” or, in other words, solicited customers and engaged in sex

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140  Kriegsverwaltungsassessor Richter to Ortskdr., Abt. Feldgendarmerie, 7 April 1942, AVB Guerre40-45, Box 25.
141  Stadtkommandanturarzt Brüssel, Meldung of Kurt F., 28 Feb. 1941, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 4.
143  Dr. Holm to Gruppe Fürs., 29 Sept. 1942, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2.
144  MBH, MVC, “Med. IV/2 to Ministry of Interior and Public Health, 10 March 1941, Stadsarchief Gent SKW II47. Note complémentaire au rapport de la Police de Mons, 21 Sept. 1942, AGR Ministère de la Justice, Police d’Étrangers (I 417), Folder 1440. On the prostitution of minors, see François, “«Une véritable frénésie de jouissance…»,” 17-34.
145  Dr. Schött to OFK 672, 10 Dec. 1940, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2.
A military patrol’s surprise visit to “Haus Diana” led to the discovery of seventeen women and the seizure of their Kontrollkarten. Inspection of the cards showed that only eight of the women were registered. The patrol’s report to the OFK in Brussels also noted that “some of the women present make such a poor impression, that one could hardly designate them as usable for a military brothel.” Because the unacceptable conditions of the space and staff offered the “highest risk of infection for visitors,” the report considered it necessary to lock up the brothel to keep Wehrmacht soldiers away. In a few cases, proprietors resisted or aggravated the initiatives of the local morals and military police. During a surprise inspection of a “shoddy” café in October 1940, members of a medical battalion were searching for one female employee in particular; this woman had allegedly worked in the café for a single night and then went to another business. The café owner initially refused to give any information about the woman. It was only after “a labourious investigation and threats to close the café” that he gave up her address to the battalion commander.

Other proprietors were suspected of being part of the illicit sex offered under their roofs. Several female employees of a drinking establishment primarily reserved for members of the Wehrmacht reported to police that their employer, a Polish woman named Maria P., “played a scandalous role” in orgies with German troops. They also claimed that Maria P. pocketed large sums of money from the prostitution of women in her employ. The College of the Mayor and Aldermen closed the business, though it later re-opened with Maria. P. again at the helm.

The greatest challenge posed by the civilian sphere to the military’s desired Kontrollprogramm emerged neither from political authorities seeking to escape the German yoke nor from rule-breaking tenanciers, but from the profession at the core of the program: physicians. There was a clear discrepancy in the numbers; there were far too many prostitutes required medical examination and there were not enough doctors to examine them. To be sure, the lack of sufficient staffing to carry out VD control measures was not a specifically Belgian problem. Even the German military command recognized a shortage of physicians within its ranks. Many doctors were sent to the front during and after the launch of Operation Barbarossa

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146 Leit. San. Offz., OFK 589, 14 March 1941, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2; Politie, St. Josse-ten-Noode, Rapport, 4 Dec. 1941, AVB Guerre40-45, Box 25.
147 Dr. Schött to OFK 672, 10 Dec. 1940, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2.
right when their expertise was needed in the military infirmaries and in the control of brothels and supervision of indigenous medical personnel in Belgium.¹⁵⁰

A day after the promulgation of the 25 June 1940 law, the city physician (Stadsgeneesheer) in Ghent, Dr. Lesseliers, grumbled to the mayor’s office that nearly all of his time was spent examining prostitutes. In one week he had examined 152 women and 45 alone in five hours on a single day. He found that only 21 women were infected or suspected of infection.¹⁵¹ The newly legislated biweekly medical examination of prostitutes guaranteed that the workload of physicians was only set to increase. In Ghent, there were approximately 150 women requiring medical attention, and at two examinations a week, Dr. Lesseliers expected to examine up to 50 women daily, tantamount to eight straight hours of work every day. Protesting that a single doctor could not carry out all of the work, he recalled that in the First World War, three physicians had shared the responsibility of examining all suspect women.¹⁵² Dr. Lesseliers requested two assistant doctors to share the workload; otherwise, he threatened to resign his other duties as overseer of the city’s public health initiatives.¹⁵³

Ghent was not the only city with an overburdened chief physician. In Brussels, in fall 1941, Dr. Desneux, the head of the city’s Intercommunal Medical Control Service of Prostitution and the city’s anti-venereal clinics, faced the proposal of the provincial administration to open another clinic at the St. Josse-ten-Noode hospital in order to be able to accommodate more medical examinations of women in metropolitan Brussels. Dr. Desneux opposed the establishment of another clinic, in part because his other health centres had only seen about two-thirds of the 1200 women expected. An additional clinic was thus an unnecessary venture that would increase his already heavy burden:

I assume responsibility for the medical direction of the control service…but my situation is particularly delicate regarding the occupier, who daily submits cases of denunciation for VD infections for my judgment; it is I alone who draw up the reports concerning these cases and who bears all the responsibility, all while I face the fundamental impossibility of personally conducting all of the required examinations.

Dr. Desneux further insisted that he would collaborate only with medical specialists whom he had prior communication with or knew personally, essentially (and deliberately)

¹⁵⁰ Dr. Holm, Besprechung über Prostitutionsfragen am 7.5.41, AN AF⁴⁰, Box 64, Folder 2.
¹⁵¹ Stadsbestuur van Gent, Verslag over de werkzaamheden van den Zedendienst, 18-24 June 1940, Stadsarchief Gent IV 353-354.
¹⁵² Dr. Lesselier, to the College of the Mayor and Aldermen of the City of Ghent, 18 June 1940, Stadsarchief Gent IV 353-354; Dr. Lesselier to Mayor Jules Storme, 26 June 1940, Stadsarchief Gent IV 353-354.
¹⁵³ Dr. Lesselier to J. Storme, 26 June 1940, Stadsarchief Gent IV 353-354.
limiting the pool of possible assistant physicians to those from central Brussels, rather than the larger suburban area of the capital.\textsuperscript{154} His demand was a subtle way to launch his opposition to and isolate the city centre from the “radically inapplicable” measures of the January law and more specifically to the provincial administration. The Ministry of Public Health considered Dr. Desneux’s resistance as evidence of the “ill will of the city of Brussels to organize with greater severity services to combat prostitution.”\textsuperscript{155} The case relays the political acrimony at the core of the occupation on two levels; first, it reveals the substantial dependence of the German authorities on the Belgian medical profession and the latter’s seemingly impossible responsibility to organize and execute the complete medical control of prostitution. Second, Dr. Desneux’s unease about the tasks assigned to him operated as a means to challenge initiatives emanating from the provincial and state authorities, showcasing the fissures between the different levels of the remaining Belgian government.

The Germans may have relied on Belgian medical professionals, but the latter did not receive the implicit confidence of the occupier. The lack of trust is demonstrated in the fact that the military command forbade VD-infected German soldiers from consulting or receiving remedies from Belgian doctors, pharmacists or chemists.\textsuperscript{156} The medical sections and Chief Medical Officers of the OFKs and FKs further reviewed and supervised the medical control of prostitutes at Belgian clinics and dispensaries.\textsuperscript{157} The Germans accused physicians of lacking rigour in the battle against VD and prostitution, occasionally in comparison with the police. In Lille, the German command noticed a striking difference in the activity and initiative between local policemen and doctors and decided to impose fines against civilian physicians in order to encourage them to conduct their medical control with greater diligence.\textsuperscript{158}

Belgian doctors’ failure to adhere to and carry out some of legislated regulations bolstered this undercurrent of distrust on the side of the German authorities. The military administration routinely complained that physicians were not providing accurate, reliable

\textsuperscript{154} Dr. Desneux, Chef du Service des Contrôle Médical Intercommunal de la Prostitution, to Dr. Lagrange, 27 Oct. 1941, AGR Administration de la Santé Publique, Folder 538.
\textsuperscript{155} Lemaire to Director General, 12 Nov. 1941, AGR Administration de la Santé Publique, Folder 538.
\textsuperscript{157} Dr Hördemann to Ministry of Interior and Public Health, Public Health Section, Betr.: Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten, 4 April 1944, AN AJ\textsuperscript{40}, Box 64, Folder 2.
\textsuperscript{158} OFK 670 to MVC, Betr.: Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten, 9 April 1941, AN AJ\textsuperscript{40}, Box 64, Folder 2.
statistics on the number of cases of venereal diseases (or the names of the infected parties). Even in February 1944, after nearly four years of occupation, Oberstabsarzt Dr. Hördemann complained that “The number of cases of VD reported by the Belgian medical profession cannot possibly be in accordance with the facts.” He emphasized that in order to preserve Volksgesundheit in Belgium, the German agencies needed a clear image regarding the state of VD, meaning that doctors had to provide precise data on cases of infection. Dr. Hördemann tasked municipal hygiene inspectors with reminding medical professionals of their duty to the Belgian people to report, diagnose and treat VD “with the utmost conscientiousness.”

The steadfastness with which the Belgian physicians held onto their prewar philosophies on medicine and health care equally infuriated the German command. It seemed that little had changed over four years of occupation. As in the First World War, local doctors were reluctant to cede the rules of doctor-patient confidentiality, a practice that would also exasperate the Allies after the liberation of September 1944 and served the doctors’ interests in both contexts. Dr. Holm observed with frustration the continuation of patient privacy in spring 1941: “In Belgium, there is a common infraction: patients – primarily if they are being treated for VD – are seen by a doctor without identification by name and are instead only identified by a number.” The problem was that doctors were required to inform the local German command of the identities of those individuals who had infected their patients. German medical officials worried that since patients did not have to give their names, they could manipulate doctors in their accounts of how they became infected and then escape punishment because they could not be identified: a physician “could possibly be the victim of totally unbelievable information, perhaps only given out of a desire for revenge.”

The biggest problem for the German occupation authority regarding Belgian physicians pertained to a simple task, but one that held significance for the war on VD: the correct diagnosis

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160 Dr. Hördemann to Prof. Dr. Libbrecht, Betr.: Meldung von Geschlechtskrankheiten, 4 Feb. 1944, AN AJ 40, Box 64, Folder 3.
161 Dr. Hördemann to Ministry of Interior and Public Health, 4 April 1944, AN AJ 40, Box 64, Folder 2.
162 Dr. Holm, Vermerk, Betr.: Prostitution, 7 May 1941, AN AJ 40, Box 64, Folder 2.
163 Ibid. Majerus has argued that that the issue of patient confidentiality, which had withstood German pressure in World War I, broke down to some degree after 1940. Although the legislation of 1940-41 posed a challenge to doctor-patient confidentiality, anecdotal evidence suggests that the old practice of privacy continued to function to some degree. Majerus, Occupations et logiques, 233.
of the healthy and the sick. On 21 March 1941, a Belgian woman, Maria B., sought medical treatment after her sex partner of six months, a German soldier, informed her that he had contracted VD. She consulted a doctor in Leuven who certified her as being “free of illness.” Because the military police did not consider the attestation of the Belgian doctor sufficient, a German physician followed up with Maria and confirmed that in fact she had gonorrhea. The Germans selected another Belgian doctor, this one considered a Vertrauensperson or informer for the regime, to oversee Maria B.’s medical care. The Stadkommandanturarzt considered the entire case a “typical example of the examination methods of certain Belgian doctors…who recklessly issue such health certificates.” A few months later in Jodoigne, also in the province of Brabant, a German soldier reported that he had contracted VD from yet another Maria, who was tracked down, hospitalized in Leuven and diagnosed with gonorrhea. This Maria, however, had the attestation of a Belgian physician, written in German and dated the day before her apprehension, certifying that she was “absolutely healthy.”

These two Brabant cases were not isolated incidents; similar cases occurred in Flemish and French-speaking areas across Belgium. Even Craushaar had heard from various sources that Belgian doctors were issuing false certificates to women claiming good health. For Belgian doctors, declaring women to be VD-free, when in fact they were not, may have been a strategy of resistance towards the occupation regime or even an attempt at sabotage. In the summer of 1941, German authorities denounced the Belgian medical profession’s production of false certificates as a severe threat to public health and, “apart from that, these are negligent or malicious falsifications that no one should make and that are not particularly compatible with the duties of a conscientious physician.” Anxious that such incidents would become even more numerous, the Germans instructed the Belgian Ministry of Public Health to hold the responsible physicians

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164 The problem of local doctors was not strictly limited to occupied Belgium but seemed to plague much of German-dominated Europe. See Seidler, Prostitution, 149.
165 KK II/931, Abt. Feldgendarmerie II, Betr.: Ermittlung u. Vorführung der Maria B. beim Arzt, 25 March 1941, AN AJ, Box 64, Folder 2; Dr. Holm to Dr. Libbrecht, 2 April 1941, AN AJ, Box 64, Folder 2.
166 KK II/931, 25 March 1941, AN AJ, Box 64, Folder 2.
167 Stadkommandanturarzt, Brussels, to Dr. Holm, Betr.: Untersuchung von geschlechtskranken Frauen durch belgische Ärzte, 29 March 1941, AN AJ, Box 64, Folder 2. See also Craushaar to OFKs and FKs, 6 May 1941, AN AJ, Box 64, Folder 2.
168 Dr. Holm to Director General, Ministry of the Interior and Public Health, Public Health Section, Betr.: Falsches Attest bei einer Geschlechtskrankheit, 19 June 1941, AN AJ, Box 64, Folder 2.
169 Craushaar to OFKs and FKs, 6 May 1941, AN AJ, Box 64, Folder 2; Tätigkeitsbericht der MV, Nr. 16, 9 May 1941, BA-MA RW 36/186, Bl. 82.
170 Dr. Holm to Director General, Public Health Section, 19 June 1941, AN AJ, Box 64, Folder 2.
accountable as well as educate the entire profession about the “reprehensibility and criminality of such false certificates.”

Although German authorities portrayed themselves as victims of “bad doctors” who knowingly falsified medical certificates of suspect women, it is possible that the whole issue was in fact instigated by the occupier. By accusing Belgian physicians of lying, German military and medical officials may have been attempting to disguise the fact that they were the true deceivers, who declared women to be infected with VD when they were not. Falsifying the confirmation of venereal infection among Belgian women would have served several German objectives: the inclusion of more women into the system of medico-police supervision (irrespective of whether they were actually ill); the deflection of attention from the sexual activities of German troops; and the breaking of ties between German men and Belgian women. It is difficult to determine whether the Germans or Belgian doctors were lying about the certificates because both parties had vested, though in this case opposite, interests in civilian women’s health.

Further scandal erupted when, in July 1941, the local hygiene inspector informed the Chief Medical Officer in Ghent that German military physicians were issuing certificates to Belgian women, excusing them from the required medical examinations by Belgian doctors. The information could not be corroborated, and the Chief Medical Officer concluded that it was likely a harmless mixup and not a malicious slander campaign directed at military doctors, as originally feared. That some in the military command suspected foul play in the first place demonstrates that the Germans never believed they had entirely co-opted Belgians into the occupation project. This suspicion would spill over into other initiatives and polices in occupied Belgium.

Conclusion

In April 1943, an activity report from the military administration declared that in regard to the control and treatment of VD: “this area of disease control is unsatisfactory due to the individualistic-liberal attitude of the population.” German soldiers’ role in the battle to

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171 Craushaar to OFKs and FKs, 6 May 1941, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2; Dr. Holm to Director General, Public Health Section, 19 June 1941, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2. Holm had already been making this request for punishment and the issuing of an announcement to the whole medical profession since the spring. See Dr. Holm to Dr. Libbrecht, 2 April 1941, AN AJ40, Box 64, Folder 2.
regulate prostitution and keep themselves sexually healthy was not even part of the discussion. This is because military officials, confronting the desire to maintain the sexual prerogatives of German troops while facing a massive manpower shortage, necessarily though reluctantly tasked Belgian civilians to execute and enforce the laws on prostitution and VD control. This chapter has attempted to provide some insight into the functioning of sexual commerce on a daily level in occupied Belgium by analyzing military, medical and police records for what they reveal about the complex relationships between different actors involved on the ground in the sex trade.

Regulations on prostitution did not put an end to certain practices but instead established a cyclical dynamic of exercising and evading power. The laws and guidelines on prostitution imposed by the Germans from 1940 to 1944 defined and enshrined the responsibilities of Belgian civil officials, policemen, tenanciers, physicians and even the sex workers. However, by broadening the circuits of power and enforcement, or “out-sourcing” regulationism to the occupied population, the Germans also inadvertently created spaces for elusion, transgression and even resistance. Whether ordinary Belgians intended to or not, in their apathy, negligence and noncompliance, they showed the practical limitations of the Germans’ all-encompassing occupation project.

Most unsettling for the German occupiers were incidents in which they perceived Belgian women to challenge the strict boundaries of the sexual economy by offering soldiers forms of intimacy that were not explicitly or only sexual. The German military had envisioned the commercial sex trade as the solution to the “problem” of contact between soldiers and local women in occupied Belgium. On one level, access to regulated Belgian women’s bodies would keep German men satisfied and committed to the war effort. On a more subtle level, the regulated sexual economy would maintain the integrity of the German family unit by keeping men from forming emotional attachments to local women. Soldiers could have sex abroad – as long as it was “safe” with healthy and politically reliable prostitutes – but their domestic lives were to remain back in the Reich. Concern and rhetoric about the sanctity of the German family intensified as it became increasingly evident to Nazi and military leaders that separating out the different strands of intimacy – and trying to mobilize some forms while prohibiting others – was rather difficult on the ground in occupied Europe.
Chapter 4
She who can “stand with us and fight for us”? The Politicization of Marriage Between Germans and Belgians

Throughout the first two years of the German occupation of Belgium, German soldiers were forbidden from marrying Belgian women. This situation changed in November 1942 when Hitler amended the 1940 Heiratsordnung for the armed forces. From then on, the Flemish Volksgruppen were part of the category of Germanic brethren. As a result, marriages between German soldiers and Flemish women were officially sanctioned.¹ In 1943, the OKW amended the list of “racially related Germanic peoples” to add Walloons and a year later permitted German soldiers to marry Walloon women.² What prompted these shifts in marital policy in the second half of the war and what were their repercussions? How did the intersection of racial ideology and political and strategic considerations affect the permissibility of marriages between Belgians and Germans?

This chapter analyzes the evolving regulations on marriages between German men and Belgian and other allegedly “Germanic” women between 1940 and 1944. Marriage was not simply an intimate union between two people but symbolized the construction of new families which would both serve and be served by the Nazi state for generations to come. By prohibiting some marriages and encouraging others, marital regulations defined which kinds of sexual interactions and which kinds of families were legitimate in the Third Reich and the imagined Greater Germanic Empire (grossgermanisches Reich). Women’s intimate labour as wives and mothers, traditionally located in the private sphere, operated as a springboard to political action for Nazi and military leaders; it was through women, the biological, social and cultural reproducers of families, that the Second World War could be won and the Nazi empire realized.

Unlike the arena of sex work in occupied Europe, in which the Nazi and military leadership focused more on local women’s health than on their racial status (since interactions with German men were only supposed to be transient), questions of race took centre stage in family policies, and specifically those relating to marriage and reproduction. Nazi officials used marriage to create racial distinctions both at home and in occupied Europe; it was no coincidence that the Nuremberg laws of 1935 forbade German gentiles from marrying Jews while also

¹ Martin Bormann, Head of the Party Chancellery, Rundschreiben Nr. 184/42, Betr: Heiraten von Wehrmachtsangehörigen mit Angehörigen der artverwandten germanischen Nachbarvölker, 16 Nov. 1942, BAB NS 6/338, Bl. 239.
² OKW, Anlage zur der Verfügung, Betr.: Heirat ausländischer Freiwilliger, 1 Dec. 1944, BAB NS 2/239, Bl. 11.
defining who qualified as Jewish and limiting their citizenship. Because of its ability to demarcate the boundaries of racial inclusion and exclusion, marital regulations operated as a central frontier for the construction of the New Order in Europe. But individual marriages could also have unexpected consequences and destabilize Nazi plans for the occupied territories – what if German soldiers or SS-men married women considered “racially inferior” or women whose brothers or fathers were involved in the local resistance or who were themselves enemy spies?

This chapter situates the discursive legal and policy record on marriage between Germans and non-Germans within the complex relationship of race and politics in occupied Belgium and what was considered Germanic Europe. Because Nazi racial experts had largely invented racial terms and categories, including the “racially related Germanic peoples” (rassisch verwandten germanischer Völker), the regulation of marriage based on abstract racial-ideological principles with little tangibility could only ever be indiscriminate. In consequence, Nazi discernments about the marriageability of the Flemish and Walloon populations in Belgium were informed by the immediate military and political objectives of order and security in addition to the long-held perceptions of “racial affinity” with Belgians, and particularly the Flemish. As a way to more concretely ground their racial projects than was possible with ideology, Nazi and military leaders intertwined racism with politics in its discussions and policies relating to marriages between Germans and non-Germans. In other words, in the drive to demarcate the familial realm of the intimate, politics became racialized and race was politicized.

That legal marriage does not simply represent an individual act of love and commitment but plays a key role in defining national agendas and public order has been long recognized by historians, political scientists, sociologists and anthropologists. Stemming from her observation

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3 Like other racial terms basically constructed by the Nazis, like Volksdeutsche or ethnic Germans, the concept of related blood was tenuous from the beginning. See Doris L. Bergen, “The Nazi Concept of ‘Volkteutsche’ and the Exacerbation of Anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe, 1939-1945,” Journal of Contemporary History 29, no. 4 (1994): 570-1; Alexa Stiller, “Volksdeutsche” als Häflinge und Bewacher in den Konzentrationslagern,” in Nationalsozialistische Lager: Neue Beiträge zur NS-Verfolgungs- und Vernichtungspolitik und zur Gedenkstättenpädagogik, eds. Akim Jah, Christoph Kopke, Alexander Korb and Alexa Stiller (Münster: Klemm & Oelschläger, 2006), 105-7. For a more comprehensive history of the shaky edifice of Nazi racial terminology, especially as interpreted by the Race and Settlement Office, see Isabel Heinemann, “Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut”: Das Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt der SS und die rassenpolitische Neuordnung Europas (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003).

4 This literature is too vast to list here, but some of the key works that have impacted my analysis include: Nancy F. Cott, Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Joyce P. Kaufman and Kristen P. Williams, Women, the State and War: A Comparative Perspective on Citizenship and Nationalism (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007); Tamar Mayer, ed., Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation (New York: Routledge, 2000); Anne McClintock, Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the
that the language surrounding nations and national narratives reflects family and domestic spheres (e.g., ‘homelands,’ ‘nativelands,’ ‘motherlands,’ ‘fatherlands’), Anne McClintock has argued that “nations are symbolically figured as domestic genealogies.” Since the 1980s, scholars of Nazi Germany have been attentive to the ways in which Nazism intervened in the private world of the family – including marriage, divorce, domesticity, conception, birth and rearing of children – as a means of creating the *Volksgemeinschaft*, the national community.\(^6\)

Examining the regulatory record of different types of marriages sheds light on the mechanisms and technologies of Nazi power in Germany and occupied Europe. Nathan Stoltzfus has argued that marriage – in his study, German-Jewish marital unions – reveals the efforts of the regime to maintain popular support and the limits of its power, such as in 1943 when gentile women protested against the incarceration of their Jewish husbands in the famous Rosenstrasse demonstrations.\(^7\) The same can be said of wartime marriages between Germans and non-Germans and, in this case, Germans and Belgians. Although military and party officials wanted to prohibit marriages between German troops and foreign women after 1939, they made concessions in cases when they calculated that the support they could gain or maintain from their troops and the civilians of occupied Europe was more valuable than upholding the path of ideological rigidity.

Enabling marriages between Germans and some non-Germans, particularly those who belonged to the envisioned Greater Germanic Empire, did not signify the sacrifice of racism to political expediency, however. In fact, such marriages could circumvent the definitional problems of Nazi racial ideology and instead bind members of the Germanic peoples tightly to the Reich by creating long-lasting ties of affinity and belonging in the form of families. Further,\(^7\)

\(^5\) McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 357. Emphasis in the original. The word “nation” derives from “natio”, meaning “to be born.”


marriages served to ground, stabilize and reinforce the racist and murderous regime of the Third Reich as Claudia Koonz and Gundrun Schwarz’s respective studies of Nazi women, including the wives of party and SS officials, have shown.\(^8\) In Belgium and elsewhere in occupied Europe, local women who married German soldiers, SS-men and employees in the occupation administrations could create “safe spaces” in the home, thereby normalizing and incentivizing the activities of their husbands.\(^9\) An examination of marriage policy thus highlights how Nazism eschewed any divide between the public and private spheres, instrumentalizing domestic life as a means to dominance and genocide in Europe.

Marriage is a key site from which to investigate the intersection of race and politics, though it was not the only area of German policy in occupied Europe to compromise the ideologically based “racial state.”\(^10\) However, marriage requests were distinctive in that they forced Nazi officials into the position of having to make daily immediate and standing decisions balancing racial-ideological purity and political, economic and military stability.\(^11\) As it turns out, military and party decisions about what types of marriages were acceptable for German men in Europe were not about privileging politics or race, but about mapping these two forms of loyalty onto one another and interpreting them simultaneously and sometimes interchangeably.

The total number of marriages between German men and Belgian women is unknown, which is to be expected given the absence of reliable estimates as to how many Belgian women had intimate relations and/or children with German troops during the war, especially in

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\(^9\) Stephan Lehnstaedt has argued that local wives acted as a form of “relief” for the consciences of the German perpetrators in Minsk and Warsaw during the war. Stephan Lehnstaedt, *Okkupation im Osten: Besatzeralltag in Warschau und Minsk, 1939-1944* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2010), 236-7.


The fact that there were probably 400-500 German-Norwegian and even fewer German-Danish marriages suggests marital unions between German men and Belgian women numbered at most a few hundred. In the spring and summer of 1944, Hitler evaluated 200 applications for marriages between German soldiers and non-German women. Only 12 percent of those applications concerned prospective Flemish brides; Walloon women did not even make the list.\textsuperscript{13} However, it also seems that far more people in occupied Europe wanted to get married than actually did during the war due to practical and bureaucratic obstacles.\textsuperscript{14}

The first part of this chapter analyzes how Belgium and its bifurcated population, the Walloons and the Flemish, ambiguously fit into the concept of the Greater Germanic Empire. I then discuss Nazi policies relating to the marriages of Germans with non-Germans, or foreigners, before the Second World War and in particular the construction of the categories “kindred or related blood” and “Germanic.” These categories were initially intended to demarcate racial affinity between Germany and northern and western Europe. However, as the third part of the chapter explores, the concept of Germanic kinship became increasingly flexible after 1941-42, as the resistance surged and Nazi and military officials wanted to draw on the Germanic peoples as a source of labour and armed support. Coming up against the instability of Nazi racial ideology, the regime instead opted for a broader understanding of racial relationality that was read through and in conjunction with assessments of political value. The final part examines how the party and military envisioned marriage as a tool to persuade Belgian and other allegedly Germanic men to fight on behalf of the Reich alongside German soldiers and the SS in the last years of the war.

\textsuperscript{12} For a comparative discussion of these numbers, see Anette Warring, “Intimate and Sexual Relations,” in \textit{Surviving Hitler and Mussolini: Daily Life in Occupied Europe}, eds. Robert Gildea, Olivier Wieviorka and Anette Warring (New York: Berg, 2006), 92-3, 106-7. Along with Belgium, there are also no definite statistics for Italy, Greece and Yugoslavia; for much of eastern Europe, estimates on the number of children and intimate relationships tend to come from Nazi documents which are unreliable. It may be possible in the Belgian case to ascertain the number of marriages through consultation of the records of the civil registries (Burgerlijke Stand/L’État Civil), which contain all data about births, deaths and marriages in Belgium. These records are subject to privacy protection for 100 years and were not available for consultation during my research trips.

\textsuperscript{13} Dr. Gross, Rassenpolitisches Amt der NSDAP, to the RMfdBÖ, Betr.: Heirat von deutschen Wehrmachtangehörigen mit Ausländerinnen, 12 Oct. 1944, BAB R 6/130, Bl. 39.

\textsuperscript{14} Warring, “Intimate and Sexual Relations,” 106.
From the Greater Germanic Idea to Empire: Mobilizing Germanic Affinity

Belgium was a central component of the Greater Germanic Idea (großgermanische Idee) and its manifestation in the Greater Germanic Empire.15 According to this concept, the indigenous people of northwestern Europe – the Flemish, Dutch, Danish, Swedish and Norwegians, and the Germans – were the descendants of a shared Nordic ancestral line.16 It was this Nordic heritage that created Germanentum, a metaphysical link among these ethno-national groups. This link, this “Germanicness,” was thought to be innate and primordial; it never disappeared, but could become temporarily dormant and require reawakening.17

Hitler first used the word “Germanic Empire” in an editorial in a January 1921 issue of the Völkischer Beobachter.18 He claimed later in Mein Kampf that there were still “great unmixed stocks of Germanic people whom we may consider the most precious treasure for our future.” These Germanic individuals needed to be united, he argued, with the goal of “slowly and surely raising them to a dominant position.”19 In these early texts, Hitler’s concept of the Germanic Empire denoted a racially based form of political organization, specifically a “Jew-free” Germany. The term operated as a rhetorical vehicle through which Hitler articulated his anti-Jewish sentiments and was not a reference to his foreign policy goals.20 In other words, before 1940, there was no explicit link between the ideological concept of the Greater Germanic Reich and plans for expansion in northern and western Europe.21 Only after the successful

16 On the development of the term “Nordic race,” which was first used circa 1900 by the French anthropologist Joseph Deniker but popularized by the American eugenicist Madison Grant in his 1916 book, The Passing of the Great Race, see Steffen Werther, SS-Vision und Grenzland-Realität, 46-54.
17 The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries witnessed the growth of the “Germanic cult”; clichés like “Germanic loyalty” and “Germanic fortitude” circulated widely and became racialized. Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, The Racial State: Germany, 1933-1945 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 25.
invasion of Norway in April 1940 did Hitler explain his vision of the Germanic Empire, specifying that it should include the peoples of northern and western Europe (Flanders, Holland, Scandinavia) and exclude the Walloons and the French. He subsequently encouraged an occupation policy (Besatzungspolitik) in these parts of Europe with the long-term goal of fostering a Greater Germanic Empire, however loosely defined.

In contrast to Hitler, Himmler was committed to the idea of a Germanic empire and viewed it as one of the most essential tasks of the SS well before the war. On 8 November 1938, twenty years after the end of World War I, Himmler spoke before a group of SS-Gruppenführer of his intention to bring every Teuton (Germane) with the “best blood” back to Germany, make this individual conscious of his Germanness and, finally, turn him into “a fighter for us,” whatever the price: “I truly have the objective to fetch, rob and steal Germanic blood in the whole world, wherever I can.” Himmler noted the error of the Second Empire in Alsace-Lorraine after 1871, whereby the German victors merely told the inhabitants, “you were French yesterday and today you are German,” and advocated caution in the methods of raising Germanic consciousness in Europe. Such individuals needed reminders about their historic ties to the German Volk and their duty to their ancestors to “march in the homeland of [their] blood.” Himmler concluded his speech with a warning about the fundamental link between Germany and Germanic Europe: “What Germany has in the future before it is either the Greater Germanic Empire or nothing.”

Nazi racial experts and politicians considered the Flemish population of Belgium to be an inherent part of the Germanic community, not least because of their shared history, alleged physical appearance, Dutch linguistic heritage and geographical position in Europe. Gottlob Berger, the head of the SS Main Office, who became president of the newly Nazified Deutsch-Flämischen Arbeitsgemeinschaft (DeVlag) in October 1941 had a personal connection to Belgium; he had fought there in the First World War and lost two brothers in Flanders.

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24 Rede Himmlers vor den SS-Gruppenführern zu einer Gruppenführerbesprechung im Führerheim des SS-Standarte „Deutschland“, 8 Nov. 1938, cited in Heinrich Himmler: Geheimreden 1933 bis 1945 und andere Ansprachen, eds. Bradley F. Smith and Agnes F. Peterson (Frankfurt: Propyläen, 1974), 38. Joseph Goebbels wrote in his diary in April 1940 that “at the end of the 1870-1 war stood the Germans; at the end of this war, the Germanic Reich will stand. That is the fulfillment of our historical task on a large scale.” Elke Fröhlich, ed., Die Tagebücher. Teil I, vol.8, April bis November 1940 (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1998), entry 10 April 1940, 45.
25 DeVlag was one of the two major Flemish nationalist groups in Belgium, founded in 1935-36 by Dr. Jef Van de Viele at the University of Leuven and Rolf Wilkening at the University of Cologne. The other organization was the
commemorate his appointment as president of DeVlag, Berger gave a speech to its membership, declaring that his generation had committed themselves and literally bled for Flanders once before, in 1914-1918. His insinuation was that the Germans were the historic allies of Flanders who sacrificed their lives not only for the Fatherland but also for the Flemish cause. He recollected that upon arriving in Flanders, after fighting in Serbia, the Carpathians, Poland and France, he and thousands of his comrades-in-arms “had the feeling that a mysterious force brought us to this land.” Because of this experience, the Flemish people had “more friends” among the Germans than they ever could have imagined.

Nazi visions of Flanders were also distinctly racialized. Berger, a self-proclaimed expert on Flanders, maintained that the region was not and could never be a geographical entity in the sense of a sovereign state. If such a Flemish state were created, it would collapse from within: “It would be forced to curl up like a hedgehog, defensive against all sides – France, England, Germany – with no more possibilities to scavenge for food.” Instead of a place, Flanders was a völkisch idea based on blood, culture and heritage. In this view, the separation of the Flemish Körper from the central Germanic Blutstrom in 1815 had sentenced Flanders to a slow death.

Herbert Aust, a racial expert in the Race and Settlement Office who would later be appointed the Lebensborn Commissioner in the Netherlands, painted the Flemish as a people standing on the brink of racial and ethnic catastrophe.

The changing social fabric of Flemish cities after the First World War provided an easy target for German Nazis and Flemish nationalists, who singled out the influx of “foreign elements,” chiefly Poles and Jews, as polluters and colonizers of Flemish culture and society.

On the eve of the Second World War, Antwerp was the “capital city” of Belgian Jewry, home to

\[Vlaams Nationaal Verbond\] (VNV), founded in 1933 under the leadership of Flemish school teacher Staf de Clerq. After 1940, DeVlag allied with the SS and desired the annexation of Flanders to the Reich, whereas the VNV envisioned Flanders as a separate state in a Germanic union and aligned itself with the military administration. Neither the VNV nor DeVlag advocated for union with Germany before the German invasion, however. See Werner Warmbrunn, *The German Occupation of Belgium, 1940-1944* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 30-1, 100, 132.


28 Aust to an unnamed Gruppenführer, 23 April 1942, BAB NS 2/80, Bl. 80. Some Flemish nationalist activists also articulated the roots of the alleged decline of Flanders in abstract, spiritual and racialized language. One such example was Dr. van Genechten, a Schulungsleiter in the National Socialist Movement of the Netherlands (NSB), who applied for a position in the SS in Belgium in the summer of 1942. See Dr. van Genechten, Memorandum über Flandern, BAB NS 19/2140, Bl. 62-8.

29 Van Genechten, Memorandum über Flandern, BAB NS 19/2140, Bl. 63; Niederschrift über die Deutsch-Flämischen Kulturtage in Köln vom 25. bis 29. Juni 1941, BAB NS 19/2140, Bl. 8.
53 percent of the country’s 65 000 Jews. Many of these Jews were from eastern Europe and had travelled westwards after 1918 in search of employment and opportunity. The most numerous and enduring alleged oppressors of the Flemish were, however, their French-speaking neighbours. The celebration of Germanicness before the twentieth century was grounded in its anti-Frenchness and rejected French claims to cultural and political dominance. During the Third Reich, German racial experts claimed to have found a parallel in Flemish victimization by the French: the suffering of the German Volk at the hands of German Jewry.

The German authorities in Belgium anticipated that the Flemish would be natural and willing allies in the construction of the Greater Germanic Empire and National Socialist revolution because they had long struggled against “Frenchifying elements” and knew the meaning of perseverance, sacrifice and hard work. In the summer of 1940, Hitler directed military officials to “favour the Flemish” – as they had in World War I – in order to diminish ties of “Belgianess” between the two populations; this order effectively repudiated the High Command’s original instructions to the German military administration to avoid exacerbating the linguistic divide in Belgium so as not to alienate the civilian population. In addition, by actively encouraging elements of the so-called Germanic parts of Belgian society, Nazi officials

30 By 1942, only 8 percent of Jews in Antwerp were Belgian citizens; 54 percent were Polish. The other city with a high concentration of Jews was Brussels, home to 38 percent of the total Jewish population. Bob Moore, Survivors: Jewish Self-Help and Rescue in Nazi-Occupied Western Europe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 167; Lieven Saerens, “Antwerp’s Pre-War Attitude Toward the Jews,” in Belgium and the Holocaust: Jews, Belgians, Germans, ed. Dan Michman (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem: 1998), 159-60; Rudi van Doorslaer, “Jewish Immigration and Communism in Belgium, 1925-1939,” in Belgium and the Holocaust, 63-4. The best monograph on Jews in Antwerp is Lieven Saerens, Étrangers dans la cite: Anvers et ses Juifs, 1880-1944, trans. Serge Govaert (Brussels: Éditions labour, 2005).

31 In 1930, 43 percent of the Belgian population spoke Flemish, 38 percent spoke French and 13 percent spoke both. In spite of the higher proportion of Flemish speakers, French continued to be the primary language in terms of state administration and in the spheres of culture and education. Warmbrunn, German Occupation, 25. For German assessments of the “oppression” of the Flemish, see “Flandern, Wallonei und Deutschchtum in Alt-Belgien,” BA-MA RH 36/536; Berger, 29 Oct. 1941, BAB NS 19/1547, Bl. 27; Niederschrift über die Deutsch-Flämischen Kulturtage in Köln, 25-29 June 1941, BAB NS 19/2140, Bl. 9; Aust to an unnamed Gruppenführer, 23 April 1942, BAB NS 2/80, Bl. 79; Hitler, 27 June 1942, Doc. 241, in Hitler’s Table Talk: His Private Conversations, ed. H.R. Trevor-Roper, trans. Norman Cameron and R.H. Stevens (New York: Enigma Books, 2000), 405.

32 Burleigh and Wippermann, Racial State, 25.

33 Berger, 29. Oct 1941, BAB NS 19/1547, Bl. 27.

34 Niederschrift über die Deutsch-Flämischen Kulturtage in Köln, 25-29 June 1941, BAB NS 19/2140, Bl. 9; Van Genechten, Memorandum über Flandern, BAB NS 19/2140, Bl. 66.

35 Warmbrunn, German Occupation, 130-1. For more on Flamenpolitik in World War I, see Sophie de Schaepdrijver, La Belgique et la Première Guerre mondiale, trans. Claudine Spitaels and Marnix Vincent (Brussels: P.I.E.-Peter Lang, 2004), 137-69.
hoped to legitimize their ideological and political claims to the region. 

“Flemish favouritism” had many faces, from the promotion of Flemish over French in schools and universities to the separation of Flemish and Walloon soldiers in PoW camps. During the war, “Belgium” was non-existent. As a female German employee working in a local Mutterberatung told a Belgian man who insisted on proudly claiming Belgian nationality, even though he was from the German-speaking area of Moresnet, “for us Germans, the term “Belgian” no longer exists; one can only speak of Flemings and Walloons.”

In spite of the lip-service paid to anti-French sentiments, the Walloon population, whom Nazi racial experts generally regarded as “Roman,” were not completely excluded from the Greater Germanic Idea. In 1937, the future head of the Culture and Education section of the military administration in occupied Belgium, Professor Franz Petri of the University of Cologne, published a book titled *Germanic National Inheritance in Wallonia and Northern France*. His central premise was that the current language border that crossed Belgium represented a retreat from the positions the Germanic peoples had previously held; the German settlements of the Middle Ages had stretched into Northern France, down to the Somme river. Petri argued that Wallonia was, in fact, Germanic territory. In May 1942, Hitler read Petri’s book “with greatest interest.” He became convinced “that Wallonia and northern France are in reality German lands. The abundance of German-sounding name-places, the widespread customs of Germanic origins, the forms of idiom which have persisted - all these prove, to my mind, that these territories have been systematically detached, not to say snatched, from the Germanic territories.”

Himmler too argued that parts of French-speaking Europe, once part of the German Reich, should be culled for allegedly racially valuable elements; these people had become French “accidentally” and

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36 This Nazi project of suppressing aspects of existing culture and promoting those that seemed Germanic also occurred in Alsace-Lorraine, another region in western Europe with a difficult historical relationship with Germany. However, the power structures differed in Alsace and Belgium during World War II; the former was re-annexed into the German Reich, rather than occupied. Elizabeth Vlossak, *Marianne or Germania? Nationalizing Women in Alsace, 1870-1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 266.


38 Bericht von Frau Wilkening, 18 Feb., unknown date, BAB NS 9/156, Bl. 79-80.


40 Hitler, 5 May 1942, Doc. 207, in *Hitler’s Table Talk*, 347.
needed restoration to the Germanic people, a membership to which they were entitled by blood.\textsuperscript{41} In 1940, such rhetoric about the Germanicness of Wallonia and northern France seemingly justified the incorporation of two French \textit{départements}, Nord and Pas-de-Calais, into the military administration of Belgium, rather than keeping them as part of the Occupied Zone in France.\textsuperscript{42}

**Marriage between Germans and non-Germans, 1933-39**

As part of the project of \textit{Gleichschaltung}, the attempted nazification of civil society and daily life, officials of the Third Reich endeavoured to ‘manage’ the marriages of German citizens. Given that the overwhelming majority of German children were born within wedlock, regulating marriage seemed vital for controlling the quality of reproduction and, more important, of families.\textsuperscript{43} Hitler wrote in \textit{Mein Kampf} that “marriage cannot be an end in itself, but must serve the one higher goal, the increase and preservation of the species and the race.”\textsuperscript{44} Medical and legal experts also participated in the mobilization of marriage to realize state aims. In 1936, Drs. Arthur Gütt and Herbert Linden, both \textit{Ministerialräte} in the Reich Ministry of the Interior, along with \textit{Amtsgerichtsrat} Franz Massfeller, published a book summarizing the Blood Protection Law of 15 September 1935 and the Marriage Health Law of 18 October 1935.\textsuperscript{45} These experts stressed the long-term stakes of individual marriages for the \textit{Volksgemeinschaft}: “Marriage is not a momentary game between two people, but a permanent bond that is of profound importance for the life of the individual and of the whole \textit{Volk}.”\textsuperscript{46} Gütt and company wanted a wholesale denial of marriage for Germans who decided to forgo eugenic marriage considerations under the guiding principle that marriage was a private matter.\textsuperscript{47} Whereas Nazi ideologues extolled the values of racially worthwhile marriages for Germans, American sociologist Clifford Kirkpatrick, offered a more cynical view of the Nazis’ obsession with

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\textsuperscript{41} Himmler argued that until the decline of the Hohenstaufen, a dynasty of German monarchs in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Reich had held French territory, including Marseilles, Lyons, Besançon, Verdun, Cambrai, Arras and Dunkirk. Himmler conveyed his plans to make Burgundy an independent state and reacquire French territory to his masseuse, Felix Kersten. See Kersten, \textit{The Kersten Memoirs, 1940-45}, trans. Constantine Fitzgibbon and James Oliver (London: Hutchinson, 1956), 184-5.

\textsuperscript{42} Wagner, \textit{Belgien}, 174; Warmbrunn, \textit{German Occupation}, 69.

\textsuperscript{43} Stephenson, \textit{Women in Nazi Society}, 40; Mouton, \textit{From Nurturing the Nation to Purifying the Volk}, 48.

\textsuperscript{44} Hitler, \textit{Mein Kampf}, 252.

\textsuperscript{45} Arthur Gütt, Herbert Linden and Franz Maßfeller, \textit{Blutschutz- und Ehegesundheitsgesetz: Gesetze und Erlauterungen} (Munich: J.F. Lehmann, 1936). The book presents full transcriptions of the two laws, in addition to legal and medical commentary. For more on Gütt, who was responsible for reforming the Office of Public Health after May 1933 to fall in line with Nazi ideogical views on race, eugenics and hygiene, see Czarnowski, \textit{Das Kontrollierte Paar}, 138–41.

\textsuperscript{46} Gütt, Linden and Maßfeller, \textit{Blutschutz- und Ehegesundheitsgesetz}, 14.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 25.
reproduction in 1939: “National Socialism reiterates with crushing conviction that the task of the family is reproduction. For companionate marriage it has nothing but scorn.”

After Hitler became chancellor in January 1933, the Nazi state sought to legally abrogate the ability of Germans to freely choose their own spouses. The Blood Protection Law, part of the Nuremberg laws of September of 1935, prohibited marriages between Jewish and and non-Jewish Germans, although existing intermarriages were not dissolved. Sexual relationships outside of marriage between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans and those of kindred blood were likewise forbidden. In a process that Raul Hilberg has termed “definition by decree,” the Nuremberg laws, which also included the Reich Citizenship Law stripping Jews of German citizenship, were key in setting legal (though not necessarily clear) racial boundaries; these laws defined who was a “Jew” and introduced the concept of “kindred blood,” a construct that impacted the issue of German men seeking to marry “non-German” or “foreign” women. This legal discourse had a gendered undercurrent in the sense that all women – both racial “insiders” and “outsiders” – were configured as potentially sexually disruptive beings who required social supervision. Ultimately, marital regulations did not reflect Nazi racial distinctions among the German citizenry so much as it created them; it was through the policing of sexual and marital relations that the racialization of daily life could proceed.

Marriages between German men and foreign women were strongly discouraged but not prohibited. The implementation regulations for the Blood Protection Law, issued on 14 November 1935, provided no means of preventing marriages between Germans and foreigners, although § 6 stated that “A marriage should not be concluded if it is expected that its offspring

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48 Clifford Kirkpatrick, *Woman in Nazi Germany* (London: Jarrolds, 1939), 94.
50 A “Jew” was defined as someone with three or four Jewish grandparents (“by race”, although this was determined by how many baptismal certificates one could provide); two Jewish and two non-Jewish grandparents meant “first-degree mixed race,” and one Jewish grandmother or grandfather, “second-degree mixed race.” Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, vol. I (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985), 63-80; Diemut Majer, ‘*Non-Germans* under the Third Reich: The Nazi Judicial and Administrative System in Germany and Occupied Eastern Europe with Special Regard to Occupied Poland, 1939-45*, trans. Peter Thomas Hill, Edward Vance Humphrey and Brian Levin (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 101-3.
will endanger the pure preservation of German blood.” Alternatively, Nazi officials created bureaucratic barriers to make marriages more difficult to conclude. The 1935 Marriage Health Law restricted some marriages for eugenic reasons and required couples to submit “marriage certificates of fitness” (Ehetauglichkeitzeugnisse, ETZ), proving that neither party suffered from a “mental disorder” or “disease, which can cause extensive damage to the health of the other party or the descendants.” If a German man wanted to marry a non-German woman, the groom had to submit an ETZ for his foreign fiancée, proving her genetic and racial health.

Marriages between Germans and foreigners raised particular concern for Nazi officials because of the issue of citizenship. German citizenship law, before and after 1933, as elsewhere in Europe and North America, privileged the citizenship status of men over that of women. The treatment of German male citizens who married foreigners contrasted starkly with female citizens who did the same thing. If a German woman married a non-German man, she was stripped of her German citizenship. In these kinds of marital unions, Nazi laws on marriage did not apply because neither spouse would be a German citizen once the marriage was formalized.

In the case of German men who married non-German women, wives assumed German citizenship and any children born of the union would be German. Regulating the marriages of German men to non-Germans, then, was especially important because of its familial implications— the new bride and any children from the match would fall under the auspices of the state. New citizens would be granted all of the rights and obligations associated with citizenship, including suffrage, welfare and service in the armed forces.

54 Paragraph 5, for example, of the Marriage Health Law stated that the provisions of the law did not apply if both of the betrothed or just the bridegroom were of a foreign nationality. RGBl. 1935 I, S. 1246, § 5.
55 Gütt, Linden and Maßfeller, Blutschutz- und Ehegesundheitsgesetz, 40. The hierarchical relationship between men and women established by German citizenship law was not distinctive to Germany. In 1804, the Napoleonic Code declared that a married woman’s nationality was the same as her husband’s and this worked both ways, including both French women who married foreigners and the foreign wives of Frenchmen. In 1844, British Parliament ruled that any woman married to a British citizen became a British citizen herself. In the United States, Congress ruled in 1855 that any woman who had married or intended to marry an American man would be naturalized and later, in 1907, declared that American women who married foreigners would assume the nationality of their husband (and thus lose their American citizenship). In 1881, Canada followed Britain, requiring women to take their husband’s nationality once married. Until 1985, aboriginal women who “married out” lost their aboriginal status. See Nancy F. Cott, “Marriage and Women’s Citizenship in the United States, 1830-1934,” American Historical Review 103, no. 5 (1998): 1456–63; Philip Girard, “‘If two ride a horse, one must ride in front’: Married Women’s Nationality and the Law in Canada, 1880-1950,” The Canadian Historical Review 94, no. 1 (2013): 28-54; Kaufman and Williams, Women, the State and War, 20-6, 41-9 ; McClintock, Imperial Leather, 357-8.
Nazi policy-makers had a ready set of discourses with which to frame their anxiety regarding marriages between Germans and non-Germans. In the German colonies of Southwest Africa, East Africa and Samoa in the first decade of the twentieth century, discussions about marriages between German men and indigenous women were entangled with race, nationality and citizenship.\textsuperscript{56} Technically, German men had the legal right to marry whomever they wished, with the usual restrictions on minors, kin relatives and the mentally incapacitated.\textsuperscript{57} However, this right posed a problem in the colonial context; if German men could pass on their citizenship to the indigenous women they married and the children they fathered, then “not only the preservation of German racial purity and German civilization, but also the white man’s position of power, are altogether endangered,” so claimed two deputies who drafted the 1905 ban on mixed marriage in Southwest Africa.\textsuperscript{58} Concern about racial homogenization also featured in contexts where there were no readily visible markers of alleged racial difference, (i.e., skin colour); in interwar Romania, for example, eugenicists discouraged Romanians from marrying non-Romanians to maintain “ethnic purity” in the face of the Hungarian and German majorities in Transylvanian cities before 1918.\textsuperscript{59}

Though a ban on marriages between German citizens and foreigners never materialized, regulations governing marriages of members of the Wehrmacht, SS and NSDAP indicate that the Nazi regime was moving in that direction by the middle of the 1930s, possibly prompted by comparable resolutions taken by the Italian Fascist state to prohibit marriages between Italian men and non-Italian women. From 1936 onwards, German soldiers needed permission to marry non-Germans.\textsuperscript{60} For men enlisted in the SS, Himmler personally evaluated requests to marry non-German women.\textsuperscript{61} Rudolf Hess, Hitler’s deputy, retained a similar prerogative on the marriages of Nazi party members. In February 1938, Hess ordered that all marriages of party


\textsuperscript{57} Wildenthal, \textit{German Women}, 90.

\textsuperscript{58} Quoted in ibid., 95.

\textsuperscript{59} In 1938, the Romanian Penal Code introduced a law that forbade Romanian officers from marrying non-Romanian women, in order to guarantee the reproduction of healthy, “purely Romanian stock.” Maria Bucur, \textit{Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania} (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002), 127, 202.

\textsuperscript{60} Diemut Majer suggests that the Nazis were inspired by the October 1938 resolution of the Great Fascist Council in Italy, which forbade marriages between Italian public servants and all non-Italian women (irrespective of racial status) as well as marriages between Italians and Jews. As a general rule, marriages between Italians and non-Italians required approval from the Italian Ministry of the Interior. Majer, ‘Non-Germans’, 104-5.

\textsuperscript{61} Himmler to RuSHA, 25 Feb. 1937, BAB NS 2/176, Bl. 53.
members (men and women) with foreign individuals required his approval “in order to curb racial mixing, which, according to the National Socialist view, is pernicious for the German people and repugnant to the sense of honour of the National Socialist.”  

In spite of all of these disincentives for Germans to marry foreigners, over 800,000 marriages between Germans and non-Germans took place in 1938 alone.

If German citizens were going to marry foreign nationals, then Nazi ideologues and racial experts considered certain marital unions better than others; those with individuals of “kindred or related blood” (artverwandtes Blut) were the safest bet. The concept of kindred or related blood, originally introduced in the Blood Protection Law, was a loose term intended to denote the various branches of the Germanic racial tree. In a December 1935 issue of the Deutsche Juristenzeitung, Minister Dr. Wilhelm Frick discussed the concept of “German or related blood”:

…The German blood is not its own race. Rather, the German Volk creates itself from members of different races. All of these races are unique, yet their blood is compatible with each other and a mixture of blood – unlike the non-related blood – causes no scruples or tensions. The blood of those people, whose racial composition is related to the German…is to be treated in every way equal to that of German blood...

Following this racial theory that Germans were one of the offshoots of a longer and larger bloodline, the pool of racially acceptable spouses included European populations who shared common Nordic origins with the Germans, the Germanic peoples: the Danish, Dutch, Flemish, Norwegians and Swedes. Marriage would prove one way to incorporate the peoples of northern and western Europe into the Greater Germanic Empire; this policy was already evident in the 1930s, for example, in the fact that the military granted soldiers automatic consent to marry a non-German if the bride was of German or related blood. Nevertheless, Nazi officials subjected racially related foreign applicants to the same rules governing Germans; marital fitness certificates had to show that the non-German applicant possessed no “influx of the blood of alien races” (fremdrassige Blutseinschläge).

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63 This number included those in Austria after the 1938 Anschluss. Dr. Erhard Wetzel, Zur Frage der völkischen Mischehe (Berlin: Sonderdruck des Rassenpolitischen Amtes der NSDAP, August 1943).
64 RGBl. I 1935 S. 1146.
65 Minister Dr. Wilhelm Frick, Deutsche Juristenzeitung, 1 Dec. 1935, quoted in Gütt, Linden and Maßfeller, Blutschutz- und Ehegesundheitsgesetz, 21–2.
66 Gütt, Linden and Maßfeller, Blutschutz- und Ehegesundheitsgesetz, 13.
68 Gütt, Linden and Maßfeller, Blutschutz- und Ehegesundheitsgesetz, 22-3.
Marriage Policy in the Early Years of the Second World War

The invasion of Poland in September 1939 heightened the dual issues of the “quality” and “quantity” of reproduction; the realization that “good blood” was to be lost through the deaths of German soldiers in battle intensified the sense of urgency surrounding family politics. In some cases, the war made it easier for German couples to get married because it removed certain administrative impediments to marriage. On 28 October 1939, Himmler issued an order to the entire SS and German police force urging them to be noble by considering the predicament of the Reich at war and facing their responsibility to father children. As further incentive, Himmler simplified the marital regulations for the SS; men who had already expressed a plan to marry needed to submit only two Fragebogen to obtain a marriage license and the Race and Settlement Office (RuSHA) could send out approval within hours of the request. In the military, the Chief of the OKW, Wilhelm Keitel, loosened (and even removed) the restrictive provisions on age and seniority for the duration of the war to encourage troops into “fruitful marriage for the preservation of German blood.” The High Command also introduced “long-distance” marriages in November 1939, whereby a couple could make their declarations of marriage at separate times and places. Nevertheless, marriage without approval still constituted a military offense.

At the same time, the military and party leadership made certain types of marriages more difficult. In his position as the Reich Commissioner for the Strengthening of Germandom after 7 October 1939, Himmler ruled that he wanted to examine the applications involving marriage to women of “alien Volkstum” and those belonging to the Germanic nations. In January 1940, the

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69 Physical and genealogical investigations of engaged couples in Germany could not be carried out on the same scale as before 1939 because of the redirection of resources and manpower from the domestic sphere to the front. Heineman, *What Difference Does a Husband Make?*, 46.

70 SS-Befehl für die gesamte SS und Polizei, 28 Oct. 1939, ITS 4/482448197#1.

71 RF-SS, Befehl, 1 Sept. 1939, BAB NS 19/577, Bl. 23. The original regulations on marriage for the members of the SS are available in an order issued by Himmler in 1931: Verlobungs- und Heiratsbefehl, SS-Befehl – A – Nr. 65, 31 Dec. 1931, BAB NS 2/280. On the SS and its engagement and marriage procedures, see Schwarz, *Eine Frau*, 25-52. There is also a dissertation on the topic of SS family policy: see Amy Beth Carney, “Victory in the Cradle: Fatherhood and the Family Community in the Nazi Schutzstaffel” (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2010).


74 See §150, Heiraten ohne Genehmigung, Anlage I, Bezeichnung der strafbaren Handlung, OKW, Betr.: Kriegs-Kriminalstatistik, 4 Feb. 1941, BA-MA RW 60/467, Bl. 2.

75 SS-Brigadeführer Otto Heider, Chef des Heiratsamtes im RuSHA-SS, 5 Feb. 1943, BAB NS 2/231, Bl. 63; Himmler to RuSHA-SS, Betr.: Zu dem Aktenvermerk vom 29.2.1940, 4 March 1940, BAB NS 2/288; Himmler to Otto Hofmann, 12 Nov. 1942, BAB NS 2/231, Bl. 67. In July 1944, Himmler reiterated that all applications in which one of the parties was of alleged Germanic origin were to be submitted to him, suggesting that there was some leniency on this point. Himmler to Richard Hildebrandt, Chef des RuSHA-SS, 3 July 1944, BAB NS 19/577, Bl. 78.
High Command issued the “Marriage Order for the Special Use of the Armed Forces.” Soldiers had to obtain official approval to marry, something already under discussion before the war.\(^76\) Section 7 of the order prohibited marriages of officers in active service, band master officers, Wehrmacht officials, non-commissioned officers and officer cadets with foreign women. There was an exception to this prohibition. The military could permit soldiers to marry ethnic German women with foreign citizenship if, after careful consideration of the circumstances, it was revealed “that this citizenship is only of a formal character, that the rest of the connections to the foreign state or to foreign nationals are dissolved, and that, therefore, involuntary or deliberate treason is precluded.”\(^77\) Already from the outset of the war, then, speculation that non-German women were potentially treasonous because of their international ties stimulated a restrictive marriage policy.

Belgian women were included in this *Eheverbot*, which remained in effect for the first half of the occupation. Some German men were permitted to engage in marital unions with Belgians; however, even though the High Command had listed precisely who could and could not marry foreign women in January 1940, local administrators on the ground in Belgium remained confused. In the summer of 1941, a Reichsbahn worker applied to marry a Belgian woman. During the war, the Reichsbahn adhered to military regulations and fell under the General Staff’s Transportation Division.\(^78\) As part of the Armed Forces Auxiliaries (*Wehrmachtgefolge*), Reichsbahn employees were not subject to the restrictions on marriages with foreign women according to the *Heiratsordnung*. Consequently, the military authorities in Brussels had no objection to the German worker’s marriage.\(^79\) In spite of such clear-cut cases, confusion about restrictions on German-Belgian marriages persisted, suggesting poor communication between policy-makers in Berlin and bureaucrats and civil servants in Brussels. Even by late November 1941, Senior War Administrative Councillor (*Oberkriegsverwaltungsrat*) van Randenborgh was still fielding questions from the Belgian

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\(^{76}\) Aufzeichnung über eine Besprechung in der Reichskanzlei über das Ausländerheiratgesetz, 14 Aug. 1939, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtiges Amt R 27248.

\(^{77}\) Chef des OKW, Anlage zur Anordnung A 15/40, Betr: Heiratsordnung für den besonderen Einsatz der Wehrmacht, 21 Jan. 1940, BAB NS 6/331, Bl. 37.

\(^{78}\) Despite the military’s control of the Reichsbahn during the war, it remained a separate entity from the German military’s rail arm. On the relationship between the military and the German national railway during the Third Reich, see Alfred C. Mierzejewski, *The Most Valuable Asset of the Reich: A History of the German National Railway*, vol. 2, 1933-1945 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), especially chapter three.

\(^{79}\) Vermerk zur Heiratsordnung für Wehrmachtsangehörige, 1 July 1941, BA-MA RW 36/393, Bl. 11.
Ministry of Justice about the exact conditions of the *Eheverbot*. His answer was straightforward: “Marriages of members of the Wehrmacht with Belgian women are fundamentally forbidden.”

The ban on marriages in Belgium in the first half of the occupation is perhaps surprising. After all, Nazi racial experts argued that at least some Belgians, especially the Flemish, were of Germanic origin. Although it is difficult to determine the exact motivation for the *Eheverbot*, some potential explanations are plausible. First, the German military experienced rapid and unprecedented success in the western campaign in 1940 and the sense of confidence that the construction of the New Order was underway across Europe may have led military and party officials to strive for the most strict and idealistic path – already on 28 October 1940, the German military administration issued two anti-Jewish decrees to define and register Jews in Belgium and restrict their economic and professional opportunities. It is possible, then, that the insistence that Germans marry Germans, without compromise, aligned with other policies to establish a new racial order in Belgium by drawing lines among the citizenry. A marriage ban would also further solidify the status of the Germans as the *Herrenmenschen* and ruling elite and was consistent with the military command’s desire to restrict social relationships with Belgians.

Political developments in Belgium and Germany must also be taken into account. The reluctance to authorize marriages between Germans and Belgians from the start of the occupation likely reflected the haziness about the long-term goals for the country. Recall Hitler’s last-minute decision to place the Netherlands under a civilian administration instead of under Falkenhausen’s military command and the debates in the summer of 1940 about whether to incorporate the non-German-speaking parts of Belgium into the Reich. It is possible that Nazi and military authorities were awaiting some sort of official policy on Belgium’s relation to the Reich (both ideologically and geopolitically) before permitting marriages between Germans and Belgians. Also critical in framing the opposition to German-Belgian engagements and marriages was the image of the “dangerous woman” emerging out of the legacies of 1914-18.

The German military did not limit its concern about an indigenous female threat to Belgian sex workers; fiancées and spouses were similarly considered liabilities to occupation security.

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80 Oberkriegsverwaltungsrat van Randenborgh to Justizministerium, 29 Nov. 1941, BA-MA RW 36/393, Bl. 77.
81 Verordnung über Massnahmen gegen Juden, 28 Oct. 1940, MBH, Verordnungsblatt, Nr. 20, 5 Nov. 1940.
1942: Striving for Victory, Confronting Compromise

The prohibitions on marriages with foreign women did not last. On 26 January 1942, the High Command, at the behest of the Führer, amended Section 7 of the 1940 *Heiratsordnung*, now permitting marriages of members of the Wehrmacht with “racially related Germanic peoples” of Holland, Norway, Denmark and Sweden. The Flemish were not included in this list, although preparations were underway in early 1942 to include them as Germanic brethren, which occurred in November 1942. As a result, marriages between German soldiers and Flemish women were officially permitted. The process of enabling marriages between German men and foreign women had a set form: first, the ethno-national groups to which the women allegedly belonged had to be added to the category of “racially related Germanic peoples” and then marriages were allowed. In this legal framework, racial categorizations theoretically determined the types of sexual and marital arrangements possible in occupied northern and western Europe.

Why the flexibility as to who was considered acceptable for marriage after 1942? And why, at that stage, could Germans only marry Flemish women in Belgium? In several respects, the year 1942 marked a caesura in Nazi marriage policy. The success of the Soviet counteroffensive in December 1941 led General Franz Halder, Chief of the General Staff of the OKH, to comment that the German military situation was “the greatest crisis in the two world wars.” In the same month, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour and German declaration of war prompted the United States to enter the war. In 1941, 357 000 German troops were killed or missing in action and over 300 000 of these losses occurred on the eastern front; this is a striking contrast to the 19 000 killed in 1939 during the invasion of Poland and the 83 000 losses in the 1940 *Westfeldzug*. By 1942, thus, military casualties had a more discernible negative impact on Nazi demographic initiatives than in the first years of the war.

By the middle of that year, Himmler grew anxious that German men were not fulfilling their roles in securing racially valuable, fruitful marriages because of the human costs of the war.

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84 Vermerk zur Heiratsordnung, 1 July 1941, BA-MA RW 36/393, Bl. 11.
85 Bormann, Rundschreiben Nr. 184/42, 16 Nov. 1942, BAB NS 6/338, Bl. 239.
87 Ibid., 213-4.
(on their side, of course). In May, he complained to Hans Jüttner, head of the SS Leadership Main Office, that some divisions of the military, especially the Waffen-SS, were not placing enough importance on the Blutsfrage: “I notice with the marriage applications of young SS-men, company commanders and superiors very often take the view that the thought of being happy for every child born is unjust given the losses at the present time. It is said that the man was still too young, he was not mature enough, the marriage was not economically secure and the like.” In September 1942, Martin Bormann, head of the Party Chancellery, drew attention to the feedback loop between the war and Nazi racial projects, declaring that “The war has led to an ever more increasing importance of race and population policy; even after the war, it will belong to the historically important tasks of the empire.” The flexible understanding of what constituted related blood, or “good blood,” from 1942 onwards reflected concerns about the Volk’s ability to reproduce itself and sought to provide further incentives and opportunities for German men to marry, even if they did not marry German women.

In addition, in early 1942, RuSHA racial experts redefined the category of “related blood,” resulting in a new decree issued by Himmler in March 1942. Isabel Heinemann has argued that this process of redefinition inaugurated a “conceptual revision” in Nazi racial terminology. Previously, Nazi racial theory had designated all those who had historically settled in Europe as artverwandt, meaning that Norwegians, Poles, Russians and Portuguese, for example, were considered related to the German Volk. By 1942, Himmler contested this classification, arguing, “This scheme is based on the false premise that the racial structure of all European peoples is so closely related to that of the Blutkörper of the German people, such that racial mixing does not bring the risk of deterioration.” Himmler’s decree maintained that racial mixing was dangerous, a fact visible in the Vermischung with non-Germanic peoples in continental Europe, particularly the Slavs. To some degree, this concern was contradictory;

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88 This was in spite of the fact that the number of marriages among the Wehrmacht, Police, Waffen-SS and SS was 34.5 percent higher than the number of marriages concluded in the second half of 1941. Statistik des Heiratsamtes im RuSHA-SS, I. Halbjahr 1942, BAB NS 19/3482, Bl. 319.
89 Himmler to Hans Jüttner, May 1942, BAB NS 19/3482, Bl. 316.
91 Isabel Heinemann, “Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut”, 476.
92 RF-SS, Anordnung Nr. 70/I, Betr.: Änderung des Begriffes »artverwandtes Blut«, 23 March 1942, BAB NS 19/3680, Bl. 10-1.
precisely as Himmler tightened up racial definitions and categories, numerous programs were underway in Poland and the Czech Republic to Germanize sections of the local populations.93

The goal of the new provisions on the category of related blood was two-fold; the first aim was to bolster “the special position of the Germanic peoples, with the aim of transforming them spiritually to the unity of the empire and biologically in a common Blutkörper,” according to Himmler.94 The second and interrelated aim was to clearly separate out the non-Germanic peoples, especially the eastern Europeans living in the same territories as the Germans and those working in the Reich. In practical terms, this meant that the previous all-encompassing category of artverwandt was divided into two classifications: deutsches und stammesgleiches (=germanisches) Blut and artverwandtes – nichtstammesgleiches Blut.95 The first category applied to all Germans and the peoples of the Greater Germanic Empire, “regardless of their individual racial appearance,” whereas all of the non-Germanic Europeans, including all Slavic, Celtic and Baltic peoples, belonged in the second category.96

The revision of racial categories legitimated a more encompassing racial policy towards the citizens in occupied northern and western Europe, one that allowed for closer ties – including marital relationships – with the German Volk.97 However, the definitional transformations in Nazi racial ideology do not fully account for the opening up of marriage policy in 1942. Facilitating marriages between Germans and some Belgian women may well have been a strategy to placate German fighting men by institutionalizing yet another form of sexual reward,

94 RF-SS, Anordnung Nr. 70/I, 23 March 1942, BAB NS 19/3680, Bl. 10-1. Isabel Heinemann has argued the revision was an explicit attempt to discriminate even more sharply against Slavs and simultaneously confirm the “special status” of the Germanic peoples. Heinemann, “Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut,” 476.
95 Initially, Himmler wanted the two new categories to be deutsches und stammesgleiches Blut and europäisches aber nicht stammesgleiches Blut. However, Ulrich Greifelt, head of the Main Staff Office of the Reich Commissioner for the Strengthening of Germanhood, pointed out a difficulty with this reconceptualization: the entire German Rassengesetzgebung was built around the category artverwandtes Blut, meaning that a single change to this category necessitated the changing of all orders and legal regulations. Himmler followed Greifelt’s recommendation to change the second term to artverwandtes, aber nicht stammesgleiches Blut. See Rudolf Brandt, RF-SS Persönlicher Stab, to Greifelt, Betr.: Änderung des Begriffes »artverwandtes Blut«, 22 Dec. 1941, BAB NS 19/3680, Bl. 5, and Greifelt to RF-SS, 11 March 1942, BAB NS 19/3680, Bl. 6.
96 RF-SS, Anordnung Nr. 70/I, 23 March 1942, BAB NS 19/3680, Bl. 11.
97 These shifting marital regulations were in line with other policies taken in preparation for a long war by the fall of 1941. With every Feldzug and forward push during the war, as the “trawl for German blood” expanded, racial categories became increasingly mutable to accommodate new populations that could be Germanized. Harvey, Women and the Nazi East, 236; Stiller, “Zwischen Zwangsgermanisierung.” 107; Wolf, Ideologie, 15, 377.
much like the establishment of *Wehrmachtsbordelle* in 1940. Women, however, provided more than just sexual services in marriages; their reproductive and domestic labour also served to construct and bolster the Greater Germanic Reich by creating and raising its future vanguard: children. Further, wives provided opportunities for German soldiers, policemen and SS-men to express and receive other forms of intimacy, including sentiment. Even as “official” Nazi racial ideology viewed the foreign spouses of German men with hesitation, such women could, like German wives, implicitly serve the racial goals of the Third Reich by creating *Lebensraum* in the home. 98

Moreover, marriages were already happening on the ground in occupied Belgium and other areas of Europe, rendering the 1942 amendments to the Marriage Order essentially *ex post facto*. The revised *Heiratsordnung* itself noted that “The marriages of German soldiers with those from the aforementioned states have reached a considerable size,” though the decree did not quantify this claim. 99 A 1943 report from the *Auslandsorganisation* (AO) in Brussels observed the daily increase in applications by German soldiers to marry Belgian women. 100 The increasingly lenient marriage policy also reflected the inability of administrative organs at home and abroad to keep up with the demands of processing marriage applications; strict procedures could no longer be carried out. In the SS, for example, the *Heiratsamt* granted “provisional approval” to most marriage petitions, putting off detailed evaluations of the couples until the end of the war. 101 In the second half of 1941, the monthly average of provisional decisions was 693; this average increased between January and June 1942 to 932. 102

Himmler had foreseen this problem before the war. In his resistance to a ban on all marriages between Germans and foreigners, drafted in March 1939, he (correctly, as it turned out) anticipated that applications for such marriages would only increase once a war had started

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100 Landesgruppe der AO der NSDAP in Belgien, Rundschreiben Nr. 18/43, Betr.: Rassenpolitische Beurteilungen bei Heiraten deutscher Wehrmachtsangehöriger mit Belgierinnen, 12 Oct. 1943, BAB NS 9/108, Bl. 22.


and German men had more opportunities to interact with non-German women. Military and party officials alike hoped that with at least the shroud of legality, marriages between German soldiers and members of the Germanic peoples would be subject to some control since applicants would require racial and political assessments.

The opening up of marriage policy occurred alongside another project intended to secure “good blood” – the intensified drives to recruit foreign “volunteers” for the German armed forces and SS after the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. These indigenous formations in Belgium, as well as in the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, and Finland and among the ethnic German populations of eastern and southeastern Europe, were intended to provide much-needed manpower for the German war effort and aid Nazi propagandists in presenting the eastern campaign as a war against Judeo-Bolshevism. In July 1941, separate Flemish and Walloon volunteer units were established, the Legion Flandern and the Légion Wallonie, the latter with close ties to Léon Degrelle’s Rexist movement. By early 1942, 27 000 volunteers from western Europe, the equivalent of two full-strength divisions, had fought on the eastern front. In July 1943, more than 18 000 Belgians were in military service, including in the SS legions, home guard auxiliary forces and transport services.

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103 Himmler to Reich Minister Dr. Lammers, 21 March 1939, BAB NS 2/55, Bl. 140. Himmler maintained in 1939 that it was already very difficult to forbid marriages between Germans and the Volksdeutsche. From his own experiences in dealing with the marriage applications of the SS, he stated that the number of marriages was quite high: “I myself receive daily around three requests regarding approval for marriage with foreigners of German or Germanic descent. From a figure of around 15 000 marriages per year in the SS, these special requests therefore amount to some 1000.” On the increased opportunities for relationships between foreign women and members of the Wehrmacht due to the war, see Wetzel, Zur Frage, 2.

104 Leiter der Führungsgruppe P 2, Vorlage für den Herrn Minister, Betr.: Behandlung der Esten und Letten als Angehörige der deutschen Völker, 8 Nov. 1944, BA-MA RH 11-V/4, Bl. 9.

105 Kenneth W. Estes, A European Anabasis: Western European Volunteers in the German Army and SS, 1940-1945 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), accessed December 5, 2012, http://hdl.handle.net.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/2027/heb.99002.0001.001, 68. The SS had already recruited Dutch, Danish Norwegian and Flemish volunteers in 1940-41, although the results were underwhelming. In September 1941, only 45 Flemish volunteers served in the SS Wiking Division. Recruitment for the Waffen-SS also took place in countries allied with or tied to Germany (Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Croatia) in earnest from 1942 onwards, although there had been earlier attempts in the spring of 1940 to recruit young Volkdeutsche men from Romania to participate in the Waffen-SS. Ibid., 52-60; Valdis O. Lumans, Himmler’s Auxiliaries: The Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle and the German National Minorities of Europe, 1933-45 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 215-6; Stiller, “Zwischen Zwangsgermanisierung,” 108.

106 On armed collaboration by the Flemish and Walloons, see Martin Conway, Collaboration in Belgium: Léon Degrelle and the Rexist Movement, 1940-1944 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Estes, A European Anabasis; Flore Plisnier, Ils ont pris les armes pour Hitler: La collaboration armée en Belgique francophone (Brussels: Éditions Luc Pire, 2008); Bruno de Wever, Oostfronters: Vlamingen in het Vlaams Legioen en de Waffen SS (Tielt: Lannoo, 1984).

107 Estes, Anabasis, 197, 271.
The Reichsführer-SS foreshadowed the connection between marriage and the recruitment of foreign volunteers in March 1939 in a letter to the head of the Reich Chancellery, Hans Heinrich Lammers. Expressing his aversion to a ban on marriages between Germans and foreigners, Himmler proposed to “win over” the Germanic peoples by, first, permitting men of Nordic blood to enlist in the SS and second, by allowing marriages with women of Nordic blood. For him, the benefits to such marriages were clear. With each Nordic individual taken away from his or her own people, the Reich actually “acquired” (gewinnen) two people: one whom the enemy lost and one who would “stand with us and fight for us.”  

During the war, Himmler maintained this stance. In November 1942, he approved the marriage of a Hauptstellenleiter of the AO with an Italian woman, in spite of the policy to forbid all marriages of party leaders with foreign women (even women “belonging to a related race, like the Swedish, Norwegians, Dutch, etc.”). Because the bride’s mother was German, Himmler argued that the woman could probably raise German children in a German fashion.  

It is also likely that Italy’s political and military alliance with Germany assuaged fears about the potential “danger” of Italian women, particularly in comparison to the Reich’s other fragile alliances with Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania and the satellite states of Croatia, Slovakia and Vichy France.

Labour shortages also facilitated a change of course in occupation policy in both western and eastern Europe, as German and Nazi officials realized the potential of local populations to fuel the German war machine. By the fall of 1941, the German economy relied on foreign labourers to facilitate the continued fighting of the war, a dependency that unnerved Nazi security authorities and racial experts because of its potential subversive political and ideological impact on the German population. In Belgium, the initially successful campaign to recruit voluntary labourers after 1940 had declined after the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 when enlistments dropped considerably. In October 1942, the military instituted compulsory labour for Belgian men (aged 18 to 50 years old) and unmarried women (aged 21 to 35) in Germany. This initiative elicited wide protests and evasions of the draft throughout 1942-43. Some Nazi officials were convinced that marriages between Germans and local citizens in the

108 Himmler to Lammers, 21 March 1939, BAB NS 2/55, Bl. 139-40.
109 Himmler to Gauleiter Bohle, 11 Nov. 1942, BAB NS 19/3482, Bl. 279.
110 Wolf, Ideologie, 192, 197.
112 Ibid., 192-7; Warmbrunn, German Occupation, 225-38.
Germanic Empire would work towards the good will of the civilian populations, thereby in turn assisting the buildup of the foreign brigades and the forced labour program in Germany.¹¹³

**Brides, Families and Politics**

The 1942 decree that permitted marriages between Flemish women and German soldiers was not, after all, an open offer; marriage applications had to be submitted to, vetted and approved by either the *Landesgruppenleiter* in the AO or the security service (*Sicherheitsdienst*, or SD) in Brussels before a marriage could take place.¹¹⁴ Only if the bureaucrats in those offices considered their political and racial assessments of the bride to be satisfactory could a marriage be approved.¹¹⁵ Wilhelm Keitel commented that the assessment of the prospective bride should be in the spirit of the “great *volkspolitisch* goal,” with the most decisive factor being the woman’s personality; it was crucial “to verify whether the wife, in the value of her character, was permanently harmed by inheritance or some other pernicious influence of the family.”¹¹⁶ “Inheritance” had a double meaning, referring to potential biological and/or mental conditions passed from parents to children and the social and political viewpoints inculcated in the family. Social and cultural beliefs and practices thus also shaped ideas and assessments of affinity.¹¹⁷

Entire families faced the rigorous application procedure for the marriage of two individuals. In October 1943, the leader of the Racial Policy Office of the AO in Brussels, Höhne, noted that the requests by members of the Wehrmacht concerning marriage with girls of Belgian nationality were increasing on a daily basis. Apparently local administrators had not been exact enough in their evaluations of marriage petitions and this resulted in a great deal of back-and-forth between offices and applicants, overwhelming local cells on the ground. Höhne’s frustration with the processing of marriage applications was evident: “I ask that these inquiries be completed as quickly as possible, so I do not keep getting reminders from the offices of the Wehrmacht or members of the Wehrmacht themselves.” He incited administrators to be more precise in filling out required information about the fiancée and her family, demanding that they

¹¹³ Dr. Gross to Party Chancellery, 10 May 1944, BAB R 6/125.
¹¹⁴ Bormann, Rundschreiben Nr. 184/42, 16 Nov. 1942, BAB NS 6/338, Bl. 239.
¹¹⁵ This “profiling” of the woman in question was true for all areas of Germanic Europe. All applications had to include a photograph of the bride from the front and sideviews, certificates of marital fitness (ETZ) for the bride and groom, proof of the bride’s Aryan ancestry back to her grandparents and, finally a notice from the applicant once the resettlement of the bride to the Reich was secured. To obtain the required political and racial evaluations, the applicant usually visited local Auslandsorganisaton (AO) offices in the capital city of each country. OKW, 26 Jan. 1942, BAB NS 19/2014, Bl. 7; Bormann, Anordnung A 1/42, 24 Sept. 1942, BAB NS 19/2014, Bl. 2.
add an appendix in which they detailed the family’s language fluency, history, *Lebensläufe* and the overall impression gained.\(^\text{118}\)

Examining the development and enforcement of marriage policy within the frame of the war and politics of occupation elucidates the multifarious levels of Nazi decision-making practices. In the fall of 1942, SS-Oberscharführer G. submitted his application to marry twenty-two-year-old Ruth T., a Dutch woman living in Arnheim. Hanns Rauter, the Higher SS and Police Leader in The Hague recommended rejecting the petition on the grounds of her family’s questionable politics.\(^\text{119}\) On the auspicious date of 11 November 1941, Ruth and her entire family had been arrested because her father was part of an anti-German organization. She was cleared within a few months but noted in a personal appeal to the Reichsführer-SS regarding the failed marriage application that she had not known why she was arrested. Ruth guessed that the reason was because – in complete opposition to her father – she had taken a German-friendly position and was writing to German soldiers.\(^\text{120}\) In spite of her professed innocence, Rauter did not want the marriage to go forward until the case against her parents was concluded, arguing that “if there are to be proceedings against both parents for suspicion of treason, and further proceedings against the father for contributing to the resistance movement, then nothing good can come from granting a marriage license for the daughter.”\(^\text{121}\)

Ruth T. seemed a good candidate for marriage to a German man; born and raised in Germany until she was 18 years old, she had a German mother and could speak and write German fluently. However, trepidation about the politics of her family and their links to the Dutch resistance initially impeded her marriage. Himmler later approved the marriage, remarking that Ruth, according to the photos submitted with the application, “makes a good impression.” Ruth T.’s potential to raise children in a German fashion eventually outweighed potential concerns about her family’s politics.\(^\text{122}\) This example, though taken from the Netherlands, illuminates the complex relationship between the racial and political potential of

\(^{118}\) Landesgruppe der AO der NSDAP in Belgien, Rundschreiben Nr. 18/43, 12 Oct. 1943, BAB NS 9/108, Bl. 22.

\(^{119}\) Hanns Rauter, HSSPF beim Reichskommissar für die besetzten Niederländischen Gebiete, to RF-SS Persönlicher Stab, 14 Sept. 1942, BAB NS 19/3482, Bl. 53.

\(^{120}\) Rauter to RF-SS, 30 July 1942, BAB NS 19/3482, Bl. 57.

\(^{121}\) Rauter to RF-SS Persönlicher Stab, 14 Sept. 1942, BAB NS 19/3482, Bl. 53.

\(^{122}\) Brandt, RF-SS Persönlicher Stab, to Ruth T., 13 Oct. 1942, BAB NS 19/3482, Bl. 46; Brandt to Rauter, 13 Oct. 1942, BAB NS 19/3482, Bl. 47.
families in Germanic Europe in German discussions and policies on marriage; these two factors are perhaps better conceived of as existing on a spectrum, rather than as a set of binaries.123

Investigating the families of women already deemed Germanic meant not only assessing their alleged racial value, but also figuring out who their brothers, fathers and friends were and whether they were friends or foes to the German occupiers. Sorting out the politically reliable families from the ones with dubious associations was essential to maintaining security in Belgium, where incidents of sabotage and assaults against the German presence dominated the daily activity reports of the field commands across the country in the second half of the occupation. In September 1943, General Falkenhausen declared that the increasing number of “terrorist” attacks by civilians threatened safety and order in his area of command to such an extent that “military objectives can no longer or only insufficiently be secured.”124

The German military further created a set of controls to monitor Belgian and other Germanic women once they had actually married German soldiers; one of these mechanisms was the requirement in the amended 1942 Heiratsordnung that new brides of non-German nationality had be taken back to and resettled in Germany after the wedding.125 This policy of bringing wives to Germany was consistent with the “recovery” of alleged minority German populations in France, Croatia, the Soviet Union, the Baltics, Bosnia, Bulgaria and Greece, whereby alleged ethnic Germans were to be brought “home to the Reich” (Heim ins Reich).126 Grooms were responsible for notifying the authorities once their wives had successfully relocated to Germany. Foreign women already married to German men before this stipulation was introduced were of especial concern and had to move to Germany immediately.127

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123 See also the case of an SS-man who wanted to marry a Dutch woman. The woman’s father was allegedly “friendly to the English” (englischfreundlich) and opposed the match, but she still wanted to proceed with the marriage. Himmler approved the marriage and wanted Hanns Rauter to help the woman, perhaps by finding accommodations in Germany. Brandt to Rauter, 13 July 1942, BAB NS 19/3482.
124 MBH to OKH, 23 Sept. 1943, BA-MA RW 36/15, Bl. 69.
125 OKW, Memorandum, 26 Jan. 1942, BAB NS 19/2014, Bl. 7. In some cases, the weddings had to happen in Germany as well. See RF-SS, Heiratsgesuch des SS-Untersturmführers August K., 22 Sept. 1942, BAB NS 19/3482, Bl. 125.
126 On the “Heim ins reich” program, the plan beginning in 1938 to bring ethnic Germans living outside the Third Reich, chiefly in Austria and western Poland, “back home into the empire,” see Heinemann, “Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut”; Lumans, Himmler’s Auxiliaries; Stiller, “Zwischen Zwangsgermanisierung”; Wolf, Ideologie.
127 Abschrift aus den Allgemeinen Heeresmitteilungen, 27. Ausgabe, vom 7.11.1941, Para. 1052, BAB NS 34/8. In August 1944, Hitler ordered all German women and children to be sent home to Germany. This included Norwegian women who had become German subjects by marrying German soldiers. Often they had little information about where they were supposed to go; some did not reach their destination and other found that the addresses given to them were heaps of rubble. In early 1945, the Nazis stopped this project of “repatriation” because of the worsening situation in Germany. Warring, “Intimate and Sexual Relations, 107.
In some cases, along with the detailed certificates on the bride’s reputation and political background, it was “absolutely necessary” to provide the woman’s exact birth date and place as well as her last known address according to the police.¹²⁸ The granting of marriage certificates did not mean, then, the cessation of doubt about foreign brides; rather, both the party and military, in a sense, “tracked” these women, making sure that they could be easily located and monitored. In December 1941, Himmler agreed to the marriage of a German police sergeant to a French woman but insisted that he be transferred and the woman relocated to Germany so that the two were “removed from French influence.”¹²⁹ The insistence that foreign brides resettle in the Reich after their marriages worked to meet both racial and political goals; first, their relocation to the Reich would facilitate the process of (re)Germanizing them; second, keeping these women in Germany severed at the very least the physical links between them and their country of origin and ensured that they would not be able to interact with any individuals of questionable political orientation.

The Germans effectively treated the brides of Wehrmacht soldiers as they did prospects for the *Heim ins Reich* program. In the latter case, the RuSHA conducted racial and political screenings and categorized people by an “O” (Osten) or “A” (Altreich) designation. “O” status meant that individuals were considered good racial and political candidates for settlement in the occupied eastern territories, while “A” status signified individuals who, even if racially valuable, required reeducation and monitoring and were thus to be sent to Germany.¹³⁰ Often those designated for settlement in the Altreich were members of predominantly Polish families or German-Polish marriages.¹³¹

**The Two Faces of Belgium**

All of the regulations on marriage with German forces concerned Flemish-speaking Belgians; the Walloons, recall, were not included in the category of Germanic brethren in the revised Marriage Order. On the one hand, the French, and their corresponding language and cultural customs, were decidedly non-Germanic. Both the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA)

¹²⁸ HSSPF beim Reichskommissar für die besetzten niederländischen Gebiete, Betr.: Verlobungs- und Heiratsgenehmigung SS-Angehörigen mit Niederländerinnen, 29 April 1942, BAB NS 2/233, Bl. 193.
¹³¹ These were people who would have been placed in groups 3 and 4 of the *Deutsche Volksliste* (DVL), the classification of inhabitants of German occupied territories into categories of desirability. Heinemann, “Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut”, 260, 263-4.
and the OKW opposed marriages between French women and German and Germanic men. In January 1942, the RuSHA debated whether or not SS-men could marry French women. The response from the head of the Sippenamt, Richard Kaaserer, referenced the 1931 Engagement and Marriage Order for the SS and specifically its goal to construct a racially healthy and valuable “clan” of a German, Nordic type. For him, this objective made marriages between French women and SS-men undesirable: “We the Germans and especially the SS strive to raise children in the spirit of the German and National Socialist way. However, if the mother is French, she will never be in a position to raise her child in such a way that is necessary for a German child.”

Himmler himself was uncertain about the status of the French. Before the war, he had simultaneously declared the French people as “impossible and not intended” for incorporation into the German Volk and claimed that “the complete and inner extraction of racially good Germanic French people for German ideals is possible.” Throughout the latter war years, particularly in 1943-44, there seems to have been a more flexible dialogue about the Walloon population of Belgium. In August 1943, Dr. Erhard Wetzel, a lawyer and “expert on Jewish affairs” in the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories (RMfdBO), suggested that although the Walloons were not Germanic, they had strong Nordic racial characteristics. In a 1944 report about Latvians and Estonians and their position in the Nazi racial hierarchy, Dr. Wilhelm Kinkelin, a doctor and member of the SS who held various positions in the RSHA, RuSHA, and RMfdBO and the Reich Office for Agricultural Policy throughout the Third Reich, recalled that the same issue had been addressed with regard to the Walloons. He concluded that there was no real difference between the Germans of East Prussia and the Latvians and Estonians “[j]ust as the Walloons hardly differ from the Flemish in a racial sense.”

Ambiguity about the position of the Walloons in general and the reluctance to authorize marriages between German men and Walloon women were also related to a Nazi bias that the Flemish were more dependable allies. Hitler articulated precisely this sentiment at the end of June 1942 in reference to the “magnificent conduct” of the Flemish SS legions fighting with the

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132 Leiter der Führungsgruppe P 2, 8 Nov. 1944, BA-MA RH 11-V/4, Bl. 10.
134 Himmler to Lammers, 21 March 1939, BAB NS 2/55, Bl. 140.
135 Wetzel, Zur Frage, 5.
136 Der Leiter der Führungsgruppe P 2, 8 Nov. 1944, BA-MA RH 11-V/4, Bl. 8.
German army on the eastern front: “The Flamands have indeed shown themselves on the eastern front to be more pro-German and ruthless than the Dutch legionaries. This is certainly due to the fact that the Flemish have for centuries been oppressed by the Walloons.”\textsuperscript{137} Perhaps the Germans assumed that the allegedly different heritage and racial origins of the Walloon population made them inherently immune to German overtures and less likely to support the German presence.\textsuperscript{138} This sentiment was proven wrong; the Walloons proved to be as cooperative with the Germans as their Flemish compatriots, though this view of the French-speaking population of Belgium as more resistant to the German occupation and its policies remains a subject of contention in present-day Belgium.\textsuperscript{139}

Both Germans and Belgians were aware that Flemish or Walloon status carried a different weight during the occupation and could impact the possibilities for marriage. In 1944, Heinz H., a German soldier, and Christine R., a Belgian woman from East Flanders, decided to get married. In a letter to Christine, dated 17 March 1944, Heinz encouraged his fiancée to get the necessary papers in order to submit their marriage petition to the local AO office and the civil authorities in her hometown. He cautioned Christine to be clear on her “Proof of Nationality” form: “You must be careful that it is Flemish, not Belgian, that is stated.”\textsuperscript{140} Heinz was aware that the processing of their marriage application might be treated differently – and even streamlined – if they underscored that Christine was Flemish. In the end, the form did not matter; the marriage never happened because Heinz’s parents insisted he marry a German girl, which he did.

**1943: Backlash and Response**

Not everyone was pleased with the easing of the regulations on marriages between German men and foreign women in 1942. By early 1943, military and party agencies were already working to reinstate the prohibition on marriages between German men and non-German women. At this point, even connections between Germans and members of the Greater Germanic

\textsuperscript{138} While researching villages in Bavaria during the Third Reich, Martin Broszat developed the term *Resistenz* to account for certain individuals’ and groups “immunity” to the nazification of every day life. Martin Broszat, Harmut Mehringer and Elke Fröhlich, *Bayern in der NS-Zeit: Soziale Lage und politisches Verhalten der Bevölkerung im Berichte* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1979).
\textsuperscript{139} The assumption that the Flemish were more willing collaborators has persisted, even seventy years after the war. Recent political debates about granting amnesty for Flemish collaborators have re-sparked the discussion about collaboration in divided Belgium. See “Flemish move for Nazi collaboration amnesty widens rift in Belgium,” *Guardian Weekly*, accessed 24 May 2011, [http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/may/24/belgium-crisis-nazi-collaboration-amnesty](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/may/24/belgium-crisis-nazi-collaboration-amnesty).
\textsuperscript{140} Letter from Heinz H. to Christine F., 17 March 1944, CEGES AA 2193.
Empire were “racially questionable,” as a December 1942 memorandum by the commander of the 20th Army in Norway and northern Finland, General Edouard Dietl, argued. A convinced Nazi, one of Hitler’s prized generals and responsible for German operations in northern Europe, Dietl wanted to provide “a very serious warning” to the company commanders to whom the rank-and-file were entrusted, arguing that in principle Germans should marry and procreate only with other Germans. Although the Germans had created an economic and military Gemeinschaft in Europe, this did not, for Dietl, translate to racial-ethnic unity as well. Racial hierarchy and difference still existed: “To this end, an authorization [for intermarriages] is in no way biologically permitted. It contradicts above all, the Nazi principle, which considers the diversity and the attributes of the Kulturvölker as an inviolable fact, whose racial-völkische destruction would mean a terrible loss for European culture.”

The remedy for this situation was to educate German men of all ranks; they needed reminding that marriage was not a personal matter, but “a commitment to the future of the entire German people. It must be made clear to these soldiers that great love can never bridge the differences that exist now even between members of different nations.” Dietl claimed that even if a woman was “the best carrier of the Germanic type,” she would always be a foreigner because she had not been raised in a German family and thus knew little of German history, customs and traditions. Party and military officials routinely stressed that there was no reason for German men to marry foreign women when there were hundreds of thousands of unmarried German women at home due to the massive casualties of the war.

There was also some concern that German men were not taking marriages with foreign women seriously enough and that the existence of an “emergency” (Notstand), most often pregnancy, sparked many marriage petitions. Christine R., for example, was already pregnant by the time she and Heinz H. were figuring out the logistics of applying for approval to wed in spring 1944. Military authorities feared that “shotgun” marriages trended towards disharmony

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141 Generaloberst Edouard Dietl, Oberkommando der 20. (Gerbirgs-)Armee, Memorandum, Betr.: Heirat von Wehrmachtsangehörigen mit Angehörigen der artverwandten germanischen Völker, 23 Dec. 1942, BAB NS 6/344, Bl. 60-1
142 Ibid., 61.
143 Ibid; Wetzel, Zur Frage, 3.
145 Bormann, Anordnung A 1/42, 24 Sept. 1942, BAB NS 19/2014, Bl. 2; Dr. Gross to Party Chancellery, 10 May 1944, BAB R 6/125, Bl. 21.
146 See, for example, Letter from Heinz H. to Christine F., 3 April 1944, CEGES AA 2193.
because they were not built on real compatibility and would not have occurred under other circumstances: “A really deep inner bond between the soldiers and the foreigner exists in the minority of cases; in most cases the connection is based solely on sexual impulses, which cannot be met otherwise at present. Few of the marriages concluded on this basis would last.”\textsuperscript{147}

Other supporters of a wholesale marriage ban layered the language of race with that of security to articulate their position. Dr. Walter Gross, head of the Racial Policy Office, for example, argued that an \textit{Eheverbot} would aid the political situation in the occupied territories because it would preserve the autonomous positions of the various ethno-national groups (by not letting them “intermix”) and thereby lessen the fear of Germany held by these smaller countries and populations.\textsuperscript{148} Some officials further insisted on the need for a single procedure regarding marriages with foreign women, arguing that the legal situation was too complex; by 1943, there were at least three different stipulations for the Wehrmacht concerning unions with non-German women, as well as individual regulations for civil servants, bureaucrats and party members.\textsuperscript{149}

Dietl’s memorandum became the basis for a revision of the \textit{Heiratsordnung} on 28 January 1943, which amounted to a general reiteration of the prohibition on marriages between soldiers and foreign women.\textsuperscript{150} However, this revision was not enforced, and within a month Keitel forwarded a memorandum to the various branches of the military stating that “It has repeatedly been pointed out by the High Command that applications by German soldiers for marriage licenses with members of related Germanic peoples are not banned, but are, noentheless, not desirable.”\textsuperscript{151} The upper echelons of the Nazi elite similarly questioned the impetus of the new Marriage Order. According to a report from SS-Brigadeführer Cassel, who received a “confidential communication” from Bormann but was denied access to the original report, the Reichsführer-SS had phoned Bormann in a rage after hearing of the Dietl Command.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[148] Gross to Party Chancellery, 10 May 1944, BAB R 6/125, Bl. 24.
\item[149] Entwurf, Betr.: Zur Frage der Eheschliessung von Deutschen mit Fremdvölkischen, undated (likely 1943), BAB R 6/124, Bl. 20-4.
\item[150] Volksdeutsche and “rassisch verwandten Personen der germanischen Nachbarvölker” – Norwegians, Swedish, Dutch, Flemish – were excepted from this ban. Such marriages still had to be “checked” as to whether they were desirable. OKW, Memorandum, betr.: Heiratsordnung für die Dauer des Krieges, Nr. 13850/42, 28 Jan. 1943, BAB NS 6/340, Bl. 110-1; Anahid Sandra Rickmann, “Rassenpflege im völkischen Staat: Vom Verhältnis der Rassenhygiene zur nationalsozialistischen Politik” (PhD diss., Universität Bonn, 2002), 237. Rickmann points out that within the \textit{Altreich}, a ban on marriages with foreigners of the “same breed” lacked legal justification. Thus, one of the most pressing issues after the war would be an extension of the Nuremberg laws to legislate such a ban.
\item[151] OKW, Memorandum, Nr. 463/43, Betr.: Heirat von Wehrmachtsangehörigen mit Angehörigen der artverwandten germanischen Völker, 26 Feb. 1943, BAB NS 6/344, Bl. 63.
\end{footnotes}
Himmler belaboured the point that such a ban worked against the building of a German empire in occupied Europe.\textsuperscript{152} Dr. Gross similarly took note of a belief circulating in some political circles that the occupied countries would “feel hit by an \textit{Eheverbot} and turn against us politically,” though he himself believed this to be untrue.\textsuperscript{153}

Hitler’s own position was somewhat less clear. In March 1943, he apparently read Dietl’s memorandum and “remarked that the observations and thoughts of Herr Armeeführer fully aligned with his.” Hitler wanted Dietl’s statement to become public knowledge, at least to the three branches of the armed forces, and stressed that it would “serve as an excellent basis” for educating military units across Europe about their responsibilities to the Reich and the \textit{Volk}.\textsuperscript{154} Himmler’s minutes from a June 1943 conversation with Hitler regarding the “hugely damaging” consequences of the Dietl Command, forwarded to Himmler’s SS representative in Brussels, Richard Jungclaus, tell a different story. In the conversation, Hitler stressed that marriages between Germans and members of the Germanic peoples were still possible, though subject to approval. Hitler further granted automatic approval to marriages with women whose brothers were members of the SS, the police or their local Nazi organization. The reason for this measure is fairly transparent; women with relatives affiliated to the Nazi movement were a safer bet when it came to security concerns—these families were already on board with the Nazi cause and could easily be monitored. Marriages would further incentivize family members to remain loyal to the Germans or risk penalties for their relatives.

Finally, Hitler wanted the SS to be unaffected by any \textit{Heiratsordnung}, anticipating that “our SS-men would marry the more valuable girls.”\textsuperscript{155} Hitler wanted SS-men to retain their “freedom” in their spousal choices because those choices were already constrained by the rigourous rules governing the marriages of SS-men since 1931. SS-men would marry the “valuable” foreign women – the racially valuable and politically trustworthy women – because Himmler evaluated the marriage petitions. Thus, the Nazi elite’s stances on intermarriages cannot simply be deduced from their racial ideology, or they would have supported a full-scale \textit{Eheverbot}. For Hitler and Himmler, enabling German men to marry some foreigners did not

\textsuperscript{152} Geheimbefehl der Wehrmacht über Heirat zwischen Wehrmachtsangehörigen und Norwegerinnen, gez. SS-Brigadeführer Cassel, 28 April 1943, BAB NS 19/3784.
\textsuperscript{153} Gross to Party Chancellery, 10 May 1944, BAB R 6/125, Bl. 22.
\textsuperscript{155} Himmler, Niederschrift über Besprechung mit dem Führer, 17 June 1943, BAB NS 19/2706, Bl. 1.
compromise their overall racial objectives so much as provide another route to their realization by creating new families whose fates were intertwined with the Reich.156

**The Germanic Freiwilligen and the Politics of Persuasion**

Marriage policy became less restrictive in the final years of the Second World War. In 1943, the Walloons were decreed racially akin to the Germanic peoples and in 1944, they were permitted to marry German soldiers. Estonians and Latvians were also at this point permitted to marry German men.157 What were the motives for such making marital unions between German men and non-German women easier precisely when marriages to German soldiers were looking less attractive for local women in occupied Europe? As early as the summer of 1942, the newspapers of the Belgian partisans were listing names of collaborators to be targeted after the war, including women accused of having fraternized with German soldiers.158 Moreover, none of these groups occupied a high rank in Nazi racial hierarchy and thus a sense of racial kinship suddenly realized by Nazi and military decision-makers cannot explain this shift.

It may seem counterintuitive that as late as autumn 1944 the OKW was still clarifying which groups should be considered as Germanic and therefore eligible to marry German soldiers. The Allies in fact had already liberated Belgium two months before marriages between Walloons and Germans were permitted in November 1944. That marriage policy still preoccupied military officials when defeat looked increasingly likely suggests that marriage, always a central component of the war and the remaking of Europe, was also viewed as a potential solution to a dire military situation on the continent. As Doris Bergen has argued, although Nazi officials constantly debated racial and ethnic definitions, their concern with winning the war, carrying out the genocide against the Jews and securing the New Order in occupied Europe trumped their steadfastness to racial principles and categories.159

The military’s acceptance of marriages between German men and Walloon and other “racially questionable” Germanic women was related to the continued and, by 1943, desperate effort to curb resistance in the occupied territories and, even more critically, to secure the loyalty

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156 See Schwarz, *Eine Frau an seiner Seite*, on the centrality of wives to Nazi visions of a *Sippengemeinschaft*, or clan community.


158 See, for example, the issues from *La Légion Noire* from the summer of 1942 (Nos. 15, 16, 17), USHMM, RG-65.011M, Reel 7.

159 Bergen, “The Nazi Concept of ‘Volksdeutsche’,” 574.
and good will of civilian men part of or contemplating joining the foreign brigades.\textsuperscript{160} How could these men be convinced to fight on behalf of the Reich if their sisters were declared unfit for marriage to a German soldier? Himmler expressed this sentiment in October 1943. In a letter to Bormann, he explained that, on the one hand, he was expected to recruit Flemish, Dutch and other Germanic individuals to fight and die for the Germanic Empire and that, for this cause, these people were viewed as equal to the Germans; as a result, marriages between Germans with the sisters and daughters of these Germanic men must be allowed. However, if one took the opposite view, Himmler continued, that these marriages should be unconditionally prohibited, “then we must also be fair and tell the Germanic volunteers, ‘Go home, we consider you inferior’.”\textsuperscript{161} For the Reichsführer-SS, marriageability was a basic standard against which incorporation into the Nazi empire – at least in terms of labour and fighting capacity – was measured. Even before the war, Himmler had not envisioned the possibility of acquiring only men from certain ethno-national groups to fight alongside the Wehrmacht and SS if the women were pronounced unworthy of marrying Germans; if the women were not valuable enough, then neither were the men.\textsuperscript{162}

By 1943, the apparent racial value of the Francophone population of Belgium mattered less than its willingness to support the German cause and fight alongside German men on the front. Exemplary of this shift was the transfer of the \textit{Légion Wallonie}, initially created under the aegis of the Wehrmacht because Francophone Belgians were not declared sufficiently Germanic, to join the SS in the spring of that year.\textsuperscript{163} Allowing marriages between Walloon women and German men acted as a gesture of good will, demonstrating that the occupiers viewed them as formidable allies, not racially unworthy enemies. Himmler extolled the value of maintaining benevolent relations with civilians in Germanic Europe vis-à-vis marriages, foreshadowing in autumn 1943 that “the \textit{Menschennot} in the coming months will force us to use this human reservoir.” He suggested that the raw power heretofore exercised by the German authorities as the \textit{Herrenvolk} had alienated the occupied populations: “That we have been behaving in this

\textsuperscript{160} In August 1942, Himmler instructed that all Volksdeutsche had a military obligation to the Reich. Foreign Minister Ribbentrop concluded agreements with the foreign governments of countries with Volksdeutsche to authorize further recruitment campaigns, enabling Himmler to launch his most ambitious campaign to date in February 1943. Lumans, \textit{Himmler’s Auxiliaries}, chapters eleven and twelve, esp. 208-15.

\textsuperscript{161} Himmler to Bormann, 4 Oct.1943, BAB NS 2/288.

\textsuperscript{162} Himmler to Lammers, 21 March 1939, BAB NS 2/55, Bl. 141.

\textsuperscript{163} On the transfer of the \textit{Légion Wallonie} to the SS, see Conway, \textit{Collaboration in Belgium}, 189-95; Estes, \textit{Anabasis}, 269-73.
manner is visible on each Germanic volunteer’s face as a resounding insult to his people. This must absolutely be stopped, otherwise nothing will bridge the inner Bruch in the Germanic legions.”

This more expansive marriage policy was one of several measures taken by the Nazi state in the last years of the war to retain the support of politically reliable Germanic people, who even as they served alongside German troops were still considered as a potential “fifth column.” In the first months of 1943, Berlin officials floated the idea of extending German citizenship to men fighting with the Wehrmacht and other German forces in occupied Europe, or at least to those men considered to be of the “same blood” as the German Volk, including the Germanic peoples and those who could be Germanized. Such a measure had “great political importance” and was passed to Himmler as the Reich Commissioner for the Strengthening of Germandom for further consideration. A precedent for the expansion of German citizenship to foreign nationals already existed; in 1942, the Reich Ministry of the Interior allowed men of German ancestry in Alsace, Lorraine and Luxembourg serving in the Waffen-SS to apply for German citizenship.

On 19 May 1943, a Führererlass decreed that men of German ancestry (deutschstämmig) serving with the armed forces were eligible for German citizenship, which further meant that they could marry German women. Applicants had to have at least two German grandparents; the Flemish, Dutch, Danish and Norwegians (Angehörigen stammesgleich Völker) were not considered to be of German origin. However, individuals could be accepted as being of German ancestry if considered to be so by the German communities in their homelands. Exceptions to these rules were possible, especially since applications were handled on a case-by-case basis.

There was some support among the Nazis to allow exceptions for certain nationalities, for fear

164 Himmler to Bormann, 4 Oct. 1943, BAB NS 2/288.
165 Alexa Stiller has made this argument about “fifth columns” in regard to the ethnic German populations of eastern Europe, but it is useful in thinking about how the Germans conceived of the populations of western Europe as both allies and liabilities. See Stiller, “Zwischen Zwangsgermanisierung,” 104.
166 Vermerk, Betr.: Erwerb der deutschen Staatsangehörigkeit durch Einstellung in die deutsche Wehrmacht, 1 March 1943, BAB R 43 II/137a, Bl. 33-5.
168 Erlaß über den Erwerb der deutschen Staatsangehörigkeit durch Einstellung in die deutsche Wehrmacht, die Waffen-SS, die deutsche Polizei oder die Organisation Todt, 19 May 1943, RGBl. I. S. 315. The Erlass invited numerous questions about exceptions to this stipulation as well of the status of wives and children, who would be permitted to apply for citizenship but only after the end of the war. See RMdI, Schnellbrief, Betr.: Ausführungsbestimmungen zum Erlass des Führers, 1 June 1943, BAB R 43-II/137a, Bl. 70. See also Bergen, “Sex, Blood and Vulnerability,” 281-2.
169 Niederschrift über die Besprechung, 1 July 1943, BAB R 43 II/137a, Bl. 84.
that excluding the m would disrupt already tense relations between occupier and occupied and destabilize the precarious German occupation systems across the continent.\textsuperscript{171}

All over Europe, German officials sought to expand their labour and fighting capacity by drawing on foreign populations, and this required holding out some olive branches to the occupied populations. In Hungary in 1944, for example, the Germans proffered a more generous understanding of Volksdeutsche – one that required only a simple interview – in order to add several hundred thousand more people in Hungary to the original count of Volksdeutsche.\textsuperscript{172} The German occupiers extended similar incentives to Belgian nationals. In late 1942, there was a concerted attempt to nationalize Flemish workers in Germany, who were to be from that point considered as “equal to the Germans,” rather than as aliens.\textsuperscript{173} In view of German defeats in the winter and spring of 1943 in Stalingrad and North Africa, followed by Italy’s capitulation that September, the occupation authorities attempted to bind the foreign volunteers and workers to the German cause and boost morale and maintain order in occupied Belgium.

**German Women and the Power of Intimate Incentives**

Marriage played a role in the project to win over volunteers from the Greater Germanic Empire. The *Heiratsbefehl* for the foreign legions, introduced on 28 August 1944, declared that all non-German volunteers who were not Reichs- or Volksdeutsche should not marry German girls or women. However, “peoples of same or related blood to us” were exempt and could marry German women with special approval from the Führer.\textsuperscript{174} Initially the list of foreign volunteers eligible to marry German women did not include the Flemish, which roused concern.\textsuperscript{175} Dr. Wetzel in the RMfbDO wanted the text of the *Heiratsbefehl* for the foreign volunteers to name the relevant Germanic groups so that the Flemish could be included. He further noted that later discussions would assess under what conditions the Walloons, Latvians and Estonians could be listed.\textsuperscript{176} The same rules applied to the *Freiwilligen* as to German soldiers; enlisted men had to

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\textsuperscript{171} Niederschrift über die Besprechung, 1 July1943, BAB R 43 II/137a, Bl. 85.
\textsuperscript{172} Bergen, “The Nazi Concept of ‘Volksdeutsche’,” 574-5.
\textsuperscript{173} Berger to RF-SS, Betr.: Flandern, 14 Dec. 1942, BAB NS 19/2140, Bl. 70.
\textsuperscript{174} OKW, Nr. 13 236/44, Betr.: Heirat ausländischer Freiwilliger, 28 Aug. 1944, BAB R 6/130, Bl. 69; Dr. Kinkelin, Vermerk, Betr.: Heirat ausländischer Freiwilliger, 19 Sept. 1944, BAB R 6/130, Bl. 31; Führungsstab Politik, Bericht über die Besprechung am 10.11.1944 in der Parteikanzlei, 16 Nov. 1944, BAB R 6/130, Bl. 75.
\textsuperscript{175} The Flemish were not included because the Marriage Order referred to the *Verfügung* from 26 January 1942 for the official list of peoples recognized as Germanic and the Flemish were only added to that eleven months later.
\textsuperscript{176} Dr. Wetzel, Stellungnahme zum Entwurf des OKW, Betr.: Heirat ausländischer Freiwilliger vom 28.8.1944, BAB R 6/130, Bl. 70. Both the Flemish and Walloons would officially be added to the list of “racially related Germanic peoples” and would be allowed to marry German women.
submit applications to their local German agency, and marriage approval was conditional on a favourable racial and political assessment by the local security police.  

The toleration of marriages between the Germanic *Freiwilligen* and German women, according to Dr. Kinkelin had “no other meaning than to close the circle of Germanic-Nordic (Teutonic) blood.”  

This language of blood relationality highlights the infiltration of Nazi racial rhetoric into policy-making. Just as the desire to close the “circle” of Germanic peoples through marriages between foreign volunteers and German women can be read as a (re)affirmation of Nazi racial projects in occupied Europe, it can also be understood as a rhetorical strategy aimed at establishing a unity of purpose between the German occupational authorities and the civilians they needed to fight on their behalf.

In response to a decision taken by Gauamtsleiter Schön of the Racial Policy Office in Gauleitung Swabia to forbid the marriage of a German girl to a Flemish man, Himmler wrote to Bormann in October 1943 and stressed that he supported marriages between Germanic men and German women. Himmler pointed out that the argument that German women should be “saved” for German men was ridiculous by 1943; there would not be a surplus of men after the war, but a surplus of women (*Frauenüberschuss*). He further argued that if these foreign volunteers were to fight and die for Germany, they should be allowed to intermarry with German women: “In my view, it is an illusion and a gross fraud, if I tell the men of Germanic Empire and the Germanic race one thing, while the party, in which I am Reich Leader, explains the very opposite in an offensive way through the mouths of a Gauleiter or a leader of the Racial Policy Office, namely, ‘You are not racially valuable and so we forbid marriage with you’.” To Himmler, marriage operated as a reward in exchange for the loyalty of the foreign brigades.

Himmler criticized the disunity between Party offices, which ensured that while one agency recruited “the sons and husbands of these countries to fight and die” for the Reich, another agency “rejected any other connections with these peoples.” He noted that both departments supposedly worked along Nazi racial principles; however, the agency responsible for selecting SS-men could stress its fifteen years of practical experience in racial selection, whereas the other agency simply proceeded, with little evidence, to apply the sharpest standards in evaluating marriage applications and ended up rejecting the majority of them. Himmler’s

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177 Cassel, Anweisung zu der Verfügung, SS-Heiraten ausländischer Freiwilliger, 1 Dec. 1944, quoted in Rundschreiben Nr. 53, 18 Jan. 1945, BAB NS 2/239, Bl. 11.
178 Dr. Kinkeln, Vermerk, 19 Sept. 1944, BAB R 6/130 Bl. 31.
recommendation was, unsurprisingly, to increase his own role as Reich Commissioner for the Strengthening of Germandom in vetting the petitions of members of the Germanic *Freiwilligen* wanting to marry German women and vice versa. He claimed that this was a natural outgrowth of his role as Reichsführer-SS, responsible as he was “for all Germanic questions.”

Himmler even wanted to have a say in the rejection process, concerned with how rejection letters were being worded to their recipients: “It is not dangerous if marriage is rejected because the medical examination has revealed weak lungs or another disease. It is dangerous to reject it because the girl in question is called racially worthless.” He sought to avoid upsetting the applicants by providing more “scientific” justifications for rejecting a given marriage. In the end, Himmler’s advocacy for marriages between the Germanic volunteers in the German armed forces and German women constituted a challenge to dogmatic Nazi officials; for him, the creation of a Thousand-Year racial empire required more effort than strict adherence to ideology: “It makes no sense that at one extreme, I have, throughout the years and under most difficult circumstances, tried to give the idea of Germanic Europe life and to attract people to this idea, while other offices in Germany undo everything in the interests of “doctrine.”

Nazi and military elites expressed uneasiness about the potential entangling of Germanic men with women of questionable racial stock and politics, just as they had in the case of German men. The discussion of whether and how to regulate relationships and marriages between the Germanic peoples and those of “alien blood” (*fremdes Blut*) crystallized in 1943, as the foreign legions expanded in size (and significance for the German armed forces) and more labourers from western and northern Europe were being sent eastwards; there were simply more chances for Germanic men to meet eastern European women at the same time as there were increased opportunities for Germans in the Altreich to encounter non-Germans of all kinds.

The case of a Dutch man, Theodor K., who appealed to the RMfbdO in early February 1943 for help in obtaining the papers required to marry his fiancée, a Ukrainian woman working in Germany, acted as a catalyst for debate regarding the marital opportunities of Germanic volunteers. On 2 April 1943, the Racial Policy Office declared marriages of Germanic peoples

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179 The decision on whether or not to approve a marital application would ultimately fall to him, even if the Racial Policy Office still participated in evaluating the applications.
180 Himmler to Bormann, 4 Oct. 1943, BAB NS 2/288.
with members of Ostvölker to be undesirable, because “it is expected that the so-called Germanic nations will in the future come into a closer relationship with the Reich and thus to the German people. In this regard, it does not seem desirable to incorporate uncontrolled Blutströme from the peoples of the occupied east along with them.”

Dr. Kinkel confirmed that both the Reich Security Main Office and the OKW viewed marriages between armed volunteers from the Greater Germanic Empire and members of non-Germanic Volksgruppen unfavourably. His own opinion was “that we have only one interest, to protect our own Volkskörper in relation to that of the German neighbouring peoples and the peoples whom we treat as Germanic neighbours.”

This concern about the insecurity invited by marriages operated on two levels; the Nazis feared the long-term stakes of “polluting” the Volk with foreign blood and articulated short and medium-term concerns about the potential threats of non-Germans in eastern Europe.

Nazi officials in eastern Europe were also concerned about private and institutional interactions between Germans and Germanic individuals and “alien persons” in the tasks and organizations of the Ostministerium. In a December 1944 memorandum, the RMdfbO argued that it was “dangerous” to work with alien personalities because official secrets could be compromised. Cooperation, the memo concluded, needed to be “responsible and restrained.”

Dr. Wetzel agreed that relationships and especially marriages between members of the Germanic peoples and the Ostvölker should be prohibited. Wetzel made three recommendations designed to clarify the issue of marriage: first, introduce a marriage ban vis-à-vis the local authorities in northwestern Europe, an avenue, he noted, the Party Chancellery was already exploring; second, use the certificates of marital fitness as a means to restrict marriages; third, implement a regulation as part of the Regulation on the Application of German Law Regarding German Nationals in the Occupied Eastern Territories from 27 April 1942.

Instituting a marriage ban proved difficult. Special considerations relative to the occupations in Germanic Europe ensured that the introduction of an Eheverbot would create administrative headaches for the German authorities. The Minister President in Norway, Vidkun Quisling, for example, was married to a Ukrainian woman. How could a ban on marriages

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183 Leiter des Rassenpolitisches Amtes der NSDAP to RMfdO, Betr.: Eheschliessungen von Angehörigen germanischer Völker mit Fremdvölkischen aus den besetzten Ostgebieten, 2 April 1943, BAB R 6/126, Bl. 5.
184 Leiter der Führungsgruppe P 2, 8 Nov. 1944, BA-MA RH 11-V/4, Bl. 10.
187 Führungsstab Politik, I 1715/43, Bericht über die Sitzung am 29 Sept. 1943, BAB R 6/126, Bl. 32.
between Germanic men and women from eastern Europe be instituted if the very head of the occupation in Norway was in such a marriage? Meanwhile, concern that political unrest would result from a restrictive marriage policy led the Racial Policy Office to suggest finding alternative methods to counteract the desirability of these marriages beyond a marriage ban and to proceed “in a skillful form, by which the feelings of the parties involved are not hurt.”

The Race and Settlement Office hesitated to limit the spousal choices of volunteers from Flanders, the Netherlands and Denmark. Marriage policy, then, was pervaded by the obsession with maintaining order in those parts of Europe that, by 1943, had become vital to military strategy and economic productivity. At the same time, a broader marriage policy also demonstrated to the Germanic peoples their central role in creating the Greater Germanic Empire.

**Conclusion**

Placing regulations on marriages between German men and Belgian and other non-German women against the background of war and occupation demonstrates that there was not a one-way relationship between marriageability and racial status or political values. With the exception of stipulations pertaining to Jews, marriage policy generally reified national categories, not invented racial classifications. In different versions of the wartime *Heiratsbefehl* for the armed forces, for example, all of the groups denoted as Germanic and therefore marriageable were listed by their nationality – Dutch, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, Latvians and Estonians. Regarding Belgium, the various marriage decrees affirmed the cultural-linguistic division of the country, even though both Belgian and German administrators during the occupation failed to make the same distinction. Few of the administrators on the ground responsible for vetting marriage applications in the offices of the AO or SD specified in their orders and papers whether a Belgian woman was Walloon or Flemish.

If the specific language of marriage policies at times confounded Nazi racial ideology, the place of marriage at the core of Nazi imperial politics in Belgium and elsewhere should not be underestimated. Marriage is perhaps the most formalized type of intimate arrangement, given

188 Leiter des Rassenpolitisches Amtes der NSDAP to RMfdobO, 2 April 1943, BAB R 6/126, Bl. 5; Party Chancellery to RMfdobO, Betr.: Eheschliessung von Niederländern und Norwegern mit Angehörigen der Ostvölker, 16 Sept. 1943, BAB R 6/126, Bl. 36.

189 Führungsstab Politik, Bericht über die Besprechung am 10.11.1944, 16 Nov. 1944, BAB R 6/130, Bl. 75.

190 See, for example, Brandt, RF-SS Persönlicher Stab, to Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, 29 July 1943, BAB NS 19/3483, Bl. 397; Landesgruppe der AO der NSDAP in Belgien, Rundschreiben Nr. 18/43, 12 Oct. 1943, BAB NS 9/108; Vermerk zur Heiratsordnung für Wehrmachtsangehörige, 1 July 1941, BA-MA RW 36/393, Bl. 11.
how governments bundle into marriage rules, benefits and obligations relating to citizenship, paternal and maternal rights, immigration, taxation and property acquisition and management, to name a few. The marital union of two individuals can create and constitute several different forms of intimate bonds and relations, including sex, affection and emotional fulfillment, the pleasure and satisfaction of domestic life, the conception and raising of children as well as the legal ties that bring the family together in name and citizenship. In the context of occupied northern and western Europe, the imagined hearth of the Greater Germanic Empire, allowing German soldiers and other uniformed men to marry local women operated as a means to reach multiple goals, including to increase the political loyalty of occupied populations and the reproductive potential of couples and families for the Thousand-Year Reich.

But marriages did not always turn out as anticipated. What about brides with families involved in anti-German activities? What if they were infertile or of poor racial stock? What if a German soldier only married his bride because she became pregnant? In many instances, particularly after Operation Barbarossa, in the second half of the war, political and racial stakes folded into one another and became inseparable in Nazi and military rhetoric and policy-making on “mixed families” in Germanic Europe. Moreover, the collusion between race and politics occurred in other areas of Nazi planning, such as the Germanization initiatives in Poland where the planned deportations of locals to accommodate ethnic German settlers in 1941 relied on broader “racial” definitions that were in fact largely framed in terms of security. The case of Belgium suggests the usefulness of making connections, both geographically between east and west and between different policy initiatives, to understand something about the Nazis’ larger plan to racially reorder Europe. Party and military officials never conceived of marriage as a singular project limited in both time and space, so why should historians?

191 Cott, Public Vows, 2.
192 Wolf, Ideologie, 15. See also Wolf’s challenge to Isabel Heinemann, who has argued that Volksdeutsche lists were based primarily on racial assessments: Wolf, Ideologie, 204-8, 453.
Chapter 5
Germanic Brethren or Political Enemies? Children and the Politics of Belonging

On 3 November 1943, a seven-month-old German child was found dead in his crib in Heim Ardennen, the only Lebensborn home established in occupied Belgium.¹ The Lebensborn organization, created in 1935, provided care for pregnant wives, fiancées and girlfriends of SS men and members of the police during and after their pregnancies. The Belgian home had only been open for nine months and the death shocked the staff as well as officials in Lebensborn’s head office in Munich.² The child had been one of the only “pure German” children in the home; most of the infants had Belgian mothers and German fathers.³ Moreover, many of the home’s employees were Belgian. These facts led Lebensborn officials to wonder if the child had been the victim of an anti-German, sinister third-party – was it murder?

The fact the German occupiers considered murder, or a Sabotageakt, as a potential explanation for the death of the infant provides insight into a central tension of German efforts to “secure” Belgium and its people as an outpost of Germandom: at the same time as Nazi officials and racial experts touted the Greater Germanic Idea and Belgium’s natural affinity to the Reich, these individuals viewed Belgian citizens as threats to occupation initiatives. This chapter explores attempts to integrate Belgians into the Nazis’ racial and territorial community of Germanic brethren through an analysis of German-initiated policies concerning the children of Belgian women and German soldiers, including the extension of the Lebensborn program into Belgium from 1942-44. Nazi leaders endeavoured to safeguard the preservation of the Germanic Volk by ensuring that these people were producing children who could later support, work and fight for the Germanic cause.

The military and SS authorities targeted a range of individuals outside the German-speaking territories of Belgium whose genetic, personal or historical ties to Germany and Germanness were complicated or non-existent. Germanizing Belgians meant making manifest their crucial role in the realization of the Greater Germanic Empire, without necessarily remolding Flemish and Walloon individuals and families – men, women and children – into Germans. A Belgian did not have to be “made” German to support or fight for the Nazi New

¹ Gregor Ebner to Himmler, 28 Dec. 1943, ITS 2/82447685#1.
² Walther Lang, Bericht, Betr.: Tod des Kindes Uwe K. im Lebensborn-Heim Ardennen am 3.11.43, ITS 2/82447689#2.
³ Ebner, Ärztliches Gutachten zum Todes all Uwe K., 14 Dec. 1943, ITS 2/82447692#1. He also conveyed this suspicion to Himmler. See Ebner to Himmler, 28 Dec. 1943, ITS 2/82447685#1.
Order, nor was this even really possible since Nazi officials viewed Belgians as second-rate Germanic peoples, tainted by a divided heritage and close ties to France. Instead, Belgians needed to be neutralized in order to ensure that the country, as the border zone between the two halves of the Nazi empire, was a “safe space” for German initiatives and especially for the German troops occupying and passing through it.

Children were ideal candidates for Germanization because they were malleable and innocent; they generally did not bear the grudges of their parents for Germany’s historical “wrongs” against Belgium. As Ann Stoler has noted in regard to nineteenth-century colonialism, the establishment of institutions related to child-rearing – designed to “rescue young citizens and subjects in the making” – was critical to the construction and perpetuation of the colonial project’s “interior frontier.”

Tara Zahra further points out that across twentieth-century Europe, children became a key site of activism for wartime and postwar states and social orders, which deliberately mobilized children in the pursuit of specific nationalist agendas because they were considered more assimilable than adults. Reproduction has thus functioned as a “productive” site of intimacy, not only in its literal creation of subsequent generations but also in its provision of new paths, or chances, for a given state or social order to legitimize itself. In occupied Belgium, Nazi ideology and politics turned on children and the policies relating to them; these were the future subjects of the Germanic Empire who operated as the “emotional glue” between families and the forces seeking to dominate them.

There has been noticeable expansion of scholarship on children’s experiences of hardship, war and genocide across Europe during World War II since the early 1990s. However,
the children born of women in the occupied territories and German soldiers have largely been separated out of this literature, ostensibly because of the postwar taboo and public silence surrounding their existence. Only since the beginning of the twenty-first century have children received scholarly and public attention; monographs, documentaries, newspaper articles and even the founding of international networks of “war children” have drawn attention to the fates of these individuals, who were (and remain) one of the most visible remnants of the Second World War.\(^8\) Definitive statistics on the number of children with German fathers and non-German mothers born between 1940 and 1945 are non-existent. Estimates range from 250 000 to 2 million.\(^9\) Historian Gerlinda Swillen, herself the child of a German soldier and a Belgian woman, estimates that 20–40 000 children were born of German-Belgian parentage.\(^10\)

The SS’s Lebensborn program figured as one route to “securing” German children and those of mixed parentage. Lebensborn arrived late and operated on a small scale in Belgium; serious talk of opening a maternity centre only began in 1942, two years after the beginning of the occupation. Between the time of Heim Ardennen’s opening in March 1943 and its closure in September 1944, the facility housed only a few dozen women and children at any given time. Nevertheless, the SS insisted on bringing Lebensborn to occupied Belgium even as wartime victory looked less certain; further, that the Germans kept the program afloat until just days before the arrival of the Allies suggests the centrality of reproduction and intimacy – in this case, the sentimental ties between children and parents, both literal parents and the nation as parent – to the creation of an racial empire. A study of how the Nazis attempted to anchor their form of

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10. There are also estimates for other areas of occupied northern and western Europe: Denmark – 5500 (Ebba D. Drolshagen, _Nicht ungeschoren davonkommen: Das Schicksal der Frauen in den besetzten Ländern, die Wehrmachtssoldaten liebten_ (Hamburg: Hoffmann and Campe, 1998), 93-4); France – 85 000 (Georg Lilienthal, _Der ‘Lebensborn e.V.’: Ein Instrument nationalsozialistischer Rassenpolitik_ (Stuttgart: Gustav Fischer, 1985), 201; Norway – 9000 (Drolshagen, _Nicht ungeschoren davonkommen, 93-4).
Bevölkerungspolitik (population policy) in a small Belgian village showcases multiple axes of intimate practice, including affect, sex, reproduction, bodies, birth, mothering and child-rearing, in a single space and provides insight into their deeply political impacts.

As Georg Lilienthal’s classic monograph and other studies of the Lebensborn organization in Germany and occupied Europe have shown, these homes were not the selective breeding or “stud” farms so often envisioned in the German and American – and even Belgian – wartime and postwar public imagination. In occupied Belgium, the plan to raise, regulate and mobilize so-called racially valuable German and Germanic children was an ideological project grounded in the everyday politics of occupation in at least three ways. First, in the most obvious instance, debates in the second half of the war over the treatment of children of German-Belgian parentage and the establishment of Heim Ardennen proved to be a politicized site of contention between the military command and SS. Both institutions attempted to mobilize dialogues and discourses about children and families as a means to establish predominance in the hierarchy of National Socialist power structures.

Second, the program of Germanization, and the Lebensborn project specifically, also relied on daily life for its realization; indeed, the chief source base for the study of Heim Ardennen, the Lebensborn files in the archives of the International Tracing Service in Bad Arolsen, reveals that the German authorities were focused on the trappings of everyday life – staff, supplies and procedures. The obsession with daily minutiae exposes the ways in which ideology and policy intersected. At its core, Nazi racial policy was about even the most elemental of concerns, such as who slept with whom or what people ate for breakfast. Regulating

11 For general studies of the Lebensborn program, see Thomas Bryant, Himmlers Kinder: Zur Geschichte der SS-Organisation “Lebensborn” e.V, 1933-1945 (Wiesbaden: Marixverlag, 2011); Catrine Clay and Michael Leapman, Master Race: The Lebensborn Experiment in Nazi Germany (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995); Marc Hillel and Clara Henry, Of Pure Blood, trans. Eric Mossbacher (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976); Volker Koop, "Dem Führer ein Kind schenken": Die SS-Organisation Lebensborn e.V. (Cologne: Böhlau, 2007); Lilienthal, Der ‘Lebensborn e.V.’; Larry Thompson, “Lebensborn and the Eugenics Policy of the Reichsführer-SS,” Central European History 4, no. 1 (1971): 54-77. Though many historians have dismantled the myth of the Lebensborn homes as breeding factories, this idea remains ubiquitous in public and popular discussions of Lebensborn. A pamphlet published by the Heritage Division of the Ministry of the Walloon Province in 1995 points out that the Lebensborn project in Belgium never panned out as the Germans had envisioned, yet rearticulates the idea that women were “racially selected” and then mated with designated men in order to produce children for the Third Reich. See Benoît Franck, Le domaine provincial de Wégimont (Namur: Ministère de la Région wallonne: Direction générale de l'aménagement du territoire, du logement et du patrimoine, Division du patrimoine, 1995), 8. Annette Timm is currently finalizing a manuscript on postwar ideas about and representations of the Lebensborn program.

12 The archival classification of the Lebensborn files in the ITS changed in 2013 and now fall under the signature NS 1. My citations are formatted according to the older system in place during my research in Bad Arolsen in 2011. These digitized files are also available at the USHMM.
roles and relations signified the alignment of ordinary or “normal” life with Nazi racial ideology; this was how constructions of racial difference and inequalities entered so pervasively and insidiously into the social fabric of daily life such that they were nearly invisible. However, situating the microcosm of the Lebensborn program in Belgium against the macrocosm of war and occupation also illustrates the impossibility of fully controlling intimate processes and outcomes. Third, the entanglement of ideology with politics is perhaps most vividly evident in the fact that even as Nazi racial experts and officials claimed the Belgians, and especially the Flemish, as Germanic allies, they remained suspicious and distrusting of Belgians who cared for German children and those of mixed parentage in hospitals and Heim Ardennen. The very term “racial ally” was slippery and often signaled a social and political attribution – loyal or disloyal to the Reich – rather than any racial or ethnic categorization.\(^{13}\)

As the work of Elizabeth Harvey and Isabel Heinemann has shown, programs to remold the occupied populations of “good blood” into the vanguard of the Thousand-Year Reich cannot be separated from the T-4 euthanasia program, the Holocaust and other atrocities committed in the name of “racial purification” in Europe.\(^{14}\) Nor can discussions of the Nazis’ pronatalist policies be separated from their antinatalist ones.\(^{15}\) To give life and to take life were two sides of the same coin; German occupiers manufactured so-called “friends” in northern and western Europe at the same time they, along with their political allies, systematically destroyed alleged “enemies” and above all Jews. Further, the same group of people carried out these twin programs, from high-level Nazi officials, such as Reich Health Leader Leonardo Conti, to the rank-and-file of the SS.\(^{16}\) 

\(^{13}\) As Tara Zahra has noted in regard to her study of Czech Germans in the Bohemian Lands during the war, “Germanness was most easily read through loyalty to Nazi ideals.” Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*, 193.


A note on terms is necessary. Ebba Drolshagen has noted that the German lexicon lacks an adequate term for the progeny of German soldiers and women in the occupied territories and argues that this absence is symptomatic of the reluctance to acknowledge the existence of these children. Drolshagen offers the term *Wehrmachtskinder* as a corrective to this gap, because it refers both to Germany and to a specific moment in German history.\(^{17}\) I have opted to use the term *Wehrmachtskinder* because this chapter focuses on how German occupation authorities politicized such children (and the very idea of them), rather than on the children’s experiences.

The first part of this chapter analyzes how the (re)making of individuals, beginning at the earliest stages of life, was intrinsic to Nazi plans to construct an empire of Germanic peoples. I then examine the ideologies surrounding the importance of children and actual policies to “acquire” *Wehrmachtskinder* in Belgium. The third part of this chapter provides a study of Belgium’s only Lebensborn home, Heim Ardennen, and relies on records from the ITS archives as well as interviews conducted in the postwar period with former Belgian employees of the home.

**Children as the “Way to Immortality”**

In October 1941, Gottlob Berger, self-described expert on Belgium, argued that the German authorities needed to win Belgian, and specifically Flemish, “hearts and minds” over to the Germanic cause. Yet the Germans had to tread carefully because Flemish civilians were habitually suspicious of Germanization:

> There are still so many over in Flanders …who have not recognized the greatness of the time and still do not know what it is about. They warn of the Germans in general and of SS leaders in particular. They see the “danger of Eindeutschen” in a negative sense, for example, like the French who had wanted to Frenchify the country. The Reichsführer does not want that and we ourselves are much too clever and have seen and learned too much and thereby know that such Eindeutschung has no value at all and will not last without internal, organic growth.\(^{18}\)

The most intimate forms of Germanization, the creation and rearing of human life, engendered Berger’s imagining of “organic growth”; it was through the reproduction of willing, resolute and reliable generations of children that the Greater Germanic Empire could secure its perpetuity.

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\(^{17}\) Drolshagen points out that the words *Kriegskinder* and *Besatzungskinder* each have specific definitions: German children raised during the war and the children of Allied soldiers and German women in the postwar period, respectively. Drolshagen, “Besatzungskinder and Wehrmachtskinder,” 235-6; idem, *Wehrmachtskinder*, 13-4.

\(^{18}\) SS-Obergruppenführer Gottlob Berger, Präsident der Deutsch-Flämischen Arbeitsgemeinschaft, 29 Oct. 1941, BAB NS 19/1547, Bl. 30.
Before and after 1933, Nazi ideologues, racial experts, party officials and administrators envisioned the (re)production of German and Germanic children as the key to curing the demographic and emotional wounds brought on by the catastrophe of the First World War and the cultural and social transformations in its wake. The interest in the birth rate and reproduction was not limited to the Third Reich; an obsession with demographics had long united conservatives, nationalists and scientists across Germany and far beyond. In 1932, population scientist Friedrich Burgdörfer claimed in *Volk ohne Jugend*, a play on the title of Hans Grimm’s 1926 book *Volk ohne Raum*, “A Volk without youth is a Volk without hope, without a future!”

In the interwar period, Burgdörfer and other population experts observed the steady decline in Germany’s birth rate since the turn of the century; in 1901, just over two million children were born, but fewer than half that number in 1933. Equally disconcerting for these German experts were the declining birth statistics from other areas of Germanic Europe, including Belgium, Denmark, Holland, Norway and Sweden. In Belgium, the number of live births fell from 184 per 1000 of the population in 1905-09 to 104 in the middle of the First World War. Anxieties about the declining birth rate in Germany and abroad were also related to concerns about the increasingly skewed age distribution of these populations by the 1930s; the number of elderly people increased, while the number of children and adolescents declined.

The demographics of fear played a key role in discourses regarding *Bevölkerungspolitik*, as lawyers, scientists and other professionals implied that the Germanic peoples were a decaying population, following the path of miscegenation and degeneration taken by the ancient societies of Rome, Babylon, Egypt and Greece. The explosive growth of the so-called “Slavic peoples,” the populations of eastern Europe, exacerbated such fears. Burgdörfer estimated that by 1960, Slavic peoples would make up 303 million, or 50 percent, of the total population of Europe.

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22 Burgdörfer, *Volk Ohne Jugend*, 354. The birth rate in Belgium had been on the decline since the 1880s when it fell to under 30 live births per 1000, partly because couples had begun to control their fertility. Ron J. Lesthaeghe, *The Decline of Belgian Fertility, 1800-1970* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1977), 4-5, 95.
23 In Germany, the life expectancy of men and women had increased by 20 years between the 1870s and the mid-1920s. This trend also occurred in other countries, including Belgium. Ibid., 18-21, 381.
25 The total population of Germanic peoples increased from 59 million in 1810 to 149 million in 1930; in the same time frame, the Slavic populations grew from 65 million 226 million. Burgdörfer, *Volk Ohne Jugend*, 373, 377.
Nazi officials and racial experts argued that the only feasible solution was to increase the birth rate in Germanic Europe. Guidelines for the political training sessions of the SS during the war focused on reminding SS-men, as members of the Third Reich’s racial elite, that the number of bridges and factories built and the number of military divisions were not adequate indicators of a country’s success; rather, the greatest measure of success was the birth rate and the glorification of German youth. Hitler stated that if the birth rate increased, “then I know that our people do not perish, and our work will not be in vain.”26 There were also more practical and medium-term objectives behind Nazi pro-natalism: more children meant more soldiers to fight for the Reich.

In view of Nazi plans to remake Europe along racial lines, it was insufficient for German SS-men and soldiers only to reproduce with German women. German men’s frequent disregard for official policies prohibiting fraternization and marriage with local women in occupied Europe, as well as the German military and civilian authorities’ own flexibility on such policies, worked in favour of the Third Reich’s population goals. With sex, of course, sometimes came children. “Acquiring” and (re)educating the children born between occupier and occupied in Germanic Europe was a two-fold strategy. First, it worked towards achieving Himmler’s (and the RuSHA’s) goal of 250 million Aryan Germans in Europe by 1980.27 Second, an integrative policy towards some non-Germans could help secure the loyalty of these people by creating lasting ties to Germany and its people in the form of children. The partnership of the sword and cradle would lead the Third Reich to victory in Europe.28 By 1942, the Nazis’ realization that there would be no swift end to the eastern campaign magnified the hunt for Germanic blood, if not German, blood and intensified programs intended to produce and Germanize children.

Germanization programs targeting children across Europe existed along a wide spectrum. In eastern Europe, “the hunt for gutrassig children” tended to be more coercive than in the west. Isabel Heinemann estimates that at least 50 000 children from Poland, southeastern Europe and the Soviet Union were “forcibly Germanized” (Zwangsgermanisierung) during the Second

28 This idea that a “victory of children” must follow the “victory of arms” was a common SS slogan. See Richtlinien für die Politische Gemeinschaftsstunden der SS, 1942-43, BAB NS 2/70, Bl. 39-46. Carney, “Victory in the Cradle,” 113 and 144-6.
World War. This policy included the separation of children from their families (many of them were reclassified as orphans) as well as the removal of children from orphanages and their subsequent forced resettlement in Germany to live with German families. The most infamous of kidnapping operations was the 1944 Heu-Aktion (literally meaning a collective harvesting of hay) whereby between 30,000 and 50,000 Belorussian children aged ten to fourteen were to be transported to Germany for forced labour; by the last few months of the war, the German authorities had removed between 11,000 and 14,500 children and adolescents from their families to work in Germany. The Nuremberg trials considered the kidnapping and forced transfer of children from one group to another as part of the Nazis’ program of systematic murder; in 1948, kidnapping as a form of genocide was also enshrined in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

By contrast, Germanization policies in northern and western Europe generally avoided the use of force, though some historians have argued that the kidnapping of racially valuable children did occur but on a much smaller scale. The relative absence of coercive schemes intended to Germanize children in France, Belgium, Denmark and the Netherlands points to a paradox in Nazi policy; because of Nazi assumptions that these populations were more Germanic than those in Poland, which had been “spoiled” by decades of Polonization, we might expect heavy-handed measures to recover the “lost blood” of Germanic Europe but this was not the case.

29 Heinemann, “Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut”, 508-9; Hillel and Henry, Of Pure Blood, 151-98. Tara Zahra suggests that the total number of kidnapped children from central and eastern Europe is difficult to estimate, first, because of the ways in which such numbers became politicized after the war and second, because of the fuzziness of the term “kidnapping.” Zahra points out that there was not such a great difference between separating a child from his or her parents and removing a child from an orphanage to live with a family. While one form of kidnapping was more individualized, both were forms of “taking” from the nation. Zahra, Kidnapped Souls, 199-200.

30 The term Heu-Aktion was a German abbreviation of the children’s family status: homeless (heimatlos), parentless (elternlos, since many of their parents were already forced labourers in the Reich) and without lodgings (unterkunftlos). See Christian Gerlach, Kalkulierte Morde: Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrussland 1941 bis 1944 (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999), 1082-92; Ulrich Herbert, Hitler’s Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labour in Germany under the Third Reich, trans. William Templer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 281.


32 Heinemann, “Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut”, 508-9. I did not find any records documenting the kidnapping of Belgian children. The closest evidence I have is from transcripts of interviews of former Belgian employees at Heim Ardennen, who recalled a Belgian woman whose child was removed to Germany on 1 Sept. 1944. In this case, it seems that the woman had previously “signed over” her child to the Germans.
It is difficult to determine exactly why the Germanic populations were largely spared the kidnappings of their children. One hypothesis is that in northern and western Europe, where the German occupiers engaged in a campaign of voluntary recruitment for work in Germany until 1942 when labour became compulsory, they feared that forcibly Germanizing children would alienate the local populations. This may have been especially true of Belgium, where the occupation relied heavily upon Belgian bureaucrats and officials in the day-to-day administration and where the voluntary labour recruitment program had been so successful in 1940-41. The type of occupied administration likely also played a role in determining the nature of Germanization projects targeting youth. In Belgium, the SS was limited in its powers to determine racial policy, as Falkenhausen and Reeder warded off infiltration by officials and agencies under the aegis of Himmler. For example, the SS office representing Himmler and dealing with Volkstumsfragen, the Dienststelle Jungclaus, named after its leader, SS-Brigadeführer Richard Jungclaus, only opened in April 1942.

Racial ideology probably also played a role in the differing Germanization schemes across Europe. Nazi officials and ideologues generally viewed the Germanic peoples more favourably than those in eastern Europe and were perhaps more willing to act benevolently because of this bias. Yet, racial status did not necessarily determine Nazi policy; as Tara Zahra’s work on children and Volkstumsarbeit in the Bohemian, other factors, such as cultural traits and the political values of parents and families played a larger role than physical appearance in so-called racial screenings of children. In the end, the reluctance to kidnap Belgian and other Germanic children likely emerged out of the uneven intersection between racial ideology and political pragmatism, which was characteristic of Nazi Germanization policies across Europe.

The Wehrmachtkinder and the Preservation of Germanic Erbgut

The Wehrmachtkinder were especially important for Nazi and military officials because they occupied a hybrid space in Nazi ideology; the Nazis viewed them as partially – but not purely – German, much like the Mischlinge, individuals of Aryan and Jewish ancestry who had one or two Jewish grandparents. This was not the first time in the twentieth century that the

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33 Tara Zahra argues that the Nazis attempted to act with “restraint” in their schemes to Germanize Czech children (compared with Polish children, who were technically less racially valuable) because they relied on Czech workers in the Nazi war economy and wanted to avoid any further antagonism of the civilian population by 1943. Zahra, Kidnapped Souls, 199-202.

34 Zahra, Kidnapped Souls, 199.
question of what to do with such children in Belgium had arisen. It might be expected that the children born of German-Belgian parentage in the First World War and its aftermath would be of particular concern for the military command in Belgium after 1940 or, alternatively, that the Belgian mothers of these children would seek to claim them as “German” in order to receive the benefits accorded to ethnic Germans throughout the occupation. However, evidence pertaining to such children, who would have been adults by the Second World War, is scarce; questions about them generally related more to the rights and obligations (such as military service) related to their status vis-à-vis the nationalities of their parents than to ideological debates about “reclaiming” them for the Reich.35

In early 1941, as the first of the Belgian Wehrmachtskinder were being born, issues relating to the legal status of such children became more urgent, especially since most of them were technically illegitimate because their parents were not married. Occasionally, Belgian women did marry the German fathers of their children and relocated to Germany in order to do so.36 Other couples wanted to get married but were prohibited by their families. Gerlinda Swillen’s grandfather refused to agree to the marriage of her mother, then twenty-two, to her father, a German NCO.37 In other cases, some German men abandoned their Belgian girlfriends when they became pregnant.38

Debate ensued over whether legal issues concerning the Wehrmachtskinder, especially child support claims, were matters for the German civil or military courts. Because members of the German occupation forces in Europe possessed an extraterritorial legal status, alimony claims for illegitimate children had to be filed in the German courts in the Reich, not in the courts of the occupied territories; as a result, most claimants lost their cases and what was owed to them.39 In January 1941, the Chief of the OKW argued that it was desirable for political reasons to help

35 See the case of a young Belgian man who was drafted for German military service in 1942. He was born in 1920 to a German father and Belgian mother who had met in World War I. Both of his parents were dead by 1926, and in 1941 he was officially adopted by an uncle on his Belgian child. The adoption potentially called into question his obligation for military service in the Wehrmacht. Kriegsverwaltungsrat, OFK 589, to MVC, Gruppe Justiz, Btr.: Wehrpflicht von einem belgischen Staatsangehörigen Adoptierten, 7 Oct. 1942, BA-MA RW 36/394, Bl. 19.
37 Swillen, Koekoekskind, 13. Swillen’s grandfather refused to consent to the marriage because he was afraid that the family’s “racial background” – including Jewish relatives – would be uncovered. In another case, it was the parents of the German soldier, Heinz H., who forbade his marriage to a Belgian girl, Christine R., because they wanted him to marry a German. See Heinz H., correspondence, 1943-44, CEGES AA 2193.
38 Anne-Marie D., N°437, Collection “Jours de Guerre” de RTBF-Charleroi, CEGES AA 1450, p. 4.
39 Lilienthal, Der “Lebensborn e.V. “, 168.
local women in Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, France and the Channel Islands pursue child support claims against the Wehrmacht by transferring the decisions on such claims to the military courts.\(^{40}\) That summer, Hitler supported the OKW’s recommendation but waited a year before issuing a relevant decree. Hitler had a different objective in mind than the military. For him, the issue of child support was not simply a legal matter but “a question of racial policy” (\(\text{eine rassenpolitische Frage}\)) which required resolution. Hitler decided that the regulation should only apply to Norway and the Netherlands, arguing that the implementation of a similar decree for Belgium and France was not possible (at the moment) because it did not align with Nazi racial ideology: “We want to protect and care for illegitimate Germanic children; we have no \(\text{rassenpolitisch}\) interest in the French.” Hitler insisted that further talks with the High Command were not necessary if they revolved only around “a political question” (\(\text{eine politische Frage}\)).\(^{41}\)

The Regulation on the Care of Children of Members of the German Wehrmacht in the Occupied Territories (\(\text{Verordnung über die Betreuung von Kindern deutscher Wehrmachtsangehöriger in den besetzten Gebieten}\)) of 28 July 1942 decreed that \(\text{Wehrmachtskinder}\) should receive “special care” from the German occupation regimes in order to preserve their “racially valuable Germanic \(\text{Erbgut}.\)” This “special care” included taking over the costs of childbirth, providing subsistence allowances for mothers before and after delivery, paying alimony for the children, accommodating mothers in hospitals or maternity homes, and, where needed (and with the consent of the mothers), accommodating children in youth facilities. The goal of these services was to “ensure that all disadvantages are kept away from the mother and that the development of the child is promoted.”\(^{42}\)

At the same time as the promulgation of July order, intended to support certain children in occupied Europe, Jewish children experienced the other side of the Nazis’ plan to racially reorder Europe: mass murder. As part of the \(\text{Grossaktion}\) in Warsaw in the summer of 1942, the Germans killed 90 000 Jewish children in Treblinka; among the many orphans killed were the 200 children under the care of Dr. Janusz Korczak, who accompanied his charges to the gas chambers. In France, more than 4 000 Jewish children were detained in the infamous July 1942

\(^{40}\) OKW to Reich Chancellery, 13 Jan. 1941, BAB R 43 II/1520a, Bl. 149. Abschrift, Betr: Unterhaltungsansprüche aus uneheliche Vaterschaft gegen deutsche Soldaten in den besetzten Gebieten, 24 Jan. 1941, copied in OKH to MBH in Belgien und Nordfrankreich und MBH in Frankreich, 29 Jan. 1941, BA-MA RW 36/393, Bl. 41.

\(^{41}\) Note from the Reich Chancellery, 27 June 1941, attached to Memorandum, Betr.: Uneheliche Kinder von Besatzungsangehörigen, 15 Aug. 1941, BAB R 43 II/1520a, Bl. 160.

\(^{42}\) RGBl. I 1942, s. 488.
Vel’ d’Hiv roundup, the majority of whom were then separated from their parents and sent to Auschwitz.⁴³ Children, including six-month-old infants, were also among the Jews deported from Belgium during the first round of deportations beginning in August 1942.⁴⁴

Although the July 1942 decree referenced the Netherlands and Norway specifically, it made provisions for all of the other occupied countries of Germanic Europe to be included. In November 1942, the welfare section of the military command and the Dienststelle-Jungclaus jointly reviewed the merits of issuing a corresponding decree for Belgium. Such a decree would provide a framework for addressing other key issues regarding children of Belgian-German parentage, like child support.⁴⁵ The establishment of paternity was essential to child support cases and women’s applications for social assistance from the Lebensborn program (operated by the SS) or the National Socialist People’s Welfare Organization (NSV).⁴⁶ Asserting paternity and the act of naming also had powerful reverberations within the context of occupation; assigning children their German fathers’ names removed the stigma attached to unwed mothers whose children, if paternity remained unvalidated, bore their names instead.⁴⁷ Even more important, confirmation of a German father meant that an illegitimate child could receive German citizenship.⁴⁸ Marital status, it seems, was not only an important signifier or determinant for women’s position in society, but also for children’s.⁴⁹ Further, giving a child his father’s name further signified the legal creation of a family, of a lineage.

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Lebensborn: Origins and Objectives

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⁴⁶ The implementation regulations for “special care” of Wehrmachtskinder mainly referred to §5 of the order, that is, the determination of paternity. Paragraph 5 decreed that the mother or guardian was to be represented by one of two offices, either Lebensborn or NSV. Otto Hofmann, Chef des RuSHA, to HSSPF Nordwest, SS-Führer im Rasse- und Siedlungswesen, Btr.: Verordnung zur Betreuung von Kindern deutscher Wehrmachtsangehöriger in den besetzten Gebieten, 29 Jan. 1943, BAB NS 2/82, Bl. 2.

⁴⁷ Anne-Marie D., CEGES AA 1450, 7.

⁴⁸ Erklärung von Karl Mrowald, 24 Nov. 1942, BA-MA RW 36/394, Bl. 49.

The NSV and the Lebensborn organization battled one another for principal responsibility in executing Hitler’s 1942 order. Though the NSV played a dominant role in child welfare and maternity programs in the Netherlands, Himmler and the Lebensborn organization triumphed in most other areas of occupied Europe.\(^{50}\) The main objective of the Lebensborn organization, founded in the Reich in 1935, was to provide care for “racially and hereditarily (erbbiologisch) valuable” mothers and children and thereby ensure the (re)production of large families.\(^{51}\) The program aimed to reduce abortions by offering assistance to unmarried expectant mothers, many of whom lacked familial, financial and medical support.\(^{52}\) Lebensborn maternity homes also admitted married women, either because these women’s husbands were not the fathers of their unborn children or because they wanted to take advantage of the high standard of medical and nursing care available in the facilities.\(^{53}\) By 1939 there were six Lebensborn homes with a total of 263 beds for mothers and 487 for children: Hochland at Steinhöring; Hohehorst near Bremen; the Harz home at Wernigerode; Kurmark at Klosterheide, north of Berlin; Bad Polzin in Pomerania; and Wienerwald near Vienna.\(^{54}\)

The beginning of the war in September 1939 heightened Lebensborn’s prewar objectives because of the potential losses of German men in battle; in Himmler’s words, “every war is a bloodletting of the best blood.”\(^{55}\) Later that year, Himmler planned to approach General Keitel in the interest of getting the Wehrmacht to support financially the aspirations of the Lebensborn organization, either via a one-time major payment or an on-going grant.\(^{56}\) The costs of caring for expectant mothers and the children of enlisted men could not be maintained solely by the SS. Himmler made clear the link between the war and the Lebensborn project, stating at the outset that his request to the Wehrmacht was one of “considerable political-defensive (wehrpolitisch) importance.” Himmler expressed concern about the number of abortions occurring annually in

\(^{50}\) Monika Diederichs, “Stigma and Silence: Dutch Women, German Soldiers and their Children,” in *Children of World War II*, 154-5; For more on the infighting between Lebensborn and the NSV, see Lilienthal, *Der “Lebensborn, e.V.”*, 168-72.


\(^{54}\) Ibid., 62.

\(^{55}\) Himmler encouraged German soldiers, SS-men and policemen to continue to father children, recalling that during the First World War, some men were hesitant to do so because they worried that their families would be left in financial distress if they were killed. Himmler promised that the men’s families, as well as all illegitimate children, would be provided for and that the SS would care for expectant mothers during the men’s absence and when need was evident. SS-Befehl für die gesamte SS und Polizei, 28 Oct. 1939, ITS 4/82448197#1.

\(^{56}\) Max Sollmann to Rudolf Brandt, 22 July 1940, BAB NS 19/1082, Bl. 4-5; Poldi to Pflaum, 15 Dec. 1939, BAB NS 19/1082, Bl. 2.
Germany—using the much-cited figure of 600,000—and argued that these terminated pregnancies represented a loss to military strength.\(^{57}\) Hoping to sway the High Command into cooperation with the SS, Himmler framed population and reproductive policy as military strategy, rather than purely a part of the SS’s *Volkstumpolitik*. 

Himmler also pointed out that with a war on, Lebensborn confronted a new set of circumstances. Due to the extensive movement of troops, extramarital pregnancies had increased since the beginning of the war. According to Himmler, the fathers of some 90 percent of all of the illegitimate children born in Lebensborn homes were members of the Wehrmacht. That reproduction was not outside of the realm of military concern was also evident in cases where the Wehrmacht intervened to ensure that pregnant German women working in the occupied territories who did not have their own homes or could not find suitable accommodations with relatives back in Germany received appropriate care. In occupied France, the German military command set up a maternity home, Heim “Manoir”, in a rural Parisian suburb for German women working or affiliated with the Wehrmacht or its auxiliary forces.\(^{58}\)

But what about pregnant non-German women in the occupied territories? In a letter to Dr. Gregor Ebner, the chief medical officer of the Lebensborn organization, about the annual report of Lebensborn for 1940, Himmler acknowledged the relatively good position of the organization but expressed doubt about the possibility of opening more homes under wartime conditions.\(^{59}\) As German losses multiplied in the second half of the war, Himmler’s ambivalence disappeared. Entrenching the Lebensborn project in northwestern Europe was not simply a side-project of the SS; military success would create the borders of the Nazi empire in Europe, but the “victory of the cradle” would sustain it. In an August 1943 memorandum sent to all of the Higher SS and Police Leaders in occupied Europe and to other SS representatives, including Jungclaus in Belgium, Himmler envisioned an ever-greater expansion of the Lebensborn program to “acquire”

\(^{57}\) Himmler hypothesized that if the abortions stopped, 600,000 children would be born, who, in 18–20 years, would make up 200 additional regiments for the Reich. Himmler to Keitel, unsigned, July 1940, BAB NS 19/1082, Bl. 6.

\(^{58}\) Dr. Habenreiser, Intendent beim Befehlshaber Nordwestfrankreich, Betr.: Genesungsheim “Manoir,” 10 Feb. 1944, BA-MA RH 36/339, Bl. 1-2. Himmler, however, was against setting up maternity homes abroad for German women. In 1943, he observed that because more and more German women employed in the occupied territories were getting pregnant, “the desire is often loudly spoken to erect a maternity home for these girls and women abroad to ensure secrecy as well as prevent undesirable reactions at home.” Himmler insisted that all German women expecting a child abroad should return to Germany, where various Nazi organizations could offer these women the possibility of safely delivering their babies with total discretion. Himmler to Hauptämter und HSPFFs et al., 8 Aug. 1943, BAB NS 2/231, Bl. 42-3.

\(^{59}\) Himmler to Ebner, Betr.: Jahresbericht, 28 Jan. 1941, ITS 4/82448339#1.
the partially German children of “mixed” parentage: “Here is our intention – to capture (erfassen) any expected child of German blood on his father’s side, racially evaluate it as well as its mother, and thereafter see to it that the child, either alone or with its mother as a carrier of German blood or as a mother of a German child, comes into the Reich at an appropriate time.”

Other Nazi officials similarly saw potential in this previously untapped resource for “good blood” – and future soldiers – in the occupied territories. In late May 1942, Reich Health Leader Dr. Conti suggested that the 50,000 children born of French women could be a valuable resource with which to repopulate the Reich, especially since the war did not seem likely to end in the near future: “In my opinion, these children are not bad; most are not worse than those born by Norwegian women in Norway…[At present] these children are lost to Germany…I propose that Lebensborn should energetically intervene to secure these children.” That Conti saw the French as a potential population reserve is instructive; this was a man who advocated for artificial insemination as a strategy to increase the birth rate because he did not trust ordinary Germans to choose racially valuable mates. Even more revealing in regard to Conti’s ideological leanings was his role in the expansion of the T-4 euthanasia program to include adults in fall 1939. Conti epitomized the spectrum of tactics, which included, interchangeably and simultaneously, incentive and murder, to ensure the perpetual survival of a ‘healthy’ Volk.

The relationship between the turning tide of war and the intensification of the Lebensborn program is further seen in the fact that earnest discussions to open maternity homes in occupied northern and western Europe only began at the end of 1942. In early 1943, Lebensborn representatives were appointed in Brussels as well as Poznań and Kraków in Poland, Oslo in Norway and The Hague in Holland. By the end of the war, Lebensborn established lone maternity homes in Belgium, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Denmark (the latter only opened in May 1945). Norway had nine homes by the time of the German defeat, and with over

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60 Himmler to Hauptämter et al., 8 Aug. 1943, BAB NS 2/231, Bl. 43.
61 Conti to Himmler, 29 May 1942, ITS 2/82447759#1. It is unclear whether Conti assumed the children of these French women had German fathers. Given the reference to Norway and the number cited, I am inclined to argue that Conti was in fact referring to children with German fathers. In October 1943, the Einwandererzentrale in Paris estimated the number of illegitimate children of German occupation authorities to be 85,000.
63 On Conti, see Friedlander, Origins of Nazi Genocide, esp. 63-4.
64 Dr. Günter Tesch to Hofmann, Btr.: Beauftragter des Lebensborn, 22 Dec. 1942, BAB NS 2/72, Bl. 32-3.
65 Hofmann to Sollmann, Btr.: Beauftragter des Lebensborn, 5 Jan. 1943, BAB NS 2/72, Bl. 30; Closing Brief III – Ebner; Viermetz; Schwarzenbergen; Sollmann; from Military Tribunal, Case 8, The USA against Ulrich Greifelt et al., ITS 4/ ID 82482464#1; Lilienthal, Der “Lebensborn, e.V.,” 173.
6000 births, the German authorities considered it to have the largest contingent of *Lebensborn-Kinder* across Europe. After the war, Max Sollmann, former director of the Lebensborn organization from May 1940 until 1945, estimated that 12 000 children were born in the facilities, excluding Norway. Georg Lilienthal considers Sollmann’s number is exaggerated and estimates that 7000-8000 children were born during the entire period of the organization’s activity. Unmarried women comprised the majority of those admitted to the homes in and outside the Reich; single women made up 58 percent of admissions until 1939 and approximately 70 percent by 1942. Only at the very end of the war did this trend reverse itself; more married women, many of them wives of Nazi officials and SS-men, sought refuge for themselves and their children in Lebensborn facilities, away from the Allied bomb attacks on German cities.

**Constructing Heim Ardennen, March 1943 – September 1944**

In contrast to Denmark and the Netherlands, Lebensborn established a foothold in Belgium relatively quickly in 1942-43. Belgium was the second occupied country after Norway in which the program was operational. Lebensborn did not, however, have a prerogative over maternal and childcare in Belgium; other maternity centres and children’s centres (*Kinderheimen*) were also operational. In the summer of 1943, the *Germanische Leitstelle* in Brussels reported on the success of an SS *Kinderheim* in Kappellenbosch, which housed twenty-five Flemish and fifteen German children. The report highlighted the camaraderie among the children and recommended “mixing” German and Flemish youth together in future endeavours because of its beneficial effect on the “mental development” of the children. Little else is known about the Kinderheim, except that there were plans for its expansion.

In March 1943, under the auspices of the *Dienststelle-Jungclaus*, the Lebensborn organization opened a maternity home, Heim Ardennen, in Wégimont château in the

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69 Lilienthal, *Der “Lebensborn, e.V.,”* 197.

70 Monatsbericht der Germanischen Leitstelle: Finanzen, Wirtschaft und Vermögensverwaltung über Volkstumsarbeit in Flandern, BAB NS 1/524, Bl. 7.
municipality of Soumagne in the province of Liège, close to the German border. German forces had occupied the château after the May 1940 invasion and plans had been in motion for some time to turn the castle into a Lebensborn home; in the fall of 1942, Inge Viermetz, a special representative (Sonderbeauftragte) of the Lebensborn organization, had travelled to Belgium to begin the necessary arrangements.71 Viermetz was a practiced Lebensborn advisor, having worked in the organization since 1938. From 1941, she was the Chief of Hauptabteilung A (Arbeit), which was responsible for the main activities of the homes. Her tasks included the establishment of the facilities, dealing with issues of guardianship, foster care and adoption placement and keeping track of statistics and registries.72 By the time of her arrival in Belgium, she was well versed in the practices of Germanization; as part of an Eindeutschungsaktion in Poland in April 1942, she had maneuvered the “shipment” of 300 Polish children from the Warthegau into Lebensborn institutions inside the German Reich. Throughout 1942-43, she organized the forcible Germanization of the children of partisans killed in Yugoslavia and the “resettlement” of children from Lidice in Czechoslovakia to the Altreich and other children from the Warthegau. Her experience spoke for itself.73

On 19 November 1942, the overseers of the château permitted the Lebensborn organization to use Wégimont, following the conditions of the High Field Command in Liège.74 The château had 14 bedrooms and each room had either two or four beds.75 In July 1943, Heim Ardennen had 20 mothers and 34 children; by November, 30 women resided in the home, although this was far fewer than 120 promised by Viermetz.76 The majority of the occupants of

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72 Initially, Viermetz shared this position with SS-Hauptsturmführer Ernst Ragaller, but their cooperation was shortlived. Andrea Böltken, Führerinnen im Führerstaat: Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, Trude Mohr, Jutta Rüdiger und Inge Viermetz (Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus, 1995), 116-7.
73 After the war, Viermetz was indicted at the RuSHA trial (or, officially, The United States of America vs. Ulrich Greifelt, et al.) in Nuremberg, which began in July 1947. She was the only woman among the fourteen defendants. Accused of kidnapping children from the occupied territories to Germany, taking away the children of female workers from eastern Europe (Ostarbeiterinnen) and forcibly Germanizing children, the court acquitted Viermetz in its judgment of 10 March 1948. See Böltken, Führerinnen im Führerstaat, 105-29; Kathrin Kompisch, Täterinnen: Frauen im Nationalsozialismus (Cologne: Böhla, 2008), 34-5. On women more generally as witnesses and perpetrators in eastern Europe, see Harvey, Women and the Nazi East; Wendy Lower, Hitler’s Furies: German Women in the Nazi Killing Fields (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013). To my knowledge, there is no study to date about the activities of German women in occupied western Europe.
74 Benoît Franck, Le domaine provincial de Wégimont, 8.
75 Cécilia P., N°417, Collection “Jours de Guerre” de RTBF-Charleroi, CEGES AA 1450, 5; Léa D., Joséphine B. Cécilia P., Marcelle P., N°406, Collection “Jours de Guerre” de RTBF-Charleroi, CEGES AA 1450, 9.
76 Home administrators registered eight births between the opening of the home and July 1943. Monatsbericht der
the home were Belgian “mothers of Germanic blood” whose children had German fathers. In line with Nazi racial ideology, German authorities in Heim Ardennen preferred Flemish, as opposed to Walloon, applicants. This partiality, however, never translated into a specific anti-Walloon policy out of a fear of politically alienating French-speaking Belgians. The fact that Lebensborn officials chose to open the home in a French-speaking province close to the largest Walloon city, Liège, suggests anti-Walloon rhetoric had little practical stock.

From the outset, Heim Ardennen’s goal to provide care for *Wehrmachtskinder* encountered difficulties. At the end of March 1943, the home’s leadership requested the creation of its own registry office (*Standesamt*), in order to maintain the secrecy of the births. Although there was no question that German mothers would fall under the jurisdiction of such a *Standesamt*, registration of individuals of Belgian nationality was the responsibility of the Belgian civil authorities. This policy, however, sometimes incurred difficulties for children of Belgian-German parentage regarding the issues of citizenship and rights of inheritance. In cases where a child was born in Belgium and where paternity was unconfirmed, the child automatically received the nationality status of its mother (Belgian). With the military administration’s support, Lebensborn recommended issuing a decree that would grant German nationality “fundamentally” (*grundsätzlich*) to all children born in Heim Ardennen to ensure their legal protection. This recommendation was about more than legal status; it was also closely tied to Lebensborn’s fundamental objective to claim “racially valuable Germanic Erbgut” to bolster the Greater Germanic Reich. Without German citizenship, a child would have few ties to the Reich and could “slip away” from German influence.

The Reich Ministry of the Interior rejected the request, arguing that Hitler had recently repudiated the bestowal of German citizenship upon the illegitimate children of German soldiers and their mothers even if they were of related blood. Bormann, however, stepped in, clarifying that Hitler had spoken only against a general acquisition of German citizenship; according to

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Germanisches Leitstelle, July 1943, BAB NS 1/524, Bl. 7; Ebner, Aktenvermerk, 12 Nov. 1943, ITS 2/82447670#1.
77 MVC to RMdl, 31 March 1943, BAB R 43 II/137a, Bl. 113; Ebner, Ärztliches Gutachten, 14 Dec. 1943, ITS 2/82447692#1. Some of the women in the home were also pregnant with the children of “foreign members of the German Hilfsorganisationen,” including the Waffen-SS, Flemish SS, Walloon Legion, etc. Women from northern France and Holland were also present in the home, as were German women, who, due to the overabundance of applicants and the chronic shortage of beds in Lebensborn homes inside of Germany came to Belgium to deliver their babies. Ibid; Léa D. et al., CEGES AA 1450, 5, 13.
79 MVC to RMdl, 31 March 1943, BAB R 43 II/137a, Bl. 113.
80 RMdl to MVC, 2 April 1943, BAB R 43/137a, Bl. 112.
Hitler, foreign women who had extramarital relationships with German troops were “by no means always racially worthy” and the children of such unions should not be considered “as a desirable population growth for the German Volk.” However, Hitler still permitted case-by-case naturalizations of racially valuable illegitimate children of mixed parentage.81

Unlike other areas of occupied Europe, the German military wanted to play a central role in deciding what treatment was accorded the children of German occupation soldiers born in Belgium. Military Commander Falkenhausen argued in September 1943 that such children possessed “for the most part racially valuable Germanic Erbgut” and that the Führer-Decree of July 1942 should apply to Belgium; it would be “expedient for political reasons to grant at least Flemish women the same status as Dutch women.” This was not the end of the military command’s request. Falkenhausen considered the similarity or equality between the Flemish and Walloon populations “irrefutable” and he wanted the children of Walloon-German parentage to likewise fall under the jurisdiction of the July decree.82

Well aware that the Nazis and SS in particular sought to exploit already existing tensions between the Flemish and Walloons (a policy Falkenhausen and others in the High Command considered a threat to political stability), the military administration did not want to leave decisions about which mothers would be applicable for the care provided under the July 1942 law and its supplementary decrees to the Dienststelle Jungclaus. Rather, the military wanted all applications presented first to its command centres (Kommandanturen), and then forwarded to the SS office in Brussels. Perhaps making a deliberate overture to the SS to satisfy its concerns about the racial status of expectant mothers, Falkenhausen recommended that Jungclaus’ office conduct racial and hereditary examinations of applicants. Ultimately, however, the decision about whether a mother (and her child) would receive support lay with the military, while the practical implementation of this care would fall to Lebensborn, the NSV or NSDAP-Landesgruppe Belgien. Lebensborn, along with the Dienststelle Jungclaus, would be little more than an executive body.83 The OKW conveyed Falkenhausen’s recommendation, along with a draft regulation, to Reich Minister Lammers, who passed it on to the Minister of the Interior, the

81 Bormann to RMdl, 24 June 1943, R 43 II/137a, Bl. 111.
82 OKW to Reich Minister and Chief of the Reich Chancellery Lammers, Betr: Betreuung von Kindern deutscher Wehrmachtangehöriger in Belgien, 19 Sept. 1943, BAB R 43 II/1525, Bl. 108. In general, Falkenhausen opposed privileging the Flemish because, as an aristocrat, he supported the retention of the monarchy and kept company with the French-speaking nobility and elites. Werner Warmbrunn, The German Occupation of Belgium, 1940-1944 (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 130-1.
83 Lilienthal, Der “Lebensborn, e.V., ” 196.
chief of the Party Chancellery and Himmler as Reich Commissioner for the Strengthening of Germanism for approval in September 1943.84

There was no movement on the proposed decree well into 1944, even though the Ministry of the Interior and Chancellery had given their agreement. The problem was Himmler, who in spite of numerous reminders, remained silent on the question of applying the July 1942 decree to Belgium.85 His silence was a calculated means of avoiding an open conflict with the military command. Relations between the SS – and Himmler in particular – and the military administration were already tense at this time due to debates about the establishment of a Higher SS and Police Leader in Belgium, a dispute the SS lost (until the late summer of 1944).86 In October 1943, Himmler argued that Falkenhausen “should have no powers…particularly in the realm of Volkstumspolitik.”87 In the end, Himmler and the Lebensborn head office in Munich, where he had sent the request for processing, delayed executing the new plan. The landing of the Allied forces in France in June 1944 and the replacement of the military command with a civilian administration in July essentially made the order obsolete.88

The Politics of Race and Everyday Life in Heim Ardennen

The villagers of Soumagne were aware of the happenings at Wégimont château; postwar accounts are replete with memories of the home’s nurses, dressed in their white aprons, taking the children for walks in their notorious “little white carriages” in the large park near the home and in the village itself.89 Yet there was also a certain distance between the home and village in part because of the power dynamic between occupier and occupied. As Cécilia P., a former Belgian employee of Heim Ardennen, remembered decades later about the relationship between Lebensborn staff and the townspeople: “It was occupied, it was occupied, we did not dare say

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84 OKW to Lammers, 19 Sept. 1943, BAB R 43 II/1525, Bl. 108; Lammers to RMdl, Reichsführer-SS, RfdFdV, Leiter der Partei Kanzlei, 22 Sept. 1943, BAB R 43 II/1525, Bl. 109.
85 Lammers to OKW, Betr.: Betreuung von Kindern deutscher Wehrmachtsangehöriger in Belgien, 29 Dec. 1943, BAB R 43 II/1525, Bl. 118; Lammers to Brandt, 14 Feb. 1944, BAB R 43 II/1525, Bl. 121; Lammers to OKW, 12 April 1944, BAB R 43 II/1525, Bl. 123.
87 OKW, Betr.: Einsetzung eines HSPFFs im Bereich des Militärbehelfsabers in Belgien und Nordfrankreich, 28 Oct. 1943, BAB NS 19/1165, Bl. 41.
88 Lilienthal, Der “Lebensborn, e.V.,” 196.
89 Cécilia P., CEGES AA 1450, 3; Léa D. et al., CEGES AA 1450, 7.
anything and they [the villagers] never did anything wrong (mal).”90 People generally kept away from those associated with the homes, partly because of the presence of German officers’ girlfriends, who believed their relationship status accorded them special treatment by Lebensborn employees and visitors, which spurred social tensions. Anne-Marie D., born in 1943 to an unwed Belgian woman who had had a relationship with a German soldier, also recalled that “everyone mistrusted one another”; her mother, who stayed on at the home to work in the payroll office after giving birth, kept to herself and avoided contact with the outside world. Anne-Marie claimed that the desire for discretion was influenced by the fact that her mother’s father and brother were involved in the Belgian resistance, and “so it was best that she kept quiet.”91

The resistance, which was active in Soumagne, was also well informed about Heim Ardennen but opted not to intervene in its operation; incidentally, the German leadership feared attacks on the home to such an extent that it established a guard force from members of the Germanic SS.92 Former Belgian employees asserted that the resistance deliberately kept its distance because it was concerned about German reprisals. In particular, resisters feared that the Germans would burn down the entire village and shoot all of its inhabitants, as had happened in France.93 After the war, former employees Léa D., Josèphine B., Cécilia P. and Marcelle P. maintained “it was better” for the resistance to stay away. It is difficult to assess the veracity of such postwar claims.

The purpose of Lebensborn was clear to resisters, villagers and the Belgians working at the facility: Heim Ardennen was for “children conceived for Hitler.”94 Belgian women who were uncertain about keeping their infants because they feared their families would reject them could “sign over” their children to the Germans, often receiving a sum of money in return.95 Women who “chose” this option did not remain long at the homes after their delivery; the babies,

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90 Cécilia P., CEGES AA 1450, 3.
91 Anne-Marie D., CEGES AA 1450, 4-5. Anne-Marie’s “memories” are likely based on what she was told by her family, given that she was born in 1943 and would only have been eighteen months old when Heim Ardennen closed.
92 Monatsbericht der Germanischen Leitstelle, July 1943, BAB NS 1/524, Bl. 7.
93 Léa D. et al., CEGES AA 1450, 17. On 10 June 1944, the 2nd Waffen-SS Panzer Division, Das Reich, massacred 642 people in the farming village of Oradour-sur-Glane. The Germans then proceeded to loot and destroy the village. Only seven inhabitants survived the massacre but were severely injured; fifteen others had managed to escape before the roundup and massacre began. The reason for the mass killing remains disputed but a commonly accepted explanation is that commanders received information that villagers were aiding the resistance. Sarah Farmer, Martyred Village: Commemorating the 1944 Massacre at Oradour-sur-Glane (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
94 Léa D. et al., CEGES AA 1450, 13, 16.
95 Cécilia P., CEGES AA 1450, 3.
meanwhile, stayed at the home until their second birthday, whereupon they became “children” according to Lebensborn logic. At that point, they were sent to Germany to be raised in other centres or with German families.\(^\text{96}\)

Not all women understood the stakes of giving up their children. One Belgian woman, Rita, who delivered a child of a German soldier and worked at the home, technically renounced her rights to her young son when she signed him over “to the Führer.” She was given some financial compensation, but, according to former employees, believed “without a doubt that the war would go on forever, that she would always work there and that perhaps she would see her son grow.” Three days before liberation in autumn 1944, Rita’s son was put in a car headed for Germany. Rita could not go with him because of the agreement she had made with the German authorities. Witnesses recounted that when the young mother realized this, she “tore at her hair, there in the courtyard, watching her son depart.”\(^\text{97}\) Cases of women like Rita, coerced into giving away their children because they could not provide for them on their own, lend credence to popular views of Lebensborn as a horrific program of child-snatching and selective breeding. Such incidents also demonstrate that the civilians of Belgium experienced Germanization as oppressive, even though specific policies differed in both scale and impact from those in eastern Europe. In general, however, instances of children being forcibly removed from their parents seem to have been the exception rather than the norm in Belgium.

The Lebensborn program itself was grounded in a distinctly racialized objective to obtain and glorify German and Germanic “good blood.” Racial status impacted both the admission and treatment of women in individual homes. Women seeking admission to Lebensborn homes before and during the war underwent a rigorous process of racial screening.\(^\text{98}\) In 1942, Himmler tightened up the racial questionnaire, arguing that the previous racial classifications of applicants were insufficient.\(^\text{99}\) Lebensborn outright rejected women with “severe physical deformities or mental defects, disgusting rashes, pulmonary tuberculosis and sexually transmitted diseases,” although Ebner took pains to state that “this rejection must of course be done with great tact.”

\(^{96}\) Léa D. et al., CEGES AA 1450, 14.
\(^{97}\) Cécilia P., CEGES AA 1450, 4; Léa D. et al., CEGES AA 1450, 3-4.
\(^{98}\) See Lilienthal on the selection (Auslese) process. Lilienthal, Der “Lebensborn, e.V.,” 84-100.
Even height could impact the decision to admit certain women over others; Lebensborn officials viewed 155 centimetres as a favourable height for women.\textsuperscript{100}

Lebensborn homes at home and abroad focused on the physical welfare of mothers but were also places of instruction in the National Socialist worldview. Ebner professed that the goal of such training was to “educate mothers into good Nazis.” It was not enough, he continued, that women in the Lebensborn homes simply be taught about how to run a household; rather, “they must also leave our homes with a solid ideology.”\textsuperscript{101} Although the homes offered courses on household management, mothers also attended lectures on Nazi racial science, Bevölkerungspolitik and kinship research (Sippenforschung), among other topics. The facilities also featured community-building events including singing evenings, film screenings and celebrations of national holidays, such as 9 November.\textsuperscript{102} The educative features of the Lebensborn project had different stakes in homes outside of Germany, which catered to German women working or living in the occupied territories as well as local women; the goal of ideological instruction may well have been intended to turn women into reliable or neutralized members of the Greater Germanic Empire.\textsuperscript{103} The term “good Nazi” had a broad meaning in occupied Europe and reflected the ways in which categories of racial, political and social loyalty were mutually constitutive.

The regulation of the minutiae of everyday life in Lebensborn homes operated perhaps as a subtler route to realizing Nazi racial objectives and population policy. Himmler, a notorious micromanager, was directly involved in all aspects of the Lebensborn program as Reich Commissioner for the Strengthening of Germandom and the head of the SS. He received all complaints about the homes and often personally deliberated on individual cases where mothers were evicted or staff fired as well as in instances of death or injury in the facilities.\textsuperscript{104} Himmler’s

\textsuperscript{100} Ärztliche Anordnung, gez. Ebner, Nr. 104, 20 Aug. 1944, ITS 2/ 82447828#1.
\textsuperscript{101} As of 1 June 1938, ideological Schulung of mothers in Lebensborn homes was carried out uniformly. Ebner, Allgemeine Anordnung Nr. 50, Betr.: Weltanschauliche Schulung in den Heimen, 27 April 1938, NS 2/65, Bl. 152.
\textsuperscript{102} Ebner, Betr.: Schulung im Monat Februar 1938, 1 March 1938, BAB NS 2/65, Bl. 172; Der Führer im Rußwesen im SS-Oberabschnitt Nord to RuSHA-SS, Betr.: Schulung im Lebensborn-Heim Bad Polzin, 20 Sept. 1938, BAB NS 2/65, Bl. 112; Heim Polzin to “Lebensborn” e.V., Betr.: Weltanschauliche Schulung, 2 Feb. 1938, BAB NS 2/65, Bl. 84; Schulung im Monat September 1943 – Heim Pommern, 4 Oct. 1943, ITS 25/82454189#1.
\textsuperscript{103} On Schulung in homes outside the Alt Reich, see, for example, Herbert Aust, Lebensbornbeauftragter für die Niederlanden, to “Lebensborn e.v.” Betr.: Regelung der Lebensbornarbeit in den Niederlanden, 12 March 1943, BAB NS 2/72, Bl. 24. Although no records were found specifically pertaining to Schulung in the Belgian Lebensborn home, it is highly unlikely that it would have differed in any considerable way.
\textsuperscript{104} Lebensborn, e.V., Nachtrag zur Hausordnung, Betr.: Beschwerden über Lebensborn, e.V., 10 Aug. 1939, ITS 8/82448914#1.
influence extended even further into the routines of daily life. In 1941, he ordered that the breakfast served in all of the Lebensborn homes was to switch from coffee with bread rolls to porridge. He advised that salt or fruit could be added to the porridge to improve its flavour. For the Reichsführer-SS, regulating what individuals did every day, in private and often behind closed doors, acted as a way to codify the abstractness of race.

The Lebensborn correspondence and reports available in the archives of the International Tracing Service are valuable sources for understanding daily life because they touch on everything from staffing to the seating in dining rooms; these sources also provide insight into the difficulties of trying to control too much and having hands in too many pots. Detailed administrative guidelines governed the Heim Ardennen’s operation, at least in theory. Cleanliness, for example, was imperative in all of the maternity homes. Ebner’s instructions for the head of the Belgian facility declared that “cleanliness and order, as I repeatedly preach, is [sic] the business card of your home.” If the staff or mothers in the home did not fall in line with this policy, Ebner ordered severe action to be taken. In postwar interviews, former Belgian staff members recall that their jobs consisted of a never-ending cycle of cleaning – making the children’s beds, cleaning the linens, washing the children’s dishes, organizing and sanitizing the Kindergarten and so on. In the words of Cécilia P., the cleaning was “all day, every day.” Lebensborn administrators, however, often complained about the state of the home. In November 1943, the head nurse of the home, Oberschwester Petrowska, filed a report about the visit of a Belgian doctor, who had come to examine a woman suffering from mastitis, an inflation of the mammary gland. The doctor visited the woman in the late morning and drained the infection. However, when Petrowska later inspected the delivery room, she was shocked to see that no effort had been made to clean the medical instruments or the room.

Heim Ardennen, like the other maternity homes in and outside of Germany, suffered from a chronic lack of supplies, something that only intensified in the final year of the occupation of western Europe. Many of the deficiencies concerned food, including buttermilk

106 Stoler, Carnal Knowledge, 6.
107 See, for example, Bericht über die Besichtigung des Heimes Westwald am 24 April 1944 durch SS-Oberführer Dr. Ebner, ITS 20/82452217#1.
108 Ebner to Frau Lydia Vorsatz, 10 May 1943, ITS 2/82447646#1.
109 Cécilia P., CEGES AA 1450, 1, 6.
110 Léa D. et al., CEGES AA 1450, 2.
111 Petrowska, attachment to letter from Lang to Ebner, 2 Nov. 1943, ITS/82447666#1.
and Vitaborn juice, two major staples for the children. Occasionally, the deficiencies could be even more detrimental; by the spring of 1944, Heim Ardennen experienced a serious shortage of disinfection materials needed for medical and surgical treatments. The ultimate shortage of the Lebensborn home was in staff. Finding suitable employees and administrators for the Lebensborn program in occupied Belgium was difficult even before the home was opened. In the last two months of 1942, the staff of Lebensborn’s head office in Munich struggled to find a candidate to act as the Lebensborn Commissioner in Belgium, whose responsibilities included managing day-to-day operations and assessing the applications of women seeking admission to the home. There was a serious manpower shortage and, within a few months, men in non-essential party and state positions would have to be released in order to serve in the war effort in the east, and all positions not of vital importance would be postponed or limited.

In lieu of an official director, Inge Viermetz took charge of the home until May 1943. Several months later, Richard Jungclaus, in his capacity as Himmler’s representative for Volkstumspolitik, accused Viermetz of “serious misconduct,” including shady financial transactions and the transportation of eggs, butter, jam, sausages, ham and flour to the Reich. Sollmann dismissed Viermetz from service in December 1943, noting that she “was professionally very efficient but, alas, her character was not such that one could leave her without supervision.” Viermetz’s replacement, a former mother in Heim Ardennen, lasted only two months. The home’s leadership was only secured with the appointment of Walther Lang as Lebensborn Commissioner. He remained in his position until September 1944.

The difficulty of finding reliable staff for Heim Ardennen continued down the chain of command. Immediately after the home’s opening, doctors and nurses were in short supply. An

112 Ebner, Aktenvermerk, 12 Nov. 1943, ITS 2/82447669#1. The Westwald home near Paris, opened in February 1944, similarly lacked basic foodstuffs of all types, including semolina, rice, oatmeal and cocoa. Ebner to SS-Hauptsturmführer Wehner, Leiter der Hauptabteilung V, 2 May 1944, ITS 2/82447770#1.
113 Truppenarzt des Ersatzkommandos Flandern der Waffen-SS to Lebensborn, e.v., Betr.: Anforderung für Desinfektionsmittel für Lebensbornheim, 7 April 1944, ITS 2/82447726#1.
115 Jungclaus to Brandt, 11 Dec. 1943, BAB NS 19/844, Bl. 2-3.
116 Sollmann’s office to Brandt, 3 Jan. 1944, BAB NS 19/844, Bl. 6-7. Brandt confirmed the decision to fire Viermetz and the matter was officially considered closed. Brandt to Jungclaus, Betr.: Frau Viermetz, Hauptabteilungsleiterin des Lebensborn, 19 April 1944, BAB NS 19/844, Bl. 20.
117 Ebner to Lydia Vorsatz, 10 May 1943, ITS 2/82447646#1; Ebner to Viermetz, 13 July 1943, ITS 2/82447651#1.
118 Lilienthal, Der “Lebensborn, e.V.,” 198.
SS doctor, aided by an administrative head, head nurse and secretary, was supposed to run each Lebensborn home. Other required employees included a nurse for the mothers and another for the children as well as security guards, maintenance and other domestic workers, including cooks and maids. A pediatrician from a nearby town would normally be on-call if needed. In May 1943, Ebner arranged for at least one nurse to be transferred from the Lebensborn home in Steinhöring near Munich to Heim Ardennen but other key positions remained unfilled – including that of head nurse – well into the summer.

There was also a shortage of available (or willing) doctors to service the home. Before her dismissal, Viermetz claimed that she had “satisfactorily” solved this problem by finding two doctors, one a gynecologist in Liège, who could be at the home in twenty minutes. To tend to the children and consult on other minor health matters, Viermetz found a Belgian general practitioner only recently settled in Soumagne and licensed by the Deutsche Krankenkasse. Ebner was unconvinced that these doctors could meet the demands of the home and its occupants, writing to Viermetz that in cases of sudden complications during births, she would be left to “stand there without medical assistance.” Ebner’s own staff continued the hunt for physicians with few results: “[doctors] are currently as rare as pieces of gold and then most of the time do not turn out to be pieces of gold.”

The need for a pediatrician manifested itself in disconcerting reports of illness and deaths in Heim Ardennen. On 31 October 1943, Lang warned that Ebner would “see for [himself] how much we need medical attention.” Lang had recently learned that the local military command in Liège had approved a third doctor for the home. The possibility of a third doctor was a real coup because, as he noted, “The authorized German physicians in Liège are certainly willing to help, but the possibility of their assisting us is minimal in view of the problems of traffic congestion and work overload.” Ebner believed that the gravest difficulty facing the Lebensborn home was the provision of qualified staff – and especially doctors. He wrote to a colleague that he was feeling “very depressed that our great work...has been in vain.”

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120 Ebner to Vorsatz, 10 May 1943, ITS 2/82447646#1.
121 Viermetz to Ebner, 7 July 1943, ITS 2/82447649#1.
122 Ebner to Viermetz, 13 July 1943, ITS 2/82447651#1.
123 Lang to Ebner, 31 Oct. 1943, ITS 2/82447664#2.
124 Ebner to Prof. Dr. Med. J. Becker, 4 Nov. 1943, ITS 2/82447663#1.
Belgium and elsewhere worsened as doctors were transferred from the occupied territories to the front to treat the wounded in field hospitals.125

The duration of the war exacerbated a trend long observed in Lebensborn. Just a few years after the organization’s creation in 1935, senior advisors became alarmed by the high turnover among staff in the centres. Midwives, for example, never remained long in employment because, according to one midwife, the financial compensation was poor.126 In a few cases, employees aggravated the labour shortage through their own machinations. In spring 1944, Lang’s right-hand man, Verwaltungsführer Pletsch, contracted syphilis and was admitted to the nearby military hospital. This “unpleasant” development was followed by another; Pletsch had infected Lang’s typist, who also required hospitalization. Still worse was that Lang’s kitchen maid was also afflicted; this woman had had an affair with an SS officer, thus putting him “in danger” of infection as well.127

Belgian Staff and the Fear of a “Fifth Column”

Even when Lebensborn homes had sufficient staff, at times, the capabilities and behaviour of these employees troubled German officials. Since 1940, three years before the Belgian home opened, Ebner complained that some nurses lacked the necessary training to properly care for expectant and new mothers and their infants. Doctors also sometimes faced accusations of unprofessionalism and negligence; for instance, the German leadership criticized physicians for coming to the homes too infrequently, bringing guests on their visits and sometimes treating the mothers disrespectfully.128 Local Lebensborn administrators considered some complaints about staff to be so serious that they required an official censure from head office. Two days before the liberation of Belgium in September 1944, Ebner’s office sent a circular to Heim Ardennen and all of the other homes in and outside of Germany with the information that a nurse at an unspecified facility had recently been fired because she had struck a ten-month-old child so hard in the face that the baby was bruised for days afterwards. Ebner instructed every Heimleiter and head nurse to remind personnel that it was forbidden to

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125 Clay and Leapman, Master Race, 74. In December 1943, Ebner wrote to a former colleague currently serving at the front. Noting the “virtually catastrophic Ärzt-not” plaguing Lebensborn at that moment, Ebner recognized “that no doctor can be pulled away from the front without reason” but suggested that if the doctor was ever reassigned to the home front that he notify Ebner immediately so he could be snapped up for Lebensborn. Ebner to SS-Untersturmführer Dr. Alexander Hagen, 30 Dec. 1943, ITS 46/82461956#.
126 Ebner, Aktenvermerk, 28 July 1938, ITS 13/82450307#1.
127 Lang to Ebner, 26 April 1944, ITS 2/82447732#1.
128 See, for example, Ebner to Sollmann, 28 June 1944, ITS 2/82447777#1.
physically reprimand a child and that other “treatments,” such as forcing children to swallow their food, similarly fell within the realm of “child abuse.”

Concerns about the professional abilities of staff members were frequently intertwined with and articulated through evaluations of their character and morality. Sollmann judged one doctor, Dr. Bissing, who came to Heim Ardennen from the Schwarzwald home in Germany, as a “pleasant enough comrade” but lacking initiative. Sollmann concluded that “he will never be able to prevail.” Lebensborn officials, meanwhile, criticized female employees for their alleged femininity. On one infamous occasion, Himmler chastized women working in the Lebensborn homes for “excessive beautification” – that is, wearing makeup, painting nails and plucking eyebrows – and argued that such behaviour set a bad example for the mothers.

The nationality of employees also played a critical role in official assessments of their work ethic. Ideally, Lebensborn officials wanted the facilities outside the Reich to have German employees, especially in the integral positions of midwives, nurses and doctors who dealt directly with the admitted women and children. In his August 1943 memorandum to Jungclaus and other administrators and SS leaders in occupied Europe, Himmler expressed concern that foreign doctors were performing abortions on German women in the occupied territories. He ordered that every German agency, and chiefly the police, were to intervene by arresting the doctor and bringing “the guilty woman” back to Germany, where she would be punished; further, “efforts should be made in the occupied countries – particularly in the west and north – to know and instate trusted German physicians as gynaecologists, whom German women and girls who are expecting a child can contact discreetly and confidently without their secret becoming public.”

German apprehension about local medical professionals treating German women echoed the military administration’s regulations about who could treat German soldiers afflicted with VD; that the occupation authorities did not trust doctors even in Germanic Europe to take proper care of Germans suggests the outer-limits of alleged racial affinity.

Though the manpower shortage compelled the heads in the Lebensborn centres in northern and western Europe to rely on members of the local populations to fill key positions, the

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129 Rundschreiben from Ebner’s office, 2 Sept. 1944, ITS 2/82447737#1.

130 In the case of a recent birth, Dr. Bissing had stood by idly, letting the midwife take charge and stitch up the mother after the birth. Even the nurses complained about inactivity of the physician; for every recommendation made, he never gave his medical opinion, just approval. Sollmann to Ebner, 3 Dec. 1943, ITS 2/82447678#1.

131 Ebner to Sollmann, undated, ITS 5/82448355#1.

132 Himmler to Hauptämter et al., 8 Aug. 1943, BAB NS 2/231, Bl. 43.
Nazi officials attempted to maintain control over who was enlisted. In December 1942, Rudolf Brandt, Personal Administrative Officer to the Reichsführer-SS, informed Sollmann that qualified Germanic and Volksdeutsche men and women doctors should be instated wherever there was a need for physicians. Brandt recommended that Heim Moselland in Luxembourg employ a man or woman doctor, but did not specify the desired nationality of this physician. He provided more precise instructions for the home in Krakow: the head doctor had to be German (deutsch) and there were also to be three Germanic (germanisch) doctors. In Norway, in the instance that only one doctor was available, a German doctor was to be appointed. In Belgium and the Netherlands, the chief doctor had to be a German, but the assistant doctor could “be another [nationality].” Brandt did not justify these specifications but it is likely that the employment of German nationals as chief physicians in most of the Lebensborn homes across Europe was a dual tactic to reward loyal Germans with the best jobs (i.e., those not at the front) and protect so-called racially valuable pregnant women and children from being harmed by unreliable or even dangerous local doctors.

In Heim Ardennen, personnel shortages prompted the German leadership to employ a Belgian midwife and several Belgian nurses; the home also hired inhabitants from Soumagne as cleaning staff, launderers, gardeners and cooks and a few even worked in the main administrative office in the château. The German occupation authorities considered service in Lebensborn an acceptable alternative to forced labour in the Reich; many Belgians thus opted to work in the home in order to stay near their homes and families. The entrenched power dynamics of occupation impacted relations between Belgians and Germans in Heim Ardennen, both as employees and occupants. When prompted by an interviewer to speak about the “atmosphere” of life in the home, Cécilia P. noted, “The ambiance was like that of war. I mean, the occupier and the occupied.” German administrators of the home and Lebensborn officials in Munich viewed the Belgian staff alternately with distaste, annoyance and suspicion.

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133 Brandt to Sollmann, Betr.: Ärztbedarf des Lebensborn, 21 Dec. 1942, ITS 2/82447629#1.
134 The Nazis perhaps considered the “protection” of pregnant German women in the occupied territories even more necessary as more German women went westwards to have their babies because of the overcrowding in Lebensborn homes and the danger of Allied air attacks in Germany.
135 Postwar war accounts suggest that the home employed somewhere between 12-15 locals. Cécilia P., CEGES AA 1450, 2, 9.
136 Cécilia P., CEGES AA 1450, 5; Léa D. et al., CEGES AA 1450, 16.
137 Léa D. et al., CEGES AA 1450, 5.
Belgian employees could not move around the home freely or roam the grounds of the château.\(^{138}\) The German personnel also prohibited social contact between Belgian workers and the mothers and children staying in the home; employees were not supposed to leave their posts for any reason.\(^{139}\) Cécilia P. remembered that whenever there were new births in the home, the nurses invited her and other Belgian employees to visit the infants. The women could look at the newborns “but not go near them.” But Belgian women did have contact with the children from time to time. Cécilia was particularly attached to “little Wolfgang,” the son of a Belgian woman from Grivegnée and a German soldier. Though the head nurse forbade Belgian employees from touching or embracing the children, Cécilia remembered pushing a bed against the door of Wolfgang’s room to block the entryway and then taking the baby in her arms. When the Oberschwester knocked on the door to see if Cécilia had finished cleaning the room, the bed was put back in place and the baby in his crib. No one was the wiser.\(^{140}\)

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the Germans’ concern over communication difficulties in other spheres of intimate politics, including sex work and marriage, language posed a special problem in Heim Ardennen. Many of the Belgian staff, including the midwife, and the specialists from the surrounding area who served the home, spoke French and not German. As Oberschwester Petrowska complained in October 1943: “If we need the doctor, as was often the case recently, then it is always especially unpleasant for me since the doctor and midwife of course only speak French. I have yet to experience a clear diagnosis in any case.”\(^{141}\) Because of the language divide and the fact that the home already lacked a full-time physician, Petrowska requested a German midwife to replace the Belgian one; Heim Ardennen, she argued, needed at least one reliable member of the staff with medical knowledge and the ability to communicate that knowledge effectively to other non-French-speaking employees.\(^{142}\)

Oberschwester Petrowska also complained to Ebner about the laziness and carelessness of the Belgian staff. One unnamed nurse took a leave of six days in order to get married, but four days after she was due back, she had still neither appeared nor been in contact. Petrowska commented bitterly, “In any case, she is still not married,” implying that not only had this nurse willingly shirked her duties, but she was also a liar. The most troublesome staff member in the

\(^{138}\) Cécilia P., CEGES AA 1450, 2.
\(^{139}\) Léa D. et al., N°406, Collection “Jours de Guerre” de RTBF-Charleroi, CEGES AA 1450, 2.
\(^{140}\) Cécilia P., CEGES AA 1450, 7-8.
\(^{141}\) Petrowska to Ebner, 20 Oct. 1943, ITS 2/82447660#2; Cécilia P., CEGES AA 1450, 10.
\(^{142}\) Petrowska to Ebner, 20 Oct. 1943, ITS 2/82447660#2.
Belgian home – and a figure who appears repeatedly in the records of Heim Ardennen – was a Belgian midwife named Fanny. Petrowska’s evaluation of Fanny was that she was efficient but “dirty and her approach to work leaves something to be desired.”¹⁴³ Fanny had also allegedly taken a longer vacation than her allotted two days leave, returning only after an insistent call from the head nurse.¹⁴⁴ Lang was similarly displeased about the Belgian midwife’s behaviour, informing Ebner at the end of October 1943 that she was unsuitable for the position, not least because her Belgian habits (Angewohnheiten) and education could not be overcome.¹⁴⁵

Lebensborn officials found Fanny guilty of “some official negligences” but rather than fire her, they transferred her to another home inside the Reich.¹⁴⁶ This decision resulted from Lang’s intervention; he did not want to dismiss her because “she is alienated from her Belgian compatriots as a result of her work for Germany and can never again find employment in Belgian homes.”¹⁴⁷ Perhaps fearing that he was about to lose a qualified (if troublesome) midwife, Lang likely intended his apparent empathy for Fanny’s situation to bolster his interest in keeping her in the Lebensborn sphere; at least there she could be of some service, since no one else would hire her. He argued that with some re-training, Fanny could learn in one of the Reich homes “what she still lacks today.” Sollmann intended to send the midwife to Wienerwald but feared that she would continue her troublesome activities in her new placement; in particular, he worried that Fanny would quickly establish “a state within a state” in Wienerwald if the Heimleiter did not immediately put her in her place. Sollmann warned Heim Wienerwald’s leadership: “Fanny has some good qualities…but her entire nature is impossible in a German Hausgemeinschaft and is contingent on whether she finally recognizes this and yields.”¹⁴⁸

In the end, Fanny was not transferred to Wienerwald but to Heim Westwald in France. Ebner complained that “she is not involved in any way in the life of the home; she does not participate especially in incidental work and, because there are few births, spends the whole day in her room.” Fanny exhibited even more alarming behaviour on D-Day when she intercepted enemy radio and reported to the mothers what she had heard. Fanny’s now treasonous behaviour proved to be the final straw. Ebner ordered her to be dismissed as soon as possible from

¹⁴³ Ibd., 2/82447661#1.
¹⁴⁴ Ibd., 2/82447660#2.
¹⁴⁵ Lang to Ebner, 31 Oct. 1943, ITS 2/82447664#1.
¹⁴⁶ Ebner, Aktenvermerk, 12 Nov. 1943, ITS 2/82447669#1.
¹⁴⁷ Lang to Ebner, 31 Oct. 1943, ITS 2/82447664#1-2; Ebner, Aktenvermerk, 12 Nov. 1943, ITS 2/82447669#1.
¹⁴⁸ Sollmann to Ebner, 3 Dec. 1943, ITS 2/82447678#1.
Lebensborn if another midwife was available.\textsuperscript{149} Fanny’s fate after her time in France is unknown. After the war, former employees of Heim Ardennen remembered Fanny but did not know what happened to her.\textsuperscript{150}

Though some of these complaints about Fanny and other Belgian employees may seem trivial and even petty, the German authorities in Heim Ardennen took a different view. They believed that such issues had the potential to destabilize the entire Lebensborn operation in Belgium. Oberschwester Petrowska concluded her list of complaints about Belgian staff to Ebner in autumn 1943 with a word of caution that “these are, however, only small excerpts of the approach to duty of the Belgian care personnel. And we should deal with this.”\textsuperscript{151} The German administrators of Heim Ardennen did not trust the Belgians working for them. German sentries and members of the Germanic SS guarded the home and inspected the bags of Belgian employees when they left the home, making sure that they had not stolen any food.\textsuperscript{152} Given the problems in food supply during the occupation, the Germans punished stealing with severity and usually imprisonment.\textsuperscript{153} Former staff noted that the administrators of the home were “very, very severe” and that “they took the littlest thing in the worst way.” They recalled a young woman, Marie B., who applauded in public when liberation from the occupation looked imminent in late summer 1944 and was subsequently arrested and imprisoned.\textsuperscript{154}

The case that opened this chapter is perhaps the most telling evidence that German Lebensborn officials had serious doubts about their Belgian employees: the death of the seven-month-old German child, Uwe K., in November 1943. While conducting her usual morning rotations of the children’s ward, a nurse was horrified to discover the still-warm child completely engulfed by his blankets, having suffocated at some point during the night.\textsuperscript{155} The incident stunned the home’s leadership, and Lang informed Jungclaus that he felt an inquest and autopsy were necessary.\textsuperscript{156} The autopsy results were inconclusive, showing that Uwe K. had developed a cyst the size of a duck egg on his brain but failing to reveal the cause of asphyxiation.\textsuperscript{157}

\textsuperscript{149} Ebner, Aktenvermerk, 28 June 1944, ITS 2/82447776#1.
\textsuperscript{150} Léa D. et al., CEGES AA 1450, 10.
\textsuperscript{151} Petrowska to Ebner, 20 Oct. 1943, ITS 2/82447661#1.
\textsuperscript{152} Cécilia P., CEGES AA 1450, 7; Léa D. et al., CEGES AA 1450, 6; Monatsbericht der Germanischen Leitstelle, July 1943, BAB NS 1/524, Bl. 7.
\textsuperscript{153} Léa D. et al., CEGES AA 1450, 7.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid, 11-2.
\textsuperscript{155} Lang, Bericht, 9 Dec. 1943, ITS 2/82447689#1.
\textsuperscript{156} Ebner, Aktenvermerk, 12 Nov. 1943, ITS 2/82447669#1; Lang, Bericht, 9 Dec. 1943, ITS 2/82447689#2.
\textsuperscript{157} Lang to Ebner, 3 Dec. 1943, ITS 2/82447678#2; Ebner, Ärztliches Gutachten, 14 Dec. 1943, ITS 2/82447692#1.
Ebner imagined three potential scenarios: first, the child had dragged his blankets over himself and was unable to push them off; second, the pressure placed on the brain by the cyst may have induced an epileptic seizure that caused Uwe inadvertently to move the blanket over himself, lose consciousness and eventually suffocate; third, someone had suffocated the child with the blanket. 158 Officials in Munich and the administrators of Heim Ardennen seriously considered the possibility of premeditated murder; Lang and the investigative commission were particularly troubled by the notion that a seven-month-old infant could completely cover himself with a blanket. 159

Three other considerations unnerved Lebensborn officials. The home was, after all, surrounded by an increasingly aggressive civilian population. Moreover, Heim Ardennen housed primarily Belgian women who became pregnant by German soldiers and also employed many Belgians. Finally, Uwe K. was one of the only “pure German” children in the home. Based on these so-called facts, Ebner considered it “quite possible that someone here has committed some sort of sabotage.” 160 Ebner’s report exposes the conviction of the occupation authorities that the Belgians were deliberately trying to destroy German Macht by destroying Germans. The language of sabotage further implies a sense of encirclement, a belief that the German minority in the home was under direct threat by an alien and dangerous population.

The Germans never determined the official cause of Uwe K.’s suffocation. Though there was not sufficient evidence to charge a Belgian nurse with murder, Ebner was convinced enough by his own and the SS-Court’s investigation that two of the nurses of Heim Ardennen bore some responsibility for the death. As part of their duties, night nurses looked in on the children every two hours, but this had not happened the night of Uwe’s death. Apparently, the head nurse in the ward had forbidden the night nurses from visiting the nursery because the guards in the home already did so and it could disrupt the children. Ebner believed both night nurses had committed an act of negligence. The death could have been prevented, he argued, given that the body was still warm upon discovery, if the nurses had followed the protocols required by Lebensborn and in which they had been trained. Lang subsequently instructed nurses that they were not

159 Lang, Bericht, 9 Dec. 1943, ITS 2/82447689#1-2.
authorized to modify the home’s procedures under any circumstances.\textsuperscript{161}

Lebensborn officials further believed a Belgian “fifth column” operated in the hospitals near Heim Ardenne where Lebensborn children sometimes received medical treatment. Lang and other staff in Wégimont expressed “great misgivings that our children there receive the help and care they need and fear that a politically hostile attitude plays a large and dangerous role here.”\textsuperscript{162} They insisted that the nuns in the University hospital “Baviere” in Liège let the children “perish” intentionally.\textsuperscript{163} There is no evidence to suggest that these suspicions were anything more than fearful imaginings. Belgian nuns were in fact engaged in underground activities but were not murdering German babies; instead, they were hiding Jewish children in convents and with Catholic families across Belgium.\textsuperscript{164} The German command in Liège promised in November 1943 to inspect this “suspicious hospital.” Lang recommended setting up a nursery in the local military hospital so that German staff could provide “secure” medical treatment and keep Lebensborn children away from intervening, hostile Belgian hands.\textsuperscript{165}

**Epilogue: The Twilight of the Lebensborn Project**

Though the Lebensborn organization continued its operations throughout 1944 and even opened a new maternity home in France, Heim Westwald, in February, that year marked the beginning of the end for the Lebensborn project in northern and western Europe. Some Lebensborn officials in occupied Europe saw the writing on the wall after D-Day and suggested closing their homes to ensure that occupants, staff and furnishings could be brought safely back to the Reich before the Allies arrived. For Ebner, such a suggestion was tantamount to an admission of defeat and an example of the self-serving motives of some of his staff.\textsuperscript{166}

On 1 September, mothers, children and German personnel bade farewell to Wégimont amid chaos. Belgian employees remember a bus arriving at the home and that the Germans “ran like crazy people into the courtyard” and put the children on the bus, which was headed for Germany.\textsuperscript{167} One unmarried German woman, Madame Simone, who worked in the

\textsuperscript{161}Lang, Bericht, 9 Dec. 1943, ITS 2/82447690#2.
\textsuperscript{162}Lang to Ebner, 31 Oct. 1943, ITS 2/82447664#2.
\textsuperscript{163}Lang to Ebner, 2 Nov. 1943, ITS 2/82447665#1.
\textsuperscript{165}Lang to Ebner, 2 Nov. 1943, ITS 2/82447665#1.
\textsuperscript{166}Ebner, Aktenvermerk, 28 June 1944, ITS 2/82447776#1.
\textsuperscript{167}Léa D. et al., CEGES AA 1450, 17; Cécilia P., CEGES AA 1450, 3.
administrative office of the home, refused to abandon her daughter when the bus arrived and left with her child to go to Germany, even though her parents had not known she had given birth.\textsuperscript{168} Other mothers were terrified. Fearful that the Germans would take her young daughter, Anne-Marie D.’s mother hid her in one of the rooms of the château. In a panic, the mother tearfully telephoned one of her sisters, who advised her, “do not budge, do not leave for Germany,” because of the total chaos in and imminent defeat of the Reich; the fear was that Anne-Marie and her mother would go missing in Germany and not be able to make their way back to Belgium.\textsuperscript{169}

In the fall of 1944, the war ended for most Belgians and with it, vestiges of the Greater Germanic Empire in western Europe. Children, and especially those born of local women and German soldiers, had had a crucial role to play in the realization of the Greater Germanic Idea; reproduction simultaneously ensured the continued existence of the Germanic \textit{Volk} and, in a more practical sense, provided generations of fighters to protect the Germanic Empire.

Nazi projects like the Lebensborn organization in Belgium highlight at a micro-level some of the ways in which the construction of the Nazi empire were contingent on and challenged by the politics and realities of everyday intimacies – between parents and children, between caregivers and their charges and between the occupation regime and the people tasked with safeguarding its future. Himmler and the SS envisioned Lebensborn as a racial scheme to protect “good blood” and designed the daily operations of the homes to meet this goal. In this sense, racial frontiers were to be constructed through the policing of intimacy; first, by regulating sex and marriage and then by racializing reproduction and child-rearing and care practices, even those that appeared to be banal. In general, German officials deliberated less on the lofty objective of (re)making Belgian children and mothers into Germanic confederates than on the immediate implications of their work, such as the legal status of children born in Heim Ardennen, and on basic tasks, including making sure there was food on the table; it was through detail and minutiae that the Germanic race would be built.

An examination of the intimate space of reproduction, like that of marriage, showcases the tensions inherent in Nazi racial goals. In both ideology and practice, there was a constant entanglement and slippage among perceptions of racial, political and social value. In the end, the German authorities did not actually trust the Belgians enough to Germanize them; instead, the

\textsuperscript{168} Cécilia P., CEGES AA 1450, 4.  
\textsuperscript{169} Anne-Marie D., CEGES AA 1450, 3.
Germans viewed themselves as a targeted minority in Belgium. Because the occupation authorities and the SS in particular viewed the Belgian population, and especially the Flemish, both as racial brethren and as politically disloyal, attempts to use reproduction and child-rearing to tie ordinary Belgians to the Third Reich were ambivalent and half-hearted.

The postwar legacy of the Lebensborn program and *Wehrmachtsskinder* in Belgium has been complex and contentious. Anne-Marie D. returned to her mother’s family after the war and grew up knowing almost nothing about her past because “it was a taboo subject.” The only thing she knew about her father was his first name – Klaus. Her mother was secretive, wanting to forget the war. In Anne-Marie’s words, “to have a child while being a fille-mère, that was already a scandal…having a German boyfriend…that was even worse.” Many other children, mothers and families had similar postwar experiences of silence, shame, and lost pasts. In newly liberated Belgium in the fall of 1944, certain aspects of the German occupation were suppressed while others became part of a public dialogue about patriotism, national reconstruction and morality.

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170 Léa D. et al., CEGES AA 1450, 6.
Chapter 6
“Deliver Us from Our Liberators”: Women’s Bodies, Belgian National Reconstruction and Allied Power Politics after Liberation

On the night of 3-4 September 1944, Allied tanks rolled into the Belgian capital, liberating the country after four and a half years of German rule. Within several days, American, British and Canadian forces entered the other major cities of Flanders and Wallonia, including Antwerp, Ghent and Liège. Liberated at last, Belgians celebrated the triumphs of the Allies and at the same time acknowledged the 90 000 dead, including 12 300 political prisoners in prisons or camps, 3000 members of the resistance and 26 000 Jews. For ordinary Belgians, the liberation invited an explosion of emotions – euphoria, sadness and rage.

The experience of liberation was altogether different for the British, American and Canadian troops who did the liberating. The cities of Belgium and France offered exciting new experiences and sights for Allied troops, the majority of whom were young and had never before set foot on foreign soil. The Information and Education Division of the U.S. Army distributed pocket guides for France and Belgium, reminding soldiers of their official duties and encouraging them to discover the “real” historic cities of Paris, Calais, Brussels, Liège, Antwerp and Bruges, rather than seek to confirm the “anything goes” popular stereotype of western Europe, especially in regards to “night life and wild women.”

In spite of such warnings, relationships between Allied soldiers and Belgian women in Belgium were commonplace; some were fleeting and casual, while others turned into long-term affairs and marriages. Still other incidents of intimate contact were coercive and violent. This

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1 Mons and Tournai were the first major cities liberated, on 2 September. Eight days later, the process of liberation was basically complete, following the liberation of Verviers in the east and Arlon in the south (although German defenders in Bruges would hold out until 12 September). The eastern cantons of German-speaking Belgium, Malmédy and Eupen were liberated a day later and St. Vith on 22 September. Luc De Vos, La Belgique et la Seconde Guerre mondiale (Brussels: Racine, 2004), 275-90; Peter Schrijvers, Liberators: The Allies and Belgian Society, 1944-1945 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 2; Pierre Stéphany, 1944: Le bonheur et les épreuves de l'année la plus longue (Brussels: Le Livre, 1995), 310.
2 De Vos, Belgique, 327-8.
chapter examines the ways in which sex and sexual relations became a central site of heightened significance and contestation between the Allied and Belgian authorities and traces how debates about sex and in particular about Belgian women’s sexual behaviour became a means to articulate two larger political projects. The first of these concerned the dismantling of the Nazi New Order and Belgium’s attempts to rebuild after the exploitative German occupation. The second project involved the entrenchment of Allied and specifically American power in western Europe. In other words, in talking about sex and fraternization, the Belgians attempted to “work through” the Nazi past, while the Allies sought to consolidate their sphere of influence.

Postwar Belgium looked significantly different from prewar Belgium. Unlike France, Belgium had never been a major European power and thus did not suffer the same blow to national prestige and international status after the German invasion of 1940. However, the violation of the Belgian neutrality for the second time in the twentieth century reminded Belgians – and men in particular – of their fragile geopolitical position in western Europe. The liberation brought freedom from the Germans but also the unpleasant realities of having more soldiers on Belgian soil who sought, like the Germans before them, the sexual “rewards” that came with victory. Belgian government, police and church authorities read Allied advances on Belgian women and, in turn, women’s apparent willingness to fraternize with a different set of men in uniform as evidence that something had been lost or sacrificed during the years 1940-44. Belgian men thus sought to reassert their domination of women’s bodies as a way to redress the humiliation of occupation and as a bargaining tool in their political relationship with the Allies.

For the Allied and especially American forces, the cataclysmic war seemed to confirm that the old European social order was fundamentally corroded and Europeans could no longer govern or bear responsibility for themselves.5 Seeming to find confirmation of this belief in the widespread nature of fraternization, sexual bartering and prostitution in Belgian cities and towns in 1944-45, the Allies mobilized the discourse of sexual immorality to justify their interventions into the civilian sphere. In particular, the view that Belgian women and not Allied troops bore chief responsibility for the spread of VD enabled the Allies to secure the sexual prerogatives of their forces without bearing responsibility for either moral rebukes from the home front or the health consequences of illicit sex.

5 As Peter Schrijvers has shown in his work on GIs in Europe, American soldiers believed they were witnessing the death knell of old Europe that had been a long time coming. Peter Schrijvers, The Crash of Ruin: American Combat Soldiers in Europe during World War II (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), 265.
There is an inherent logic to the significance of sexual politics in the aftermath of war and occupation. As Dagmar Herzog has observed, since the Nazis had been so interested in mobilizing sex and women’s bodies to serve their military, political and racial interests during the war, routes to deconstructing and grappling with that past in the postwar period necessarily had to enter the realm of intimacy. Gendered narratives of liberation and postwar reconstruction in Europe are well known, not least because fraternization between local civilians and foreign soldiers accompanied the Allied path to victory all the way across Europe. Elizabeth Heineman and Maria Höhn have shown how after the German defeat, German women who fraternized with the Allies symbolized the larger degradation of the German nation brought about by the loss of sovereignty after the unconditional surrender of 1945. Mary Louise Roberts’ study of American GIs in liberated France examines sex as a pivotal site for the negotiation of power between the two nations, demonstrating how central it was to American conceptualizations and experiences of fighting the war and French attempts to reconcile the defeat and occupation of 1940-44.

Postwar debates about sex across Europe were ways of responding to the war itself; they were also ways of engaging in a dialogue about the future – the future of the Belgian nation-state and the future of Europe heavily influenced by the United States. This chapter demonstrates that the two simultaneous processes of purging Belgian society of its dark past and consolidating Allied power in liberated Belgium took the same, unsurprising target: Belgian women, and chiefly their bodies and sexuality. The types of discussions among Belgians, among Allies and between them were not unique; civil, military, public health and religious officials in Britain, Canada, France and Germany during and after the Second World War considered women and

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7 Other general studies of the experience of invasion, liberation and occupation by Allied troops in continental Europe have similarly identified the crucial role of sex and fraternization in shaping relations between the Allies and local populations: William Hitchcock, Bitter Road to Freedom: A New History of the Liberation of Europe (New York: Free Press, 2008), 92-7; Schrijvers, Crash of Ruin, 177-90; idem, Liberators, 206-20, 226-9.
their sexuality to be social “problems” that required fixing. Nor was the obsession with sex solely the purview of the postwar period. That Allied and Belgian officials agreed women were the real culprits of sexual immorality in 1944-45 is perhaps best understood as an “episode” in a continuous modern discourse about “proper” norms of female sexuality. Like the German occupiers before them, Allied and Belgian officials scapegoated Belgian women perceived to be sexually promiscuous and, in fact, found regulations from the occupation on prostitution and VD control quite useful. The difference was that Belgian society was liberated in 1944 and technically transitioned from wartime to peacetime. But even as it was freed from the German yoke, postwar Belgium remained unsettled by internal and external conflict; in 1944, World War II was not yet over in Europe, and fighting briefly returned to Belgian soil during the Germans’ Ardennes offensive of December 1944.

Understanding the stakes of the political projects at work in this unstable moment in Belgian history provides insight into why women always seem to be the targets of a directed social policy designed and enforced by men at moments during political upheaval or transition. Nira Yuval-Davis has argued that women are crucial in constructions of nationhood and national identity, not least because they “reproduce” the nation-state biologically, culturally and symbolically. Yet, she also argues that women occupy an ambivalent position within the national collective in that they often represent the unity and meaning of specific national projects (e.g. fighting a war), but are generally considered objects, rather than subjects, in the civil sphere. The control of female sexuality in liberated Belgium provided a focal point for the project of national reconstruction and also worked to purge remnants of the earlier German occupation without having to ask deeper moral questions. At the same time, this story of postwar gender relations is a transnational story. As Katherine Moon has observed, women’s relationships with

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13 Heide Fehrenbach has observed that although historians have been keenly interested in the Nazi state, little research has attempted to understand how this state and its racist policies were dismantled and delegitimized after 1945, a critique also applicable to research on postwar western Europe. Heide Fehrenbach, *Race After Hitler: Black Occupation Children in Postwar Germany and America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 6.
foreign soldiers in the context of a foreign occupation or military presence do not simply underscore the interrelations between governments and states but are constitutive of them.\textsuperscript{14} Examining how governments and militaries use women as instruments of policy both to fight war, as in the case of the Allies, and to make peace, in the case of the restored Belgian government, illuminates the persistence of intimacy as a site for working out transnational and militarized relations in wartime and postwar contexts.

This chapter draws from two main source bases: the records of the Allied Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) in Belgium and the files of the High Commission for State Security (\textit{Haut Commissaire à la Sécurité de l’État}, HCSE), an office created by the Belgian government-in-exile in July 1943 to deal with matters relating to law, order and internal security.\textsuperscript{15} Other records of note include those of public health and police officials in liberated Belgium. The analysis primarily focuses on state, police and municipal actors; other institutions and social groups – notably the Catholic Church – were also concerned about the moral dangers imbued in the perceived “excesses” of liberation but are addressed here only in passing.\textsuperscript{16}

I begin with a brief discussion of the liberation “moment” in September 1944 to showcase the emotional fervor that accompanied this event. The chapter then analyzes the fervor of civil vengeance that targeted Belgian women accused of “horizontal collaboration,” or having had intimate relations with the German occupiers, in the heady days after liberation, as a means to reclaim the female body from both the German occupiers and Allied liberators.\textsuperscript{17} Fraternization between Allied soldiers and Belgian women further heightened the apparent powerlessness of the Belgians vis-à-vis their stronger and wealthier American and British heroes.

\textsuperscript{15} In the AGR, the files of the HCSE had the record group designation HCSE AA 1311 during my period of my research in 2012. In the interests of brevity, this collection with be referred to simply as AA 1311.
\textsuperscript{17} As Michel Foucault observed in regards to public executions, carnivalesque spectacles are less a means of establishing or bringing justice than they are a reactivation of sovereign power. Michel Foucault, \textit{Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison} (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 49.
The last section of this chapter explores this tension through the lens of debates about how to combat the spread of VD and prostitution. Belgian authorities criticized the entitlement and arrogance American and British soldiers brought with them to the countries they liberated, while the Allies focused their efforts on control of Belgian women as a means of bolstering their political and moral power in postwar Europe.

**The Liberators and the Liberated**

In September 1944, the Belgian population received its liberators with such jubilation and gratitude that the experience left a lifetime impression on many Allied officers and soldiers.\(^{18}\) Soldiers described their journey into the capital as a “blaze of colour” in their diaries and letters to loved ones in Britain, Canada and the United States. En route to Brussels, the troops heard chants of “the war is over” and “Vive les Alliés” and watched as streets and cafés lit up to greet the approaching tanks and vehicles.\(^ {19}\) In an undated letter to his wife, projectionist C. J. Charters, who had landed in Normandy in June 1944, wrote about the last leg of his journey across France and his unit’s reception in Belgium:

> Our reception grew warmer and warmer until we finally crossed the border into Belgium, where the welcome was overwhelming. Traffic was very congested in the first village we entered and we were held up in a traffic jam for nearly an hour. Kiddies swarmed all over our trucks offering us pears, apples, grapes, tomatoes; while women brought out coffee, beer, wine and more fruit.\(^ {20}\)

Excited by the attention, Allied soldiers handed out chocolate, cigarettes and chewing gum to onlookers; some even handed out American dollars, which most Belgians had never seen before. Other soldiers happily signed autographs and received embraces from the populace.\(^ {21}\) In Brussels, “bold young women” jumped on top of Allied trucks and kissed soldiers on the mouth, while in Arlon, women tore buttons off from the uniforms of GIs as keepsakes.\(^ {22}\) Sergeant Richard Greenwood of the 9\(^ {th} \) Battalion, Royal Tank Regiment, commented excitedly on the

\(^{18}\) For testimonies and photographs from the liberation, see Bruno Deblander and Louise Monaux, eds., *Apocalypse en Belgique : 1940-1945, témoignages inédits* (Brussels: Racine, 2010), 113-61; Images n° 28756, n° 28757, n° 28768, n° 28815, n° 28871, n° 28898, CEGES Photo Library, Libération d'Antwerpen par les alliés, 9/1944. For secondary accounts of the liberation of Belgium, see Schrijvers, *Liberators*, 49-68; Peter Taghon, *België 44: De bevrijding* (Tiel: Lannoo, 1994).

\(^{19}\) Janine Lambotte, *Chocolat embrasse Mickey Mouse: Chronique de la libération* (Brussels: Grama, 1994), 85; Private Papers of H.R. Pillinger, diary entry, 3-4 Sept. 1944, IWM, 04/15/1; Private Papers of Maurice Herbert Cooke, *War Memoirs of 1944*, IWM, 03/28/1, 150.

\(^{20}\) Private Papers of C. J. Charters, Undated letter, IWM, Con Shelf.\(^ {21}\) Private Papers of Len Voller, *Memory*, IWM, 06/41/1, 10; Marie-Claire D., N°414, Collection “Jours de Guerre” de RTBF-Charleroi, CEGES AA 1450, 3-4.

presence of these young women at liberation celebrations: “And the girls! There were so many – so clean – healthy – fine looking. What a sight for our lads!!”23 Many men were struck by their popularity among the Belgians, having just come from France, where some soldiers felt that the civilians were unappreciative.24 The hospitable weather, the fact that many Germans had already departed before the Allied arrival and sheer excitement of the moment enabled the Belgian experience of liberation to be celebratory.25

The Allies had a massive presence in Belgium that stretched beyond the euphoria, chocolate and kisses of the first days of liberation. American forces were concentrated in the French-speaking southeastern part of Belgium, whereas British, Canadian and some Polish liberators were mainly stationed in Flanders.26 Though many troops continued their forward advance into Germany, the Allies did not vanish immediately or entirely from Belgium. Many officers and rank-and-file spent their leave from the front in Belgium’s major cities. Even after the defeat of Germany in May 1945, pulling out troops and equipment did not occur overnight. A number of Allied soldiers remained on Belgian soil into 1946; the last Americans left the country in 1947.27 The war may have been largely over in Belgium by the fall of 1944 but the landscape remained profoundly militarized, a fact that would have a powerful influence on the types of gendered arrangements and relations of interest to Allied military and Belgian civil officials.

The Belgian Prime Minister, Hubert Pierlot, and his government returned to Brussels from exile in London on 8 September 1944. Belgium was the first of the liberated countries to see its government restored, partly because there was no occupation government to dismantle

23 Private Papers of Richard Greenwood, One Day at a Time: A Diary of the Second World War, 6 Oct. 1944, IWM, 95/19/1.
24 John Groth, Studio: Europe (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1945), 41; Greenwood, One Day, 6 Oct. 1944 IWM, 95/19/1; Private Papers of Edward Elliot, Combat Diary: An account of six months in action with the 2nd Bn: Glasgow Highlanders, 1944, IWM, 99/61/1. See also Hitchcock, Bitter Road to Freedom, 60-5; Peter Schrijvers, Crash of Ruin, 125-6, 131-2.
25 It is also important to note that although the four-year German occupation was swept away in less than a month, the last few months of occupation after the establishment of the Zivilverwaltung under Josef Grohé were chaotic and often violent. See Francis Balais, “La nuit la plus courte…La Libération de Bruxelles,” in Jours libérés 1, vol. 19, Jours de guerre, ed. Francis Balais (Brussels: Crédit communal, 1995), 60-1; Schrijvers, Libérators, 9-25, 34-8.
26 GIs were also numerous in major urban centres in Flanders, including Brussels and port cities like Bruges, Ghent and Antwerp. Although I focus on the American and British troops, soldiers of other nationalities also participated in the liberation of Belgium. Canadian forces were especially numerous and played a key role in the liberation of west Flanders. See Jacques R. Pauwels, De Canadezen en de bevrijding van België 1944-1945 (Berchen: Epo, 2004).
first, as in France, for example.28 Two days later, the arrival of British Major-General George Erskine in Belgium, appointed by General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander, signaled the establishment of the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Force Mission to Belgium (SHAEF-B).29 SHAEF-B was responsible for Allied affairs at the national level and established a Civil Affairs (CA) department to deal with all issues relating to civilian matters. The British and American forces set up CA detachments in the provinces and cities to act as SHAEF’s local “eyes and ears” and to help reconstruct basic infrastructure, including food distribution, transport networks and public health institutions.30 The chief goal of SHAEF-B was to get the Belgian bureaucracies up and running so that they could act as a resource for Allied forces as they pushed into Germany.31 Eisenhower wanted to hand over full responsibility for the country to the Belgians as soon as possible in order to reduce the Allied mission to one of “a purely military character,” eerily echoing word-for-word the German High Command’s vision for Belgium in 1940.32

Belgians themselves had a role to play in the form of the Belgian Military Mission (BMM), which was appointed by the Belgian government in May 1944 under the Civil Affairs agreement. Designed to liaise between the Allied military command and Belgian civil authorities, the BMM was divided into three sections; the first section concerned itself entirely with military matters and the second with civil affairs under the leadership of Paul Tschoffen, a Catholic industrialist and politician. The third section comprised the High Commission for State Security and was headed by the powerful Walter Ganshof van der Meersch, the chief military prosecutor (Auditeur Général) in charge of the military tribunals against collaborators and citizens accused of committing offenses against the Allied armies.33 Ganshof van der Meersch stationed officers in each of the country’s nine provinces to report back to the HCSE on public opinion and other internal issues. Reports from the HCSE and SHAEF-B and its CA detachments

29 On the appointment of Erskine, see De Vos, “U.S. Forces In Belgium,” 181.
30 Conway, Sorrows of Belgium, 63-4; De Vos, “U.S. Forces, 181-2; Schrijvers, Liberators, 4-5. On the CA mission, see SHAEF, Annexure 1 to Directive on Civil Affairs-Belgium, undated, NARA RG 331, Entry 56, Box 7.
32 SHAEF European Allied Contact Section to Chief of the Belgian Mission, NARA RG 331, Entry 56, Box 14.
provide a more local view of the political and gendered developments of post-liberation Belgium.

**Bodies and National Reconstruction**

If the popular celebrations of September 1944 represented the peak of the Allied-Belgian relationship, the politics of intimacy crystallized the waves of unease underlying the alliance. Outwardly, Belgium looked much like its prewar self by the end of 1944; there had been little physical damage during the German retreat and Allied liberation, and the Pierlot government had moved quickly to resurrect the state and its apparatus. Yet this was a society that had been consciously de-nationalized by the German occupiers for four years. The occupation had intensified existing cultural, linguistic and ethnic tensions, exploited resources and labour power and made some citizens complicit in the country’s subjugation. The violation of Belgian neutrality (again), the brutal occupation by the Germans (again) and the country’s liberation by foreign armies seemed to confirm the inability of the Belgian nation-state to protect its citizens.

Reinvigorating the national concept in Belgium meant reframing the memory of the war and occupation within the discourse of patriotism. This reconstructive process was a gendered one; just as the German occupiers had earlier attempted to mobilize Belgian women and their bodies in the pursuit of the New Order, the returning Belgian state authorities envisioned women as key to the fashioning of coherent national identity in two ways. First, Belgian state authorities intended to mobilize women’s bodies to reaffirm and literally “reproduce” the nation. Second, women – and particularly their sexuality – demarcated the limits of national inclusivity and provided a way to mark the boundary between past humiliation and future strength. In other words, individual bodies that fit the patriotic narrative were useful, whereas bodies that had transgressed the “true nation” during the war had to be purged from the larger sociopolitical body.

The psychological and political unease about the recent past reared its ugly head in the first days after liberation when Belgians targeted real and suspected collaborators in impulsive

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34 On the reconstruction of the Belgian nation-state after Sept. 1944, see Conway, *Sorrows of Belgium*, 238-82.
35 Conway, *Sorrows of Belgium*, 1; Lagrou, *Legacy of Nazi Occupation*, 21, 301.
36 This is Pieter Lagrou’s argument; he demonstrates how the state mobilized “the straitjacket of patriotism” to reshape the allegedly “collective” memories of resistance, forced labour and persecution and the futility of this project. See Lagrou, *Legacy of Nazi Occupation*. 
and sporadic acts of vengeance.\textsuperscript{37} Women were among those targeted and the charges leveled against them were often similar to those against Belgian men, including having worked for the Germans, denounced fellow citizens to the Gestapo, participated in collaborationist organizations and engaged in black market activity. Unlike men, however, the Belgian public also condemned women for what was termed “horizontal collaboration,” or friendships and sexual and romantic relationships with the Germans during the occupation. Charges of sexual misconduct against Belgian women were common even before the arrival of the Allies. Throughout the war, clandestine newspapers published lists naming “bad Belgians” (mauvais Belges) accused of pro-German sentiments and thus setting these individuals up as targets for a vengeful population the moment the Germans were gone. These lists included women seen constantly en rapport with German officers.\textsuperscript{38} A June 1942 issue of \textit{La Légion Noire} noted a reader’s request to publish “the names of women and young girls who……flirt (!)….with les Boches. We would like to satisfy you but, my dear friend, admit it, this task is impossible; there are too many.” The editor offered some advice to the paper’s readers, which was to become a mot d’ordre: “Take notice of every woman or young girl who frequents the grey, black or brown uniforms and whom you can identify. These lists will be important shortly.”\textsuperscript{39}

In autumn 1944 and again in spring 1945, following the defeat of Germany and the liberation of the concentration camps and the return of PoWs and forced labourers, the iconic image of summary justice enacted against local collaborators in western and northern Europe was the shorn woman, \textit{la tondue}. Ordinary citizens, neighbours and members of the resistance dragged an unknown number of Belgian women suspected of having had intimate relationships with German soldiers to public squares. Often forced up onto a stage and surrounded by angry crowds of people, these women were declared “unpatriotic,” partially or fully stripped and had their hair shorn off as punishment; some women also had to wear placards around their neck stating their crimes, while others were branded with swastikas on their foreheads or a Hitler-style

\textsuperscript{37} Archival sources on the violence against collaborators in fall 1944 and spring 1945 are too numerous to list but see, in particular, the HCSE reports at the AGR; the SHAEF-B Fortnightly Reports and the reports from the Provincial Liaison Officers, as well as the files related to Sir Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen, Ambassador to Belgium, at the BNA. CEGES also contains an impressive archive of photographs relating to the liberation and the rounding up of suspected collaborator (see the collection: Répression et exécution de collaborateurs, 1944). For descriptions of some of these events, see Conway, \textit{Sorrows of Belgium}, 146-9; Schrijvers, \textit{Liberators}, 69-82.


\textsuperscript{39} \textit{La Légion Noire}, no. 16, June 1942, USHMM RG-65.011M, Reel 7. Emphasis and ellipses in the original.
mustache, covered in tar and feathers and forced to give the Hitler salute.\textsuperscript{40} I am chiefly interested in the meanings of \textit{la tonte} (as the head shaving was known) as a political ritual and in \textit{les tondues} as political symbols and do not seek to reproduce the violence against these women by providing further descriptions of the abuse they experienced.\textsuperscript{41}

This form of retribution against women accused of sexual fraternization also accompanied the process of liberation in Denmark, Italy, the Channel Islands, Norway and the Netherlands, as well as, most infamously, France.\textsuperscript{42} Symbolically marking a transition from one era to another, the punishment of head shaving dates as far back as the Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{43} After the First World War, women in northern France and Belgium accused of friendly relations with \textit{les boches} were hunted, paraded and shorn.\textsuperscript{44} In the interwar period, German women in the Rhineland were targeted for their relationships with members of the occupying forces, especially

\textsuperscript{40} CEGES, Images n° 28291, n° 28292, n° 28294, n° 28300, n° 28303, n° 28390; USHMM Photo Archives, Photographs #81847, #81848, #81849, #82885, #82886; Interview, Stewart John Irwin, Reel 2, 30 May 1998, IWM, 18210; Interview, Norman Thomas Madden, Reel 2, 29 Oct. 1998, IWM, 18576. For secondary sources, see Schrijvers, \textit{Liberators}, 77-8; Carolien Van Loon, “De geschorene en de scheerster. De vrouw in de straatrepressie na de Tweede Wereldoorlog,” \textit{Cahiers d'histoire du temps présent}, no. 19 (2008): 45-78.


\textsuperscript{43} Virgili, \textit{Shorn Women}, 181-5.

French colonial troops. The practice of head shaving has also featured prominently in civil conflicts. In the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39, the nationalists removed the hair of women who gave birth to Republican children or who fought on the Republican side.

Perhaps having inculcated German rhetoric about “disloyal women” from the occupation, Belgian patriots, including a wide array of actors from the state to the police to members of the ordinary population, conceptualized intimate encounters between their fellow citizens and the Germans not as private affairs but as acts of treason; in other words, women’s perceived sexual transgressions were reframed through the lens of national injustice. The presence of these alleged sexual collaborators was painful and unsettling reminders of some of the ways in which Belgians had cooperated with the occupier in its own subjugation. Punishing and scapegoating women thus transferred wartime blame and exculpated many at the expense of a few. The public branding and shearing of women also acted as a symbolic reassertion of masculine power in Europe and a purging of the humiliations and traumas of defeat and occupation; the ceremony of the *tonde* both punished and reappropriated female sexuality in the service of the revitalized (male) nation-state. But it is too simple to conceptualize women as victims and men as perpetrators; such a binary obfuscates the importance of power and in particular how the liberation period created a set of hierarchies based on national loyalty. After all, Belgian women—those whose reputations remained “untarnished”—sometimes participated in the demonstrations against suspected “horizontal collaborators” and even brandished the scissors.

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The explosive public violence against Belgian women did not actively target sex workers for the most part because, in the minds of many, their status marked them as already morally corrupt and therefore not useful to the project of reconstituting Belgian national identity. In this rhetoric, prostitutes’ betrayal during the occupation was unsurprising and even expected. By contrast, non-sexual forms of suspected collaboration, such as serving the German occupiers as shopkeepers, were publicly interpreted as sexual treason. Accusations launched against suspected women in Belgium also rarely concerned only one German boyfriend; often, such women were accused of promiscuous behaviour and of exchanging one German for another.\(^{49}\) The real problem for postwar authorities, then, was female sexuality. Condemning women’s sexual behaviour between 1940 and 1944 as symptomatic of their general licentiousness, rather than as isolated or unique cases, held significant political meanings in the postwar period. The subtle rhetoric about the dangerous and disloyal female body that underwrote the *tonte* served to bolster the state’s claims to the regulation of women’s sexuality in the name of national reconstruction.

The punishment sought not only to marginalize women for their national transgression vis-à-vis their visibly bald heads but also to restrain their sexuality by destroying their femininity and sexuality.\(^{50}\) As part of an individual’s body, appearance and identity, hair is intensely personal; hair is also inscribed with a set of historical meanings for women, including gender and sexual differentiation from men.\(^{51}\) The goal was to mark these women and destroy their perceived femininity so as it to make difficult for them to engage in any further sexual misconduct (or any sex at all, for that matter), especially in view of the Allied presence all over western Europe. How successful was this strategy? A British soldier who passed through France recollected seeing French women who “were getting a full belly from the rest of the populace” and having their heads shaved. He noted with some disparagement that, “before you shaved their heads off, they were most attractive…but…I said I couldn’t face it with a sack over its head, you know. So I never had it.”\(^{52}\) Although it is difficult to know how representative this account is of Allied attitudes towards *les tondues*, for this one soldier, these women had been stripped of their gender identity and sexual desirability, becoming in the process the generic “it.” The practice of


\(^{50}\) Van Loon, “De Geschoorene en de scheerster,” 61, 67.


\(^{52}\) Interview, Ronald Albert Charles Robinson, 11 Nov. 1992, Reel 2, IWM, 12897.
cutting off women’s hair thus had a double function: it was both a spectacle intended to punish sex and a sexual punishment in and of itself.\textsuperscript{53}

The \textit{femmes tondues}, however, did not encompass all Belgian women. One married woman was known to the police in Brussels for having had relations with German officers but, aside from being “poorly regarded in her neighbourhood,” seems to have escaped other punishments.\textsuperscript{54} Nor did the \textit{tonte} so easily enable Belgian citizens to reconcile the recent past and create the foundations for a new national and moral order. Belgian civil authorities were alarmed by the female population’s apparent willingness to fraternize, yet again, with foreign soldiers stationed in the country – this time primarily of British and American nationality. Such a project, however, meant challenging the Allies’ sexual prerogatives in the country they had liberated. Peace may have arrived in Belgium, especially after the end of the Ardennes offensive in late January 1945, but the country was by no means peaceful.

\textbf{Sex, Youth, and the “Moral Question”}

The presence of Allied troops reminded Belgians who held real and legitimate power. Even on an everyday level, the liberators possessed enormous authority over the liberated population, which offered privileges and temptations for these uniformed men as well as the potential for abuse. The wreckage of continental Europe confirmed for the American GIs that the New World had the right spirit and dynamic for the modern era, while the archaic Old World was rotting from the inside.\textsuperscript{55} Moreover, the Allies had done “their bit” successfully; they had liberated the civilians of western Europe and felt they deserved the sexual rewards that were part and parcel of their status as victors.\textsuperscript{56}

Nowhere were these power dynamics more evident than in the Allies’ sometimes demeaning and violent treatment of local women. Attacks on women began almost immediately after the liberation, usually in the late evening, under the cover of darkness.\textsuperscript{57} In October 1944 in

\textsuperscript{53} This is my answer to Caroline van Loon’s question of whether the head shaving of women was a punishment for sexual collaboration during the war or whether it was a sexual punishment for collaboration that targeted women in order to limit, control and restrain their sexual power. Van Loon, “De Geschoorene en de scheerster,” 61.

\textsuperscript{54} Report concerning Elisabeth D., 1 March 1945, AGR Ministère Justice, Police d'Étrangers (I 417), Folder 1440.

\textsuperscript{55} Schrijvers, \textit{Crash of Ruin}, 265.


\textsuperscript{57} Municipal police interventions in metropolitan Brussels from 3 Sept. 1944 to 3 Mar. 1945, British military, AGR AA 1311, Folder 528; Procès-verbal No. 4391, 1ère Division de police, Commune de Schaerbeek, AGR AA 1311, Folder 574. The most thorough study of sexual violence committed by the Allies is J. Robert Lilly, \textit{Taken by Force: Rape and American GIs in Europe During World War II} (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). See also Roberts, \textit{What Soldiers Do}, 195-254; Schrijvers, \textit{Liberators}, 226-30.
Leopoldsburg in Flanders, a nineteen-year-old student was on her way home when she was knocked unconscious by an unknown attacker. She regained consciousness after a short while when a passerby approached and the assailant fled. The young women thought her attacker might have been English because “he spoke a language that she didn’t understand and wore a khaki gabardine.” A medical certificate later confirmed that she had been sexually assaulted. On the other side of the language border, in the town of Jambes in the province of Namur, an American soldier attacked a woman returning home at around 10 p.m. When she refused to go with him, he attempted to strangle her with a rope. The soldier fled when people rushed to the scene and intervened, having heard her screams. The author of an HCSE report documenting the attempted rape noted, “personally, I can confirm that a week doesn’t pass where American soldiers, alone or with others, don’t ring at my own home around 11 or 11.30 p.m. to ask to ‘sleep avec mademoiselle.’ The incidents are increasing and the edgy population intends to defend itself. Fights are inevitable and will happen in the coming days.”

It is too easy, however, to fall into the trap of the “poor Belgians” versus the “powerful Allies.” Allied forces were not the only men violating local women or exploiting privileged positions of power. In October 1944, women in Eekloo complained about the “nasty attitude regarding women” exhibited by the commander of the local gendarmerie; the commander had commented on the “well-built” body of a thirteen-year-old girl – specifically her “fine chest” – and inquired as to whether she had begun menstruating. Nevertheless, the Belgian public tended to focus more on Allied infractions, blaming the Military Police (MP) for failing to take crimes against women seriously as well as wondering “why the [Belgian] government does not take measures for the protection of the Belgians.” Sexual violence highlighted multiple axes of conflict in the postwar period, between the Allies and Belgians and between the Belgian state and its citizenry.

The answer was that perhaps Belgian authorities were not as angered by the violent actions of the Allies towards women as they were by consensual fraternization. In this view, violence and misconduct were matters of military discipline best left to the Allied chain of command. Fraternization, however, exposed Belgian women’s consent to partner with Allied

58 Gendarmerie, Compagnie de Hasselt, Procès-verbal No. 934, Oct. 1944, AGR AA 1311, Folder 574.
60 See the statements of Léonie D., Emma H. and Marie D., 3 Oct. 1944, AGR AA 1311, Folder 954.
soldiers and roused anxieties about a postwar “crisis of masculinity.” The fit, healthy and smiling foreign soldiers immediately attracted some Belgium women as elsewhere in devastated Europe. During an interview in the 1990s, a Belgian woman from Céroux-Mousty in Ottignies became flustered when asked about whether she had had any romantic feelings towards the Americans who liberated her village in 1944: “Ah, no, I don’t think so. I don’t know anymore. I don’t know anymore. They were handsome in any case. They were young. They were young, they were handsome. Yes, they were handsome young men. Yes, we were happy.”

Unlike their Belgian counterparts, Allied men had full pockets and offered women enticing incentives, such as promises of movie passes and special invitations to events, in addition to the more traditional (and much desired) offers of food, coffee, tea and candy. Allied men argued that it was the tedium and dissatisfaction of everyday life that pushed women into their embraces. Sergeant Greenwood remembered staying with a Belgian family in a suburb of Liège and that, when the time came to depart, his hostess, Mrs. Maertens, was quite sad:

She has this morning been recounting the details of her cheerless existence. The usual story of a selfish and uninteresting husband who regards his wife as his servant and plaything. Have heard the same thing so often over here…Perhaps it is no wonder that so many wives have allowed American – and British – soldiers to become intimate. It is at least a change for these women!”

In some cases, Allied soldiers deliberately snubbed Belgian men as potential rivals for women’s attentions. In late September 1944, Sgt. Greenwood attended a dance, where Belgian men were persona non grata. When three young women arrived, two with their fiancés, the men “were politely told they weren’t wanted – but their girls were dragged inside. The disappointed swains lingered outside – gazing in through the window.” Later in the evening, after supper, there was more dancing and one soldier disappeared with the two girls, while their paramours waited outside: “He returned half an hour later – with the girls, but without their men! He had shaken them off somehow!”

A few months later, after being repeatedly denied entry to dances held by British troops, local men in the town of Sint-Niklaas decided to get even by holding their

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62 Schrijvers, Liberators, 206-9; Conway, Sorrows of Belgium, 298.
63 Marie-Claire D., N°414, CEGES AA 1450, 4. Women in Germany also commented on the appearance of American GIs, including their good teeth. Höhn, “‘You Can’t Pin Sergeant’s Stripes on an Archangel’,” 113-4.
66 Ibid.
own dance and not inviting British troops. However, an HCSE officer reported that such incidents harmed relations between the Allied forces and civil authorities and was “of the opinion that the systematic exclusion of Belgian citizens from festivities organized by the English works to the advantage of representatives of certain political groups.”

The Belgian obsession with fraternization did not simply reflect a bruised male ego but revealed deep concerns about internal security and political stability. In Charleroi, the local HCSE worried about the long-term implications for party politics of what they perceived as the loosening of women’s morality: “There is no doubt that in the not too distant future, when the military events have lost their importance, some political parties could potentially exploit this negligence (laisser-aller), which would have left sad memories, for propaganda purposes.” It was not, after all, politics “as usual” in occupied Belgium; the Pierlot regime was in crisis by the end of 1944, lacking both the means and the popularity to govern effectively. Unlike Charles De Gaulle’s ecstatic welcome in Paris, Pierlot and the other chief ministers of the government-in-exile had returned to Brussels without any fanfare. The immediate circumstances of liberation, including material shortages, the government’s attempts to demobilize the resistance and general dissatisfaction about the “repression” of collaborators exacerbated doubts about Belgium’s political future. This political crisis reached a head in February 1945 with Pierlot’s resignation and the establishment of a new government under the socialist Achille van Acker. As a general rule, the struggles of the Belgian political elite to form a functioning and coherent government structure led to more Allied intervention, especially in the winter of 1944-45 when Belgium operated as the primary supply base for the forthcoming invasion of western Germany.

Concern about fraternization also reflected instability in gender norms and relations. By the first few months of 1945, reports flooded into the HCSE on the “unanimous public opinion” deploring “the considerable debasement of morality” resulting from fraternization. Cardinal van Roey, Archbishop of Mechelen and primate of Belgium, encouraged a return to Catholic morality after the occupation, offering words of caution that the materialist, hedonistic

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68 HCSE Report, Charleroi, 23 March 1945, AGR AA 1311, Folder 1020.
69 On the political crisis of 1944-45 that led to Pierlot’s resignation on 7 February and the subsequent government under Van Acker, see Conway, *Sorrows of Belgium*, 58-124.
atmosphere of the country and people’s “pursuit[s] of worldly pleasures” were preludes to moral derangement. He singled out those who “brazenly violate the laws of chastity” and particularly rebuked women for their styles of dress.71

The press focused its wrath on women of “easy virtue,” criticizing them for letting their purses and hungry stomachs get in the way of their consciences.72 A February 1945 article in Het Belang van Limburg railed against such women: “And do not tell us it is Patriotism! This behaviour is usually driven by selfish motives: it is all about chocolate, soap and meat.”73 Belgium was a fragmented nation with no room in its new patriotic national narrative for pleasure-seeking women who apparently shirked their obligations to the collective; such women were “anti-citizens.”74 The local authorities and press across Belgium sought to remind women of their national duty, encouraging them not to sacrifice their future prospects or those of the nation for an “hour of abandon” or “park bench 15 minutes romances.”75

Morality campaigns focused especially on young girls whose “state of morals leaves much to be desired,” according to Captain Pirotte, company commander of the gendarmerie in Huy.76 A special “call to the people,” published by the police in Verviers in March 1945, noted that the war was not yet over, but “in this spring of 1945, our youth face the greatest DANGERS.” The article chastised young people for launching into romantic adventures without a care for their dignity or physical welfare, all the while other Belgians fought and died in camps and on the battlefield.77 Such condemnations of the behaviour of young women were country-wide. In Mons, a judge in the juvenile court, Monsieur Scarmure, complained to the commandant of the Civil Mission, Captain Drapier, that “there has not been one week where I haven’t had the task of looking after a young girl arrested for misconduct.” The police were of little help, since

72 HCSE Report, Charleroi, 23 March 1945, AGR HCSE, AA 1311, Folder 1020.
73 Het Belang van Limburg, 8 Feb. 1945, quoted in Schrijvers, Liberators, 211.
74 The term “anti-citizens” is taken from Sonya O. Rose’s book on sex, citizenship and national identity in Britain during the Second World War. Rose argues that women perceived to be challenging conventional gender norms were constructed as individuals existing outside of the citizenry proper (as “anti-citizens”) because they failed to defend the nation, while other Britons served and sacrificed for home and front. Sonya O. Rose, Which People’s War? National Identity and Citizenship in Britain, 1939-1945 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 79.
75 “Appel à la population,” 10 March 1945, AGR AA 1311, Folder 759; Provincial Liaison Officers Reports, Namur, 16 March 1945, BNA WO 202/652.
77 Emphasis in the original. “Appel à la population,” 10 March 1945, AGR AA 1311, Folder 759.
they were not permitted to enter premises occupied by Allied troops. The judge incited Drapier to intercede with the Allies and to synchronize their actions with those of the local Belgian police “if we want to preserve our youth as much as possible.” Many Belgians and members of the Allied command argued that most women were too young and naïve to look beyond the fancy uniform of the British or American soldier and consider the long-term stakes of their behaviour.

The intersection between gender and age was critical in discourses about public morality because of the pervasive belief that the German occupation had corroded social and moral norms. Civil authorities considered their youth – the only Belgians with any moral innocence intact after 1944 – to be the vanguard of a new nation. Most obviously, women could literally rebirth the nation through the production of children. Though there was no explicit, state-driven campaign in Belgium to push women back into the home, many women’s social and political opportunities narrowed during the postwar years. Many women themselves welcomed a return to the domestic sphere after the war. The state further promoted the ideal of the nuclear family, the microcosm of the nation, through tax and welfare benefits. In addition to reaffirming traditional gender differences, the war deepened generational divides. As labourers, PoWs or prisoners in Germany or as members of the resistance or fascist organizations, young Belgians of both genders experienced some vestige of freedom from their parents and social elites. “The hour of reconstruction is at hand,” Verviers’ appeal to young Belgians declared, “No country can rebuild

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78 M. Scarmure, Juvenile Court, to Captain Drapier, Civil Affairs Command, Mons, 10 March 1945, AGR AA 1311, Folder 972.
79 “Appel à la population,” 10 March 1945, AGR AA 1311, Folder 759; Ethel Hammond, V.D. Contact Investigator, HQ Area 5, Channel Base Section, to Office of the Surgeon General, Channel Base Section, Report: Treatment with Penicillin of Women Infected with Venereal Disease at the Hospital Recollets, Liège, Belgium, 15 June 1945, NARA RG 498, Entry UD 593, Box 4033; “Are the doctors going to obey von Falkenhausen?” (English translation), La Lanterne, 10 Feb. 1945, NARA RG 331, Box 47, Entry 47.
80 Social conservatives were especially eager to see women “return to the home” because of their concern about the birth rate in Belgium, which had been on the decline since the 1880s when it fell to under 30 live births per 1000. These conservatives were undoubtedly delighted by Belgium’s postwar baby boom. Ron J. Lesthaeghe, The Decline of Belgian Fertility, 1800-1970 (Princeton: Princeton University, 1977), 4-5, 95, 130.
82 Conway, Sorrows of Belgium, 306-7.
if it does not possess a youth, healthy in body and soul.”

After the upheaval of occupation and excess of liberation, this youth required some redirection and social control.

Rhetoric about national identity was also fundamentally about race and in particular, perceptions of a supposed “racial threat.” The press and police urged women to remember their duty to the “future of our race” and to avoid endangering the racial and hereditary health of subsequent generations, a point reflecting the widespread concern about fraternization with African-American GIs. The town of Athus in southeastern Belgium earned the moniker “the city of negroes” because it was rumoured that so many black American soldiers ventured to the city to seek their “nocturnal pleasures.” As in Germany and France, the dénouement of Nazi racism in the Holocaust had not entirely delegitimized racism or racial hierarchies in postwar Belgium. To be sure, some Belgians welcomed black GIs in ways unthinkable in the United States, inviting them, for example, to family dinners and christenings.

Many more Belgian citizens, however, were unsettled by the presence of African-American troops because this was the first time large numbers of black men were on home soil. Even though the Belgian state had ruled the African Congo since 1908 (and even earlier under Léopold II), the public at home had had little direct engagement with the colony. Belgian settlers to the Congo and African immigrants to the metropole were also too few to have occasioned much social interaction in either space. Nevertheless, in the decades leading up to the Second World War, certain ideas about the Congo circulated through popular channels; propaganda, documentaries, publications and exhibitions had portrayed black Africans as primitive and

83 “Appel à la population,” 10 March 1945, AGR AA 1311, Folder 759.
84 Ibid.
86 Heide Fehrenbach’s work in particular has shown that postwar Germany was by no means “race-blind” and demonstrates the gradual construction of black/white binary of racial difference, like that of the United States, after 1945. Fehrenbach, Race After Hitler, 6-8. See also Höhn, GIs and Fräuleins, 123-5, 210-3.
87 Schrijvers, Liberators, 218. Some also the positive recollections of black GIs in Germany and France. Höhn, GIs and Fräuleins, 90-3; Roberts, What Soldiers Do, 236-8.
88 By the 1930s, just over 10 000 Belgians resided in the Congo. Going the other way, very few Africans ventured from the Congo to Belgium or had any opportunity to do so; in the nineteenth century, some Belgians brought Congolese to Belgium in order to educate them but this practice was short-lived. For the argument that Belgians were relatively indifferent to empire and were “reluctant imperialists,” see Guy Vantemsche, Belgium and the Congo, 1885-1980, trans. Alice Cameron and Stephen Windross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Other scholarship has sought to complicate the notion that the Congo was of little interest to ordinary Belgians by showing the resonance of colonial images and propaganda at home. See in particular Matthew G. Stanard, Selling the Congo: A History of European Pro-Empire Propaganda and the Making of Belgian Imperialism (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011).
uneducated children in need of a “civilizing mission.” The lingering representations framed Belgian ideas about blackness in 1944-45.\(^8\)

Across Europe, the most explicitly charged reckonings with race and racial ideologies occurred in response to interracial intimate contact between local (white) women and Allied soldiers of colour.\(^9\) Municipal authorities in Belgian towns and cities worried particularly about the young civilian women who visited Allied camps reserved for African-American GIs, believing old stereotypes about the overeroticized and sexually uncontrollable black man.\(^9\) There was also a widespread racist assumption, common among both Europeans and the Allies, that black soldiers were more likely to be afflicted with VD than their white counterparts.\(^9\)

**From One to Another?**

After liberation, Belgian women stood accused of committing a second affront to the nation with their bodies – the charge was the same, but the accessory had changed. Women had simply traded in their German lovers for American, British or Canadian ones; in the words of some disgusted critics, “they had *fic fic* with Fritz and now they *zig zig* with the Yanks.”\(^9\) An HCSE officer in the American sector in Virton claimed of the women who were enticed by the American troops that almost all had favoured the Germans during the occupation.\(^4\) Germans, moreover, had not entirely disappeared from Belgium after the arrival of the Allies, a fact that outraged the population. In the commune of Fléron, the gendarmerie reported in September 1945 that American trucks regularly came to unload waste and merchandise like flour, matches and sugar and were often accompanied by German PoWs. To the vexation of locals, young women

\(^8\) For these images of the Congo, see Luc Vints, *Kongo made in Belgium: Beeld van een kolonie in film en propaganda* (Leuven: Kritak, 1984); Stanard, *Selling the Congo*.


\(^9\) M. Scarmure to Captain Drapier, 10 March 1945, AGR AA 1311, Folder 972. In Verviers, the police encouraged young women to stay away from Allied troops because these men had previously been in North Africa, the alleged birthplace and breeding ground of VD. “Appel à la population,” 10 March 1945, AGR AA 1311, Folder 759.

\(^9\) HCSE Weekly Report, Althus, 4 Aug. 1945, AGR AA 1311, Folder 1007. The American army kept separate statistics for white soldiers and soldiers of colour and generally assumed that black GIs were more likely to become infected during their period of service; however, as Mary Louise Roberts and Annette Timm have pointed out, it is possible that racial prejudice may have led to an overestimation and over-diagnoses of VD for non-white troops. Roberts, *What Soldiers Do*, 165; Timm, *Politics of Fertility*, 219-21.

\(^3\) “Zig zig” and “zig zag” became euphemisms for sex in France and Belgium. Quoted in Stéphany, *1944*, 412.

\(^9\) HCSE Weekly Report, Virton, 14 April 1945, AGR AA 1311, Folder 1111. See also the account of a Brussels woman who had a brief sexual relationship with an American soldier in John Costello, *Virtue Under Fire: How World War II Changed Our Social and Sexual Attitudes* (New York: Fromm International, 1987), 248-9. When the soldier returned from duty to visit the woman, he found her house empty and the outside walls “were now daubed with obscenities and rough painted swastikas. Above the door were two large scrawls “traiteur collaborator.”
talked and joked with the PoWs; on one visit, some women even received small gifts from and shared cigarettes with the prisoners.  

Many Belgians felt that the Allies were too sympathetic to the Germans and criticized the Americans in particular for demonstrating a “quasi maternal solicitude” towards German prisoners and providing them with abundant rations, while innocent Belgians starved. In Namur, the public was infuriated to see German PoWs smoking American cigarettes and eating oranges, luxuries lacked by most civilians. The frequent presence of German women shopping in Belgian cities, accompanied and protected by American soldiers, also angered locals: “It is not enough that les boches stole from us throughout the occupation; and yet, it still happens that they come and take away the few items we have.”

Tensions were particularly high in the German-speaking region of Eupen and Malmédy, where liberation by the Americans in mid-September received a frosty reception from the majority of the population. The Allies and Belgians considered the inhabitants of the region to be “pro-German” (since the territory had been annexed by the Reich in May 1940) and took action to round up and intern German nationals in the fall of 1944. Belgium officially received sovereign authority over Eupen and Malmédy in 1945, but the government still wanted to distinguish German nationals, requiring, for example that they wear a yellow armband. This form and colour of marking was perhaps a gesture of vengeance, given that the Germans had required Jews all over Europe to wear badges with the yellow star after 1941 and in Belgium specifically in May 1942.

Fraternization between Allied soldiers with German women was a contentious issue in liberated Belgium. In July 1945, the High Comissioner for State Security, Walter Ganshof van der Meersch, wrote to General Erskine that the Belgian populace believed that German women

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95 Gendarmerie Liège, Subj: Fraternization between civilians and German prisoners, 21 Sept. 1945, AGR AA 1311, Folder 974.  
97 SHAEF Mission, Psychological Warfare Division, Weekly Consolidated Intelligence Report, 4 Feb. 1945, BNA WO 219/1597A.  
99 Schrijvers, Crash of Ruin, 132-3.  
100 See the correspondence between Ganshof van der Meersch and Erskine in October 1944 regarding “German Nationals at Large in Belgian Liberated Territory” in BNA WO 219/1597A. For references to the yellow armband, see HCSE Weekly Report, Eupen, 19 May 1945, AGR AA 1311, Folder 1338; HCSE Weekly Report, Eupen, 21 April 1945, AGR AA 1311, Folder 1154. See also Perry Biddiscombe, Werewolf! The History of the National Socialist Guerilla Movement, 1944-1946 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 203-4.  
in Eupen and Malmédy received “privileged treatment” by the Allies. German women worked for the local American staff in Eupen and reportedly rode around in American jeeps and wore the uniforms of American GIs. “Sammys” were also spied enjoying Eupen’s nightlife with German women, a sight deemed “most unfortunate” by an HCSE report from mid-June 1945.

It was bad enough, another report observed, that Belgians witnessed American soldiers strolling with German women, “but now, seeing American soldiers strolling with Reichsdeutsche is made even more obvious due to the fact that [the women] are wearing the yellow armband; this time the critics have become even more violent.”

The Belgian public could not understand Allied soldiers’ behaviour when such obvious markers of the disloyalty of their escorts stared them in the face. Belgian citizens were so sensitive to the presence of Germans that they sometimes questioned the identites of non-German women, as was the case in Verviers in August 1945 regarding two female employees of the U.S. Army who had Dutch and Polish nationality, respectively. Because the townspeople adamantly insisted that the women were German, the military police took the two to an undisclosed location in order to wait out the hostility of public opinion.

Ganshof van der Meersch argued that the pro-German elements in Eupen and Malmédy sought to use the close ties between German women and Allied soldiers to their political advantage, explaining to Erskine that “they feel protected and sometimes defy the Belgian authorities.” He implied that some women were using their sexual allure to promote a separatist agenda in German-speaking Belgium: “Former collaborators are taking advantage of the fact that the Americans seem quite impressed by their wifes [sic], daughters and sweethearts’ charms. All those elements are trying to persuade the Americans that the problem of Eupen and Malmédy is a “minority” problem about which they should be more concerned.”

Allied fraternization with German women thus potentially undermined the political unity of the reestablished Belgian state. Some Belgians refused passively to accept the behaviour of their female fellow citizens and, at different moments, tried to warn, protect, hinder and even harm women. In Sint-Niklaas, so-called “radicals” posted signs cautioning local women that sanctions would be taken against

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102 Ganshof van der Meersch to Erskine, 5 July 1945, AGR AA 1311, Folder 1148; Ganshof van der Meersch to Erskine, 13 July 1945, AGR AA 1311, Folder 1148.
103 HCSE Weekly Report, Eupen, 16 July 1945, AA 1311, Folder 1148.
104 HCSE Weekly Report, Eupen, 21 April 1945, AGR AA 1311, Folder 1154.
106 Ganshof van der Meersch to Erskine, 5 July 1945, AGR AA 1311, Folder 1148.
them if they went out with American soldiers.\textsuperscript{107} Women probably took such threats seriously and with good reason; they had just witnessed female family members, neighbours, friends and strangers have their heads shorn as punishment for alleged sexual misconduct during the occupation. In Leuven, some male students at the university’s Catholic college crusaded against “riotous immorality” in spring 1945, distributing anonymously authored leaflets lambasting women for their relationships with “brutal and bestial” soldiers. However, the university administration disapproved of the conduct of these students, arguing that they were part of a “fifth column” deliberately trying to stir up a more general discontent about the Allies.\textsuperscript{108}

Irrespective of whether a “fifth column” actually existed, the politics of sex, including consensual and coercive sexual interactions, damaged Allied-Belgian relations into 1945. An HCSE report from La Louvière observed a common sentiment “that we are emerging from a long enemy occupation in order to replace it with another foreign occupation.”\textsuperscript{109} Belgians were overheard in trams and other public spaces discussing how “liberation” was worse than the occupation by the Germans.\textsuperscript{110} The most contentious consequence of intimate interactions between the Allies and Belgians related to the sexual act itself: the possibility of contracting and spreading VD. Though Belgian officials shared a vested interest in regulating female sexuality, the heavy-handed rhetoric of the British and American military authorities left them to wonder if they were partners with or servants to the Allies after September 1944.

The Allies and the VD Problem

The Allies too were generally unhappy about the rampant fraternization between their men and local women in Belgium, even though, unlike German women, Belgians were technically “friends” rather than “foes.”\textsuperscript{111} There was no prohibition on marriage, for instance, between members of the Allied forces and citizens in Belgium as there was in Germany and Austria (until 1946); however, heavy paperwork and bureaucratic difficulties acted as roadblocks

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\textsuperscript{107} USFET, Mission to Belgium and Luxembourg, Monthly Report, No. 4, For Period Ending 15 Nov. 1945, NARA RG 331, Entry 56, Box 131.
\textsuperscript{108} Rijkswacht Leuven, Monthly Report, 7 April 1945, AGR AA 1311, Folder 1063.
\textsuperscript{109} HCSE Report, La Louvière, 20 July 1945, AGR AA 1311, Folder 1054; SHAEF-B, Psychological Warfare Division, Weekly Consolidated Intelligence Report, 4 Feb. 1945, BNA WO 219/1597A.
\textsuperscript{110} HCSE Report, Oostende, 2 Nov. 1944, AGR AA 1331, Folder 1082.
\textsuperscript{111} A ban on fraternization between Germans (and Austrians) and GIs was in effect from April 1944-October 1945; marriages between GIs and German women were permitted only as of December 1946. Perry Biddiscombe, “Dangerous Liaisons: The Anti-Fraternization Movement in the U.S. Occupation Zones of Germany and Austria, 1945-1948,” \textit{Journal of Social History} 34, no. 3 (2001): 616; Höhn, “‘You Can’t Pin Sergeant’s Stripes on an Archangel’,” 110, 115.
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to such unions. As of April 1945 in Belgium, there were more than two hundred outstanding marriages to be approved and concluded among the British forces alone.

Allied officials desired the segregation of troops from civilians partly because they feared security breaches by persons sympathetic to the enemy cause. This paranoia was perhaps not unjustified, given the pro-German sentiments expressed in Eupen and Malmédy in 1944-45. But Germans were not the only suspect populations in liberated Europe. According to the U.S. War Department’s 1944 Guide to France, troops needed to watch out for “the wolf in sheep’s clothing” – the pretty, friendly women, often prostitutes, deliberately planted by the Germans as undercover agents. The Guide warned soldiers that “You probably won’t get mixed up with anything as glamourous as Mata Hari - the Germans have wised up and are sending around much less obvious spies these days.” These cunning women purportedly sought out soldiers in cafés and restaurants, hoping to pick up valuable tidbits of information about military operations for German intelligence. Soldiers should avoid “loose women” (femmes de mœurs légères) who asked too many questions and seemed overly interested in the soldiers’ jobs. “Be as friendly as you like with anyone who wants to share your friendship, just don’t discuss anything connected with the operations of your unit or of any other you may have heard about.”

Fraternization between female civilians and military personnel posed another key problem, one perhaps even more detrimental to the pursuit of military victory: the potential spread of VD. In 1943-44, as Allied officials planned for the invasion of northern France, they worried that rising VD rates among the rank-and-file would occasion a manpower shortage, adversely affecting their military strategy for the defeat of Germany. The rhetoric of the Allies regarding sexual health was remarkably similar to that of the German High Command. An April 1944 memorandum to U.S. forces characterized soldiers with VD as burdensome “dead weights,” who dampened the organization’s fighting effectiveness and used up critical resources. The memorandum argued that “there is a great more honour in going home as a casualty from a

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112 These procedural issues included confusion about the documents necessary to approve a marriage, questions about the citizenship of the bride upon her marriage to a British or American soldier and issues of consent regarding applicants under 21 years old. See the files related to marriage between Allied troops and Belgian women: AGR AA 1311, Folder 535; BNA WO 229/5/25, WO 32/13527 and WO 32/13528; NARA RG 331, Entry 56, Box 26.
113 Lt. Col. Bassmore to Lt. Col Dumon, Subj.: Marriage between a British Subject and Belgian National, 4 April 1945, AGR HCSE, Folder 535.
116 George C. Marshall to Eisenhower, 6 Jan. 1944, NARA RG 498, Entry UD 1187, Box 5762.
battle wound than from a venereal disease."

Military officials in the United Kingdom and the United States also considered soldiers’ contraction of VD to be a breach of national and soldierly loyalty and honour, as well as a destabilizing threat to family norms back home. Troops who contracted VD overseas had to have had sex with someone in the first place, someone who was presumably not their wife or girlfriend.

Wartime regulations regarding prostitution and VD at home in the Allied countries varied. In the United States, the repression of prostitution occurred through the arrest and forcible treatment of suspected prostitutes, the closure of ‘red light’ districts in cities and towns and the organization of a system of contact investigation. Policies to control VD and prostitution were considerably less aggressive in Great Britain. Since the 1830s, brothels were illegal in Britain, but soliciting was not. In the fall of 1942, however, the British Ministry of Health introduced Defense Regulation 33B, which stipulated that any individual identified as the source of VD by two informants was subject to arrest and compulsory treatment; the Home Office refused throughout the war, however, to criminalize soliciting.

When war broke out in 1939, VD rates rose quickly, even in the U.S. army, which did not officially enter the conflict until December 1941. Over 65 000 American soldiers contracted VD in the first two years of the war (1940-41). In the United Kingdom, syphilis increased by 240 percent between 1940 and 1942. All of these statistics signified lost “man days,” or days of active service. If the experiences of the 1943 North African and Italian campaigns were any indication, SHAEF officials anticipated VD rates among civilians and Allied military personnel

117 Memorandum, HQ ETOUSA to C.G.s, American Component, Allied Expeditionary Air Force, et al., Subj.: Venereal Diseases, 27 April 1944, NARA RG 112, Entry 31(Z1), Box 1265. For more of this language of “economic wastage of manpower” via rising VD rates, see also Memorandum, Subj.: Promiscuity and Venereal Disease, 28 July 1943, NARA RG 498, Entry UD 1187, Box 5761.

118 Memorandum, HQ ETOUSA, to Each Unit Commander, Subj.: Control of Venereal Disease, 31 Dec. 1943, NARA RG 498, Entry UD 1187, Box 5761. Allied military authorities in both countries also worried that soldiers overseas suffering from VD who returned home might infect their spouses or other members of the civilian population. See Conference on Venereal Diseases, 29 Mar. 1944, NARA RG 331, Entry 6, Box 45.

119 Unlike the United States, the British government was generally reluctant to take preventive measures, such as education about methods of prophylaxis, fearing that church and social purity organizations would argue it was encouraging sexual immorality and promiscuity. For a more comprehensive account of the differences of the two major Allies regarding state control of prostitution, see Reynolds, Rich Relations, 203-8; Rose, “Sex in Anglo-American Relations,” esp. 885-94. In Canada, the first criminal code of 1892 decreed that women and men could be arrested for inhabiting a suspected house of prostitution and made it a crime to live off of prostitution; subsequent provincial vagrancy laws also effectively made streetwalking illegal. See Jeffrey Keshen, Saints, Sinners and Soldiers: Canada’s Second World War (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 135.

120 “Venereal Disease,” Lecture prepared for use in production of film on venereal disease, NARA RG 112, Entry 31(Z1), Box 1266.

121 “Army Declares War on VD,” Stars and Stripes, 29 May 1943, NARA RG 498, Entry UD 1187, Box 5761.
to spike almost instantly after the invasion of Normandy, planned initially for spring 1944 and delayed to June. Between September and December 1943, the incidence of VD was approximately 168 per 1000 per annum.\textsuperscript{122} SHAEF considered a “reasonable” rate to be anything below 30 per 1000 per annum.\textsuperscript{123} Striving to apply lessons learned from its earlier campaigns to the coming operation, the Allied command realized it would have to intervene in civilian affairs.

The health of civilians in Belgium and elsewhere mattered to the Allies only insofar as it could impact the success of the greater military agenda. CA Public Health Officers in Belgium were tasked with enacting measures to control communicable diseases and distributing medical and sanitary supplies needed by civilians to the Belgian authorities. The main CA office instructed health officers to issue only the “minimum necessary to raise existing standards to those accepted from the viewpoint of military necessity.”\textsuperscript{124} Yet there was also a sense among Allied military and medical officials that public health activities targeting civilians were a pivotal aspect of SHAEF, not least because of the realization that what benefited French and Belgian civilians benefited American, British and Canadian soldiers.\textsuperscript{125} As a result, SHAEF’s Medical Office ordered individual unit commanders to “insure that conditions exist among the civilian population which will not interfere with the operations against the enemy but will promote such operations to the greatest extent possible.”\textsuperscript{126}

Wartime statistics on VD from the continent struck fear into the hearts of Allied commanders and medical officers; reports claimed that at least five million Europeans suffered from VD and that the infection rate among the civilian populations had increased from three to ten times during the war.\textsuperscript{127} In Belgium, CA and public health personnel observed that VD and prostitution had “increased considerably” during the occupation.\textsuperscript{128} The Allies took special note


\textsuperscript{123}SHAЕF, Admin. Memorandum, Subj.: Venereal Diseases, 27 April 1944, NARA RG 331, Entry 6, Box 45; Diary of Albert Kenner, 8 Nov. 1944, NARA RG 331, Entry 66, Box 8.

\textsuperscript{124}SHAЕF, Annexure 1 to Directive on Civil Affairs-Belgium, undated, RG 331, Entry 56, Box 7.

\textsuperscript{125}Col. Thomas B. Turner, Medical Corps, to the Surgeon General, Report on Plans for Civil Affairs Public Health in the ETO, undated, NARA RG 331, Entry 65, Box 1.

\textsuperscript{126}SHAЕF, Medical Division, Subj.: Army Medical Services and Civil Affairs, 27 May 1944, NARA RG 331, Entry 65, Box 1.

\textsuperscript{127}Memorandum, Subj.: Venereal Diseases, 5 May 1944, NARA RG 331, Entry 6, Box 45; Conf. on Venereal Disease, 29 Mar. 1944, NARA RG 331, Entry 6, Box 45.

\textsuperscript{128}SHAЕF, Civil Affairs Division, Belgian Section, Subj.: Prevention of Venereal Disease, 13 March 1944, NARA RG 331, Entry 47, Box 31; First U.S. Army, G-5, Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, Public Health Department
of the upsurge in syphilis rates in 1942-43, although they hesitated to trust the available statistics and assumed that there were at least as many unreported as reported cases of VD.\textsuperscript{129}

To some degree, the Allies anticipated that VD would be a problem because of the set of beliefs they held about western Europe. In the summer and fall of 1944, British and American soldiers brought with them the stories of their fathers and uncles who had fought in Belgium and France during the First World War, stories of good wine and easy women. Such stereotypes of western Europe’s sexual licentiousness reinforced the Allies’ own inclinations to intervention in the arena of public health.\textsuperscript{130} The Allies also, however, acknowledged that the social and economic consequences of the German occupation in Belgium had exacerbated what they perceived to be an already loose attitude towards sexual morals. One pre-liberation report on German-occupied Belgium noted that the economic situation had become so dire that “women and girls are paying for a square meal with their bodies.”\textsuperscript{131}

A memorandum on VD prevention in northwest Europe from April 1944 cautioned against understanding women’s instigation of promiscuous sex with Allied soldiers as purely the purview of professional prostitutes; rather, “there will be many amateurs in NW Europe whose moral fiber has been weakened by privations.”\textsuperscript{132} Ethel Hammond, a VD Contact Investigator in Belgium, defined two new potential sources of infection emerging from the occupation, the clandestine prostitute and “the girl friend”: “The clandestine is very often a young girl or a woman out of a job whose problem it is to get food to eat and clothing to wear or a married woman, perhaps with children, whose husband is a PoW in Germany. The “girl friend” from a “decent home” or “good family” is often in love with love and woefully ignorant.”\textsuperscript{133} The meaning of terms like “decent home” were assumed, rather than explained.

After liberation, the anticipatory anxiety regarding the spread of VD within the Allied command proved simultaneously justifiable and inadequate. The VD rate in the European Theatre of Operations (ETO) jumped from 24.44 per 1000 per annum in August 1944 to 61.36...
by mid-October 1944. Among U.S. troops on the continent, the VD rate by the end of the year had increased by nearly 200 percent. In Belgium, the incidence of VD rose steadily in fall 1944 among civilians and Allied troops alike, especially in urban centres like Antwerp, Brussels, Ghent, Mons, Verviers and Liège. Rural areas were also affected by the spread of VD, because they lacked the resources central to containment policies, for instance policemen, and also because mayors hesitated to enforce any VD control measures that would alienate their electorate. In November 1944, the SHAEF Mission in Belgium raised a call to arms, declaring to headquarters that “the incidence of VD among Allied troops deployed in Belgium has recently reached such disquieting proportions as to merit the issue of a special order on the subject by the C-in-C [Commander-in-Chief] himself.”

VD rates worsened the longer the Allies stayed in Belgium. In the month of November 1944, for instance, CA detachments and local and national health agencies reported 63 cases of gonorrhea and 46 cases of syphilis. Four months later, in February 1945, those numbers jumped to 450 and 276 for gonorrhea and syphilis, respectively. Throughout the first half of 1945, Belgium was the main source of VD infection among troops in the European Theatre, with reported cases of syphilis and gonorrhea consistently outstripping those in France and the Netherlands. The reason for the increase into 1945 related to the increasing Allied confidence

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134 Diary of Major General Albert Kenner, Chief Medical Officer, SHAEF, 8 Nov. 1944, NARA RG 331, Entry 66, Box 8. For statistics showing the minor rate of VD in August 1944 and the increase after October 1944 through to 1945, see the figures of the First Army in Appendices 17-23, Medical Statistics Summaries, Aug. 1944-Feb. 1945, Annex No. 11, Medical Section Report, First US Army, Report of Operations, 1 Aug 1944-22 Feb. 1945, NARA RG 498, Entry 891, Box 4452.


138 21 Army Group, Historical Survey for Nov. 1944, Pt. I, BNA WO 291/3734. A few months later, the Public Health Branch of SHAEF considered VD the “single most important group of civilian communicable diseases.” Major General Warren Draper, Public Health Branch, SHAEF, 22 Jan. 1945, NARA RG 331, Entry 47, Box 47.

139 See, for example, Rijkswacht Tongeren, Monthly Report, 8 Feb. 1945, AGR AA 1311, Folder 1103; Gendarmerie Liège, Monthly Report, 6 Sept. 1945, AGR AA 1311, Folder 1057.


141 Only for the week of 13 January 1945 did the number of cases in France exceed reach higher than those in Belgium. Appendix “D,” Historical Survey - Jan/March 1945, Pt. II, BNA WO 219/3737.
in victory and the fact that once the guns stopped in Europe on 8 May 1945, units became stationary and soldiers had more off-duty time and thus increased opportunity for contact with civilians. Weekly and monthly reports often contained disclaimers noting that the numbers provided rarely “represent more than a fraction of the actual number of cases infected.”

To combat the rising incidence of infection, the Allies pushed an intensive anti-VD campaign. This plan can be subdivided into two main areas: measures directed towards the prevention, discovery, diagnosis and treatment of the medical effects of VD in infected soldiers and measures intended to limit the physical, psychological and social factors that increased the likelihood of soldiers’ engagement in risky sexual behaviour and exposure to VD. In the first instance, unit commanders intensified their educational efforts to teach soldiers about the dangers of VD and drew on a wide array of supplementary materials, including memoranda, bulletins, films, literature, posters, pamphlets and manuals. This training in sexual health was an essential feature of wartime strategy and planning; a 21 Army Group Directive stated that the standard of anti-VD education should be “on at least as high a level as that of anti-gas training,” since soldiers were more likely to encounter the danger of VD than they were a gas attack. Commanders were typically supposed to emphasize abstinence as the foolproof method to avoid infection.

In September 1944 in Belgium, Reuben Seddon, a British Legal Officer with Civil Affairs, wrote to his wife that there was an “anti-sex urge mixture” in the food.

In the likely event that education failed to modify sexual behaviour, the Allies provided soldiers with chemical and mechanical prophylactics to decrease the risk of exposure to VD. Creams, condoms and other prophylactics were abundant and readily available at all leave hotels, the post-exchange and MP headquarters, as well as at specially-set up prophylactic stations

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142 Kenner to Commanding General, USFET, Subj.: Venereal Disease in the European Theater, Sept. 1945, NARA RG 112, Entry 31, Box 1264.
144 For a sample highlighting the scale of this VD campaign and some of the supplementary instructional material involved both before and after D-Day, see: Lt. Col. Thomas Sternberg and Col. Thomas Turner, Basic Principles of Army Venereal Disease Control Program (New York: The American Social Hygiene Association, 1944), NARA RG 112, Entry 31(ZI), Box 1268; Venereal Disease Control Branch, Division of Preventive Medicine, Office of the Chief Surgeon, 1945, 1st Semi-annual, undated, NARA RG 112, Entry 31(ZI), Box 1273.; 21 Army Group Directive on the Control of Venereal Disease, 29 May 1944, NARA RG 331, Entry 6, Box 45; HQ, United States Strategic Air Forces in Europe, Deputy Commanding General for Administration, Office of the Surgeon, Subj.: Venereal Disease Control, 17 Nov. 1944, NARA RG 331, Entry 65, Box 7; Preventive Medicine Division, Diary, Week ending 24 Dec. 1944, NARA RG 498, Entry UD 1187, Box 5763. For anti-VD posters and advertisements, see the files of the Office of the Surgeon General: NARA RG 112, Entry 31 (ZI), Boxes 1276-80.
145 21 Army Group Directive, 29 May 1944, NARA RG 331, Entry 6, Box 45.
146 Private Papers of Reuben Cowburn Seddon, Letter No. 5, 21 September 1944, IWM 95/19/1.
across Belgium. In the minds of many Allied officials, these preventive, troop-based strategies were futile if the VD control program failed to target the ultimate source of the scourge: civilian women. Like the Wehrmacht soldier, the American GI and British Tommy assumed that western European women were more promiscuous than women at home. A lecture prepared by the Office of the Surgeon General for Allied forces cautioned soldiers “to remember that any woman not your wife who permits you to have sexual relations with her has probably permitted other men to have sexual relations with her too.” The lecture concluded with the incitement that soldiers “be strong enough to withstand the temptations of strange places and strange women.”

The rising VD rates proved that Allied forces were evidently not strong enough.

The Battle over Belgian Law

Almost immediately after the liberation, the Allies entered into negotiations with national public health authorities and police in Belgium, requesting, first and foremost, that the Belgian government retain the regulations regarding medical and police control of prostitution and VD passed during the occupation at the behest of the German occupiers. In particular, the Allies wanted to retain the decree-laws of 3 January 1941 and 19 June 1941, which sanctioned prostitution in houses designated by the executive municipal organ, the College of the Mayor and Aldermen, and provided for the registration and compulsory medical examination of prostitutes and the obligatory treatment by doctor of their choice of all persons infected with VD. Though the laws had been declared “null and void” on paper, their practical value safeguarded their

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147 In November 1944, Greater Liège had 16 prophylactic stations in operation, reflecting the high concentration of American GIs in the area. By March 1945, Brussels had four British and eight American prophylactic stations, with plans for two more. HQ, Advance Section, Com Z, Office of the Surgeon, Preventive Medicine Division, Daily Situation and Activities Reports (DSAR), 16 Nov. 1944, NARA RG 498, Entry UD 1292, Box 6383; Penton S. Jacobs, Subj.: Venereal Disease Survey of Brussels, 14 March 1945, NARA RG 331, Entry 244, Box 229.

148 Schrijvers, Crash of Ruin, 239; Roberts, What Soldiers Do, 53.

149 “Venereal Diseases,” Lecture prepared for use, NARA RG 112, Entry 31 (ZI), Box 1266.

150 This request to retain the ordinances promulgated during the occupation was not particularly unusual; in France, in September 1944, the regulation of prostitution and VD was carried out under the laws of December 1942 and July 1943, which empowered the apprehension, detention and compulsory treatment of individuals infected with VD. SHAEF, G-5 Division, Monthly Communicable Disease Report, No. 2, 10 Sept. 1944, WO 219/3881.

applicability.\textsuperscript{152} A SHAEF-B fortnightly report, dated 3 October 1944, observed that the VD problem was “being handled as under the German occupation.”\textsuperscript{153} The Allied authorities considered the reinstatement of the German laws to be a temporary solution. What they really wanted was closure of brothels in France and Belgium, or at least the placement of such establishments as “out of bounds” to service personnel.\textsuperscript{154} A circular on VD drafted months before D-Day was clear about the position of Eisenhower’s command:

The practice of prostitution is contrary to the best principles of public health and harmful to the health, morale and efficiency of troops. No member of this command will, directly or indirectly, condone prostitution, aid in or condone the establishment or maintenance of brothels, bordellos or similar establishments, or in any way supervise prostitutes in the practice of their profession or examine them for the purpose of licensure or certification.\textsuperscript{155}

Some among the senior commanders of the Allied forces argued that brothels served a useful purpose. General George S. Patton famously said, “if they don’t fuck, they don’t fight.”\textsuperscript{156} In favour of brothels, Patton contended that soldiers would seek to satisfy their sexual instinct irrespective of any laws, prohibitions and disincentives, and considered women in regulated brothels to be “safer bets” than those engaged in “illicit prostitution.”\textsuperscript{157} The former had access to washing facilities between contacts, an advantage that most clandestine prostitutes did not have. Registered prostitutes were also more likely to be diagnosed in a timely fashion and segregated from male contacts because they could be traced more easily; by contrast, unregistered women were rarely examined unless they had been arrested.\textsuperscript{158} However, even individuals who eventually realized that it was impossible to close all brothels – because there were not enough MPs to stand in front of and monitor every maison tolérée – refused to grant any house “implied or actual recognition.”\textsuperscript{159}

\textsuperscript{152} Historical Survey for November 1944, Pt. II, BNA WO 219/3733.
\textsuperscript{154} 21 Army Group, “Dress, Discipline and Leave in Brussels,” GRO, No. 56, to be published 13 Oct. 1944, NARA RG 331, Entry 198, Box 83; Pauwels, \textit{De Canadezen}, 156. See as well other documents in RG 331, Entry 198, Box 83 on the closure of establishments and placing of entire cities, including Brussels and Liège, “out of bounds.”
\textsuperscript{155} Draft of Proposed Circular on the Control of VD, 28 March 1944, NARA RG 498, Entry UD 1187, Box 5762.
\textsuperscript{156} Roberts, \textit{What Soldiers Do}, 160.
\textsuperscript{157} George S. Patton to Eisenhower, 19 Oct. 1944, NARA RG 331, Entry 6, Box 45. See also R.C. Brooks, SHAEF, G-1, Plans and Policy Branch, Subj.: Access of Allied Troops to Houses of Prostitution, 8 March 1945, NARA RG 331, Entry 6, Box 45; Roberts, \textit{What Soldiers Do}, 160. There were others who supported brothels and dis obeyed the official SHAEF rules. As Mary Louise Roberts argues, this “double maneuvering” – the simultaneous endorsement and repression of prostitution – in occupied Europe crippled SHAEF’s efforts to curb the spread of VD.
\textsuperscript{158} G-5 Public Safety to SHAEF-Main, 21 Feb. 1945, NARA RG 331, Entry 47, Box 31.
\textsuperscript{159} HQ, Com Z, to Commanding General, Southern Line, 28 Dec.1944, NARA RG 498, Entry UD 1187, Box 5763.
troops’ patronage of houses of prostitution. The American military authorities targeted two such establishments in Valenciennes in November 1944 after five GIs were hospitalized with gonorrhea after visiting the brothels.\footnote{HQ, Advance Section, Com Z, Office of the Surgeon, Preventive Medicine Division, DSAR, 18 Nov. 1944, NARA RG 498, Entry UD 1292, Box 6383.}

Allied officials in Belgium wanted to go a step further than the Germans and make prostitution illegal. By late 1944, this power seemed within grasp. In early November 1944, Dr. Marteaux, the Belgian Minister of Public Health, informed Paul Hawley, Chief Surgeon in the ETO, that he planned to submit two draft laws to the Council of Ministers.\footnote{Dr. A. Marteaux to Major General Paul Hawley, Chief Surgeon, HQ ETOUSA, 10 Nov. 1944, NARA RG 498, Entry UD 1187, Box 5763.} The first would forbid the practice of prostitution in Belgian territory, establish a rehabilitation programme for affected persons and recommend creation of a morals police to aid in the repression of clandestine prostitution. The second would make the notification and treatment of VD compulsory.\footnote{SHAEF-B, Daily Casum No. 48, 10 Nov. 1944, BNA WO 219/3920.} Marteaux was confident the Council would pass both decrees within a few days and promised to “insist particularly on the necessity not only to defend the health of our own people but also to protect that of the soldiers of the Allied armies.”\footnote{SHAEF-B, Daily Casum No. 48, 10 Nov. 1944, BNA WO 219/3920.} The Allies were impressed by the Belgian government’s willingness to meet their demands. For Hawley, “This is exactly in line with…the attitude of the French Ministry of Health. It is very interesting to see these European countries who have heretofore always viewed prostitution as an essential part of the social fabric rapidly adopting the modern view of this evil.”\footnote{Hawley to Barker, 16 Nov. 1944, NARA RG 498, Entry UD 1187, Box 5763.} Hawley’s comment reflected the sense of superiority among the American forces that their role on the continent was to bring the social landscape of western Europe into line with the new, modern, and more moral, world.

As it turned out, Dr. Marteaux resigned before the Council received and approved the draft laws. His resignation signaled the third major change in the Ministry of Public Health since liberation and effectively meant that there was no official public health authority with decision-making powers. The Ministry of Health reverted to the status of a bureau within the Ministry of the Interior and, in December 1944, was transferred to the Ministry of Labour.\footnote{SHAEF-B, Daily Casum No. 51, 17 Nov. 1944, BNA WO 219/3920; SHAEF-B, Fortnightly Report, No. 5, 28 Nov. 1944, BNA WO 202/685; SHAEF-B, Daily Casum No. 59, 13 Dec. 1944, BNA WO 219/3920; SHAEF-B, Daily Casum No. 60, 16 Dec. 1944, BNA WO 219/3920.} Matters relating
to public health were thus stalled and confused; Dr. Marteaux’s successor, Dr. De Laet, tried to assuage Allied concerns by issuing a memo to all physicians in early December 1944. The Minister criticized the fact that the Belgian medical profession had, up to that point, basically ignored prewar and wartime legislation regarding the obligatory notification of all cases of communicable diseases, including VD, to the public health and civil authorities. If doctors hesitated to apply “the letter of the law” during the German occupation of 1940-44, such vacillation was no longer acceptable, Dr. De Laet declared, because “today, the responsibility of National defense is added to your medical duty.” He insisted that physicians provide the Allies’ with public health data and pointed out that Belgians themselves benefited from the implementation of these laws; the war was not over, even if victory was on the horizon. With this in mind, De Laet incited physicians to remember that “keeping the fighting capacity of the soldier must be the premier object of our efforts.” He warned doctors and laboratory staff that their work would be monitored and he would be informed of any acts of deliberate negligence.166

Dr. De Laet’s appeal failed to satisfy Allied authorities, who in turn advocated for stricter regulations relating to the social and medical control of women and even prepared a draft decree at the end of December 1944 for the government.167 The Allies no longer considered the criminalization of prostitution essential for the protection of their forces; what was necessary, according to a 21 Army Group survey, was “the power to ensure effective examination and treatment of any women against whom reasonable evidence exists that she has infected a soldier.168 The proposed decree sought dominion over all women denounced by an Allied soldier or considered suspect and obscured the differential status of sex workers from non-sex workers. The plan thus shifted from one that focused on the eradication of prostitution to one modelled after the Germans’ approach; the Allies would tolerate sex work, but with the caveat that women’s bodies be placed at the discretion of military, medical and police agents. To give one example from the draft decree, the Allies wanted medical inspections of suspected women to

166 Copy of Circular from Minister of Public Health to all doctors, 8 Dec. 1944, AGR AA 1311, Folder 889.
167 SHAEF-B to SHAEF Main, G-5, Subj.: Control of Venereal Diseases, 30 Dec. 1944, NARA RG 331, Entry 47, Box 47; Draft Decree, 28 Dec. 1944, BNA WO 219/3735A.
168 Historical Survey for November 1944, Pt. II, BNA WO 219/3733. Civil Affairs representatives likewise argued that the anti-VD campaign was destined to fail if military and local police in Belgium lacked the ability to apprehend and detain women “suspected to be infective.” 21 Army Group, Rear HQ, Civil Affairs, Copy, Subj.: Control of VD, SHAEF Mission to Belgium, 16. Dec 1944, BNA WO 219/3735A.
consist of “an examination of any part of the body which the Medical Officer considers necessary.”

In early 1945, the Allies got their legislation, but it lacked the broad scope originally envisioned. The Council of Ministers signed a law on 24 January, providing for the mandatory treatment of infected persons and the registration of cases and the hospitalization of sufferers in certain circumstances, among other provisions intended to check the spread of venereal diseases. The legislation was poorly received in the press. La Lanterne published an article with the provocative headline “Are the doctors going to obey von Falkenhausen?” Noting that the methods of the Allies and Belgian government to regulate VD and prostitution looked uncannily similar to those of the Germans, the journalist criticized the notion that doctors could be forced to “denounce” – a loaded term in liberated Europe – their patients:

The origins of this measure will not cause any astonishment when one learns that it was promulgated under the occupation by the order of General von Falkenhausen. What is the basis of this order, dragged out a year after the departure of the occupying power, why revive this dangerous measure? Is it really necessary to have recourse to General von Falkenhausen for such a measure? What are those responsible hiding behind. [sic]

The article suggested that breaching doctor-patient confidentiality was an ineffective strategy because patients would feel betrayed and “go to the quacks to obtain an illusory cure by the use of medicaments as ineffective as they are harmful.” Like their German predecessors, the Allies struggled to convince Belgian general practitioners to alter their long-held ideas about the rules of confidentiality in the medical sphere; they were further exasperated about the delay in the construction of the notification system regarding cases of incomplete treatment because of “the lack of appreciation by the profession about the preventive nature of their work.”

In early 1945, the new decree-law confronted yet another obstacle: the Belgian government refused to sanction the required supplementary instructions to the regional

169 Draft Decree, 28 Dec. 1944, BNA WO 219/3735A.
170 Public Health Report, 21 Army Group, CA/Mil Gov Branch, Historical Survey - January/March, 1945, Pt. 1, BNA WO 219/3736A.
171 Other provisions included the prohibition of advertising of anti-venereal drugs and treatments, the prohibition of sale of anti-venereal drugs by pharmacists (except with a physician’s prescription) and penalties of fines (26 to 1000 francs) or imprisonment (eight days to two years) of VD-infected persons who engaged in sexual intercourse and fines and imprisonment of physicians and pharmacists who failed to observe the law. Arrêté-loi relatif à la prophylaxie des maladies vénériennes – 24 Jan. 1945, Moniteur Belge, 26 Jan. 1945; SHAEF-B, Daily Casum No. 66, 6 Jan. 1945, BNA WO 219/3920; SHAEF-B, Daily Casum No. 72, 27 Jan. 1945, BNA WO 219/3920.
172 “Are the doctors going to obey von Falkenhausen?” La Lanterne, 10 Feb. 1945, NARA RG 331, Box 47, Entry 47.
inspectors of hygiene. In Ganshof van der Meersch’s assessment, “it seems on the one hand, [the government] fears to take steps that could be criticized and, on the other hand, wants, through its abstention, to put pressure on the inter-allied military authority so that they suppress all of the dancing clubs they have opened in different centres.” It appears that the Belgian government turned the implementation of the decrees into a bargaining chip. Belgian officials, accompanied by a “scurrilous” press and radio campaign, correlated the increase in VD with the dance clubs operated by the Allies, arguing that VD had all but “disappeared” in Belgium before the liberation. La Lanterne claimed that if there were any traces of VD, “one certainly did not find it among the good-class girls who at present go to these clubs. But the evil is here.”

The Belgians argued that because Allies prohibited their soldiers from visiting maisons tolérées, the men set up private clubs in search of entertainment and sexual fulfillment. In addition to often being sites of brawls between soldiers and civilians, Allied dance halls were also spaces for illicit activity, including alcohol consumption and sex, and were difficult to monitor. In Mechelen, the local Chief Constable was forced to intercede with the head of the

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175 Ganshof van der Meersch to C.A.C Lieutenant van Leckwyck, Subj.: Règlementation de la prostitution, 15 Jan. 1945, AGR AA 1311, Folder 889. The Allies were aware that the law was “pending a satisfactory solution of the question of Belgian girls attending dances at Allied Entertainment centres.” SHAEF-B, Daily Casum No. 72, 27 Jan. 1945, BNA WO, 219/3920; Col. W.H. Crichton to SHAEF-Main, 6 Feb. 1945, BNA WO 219/3737.

176 21 Army Group to SHAEF Main, Subj.: Legislation for VD Control, 6 Feb. 1945, BNA WO 219/3737.

177 La Lanterne, 10 Feb. 1945, NARA RG 331, Box 47, Entry 47. For other references to “gangster” behaviour, see Hitchcock, *Bitter Road to Freedom*, 92, and Conway, *Sorrows of Belgium*, 310.


British military police, the Provost Marshal, on behalf of the townspeople after a ball at the Alcazar Dance Hall. The chief stated that the conduct of American GIs from the 104th Infantry Division was inappropriate to the point that “our Girls were obliged to leave or be humiliated by the soldiers.” The Deputy Provost Marshal, unimpressed with “the truly disgusting behaviour” of the troops, criticized local MPs for failing to monitor the soldiers and wanted the matter taken to the leadership “because the damage these personnel have done towards American prestige and incidentally to Allied relationship [sic] is very considerable.”

The Belgian government manipulated the Allies’ desire for anti-prostitution legislation in Belgium to secure its own goal, the closure of the dance halls. The Allies scoffed at the request to shut down the clubs and open brothels instead. British medical authorities argued that dance clubs helped to decrease, rather than increase, VD. In the Civil Affairs Detachment of 21 Army Group, Colonel Crichton sought to “expose the fallacy that the brothel is ‘safe.’” He wrote to SHAEF-Main in February 1945, requesting relevant articles and statistics, arguing that if he could convince “everyone concerned that the brothel is not the answer to the problem we could then persuade the Belgian government why our policy of providing healthy distraction is sounder than that of providing unlimited, degrading and extremely dangerous brothels.”

The Allies eventually capitulated to the Belgians’ political power play. A conference in the first months of 1945 called by the Deputy Adjutant General at SHAEF “sympathetically discussed” the terms of the Ministry of Health and recommended complying with any restrictions or policies of chaperonage suggested by the Belgian government relating to the dance clubs. In February 1945, the Belgians finally placed the January law into practicable effect by issuing the necessary instructions. The Belgian government had challenged Allied hegemony in the country and emerged from the battle with partial success, if not slightly greater confidence in its political muscle.

181 Chief Constable, Mechelen, to Provost Marshal, British Forces in Mechelen, Subj.: American Forces in Mechelen, undated, NARA RG 331, Entry 198, Box 83.
182 Deputy Provost Marshal, response to police report, Mechelen, undated, NARA Entry 198, Box 83.
185 Crichton to SHAEF-Main, 6 Feb. 1945, BNA WO 219/3737.
Beyond Legislation: Raids, Space and Coercion

The failure of the Allies to enact an all-encompassing anti-VD and prostitution program via the Belgian legal system was a hiccup in their drive to control Belgian women’s social mobility. One case from the province of Limburg is particularly instructive. In February 1945, a provincial CA officer, Captain Kelley, devised an action plan for towns with large numbers of soldiers because he considered the VD legislation just passed by the Belgian government insufficient for the protection of Allied forces. This plan included asking the mayor “to issue a decree requiring that any person suspected by the police or military authorities of being a prostitute submit to an examination by a medical doctor to be selected by the commune.” If the individual was diagnosed with VD, she was required to submit to treatment prescribed by a physician. The mayor would further be asked to name a medical board upon which Army Medical Officers sat. The goal was clear: “In this way prostitutes are unable to evade the law by going to an unscrupulous physician of their own choice.” This measure was harsher than under the German occupation, where women could seek examination and treatment from a doctor of their choice.\footnote{Annette Timm’s work on Allied-occupied Berlin confirms that Allied laws were sometimes harsher than those from or predating the Third Reich. One 1945 ordinance made it an offense for a German woman to infect someone with VD even if the transmission occurred before the women knew she was sick. Timm, \textit{Politics of Fertility}, 198-9.} Penalties for violation of these rules included fines or jail time. The CA detachment even formed a sort of “back door” agreement with the courts to ensure that the sentence of imprisonment was imposed in every case. The mayors of Maaseik, Hasselt, Visé, Tongres, Eisden and St. Trond had either confirmed or intended to confirm these measures by the time of the Provincial Liaison Officer’s Report of 15 February 1945.\footnote{Provincial Liaison Officers Reports, Limburg, 15 Feb 1945, BNA WO 202/647.} Women in these towns had few options as army, judicial and legislative authorities joined forces.

The shrewdness of the Limburg case is exceptional. In most areas, the Allies tried to trace women by establishing a system of contact investigation whereby infected soldiers gave personal details about the women from whom they had supposedly contracted VD. In general, however, the system of notification and tracing contacts was haphazard. American, British and Canadian soldiers were no better than their German counterparts at remembering information about the women they had sex with. The information provided by Allied troops was so scanty that it was useless in more than 40 percent of cases.\footnote{Report on Public Health, 21 Army Group, CA/MG Branch, Historical Survey, December 1944, Part II, WO 219/3735A. Between 6-10 November 1944, Lt. Ethel Hammond of the Army Nurse Corps conducted interviews} One private, diagnosed with gonorrhea in early
February 1945, could recall only that he had worn a condom and that the place of exposure was a Brussels hotel.\textsuperscript{190} The Allied system of contact tracing failed to operate as effectively as it had in the United Kingdom in 1943 because of three problems distinctive to continental Europe: language difficulties, geography and the sheer prevalence of sex work and VD.\textsuperscript{191}

The efficacy of contact investigation looks rather different from the perspective of Belgian women, its chief targets. Almost immediately after the liberation, women were tracked, apprehended by the civilian and/or military police and then forcibly hospitalized for examination and treatment in Belgium’s largest cities.\textsuperscript{192} Allied officials were well aware that sex occurred outside of brothels. As a Public Health Report from 21 Army Group noted in November 1944, “the main difficulty in the control of the disease is not the prostitutes in the brothels which are in any case out-of-bounds but the prostitute disguised as a waitress in a café, or an entertainer or dancing partner, or even as a cloakroom attendant, and the enthusiastic amateur.”\textsuperscript{193} Ghent was reported to have 200 registered and 700 unregistered prostitutes, with nearly all of its 148 small cafés functioning as brothels.\textsuperscript{194} Even natural spaces warranted suspicion. In Namur, local authorities requested the nighttime closure of Parc Marie-Louise because of the frequent “orgies” hosted there under the cover of darkness.\textsuperscript{195}

Sex was everywhere and, by extension, everywhere threatened the welfare of Allied troops. After September 1944, local Belgian police forces swapped their German military police partners for American and British MPs in order to carry out raids of dubious establishments and streets and round up suspect women.\textsuperscript{196} Over in Liège, the local authorities and Provost Marshal agreed to conduct spot raids nightly in the city after a VD control survey discovered that some

\textsuperscript{190}Pvt. Clifford B., Individual Case Report of VD, 6 Feb. 1945, NARA RG 331, Entry 100, Box 41. For other "Individual Case Reports", see NARA RG 331, Entry 244, Box 229 and Entry 100, Boxes 40-41.
\textsuperscript{191}HQ Theater Service Forces, European Theater, Office of the Theater Chief Surgeon, Report of Operations: 8 May 1945 to 30 September 1945, NARA RG 498, Entry 593, Box 4033; Venereal Disease Survey of Brussels, 14 March 1945, NARA RG 331, Entry 244, Box 229.
\textsuperscript{192}HQ, Advance Section, Com Z, Office of the Surgeon Preventive Medicine Division, Weekly Activities and Problems Report (WAPR), 5 Nov. 1944, 25 Nov. 1944, 2 Dec. 1944, NARA RG 498, Entry UD 1294, Box 6389.
\textsuperscript{194}Costello, \textit{Virtue Under Fire}, 248.
\textsuperscript{195}Armée Belge, Excerpt from the 4\textsuperscript{th} Military District, 25 Aug. 1945, AGR AA 1311, Folder 527.
\textsuperscript{196}HQ, Advance Section, Com Z, WAPR, 5 Nov. 1944, NARA RG 498, Entry UD 1294, Box 6389; WAPR, 17 March 1945, NARA RG 498, Entry UD 1294, Box 6389.
239 establishments were being used for sexual transactions.\textsuperscript{197} By early 1945, the city had six “vice squads” in operation, with each squad composed of one MP and one civilian policeman.\textsuperscript{198} Providence also intervened to help regulate public space on a few occasions. In Liège, where exposure to VD in cafés and rooming houses reached a “new high” precisely as the Wehrmacht launched the Ardennes offensive in mid-December 1944, the dropping of “buzz bombs” (courtesy of the Germans) put some of these establishments out of commission.\textsuperscript{199}

Practical problems relating to enforcement, manpower shortages and bureaucratic bumbling routinely plagued the system of spatial control. In spring 1945, Allied officials in Antwerp worried that VD rates would surge following the cessation of German bombing efforts to destroy the ports. However, the local U.S. Provost Marshal was “not eager” to institute “out of bounds” regulations because they were effectively unenforceable: “There are entirely too many waterfront cafés where prostitution occurs to permit proper enforcement without a sizeable increase in staff.” Meanwhile, in Brussels, Provosts needed reports of three or more VD infections having been contracted on any premises before the location could be placed “off limits” for a three-month period. The Allies accused the president of the Café Proprietors Association of not taking stringent steps to repress prostitution; in the city’s registry of sex contact histories, only eight cafés were named three or more times as places of infection. Although Belgian authorities did take action against these few establishments, Allied officials fretted about the procedure’s effectiveness, given that “there are reported to be well over 300 cafés where prostitution or solicitation for prostitution occurs.”\textsuperscript{200}

In Verviers in March 1945, the Allies took steps to prevent the movement of known prostitutes from the jurisdiction of one detachment to another as a control measure for VD.\textsuperscript{201} This tactic is unsurprising, given the debates before Operation Overlord about the potential deportations of real and suspected sex workers from areas occupied by Allied troops.\textsuperscript{202} The policing of space and bodies in liberated Belgium was indiscriminate and showcased the

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\item \textsuperscript{197} HQ, Advance Section, Com Z, DSAR, 5 Nov. 1944, NARA RG 498, Entry UD 1294, Box 6389.
\item \textsuperscript{198} HQ, Advance Section, Com Z, WAPR, 20 Jan 1945, NARA RG 498, Entry UD 1294, Box 6389.
\item \textsuperscript{199} HQ, Advance Section, Com Z, WAPR, 16 Dec. 1944, NARA RG 498, Entry UD 1294, Box 6389. Two brothels were also bombed out on 16 January 1945 in Liège. WAPR, 20 Jan. 1945, NARA RG 498, Entry UD 1294, Box 6389.
\item \textsuperscript{200} SHAEF-B to SHAEF Forward G-5, Public Health, Subj.: VD Control, Belgium, 4 May 1945, NARA RG 331, Entry 47, Box 47.
\item \textsuperscript{201} SHAEF, G-5, Civil Affairs Weekly Summary, No. 42, 31 March 1945, NARA RG 331, Entry 56, Box 132.
\item \textsuperscript{202} SHAEF, Subj.: Prevention of VD in NW Europe, 22 April 1944, NARA RG 331, Entry 65, Box 7; Brigadier D.A.G. to DMS, Subj.: Venereal Diseases, 5 May 1944, NARA RG 331, Entry 6, Box 45.
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conservative and misogynist attitudes of both the Belgian and Allied authorities. In Liège, as of November 1944, civilian policemen had picked up forty women for medical examination in fifty days. American soldiers had named about half of these women as sex contacts; the other half had been “selected” by the police. With no clear criteria with which to evaluate whether a woman was “suspect,” policemen generally relied on their own socially constructed schemas of female sexual propriety. The discretionary nature of the police raids in 1944-45, which echoed that of 1940-44, signaled that any “deviant” behaviour assumed to be transgressing accepted gender roles and norms was just as unwelcome after the liberation as before it.

Allied and Belgian efforts to control the social mobility of a wide variety of women were not always successful and expose the contested nature of police and military tactics. A “colossal” raid conducted by the morals police in collusion with Allied MPs in a specific quarter of Liège in late February 1945 roused public rage. The raid had ensnared 150 women who were freed by police only after medical examination. Of the 150, only thirty women had VD. Though agreeing that police actions were necessary to curb the spread of VD, an HCSE report about the raid advised caution: “We are in full agreement that we are looking eagerly for corrupt beings in order to avoid a new scourge; such action, however, raises a scandal due to the fact of having forced examination upon certain, non-suspect women who were accidentally found on the premises.” The press called on the police to be more discriminating in the future. Nor were young women passive objects of the VD control campaign. In Eupen, where the Americans ordered suspect women to be confined and treated in the Sint-Niklaas hospital, the facility’s director reported three escapes and noted that other women intended to follow suit if they were not released. Within the national anti-VD campaign that targeted their moral and bodily integrity, women and other individuals sometimes found avenues to subvert the foreign, state, medical and juridical actors that tried to discipline them in the name of public health.

**Conclusion: A Liberation of What Kind?**

It is tempting to recast relations between liberators and liberated in 1944-45 as a repeat of those between occupier and occupied in 1940-44. The Allied liberation in early September 1944 technically marked the beginning of a new era in Belgium; however, for many citizens, it felt as

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203 HQ Advance Section, Com Z, DSAR, 11 Nov. 1944, NARA RG 498, Entry UD 1292, Box 6383.
though one occupation had been replaced by another. To some degree, the historical evidence supports this type of comparison between the periods of occupation and liberation in Belgium. The implications of Allied and Belgian investments in controlling female sexuality and women’s social mobility – including extra-legal measures like the *tonte*, the surveillance of public space, vice raids and arbitrary arrests – ensured that in some respects 1944-45 did not look much different than the years of occupation and that the period was for many Belgian women “a liberation without liberty.”

But to dismiss the liberation years as an extended period of foreign occupation obscures the importance of the female body to the rearrangements of power – between men and women, between state and citizenry and between nation-states – in the aftermath of world war. Just as the German occupiers had mobilized sexual politics in the pursuit of a Thousand-Year Reich, Belgian and Allied officials also politicized women’s bodies and sexuality but in pursuit of different objectives. Debates about fraternization between Allied troops and Belgian women make visible the ways in which female sexuality became a locus for anxiety about the moral reconstruction of a violated “small country” and the realization of American dominance in Europe in the postwar period. The Belgians reappropriated women’s sexuality and physical bodies both from the Germans and from the Allies as a means of dismantling the occupation and reasserting the masculine sovereignty of the Belgian nation-state. For the Allies, focusing on the Belgian female body as an infectious site requiring management simultaneously worked to justify their own interventions into the arena of Belgian public health and to naturalize American dominance in Belgium.

Intimacy did not lose its importance after the occupation and war effectively ended in 1944; instead the militarization and politicization of bodies and relations continued to thread their way through everyday life long after the foreign occupiers had departed. The contours of intimate politics may have changed shape, courtesy of a new military presence and the return of the old political guard, but the powerful role of intimacy in shaping Belgian society and ordinary lives persisted across the 1944-45 divide.

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206 This phrase is borrowed from Régine Torrent’s chapter of the same name in *La France américaine: Controverses de la libération* (Brussels: Racine, 2004).
Conclusion

Between May 1940 and the summer of 1945, Belgium was a country overrun with soldiers. The first of these were the Germans who, under the banner of a military administration, sought to use Belgium as a launching pad for Hitler’s planned invasion of Great Britain and exploit the country’s material resources and labour power for the war effort. Throughout the ensuing four and a half years of occupation, Germans and Belgians lived alongside one another and interacted in everyday life, in spite of the consistent and repeated efforts of the German High Command and Nazi party to incite German men in uniform to avoid contact with local civilians all over Europe. This project has explored one facet of the German-Belgian encounter between 1940 and 1944: the intimate. Domains of intimacy – including sexual violence, sex work, marriage and reproduction – were crucial in the shaping and management of German rule in occupied Belgium; these domains provided modes and spaces within which to define or resist racial categorization, affirm or challenge political loyalty and, ultimately, consolidate or confound the Nazi program to remake Europe, the New Order. The politics of occupation in Belgium between 1940 and 1944 were made between and among people – men and women – not in spite of them.

To explore people’s gendered, sexual and emotive contacts with one another is to understand something about the dynamics of power and political authority. This dissertation has focused chiefly on how German military officials, Nazi functionaries, physicians and racial experts harnessed ideas, discourses and policies concerning sex and its related ties and consequences in the pursuit of wartime victory and the creation of the Thousand-Year Reich. In other words, the central question here has not been how Belgians and Germans experienced intimacy during the occupation but how the German authorities thought people experienced it and the politicization of presumed relations. Germans and Nazis devoted a significant amount of paper to regulating “contact zones” between occupier and occupied.

This attention to what their soldiers were doing with civilian women failed to waver even as the Nazis developed a systematic program of genocide against the Jews of Europe and military victory looked less and less likely by the second half of the war. Recall, for instance, that in November 1942, just after after the Germans completed the forced transfer of 17 000 Jews from Belgium to Auschwitz, Hitler amended the Heiratsordnung for the Wehrmacht, adding the Flemish to the list of Germanic brethren and permitting marriages between soldiers and Flemish
women. It is tempting to read this expansion of marriage policy as exemplary of the massive apparatus of the Third Reich, with its tentacles in all areas of political, racial, social and economic administration, and to argue in favour of insurmountable gaps between ideology and policy, between what was planned and was actually possible; how could a state, along with its allies, carry out a program of mass murder while devoting time and effort to refining policies and decrees relating to soldiers’ marriages?

In fact, the reverse argument is evident: the instrumentalization of intimacy in the construction and maintenance of occupation in Belgium and elsewhere was not a misdirected calculation or side-project, but worked in conjunction with other policies and to the same end of creating a nazified Europe. Enabling marriages between Flemish and later Walloon women and German soldiers in the second half of the war served to bring the two populations together and facilitate long-lasting bonds that would (literally) regenerate themselves across the generations. The German occupiers cared deeply about the children of German-Belgian parentage born during the war because they were “clean slates.” Unblemished with the biases and experiences of their parents, these children – future supporters, soldiers and reproducers – provided a key opportunity for the Reich to secure its perpetuation.

Certainly, some aspects of the Germans’ intimate politics in occupied Belgium seem, at first glance, inconsistent and indicative of the ways in which the occupiers thwarted their own goals. But an emphasis on the contradictions of German policies often conceals the inherent logic and underlying purpose of intimacy in relation to the larger visions and schemes of the Third Reich. Consider the system of regulated prostitution initiated and promoted by the German military command in occupied Belgium in 1940-41, which seemed to contradict the High Command and Nazi party’s admonishments against fraternization with non-German women and their emphasis that German soldiers prioritize their fitness and hygienic health above physical pleasure. Read differently, however, regulating Belgian sex workers provided solutions for both of these problems, enabling military and party officials to “work through” the tension between their insistence on soldiers’ discipline and restraint and their belief in soldiers’ physiological and emotional need for sexual satisfaction – this was how sex workers could be simultaneously socially marginal and useful to the occupation project.

The regulation of everyday roles and relations between German men and Belgian women stood at the core of occupation policy because it had the power to demarcate, consolidate and
reproduce the binds of political allegiance and racial membership so central to the New Order. Yet at the same time, intimacy gained political traction for precisely the opposite reason; if the goal of the occupation was to secure German dominance in Belgium, “tender ties” between occupier and occupied potentially destabilized structures of power and superiority because they exposed the artificialities and gaps in Nazi-created hierarchies of race.

When soldiers danced, linked arms, slept and fathered children with Belgian women, they implicitly demonstrated that they themselves did not put much stock in official rhetoric telling them to “go German” first and to view local women as racially inferior. Attempts to use intimacy to strengthen the occupation project were also confounded by the fact that, in practice, the German command never trusted the women it allowed to satisfy troops in brothels, marry German soldiers, bear children of mixed parentage and care for those children at home, in nurseries and hospitals. Intimacy was essential to the establishment of German hegemony in Belgium and operated as a marked challenge to that very same authority. In particular, the German authorities used sex and other intimate arrangements to entice Belgians and Germans to participate in the occupation, even as they feared the physical, political and affective consequences.

Attention to sex and intimacy reveals how the Third Reich attempted to buy loyalty not only with money, career opportunities, upward social mobility and pilfered goods but also by holding out pleasure. Even though the German High Command constantly cautioned soldiers about the dangers of promiscuity and worried about forms of alleged sexual deviance, including homosexuality and sexual violence, at no point during the occupation of Belgium or the entire war for that matter did it consider implementing a full ban on sexual activity for its forces. That sex served a purpose prompts more nuanced understandings about the often-blurred structures of domination, subjugation, coercion and consent in operation across Europe between 1939 and 1945.

We know more about the multiple manoeuvrings of intimacy in some areas of occupied Europe than we do about others; we know quite a lot, for instance, about relationships between Germans and local women in France, Holland, Norway, Denmark and the Soviet Union. The present study takes seriously calls for more national, regional, transnational and comparative studies; only with a broader perspective can we understand what is distinct or common in terms of the gender and sexual politics at work in a specific wartime, conflict-ridden or politically
unstable society. In focusing on Belgium, I have attempted to examine the space as the soldiers experienced it – as a gateway to both the west and east – in order to analyze how concepts and policies moved across, between and among the broad fronts of German-dominated Europe. At different moments, the German occupation of Belgium looked similar to occupations elsewhere. The military’s reprimands of its soldiers for dancing with civilian women, for example, followed the frontlines from Poland to France in 1939-40. Similarly, Nazi and military fears about erotic female enemy agents were not bound to a particular geographical area or group of women. In some arenas of sexual politics, thus, the German occupiers were concerned about women not because of their particular national, ethnic or racial status but because they were women.

At the same time, however, I have remained attentive to the historical specificities of the Belgian occupation, which has helped to explain important differences between western and eastern Europe. There was a reason, after all, that the Wehrmacht in 1940 intended to ensure that occupied Belgium did not end up like Poland, where, in the immediate aftermath of the invasion of 1939, the SS was able to gain a critical foothold and instigated, with the cooperation of the military, the mass killings of Jews and members of the intelligentsia. There was also a reason that policies relating to intimate contact in Belgium tended to be more mindful of public opinion and generally less repressive and brutal; consider, for example, that there were very few (if any) kidnappings of Belgian children during the war, a marked contrast to the tens of thousands of kidnapping cases from Czechoslovakia, Poland and the Soviet Union. These reasons can be traced to the memory of the first occupation of Belgium in 1914-18; the Germans intended to do things differently the second time around, though actual practice did not always reflect that aspiration.

For several members of the German military command, their arrival in Belgium in 1940 was not their first visit to the country; some had served there in the First World War and brought with them their imaginings about that earlier defeat and particularly the legacy of “the rape of Belgium.” In the interests of maintaining the stability of the military command and avoiding a defeat in the image of 1918, the Wehrmacht sought to avoid alienating the Belgian civilian population. This strategy was particularly evident in the arena of intimacy, as the German military command attempted to create a new public persona for the German soldier, one that

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distinguished him from his World War I counterpart. Unit commanders and higher-ranking officials incited German soldiers to demonstrate sexual restraint in their dealings with Belgian women; at the same time, however, the military cared less about what soldiers did behind closed doors, establishing an elaborate system of regulated brothels to provide soldiers with sexual access to local women. In occupied Belgium, the German military distinguished between the public and private spheres, even as its mobilization of intimacy as a political strategy confounded that very distinction in the first place.

The instrumentalization of intimacy was not the sole purview of the German occupiers; after September 1944, Allied military and Belgian civil authorities found it expedient to harness female sexuality as a means to rearrange the power dynamics after the departure of the Germans. For Belgian men, “acting out” on women’s bodies symbolized both the deconstruction of the Nazi order and the restoration of the prewar system of liberal (male) democracy. Meanwhile, for the Allied forces, the control of Belgian women’s health and social mobility was a clear demonstration of the belief that Europeans were no longer fit for self-governance. Postwar debates and discussions about rampant fraternization and rising rates of VD only transparently disguised the much larger Allied chastisement that the Belgian state had failed to defend and protect its citizens from the German yoke twice in thirty years.

Even though both Germans and Allies used intimacy in 1940-45 to reach specific objectives, it is reductive to assume that the politicization of intimacy always takes precisely the same form or that it has the same end in sight. This dissertation has shown the mutability of intimacy – with varying degrees of success – for all sorts of political projects between 1939-45: the construction of the Nazi racial empire; the Wehrmacht’s quest for military victory in Europe; the enlistment of Belgian support for occupation initiatives; the galvanization of German troops to keep fighting; the dismantling of the German occupation command in Belgium after liberation and the process of national reconstruction; and, finally, the consolidation of Allied political authority on the continent. These multiple, sometimes paradoxical, ways in which intimacy and sexuality became political tools suggest a wider resonance for understanding the role of bodies, emotions, sexuality and sexual relations in wars, foreign occupations, civil conflicts and periods of transition and political instability. Intimacy is not simply a set of relations between people, but a central pivot of power that can alternately serve, reproduce and challenge certain political orders, often with unexpected and unintended results.
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