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**'Improperly and amorously consorting': post-1945  
relationships between British women and German  
Prisoners of War held in the UK**

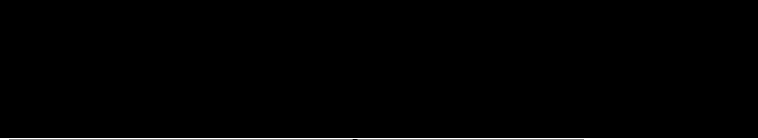
**Mary Ingham**

Thesis submitted for examination for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
Department of History, Goldsmiths College, University of London

March 2019

## **Declaration of Authorship**

I, Mary Ingham, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.



6 March 2019

## **Acknowledgements**

This study would not exist without the generous response of all the women and men who shared their personal memories with a stranger. I am greatly indebted to them and to their families. I also owe a large debt of gratitude to Heidi Berry, and latterly to Ingrid Rock, for their invaluable translation assistance. I must also thank Sally Alexander for encouraging the proposal, my supervisor Richard Grayson for his support and guidance through this process, and others who have offered constructive suggestions. Appreciative thanks also go to Vivienne Richmond, the History Department and Goldsmiths for enabling me to resume the project after personal circumstances necessitated a long period of interruption.

## **Abstract**

This thesis concerns transgressive gender relations in Britain in the aftermath of WW2. It examines illicit intimate relationships between British women and German prisoners of war held in the UK for several years immediately following WW2. In discussing the significance of these relationships relative to gender roles, sexual relations and war, this study seeks to re-address and add a nuanced aspect to the question of the effect of the war on British women. It is argued that in the context of the gendered dimension of the transition from war to peace, these controversial relationships highlight a neglected narrative of the conflicted early postwar years. By exploring the subjectivity of both sides, this thesis also attempts to show how these relationships demonstrate susceptibility among younger age cohorts to wartime influences on British women.

Oral history testimony from the subjects themselves forms the main primary source material. These narratives, comprising interviews and correspondence with 38 former prisoners of war and 61 women, were mostly collected in the mid- to late-1980s, when many of the subjects were in their early 60s. A wide range of other sources, both primary and secondary, including official documents, newspapers and autobiographical accounts, has been used to complement, inform and verify or compare with the primary source material. Secondary sources have been drawn on for contextual, comparative and reference purposes.

These initially prohibited relationships have been summarised in general discussion of fraternisation with UK-held enemy POWs, in terms of formal and informal policing of sexuality. This thesis argues for the relevance of exploring individual protagonists' lived experience in greater depth, to clarify their place in the debate on post-conflict sexuality, and their significance in the context of war, gender relations and women's history.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

At 14, I met a German prisoner of war, whose face I can no longer fully remember, who filled all my life for one brief summer after the war... with guilt and happiness and a dread of being discovered.

Beryl Bainbridge<sup>1</sup>

Drawing on subjective narratives from British women and former German prisoners held in the UK post-1945, this study aims to contribute to the field of post-WW2 gender relations and elaborate upon existing work on the UK presence of German POWs. Recent discussion of themes of women's history points out that oral history has been effective in 'restoring narratives of women's agency', referring in particular to the work of Lucy Bland in uncovering women's agency 'in personal and private contexts'; and that such narratives have often shown women to have exercised individual agency by 'negotiation with and subversion of... [social] constraints.'<sup>2</sup> This study takes a gendered approach, by including narratives from the male participants in these relationships and discussion of their lived experience and influence.

As is discussed in more detail below, social histories of Britain have tended to overlook the postwar captive presence of German POWs; academic discussion of this presence has largely remained within POW studies, with some consideration in relation to migration. However,

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Chris Hastings, 'Beryl Bainbridge, a German prisoner of war and a secret love affair', *Sunday Telegraph*, 11 December 2005 < <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1505198/Beryl-Bainbridge-a-German-prisoner-of-war-and-a-secret-love-affair.html> > [accessed 29 January 2015].

<sup>2</sup> Catherine Lee and Anne Logan, 'Women's Agency, Activism and Organisation', *Women's History Review*, 2017, Special Issue Introduction, 1-4, (pp. 3-4); Kathryn Gleadle, 'The Imagined Communities of Women's History: Current Debates and Emerging Themes, a Rhizomatic Approach', *Women's History Review*, 22, iv (2013), 524-40, (p. 532).



recent commentators have advocated more interdisciplinary approaches, and begun to link the subject of POW fraternisation to issues relating to war and women. The present study builds on that association. It looks to position these relationships relative to discussion of effects of WW2 on British women, and gendered European post-conflict controversies.

The following sections of this introductory chapter discuss the British and European context in the debate on WW2 fraternisation relationships; the marginalisation of UK-held German POWs, in relation to Britain's 'good war' myth; and the relevance of age and developmental life stage to an understanding of change or continuity in British women's lives in the aftermath of WW2.

### *Amorously consorting – the British and European context*

In September 1946, more than a year after WW2 ended, over 400,000 German prisoners of war remained in the UK.<sup>3</sup> Although some were billeted on farms, most were held all over the UK in huddled accommodation in camps or requisitioned large houses. The majority were held for two years after the war ended, ostensibly for re-education purposes but also for reparative rebuilding and agricultural work. Repatriation took place in stages, the last not leaving until mid-1948. Fraternisation (meaning any social contact with the British population) was forbidden until December 1946, when civilians were allowed to invite POWs into their homes and the POWs permitted to walk within a few miles' radius outside their camps, but barred from entering pubs, shops or cinemas. In the British and American zones of Occupied Germany, social fraternisation had been permitted from mid-1945, with marriage between British servicemen in Germany and German women allowed from mid-1946. By comparison,

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<sup>3</sup> J. Anthony Hellen, 'Temporary Settlements and Transient Populations: The Legacy of Britain's Prisoner of War Camps 1940-1948', *Erdkunde: Archiv für wissenschaftliche Geographie*, 53, iii (1999) 191-219, (p. 193) cites rounded official figures, including 402,200 in September 1946.

in the UK, social contacts with British civilians were not permitted until December 1946, and relationships of a romantic or sexual nature with women, including walking arm in arm, remained strictly forbidden, until July 1947.

The official rationale was that such relationships would prejudice POW discipline.

Nevertheless, numerous women and POWs defied this ban. Some liaisons were discovered; resulting prosecutions and courts martial were reported in local and national newspapers.

Attitudes towards such relationships tended initially to be hostile; with time, public opinion became more sympathetic, although the issue remained controversial.

In July 1947, with more than 250,000 Germans remaining in the UK as POWs, and following considerable public pressure to permit one POW to marry the mother of his child, the marriage ban was finally lifted. Nearly 800 couples are recorded as having taken advantage of the opportunity to marry. This figure is likely to be an underestimate.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, given their hidden nature, it is impossible to estimate how many other relationships did not survive the difficulties. However, anecdotal opinion and documentary evidence suggest numbers must have run into thousands.<sup>5</sup> Against the estimated three million American service personnel who passed through Britain during WW2 and approximately 37,000 alien wives of US citizens admitted to the USA from the UK between 1946 and 1950,<sup>6</sup> numbers of Anglo-German POW relationships are clearly small. This thesis contends that these relationships, while numerically relatively small, remain significant.

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<sup>4</sup> The figure 796, given in Henry Faulk, *Group Captives: The Re-Education of German Prisoners of War* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1977), p. 169, is probably an understatement, representing marriages while Germans remained prisoners of war, without including marriages after release.

<sup>5</sup> Suggested by contributors to this study and references to fraternisation in government files.

<sup>6</sup> David Reynolds, *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain 1942-1945* (London: HarperCollins, 1996), pp. xxiv, 420. (Susan Zeiger, *Entangling Alliances: Foreign War Brides and American Soldiers in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: New York University Press, 2010), p. 100, includes those entering pre-1946, suggesting more than 70,000.)

Social histories of the postwar period generally overlook the presence of German POWs. Consideration of their captivity in the UK was initially confined to specific studies.<sup>7</sup> Academic attention was slow to move towards the subject of POWs. In their 1996 edited collection of essays on WW2 POWs, Bob Moore and Kent Fedorowich pointed to academic research on POWs (as opposed to combatants) as scattered and fragmentary. Despite captivity having been experienced by an estimated 35 million servicemen during WW2, the POW experience remained a specialist, discrete subject. Their pioneering work aimed to integrate such work, and encourage further serious consideration of 'another category of the disempowered in the twentieth century'. Drawing on evidence from government files, Moore surveyed UK government policy towards, and treatment of, Italian and German POWs held in the UK during the war itself, contrasting the collective view of Germans as dangerous, ideologically committed and ruthless opponents to be treated with suspicion, against that of Italians, seen as basically honest, having been led astray. In the context of post-1943 Armistice contact between Co-operator Italians and British civilians, Lucio Sponza raised the subject of contentious issues surrounding fraternisation and Italian prisoners' interactions with British women. He described fraternisation with women as the most recurrent denunciation among complaints from the general public, either for consenting associations or 'alleged pestering'.<sup>8</sup> Discussion of the fraternisation issue, and the general hostility this stirred, was taken up in more detail in later publications.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Faulk; Matthew Barry Sullivan, *Thresholds of Peace: German Prisoners and the People of Britain* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1979); Miriam Kochan, *Prisoners of England*, (London: Macmillan, 1980).

<sup>8</sup> *Prisoners of War and Their Captors in World War II*, ed. by Bob Moore and Kent Fedorowich, (Oxford: Berg, 1996), pp. viii, 1, Bob Moore, 'Axis Prisoners in Britain during the Second World War: A Comparative Survey', pp. 19-46, Lucio Sponza, 'Italian Prisoners of War in Great Britain 1943-6', pp.205-26 (p. 217).

<sup>9</sup> Lucio Sponza, 'Italian Prisoners in Great Britain, 1943-6', in *Divided Loyalties: Italians in Britain during the Second World War*, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000); Bob Moore and Kent Fedorowich, *The British Empire and its Italian Prisoners of War, 1940-1947* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), chapter 7, 'Neither Enemies Nor Allies: Italian Prisoners in the UK After the Armistice', pp. 148-70; *Prisoners of War, Prisoners of Peace: Captivity, Homecoming and Memory in WWII*, ed. by Bob Moore and Barbara Hatley-Broad, (Oxford: Berg, 2005)

The focus, regarding enemy prisoners held in the UK, initially remained on the majority held during the war itself: the Italians. Moore and Barbara Hatley-Broad's (2005) edited collection arose from a conference which aimed to encourage new, multidisciplinary approaches to the subject of POWs and investigate longterm consequences of war-related experience. Most of the resulting essays underlined lasting consequences of military captivity in WW2, including on family life and gender relations. Bob Moore's chapter, on British perceptions of Italian POWs up to their ultimate repatriation, drew on archival material and published accounts testifying to their welcome and unwelcome attentions to British women, in the aftermath of freedoms granted in exchange for their labour on the land. Moore offered some comparisons with German POWs: initially, the Italians were viewed as harmless, with the Germans perceived as more hostile and dangerous; in the aftermath of the war, the Germans were considered hardworking and the Italians judged as lazy, stimulating both 'contempt and sympathy'.<sup>10</sup>

Most recently, exploiting bulk searching made possible by the digitisation of newspapers, Alan Malpass has analysed, through newspaper reports and correspondence columns, British attitudes towards the German POWs held in the UK. Drawing in addition on government documents, Hansard, and Mass Observation material, Malpass posits the importance of British values and notions of fair play in public discussions of the treatment of German POWs held in the UK. Part of his chapter on fraternisation discusses illicit amorous relationships between individual German POWs and British women, focusing on detail of publicized court cases, and public discussion they attracted.<sup>11</sup>

Inge Weber-Newth and Johannes-Dieter Steinert's earlier study of postwar German migrants included former POWs who had married and settled in the UK. This work, based on oral history interviews with German migrants, briefly described the German POW presence in the

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<sup>10</sup> Bob Moore, 'British Perceptions of Italian Prisoners of War, 1940-7', in *Prisoners of War, Prisoners of Peace*, pp. 25-39.

<sup>11</sup> Alan Patrick Malpass, 'British Attitudes towards German prisoners of war and their treatment 1939-48', (Unpublished doctoral thesis, Sheffield Hallam University, 2016), pp. 155-69.

UK. Using press reports and a few ex-POW and German refugee reminiscences, it also summarised the controversy over amorous relationships, and the fascination POW camps held for some young girls, commenting that even British women who married German POWs 'sometimes had to suffer condemnation from their communities.'<sup>12</sup>

Otherwise, however, discussion of fraternisation relationships remained within the field of POW studies, despite issues around wartime moral patriotic expectations of women having been raised within the context of women's studies. In an American context, Susan Hartmann (1978) had discussed social pressure on women to fulfil certain obligations towards returning veterans in the aftermath of the war. Exploring literature which advised women to bolster the male ego by forsaking 'newly found competence and economic independence' in favour of traditional sex-role behaviour, Hartmann also found evidence of the sexual double standard 'reinforced on the grounds that the horrors of war both excused male infidelity and required female faithfulness,' with writers repeatedly stressing 'the crucial role of women's fidelity in bolstering the morale of retired soldiers.'<sup>13</sup> Echoing Hartmann's 'Prescriptions for Penelope', Phil Goodman, writing on 'Patriotic Femininity' (1998), also raised the issue of the sexual double standard in official and unofficial policing, for the sake of fighting men's morale, of women's wartime moral behaviour. In this context, although one of his oral sources alluded to British servicemen's relations with 'German girls', the subject of British women and enemy POWs was not mentioned.<sup>14</sup>

In a subsequent collection of essays, examining the 'awkward space between war and peace', the difficult transition period from war to peace in relation to European women, several contributions acknowledged contentious events relating to women and sexuality. However,

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<sup>12</sup> Inge Weber-Newth and Johannes-Dieter Steinert, *German Migrants in Postwar Britain: An Enemy Embrace*, British Politics and Society (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003), pp. 56-63.

<sup>13</sup> Susan M. Hartmann, 'Prescriptions for Penelope: Literature on Women's Obligations to Returning World War II Veterans', *Women's Studies*, 5, 1978, 223-39, pp. 230-31, 236.

<sup>14</sup> Phil Goodman, "'Patriotic Femininity": Women's Morals and Men's Morale during the Second World War', *Gender & History*, 10, ii (August 1998), 278-93 (p. 289).

although Penny Tinkler analysed official initiatives arising from concern about the behaviour of teenage girls, the essays relating to British women otherwise gave little hint of similar UK problems.<sup>15</sup>

However, Sonya Rose's 2003 study took Goodman's point further, delineating how women whose behaviour was deemed unpatriotic (including those consorting with foreign Allied servicemen), were denounced as pleasure-seeking, selfish 'anti-citizens'. Focused on Alien allies, particularly African Americans, Rose appeared to overlook British women's arguably more transgressive unpatriotic behaviour with Italian POWs. (This had been explored in the 1996 Moore and Fedorowich collection and was revisited in more detail, using government document and newspaper sources, in follow up studies by Sponza, and Moore and Federowich.<sup>16</sup>) One reason for this apparent oversight might be that although ultimately encompassing broad issues around citizenship and national identity, Rose's study had originally been quite narrowly concerned with the wartime impact on British women of 'the American presence', 'women's sexual engagements and the public commentary about such women'.<sup>17</sup>

The issue of relationships between British women and German POWs held in the UK had thus far only been discussed in the context of prisoner of war and migration studies. However, in 2013 two journal articles referenced liaisons between enemy POWs and British women in the context of the war and the immediate postwar period.<sup>18</sup> Whereas Hartmann had referred to the Penelope myth of women waiting faithfully for their warrior husbands' return, Wendy

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<sup>15</sup> *When the War Was Over: Women, War and Peace in Europe, 1940-1956*, ed. by Claire Duchon and Irene Bandhauer-Schöffmann.

<sup>16</sup> Sponza, *Divided Loyalties*; Moore and Fedorowich, *The British Empire*.

<sup>17</sup> Sonya O. Rose, *Which People's War: National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939-1945*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. v, vi.

<sup>18</sup> Wendy Webster, "'Fit to Fight, Fit to Mix": Sexual Patriotism in Second World War Britain', *Women's History Review*, 22, iv (2013), 604-24; Bob Moore, 'Illicit Encounters: Female Civilian Fraternization with Axis Prisoners of War in Second World War Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 48, 4 (2013), 742-60; Wendy Webster, *Mixing It: Diversity in World War Two Britain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

Webster employed the term 'sexual patriotism' in relation to British expectations about women's wartime behaviour while their men were absent defending them. Such expectations were demonstrated by censure of women's amorous relationships with enemies as well as allies of different nationalities. Webster underlined the double standard, whereby British servicemen's sexual behaviour overseas received little attention. But she also conceded that the 'fratting scandal' over British servicemen's relationships with enemy women in Germany in the war's aftermath 'demonstrated that they were not always exempt' from similar moral judgement. In this context, she briefly mentioned the ban on marriage with German POWs held in the UK. Ultimately, however, Webster's article (and subsequent book) centred on migration and WW2-related cross-cultural marriages as a significant catalyst in the shift towards a modern multi-national British society.<sup>19</sup>

But Moore, revisiting the subject of fraternisation with enemy POWs, chose to focus on 'Illicit Encounters'. This article expanded on his (2005) discussion of public criticism and resentment of amorous encounters with Italian POWs, but, drawing on newspaper reports and government files describing official concerns and publicity given to isolated cases, also included the even more contentious relationships with German POWs during the postwar period. Moore concluded by situating official and public attitudes towards fraternisation within contemporary debates on declining female morals, and making tentative comparisons with concerns about women's "'moral laxity" and unpatriotic behaviour' exhibited by relationships with foreign allied soldiers, as discussed by Sonya Rose. Alluding to women who fraternised with German soldiers in Occupied Europe, Moore suggested that consorting with the enemy 'may have had more to do with youthful rebellion coupled with the loosening of paternal and community control' than what he termed 'more sinister political motivation.' He speculated on the attraction of the 'exotic', and that most instances of fraternisation reflected

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<sup>19</sup> Webster, "Fit to Fight", pp. 617-18, 621.

spontaneous, irresponsible actions without considering the consequences, rather than 'predilection for a particular nationality.' Moore surmised that the public attitudes Sonya Rose had identified, condemning unpatriotic, 'anti-citizen' amorous female behaviour with foreigners, became more intransigent when these involved enemy POWs, whose work on the land, especially in respect of Italian POWs after the 1943 armistice, led to contact with women, and considerable government concern about fraternisation, which was hard to police. He aligned fraternisation with enemy POWs in the UK and wartime fraternisation with German soldiers stationed in Occupied Europe.<sup>20</sup>

Various expressions were used to describe intimate relations with the enemy in Occupied France during WW2, including '*collaboration sentimentale*', or, more crudely, '*collaboration horizontale*', found in official, press and police reports as well as historical accounts.<sup>21</sup> As part of the gendered historiography of WW2 in Europe, the subject of 'horizontal collaboration' and sexual fraternisation with the enemy has been studied in the context of Nazi Germany and Occupied Europe, both during the war itself and in its immediate aftermath.

Birthe Kundrus has described how German women in Nazi Germany, who formed romantic relationships with enemy (including British) POWs and foreign forced labourers, were accused of sullyng Aryan purity, betraying their menfolk and dishonouring their country. Locally named and shamed, sometimes publicly paraded, they were imprisoned under anti-fraternisation laws. German men who formed intimate relationships with foreign women, however, seen as enacting conquest, were reprehended much more mildly. This double standard sexism did not pass unnoticed by German women.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Moore, 'Illicit Encounters', p. 759.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Vinen, *The Unfree French: Life under the Occupation*, (London: Allen Lane, 2006), p. 176; Fabrice Virgili, *Shorn Women: Gender and Punishment in Liberation France*, trans.by John Flower (Oxford: Berg, 2002), p. 15.

<sup>22</sup>Birthe Kundrus, 'Forbidden Company: Romantic Relationships between Germans and Foreigners, 1939-1945', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 11, i & ii (January/April 2002), 201-22.



The female body as a war trophy has been explored in relation to fraternisation between Danish women and German soldiers, in the context of the absence, during Denmark's occupation, of Danish men.<sup>23</sup> In France, liberation in 1944 triggered a spate of summary retributive punishments (usually involving public head-shaving) of women perceived as guilty of horizontal collaboration.<sup>24</sup> Drawing on oral and archival sources, Hanna Diamond examined individual French women's motives – both pragmatic and personal – for entering into intimate relationships with the enemy Occupiers.<sup>25</sup> The punishment of French women for collaborating with the enemy has been interpreted as a cleansing ritual, a form of scapegoating to deflect attention from more culpable collaboration, and a means for French masculinity, diminished by four years of occupation, to redeem itself.<sup>26</sup>

In postwar Austria and Occupied Germany, desperate hunger led women to offer sexual favours in return for food.<sup>27</sup> Hunger 'revised' Occupation relationships, creating a norm of 'prostitution in order to survive'.<sup>28</sup> Expediency played no small part in Occupation relationships. An American boyfriend brought a precious commodity – food. Contact with a GI became a precarious balancing act between autonomy and subjugation: desperate need blurring the boundaries between consensus and coercion; the victorious Occupiers offered a tantalising opportunity to escape desperate circumstances. Austrian women seen consorting

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<sup>23</sup> See Anette Warring, 'Intimate and Sexual Relations', in *Surviving Hitler and Mussolini*, ed. by Robert Gildea (Oxford: Berg, 2006), pp 88-128; Anette Warring, 'War, Cultural Loyalty and Gender: Danish Women's Intimate Fraternization', in *Children of World War Two: The Hidden Enemy Legacy*, ed. by Kjersti Ericsson & Eva Simonsen (Oxford: Berg, 2005), pp 35-52; Lulu Anne Hansen, 'Youth off the Rails: Teenage Girls and German Soldiers – a Case Study in Occupied Denmark, 1940-1945', in *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe's Twentieth Century*, ed. by Dagmar Herzog (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 135-67.

<sup>24</sup> See Vine, *Unfree*, pp 157-81; Fabrice Virgili; Claire Duchon, 'Crime and Punishment in Liberated France: the case of *les femmes tondues*', in Duchon & Bandhauer-Schöffmann, pp 233-50.

<sup>25</sup> Hanna Diamond, *Women and the Second World War in France 1939-1948: Choices and Constraints* (London: Longman, 1999), pp 71, 82-86.

<sup>26</sup> Duchon, 'Crime', pp. 236-37.

<sup>27</sup> Atina Grossmann, 'A Question of Silence: The Rape of German Women by Occupation Soldiers', 'Berlin 1945: War and Rape "Liberators Take Liberties"', *October*, 72, (Spring 1995), 42-63, (pp. 59-60).

<sup>28</sup> Irene Bandhauer Schöffmann & Ela Hornung, 'Von der Trümmerfrau auf der Erbse: Ehrnährungssicherung und Überlebensarbeit in der Unmittelbaren Nachkriegszeit in Wien,' *L'Homme: Zeitschrift für Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft*, 7, I (1991), 77-105, (p. 103), cited in Duchon & Bandhauer-Schöffmann, p 224.

with Occupation soldiers received anonymous threatening letters and suffered public punishment meted out by local youths. (Young women in Germany attracted similar attention and treatment.<sup>29</sup>) Returning Austrian veterans vented the most resentment over these controversial relationships, reacting with fury, shock and bewilderment, accusing ‘Americans’ whores [of] dragging Austria’s honour into the dirt.’ Ingrid Bauer suggests such disparagement ‘made bearable the personal threat’ felt by ‘men confronted by the overpowering sexual competition from US Occupation soldiers.’<sup>30</sup> Among the victors, neither French, British, nor Soviet troops could compete with the heady ‘myth of America’ radiated by healthy GIs; defeated, downtrodden, exhausted and depressed Austrian men did not stand a chance. Some veterans reacted with resignation, accepting it as the natural outcome, victors claiming the spoils of war. These women’s betrayal and willing capitulation to the enemy symbolically reinforced their country’s defeat and rendered meaningless the sacrifices their menfolk had made during the war. While early studies stigmatized women and young girls consorting with Occupation soldiers as ‘mostly shiftless’ and ‘flotsam of the age’,<sup>31</sup> Bauer elected to describe them in terms of exuberant agency and self-determination. Rather than feckless, lost or confused, these teenagers according to Bauer exhibited ‘youthful openness to the world’ and ‘purposefulness’, seeking more than ‘hard-earned survival’. Those who denounced ‘Ami-Whores’ were casting off their own dishonour: so-called ‘Ami-Brides’ became scapegoats, a smokescreen to deflect attention from the war’s darker misdemeanours.<sup>32</sup>

Relationships between former – and arguably ongoing – enemies may be deemed purely personal by the participants themselves and even by some onlookers. But in the context of discussion of the immediate post-WW2 years they contribute, relative to Occupied Europe, a

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<sup>29</sup> Renate Greenshields, *Lucky Girl Goodbye* and its sequel *A Bit of Time* (Axminster: Greenshields & S.P.A, 1988, combined edn, 2006), p 159.

<sup>30</sup> Ingrid Bauer, “‘The GI Bride’: on the (de)construction of an Austrian post-war stereotype”, in Duchon & Bandhauer-Schöffmann, pp. 222-32, (p 226).

<sup>31</sup> Klaus-Jörg Ruhl, *Die Besatzer und die Deutschen: Amerikanische Zone 1945-48* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1980), p 97.

<sup>32</sup> Bauer, ‘GI Bride’, pp. 224, 227 (citing *Pinzgauer und Pongauer Zeitung*, 5-1-1946).

salient part of the postwar picture, encompassing and outlining gender roles and relationships in relation to war, as well as the gendered dimension of the difficult process of resolution of conflict and transition to peace. On both sides of the conflict, a picture of wounded masculinity striving to heal itself is brought into relief by these relationships: liberated Frenchmen seeking to re-assert their virility;<sup>33</sup> defeated Austrian men and Germans defending theirs – both sides exhorting a ‘Penelope pact’ of women waiting faithfully for the return from the war of the men defending them.

Women involved in Occupation relationships have been viewed as reverting to traditional sex-role stereotypes: low-status camp followers; or impressionable, irresponsible young women willing to abandon their country, their origins and their own identities by opting for economic dependence on unequal terms; succumbing to a romanticized fantasy Cinderella future in a faraway land of plenty. Alternatively, some feminist historians have emphasized their agency and enterprise, exuberantly defying public opinion, throwing off the shackles of defeat, seeking autonomy and independence by embracing their conquerors and becoming ambassadors for peace. Others have offered narratives of postwar identity transformation for women caught up in conflicts and emboldened by their own survival strategies to effect postwar shifts in gender relations.<sup>34</sup> In Occupied Germany, to stem simmering controversy over romantic relationships between German young women and Allied Occupiers, the German press endeavoured to portray German-American couples as fostering good relations between former enemies, offering a positive image of the modern German woman.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Described in a different context by Luc Capdevila, “The Quest for Masculinity in a Defeated France, 1940-45”, *Contemporary European History*, 10 (2001), 423-45.

<sup>34</sup> See Sheila Meintjes, ‘War and Post-War Shifts in Gender Relations’, in *The Aftermath: Women in Post-conflict Transformation*, ed. by Sheila Meintjes, Anu Pillay & Meredith Turshen (London: Zed Books, 2001), pp.63-77.

<sup>35</sup> Raingard Esser, “‘Language No Obstacle’: War Brides in the German Press, 1945-49’, *Women’s History Review*, 12, iv (2003), 577-603.

Given that mainland Britain did not suffer enemy occupation, it is pertinent to question whether relationships between German POWs and British women belong in the debate on post-conflict sexual relations. War and gender relations issues, including war brides, have been widely addressed by European feminist academics.<sup>36</sup> However, studies of WW2 war brides (mostly written from a North American perspective) include enemy brides, yet overlook Allied women's marriages with enemy men.<sup>37</sup> English language studies on the subject of German POWs held in Britain after the end of WW2 touch on the subject of German POWs' involvement with British women, relying on official, newspaper and *Hansard* reports of these relationships, although Kochan (1980) and Quinn (2015) offer some anecdotal evidence from former prisoners.<sup>38</sup> Three British widows of former German POWs published their personal stories, one as a first novel under the author's own name.<sup>39</sup> The other two were published as autobiographical accounts, with some names and placenames disguised.<sup>40</sup> At least two other wartime memoirs accounts describe a relationship with a POW (one German, one Austrian).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>e.g., Ingrid Bauer, 'Die "Ami-Braut": Platzhalterin für das Abgespaltene? Zur (De)-Konstruktion eines Stereotyps der österreichischen Nachkriegsgeschichte, 1945-1955', in 'Tausendundeine Geschichten aus Österreich', *L'Homme, Zeitschrift für Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft*, 7, i (1996), 107-21; Bauer, 'GI Bride', in Duchon & Irene Bandhauer-Schöffmann, pp. 222-232; Esser, "Language no Obstacle"; Marilyn Lake, 'The Desire for a Yank: Sexual Relations Between Australian Women and American Servicemen During World War II', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 2 (1992), 621-33.

<sup>37</sup> Zeiger (cited above) and Elfrieda Berthiaume Shukert & Barbara Smith Scibetta, *War Brides of WWII* (California: Presidio Press, 1988) are the most comprehensive on WW2, including German and Japanese war brides. Other English language publications on war brides include: *The War Brides*, ed. by Joyce Hibbert (Toronto: PMA Books, 1978); Pamela Winfield with Brenda Wilson Hasty, *Sentimental Journey: The Story of the GI Brides* (London: Constable, 1980); Barbara Ladouceur & Phyllis Spence, *Blackouts to Bright Lights: Canadian War Bride Stories* (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 1995); Jenel Virden, *Goodbye Piccadilly: British War Brides in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996); Melynda Jarrett, *War Brides: The Stories of the Women Who Left Everything Behind to Follow the Men They Loved* (Stroud: Tempus, 2007); Hilary Kaiser, *French War Brides in America: An Oral History* (Oxford: Harcourt Education, 2008).

<sup>38</sup> Faulk; Sullivan; Miriam Kochan, *Prisoners of England*, (London: Macmillan, 1980); Robin Quinn, *Hitler's Last Army: German POWs in Britain* (Stroud: The History Press, 2015).

<sup>39</sup> Patricia Wendorf, *Peacefully in Berlin* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1983).

<sup>40</sup> Thea Burghart, *Loving Mine Enemy* (Bognor Regis: Anchor Publications, 1985); Muriel Mae, *Enemies in Love* (Edinburgh: Pentland Press, 1994).

<sup>41</sup> Barbara Dennis, *Love was Different Then*, (London: Daily Mail PYB00378, [n.d.]); Grace Palin, *Grannie's Diaries: The Tip of the Iceberg*, compiled by Ellen Bostock (Ely: Melrose Books, 2006).

In his thesis focused on British public opinion towards German POWs in their midst, Malpass's concluding remarks call for exploration of local and individual memories of the postwar presence of the German prisoners, to further investigate 'the local and individual significance of captivity'.<sup>42</sup> My study explores 'individual significance' in the subjectivity of relationships between British women and German POWs, seeking to position them within the context of gender roles and conflict-related sexuality. Regarding illicit relationships with German POWs, Weber-Newth and Steinert had surmised that they could: 'only guess at the individual consequences of such unhappy relationships, the family problems that often accompanied them, the effect on friends and neighbours, and being publicly humiliated in the press.'<sup>43</sup> In 'Defying Racial Prejudice', Lucy Bland has extended the work of Sonya Rose by uncovering the individual experiences of British women who had children fathered by black GIs stationed in Britain during WW2 through interviews with the children themselves, portraying their mothers' stoic agency in defiance of prevailing mores. She argues that although historians like Webster and Rose have 'contributed greatly to setting the scene for an understanding of relationships between British women and black Americans during the war... they do not say a great deal about the women's actual experiences.' Bland argues that listening to such narratives 'extends our understanding of what these women went through.'<sup>44</sup>

My study examines certain young women's defiance of gendered patriotic expectations, and the extent to which their outsider relationships illuminate WW2's influence on certain British teenage girls and young women. It proposes that, although mainland Britain remained free from enemy occupation during WW2, relationships between German POWs and British women belong in post-conflict sexual relations discussions.

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<sup>42</sup> Malpass, 'British Attitudes towards German', pp. 208-09.

<sup>43</sup> Weber-Newth and Steinert, pp. 56-63.

<sup>44</sup> Lucy Bland, 'Defying Racial Prejudice: Second World War Relationships between British Women and Black GIs and the Raising of their Offspring', *Women's History Review* online, 5-7-2017, special issue "Agency, Activism and Organisation", 1-16, (pp. 1, 2.).

## *Puncturing the British postwar myth of national unity and moral impunity*

Over the latter part of the twentieth century, WW2 became increasingly memorialized through a 'feelgood' soft focus of national unity, shared moral purpose and triumphant victory.<sup>45</sup> The WW2 'good war' myth was predicated on the (deemed indisputable) Allied moral rationale for fighting and Britain's successful avoidance of surrender to the enemy. The Channel Islands, in this respect, were viewed as a separate entity, whose perceived patriotic shortcomings during their Occupation Churchill chose to keep from the British nation as a whole.<sup>46</sup> As Madeleine Bunting put it, 'Liberation of the Islands raised the spectre of the kind of social unrest which had haunted the liberation of Europe', when the British 'had watched in horror as each liberated country had turned in on itself in a frenzy of vengeance against collaborators and fraternisers.'<sup>47</sup>

The construction of British national unity and moral supremacy in WW2 has, however, been increasingly unpicked, revealing mainland Britain's own internecine conflicts and internal enemies.<sup>48</sup> Sonya Rose has shown how those in Britain who did not conform to certain national virtues were singled out for condemnation as 'anti-citizens'. Wartime notions of British nationhood were 'shaped in opposition to images of Nazi Germany' around notions of co-operation and good citizenship. Transgressive individuals included so-called 'good-time' girls, who associated with American GIs and were portrayed as selfish 'pleasure seekers', whose 'sexually expressive' personal choices were politicized and perceived as threatening wartime British national identity. Desire and pursuit of pleasure were deemed antithetical to

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<sup>45</sup> For discussion of the myth of British wartime national unity, see, for example, Lucy Noakes, *War and the British: Gender, Memory and National Identity* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998).

<sup>46</sup> See Madeleine Bunting, *The Model Occupation: The Channel Islands under German Rule 1940-1945*, (London: Pimlico, 2004) for a fuller discussion.

<sup>47</sup> Bunting, p. 238.

<sup>48</sup> Angus Calder, for example, in *The People's War*, (London: Cape, 1969), questioned the myth that Britain, with its colonial resources, had 'stood alone' in 1940, later issuing a more forceful challenge of WW2 national unity in *The Myth of the Blitz* (London: Cape, 1991).

national virtues of duty, sacrifice and courage.<sup>49</sup> Concern about exposure to moral corruption prompted attempts during the war and in the immediate postwar period to organize young British women's leisure.<sup>50</sup> Rose highlighted the controversy and alarm caused by British women and young girls associating with Black GIs.<sup>51</sup> Similar concern was expressed about teenage girls meeting Italian prisoners of war on labour detail in the UK during WW2 and its immediate aftermath.<sup>52</sup>

On the subject of gendered aspects of war-torn postwar Europe, Britain has tended to be regarded as a bystander, untouched by the moral contamination of enemy occupation. This image was reinforced in a collection of essays on marginalised gender histories of the transitional, immediate postwar period in Europe, described as 'the awkward space between war and peace'. Within contributions from Eastern and Western Europe encompassing sexual violence, hunger, persecution, humiliation and defeat, the two essays on Britain in the immediate postwar period strike a somewhat anodyne note, reinforcing the image of Britain as separate from the retributive ravages of postwar Europe, morally unsullied by occupation, free from gendered secrets or shameful silences.<sup>53</sup>

Penny Summerfield's chapter, on the effects of individual British women's wartime experiences, concluded the war either acted as a tonic, a confidence boost and catalyst to maturity, or was suffered as a tediously demanding interlude of doing one's duty, from which some women were relieved to be released, to return to traditional roles as wives and mothers.

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<sup>49</sup> Sonya O. Rose, *Which People's War? National identity and citizenship in wartime Britain 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp 14, 71-92.

<sup>50</sup> See Penny Tinkler, 'At Your Service: The Nation's Girlhood and the Call to Service in England, 1939-50', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 4, iii (1997), 353-77; Penny Tinkler, 'Girlhood in Transition? Preparing English girls for Adulthood in a Reconstructed Britain', in Duchon & Bandhauer-Schöffmann, pp. 59-70.

<sup>51</sup> See Sonya O. Rose, 'Girls and GIs: Race, Sex and Diplomacy in Second World War Britain', *International History Review*, 19, i (1997), 147-60.

<sup>52</sup> Moore, 'Illicit Encounters', pp. 750-51, 754, 757.

<sup>53</sup> Penny Summerfield, 'It Did Me Good in Lots of Ways: British Women in Transition from War to Peace' and Tinkler, 'Girlhood in Transition', pp. 13-28, 59-70.

Intimation of a difficult transition is suggested by a handful of interviewees mentioning initial restless unhappiness, including one who, although happy to be married and making a home, admitted she had felt 'unsettled' initially.<sup>54</sup> (In a study of *Woman* magazine, Janice Winship detected a radical, incipiently feminist editorial stance during the late 1940s, in respect of readers' difficulties of adjustment to the return of the men. Winship concluded, given the magazine's cautious approach to any controversial issue, that its coverage of such problems indicated 'profound discontents actually felt by women' at the time.<sup>55</sup>) Penny Tinkler's essay examined postwar planning policies in relation to anxieties about the moral welfare of teenage girls in the later stage of the war and immediate postwar period, but without detailing the substance of these concerns. A more recent study of moral panic over unfettered sexual agency of young women in twentieth-century Britain acknowledged war as a catalyst of social change. Touching on teenage girls' exploits with foreigners and servicemen, it did not, however, mention contacts with enemy prisoners of war.<sup>56</sup>

The phenomenon of conscious or unconscious 'composure' by an interviewee of an acceptable past history has been recognized as an obfuscating aspect of the oral history interview.<sup>57</sup> It also arguably acts at group and societal levels, deterring examination of uncomfortable experiences in which shame or guilt may be involved. Bunting acknowledged the emotional difficulties for Channel Islanders in confronting their painful Occupation past, including

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<sup>54</sup> Summerfield, 'It Did', p 2.

<sup>55</sup> Janice Winship, 'Nation Before Family: *Woman*, the National Home Weekly, 1945-1953', in *Formations of Nation and People*, ed. by Formations Editorial Collective (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 190.

<sup>56</sup> Carol Dyhouse, *Girl Trouble: Panic and Progress in the History of Young Women*, (London: Zed Books, 2013); see also Pamela Cox, *Bad Girls in Britain: Gender, Justice and Welfare 1900-1950* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) on policing teenage female sexuality, without mention of contacts with enemy POWs.

<sup>57</sup> See Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 11-26; Penny Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews', *Cultural and Social History*, 1 (2004), 65-93.



collaboration relationships. (Islanders insisted only a small number of women fraternised, whereas Germans formerly stationed there claimed most had Island girlfriends.)<sup>58</sup>

Relationships between mainland British women and German prisoners of war held in the UK in the immediate postwar period might be deemed insignificant, since mainland Britain did not suffer enemy invasion and occupation. However, in terms of the awkward transition from war to peace between former enemies, it may reasonably be argued that the presence of nearly half a million enemy soldiers in the United Kingdom in the immediate aftermath of the war did constitute, if not an actual enemy invasion, a pervasive enemy presence, a form of occupation – by members of a defeated army, rather than victors.

Maps of the UK marking POW camps reveal them scattered over England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, but sited most intensively in England. Between 1946 and 1948, German POWs could be seen working on roads and farms, or, latterly, walking outside their camps: ‘their numbers were such as to make a perceptible impression on British life.’<sup>59</sup> Malpass has commented that retention of German POWs as forced labour sits ill with Britain’s postwar image, and memory of the ‘good war’.<sup>60</sup> Their omission from most social histories covering the immediate postwar period suggests that this individual enemy presence, and the personal contacts that arose from it, have sat so uncomfortably with the myth of British national unity and the ‘good’, just war, emphasized by postwar memorialisation, that their place in that ‘awkward space’, the transition from war to peace, has remained largely unacknowledged.

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<sup>58</sup> Bunting, pp. 4-5, 55-56, 337, 344.

<sup>59</sup> Hellen, ‘Temporary Settlements’, fig. 4, 8, pp. 196, 204; Kochan, jacket front flap blurb. < [http://www.historyonthenet.com/WW2/german\\_pow\\_britain.htm](http://www.historyonthenet.com/WW2/german_pow_britain.htm) > [accessed 30-1-2015].

A table in Hellen, ‘Temporary Settlements’, p. 205, gives 363 camps in England, 40 in Scotland and 21 in Wales. FO 939/204 gives POW camp locations at November 1947.

<sup>60</sup> Malpass, pp. 21-22.

## The marginalisation of German prisoners of war

In 1948, as Harry Hopkins noted, 'there were still thousands of German prisoners of war around in their chocolate battledress and old peaked Wehrmacht caps.'<sup>61</sup> It seems surprising, given Hopkins' (1964) confirmation of the postwar proximity to a large part of the UK population of former enemy combatants in relatively large numbers and for several years, that most social historians' narratives covering the late 1940s ignore their presence.<sup>62</sup> Mostly fit young men in distinctive dyed battle dress often with large, coloured, diamond-shaped patches on their backs, they built houses, repaired roads, tilled fields, dug up potatoes and brought in the harvest. Yet Hennessy (1992) only merits them with one passing mention, as having vacated the Clapham Common Deep Shelter in 1948.<sup>63</sup>

Arthur Marwick's (1968) social history of Britain suggested that enemy bombing encouraged perception of the opponent as an inhuman barbarian.<sup>64</sup> His discussion of the years 1945-1950 portrayed the British as voracious newspaper readers. However, his study, published only four years after Hopkins, made no comment on the presence of almost half a million of the barbarians the population had so recently positioned itself against; nor did it mention the controversy the POWs attracted in the newspapers consumed so voraciously by the postwar reading public. Most non-fiction accounts of the Women's Land Army (WLA) depict women land workers' vital, sometimes life-endangering contribution to victory; the German POWs who latterly worked alongside them are absent.<sup>65</sup> Ann Kramer's more recent study does

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<sup>61</sup> Harry Hopkins, *The New Look: a Social History of the Forties and Fifties in Britain* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1964), p 103.

<sup>62</sup> *Age of Austerity*, ed. by Michael Sissons and Philip French (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1963) also mentioned German POWs briefly twice (pp. 38, 46).

<sup>63</sup> Peter Hennessy, *Never Again: Britain 1945-51* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992), p 441.

<sup>64</sup> Arthur Marwick, *Britain in the Century of Total War: War, Peace and Social Change 1900-1967* (London: The Bodley Head, 1968), pp 295-300. Neither his follow-up study, Arthur Marwick, *British Society Since 1945* (London: Allen Lane, 1982) nor its later edition (2003) remedied this oversight.

<sup>65</sup> Carol Twinch, *Women on the Land: Their Story During Two World Wars* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1990); Nicola Tyrer, *They Fought in the Fields: The Women's Land Army: The Story of a Forgotten Victory* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1996); Bob Powell & Nigel Westacott, *The Women's Land Army 1939-1950* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1997).

mention briefly that 'most land girls worked alongside German or Italian prisoners of war... initially a strange experience.' Kramer's chapter covering romance, however, cites only one description of the Germans as 'a bit different', a contributor adding 'we were a bit uppity', not wanting to work with them. 'They were quite nice to us apart from the fact that they would catch mice and put them in your pocket; they were young like us.'<sup>66</sup> Another patriotic portrait of the WLA relegated to a short subsection brief mention of diffident contact with enemy POWs, while also citing one former member who 'revealed' that a few girls married German POWs.<sup>67</sup>

Simon Garfield's edited transcripts of diaries from the Mass Observation archive cover the period during which the largest numbers of German POWs were held in Britain.<sup>68</sup> Four of Garfield's five selected contributors mentioned German POWs. Their comments reflected the public presence of German POWs working among the civilian population and changing attitudes towards them at different stages of the postwar period. Confronting contentious Anglo-German relations over the course of the twentieth century, John Ramsden included some discussion of German POWs in the UK both during and following WW2.<sup>69</sup> However, David Kynaston's (2007) diorama of postwar Britain ignored the German prisoners who lived and worked among the British population in the immediate postwar years.<sup>70</sup>

Although interest in the years 1945 to 1950 has grown, it has been left to individuals at grassroots level to record the presence of enemy prisoners of war living among the British population for several years and in some cases for a lifetime.<sup>71</sup> Accounts of German POWs in

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<sup>66</sup> Ann Kramer, *Land Girls and Their Impact* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2008), pp. 111-113.

<sup>67</sup> Gill Clarke, *The Women's Land Army: A Portrait*, (Bristol: Sansom, 2008), pp. 133, 136, 138.

<sup>68</sup> Simon Garfield, *Our Hidden Lives: The Everyday Diaries of a Forgotten Britain* (London: Ebury Press, 2004).

<sup>69</sup> John Ramsden, *Don't Mention the War: The British and the Germans Since 1890* (London: Little, Brown, 2006).

<sup>70</sup> David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain 1945-51*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2007).

<sup>71</sup> For example, Pamela Howe Taylor, *Enemies Become Friends*, (Lewes: Book Guild, 1997), and *The Germans We Trusted*, (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2003).

Western hands have focused on escape attempts, although a few UK-held former POWs have produced their own (mostly self-published) stories.<sup>72</sup> In 2005, a national newspaper revealed novelist Dame Beryl Bainbridge's six-year secret romance with a German POW.<sup>73</sup> German POWs held in the UK have otherwise remained absent from the mainstream discourse of the postwar period, relegated to occasional newspaper articles, privately published accounts, online individual reminiscences or local history websites.<sup>74</sup>

Noakes suggested that British memorialization of WW2 has overshadowed its more contentious and uncomfortable facets, including Allied bombing of German civilians.<sup>75</sup> Richard Overy has discussed the escalation of Allied 'terror' bombing, duplicitously eroding moral constraints. German bombing of cities was quietly withdrawn as a Nuremberg war crime indictment, 'as it was self-evident that German defence lawyers would have little difficulty in tarring Allied bombing with the same brush.'<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> e.g., Peter Phillips, *The German Great Escape* (Bridgend: Seren, 2005); Charles Whiting, *The March on London: Covert Operations in the Battle of the Bulge, December 1944* (London: Leo Cooper, 1999); Fritz Wentzel, *Single or Return? The Story of a German POW in British Camps and the Escape of Lieutenant Franz von Werra*, (London: William Kimber, 1954). Catrine Clay, *Trautmann's Journey: From Hitler Youth to FA Cup Legend*, (London: Yellow Jersey, 2010); Henry Metelmann, *Through Hell for Hitler: A Dramatic First-Hand Account of Fighting on the Eastern Front With the Wehrmacht*, (Wellingborough: Patrick Stephens, 1990); Ian Fleming, *From Schöneiche to Alton, a Prisoner of War Who Stayed: Willi Gerlach's Story* (n. pub., 2005); Fritz Hermann Zimmermann, *A Stranger in Three Continents: My Life from 1920 to 1951*, (Billericay: Acors Press, 2004); Stuart Crocker, *Foreign Shores: A True Story* (Leicester: Matador, 2010).

<sup>73</sup> Hastings, *Sunday Telegraph*, 11-12-2005.

<sup>74</sup> e.g., < [http://www.historyonthenet.com/WW2/german\\_pow\\_britain.htm](http://www.historyonthenet.com/WW2/german_pow_britain.htm) >  
<[http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain\\_wwtwo/german\\_pows\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain_wwtwo/german_pows_01.shtml)>  
<[http://www.hertsmemories.org.uk/page/no\\_95\\_batford\\_prisoner\\_of\\_war\\_camp](http://www.hertsmemories.org.uk/page/no_95_batford_prisoner_of_war_camp)> [accessed 29-1-2015]; <<http://www.islandfarm.fsnet.co.uk/>> ; 'The Secret Prisoner of War Camp in West Cumbria', *Cumberland News & Star*, 30 July 2009 <<http://www.newsandstar.co.uk/features/the-secret-prisoner-of-war-camp-in-west-cumbria-1.591448> >;  
<[http://www.hertsmemories.org.uk/page/no\\_95\\_batford\\_prisoner\\_of\\_war\\_camp](http://www.hertsmemories.org.uk/page/no_95_batford_prisoner_of_war_camp)> [accessed 29-1-2015]; <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/08/a3673208.shtml>>  
<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/50/a3284750.shtml>>  
<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/48/a7564548.shtml>>  
<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/categories/c55619/>> [accessed 29-1-2015].

<sup>75</sup> Lucy Caroline Noakes, 'Gender and British National Identity in Wartime: a study of the links between gender and national identity in Britain in the Second World War, the Falklands War and the Gulf War', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sussex, 1996), p. 7.

<sup>76</sup> Richard Overy, *The Bombing War: Europe 1939-1945*, (London: Allen Lane, 2013), pp. 628-33.

Perhaps the British WW2 morally un-impeachable 'good war' myth has depended in some degree on discursive denial of the postwar British presence of the human face of the enemy. A Jersey schoolboy interned for five years in Germany claimed he never witnessed cruelty: "We saw... the human face"; whereas "For the British... every German was considered a Nazi." He had shown photographs to friends who had been evacuated to England. Fed on propaganda images of square-headed brutes, they refused to believe the camp guards were Germans.<sup>77</sup>

Freud theorized that individual conscience becomes relaxed by conditions of war, releasing 'evil passions'.<sup>78</sup> Freudian personality theory identifies defence mechanisms against such socially unacceptable feelings, including that of 'projection,' to relieve the discomfort of unacceptable impulses by disowning and ascribing them to others. Thus, with the help of propaganda, 'evil passions' unleashed by war become embodied by the enemy. This has subsequently been described as 'war psychosis'.<sup>79</sup> Such a theory, of shared projection of unacceptable human characteristics on to the enemy, suggests psychological difficulties following the peace process, necessitating a re-adjustment, whereby formerly projected 'bad' human characteristics are reclaimed and the moral compromises of even a 'good war' confronted. Perhaps avoidance of the human face of the enemy encourages perpetuation of the splitting process in the national psyche fostered by wartime enmity and propaganda, whereby negative human attributes remain comfortably projected on to the ex-enemy.

Since relationships between civilian women and German POWs held in the UK post-WW2 were treated as fraternisation and initially banned by the authorities, this study contends that such

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<sup>77</sup> Bunting, p. 320.

<sup>78</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Thoughts for the Times on War and Death', trans. by E. C. Mayne (1925), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1974), XIV, pp. 273-302.

<sup>79</sup> See, for example, Brian Koehler, 'The Psychosis of War', 24 December 2006 <[http://www.isps-us.org/koehler/psychosis\\_war.html](http://www.isps-us.org/koehler/psychosis_war.html)> ; Frank MacHovec, 'Is War a Psychosis?', 27 April 2007. <<http://brainblogger.com/2007/04/27/is-war-a-psychosis/>> [accessed 29-1-2015].

relationships represent a significant episode of British postwar peace re-adjustment, and also belong on the continuum of post-conflict gender relations. This study re-engages with what Summerfield described as 'the destabilization of gender relations by war in the twentieth century'.<sup>80</sup>

### **Effects of the war on certain British women**

Noakes' study of British wartime national identity argued that notions of femininity and masculinity adapted to temporarily changed circumstances. She acknowledged the wartime 'Penelope myth', whereby women symbolically represent the home and family waiting for the soldier's return, but suggested that women's war work potentially challenged 'existing dominant ideas of femininity', while men's roles as soldiers 'fitted easily into the predominant ideological construct of masculinity'.<sup>81</sup> Higonnet and Higonnet (1987) claimed both male and female gender roles became more masculinized during wartime, remaining the same relative to one another, before reverting, postwar, to their pre-war positions.<sup>82</sup> Summerfield later argued that this model might be too rigid, that the 'wartime mobilization of women bore the appearance of both an alignment between women and men and of a blurring of the visual boundary between masculinity and femininity'.<sup>83</sup> Summerfield acknowledged that variables in women's responses might include age and marital status, and concluded that evidence could be provided to support several contrasting views of the war's transformative effect on women.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Penny Summerfield, 'Gender and War in the Twentieth Century', *International History Review*, 19, i (1997), 3-15, (3).

<sup>81</sup> Noakes, *War*, pp. 18, 73, 74, 167.

<sup>82</sup> Margaret R. and Patrice L.-R. Higonnet, 'The Double Helix', in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, ed. by Margaret Randolph Higonnet and others, (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 1987).

<sup>83</sup> Summerfield, 'Gender and War', p. 5.

<sup>84</sup> Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

A number of psycho-sociological studies have explored the significance of experiencing historical events at different stages of the life cycle. Stewart and Healy's empirical study, for example, suggested the impact on individual women of their expanded WW2 work role differed according to 'age and life stage', supporting the hypothesis of the greater significance of events experienced in late adolescence/early adulthood, 'when identity development is a normative task'.<sup>85</sup> Historians have also noted the importance of the stage of life at which events are experienced. Sue Bruley, writing on women factory workers, recognized that WW2 affected women too young to have childcare/household responsibilities markedly differently from wives and mothers. Sarah Housden and Jenny Zmroczek, exploring identity in later life, cited life-stage theorists (Erikson and Levinson) to account for the vivid memories of people who were adolescent/young adults during WW2, arguing that those years played a critical part in their identity formation.<sup>86</sup>

This study references life-stage personality development theories as a lens through which to view the attitudes and agency of its subjects. The actions of this small group of young men and women raise questions about the effect of WW2 on certain age groups; the role of dissident outsiders in rehearsing social change; and the question of masculinity destabilized by defeat. This study proposes that certain British women not only flouted patriotic expectations, but were attracted to men whose soldierly masculinity had been compromised, 'feminized' by defeat. Exploration of these fraternisation relationships further punctures 'good war' mythology, demonstrating that Britain experienced its share of post-victory internecine

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<sup>85</sup> Abigail J. Stewart & Joseph M Healy, Jr., 'Linking Individual Development and Social Changes' *American Psychologist*, 44, i (1989), 30-42 (pp. 34, 39, 40); Lauren E. Duncan & Gail S. Agronick, 'The Intersection of Life Stage and Social Events: Personality and Life Outcomes', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69, iii (1995), 558-68 (p.565).

<sup>86</sup> Sue Bruley, "'A Very Happy Crowd": Women in Industry in South London in World War Two', *History Workshop Journal*, 44 (Autumn 1997), 58-76; Sarah Housden and Jenny Zmroczek, 'Exploring Identity in Later Life Through BBC People's War Interviews', *Oral History*, 35, ii (Autumn 2007), 100-08.

bitterness, recrimination and hostility towards some of its own citizens and the former enemy, triggered by their competitive presence within the courtship arena.

## Research Methods

### *Sources*

This thesis explores the subjectivities of British women and German prisoners of war via oral and written testimonies and memorabilia of 67 British women and 40 German men. Other sources are also drawn on to complement and compare with these oral history narratives. The following sources are used:

- a) A private oral history archive constitutes the main primary source material.<sup>87</sup> This comprises: taped interviews and correspondence with 61 British women who had relationships with German POWs and 6 women who commented on such relationships; tapes and letters from 38 former POWs and two other German male contributors, with associated memorabilia, in the form of original letters, photographs and other personal documents. This oral history material was mainly collected in the mid- to late-1980s and is described in more detail below, with discussion of methods used in collecting the material, and a number of copyright and ethical issues relating to its use.
  
- b) Biographical and autobiographical accounts of German ex-POWs and British women, are also drawn on as primary source material.<sup>88</sup> Three accounts by women who married German POWs, include one written under a pseudonym and one as a first novel under the author's own name. (This author felt it would have lost its validity, had

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<sup>87</sup> See further information in Appendix 1.

<sup>88</sup> See Appendix 1.



she used a pseudonym; she vouched for its authenticity, describing it as written so her children and grandchildren might better understand. Narrated in the third person, it explores her husband's character's viewpoint as well as her own.)<sup>89</sup>

- c) *Hansard*, national and local newspapers, to explore the role of the media and public debate on the subject of German prisoners and British women's relationships with them. This material includes parliamentary debate, newspaper correspondence and reports.
  
- d) Documentary primary source material in the form of public records relating to this issue, held at The National Archives (TNA). These consist mainly of war office, home and foreign office policy documents relating to the legality of marriage between British women and German POWs while the fraternisation ban was in force, and army courts martial charge sheets recording individual prosecutions under the ban.<sup>90</sup>
  
- e) Secondary sources include: studies of German POWs held in the UK; 1940s publications addressing the position of women; historical studies based on oral sources, and work by British and European academics on women in wartime and postwar gender relations. These are used for contextual, comparative and reference purposes.

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<sup>89</sup> Wendorf.

<sup>90</sup> TNA holds records regarding the court martial of military offenders. These include, in series WO 84, charge books comprising copies of correspondence from the Judge Advocate General's office, relating to preparation of charges in individual cases.

## *Reflections on research method*

### **Using oral sources**

Over the latter half of the twentieth century, oral sources became a popular means of accessing history 'from below', neglected personal and individual experience of historical events, and recovery of historical evidence (from, for example, marginalised groups) inaccessible through documentary sources. However, the growth of oral history also brought questioning of the evidential accuracy and reliability of oral sources. Aside from memory concerns regarding recall fallibility or distortion, and restriction of language in communicating past lived reality, issues were raised around the bias of personal testimony, and variables affecting that bias. Attention was drawn to the characteristic unique to oral history material, of the researcher's direct involvement in the creation of their sources.<sup>91</sup>

Ron Grele brought attention to the importance of recognizing intersubjectivity present in the oral history interview. He termed oral history 'conversational narrative', emphasizing its story-telling aspect. He had earlier pointed to the importance of recognizing the interview as a conversation, the outcome of which cannot be exactly replicated since its form and dynamic is unique to that instance of interaction between interviewer and interviewee. Grele argued for a self-conscious theoretical approach to oral history practice, showing awareness of perceptions.<sup>92</sup>

Oral history is thus regarded as a dialogue, and oral historians as interested in individual versions of past events, while remaining aware that personal narratives are affected by wider cultural and social forces. In view of the arguments levelled against oral sources as

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<sup>91</sup> For fuller discussion of the development of theory and debate around oral history theory, see *The Oral History Reader*, ed. by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, (Abingdon: Routledge, 1998, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 2006, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, 2016); Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 2016).

<sup>92</sup> *Envelopes of Sound: Six Practitioners Discuss the Method, Theory and Practice of Oral History and Oral Testimony*, ed. by Ronald J. Grele, (Chicago: Precedent, 1975); *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History*, ed. by Ronald J. Grele (Chicago: Precedent, 1985, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 1991).

questionably objective, oral historians have chosen to celebrate the subjectivity of oral sources, to consider point of view and subjective meaning of an event as more significant than evidence, although Lynn Abrams acknowledges that oral history produces useful descriptive and factual 'evidential material'. Abrams summarises oral history as having 'tested the limits of conventional historiography, by privileging personal experience, allowing for subjectivity, celebrating memory's inconsistencies and forcing the historian to be more reflexive about research practice', while drawing on other disciplinary approaches.<sup>93</sup>

Interviewee narratives have been viewed as a 'performance', editing and 'composing' a life story to appear acceptable to a perceived 'audience'. However, others have pointed out that, just as an interview may progress from being formal to becoming more relaxed and conversational, 'composure' does not necessarily relate to all interviewees all of the time, who may, in a self-questioning, exploratory sense, 'think aloud' in an interview, and offer some memories as 'sensory word pictures'.<sup>94</sup>

It seems important to acknowledge the extent to which individuals act from their own motivations and emotional responses to their life situations and to respect the interviewee's understanding and recollections of their own lived past. Feminist historians in particular have raised awareness of the interpretive power imbalance between researcher and respondent. Richard Cànida-Smith (1999) commented, in respect of poststructural interpretation, that 'if meanings found in oral evidence exist for the purposes of historians' arguments, then the interviewee's contribution to a fuller understanding of the past is ancillary at best and may be entirely lost.' He noted that Grele 'believed the interviewee to be integral to the analytic process... that two understandings of the past confront each other across the tape recorder.' Cànida-Smith concluded that Grele's work convincingly argued that more profound

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<sup>93</sup> Abrams (2010), p. 31.

<sup>94</sup> Alistair Thomson, 'Life Stories and Historical Analysis' in *Research Methods for History*, ed. by Simon Gunn and Lucy Faire, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012, 2016), p. 116.

theoretical explanations for the past may be developed by interactive analysis between historian and interviewee.<sup>95</sup>

However Abrams has cautioned that sharing authority with interviewees has ‘sometimes foundered on practical and scholarly grounds’. In summary, oral historians address ‘questions of self, intersubjectivity, memory, narrative, performance and power’. With regard to the practical ‘how’ of interpretation, Abrams has proposed ‘sensitive analysis’ in weighing and interpreting oral sources, leading to ‘deeper and richer understanding of how the past is remembered, reworked and reconstructed by people in the present.’<sup>96</sup> Most of the oral sources drawn on here now consist of reconstruction of a more distant past in a more recent past, rather than the present. The following sections will address some of the difficulties relating to use of the oral and written sources this study is based upon.

### **How this oral history source was created**

In 1985, while researching possible subjects for a general non-fiction book, I read the unpublished memoir of a former Italian POW, held in the UK at the end of WW2. This led, via *The Times* index, to intriguing newspaper reports of illicit mid-1940s relationships between German POWs and British women. To explore the subject further, contacts with former German POWs settled in the UK were made through the Anglo-German Society and the authors of two non-fiction books on German POWs; appeals were also placed in German newspapers.<sup>97</sup> These appeals produced letters from former POWs describing love affairs which had often abruptly ended, when the relationship had been discovered and the POW had

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<sup>95</sup> Richard Cándida-Smith, ‘Review Essay: Ronald Grele on the Role of Theory in Oral History’, *Oral History Review*, 21, ii (Winter, 1993), 99-103, (p. 103).

<sup>96</sup> Abrams (2016), p. x; (2010), p. 8.

<sup>97</sup> These included: *Die Welt*; *Welt am Sonntag*; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*; *Frankfurter Rundschau*; *Süddeutsche Zeitung*; *Hamburger Abendblatt*; also the war veterans newsletter, *Der Heimkehrer*.

been moved to another camp. Where the relationship had led to marriage, it was the British wife who generally responded. One sent taped reminiscences, some sent photographs and memorabilia. Restricted to 'A' level-grade German, my written communication and understanding was invaluablely assisted by a native German speaker. This allowed me to include German-language accounts. Practical language and travel restrictions, however, created an inevitable bias in the source material towards UK-based and/or English-speaking ex-POWs, or wives, although German-resident ex-POWs made written German-language contributions.

Two women who had figured in high-profile court cases and the authors of two published autobiographical accounts were traced and interviewed. A magazine article in 1987 produced further letters, mainly from women in the UK whose relationship with a POW had been shortlived.<sup>98</sup> Some women were followed up and interviewed on tape. Others answered questions by letter or telephone, one sending spoken responses on tape. Most interviews were conducted between 1985 and 1988. The tapes and letters include reminiscences from 38 former German POWs, of whom 10 had married British women (including 3 who moved to Germany, and 2 who had divorced); 16 had relationships not culminating in marriage and 12 (plus 2 non-POWs) wrote about the experiences of others, or contributed general comments. The British women contributors included 45 who married a German POW (of whom 31 had remained in the UK, 14 at some point moved to Germany or elsewhere abroad, 10 had met their husbands after 1947 and 6 had divorced). Of the remaining women contributors, 16 had a brief romance which did not last, or was ended by outside interference and 6 wrote on the subject without personal experience of romantic involvement with a POW.

Material was initially collected to prepare a proposal for a general non-fiction book. The commission did not materialize; the project was pursued for some time, then abandoned. The material may therefore be described as fragmentary and incomplete, comprising 'subjective

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<sup>98</sup> Mary Ingham, 'The Women Who Dared to Love Against the Odds', *Woman*, 11-7-1987, pp. 20-21.

glimpses', collected initially in an exploratory way, before themes had been decided upon, and in anticipation of following up contacts at a later date. Nevertheless, some in-depth interviews were conducted and detailed correspondence received. As some contributors had already written at some length before interview, the interviews vary in style and substance, at times conversational, exploratory and open-ended rather than formally structured. As the interviewer, I was, however, aware of and had training in non-directive interviewing techniques, with considerable previous interviewing experience.<sup>99</sup> Areas of interest varied, and developed over time. Some tapes are dated, and associated correspondence and an early notebook confirm or supply interview dates, with brief notes made at the time.

### **Addressing bias and intersubjectivity**

Women's history researchers were among the first to embrace, and grapple with, the importance of recognizing that oral testimony is qualified through filters of language, prevailing public discourse, inter-subjective interviewer-interviewee interaction, self-conscious interviewee self-censorship and the urge to rationalize a narrative to suit a comfortable constructed persona. In the postmodern era of writing about history, the research process has been recognized as partial and 'messy', where subjectivity is acknowledged and reflexivity encouraged.

The material collected was limited by travel, funding and language constraints; in addition, although experienced in non-directive interviewing, I was not the ideal researcher to conduct these interviews: I was not bi-lingual and, having only visited Germany twice, had no depth of understanding of the culture, although on the first of those visits, a penfriend exchange, in 1963, I had gained awareness of some conflicted aspects of postwar Germany. In terms of

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<sup>99</sup> This included psychiatric social work, market research interviewing, magazine journalism and two general non-fiction books based on oral history interviews.

resolving and accepting Anglo-centric bias, I could simply have focused on the experiences of the women, omitting the male testimony. However, given the interpretive significance of gender, this strategy risked reducing the men to stereotypes. Ex-POW contributors have therefore been included.

Historical source material is often fragmentary. (Letters and diaries preserved in archives, for example, represent those whose diaries or correspondence survived, were deemed of value, preserved and possibly edited.) The oral evidence is offered here as 'subjective glimpses' of a group of life stories exhibiting certain common patterns; being largely self-selected, they may not be representative of the experience of others involved in such relationships, for example, excluding older participants, those who had already died, those more chary of drawing attention to themselves, or distrustful of communicating with a British woman journalist. With self-exclusion in mind, one area omitted from my questions and not explored unless a contributor raised it himself, was that of childhood and early life in Germany. At the time, I was concerned not to appear confrontational, to build trust. My professional experience had taught me to maintain a neutral presence. However, as Alessandro Portelli has pointed out, of the interview situation, 'the observed observe us... and judge us from our body language and from behaviour of which we are not even aware.'<sup>100</sup> For those male contributors with whom contact was restricted solely to correspondence, the extent of the fantasy projections of a German man in his sixties reminiscing about a youthful romance with an Englishwoman, while writing to an unknown British female, can only remain a source of speculation.

'Triangulation' has been endorsed as one recognized means of bolstering oral sources through a 'sociobiographic approach': complementing oral and biographical sources by researching historical context and providing contextual-historical material to make further sense of

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<sup>100</sup> Alessandro Portelli, 'Afterword', in *Oral History Off the Record: Towards an Ethnography of Practice*, 'Palgrave Studies in Oral History', ed. by Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), (pp. 273-286), p. 279.

individual cases.<sup>101</sup> Oral reminiscences in conjunction with other sources have been shown to be invaluable in, for example, revising perceptions of civilian British men on the home front during WW2.<sup>102</sup>

This study employs triangulation in that way, and also as a means of supplementing an unfinished research project, which nevertheless offers valuable research material. Thus other sources have been drawn on, including autobiographies, biographies and other studies using oral sources. Such sources are not unproblematic themselves, in terms of omission and bias. Any historical narrative is based on selection: while retaining some facets of a subject, it represses or otherwise excludes others.<sup>103</sup> In her study drawing on British POW diaries, letters and memoirs, Clare Makepeace has drawn attention to the lack of emotional immediacy or contemporary detail in autobiographical accounts written decades after the events described.<sup>104</sup> Richard Holmes eschewed veterans' eye-witness accounts composed long after a war and culturally coloured by intervening life and social events.<sup>105</sup> However, letters and diaries are not unproblematic: omitting, for example, some emotions or details unacceptable at the time, either for the writer or for whoever they were aware might read what they had committed to paper, but which may subsequently be admitted at the safe distance of a later stage of life. Krista Cowman has endorsed biographical material as a way of accessing marginalised groups. She sees it as a revelatory approach, seeking personal perspectives to probe individual motivations and experiences as well as broader social movements.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Tom Wengraf, Prue Chamberlayne, Joanna Bornat, 'A Biographical Turn in the Social Sciences?: A British-European View', *Cultural Studies <=> Critical Methodologies*, 2, ii (2002), 245-69, (p. 260); Jo Guldi, 'Landscape and Place,' Thomson, 'Life Stories', in Gunn and Faire, pp. 69, 102.

<sup>102</sup> Juliette Pattinson, Arthur McIvor, Linsey Robb, *Men in Reserve: British Civilian Masculinities in the Second World War*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016)

<sup>103</sup> Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory*, 'Historical Approaches Series', (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 53.

<sup>104</sup> Clare Makepeace, *Captives of War: British Prisoners of War in Europe in the Second World War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 22; Clare Makepeace, "'A Pseudo-Soldier's Cross": The Subjectivities of British Prisoners of War Held in Germany and Italy during the Second World War', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, 2013), pp. 265-66.

<sup>105</sup> John Crace, 'Richard Holmes: officer and gentleman', *Guardian*, 18-5-2004.

<sup>106</sup> Krista Cowman, 'Collective Biography', in Gunn and Faire, pp. 92-94.



However, alertness to composure, the 'hidden performance elements', is fundamental when drawing on autobiographical and biographical material.<sup>107</sup>

Thus, memoirs should clearly be treated with caution, but can offer reflection and a useful source where little else about certain individual lives has survived. Tom Wengraf, Prue Chamberlayne and Joanna Bornat have pointed to increasing use of biography to understand historical changes. They identified what they termed a '*biographical turn...* in which personal and social meanings as bases of action gain greater prominence', reflecting the need to reconnect with 'lived realities'.<sup>108</sup> John Tosh has also stressed the 'need to reconnect with... curiosity about experience and subjectivity, while recognizing that experience is always mediated through cultural understandings.'<sup>109</sup>

## **Interpretation**

While living witnesses remain, so do conflicted testimonies, shameful secrets or disquieting memories. Oral sources are recognized as an important conduit for uncovering sensitive, taboo subjects. The oral history material offered here constitutes subjective remembrance of one such sensitive subject. If this study relied solely on available documentary sources, a poorer, more polarised view would emerge.

This study has used oral testimony evidentially, in terms of contributors' accounts of their own lived experience unavailable from other sources. I have endeavoured to interpret them with 'sensitive analysis', including consideration of the need to employ caution. Using oral sources

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<sup>107</sup> Jaume Aurell, 'Autobiographical Texts as Historiographical Sources: Rereading Fernand Braudel and Annie Kriegel', *Biography*, 29, iii (Summer 2006), 424-45, (p. 441).

<sup>108</sup> Tom Wengraf, Prue Chamberlayne, Joanna Bornat, 'A Biographical Turn in the Social Sciences?: A British-European View', *Cultural Studies <=> Critical Methodologies*, 2, ii (2002), 245-69, (pp. 245, 262).

<sup>109</sup> John Tosh, 'The History of Masculinity: An Outdated Concept?' in *What is Masculinity? Historical Dynamics from Antiquity to the Contemporary World*, ed. by John H. Arnold and Sean Brady (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), (17-34), p. 31.

as a means of elucidating ‘hidden, neglected or marginalized experience... may require interpretation, context, media and sometimes co-related documentation’ to bring out their full significance.<sup>110</sup> For this reason, supportive sources of other types have been drawn on, and contributions queried for internal consistency, errors and omissions, cross-checking where possible against other sources. However, as Nancy Janovicek has pointed out, it is important also to respect our oral sources’ integrity, that if we earn their trust, ‘their insights guide our analyses’.<sup>111</sup> A 2002 journal article commented, in respect of the use of biographical sources: ‘Just as the individual life encompasses experiences that draw on a multiplicity of forms of thought and action, so its interpretation requires reference to a wide range of disciplines’ – regarding ‘the interdisciplinarity of the biographical turn’ as a beneficial approach, bringing contributions from different concepts of psychology, etc.<sup>112</sup>

### ***Historical Significance of Young Adulthood***

At the turn of the twenty-first century, Michael Corsten claimed generation and age as ‘classification markers’ replacing categories such as social origin and class, which had ‘lessened in relevance’. Referencing the work of Karl Mannheim, he drew attention to the phenomenon that people born in the same time-period experience historical events, such as depression, war, postwar prosperity, at the same stage and in a certain sequence in their lives.<sup>113</sup>

As raised earlier, Housden and Zmroczek challenged reservations about latter-life memory by drawing attention to the vivid recall capacity of those who were adolescent/young adults during WW2, arguing that those years played a critical part in their identity formation.<sup>114</sup>

Several other historians have drawn attention to the heightened significance of age,

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<sup>110</sup> Editorial, *Journal of the Oral History Society*, 33, ii (Autumn 2005), p. 2.

<sup>111</sup> Nancy Janovicek, “‘If You’d Told Me You Wanted to Talk about the ‘60s, I Wouldn’t Have Called You Back’’: Reflections on Collective Memory and the Practice of Oral History’, in Sheftel and Zembrzycki, (pp. 185-99), p. 192.

<sup>112</sup> Wengraf, Chamberlayne, Bornat, p. 262.

<sup>113</sup> Michael Corsten, ‘The Time of Generations’, *Time and Society*, 8, ii (1999), 249-272, (pp. 249-50, 253-54).

<sup>114</sup> ‘Exploring Identity’, pp. 100-08.

particularly young adulthood, in relation to 'a striking juxtaposition of the personal and the public.' A tendency has been observed of public events deemed 'of great personal significance' having taken place 'around the time of a person's transition to full adulthood... It is as much that one was aged 18-24 when certain historical events were experienced... as that these events were significant in themselves.' Writing about generational identity (in relation to the late 1980s demise of the USSR), the authors further assert that 'When genuinely important historical transitions... coincide with one's entry into young adulthood, personal and historical significance interact and intensify.'<sup>115</sup>

Michael Roper has successfully argued for and used psychoanalytic theory to help account for behaviour, and the significance to frontline soldiers of correspondence with home. Roper encouraged studies of the 'private sphere', endorsing the family as the 'crucible of subjectivity', and the fundamental significance of familial relationships as a source of identity of impact emotionally in later life.<sup>116</sup> Other theorists of personality development have argued convincingly for the developmental importance of post-childhood life experiences, including the influence on individual subjectivity and identity of events during the years of transition from the dependence of childhood to the independent agency of adulthood. This is further explained in the Introduction to Section A, referencing the work of Erik Erikson, Charlotte Bühler and Daniel Levinson. Given the perceived significance of events experienced during young adulthood, this study puts forward this view as a lens through which the agency and gendered identities of the protagonists may be viewed.

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<sup>115</sup> 'Introduction: Biographical Research and Historical Watersheds', *Biographical Research in Eastern Europe: Altered Lives and Broken Biographies*, ed. by Robert Miller, Robin Humphrey, Elena Zdravomyslova, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003). See also Robert L. Miller, *Researching Life Stories and Family Histories*, London: Sage, 2000), pp. 24-34.

<sup>116</sup> Michael Roper, 'Slipping Out of View: Subjectivity and Emotion in Gender History', *History Workshop Journal*, 59, (2005), 57-72, (p. 67); Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

## Salvaged sources – a metaphor

*The Oral History Reader's* second edition cites an African proverb, credited to Amadou Hampâté Bâ: 'Every old man that dies is a library that burns'.<sup>117</sup>

When I re-engaged with the oral source material for this research project, over fifteen years later, I remained in touch with three contributors, and others appeared traceable. This presented the opportunity for obtaining retrospective consent and copyright clearance, and enlarging upon the material, in a way that archive material generally – either documentary or oral – is not normally open to be expanded. However, salvaging additional material proved more difficult than it first appeared.

Complications relating to this process suggested a metaphor considering history as a salvaging process, illustrated by two instances of destruction by fire (separated by six decades and scale of destruction). One was the destruction of the public library in my home town. This elegant listed building was due to celebrate its centenary, but on the evening of Friday 13 August that year, a fire broke out.<sup>118</sup> The fire station, only yards away but down a steep hill, could not produce sufficient water pressure to fight the fierce blaze, which destroyed most of the building and its contents. The following morning, a few heat and water-damaged artefacts were retrieved from the cellar and removed for restoration. At this stage, red-hot rubble and the dangerous condition of the façade prevented further salvage attempts. Three days later, spontaneous small fires were still erupting, ignited by wind. It was six weeks before the site became sufficiently safe for ashes and rubble to be sifted in case anything else could be salvaged.

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<sup>117</sup> Perks and Thomson, *Oral History Reader* (2006), p. ix

<sup>118</sup> See 'Arson Enquiry after Library Fire', *BBC News*, 16-4-2004. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/kent/3564428.stm>>; <<http://www.ramsgate-society.org.uk/articles/library-news.php#.VJGXWyusWmQ>> [accessed 30-1-2015].

Local politicians, aware the building had been insufficiently protected against fire hazards, downplayed the tragedy, claiming nothing original had been lost. An important collection of local photographs and postcards *had* survived in a fireproof filing cabinet; but unique local maps were completely destroyed, along with rare antiquarian books, local guides and directories. Two thirds of the local history reference collection had been catalogued, in odd moments, by a senior librarian and miraculously the computer hard disk had survived. Had the fire happened 18 months earlier, it would have been left to staff memories to retrieve any awareness of what had been lost.<sup>119</sup>

As a metaphor, this sad loss of irreplaceable local history sources articulates something about the salvaging process by which historical sources come to be preserved. Much vanishes in the immediate all-consuming 'heat of the moment'. A cooling-off process occurs before salvaging of surviving fragments can begin. These fragments – the documents, images and memories which become our sources – may survive through fortuitous accident (archivists recount anecdotes of precious items retrieved from skips) or preservation policies, often dictated by practical time and space constraints and what is considered of value. The metaphor of this as a salvaging process from the heat of the here and now spoke to my awareness, while re-contacting the living creators of my oral history material, of stirring embers which might suddenly re-ignite.

The other, much more serious conflagration referenced in pursuit of this metaphor was a firestorm caused by RAF bombing at the end of July 1943, in a German town called Remscheid. In that instance, witnesses who survived to recount the narrative on the ground – as opposed to that from the air – were women and children huddled in underground shelters. It was hours before the heat abated enough to allow them to leave the shelters, and days before the ashes

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<sup>119</sup> Information obtained by informal interview with the librarian concerned, who believed the Ramsgate library losses had been understated. See also <[http://thanetonline.blogspot.co.uk/2008\\_08\\_01\\_archive.html](http://thanetonline.blogspot.co.uk/2008_08_01_archive.html)> [accessed 30-1-2015].

cooled sufficiently for cellars where residents had stored their possessions to be excavated. One survivor wrote that all that remained of several generations of possessions were scorched porcelain plates.<sup>120</sup>

Historically, and historiographically, the ruins of WW2 have been looted, picked over, cleared, itemised, restored, demolished and rebuilt. However, hotspots remain: pockets of contested history, smouldering embers still difficult to approach. Residual conflicted facets of WW2 (including the Allied bombing strategy of which Remscheid formed a part), may be re-ignited by ongoing rituals of remembrance, European politics or sporting contests.

My research concerned one such sensitive issue. Officially forbidden before July 1947, relationships between British women and German POWs began in secret. They stirred up strong feelings among the British population and remained capable of doing so, while wartime witnesses survived. At an early stage of the initial research, I approached a representative of the Channel Islands Occupation Society, who replied that associations between Island women and German soldiers remained a highly sensitive subject better left alone, as it would upset many people.<sup>121</sup> I did not pursue the idea. It takes courage, as well as time, funding, and resolute focus to pursue a controversial oral history project.<sup>122</sup> Contested hotspots of cultural history may thus resist preservation.

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<sup>120</sup> Fritz Besser, *Experiences of a Survivor (Meine Überlebnisse)*, trans. by Walter Besser (unpublished MS, TS copy in personal possession).

<sup>121</sup> Letter, 18-7-1986.

<sup>122</sup> The Oral History Society's 2007 conference 'Using the War: Changing Memories of World War Two' included 'Adding Memories of WW2' a contribution from Monika Kokalj Kočevar ( National Museum of Contemporary History, Slovenia), describing the difficulties of collecting testimony relating to victims of the partisans in WW2. Sixty years on, family members remained afraid to speak and Kočevar herself received threats.

## Copyright and ethical considerations and the re-contacting process

The source material for this study centres on a small private oral history archive of letters and taped interviews, mostly collected pre-1989. This material presented difficulties regarding its use, having been collected when formal written copyright permissions were not required in respect of interview material. Copyright and ethical implications (see Appendix 2) of using this material became the most pressing reasons to re-contact contributors.

Recommending that consent is best negotiated at the time of interview, Oral History Society (OHS) guidelines described retrospective clearance as usually 'very time-consuming and often impossible if informants or interviewers have died or moved away.'<sup>123</sup> This daunting task did offer the opportunity of maximising use that could be made of the material, with the possibility of adding to it. But tracing difficulties, death and the obduracy of relatives may not be the only obstacles on the ethical best practice path towards obtaining informed consent.

Difficulties began with phrasing the approach letter. What if it mistakenly approached the wrong person, or they were unwell, with a carer opening their mail? Some contributors, both male and female, may have spoken or written of clandestine relationships without the knowledge of families or spouses. The initial approach letter was therefore phrased to remind them of their contribution without revealing the exact subject of my research.

Anna Bryson recognized the ethical dilemma in interviewing the elderly 'between the duty to produce good history and the sense of responsibility towards real people.'<sup>124</sup> For consent to be valid, it must be informed, voluntary and *competent*, meaning that a person understands what they are agreeing. Good research practice requires that information is given both verbally and in writing. My contributors, mostly aged around sixty in the mid-1980s, were in or

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<sup>123</sup> <http://www.ohs.org.uk/advice/ethical-and-legal/3/> [accessed 2-6-2017].

<sup>124</sup> Anna Bryson, "'Whatever You Say, Say Nothing': Researching Memory and Identity in Mid-Ulster, 1945-1969', *Journal of the Oral History Society*, 35, ii (Autumn 2007) 45-56.

reaching their eighties when re-contacted. At the time of consulting it, the OHS Guide set out clear guidelines for interviewing children, but was less forthcoming regarding elderly, potentially vulnerable adults.<sup>125</sup>

Since the elderly are likely to be of particular interest as oral history research subjects, guidance on approaching them seemed sparse, with little direct discussion in the literature about research ethics, although Jamieson and Victor (2002) proved useful, discussing competent consent, confidentiality, privacy considerations and likely sensitivities.<sup>126</sup>

Interviews with children necessitate negotiation with parents or other 'gatekeeper' guardians. With the elderly, it may not be possible to anticipate whether a gatekeeper will be involved: an interviewee may be a lively independent ninety-year-old, or suffering dementia in their seventies.

My own sensibilities were also affected. A short search on the internet might reveal clear evidence of an interviewee's death.<sup>127</sup> Having been listening to their voice and framing further questions in my mind, the sense of loss was palpable. The four women whose stories illustrated my 1987 magazine article had all died.<sup>128</sup> This registered as a disturbing personal intimation of mortality, but also granted an insight lacking when they were first interviewed – how might I, now their age then, review *my* early adult life?

Approach letters sometimes elicited a response from a grieving spouse, or a relative of a respondent suffering from dementia. In other instances, the memory of a former contributor, seemingly willing and eager to contribute more, had faded to blandness. I began to appreciate that living witness does not cease when witnesses actually die: the process starts while they

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<sup>125</sup> Alan Ward, 'Is your oral history legal and ethical?' (Oral History Society and Alan Ward, 2003) <[http://www.concernedhistorians.org/content\\_files/file/ET/187.pdf](http://www.concernedhistorians.org/content_files/file/ET/187.pdf)> [accessed 30-1-2015].

<sup>126</sup> Mary Gilhooly, 'Ethical issues in researching later life', in *Researching Ageing and Later Life*, ed. by Anne Jamieson & Christina Victor (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2002), pp. 211-25

<sup>127</sup> From the General Register Office online death indices: <<http://www.findmypast.co.uk>> [accessed 30-1-2015].

<sup>128</sup> Ingham, 'Women'.



are very much alive (purportedly from the moment memory takes over from actuality). The memories of some respondents were certainly clouded into cliché by what became obvious was now the repetition of more than twice-told tales.<sup>129</sup>

I had pictured myself wandering the banks of the river Styx. I now realized I was following the Lethe, another of several rivers that, in Greek mythology, divided the underworld from the land of the living. Drinking from the Lethe was said to cause complete forgetfulness. One contributor had mentioned that her husband could still remember what she was wearing when they first met in 1946. But when re-contacted and asked this question, her widower replied sadly that he could now no longer recall that detail. The memory had vanished, sunk beneath the waters of the River Lethe.

Inadvertently I had created a longitudinal study; in a few cases I acquired several versions of the same story, sometimes simply rephrased, but also recomposed, with details revised, or deleted. Women who twenty years previously had written confessional letters to a total stranger were now looking back from a different perspective. Ironically, while I now related more easily to their earlier reminiscence, it seemed that they sometimes could not. More dependent status appeared to affect willingness to speak openly about the past. Several appeared noticeably more loyal to their life partner, more concerned about their own memory legacy.

Re-opening contested aspects of individual pasts brought to mind the small fires re-kindled by the wind, in the ashes of my home town's library. The legal responsibility to undertake 'due diligence' in making efforts to obtain informed consent clashed with my ethical responsibility to respect my contributors' privacy. This concern eventually persuaded me that seeking

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<sup>129</sup> The inefficacy of 'twice-telling' was demonstrated in one instance where the microphone failed, requiring the interview to be re-conducted, resulting in a paler version of the original account. Karim Nader, 'Memory traces unbound', *Trends in Neurosciences*, 26, ii (February 2003) 65-72 (p.65) suggests recovering and relating a memory may destabilize and degrade it.

permission from or via a relative unless that relative was of a POW marriage was probably too problematic. Some respondents had originally written in confidence to a stranger, sometimes a stranger in a foreign country. It seemed questionable that they would have wished their family to read what they had written. A former POW happy to contribute his unforgettable love story anonymously might not have wanted his widow or family to read it. Comfortingly for some children or surviving spouses of POW marriages (and for me), a CD copy of an interview offered an unexpected, treasured communication from beyond the grave. Otherwise, the re-contacting process reinforced the difficulties inherent in obtaining retrospective informed, voluntary and competent consent. I aimed for 'best practice' strategies that were, in psychotherapeutic parlance, 'good enough'. One contributor's consent appeared, on one occasion at least, neither informed nor competent. Ultimately, with her relative acting as 'gatekeeper', I deemed her consent valid.

The permissions and copyright form ensures that, from an ethical point of view, contributors are made aware of the purpose of the interview and its likely future use. A draft was sent to a contributor with whom I had remained in contact, for consideration of its clarity and whether it would answer her concerns. Her response was to sign and return it – gratifying, but not exactly reassuring that she had competently understood the covering letter! Conversely, other interviewees, happy to offer verbal consent, voiced suspicion when asked to sign an official-looking form. Since some contributions detailed possibly sensitive family conflict or community condemnation, some comments have been further anonymised. Alan Ward's guidelines advised that agreements to anonymity should be avoided, or time-limited. This stipulation seems somewhat unrealistic in respect of sensitive interview material.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Alan Ward, 'Is Your' <[http://www.concernedhistorians.org/content\\_files/file/ET/187.pdf](http://www.concernedhistorians.org/content_files/file/ET/187.pdf)> [accessed 30-1-2015].

The re-contacting process has resulted to date in 28 interviews and correspondence on which signed copyright clearance and informed consent had been obtained, which may be quoted and used in depth. A small number of contributions were already in the public domain. Remaining interviews and correspondence for which clearance has not to date been obtainable have been largely paraphrased, and anonymised by the use of letter and number references: for example, PW01 for a male contributor, BW01 for a female contributor.

### *Aims and structure of this thesis*

This study seeks to elucidate Moore's tentative conclusions and Weber-Newth and Steinert's speculation about the personal, familial and social impact and motivations of illicit relationships between British women and German POWs held post-WW2 in the UK. It draws on written and spoken oral history material collected from the subjects themselves in the mid-1980s, extended and informed by other sources.

It aims to explore how these relationships arose, developed and influenced the individuals involved; what the protagonists brought in terms of previous formative experiences; the difficulties they encountered, and how their relationships were viewed within their families, social circle and wider society. In so doing, it seeks to claim their place within the continuum of post-conflict gender relations; to explore their dynamic in relation to gender roles within them; and demonstrate susceptibility among certain younger British females to wartime influences on British women.

This thesis is constructed in three themed sections, following a chronological development. Section A discusses the identities the protagonists brought to these relationships, in terms of prior life experiences and cultural influences on attitudes. These chapters draw in particular

on other oral sources, biographical and autobiographical accounts. Section B examines how these two separate groups recalled the lived experience and dynamic of their personal emotional encounters. Section C discusses official and public attitudes towards and influences upon relationships between German POWs and British women and resulting cross-cultural marriages. Finally, the Conclusion seeks to summarise the extent to which this thesis has answered questions posed by these relationships, and suggest further possible avenues of research.

## Section A: Contrasting Enemy Subjectivities

Writing in the 1950s, the psychologist Erik Erikson drew attention to the relevance to historiography of the fact that ‘society consists of individuals in the process of developing from children into adults.’<sup>1</sup> Initiating this exploration of the interactive and influential relationship between historical events, gender and individual personality development, Chapters Two and Three discuss childhood and early life experiences of the subjects of this study. Familial and societal influences are considered significant in terms of their impact on attitudes, gender identities and gender roles, in the context of individual personality development.

### Personality Development in Adolescence and Young Adulthood

A number of personality theorists have proposed that development occurs throughout the life cycle, particularly at certain significant transitional stages. Erikson’s theory posited eight stages to be negotiated through childhood and adult life, each presenting a ‘task’, the resolution of which he proposed was integral to successful personality development.<sup>2</sup> His most well-known concept, the ‘identity crisis’ characterized the fifth stage of his theory of development, involving a search for meaning and a choice of life path, in the course of establishing individual sense of identity. This stage precedes that of young adulthood, when the individual confronts the dichotomy between intimacy and isolation, negotiating intimate reciprocal relationships.

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<sup>1</sup> Erik H. Erikson, ‘Ego Development and Historical Change: Identity and the Life Cycle’, *Psychological Issues*, 1, (1959), p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1950), pp. 219-34. See also Erik H. Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle* (Madison, CT: International Universities Press, 1959; London: Norton, 1980, reissued, 1994).

Erikson suggested that successful negotiation of adolescence involves discovering one's value, helping resolve confusion and build a sense of identity. He emphasized that identity can only be properly established through encountering and testing partners in work and love, although basic patterns of identity emerge from 'selective affirmation and repudiation of an individual's childhood identifications' and how 'the social process of the times' identifies and recognizes the individual. Erikson thus acknowledged the interplay of individual agency and personal and societal relationships in forming adult personality. He presented human growth as a challenging process of weathering inner and outer conflicts, to emerge with a more integrated self, better judgment, and enhanced ability, according to the individual's own standards and those of people who matter to them. Adolescence involves the transfer of childhood trust and need for guidance from parents to mentors and leaders. However, identity formation is not possible without some questioning, which helps to define identity.<sup>3</sup>

Charlotte Bühler, another mid-twentieth-century lifespan development theorist, defined late adolescence and early adulthood as 'tentative self-determination', involving developing a sense of self, making plans and initial commitments to work and to other people, exploring and clarifying basic personal values.<sup>4</sup> Theodore Lidz, writing in the 1960s, identified mid-adolescence as 'a pivotal time of life when youths turn away from the family'.<sup>5</sup>

A later theorist, Yale psychologist Daniel Levinson, distinguished what he termed the Early Adult Transition (around age 17-22), as a crucial stage, where the immature and malleable adolescent enters and seeks to take their place in the adult world. Levinson identified the primary task of each transitional period to question and explore possibilities for change, and commitment to crucial choices. He viewed early adulthood as characterized by energy and

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<sup>3</sup> Erik H. Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed: A Review* (New York: Norton, 1982, reissued edn, 1994), pp. 72-74.

<sup>4</sup> Candida Peterson, *Adults Growing Up* (Perth: Western Australia, Apple Press, 1982), p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> Theodore Lidz, *The Person: His and Her Development throughout the Life Cycle* (New York: Basic Books, 1968, revised edn, 1976), pp. 330-32.

desire for personal gratification, in the context of the adult world's external pressures.

Levinson acknowledged the importance of engaging with the outside world, and stressed that life is modified by the cultural context and external events within which it is lived.<sup>6</sup>

The age at which the contributors to this study experienced the war and the pivotal early postwar period is thus considered significant, in that these theories illuminate their chosen actions.

Of 38 women contributors whose year of birth was mentioned or identified: 37 were spread between 1921 and 1931, aside from one in 1917. They included 22 born between 1924 and 1928, aged between eleven and fifteen at the start of WW2, embarking on their working lives either during the war or at the end of it, and 11 born between 1929 and 1931, aged between eight and ten in 1939 and mostly still at school when the war ended. (One contributor was already married when the war started; another married in 1944.) Most male contributors appear to have reached late teens or early twenties at the end of WW2, therefore born early to mid-1920s.

It is contended that the developmental dilemmas these individuals faced affected the choices they made in their response to personal and societal influences.

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel J. Levinson, *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (New York: Knopf, 1978, Ballantyne Books revised edn, 1979), pp. 8, 21-23, 71-81, 336.

## Chapter 2: Young British women and the disruption of war

### *Introduction*

Chapter Two explores the implications for this study of its female contributors' childhood, adolescent and young adult experiences. Angus Calder depicted WW2 as having engaged and affected the civilian population more than any preceding war.<sup>1</sup> WW2's dislocations of family life (including evacuation, curtailed schooling, absent fathers, direction of female labour and paid employment of married women), as outlined in Geoffrey Field's overview of the working classes during WW2, temporarily disturbed traditional sex roles within British family life.<sup>2</sup> Summerfield acknowledged the significance of WW2 for many women, stressing the importance of a nuanced interpretation of its effects, and acknowledging the diversity of women's subjective responses, depending on, for example, age and marital status.<sup>3</sup> The age at which WW2's disruptions were experienced may be viewed as potentially affecting behaviour, attitudes and postwar life choices.

Most women contributors to this study experienced the second world war as pre-adolescent schoolgirls and/or mid to late teenagers embarking on working lives as young adults. Seventeen contributors spoke or wrote about their early life, including seven at some length, describing childhood and wartime experiences.<sup>4</sup> Two published autobiographical accounts from women who had later relationships with German POWs have also been drawn on.<sup>5</sup> Other

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<sup>1</sup> Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-1945* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey C. Field, *Blood, Sweat and Toil: Remaking the British Working Class 1939-1945*, (Oxford: OUP, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Penny Summerfield, 'Approaches to Women and Social Change in the Second World War,' in *What Difference Did the War Make?*, ed. by Brian Brivati and Harriet Jones (London: Leicester University Press, 1993, p/b edn 1995), pp. 63-79.

<sup>4</sup> Sylvia L., Lorna H., Margaret J., Joyce S., Edna S.; Maude P., Phyllis H.

<sup>5</sup> Thea Burghart; Barbara Dennis.



autobiographical accounts and several secondary sources based on oral history interviews and personal accounts have been used to illustrate the subjective experiences of female contemporaries.<sup>6</sup> In addition, secondary sources, including social histories and academic studies, contemporary commentators and social surveys have informed this discussion.

Contributors recalling growing up in the interwar period portrayed their mothers as housewives. One exception, Margaret J.'s mother (after Margaret started school in 1932) had become a hospital almoner (medical social worker), one of very few professional openings for women in the 1930s. In addition to more subtle discriminatory practices against employing women, other professions (including teaching, the civil service and medicine) introduced a bar to married women.<sup>7</sup> Unemployment among returning WW1 servicemen had turned public opinion against married women working. This was reinforced during the interwar economic downturn, with married women workers perceived as depriving male breadwinners of work. Some working-class mothers shouldered a dual role out of necessity, but the 1931 census showed only 16 per cent of women in paid employment were married, a proportion barely changed from 1911.<sup>8</sup> It was also a status issue: going out to work implied, for all but professional married women, that a husband could not afford to support his wife. In 1939, over nine million women registered their occupation as 'unpaid domestic duties'.<sup>9</sup>

Barbara Dennis's memoir describes most mothers as 'frustrated housewives', portraying a claustrophobically sheltered upbringing for girls for whom the only future career would be

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<sup>6</sup> Virginia Nicholson, *Millions Like Us: Women's Lives during the Second World War* (London: Viking, 2011); Barry Turner and Tony Rennell, *When Daddy Came Home: How Family Life Changed Forever in 1945* (London: Hutchinson, 1995); Ben Wicks *Welcome Home: True Stories of Soldiers Returning from WW2* (London: Bloomsbury, 1991); Julie Summers, *Stranger*. See also Field, ch. 5, 'Family in Trouble'.

<sup>7</sup> Penny Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War: Production and Patriarchy in Conflict* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> Deirdre Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty: Women between the Wars, 1918-1939* (London: Pandora Press, 1989), pp. 58, 82-83, 99.

<sup>9</sup> 1939 National Identity Register statistic, cited in Alberti Nardelli, 'The 1939 Register: A Tale of a Country on the Eve of World War', *Guardian* 2-11-2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2015/nov/02/the-1939-register-a-tale-of-a-country-ravaged-by-war> [Accessed 28-9-2018]

marriage: 'Daughters were vehicles for possible ruin, to be controlled by enforcing an artificial and eternal childhood, still in thrall to Mummy.'<sup>10</sup> Barbara (born 1927) won a scholarship to attend grammar school. Her memoir conveys adolescent innocence under the stifling restrictions of a lower-middle-class upbringing. Her controlling and repressive mother insisted she must do well at school in order to obtain a good secretarial job and with it, by implication, upward social mobility by finding a middle-class husband. As Helen Forrester explained, 'In those days, many mothers believed that they owned... their daughters.'<sup>11</sup>

According to Selina Todd, interwar mothers (whose occupational horizons had briefly widened during WW1) were projecting their own thwarted ambitions into hopes and expectations for their daughters in a labour market with, from the mid-1930s onwards, increasing industrial and clerical opportunities for female employment. Todd examined working-class young women's employment between 1900 and 1950, using oral history testimony, census data and social surveys. She presented them, in the interwar context of war-disabled or unemployed fathers and war-widowed, domestically burdened mothers, as vital family income contributors. She concluded that although age and gender ensured young women remained subordinate family members, their economic input positively impacted on their family role and relationships, significantly enhancing their status and self-image. She saw daughters' relationships with their mothers (in possibly more cash-strapped households than lower-middle-class homes) as a 'complex combination of mutual economic and emotional support, affection and obligation.'<sup>12</sup>

Todd presented young working-class women as embracing personal freedom and agency, aspirational for an easier life than that endured by their mothers. She acknowledged the

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<sup>10</sup> Dennis, *Love Was Different*, pp. 12, 4, 5.

<sup>11</sup> Helen Forrester, *Lime Street at Two* (London: The Bodley Head, 1985), p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> Selina Todd, *Young Women, Work and Family in England, 1918-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 26, 84, 112, 226, 229. (The phenomenon of thwarted ambitions projected on to daughters has been observed in respect of the wartime generation itself, see Mary Ingham, *Now We Are Thirty: Women of the Breakthrough Generation* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981), pp. 27, 50.)

significance of WW2 in terms of male absence and enhanced employment roles for women, but saw this, rather than a sudden change, as an acceleration of gradually expanding female employment opportunities, following WW1.<sup>13</sup> Todd focused on the trajectory of young women's employment over the years 1918-1950 in influencing their attitudes and independent agency. This chapter addresses aspects of the WW2 home front's impact on family life, which arguably offered some young women the opportunity and impetus to consolidate greater personal freedom at a developmentally significant and formative stage in their lives.

### *Girls growing up*

#### **Experiences of 'otherness' and loosened home ties**

Most children in the inter-war period grew up within familiar communities where few families owned a motor car. A traumatic shock to such stability could occur when, as Todd points out, in the 1920s and early 1930s adolescent working-class girls left home to enter residential domestic service, severing day-to-day bonds with their families and often their local community.<sup>14</sup> At the outbreak of war, mass evacuation of children and adults from major cities and ports fractured this insularity on a much larger scale. In 1940, evacuees were followed, in some UK areas, by an influx of foreign troops (Polish airmen, Norwegians, Canadians, Free French) and Dutch, German-Jewish and Belgian refugees: 'Villages where a visitor from another county was considered a stranger, became accustomed to hearing... strange tongues they could not even identify.' Norman Longmate described these 'outsider' invasions as some of the 'successive shocks that [British civilians] sustained between 1939 and

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<sup>13</sup> Todd, pp. 52, 229.

<sup>14</sup> Todd, p. 26. Even by 1951, only 14 per cent of UK households had access to a car, see Craig Lindsay, 'A Century of Market Labour Change: 1900 to 2000', *Labour Market Trends*, London, Office for National Statistics, (March 2003), 133-44, (p. 141). See also Field, pp. 23-34.

1945.<sup>15</sup> Olive K. (born 1932), living in Lincolnshire, remembered 'a lot of soldiers... Americans, French, Poles... we grew up among foreign people, more than now.'<sup>16</sup> Historian Eric Russell Chamberlin suggested refugee numbers reached 50,000.<sup>17</sup>

Foreigners, according to Longmate, 'obligingly conformed to the expected national stereotypes', with attitudes towards them varying from suspicion or contempt to over-enthusiastic adulation. Refugees, competing for scarce resources, were vulnerable to criticism, whereas affluent American servicemen were mostly 'well liked', although their success with women created some friction, crystallised in the well-worn phrase 'over-paid, over-sexed and over here'.<sup>18</sup> Susan Goodman cites a source who grew up near two American bases in Lancashire, who remembered the Americans arriving at local dance halls at weekends, 'eagerly awaited by the local girls. Scuffles broke out nearby... between the Yanks and the British servicemen home on leave.'<sup>19</sup> Several older contributors to this study recalled dancing with smartly uniformed Americans and Canadians.<sup>20</sup> Lorna H. remembered weekly dances in her local town invariably ending in a brawl between British and American servicemen stationed nearby, who arrived at the dance after drinking in nearby pubs.<sup>21</sup>

Foreigners brought novelty, resentment, cultural misunderstandings and, ultimately, fear. After the fall of France in June 1940, fears of spies, Fifth Columnists and enemy paratroops were fuelled by government pamphlets warning the population to be prepared for imminent invasion. This threat prompted a policy of internment of all 'enemy aliens' (mostly Italian and

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<sup>15</sup> Norman Longmate, *How We Lived Then: A History of Everyday Life during the Second World War* (London: Hutchinson, 1971; Pimlico edn, 2002), p. 470.

<sup>16</sup> Olive K., interview.

<sup>17</sup> E. R. Chamberlin, *Life in Wartime Britain* (London: Batsford, 1972), pp. 154-56; Martin A. Doherty, *Nazi Wireless Propaganda: Lord Haw-Haw and British Public Opinion in the Second World War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 145.

<sup>18</sup> Longmate, *How*, Chapter 38, p. 471. See also, Calder, p. 129; Nicholson, pp. 194-200; Chamberlin, pp. 154-60; Reynolds, pp. xxiii, 143, 152, 264-68.

<sup>19</sup> Susan Goodman, *Children of War: The Second World War through the Eyes of a Generation* (London: John Murray, 2005), p. 259.

<sup>20</sup> Sylvia L.; Lorna H.; BW26.

<sup>21</sup> Lorna H., telephone interview.

German nationals settled in Britain or recently arrived as refugees).<sup>22</sup> Maude P. taught in a small boarding school which took in a few German-Jewish refugee children. They were shocked when one 'very sweet and lovable girl, was fetched by the police and interned on her sixteenth birthday', although the local doctor became convinced the twelve-year-old boy – blond, bad-mannered and a former Hitler Youth member – was a spy.<sup>23</sup>

At least five other contributors to this study experienced 'otherness' subjectively, as part of the September 1939 mass evacuation, dubbed 'Operation Pied Piper', of almost 1.5 million children from Greater London, coastal Kent, Medway and major provincial UK towns.<sup>24</sup>

Evacuation proved an unhappy experience for many children. By January 1940, only 55 per cent of unaccompanied children remained in the reception areas.<sup>25</sup> Lorna H. (born 1928) grew up on the East Kent coast, in a close-knit, fairly affluent family. When war broke out, she was evacuated to Wales 'a period of my life that I absolutely hated.' She was billeted in a pub and although the hosts were kind, 'drunkenness and swearing, all of which I had never been exposed to before, were the order of the day.' Lorna returned home briefly for Christmas. When her father took her back to Wales, and 'saw how I was living, he brought me back home the next day.'<sup>26</sup> Margaret J. (also born 1928) was evacuated from London to Kent for two years, before the family moved to Scotland, where her father continued to run his business, with her mother as his secretary. Margaret's mother had always handled all the 'paperwork', having attended grammar school, whereas her father had only had an elementary school education. Margaret found being an outsider – English in Scotland – difficult. (Looking back

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<sup>22</sup> See Peter & Leni Gillman, *'Collar the Lot!': How Britain Interned and Expelled its Wartime Refugees*, London: Quartet Books, 1980).

<sup>23</sup> Maude P., correspondence.

<sup>24</sup> Lorna H.; Margaret J.; Olive P.; Olive K., June K; Mike Brown, *A Child's War: Growing Up on the Home Front 1939-1945* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2000), pp. 3-4; Martin L. Parsons, *I'll Take That One: Dispelling the Myths of Civilian Evacuation, 1939-45* (Peterborough: Beckett Karlson, 1998), pp. 42, 68; Mike Brown, *Evacuees: Evacuation in Wartime Britain 1939-1945*, (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2000), ch. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy* (London: HMSO, 1950), p. 172, referenced in Parsons, p. 265.

<sup>26</sup> Lorna H., interview and written account.

half a century later, she felt she had more problems being English in Scotland than her husband ever had being German in England.)<sup>27</sup>

London children evacuated to rural areas found themselves ostracized and labelled.<sup>28</sup> Lorna H. recalled curious local Welsh people 'came to the house to view the 'foreigners' when we arrived... They "oo-ed" and "ahh-ed" at us and kept touching us to see if we were real... They couldn't have been more bemused if we had come from outer space!'<sup>29</sup> June K., aged nine, was evacuated with her two sisters from the dockland area of a large coastal town: 'We were evacuated with the school. It was a horrible thing, having a happy childhood, then suddenly put on a train not knowing where we were going.' Their mother had insisted they were not to be parted, but 'nobody wanted three. In the end we were put in a car with a strange man and taken to a house and people we had never seen... I don't think we were there that long – we were very unhappy.' Their mother subsequently sent them to friends in Somerset. (This strategy followed the general pattern of secondary evacuation, where parents usually made private arrangements with family or friends, rather than entrusting their children to strangers again.) They were absent from home for about three years. June F. (born 1928), who grew up in Southampton, was also likely to have been evacuated. Olive Reynolds (born 1925) was sent from West Ham to Lancashire. She also 'didn't like it there', and returned home.<sup>30</sup>

Accounts of the evacuation of British children during WW2 tend to focus upon the emotional and psychological culture shock of being uprooted, taken in by strangers in unfamiliar surroundings many miles from home and singled out as different in their new setting, marked out by their unfamiliar accents.<sup>31</sup> Returning could be equally problematic. Some younger

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<sup>27</sup> Margaret J., interview.

<sup>28</sup> Lyn Smith, *Young Voices: British Children Remember the Second World War* (London: Viking, 2007), pp. 65, 66; Goodman, p. 126; Ruth Inglis, *The Children's War: Evacuation 1939-1945* (London: Collins, 1989), p. 158.

<sup>29</sup> Lorna H., written account.

<sup>30</sup> June K., interview; June F., correspondence; Olive P., interview.

<sup>31</sup> For example, Brown, *Child's War*, pp. 4-8; Smith, pp. 53; 391; Ben Wicks, *No Time to Wave Goodbye* (London: Bloomsbury, 1988, 1989 edn) pp. 80, 93, 201. See also Gillian Mawson, *Britain's Wartime*

evacuees returned from Wales speaking only Welsh, while others faced re-adjusting acquired accents and re-establishing friendships.<sup>32</sup> Julie Summers' interviewees reveal how, for children whose evacuation experience had been positive, home-coming proved more traumatic than leaving, with lifelong alienating effects, in terms of split loyalties and guilt, having grown apart from their parents. One described feeling 'dissociated from my family – like a person on the outside looking in, a stranger.'<sup>33</sup>

The evacuation scheme had failed to address the psychological impact on children and parents. John Bowlby and Donald Winnicott had warned of this at the outset; their seminal postwar work grew out of what was learnt from the wartime phenomenon of child/parent separation, and its traumatic effects on former evacuees, felt in later life.<sup>34</sup> June K. claimed her unhappy evacuation experience had not affected her.<sup>35</sup> However, it seems possible, in the light of later events, that it influenced her in subtle ways: that evacuation enhanced former evacuees' capacity to empathize with outsiders, having experienced 'otherness' themselves.<sup>36</sup> One of Summers' interviewees explained its profound effect, in having 'formed the foundation of my philosophy of trying to understand and consider other people's point of view.... I like to give people what was not offered to me – a chance to... [be] heard in a fair and impartial manner.'<sup>37</sup> Another evacuation survivor chose a career in childcare to give other children the understanding she had not been offered.<sup>38</sup>

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*Evacuees: The People, Places and Stories of the Evacuations Told through the Accounts of Those Who Were There*, 'Voices from the Past' (Barnsley: Front Line, 2016), pp. 62, 77, 79, 170.

<sup>32</sup> Mawson, pp. 170-73.

<sup>33</sup> Summers, *When*, p. 44. See also Mawson, pp. 170, 172, 173, 180-89.

<sup>34</sup> John Bowlby, Emanuel Miller, D. W. Winnicott, 'Evacuation of Small Children', *Correspondence*, *British Medical Journal*, 16-12-1939, pp. 1202-03; Judith Issroff, Christopher Reeves, Bruce Hauptmann, *Donald Winnicott and John Bowlby: Personal and Professional Perspectives*, (NY and London: Karnac, 2005). A later study showed increased self-criticism among females evacuated in WW2 as early adolescents (aged 10-12): James S. M. Rusby and Fiona Tasker, 'Long-term Effects of the British Evacuation of Children during World War 2 on Their Adult Mental Health', *Aging and Mental Health*, 13, iii, (2009), 391-404.

<sup>35</sup> June K., interview.

<sup>36</sup> See also below, another evacuee, Margaret J.'s reaction to the shooting down of a German plane.

<sup>37</sup> Summers, *When*, pp. 44, 38, 51.

<sup>38</sup> Sheila Whipp, cited in Mawson, p. 189.

Sylvia L.'s unsettled and unconventional childhood had similarly opened her eyes. The illegitimate daughter of a teenage mother who eventually married, then deserted, a much older man, Sylvia (born 1924) explained the broadening effect on her outlook of changing schools, 'moving about from place to place' and making new friends. Her best friend's Anglo-Irish father, an 'educated man', offered her his outsider view: 'He hated Churchill, was always going to string him up.' He introduced Sylvia to J. B. Priestley's radio broadcasts, which she found 'very illuminating because they really told you something.'<sup>39</sup>

The war suddenly lent Sylvia's 'roaming life' a veneer of normality. Her mother's desertion had been 'a big crisis', but then war came and 'disrupted everyone's lives. So I didn't feel different from other people.'<sup>40</sup> Conscription, direction of labour, evacuation and bomb damage uprooted people from the familiar routine of their lives: young women from Scotland, Wales and northern England were sent to work in Midlands factories. Between September 1939 and December 1945, the National Register recorded 60 million changes of address for a civilian population of about 38 million.<sup>41</sup> Several contributors to this study joined the women's auxiliary services during the war or shortly after it ended. Service away from home – a new life, new friends – loosened home ties.<sup>42</sup> In the ATS for four years, Joyce S. lost contact with all except one friend at home.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Sylvia L. interview. (Probably a reference to Priestley's *Postscripts* broadcasts, a 'popular counterpoint' to Churchill's broadcasts, reminding the nation of pre-war 'broken promises', Field, pp. 36, 227, 235.)

<sup>40</sup> Sylvia L., interview.

<sup>41</sup> Douie, p. 14; Calder, pp. 333-34; Sheila Ferguson and Hilde Fitzgerald, *Studies in the Social Services, History of the Second World War United Kingdom Civil Series*, ed. by Sir Keith Hancock (London: HMSO and Longmans, 1954), p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> Joyce S., BW02, Lorna H., BW17; Field, p. 169.

<sup>43</sup> Joyce S., correspondence.



## *Women's wartime employment*

Official figures indicate that numbers of women in paid employment increased from a pre-war figure of five million to over seven million by 1943. (This figure understates total numbers of female workers by about 350,000, as it included part-time workers by counting two women as one worker.) By 1943, the total working population had climbed from 19.5 million to a wartime peak of 22.3 million, largely due to increased numbers of women workers, who comprised four out of five fresh entrants to the labour market.<sup>44</sup>

In May 1940, Regulation 58A of the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act became law, empowering the direction of male and, for the first time, female labour. By early 1941, many women had voluntarily entered the women's services or taken up work in factories. The 1941 National Service (2) Act introduced conscription (for auxiliary armed forces or other national service roles) for single or widowed childless women aged 19-30. Women aged 18 or over 30 (and, by late 1943, the 46-50 age group) were subject to direction under the Registration for Employment Order and required to register at Employment Exchanges. Girls aged 16-17 were required to register, to be put in touch with youth organizations. Given increased industrial demand while one third of the male working population were serving in the armed forces, the government obtained trade union agreement for women to be employed in previous closed shop 'men's work' processes, and substituted for men in factory work and engineering, transport and postal services. Women also worked for the police and auxiliary fire service, and on full and part-time ARP duties, WVS canteen and rest centre work. Citing government statistics, Margaret Goldsmiths wrote that by autumn 1944, out of roughly 16,000,000 women aged 14-59, 7,000,000 were working fulltime serving in the auxiliary forces, working in

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<sup>44</sup> Ferguson and Fitzgerald, pp. 5-6; Peter Howlett, *Fighting with Figures: A Statistical Digest of the Second World War* (London: HMSO, 1995), p. 38; Douie, p. 19.

industry, nursing, the WLA, public transport or civil defence; a further 1,250,000 were employed part-time in industry and civil defence.<sup>45</sup>

It was officially estimated that 90 per cent of single women and 80 per cent of childless married women were contributing to the war effort. Pregnant women and mothers caring for their own children under fourteen were exempted from direction or conscription, although according to Vera Douie, 'many thousands' worked voluntarily, particularly in the absence of husbands and evacuated children.<sup>46</sup> Following her children's evacuation, June K.'s mother became an ambulance driver; in 1940, with her husband away in the forces and their small daughter evacuated to relatives, an older contributor described how she had responded to Gloster Aircraft factory's appeal for workers and volunteered, feeling patriotic, to work nightshifts gluing canvas to wings. New opportunities and experiences occasioned by wartime conditions extended to other interviewees' mothers: Sylvia L.'s mother, having never previously worked, learned to drive and took on a milk round.<sup>47</sup> The Ministry of Labour estimated 41 per cent of wives and widows under 60 without children under 14 and 13 per cent of those with children under 14 were in the forces, or undertaking paid civil employment. For the 18-40 age group, the percentages were 81 and 12. (These figures also counted two part-time workers as one.) Municipal day nurseries, child minder registers and after-school play centres were set up to encourage mothers to work outside the home. Servicemen's wives were treated as 'immobiles', working in the vicinity of their homes, but otherwise women could be sent to live and work away from home; respectable unmarried women (aside from residential domestic workers) had hitherto normally only left home upon marriage.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> 'Statistics relating to the War Effort of the United Kingdom', Cmd. 6564, November 1944, cited in Margaret Goldsmith, *Women and the Future* (London: Lindsay Drummond, 1946), p. 14; also Vera Douie, *Daughters of Britain* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1950), pp. 18-19.

<sup>46</sup> Douie, p. 12.

<sup>47</sup> June K., interview; BW03, correspondence, Sylvia L., interview.

<sup>48</sup> See Douie, *Daughters*, regarding employment of women in WW2 and the workings of this legislation, pp 1-20.

Selina Todd has argued that wider employment opportunities during the 1930s had already endowed young working-class women with aspirational self-confidence. WW2 opened up new opportunities, including skills training and promotion. Todd cites a former shop assistant turned factory forewoman who claimed proudly – ‘We done the work as well as the men’. June MacDonald, a secretary, recalled the heightened status of hitherto lowly women workers: ‘A clippie in charge of a bus, she was in control and you did what she told you.’ Shop assistants, who before the war ‘had been rather subservient... always terribly polite’, became, as custodians of rationed goods, ‘suddenly very powerful people.’<sup>49</sup>

BW03 believed women’s wartime independence ‘gradually grew’, remembering ‘It was wonderful to find yourself in demand and quite independent and equal to men.’<sup>50</sup> Barbara Dennis recalled middle-class housewives welcoming this, ‘but husbands did not.’ Not all housewives embraced independence, however, either for themselves or for their daughters. Leaving school in her mid-teens in 1944, Barbara ‘thought longingly of the women’s services – mixed company, edgy excitement, vital and honoured work, the status of a uniform.’ Her mother reacted with emotional blackmail, perceiving her daughter’s first duty to be to her, not her country: ‘After all I’ve done for you, you can’t leave me now.’ At sixteen, Barbara registered for national service and took a shorthand/typing course. She had to fight her mother for every chance to go out on her own. Her diary recorded eagerness to earn her own money. She took a job at the Foreign Office in central London, and braved further parental displeasure by going to dances.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Selina Todd, *Young Women, Work and Family in England, 1918-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 12, 22, 26, 52, 112; Paul Addison, *Now the War is Over: A Social History of Britain 1945-51* (London: Pimlico, 1995), pp. 5, 8.

<sup>50</sup> BW03, correspondence.

<sup>51</sup> Dennis, pp. 6-7, 15, 20-21.

## *Experiencing WW2 as children, adolescents and young workers*

Brian Thompson described the war having ‘thickened and coarsened’ children’s feelings.

Barbara Dennis remembered children’s innocence and insensitivity, no fear about wartime dangers, only a sense of drama and excitement: collecting shrapnel, even boasting of picking up bits of bodies. While adults faced constant strain to keep going despite overwork and lack of sleep, food and other necessities, many children delighted in the disruption. As a twelve-year-old, living in outer London just outside the evacuation area, Barbara remembered praying for the school to be bombed, and communal delight on the rare ‘welcome occasions’ when bombs dropped in the school grounds, necessitating its closure for a few days.<sup>52</sup>

Lorna H. returned to the Kent coast to find all grammar schools closed: her only option was elementary school. Academically ahead of the others, she did not need to work, and ‘had a whale of a time.’ With the Battle of Britain going on overhead, much time was spent ‘looking skywards until things got too hairy and we had to dash for cover.’ Lorna became a classroom assistant, then, reaching fourteen (school-leaving age), ‘pestered my parents to let me leave school and earn some money.’ Told she could leave if she found a job, she walked into a large grocery store the same day and got a job on the till. Kathleen W. (born 1931) commented, ‘we grew up a lot quicker’ having to ‘go out and hold a job... at fourteen.’<sup>53</sup>

June K. described her wartime education as ‘practically non-existent’. She returned from evacuation to find the school building ‘taken over by Free French sailors.’ Lessons were taught in ‘different people’s front rooms... there were no exams.’<sup>54</sup> Sylvia L.’s education also suffered. ‘All that stopped. We didn’t really finish our education.’ She took a bookkeeping course, then in 1940 started work in an office near Southwark Bridge. Sylvia’s account conveys youthful

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<sup>52</sup> Brian Thompson, *Keeping Mum: A Wartime Childhood* (London: Atlantic Books, 2006), pp. 33-34; Dennis, pp. 9-10. See also Goodman, p. 139.

<sup>53</sup> Lorna H., written account; Kathleen W., interview.

<sup>54</sup> June K., interview.

insouciance during the Blitz. Her bus journey to work became a daily adventure, detouring around streets blocked by rubble. Impatient with staff trailing in late, her boss arranged a chauffeur to fetch them, but they had to make their own way home at night. Sometimes, with darkness falling, sirens would sound, warning people 'to get out of the centre.' They hitchhiked, cars offered lifts. Sylvia arrived at work one day to find 'just smoking rubble' and 'firemen's hoses all over the street [...] I remember being quite happy, thinking "Don't have to work today!" We got two weeks' pay and were told to look for another job,' which she obtained within a few days.<sup>55</sup>

Absence of young men on active service telescoped courtship, leading to hasty marriages.<sup>56</sup> But Sylvia wasn't looking for love and commitment: that was too emotionally risky. Her Canadian boyfriend was killed: 'He wasn't the love of my life... You met people one day and they were gone the next, so it was hard to keep a relationship going. Some girls married very quickly, but I decided not to marry during the war.' Sylvia had witnessed 'this awful heartbreak', of marrying someone 'and then they'd be killed within a few months. I couldn't stand it... to be married to someone knowing they were going over – you don't know where they are. No, that's what I couldn't put up with.' Sylvia recalled boys from her class in school 'killed, on minesweepers and things like that', and friends' husbands 'taken prisoner.' Air raids were 'terrifying... but when you're young you're resilient. And in between times we enjoyed life. You can't imagine dying. You think you'll be lucky.' The reality of the war eventually touched her with the 'devastating' news that an air raid had killed her closest friend. But

People were told not to get depressed, all this propaganda – be cheerful, got to think of the war effort... so people kept their spirits up. There were jolly times, the pubs were jolly, there was singing and dancing... I loved dancing. We had a very good time in that respect... lots of friends. But we worked very hard.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Sylvia L., interview.

<sup>56</sup> Field, p. 203

<sup>57</sup> Sylvia L., interview.

Virginia Nicholson suggested that the war began 'to have a transformative effect' on women, who, 'with new skills, new responsibilities', were learning to cope in the absence of male protectors. One of her sources also recoiled from the commitment of marriage, having tasted the opportunities and insecurities that the war had 'thrown' at her. 'What law said that you had to marry a boyfriend because your parents liked him? Who had ordained that one couldn't have a bit of fun, play around, travel, experiment?'<sup>58</sup>

Joyce S. (born 1926) had a reserved occupation at Vauxhall Motors, as a typist, but volunteered in 1943 to join the ATS 'to do my bit to fight to end the war, rather than sit at home in a safe job.' It offered a chance to 'see the world, gain experience.' However, she questioned whether the war made women more independent-minded, since she had always been inclined that way, encouraged by her mother:

My father was not so keen; he believed he knew more about things than I did. We did not always see eye to eye, but he usually left me to find things out for myself... Maybe I was a little proud... that I... could manage on my own.

Thea Burghart's pseudonymous autobiography describes how, in 1942, she discovered her age group were to be called up. She professed herself eager to 'get into uniform' and do something patriotic, while reluctant to lose home comforts or abandon her widowed father. She joined the Women's Land Army, which assigned her to a local estate. When this proved lonely and monotonous, she approached the local W.A.E. Committee.<sup>59</sup> They offered a job as a pest operator, travelling round rat-catching and setting snares for rabbits, which she enjoyed much more, despite the work's gruesome, unfeminine nature.<sup>60</sup>

BW29 (born 1921) had been earning £2 a week in a village post office. She dodged conscription or being directed to a munitions factory – ostensibly to avoid worrying her

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<sup>58</sup> Nicholson, pp. 213, 218.

<sup>59</sup> During the war, county War Agricultural Executive Committees organized land work.

<sup>60</sup> Burghart, pp. 45, 58-61.

mother – by obtaining exempted clerical work (paying twice her previous wage) at Donnington central ordnance depot. She worked alongside local ATS recruits, some of whom had joined up anticipating being posted away from home, but instead simply sat beside her in uniform. She described them as ‘furious’ at having ‘all that drilling’, while civilians pleased themselves and could earn more. When Donnington absorbed Woolwich Arsenal, a rural backwater became a brick-built town, humming with activity, transforming her social life.<sup>61</sup> Dances were held at different camps three or four times a week, including to the nearby air force base where Americans were stationed, with ‘lovely food’ laid on, offering her first taste of peanut butter. The Americans generously gave them food to take home, which possibly accounted for her mother covering for her, to her authoritarian father.<sup>62</sup>

Lorna H., as a working mid-teenager, also went dancing several times a week. Local cinemas had re-opened so she had ‘quite a social life... I loved dancing.’ There was no shortage of partners – ‘the town was full of troops.’ Lorna found it difficult to dance ‘cheek-to-cheek’ as the young Americans expected. ‘I used to blush, but if the GI was good-looking, I was secretly delighted.’ After the dances finished, they walked five miles home in the blackout, at midnight.<sup>63</sup> As girls and young women enjoyed more unchaperoned social freedom during the war, concerns were raised about moral standards slipping.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> A Shropshire village had been chosen in 1936 as the site for a depot to replace Woolwich Royal Arsenal. Construction began in 1938; 600 civilians transferred from Woolwich in 1940; building completed in 1943.

<sup>62</sup> BW29, interview.

<sup>63</sup> Lorna H., interview.

<sup>64</sup> Field, pp. 194-202, 206; Ferguson and Fitzgerald, pp.92, 97-98, 102; A. P. Jephcott, *Girls Growing Up* (London: Faber and Faber, 1942), pp. 136-37.

## *Absent fathers and female role models*

By mid-1945, 4.6 million males (approximately 30 per cent of the male working population) were serving in the armed forces, including nearly half a million (467,100) aged over 40. The majority (4.1 million) were aged 18-39 and included 63 per cent of the male 20-29 age group. Prominent historian Margaret Mary Gowing's introductory chapter to Ferguson and Fitzgerald's official history of wartime social services estimated (extrapolating from numbers of married men in the Army alone at the end of 1944), that about 55 per cent of all servicemen at that date were 'probably married'. From this, the conclusion was drawn that approximately 2.5 million servicemen were separated on a daily basis from wives and families, since even those not serving abroad (the majority of the Army, between mid-1940 and mid-1944) were posted to depots and camps. Gowing regarded conscription into the armed services as 'perhaps the most ruthless instrument in dispersing families', pointing out that military service abroad entailed lengthy absence from home, sometimes for several years. Males in the home forces were mostly posted too far from home to be able to visit frequently, or 'give help in times of trouble.' She added that 'many civilian families were also separated.'<sup>65</sup>

Roughly half the 10.1 million civilian male workers aged 14-64 worked in reserved occupations. Subsequent studies have questioned WW2 home front narratives' emphasis on servicemen's absence, pointing to the large numbers of able-bodied men who worked in reserved occupations. Sokoloff pointed out that the 5 million men working in reserved occupations were concentrated in certain industrial areas, like the Midlands. Reserved men were spared conscription, but, as Gowing pointed out, following the establishment of large new industrial sites, and evacuation of businesses and administrative offices from city centres, they did not necessarily continue to work in their home areas. While conceding an 'unknown number' managed, despite housing shortages, temporarily to move their families nearby, they

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<sup>65</sup> Howlett, pp. 36, 40; Ferguson and Fitzgerald, pp. 3-4.



contended that, In addition to married servicemen, a proportion of married civilian men had occupations which involved absence from their homes. However, Sokoloff suggests short home leaves were common, for morale purposes, for servicemen on home service.<sup>66</sup> And Summerfield (1984) pointed to popular resistance to married women's direction to work away from home, although she also cited a Ministry of Labour ruling which described 'the separation of husbands and wives... in the discharge of their moral obligation... towards the... national effort to secure the defence of the country' as 'one of the common experiences of the times'.<sup>67</sup> Marital separation as a common experience was underlined by wartime and postwar concern about after-effects of wartime lack of supervision on so-called 'latchkey kids', whose fathers were absent and mothers at work. A Metropolitan police report cited lack of 'fatherly control and restraint... in a large number of families [where] mothers have obviously tended to allow too much freedom', and where children invariably arrived home some time before their mothers.<sup>68</sup>

Social researcher and youth work organizer Pearl Jephcott noted that wartime adolescents seemed to have no interest in hobbies; teachers noticed children aged 11-14 now disdained playground games – 'They just stroll about.'<sup>69</sup> Penny Tinkler has pointed out that pre-war concerns about young girls' leisure activities increased during WW2 and the immediate postwar years, which highlighted problems of sexual delinquency and lack of organized leisure to keep girls out of trouble. The 14-20 age group, recognized as negotiating a critical transitional stage before adulthood, were singled out for special attention. A link was perceived between employment (disposable income and workplace adult influences), leisure

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<sup>66</sup> Ferguson and Fitzgerald, pp. 3-4; Howlett, pp. 36-40; Sally Sokoloff, "'How Are They At Home?': Community, State and Servicemen's Wives in England 1939-45,' *Women's History Review*, 8, i (1999), 27-52, (p. 41.)

<sup>67</sup> *Ministry of Labour Gazette*, February 1941, cited in Penny Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War* (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1984), p. 47.

<sup>68</sup> Wood Green Y Division (Metropolitan Police) Report, 27 October 1948, TNA ref MEPO 2/8430, cited in Turner and Rennell, p. 157.

<sup>69</sup> Jephcott, *Girls*, p. 110.

and sexual misconduct, with female rather than male sexuality regarded as problematic.

Attention focused on female promiscuity and the increase in the illegitimate birth rate among younger women during the war. Referring to official concerns about wartime dislocation and lack of normal social control over the young, Tinkler cites Olive Wheeler's explanation that 'war conditions – the black-out, bombing, evacuation, the early entrance... into industry and economic independence and the absence of fathers in active service and of mothers on war work, increased the risks of disaster to the youth of this country.'<sup>70</sup>

Noting greater consumption of alcohol among young people, Jephcott suggested the war had made growing-up more difficult, having 'burst open' the formerly 'narrow but very secure' school-life. Adolescents had suffered 'all kinds of interruptions both in their education and their home life. Fathers were 'likely to be... away in the Forces. Mothers and older sisters are at work all day', leaving younger girls 'very much to their own devices.' Jephcott's later study concluded that 'War-time influences in general seem to have whetted the adolescent's desire to grow up more rapidly.' These concerns drove the establishment of youth clubs and youth organizations, aiming to build character and discourage delinquency, encouraging companionable rather than sexualized socializing. They emphasized confidence-building education for future citizenship, to dissociate the initiative from overtones of Hitler Youth organization and coercion.<sup>71</sup>

In Tinkler's view, mixed-sex youth clubs, in seeking to curb the sexuality of working-class young women to encourage them towards monogamous, companionate marriage, 'did not necessarily challenge, and may even have accentuated, the sexual division of labour within

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<sup>70</sup> Penny Tinkler, 'Cause for Concern: young women and leisure, 1930-1950', *Women's History Review*, 12, ii (2003), 233-61, (pp. 239, 247 and 244, citing Olive A. Wheeler, 'The Service of Youth', *Journal of Educational Psychology* (1943), 13, pp. 70-72).

<sup>71</sup> Jephcott, *Girls*, pp. 136-37; Pearl Jephcott, *Rising Twenty: Notes on Some Ordinary Girls* (London: Faber & Faber, 1948), p. 108. (Jephcott worked 1942-1946 for the National Association of Girls' Clubs); Tinkler, 'Cause', pp. 247-48, Agnes Miall, cited p. 249; J M Cowper, *The Auxiliary Territorial Service* (London: The War Office, 1949), pp. 97, 141.

marriage and family life.<sup>72</sup> However, she also concluded that these initiatives were not particularly successful; young women's leisure activities remained relatively unchanged, due to lack of facilities or trained leaders and, more importantly, resistance from girls themselves. (Only one contributor to my study mentioned frequenting a local youth club.<sup>73</sup>)

### **Wartime role models and postwar re-adjustments**

From Bowlby and Winnicott onwards, attention has been drawn to the effect of WW2 family disruptions on children and adolescents' behaviour and emotional adjustment.<sup>74</sup> Less consideration appears to have been given to influence on children with regard to gender role models. In the context of interwar male unemployment, Todd criticised the male breadwinner role stereotype as inadequate, since it ignored the economic contribution young working-class women's paid employment made to their families. But she also acknowledged the family as 'a site of socialization... characterized by patriarchal relations', in which women remained subordinate (despite their economic importance and less patriarchal forms of household decision-making) to a male head of the household (and other male household members).<sup>75</sup> During WW2, however, although servicemen's wives sometimes moved in with relatives, a proportion of children whose mothers remained housewives would have experienced what were effectively female-run, single-parent households which, during his absence, did not appear to defer to a male head. Among contributors to this study, Joyce W. recalled nothing unusual during the war – 'We were just at home, at school' – but also explained that her widowed mother had brought them up; the war conferred normality on their situation as a single-parent family. Barry Turner and Tony Rennell's oral history study of the aftermath of

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<sup>72</sup> Tinkler, 'Cause', p. 252.

<sup>73</sup> BW04, correspondence.

<sup>74</sup> See earlier references and below, under subheading '*Concern about Fatherless Families and Girls' Leisure*'.

<sup>75</sup> Todd, pp. 69, 84 227.

WW2 cited one contributor who claimed to have been unaffected by the war, despite her father's absence on war service which necessitated her mother, while raising two children and caring for their grandmother, taking over 'all the family finances', never previously her responsibility.<sup>76</sup>

Children would clearly also have witnessed women undertaking pre-war traditional 'men's work', driving vans, collecting busfares, delivering the post, in ARP and auxiliary fire service roles.<sup>77</sup> Ernest Bevin acknowledged the vital importance of those in transport roles, praising 'These women on crowded vehicles' doing 'a marvellous job'. Women working in transport roles, as bus and tram conductresses, railway porters and ticket inspectors, all wearing trousers, would have been particularly visible to children.<sup>78</sup>

Sokoloff acknowledged the postwar phenomenon of 'independent-minded wives who had learned to live without husbands'.<sup>79</sup> Assuming the figure of over two million married couples separated during the war as a conservative estimate (since it excluded civilian men working away from home), a plausible conclusion may reasonably be drawn. This is that a proportion of young female children, adolescents and teenage girls would have been exposed (either in their own homes or their communities) to wartime role models who were no longer dependent housewives but women engaged in paid employment who also ran their households in the absence of an adult male.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Todd, pp. 69, 84 227; Barry Turner and Tony Rennell, *When Daddy Came Home: How Family Life Changed Forever in 1945* (London: Hutchinson, 1995), p. 126.

<sup>77</sup> for examples of the work undertaken by women during WW2, see Neil R. Storey and Molly Housego, *Women in the Second World War* (Oxford: Shire, 2011); J B Priestley, *British Women Go to War* (London: Collins, 1943); Margaret Goldsmith, *Women at War* (Letchworth: Lindsay Drummond, [n.d. ?1943]).

<sup>78</sup> 'Man-Power', Commons debate, 23-9-1943, vol. 392, cc 459-541 (472); Calder, pp. 334-35.

<sup>79</sup> Sokoloff, p. 45.

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## Married women's postwar re-adjustments

Ben Wicks' study of postwar marital adjustment cited several women who found it hard to settle in a domestic role, when husbands returned 'as if nothing had changed... Once again, he was the master of the house.... It was a traumatic time... having to ask for any decision, being told what you can and cannot do... they were the worst years of my life.'<sup>81</sup> Married women's postwar difficulty in adjustment in itself underlined the effect the war had on women's roles, and was in some cases witnessed by their children. In an oral history-based exploration of post-1945 family life, Barry Turner and Tony Rennell suggest the seeds of feminism's late-twentieth-century second wave were planted in WW2, when growing girls saw 'that it was possible to exist without a man about the house... [even] in the most aggravating circumstances.' One of their sources stressed that she 'only had strong women as my role models in my formative years'; another commented that men came back to find 'strong useful women with harder hearts and harder hands capable of doing jobs that men never dreamed women could do.'<sup>82</sup> Summers also emphasizes this image: citing sources who had been children during the war whose 'mothers, in becoming fighters and survivors, had become hardened', and 'formidable'. One woman commented that the men had spent five years being taken care of by the Army, whereas the women had been running a household and paying bills.<sup>83</sup> In turn, ex-servicemen felt resentful and estranged, unable to understand rationing and shortages of which they, on service rations, had been oblivious.<sup>84</sup>

Wicks cited a number of archive accounts and correspondents describing women's adjustments to postwar life, quoting one woman who (like June K.'s mother) had served in an ambulance station, and greatly missed the independence and workplace camaraderie.

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<sup>81</sup> A. Freeman, in Ben Wicks, *Welcome Home: True Stories of Soldiers Returning from World War II* (London: Bloomsbury, 1991), p. 142.

<sup>82</sup> Avril Middleton; Margaret Wadsworth, cited in Turner and Rennell, pp. 137, 162, iv.

<sup>83</sup> Julie Summers, *Stranger in the House: Women's Stories of Men Coming Home from the War* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2008; Pocket Books edn, 2009) p. 46.

<sup>84</sup> Turner and Rennell, pp. 46, 126.

Another woman reflected on the empowering confidence boost, after four years in the ATS on an Anti-Aircraft command post, 'of being my own person – instead of a housewife pandering to my husband's every need, which was the norm in those days.'<sup>85</sup>

Writing in WW2's later stages, Margaret Goldsmith suggested that married women's war work had shifted 'the pivot of their working existence' away from husbands and 'children even'; young married women had 'become accustomed to living alone, to making plans and arrangements by themselves without consulting their husbands.' Acknowledging this might not represent a permanent shift in the domestic 'balance of power', she nevertheless suggested younger wives had formed 'new attitudes' with many having become accustomed to 'new economic and mental independence', and suggested their husbands were becoming 'accustomed to this independence.' Goldsmith further argued that although many women had not necessarily relished independence and were homesick for their pre-war lifestyle, this longing was a 'glowing fantasy', denying 'formed habits of independence' and taking for granted the company and other recompenses of going out to work. She suggested wives 'may not value their economic independence until they are again forced to ask their husbands for every shilling they wish to spend.'<sup>86</sup>

In January 1945, *Woman's Own* published an article which, while emphasizing the need to reinstate the family home, tentatively acknowledged wives had become 'more independent', shouldering more responsibilities in their husbands' absence, with some having 'learned to enjoy the independence of salaries of their own. Giving these up may not be too easy.'<sup>87</sup> A 1945 WVS newsletter offering advice to staff dealing with demobilized husbands returning

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<sup>85</sup> Wicks, *Welcome*, pp. 137, 129-44.

<sup>86</sup> Margaret Goldsmith, *Women and the Future*, p. 15.

<sup>87</sup> Norah C. James, 'Back to Real Life', *Woman's Own*, January 1945, p. 15, cited in Summers, *Stranger*, p.16.

home with a pre-war view of women and finding 'their women terribly independent!'

suggested putting it to them that:

If a woman has had to make decisions as to whether her children shall be evacuated... do all the business over air-raid repairs [one in three houses had been damaged or destroyed] and has perhaps herself kept the (husband's) farm or shop ticking over, she naturally does not now wait for her husband to decide whether to call in the plumber or not; she knows there isn't a plumber anyway, and she probably gets on with the job herself!<sup>88</sup>

This contrasted somewhat with most women's magazine advice, which echoed Norah James, making it clear which partner would need to adjust.<sup>89</sup>

Janice Winship underlined the 'incipient feminism' of wartime discussions regarding working mothers, citing the National Marriage Guidance Council general secretary regarding the effect of wartime dislocations of family life that characterized the late 1940s. She argued that, given the timid conservatism of *Woman* magazine when tackling social problems, the 'radical edge' it displayed in the immediate postwar era must only have touched the surface of the 'profound discontents actually felt by women'. Evelyn Home's advice column tackled the problems of 'the emotional dislocation of one or both partners returning from the excitement of war'. Some difficulties of the housewife/mother role were demonstrated by what Winship labelled 'rather fatalistic grumbles'. One correspondent in 1948, a homemaker with a husband and two sons, yearned for her single life 'when work stayed within the boundaries of 9.30am and 5.30pm, 5 days a week and I was actually paid for it.'<sup>90</sup>

The falling wartime birth rate had led the government to urge women to have four children, prompting young women to complain to the magazine about not wanting to be slaves to children and the kitchen sink like their mothers. By 1947, with the postwar baby boom allaying birthrate concerns, women were being encouraged back into factories to boost postwar

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<sup>88</sup> WVS newsletter 1945, cited in Turner and Rennell, p. 125.

<sup>89</sup> Summers, *Stranger*, p. 16.

<sup>90</sup> Cited in Winship, 'Nation', pp. 198, 205, 203.

production. *Woman* tirelessly repeated working wives' need for help with domestic responsibilities, exhorting husbands to 'jettison the idea that one man's comfort is one woman's wholetime job,' given that 'many married women would be combining marriage and motherhood with paid work.'<sup>91</sup> By contrasting advice to women in the late 1940s with that in the 1950s, Winship demonstrated a difference in attitudes towards domestic responsibilities and work in the late 1940s, although there was never any real challenge to the division of labour in the home – it was never suggested that men should take an equal share.

### **Postwar marital conflict**

Conflict between their parents was not a subject expressly explored with contributors to this research. It was only referred to obliquely by two: one mentioned her parents had divorced; another spoke of her parents' postwar domestic arrangement, which cost her father his place as head of their household. Some children would have witnessed postwar 'marital tension', difficult readjustments between their parents.<sup>92</sup> Gillian Mawson's study cited a male source recalling that his mother found it difficult to revert to the traditional housewife role after the war. During the war, she had 'worked, paid the bills and looked after us whilst Dad was in the forces. It changed her outlook and ideas on what women were actually capable of doing.'<sup>93</sup> A woman who had been in her mid-teens when the war ended, recalled how her mother, who had taken over her father's job when he was called up, 'had to take a back seat on his return... Her ego never got over the bruising it took having to step down in the business.' But another woman claimed that after six years in the army, the men hadn't really grown up. They 'didn't

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<sup>91</sup> Cited in Goodman, p. 198. Proscription against mothers of young children going out to work did not appear until the mid-1950s, when John Bowlby's theories on attachment and loss were interpreted to recommend that pre-school children's mothers should stay at home.

<sup>92</sup> Goodman, p. 310.

<sup>93</sup> John Tippett, cited in Gillian Mawson, *Britain's Wartime Evacuees: The People, Places and Stories of the Evacuations Told through the Accounts of Those Who Were There*, 'Voices from the Past' (Barnsley: Front Line, 2016), p. 179.



take their responsibilities properly. It was Mum, army, then the wives took over.' And a former ATS sergeant major had missed the companionship and the authority she had in the army, but her marriage didn't suffer 'because he was a very quiet man, so I just took over automatically, running the house and bringing up the children.'<sup>94</sup>

Sylvia L. recalled homecoming men voicing general disillusionment.<sup>95</sup> Thomas Forrest Main, a psychiatric advisor in the RAMC, described returned ex-servicemen's 'emotional isolation', how 'great barriers of unshared experience' loomed between them and their families.<sup>96</sup> A stranger returned to a wife and family group that had learned to manage without him. Children resented repressive, over-authoritarian paternal attempts to pass on the rigid discipline adhered to during the war, while other fathers apparently 'refused to take responsibility for anything, either financial or personal.'<sup>97</sup> Demobbed men missed the camaraderie and irresponsible simplicity of service life, extended by the postwar gratuity, which some drank or frittered away.<sup>98</sup>

Despite the Army Welfare Service's best reconciliation efforts, divorce petitions increased from an annual average of 7,500 in the immediate pre-war period to 25,711 in 1945; 43,163 in 1946 and 48,501 in 1947.<sup>99</sup> Oliver McGregor suggested the extension of married women's employment, encouraging financial independence, might partly explain the 1939-1949 fourfold increase in divorce petitions. Husbands' petitions, mainly on the grounds of adultery,

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<sup>94</sup> Cited in Wicks, *Welcome*, pp. 142 (A. Freeman), 141, 133 (Peggy Boorman), 138 (Vicky Masterman).

<sup>95</sup> Sylvia L., interview.

<sup>96</sup> T. F. Main, 'Clinical Problems of Repatriates', *Journal of Mental Science*, 93, 1947, (354-63), p. 360.

<sup>97</sup> Turner and Rennell, pp. 175, 182, 185, 218-19, 136-37; Summers, *Stranger*, pp. 46, 127, 199, 201, 208; Wicks, *Welcome*, p. 151, 164-65; Alan Allport, *Demobbed: Coming Home After the Second World War* (London: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 69-74, ch. 5.

<sup>98</sup> Addison, p. 23.

<sup>99</sup> Lt Col. R F Burnand, Army Welfare Service, letter to the Editor headed 'Service Divorces', *The Times*, 20-4-1946, p. 5.

represented 61 per cent of the 1947 figure; wives' adultery might also be viewed as symptomatic of the agency women exercised during the war.<sup>100</sup>

### **Single young women's postwar adjustments**

Sylvia L. had joined the victory celebrations crush at Trafalgar Square. 'And of course everybody was deciding what to do... We all thought everything would be wonderful suddenly.' Her plans to go to Australia, however, turned out to be 'just a dream. Everything went on much the same, shortages, and hard work, people going home ...coming back married, husbands coming back, being demobbed, having to think about jobs and where to live...' She felt deflated, missing heightened wartime emotions. It was a 'big anti-climax, like after exams.'<sup>101</sup>

Several contemporary publications sought to articulate and build on the gains women made during the war, discussing career options, equal pay issues and exploring practical ways of extending career ambitions in the postwar period. Journalist Margaret Goldsmith claimed one of the war's 'outstanding developments' as 'this new independence', stimulating 'among a great majority of the younger women a spirit of rebellion.'<sup>102</sup> Gertrude Williams addressed whether home-making was a full-time job, whether married women had the right to earn a living, and whether women whose priority was home and family could expect to get responsible jobs, while Ursula Bloom explored practical career possibilities for 'girls at present in the services'.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Oliver Ross McGregor, *Divorce in England: A Centenary Study*, (London: Heinemann, 1957), pp. 37-45.

<sup>101</sup> Sylvia L., interview. A Battersea teenager confirmed similar feelings of 'anti-climax... everything... dull and flat after the excitement and friendliness', cited in Longmate, *How*, p. 506.

<sup>102</sup> Goldsmith, *Women and the Future*, p. 136.

<sup>103</sup> Vera Douie, *The Lesser Half: A Survey of the Laws, Regulations and Practices Introduced During the Present War Which Embody Discrimination Against Women* (Swindon: Swindon Press, 1943); Ursula

Roxanne Houston's memoir of her WRNS service describes a homebound voyage over Christmas 1945 sharing intense discussions of ambitious plans for the future, although some fellow Wrens confessed to having no idea what to do when cast adrift from service life, and many seemed to be solving the dilemma by getting married, or looking forward to the marital life they had postponed.<sup>104</sup> Houston described feeling alone and bereft of an identity, having outgrown her pre-war persona. They had all talked longingly of returning home, but home was now in an unfamiliar place. After six years of obeying orders, never having to make difficult decisions, she 'struggled to adjust', anxiously searching for direction.<sup>105</sup>

At the end of WW2, young women without domestic responsibilities, including those in the auxiliary services, spared rationing constraints or household demands, felt somewhat differently from tired wives and mothers. A Mass Observation survey in 1944 had registered younger service women's restlessness, urge for adventure and foreign travel, and tendency, like Joyce S., to hold their own opinions.<sup>106</sup> Restlessness appeared a predominant postwar feeling among other young women. Wicks cites one woman who waited until the Essential Works Order was lifted in 1946, then 'lost no time in shaking the dust off my feet and left the place the same day.' Young women sought out further challenges, re-joining the services or finding work abroad. One described feeling restless and unsettled after the shared dangers,

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Bloom, *Me After the War: A Book for Girls Considering the Future* (London: John Gifford, 1944); Gertrude Williams, *Women and Work* (London: Nicholson & Watson, 1945).

<sup>104</sup> Government statistics indicate that marriage numbers in England and Wales increased by 31 per cent between 1944 and 1945, then declined between 1947 and 1957. <http://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/marriagecohabitationandcivilpartnerships/bulletins/marriagesinenglandandwalesprovisional/2014-06-11> [Accessed 28-11-2016].

<sup>105</sup> Roxanne Houston, *Changing Course: The Wartime Experiences of a Member of the Women's Royal Naval Service 1939-1945* (London: Grub Street, 2005), pp. 265-69.

<sup>106</sup> *The Journey Home: A Report Prepared by Mass-Observation for the Advertising Service Guild* (London: John Murray, 1944), pp. 58-60.

hardships and heightened emotions. Her solution was working in Austria, attached to the army. 'The apprehensions and the little fears seemed to cure my restlessness.'<sup>107</sup>

Over 600,000 women had joined the auxiliary forces over the course of the war. Service women had been clothed, fed, entertained and enjoyed free travel. Lorna H. recalled how she couldn't wait to be old enough to join the services; she didn't want to miss out, for the war's excitement to be over before she had tasted it, away from home. At seventeen, the WAAF recruiting office accepted her as a clerk. Her father, having served in the RAF, was pleased; her mother worried because she was so young. But Lorna, no longer a homesick child evacuee, had become an adventure-seeking teenager with three years' work experience behind her. She was called up in February 1946. By late 1946, more women were joining the services than leaving them. The SSAFA reported that 'The disappointments of civil life and the attraction of the life offered by the Services resulted in a big increase in new recruits.'<sup>108</sup>

### *Attitudes towards the Enemy Other*

Those who lived through the war were also psychologically affected in other ways. Women contributors to this study experienced WW2 as children, adolescents, teenagers or young adults; they almost unanimously described feelings of fear, horror and hatred towards their wartime enemies. Margaret Kertesz has argued that combatants' hatred for the enemy is tempered by the responsibilities that accompany direct engagement, whereas civilian hatred remains unrestrained, their experience of the enemy as 'a more shadowy abstract concept'.<sup>109</sup> Anecdotal accounts suggest that, for some children, the imagined enemy appeared, at the

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<sup>107</sup> Cited in Wicks, *Welcome*, pp. 135 (Joyce Hampson), 143 (Dorothy Lowman), also 160 (Marigold Hoare).

<sup>108</sup> Lorna H., correspondence; *Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen Families Association Annual Report*, December 1946, cited in Turner and Rennell, pp. 110, 112.

<sup>109</sup> Margaret Kertesz, 'The Enemy: British Images of the German People during the Second World War' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sussex, 1992), p. 2.

outset of WW2, frighteningly real. One online reminiscence describes emerging from Sunday school to hear that war had been declared. The siren then sounded, and they dashed home 'expecting the Germans to come round the corner at any minute.'<sup>110</sup> Barbara Dennis, an imaginative child, heard the first siren and pictured 'immediate annihilation... entrails... bloodied corpses'. Another woman, sheltering as an eight-year-old during an air-raid, recalled screaming when the air raid warden banged on the shelter door. 'We thought Hitler had come to get us.'<sup>111</sup>

By mid-1940, threat of enemy invasion became very real: eastern and south-eastern coastal areas were cleared of their civilian populations.<sup>112</sup> Government leaflets instructed what to do if German parachutists arrived.<sup>113</sup> One woman remembered being 'taught how to flee into the woods and hills.'<sup>114</sup> Buses showed no destinations, signposts and station names were taken down. Olive K., aged eight in 1940, recalled 'You had it on your mind – hope I don't see a German! ... [fearing] they'd land, and... ask you the way.' Olive was with Pamela, an evacuee, when a stranger did just that, asking the way to London. 'And Pam said to me "We don't know... You mustn't ever tell anybody where London is," ... it could have been a German.'<sup>115</sup>

Invasion fears disturbed even children in the West Country, where junk was scattered on fields and golf courses to prevent enemy aircraft landing, anti-tank barricades built across main roads. With invasion viewed as inevitable, conversation revolved around how the Nazis would behave. Ann Stalcup heard 'terrible rumours about their cruelty. Townspeople... were killed if

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<sup>110</sup> Ruth L. Sharman, online oral history contribution ID A2045288, *BBC WW2 People's War*, 'War Time Childhood in Surbiton', 2003:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/88/a2045288.shtml> [Accessed 19-7-2017]

<sup>111</sup> Dennis, p. 1; Jean Birch, cited in Ben Wicks, *No Time*, p. 166.

<sup>112</sup> In 1940, war artist Eric Ravilious titled depictions of Sussex coastal defences his 'pre-invasion drawings', implying imminent invasion. James Russell, *Ravilious in Pictures: The War Paintings*, (Norwich: Mainstone Press, 2010), p. 26.

<sup>113</sup> Nicholson, p. 63; see also Marion Yass, *This is Your War: Home Front propaganda in the Second World War* (London: HMSO, 1983), pp. 21, 34-35.

<sup>114</sup> BW27, correspondence.

<sup>115</sup> Olive K., interview; see also Brown, p. 24.

they didn't obey orders quickly enough.' Questioning their own capacity for violence, people planned to escape into the countryside. 'Everyone was trying to be brave, but we were all secretly very frightened.'<sup>116</sup> Mothers anticipated their daughters being raped. Kathleen W. remembered her mother insisting 'If ever the Germans get here, they'll never have you. I'll shoot you first.'<sup>117</sup> Other parents also contemplated shooting their children: 'Far worse than death would be...to grow up Nazis.'<sup>118</sup>

In WW2's early stages, government propaganda emphasized the enemy as the Nazis, and feature films distinguished between cunning Nazis and 'good', decent Germans.<sup>119</sup> However, growing complacency about inevitable invasion<sup>120</sup> prompted an official propaganda 'Anger Campaign', stressing the loss of democratic freedoms under Nazi occupation.<sup>121</sup> The popular press and cinema newsreels presented the enemy as cruel barbarians.<sup>122</sup> In 1941, the Ministry of Information decided to convince the British public 'of the increasing brutality of the Germans'.<sup>123</sup> One official pamphlet claimed Nazism destroyed family life and turned German children and young men into heartless, fanatical automatons.<sup>124</sup> Another depicted a German soldier as a 'snarling gorilla-like creature'.<sup>125</sup> Over the 1942-1943 winter, concentration camp revelations began to emerge. A September 1939 opinion poll had shown that the vast majority

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<sup>116</sup> Ann Stalcup, *On the Home Front: Growing up in Wartime England* (USA: Linnet Books, 1998), pp. 45-6, 48-9.

<sup>117</sup> Kathleen W., interview; also Kaitlin Wells and Dorothy Williams, cited in Penny Summerfield & Corinna Peniston-Bird, *Contesting Home Defence: Men, Women and the Home Guard in the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 264-65.

<sup>118</sup> Cited in Longmate, p. 105.

<sup>119</sup> For example, *Pastor Hall*, *Freedom Radio*, both released in 1940.

<sup>120</sup> Home Intelligence report (TNA ref. INF 1/252), cited in Doherty, p. 106.

<sup>121</sup> For example, pamphlet titled '*What Would Happen if Hitler won*' (TNA ref. INF 1/332).

<sup>122</sup> For example, 'Nazis Torpedo Mercy Ship, Kill Children,' *Daily Sketch*, 23-9-1940; 'In Every Heart There is No Fear, Only a Most Passionate Hatred of the Enemy', reporting on Coventry, *Daily Herald*, 16-11-1940; 'This Street was Their Playground', reporting on Southampton, *Daily Mirror*, 6-12-1940, p. 7; 'Bomb These Ten Towns!', Cassandra column, exhorting retaliatory action on Germany, *Daily Mirror*, 29-8-1940, p. 4.

<sup>123</sup> INF 1/849, cited in Yass, p. 43.

<sup>124</sup> HMSO, *Children into Ruffians: The New Nazi Education* (Watford: Odhams, [n.d.]).

<sup>125</sup> *The Battle for Civilization*, INF 2/1, reproduced in Yass, pp. 44-45; Robert MacKay, *Half the Battle: Civilian Morale in Britain during the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 172.

(91 per cent) regarded the Nazi government as their chief enemy, rather than the German nation. By April 1943, the proportion viewing the Germans as their main enemy had increased to 43 per cent.<sup>126</sup> Ministry of Information 'atrocities literature' continued being produced until late 1944.<sup>127</sup>

As the war progressed, threat of invasion receded but popular desire for retribution accelerated. During the Blitz, Londoners were apparently 'almost evenly divided on the question of whether to give the German population an equal measure of terror.'<sup>128</sup> However, by June 1943 a Home Intelligence report claimed the majority of the British public felt 'unqualified approval of relentless bombing of Germany, with little or no thought of enemy civilian casualties.' For some, it was 'a good thing to kill Germans, not so much from vindictiveness as from policy'; a large majority regarded the bombing as a 'horrible but necessary' means of ending the war.<sup>129</sup>

Maude P. reflected on a growing 'blunting of sensitivity towards sufferings on the other side. 'We felt the horror of carpet-bombing Germany, but less than we had felt the shooting-down of a German plane nearby at the beginning of the war. It became more like a game of taking your opponent's pieces.'<sup>130</sup> The war dehumanised the enemy and desensitised the population, including children. A 1944 medical journal column warned that 'destructive impulses let loose in war' encouraged small children's natural aggression, given that 'Bombing, killing, burning are all accepted by adults as meritorious when meted out as retribution to the wicked enemy.'<sup>131</sup> Barbara Dennis described watching an aerial dogfight from the school tennis courts and seeing a German plane falling in flames 'just the enemy, not human flesh.'<sup>132</sup> Joan Tagg,

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<sup>126</sup> Chapman, p. 221; Doherty, pp. 165-66.

<sup>127</sup> TNF 1/672, cited in Yass, pp. 45-47.

<sup>128</sup> Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), pp. 295-96.

<sup>129</sup> INF 1/292, 'Home Intelligence Weekly report', 3 June 1943, cited in Doherty, pp. 165-66.

<sup>130</sup> Maude P., correspondence.

<sup>131</sup> 'War in the Nursery', Annotations, *British Medical Journal*, 1944, i (4331), (49-50), p. 50.

<sup>132</sup> Dennis, p. 10.

aged 15, echoed Lorna H., watching Spitfires attacking German bombers: 'It was just so exciting – like a cinema show really.'<sup>133</sup>

Lorna H. contrasted her own callous insensitivity with her parents' more humane moral outlook. A serviceman home on leave was showing off a wallet he'd taken from a German prisoner containing pictures of his family. Lorna remembered thinking 'it was great – Look at this! Germans! My parents thought [taking personal mementoes] was awful, even though they hated Germans.' She later reflected 'You had been taught all those years to hate Germans.' Her own antipathy had surfaced when 'the papers used to publish pages of all the [German] atrocities.'<sup>134</sup> By summer 1944, public antipathy towards the enemy was reported as 'intransigent'. Hatred and bitterness intensified after the V-1 and V-2 raids, and renewed revelations about German barbarities in occupied Europe. Many Britons were reportedly demanding 'total annihilation' of the Germans.<sup>135</sup>

Tom Harrison, drawing on wartime Mass-Observation reports produced for the Ministry of Information, later claimed that what mattered was 'events and experiences and people's own innate feelings'.<sup>136</sup> Margaret J.'s attitude suggests some validation for this view. Evacuated to Kent, she recalled witnessing the Battle of Britain overhead and 'crying when a [German] plane was shot down and everyone else was cheering. I knew even then that it was someone's father or husband killed and I think that is how I have always felt.' Thea Burghart, a land worker, remembered sitting in a mangold field eating her packed lunch during the miserable winter of 1942 and feeling sorry for 'those poor German troops in Russia.' This triggered a

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<sup>133</sup> Cited in Nicholson, p. 82.

<sup>134</sup> Lorna H., interview.

<sup>135</sup> Home Intelligence report, 27 July 1944, cited in Doherty, pp. 178-79.

<sup>136</sup> Tom Harrison, 'Films and the Home Front – The Evaluation of Their Effectiveness by "Mass-Observation"', in *Propaganda, Politics and Film* ed. by Nicholas Pronay & D. W. Spring (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 234-45.



rebuke from a companion that she should be thoroughly ashamed of herself, and they should all freeze to death. By 1945, however, Thea's pity had evaporated.<sup>137</sup>

Looking back, one contributor viewed herself as 'brainwashed for six years', regarding Germans 'with horror and terror'. June K. also recalled feeling 'terrified' during an air raid, and thinking Germans 'were terrible. I can honestly say I saw them as sub-human, not like us.' Joyce S. described herself as 'very patriotic, very naïve... All I knew of Germans was what I read in newspapers, saw on films, heard about the 1914-18 war, that they were terrible people... I was as frightened as anyone else in the bombing.' Others described having absorbed their parents' attitudes. BW26's father, who had served in WW1, subscribed to the popular belief that there were 'no good Germans.' Joyce W.'s mother, who had 'a lot of influence' as she grew up, 'disliked Germans very much and had the worst remembrances of them, all the propaganda from the First World War. So we certainly didn't have any good feelings about Germans.' Joyce was left with the impression 'that Germans were all blond and fat and lacking a sense of humour.' Conversely, although Sylvia L. had lost a close friend, her Canadian boyfriend and boys from her class at school, she 'had no hatred of Germans', having been more influenced by her friends' liberal-minded parents and a mother who loved German music.<sup>138</sup>

This attitude was unusual. Contributors who were working women during WW2 described a shared feeling of hatred, exacerbated by the threat of hostile enemy action. BW29, in the relocated Woolwich Arsenal, a vast rural site camouflaged to look from the air like ploughed fields, was upset by Lord Haw Haw's constant's threats that the Germans would bomb them, which did happen, 'one dreadful night'. She described most people, herself included, wanting to ruthlessly bomb and kill all Germans, to end the war. Another Donnington worker, whose

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<sup>137</sup> Burghart, pp. 47, 79.

<sup>138</sup> BW26, correspondence; June K., interview; Joyce S., correspondence; BW26, interview; Joyce W., taped responses; Sylvia L., interview.

hometown had been heavily bombed, recalled sending Woodbines to the RAF with notes inside, asking them to put her name on a bomb. Her attitude towards Germans was unequivocal: she 'loathed' them, saw them as 'bestial', later reflecting that it was just accepted that 'only us' spoke the truth.<sup>139</sup>

Phyllis H., whose father felt no bitterness from WW1, believed her anti-German feelings were influenced more by her peer group and the media than her parents. She described herself as too young to fear invasion, but otherwise very impressionable, going to the cinema, listening to her friends, unthinkingly adopting popular anti-German attitudes, with adolescent bravado: 'I used to say what I would do to them, what I wouldn't do to them... But I was only fifteen or sixteen. I would probably have run a mile.'<sup>140</sup> Some schoolboys found an outlet for intense 'anti-German feeling generated by the government and the press,' by kicking and spitting on parked Opel cars.<sup>141</sup> Lorna H. found hers by standing beside 'a big bomb' at the town hall 'persuading people to buy savings stamps' to stick on the bomb. 'That was great, we were going to kill Germans.' She insisted she felt no fear, only aggressive hatred, intensified by depiction of Germans in war films. Lorna went to the cinema three times a week. She loved romantic dramas, musicals and comedies, but also enjoyed patriotic war films – 'Always the ugly ones were the Germans, with monocles and bald heads.... Made you hate them. You felt you wanted to fight 'em, kill them.'<sup>142</sup>

Of a sample of British civilians questioned in 1943, 32 per cent visited the cinema at least once weekly. For a cinema audience primarily looking for escapist entertainment, feature films (despite formulaic plots, set in occupied countries where heroic resistance characters battled

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<sup>139</sup> BW29, interview; BW17, interview.

<sup>140</sup> Phyllis H., interview.

<sup>141</sup> Alan Lake, 'Anti-German Propaganda', article ID A1170956, in 'Childhood and Evacuation', *BBC WW2 People's War*, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/56/a1170956.shtml> [accessed 16-1-2015].

<sup>142</sup> Lorna H., interview. Schoolchildren were encouraged to help raise money for munitions, through a summer holiday 'Buy a war weapon through your savings group' campaign, see Stewart A. Ross, *At Home in World War Two: Propaganda* (London: Evans Brothers, 2004), p. 27.

cruel and brutal German villains) were judged a more effective propaganda tool, more subliminally portraying the enemy Other as a villain to be feared and hated.<sup>143</sup> Five- to seventeen-year-olds, although only a fifth of the population, represented a third of all civilian cinema-goers.<sup>144</sup> Younger cinema-goers may have been more impressionable, more receptive to negative images of the enemy. A major US research project in the late 1920s, arising from concerns about the new mass medium's effects on children's attitudes and behaviour, studied the extent to which films could influence children's attitudes, including towards other nationalities. The findings indicated that effects of a single film were insignificant, but several similarly themed films produced significant attitude modification towards views expressed in them; effects of films on the social attitudes of children could not only persist, but increase with the passage of time. It was concluded that children's attitudes were definitely influenced by some films, and by seeing two or more films with the same bias.<sup>145</sup>

Of films viewed by one of a 1945 female teenage sample, most reflected Lorna H.'s tastes: romantic dramas, comedies or musicals, but also a war film depicting heroic Allies and evil Nazis.<sup>146</sup> The appeal of such films varied. One self-confessed film addict since the age of eight, admitted at fourteen, in 1943, going 'absolutely mad on' war films, which reinforced German brutality and her own hatred of Germans. She fantasized being 'caught by the Germans, undergoing torture but forever remaining silent.' Two other sixteen-year-olds liked films showing 'the type of man against whom we were fighting.' However, an eighteen-year-old

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<sup>143</sup> Robert Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel: Cinema and Society in Britain, 1939-49* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 19-20; James Chapman, *The British at War: Cinema, State and Propaganda 1939-45* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998), pp. 221-31; Jo Fox, *Film Propaganda in Britain and Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), pp. 136-59.

<sup>144</sup> J. P. Mayer, *British Cinemas and their Audiences: sociological studies* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1948), Ministry of Information Wartime Social Survey, pp. 251-72.

<sup>145</sup> Ruth C. Peterson & L I Thurstone, *Motion Pictures and the Social Attitudes of Children* (New York: Macmillan, 1933; Arno Press & New York Times reprint, 1970), pp. 64-66; also referenced in Shearon A. Lowery & Melvin L De Fleur, *Milestones in Mass Communication Research: Media Effects*, (London: Longman, 1983, 1988 edn), pp. 39-44.

<sup>146</sup> Jephcott, *Rising*, p. 154.

suggested 'everyone is tired of underground war films... you'd seen the invariable chase by Gestapo so often before.'<sup>147</sup>

Occasionally the actual enemy was glimpsed on newsreels of captured German airmen. Joyce W. wrote of 'seeing lorryloads of Italian POWs in Cambridge' early in the war. 'That was a sensation!'<sup>148</sup> Otherwise, in a country bombed but neither invaded nor occupied, the enemy remained a chimera, a monstrous caricature of evil Otherness, depicted by lurid cartoons, newspaper headlines and cinema villains. However, on the edge of the British population's postwar difficulties, the enemy human presence loomed, at first in intimidating numbers in large, fenced-off camps, then numerous smaller camps, hostels and farm billets across the UK.

### *Conclusion*

Drawing on official reports, oral sources and secondary studies, this chapter has considered WW2's influence on British females, subscribing to the view that its impact differed according to age and individual experience. While married women bore the brunt of wartime anxieties, work demands and domestic difficulties, younger women, children and adolescents felt its insecurities, freedoms, excitements, and novelties. Anecdotal oral evidence of married women's postwar difficulties of readjustment, and official awareness of social problems seen as related to fathers' absence suggest that a proportion of wartime households functioned without a male head. Paternal absence (through mobilisation into the forces or direction of labour) offered children role models of women accomplishing men's work and, to rephrase Todd's words, temporarily establishing the home as a site of matriarchal power. Young women consolidated growing independent agency.

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<sup>147</sup> Mayer, pp. 35, 38, 170, 175, 186.

<sup>148</sup> Joyce W., correspondence.

The effect of wartime propaganda on the young, including contributors to this study, is pertinent to this study's consideration of openness to transgressive agency in the form of attraction to the enemy, despite former deeply entrenched anti-German sentiments. Chapter Three discusses formative experiences of the young Germans these young women were about to meet. The dynamic of such encounters is explored in Section B.

## Chapter 3: Young German men – war and personal transformation

### *Introduction*

This chapter discusses influences on young German males and formative experiences growing up in the interwar period, including Hitler Youth membership, military training and war service. Effects of combat and captivity on personal development and morale are also explored. Many German POWs faced stressful ordeals and testing reversals in their late teens and early twenties, a life stage when, as discussed in the introduction to Section A, young adult personality is consolidated. Understanding the nature of their experiences crucially contributes to understanding how male contributors to this study reacted to encountering young British women.<sup>1</sup>

Since most male contributors to this study were not specifically asked for childhood details, comparable published and oral firsthand accounts have also been drawn on in this chapter.<sup>2</sup> Titles of published accounts emphasize their subjects' personal odyssey, either geographically (*From Pomerania to Ponteland* and *From Schöneiche to Alton*), or by stressing an outsider identity (*A Stranger in Three Continents* and *Foreign Shores*). Others focus on subjective transformation (*Trautmann's Journey: from Hitler Youth to FA Club Legend* and *From Hitler Youth to Church of England Priest*). Having written about their captivity and combat experiences, two former POWs produced a second volume of reminiscences directly

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<sup>1</sup> Year of birth has been established for fourteen male contributors to this study. Apart from one in 1919, all these births fell between 1920 and 1926.

<sup>2</sup> Twelve published biographical and autobiographical accounts of former German POWs (of whom ten were held in the UK, including six who had relationships with British women) have been drawn on in this chapter. Nine were born between 1920 and 1925, one in 1929, and two pre-1920s. Imperial War Museum interview recordings with six English-speaking former German POWs (born between 1921 and 1926) who married British women have also been consulted. See Appendix 1.

confronting their experience of growing up under the Nazi regime (*Under the Crooked Cross* and *A Hitler Youth*).

The chapter considers National Socialism's deliberate fostering of soldierly masculinization of boys, largely through the *Hitler-Jugend* (Hitler Youth), which all boys were expected (and ultimately officially required) to join. *HJ* members were encouraged to aspire to an exaggerated heroic warrior ideal. Early war successes reinforced this role model; military training and service enmeshed most young men within a harsh, all-male environment. However, as this chapter argues, twentieth-century research on combat psychology in WW2 demonstrated that masculine ideals of heroism, toughness and courage are illusory – all soldiers will ultimately break down under combat stress. For German servicemen, struggles on the Eastern Front, the long, bitterly cold retreat and chaotic reversal of fortunes on the Western Front culminated in demoralizing defeat. Individually, they faced a traumatic personal transition, from honourable defenders of their homeland to humiliated, disillusioned captives, cut off from the comfort of family support.

Undisguised revulsion towards them (in countries they had occupied, and following concentration camp revelations) contributed to the collapse of their ideals, including belief in their own superiority. As prisoners of war, they had few possessions, no control over their own fate and for months no news from their families. Despite widespread cynicism over Allied attempts at re-education towards democratic ideals, many experienced what Erik Erikson would later define as an identity crisis.<sup>3</sup> Most remained POWs for three years after capture. For much of that time they were officially denied outside social contact. For many months following capture, German POWs inhabited an all-male environment, subordinate to their captors and the civilian population. Individual POWs' outlook and mentality was influenced by

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<sup>3</sup> See Erik H. Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis* (London: Faber, 1968).

the time, place and stage of WW2 at which they had been captured, their home background, previous experiences as combatants, and the manner in which they entered captivity.

In the early years of WW2, few German POWs were held in the UK, for fear of creating a Trojan horse in the event of invasion. By March 1941, nearly three thousand had been shipped to Canada; by the unconditional surrender, over 33,000 were held there. Many captured in North Africa in 1943 were sent to north America. From the D-Day invasion onwards, German POWs were brought to the UK in large numbers. The British and Americans initially worked on a fifty/fifty quota basis, sharing responsibility for German POWs equally, so that half the POWs taken prisoner in France were shipped to the US and half to the UK, regardless of who had captured them. Accommodation shortage in Britain meant that this arrangement could not be sustained, resulting in 175,000 German POWs sent to the US, 'held on the account of the UK as British prisoners'. These were later transferred to the UK over winter/spring of 1946, together with those from British-run camps in Belgium, bringing the total numbers held in the UK in 1946 to approximately 400,000, a relatively small proportion of 3,700,000 German prisoners and 'surrendered enemy personnel' in British hands in Europe during 1945. While hostilities lasted, German POWs were held in large base camps holding more than 1,500 men housed in Nissen huts. These camps were surrounded by a high double fence of barbed wire and guarded by armed soldiers. Only a small number of prisoners worked outside their camps prior to May 1945. As more POWs arrived, tented camps were set up. Once the prisoners began to be employed as cheap labour, keeping them in large camps became less practicable, due to the cost and difficulty, under petrol rationing, of daily transportation. Faulk explains how the large base camps then became transit camps or working camps at the hub of a number of smaller satellite camps and hostels, which altogether ultimately numbered 1,500.<sup>4</sup> In addition, starting from winter 1945-1946, ultimately about 25,000 POWs were billeted on

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<sup>4</sup> Faulk, pp. 32, 85; Sullivan, pp. 21-22, Kochan, pp. 2-3.



farms. A map marking main camps for German POWs indicates they were scattered over England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, but sited most intensively in the Midlands and Home Counties.<sup>5</sup>

From December 1945, German POWs held in the US began to be shipped to Britain. Over the first six months of 1946, 123,000 were transferred in this way to Britain from America. Since mid-1945, it had been intimated in the American press that German POWs held in America would be handed over as a labour force to the former occupied European countries, but no mention had been made of supplying Britain with POW labour. The American press and public believed, and the German prisoners recounted without exception that they were told, that they were being repatriated back to Germany. In addition to those shipped from the US, between February 1946 and February 1947, 33,400 German POWs were transferred from Canada to Britain.<sup>6</sup>

Following the unconditional surrender, large numbers of German armed forces were scattered around Europe. Although presenting a potential risk as partisans or terrorists, there were insufficient resources to treat all these men administratively as POWs. Given the title Surrendered Enemy Personnel (SEP), they were allocated accommodation and rations and left to their own devices or employed as forced labour. The British government reserved the right to convert SEPs into regular POWs at any time. In summer 1946, 14,500 SEPs were requisitioned as POWs and shipped to Britain to work.<sup>7</sup>

Repatriation in groups began in September 1946 but did not gain momentum until 1947 and although by then leading much freer lives – barbed wire now only a token barrier and removed altogether at some camps – the last POWs were not formally released until late 1948.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> 'Principal German POW camps in Britain, 1944-1948', in Hellen, 'Temporary', p. 204, fig. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Faulk, p. 178.

<sup>7</sup> Faulk, pp.46, 49.

<sup>8</sup> Faulk, pp. 175-80. Rudolf R. claimed not to have been officially released until 31 December 1948, having been given civilian status on 10 February 1948.

## War and masculinity

Lucy Noakes made the point that while WW2 potentially challenged women's traditional role, it reinforced the male traditional role.<sup>9</sup> Generally, the debate on gender roles has proposed that war, emphasizing traditionally masculine values of aggression, strength and heroism pursued in an all-male environment, heightens and exaggerates the masculine role, distancing men from so-called 'feminine' aspects of themselves and reinforcing a traditional male stereotype.<sup>10</sup> Margaret and Patrice Higonnet had maintained that male gender roles became more exaggeratedly masculinized during wartime.<sup>11</sup> This appears to have been the case under National Socialism (NS) in Germany, both during the war and, crucially, prior to it, while the generation of young men who went to war were growing up. Higonnet and Higonnet argued that as female roles (in the US and Britain) became more masculinized, the militarised over-masculine male role ensured a similar relative gender-role distance between the sexes was maintained. Under the NS regime in Germany, however, this distance appears to have increased, since traditional female roles were largely maintained, although during the war women were employed as *Hilferinnen* (female helpers), as nurses and ultimately also in factories and as auxiliaries to the armed forces.<sup>12</sup>

Raewyn Connell, in tracing twentieth century hegemonic masculinities, has argued that the fascist movements which stamped down on the popular liberal socialist upheaval following

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<sup>9</sup> Noakes, 'Gender and British National Identity', p. 31; Noakes, *War*, p. 74.

<sup>10</sup> See Adrian Caesar, *Taking it Like a Man: Suffering, Sexuality and the War Poets* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 7, 53, 194, 225; R. W. Connell, *The Men and the Boys* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), pp. 212-16; Margaret R. and Patrice L.-R. Higonnet, 'The Double Helix', in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, ed. by M.R. Higonnet et al (ed.) (Newhaven & London, 1987, Yale University Press), pp. 31-47.

<sup>11</sup> Higonnet and Higonnet, 'The Double', pp.34-35

<sup>12</sup> See Jill Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany* (Essex: Pearson Education, 2001), xvii, 4, 58. From 1943, labour conscription was introduced for women aged 17-45; ultimately about half a million women worked as auxiliaries in signals, secretarial and anti-aircraft roles, and, in the absence of serving men, 'millions... worked full-time or part-time, in every sector of the economy'.

WW1, became 'a naked reassertion of male supremacy... Fascism promoted new images of hegemonic masculinity, glorifying... the unrestrained violence of the frontline soldier.'<sup>13</sup> Ben Shephard made the point that a German soldier 'aged 20 in 1940 had passed through adolescence in a society that glorified and prepared for war, championed the warrior ethos and inculcated masculine rather than feminine values.'<sup>14</sup>

This chapter looks at the lived reality of masculine identity at an individual level for some Germans of that generation, through childhood, war, captivity and defeat. It suggests that although emphasis may have varied depending on local leadership, the NS world view offered boys growing up in 1930s Germany masculine warrior role models promoted as heroic Aryan ideals, while the *HJ* sister organization, the *Bund Deutscher Mädel* (League of German Girls) reinforced traditional sex roles, promoting German girls' future as wives, mothers and homemakers.

Under the Weimar Republic, women's employment outside the home functioned merely as marking time before marriage. After marriage, a woman belonged not behind a counter nor in an office, but at home, looking after her family. 'Promises to keep married women out of the labour market had also been prominent in [NS] election propaganda.' Even unmarried women were to engage in occupations 'compatible with their nature', i.e., 'domestic service, agriculture or social work'. Hitler had written in *Mein Kampf* that girls' final goal was to be mothers. The 1933 Law on the Prevention of Unemployment offered interest-free loans to young couples on condition the wife discontinued paid employment; with the birth of each child, the loan reduced by 25 per cent, encouraging families to have four children.<sup>15</sup> Among the accounts drawn on here, only Rudolf R., a contributor to this study whose parents were

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<sup>13</sup> Raewyn W. Connell, *Masculinities* (London: Polity Press, 1995, 2005 edn), p. 193.

<sup>14</sup> Ben Shephard, *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists 1914-1994* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000), p. 304.

<sup>15</sup> Ute Frevert, *Women in German History: From Bourgeois Emancipation to Sexual Liberation*, trans. by Stuart McKinnon-Evans with Terry Bond and Barbara Norden (Oxford: Berg, 1988, 1990 edn), pp. 179, 217-18, 229-30.

divorced, described a family home that did not comprise working father and housewife mother.

### *Growing up male in 1920s and 1930s Germany*

For male contributors to this study, life began in a country suffering the aftermath of defeat in the Great War. Hyperinflation and unemployment, with political instability and unrest, manifested in demonstrations and street violence between opposing political factions. Global effects of the 1929 Wall Street crash led to higher unemployment in the early 1930s. Firsthand accounts suggest the extent these problems were felt depended on family and community circumstances, social and economic status.<sup>16</sup>

Like their opposite sex counterparts growing up in interwar Britain, former German POWs' accounts portray children raised in relatively insular communities. Rudi Lux (born 1929, in rural Pomerania), and Gerhard Hennes (born 1922, into a middle-class family in Westphalia) remembered few car-owners. Where Fritz Zimmermann (born 1920) grew up, near Hamburg, 'everyone knew everybody and their business'. Even those living in towns and cities tended to stay within their own neighbourhood. However, urban families, in addition to being more susceptible to the effects of unemployment, were more aware of street violence – frightening for some; exciting for others. Fritz Zimmermann's family moved in 1930, to Uetersen (a small town about 30km from Hamburg), where he witnessed frightening political demonstrations, marches and fights. George Gebauer, (born in 1925 in inner-city Berlin), recalled being attracted, aged five, to the Saturday afternoon marching processions and brass bands of

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<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Fleming, pp. 6-12; George Gebauer, *Hitler Youth to Church of England Priest: My Autobiography* (Charleston, SC, USA: Createspace, 2014), pp. 11-12; Henry Metelmann, *A Hitler Youth: Growing up in Germany in the 1930s* (London: Caliban Books, 1997; Staplehurst: Spelmount, 2004 edn), p. 5.

different political factions, between whom fighting invariably broke out. After he ran off to join the 1934 May Day rally, this dangerous fascination contributed to Gebauer's parents' decision to move to an outer suburb.<sup>17</sup>

Several accounts recalled Hitler's rise to power as a time of mixed parental attitudes to National Socialism, and family friction as people changed sides.<sup>18</sup> Aged eight, Willi Gerlach (born 1925, in rural Silesia) upset his Communist grandfather by persuading his mother to make him a Hitler Youth uniform, although he was too young to join. The NS youth organization, the *Hitler-Jugend (HJ)*, had formed in 1926. Hennes joined its branch for younger boys, the *Jungvolk (JV)*, in 1932. He wanted to be where the future seemed to point, to march and sing and play football.<sup>19</sup> Most boys joined for similar reasons, attracted by the patriotic ideals, sporting and outdoor activities, singing round campfires.<sup>20</sup> Henry Metelmann (born 1922) wanted to be with his friends and continue the scouting activities he had enjoyed with the Christian *Jungschar*. Once Hitler became Reichstag Chancellor in 1933, existing youth groups were rapidly disbanded or absorbed into the *HJ*.<sup>21</sup> Metelmann grew up in a dockland town near Hamburg, his father a committed socialist. Metelmann describes how his church youth group was taken over, when he was about eleven or twelve. Lined up outside their normal meeting place, they heard marching feet, an *HJ* troop with a swastika flag appeared, and they were told to fall in behind. Without realizing they had just joined the Hitler Youth, they were led to the *HJ* headquarters. Fritz Zimmermann's father, a rural craftsman, who

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<sup>17</sup> Lux, pp. 8-9; Gerhard Hennes, *Under the Crooked Cross*, (Bloomington, Indiana, USA: AuthorHouse, 2008), p. 69; Zimmermann, p. 6; Gebauer, pp. 31-41.

<sup>18</sup> See Liebschner, reel 1; Fleming, p. 14; Hennes, *Under*, pp. 86, 88; Schran, reel 1; Crocker, pp. 27,32,76.

<sup>19</sup> Fleming, p. 13; Hennes, *Under*, p. 87;

<sup>20</sup> Liebschner, reel 1; Schran, reel 1; Henry Metelmann, *A Hitler Youth* (London: Caliban Books, 1997, Staplehurst: Spelmount, 2004 edn), pp. 74-75. 'Most... joined for the same reason that I did... [to] get together with other boys in exciting activities... we enjoyed ourselves and also felt important.' Former *HJ* member cited in William Sheridan Allen, *The Nazi Seizure of Power: The Experience of a Single German Town 1930-1935* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1966), p. 73.

<sup>21</sup> H.W. Koch, *The Hitler Youth: Origins and Development 1922-45* (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1975), p. 96.

considered the *HJ* 'rowdies', stopped him joining after his Social Democrat sports club closed down.<sup>22</sup> But despite his father's opposition, PW01 (born 1920, near Hamburg, where his father had a white-collar job) described joining the *HJ* like everyone his age.<sup>23</sup>

However, *HJ* 'rowdiness' and 'machismo', expressed in boastful interest in girls, did not appeal to Hennes, who resisted peer group pressure; he remained in the *JV*, where discipline was moderate and drilling minimal, moving up to a leadership role.<sup>24</sup> Some accounts describe the *HJ* in more positive terms. Portrayed by Hans-Paul Liebschner and Gebauer, membership involved healthy outdoor activities, valuable community work, honouring parents, helping the elderly, respecting girls. Liebschner (born 1925, lower Silesia) described the ideal *HJ* member as 'tough, fast, obedient, loyal, honest, helpful'.<sup>25</sup> Many working-class districts were won over by the stability, employment opportunities and holidays for working classes offered by the new regime.<sup>26</sup> And regardless of parental political affiliation, German children became exposed, through government control of youth groups and the education system, to NS ideology and propaganda.

### **Education under National Socialism**

William Allen's study of the Nazification of a German town described how the Nazis changed school curricula to focus on sport (and their racial theories).<sup>27</sup> Teachers were replaced or intimidated into teaching Nazi ideology, although some tried to demonstrate its lack of scientific basis. It was believed that boys, at puberty, sought 'risk and adventure and heroic actions', extolling as ideals 'the death-defying fighter' whose 'blind confidence [...] overcomes

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<sup>22</sup> Zimmermann, p. 22.

<sup>23</sup> PW01, correspondence.

<sup>24</sup> Hennes, *Under*, pp. 157-61. Normally, after joining the *Jungvolk* at ten, boys transferred to the *HJ* at fourteen.

<sup>25</sup> Hennes, pp. 157-58; Gebauer, p.53; Liebschner, reel 2.

<sup>26</sup> Liebschner, reel 1; Schran, reel 1; Grubba reel 1.

<sup>27</sup> Allen, pp. 249-50.

unusual difficulties', and 'can manfully carry suffering without his substance being damaged.'<sup>28</sup>

School curricula were adjusted towards more physical exercise. Hitler favoured boxing, to encourage aggressive spirit, quick reactions and toughness in giving and taking blows.<sup>29</sup>

According to Connell, 'bodily capacity to commit violence' becomes part of many boys' and young men's masculine identity, demanding 'willingness to put their bodies on the line' to prove or defend their masculine honour, or challenge that of others.<sup>30</sup>

Hennes described his new school principal as 'clearly a political appointee.' Sports became more important: three hours a week, with an added hour of boxing, which Hennes hated, realizing he was a physical coward. He was one of only five non-*HJ* members in his class.<sup>31</sup>

Erwin Grubba (born 1925) attended an academic grammar school in Berlin. His father was very rightwing but anti-Hitler. Erwin, solitary and bookish and not attracted to marching or parading, simply didn't join the *HJ*. His was the only white shirt in his class. His school was 'old-fashioned', most teachers not NS Party members. He believed he would not have got away with it had his headmaster been a Party member.<sup>32</sup>

Zimmermann explained how at school, once the NS came to power, 'everything changed.'

Despite having avoided joining the *HJ*, he had to learn NS ideology, attend films about Nazi heroes and give the Nazi salute. Anyone not standing to attention was branded a communist.<sup>33</sup>

NS teaching emphasized patriotism, and pride in being German. Aged twelve, Theo Terhorst discovered his family was Dutch, not German, and his father not a WWI hero whose exploits could be boasted about at school. This sent him into hysterics, shouting at his father, who seemed no better than a traitor. Terhorst was also confused and shocked to discover his

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<sup>28</sup> The NS Teachers' League, cited in Koch, p. 143.

<sup>29</sup> Caesar, p.7, evoking the sado-masochistic distortion of youthful male vitality in WW1 (in which Hitler served), writes of 'the cult of athleticism', which defined "'masculinity" ... by the ability to endure and inflict pain'.

<sup>30</sup> Connell, *The Men*, p. 218.

<sup>31</sup> Hennes, *Under*, pp. 117-26.

<sup>32</sup> Erwin Grubba, reel 2.

<sup>33</sup> Zimmermann, p. 18.

mother's Jewish former employers were the evil people he had been learning about at school. He lived in fear of being taken away, like them, until his father successfully applied for German citizenship to enable his elder brother to obtain an apprenticeship.<sup>34</sup>

When Hans Behrens (born 1926 into a devout Roman Catholic family in Freiburg) was about thirteen, he and the only other boy in his class who were still not *HJ* members, were forced by their teacher to enrol. He enjoyed the activities rather than the indoctrination, which included propaganda films against the Poles.<sup>35</sup> However, Metelmann felt that, by the age of thirteen or fourteen, he and most of his peers accepted uncritically everything they were being told.<sup>36</sup>

### **Conditioning for war**

Through the *HJ*, Hitler proved an effective Pied Piper. Boys were led to believe they were strong and held the key to a better future.<sup>37</sup> Metelmann, like his friends, idolising Hitler as the greatest man on earth, described how he lost respect for his own father's views. *HJ* members swore a special oath of allegiance, to devote their lives to and be ready to die for Hitler – not realizing how literally they would be expected to live up to this promise.<sup>38</sup> Bernd Trautmann enthusiastically joined the *JV* as soon as he was eligible. Tall, blond, athletic, he shone in the *HJ*, but his father became disenchanted, feeling that insisting boys' only loyalty was to Hitler 'undermined parental authority, encouraging an unpleasant arrogance towards their elders.'<sup>39</sup>

*HJ* influence risked disrupting the development of a rounded gender identification with fathers, replacing it with an idealized masculine stereotype. Trautmann recalled rapidly feeling

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<sup>34</sup> Crocker, pp. 43, 52-56.

<sup>35</sup> Behrens, reel 1.

<sup>36</sup> Metelmann, *A Hitler*, p. 86.

<sup>37</sup> At a speech on *Reichsparteitag*, 1935, addressing over 50,000 *HJ* members, Hitler is reported to have said "You are the future of the nation, the future of the German state!" ("*Ihr seid die Zukunft der Nation, die Zukunft des Deutschen Reiches!*", *Freiburger Zeitung*, 16-9-1935).

<sup>38</sup> Metelmann, *Through*, pp. 15, 17; *A Hitler*, pp. 80, 84, 86; Crocker, pp. 36-37; Fleming, p. 16.

<sup>39</sup> Clay, p. 82.



nothing but disdain for his father, regarding him as weak and ineffectual. Metelmann's father's influence waned, although they maintained a loving relationship. When a local trade-union official was arrested and taken away, Metelmann's father, having always referred to Nazism as the 'brown pest'<sup>40</sup>, became alarmed, and begged his son not to repeat his views outside their flat.<sup>41</sup> Zimmermann's father was reported and arrested for arguing about politics at work. He was only released through an influential contact; others who criticised the government noticeably disappeared.<sup>42</sup> After overhearing the butcher joking to his father about Hitler, Terhorst wondered whether he should tell his teacher, so the butcher could be instructed in the error of his ways.<sup>43</sup> Parents became more circumspect in expressing political views in their children's hearing, Terhorst's father simply warning his son to beware of anyone in authority. Adults noticeably began talking in whispers, no longer openly voicing complaints.<sup>44</sup>

Considerable local pressure was put on young boys to join the *HJ*. As Gerlach's father was not a Party member, his business had to be overseen by a local Party 'manager', who warned that Willi should attend more *HJ* meetings. Those who resisted found it difficult to find work. In a small rural community, Fritz Zimmermann had managed to avoid joining the *HJ*. However, at fifteen in 1935, unable, without *HJ* membership, to find an apprenticeship to train as a baker, he had to take farmwork. (The first question on Metelmann's application form for a railway locksmith apprenticeship asked *when* he had joined the *HJ*.)<sup>45</sup> Grubba was warned he would not get a university place or a job without *HJ* membership; this didn't worry him because he accepted his father's opinion that the NS wouldn't last very long.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Metelmann's translation; *Pest* literally translates as 'plague'.

<sup>41</sup> Metelmann, *A Hitler*, pp. 65, 81-83; *Through*, p. 15.

<sup>42</sup> Zimmermann, p. 22.

<sup>43</sup> Crocker, p. 58.

<sup>44</sup> Crocker, pp. 59-60, 63.

<sup>45</sup> Zimmermann, p. 21; Metelmann, *Through*, p. 15.

<sup>46</sup> Grubba, reel 2.

*HJ* Membership became compulsory from age ten. (Those who managed to avoid joining appear to have come from rural or Roman Catholic or cosmopolitan areas, where NS political influence was weaker.)<sup>47</sup> In 1938, emphasis on paramilitary training increased. On weekly trips to the countryside, Metelmann's *HJ* group were taught military commands and engaged in noisy mock battles, resulting in bloody noses and shrieks of pain. Hating this fighting initially, he got used to it, and believed it fostered latent aggression.<sup>48</sup> Drawing on studies arguing that testosterone is more likely to be a consequence of social relations than an inherent source of male aggression, Connell claims that masculinities are actively created, 'sustained and enacted by groups, institutions and cultural forms'. Also hierarchical, they exploit 'fear of being at the bottom' as a means 'of training boys and men to participate in combat and violent sports.'<sup>49</sup>

Metelmann's father knew all along; Trautmann's father realized too late that *HJ* emphasis on marching, parades, outdoor sporting activities and orienteering aimed to groom boys for military service.<sup>50</sup> Each *HJ* troop met weekly to learn drill and shout '*Sieg Heil*'.<sup>51</sup> At Metelmann's troop's *Heim* (clubhouse), decorated with battle scenes and old weapons, they learnt *HJ* songs, many featuring references to 'Fatherland, blood and honour and dying'. They were often reminded – echoed in later military training – that the aim was to rebuild them in the Nazi image. WW1 heroes came to give speeches, extolling the honour of dying for one's country. Told they were 'young soldiers of the *Führer* and Fatherland,' they learned boxing, wrestling, athletics and were forced, if necessary, to swim. Günther Schran (born 1921 in a Rhineland mining town) described gruelling *HJ* summer camps, aged fourteen to fifteen, marching 25-30 km a day. Metelmann recalled how such marches, offering no sympathy for

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<sup>47</sup> Zimmermann, Grubba, Steffen, Behrens, Ranft.

<sup>48</sup> Metelmann, *A Hitler*, p. 91.

<sup>49</sup> Connell, *The Men*, p. 217. See also Joshua S. Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 153-54.

<sup>50</sup> Metelmann, *A Hitler*, p. 86; Clay, p. 82.

<sup>51</sup> Michael H. Kater, *Hitler Youth* (Cambridge, USA/London: Harvard University Press, 2004), p.33.

any who collapsed, strengthened their endurance. They learned to throw grenades, make foxholes and earth bunkers, and use cover to move around unseen. Metelmann could not see that war or killing people was wrong. He realized later, as an adult, how *HJ* training significantly reduced army training time.<sup>52</sup>

NS youth service legislation punctured insular upbringing, although German youth broadened their horizons and encountered otherness rather differently from the evacuation and refugee experiences of British youth. A 1939 government decree reinforced compulsory *HJ* membership and announced annual public service for all aged 16-18: boys to help in agriculture, girls to help families with children. Called *Jugend-Dienst-Gesetz* (Youth Service Law), this made youth service as compulsory as labour and army service.<sup>53</sup> Terhorst, who had never been further than twenty miles from home, was called up for labour service in Saarbrücken.<sup>54</sup> Others served *Arbeitsdienst* in Austria, Poland, and occupied France.<sup>55</sup>

The vast majority of young German men who volunteered or were conscripted into the German forces had been *Hitler-Jugend* members.<sup>56</sup> On reaching eighteen, *HJ* members were expected to join the Nazi Party and move on to the *SA*<sup>57</sup> or *SS*. After war began, they were called up for military service. Schran, who, aged eleven, had witnessed political street fighting, wanted to join the *SS* and was horrified that his father wouldn't consent. From about 1934, the *SA* had begun committing random acts of vandalism and violence, intimidating ordinary people. When Metelmann reached eighteen in 1940, he described having automatically transferred to the *SA*, marching through working class districts singing about Jewish blood dripping off their knives. After an hour's march, they returned to their *Lokal* (meeting place)

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<sup>52</sup> Metelmann, *Through*, p. 19; *A Hitler*, pp. 84-86, 91-96, 171; Schran, reel 1.

<sup>53</sup> Koch, p. 80.

<sup>54</sup> Crocker, p. 112.

<sup>55</sup> Behrens, reel 2; Ranft, reel 1; Schran, reel 2.

<sup>56</sup> By September 1939, the *HJ* numbered about 4.5 million boys aged 10-18, Koch, *Hitler Youth*, pp. 114, 233.

<sup>57</sup> *Sturmabteilung* (stormtroops)

for lectures, and beer-drinking late into the night. No one dared complain about the rowdy drunkenness and violence at the *Lokal* opposite Metelmann's home. In 1940, he was called up to join the *Panzers* (tank regiment).<sup>58</sup>

Timm and Sanborn have stressed the masculine appeal of a 'martial, neo-traditional gender order'. They define fascism as: a movement combining 'the aggressive and misogynistic aspects of wartime masculinity with the biological justifications for sexual and/or racial dominance' creating a system promoting unity on the basis of 'radical masculinity and the practices of violent male bonding.'<sup>59</sup>

With the postwar humiliation and injustice of Germany's treatment by the Allies drummed into them, Hitler's remilitarisation of the Rhineland in 1936 felt only right to eleven-year-old Liebschner and his peers.<sup>60</sup> In 1939, when the radio announced German troops had attacked Poland, Terhorst's whoops of delight were shushed by his horrified parents. At fourteen, Terhorst had left school impatient to become a man, earn a wage, do what men did.<sup>61</sup>

### **Making men of them**

British general Sir David Fraser ascribed the *Wehrmacht's* superior performance in WW2 to its 'brutal initial training' and 'draconian punishment... for disobedience and failure.'<sup>62</sup> Military training harshly reinforced the *HJ* regime, with fourteen-hour days of cold showers, incessant drill and training, being shouted at and insulted.<sup>63</sup> Bullying and institutionalized violence in the armed forces are condoned and encouraged as a means of toughening men up. Depicting young men as more attracted and affected by the compensations for such cruelties – 'the thrill

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<sup>58</sup> Schran, reel 1; Metelmann, *Through*, p. 17; *A Hitler*, pp. 103-05.

<sup>59</sup> Annette F. Timm and Joshua A. Sanborn, *Gender, Sex and the Shaping of Modern Europe: a history from the French Revolution to the present day* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), p. 153.

<sup>60</sup> Liebschner, reel 2.

<sup>61</sup> Crocker, pp. 51, 62-63, 66.

<sup>62</sup> Cited in Shepherd, *A War*, p. 300.

<sup>63</sup> Clay, p. 85.

of comradeship, the excitements of the chase, the exhilarations of surprise, deception... the exaltation of success, the sheer fun of prankish irresponsibility' – John Keegan pinpointed the established military ritual of drinking alcohol. As psychological preparation for battle and combat, alcohol releases tension, fear and inhibitions, and cements male bonding.<sup>64</sup>

Zimmermann, Terhorst and Trautmann recalled getting very drunk prior to first postings.<sup>65</sup>

New recruits eagerly anticipated the chance to prove themselves. Bernhard T.'s diary described in March 1945 leading an anti-tank company of teenaged *HJ* recruits, who 'could hardly wait for their baptism of fire.' He added, 'It was not what they expected.'<sup>66</sup> In 1941, Fritz Zimmermann was posted by train to Libya. At every station people waved and cheered, just as Hitler had promised. 'We wanted an adventure... nobody thought about getting killed. We were all in high spirits.' Their first engagement, however, involved trudging several miles across sand dunes towards Tobruk, in stifling heat carrying heavy equipment and passing burnt-out vehicles and dead bodies.<sup>67</sup> In November 1941, on their way to the Eastern front, Metelmann and fellow fresh recruits also glimpsed some grim realities of war. As their train chuffed slowly past the charred coffin of a *Panzer* tank exactly like his own, Metelmann recalled feeling fear shoot through him. 'I was only nineteen, and did not want to die.'<sup>68</sup>

Studies of stresses affecting soldiers in combat point out that fearful apprehension appears once soldiers have experienced combat reality.<sup>69</sup>

Serving in a signals regiment, Trautmann had seen men with limbs blown off, innards hanging out, half-missing faces; but he had not seen action, other than small skirmishes with partisans.

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<sup>64</sup> John Keegan, *The Face of Battle: A Study of Waterloo, Agincourt and the Somme* (London: Cape, 1976; Penguin Books edn, 1978), pp.332-33, 183-84; Goldstein, p. 266.

<sup>65</sup> Zimmermann, pp. 24, 28-30; Crocker, pp. 113-35; Clay, p.83.

<sup>66</sup> Bernhard T., diary entry.

<sup>67</sup> Zimmermann, pp. 30-33.

<sup>68</sup> Metelmann, *Through*, p. 32.

<sup>69</sup> Albert L. Kubala & William L. Warnick, *A Review of Selected Literature on Stresses Affecting Soldiers in Combat* (Texas, US Army Research Institute Technical Report, 1979) accessible as a PDF <http://www.dtic.mil/get-tr-doc/pdf?AD=ADA071115> from Defense Technical Information Center <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic> [accessed 4-1-2016]

Without proper winter kit, the weather seemed a more formidable enemy, prompting him, in January 1942, to volunteer for paratroop training in Berlin. The training was brutal, aimed at building a tough, fighting force for guerrilla warfare against the partisans. Two months later they were sent to the Eastern front, operating as small, rapid-response *Kampfgruppen* (combat units) against partisan activity behind German lines. Trautmann was scared to death, but also thrived on the adrenalin, feeling tough and proud and soon ‘as brutalised as the rest.’<sup>70</sup> In military vocabulary, human beings (together with the misfortunes war visits upon them) are given simplistic labels (‘enemy’, ‘friend’, ‘casualty’, ‘non-combatant’, ‘dead’), to be dealt with routinely and sanitized in memory or discussion afterwards.<sup>71</sup> At home on leave, Trautmann never mentioned bloodshed or brutality, just soldiers’ bravery. His biography describes ‘fighting the partisans’ in general terms, withholding detail of his own combat actions.<sup>72</sup> Metelmann’s autobiographical account is more forthcoming (and confessional) regarding his complicity in the brutality of war on the Eastern Front: the injuries suffered by his comrades, his own part in killing others, including wounded comrades too far gone for help, and occasional random acts of violence and revenge (not only against the enemy) sparked in the heightened stress of guerrilla warfare.<sup>73</sup>

In 1944, able-bodied German soldiers were transferred to the Western Front. Trautmann was posted to Paris, training raw teenage *HJ* recruits, then sent to defend the Atlantic ports. At twenty-one, he was a toughened veteran wearing two iron crosses.<sup>74</sup> To his mother’s dismay, Rudolf R., a battle of Minsk veteran, was headhunted by a *Waffen SS* colonel to command an *HJ SS* tank crew in Hungary.<sup>75</sup> Metelmann, in his early twenties, had been decorated for his

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<sup>70</sup> Clay, pp. 83, 121-27, 131-33.

<sup>71</sup> Keegan, *Face*, p.25.

<sup>72</sup> Clay, p. 144.

<sup>73</sup> Metelmann, *Through*, pp.137-38.

<sup>74</sup> Clay, pp.158-59.

<sup>75</sup> Rudolf R., interview.

part in the battles of Crimea, Stalingrad, Kursk, among others.<sup>76</sup> Trautmann, Rudolf R. and Metelmann appeared to embody the battle-hardened warriors they had worshipped in the *HJ*. Individual war experiences inevitably differed. In a signal corps posted to France, George Gebauer had very little experience under fire before surrendering to a small party of Americans.<sup>77</sup> An incident in occupied France left Terhorst feeling like a man; but also tormented by guilt, of having abused the power his rifle gave him.<sup>78</sup> That power in actual combat, he eventually discovered, proved limited. After six months on guard duty waiting for the inevitable invasion, Terhorst's small company, armed only with rifles, was instructed to hold off an enemy with much greater fire power. Within the space of a few days, under constant fear of attack, he had buried horrifically wounded comrades' bodies, been shot in the leg, injured after their stolen US jeep fell off a dynamited bridge, then finally evacuated on a hospital ship.<sup>79</sup> Hans Behrens was training in France in 1944, learning morse code when the invasion overtook them. In his IWM interview, avoiding painful detail, he simply commented that it was 'awful for absolutely green recruits to be thrown into this mess' – the 28 survivors (out of 250) were posted back to Germany to re-group.<sup>80</sup>

### **Cracks in the masculine façade**

Research studies have concluded there to be 'no such thing as "getting used to combat"... men will break down in direct relation to the intensity and duration of their exposure.... Psychiatric casualties are as inevitable as gunshot and shrapnel wounds.'<sup>81</sup> A US Army Research Institute

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<sup>76</sup> Metelmann, *Through*, p.186.

<sup>77</sup> Gebauer, pp. 118-20.

<sup>78</sup> Crocker, p. 131-37.

<sup>79</sup> Crocker, pp. 164-98.

<sup>80</sup> Behrens, reel 2.

<sup>81</sup> J.W. Appel and G. W. Beebe, 'Preventive Psychiatry: an epidemiological Approach', *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 131, 1946, (1469-75), p. 1470, cited in John Ellis, *The Sharp End: The Fighting Man in WWII* (London: Aurum Press, 2009), p. 216.

summary of research on stress in combat concluded that certain factors (including wounding and casualty rates and cumulative time in combat situations, combined with frustrations through inability to act) consistently compound combat exhaustion rates. Additionally, studies of combat stress conclude that aggressive action is the best antidote to fear – combat exhaustion casualties increase rapidly in situations where troops are forced to dig in and wait (when a ‘fight or flight’ reaction would normally be triggered). ‘Inability to retaliate, and idleness have... been shown to be related to neuropsychiatric casualty rates even when wounding rates were comparatively low.’ Several studies reported that being pinned down by enemy fire with no means of counter-attacking increased neuro-psychiatric casualty rates.<sup>82</sup> Zimmermann recalled the El Alamein battle starting as a terrifying bombardment of heavy artillery trapping them in their dugout, with many casualties.<sup>83</sup> Bernhard T.’s unit’s unexpected baptism of fire involved a massive barrage of heavy artillery, pinning them down in a bunker for hours, unable to retaliate. They could not engage with the enemy, as they never saw an enemy combatant.<sup>84</sup>

Physical illness becomes statistically more likely in hostile situations. Increased stress results in ‘maladaptive’ behaviour; symptoms of combat exhaustion include minor and ‘avoidable’ injuries.<sup>85</sup> Noticeably, several narrative accounts drawn on in this study mention being lightly wounded or falling ill, resulting in reprieve from a potentially intolerable situation.

Metelmann’s minor shrapnel wound rescued him from the exhausting, dangerous retreat from Russia which claimed many of his comrades.<sup>86</sup> Jaundice saved Steffen from being sent back to Russia. Trautmann, a seventeen-year-old fresh recruit, court-martialled for what he had thought was a harmless prank, found himself facing a nine-month sentence in a filthy dungeon

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<sup>82</sup> Kubala & Warnick, Chapter 2, pp. 11-13.

<sup>83</sup> Zimmermann, p. 38.

<sup>84</sup> Bernhard T., diary entry.

<sup>85</sup> Kubala & Warnick, Chapter 4, p. 16.

<sup>86</sup> Metelmann, *Through*, p.180. Similarly, PW04., correspondence; PW07, correspondence; Max D., correspondence; PW01, correspondence; Theo Terhorst, Crocker, p. 191.



cell shared with a murderer. He developed acute appendicitis, was hospitalized, and saved from serving his sentence. After witnessing the gruesome aftermath of battle *en route* to Tobruk, Zimmermann contracted dysentery and was evacuated. When he re-joined his company, many faces were missing, casualties he might also have been among. Erwin Grubba was midway through training in 1943 when bombs demolished his family home. His parents survived, but, not knowing their whereabouts, he still felt orphaned. He was sent to the Eastern front, a posting every German soldier feared, 'like being sent to hell.' En route, one man's legs were blown off by a mine planted by partisans, and they passed a train crammed with returning bloodstained-bandaged wounded. Grubba developed dysentery, was hospitalized, then assigned to a new draft. Ignorant of their destination, they accepted their likely fate with soldiers' black humour: 'See you in a mass grave or a POW camp.' But, lying on flatbed open wagons, travelling at night, a comrade familiar with the constellations noticed their train was travelling west, not east, which raised their spirits considerably.<sup>87</sup>

A German military psychiatrist, noting the relatively low psychiatric casualties among German troops in WW2, concluded German soldiers had nothing to gain by developing psychological problems, which were treated purely as disciplinary cases. An Allied physician had also noticed, in 1944, 'few cases of psychoneurosis' among German captives, wondering whether this was simply because they had been better prepared for war. British generals had consistently admired German soldiers 'for their tenacity... when a situation seemed hopeless', their ability 'to escape... when they were surrounded... to adapt... and think for themselves.' General Alexander dubbed them 'the best soldiers in the world – what men!' But as one German medic put it, 'There were practically no tremblers... in this war, the stomach was everything.' Given the inevitable consequences of food irregularities in active combat situations, 'everyone – even the strongest and bravest' frequently suffered 'gastric upset',

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<sup>87</sup> Grubba, interview notes; Grubba, reel 5.

which became the neurotic 'symptom of choice'. Shepherd concludes that 'German refusal to recognise psychological manifestations of stress encouraged soldiers to develop physiological symptoms instead'. After 1942, suicides and self-inflicted wound cases increased alarmingly, especially on the Eastern front.<sup>88</sup>

Studies of Allied Italian invasion campaign participants deduced that soldiers began to exhibit combat exhaustion after 90 days. In the much more stressful campaign in Normandy, this shrank to four weeks, after which such symptoms appeared among most men. After 40-45 days, they manifested hopeless apathy and a fatalistic attitude that they would not survive. On the Russian front, in summer 1941, exhaustion from interminable marching followed by a ten-day artillery barrage induced apathy and 'fits of crying' among German soldiers.<sup>89</sup> One stress study hypothesized (somewhat self-evidently) that awareness of possible "'unpleasant" outcomes' of an important situation will trigger stress.<sup>90</sup> In the final year of the war, German soldiers became increasingly aware of the 'unpleasant' probability of defeat. In autumn 1944, on the Dutch-German border, Trautmann became buried under rubble for three days. His *HJ Kampfgruppe* was subsequently diverted to the Ardennes where the *Amis* (Americans) weren't the only enemy. *SS* men roamed the woods looking for deserters – anyone who couldn't produce the right papers was shot on the spot. After four years' active service, Trautmann admitted – although not at the time – that his 'nerves were in shreds, at breaking point.' By late March 1945, with the Allies across the Rhine, it was every man for himself, starving and exhausted, fleeing or surrendering. Scared and panicking, Trautmann somehow lost contact with his *HJ* unit. (Given that many *HJ Kampfgruppen*, instilled with their vow to Hitler, refused to give up, this could be seen as a deliberate act of self-preservation on Trautmann's part.)

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<sup>88</sup> Ben Shephard, *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists 1914-1994* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000), pp. 299-300, 304, 306-08.

<sup>89</sup> Shepherd, p. 307, doctor's report, cited in Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis and War in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 21.

<sup>90</sup> Kubala & Warnick, Chapter 2, p. 4.

Keeping a pistol, he decided to make for home, 500 km away in Bremen. Military police were still about, shooting deserters, but it was *Amis* who caught him.<sup>91</sup>

### *Narratives of disillusion, demoralization and defeat*

Capture in North Africa in 1942 and 1943 arrived as a bewildering shock, a group experience with an air of unreality, rather like admitting defeat in a sporting match. Several correspondents wrote of playing darts or football with former adversaries.<sup>92</sup> Max D., captured by the British in 1943, remembered the sudden announcement 'that the English fancied a game of football against a German team. It didn't take long to mark out a pitch, find eleven players and under a burning sun the match began.' English and German spectators were 'sitting round mixed together, cheering their players on. A week earlier, we had been shooting one another. One had to ask oneself, what kind of world is this?'<sup>93</sup> Although faith in ultimate victory was privately shaken by seeing the enemy's vast resources, either stockpiled at ports or seen from trains taking them across the United States to prisoner-of-war camps, captivity did not at this stage disrupt group identity as combatants in war. Emphasis remained on obstruction towards the enemy, sabotage or planning abortive escapes.<sup>94</sup>

It was different for those still on active service. Keegan suggested that awareness of impending defeat predisposes acceptance of it.<sup>95</sup> Several sources identified 1943 as the turning point, when real doubts crept in about invincibility and ultimate victory.<sup>96</sup> Metelmann's *HJ* 'ideals' crumbled. Billeted at an early stage in a village, he had learnt Russian, and begun to

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<sup>91</sup> Clay, pp. 164, 167, 175, 178.

<sup>92</sup> Max D.; PW31; Peter R.

<sup>93</sup> Max D., correspondence.

<sup>94</sup> PW30, interview notes; Sullivan, pp. 96-97.

<sup>95</sup> Keegan, *Face*, p.334.

<sup>96</sup> PW14; PW09; Grubba, reels 1, 5.

understand the emptiness of German racial superiority, although in a rather confused way, still exhibiting unthinkingly much *HJ* arrogance. On the retreat, seeking shelter among Russian villagers, Metelmann had many conversations which challenged his rationale for invading Russia, echoing his father's arguments.<sup>97</sup>

Metelmann recalled general disillusion on the harrowing trek westwards, realizing their only chance of survival was to stay disciplined and stick together, sometimes simply ignoring orders they deemed ill-judged. They knew they were being lied to: every retreat was described as straightening the line. Finally, a slight wound secured him a place on a Red Cross transport back to Germany. Despite the shocking sight of bomb-scarred cities, some still expected a reception committee with flowers and speeches. The reality was civilian indifference or resentment, as if the war was their fault, before being dumped in a hospital corridor by harassed *HJ* stretcher bearers. (Rudi Lux was among *HJ* members in Massow watching a film one Sunday afternoon in 1941 when the screening was interrupted by an announcement for all *HJ* members to go to the station at once, to carry off the wounded. He took the horse and cart, but the gangrene stink was so bad that the horses would not go near the station. There was no hospital so the casualties had to be taken to the school. Lux was thirteen. He described also having to help the undertaker lay out bodies, and commented that his childhood was cut short in a few powerful lessons.<sup>98</sup>)

Metelmann was finally sent to join a nameless unit, of 'disillusioned survivors thrown together from once-proud fighting divisions', and issued an old WW1 rifle and a cumbersome bazooka. Their role was to hold back the Americans from invading Germany. 'Sullen and distrustful', few believed Goebbels' speeches about secret weapons that would bring victory. Civilians

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<sup>97</sup> Daehn, correspondence; Metelmann, *Through*, pp. 49-54, 170-75.

<sup>98</sup> Lux, p. 13.

reported that the *Amis*, only about 10km away, were behaving correctly. This was a relief, as rumours had been circulating that young males would be castrated in the event of invasion.<sup>99</sup>

After the D-Day invasion, demoralizing comprehension had dawned on Theo Terhorst that Germany was losing. His more experienced comrade-in-arms advised him that 'staying alive is the only victory you or I are going to have.'<sup>100</sup> Eddie W., called up in 1943, joined a parachute regiment but, like Terhorst, never jumped in action: by then there was no spare fuel. They were simply infantry in paratroop uniform, told they would have to fight on the ground. No one dared comment. 'They would shoot you as a saboteur. Nobody dared to say we can't win this war – even though one German tank had to pull five trucks because they had no petrol.'<sup>101</sup>

For those taking part in the retreat on the Eastern Front and later on the Western Front, defeat manifested as an accumulation of strange role reversals. Shamefully sneaking away under cover of darkness in August 1944, Hörner recalled his pride marching into France in May 1940. In Russia in April 1943, aware of German treatment of Russian prisoners and their reprisals against civilians, Trautmann and Metelmann both experienced terror when briefly captured by the Russians, then shock at being treated fairly. Later, hiding in a cellar when the *Amis* arrived, feeling the cobblestones shake as tanks rolled past, and seeing marching rubber-soled boots, Metelmann realized how Russians must have felt when his tank drove into their villages.<sup>102</sup>

Combat stress, exhaustion and the confusion of reverses punctured German soldiers' self-perception; defeat brought with it disempowerment, fear, uncertainty and also humiliation, not necessarily at their enemy's hands. One Berlin woman, writing in her journal in the war's closing weeks, pondered how German women's feelings towards their menfolk had undergone

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<sup>99</sup> Metelmann, *Through*, pp. 135, 152, 160-66, 175, 180-82.

<sup>100</sup> Crocker, pp. 169-70.

<sup>101</sup> Eddie W., interview notes.

<sup>102</sup> Helmut Hörner, *A German Odyssey: The Journal of a German Prisoner of War*, trans. and ed. by Allan Kent Powell (Colorado, USA: Fulcrum, 1991), p. 66; Clay, p. 152; Metelmann, *Through*, p. 184.

a sea change, a growing 'collective disappointment': 'We are sorry for them, they seem so pathetic and lacking in strength. The weakly sex... The man-dominated Nazi world glorifying the strong man is tottering, and with it the myth "man".' Sharing the war's dangers had changed German women. The many defeats brought by the end of the war would include 'the defeat of man as a sex.'<sup>103</sup>

Henry Metelmann's account relates demeaning encounters with his countrywomen, the women Hitler had promised would hero-worship him. A group of women 'begged me not to be silly and start fighting with the *Amis* in the streets, as it would only end in death and much unnecessary destruction.' Deep down he agreed, but had to behave like a soldier. Some women started to laugh, and when he turned to pick up his bazooka, it had vanished. Despite shouting, then abject pleading, they simply walked away, giggling. Later, after the *Amis* had taken over the town, his small group emerged in full uniform clutching an improvised white flag. They encountered only a group of women, feigning mock surprise, who commented sarcastically about "'Hitler's last hope.'" Metelmann, adorned with his hardwon medals and now a laughing stock, felt insulted; more was to come.<sup>104</sup>

### **Facets of defeat**

Capitulation *en masse* in North Africa mid-way through the war differed from individual surrender, or as a small group, on the European front in 1944 or 1945. In 1942 at El Alamein, when everything suddenly went quiet, Zimmermann risked looking out of the dugout – to see British tanks and infantry advancing as far as the eye could see. They didn't know what to do.

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<sup>103</sup> Anon (believed to be journalist Marta Hillers), *A Woman in Berlin*, trans. by James Stern (London: Secker & Warburg, 1955), p.55.

<sup>104</sup> Metelmann, pp. 183-86; Nicholas Stargardt, *Witnesses of War: Children under the Nazis* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005), p. 301, also gives examples of German civilians obstructing German troops in the war's final stages.

The corporal told them it was all over. So they emerged and gave themselves up.<sup>105</sup> Sullivan used short phrases to convey the emotional shock of transition from action to capture – fear, hope, anger, shame, intense relief, thankfulness to be alive, satisfaction at having fought well, tension, terror, confusion – before the *'sullen face... of defeat, of exhaustion – but also of change. One world has ceased to be.'*<sup>106</sup>

Bernhard T.'s near-contemporaneous diary extracts included a review of the circumstances leading up to his surrender, as if to convince himself there had been no alternative.

Otherwise, most contributors to this study, writing several decades after the event, made no mention of having fought well. If described at all, they briefly noted where and which nationality captured them, how they were treated, the discomfort and indignity of early experiences as prisoners, and being relieved of personal effects. Bernhard T. recorded bitterness at being stripped of all possessions, even his underwear. Zimmermann's narrative belies the impression conveyed by Max D., that mass surrender was less frightening than in small groups during continued fighting, or that Allied troops' conduct was more correct earlier in the war. El Alamein had been a last stand of a bitter campaign in a war the Allies seemed, in 1942, to be losing. Montgomery is said to have sent a message to his troops exhorting them to 'be imbued with the burning desire to kill Germans.'<sup>107</sup> According to Zimmermann: 'A few enemy soldiers... took us back beyond their line, but before that a British soldier wanted to shoot us all.' They were saved when one man, able to speak English, cited the Geneva Convention. The soldier still took their valuables. 'Somebody protested and was hit. So we went into captivity with a heavy heart', although most were glad the fighting was over. They had to march all night, hungry and thirsty, but relieved to be alive.<sup>108</sup> First impressions of the

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<sup>105</sup> Zimmermann, pp. 38-39.

<sup>106</sup> Sullivan, p. 5. See also A J Barker, *Behind Barbed Wire* (London: William Clowes, 1974), pp. 37, 43.

<sup>107</sup> Nigel Hamilton, *The Full Monty: Montgomery of Alamein, 1887-1942* (London: Allen Lane, 2001), p. 685, cited in Alan Warren, *World War II: A Military History* (Stroud: Tempus, 2008), p. 164.

<sup>108</sup> Zimmermann, p. 39.

enemy – positive or negative – tended to last: gratitude at being fairly treated, or bitterness after being robbed or assaulted. Either reaction emphasized the transition to disempowerment, symbolized by voluntarily relinquishing their weapons, the symbol of soldiers' power. Capture obliged passive submission to being assaulted and stripped of personal possessions, to await whatever fate the enemy planned, orchestrated – or permitted.

Captured alone by American paratroopers in March 1945, trying to keep his trembling hands above his head, jeered, jabbed in the back with a rifle, Trautmann was faced against a tree and stood waiting to be shot, hearing the *Amis* playing with the catches of their pistols.<sup>109</sup> When they finally gestured him to run away, he feared they would pretend he was trying to escape and shoot him in the back.<sup>110</sup> After the British stripped Bernhard T., he asked if he could at least have his documents back, but was told he should be happy he had not lost his life.<sup>111</sup> 'US' was said to stand for *Uhrensammler* (watch collectors).<sup>112</sup> Black Americans were said to have behaved more fairly, offering money in exchange for valuables. (In some camps, black GI guards also smuggled food to the POWs. Taught to regard such people as racially inferior, the POWs found themselves in the confusing humble position of gratitude for black sympathy.)<sup>113</sup>

Trautmann, literally running for his life, landed unarmed in the middle of a British signals unit, who brought him a mug of tea and offered cigarettes. Trying to hang on to his pride, he accepted politely, without smiling. Written for a British market, Trautmann's narrative of capture makes no mention of surrendering possessions to the victors. By his account, the soldiers who behave improperly are Americans; the British are mostly professional and correct,

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<sup>109</sup> Peter Rodi described a similar mock-execution 'game' after capture by the French; Wolfram Aichele, who, driven by hunger, gave himself up to Americans in Normandy in 1944, had heard 'numerous stories of trigger-happy GIs' shooting those who surrendered. Cited in Giles Milton, *Wolfram: the Boy Who Went to War* (London: Sceptre, 2011), pp. 221, 205. See also Alexander McKee, *Caen: Anvil of Victory* (London: Souvenir Press, 1984; Papermac edn, 1985), p. 201: 'Any German who tries to surrender nowadays is a brave man; we just shoot them there and then with their hands up.'

<sup>110</sup> Clay, p. 179.

<sup>111</sup> Bernhard T., diary entry.

<sup>112</sup> Helmut Hörner, *A German Odyssey*, p. 124.

<sup>113</sup> Sullivan, pp. 7, 15-16.



with 'all in it together' affability.<sup>114</sup> Captured in Normandy in summer 1944, PW30 told a different story, of being brought across the Channel in a rusty landing craft, deloused and taken to Devizes, where all their photographs, placed in a heap, had a match put to them. He recalled the atmosphere as 'terrible': men had lost their homes and families, their only possession had been their children's photograph.<sup>115</sup> This bitter experience of the British stayed with him. 'All the Allies had promised in the leaflets they dropped was propaganda.'<sup>116</sup>

Surrender in Normandy in late August 1944, to four frightened Americans, brought Helmut Hörner to 'the most disgraceful moment' of his military career. He watched with 'inner emptiness and abandonment' as his decorations and insignia were ripped off, together with his wristwatch, and 'dirty fingers' sorted through his possessions.<sup>117</sup> Forty years later, Metelmann could still visualise the 'greedy, gum-chewing face' of the little GI who tore all the medals from his tunic.<sup>118</sup> Others taken prisoner in a country they had been occupying as conquerors were shocked to become the butt of verbal and physical assault from civilians with whom they had formerly believed themselves on good terms. Metelmann described two days travelling through France in open freight wagons, jeered by people gathered to watch. At Cherbourg, a young Frenchman who lashed out at them was dragged into their column and beaten senseless. Implying he was directly involved, Metelmann's comment – 'I look at this as my last action of the war' – suggested this as the last chance to assert themselves as fighting men.<sup>119</sup>

In the early stages, captives had no idea what was in store; unable to understand the language, many fell victim to their own worst fears. Panic when Metelmann's fellow POWs were ordered

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<sup>114</sup> Clay, pp. 179-80.

<sup>115</sup> For further examples of how British soldiers treated surrendering enemy soldiers, see David French, "'You Cannot Hate the Bastard Who is Trying to Kill You...': combat and ideology in the British Army in the War Against Germany, 1939-45', *Twentieth Century British History*, 11, i, 2000, 1-22.

<sup>116</sup> PW30, interview notes; Faulk, p. 178.

<sup>117</sup> Hörner, pp. 88, 92-94.

<sup>118</sup> Metelmann, p. 186.

<sup>119</sup> Sullivan, p. 13; Hörner, p. 65, 153-55; Fleming, p. 36; Metelmann, *Through*, pp. 189, 191.

to dig a ditch the size of a mass grave dissolved into relieved laughter on discovery, from a German-speaking *Ami*, that it was for a latrine. Feelings of emasculation found expression in the circulation of rumours that they were all going to be castrated. Instead, they were transported crammed together like cattle and corralled in 'cages', makeshift transit camps with insufficient (or simply non-existent) food, water, sanitary facilities, blankets or shelter. Eventually at Cherbourg they discovered their fate, herded into the hold of a ship to be transported to America, like the black slaves they had learned about at school.<sup>120</sup>

Trautmann recalled sleeping out in the open with no blankets at a holding camp (at Weeze near the Lower Rhine); others in a tented transit camp in January 1945 slept huddled together 'like herrings'. Bernhard T. spent Easter 1945 at Wesel, another large transit camp, in constant pouring rain. It was a relief to be driven in the back of a lorry to Ostend, then force-marched to an empty former munitions depot, 'not exactly nice, but a great improvement on [...] experiences to date.' At that stage (April 1945) most believed 'we shall soon be released.'<sup>121</sup>

Terhorst's account conveys the desolate loneliness, in the early stages of captivity, of a sea of strange faces, underlining the importance, in maintaining morale, of the company of comrades who had been together in combat, at a time when honour was not compromised and identities were intact.<sup>122</sup> Despite POWs' outwardly defiant stance while the war was ongoing, Kurt K., in a POW camp in the US on Christmas Eve 1944, had seen grown men reduced to tears, hearing 'Silent Night' played on a trumpet. In the camp at Weeze, where Trautmann found himself after capture in March 1945, alone among several thousand men in an open field, few people spoke. One evening, a former opera singer stood up and sang a popular song from the 1930s,

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<sup>120</sup> Metelmann, *Through*, pp. 187-91.

<sup>121</sup> Clay, p. 181; Sullivan, p. 22; Bernhard T., diary entry.

<sup>122</sup> 'though surrounded by dozens of other men, I had never felt so alone in all my life', Crocker, pp. 257-58.

'*Heimat Deine Sterne*'.<sup>123</sup> Hungry and cold, hearing the song his mother had hummed while cooking the evening meal, Trautmann – and many others – broke down and began to cry.<sup>124</sup>

'Boys don't cry' refers either to an admonition to adhere to a gendered code of conduct, or a longstanding Western male taboo. Adrian Caesar writes of the British public school tradition of defining masculinity by 'the ability to endure and inflict pain', dependent on denying 'the full range of emotional life', and extolling 'aggression and stoicism as paramount virtues'.<sup>125</sup> Analysing more modern masculinities, Connell states that conventional 'western masculinity tends to suppress emotion and deny vulnerability'.<sup>126</sup> In his overview of studies of war and gender, Joshua Goldstein describes how crying becomes 'a central taboo' for soldiers 'hardened' to suppress emotion.<sup>127</sup> Given Liebschner's description of the *HJ* ideal, and Metelmann's assertion that any show of weakness in the *HJ* was not tolerated, it seems probable that tears for most young German males would hitherto have been taboo.<sup>128</sup>

Rudolf R. was still with his *HJ Panzer* unit, in Austria, the day they heard from a civilian that the war was over. He sent his boys into a wood (so they would not see him?), sat on a stone street sign and cried for the first time in his life. Like Trautmann, all he wanted now was to go home to his mother, but had no idea where she was.<sup>129</sup> His tears were shortlived; he still had his weapon and his freedom. His tank driver suggested they all make for his home near Wolfenbüttel. They blew up the tank, and walked nearly 1,000 km, arriving two months later.

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<sup>123</sup> 'Homeland, your stars (shine down on me even when I'm far away).'

<sup>124</sup> Clay, p. 181.

<sup>125</sup> Caesar, pp. 7, 225.

<sup>126</sup> Connell, *Men*, p. 5. Other studies also refer the conventional strong, silent, emotionally stifled 'real man' stereotype, in control of all tender feelings, of which striving to be 'cool' is the modern expression; see *Boys Don't Cry?: Rethinking Narratives of Masculinity and Emotion in the US*, ed. by Milette Shamir and Jennifer Travis, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

<sup>127</sup> Goldstein, p. 267-68.

<sup>128</sup> Liebschner, Reel 2; Metelmann, *Through*, p. 19; *A Hitler*, pp. 95, 171

<sup>129</sup> Rudolf R., interview.

They had just eaten when four British soldiers turned up to arrest them. 'Somebody must have told them where we were.'<sup>130</sup>

### **Painful truths – and perceived reprisals**

On the Channel Islands, cut off since D-Day, and subsisting on starvation rations, Erwin Grubba prayed for the war to end. The only news filtered through from Islanders illicitly listening to the BBC. One morning, just as he had gone to bed after night duty guarding greenhouses from marauding, hungry comrades, the young son of a friendly farmer tapped on his open window and called, 'Hitler's dead.' 'Good,' Erwin replied, and fell asleep.<sup>131</sup>

At the large transit camp on the Rhine, Trautmann recalled most men didn't talk much. Only those he described as 'real' Nazis went about damning the enemy, praising Hitler and swearing revenge. Trautmann, the tough paratrooper and former ardent *HJ* member, said nothing.

Later, in Ostend, a rumour circulated that Hitler was dead. Life without Hitler was unimaginable. 'Lies, propaganda,' some shouted. Sensing it might be true, Trautmann 'felt the fight drain out of him,' leaving relief, perhaps for final release from his *HJ* oath. Metelmann's arrival in New York coincided with news that Hitler was dead, and the war over. They received this news with confusion, and without discussion. None had dared say anything against Hitler while he was alive, and they could not be certain he was dead. 'The deadweight of the Nazi past was lying heavily on us. All of us younger ones... could not imagine a Germany without Hitler.'<sup>132</sup>

At a camp in Liverpool, Bernhard T. described how inmates captured earlier 'didn't want to believe us newcomers that the war had ended. If you described your final experiences and impressions of Germany, you would be dismissed as a "democratic propagandist".' An elderly

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<sup>130</sup> Rudolf R., interview.

<sup>131</sup> Erwin G., interview notes; Grubba, reel 6.

<sup>132</sup> Clay, pp. 181, 186; Metelmann, *Through*, p. 192.

NCO refused to accept that Bernhard had been taken prisoner by the English at Bocholt on 29 March. 'You sometimes got really puzzled, not knowing what was going on with these people.'<sup>133</sup> Metelmann's camp in Arizona contained several thousand *Afrika Korps* prisoners. 'Still living in the clouds, protected by their Nazi blinkers,' some 'accused us of having thrown in the towel after the enemy had crossed into the Fatherland.' Having fought in Russia, Metelmann could stand his ground, and had a number of quarrels, although discovering they had hanged a fellow prisoner who had spoken out against fascism left him rather cautious.<sup>134</sup>

German POWs arrived in the US to much curiosity and surprise, not resembling the warmongering beasts with horns caricatured by wartime propaganda. Manfred H., captured in Africa in 1943, was sent to Texas, where young American soldiers asked where were the Swastikas tattooed on their foreheads? However, 'When they realized what Germans had done in the concentration camps, we were given hard times in America.' From early 1945, shocking pictures and news emerging from newly liberated concentration camps reinforced the wartime stereotype of the enemy. Sullivan describes 1945 as the 'time of the Leper' when all Germans were regarded as complicit in the Nazi regime's crimes against humanity. The racially superior found themselves demoted to the status of untouchables.<sup>135</sup> PW02 (captured April 1945) was hospitalized, and interrogated by a German-Jewish British Army sergeant who had left Berlin in 1933 and believed every German was a Nazi.<sup>136</sup> After reciting a poem by a well-known Nazi opponent, PW02 suddenly found himself accepted 'as a member of civilised society': the medical staff became amazingly friendly and kind.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Bernhard T., diary entry. See also Fritz Bülter, *POW: Erlebnisse eines Seemanns in Amerika und England* (East Berlin: Verlag Das Neue Berlin, 1956), p. 105.

<sup>134</sup> Bernhard T., diary entry; Metelmann, *Through*, pp. 192, 194.

<sup>135</sup> Manfred H.; Sullivan, pp. 86-89.

<sup>136</sup> He implied that refugees who had escaped later, during the Nazi regime, were more aware of the extent to which many Germans were intimidated into silence rather than actively supporting it.

<sup>137</sup> Manfred H., correspondence; PW02, correspondence.

Otherwise, following the concentration camp revelations ‘human equality between British and Germans was totally destroyed.’ Many German POWs refused to accept the concept of collective guilt for Nazi crimes, arguing that a regime which totally controlled the media and met even verbal criticism or non-conformity with severe punishment left little room for individual responsibility.<sup>138</sup> PW28 explained how it was only on arrival in England that they met the full wave of hatred, which he felt was stoked by British newspapers. Sullivan confirmed that even the moderate British press assumed virtually all Germans who had fought for Hitler actively subscribed to his doctrines, adding that the wartime catchphrase that the only good German was a dead one could not be unlearned overnight.<sup>139</sup>

Boarding the train to Arizona, Metelmann and his fellow prisoners found ‘glossy brochures’ about the concentration camps on the upholstered seats. Nobody spoke about the contents but the photographs clearly shocked them all. He thought at first that they were fakes, but later took another look and could see they were real. Remembering much he had witnessed in Russia, ‘the sheer enormity of the crime against humanity I had collectively partaken in, took a clearer conception in my mind.’<sup>140</sup> Trautmann’s experience reflected that of most POWs held in the UK at that stage. Shortly after arrival at a UK camp, they filed in batches into a Nissen hut, sat on benches and were shown film of Belsen. Trautmann recalled snorts of indignation, anger, disgust and outrage. Many filed out protesting it was fake propaganda, but Trautmann had the uncomfortable memory of a scene in a Ukrainian forest he had witnessed (and fled from), of *Einsatzgruppen SS* shooting women and children in a pit.<sup>141</sup> Behrens remembered being shown the film in late 1945, in a mess hut in California, surrounded by American soldiers holding truncheons, with which they lifted up the chins of those who looked away, many

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<sup>138</sup> Faulk, p. 16; Bülter, p. 73; Rudolf R., interview.

<sup>139</sup> PW28, correspondence; Sullivan, p. 87, cites an April 1945 *Sunday Express* editorial denouncing the Germans as ‘moral lepers’ to be ‘outlawed from the civilised world until the present generation of Germans is dead.’

<sup>140</sup> Metelmann, *Through*, p. 192.

<sup>141</sup> Clay, p. 194.

crying. He described himself as 'devastated', unable to believe his countrymen could do such things.<sup>142</sup>

Ex-POW narratives recount, following the concentration camp revelations, random acts of retribution or individual cruelty; neglect, which some ascribed to inability to cope with overwhelming numbers being taken prisoner, others felt represented deliberate maltreatment. Belgian camps were perceived to be the worst. Metelmann recalled spending the night in bell-tents filled with boulders, which the laughing Belgian guards did not allow them to remove. At another camp, Bernhard T. described Belgian guards sometimes shooting wildly into the camp. 'Leaving the hut at night means certain death.'<sup>143</sup> Kurt E., an SEP, starving hungry in a Belgian camp, volunteered for a labour detail in order to steal guard dog biscuits or kidneys from frozen meat carcasses.<sup>144</sup> Extreme shortage of food in certain Belgian camps in 1945-46 was finally brought to the government's attention, through a British newspaper exposé. An investigation concluded 'junior officers' were to blame, allowing a situation to develop where German inmates were selling food on the black market.<sup>145</sup> From the POW viewpoint, it was easily seen as retaliation for the concentration camps. Rudolf R., an SEP, described being released, then about three months later, in December 1945, picked up again and transported to a POW camp at Ghent where 'there was much hunger'. Held there until the end of May 1946, they were suddenly told "'Sorry, we made a mistake'", and brought to England among many former SS shipped to the UK over a four-week period.<sup>146</sup> Other former POWs appeared reluctant to criticise, commenting 'One does not think back so well about the POW camps on the Continent', or blaming pressure of numbers, when food was

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<sup>142</sup> Behrens, Reel 2.

<sup>143</sup> Bernhard T., diary entry.

<sup>144</sup> Kurt E., interview.

<sup>145</sup> 'War Office to Investigate Camp Charges', *Sunday Observer*, 19-5-1946, p.1.

<sup>146</sup> Rudolf R., interview. Sullivan, p. 31, states 79,000 between March and August 1946, and that many were just skin and bone.

difficult to obtain.<sup>147</sup> According to the Geneva Convention, POW rations were supposed to equal home force rations. Any wartime reduction would have presented an excuse for an equivalent reduction for Axis-held prisoners. However, after complaints from the public, POW postwar rations were reduced. Many interpreted this as punishment for the concentration camps.<sup>148</sup>

According to Sullivan, after the unconditional surrender, 'a sombre mood descended on the camps. Singing of the old songs virtually ceased and so did the overt violence.' Men were in 'shock, bowed down, bitter, bewildered.' One described utter loneliness, withdrawing into himself to cope with the blow that everything he had believed in was false, circling the camp perimeter repeating lines from Goethe to try to draw comfort from them. The journal of Herbert Schmitt, a former U-Boat officer, described agonizing for many hours whether it was 'really all lies that our Führer told us, everything criminal that they ordered us to do? [...] Were they traitors – or were we – for capitulating?' The general mood was 'depressed and dejected[...], completely insecure yet defiant.' By September they were forming into small groups to try to work out answers.<sup>149</sup>

Bernhard T.'s diary, bemoaning 'the constant reminder of the barbed wire', described how captivity and boredom 'caused depression and restlessness.' People became 'suspicious and quarrelsome, living together in such a small space... irritable, small-minded and prone to outbursts.' Lack of news also bred 'senseless rumours and irrational false judgements. They curse their fate, worry about what lies ahead, with hope of soon returning home.' Kurt E. was nineteen when captured by the Americans in the Ardennes, stripped of everything he had, then handed over to the British and held as an SEP in camps in Belgium. In February 1946, believing they were finally returning home, they disembarked in England. 'I shall never forget

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<sup>147</sup> Kurt K., interview.

<sup>148</sup> Faulk, p. 17.

<sup>149</sup> Herbert Schmitt, cited in Sullivan, p. 116.



the sight of London and the feeling of being totally lost in space, in a strange country where I didn't belong. I was utterly dismayed.<sup>150</sup>

### **Impotent uncertainty**

Faulk regarded uncertainty about length of captivity as 'the chief factor in the destruction of [POWs'] morale.' In March 1946, a statement was circulated to all camps via *Die Wochenpost*, the POW newspaper, confirming there was no prospect of imminent repatriation. Following this, 'the enormous volume of requests for "certainty" [...] was replaced [...] by bitter words on slave labour.'<sup>151</sup>

Part of the wartime arrangement of shipping British-captured German POWs across the Atlantic, PW09 described himself as passed over in 1943 to the US, as "'war booty"'.<sup>152</sup> German prisoners shipped back from North America in 1946 recounted how they were told they were being repatriated, only to be disembarked at Liverpool and taken to British camps.<sup>153</sup> Contributors to this study mostly mentioned this sardonically, in passing, as an injustice; a few recalled sadness and disappointment. Metelmann's group, realizing they had been sold to the British 'like slaves', tried, unsuccessfully, to complain formally to the British camp commandant. Metelmann, as spokesman, unable to cite the relevant section of the Geneva Convention, was advised "'with your history behind you"', never to mention the Geneva Convention again. This response suggests a retributive element in treatment of German POWs.<sup>154</sup> They were sent to work on farms: 'We had accepted our fate now, worked

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<sup>150</sup> Bernhard T., diary entry dated June 1945; Kurt E., interview; Kochan, p. 126.

<sup>151</sup> *Die Wochenpost*, 81, 23-5-1946, Faulk, *Group Captives*, pp. 46-47. *Die Wochenpost* was an eight-page weekly German-language newspaper first produced for UK-held German POWs in 1941, ceasing after German POWs were sent to Canada. From November 1944, it reappeared, rising to a circulation of 110,000 in September 1947. In addition, from April 1946, individual POW camps produced their own magazines. Faulk, pp. 110-13, 142-46.

<sup>152</sup> PW09, correspondence.

<sup>153</sup> Sullivan, p. 170. See also Hörner, pp. 374-75; Zimmermann, p. 51,

<sup>154</sup> POWs had right of access to copies of the Geneva Convention, Faulk, p. 35, Sullivan, p. 121.

hard and caused no trouble.<sup>155</sup> Work was therapeutic, a means of redeeming self-worth and proving their value to the society which judged them. During 1946, however, output fell as morale declined, ascribed to uncertainty about repatriation and anxiety over their families' fate. In the months before captivity, many German soldiers had had no leave, nor any word from home. Trautmann finally heard from his family at the end of April 1946, the first news for two years.<sup>156</sup>

### **Regressive emotional need**

In both world wars, servicemen's contact with home was acknowledged as important for maintaining morale. During WW2, the International Red Cross (IRC) maintained postal services between belligerent countries and German POWs were allowed two communications a week, either letters or postcards. However, in the war's chaotic final months and aftermath, between August 1944 and November 1945, this service broke down.<sup>157</sup> Michael Roper has highlighted 'the emotional significance of communicating with home', 'abject disappointment' at failure to receive mail, and the disturbance to the psyche of loss of 'familial objects', experienced by POWs like those at Devizes whose family photographs were destroyed. Faulk considered repatriation and mail from home as the two most important psychological factors for the POWs. He argued that the collapse of Nazism and chaos of the war's final months deprived German POWs 'of the psychological support an adult derives from group belonging.' They universally reacted by withdrawing 'to the psychological security of the family but needed a tangible sign to remove the fear of losing that security.'<sup>158</sup>

Some POWs, not fully appreciating the chaotic conditions in Germany, became (and remained) convinced that postal contact was withheld as a punishment for the concentration camps.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Metelmann, *Through*, pp. 200-02.

<sup>156</sup> Faulk, pp. 40, 43; Clay, pp. 217-18.

<sup>157</sup> 'Prisoners of War', Commons Oral Answers, 29-4-1941, *Hansard*, vol. 371, cols 323-24; Faulk, p. 45.

<sup>158</sup> Roper, 'Slipping Out of View', pp. 64-65; PW30, correspondence; Faulk, pp. 44-46. The period without post was even longer in some cases.

<sup>159</sup> Bernhard T., diary entry.

In autumn 1945 (although several sources recalled it as much later), so-called 'sign of life' (*Lebenszeichenkarte*) postcards were distributed among POWs in the UK. Each card was printed with the message that 'A member of the defeated German army seeks his next of kin.'<sup>160</sup> The wording was intended to forestall insurrection, but many POWs took it as unnecessarily insulting. Kurt Bock estimated that perhaps five to ten per cent of POWs in his camp refused to send the card. Like most others, his need for family contact overrode other emotions: he did not hesitate to send the card.<sup>161</sup> The government claimed that by late March, 1946, 70-80 per cent of POWs with families in the non-Russian zones had re-gained contact.<sup>162</sup> Mail contact brought consolation; letters became an outlet to express longing for home.<sup>163</sup> During most of their captivity in the UK, German POW mail was not private, and restricted in number of communications and word length. The service was also slow and unreliable, and communications with the Russian zone took weeks or months.<sup>164</sup> For some German POWs, in spring 1946, contact with their families (many were refugees, expelled from areas returned to Poland or Czechoslovakia) remained non-existent. Renewal of contact brought relief and 'mainly good news.'<sup>165</sup> Kochan emphasized postal family contact as a slender bond the POW's emotional security and personal identity depended upon, 'the sole basis... of reconstructing in his imagination the scene to which he would one day return.' Bock recalled how some POWs 'spent hours and hours' [...] once the limit on number of words had lifted, writing 'very long stories in microscopically small characters [...] and boasting how many [words] they had managed to get on the small letter-card.'<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> 'Ein Mitglied der geschlagenen Wehrmacht sucht seinen nächsten Angehörigen.'

<sup>161</sup> Cited in Kochan, p. 104.

<sup>162</sup> 'Prisoners of War', Commons, 27-3-1946, *Hansard*, vol. 421, cols 531-40, (535, 539-40).

<sup>163</sup> Barker, pp. 141, 214, 226.

<sup>164</sup> 'German and Austrian Prisoners of War', Commons Written Answers, 13-11-1945, *Hansard*, vol. 415, cols 2062-63W.

<sup>165</sup> Faulk, p. 45 (German Commission ICRC report no 3322, 6-11-1945.)

<sup>166</sup> Kochan, pp. 104-05.

By July 1946, restrictions on incoming mail from Germany were lifted, although Other Ranks POWs remained limited to sending two letters and four postcards a month.<sup>167</sup> During the severe 1946/1947 winter, many letters were delayed, sometimes up to a month.<sup>168</sup> By October 1947, with repatriation having been operating at 15,000 a month for a year, about 200,000 German POWs remained.<sup>169</sup> Restrictions were lifted on the number of letters German prisoners could send, although mail sent to POWs by British subjects in the UK were subject to censorship, 'for disciplinary and control purposes'.<sup>170</sup>

Faulk suggested that, following initial good news from home, POWs then 'exaggerated the pathos' of their families' situations to expedite repatriation. He cited a published account, bemoaning the POWs' impotence in the face of their families' miseries. It described them 'swamped in a flood of appalling news', learning not only of 'general starvation, destruction and helplessness' but of wives 'pregnant by an unknown soldier'.<sup>171</sup> Writing in the 1970s, Faulk was probably not in possession of the now-accepted facts of widespread rape by Soviet (and other Allied) soldiers, in addition to prostitution in the face of starvation and homelessness among the civilian German population, aside from the Russian occupation and the death toll from Allied bombing.<sup>172</sup> As Goldstein puts it, rape in war humiliates the enemy 'by despoiling their valued property', underlining their failure as protectors.<sup>173</sup>

Some POWs never re-contacted their families; others eventually received news of parents' or siblings' deaths and/or loss of their homes.<sup>174</sup> After a year, BW20's future husband learned his

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<sup>167</sup> 'Visitors and Correspondence', Commons, 30-7-1946, *Hansard*, vol. 426, col. 149W.

<sup>168</sup> Richard Stokes, 'Postal Delay', Commons, 26-3-1947, *Hansard*, vol. 435, col. 1226; Commander Sir Douglas Marshall, 'Outward Mails (Censorship)', Commons, 27-10-1947, *Hansard*, vol. 443, col. 486.

<sup>169</sup> Kochan, pp. vii, 125.

<sup>170</sup> Mannie Shinwell, 'Letters, Prisoners of War,' Commons, 28-10-1947, *Hansard*, vol. 443, col. 673.

<sup>171</sup> Harald von Koenigswald, *Birger Forell* (Berlin: 1962), p.266, cited in Faulk, p. 45.

<sup>172</sup> See Miriam Gebhardt, *Crimes Unspoken: The Rape of German Women at the End of the Second World War* (Cambridge: Polity, 2017); Hsu-Ming Teo, 'The Continuum of Sexual Violence in Occupied Germany, 1945-49', *Women's History Review*, 5, ii, (1996), 191-218.

<sup>173</sup> Goldstein, p. 362.

<sup>174</sup> PW04; PW09; PW30 (from BW25 interview).

mother and three brothers had died. Rudolf R. discovered his home was now in Poland, but only several decades later learned of his mother's death from hunger in 1946.<sup>175</sup> Suicides occasionally resulted from bad news, or no news.<sup>176</sup> Mentioning such cases, the Bishop of Sheffield commented that prisoners are kept sane by hope; and that better communications with their families in Germany possibly increased POWs' suffering.<sup>177</sup> One ex-POW's account explained that the later, more negative descriptions of news from Germany arose as families gradually began to divulge realities they had previously withheld. 'There was hardly one of us who hadn't his troubles to bear.' He described how 'Laughter grew rare, and became bitter.'<sup>178</sup> Bülter related how in January 1946, he was happy to receive but frightened to open a letter from his fiancée, for fear of what it might contain.<sup>179</sup> Having not heard from his family for a year, Vincent Fetzer received a brief answer that all were well. However, a subsequent letter brought more details, including 'Completely burned out'.<sup>180</sup> Of a group of POW repatriates questioned in Munsterlager in 1948, 54 per cent reported that letters had meant bad news. Faulk described 'all-pervading emotionalism' with regard contact with home, but conceded that POWs 'identified through the letters with their families.'<sup>181</sup>

Eddie (Adolf) W. had also not heard from his family and was 'very worried because of the bombing.' After sending the *Lebenszeichenkarte*, it was almost a year before the reply arrived – 'still alive but bombed out, living in rooms'. They were glad he was in England. After their first card 'telling me there was not enough to eat in Germany' he no longer felt homesick 'but I missed them. I had been really worried about them. But as soon as I knew they were OK – as a

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<sup>175</sup> BW20, interview; PW05, correspondence; Rudolf R., telephone interview notes.

<sup>176</sup> E.g., 'German Prisoner Hangs Himself', *Grantham Journal*, 31-08-1945, p. 1; 'German Prisoner Hanged Himself', *Berwick Advertiser*, 31-01-1946, p. 3; Herbert Heinemann, 'A German POW in Britain – Part 3', BBC WW2 People's War, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/06/a5972006.shtml>, [accessed 29-1-2016].

<sup>177</sup> 'Employment of Prisoners of War,' Lords, 11-7-1946, *Hansard*, vol. 142, col. 400.

<sup>178</sup> Wentzel, pp. 163-4.

<sup>179</sup> Bülter, p. 241. See also Terhorst's 'trembling hands', Crocker, p. 283.

<sup>180</sup> 'The Diary of a Prisoner of War In Tonbridge in WW2', Tonbridge Historical Society, <http://www.tonbridgehistory.org.uk/archives/war-diary.html>, [accessed 8-2-2016].

<sup>181</sup> Faulk, pp. 45-46, 248.

boy of twenty – all I was interested in was “Do I get enough food? What is my job?”<sup>182</sup>

Eddie’s sanguine attitude may have stemmed from being part-Jewish; once he knew his family were safe, the fall of Germany is unlikely to have meant to him what it would have meant to most fellow POWs.<sup>183</sup> As Faulk put it: ‘the social structure that had given meaning and direction to their lives, and justified their social roles, values, prestige and inequalities, had collapsed.’<sup>184</sup>

### *Young adult identity crises*

For young Germans arriving in the UK as POWs aged between late teens and mid-twenties, their country’s defeat and their own continuing captivity coincided with the difficult developmental stage from adolescence to early adulthood. In his study examining mid-twentieth century adult male personality development, Daniel Levinson identified the Early Adult Transition (EAT), a novice adult phase, often a time of crisis and inner conflict.

Levinson defined the EAT task as to provide a workable link between self and adult society, finding a valued place in the world and creating a viable life structure, with reduced dependence on the family. He described struggles between urge for independence and need to maintain parental relationships and pre-adult aspects of the self. Periods of crisis and inner conflict play an important part in the task of developmental transition. Most of Levinson’s sample were WW2 or Korean War veterans. These experiences were perceived as having had a formative effect on the transition from pre-adult to early adulthood. Levinson acknowledged the possibility of a sharp life shift, triggering at least a modest crisis. While observing that WW2 and Korean War service had a formative effect on EAT, Levinson did not distinguish

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<sup>182</sup> Eddie W., telephone interview notes.

<sup>183</sup> On screening, see Faulk, pp. 79-88; Sullivan, pp. 122-26.

<sup>184</sup> Faulk, p. 10.

between the very different experiences of those war veterans, especially in terms of reintegration into civilian society. But he observed that young men are often too immature, conflicted and inexperienced to be able to resolve the contradictions of their transition from adolescence to adulthood. His study found that very few young men built their first life structure without considerable difficulties and occasional crises. Difficulties during this period were accentuated by specific aspects of their social situation, whether economic recession, racial discrimination, or international conflict.<sup>185</sup>

Relating this to German prisoners, the structure of their childhood, adolescence and early adulthood had, in Faulk's words, collapsed. They also faced identity conflict. After watching the concentration camp film, Günther Schran and Werner K. both described feeling ashamed to be German. A POW in America, Werner K. volunteered to work, and fellow POWs called him a traitor.<sup>186</sup> PW09 had been a POW since May 1943. Learning in the US of the Nazi regime's crimes, he described his own and others' 'blind enthusiasm' for Nazism subsiding. But he stressed the significance that his group of POWs shipped from the US to the UK (rather than repatriated to Germany, as they had been promised) arrived in spring 1946 in what he described as 'a partly very upset and angered state of mind.'<sup>187</sup>

Peter R. conveyed the obstructive mindset of POWs sent out to work in early 1945, while war was ongoing.<sup>188</sup> Following the concentration camp revelations, however, some prisoners wanted to work hard to prove not all Germans were bad, and redeem their country's reputation.<sup>189</sup> Most sources for this study emphasized the therapeutic effect of postwar work. As Manfred H. put it, 'All you had was your memories and your feelings and your work. And you could love the countryside, and like your work. We did, we loved our work.' Bernhard T.

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<sup>185</sup> Levinson, pp. 19-23, 42, 72-78.

<sup>186</sup> Schran, reel 3; Werner K., interview.

<sup>187</sup> PW09, correspondence.

<sup>188</sup> Peter R., interview notes.

<sup>189</sup> Sullivan, p. 335

described the healing effect of working to restore a rundown country estate, and then the good luck, in December 1945, of being billeted on a farm. 'Although I had not spent much time in captivity, I cannot describe how I felt as I suddenly became a free man. On the farm, I was accepted as a member of the family and it became like "home".' His first social contact, as for many POWs, was with the farmer's children, who taught him English.<sup>190</sup>

From 1946, more German POWs (eventually c25,000) were billeted at farms. Most slept and ate in outbuildings with little social contact with their employers. They wore POW uniform, were not supposed to leave the farm or travel alone. The social fraternisation ban remained in force and most German POWs were still held in camps, sent out in working groups to clear rubble, repair roads, dig ditches, and work on fields. Several sources for this study recalled farmers who were mistrustful or mean. POWs who arrived in the UK in 1946 (when attitudes towards the Germans began to soften) expressed more positive views, describing camaraderie, friendliness and hospitality despite the fraternisation ban. PW09 described appreciation for being treated as 'human beings... no "Conqueror" mentality', while another wrote of this as the first opportunity 'to recover from all the turmoil of the previous years – the English sense of humour did the rest.'<sup>191</sup>

The POWs were oddly positioned: set apart from the society in which they found themselves; cut off from their families and home backgrounds; free from many adult male responsibilities, yet unfree, minded by the military authorities, in some ways like children. Several former POWs recognized, in retrospect, the opportunity continuing captivity in the UK gave them to recover from the stress of war service, free from the demands of civilian life. Amid the confusion of belief and identity, the depression and anxiety, their restricted position was also liberating. The halfway house they inhabited, between institutionalized military life and

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<sup>190</sup> Manfred H., interview. Bernhard T., correspondence.

<sup>191</sup> Faulk, p. 32; MAF 186/92; PW09, PW12, correspondence.



civilian responsibilities, offered a breathing space, an opportunity to regress. Several sources mentioned the emotional significance of being taken into a family they worked for or were befriended by, and treated like a son.<sup>192</sup>

Once German POWs began working outside camps, especially in rural districts, they encountered civilians, including women: female relatives of the farmers they worked for and were billeted with, WLA members, as well as ATS and WAAF drivers and clerical workers, to whom some became attracted. Manfred H., who arrived in 1946 from the US, recalled 'Talking was forbidden. We knew fraternisation was forbidden, but there was always some. It all began on the fields.' When describing how they loved their work, he added 'But part of that was always the existence of *her*. And that goes for many of my colleagues.'<sup>193</sup>

## *Conclusion*

Chapter Three has followed the war's effects on the lives of men raised under the Nazi regime. These young Germans negotiated the challenging developmental transition from adolescence to early adulthood initially as enthusiastic adherents and combatants, before – through frightening stresses and reverses – becoming disillusioned, captive pariahs. In his account of German POWs held in the UK, Sullivan asked how 'the feelings of this multitude of disarmed, despondent and mainly sullen men', captured, defeated, hated and humiliated, could be adequately imagined.<sup>194</sup> In the midst of such difficulties, these novice adult males, lacking home comfort and emotional support, encountered young British women. Section B considers individual interactions between these two very different groups.

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<sup>192</sup> Sullivan, p. 334; Bernhard T., Manfred H., Max D., PW09, Kurt K., Werner K.

<sup>193</sup> Manfred H., interview.

<sup>194</sup> Sullivan, p. 16.

## Section B: Subjectivity, Identity and Sexual Attraction

Historian Michael Roper has described subjectivity as ‘personality formed through lived experience and the emotional responses to those experiences.’<sup>1</sup> Chapters Four and Five examine emotional encounters between British women and German POWs during the postwar period when fraternisation was forbidden. The conflict this created, between the exciting allure of ‘otherness’ and societal and parental pressures to conform, illuminated the challenges of aspiring early adulthood. Chapter Four shows how the adolescent ‘tentative’ self-determination identified by Charlotte Bühler allowed some young women to succumb to attraction to a German POW, then became strengthened through secrecy, opposition and personal initiative.<sup>2</sup> Chapter Five discusses how prisoners’ success with the holding power’s women boosted morale and fulfilled a need for sexual and emotional intimacy, and escape from communal, all-male camp life.

The freedom and agency exercised by these young women contrasted with the POWs’ restricted status and emotional deprivation. Both parties faced the challenges of transition from adolescence to early adulthood, their life choices and development affected by the gender role reversals which characterized these relationships. This subversion of conventional gendered courtship roles underlines both the prisoners’ disempowerment and some young women’s willingness to act out assertive agency fostered by wartime female roles and role models.

As outlined in the Section A Introduction, theories of early adult personality development suggest a mid-teens to early twenties tension between contradictory urges for greater

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<sup>1</sup> Roper, ‘Slipping’, p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> See Eugene Mario de Robertis, ‘Charlotte Bühler’s Existential-Humanistic Contribution to Child and Adolescent Psychology’, *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 46, i (2006), 48-76 (pp. 65-68).

independence and regressive need for comfort in the face of identity crisis; between (parental or societal) authority and adolescent rebellion. Erik Erikson believed identity formation necessitated some 'role repudiation';<sup>3</sup> Theodore Lidz regarded intergenerational conflict as inevitable and 'essential to social change.' Lidz, writing in the 1960s, identified the 'pivotal time of life when youths turn away from the family' that has nurtured them. He saw adolescence as characterized by 'revolt and conformity', the denial of parental standards 'as adolescents try things out in their own ways', testing their own 'capabilities and limitations.'<sup>4</sup>

Daniel Levinson's study identified life stages very similar to Erikson's ego stages of development, but centred more directly on the boundary between self and the world. For Levinson, the primary task of each transitional period is to question and explore possibilities for change, and commitment to crucial choices. Each developmental transition is characterized by crisis and inner conflict. The tasks of his 'Early Adult Transition' are to provide a workable link between one's valued self and adult society, establishing oneself and creating a viable life structure, with reduced dependence on the family. This 'novice adult' phase, often involving profound change in relation to the world, occurs from late teens to late twenties.

Levinson acknowledged the possibility of discontinuity (a sharply different life change) in this shift, with the likelihood of at least a modest crisis. Most of the sample on which his theories were based had seen military service in WW2, or in Korea in the early 1950s. These experiences were perceived as having had a formative effect on the transition from pre-adult to early adulthood. He described struggles to end and also maintain relationships with parents and pre-adult aspects of the self, characterized by greater physical distance from family and reduced dependence.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Erikson, *The Life*, pp. 72-74.

<sup>4</sup> Lidz, *The Person*, pp. 330-32.

<sup>5</sup> Levinson, p. 75.

Levinson's theories seem particularly relevant to the German prisoners, whose distance from and reduced dependence on family was enforced through the harsh discontinuity of the way their war ended. The structure of their childhood, adolescence and early 'novice adult' phase had shattered. The POWs were oddly positioned: set apart from the society in which they found themselves; free from adult male responsibilities, yet fettered and minded by the military authorities in infantilizing ways, and deprived of emotional support.

Section B suggests that German POWs' situation in the UK encouraged the beginnings of a modified adult masculine identity, brought into relief through relationships with British women.

## Chapter 4: Forbidden fruit: the attractions of 'otherness'

### *Introduction*

The wartime disruptions outlined in Chapter Two allowed children and young women greater autonomy and offered non-traditional female gender role models. The young were also exposed to 'otherness', with some, through evacuation, becoming 'Other' themselves. Young girls learned to accept wartime uncertainties, including loosened home ties and fleeting romances. At the war's end, adolescent and single young women were disposed to crave more of the war's adventure and excitement.

Chapter Four concerns the experiences of young British women who met German POWs in the immediate postwar period. These encounters are explored in the context of attitudes towards the 'enemy Other' and the attraction of 'otherness'. The secret romantic liaisons that ensued are examined in the light of certain young women's postwar independent agency and determination to pursue personal gratification despite familial and social disapproval.

Following D-Day, German prisoners began to appear in large, uniformed groups marched to and from railway stations, or crowded on open lorries. A few civilians encountered them individually, in working situations. Initially, under the Prisoners of War and Internees Access and Communication Order, no communication with enemy POWs was officially permitted, other than deemed necessary in the course of their work.<sup>1</sup> Awareness of this regulation and adherence to it appear to have varied across the country, possibly reflecting disparate local attitudes towards authority, extent of wartime civilian suffering and perception of the enemy.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Statutory Rules and Orders 1940 no. 1389, MAF 47/117, see Appendix 3.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Hewitt, "'When the Great Planes Came and Made Ashes of our City...': Towards an Oral Geography of the Disasters of War', in *Antipode*, 26, i (1994), 1-34.

In bomb-damaged Southampton, for example, people threw bread for bedraggled columns of arriving German prisoners; in Liverpool, more heavily bomb-damaged, they threw stones at buses carrying German POWs.<sup>3</sup>

Some sources for this study described seeing groups of prisoners being transported, or working on the land and on building sites or road works; others did not recall having seen any POWs before their first individual encounter. Such encounters in the mid-1940s occurred within an early postwar atmosphere of strong anti-German sentiment, following years of war propaganda cemented by concentration camp revelations. Civilian contacts with German POWs were initially conducted under a blanket policy of social ostracism – ‘sending them to Coventry’. Faulk described, as ‘war psychosis’ ebbed, gradual erosion of the social fraternisation ban over the course of 1946, with civilians in certain areas disregarding it, and (mostly non-conformist) church leaders condemning it.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, in December 1946, in response to the prisoners’ low morale (and lowered productive output), amid softening public attitudes and pressure from certain public figures, restrictions on German POWs were relaxed sufficiently to allow them to accept invitations into the homes of civilians and walk outside their camps singly or in small groups, within a restricted radius. Travelling on buses or trains, entering shops, cinemas, dance halls or pubs remained forbidden, together with ‘sexual or amorous’ relationships with women. Social contacts with members of the public increased from this time, through individual initiatives of inviting prisoners into homes, and interactions in the countryside and in public places.<sup>5</sup>

Joyce S. reflected that most of her social circle in Bedfordshire, and people she heard talking ‘on buses, in the office, or in shops, were full of hate when they saw the POWs... or heard about them.’ She ascribed this reaction to the proliferation of war films and newsreels about

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<sup>3</sup> BW28, correspondence.

<sup>4</sup> Faulk, p.168.

<sup>5</sup> Sullivan, pp. 185, 325-42.

German atrocities.<sup>6</sup> However, as time passed, especially after social interaction was allowed, 'things improved, as people realized that they were human beings.'<sup>7</sup>

### *Enemy encounters amid the dull reality of peace*

One contributor remembered expecting lights would suddenly come back on and social life would improve, but after the victory celebrations, the postwar world became uniformly bleak.<sup>8</sup> Without the shared goal of fighting, the worsening privations of rationing and shortages seemed an unjust penance: was this the prize for winning? Worse still, for young single women, the glamorous servicemen vanished. Phyllis Willmott described the dearth of men in uniform in the aftermath of VE day, 'as if a sudden sump had been opened'.<sup>9</sup> For many young women, the end of the war ended the excitement. The unfettered exuberance of dancing had offered young women a vital release from the physical constraints of repetitive wartime work.<sup>10</sup> BW11, who turned sixteen in 1943, remembered dances nearly every night, until suddenly, in 1945, the gaiety ended.<sup>11</sup> Another, working in a government intelligence department, noticed general restlessness among her colleagues, a yearning for adventure and travel.<sup>12</sup> In 1946, missing wartime adrenalin, the excitement and heightened emotion of short-leave romantic reunions, Sylvia L. found herself a new job on a 'War Ag' (War Agricultural Executive) camp running working holidays on farms.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Newspaper correspondence columns reflected this.

<sup>7</sup> Joyce S., correspondence.

<sup>8</sup> BW26, interview.

<sup>9</sup> Phyllis Willmott, *Coming of Age in Wartime* (London: Peter Owen, 1988), p. 137.

<sup>10</sup> Jephcott, *Girls*, p. 114.

<sup>11</sup> BW11, correspondence.

<sup>12</sup> BW26, interview.

<sup>13</sup> Sylvia L., interview. Each county had a War Agricultural Executive Committee, organizing local agricultural production, including seasonal labour on farms.

June K., fourteen in 1945, felt stifled by lack of career opportunities. Having aspired to join the police force, she did not relish the only parentally acceptable alternatives: shop assistant, or nurse. She learnt typing at night school and found work in the local Home Guard office. 'It was so boring, it was terrible.'<sup>14</sup> For Patricia Wendorf, also bored, stuck in an office, Women's Land Army recruiting posters promised rural romance and escape from suffocating parents monitoring her every move.<sup>15</sup> Despite the realities of an aching back, blistered hands and middle-aged, married men, the WLA fulfilled its promise of freedom.<sup>16</sup> The continuation of the WLA until 1950 offered independent lifestyles and a step towards emancipation for women normally expected to live at home until marriage.<sup>17</sup> The postwar women's auxiliary services likewise offered restless young women adventure away from home.<sup>18</sup>

While teenagers like Lorna H. rushed to join the women's services, slightly older young women were meanwhile endeavouring to re-adjust to civilian life. Released in October 1946, after several years in the ATS, Joyce S. returned home to her former clerical job and 'just couldn't settle down.' ATS service had been 'hectic', and confidence boosting, her mind expanded by 'good comradeship with people of all walks of life.' As relieved as everyone else that the war was over, she now 'worried over settling back into a "dull" life.'<sup>19</sup> Meeting a German POW was to remove that concern.

During the war, the few women who came into contact with German POWs encountered them in the course of their work as nurses, or as land workers, when some POWs, under guard, were detailed to work in gangs on farms.<sup>20</sup> In early 1945, Margaret R. was pulling carrots with other

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<sup>14</sup> June K., interview.

<sup>15</sup> Wendorf, pp. 10-12.

<sup>16</sup> See Shirley Joseph, *If Their Mothers Only Knew: An Unofficial Account of Life in the Women's Land Army* (London: Faber and Faber, 1946).

<sup>17</sup> Suzanne V. Cook, 'Emancipation or Exploitation? The Women's Land Army in the Second World War,' *Minerva: Quarterly Report on Women and the Military*, 18, ii (2000), 7-16.

<sup>18</sup> Turner and Rennell, pp. 110, 112.

<sup>19</sup> Joyce S., correspondence.

<sup>20</sup> See MAF 186/92; HO 45/21875; HO 45/23086 (copy of Western Command letter, 16-1-1945); Faulk, pp. 17, 32, 79.



women land workers. A gang of German prisoners joined Italian POWs at work in the field opposite. Margaret noticed in amazement the one working the riddling machine give a Nazi salute to the Italians, commenting to her companion on 'that cheeky Jerry grinning, with *Heil Hitler*.' The following day, under laxer Irish guards, the 'cheeky Jerry' sat down beside the women at dinnertime. Margaret gave him some of her cake, and cigarettes.<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps the mild 'cheeky Jerry' memory of her words reflect a retrospective softening of what Margaret R. actually said; or, with the Germans finally on the run, and prior to the shocking news from liberated concentration camps, possibly the 'enemy Other' seemed less of a threat.<sup>22</sup> Other early encounters certainly reflected the strength of conditioned fear or hatred of the enemy, particularly among the young. The duties of one ATS Sergeant Instructor, who taught basic German to British servicemen, included passing on officers' instructions to German POWs. She found the Germans very arrogant and recalled how some would stare at her in disbelief that she (a woman?) was giving them orders in their own language. She began to have brief conversations with one of the 'nicer' prisoners, but still spoke down to him. After VE Day, when another sergeant reminded her that he was a human being, she emphatically disagreed. He was German.<sup>23</sup>

Shortly after VE Day, Barbara Dennis and her colleagues at the Foreign Office were informed the three young men joining the department to work for British Intelligence were enemy POWs, and asked 'Be nice to them.' However, in the aftermath of news of Belsen and Buchenwald, 'Germans were regarded as fiends incarnate[...]. To those of my age [...] brain-washed non-stop for six years, they meant nothing but revulsion and terror.' One prisoner 'almost immediately began edging into acquaintance [...] I think I would have emigrated if I

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<sup>21</sup> Peter and Margaret R., interview notes.

<sup>22</sup> Soviet discovery of Auschwitz in January 1945 had not been broadcast; British and American forces did not liberate Nordhausen, Bergen-Belsen, Dachau and Buchenwald until April 1945, see Ben Shephard, *The Long Road Home: The Aftermath of the Second World War* (London: The Bodley Head, 2010), pp. 69-70.

<sup>23</sup> BW17, interview.

could, so great was my terror.’ Convinced ‘Franz’ was going to rape her, she was horrified to be assigned to work for him.<sup>24</sup> In mid-1946, Lorna H., now a WAAF clerk in Gloucester, remembered German POWs cleaning the offices. She was not alone in finding this enemy presence disturbing. ‘We were a bit wary of them, a bit nervous... I don’t know whether we thought they were [*laughs*] going to slit our throats or what, but you had been taught for all those years to hate the Germans.’ Faced with them in human form, she ‘didn’t quite know how to react to them.’<sup>25</sup>

Several contributors described meeting a German when the prisoners began to be billeted on farms.<sup>26</sup> Thea Burghart’s account relates how, after Italian POWs were repatriated following the 1945 harvest, her husband proposed, to her horror, using German POW labour. Since the V1 and V2 attacks and the concentration camp revelations, Thea had taken on board that ‘the only good German was a dead German.’ At harvest-time in 1946, the Germans arrived, wearing shabby British battledress with POW patches. Watching with amused disdain this sight of the master race now humbled by defeat, she still felt her hand trembling. The sullen-looking younger one moved into the farm cottage, where Thea took his meals for him to eat alone. He was polite and correct, but she felt uncomfortable around him, and even more uncomfortable when her husband suggested the German eat with them in the farmhouse.<sup>27</sup> Face-to-face encounters, however, had begun to erode conditioned prejudice. In late 1945, about twenty German POWs were suddenly marched into the Royal Army Ordnance depot where Muriel Webster, a ‘giddy’ nineteen-year-old, stencilled wooden packing cases, boring warwork she had been directed into. To her surprise, ‘Not one of them was a seven-foot gorilla-type man wearing jackboots, as I had been led to believe all Germans were.’<sup>28</sup> One

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<sup>24</sup> Dennis, pp. 68-69, 75-80, Barbara D., interview and correspondence.

<sup>25</sup> Lorna H., interview.

<sup>26</sup> BW15; BW16; Rosemary P.; PW15’s future wife.

<sup>27</sup> Burghart, pp. 81-86.

<sup>28</sup> Mae, p. 6.

eighteen-year-old's immediate reaction to Germans was interest, and pity, rather than fear, when an army lorry drove into the yard of her parents' farm and decanted six young German POWs, from a camp at Chester. They were about her own age, and one of them looked nice.<sup>29</sup> Kathleen W. worked for a rubber company which in 1946 began using POW labour, brought in an open-backed lorry driven past Kathleen's office window. 'They all used to laugh and joke,' and Kathleen started talking to one she passed when crossing the yard.<sup>30</sup>

Edna S., a civilian clerk at Donnington, recalled her first sight of German prisoners in late 1945/early 1946, when a squad marched into the depot, as she came cycling into work. Some prisoners worked in the offices, where printed notices warned employees not to fraternise, or give them cigarettes or food.<sup>31</sup> Most work-based interactions between German POWs and British women during 1945 offered little opportunity for more than brief attempts at conversation. One WLA member in Wales between 1945 and 1946 recalled working alongside German POWs, with occasional illicit, conciliatory conversations over refreshment, which she described as just friendly working chat, before being driven back to their billets.<sup>32</sup>

As German POWs were dispersed around smaller camps and billeted out on farms, working groups or lorryloads were glimpsed more frequently, some silent and sullen, others animated by the sight of the opposite sex, boldly shouting comments and wolf-whistling. Surrounded by British servicemen at Donnington, Edna S. had got used to them whistling and shouting 'Hiya Blondie!'; Patricia Wendorf recalled mixed 'delight and repulsion' witnessing similar brash liberties. Most young women accepted it, as keeping up 'our boys'' morale. From defeated enemy prisoners, however, such behaviour was unacceptable. June K. remembered feeling

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<sup>29</sup> BW13, correspondence.

<sup>30</sup> Kathleen W., interview.

<sup>31</sup> Edna S. interview.

<sup>32</sup> BW11, correspondence.

‘very hostile towards the POWs... complaining bitterly to my parents when they dared to whistle from the lorries that transported them around.’<sup>33</sup>

For BW11, however, the vacuum after the war ended had left ‘absolutely nothing to do’; then, ‘out of the blue’, the German POWs arrived. She described most as ‘very young and very handsome’, admitting ‘we girls went overboard for them.’<sup>34</sup> By early 1946, the group presence of several hundred thousand German POWs, in camps all over the UK, was attracting the interested attention of adolescent girls and young women. So-called camp followers also apparently ‘found vigorous young Germans more exciting to know than local boys.’<sup>35</sup>

### *The lure of men in uniform – a subversion of gender roles*

Female ‘camp followers’ had long been identified as a military nuisance. Early in WW1, the phenomenon of women hanging around soldiers’ camps acquired the label ‘khaki fever’, with young women’s social and sexual behaviour prompting widespread concern and condemnation. Woollacott has suggested such behaviour demonstrated young women as ‘wilful... autonomous sexual agents’, that their ‘blatant, aggressive and overt’ harassment of soldiers ‘threatened a subversion of the gender as well as the moral order.’ Khaki fever soon subsided, Woollacott argued, when young women took an active war role themselves, thereby earning their own value and status, no longer needing to seek the reflected glory of men in khaki.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Edna S., interview; Wendorf, pp. 11-12; June K., interview.

<sup>34</sup> BW11, correspondence.

<sup>35</sup> Sullivan, p. 337.

<sup>36</sup> Angela Woollacott, “‘Khaki Fever’ and its Control: Gender, Class, Age and Sexual Morality on the British Homefront in the First World War”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29, ii (1994), 325-47 (pp. 326, 332-33).

During WW2, concern again arose about unsavoury influences on mid-teenage girls, including the lure of a trophy boyfriend in uniform. 'Girls who... sit about on the grass at the entrance to the Aerodrome', Jephcott considered, were 'losing their sense of proportion.'<sup>37</sup> But, as one source put it, 'soldiers were much more exciting.'<sup>38</sup> In 1942, Dr Martha Eliot reported that the problem in Britain of 'fifteen-year-old and sixteen-year-old girls near military camps... was greater than many people were willing to admit and [...wherever] troops were stationed.'<sup>39</sup> Welfare workers expressed concern about adolescents 'tempted by a life of pleasures and excitements...normally... beyond their reach' who 'spent much of their time in the company of Servicemen', especially foreigners, and Americans. Such girls, being neither unstable nor of low intelligence, did not fit the profile of those normally perceived at moral risk. One London probation officer described them as 'above normal intelligence, well-spoken and good-looking.'<sup>40</sup>

Army camps continued to attract teenage girls after WW2. Olive Reynolds had gone around in a gang of friends with soldiers during the war, although she had no particular boyfriend. Postwar, bored in their spare time, Olive (aged twenty), her friends and her younger sister (aged fifteen) took to hanging round an army camp in the woods near Chingford. In January/February 1946, they were playing leapfrog outside the barbed-wire fence. Such a game presents as oddly childlike; it may be better understood as rough and tumble, serving a sexual purpose. Jephcott identified innocent 'larking about' and cavorting between the sexes (snatching personal property, playing splashing games or dolling boys up with make-up) as behaviour which offered opportunities for physical contact as well as showing off physical

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<sup>37</sup> Jephcott, *Girls*, pp. 133-34.

<sup>38</sup> BW26, interview.

<sup>39</sup> Martha M. Eliot, MD, 'The Effect of War and Civil Defense on Children: The British Experience', *Social Service Review*, 16, i (March 1942), 1-36, (p. 24).

<sup>40</sup> Sheila Ferguson and Hilda Fitzgerald, *Studies in the Social Services, History of the Second World War, United Kingdom Civil Series*, (London: HMSO, 1954), pp. 95-97.

attractions.<sup>41</sup> In this context, Olive Reynolds and her friends may be perceived as giving themselves an innocent excuse for loitering near the camp, while overtly erotically attempting to attract camp inhabitants' attention, by playing a game which involved showing more of their legs than would be glimpsed by merely walking past. Olive claimed she didn't initially realize that the men in strange-coloured battledress who came to the fence to watch were German prisoners. She fancied and felt sorry for one called Werner, who had arrived from America, thinking he was going home. From then on, they met nearly every night, in the woods. She dared not tell anyone.<sup>42</sup>

One woman, aged eighteen in 1946, who worked in a shop near a POW camp 'knew all the "do's and don'ts" about fraternising.' But she and her friends 'felt sorry for the POWs,' whom they met 'in gangs in woods'. She described being 'chased by military police, farmers and so on. But I did not have a special one.'<sup>43</sup> Her explanation focuses on feeling pity for the German prisoners, while also suggesting an attraction characterized by teenage rebellion, the exhilaration of harmlessly 'larking about' with the opposite sex, with the added frisson of flouting regulations and evading irate authority figures.

While motives are difficult to divine, and expressions of pity may be read as a self-justifying rationalization for betrayal of patriotism and prevailing social mores, they also suggest empowerment: these were men in uniform with whom young women felt they had, for a change, the upper hand. BW20 and her friend made a date with two lonely German POWs they had met while out walking, then stood them up, and went to the cinema. After the film, saying, "Oo, they'll have waited for us!", her friend suggested going to see if the POWs were

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<sup>41</sup> Jephcott, *Girls*, pp 130-31; horseplay and exhibitionism among girls to attract attention from boys is also mentioned by Diana Leonard, *Sex and Generation: A Study of Courtship and Weddings*, (London: Tavistock, 1980), p. 80.

<sup>42</sup> Olive P., interview.

<sup>43</sup> BW27, correspondence.

still there. They found them 'sitting in the same spot' at 8pm, when the agreed rendezvous had been six hours earlier. 'He seemed pleased to see me.'<sup>44</sup>

### *Transgressive courtship and empowerment*

Marilyn Lake identified the emergence in the 1930s, reinforced in WW2, of a new femininity, revolving around 'sexuality, sexual attractiveness and youthfulness'. She stressed the importance of subjective experience, and identified the task for historians of explaining why certain groups of women, in shared historical circumstances, were more likely than others to respond to some representations of their identity and experience. She argued that several factors – transformation of femininity during the 1930s and 1940s, women's wartime work experiences, and how the war had sexualized women – affected how disparate groups of women understood and negotiated their lives. Crucially, she regarded *age* as the specific determinant in the effect of these transformations.

Lake used Clarice McNamara's phrase, likening women who had taken on better-paid male work and responsibilities in WW2 to 'the lion that has tasted blood.' She argued that, rather than feeling pressured postwar to return to pre-war gender roles, young women 'were offered the adventure of sexual romance' heightened by confidence in their right to enjoy it as pleasure-seekers and 'agents of their own lives, "picking up" and discarding men at will.'<sup>45</sup>

Lake was suggesting that some young women, growing up alongside increased freedoms in the

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<sup>44</sup> BW20, interview.

<sup>45</sup> Marilyn Lake, 'Female Desires: The Meaning of World War II', *Australian Historical Studies*, 24, xcvi (1990), 367-376. Summerfield and Crockett (1992) regarded such messages as over-simplistic. However, their study acknowledged wartime women's assertiveness in sexual gender relations without identifying age group differences, see Penny Summerfield and Nicole Crockett, "'You Weren't Taught That with the Welding": Lessons in Sexuality in the Second World War', *Women's History Review*, 1, iii (1992), 435-54.

1930s, had enjoyed economic status and freedom during WW2, particularly in asserting entitlement to and enjoyment of their own sexuality. British moral welfare workers reported encountering in WW2 unmarried mothers of a 'new type', with considerable 'spirit of independence' and 'little of the sinner and the penitent.' They 'objected to the very term [...] "moral welfare", which seemed to imply reproach and moral censure.'<sup>46</sup>

During the first half of the twentieth century, courting encounters migrated from the home, church or other organized community activity to less supervised commercial centres of entertainment, including cinemas, dance halls and public houses.<sup>47</sup> Claire Langhamer has argued that courtship during formative young adulthood offered young women the opportunity to explore different selves, through different choices of partner. Parental attempts to control potential courtship encounters underlined the importance, for young women, of marital choice, in terms of future economic status. Working-class and lower-middle-class young women met young men in commercial establishments like dance halls; among the middle classes, introductions to potential partners tended to remain under supervised and socially controlled conditions, in the home or an institutional community setting, like the tennis club. Langhamer suggested that young women exercised and consolidated the empowerment they had experienced during the war, through pro-active flirtation and association with the opposite sex.<sup>48</sup>

Some young women in the immediate postwar period had either experienced greater freedoms during the war or were impatient to access them and achieve independent agency outside parental control. They did so, as the following sections of this chapter show, by exploiting parental ignorance, geographical distance from familial or community supervision,

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<sup>46</sup> Ferguson and Fitzgerald, pp. 95-96.

<sup>47</sup> Asia Anna Eaton, Suzanna Rose, 'Has Dating Become More Egalitarian? A 35 Year Review Using Sex Roles,' *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, 64, xi-xii (2011), 843-62.

<sup>48</sup> Claire Langhamer, 'Love and Courtship in Mid-Twentieth Century England', *The Historical Journal*, 50, i (2007), 173-96.



and by deception. Encounters with German prisoners exemplified and in some cases extended loss of parental control. The relationships which grew out of such encounters demonstrate proactive female agency, not only acting independently but subverting normal gendered roles of courtship, as well as prioritising personal pleasure and desire over emotional commitment or future social or economic status. Further, in terms of exploring different selves through choice of sexual partner, young women who embarked on relationships with German prisoners, by engaging with 'otherness', placed themselves in an isolated and independent social and emotional position, at variance with parental and community values. This required (or entailed acquiring) both autonomy and courage.

### **Transgressive encounters**

June K. related how she would complain to her mother, "A lorryload of Germans went by and they all whistled and shouted things like 'Hello Blondie' and I thought how dare they? They've got no right..." Then Gerhard smiled at me. How you change!"<sup>49</sup> The chain came off June's bike shortly after she had cycled past two German prisoners. In a panic, conscious they were gaining on her, she struggled to hook it back on. But glimpsing one of the Germans she had been so intent on escaping, her antipathy rapidly gave way to attraction. Muriel Webster similarly described instant attraction, to one of the POWs who marched into her workplace.<sup>50</sup> BW29 remembered seeming to 'click' straight away. Previously, like anyone else, she always felt pleased if Germans were shot, but instantly upon meeting she liked everything about this German. It was love at first sight, with the added spice of exciting fun of the subterfuge.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> June K., interview.

<sup>50</sup> Mae, p. 6.

<sup>51</sup> BW29, interview.

BW20 described a less rapid emotional U-turn, from fear and hate to warmth and pity. She was out walking with a friend, in spring 1947, when they recognized by their patched battledress that the approaching young men were German POWs. She felt frightened and diffident when they asked the time; having been twelve when the war started, and always heard the saying about good Germans being dead ones, she thought she hated them. But, drawn into conversation and shown photographs of their families, she found herself starting to like them. When one asked to meet the next day she refused, frightened in case anyone saw her and told her family. But he kept asking, and finally, feeling sorry for him, she agreed.<sup>52</sup>

In May, 1946, middle-class and grammar-school-educated Roslyn D. casually exchanged a few 'chummy' words with an attractive older man, whom she initially mistook for Canadian. Having been a prisoner in the USA, he spoke English with an American accent. When she realized he was a German POW, she 'was petrified someone might see me speaking to him,' but still continued.<sup>53</sup> Another source recalled how a 'deathly hush' fell over the village hall dance one Friday evening in late December 1946 when half a dozen German POWs walked in. Under the limits of their new freedom to walk about, they were not supposed to be there. But the band played on, dancing resumed and BW05 and her sister accepted when two POWs approached to partner them.<sup>54</sup>

Other encounters were more furtive. Several sources described receiving a secret request to meet, via an intermediary, from a POW they had not noticed – an invitation they regarded in a frivolous light. By early 1946, Edna S. had become accustomed to German POWs working at Donnington. Older male civilian cleaners befriended the Germans. One cleaner pointed out a German, 'a very nice fellow', saying 'I think he's got his eye on you.' Edna thought he looked nice. She knew another girl was secretly going out with a prisoner, despite all the printed

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<sup>52</sup> BW20, interview.

<sup>53</sup> Roslyn D., correspondence.

<sup>54</sup> BW05, correspondence.

notices forbidding fraternising. The cleaner explained that the POW wanted her permission to write to her. 'For devilment', she agreed, and received several short notes in broken English, asking if they might meet and talk, then sending a diagram showing the rendezvous. She described herself as probably petrified at first, in case she was seen, but gradually became oblivious to that risk, although, as BW19 emphasized: in 1946, it was not permissible even to be friendly with a German POW.<sup>55</sup>

At the 'War Ag' camp, Sylvia L. worked with another hostess who supervised two young German POW kitchen workers, with whom they used to laugh and joke. One day the younger POW brought a letter for Sylvia from their interpreter. It was in good English, with a long description of himself and instructions where to meet. 'He'd made a little map up with crosses on, and I thought, this will be a laugh.'<sup>56</sup> Lorna H. and a fellow WAAF would spend their day off in Gloucester 'just to get out of the camp atmosphere.' Although it was against regulations, they usually changed into civilian clothes, as WAAFs had a bad name in Gloucester, for being rowdy. They would window-shop, visit a café, go to the cinema or sit in the park. One weekend, walking round, they passed two German prisoners, who nodded and smiled. Lorna and her friend ignored them and 'just kept walking'. However, they met so often, that 'in the end, they burst out laughing and we burst out laughing.' The POWs asked if they could walk with them. 'Very warily we said, "Well, we're just going to catch the bus."' The prisoners accompanied them to the bus stop, introduced themselves, and asked to meet again, the following Saturday. 'We did... but still very warily.' At that point Lorna's friend backed out, conscious that the diamond patches on their uniforms marked them out publicly as POWs, but Lorna accepted H.'s invitation to meet him alone.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Edna S., interview; BW19, correspondence.

<sup>56</sup> Sylvia L., interview.

<sup>57</sup> Lorna H., interview.

For some, the change from antipathy to attraction happened gradually. Fear was not only of being seen with a German, but of being with a German. Pat Wendorf had given up hope of rural romance on the land. Carrying a heavy basket of sandwiches, she only registered that one group of men had been awkward and chosen to sit at the other end of the field, forcing her to stagger much further. They were German POWs; one feigned amazement at her bringing the basket to them. It was autumn 1947. The fraternisation and marriage ban had been lifted, but she didn't know. One of them invited her for a walk. He had very limited English; she found him attractive, but couldn't help feeling frightened and repelled when he spoke in German.<sup>58</sup>

Another source described herself 'beguiled' from terror into 'liking and trust'.<sup>59</sup> Meeting H. challenged Lorna H.'s ingrained perceptions of the enemy. At first, she was afraid of him:

I thought God knows what he's going to do to me, but he was just a human being same as us... in fact he was quite a gentleman. He used to get a bit cross about it, [saying] 'Well, we'd been told the same things about you, you know... What do you think I'm going to do?'<sup>60</sup>

Over the cold 1946/1947 winter, on her route to work, Joyce S. passed German POWs digging trenches to lay pipes for a new housing project on a bombsite. Rushing for a bus one day, she dropped her purse, which was retrieved by 'a tall, blonde POW'. In gratitude, Joyce started to throw him 'food, cigarettes, fruit as I went by the trenches. We weren't allowed to speak to POWs. However [...] he tried to thank me and by Easter I eventually did speak to him. He spoke very little English and I no German whatsoever.'<sup>61</sup>

Such gestures (throwing food or cigarettes to German POWs working in public places) constituted a humanitarian acknowledgement of the prisoners, possibly frowned upon by

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<sup>58</sup> Wendorf, pp. 11, 15.

<sup>59</sup> BW26, correspondence.

<sup>60</sup> Lorna H., interview and correspondence.

<sup>61</sup> Joyce S., correspondence.

others but avoiding direct social contact. Joyce S. did not elaborate on why she eventually spoke. The newly permitted social interaction with German POWs may have enabled some thawing of public acknowledgement, although she implied she was unaware of this relaxation. Fay S., aged nineteen, a railway clerk, also seemed unaware that social interaction was now permitted. One evening in May 1947, she was walking with her young aunt, 'And we saw two German POWs. They were allowed to go out but not to speak to us or anyone else.' Instead, they laughed 'and we smiled back [...]. It was more curiosity than anything else that got us to speak to each other.'<sup>62</sup>

Beryl Bainbridge, a rebellious tomboy, kept a pair of her brother's old trousers to change into in the woods: "Girls didn't wear trousers in those days unless they were... in the Land Army." The army huts behind the sand dunes had been turned into a POW camp. By 1947, when Beryl was fourteen, the prisoners were able to walk around in the vicinity of their camps. One POW wished her 'Good evening' the second time she saw him; she didn't reply "because he was the enemy." She could not remember how they eventually got into conversation or "grew so close.... One moment we were strangers and the next we met night after night", at a special spot in the bushes.<sup>63</sup>

## Enemy Attractions

Nella Last, a Mass-Observation diarist, noted in November 1945 that her neighbour's daughter had no time for local boys – "They are all dull after RAF and Americans."<sup>64</sup> Lorna H. echoed this sentiment: 'Local girls didn't want to go with local boys [... who were] silly and immature.

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<sup>62</sup> Fay S., correspondence.

<sup>63</sup> Obituary, *Guardian*, 3-7-2010, p. 39; interview, *Daily Mail*, 25-5-1996, Beryl Bainbridge papers, British Library (BL) GB58 Add MS 83729-83829.

<sup>64</sup> *Nella Last's Peace: The Postwar Diaries of Housewife, 49*, ed. by Patricia and Robert Malcolmson (London: Profile Books, 2008), p. 38.

You were looking for something better.’<sup>65</sup> Another young woman questioned in the late 1940s, expressing an intangible longing for heightened romantic adventure, admitted that ‘the attentions of the local boy irritated me. I was contemptuous of his rather dull dates, and felt that his perfectly ordinary advances were childish and inexperienced. They lacked something that I felt I wanted.’<sup>66</sup> Like the GIs before them, German POWs were young, fit, attractive and on hand, when many other young men were demobilized, still overseas or had been called up.<sup>67</sup> But after heroic RAF aircrew and smart, affluent Americans, what could penniless enemy prisoners, toiling on menial work in patched battledress possibly offer young British women?

In autumn 1947, after the ban against German POW marriages was lifted, a group of girls was asked why they preferred the prisoners to British young men. Their unhesitating response suggests desire to explore the unknown – ‘We grew up with the lads in the village and know them like brothers. That’s not interesting any more’ – avoid the constraints of commitment and satisfy their curiosity: ‘It’s too dangerous to go steady. Everyone knows about it and thinks there’s going to be a wedding. So you have to watch it. But no one takes the prisoners seriously. That’s just being friendly. Besides, you want to know what they are like.’<sup>68</sup> The ambiguous comment about not taking the POWs seriously suggests they were not viewed (whether by the girls themselves, or the local community) as husband material.

Sources for this study also emphasized the German prisoners as ‘a novelty’. Many referred to their physical attractions: blond, handsome and muscular. Others mentioned liking them for being ‘so kind and gentle and full of fun’, ‘quiet’ and ‘hardworking’, and feeling ‘sorry for them’. The language barrier and the ‘fascinating, charming accent’ (that had initially repelled Pat Wendorf) became attractive. The POWs also offered ‘something different, and the

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<sup>65</sup> Lorna H., interview.

<sup>66</sup> Mayer, p. 84.

<sup>67</sup> Conscription continued after 1945 (becoming ‘National Service’ in 1949). Several sources for this study mentioned steady boyfriends or fiancés having been posted abroad.

<sup>68</sup> Cited in Faulk, p. 169.

challenge of perhaps being caught... they were interesting to talk to... as best we could.<sup>69</sup> In comparison with 'Harry', a seasoned soldier in his mid-twenties, who had fought in Russia before being captured and sent as a POW to America, Beryl Bainbridge found local youths 'so schoolboyish'.<sup>70</sup>

The prisoners also refreshingly exuded charm, old-fashioned chivalry and good manners (as black GIs had), unlike the 'dour misogyny' of local boys.<sup>71</sup> Land Army workers, accustomed to the casual chauvinism of local farmers and farm workers, were impressed by how 'polite and courteous' the Germans were, and 'very helpful to us if we had a heavy job to do.'<sup>72</sup> German prisoners 'would never let you lift a heavy sack.'<sup>73</sup> When Phyllis H. lost her footing on the bank by a lake, it was a German POW who rushed forward to save her and a German POW who fixed June K.'s bicycle.

Sylvia L. remembered H. as 'very formal'. In an era in which young men were expected to push for sexual intimacy and young women to defend their reputations by repelling such advances, the POWs' cautious sexual approach (given the fraternisation ban), their care not to try to take liberties too soon, appears to have added to their attraction. As Olive K. pointed out, German POWs' attentions were flattering without being embarrassing: 'they [... had a] nice way of speaking – no "smutty talk."<sup>74</sup> You didn't have to fight them off. Olive Reynolds had never liked local boys: 'Some only wanted you for one thing.'<sup>75</sup> Lorna H. recalled that H. had always behaved as a 'perfect gentleman [...] I didn't have any bother like that with H.'<sup>76</sup> Freed from fending them off, some sources became less defensive, and warmed emotionally. One source

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<sup>69</sup> BW27, correspondence.

<sup>70</sup> Beryl Bainbridge Journal entry, 10-1-1949, BL Add MS 83729.

<sup>71</sup> Sarah Benton, 'Women, War and Citizenship', *History Workshop Journal*, 58 (2004), 326-34 (p. 333), reviewing Rose, *Which People's War?*

<sup>72</sup> BW11, correspondence.

<sup>73</sup> BW07, telephone interview notes.

<sup>74</sup> Olive K., interview.

<sup>75</sup> Olive P., interview.

<sup>76</sup> Lorna H., interview.

explained that after several months she felt she knew him 'more and more... still on a friendly base, you know, because he was forbidden to touch your arm.'<sup>77</sup> Beryl Bainbridge's German POW 'didn't kiss her for weeks and weeks'. When he tried to put his arm around her, she always pretended she heard someone coming. 'She fell in love with him, feeling happiness tainted with fear, "for if I was seen my parents would be told and they would be terribly angry."<sup>78</sup>

POWs' reticence allowed some young women to release their own sexual feelings. Phyllis H.'s new POW friend behaved very well. Phyllis had stipulated 'no hanky panky', yet kissed him goodnight the first time they met.<sup>79</sup> Barriers of language and against speaking, meeting or touching operated to safely eroticize non-verbal encounters with German prisoners. One woman, a WAAF on an RAF station where POWs were employed, described falling for a German just by glances, and the depth of love expressed in his eyes.<sup>80</sup> Muriel Webster recalled the German POW where she worked 'holding me so tenderly with his look. [...] I had never felt so caressed in my life and that was without any physical touching.'<sup>81</sup>

### **Connecting with 'otherness'**

Young British women found themselves receiving intimate confidences from the bogeymen they had been taught to fear and hate. Gradually realizing how educated H. was came as a surprise for Sylvia L., after what 'you'd heard about the enemy.' His conversation 'so

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<sup>77</sup> BW20, interview. Jennifer Purcell, *Domestic Soldiers: Six Women's Lives in the Second World War* (London: Constable & Robinson, 2010), p.312, cites a Mass-Observation interviewee who fell in love with 'a perfect gentleman' not out for what he could get. Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher, *Sex before the Sexual Revolution: Intimate Life in England 1918-1963* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 134, suggest women trusted and felt respected by men who did not attempt sexual intimacy.

<sup>78</sup> *Daily Mail*, 25-5-1996, Bainbridge Papers, 1, fols 16-17.

<sup>79</sup> Phyllis H., interview. Reynolds, p. 265, suggests a kiss represented a fairly serious token of affection.

<sup>80</sup> BW02, correspondence.

<sup>81</sup> Mae, p. 7.



impressed my mind.’ She was shocked to realize he was ‘the best person I’d ever met.’<sup>82</sup> Feminist psychologist Carol Gilligan argued that developmental asymmetry between the sexes encourages women to ‘see into the gap between psychological experience and a socially constructed reality and to catch sight of the cultural edge.’<sup>83</sup> The fascination of difference that the prisoners imparted with the detail of their family and personal lives encouraged these young women to challenge the stereotyped image of the enemy that years of wartime propaganda had imprinted on their minds. Lorna H.’s boyfriend showed her a photograph of his Prussian father; she immediately saw the resemblance to the cinema villains she had hated.<sup>84</sup> He talked about his family, but they also tentatively discussed the war. He had wanted to serve in U-boats. ‘I said, “Oh, I see. You wanted to be ... in those awful Wolf Packs... and blow all the ships up.” And he said, “No, I just fancied going in the U-Boats.”’ It was a difficult subject they could ultimately only discuss lightheartedly: ‘He’d say “We beat you at Tobruk.” ... And [I’d say], “Ah, but... we took over so-and-so and we beat you there.” We used to just laugh about it, because that was all you could do.’<sup>85</sup>

This means of handling the awkwardness of having been on opposing sides echoes Maude P.’s remembrance of the war having devolved into a game. Joyce S., however, initiated more directly challenging conversations with her fiancé:

I did a very cruel thing once, but at the time I felt I had to do it. I badgered my [boyfriend] over the terrible things that happened in the concentration camps. I said he must have known something, that all the Germans must have known what was going on, have agreed with it, etc. etc. I was of course fighting with myself over my secret meetings with him. In every newspaper every day, there were pictures of victims of German concentration camps.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Sylvia L., interview.

<sup>83</sup> Carol Gilligan, ‘The Centrality of Relationship in Human Development: A Puzzle, Some Evidence, and a Theory’, in *Development and Vulnerability in Close Relationships*, ed. by Gil G. Noam and Kurt W. Fischer, Jean Piaget Symposia Series (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1996), pp. 237-62, (p. 251).

<sup>84</sup> Lorna H., interview.

<sup>85</sup> Lorna H., interview.

<sup>86</sup> Probably a reference to news coverage of the Nuremberg trials.

Joyce's boyfriend became 'very upset at my accusations, he cried bitterly.' Ultimately Joyce used her 'common sense', knowing he was eighteen when called up in 1942, sent to Russia as an army 'spotter' (which she had been herself), contracted typhus, was posted to France and captured in 1944. 'I couldn't see that he had had any connection with atrocities, so... I decided to follow my instincts. I defended him tooth and nail from then on.'<sup>87</sup>

Joyce's accusations and subsequent rationalization betray ignorance both of the realities of life in Nazi Germany and also of atrocities committed in ordinary warfare; but her identification with her boyfriend's wartime role implies acknowledgement of responsibility on both sides for causing death and destruction. Other sources mentioned their boyfriend's Jewish family connections, starvation in a Belgian POW camp, or experience of Allied cruelty, implying a need to exonerate them, or redress the balance, having empathically glimpsed 'the cultural edge'.<sup>88</sup> June K. claimed that the volte-face of her own feelings, from repulsion to attraction, 'taught me to look at everything from two sides.'<sup>89</sup> Receiving German POWs' confidences exposed some young women to a counter-narrative from that of the 'good war'. Thea Burghart's account describes her bewilderment, hearing about maltreatment in Belgian camps: 'The *Germans* beat and starved people; but the British? ...Could it be true?'<sup>90</sup> Jillian R. maintained that whenever asked about war crimes, she replied with the challenge 'that Martin has told me many, many stories of English officers' brutality which he personally had to endure, and hundreds of others like him, but no one has ever told the English people about them.'<sup>91</sup> (James Weingartner supports this assertion, comparing publicity and harsh sentences

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<sup>87</sup> Joyce S., correspondence.

<sup>88</sup> For example, Joyce W.; BW28.

<sup>89</sup> June K., correspondence.

<sup>90</sup> Burghart, pp. 87-89.

<sup>91</sup> Jillian R., correspondence.

meted out to Germans involved in the murder of downed US airmen with the hushed-up, lighter treatment afforded to US servicemen who murdered German civilians.<sup>92)</sup>

The lure of the forbidden simultaneously offered these young women an opportunity to rebel against the authority they now questioned. The excitement and drama of clandestine romance reawakened heightened wartime emotions and resolved restlessness after active wartime roles. For June K., stuck in a boring postwar job, 'Gerhard absolutely filled my life';<sup>93</sup> Joyce S.'s fear of dullness evaporated after embarking on her secret romance, which offered fresh challenge, interest and excitement. Over several months, they only met eight times, on Saturday afternoons for half an hour. 'Nobody ever saw us, we never saw anyone either. I knew of no other girl who was seeing a POW in secret.'<sup>94</sup> Nora R. described waiting anxiously at their secret meeting place as her POW boyfriend sometimes 'could not make it from the camp... if he didn't come I would go to the bridge the following day.'<sup>95</sup>

As discussed earlier, with growing commercialization of leisure and greater wartime independence of young women, working-class courtship arenas had drifted from parental control. Young women increasingly frequented dance halls and cinemas, beyond parental scrutiny. However, the tendency to 'walk out' remained: displaying oneself by walking in pairs or small groups in public, a version of earlier 'promenading', or 'parading'.<sup>96</sup> In this context, it

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<sup>92</sup> James J. Weingartner, 'Americans, Germans and War Crimes: Converging Narratives from "the Good War"', *Journal of American History*, 94, iv (March 2008), 1164-83; see also Max Hastings, *Overlord: D-Day and the Battle for Normandy* (London: Michael Joseph, 1984), p. 211: 'propaganda has distorted the balance of guilt'; and individual Allied memoirs, e.g., Victor Gregg, *Soldier, Spy: A Survivor's Tale* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. xiv, 228.

<sup>93</sup> June K., correspondence.

<sup>94</sup> Joyce S., correspondence.

<sup>95</sup> Nora R., correspondence.

<sup>96</sup> See Joseph A. Amato, *On Foot: A History of Walking* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2004); also Langhamer, 'Love', p. 183: 'urban and rural spaces... arenas within which young men and women could parade and make introductions'; Langhamer suggests parades 'had largely died out by the late 1940s in the face of [...] youthful affluence'; sources for this study, however, imply that for young women with limited funds, in the late 1940s informal parading remained a common leisure pursuit.

is hard to accept at face value the impression BW20, Fay S., Phyllis H. and Lorna H. convey, that meetings with young prisoners were accidental or unexpected occurrences during strolls in the fresh air, ostensibly to enjoy the fine weather, or window-shopping, in the face of limited financial means.<sup>97</sup>

When (from mid-December 1946) German prisoners were allowed to walk about within a few miles' radius of their camps or billets, they began to be seen more often, in parks and other public places frequented by young women. Although POWs were also now allowed social contact with civilians, relations of a 'sexual or amorous nature' remained strictly forbidden and they were barred from commercial premises (dance halls, pubs and cinemas) where the young often congregated to flirt with the opposite sex. However, permission to walk in public spaces allowed the POWs to frequent well known public 'courtship arenas' in the vicinity of their camps. Several sources for this study 'picked up' or were 'picked up by' German POWs in this way, in public parks or woods. The prohibition and public disapproval of such relationships lent a challenging constraint – and added excitement – to such casual encounters.

Traditionally, middle-class young women's encounters with the opposite sex took place in parentally controlled settings where they were introduced to young men from similar social backgrounds.<sup>98</sup> A woman reminiscing about GIs recalled girls being 'very strictly warned off' talking to them; 'they were, after all, strangers.'<sup>99</sup> From December 1946, German POWs were allowed to accept social invitations into civilian homes. Middle-class parents who extended charitable hospitality to German POWs were inadvertently and innocently introducing them to their daughters.<sup>100</sup> Several sources for this study met German POWs invited into their own,

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<sup>97</sup> E. S. Turner, *A History of Courting*, (London: Michael Joseph, 1954), p. 228, mentions window-shopping as a 'picking up' technique.

<sup>98</sup> Langhamer, 'Love', p. 184.

<sup>99</sup> Cited in Brown, p. 53.

<sup>100</sup> In the context of 1960s socio-economic implications of marital choice, Leonard noticed cross-class parental vetting of daughters' courting partners, with 'a slight tendency for the middle and "respectable" working class to be more actively interventionist.' Leonard, p. 93.

neighbours' or relatives' homes.<sup>101</sup> When June K. and her sister told their mother they had spoken to two German POWs, she suggested inviting them for tea, not realizing the risk.

So of course I asked Gerhard [...] I can see him now... looking down to see if his boots had made a mess on the carpet. He was really on edge... I don't think my mother thought for one moment it would develop as it did. But then of course they realized and I had quite a bad time.<sup>102</sup>

### **Cycling and subversive courtship**

Introduced in the 1880s, the safety bicycle permitted women who dared use it considerable freedom, no longer constrained by how far they could walk.<sup>103</sup> Flora Thompson extolled the exhilaration of 'defying space and time by putting what had been a day's journey on foot behind one in a couple of hours!' With just a tinkling bell and a wave, young women sped past gossip-prone acquaintances by whom, on foot, they would otherwise have been ensnared.<sup>104</sup>

In 1915, Richard le Gallienne spelled out the debt women owed to the bicycle: 'That apparently innocent machine' allowed a woman to 'go where she pleased' and, significantly, 'with whom she pleased', ending the 'old system of courtship', exchanging the 'chill drawing-room' for the 'open road' and the (enticing-sounding) 'whispering woodland'.<sup>105</sup>

Between the wars, youth hostels, cheaper bicycles and more practical dress codes for women fostered the popularity of cycling. WW2 petrol restrictions and crowded public transport further encouraged cycling as a universal means of transport. In 1941 few fourteen- to seventeen-year-old working-class girls considered cycling as a leisure pursuit, compared with

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<sup>101</sup> Margaret J.; Joyce W., BW30; BW31; June K.

<sup>102</sup> June K., interview.

<sup>103</sup> Marilyn Bonnell, 'The Power of the Pedal: The Bicycle and the Turn-of-the-Century Woman', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 14, ii (1990), 215-39.

<sup>104</sup> Flora Thompson, *Candleford Green*, Lark Rise to Candleford: a trilogy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1943; London: Penguin Books edn, 1973), pp. 477-78.

<sup>105</sup> Richard le Gallienne, *Vanishing Roads and Other Essays* (London: Putnam & Sons, 1915), p. 37.

the cinema or dancing, but by the late 1940s, Jephcott noted a 'cycling craze' among a large proportion of girls.<sup>106</sup>

Cycling facilitated attending social events, avoiding reliance on public transport or parents.<sup>107</sup> A 1949 survey cited cycling as a liberating force in terms of picking up men: 'a cycle was regarded as essential for making street encounters, since it is quite in order to pick up boys if one is on a bike – an altogether different matter from going after them on foot.'<sup>108</sup> This comment is difficult to comprehend unless the encounter is visualised, the bicycle affording the opportunity to slow down without actually stopping, conferring a greater measure of autonomy than walking.

Cycling offered an excuse to pause, dally and exchange a few innocent but possibly flirtatious words while showing off one's figure, one leg stretched to tiptoe on the ground, the other bent with the foot still on the pedal, affording the option of escape. Pedalling off might be envisaged should the appeal of the encounter wane, should the object of interest attempt an over-familiarity, or in the event of the appearance of a third party who might witness – and judge – the encounter. Nora R. demonstrated this technique in April 1947, out cycling with a girlfriend: 'Felix and another POW were walking along the pavement and we stopped cycling and it just started from there.' They were subsequently able to meet secretly because, as she put it, 'I had a bicycle (who didn't then!)'.<sup>109</sup> Cycling home one summer evening in 1947, Margaret S. was stopped by a young man who asked for a light. She realized he was foreign, but not that he was a German POW. 'We got talking [...]. It was like love at first sight.' They

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<sup>106</sup> Jephcott, *Girls*, p. 115; Jephcott, *Rising*, p.56; Pearl Jephcott, *Some Young People* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1954), p. 58.

<sup>107</sup> BW11, correspondence.

<sup>108</sup> Jephcott, *Some*, p. 58.

<sup>109</sup> Nora R., correspondence.

were both twenty-two. 'I did not tell my family at the time, but we saw quite a lot of each other until he was transferred to another camp.'<sup>110</sup>

June K. and her sister were cycling on the wet Easter Monday 1947 to collect their father's newspaper. June's bicycle transformed in a matter of moments from a means of escape from the enemy to that of pro-actively flirting with one. The bicycle chain had come off after passing two German POWs. In a panic,

I'd got the chain back on and we cycled on and then I thought, oh gosh, he was gorgeous, I wish I hadn't done that! So I hooked it off with my foot and of course they caught up with us and he said, 'Oh, can we help?' They couldn't speak very much English! But [we] walked up the road together and he asked, would I meet him?

At her village youth club, another teenager encountered an attractive German POW, on his knees teaching enthusiastic small boys to box. She described how – fortunately – the lights on her bike were not working, so he pushed it home for her.<sup>111</sup>

Bicycles offered opportunities to make distant assignations with prisoners, free from neighbourhood constraints. One source described how she and a friend borrowed bikes for two German POWs they had met, to go off for picnics, unknown to their parents. In February 1947, when sixteen-year-old Jillian R.'s RAF boyfriend had just been posted to Iraq for two years, she met a German POW at a dance. He was billeted ten miles away, but she cycled to meet him once a week. Constrained in the street to only exchanging a few words with the German POW who had retrieved her purse, Joyce S. started cycling on Saturday afternoons in spring 1947 to fields about a mile from his camp. 'He walked there and for about half an hour we could talk and I took fruit and chocs (my ration), and cakes.' BW11 cycled to local dances with her friend, then on to secret dates with the German POW she met working on a farm.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Margaret S., correspondence.

<sup>111</sup> BW04, correspondence.

<sup>112</sup> Dorothy H., correspondence; Jillian R., correspondence; Joyce S., correspondence; BW11, correspondence.

## **The empowering potential of transgressive courtship**

Langhamer identified mid-twentieth-century English courtship as ‘an important rite of passage’ in which young women ‘exercised real, if bounded, agency’, and through which they could try out new roles and negotiate future status and identity.<sup>113</sup> Langhamer drew attention to female desire to remake the self and seek a partner who allows for this transformation. This study suggests that, by choosing a relationship which allowed, and even demanded, more independent agency, young women who aligned themselves with a former enemy set themselves more independently apart than their peers with more socially acceptable boyfriends. By demonstrating determination to pursue their own sexual desires to the extent of rebelling against authority, and positioning themselves at odds with their familial and social milieu, they reinforced an independent identity.

Additionally, the relationship encouraged the subversion of normal courting rules and rituals. The tradition of boyfriend ‘treating’ girlfriend, by paying the expenses incurred in their courtship activities, appears to have evolved from the commercialization of youth leisure pursuits and the disparity in earnings between the sexes. The young woman would spend her (lesser) earnings on looking passively decorative at her boyfriend’s side, while he negotiated the ticket transaction, bought bus fares, drinks at the bar, ice creams from the usherette, summoned the waiter, ordered the meal, called for and settled the bill.

Allowing herself to be ‘treated’ presented as a bargain not without danger: the boyfriend who paid expected some sort of ‘return’ for his financial outlay, possibly extending to more than just the pleasure of her company.<sup>114</sup> Referencing Jephcott’s studies, Langhamer points out

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<sup>113</sup> Langhamer, ‘Love’, p. 173.

<sup>114</sup> Elizabeth Alice Clement, *Love for Sale: Courting, Treating and Prostitution in New York City 1900-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of Carolina Press, 2006) discusses ‘treating’ as sexual barter.



postwar young women's increasing willingness and 'determination to self-finance courtship practices reflected a desire to control male expectations and behaviour.'<sup>115</sup> Those questioned in Jephcott's wartime study were conscious of the dangers of being treated, in terms of sexual favours young men might expect in return.<sup>116</sup> However, Jephcott's postwar study suggested that, during the war at least, a boyfriend offered 'a marvellous time for nothing', representing 'a definite financial as well as social asset'. Some girls preferred to pay their own way on a date, "'then [boys] don't expect anything of you'", but this applied more to casual dating rather than serious courting. Parents judged a boyfriend's eligibility by the 'material pledges' he made. In return, the girl was expected to accumulate items for their future home together, in a real or metaphorical 'bottom drawer'.<sup>117</sup> Leonard concurred that, when seriously courting, unless both were students, the man paid 'all the major expenses'. She also pointed out, in more general terms, that 'Men have the *right and obligation* [my italics] to ask women out, to pay for outings and press for sexual "favours" in return.'<sup>118</sup>

Wartime relationships with American GIs temporarily stationed in the UK had exaggerated the disparity of earnings between the sexes. The phenomenon of better-dressed and better-paid American soldiers, bearing nylons and ham from the PX store and buying their way into the homes and hearts of rationing-starved, bare-legged British women, appears to have had more substance than just a caricature portrayed by disgruntled absent or less successful British suitors.<sup>119</sup> Several sources for this study mentioned former associations with GIs, emphasizing the material advantages: rich fruit cake, 'butter... chocolate, stockings... cigarettes. We all did very well.' In addition to the 'lovely food' one source remembered being given to take home from US camp dances, Americans also had transport. They arrived in jeeps to collect the girls,

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<sup>115</sup> Langhamer, 'Love' (2007), pp. 187-88.

<sup>116</sup> Jephcott, *Girls*, p. 136.

<sup>117</sup> Jephcott, *Rising*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>118</sup> Leonard, pp. 83, 107.

<sup>119</sup> Reynolds, pp. xxiv, 263, 264-65; Claire Langhamer, 'A public house is for all classes, men and women alike': Women, Leisure and Drink in Second World War England', *Women's History Review*, 12, iii (2003), 423-43 (p. 424).

and ferried them home again. 'Of course my brother didn't have that, and [my POW boyfriend] didn't have a car!'<sup>120</sup>

German prisoners could not even travel by bus; nor, for much of their period as prisoners, did they (legitimately) have money.<sup>121</sup> From June 1947, those who worked were allowed up to fifteen shillings a week, of which they received three shillings and sixpence in sterling, a similar amount paid in tokens redeemable in their camp canteens, and the remainder held back for payment on repatriation.<sup>122</sup> For the first time they were permitted to purchase items in shops, prompting some shopkeepers to display notices that Germans would not be served.<sup>123</sup> After the ban on using buses or entering commercial premises was lifted, some proprietors still refused entry to German prisoners, and conductors barred them from boarding buses.

Compared with the casual, free-spending generosity of the Americans, German POWs' gifts were modest, old-fashioned and, arguably, more romantically meaningful while less sexually coercive – impromptu gifts of wild flowers, as, in early 1945, the snowdrops Peter R. picked for his future wife, Margaret; or simple but painstakingly handmade presents – BW06's POW lover made her a string bag; Muriel Webster's boyfriend proposed with jewellery he had fashioned from nails: a ring and three tiny handpainted flowers.<sup>124</sup>

The German prisoners seemed more emotionally needy, more talkative than other young men. A woman who had been a teenager in the 1940s reminisced that British soldiers would take you for a drink and either bore you talking about cars or sport or abandon you to talk to their 'mates' for the evening.<sup>125</sup> German prisoners, however, were escaping the tedium of male

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<sup>120</sup> Laura F., interview; Sylvia L., interview; Olive K., interview; BW29, interview.

<sup>121</sup> Some POWs earned small amounts illicitly. See Sullivan, pp. 330-32; Kochan, p. 117; Appendix 5., 'German POW Working Camp permanent walking out pass'.

<sup>122</sup> Faulk, p. 42.

<sup>123</sup> 'POWs Spend £2 Month 'Outside': Some Shops Say "No Germans"', photocopy of unnamed newspaper cutting, 27-7-1947, p. 3.

<sup>124</sup> Peter R., interview notes; BW06, correspondence; Mae, p. 66.

<sup>125</sup> Norman Longmate, *The G.I.s: The Americans in Britain 1942-1945* (London: Hutchinson, 1975), p. 257; Reynolds, p. 265. See also Leonard, pp. 79, 81.

communal life: 'Many of them were just thirsting to talk to a female.'<sup>126</sup> The restrictions of meeting tended to intensify the relationship. Fear of being seen together, and the ban on POWs entering conventional commercial courting arenas, meant most couples passed the time alone, walking and talking in the countryside. One source wrote how, unable to go to the cinema, they exchanged confidences about their families, and through this intimacy developed a deep love.<sup>127</sup> Lorna H.'s previous dates with boyfriends had been 'fun', but with H. she 'couldn't [...] go to a dance or do the normal things... and I suppose for the first time in my life I was a bit serious-minded.' Phyllis H., formerly 'picture-mad' and keen on rollerskating, spent Saturday nights with her POW boyfriend 'walking round and round'. Others, like Lorna H. who had previously been 'dance-mad', also described their dates with POWs as 'just walking'.<sup>128</sup> When Joan Z. met her POW boyfriend after work: 'All we could do was go for walks... We couldn't be seen in the town or at the pictures... Cafes were also out because everyone stared... and made us feel uncomfortable. People always looked at them with suspicion.'<sup>129</sup> Lorna H. explained she and her POW boyfriend got to know one another 'so well' because 'all we did was talk all the time', adding that he was lonely, 'it was good for him' and a novelty for herself.<sup>130</sup>

In the mid-twentieth century, respectable young women would not normally enter pubs unescorted.<sup>131</sup> WW2 appeared to have, however, broken down some barriers in this respect, and in 1947, Olive K.'s father sent her down to the village pub every night to fetch him a pint of beer.<sup>132</sup> A group of German POWs regularly stood outside all evening, 'drawing on their

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<sup>126</sup> BW03, correspondence.

<sup>127</sup> BW01, correspondence.

<sup>128</sup> Lorna H., interview; Kathleen S., Edna S., Joan Z., Sylvia L.

<sup>129</sup> Joan Z., correspondence.

<sup>130</sup> Lorna H., interview.

<sup>131</sup> Leonard, pp. 76, 79, referring to the late 1960s: 'young women will only go into a pub when accompanied [...] are dependent upon drinks being bought for them.'

<sup>132</sup> For fuller discussion of young women in pubs in the 1940s, see Langhamer 'A Public'; David W. Gutzke, *Women Drinking Out in Britain Since the Early Twentieth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), pp. 54-59.

cigarettes and staring in.’ Olive, free to enter where these men could not, sometimes bought them a pint.<sup>133</sup>

In a relationship with a German prisoner, the ‘norm’ for a young woman of being a ‘treated’, passive appendage, became subverted: she gave gifts – of food, or clothing, to disguise her boyfriend; she bought and paid for the cinema tickets while he hung back in the shadows. BW27 confessed to spending all her savings on her POW boyfriend. One woman took her POW boyfriend, wearing her brother’s clothes, to London art galleries, paying for everything; another took hers, in her brother-in-law’s coat, to the cinema, after dark: ‘I had to get the tickets and pay and treat him. Soldiers always paid for us. I liked him enough, I wanted to pay for him.’<sup>134</sup> Kathleen G. had met a German POW in spring 1946. She sometimes took him to the cinema, dressed in her brother’s suit. ‘I paid and we sat at the back after going in when the film had started.’<sup>135</sup>

Normally, young men were allowed much greater freedoms than young women, who often had a curfew imposed by parents, a time they were expected home. It was accepted that your boyfriend would walk you home, then get home much later himself.<sup>136</sup> Jillian R. railed against always having to be home by 9.30pm, when dances were only just warming up, but she was allowed out later than German POWs. Joyce W. recalled how, from December 1946, POWs were allowed to walk outside their camps or accept invitations into private houses, ‘as long as they were back in camp before lighting-up time.’<sup>137</sup> When June K. was courting Gerhard, he ‘was still in the POW camp and had to be back at 8pm.’ Joyce S. described how, even on their

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<sup>133</sup> Olive K., interview.

<sup>134</sup> BW20, interview, BW29, interview; see also Mae, p. 27; Dorothy H., correspondence; BW01, correspondence; Nora R., correspondence; Joyce S., correspondence; Phyllis H., interview; Lorna H., interview; Fay S., correspondence; Kathleen W., interview; Margaret J., interview.

<sup>135</sup> Kathleen G., correspondence.

<sup>136</sup> Dennis, pp. 37-38: ‘The Air Force boy followed the accepted ritual of “clicking or picking up”; “Can I see you home?”...And then Harry walked home six miles’. Also Leonard, pp. 76, 107, referring to the 1960s/70s: ‘Young women cannot go to certain places or walk home alone at night.’

<sup>137</sup> Jillian R., Joyce W., correspondence.

wedding day: 'At 8.30pm we walked to the town [...] for [the POWs] to return to camp. The 9pm bus took them all back (my husband included).'<sup>138</sup>

POWs had to be present in camp for evening roll call. Several women described escorting POW boyfriends as near as they dared go to the gates, then walking home themselves. 'Girls who had boyfriends there used to take them home at night [...]. Then we would all walk home together.'<sup>139</sup> Several women portrayed themselves as 'protective' of their POW boyfriends, whom they described as 'sensitive' or shy.<sup>140</sup> Others traced the origins of their relationship in having felt sorry for him. Olive K. had noticed her future husband hanging around looking lost outside the cinema, and taken him in to see the film.<sup>141</sup> Such accounts exude a sense of female empowerment, of picking up on the POWs' emotional neediness, rather than their own. 'Their position was so stupid. They were all desperately lonely and unhappy and needing girlfriends like anything.'<sup>142</sup>

Most sources described organizing illicit outings, disguising their boyfriends with borrowed civilian clothes.<sup>143</sup> Some who ultimately married described themselves as 'sharing costs', as neither party had much money. For Joyce S. 'it seemed normal for me to pay the marriage licence. I earned money, my [fiancé] had no money.' He earned a small amount making slippers out of potato sacks (which Joyce sold, illicitly, to family and workmates), and saved up six guineas to pay for their wedding rings. 'So I felt we were sharing the cost of the important

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<sup>138</sup> Joyce W., Joyce S., correspondence.

<sup>139</sup> Joan Z., correspondence.

<sup>140</sup> Jillian R.; BW20; Joan Z.

<sup>141</sup> Olive K., interview.

<sup>142</sup> Joyce W., taped response.

<sup>143</sup> From February 1947, HO Circular 38/1947 announced that German prisoners' diamond-patched clothing was to be gradually replaced by plain brown battledress, HO 45/23086. This uniform relaxation appears to have been slow being implemented, 'owing to the shortage of cloth.' 'Clothing (Modification)', Commons, 20-5-1947, *Hansard*, vol. 437, col. 230W.

[...] things.<sup>144</sup> For one young woman, arranging the wedding and paying for her wedding ring formed part of the empowering fun of subverting conventional roles.<sup>145</sup>

Delight in turning convention on its head is also reflected in Joyce W.'s narrative of the event that led to meeting her future husband. Her younger sister, aged eighteen, was out walking with a friend when two German POWs approached them. The POWs

had practised a few sentences they wanted to say if they met somebody nice. They stopped these two girls and one of them announced 'If you invite me, I can come to tea.'<sup>146</sup>...which the two girls thought very amusing, and my sister's friend said 'OK, you can come to tea with us on Saturday.'<sup>147</sup>

Joyce did not explain exactly what the two girls found so amusing about this opening gambit: possibly the clumsy transparency of such an approach, or its novelty. Tea with a girl's parents would not normally figure as a chat-up line; a boy would typically ask a girl out, shying away from being vetted by her parents. Equally, the incongruous prospect of inviting for tea not just a complete stranger, but a former enemy suggests a mischievously appealing subversion of the convention of bringing a boyfriend home as an indication of committed courtship, into the setting where one was normally only introduced to 'suitable' young men.<sup>148</sup>

### *Deception and defiance*

Romantic involvement with a German POW was kept secret from family, friends and work colleagues as long as possible. Between 1945 and the late 1940s, need for secrecy remained an issue for most women, even after the marriage ban was lifted. Fay S. described herself as

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<sup>144</sup> Joyce S., correspondence.

<sup>145</sup> BW29, interview.

<sup>146</sup> From December 1946, invitations into civilian homes could be accepted.

<sup>147</sup> Joyce W., taped response.

<sup>148</sup> Leonard, p. 94, indicates the 'important social significance' of taking a boyfriend home for 'the dreaded "Sunday tea".'

happy that, by late 1947, they could go to a dance or the cinema instead of ‘walking the countryside for months – wind or weather.’ But BW03 could not recall girls walking in public with POWs and most sources described meeting under cover of darkness, in the countryside, in woods, haystacks, old barns, endeavouring not to be seen. Nora R. would tell her parents she was meeting a girlfriend, and cycle about a mile from home, to rendezvous with her POW boyfriend on a railway bridge at the end of a lane. Sylvia L. recalled, in summer and autumn of 1946, running with Daisy in court shoes through wet grass and across muddy fields to meet the two Germans, with whom they dared not laugh, or raise their voices.<sup>149</sup>

The snowbound early months of 1947 drove others to smuggle POW boyfriends into the cinema, although some, including Edna S. wearing three coats, still braved the elements. The snow by the railway track was waist deep, but they sat on a tree branch. Edna eventually told her mother, who kept it from her strict, anti-German father. Despite knowing she could be sacked from her job, Edna relished the romantic excitement of subterfuge, hands touching as they exchanged notes, brushing past one another at work.<sup>150</sup> Although some sources confided in a close friend or sibling, others told no one. When H. told Sylvia L. that her work colleague was meeting a fellow POW, ‘It was the first I’d heard of it. Daisy had never said a word to me.’<sup>151</sup> Fay S. realized that not discussing her boyfriend with girlfriends at work was becoming suspicious. She finally thought up a plausible excuse, “‘You never talk about the one you love.’” Well, I couldn’t, could I?’<sup>152</sup> Studies of ‘bedroom culture’ underline the importance for adolescent girls of shared confidences within tight-knit friendship.<sup>153</sup> Withholding confidences

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<sup>149</sup> Fay S., correspondence; BW03, correspondence; Nora R., correspondence; Sylvia L, interview.

<sup>150</sup> Edna S., interview.

<sup>151</sup> Sylvia L., interview.

<sup>152</sup> Fay S., correspondence.

<sup>153</sup> See Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber, ‘Girls and Subcultures [1977]’ in *The Subcultures Reader: Second Edition*, ed. by Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 105-12 (p. 112); Sian Lincoln, ‘Teenage Girls’ “Bedroom Culture”: Codes versus Zones’, in *After Subculture: Critical Studies in Contemporary Youth Culture*, ed. by A. Bennett and Keith Kahn-Harris (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004), pp. 100-01; Leonard, pp. 79-80, also refers to sharing confidences between friends and work colleagues.

about boyfriends set these young women on a more autonomous path, independent of parents, family and peer-group friends.

A German POW had asked Jillian R. to dance, after which, when a 'ladies' excuse me' came up, she boldly reciprocated: 'and then we danced every dance that evening... and made a date for two weeks' time.' Expected to tell her parents where and with whom she was going out, she resolved this filial dilemma by avoiding the whole truth, saying she had a date with 'a nice "boy" named Martin (a good English name).' They were unimpressed to hear he was a tractor driver 'but I don't think it had ever crossed their minds that he wasn't any other nationality than English.' Jillian's father had served on a minesweeper during the war. 'I didn't dare tell [them] he was German.' After six months, she still hadn't come clean. 'My friends knew, and some didn't speak to me for a long time [...] at that time there were some horrible things said about girls who fraternised with the "enemy".'<sup>154</sup>

Monica Ganter, serving away from home in the ATS, manipulated the truth to the extent of marrying her POW boyfriend, six months before the lifting of the ban. His surname didn't sound German, so she applied for a special 48-hour licence, giving his second forename, Leo, and her home address as his, borrowed a suit for him and asked two strangers in a nearby library to witness the register office ceremony.<sup>155</sup> Fay S., in 1947, disguised her POW boyfriend in civilian clothing primarily to protect her family's reputation. However, in 1945, Margaret R. had exploited her family's standing in the community, showing a blatant disregard for the fraternisation ban. In conversation with a policeman when an open lorry passed, carrying German POWs, she pointed out her boyfriend. The policeman said "'Miss S., those are Germans... I could lock you up for this'", to which Margaret claimed she replied "But you

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<sup>154</sup> Jillian R., correspondence.

<sup>155</sup> "'I Don't Regret" says ATS who wed German', *Daily Mirror*, 5-6-1947, p. 5; *Wellington Journal & Shrewsbury News*, 7-7-1947; 'German's ATS Wife Fined £4', *Manchester Guardian*, 5-6-1947, p. 8. 'ATS girl who wed German says: "I'd do it again"', *Sunday Express*, 18-5-1947, p. 1.



won't."<sup>156</sup> Otherwise, Maude P., ten years older than most of the sources for this study, appeared alone in having chosen to be defiantly confrontational. She was wearing a present from her boyfriend, a German army belt from which the swastika had been filed, when another student she described as from 'an obviously Conservative home [...] bent down and sniffed at it, saying "Do you realize that's been round some beastly German's waist?" I lifted her chin up and looked her in the eye and said "That's why I'm wearing it" which wasn't actually true, as it wasn't K.'s own belt.'<sup>157</sup>

Most sources were simply quietly pursuing their own desires, regardless of family loyalty. One woman described absenting herself from a village dance, to snatch an hour after dark with her POW. She acknowledged that her parents would have 'killed' her, had they known, as her brother had returned in an emaciated state from a POW camp in Germany.<sup>158</sup> Nora R. was just seventeen when she fell in love with a German POW, met in April 1947 while she was out cycling with a friend. For several months they met secretly, as her parents 'would have been horrified if they knew I was seeing a German.' They eventually found out. 'I was in deep trouble. But when in love nothing matters and I still managed to meet him with help from friends.'<sup>159</sup> Some clandestine relationships were facilitated by sympathetic friends or acquaintances, probably not aware they risked prosecution.<sup>160</sup> One couple's correspondence was 'sent under cover of a local shop'.<sup>161</sup> Jillian R.'s relationship with Martin developed through having 'a very good friend in the postman', who handed over her post on the way to the bus stop.<sup>162</sup> Another woman corresponded with her new POW boyfriend courtesy of the

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<sup>156</sup> Peter and Margaret R., interview notes.

<sup>157</sup> Maude P., correspondence.

<sup>158</sup> BW11, correspondence. She did not specify when in 1946 they met. DST (double summer time) was not in operation that year; BST began on 21 April; sunset times (c8.30p.m. on 5 May, and c9pm on 25 May) suggest they met before May.

<sup>159</sup> Nora R., correspondence.

<sup>160</sup> 'German P.O.W.'s Letters: Girl Charged with Obstructing Police', *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 25-2-1947, p. 3. See also Klaus Steffen, reel 3, whose girlfriend's uncle, the camp assistant quartermaster, although 'scared stiff', acted as an intermediary.

<sup>161</sup> BW26, correspondence.

<sup>162</sup> Jillian R., correspondence.

baker, who also wrote the letters for him.<sup>163</sup> Some sources described meeting at friends' homes or pretending they were out with a girlfriend. When Kathleen G.'s father summoned the police to search for her, another policeman (having been well-treated as a POW in Germany) tipped her off and she was able to hide.<sup>164</sup>

## Exposure

A few sources described ending the relationship with a German POW before it came to light, because of their own conflicted feelings of inner turmoil and guilt; having confided in a close friend or family member who had advised it had no future; or because 'I let my head rule' – choosing the safer option of a British fiancé.<sup>165</sup>

Joyce S.'s mother had always encouraged her to make her own decisions. After her ATS service, Joyce had lost touch with friends at home, and told no one about her secret boyfriend. In July 1947, being over twenty-one and having resolved to marry now the ban had been lifted, she introduced her sister to him, before telling their parents, who only had 'a few weeks "to get over it" before we married in August.'<sup>166</sup> At twenty-two, Joyce W., having previously pointed out that 'in those days one did as one's mother said,' showed equally stubborn resolve, which she ascribed to being young and in love. A university graduate, she had tasted independence as a student and was already working away from home. Joyce's mother (following a neighbour's example) had invited two German POWs to tea, one of whom, the camp interpreter, impressed her mother as 'so interesting and [...] quite different from any German she had ever imagined before', although she was not contemplating him as a future

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<sup>163</sup> BW25, correspondence.

<sup>164</sup> Kathleen G., telephone interview.

<sup>165</sup> BW12, BW05, BW18. Leonard, pp. 106-07, discusses the (mid-twentieth century) tension, given women's economically dependent status, between romantic love and pragmatism, influencing some women to settle for a husband they were 'less enthusiastic about'.

<sup>166</sup> Joyce S., correspondence.

son-in-law. Joyce met him on a visit home and did not immediately find him attractive, but he was different, 'He grew on me [... and] I must have been a bit sorry for him.' By May 1947, although it was still not officially permissible, they had decided to marry. 'My mother was bitterly unhappy about it, all the family were against it, of course.' She later reflected, 'It was not a particularly happy time for me, insisting on doing it my way.'<sup>167</sup>

During 1947's 'lovely summer', one woman's mother queried all the picnics she had been having, then, noticing mud on her shoes, asked where had she been? She realized she would have to come clean, because 'I was so set on this fellow.' After she explained that she'd been friends with a German POW "'but I thought you wouldn't like it,'" her mother asked to meet this boyfriend, to judge for herself. When he spotted her mother approaching with her, fearing a reprimand, he 'dodged back into the trees! [...] He was very quiet and shy.'

Fortunately, her mother liked him. Concern about the fraternisation ban seemed now more on his side. 'We spent most of the time in the woods because he was frightened of being seen.' In October, she finally took him home wearing civilian clothes, so there was no fear of censure from the neighbours.<sup>168</sup>

As Langhamer points out, young women serving away from home were freed from familial and neighbourhood controls.<sup>169</sup> Lorna H. and her POW boyfriend 'laughed a lot and made each other happy.' When he asked her to marry him and go to Germany, she 'was over the moon' at the prospect of such an exciting adventure, and wrote to tell her parents. Her father, to whom she was devoted, replied that the union 'would be without his blessing.' Lorna's boyfriend was due for repatriation and Lorna for demobilization. They cried together. Planning

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<sup>167</sup> Joyce W., taped response.

<sup>168</sup> BW20, interview.

<sup>169</sup> Langhamer, 'A Public', p. 431.

to keep in touch by letter while saving for a future together, Lorna returned home to the scrutiny and influence of her parents.<sup>170</sup>

After her boyfriend's repatriation, Beryl Bainbridge appears (judging from his surviving letters) to have encouraged him to pretend he was a Dutch penfriend. For others who continued their relationship in secret, typically at some point their subterfuge failed. BW13's family liked the POW working on their farm, unaware of how her friendship with him had developed. They were very happy together; he talked of coming back after his release, but she felt unsure what to do. The decision was then taken out of her hands, when 'one of the boys' told her father, and her boyfriend was withdrawn from working at the farm. They managed to meet for one last time, both in tears. He was due to be repatriated, and gave her his mother's wedding ring as a keepsake.<sup>171</sup>

Exposure of a clandestine relationship with a German prisoner usually triggered an explosive family argument. Several interviewees described returning home from a date to 'all hell' breaking loose, their parents 'horrified' and/or 'furious'.<sup>172</sup> The confrontation followed denunciation by a third party (a relative, unwary friend, jealous roommate, neighbour, or – 'you've been seen' – anonymous source in the community) to the young woman's parents, or (in the case of Sylvia L. and BW06) to her employer. Exposure compromised parental status in the community.<sup>173</sup> Jillian R.'s mother 'met someone in the village who remarked "I'm surprised you let your daughter go out with a German, since your husband's been risking his life to

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<sup>170</sup> Lorna H., correspondence.

<sup>171</sup> Bainbridge, BL ADD MS 83729, fols 8-11; Muriel Webster also attempted passing her boyfriend off as Dutch, Mae, pp. 34, 102; BW13, correspondence. BW13, correspondence.

<sup>172</sup> Jillian R., June K., BW19, Nora R., Mae, p. 102.

<sup>173</sup> Leonard, p. 50, refers to parental anxiety about being socially judged by their children's behaviour and choices.

protect England against them.”<sup>174</sup> Parents whose daughters were minors (under twenty-one and unable to marry without parental consent) initially insisted the relationship must end.

Joyce S.’s parents had reacted with horror when she announced she was marrying a POW:

The war was only just over, and Germans were the enemy, and then of course he was without means, and they couldn’t see when he would be released or what he would do when he was free again. He would want to go home to Germany and I would go with him; how would I cope, how would it end?<sup>175</sup>

A German POW presented as a highly unsuitable future husband: a potentially poor provider as well as a former enemy. Parents feared for daughters’ futures as outcasts, either in the UK or in Germany. One mother asked anxiously, “You won’t take her out of the country, will you?” Her future son-in-law reassured her he had no wish to go back.<sup>176</sup> It was feared that daughters taken to ‘darkest Germany’ would become domestic slaves, forced to bear multiple children. This view was reinforced by Lorna H.’s uncle, who had attended the Nuremberg trials. ‘He had no time for the Germans. I think he poisoned [my parents’] minds to a certain extent, saying the way German men treated women disgusted him. Mum used to get upset about that.’ Kathleen W. recalled her aunt, stationed in Germany, warning “She’ll be a fool if she marries him.” ... She couldn’t understand my own mother allowing it [because] Germans have big families and they never help their wives.’<sup>177</sup>

Aware of her mother’s love of German music, Sylvia L. had written to confide in her about this important new relationship, and was totally unprepared for the response, referring to ‘contemptible Germans’, and her stepfather’s moral reproach – “We expected more of you than that – we didn’t think you could sink this low.” Other parents expressed hatred – ‘no German will ever cross this threshold’. One source’s father, a WW1 veteran who believed

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<sup>174</sup> Jillian R., correspondence.

<sup>175</sup> Joyce S., correspondence.

<sup>176</sup> Kathleen W., interview.

<sup>177</sup> Lorna H.; Kathleen W., interview.

there were no good Germans, never allowed her husband over the threshold; the mother of another source, whose father had died after being gassed in WW1, 'refused at first to even acknowledge him, let alone invite him in. I was accused of being a traitor to people who died in the war!'<sup>178</sup>

Exposure sometimes involved the police. Olive Reynolds recalled that the policewoman who apprehended the group of girls meeting German POWs in the woods near Chingford, 'was going to smack me round the face.' (Police policy towards delinquent behaviour at that time commonly consisted of cautioning, including shouting and/or cuffing.) Olive's sister was subsequently taken into care; Olive believed this happened because they were a single-parent family.<sup>179</sup> Werner was transferred miles away. One woman's father called the police, who came looking for her with a dog. She successfully evaded them, but became the subject of local gossip and lost her job. Her brothers tormented her, and her friends ignored her.<sup>180</sup>

### **Reactions to parental disapproval**

Leonard refers to adolescents' 'desire for acts of bravado', pointing to 'parental opposition [as] an added spice for an age group... attempting to show its independence of familial authority', with conflict 'ritualized around' freedom to go out. Mid-twentieth-century parents expected daughters' deference, obedience and caring support.<sup>181</sup> When a romance with a German POW was discovered, parents would attempt to exercise their authority: Jillian R. was instructed 'to finish the friendship and never see him again. I was told firmly that the relationship was impossible, and we could never marry.'<sup>182</sup> Within two weeks of meeting in spring 1947,

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<sup>178</sup> Sylvia L., interview; BW29, interview; BW09, correspondence.

<sup>179</sup> Juveniles considered in need of care and protection or 'beyond control' were taken into care, see Ferguson and Fitzgerald, p. 21.

<sup>180</sup> Olive P., interview: BW19, correspondence.

<sup>181</sup> Leonard, pp. 76, 49-51.

<sup>182</sup> Jillian R., correspondence.

seventeen-year-old June K. and her POW boyfriend had resolved to marry, regardless of obstacles. Her parents initially threatened to send June to stay with her sister in Canada, resorting to the age-old solution of creating distance between the couple.<sup>183</sup> Both sets of parents ultimately capitulated under the force of their daughters' determination, although for Jillian R. it took many arguments over two years. BW25 was just sixteen when she met a German POW at a funfair in October 1947. With the help of a friend, at whose house they met twice a week, their relationship developed in secret for about a year. But after 'someone had made it their business to tell him', her father forbade her from meeting H., who cried when she told him. His depth of feeling prompted BW25 to stand up to her father, by threatening to leave home.<sup>184</sup> Her father relented, asking 'would I stay if he let me marry H.?'<sup>185</sup>

Exercise of parental authority largely seems to have been ineffective – those who did not pursue the relationship described having decided for themselves; others believed parental opposition drove them towards closer commitment to the relationship, which they continued to pursue in secret.<sup>186</sup> Joyce W. pointed out that 'the difficulties of the situation only made it more interesting.'<sup>187</sup> Jillian R.'s feelings for Martin overrode filial obedience: 'We tried to finish,' and lasted a week without meeting – 'the worst in my life, and longest.' Martin managed to phone her at work 'to plead with me to meet him again, as he couldn't carry on without seeing me.' They met that evening and 'both shed a few tears.' Discovering their mutual feelings determined them 'to fight for what we wanted.' They continued meeting secretly; eventually Jillian informed her parents 'that nothing they said or did' would stop her pursuing the relationship. She offered false reassurance that their fears were groundless, as Martin would return to Germany, 'but I knew in my heart that this wouldn't happen, and that

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<sup>183</sup> June K., interview.

<sup>184</sup> Underage women wanting to marry GIs used similar moral blackmail tactics against parents: "'There may not be a wedding – but there'll be a honeymoon anyway'", quoted in Juliet Gardiner, *'Over Here': The GIs in Wartime Britain* (London: Collins & Brown, 1992), p.140.

<sup>185</sup> BW25, correspondence.

<sup>186</sup> Jillian R.; Dorothy H., correspondence.

<sup>187</sup> Joyce W., taped response.

he would not leave me, [although] to be honest... in those early days I couldn't see any future for us.<sup>188</sup>

BW17 viewed the future more optimistically, that time was on their side.<sup>189</sup> Others visited the register office as soon as they heard the marriage ban had been lifted, or as soon as they reached twenty-one, the age of majority.<sup>190</sup> Several mentioned feeling confident, as German POWs gradually became more accepted, that things would work out for them. However, the future also held formidable barriers of separation, once repatriation of the POWs gathered pace.

Hostility of parents, relatives or friends was more likely to evaporate once a meeting with the POW had been engineered – although sometimes not before the wedding itself.<sup>191</sup> Jillian R. finally managed to introduce her family to her boyfriend in a public setting. She had booked theatre tickets for them beside Martin, who introduced himself. '(I was amazed at his nerve) and by the end of the evening my Gran had succumbed to his charm.' Jillian described a very 'gradual "thawing out" period', when he 'came to tea and then for a day on a Sunday and then to spend Christmas with us,' during which her family grew to like him and "'forgot" he was German.' They realized 'this was a very nice, hard-working, well-mannered boy I was in love with, and that I would not give him up,' and finally consented to the marriage.<sup>192</sup>

Other parents, especially where circumstances did not permit acquaintance with their daughter's POW boyfriend, remained intransigent.<sup>193</sup> Where amorous relationships were suspected or discovered, POWs were often transferred.<sup>194</sup> Difficulties in maintaining contact

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<sup>188</sup> Jillian R., correspondence.

<sup>189</sup> BW17, interview.

<sup>190</sup> The first officially sanctioned POW wedding took place on 10 July 1947: 'Prisoner's Patch and White Carnation: Girl Weds Local P-o-W as Ban is Lifted', *Gloucestershire Echo*, 11-7-1947, p. 3. Fay S. married as soon as she could after turning twenty-one: Fay S., correspondence.

<sup>191</sup> Dorothy H., June K., Nora R..

<sup>192</sup> Jillian R., correspondence.

<sup>193</sup> Lorna H., Sylvia L., Fay S., BW29, June K., BW25, BW19.

<sup>194</sup> A practical remedy employed to resolve similar problems of young women's 'improper' relations with paroled French officer POWs during the Napoleonic War. In such cases, however, the complainants



following separation and/or repatriation presented a major threat to such relationships and more subtle attempts at dissuasion – by pointing out all the difficulties – proved more effective than ultimatums. Rather than forbidding the relationship, Lorna H.'s father reasoned with her that they would be social pariahs in either country, and the reality of living in Germany would be untenable, inviting her to imagine how she would be treated 'as one of the victors': "You'll be shunned and you'll be miles from home, [...with] no home," because H. hadn't got a home.<sup>195</sup>

### **Shunned at home**

Some women expressed surprise, in retrospect, at their own insouciance in rebelling against their parents and putting themselves at odds with their community and society at large. Having met H. miles from home, Lorna had not risked being seen by anyone she knew. She was conscious of negative public attitudes towards girls seen with German POWs, commenting that people felt as the French had towards women fraternisers, 'It was that sort of atmosphere. They really were quite hard on you', but claimed she 'didn't care very much about that.' In autumn 1947, glares from passing strangers were all she suffered. Prior to July 1947, however, another interviewee recalled feeling nervous of the consequences of contravening the fraternisation ban. She had no idea what might happen if they were seen, although she knew in France 'when the war was over they shaved the women's heads'. However, she never imagined anyone English doing that, nor that she could be prosecuted, having 'always had it in my mind that the boys were marrying the German girls, weren't they?'

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(usually the woman's parents) were required to pay the cost of transferring the prisoner. Roy Bennett, 'French Prisoners of War on Parole in Britain (1803-1814)' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, 1964), pp. 309-10.

<sup>195</sup> Lorna H., interview.

Her male work colleagues returning from serving in Germany would brag of having gone out with German girls.<sup>196</sup>

When the warden where Sylvia L. worked warned that she had been seen meeting the POW camp interpreter, Sylvia stood up for herself, objecting that “‘The war’s over now, it should all be forgotten. Anyway, I understood our troops were meeting and marrying German girls.’”

Other sources had also noticed the discriminatory aspect of the fraternisation ban: Olive Reynolds felt that ‘our English fellers [in Germany] were going out fraternising with German girls. It was all right for them.’ Such comments reflect the view expressed in 1945 by Cecil King (a *Daily Mirror* director), that ‘the main change since 1939 has been in the position of women... [who] are determined to claim in every way the same freedom as men.’<sup>197</sup> One woman shared Sylvia L. and Joyce W.’s belief that their own choice was not justifiably reprehensible, as the country was no longer at war. Another similarly rationalized that her action did not involve any serious transgression, like passing secrets, but simply anticipated what was to come.<sup>198</sup>

Within their own communities, those seen consorting with a German POW endured verbal abuse and/or ostracism from family, friends or passing strangers. Young women who associated with German POWs sacrificed their reputations. One teenager’s brothers ‘made my life hell with the names they called me’. Sylvia L. described one night when two local women saw her and Daisy emerging from the POW camp ‘and swore at us – Daisy was blocking her ears. It looked bad, coming out of the camp.’<sup>199</sup> Some received anonymous hate mail, often from people bereaved due to the war. Others were subjected to name-calling in the street, generally ‘*Fräulein*’, or ‘*Heil Hitler*’, with the Nazi salute, or simply ‘Nazi’ or ‘Traitor’. Leaving a

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<sup>196</sup> Lorna H., interview; BW20, interview.

<sup>197</sup> Sylvia L., interview; Olive P. interview; Cecil H. King, *With Malice Toward None: A War Diary* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 2008), p. 288.

<sup>198</sup> BW20, interview; BW17, interview.

<sup>199</sup> BW19, correspondence; Sylvia L., interview.

dance, Muriel Webster and her friend were called 'filthy Jerry lovers' and 'scum'; Rosemary P. described non-verbal condemnation – 'people spat at me and walked on the other side of the road.' Some women were censured by work colleagues. In late 1946, after Kathleen W. had become friendly with a German POW employed where she worked, two fellow (male) employees took to expressing their opinion by spitting on the ground in front of her, with comments like '*Fräulein*' or 'Fraternising'. At the hospital where BW06 worked, the gateman took to calling her 'Eva Braun'.<sup>200</sup>

Writing in the 1980s, Mica Nava drew attention to 'power relations *between* boys and girls', whereby boys constrain girls' attempts to assert independence from them; boys 'police' girls by acting as 'observers and *guardians* of girls' passivity'. Nava argued that social groups, rather than individuals, exercise this control, through harassment and reference to derogatory categories 'to ensure "appropriate"... feminine behaviour.' Although it was alluded to more generally, only one source for this study mentioned specific peer group pressure from local boys. Joan Z. recalled how local boys, whom she dismissed as 'jealous', expressed the most disapproval, ostracizing or morally denigrating girls who associated with German POWs: 'If a girl had been out with a POW and went on to an English boy they always denied they had ever met the Germans [...]. If you went out with a POW, other boys didn't want to know you.'<sup>201</sup>

When he eventually sacked Sylvia L., the camp warden referred obliquely to "'certain stories about you I don't like'", implying generalized immoral behaviour on her part. Sylvia was aware of 'horrible gossip in the village, about some of the women meeting the prisoners.'<sup>202</sup> Those who like BW06 and June K. received anonymous letters, described them in vague terms, as 'horrible'. Some sources for this study, referring to verbal abuse, were reluctant to specify

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<sup>200</sup> BW17; June F.; Mae, p. 116; Rosemary P. interview; Kathleen W., interview; Margaret S., correspondence; BW06, correspondence.

<sup>201</sup> Mica Nava, 'Youth Service Provision, Social Order and the Question of Girls', in *Gender and Generation*, ed. by Angela McRobbie and Mica Nava (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 12; Joan Z., correspondence.

<sup>202</sup> Sylvia L., interview.

what had been said, beyond suggesting it had impugned their reputations. (Refusing to listen to or retain insults possibly functioned as a psychological defence mechanism, although one woman maintained she simply wished to avoid stirring up past family antagonisms.)

Joyce S. felt the mere presence of German POWs in the UK provoked enemy hatred and bitterness. Another source voiced a different opinion, regarding most people as 'indifferent to the prisoners (we had won a war).' With the impression that 'all was well as long as they left the women alone,' she concurred with Sylvia L.'s POW boyfriend's view, that consensual relationships between British women and German prisoners constituted the antagonizing factor. By autumn 1946, Sylvia pointed out, many young British servicemen 'were marrying German girls.' They suffered prejudice 'but it wasn't as strong as [against us].' Her boyfriend said it was because "'they'd won the war'"; German women were trophies of war, whereas "'the ones who lost aren't allowed to have the victors' women.'"<sup>203</sup>

Few sources for this study felt able openly to confront abuse, however. Kathleen W. did ultimately complain to the office manager, who took her side, telling the male employees it was none of their business, and the abuse stopped. Most women chose a strategy of ignoring, or affecting to ignore, abusive comments or behaviour, although several expressed protective concern about their boyfriends' feelings over the name-calling. Jillian R. explained: 'Girls who 'fratted' with POWs – the most obvious was to be called a "Nazi swine lover" and greeted with 'Heil Hitler' and the salute. This didn't worry me so much, [but] I hated Martin being hurt, as he is a shy and very sensitive person.' Others felt insulated by the strength of their relationship: one described people shouting "'Nazi", "Traitors" and whispered gossip' over a long period, but claimed 'It did not worry us, as we were in love'; Nora R. described some people as 'offish... but it didn't worry me what people thought.' BW27, who met a German

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<sup>203</sup> Joyce S., correspondence; BW03, correspondence; Sylvia L., interview. See also Goldstein, p. 369, regarding women's bodies as 'national "property".'

POW at Easter 1948, kept the relationship secret for months. Eventually, her family found out, most of her friends disowned her and she became the object of local gossip, 'but it did not matter. I adored him.'<sup>204</sup>

Most sources described avoiding being seen publicly with a POW. June K., while the fraternisation ban was in force, 'wouldn't have dared hold hands.' In late 1947, Lorna H. had braved the pointed stares of passers-by in a town where she was not personally known, but most sources avoided censure in their own communities, by taking, as one put it, 'to the fields and the woodland.' From June 1947, using public transport, patronising cinemas and entering unlicensed commercial premises became permissible for POWs. These new concessions brought them into more direct and competitive contact with members of the public, stirring up animosity towards the 'Enemy Other'. POWs were resented for taking seats on buses at the expense of British passengers. Some premises and buses still barred them, claiming their clientele did 'not wish to rub shoulders with Germans.'<sup>205</sup> Joyce S. quickly abandoned any attempt to challenge discriminatory behaviour. She had ventured a cinema outing with her POW boyfriend. They managed the bus journey by not sitting together. But at the cinema, 'the usher refused us entry, calling me a few names. I asked him how long he had served in the forces, told him the war was over.' They then had to walk four miles back, as the return bus conductor 'refused to let my POW on the bus, saying he had the right to decide who was to travel on his bus. We never tried again to go on the bus (even though it was now allowed) or to the cinema.'<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Jillian R., correspondence; Dorothy H., correspondence; Nora R., correspondence; BW27, correspondence.

<sup>205</sup> June K., interview; BW03, correspondence; 'POW on Public Transport: Resentment: an Explanation: Fresh Concessions Next Week', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 12-7-1947, p. 1; 'Conductress Right', 'Our German Prisoners', Letters, *Nottingham Evening Post*, 21-7-1947, p. 3.

<sup>206</sup> Joyce S., correspondence. A letter of protest from two hundred Dover busmen conveyed the vehemence of their anti-German feeling in 1947, 'Viewpoint', *Daily Mirror*, 3-7-1947, p. 2.

For women who associated with the POWs, intimacy had fostered understanding: a German POW became someone with whom to empathize, to support and defend. These women found themselves facing the flak of continuing hostility towards the enemy. Pat R. described getting in to see a film with her POW boyfriend, but when they sat down for tea in the plush lounge afterwards, no one came to serve them. The manageress finally appeared and addressed Pat, telling her: “The German you’ve got with you – you can stay, but he must go,” to which Pat replied, “We’ll go, both of us.” On another occasion, after they had been served in a café, the proprietor appeared, saying: “That’s a German, isn’t it? [...] If I’d been in here, you wouldn’t have got anything.” I said, “Well, now we’ve had it, and here’s the money.”<sup>207</sup>

Most women who suffered criticism – whether in public, by anonymous letters, or hostility from relatives and friends – excused it as coming from people who had suffered at the hands of the enemy, as POWs or by losing someone as a casualty of the war; or, less excusably, from those who had not experienced war service themselves. Maude P. recalled the postwar ‘longing to embrace the enemy’ expressed among religious non-conformists.<sup>208</sup> However, whether from the continuing effect of propaganda and revulsion towards the enemy, or the need to give meaning to personal suffering, Sylvia L. sensed ‘this awful feeling against the idea of people coming together.’<sup>209</sup>

## *Conclusion*

This chapter has argued that the freedoms of the war loosened parental control over possible future life partners, distancing parents from oversight of ‘courtship arenas’. This facilitated young women’s exploration of future adult selves through a wider choice of partners, including

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<sup>207</sup> Pat R., interview.

<sup>208</sup> Maude P., correspondence.

<sup>209</sup> Sylvia L., interview.

enemy prisoners of war. The attraction, interest or rebellious fun of such encounters outweighed, for some, considerations of what was right or proper. Transgressive choice of an 'enemy Other' presented opportunities for subverting conventional courtship gender roles and consolidating pro-active agency, through initiating and indulging in subterfuge, taking the lead in social situations and experiencing empowerment as agents rather than passive recipients. Such choices, while negotiating familial, peer group and societal conflict and ostracism, encouraged further autonomy.

Although spared the summary punishments inflicted on women who had fraternised with the enemy in Occupied Europe, British women who consorted with German POWs were subject to moral condemnation and abuse. Their preference for their former enemy appeared to threaten the consolation that for many people gave meaning and purpose to the deep personal sacrifices of the war. Their recognition of Germans as human beings rather than stereotyped projections of brutality also challenged the assumptions they had grown up to accept, the comfortable moral absolutes of the 'good war'. Drawn into relationships with their former enemy, these young women may be seen, in psychoanalytic terms, to be reclaiming their own disowned 'Other'. So doing, surrendering a comfortable sense of shared moral rectitude, they placed themselves at odds with their own families and communities. Those who had already experienced outsider status in their own lives – as evacuees or children of single or separated parents<sup>210</sup> – were arguably already familiar with this position and could perhaps more easily adopt it.

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<sup>210</sup> Including Lorna H., Sylvia L., BW20, BW27, Margaret J., June K., Olive P.

## **Chapter 5: Forbidden fruit: sexual hunger and challenged identities**

### *Introduction*

Chapter Three considered societal and environmental influences upon the male subjects of this study, during the important developmental transition from adolescence to early adulthood. This chapter further addresses effects on German POWs' young adult personalities, in terms of identity challenges highlighted by their sexual relationships with British women.

In the UK, blanket social ostracism of German POWs was relaxed at Christmas 1946, following public concern about prisoners' morale. Relationships of an amorous or sexual nature with British women remained strictly forbidden. This chapter is framed within the context of sexual deprivation experienced by prisoners of war, including effects of diet and restricted access to women on sex drive, morale, male bonding, masculine identity and male roles. It discusses illicit fraternisation relationships with women, including reference to POWs transferred to the UK from US custody.

By 1945, a few illicit contacts with British women had been established. These increased during 1946, as more prisoners worked and/or were billeted outside their camps. Amorous adventures with women of the holding power may be seen as morale-boosting, reinforcing German POWs' masculine identities. However, in the context of exploring the emotional significance of POWs' lack of contact with their families and homeland, it is contended that female company constituted more than simply sexual solace; that amorous relationships with British women represented more than simply sexual conquest. Referencing twentieth-century studies of masculinity and male sexuality, this chapter proposes that relationships with British



women provided crucial emotional support, underlining, and drawing some German POWs towards acceptance of, a modified masculine identity.

Fraternalisation experiences of this study's ex-POW sources are thus examined in relation to the extent to which their masculine identities were boosted, modified or feminized within conditions of continuing captivity, and the influence this may have had on shaping an adult male identity within relationships with British women.

### *Prisoners of war: sexual deprivation and desire*

'The freedom the POWs had in Britain did not include sexual access to women. But of course many longed for it and some achieved it.'<sup>1</sup> Restriction of POWs' liberty generally involves depriving mostly young, heterosexual men of the opportunity to pursue their sexual inclinations. German POWs held in the UK following WW2 were eventually allowed some freedom to walk outside their camps and socialize with British civilians, but, as Sullivan baldly put it, 'sexual access to women' remained forbidden until July 1947.

Referring in general terms to men in war, Paul Fussell suggested that those in combat remain untroubled by lust, being 'too scared, busy, hungry, tired and demoralized to think about sex'. Behind the lines in WW2, however, masturbation was indulged in as solace against pre-combat anxiety as well as the absence of wives and girlfriends.<sup>2</sup> It also offered post-combat comfort for some POWs, Allied and Axis alike, notwithstanding lack of privacy.<sup>3</sup> Barker's general account of prisoners of war implied that single men would not miss what they had not known.<sup>4</sup> However, Eric Newby, a British POW held in Italy, recalled joining other single POWs to crowd,

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<sup>1</sup> Sullivan, p. 337.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Fussell, *Wartime* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 107-09.

<sup>3</sup> See Sullivan, p. 321; Eric Newby, *Love and War in the Apennines* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1971), pp. 35-36; Bernhard T., diary entry (dated 5-6-1945); Barker, p. 134.

<sup>4</sup> G. S. Stavert, letter cited in Barker, p. 77.

every Sunday, at risk of being shot by the guards, at their prison windows. From here they watched large numbers of young women make ostensible pilgrimages to the cemetery, seemingly intent on tantalising the incarcerated men. Some girls waved or coquettishly twirled their scarves, prompting the prisoners to cheer and wave back.<sup>5</sup>

Fussell suggested many young WW2 servicemen remained naïve and innocent.<sup>6</sup> Among sources for this study, those who mentioned the subject described themselves as ‘innocent’ or ‘inexperienced’, having had little other than social contact with girls.<sup>7</sup> One exception explained that, before military service, platonic friendships and ogling ‘girls of easy virtue’ on a visit to the notorious *Reeperbahn* in Hamburg represented the extent of his experience with the opposite sex. Army service, however, offered the opportunity of sexual initiation. Aged seventeen, he was posted to France for paratroop training, at the end of which increased off-duty hours allowed the older ones (aged nineteen) to take ‘us green ones’ to Paris, to visit the numerous bordellos.<sup>8</sup>

At one Lancashire POW camp, in early 1945, several hundred cases of syphilis were treated, mostly contracted in France.<sup>9</sup> However, frequenting brothels was not necessarily an experience shared by all Germans who served in France. Theo Terhorst recoiled from sex with a prostitute in Paris; Willi Gerlach, aged eighteen in 1943, described being posted to Nice, where there was ‘plenty of local wine,’ but, having a girlfriend at home, he ‘resisted attempts by my mates to get me to visit the local brothel.’<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Newby, *Love*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>6</sup> Fussell, pp. 107-109. See also Goldstein, p. 336.

<sup>7</sup> Manfred H., PW16, Max D.

<sup>8</sup> PW07, correspondence.

<sup>9</sup> Sullivan, p. 337; see also Tony Perrottet, *The Sinner's Grand Tour: A Journey through the Historical Underbelly of Europe* (New York: Broadway Books, 2011), pp. 70-72; Patrick Buisson, 1940-45, *Années Erotiques, Tome 2: de la Grande Prostituée à la Revanche des Mâles* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Fleming, p. 32.

The doctor treating the Lancashire POW camp syphilis cases in 1945 reported that subsequently there were 'virtually none'; it is otherwise hard to draw any conclusion about sexual activity or sex drive among German POWs in the UK.<sup>11</sup> In late 1946, when German POWs were first allowed out on parole, their passes contained an explicit instruction against entering any licensed premises, dance hall, restaurant, shop or cinema.<sup>12</sup> The literal German translation of 'licensed premises' (*öffentliche Einrichtungen*) apparently led a number of eager POWs on a fruitless search for red light establishments, since the term 'public house' in German implied a brothel.<sup>13</sup> Other anecdotal evidence suggests some POWs were more successful. A former British corporal stationed at a POW camp in Berkshire in late 1946/early 1947 recalled that although fraternisation was forbidden, the German POWs 'would go out the back, where a couple of females had set up an establishment in a tent nearby.'<sup>14</sup>

Barker contended that sex drive among POWs 'depended on food, climate, conditions and opportunity' (suggesting opportunity itself as an aphrodisiac). He made the point that, for POWs, 'conventional heterosexual activity' opportunities were rare but not impossible, usually arising in the course of work that brought them into contact with women. (Robert Kee, as a non-working British officer POW held in Germany, had no contact with women, and recalled of 'the various forms of starvation... sex starvation was the most complete.'<sup>15</sup>) Encounters described by Barker are noticeably characterized by dependence on the initiative and inclination of the free agent involved – the woman. One Russian-held German POW recalled intimate body examinations for vermin conducted by 'a blowzy middle-aged Russian nurse', who segregated POWs she took a fancy to for work in the Russian women's quarters. Barker does not expand on whether her attentions were welcome. Attempts to escape were often

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<sup>11</sup> Sullivan, p. 337.

<sup>12</sup> PW19, walking out pass, see Appendix 5.

<sup>13</sup> Sullivan, p. 337.

<sup>14</sup> Kochan, p. 147.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Kee, *A Crowd is Not Company* (London: Cardinal, Sphere, 1989), p. 75.

aided and abetted by women or, among well-fed German POWs in the USA, undertaken with the aim of consorting with women.<sup>16</sup>

However, Gerhard Hennes, a POW in the US from 1943, wrote that 'in the long months of abstinence, the natural longing for kisses and tenderness, for women and sex, could best be overcome by exhausting physical exercise and, as some fellow prisoners suggested, cold showers.'<sup>17</sup> And Fritz Wentzel, a German naval commander held in Canada and the UK, dismissed POW accounts of sex starvation as sensationalism:

We were all young, healthy and well fed, and with the normal instincts of fit men, but with a little self-discipline and plenty else to occupy our minds we got over our difficulties fairly easily. And later on when we didn't get enough to eat sexual desire disappeared altogether.<sup>18</sup>

Among underfed Allied POWs, one of Eric Newby's fellow prisoners ogling female passers-by in Italy commented that 'It isn't that one just wants to poke them. I'm not sure I could do it anymore, but it would be heaven just to be with them.' Newby admitted 'most of us felt as he did,' implying that enforced celibacy had undermined their sexual confidence, along with their sex drive. Despite the longing to look, Newby acknowledged as a POW being 'not unduly troubled by the lusts of the flesh' suspecting it had 'something to do with the diet.'<sup>19</sup> Kee believed poor diet was a 'restraining factor', but still claimed 'sufficient sex feeling left over to need an outlet.'<sup>20</sup> Sullivan described how two German refugees combed secondhand bookshops for good quality German literature for POWs in the UK, under the proviso of 'nothing too erotic: a young officer had remarked... "It's hard enough for us anyway!"'<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Erwin Hermann, cited in Barker, pp 132-34.

<sup>17</sup> Gerhard G. Hennes, *The Barbed Wire: POW in the USA*, (Franklin, Tennessee: Hilsboro Press, 2004), p. 40.

<sup>18</sup> Wentzel, p. 148.

<sup>19</sup> Newby, *Love*, p. 36.

<sup>20</sup> Kee, p. 75

<sup>21</sup> Sullivan, p. 83.

## Sexual appetite as a function of diet

Robert Schulz, a German POW held in Morocco, recalled that food replaced sex as the primary conversation topic.<sup>22</sup> Newby described his years as a POW as 'celibate': on a diet of merely 600 calories a day, they only lusted after food.<sup>23</sup> Other Allied POW accounts concur that sex drive depended on prisoner diet. Geoffrey Stavert recalled being 'hungry all the time', with 'no thoughts below his stomach throughout his captivity.'<sup>24</sup>

In accordance with the 1929 Geneva Convention, during most of WW2, German POWs held in the US received food rations equal to those of non-combat US military personnel.<sup>25</sup> Matthias Reiss has argued that the ample diet (in an affluent country immune from wartime shortages) fed to US-held German prisoners led to a need to sublimate or neutralise sex drive; or, as mentioned earlier, escape attempts to satisfy it.<sup>26</sup> Some prisoners' accounts however dispute that all 'POWs in the US lived like maggots in the bacon', pointing out that conditions varied between camps, some of which 'were hell', and that POWs' rations (particularly of protein) were reduced in 1945.<sup>27</sup> Public opinion following the concentration camp revelations, the repatriation of American POWs who revealed their privations in German hands (which also signalled an end to concern regarding reciprocal treatment), and food shortages affecting the US itself, all appear to have played a part in a US government decision implemented in 1945. This aimed to 'drastically reduce' German POW rations, to counter complaints that German

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<sup>22</sup> Robert Schulz, *Trilogie hinter Stacheldraht: als deutscher Kriegsgefangener in den Lagern des Alliierten auf drei Kontinenten 1943-1947* (Berlin: Scultetus, 1996), pp. 27-28.

<sup>23</sup> Eric Newby, *Something Wholesale* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1972), p. 78.

<sup>24</sup> Barker, p. 82.

<sup>25</sup>The *Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War* (Geneva, 27 July, 1929), Part III, Section II, Chapter 2, Article 11, stated that 'The food ration of prisoners of war shall be equivalent in quantity and quality to that of the depot troops.... All collective disciplinary measures affecting food are prohibited.' See 'Treaties, States Parties and Commentaries', International Committee of the Red Cross <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/305?OpenDocument> [accessed 8-1-2016].

<sup>26</sup> Barker, p. 133; Matthias Reiss, 'The Importance of Being Men: The Afrika-Korps in American Captivity', *Journal of Social History*, 46, i (Fall 2012), 23-47 (p. 30); Matthias Reiss, 'Bronzed Bodies behind Barbed Wire: Masculinity and the Treatment of German Prisoners of War in the United States during World War II', *Journal of Military History*, 69, ii (April 2005), 475-504 (pp. 494, 496).

<sup>27</sup> Barker, p. 102.

POWs were being over-indulged, and also conserve meat and other foodstuffs, apparently being “rapidly exhausted by the increased demands of our armed forces.” One Colorado-held POW recalled rations after VE Day being reduced to porridge, bread and pea soup. Another claimed their ration was ‘reduced by a third.’ Arnold Krammer notes that most men lost between ten and twelve pounds (about five kilos), and farmers protested they were no longer getting value for money in terms of POW labour.<sup>28</sup> On the much-reduced diet, Hennes wrote, ‘Weight loss was common. Sports activities shrivelled. Talk about women and sex shrank.’<sup>29</sup>

Henry Metelmann described back-breaking work in the USA, introduction of a ten-day working week and reduced rations, causing several prisoners to collapse.<sup>30</sup> Others in US and Canadian camps described similar experiences.<sup>31</sup> In late May 1945, the bread ration at Fritz Bülter’s camp was abruptly reduced to one small slice; they were shown film of Buchenwald and told they were being taught a lesson.<sup>32</sup> For Werner K., captured in North Africa in 1943, at first the food in America was very good; but as the concentration camp news emerged, ‘life for us got worse.’ Forced to work much harder, their lunches were reduced to ‘dry bread and spam.’<sup>33</sup> Fritz Wentzel described how the occupants of his camp in Canada were shown ‘the Belsen film’ and their rations reduced such that they rapidly lost weight, with some men even hospitalized. Wentzel believed this was in retaliation for the concentration camps.<sup>34</sup>

Kochan cites two ex-POWs held in camps run by the British and Americans in Belgium, who lost several stone in weight. On arrival in the UK they were given a special diet and excused work

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<sup>28</sup> Arnold Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America* (New York: Stein & Day, 1979; Lanham, MD: Scarborough House edn, 1996), pp. 240-42; see also ‘Food For German Prisoners Less, Due To Shortage’, *Nevada Daily Mail*, 28-4-1945, p. 1; and ‘Nazi captives... “as fat as pigs” lounge about a camp in Arizona’, from ‘Hun POW Ration Down – MP Demanding More Cuts’, *Daily Mirror*, 24-4-1945, p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> Hennes, *Barbed*, p. 86

<sup>30</sup> Metelmann, p. 197.

<sup>31</sup> Barker, p. 102; Manfred H., interview.

<sup>32</sup> Bülter, pp. 223-30.

<sup>33</sup> Werner K., interview.

<sup>34</sup> Wentzel, pp. 154-55.

for a month.<sup>35</sup> Kurt K. experienced camps in Germany and Belgium, before arriving in the UK in 1946: 'They fed us on 1,500 calories... you can eat that and still be hungry.' Acknowledging that the winter of 1945 was bad everywhere, and many civilians in Europe went hungry, he made the point that being 'behind barbed wire,' was different, since civilians could barter on the black market, 'pinch a bit here and there' to supplement their official ration. On arrival in Scotland, 'The English army medic shook his head at some... [...] not much better than pictures you see from Belsen, like, skeletons.' He believed the worst cases were those who smoked 'That ration... was just about enough to keep us going. But if you swapped half of that away for cigarettes...'<sup>36</sup> Rudolf R. was held in 'a not very good' POW camp at Ghent, where there was 'much hunger', from December 1945 until May 1946. 'We got one slice of bread in the morning. Water soup at dinner time. One slice of bread in the evening. You could just squeeze it into a little ball and eat it.'<sup>37</sup>

As in the US, POWs held in the UK during WW2 were fed according to the Geneva Convention, receiving more generous rations than civilians. A public outcry when the war ended contributed to the government's decision to reduce POW rations.<sup>38</sup> The new scale (almost halving the meat ration) would provide approximately 2,000 calories per day, 'substantially less than the average civilian consumption in this country.'<sup>39</sup> (Modern guidelines stipulate

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<sup>35</sup> Kochan, pp. 127, 128. Interviewed for this study, Kurt E. described suffering extreme hunger in a large POW camp near Brussels and attempting to steal guard dogs' biscuits. See also Sullivan, pp. 30-32; 'Prisoners' food in British Camps Abroad', *Manchester Guardian*, 22-5-1946, p. 6; 'Prisoners of War Rations (Germany and Belgium)', Commons, 21-5-1946, *Hansard*, vol. 423, cols 186-89; 'Belgian Prison Camps (Allegations)', Commons Oral Answers, 16-7-1946, *Hansard*, vol. 425, cols 1056-57.

<sup>36</sup> Kurt K., interview.

<sup>37</sup> Rudolf R., interview.

<sup>38</sup> 'Hun POW ration down – MP Demanding More Cuts', *Daily Mirror*, 24-4-1945, p. 4.

<sup>39</sup> See Sullivan, pp. 17, 120-21; 'Rations', Commons, 29.5.1945, *Hansard*, vol. 411, cols 9-11; Alexander Dilke, 'How the P.O.W. Problem is being Solved', *War Illustrated*, 9, ccix, 22-6-1945, p. 110.

that, based on normal activity, a man needs 2,500 calories per day to maintain bodyweight.<sup>40</sup>

Heavy manual work however burns 300-500 calories per hour.<sup>41</sup> )

Wentzel considered food rations in UK camps were better than the 'Retaliation for Belsen' in Canada, although 'we were almost always hungry'.<sup>42</sup> Other accounts suggest postwar POW rations in the UK were inadequate.<sup>43</sup> An official who supervised several thousand Germans in Norfolk, recalled POW rations 'for a long day's work were appalling.' Against War Office regulations, he 'encouraged farmers to give them what eggs and poultry they could spare'.<sup>44</sup> However, two former POW contributors to this study recollected only receiving bread and jam or boiled potatoes, while the farmer's family ate a hot midday meal; they also admitted stealing farmers' eggs and chickens to assuage hunger.<sup>45</sup> Courts martial charge books record fairly frequent charges against POWs for theft of food.<sup>46</sup> Thomas Brasnett, supervising several thousand POWs, commented (confirmed by Kurt K.), that POWs stole poultry from those who had treated them badly, rather than friendly farmers.<sup>47</sup>

There does also appear to have been a punitive element to reduction of POW rations: in July 1945, at a camp in Liverpool for POWs categorized as hardline Nazis, Bernhard T. recorded the food as 'the worst I had had so far as a POW. Nearly every day there was thin cabbage soup. For breakfast and supper two pieces of bread, with a little fat, jam or meat.'<sup>48</sup> Another former

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<sup>40</sup> 'What should my daily intake of calories be?', NHS Choices <http://www.nhs.uk/chq/pages/1126.aspx?categoryId=51> [accessed 21-10-2015].

<sup>41</sup> Deborah Green, 'The Calories Burned While Working', Livestrong.com <http://www.livestrong.com/article/344680-the-calories-burned-while-working> [accessed 22-8-2017].

<sup>42</sup> Wentzel, pp. 154, 163.

<sup>43</sup> '...headlines like "Prisoners of War Too Weak to Work"', Richard Stokes, 'Prisoners of War', Commons, 27-3-1946, *Hansard*, vol. 421, col. 537.

<sup>44</sup> Kurt Schwedersky, cited in Sullivan, p. 330; Zimmermann, pp. 51-52; Thomas Brasnett, cited in Sullivan, p. 326.

<sup>45</sup> Sullivan, pp. 326-27, 329, 330; Rudolf R., interview; Kurt K., interview.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example (August-October 1946) WO 84/79, fols 67, 260, 267, 285, 286, 304, 334, 357, 413, 655. These ledgers also bear testament to the established practice of petty pilfering among lower ranks in the British army. Donald Thomas, *An Underworld at War* (London: John Murray, 2003), pp. 200-03, describes 'a steady, unspectacular traffic in stolen goods from soldiers to civilians'.

<sup>47</sup> Sullivan, pp. 326-27.

<sup>48</sup> Bernhard T., diary extract.



POW recalled working for a farmer reluctant to give him a midday meal; when a second POW arrived and was refused a meal, he went on strike. He explained that their hostel billet only supplied powdered tea mixed with sugar and dried milk, one slice of white bread, margarine and a slice of sausage or cheese.<sup>49</sup> Work in camp or hostel kitchens was much prized, since it offered the opportunity of scrounging more to eat.<sup>50</sup>

Sullivan, referring to one POW camp, assumed 'there was, of course, sexual frustration' but added 'probably less than in most monasteries.' When women first visited the camp at Wilton Park, War Office concerns 'that the sex-starved POWs would at once fall upon them' proved groundless.<sup>51</sup>

### **Significance of denying sexual access to women**

From December 1946, UK-held German POWs were officially permitted to walk within a certain radius outside their camps, and issued walking-out permits. These passes detailed, in English and German, the rules and restrictions under which this freedom was permitted. One paragraph stated: 'You may converse with members of the public but you may not establish or attempt to establish any relations with women of an amorous or sexual nature. This prohibition includes walking arm in arm or any other familiarity.'<sup>52</sup>

In proscribing physical intimacy with women, the War Office contended it would compromise prisoners' discipline and good behaviour, and (if German POWs were witnessed consorting with British young women as Italian POWs had) potentially offend the British population.

Lurking behind such rationales lingers the suspicion of Sylvia L.'s boyfriend's suggestion

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<sup>49</sup> PW16, correspondence.

<sup>50</sup> One SEP brought to the UK in 1946 weighing only 7 stone, volunteered to peel potatoes, which he ate raw to appease hunger. Rudi Lux, *From Pomerania to Ponteland: The Youngest Prisoner of War* (Stockport: Kennington, 2001), pp. 22-23.

<sup>51</sup> Sullivan, pp. 149, 254.

<sup>52</sup> PW19 walking-out pass, see Appendix 5.

(mentioned in Chapter Four) of enemy women as trophies of war, to whom the defeated were not entitled.

The consequences of prolonged sexual deprivation among prisoners of war had been studied during WW1. Adolf Vischer, a Swiss doctor, toured POW camps (including in the UK), interviewing POWs and internees. He considered sexual frustration (including the 'terrible void' felt by male prisoners when deprived of the 'charms' of the opposite sex) an important contributory factor in 'barbed wire disease' (claustrophobia and mental illness brought on by the stress of indefinite incarceration), and<sup>53</sup> Vischer noted prisoners' attempts to compensate: discussing sex; pinning up 'suggestive pictures' and publishing 'suggestive artwork' in camp newsletters; creating the illusion of femininity playing female characters in theatrical performances 'by perfecting their costumes and softening their voices.'<sup>54</sup>

In relation to WW2, personal photograph collections demonstrate evidence of Wehrmacht soldiers play-acting in 'drag' while in training and on active service, as well as in theatrical performances in Allied POW camps.<sup>55</sup> Focusing on the unique case of German WW2 POWs held in the US, Matthias Reiss has offered a dissenting voice in the general narrative of the emasculating effect of captivity as a POW, arguing that these prisoners' masculine identities were not undermined by captivity. Reiss maintains that well-fed German POWs held in the US did not feel emasculated: they needed to satisfy, sublimate or neutralise normal sexual appetites. He reiterates Vischer's observation that pin-ups and theatrical productions allowed

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<sup>53</sup> Adolf Lucas Vischer, *Barbed Wire Disease: A Psychological Study of the Prisoner of War* (London: John Bale, Sons & Danielsson, 1919), p. 75; cited in Brian K. Feltman, *The Stigma of Surrender: German Prisoners, British Captors, and Manhood in the Great War and Beyond* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), p.75.

<sup>54</sup> Feltman, pp. 129-30.

<sup>55</sup> See Martin Dammann and Harald Welzer, *Soldier Studies: Cross-Dressing in der Wehrmacht*, trans. by Simon Ward (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2018).

POWs to 'affirm heteronormativity' by conjuring an illusion of female presence, thereby moderating the 'celibate years' to which Newby referred.<sup>56</sup>

At Tonkawa POW camp, Oklahoma, PW12 explained how, after drawing lots, the role of Olivia in *As You Like It* fell to him. He recalled playing an elegant lady in a purple low-cut dress, with false breasts as 'royal fun'.<sup>57</sup> Theatrical illusion also extended into everyday prison camp existence. Among WW2 British POWs, cross-dressing female impersonation (at tea parties and dances) was jocularly acknowledged openly in letters sent home. However, given unmet physical and emotional needs, this led to homoerotic blurring of sexual boundaries, increasing homosexual activity and 'love affairs arising out of dressing in drag'.<sup>58</sup>

Early published sources on UK-held German POW camps acknowledged the popularity of amateur dramatics. However, only Sullivan mentioned cross-dressing, contrasting Featherstone Park officers' camp (where so-called 'stage fever' was 'under control' and Herbert Schmitt, playing female parts, never subjected to 'innuendos or smutty talk'), with Colchester (a large other ranks' camp), 'where there was even a bit of transvestism'.<sup>59</sup> The talented *Theater des Camp 186* at Colchester had initially abridged plays to eliminate women's parts. Seeking more morale-boosting general appeal they eventually staged a revue in which the finale, a can-can dancer in drag, brought the house down. Carl Weber recalled this 'rather grotesque display' as exemplifying 'the well-known popularity drag shows enjoy in all-male environments, like camps or prisons', adding, 'the company remained... aware of the problems of female impersonation,' endeavouring to 'avoid the cheap effect of "drag shows"'.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Reiss, 'Importance', pp. 31, 33-37; Newby, *Love*, p. 36. Pin-ups of scantily clothed Hollywood beauties were also noted at a US *Afrika Korps* POW camp in 1944, Bülter, p. 103.

<sup>57</sup> PW12, correspondence

<sup>58</sup> Makepeace, *Captives*, pp. 95, 120, 123; Jim Witte, cited in Barker, p. 132.

<sup>59</sup> Sullivan, pp. 206-07.

<sup>60</sup> Carl Weber, 'TdC 186: A Repertory Theatre in a PoW Camp', in *Theatre and Film in Exile: German Artists in Britain, 1933-1945*, ed. by Günther Berghaus (Oxford: Berg, 1989), pp. 231-45 (pp. 233, 236, 240). Weber's involvement with TdC 186 led to a career as a theatre director and academic.

Enclosed single-sex institutions have been identified as incubating ‘erotic tensions’ diffused by theatrical activities but also fostering ‘situational homosexuality’, where otherwise heterosexual individuals resort to homoerotic activity amid what Marjorie Garber dubbed ‘carnivalised power relations’, where dominant individuals seduce or coerce younger, more vulnerable sexual partners, as ‘surrogate women’, to satisfy unmet sexual needs.<sup>61</sup>

Weber’s account comments that, common to anywhere large numbers of men are confined, ‘homosexuality became an accepted mode of relationship’, with ‘quite an uninhibited display of affection in public’. Only two primary sources drawn on for this study mentioned anything relating to homosexual activity. Rudi Lux’s memoir touches on sexual abuse he suffered as a vulnerable seventeen-year-old (in a Hanover transit camp in 1946), and subsequent sexual harassment (in live-in accommodation after release in 1948), about which, as an unmentionable subject, he could not complain.<sup>62</sup> Bernhard T.’s diary entry headed June 1945, Camp 182/D (Barony, Dumfries), commented obliquely on others succumbing to masturbatory fantasy and ‘sexually deviant behaviour’ (probably a reference to homosexual activity). This, he felt, was sad but understandable under the circumstances.<sup>63</sup>

Given the culturally taboo and illegal nature of same-sex activity at the time, Reiss argues that it was more widespread among POW camps than available sources imply. He cites Kurt

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<sup>61</sup> Regina G. Kunzel, ‘Situating Sex: Prison Culture in the Mid-Twentieth Century United States’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 8, iii, (2002), 253-70 (p. 253); Marjorie Garber, cited in Emma Vickers, *Queen and Country: Same-Sex Desire in the British Armed Forces 1939-45* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), p. 97.

<sup>62</sup> Weber, p. 243; Lux, pp. 22, 28-29. Lux’s experiences reflect prison ‘hierarchies of age, physical strength, command of resources and social status’ which dictated predatory dominance or sexually accessibility, including ‘initiator rape’: Dan Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 231, 233.

<sup>63</sup> Bernhard T., diary entry dated 5-6-1945. A search covering seven months between August 1946 and April 1947 (WO 84/79-83) found one case of ‘indecent behaviour with another POW’ in court martial charge books (WO 84/79, f. 593), compared with multiple instances of amorous heterosexual offences. Given that homosexual acts were illegal in 1940s Britain, this suggests ‘blind eye’ tolerance, the ‘taboo’ Lux mentioned, or low-profile internal camp disciplinary measures in response to homosexual activity. See also Matthias Reiss, *Controlling Sex in Captivity: POWs and Sexual Desire in the United States during the Second World War* (London; Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), pp. 5, 106-38.

Böhme's reference to the UK YMCA's postwar concerns regarding young German prisoners' vulnerability in captivity to precocious hetero- or same-sex activity.<sup>64</sup>

Reiss suggests discussion of sex helped US-held German POWs 'reconstitute their identity as masculine soldiers.'<sup>65</sup> Wentzel, in Canada, acknowledged sharing 'the usual broad jokes and witticisms' on the subject.<sup>66</sup> According to Hennes, when food in US POW camps was plentiful 'there was much boastful and exaggerated talk about the fairer sex', but when food was scarce, such talk 'shrank.'<sup>67</sup> Barker illustrates absence of women expressed in songs and humour with a cartoon of a woman undressing in front of a POW, who is pointing in the direction of her bra asking 'What is that? Having been so long in captivity, the memory has escaped me.'<sup>68</sup> In this example of 'locker room' male bonding, self-deprecating parody inverts normal exaggerated boasts about encounters with the opposite sex.

And as Reiss also acknowledges, gazing at photographs of beautiful women could be counter-productive.<sup>69</sup> Bülter described one such occasion, in the camp cinema watching a Tarzan film, with a half-naked Jane swinging alluringly through the jungle. Unable to stand the feelings this aroused, he abruptly rushed out: 'That damned film!'<sup>70</sup> Wentzel, held (initially well fed) in Canada since 1940, described turning away from the 'disturbing' sight of attractive, well-dressed women, to the extent of not wanting to go out on parole (a weekly walk outside camp, on word of honour not to escape). They tried to suppress thoughts of women, which was easier 'if you just didn't see any women at all and for that reason I gave up these walks in the

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<sup>64</sup> Kurt W. Böhme, *Geist und Kultur der deutschen Kriegsgefangenen im Westen*, ed. by Erich Maschke, *Zur Geschichte der deutschen Kriegsgefangenen des Zweites Weltkrieges*, XIV (Bielefeld: Ernst & Werner Gieseking, 1968), pp. 14-15, cited in Reiss, *Controlling*.

<sup>65</sup> Matthias Reiss, 'Importance', p. 31.

<sup>66</sup> Wentzel, p. 148.

<sup>67</sup> Hennes, *Barbed*, pp. 40, 86.

<sup>68</sup> 'Was ist das? Infolge der langen Gefangenschaft, hat der Erinnerungsvermögen gelitten!', Barker, pp. 134, 144.

<sup>69</sup> '... "wenn man so etwas sieht, wird einem das Trostlose unserer Lage bewusst."' Diary of K. H. H., p. 366, cited in Reiss, 'Importance', p. 31.

<sup>70</sup> 'Dieser verfluchte Film!', Bülter, p. 120.

end. The sight of women just brought useless and unnecessary disturbance into our monastic existence.<sup>71</sup>

Although Reiss references German POWs clad only in shorts, desporting their toned and tanned bodies, other sources suggest this as a reaction to the oppressive heat of the Southern States, rather than an expression of masculine vanity on behalf of any more than a narcissistic minority.<sup>72</sup> (Among Allied POWs, Geoffrey Stavert suggested individuals followed their personal inclinations, gravitating towards different 'cliques', and that all camps contained some narcissists: 'body worshippers tanning themselves 'in ever-diminishing loincloths until even the sentries complained of their indecent exposure.'<sup>73</sup>)

According to Reiss, German prisoners in the US flaunted their bronzed bodies to devastating effect, overturning American civilians' negative view of their barbarous enemy and attracting American women. This led, at least in some instances, to 'heavy fraternization' with American women and inflammatory newspaper reports of POWs dating American girls, visiting 'shady ladies', whistling and flirting with 'our women', including schoolgirls. It is difficult to assess to what extent such reports were exaggerated, both by the prisoners themselves and the American press; Reiss's sources do convey evidence of '*Feldgrau fever*', and in the absence of US servicemen it is easy to imagine the attraction of young, blond, healthy and handsome German POWs.<sup>74</sup>

Among ex-POW sources for my own study, twelve were held in US camps prior to being shipped to the UK. Two (the only ones who mentioned relationships with American women, or

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<sup>71</sup> Wentzel, pp. 147-48.

<sup>72</sup> Matthias Reiss, 'Bronzed', p. 483; Matthias Reiss, 'Importance', pp. 26, 31; Bülter, p.97; Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners*, p. 76.

<sup>73</sup> G. S. Stavert, cited in Barker, pp 76-77. See also Faulk, p. 12. According to a British ex-convict, all prisons have a quota of 'budgies': narcissistic bodybuilders who spend all their time in the prison gym, or parading in front of mirrors, 'preening and chirping at their own reflection.' Noel 'Razor' Smith, *The Criminal Alphabet: An A-Z of Prison Slang* (London: Particular Books, Penguin, 2015).

<sup>74</sup> Matthias Reiss, '*Die Schwarzen waren unsere Freunde*': *Deutsche Kriegsgefangene in der amerikanischen Gesellschaft 1942-1946* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2001), pp. 123-28; Matthias Reiss, 'Bronzed', pp. 475, 494-96.

indeed any contact with ordinary civilians) referred to feeling physically superior to their captors, but recognized their guards were low-calibre men, not representative of serving troops.<sup>75</sup> Fraternisation contact with the local German immigrant population appears to have been confined to certain areas of the US. One source described *Ami*-POWs' disappointment in England, having in the US 'lived in relatively much greater freedom, through their contacts with former Germans and German-friendly Americans.'<sup>76</sup> However, Sullivan cited an *Ami*-POW who, in the UK, found 'quite a change not to see an armed guard keeping an eye on us.'<sup>77</sup> Werner K.'s experience concurred: they were constantly accompanied by 'a couple of soldiers with rifles, of course. It wasn't what I'd call friendly... with the American people. If they did they took a big risk, even just to communicate with us.'<sup>78</sup>

According to an official US Army memorandum, US policy precluded POWs working without guards or billeted out partly because this risked 'contact and normal relations with women with consequent incidents that would result in adverse public reaction.'<sup>79</sup> (At the date of this memorandum, February 1945, very few German POWs in the UK worked without guards or billeted out.) Most US-held POWs who contributed to this study described living in heavily guarded camps, transported long distances across the US to farms needing work, mainly harvesting crops including cotton and sugar beet, working in guarded gangs, among poor Mexicans, American Indians or blacks.<sup>80</sup> In one camp in California, Henry Metelmann, who spoke some English, avoided manual labour by working in the PX<sup>81</sup> office, where he befriended two young women.<sup>82</sup> Fritz Bülter met women under similar circumstances while in

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<sup>75</sup> Fritz B., PW12, correspondence.

<sup>76</sup> PW11, correspondence.

<sup>77</sup> P. A. Hoffmann, in Sullivan, p. 328

<sup>78</sup> Werner K., interview.

<sup>79</sup> Cited in Reiss, 'Bronzed', p. 500.

<sup>80</sup> Werner K., Max D., Manfred H.; Henry Metelmann; Fritz Bülter; see also Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>81</sup> Post Exchange Army base retail store.

<sup>82</sup> Metelmann, *Through*, p. 198.

American captivity. PW12 described fraternisation as 'permitted' in the US in 1946.<sup>83</sup>

However, his later, more detailed explanation did not suggest open fraternisation. He was given special permission to visit relatives resident in the US near his camp. These visits led to a clandestine affair, which he lived in great fear of being discovered.<sup>84</sup>

It is worth noting that Reiss's study focuses on German POWs' militaristic discipline and 'soldierly masculinity' during the war itself. Sullivan makes the point that 'while the war still raged, most camps remained militant,' a 'dammed up, male and alien force' singing the Horst Wessel song at the tops of their voices. Defiance figured as a common wartime POW strategy on either side, to maintain warrior identities, despite being excluded from combat.<sup>85</sup> This was arguably merely superficial, shoring up demoralization, just as POW escape plans mostly reflected morale-boosting fantasy. Among Allied POWs, Newby described a shared scornful attitude towards their Italian guards, but added significantly, 'We were arrogant because this was the only way we could vent our spleen at being captured and, at the same time, keep up our spirits, which were really very low.'<sup>86</sup> PW09 (captured in 1943) described how, as prisoners, they would march out with Prussian discipline, singing boisterously. Later demoralized arrivals from Normandy became caught up in this, but 'it was to impress' the civilians who gathered each week to watch, and 'also a way of combating a creeping loss of self-respect.' Bülter recounted similar feigned nonchalance, following dispiriting and humiliating experiences at the hands of their American captors.<sup>87</sup>

Following the collapse of Germany, the mood in camps changed: defiance became more of a defensive front, as Metelmann's account demonstrates. When his protests at being held in

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<sup>83</sup> Arnold Krammer, *Prisoners of War: A Reference Handbook* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2008), pp. 46, 51, suggests friendships with guards, farmers and some local church communities, despite official policy.

<sup>84</sup> PW12, correspondence.

<sup>85</sup> Sullivan, p. 96-97

<sup>86</sup> Cited in Sullivan, p. 172; Newby, *Love*, p. 44.

<sup>87</sup> PW09, correspondence; Bülter, p. 121.



the UK in contravention of the Geneva Convention fell flat, he described staring defiantly, while inwardly admitting defeat. They accepted their fate and ‘caused no trouble.’ Morale-boosting escape plans also largely evaporated – with the enemy in one’s own country, what was the point?<sup>88</sup>

Brian Feltman has described the ‘stigma of captivity’ weighing heavily on POWs ‘whose confidence and manhood had been challenged by surrender.’<sup>89</sup> Michael Roper has alluded to ‘the precariousness of masculinity at the level of lived experience’.<sup>90</sup> Victor Seidler earlier identified the inherent uneasy instability of masculine identity, as ‘always something we have to be ready to prove and defend.’<sup>91</sup> If sexual deprivation constituted a threat to the challenged masculine identities of prisoners of war, then, given Seidler’s view of the instability of masculine identity, restricted freedom to prove themselves with the opposite sex arguably threatened post-WW2 German POWs’ masculine identities, however much they were able to compensate.

### *‘Fratting’ from the POW viewpoint – amorous agency and masculine identity*

One source for this study recalled that several recently arrived *Ami*-POWs escaped through the fence after evening roll call to meet English women in a nearby churchyard.<sup>92</sup> German POWs

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<sup>88</sup> Metelmann, p. 202; Wentzel, p.162; Josef Kox, ‘A POW Remembers’, *BBC WW2 People’s War* <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/48/a7564548.shtml>, [accessed 29-1-2016].

<sup>89</sup> Feltman, p. 104. See also Makepeace, *Captives*, pp. 3, 7, 40-41, 85, 225.

<sup>90</sup> Michael Roper, ‘Slipping’, p.63.

<sup>91</sup> Victor Seidler, ‘Raging Bull’, *Achilles Heel*, 5 (1980), p. 9, cited in Tony Eardley, ‘Violence and Sexuality’, in *The Sexuality of Men*, ed. by Andy Metcalf and Martin Humphries (London: Pluto Press, 1985), p. 98.

<sup>92</sup> PW11, correspondence. He claimed this happened at a camp in Rotherham in 1945, and he had dates to support it. His identification of them as *Ami*-POWs would place this occurrence in or post-December 1945, the earliest date US-held German POWs began to be sent to the UK.

in the UK who managed to achieve 'sexual access' to females, appear to have succeeded in restoring their masculine identities, by defying the holding power and seducing its women. Several sources for this study offered a narrative of amorous adventures along those lines. On one routine inspection visit to farms where POWs were billeted, it was discovered that the prisoner in question had decamped to a London 'love-nest' with his girlfriend, who reimbursed the farmer's payments to the government for the prisoner's labour.<sup>93</sup> PW31, brought in 1944 initially to an American-run camp in Lancashire, claimed one US guard promised to smuggle him out, in American uniform, to meet girls, except 'it didn't come off.'<sup>94</sup> Others outlined similar unrealized plans (reminiscent of POWs' wartime morale-boosting escape fantasies). PW11 claimed an English girl asked, in the summer of 1945, to be smuggled into the camp; but admitted he couldn't vouch that it actually happened.<sup>95</sup>

Several correspondents recounted personal morale-boosting amorous adventures, through opportunistic work contacts. One prisoner's school English led to being used as an interpreter and riding in the front cab of the truck. Two drivers were women, one of whom always engineered for him to accompany her. He described how, after initial pleasantries, she made it clear that she was interested in a closer relationship and made the first move. He extolled the advantages of losing his virginity to an older, sexually experienced married woman.<sup>96</sup> Another source also described an affair at work with a married woman twenty years younger than her husband. This liaison appears to have been discovered or suspected, as he was suddenly, without opportunity to say goodbye, transferred to a factory near London. Here he met another attractive Englishwoman with a penchant for Germans. They embarked on a

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<sup>93</sup> PW28, correspondence.

<sup>94</sup> PW31, interview notes.

<sup>95</sup> PW11, correspondence

<sup>96</sup> PW05, correspondence.

passionate affair, despite a severe reprimand and warnings from the foreman. Again he was suddenly transferred, on this occasion repatriated to Germany.<sup>97</sup>

Interviewed in 1985, PW31 described being sent in a work gang to a farm in January/February 1945, where, over a meal break, he chatted up his future wife. Coloured by his bad experience after capture in 1944 (when all their photographs were burnt), and the ongoing war, his account stressed a belligerent attitude towards the English. Prisoners would use any excuse, like a hole in their shoe, not to work. He described hoodwinking the camp authorities and pursuing his romance over a protracted period of time. On one occasion, after his absence was discovered, he went to great lengths to protect his girlfriend, ducking through a water-filled ditch carrying her so her clothes and shoes would not get muddy, while camp guards searched the area with flashlights.<sup>98</sup>

One correspondent seemed to have taken vicarious pleasure in other POWs' amorous adventures, collecting newspaper cuttings of court martial cases. In June 1945, he was transferred to a work camp where he claimed there were 'naturally' secret successful contacts with English women. At the next camp, near a river, in summer 1946, prisoners swam across to join girls waiting on the opposite bank. There were work contacts, over 1946 and 1947, with land girls, farmers' daughters, and even farmers' wives, with a nearby shepherd's hut serving as a love-nest. This source claimed the guards turned a blind eye, and hardly anyone was punished, although in 1947, a prisoner at another camp was caught three times making night rendezvous, each time given twenty-eight days' confinement. Generally, however, he claimed it was a common event, which camp commandants were powerless to prevent. In summer 1947, in return for their rations, he aided and abetted two comrades to live with their English 'paramours', one a war widow, the other unmarried and 'pushing thirty'. Both POWs

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<sup>97</sup> PW04, correspondence.

<sup>98</sup> PW31, interview notes.

returned each week in time for the Saturday morning inspection, before slipping away again, through the fence. He cashed their meal tickets, collected their post and claimed their absence was never discovered.<sup>99</sup>

A further source described meeting young and pretty machinists at a factory beside the motor pool where he worked. A fellow POW (who had fallen for one young woman, but spoke no English), arranged a foursome with his girlfriend's workmate, who was also interested in getting to know a German POW. This source described how, among other things, he asked his date why English girls preferred German POWs to their own people, since the prisoners could offer them very little materially. She explained

'because you always wear clean clothes and are always courteous to us. If you see English boys on Sunday with their wellington boots, wrinkled socks and battered caps, who [...] are only interested in pubs and beer, then we'd rather be with German POWs.'<sup>100</sup>

Other sources also suggest German POWs' efforts to look smart succeeded against better off, but badmouthed, 'sloppily dressed' British rivals.<sup>101</sup> A labour officer in charge of German POWs in Essex recalled how some 'always managed to get out of camp at night to find girls. Local girls fell over them!' Two POWs, pretending to be Polish, played in local dance bands, 'making, stealing or borrowing their clothes... They also stole razor blades. I have never met anyone like the Germans for smartness and cleanliness.'<sup>102</sup> A correspondent to a local newspaper wrote in defence of German POWs that he had been 'struck by their politeness and smartness.'<sup>103</sup> Sullivan noted that 'German cleanliness, smartness and punctiliousness often made a good impression, referring to a Dorset newspaper article, that 'POWs walking out on

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<sup>99</sup> PW11, correspondence.

<sup>100</sup> PW05, correspondence.

<sup>101</sup> Alan Allport, *Demobbed: Coming Home after the Second World War* (London: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 61.

<sup>102</sup> M. J. L. Rice, cited in Barker, p. 103.

<sup>103</sup> Robert Hughes, 'Readers' Views to the Editor', *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 2-2-1948, p. 2 (cited in Sullivan, p. 332.)

Sunday with their spruced jackets and pressed trousers were the smartest young men in the district.’<sup>104</sup>

Kochan cited at length the reminiscences of two ‘enthusiastic’ fraternisers. Alf Eiserbeck, recalled in spring 1946, when, despite notices everywhere forbidding fraternisation, he and three other prisoners ‘always managed to get out of camp over the barbed wire and through the depot fence’ at night, sometimes meeting ATS girls, and drinking in a pub. They also pitched small tents in a field, where they met girls at night. When a civilian reported them, ‘Military and civilian police came over and had us.’ He claimed ‘national newspapers’ ran ‘a big article’ about it, but ‘We only got a warning.’<sup>105</sup>

Eiserbeck’s boasts about fraternisation were framed within a defiant narrative of rule-breaking and mocking authority. Siegfried Gabler recalled the welcome freedom, beginning in 1946, of working in ones and twos. This offered an opportunity, against the non-fraternisation ruling, of getting to know people, mainly through other farm workers. He recalled the barbed wire being lowered ‘foot by foot, until it was only two feet high.’ To entertain the inmates, his camp showed a film every Saturday night, English one week, German the next, but Gabler had met a farmer’s daughter, ‘a lovely blonde’. After the Saturday evening rollcall, ‘over the fence we went. I generally went to the farmer’s house...’<sup>106</sup>

PW07 claimed to know many stories about love affairs between English girls and German POWs, and described the transformative effect on his own morale, and outward appearance, of a liaison with an attractive English girl. In autumn 1946, he had wangled a weekly errand which involved walking alone to fetch the laundry bag from a small satellite hostel, a seven-mile round trip. Walking fast, it could be accomplished in about ninety minutes, but, as he put

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<sup>104</sup> Sullivan, p. 335.

<sup>105</sup> Kochan, pp. 121-23. (A search of available online national and local newspapers which failed to find supporting evidence of this claim may reflect press suppression of such news, mentioned in Chapter Six.)

<sup>106</sup> Siegfried Gabler, cited in Kochan, p. 123.

it, 'who as a POW went fast?' Seldom meeting anyone, he enjoyed the freedom of sauntering alone, lost in thought, until one day, in late autumn, he noticed two attractive girls approaching. They stopped and smiled, and asked if he was a German. This threw him into confusion, stammering and blushing. (His sudden failure of confidence echoes Eric Newby's experience when, after escaping from the building he had been held in as a POW, he came face to face with girls resembling those he had ogled from the prison windows. He admitted feeling less bold at close quarters, without any barriers between them. The Italian girls had also appeared shy – 'all we managed were some nervous smiles'.<sup>107</sup>) The UK teenagers (described as sixteen or seventeen) who stopped to speak to this German POW apparently showed no such timidity. He described how his obvious nervousness gave them the upper hand and they began to interrogate him, talking for nearly an hour, before making a date for the following Sunday. Having hitherto placed little value on his outward appearance, this encounter awoke an ambition to look smart. Using money gained through a black market scam with the civilian for whom he worked, he was able to buy decent trousers and even aftershave.<sup>108</sup>

Not all POWs succeeded with British women, and most, despite illicit money-making schemes, lacked money (or ration coupons) to buy clothes. Brasnett described the POWs he supervised as more popular locally than the Americans previously stationed there. They were 'sober, not having the means to be otherwise... conscientious and did not interfere with women – which was forbidden.'<sup>109</sup> One former POW described daring, with several POW comrades, to visit an open-air swimming pool in early summer 1947. Spying an attractive blonde, he fantasized out loud that they were having a swim after work, and would invite the blonde to come dancing, and bring her friends. But in reality they were all thinking "'Damn it! Why was it so impossible

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<sup>107</sup> Newby, *Love*, p. 54.

<sup>108</sup> PW07, correspondence.

<sup>109</sup> Sullivan, p. 326.

simply to speak to the girl?" When she sauntered off, one vowed to speak to her if she turned round; but she did not. 'An hour later we were reminded that it was not our world.' A complaint had been made; they were asked to leave.<sup>110</sup>

Yearning felt in an all-male environment for the company of women was expressed by a number of ex-POW sources for this study. One recalled knowing of numerous relationships, not necessarily lasting, arising from the 'longing for women' in the camps.<sup>111</sup> He did not specify whether this longing arose simply from sexual deprivation. Kurt E. believed many ill-advised relationships originated out of pent-up sexual need on both sides (referring to POWs who became involved with widows, divorcees or unhappily married women).<sup>112</sup> Manfred Knodt, in a POW camp magazine article, believed most relationships with British women were based on physical attraction; only exceptionally were they also 'of the mind and spirit.' He appealed to any POW not yet ensnared with an Englishwoman to 'temper his uncontrolled urges and not be carried away in this predicament'.<sup>113</sup>

### *Emotional significance of sexual solace*

Encounters with British women appear to have sated some POWs' sexual hunger, boosted morale and reinforced masculine identity; there was clearly a morale-boosting element in the excitement of an illicit relationship. One man, recalling three ATS girls whom he and two

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<sup>110</sup> Egon Schormann, cited in Kochan, pp. 184-85.

<sup>111</sup> PW11, correspondence.

<sup>112</sup> Kurt E., interview.

<sup>113</sup> Manfred Knodt, 'Warum englische Mädchen heiraten? Gesichtspunkte, die auch bedacht werden müssen' ('Why Marry English Girls? Factors which must also be considered'), *Lagerpost*, Camp 51 ([n.d., post July 1947]), see Appendix 7.

comrades met for picnics in 1946, wrote of the exhilaration of spending 'beautiful hours together', and that 'forbidden fruit tastes the best.'<sup>114</sup>

But did German POWs' amorous relationships with British women arise simply out of unfulfilled and pent-up sexual needs, as Pastor Knodt believed, or did they also answer other unmet needs? Fussell (and Bernhard T.) depicted masturbation not so much as relief from sexual frustration, but possibly more as a comforting reaction to feelings of fear, anxiety or loss.<sup>115</sup> And when Gerhard Hennes wrote of 'the natural longing for kisses and tenderness, for women and sex' he appears to have prioritised 'tenderness' over sex.<sup>116</sup>

Mid-twentieth-century studies have portrayed male sexuality as coloured by conditioned repression of emotional expression, suggesting that for men sex expressed more than an erotic impulse. It was argued that sexual contact mimics early infant life and, through the comfort of emotional regression, could re-evolve powerful feelings of well-being. From boyhood, men were discouraged from expressing emotional need, especially through physical contact. For men conditioned in this way, sex became the one interaction, offering comfort and confirmation of close physical contact, which enabled them to express inner feelings and vulnerability. Sex became a means of resolving feelings of disconnection and emotional need – 'misery that only sex seems able to right.' Andy Metcalf suggested sex for men as therefore 'heavily charged', weighted by the emotional illiteracy and repression intrinsic to male socialization, the single means to relieve a 'bottle-neck' of pent-up emotional yearnings.<sup>117</sup>

These explorations of the male psyche, in addition to drawing attention to the psychological and emotional significance to POWs of lack of physical contact, implied that boys rarely discussed intimate problems with male friends, and emotional reticence persisted in adult

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<sup>114</sup> PW08, correspondence.

<sup>115</sup> Fussell, *Wartime*, pp. 107-08; Bernhard T., diary entry.

<sup>116</sup> Hennes, *Barbed*, p. 40.

<sup>117</sup> Andy Metcalf, 'Introduction' in *The Sexuality of Men*, ed. by Andy Metcalf and Martin Humphries (London: Pluto Press, 1985), pp. 1-14, (pp. 4-5).



life.<sup>118</sup> Relating this theory to available testimony of former German POWs, few mentioned looking back nostalgically to heart-to-heart conversations with other prisoners.<sup>119</sup> Silence and withdrawal – as Henry Metelmann recalled, when faced with photographs of concentration camps – is more noticeable. Several spoke of daydreaming, or taking solitary walks, inwardly trying to resolve thoughts and feelings; another mentioned how, after the arrival of bad news from home, a POW would fall silent, and isolate himself rather than confide in his mates.<sup>120</sup>

While acknowledging the excitement of romantic subterfuge, several sources for this study extolled their relationships in idealized, ecstatic terms: recalling love at first sight; writing of ‘heavenly moments’; and ‘heaven’, ‘a dream’, to hold a girl and kiss her (echoing Eric Newby’s fellow POW, envisaging the ‘heaven’ of just being with Italian girls). This might be interpreted simply in terms of the relief of satisfying the need for sexual contact. But one man, whose relationship was abruptly ruptured by his transfer, wrote forty years later that she represented the sole bright spot in his time as a POW, and he still felt pain in his chest when he thought of her. Another POW, who had planned a future with the daughter at the farm where he worked, admitted their close relationship never became physical. Manfred H. fell in love, yet only shared one innocent kiss; the significance of a kiss, for a man starved for several years of the comfort of close embrace, should not, perhaps, be underestimated.<sup>121</sup>

Another ex-POW wrote that he still thought back about ‘the beautiful heavenly moments and hours’ spent with ‘the girl of my dreams’ in autumn 1946. During his lunch break, he noticed a wheel working loose on the pram a young woman was pushing up the hill towards him. (It is tempting to deduce this fault as contrived, since he mentioned having frequently seen her

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<sup>118</sup> Vic Seidler, ‘Men, Sex and Relationships’ and ‘Postscript: Men, Therapy and Politics’, in *Men, Sex and Relationships: Writings from Achilles Heel*, ed. by Victor J. Seidler (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 1-26, 235-62, (pp. 1-2, 243).

<sup>119</sup> Kurt Bock, cited in Kochan, p. 111, was one exception.

<sup>120</sup> Clay, p. 218; Metelmann, *Through*, p. 192; Manfred H., interview; Max D., correspondence; Wentzel, pp. 163-64.

<sup>121</sup> Newby, *Love*, p. 36; PW31, correspondence; PW01, correspondence; PW16, correspondence; PW09, correspondence; Manfred H., interview.

passing.) She was friendly, but nervous of being seen speaking to him, so he suggested exchanging notes. As they passed one another, he would slip his letter 'unnoticed into the pram and M. let hers fall somehow by the wayside or in the bushes. What an exciting time!' He had to destroy her messages after reading them, but it became more than an illicit amorous adventure:

We both noticed that a certain sympathy and understanding unfolded between us. Anyone observant would only to have looked in our faces to know how it was between us.... What I had dreamed about, all the long years of the war, now stood... in front of me. Everything about her was beautiful, her voice, her laugh, her letters.<sup>122</sup>

PW16 also wrote of having improved acquaintance with an English girl by exchanging notes on small slips of paper, 'long before 1947.' He had noticed a shy, pretty young girl at a house near where he waited for the lorry to collect him in the evening after farm work. After several weeks of exchanging looks and a few illicit words, she slipped a bar of chocolate into his hand. He described her as just as innocent as himself; and that it took a long time for the propaganda images of Huns with horns to subside, for him to be accepted as a normal person. Eventually he was invited into the house, and began sneaking out of the hostel to meet S. at her home, always with her mother present. At his hostel billet roll call, a friend would wait to be counted, then sneak into another room, to be counted again. PW16 would return to the hostel before dawn. On occasions when his absence was discovered, he was confined to camp. But it was worth it, for what he felt was 'true love, without ifs or buts.'<sup>123</sup>

Female company mitigated isolation. In declaring that 'we all loved the "Iti" [Italian] girls', Newby emphasized that POWs 'always make an exception for the women of the enemy, for, otherwise they would feel themselves completely alone.' In their ostracized position on former enemy territory, German POWs recalled that it was British women who expressed

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<sup>122</sup> Max D., correspondence.

<sup>123</sup> PW16, correspondence.

sympathy towards them, reaching out with gestures that encouraged them to feel less isolated, from housewives mothering them with cups of tea, to young women throwing them cigarettes, or even streetwalkers calling to them. Hans Freiburger remembered hearing inviting voices calling “‘Hullo boys’” as they marched late at night to their camp. ‘To be called at in a not unpleasant manner made them feel they belonged to humanity.’ Others wrote that seeing German POWs awakened sympathy in many English people, especially women, who were ‘very nice to us’.<sup>124</sup>

Roper has emphasized the emotional significance, for men far from home, of ‘acts of care’—such as those proffered by POWs’ girlfriends. German POWs’ need for female company was arguably emotional as much as sexual, exacerbated by distance from home and their ostracized and denigrated status in a former enemy country. At first, hard work had proved therapeutic; the decline, over 1946, of POW productivity was ascribed to anxiety about the state of Germany and their families at home, and uncertainty about length of captivity, especially for the *Ami*-POWs, shipped from the US expecting repatriation. *Ami*-POW sources for this study mostly mentioned this somewhat sardonically in passing as an injustice. Few elaborated on their feelings at the time; one wrote simply of how sad he was, and another, referring to himself and his fellow POWs, of their disappointment. Kurt E. described himself as ‘utterly dismayed’ to be ‘brought here against my will’ from Belgium in 1946.<sup>125</sup>

Others were also feeling unhappy, and defensive. German POWs were confronted not only with defeat, loss of liberty and continuing indefinite separation from their families, but also collective responsibility for National Socialism’s crimes. Paul Seufert recalled his first walk outside the camp on his own and found people staring at the diamond patch on his back, marking him out as a POW. This brought an uncomfortable realization of how Jews at home

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<sup>124</sup> Newby, *Love*, p. 43; Hans Freiburger, cited in Sullivan, p. 337; PW06, PW04, correspondence.

<sup>125</sup> Roper, ‘Slipping’, p. 63; PW01, PW05, correspondence; Kurt E., interview.

must have felt, wearing the Star of David. Struggling with such psychological adjustments, the POWs were marooned in the country of their enemies. One recalled, of his experiences of hostility, 'I could understand their feelings but also wished they would understand mine.'<sup>126</sup>

Some British people did observe how unhappy the POWs looked, peering in at lighted windows, their faces 'full of sadness and yearning'. Invited for Christmas 1946, one POW sobbed at the sight of a white tablecloth. A service where a child sang *Stille Nacht*, prompted 'so many tears, I felt it was almost cruel.' Speaking in July 1946, the Bishop of Sheffield ascribed the recent 'increasing... hopelessness' among POWs to separation from their families. He referred to established 'evidence of the kind of psychological disturbance caused by these long separations both on serving men and especially, of course, upon prisoners', warning that this would impact upon their mental and physical state when they were ultimately repatriated.<sup>127</sup>

### *Separation from home and homeland*

Michael Roper has highlighted how 'sheer psychic force of events' can strip away 'years of... training in manliness, returning men to the childlike desire for the comforting presence of a mother.'<sup>128</sup> Deprived for much of their captivity of emotional support, many POWs, once social fraternisation was permitted, gravitated towards mother figures. One German-Jewish refugee quickly became known as 'Mutter Kaden' among local POWs, who confided their

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<sup>126</sup>PW09, correspondence; Seufert, cited in Sullivan, p. 334; Engelbert S., cited in Sullivan, pp. 334, 328.

<sup>127</sup> Ruth Fisher and William Reece, cited in Sullivan, pp. 187-89; also Pamela Howe Taylor, *The Germans We Trusted*, p. 48; 'Employment of Prisoners of War', Lords, 11-7-1946, *Hansard*, vol. 142, cols 377-82.

<sup>128</sup> Roper, 'Slipping', p. 66.

troubles to her.<sup>129</sup> Some POWs formed relationships with (and ultimately married) women five, eight, fifteen, twenty-two and twenty-five years older than themselves.<sup>130</sup>

Another German-Jewish emigrée, whose empathy overcame her initial antipathy towards the POWs, recalled: 'we ourselves had been stranded and hopeless not long before, and here were disillusioned, insecure young men kept in captivity, bombarded with news from the Nuremberg Trials and the atrocities committed in the concentration camps. They needed a home to come to and friends to talk to.'<sup>131</sup> Metcalf points to family as 'the place for warmth, feeling, and belonging', a focus for emotional acceptance and dependence.<sup>132</sup> Several women contributors to this study described the appeal their own homes and mothers clearly held for their POW boyfriends.<sup>133</sup> Phyllis H. recalled when, after several dates with her new POW boyfriend, in summer 1947, she invited him home for dinner, he replied 'Thought you'd never ask!' After that first invitation home, Karl was often there when she arrived back from work. 'He played the piano, he liked the homely atmosphere. Mum liked him, too.'<sup>134</sup> Bernhard T. described his happiness at being billeted out on a farm, where 'I was accepted as a member of the family and it became like "home".'<sup>135</sup> For the less fortunate, remaining in camp, Faulk maintained that 'the oppressive sense of military control and routine in the camps' exacerbated 'background depression, the longing for home and the worry over families.' Work was therapeutic, but not engaging enough 'to stop the eternal brooding over the families back

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<sup>129</sup> Sullivan, pp. 323-24. Sullivan also mentions one paternally caring camp commandant, held in great esteem by his POWs, who expressed their gratitude by jokingly describing themselves as his 468 children, p. 268.

<sup>130</sup> For example, Fritz Zimmermann, PW14, Kurt E., PW32, PW31, George Gebauer, Hans-Paul Liebschner, Günther Schran.

<sup>131</sup> Eva Koch, cited in Sullivan, p. 189.

<sup>132</sup> Metcalf and Humphries, p. 10.

<sup>133</sup> Kathleen W.; BW04; June K.; Maude P.; BW01; BW20; Phyllis H.

<sup>134</sup> Phyllis H., interview.

<sup>135</sup> Bernhard T., correspondence; also PW08, correspondence; Werner K. interview.

home.... There was no ease for a man's mind.' They had lost, in his words, 'the social structure that had given meaning and direction to their lives'.<sup>136</sup>

The POWs' personal sense of security in the meaning of home, of their *Heimat*, had also collapsed. Michael Roper has explored the emotional significance to serving WW1 soldiers of writing and receiving letters from home. This correspondence played a vital role in maintaining morale through emotional support, and also connection with inner feelings of emotional security. The act of reading or writing a letter conjured up the comforting presence of home and sense of belonging.<sup>137</sup> Roper's insight into the vulnerability and emotional regression of suffering WW1 soldiers may be also applied to the psychological disturbance for German POWs of the aftermath of WW2. Although no longer risking physical death, they were facing, as pariahs on formerly (and to some degree still) hostile territory, the collapse of their homeland, inner identity and security. Oliver Wilkinson has discussed (in relation to WW1 POWs) how mail to and from home mitigated POWs' physical and psychological displacement from their militaristic and domestic male roles. He suggested that mail contact evoked tangible "'presence'", creating an 'epistolary space' allowing imaginative reconnection with their home world and male role within it.<sup>138</sup>

'*Heimat*' translates unsatisfactorily into English as 'home', native place, or national homeland, without conveying its more resonant meanings, which reach into German inner sense of identity. *Heimat* is intrinsically important to German self-perception. Peter Blicke's exploration of the German notion of *Heimat* defines it as the entirety of past experience, including childhood, family ties, social relationships, landscape. It represents an idealized, spatial manifestation of emotional attachment and identity; an emotional refuge beyond wars,

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<sup>136</sup> Faulk, pp. 40, 71, 72, 10.

<sup>137</sup> Roper, 'Slipping', pp. 64-65; Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), pp. 15, 50, 251-52.

<sup>138</sup> Oliver Wilkinson, 'Diluting Displacement? Letters from Captivity', in *War and Displacement in the Twentieth Century: Global Conflicts*, ed. by Sandra Barkhof and Angela K. Smith (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 70-88.

with defined gender roles. It offers unity and centredness, and a defence against adult anxieties. 'Through *Heimat* the fear and uncertainty of self-definition... responsibility for one's own decisions and... happiness are laid to rest. *Heimat*... provides an unquestionable sense of... a morally good self.'<sup>139</sup> This perception suggests *Heimat* protects, insulates, and permits comforting regression, a bulwark against despair. The childhood innocence *Heimat* represents becomes part of an adult regressive strategy for re-contacting a sense of wholeness. (Regression is used here in its psychoanalytic sense, as a return to more immature behaviour in reaction to stress, an expression of increased need of the maternal comfort of childhood.) What therefore happens when *Heimat* itself becomes contaminated, spoiled, disintegrated? The emotional vulnerability of German POWs may be viewed in the light of their separation not simply from their geographical homeland, but from access to the emotional bedrock and maternal comfort it would normally offer in times of psychological stress. It was in such a vulnerable emotional state that German POWs were drawn into intimacy with British women. These relationships began to engage and enmesh POWs into a hitherto alien culture.

### **Cultural connections – seduced into speaking English**

Waiting on the main road for their lift back to camp after work opened a window of opportunity for one group of POWs to interact with young girls from the local village, communicating 'with hands and feet and sign language. They helped us and told us words... We all picked up some English, enough to get us by.'<sup>140</sup> Another POW, suggesting a primarily carnal interest in women, regarded it as useful to be able to speak English – not so much in

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<sup>139</sup>Peter Blickle, *Heimat: A Critical Theory of the German Idea of Homeland* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2002), p. 136.

<sup>140</sup> Kurt K., interview.

order to communicate with a girl, but to be able to explain yourself if you were caught, to avoid accusation of rape.<sup>141</sup>

Kurt E. made his initial attitude very clear: 'I didn't even bother to learn the language for a time... I didn't want to make any contact.'<sup>142</sup> However, some German POWs had learned English at school; others learned by reading English language newspapers, to inform themselves or engage with local people.<sup>143</sup> Max D., working at a centre administering the dismantling of US invasion camps, made concerted efforts to improve his language skills 'to make more contacts.' This became

for me the beginning of something quite special [...] after all the years of isolation [...] to speak to children on the road at our workplace [...] during our lunchbreak. I remember various nice little encounters there.

A typist at his workplace agreed he could write letters for her to correct, to improve his written English. He wrote 'everything I could think of about my home and my hobbies.' This exercise became invaluable when he met an attractive girl and they began exchanging confidences in secret notes, drawing them closer together. For several sources, knowledge of English maximised opportunities for interpreter and translation roles, bringing contact with British women. English-speaking POWs extended social contacts within the local community by illicitly selling handmade toys and slippers smuggled out of camp on their way to work.<sup>144</sup>

While Manfred H.'s comrades sat together after work in the evening playing lively card games 'I stood at the bedside and studied English.' It seemed 'the one and only opportunity to do it. You are in the country... and there was no television, no radio.' Manfred's growing command of English brought a profitable income from translating love notes from fellow POWs' English girlfriends and writing their replies. He explained how 'sooner or later' POWs would approach

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<sup>141</sup> Elmar Tremmel, in Sullivan, p. 337.

<sup>142</sup> Kurt E., interview.

<sup>143</sup> PW05, correspondence; Rudolf R., interview.

<sup>144</sup> Max D., correspondence. PW07; PW03; PW05; PW29; Max D.; Fritz Bülter.



him and say that 'during their working day they got in contact with families... and I saw girls standing at the fence in the evening.' He later reflected on 'being a POW and having to deal with seeing many women. They never came into the camp. It was all in your mind.' Most of the POWs 'couldn't make themselves understood... but they wanted to express their love to the young ladies, because they were young themselves, like me.' They would give him the girl's name, and some details about her. 'I gave away part of my life writing those letters [...] put all my heart and all my feelings into love letters which I only wrote for somebody else.' He had fallen in love himself, and she with him, but she had a fiancé serving abroad. 'My English wasn't all that good; I couldn't make myself understood in such a situation and I wasn't prepared for it.'<sup>145</sup>

Two former POWs mentioned having practised short chat-up phrases, before learning English as their girlfriends' pupils. PW07's girlfriend improved his clumsy pronunciation and taught him 'many new words and expressions, which you very quickly pick up in such situations.' His language skills 'improved considerably... also my impressions in relation to the female psyche.' When Olive K. extolled the POWs' 'nice way of speaking, no –', it was her husband who supplied the words she was reaching for – 'no smutty talk'. Might this more respectful approach imply abandonment of the habit of objectifying women, and acceptance of feminine values? Manfred H. admitted having cried over a woman, and emphasized that this unmanly expression of emotion was not mocked: 'my comrades... didn't laugh at me, they understood.'<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Manfred H., correspondence and interview.

<sup>146</sup> PW03; PW07, correspondence; Kurt and Olive K., interview; Manfred H., interview.

## *A modified masculinity?*

Alf Eiserbeck derived evident retrospective pleasure in describing an episode during his captivity, whereby civilian drivers complained about German POWs driving ATS girls to work, after which the practice was stopped. In protest, the ATS refused civilian-driven lorries and walked to work until 'POWs were put back driving them.'<sup>147</sup> This victory seemingly reinforces Reiss's argument, that success with the enemy's women confirmed German POWs' 'soldierly masculinity'; but it is worth noting that the victory Eiserbeck described was won on the POWs' behalf, by women.

Fritz Bülter's account, published in the 1950s, described working in a REME [Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers] workshop alongside girls who appeared ill at ease around German POWs. He assumed the role of interpreter and became involved in an illicit POW trade making and selling slippers. One young woman, a technical draughtsman in the workshop, one day surprised him by shaking hands, and thereby passing him a note. Disconcerted, he sneaked off to read it. The note read: "'Would a German girl ask a man to meet her? I don't know. An English girl would generally not do it either. But the special circumstances excuse it, if I stray from convention.'" It ended with a 'command' to be at a particular place at 11pm the following Sunday.

His reaction was of fear and suspicion – was this a trap? Or exploitation – 'looking for some kind of adventure with a POW?' They began meeting twice a week. He portrays her as evading answering when he asked why she had chosen him. 'Was it knowing that a POW must stay silent, that he after some time would disappear, so that no shadow was cast over her reputation?' He described her coquettishly teasing him, then suddenly vanishing.<sup>148</sup> In correspondence, thirty years after this account, Bülter portrayed the outcome somewhat

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<sup>147</sup> Kochan, p. 120.

<sup>148</sup> Bülter, pp. 286-87.

differently: he was apprehended one night by a policeman and transferred to another camp. His subsequent repatriation to East Germany caused the final break between them. His earlier, published account portrayed a self-determined young woman in control, toying with a subservient German POW. It seems curiously significant that the author chose to portray his British girlfriend in that way, as if conveying felt power relations rather than actual events.

German POWs noticeably actively engaged with teenage girls, in some instances almost ten years younger. While this may be viewed as an attempt to target members of the opposite sex they might more easily impress, found easier to meet and more amenable to rebellious transgressive relationships, the POWs also present as passive recipients of the attention of transgressive young women who sought out them out. Independent and rebellious girls in their mid-teens were accused of luring German POWs into committing acts of indiscipline.<sup>149</sup>

At one POW's court martial, the defending counsel described him as having been 'led astray by "a young and over-sexed girl,"' appealing against his detention by contending that he was 'not the moving spirit' in their association.<sup>150</sup>

Faulk regarded the general behaviour of German POWs as 'probably the best of all POW of the last war,' adding that it 'was not simple submission to authority. It was conscious good conduct', hoping their self-discipline 'would persuade the world at large that they were not really barbarians.'<sup>151</sup> They sought to prove they were civilised, polite, clean and well-dressed. Young British males' masculine identity generally appeared to depend on not caring about such niceties. National service conscription perpetuated military masculine identity for British young men. For the POWs, military masculinity had crumbled; challenges to male esteem were part of normal life.

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<sup>149</sup> 'Spent Night in Hut with P.O.W.s', *Lancashire Evening Post*, 30-7-1946, p. 1.

<sup>150</sup> 'Girl's P.O.W. Friend Courtmartialled', *News Chronicle*, 21-6-1947, p. 3; RG 48/2009. WO 84/79-84 record cases of German POWs accused of 'indecent assault' or 'carnal knowledge' of underage girls.

<sup>151</sup> Faulk, p. 40.

Bitterness and despondency over continuing captivity remained (together with cynicism over classification assessments, re-education and democratisation, perceived as haphazard, ignorant and clumsy). But defiance and antagonism disappeared in the postwar period, except among a hardline Nazi minority.<sup>152</sup> Several former POWs conveyed their consciousness of being powerless. PW11 explained that much of the scrapbook material he had collected while a POW was confiscated by the guards. As POWs, powerless and without rights, 'all protest was useless'.<sup>153</sup> Manfred H. commented on their day-to-day ignorance about what was happening or where they were going: 'We knew nothing, we were told nothing.'<sup>154</sup> Kurt E. described the state in which he arrived in the UK as a POW, with 'absolutely nothing': 'I didn't even have a hankie.'<sup>155</sup>

Although many German POWs earned illicit pocket money making wooden toys, or by black market bartering, their impoverished and compromised alien, pariah status prevented POWs taking the lead in social situations. Walking and talking represented their main social recreation. Official restrictions on German POWs' freedoms outside their camps aimed to avoid the confrontational situations that had arisen with Italian Co-operator POWs.<sup>156</sup> German POWs were only permitted to walk out in ones and twos; potentially hostile areas of local towns were sometimes out of bounds. For most of their captivity in the UK, cinemas and indoor courtship arenas where alcohol was consumed were also officially out of bounds, in addition to cafés, shops and buses, where POWs might be competing with the general public. German POWs could not drink or carouse in pubs unless abetted by sympathetic civilians. Even when invited, one ex-POW recalled having refused to enter a public house, for fear of losing privileges he already enjoyed.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Wentzel, pp. 154-57, 165; Faulk, pp. 85, 195-96.

<sup>153</sup> 'Wir waren als Kriegsgefangene eben recht- und macht-los.' PW11, correspondence.

<sup>154</sup> Manfred H., interview.

<sup>155</sup> Kurt E., interview.

<sup>156</sup> See HO 45/21875; HO 144/23269; HO 45/21875; MAF 47/117.

<sup>157</sup> Klaus Steffen, reel 3.

However, arriving in convoy at an army camp in Dover, in May 1946, Alf Eiserbeck claimed their British escorts 'looked the other way' and let the POW drivers go to the camp dance, where a fight with British servicemen soon started and the POWs had to return to their huts.<sup>158</sup> A 1948 newspaper article implied this was a common occurrence – 'bus conductors refused to carry Germans, Councillors would not have them in libraries, ex-soldiers fought them in dance-halls'.<sup>159</sup> Theo Terhorst's son-in-law confirmed that his father recounted witnessing many instances of POWs getting into fights (usually over women) in local pubs and dance halls.<sup>160</sup> Searches of several national newspapers and available online local newspapers failed to confirm this, producing only isolated reports of assaults on (rather than fights with) POWs.<sup>161</sup> In one case, a member of the public pleaded guilty to grievous bodily harm for assaulting a German POW, who ran away with a broken nose.<sup>162</sup> (Dance hall punch-ups would seem more likely to have occurred from mid-1947 onwards, when camp discipline was less rigid and POWs were competing under more openly equal terms with British rivals.)

Although several related being turned off buses or refused service, no ex-POW sources for this study mentioned publicly standing up for themselves while POWs, or getting into a fight.

Confrontations with bus conductors, waitresses, etc., were mediated by girlfriends. Rudolf R. was turned away from a bus, until his girlfriend persuaded the bus conductor to allow him on board. On another occasion (mentioned in Chapter Four), they decided to have tea in a smart cinema lounge. Rudolf 'helped her out of her coat... And nobody came to our table. I watched that. And after a little time the manageress came and said to her – "You can" –'. He hesitated, and his wife took up the story of how the manageress had told her she could stay, but the

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<sup>158</sup> Cited in Kochan, pp. 119-20.

<sup>159</sup> *Sunday Express*, 13-6-1948, cited in Faulk, p. 170.

<sup>160</sup> Stuart Crocker, email correspondence.

<sup>161</sup> Lack of further supportive evidence may reflect current geographically patchy British Newspaper Archive local newspaper digitisation of the immediate post-WW2 period.

<sup>162</sup> 'German POW Assaulted: London Man Heavily Fined, "I thought we were the Governors"', *Biggleswade Chronicle & Bedfordshire Gazette*, 17-10-1947, p. 10. See also 'Struck German POW: a miner was fined £3', *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 26-6-1947, p. 5. 'Assaulted POW: a limbless Crieff ex-soldier, stated to have a lasting hatred of all things German', *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 8-12-1947, p. 5.

German with her had to leave. She had replied that they would both leave. Rudolf then said 'I'm telling you, I felt very bad. I stood up, helped her with her coat [...].' This humiliating episode rankled. He had wanted to go back 'after the war' [sic], order everything they had and then say, 'Oh, I'm German. Sorry, I forgot I can't eat here,' and get up and walk out.<sup>163</sup>

Other sources related or implied similar passive responses to hostility.<sup>164</sup> A search of courts martial charge books produced only two instances of a charge of assault by a POW.<sup>165</sup> One person whose family had entertained about 200 POWs commented: 'The docility of the prisoners we met amazed me.'<sup>166</sup> POWs had learned soon after capture that survival depended on submissiveness. Punched to the ground by an American, Metelmann had self-protectively stifled his reflex reaction to fight back. In Belgian camps, merely leaving a tent overnight to relieve themselves could result in being shot, and former POWs recalled uneasy awareness that trigger-happy US soldiers were not required to account for their ammunition.<sup>167</sup>

Testimony of women sources for this study (as outlined in Chapter Four) suggests that, in situations where they suffered abuse from passers-by, their German boyfriends did not leap to their defence; it was, conversely, the women who felt protective, wishing to shield their more sensitive/vulnerable boyfriends. BW09's boyfriend was transferred to a camp where he was baited by local youths and became very unhappy.<sup>168</sup> The few former POW sources who mentioned abuse from members of the public downplayed the subject and appeared reluctant to discuss it. Werner K. portrayed it as trivial, coming from younger people. 'They might just call you names, something like that. Mostly youngsters, nothing serious.' Kurt E. recalled being jeered when driven around in open trucks, but regarded this as understandable and

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<sup>163</sup> Rudolf and Pat R., interview.

<sup>164</sup> Bülter, p. 121; Rudolf R; BW09.

<sup>165</sup> WO 84/81-84 (covering December 1946 to July 1947): WO 84/82, fol. 40, WO 84/84, fol. 269.

<sup>166</sup> Kelvin Osborne, cited in Sullivan, pp. 319-20.

<sup>167</sup> Metelmann, *Through*, pp. 188-89; Sullivan, p. 23.

<sup>168</sup> BW09, correspondence.

unimportant. 'So long as you were German, that's it, you were branded with the same stamp, weren't you?' Adding, 'You get this sort of thing, people get certain prejudices, for various reasons... rightly or wrongly,' he reverted to discussing positive social contacts.<sup>169</sup>

Roper suggests that, in the absence of their mothers, men show maternal 'care and forethought' to one another.<sup>170</sup> (A *Wehrmacht Kompanie Feldwebel* (Company Sergeant-Major) was customarily dubbed 'the company mother'.<sup>171</sup>) Inside POWs' camps and hostels, the all-male environment encouraged the adoption of skills at that period normally classed as 'women's work'. Kitchen work, traditionally regarded as low-status skivvying, was positively coveted (for the reasons given earlier in this chapter). In farm billets, as one man mentioned, housework – 'we had to put the house in order, clean, cook and wash' – formed a shared part of the daily routine, simple domesticity replicating missing home life. 'There was so much fun, you could tell that peace had come and now a new life could begin.'<sup>172</sup> Rudolf R. and two other POWs worked for a market gardener. They were accommodated in a former railway wagon, where Rudolf's non-conventional upbringing was reinforced: 'I done the cooking, the other two had to work.' He played the housewife role, normalising in adulthood his childhood situation of having been taught to cook by his single-parent mother. 'You grow up different [...] alone with your mother. She was not only my mother, we were friends.'<sup>173</sup>

Necessity and enterprise fostered otherwise traditional female pursuits. PW31 had been stripped of his underwear after capture. Transferred to a POW camp in a former Lancashire cotton mill, he scavenged the rubbish tip and managed, using the eyed key of a corned-beef tin

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<sup>169</sup> Kurt E., interview.

<sup>170</sup> Roper, 'Slipping', p. 68.

<sup>171</sup> 'Die Mutter der Kompanie', Sullivan, p. 268

<sup>172</sup> PW12, correspondence.

<sup>173</sup> Rudolf R., interview.

as a needle, to create a new set.<sup>174</sup> One group of POWs turned sheets into swimming trunks.

'We had long since learned how to sew and darn and also how to knit.'<sup>175</sup>

German POWs' unusual status also subverted their work roles in relation to women. Normally in subordinate, lesser paid roles in relation to male employees, most women the POWs encountered worked above them in the hierarchy, and earned more. This role reversal seems to have been accepted on both sides, whereas a 1970s case study of workplace dynamics where women were in positions of power found defensive anxiety among both sexes, with resistance to changing the conventional sex-role hierarchy. Manfred H. fell in love with a young woman literally working above him, while he laboured below: 'She was the only one who could drive a tractor [...]. She was on the tractor, we were on the ground, and we had to pick the potatoes which her tractor pulled out.'<sup>176</sup>

POWs' courting descriptions also demonstrated their lower status: 'and it was truly love at first sight – but she didn't take any notice of me [...] Only after months I was brave enough to ask her whether we could go to the pictures together or go for a walk.'<sup>177</sup> Two former POWs appeared to shy away from recalling their reduced circumstances when they met their future wives. Kurt E. recounted how he 'took her to cinemas', before acknowledging that his future wife, a bus conductress, actually bought the tickets. He recalled her giving him twenty Passing Cloud cigarettes when he was employed on roadworks, as she passed on her way to work.

When asked how they met, he replied 'She was a young lady, walking past. How does a fellow

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<sup>174</sup> PW31, interview notes.

<sup>175</sup> Egon Schormann, cited in Kochan, p 183. The therapy of practising traditionally female occupations is echoed in the current organization, 'Fine Cell Work', which describes itself as 'a social enterprise that trains prisoners in paid, skilled, creative needlework to foster hope, discipline and self-esteem,' 97 per cent of its stitchers being men. One claimed every inmate wanted 'to get involved in embroidery. You'd expect it to be the women, but in a man's prison when they see it being done... there's no stigma, no teasing.' Martin, cited in Julia Blackburn, *Threads: The Delicate Life of John Craske* (London: Cape, 2015), p. 223.

<sup>176</sup> Sharon S. Mayes, 'Women in Positions of Authority: A Case Study of Changing Sex Roles', *Signs*, 4, iii (Spring 1979), 556-68, (pp. 560-62, 566). Manfred H., interview.

<sup>177</sup> Eddie W., telephone interview notes.



make contact? I don't know now. You whistle, probably. And she looked round.' Laughing, he added 'Mind you if I whistled after her [giving me all these cigarettes], she'd crown me, wouldn't she?'<sup>178</sup> In one interview with a couple, the husband became tongue-tied concerning how they met. His wife explained, giggling, that she sometimes bought him a pint of beer when she saw a group of POWs hanging around outside the pub: 'They used to stand at the gate and... draw on their cigarettes, [giggles], stare through... Because they couldn't go in pubs...' At a later point, she suddenly interjected,

I know what started it [...] we met you, didn't we, outside the pictures, and I said to you why don't you come [...]? Yes, we paid so you could go to the pictures [...]. I felt sorry for you [...] I thought, oh, he does look – [laughs] – really that was what done it. Meeting that Saturday outside the pictures [...].<sup>179</sup>

POWs were well aware of their outsider status as the former enemy, belonging, as one put it, 'to a defeated, poor, occupied fatherland.'<sup>180</sup> A POW asked a young woman he walked out with 'Do you want to be seen with me?'<sup>181</sup> Sources for this study expressed admiration for the courage of British women in braving the contempt of others in their community.<sup>182</sup> PW06 wrote of his abiding great respect for 'the English women, who so self-confidently and naturally showed themselves in public with prisoners of war', whom he described as 'marked out as people outside society by the coloured patches' on their clothing.<sup>183</sup> (Not all POWs felt humble, or responsive to compassion. Some were cynically conscious of being objects of charity or pity: 'The English are kind to dogs and [...] cats and very kind to prisoners of war [...] another subspecies.'<sup>184</sup>)

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<sup>178</sup> Kurt E., interview.

<sup>179</sup> Kurt and Olive K., interview.

<sup>180</sup> PW09, correspondence.

<sup>181</sup> Engelbert S., cited in Sullivan, p. 334.

<sup>182</sup> Kurt E.; PW08.

<sup>183</sup> PW06.

<sup>184</sup> Former POW cited in Sullivan, p. 347.

The future of a relationship between a German POW and his British girlfriend could be jeopardized by the consequences if they were seen together. In the conventional working environment, following an ill-advised romance, the female employee would normally have been the one redeployed elsewhere.<sup>185</sup> Between a British woman and a German POW, it was the prisoner who risked sudden transfer.<sup>186</sup> This happened to several sources for this study, including Rudolf R., transferred not because his own relationship was discovered, but after a POW with whom he worked had been caught climbing out of a girlfriend's bedroom.<sup>187</sup> Other punishments included one month confined to camp, hard labour, and/or solitary confinement (the 'cooler'). One source described how, in order to meet his girlfriend, he would have 'crawled through a thick concrete wall', which he pointed out was unnecessary in a small camp with only a single strand of barbed wire fence. His covert escapades succeeded for a long time, until the night a policeman recognized him. He was transferred to another camp where he spent 28 days in solitary confinement, mowing grass during the day.<sup>188</sup>

Whereas in liberated Europe and occupied Germany, women fraternisers' heads were shaved, in the UK this punishment for fraternising was reserved for the German POWs.<sup>189</sup> PW16 recalled an occasion when, returning in the early hours, he found the hostel in uproar. His absence had been discovered; the involvement of a girl was strongly suspected. Ensuring it appeared that he didn't speak or understand English, he insisted he had simply gone for a walk

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<sup>185</sup> Jeff Hearn, 'Men's Sexuality at Work', in Metcalf and Humphries, pp. 110-28 (p. 115); also Robert E. Quinn, 'Coping with Cupid: The Formation, Impact, and Management of Romantic Relationships in Organizations', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 22, i (March 1977), 30-45, (pp. 43-46): 'Once superiors know about a romantic relationship... The female is twice as likely to be terminated as is the male... [who] is usually in a higher position [and...] less dispensable than the female [...] the female's superior is often the other participant in the relationship.'

<sup>186</sup> Wally Reuter described breaking out of camp every night (in April 1946) to relieve boredom, and meeting 'a nice English girl, whom I met frequently thereafter – always at night. When the German camp foreman heard of this I was transferred on.' Related in 'German PoW Pal who found me 50 years later', *WW2 People's War*, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/02/a8080102.shtml>, [accessed 8-2-2016].

<sup>187</sup> PW30, correspondence; PW01, correspondence; PW04, correspondence; Rudolf R., interview. Also Werner Vetter (Olive P., interview).

<sup>188</sup> PW30, correspondence.

<sup>189</sup> For example, Mae, p. 62.

to ease stomach ache. As nothing could be proved, he got 'seven days' arrest and a shorter haircut.<sup>190</sup> Head-shaving was mentioned by another POW, together with solitary confinement and extra fatigues: 'You stood there with your hair cut off and a piece of cloth and they laughed at you.'<sup>191</sup> This comment suggests it was an emasculating humiliation within the camp community.

Discovery of his association with a land girl who worked where he was billeted led to Fritz Zimmermann being returned to camp and given 28 days' detention. He had no choice but to passively accept his punishment. The injustice, however, angered his girlfriend, who travelled to the War Office, where she demanded and received an audience with 'someone high up'. Zimmermann added that the fraternisation ban was lifted the following day. 'Lilian always said this was due to her!' Lilian then proposed to him, and made the wedding arrangements.<sup>192</sup>

### **Accepting a modified sex role**

Some relationships were severed by increased distance, whereas others survived the obstacles of separation. One factor appeared significant in determining survival of the relationship: the extent to which the POW accepted his compromised status in a committed relationship, in terms of his male role. Several sources described being unable to propose marriage, not being in a position to support a wife and with such poor career prospects at that time. (Sylvia L.'s boyfriend had confessed 'I daren't ask you to marry me; you might laugh in my face.'<sup>193</sup>) In autumn 1947, shortly before repatriation, PW05 met a red-haired beauty. They fell in love "'at first sight'". She visited him twice at his parents' home in Germany. He was aware she would have married him, but marriage remained unthinkable, as he had no professional training,

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<sup>190</sup> PW16, correspondence.

<sup>191</sup> Manfred H., interview.

<sup>192</sup> Zimmermann, pp. 53-54.

<sup>193</sup> Sylvia L., interview.

having become a soldier straight from school.<sup>194</sup> PW03 related a similar story. Following his repatriation in 1948, he and his girlfriend continued corresponding by letter. Despite knowing she wanted to marry him and loving her very much, he dared not propose; he was only 23, and, crucially from his point of view, had no profession to enable him to support a family. He gave this as the only reason that, to his regret, they drifted apart.<sup>195</sup>

PW09 had fallen for the daughter of a widow who ran the farm where he worked; potentially he could have taken on a comfortable life. He described 'beautiful memories' of sitting in front of a log fire, eating cake and drinking sherry... but admitted not even kissing her, despite ample opportunities. He ascribed this reticence to his Prussian upbringing – 'loyalty, sense of duty, correctness', that he would have felt 'more than shabby to disappoint the trust of O.'s mother.' He explained that in England he was a nobody, with nothing, and, coming from an area from which the German population had been expelled, his future prospects were dim. It seemed morally wrong simply to capitalize on O.'s affection and her mother's goodwill, in order to 'lie in a made bed'. His repatriation date (April 1947) grew closer, but, not wanting to awaken hopes that might not be fulfilled, he did not speak his heart. He described arriving in Germany and instantly wishing he could return to England. His family, refugees living in a 16 square metre room, comprised his mother and two school-age sisters; his father and brother were still missing. His plan, either to bring O. to Germany or return to England after he had established a livelihood, never materialized.<sup>196</sup>

Eddie W. had also fallen in love, with a teacher. He managed to continue the relationship, despite having returned to Germany, with 'no profession, no job. I was still an apprentice.' His father was shocked when, at Easter 1949, he announced their plan to marry.<sup>197</sup> His fiancée relinquished a good career in England (where schoolteachers did not marry farm labourers) to

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<sup>194</sup> PW05, correspondence.

<sup>195</sup> PW03, correspondence.

<sup>196</sup> PW09, correspondence.

<sup>197</sup> Eddie W., telephone interview.

join him in Germany, and immediately found work teaching English. Other POWs, choosing to remain in the UK, accepted how this exaggerated the imbalance in their marital relationship. One had also fallen in love with a teacher; despite having no training himself, they stayed in the UK, where his wife became the main breadwinner.<sup>198</sup>

Despite his original dismay on arrival, Kurt E. stayed in the UK. 'Eventually we got married. I had to borrow a suit.... She dished out the money, I think about fifty bob for a ring, because I didn't have any money... And then I duly returned the suit again and that was it.' He was still living in camp, in a dormitory with separate cubicles, 'which meant that I had a room of my own, admitted it was only a single bed, but we managed [...]. The rules were that if you were married your wife shouldn't live with you, but [...] in fact, she lived partially there.' His wife rented lodgings, where they also stayed together, before he found farm work with a tied cottage, while she continued working fulltime.<sup>199</sup>

Reflecting on POWs' motives for marrying British women, Kurt E. endorsed Pastor Knodt's warnings about rushing into marriage through inability to sexually contain themselves. He suggested that older, sexually experienced women who had lost their male partners, through death or divorce, were

probably just as lonely as we were. Chaps like us [...] we had had no contact with the opposite sex [...] and it's very overriding very often [...] particularly with a chap... There was a shortage of choice, of females at that time and [...] young chaps about the age of twenty, or so, the natural need for a female was obviously much greater [...]. And [...] if you have the same needs on the other side, by virtue that you've lost a husband [...].<sup>200</sup>

Another source expressed the urgency of his motives more romantically:

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<sup>198</sup> BW14, interview.

<sup>199</sup> Kurt E., interview.

<sup>200</sup> Kurt E., interview.

Girls are like that. They look beautiful and they conquer you [...]. I would have stayed for E. You don't think about the future. It doesn't count. You are just there and in love and that is it. And all that matters.<sup>201</sup>

Kurt E. however also made the point that POWs married for pragmatic reasons, to avoid being sent back to Germany. He was not alone in believing that marriage to a British woman offered safety from repatriation, despite official advice to the contrary. In July 1947, the government permitted marriages between German POWs and British women under legislation which decreed that alien husbands of British women retained their own nationality, while their wives relinquished their British nationality. A statement in the Commons indicated that marriage to a British national did not confer special rights on German POWs.<sup>202</sup> However, this was subsequently modified to benefit those married to British women. And in practice, especially for POWs intent on avoiding returning to homes now in the Russian sector of Germany, marriage to a British woman offered a prisoner a foothold and material advantages, often in terms of a joint income, especially while prisoners were only permitted low-wage work on the land. Although such marriage did not offer a passport in the literal sense, it did create a cultural connection, some economic security and a material base in addition to an emotional rationale for remaining. This is discussed further in Chapter Seven.

## *Conclusion*

This chapter has discussed aspects of the sexual and emotional hunger of German POWs, including the question of sexual conquest and masculine identity. It has suggested that emotional distance from home encouraged some German POWs to embrace intimate

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<sup>201</sup> Manfred H., interview.

<sup>202</sup> 'No undertaking could be given that the husband would be allowed to remain in this country when he would in ordinary course be due for repatriation', Under Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr Oliver), Commons, 8-7-1947, *Hansard*, vol. 439, col. 2016.

emotional dyads with British women, in addition to (or rather than) simple sexual satisfaction. These relationships were coloured both by the POWs' peculiarly restricted position as men and the empowering opportunities this offered young women energised by freedoms developed during the war. German POWs' restricted situation subverted normal social sex-role relations, leading them to cede the traditional dominant male role to their girlfriends. It is suggested that POWs' emotional need contributed to their acceptance of the terms of these relationships, both with older and younger women. Teenage girls (with whom many German POWs actively engaged), may be seen as more impressionable and less challenging partners; but the POWs may equally be viewed as passive recipients of the attention of assertive, transgressive teenagers who sought them out.

In addition to unfulfilled sexual needs, German prisoners suffered regressive need for emotional succour, lacking comforting contact with home, other than through sparse postal communications. They faced continuing captivity accompanied by impotent awareness of the destruction of their homeland, confrontation with the crimes committed under National Socialism and Allied attempts at re-education. Their establishment of a secure adult identity was arguably severely challenged by the disintegration of the value systems they had been raised to uphold.

However, the limitations of POW life also granted freedom from the constraints of the traditional male breadwinner role, offering an important psychological space within which to adjust emotionally from military to civilian life. (This was not open to returning demobilized British servicemen. Culture-shocked and intimidated by the demands of civilian life and family relationships, British ex-servicemen could be prone, as mentioned in Chapter Two, to regress into attempting to replicate the security of institutionalized military life by seeking out group male company.)

Relationships with British women boosted their morale, but also underlined German POWs' lack of power and status in the male world. Reluctance to accept this gender-role imbalance and disempowerment contributed to some relationships foundering. Where the POW accepted a less dominant role, this compromise, and the restricted conditions under which they lived, encouraged a modified masculine identity, discussed further in Chapter Seven.



## Section C: Ex-Enemy Relationships in the Public Sphere

As Erikson put it: ‘Society can feel deeply and vengefully rejected by the individual who does not seem to care to be acceptable.’<sup>1</sup> This section examines official and public attitudes towards and influences upon relationships between German POWs and British women, including the role of the media in precipitating the decision to lift the marriage ban; and its aftermath and outcomes for ex-enemy cross-cultural couples within the wider community, both in Germany and the UK.

Chapter Six highlights public attitudes towards fraternisation and marriage to aliens. It follows the process of official acceptance of these intimate Anglo-German alliances, alongside two relevant concurrent narratives: ex-enemy marriage in Occupied Germany and the nationality status of British women who married aliens. Chapter Seven discusses cross-cultural implications for each party in resulting marriages, contrasting early experiences of POW brides with other, contemporaneous cross-cultural brides. This chapter also considers how POW marriages showed a tendency to subvert the postwar cross-cultural marital norm of wives assuming the migrant spouse role.

### Cross-cultural challenges

Chapter Seven references migration study concepts regarding the ‘acculturation’ process, whereby migrant individuals adapt to a foreign cultural context. The migrant spouses in these contentious alliances between ex-enemies faced acculturation challenges in their ‘host’ country. Acculturation outcomes depend on individual migrant strategies and attitudes, and

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<sup>1</sup> Erikson, *The Life*, p. 72.

the influence of the society to which they migrate. Migrants may successfully culturally adjust, by integrating or assimilating. They may otherwise react, or withdraw. Reaction may involve retaliation (for example, by affirming native national identity) and/or withdrawal, either by isolation from wider society, or the option of returning to their home culture.<sup>2</sup>

Among married contributors to this study: 35 couples remained in the UK; 14 couples moved to Germany (not always immediately), and one couple left Europe. Of those who moved to Germany, 3 marriages ended in separation or divorce and 3 were described as dysfunctional.<sup>3</sup> Of couples remaining in the UK, 5 had divorced. Although divorce for the migrant wife was possibly a lesser option, these statistics are not implied as significant other than in describing the sources upon which this discussion is based.

Section C thus proposes that postwar narratives relating to fraternisation and marriage to aliens illuminate contemporary sex discrimination, in this case confronted and combated by the women themselves. Discussing acculturation challenges of ex-enemy marriages, Chapter Seven suggests that former POWs' migrant status in the UK further encouraged a modified and, arguably, modernized masculine identity and marital role. Masculine identities in postwar Occupied Germany were also compromised, affecting such marriages somewhat differently.

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<sup>2</sup> For an overview of this subject and its conceptual framework, see John W. Berry, 'Acculturation and Adaptation in a New Society', *Special Issue: Migration and Health in the 1990s*, ed. by H. Siem and P. Bollini, Papers Presented at the Second International Conference on Migration and Health, Brussels, 29 June – 1 July 1992, *International Migration Quarterly Review*, 30, S i (1992), 69-85.

<sup>3</sup> One woman described having stayed because her child wanted to remain in Germany; another related the shock of discovery that simply discussing her marital problems with a third party would constitute grounds for divorce.

## Chapter 6: Intimate alliances in the public eye

### *Introduction*

This chapter outlines factors leading to lifting of the ban on sexual relations between British women and German POWs, examining postwar attitudes towards intimacy between British and foreign nationals, both Allied and ex-enemy. Relationships between British women and German prisoners of war are situated as one of three postwar narratives relating to marriage to aliens in the transitional war-to-peace era, highlighted by media discussion and parliamentary debate. Familial and social factors affecting such couples' decisions to marry are explored, together with public responses to the weddings.

### *A furore over 'fratting'*

The Emergency Powers (Defence) Act, passed in August 1939, empowered the government to issue emergency 'Defence Regulations' in relation to the civilian population. Regulation 18C, the Prisoners of War and Internees (Access and Communications) Order no. 1389 of 1940, forbade 'any act likely to prejudice the discipline of any prisoner of war or interned person', including communicating to prisoners or internees without lawful authority.<sup>1</sup> It emerged, however, once Italian POWs began working on the land, that any civilian who fraternised with a POW outside their camp or hostel was not contravening this order, which only referred to POWs' *place of detention*. POW camp commandants were therefore instructed to ensure that prisoners were aware of disciplinary rules forbidding them to communicate with civilians, especially 'women or girls', except for the execution of their work duties. It was emphasized

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 3.

that these orders should be 'clear and comprehensive [...] since [...] where a member of the other sex acquiesces to advances of a sexual nature by the prisoner of war, it is doubtful whether any chargeable offence exists unless it can be shown that the prisoner of war had also disobeyed orders.'<sup>2</sup>

Wartime rationalization for non-fraternisation was clear: sympathy for the enemy compromised national security, threatened personal safety and betrayed the common national cause. Those who ignored the war's demands for selfless unity were castigated, as Sonya Rose has demonstrated, as failed citizens, guilty of selfish pursuit of personal pleasure.<sup>3</sup> Official concern was expressed about the negative effect on morale of fighting troops of news of selfish acts of 'irresponsible' girls or 'undesirable' women. If such unpatriotic behaviour could not be stopped, it should be hushed up, by discouraging national newspapers from reporting it.<sup>4</sup>

Once German POWs began working on the land shortly before hostilities ended, the Home Office proposed public notices appealing to the public not to do anything to render a prisoner liable to punishment. Finally, in March 1946, a Home Office circular to this effect was issued to chief constables, emphasizing non-fraternisation with German POWs.<sup>5</sup>

### **Fraternalisation in Germany**

In Occupied Germany, moralistic cold-shouldering of the population, anticipated to last 'several years', crumbled a matter of weeks after the German surrender. Doubts about the policy had rapidly grown, with instances of servicemen breaking the non-fraternisation ruling

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<sup>2</sup> MAF 47/117 (Appendices A, B, & C).

<sup>3</sup> Rose, *Which People's*, pp. 71-73, 106.

<sup>4</sup> MAF 47/117.

<sup>5</sup> HO circular no 85/1946, issued 30 March 1946, HO 45/21875. See Appendix 4.

amid a starving population largely consisting of women, children and the elderly (able-bodied men, a possible threat to Occupation forces, were interned or sent to POW camps). In mid-July 1945, social interaction was permitted.<sup>6</sup> *The Times* had suggested lifting the ban would 'distress a large number of women at home' who would correctly assume that fraternisation meant associating with German girls; but acknowledged that the anti-fraternisation order would be modified, under 'biological pressure.'<sup>7</sup> Servicemen's sexual impulses would override boundaries between enemies, even those as odious as the Germans. By August 1945, evidence of romantic fraternisation in Germany rapidly became an internationally contested issue.<sup>8</sup> Sexual intimacy, welcomed by some as promoting peace, was otherwise condemned so soon after the war's sufferings, and denounced as unpatriotic betrayal.<sup>9</sup>

According to one British newspaper, 'FRATERNISATION' headed the list of subjects which angered its readers. British women were 'furious at seeing pictures of our men going around with German girls': "Why should we sit back while our men take Hun women around? The men make enough fuss when one of our women 'fraternises' with an Italian prisoner of war – are they any better?" One ATS reader condemned the "insult to British women, to the boys who have died fighting the German enemy".<sup>10</sup> This prompted a challenging response from 'some BLA chaps': "Is it because the Americans and Italians have become less available that the 'pioneers of fratting' have suddenly become interested in the ordinary British 'Tommy'?"<sup>11</sup>

The suggestion that 'fratting' with foreign Allies constituted as unpatriotic a betrayal as consorting with the enemy is underlined by reports from liberated countries, where women fraternising with Allied liberators suffered similar treatment to those who had fraternised with

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<sup>6</sup> 'Mixing with Germans', *The Times*, 16-7-1945, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> 'Fraternization in Germany', *The Times*, 9-7-1945, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> 'Fraternization Sentence,' *The Times*, 2-8-1945, p. 3; 'Officer Reprimanded', *Daily Mirror*, 2-8-1945, p. 1; Miss Elise H. Fermin, 'Fraternization', 'Points from Letters', *The Times*, 20-7-1945, p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> *Sunday Pictorial*, 27-1-1946, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> 'You're angry about...', *Daily Mirror*, 23-7-1945, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> 'Fratting', *Daily Mirror*, 30-7-1945, p. 6.

the enemy Occupiers. Dutch girls suspected of immorality with Canadian soldiers had their hair shorn. Ian Buruma cites (in English translation) a menacing song popular at the time, titled 'Girl, Watch out for Yourself': 'Many who hailed with the Huns/Have already paid the price/Girl, you betrayed the honour of your country/Just as much.../No Dutch boy will look at you again/Since you left him in the cold'. Puritanical attitudes were laced with jealous resentment of Allied troops who had arrived like invaders, requisitioning prime courting arenas and triggering resentment. In Utrecht, a group of young Dutchmen grabbed and tried to shave the heads of girls consorting with Canadian soldiers: 'The Canadians felt protective. Knives were pulled, stones were thrown, guns went off' and several people were wounded.<sup>12</sup>

From late 1944, official concern about impromptu, ill-advised marriages of British servicemen with women from liberated Allied countries extended to concern about and strategies to prevent similar marriages with German women. Legal opinion concluded that, although a serviceman could suffer the consequences of disobeying a military order, such a marriage, if contracted, would, inconveniently for the military authorities, remain legal.<sup>13</sup> In November 1945, a male Labour MP queried the ban 'that prohibits the British soldier from marrying whom he pleases, if his choice should fall upon a girl of German nationality.'<sup>14</sup> Disregarding concern about offending public sensibility, the question was framed as an argument for the personal liberty British servicemen had defended.

As anti-German feeling started to subside – Faulk described 'war psychosis' of total condemnation ebbing from early 1946<sup>15</sup> – a group of MPs (nearly all ex-servicemen themselves, and conscious the service vote had supported their recent election) challenged the ban's legality and rationale, championing 'fighting' soldiers' 'inalienable right' to marry

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Ian Buruma, *Year Zero: A History of 1945* (London: Atlantic Books, 2013), pp. 47-48.

<sup>13</sup> FO 1060/874.

<sup>14</sup> 'Germany (Marriage Ban), Commons, 5-11-1945, *Hansard*, vol. 415, col. 911.

<sup>15</sup> Faulk, p. 168.

whom they pleased, regardless of British women's 'bad luck... if this ban is lifted'.<sup>16</sup> This suggested entitlement of a soldier on active service to ignore any commitment to a patriotic marital choice as a good citizen. A *Daily Mirror* editorial disagreed, on procreative grounds, wanting 'no [bad] German blood in our future generation.'<sup>17</sup>

On 1 August 1946, the government announced relaxation of the ban on marriage to German and Austrian women.<sup>18</sup> (By May 1947, 3,633 BAOR servicemen had applied.<sup>19</sup>) The announcement coincided with a decision to end the sex discrimination inherent in existing legislation in respect of marriage to aliens. This narrative of British servicemen's struggle for entitlement to marry their ex-enemies overlapped with two similar gendered issues. One concerned British servicewomen marrying non-British subjects.

### **Marital nationality of British women**

The prospect of marriages between British servicemen and ex-enemy women appears to have forced the government finally to address inherent discrimination in prevailing legislation regarding marriage to aliens. As the law stood, ex-enemy women marrying British men acquired British nationality, whereas British women who married Allied servicemen (often encountered while abroad on war service) risked losing British nationality and the right to live in their own country. The government had accepted the principle of nationality equality in 1931, after a determined international feminist campaign. However, actual legislative reform

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<sup>16</sup> 'Germany (Marriage Ban)', British Army, Commons, 5-11-1945, *Hansard*, vol. 415, col. 911; 'Marriage Bar (German and Austrian Women)', Commons written answers, 12-2-1946, *Hansard*, vol. 419, col. 54W; 'Marriage Ban', British Army, Commons, 19-2-1946, *Hansard*, vol. 419, cols 946-47; 'Marriage (Aliens)', British Army, Commons, 9-7-1946, *Hansard*, vol. 425, cols 218-19; 'Cabinet discuss Ban on German wives for BAOR', *Daily Mirror*, 1-5-1946, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> 'The Reason Why', *Daily Mirror*, 6-5-1946, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> 'Services Personnel (Marriage Ban Removal)', Commons, 1-8-1946, *Hansard*, vol. 426, cols 225-27.

<sup>19</sup> 'Marriage (German women)', Commons written answers, 19-11-1946, *Hansard*, vol. 430, col. 79W; 'Marriage (German Women)', British Army, Commons written answers, 20-5-1947, *Hansard*, vol. 437, col. 229W.

was held up by the need for accord among British Commonwealth nations, all of which issued British passports to their citizens.<sup>20</sup> A campaign by the Nationality of Married Women Committee gathered momentum during WW2, in the light of 'the large number of marriages between British women and members of the Allied forces.'<sup>21</sup> Contrary to male MPs' early fears about women in Westminster, female MPs did not necessarily concern themselves with women's issues.<sup>22</sup> However, by the mid-point of the war, with conscription of women in place, some female MPs became more vociferous about women's rights, increasingly aware of a patriarchal atmosphere in Westminster of prejudice and discrimination.<sup>23</sup>

On 1 August, 1946 (preceding the announcement lifting the ban against British servicemen marrying German or Austrian women), it was announced that agreement had now been reached between the respective governments involved, regarding legislation governing the nationality of married women. A British woman who married a foreigner, whether or not she acquired her husband's nationality, would not lose British nationality unless she renounced it; a foreign woman on marriage to a British subject would not automatically acquire British nationality, but would have the right to apply for it. (This defused the contentious issue over ex-enemy wives of British servicemen immediately becoming British subjects.) Answering one objection, the Home Secretary affirmed 'the doctrine of the equality of the sexes' as now 'generally accepted.'<sup>24</sup>

The question of dilution of British identity through marriage to a foreigner became an issue of serious public debate towards the end of 1946, when rumours began circulating of Princess

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<sup>20</sup> 'House of Commons, Nationality of married women', *The Times*, 28-6-1933, p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> 'Nationality of Married Women', Letters to the Editor, *The Times*, 12-5-1944, p. 5; see also 'Nationality of Married Women', Letters to the Editor, *The Times*, 6-8-1946, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> Pamela Brookes, *Women at Westminster: An Account of Women in the British Parliament 1918-1966* (Plymouth: Clarke, Doble & Brendon, 1967), pp. 239-40.

<sup>23</sup> 'Woman-Power', Commons Orders of the Day, 5-3-1942, *Hansard*, vol. 378, cols 817-900 (col. 848).

<sup>24</sup> 'Married Women's Nationality (Empire Agreement)', Commons, 1-8-1946, *Hansard*, vol. 426, cols 208-12.



Elizabeth's impending engagement to Philip Mountbatten.<sup>25</sup> The *Sunday Pictorial* polled readers' attitudes towards the future Queen marrying 'a prince whose... origin will scarcely be disguised by formal British citizenship.' Initial results showed slightly more in favour of freedom to make her own choice. Those against expressed a xenophobic fatigue – 'let's have no more foreigners in England' – characteristic of the immediate postwar era. The final poll shifted in favour of the marriage if they were genuinely in love, although 32 per cent remained against.<sup>26</sup> Alongside belief in individual right to personal happiness, postwar antipathy towards 'foreign-ness' remained.<sup>27</sup>

### **Behaving improperly with enemy POWs**

During WW2, isolated cases of marriage between Italian POWs and British women established that, while a disciplinary offence for the prisoner, such a marriage remained legal. The government largely succeeded in hiding this inconvenient legal nicety from public knowledge. Conflict of interest between the Registrar General's department and the War Office regarding their differing responsibilities became resolved through an arrangement where Superintendent Registrars undertook to notify the Registrar General of applications for marriage licences where one party was an enemy POW and the Registrar General in turn apprised the War Office, which could then take steps to prevent the marriage taking place.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> 'Our London Correspondence: Elizabeth and Philip', *Manchester Guardian*, 2-1-1947.

<sup>26</sup> 'Should Our Future Queen Wed Philip?', *Sunday Pictorial*, 5-1-1947, p. 1; 'The Princess and the People', *Sunday Pictorial*, 12-1-1947, pp. 1; 4-5; 'Royal Poll Result', *Sunday Pictorial*, 19-1-1947, p. 1; '64% now say "YES"', p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> See Webster, *Mixing*, pp. 16, 18-19, 234, 239-40.

<sup>28</sup> RG 48/1663. The War Office had initially insisted that a POW must return to his country with the same status with which he had arrived. However, the Treasury Solicitor, referencing Sir Arnold Duncan McNair, *Legal Effects of War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1944 edn), p. 54, pointed out that an enemy POW had full civil capacity, including marrying or being prosecuted, and that a registrar would therefore be 'taking a considerable risk' in refusing a notice of marriage tendered by a woman because the man was a POW.

Aside from the Cann/Ganter marriage in January 1947, no marriage between a British woman and a German POW is known to have taken place until after 9 July 1947, when the ban on such marriages was lifted, nearly a year after the equivalent ban was lifted in Germany. Courts martial of German POWs for amorous fraternisation with British women increased in the months following relaxation in December 1946 of the ban on social contact and freedom given to POWs to walk outside their camps. These cases began to receive publicity in national as well as local newspapers. The reports, initially portraying women of dubious moral character and irresponsible teenage girls, demonstrated these women's defiant attitude and independent initiative.

Among petty thefts committed by German POWs (and British servicemen) over the course of 1946 and the first half of 1947, army courts martial charge books record prosecutions of German POWs for 'improperly consorting and associating' and having sexual intercourse with named women, including servicewomen, as well as 'indecent assault' of under-age teenagers.<sup>29</sup> Initially, (in line with government policy) very few such cases appear to have received national publicity.<sup>30</sup> Cases concerning intimacy between POWs and British women that did attract national media attention initially involved mature married women, who claimed motherly affection for the POWs with whom they had sexual relations. In contrast to those who had previously expressed shame and remorse, two women involved in these cases stood their ground. One dismissed 'a silly law, which will soon be stopped', unabashedly denigrating her own countrymen as 'under-nourished, undersized, under everything.' She

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<sup>29</sup> See WO 84/79-84, covering courts martial charges between August 1946 and mid-July 1947, relating to offences from early 1946 to mid-1947.

<sup>30</sup> For example, the report of a woman in Kent sentenced to nine months for encouraging an underage girl to have 'immoral relations' with a German POW appeared in the *Dover Express* (5-7-1946, p. 9), but was not found in a search of national newspapers.

claimed 'the only decent specimens' were the German POWs, and that hundreds of other people were doing the same thing; she had simply been unluckily found out.<sup>31</sup>

A subsequent court martial involving teenagers prompted headlines referring to 'giggling' and 'silly' girls.<sup>32</sup> The young women's ages ranged from seventeen to twenty-two. Having met when the Germans played in the orchestra at a local dance, they passed messages and went to the pictures, where the girls paid for the tickets. The eldest stood up for her friend: 'even if a German, he was a gentleman.' The youngest, Doris Juson, added, 'We knew English boys fratted with German girls so thought we could do the same.'<sup>33</sup> While two expressed remorse, the others insisted they had 'done nothing wrong, we have nothing to regret.'<sup>34</sup> This case demonstrated the independent spirit of certain young women, their economic independence and assumption of sexual equality.

In April 1947, a front page story concerned a sixteen-year-old 'sent to Coventry' by fellow workers. She had nevertheless defiantly become engaged, with parental approval, to a German prisoner. Significantly, the article ended: 'Application must be made to the Home Office for permission to marry a POW. There is no general permission.'<sup>35</sup> This statement appears to offer the first intimation of the official possibility of such a marriage. Recent reports that some German POWs would be offered an opportunity to stay in the UK as civilians must also have offered hope to young women courting German POWs.<sup>36</sup> Over the ensuing

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<sup>31</sup> 'Mrs Paris – She Still Prefers Germans', *Daily Mirror*, 26-2-1947, pp. 4-5; also 'Lonely Wife Hid 3 Germans: fined £60', *Daily Mail*, 24-2-1947, p. 3; *Daily Express*, 25-2-1947, p. 1; 'Woman enticed a POW to caravan, Court told', *Daily Mirror*, 12-2-1947, p. 8; 'Woman enticed POW to her caravan: defence plea', *News Chronicle*, 12-2-1947, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> 'Five 'Silly Girls' Meet 5 POWs', *Daily Express*, 12-3-1947; 'Five "silly" girls stand with faces to wall at PoW trial', *Daily Herald*, 12-3-1947, p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> 'Five giggling girls rebuked at the trial of their secret boyfriends', *Daily Mirror*, 12-3-1947, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup> 'Court told: These 5 Silly Girls encouraged 5 Germans', *Daily Mail*, 12-3-1947.

<sup>35</sup> 'Emily is Shunned', *Daily Mail*, 5-4-1947, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> 'Farm PoWs May Work on as Civilians: 130,000 get choice', *Daily Herald*, 20-3-1947, pp. 1 & 5.

weeks, courts martial of German POWs for consorting with British women increased, with a few cases receiving national publicity.

In mid-May, the *News Chronicle* referred to the 'ban on marriages between Britain and Germany', adding 'But love laughs [in the face of obstacles].'<sup>37</sup> The following day, the *Daily Herald* appeared to prove this point, carrying a front page story that a serving ATS sergeant had secretly married a German POW. Claiming that the military and civil authorities 'are trying to decide whether the marriage is legal', the newspaper posed several questions, including whether Sergeant Cann, now – under prevailing nationality laws – a German, could remain in the ATS?<sup>38</sup> Other national newspapers picked up the story. The *Manchester Guardian* cited Western Command that the couple, who had married five months previously at Wellington Register Office, were not under arrest, but the 'matter is being considered by a higher authority'.<sup>39</sup> Monica Ganter was ultimately fined £4 for two offences under the Perjury Act: unlawfully signing a false notice of marriage and causing a false statement to be inserted in the marriage register.<sup>40</sup> She had supplied his second name, Leo, and her home address as his. Her statement explained that she had paid all the expenses and borrowed a British uniform for him, adding that she 'married him because I love him' and did not regret it, knowing 'it would be hopeless to try to get married through the proper channels.'<sup>41</sup> Monica Ganter's actions inspired a nineteen-verse fantasized eulogy in a POW camp magazine.<sup>42</sup>

Courts martial sentences were normally decided after hearings, and received no publicity.

However, from late June 1947, army and RAF sentences were made public in open court after

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<sup>37</sup> 'He Remarried his German Bride', *News Chronicle*, 15-5-1947, p. 1; 'Romance that Softened the War Office', p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> 'ATS Weds German Prisoner', *Daily Herald*, 16-5-1947, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> 'ATS Sergeant and German Prisoner: marriage disclosed', *Manchester Guardian*, 17-5-1947, p. 5; 'POW Bridegroom moved by Army', *News Chronicle*, 17-5-1947, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> 'Fines for A.T.S. Sergeant who married P.O.W.', *The Times*, 5-6-1947, p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> 'German's ATS wife fined £4: false notice of marriage', *Manchester Guardian*, 5-6-1947, p. 8.

<sup>42</sup> 'A real-life love story', *Pflugchar*, POW Camp 250 magazine (Old Malton, Yorks), cited in Kochan, pp. 177-78.

they had been determined.<sup>43</sup> This increased public awareness of prison sentences (of up to two years) imposed on German POWs for consorting with British women.<sup>44</sup> The Vetter/Reynolds case (involving a POW given a year's imprisonment) raised questions in the House and attracted wide publicity, stimulating comment and debate. This case led to the ban on British women's amorous relations with the enemy being finally overturned, almost one year after the equivalent ban affecting British servicemen had been lifted in Germany.

### **A sex discrimination issue?**

Seventeen-year-old Doris Juson's comment – 'We knew English boys fratted with German girls, so thought we could do the same' – implied assumed equality with the opposite sex.<sup>45</sup> Young women's letters to newspapers reiterated this.<sup>46</sup> Parliamentary discussion of the issue of relationships of British women with German POWs suggested a similar assumption, although the words 'sex discrimination' appear only to have been used once, by MP Leah Manning, who (at the eleventh hour before the ban was lifted, in relation to the Vetter/Reynolds case in her constituency) asked the Minister for War 'why his Department exercises sex discrimination against English women wishing to marry German prisoners of war, when no such embargo is placed upon marriages between British serving men and German girls?'<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *News Chronicle*, 25-6-1947, p. 1.

<sup>44</sup> 'PoW "pursued" by Girl, is Gaoled', *Daily Mirror*, 4-7-1947, p. 3; 'Germany (Conditions)', Commons, 5-2-1947, *Hansard*, vol. 432, col. 1886, [accessed 27-3-2017].

<sup>45</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 12-3-1947, p. 4.

<sup>46</sup> For example, correspondence in the *Lancashire Evening Post*: 'Why aren't we girls allowed to fraternise as our soldiers are doing all over Germany?', *Two Disgusted Girls*, 12-8-1946, p.3; 'If our men are allowed to do all that, our girls should be allowed to go about openly with German prisoners of war,' *Another Disgusted Girl*, 23-9-1946, p. 4.

<sup>47</sup> 'British Women (Marriages)', Commons oral answers, 8-7-1947, *Hansard*, vol. 439, col. 2013. As the only woman MP to raise this issue, Manning (a staunch anti-Fascist) appears to have done so because it concerned the high-profile case of one of her constituents.

The issue had, however, not been taken up as a feminist cause. Unlike male ex-services MPs' attacks on the marriage ban in Germany and organized feminists' fight for equality of nationality rights, the few MPS who lobbied against the ban on marriages of British women with German POWs generally focused on unfair and inexpedient punishment of German POWs caught consorting with women, arguing that allowing social interaction with the opposite sex but prohibiting its inevitable consequences was 'against human nature'. This woollier version of the pro-personal liberty argument on behalf of British servicemen suggests reluctance to equate the rights of defeated German prisoners and British women involved with them with those of victorious British soldiers or patriotic British servicewomen.

Disparate policies in Germany and the UK regarding intimate relations with Germans were initially questioned in the Commons in March 1945.<sup>48</sup> The subject was raised again several times the following year to no avail, even after the marriage ban was lifted in Germany.<sup>49</sup> German women British servicemen in Germany were associating with were probably perceived as a lesser threat, since most had not, regardless of their political views, been directly involved in prosecuting the war. German POWs, on the other hand, although fewer in number, represented active agents of wartime suffering.

In October 1946, Tom Driberg tried more pointedly accentuating the anomaly between rights of British servicemen in Germany and British citizens in the UK, prefacing a question on marriage with ex-enemy POWs by asking how many British service personnel had married ex-enemies.<sup>50</sup> A radically different argument proposed tackling several postwar population

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<sup>48</sup> 'Prisoners of War (Fraternisation)', British Army, Commons written answers, *Hansard*, 22-3-1945, vol. 409, cols 1016-17W.

<sup>49</sup> 'Prisoners of War (Fraternisation)', Commons written answers, *Hansard*, 14-3-1946, vol. 420, col. 241W; 'Germany and Austria', Commons debate, *Hansard*, 29-7-1946, vol. 426, cols 526-640 (608); 'Fraternisation', Commons written answers, *Hansard*, 2-8-1946, vol. 426, cols 283-84W.

<sup>50</sup> 'Ex-Enemy Nationals (Fraternisation)', Commons written answers, 8-10-1946, *Hansard*, vol. 427, cols 2-3W. (The information supplied the following month, unsurprisingly, given the dearth of young men in Germany, did not appear to show any marriages of British servicewomen to enemy nationals.)

problems by encouraging selected, unmarried German POWs to settle in the UK, with the opportunity of becoming naturalised citizens. Martin Lindsay suggested this would resolve the labour shortage and provide husbands for 200,000 surplus single British women aged 20 to 40 (set to increase, given British servicemen's plans to emigrate or marry German women). By suggesting this would improve British bloodstock, as the US had gained from 'admixture of good, foreign blood', he endorsed the notion that not all Germans had 'bad blood'. The Home Secretary's response emphasized that, with war memories 'still fresh', this would invite 'very severe criticism and censure', but might be considered 'in two or three years' time.'<sup>51</sup>

In February 1947, Ralph Glyn (a WW1 veteran) raised the issue again, arguing that 'German prisoners' greater liberty now' naturally led to 'relations with English girls.' He dismissed 'Germans walking about our streets... without any possibility of a girl being able to marry a German if she wishes to do so?' as 'complete nonsense and utterly wrong', but stopped short of arguing for the rights of young British women as worthy citizens. Instead, he proposed the POWs be given 'authority' to marry 'our girls', instead of risking court martial and two years' imprisonment.<sup>52</sup> Glyn also suggested the expediency of demonstrating democratic ideals to future German citizens. Since in both countries it was the former combatant/serviceman who suffered the penalty, it was in many respects natural to focus on his rights. However, given that the publicized cases had featured rebellious teenagers or morally dubious married women, it seems likely that theirs was not seen as a strong case. Following Monica Ganter's marriage, however, the government were said to be considering 'this matter'.<sup>53</sup> But in early June, an exchange in the Commons involving several male Labour MPs continued to focus on unstoppable 'human nature', rather than any democratic right of British women to marry

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<sup>51</sup> 'German Prisoners of War', Commons, 17-10-1946, *Hansard*, vol. 427, cols 1110-14.

<sup>52</sup> 'Germany (Conditions)', Commons, 5-2-1947, *Hansard*, vol. 432, col. 1886.

<sup>53</sup> 'German Prisoners of War (Marriages)', National Finance, Commons written answers, 15-5-1947, *Hansard*, vol. 437, col. 180W.

whom they pleased.<sup>54</sup> The following month, the Secretary of State for War stated that fifty-four British women had written applying to marry German POWs and that no disciplinary action has been taken against POWs named in the letters.<sup>55</sup>

### *The role of the media*

Newspapers played an active role in the process which persuaded the government to relax the ban on intimacy between German POWs and British women. In early June 1947, a full-page *Daily Herald* article outlined the country's extent of dependence on the labour of the remaining 290,000 German prisoners. This work appeared to have repaired the former enemy's reputation: the newspaper suggested public support for the POWs becoming greater than for some remaining foreign Allied refugees, with sympathy for their plight in being separated from their families for up to seven years. One short paragraph within the article concerned the 'growing file of letters' at the War Office. It mentioned thirty registered applications 'from British girls asking permission to marry German prisoners', and an official estimate of 'several hundred' unregistered applications, where the prisoner's name had been withheld, for fear of his punishment.<sup>56</sup> (The figure the War Minister cited a week later clearly considerably underplayed numbers of young women taking the initiative in a situation where their boyfriends could not act.)

Late June 1947 saw widespread coverage of the court martial of Werner Vetter, a 22-year-old German POW, charged with 'improperly and amorously consorting' with a 21-year-old laundry worker, who had borne his child. Popular national newspapers publicized Vetter's court

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<sup>54</sup> 'German Prisoners of War (Marriages)', Commons oral answers, 3-6-1947, *Hansard*, vol. 438, cols 16-17.

<sup>55</sup> 'Marriages (British women)', Commons written answers, 10-6-1947, *Hansard*, vol. 438, col. 90W.

<sup>56</sup> 'What shall we do without POWs?', *Daily Herald*, 2-6-1947, p. 2.



martial.<sup>57</sup> This coverage differed significantly from earlier accounts in headlining the prisoner's view of his situation in his own words: 'MAN WITH NO RIGHT TO LOVE' (*Daily Herald*); 'POW Father Court-Martialed – AND THIS IS WHAT HE SAID IN MITIGATION' (*News Chronicle*); 'Her Lover is "Man without the right to Love"' (*Daily Mirror*); 'To a British courtmartial a young German makes this plea: "Why Bar a POW marrying an English girl? Thousands of your men wed German women."' (*Daily Express*).

Vetter's plea of mitigation, read out in court, presented a German POW as a human being, conscripted into a war machine and denied the right to personal happiness; having 'good' rather than 'bad' blood to offer; eager to fulfil his responsibilities as a father and preserve the sanctity of the family. He avoided presenting himself as an equal to British soldiers marrying German women, substituting instead the notion of 'a decent English girl' as an equal to her service compatriots in Germany. Since POWs were not permitted to write to newspapers, reproduction of Vetter's own statement gave German POWs a public voice for the first time.<sup>58</sup> A storm of protest gathered. On 2 July, the Married Women's Association (established in 1938 to promote equal rights for married women) expressed concern that young British women were being prevented from marrying German POWs, while the military authorities were arranging free air transport for German fiancées of British soldiers. The association urged the government to ensure British women received as sympathetic an understanding as British men marrying German women.<sup>59</sup>

The storm broke over Vetter's harsh sentence: one year's imprisonment. Thirteen serving Wrens protested to the *Daily Mirror*: 'We have worked side by side with the men who are now bringing German wives and children to this country, and we think it abominable that English

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<sup>57</sup> *News Chronicle*, 27-6-1947, p. 3; *Daily Mirror*, 27-6-1947, pp. 4 & 5; *Daily Express*, 27-6-1947; *Daily Herald*, 27-6-1947, p. 3.

<sup>58</sup> For Vetter's full statement, as it appeared in 'PoW's Love for Girl: Life meaningless before they met', *Droitwich Guardian*, 28-6-1947, p. 5, see Appendix 6.

<sup>59</sup> 'Women urge right to wed Germans', *Daily Mirror*, 3-7-1947, p. 5.

girls should not have the right to marry German prisoners.’ Many other letters condemned the ban as ‘no way to educate the Germans in the democratic way of life’; that young people had the right to love, which should not be ‘dragged through the dirt and called “improperly and amorously consorting”’; and that some Englishmen were more worthy of hate than Germans.<sup>60</sup>

In mid-June 1947, a newly released feature film titled ‘*Frieda*’ depicted the arrival in a British village of an RAF officer’s young German bride. The *Daily Mirror* review’s introductory sentence – ‘Should our boys and girls marry Germans?’ – anticipated the controversy the film would cause. Other reviews carried a similar emphasis.<sup>61</sup> The front page of the *Sunday Pictorial* edition reviewing *Frieda* headlined its main story in large, underlined, capitals: ‘4,000 BRITISH SOLDIERS WANT GERMAN BRIDES’. But the accompanying illustration featured a large photograph of Olive Reynolds and her baby daughter, with an inset caption headed in much smaller type: ‘And this British girl asks: WHY CAN’T I WED A GERMAN?’ The article presented an unassailable argument for abandoning the marriage ban: respectable young woman in love left as unmarried mother because the state prevented the father of her child honouring his family responsibilities by marrying her and giving their child a name. While Vetter presented as a loving and would-be responsible family man and provider, Reynolds emphasized the agency of the new postwar woman: proud of her bastard child and her German POW lover; unashamed of her unmarried status, and believing in sexual equality – that she too should have been punished, as equally responsible.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> ‘The Right to Love’, *Daily Mirror*, 2-7-1947, p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> “‘FRIEDA’ WILL START A FAMILY ROW’, The Bright Lights by Dick Richards, *Sunday Pictorial*, 6-7-1947, p. 11; ‘New films in London’, *Manchester Guardian*, 5-7-1947, p. 5; ‘World in Shadow’, *Observer*, 6-7-1947, p. 2; also widely reviewed in local newspapers, including *Dover Express*, 18-7-1947, p. 7; *Chichester Observer*, 5-7-1947, p. 2; *Harrogate Herald*, 23-7-1947, p. 5; *Thanet Advertiser*, 1-8-1947, pp. 3, 6.

<sup>62</sup> ‘The Girl who loves a German prisoner says – why can’t I wed the father of my child?’, *Sunday Pictorial*, 6-7-1947, p. 6.

Other women began to speak out. A clerk in Dorset announced a 'League of Frustrated Fiancées' and a petition. Edna Diment's two sisters were engaged to German POWs but 'breaking their hearts because they cannot see any future to their romance.' She knew nearly twenty others, including two who were 'mothers of young children through "underground courtships" with prisoners, yet dare not reveal who the fathers are.' Boldly championing unmarried mothers, Diment reiterated the argument of it being 'against all the laws of nature' to bar British women from loving German prisoners.<sup>63</sup> The following day another case received national publicity. A serving WAAF had arranged to marry a POW with her parents' consent, having been informed the Registrar General's office had no objection. At the last moment, her leave was cancelled and she was sent to a distant posting. In this instance, the War Office and Registrar General's mutually agreed strategy backfired badly, in terms of public relations, with the *Daily Mirror* offering enlightening legal advice: 'If a clergyman or registrar is willing to perform the ceremony, marriage between a PoW and an English girl is valid, even though the prisoner commits a Service offence by wedding her.'<sup>64</sup>

Over a period of a year after British servicemen were allowed to marry German women, a small number of male MPs had harried the Home Secretary and the Minister for War to permit POW marriages, to little effect. Female MPs appear to have ignored or shied away from the issue, perhaps for its unpatriotic and immoral taint, until Leah Manning's last-minute involvement, on behalf of her constituent, Olive Reynolds. By this time, the predicament of a man 'without the right to love' sent to prison for twelve months, and the mother of his illegitimate child, unashamed to admit she had given him 'everything', had already provided a persuasive barometer of public opinion.

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<sup>63</sup> 'League of Frustrated Fiancées,' *Aberdeen Journal*, 7-7-1947, p. 1; 'She is planning a "League of Frustrated Fiancées"', *Daily Mirror*, 7-7-1947, p. 1.

<sup>64</sup> 'Waaf Tried to Wed – Sent 100 Miles Away', *Daily Mirror*, 8-7-1947, p. 4.

On 8 July 1947, the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department announced important implications concerning 'marriage between German POWs and women in this country':

As the law stands, the woman, if British, would lose her nationality on marriage to a German. No provision could be made for her to live with her husband who, as a prisoner of war, would have to remain in a camp or hostel under military control. There could be no relaxation in his favour of restrictions applicable to other prisoners of war. No undertaking could be given that the husband would be allowed to remain in this country when he would in ordinary course be due for repatriation.

He added that 'steps will be taken to see that the [mentioned] considerations... are understood by both parties, and if, nevertheless, they determine to marry, no obstacles will be placed in their way.'<sup>65</sup> It had earlier been announced that the War Office would not take disciplinary action against POWs whose girlfriends wrote applying to marry them. On 10 July, an urgent War Office memorandum to all Home Commands advised that 'regulations forbidding German prisoners of war to establish relations of an amorous or sexual nature with members of the public have become anomalous and are cancelled.'<sup>66</sup>

Women had shown determination and initiative, pursuing relationships with German prisoners, publicly defending them and appealing for permission to marry them. Public reaction to resulting publicity demonstrated growing acceptance of German POWs. These forces combined appear to have been more effective than parliamentary pressure in ending government procrastination over granting British women in the UK similar rights regarding marriage to Germans as British servicemen in Germany.

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<sup>65</sup> *Hansard*, 8-7-1947, vol. 439, cols 2015-16 [accessed 27-3-2017].

<sup>66</sup> 'Marriage of German Prisoners of War to British Women', copy of War Office Urgent Memorandum dated 10 July 1947, RG 48/2009.

## *Patriotic pressures*

Following lifting of the marriage ban, Manfred Knodt's article appeared in a POW camp magazine, exhorting fellow prisoners to do the patriotic thing: resist their sex drive leading them into an unwise and probably doomed marriage with a foreigner of dubious merits (having lowered herself to consort with an enemy POW), when this would deprive a fellow countrywoman of her life's desire for a husband and family.<sup>67</sup>

Did German prisoners who married British women experience an uncomfortable sense of betrayal? 'Sight of the stricken homeland' re-awakened resentment towards the holding power among more than a few repatriated POWs.<sup>68</sup> Pat Wendorf's novel portrays her husband having neglected to tell his surviving family in the Russian sector of his marriage in England. He is repatriated to relatives living as refugees in desperate conditions in the British sector. Keeping the hand bearing 'the mark of his betrayal' in his pocket, he slips the wedding ring into his tobacco tin, where it rattles reproachfully. His cousin, when finally told, sees the irony – "So they took you prisoner so some English girl could nail you...?" – and ultimate proof of Kurt's, and by implication his country's, downfall: not a victory over the victors by claiming one of their women, but the victors' final victory.<sup>69</sup> Theo Dengel was screamed at as "a traitor", after admitting he had married an English girl.<sup>70</sup> Peter Roth felt no guilt. Returning to Germany in 1949, after marrying his English sweetheart, he was accosted by an old school friend, who said she would "never forgive" him, adding "You should have married one of the

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<sup>67</sup> Knodt. See ch. 5 and Appendix 7.

<sup>68</sup> Sullivan, p. 366.

<sup>69</sup> Wendorf, pp. 38-42.

<sup>70</sup> Cited in Quinn, *Hitler's*, p. 206.

German women now left on the shelf.” I simply replied: “Go back to 1939 – if I’d asked you to marry me you would have turned up your nose, so what has changed?”<sup>71</sup>

The change concerned the ratio of women to men in Germany in the aftermath of WW2. With millions of men dead or still held in captivity, the *Frauenüberschuss* (single women surplus, an estimated two million adult women), with ten men for every sixteen women in the 20-40 age group, was considered a serious social problem.<sup>72</sup> Pat Wendorf portrays her sense of guilt, after joining her husband in Germany, for having stolen the only remaining man in the Baumann family; she notices, fearfully, the German girls looking at him ‘with covetous eyes’.<sup>73</sup> Her concerns were probably justified. Starvation had forced German women into prostitution, or relationships with members of the occupying forces. Many German men remained in Soviet captivity; those released initially were the sick and maimed. By contrast, POWs returned from British and American captivity in good health. It seems hardly surprising if single German women coveted these able-bodied repatriated young men.

Muriel Webster’s prospective mother-in-law had (unsuccessfully) appealed for the British Queen’s intervention, to prevent her son marrying an Englishwoman. Certain German women appear to have taken matters more effectively into their own hands. Lorna H.’s repatriated fiancé was living as a refugee, in lodgings, trying to establish himself so Lorna could join him. They regularly exchanged letters, but one day Lorna received a letter in strange handwriting. Taking it to her German teacher to translate, she was embarrassed to discover it was from her fiancé’s landlady’s daughter, asking her to release him from his promise to her. She

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<sup>71</sup> Peter Roth, quoted in Helen Weathers, ‘Sleeping With the Enemy: The British women Who Fell for German Prisoners of War,’ *MailOnline*, 17-8-2007, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-476097/Sleeping-enemy-The-British-women-fell-German-PoWs.html> [accessed 26-7-2016].

<sup>72</sup> Elizabeth Heineman, ‘The Hour of the Woman’, *American Historical Review*, 101, ii, (1996) 354-95 (p. 374); Elizabeth D. Heineman, *What Difference Does a Husband Make? Women and Marital Status in Nazi and Postwar Germany* (London: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 8, 10, 11, 210; Patricia Meehan, *A Strange Enemy People: Germans under the British 1945-50* (London: Peter Owen, 2001), p. 261; FO 1040/1868, referenced by Meehan, p. 114.

<sup>73</sup> Wendorf, pp. 75, 108.

immediately wrote to H., demanding to know what this meant, but his next letters oddly did not mention the subject, until one final communication, saying it seemed this was the end. She subsequently discovered he had married his landlady's daughter and concluded her final letters had probably been intercepted without reaching him, that their separation had been stage-managed by his landlady's daughter. The actions of another POW's family after his repatriation also ensured the end of his relationship. He wrote many letters to his English girlfriend, without receiving any reply. Two years later, following his wedding to a fellow German, his sister confessed their parents had destroyed his English girlfriend's letters.<sup>74</sup>

British women were also castigated as disloyal. One woman shrugged off such criticism, saying she married a man, not a country. June Fellbrich recalled a woman at her wedding yelling 'Aren't our boys good enough for you?' Others remembered milder comments from friends or relatives: 'I had the odd person who said it was a pity I could not find a nice English boy, but I never worried about what people said.' Olive K.'s father warned "'You find yourself an Englishman.'" <sup>75</sup> Some British families attempted to persuade German POWs' fiancées where their patriotic duty should lie. Where Phyllis H.'s family tried unsuccessfully to push her together with a friend's brother who had returned from a POW camp, Sylvia L.'s family succeeded: 'I was called selfish, so you think: am I?' <sup>76</sup> Separated from the man she loved, worn down by criticism, she allowed herself to be propelled into a more patriotic relationship, with a traumatized British ex-POW.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Mae, p. 191; Lorna H., correspondence and interview; PW01, correspondence.

<sup>75</sup> Joan Z., correspondence; June Fellbrich, cited in Helen Weathers, 'Sleeping with the Enemy', *MailOnline*, 17-8-2007 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-476097/Sleeping-enemy-The-British-women-fell-German-PoWs.html> [accessed 23-7-2017]; Margaret S., correspondence; Olive K., interview.

<sup>76</sup> Selfishness was deemed 'antithetical to the spirit of the People's War': Rose, *Which People's*, p. 106.

<sup>77</sup> Sylvia L., interview.

Other cultural influences appear to have acted more subtly: separation and return home to desperate conditions in Germany strengthened family loyalties and loosened amorous ties. One POW had fallen deeply in love shortly before repatriation. His English girlfriend visited him two years running. In retrospect, he presented lack of professional training and prospects as a reason for not proposing marriage; but also admitted the pull of family responsibilities, and reluctance to return to England, since his brother had died in Russia and his mother totally depended on him. Another former POW's family expressed no objection to his plan to bring over the English girl he had fallen for, once he had established himself. But in 1948, now a store branch manager, he met his future German wife.<sup>78</sup>

Grace Palin's memoir describes her reluctance after the war to 'settle down to eternal domesticity.' She takes pity on a lonely German POW, becomes romantically involved and unofficially engaged. Following his repatriation, however, cultural loyalties on each side ultimately prevail. He urges her to apply for documentation to join him in Germany; she prevaricates, unable to envisage living there. He feels unable to abandon his parents to return to England. She reasons: 'if he really wanted me he would come over here to live, and if I really wanted him, I would cheerfully live over there.'<sup>79</sup>

Manfred Knodt's warning of the dangers of lust leading fellow POWs into doomed and unpatriotic marriages held some justification. When asked what attracted him to his future wife, Rudolf R. admitted that, 'to say the truth the attraction was not only [she's] goodlooking, but the attraction was – she is a girl... I had six years in the war, three behind barbed wire.'<sup>80</sup> However, Pastor Knodt appeared to overlook other forces pushing German POWs into unpatriotic marriages with their ex-enemies. Kurt E. believed many POWs contracted marriages of convenience, to avoid repatriation to East Germany. One contributor to this

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<sup>78</sup> PW05, correspondence; PW09, correspondence.

<sup>79</sup> Palin, *Granny's Diaries*, pp. 60, 145-47.

<sup>80</sup> Rudolf R., interview.



study described such a marriage (which ended in divorce). She frequently witnessed her POW husband crying for his ex-wife in East Germany.<sup>81</sup>

Another contributor concluded that loneliness drove some POWs to marry 'unsuitable women' (too old, too young, single mothers, disreputable and even prostitutes), which gave German prisoners a bad name, and reflected badly on herself.<sup>82</sup> Emotional need, as suggested in Chapter Five, clearly figured as a significant factor for some POWs, who, like Phyllis H.'s husband, appreciated their girlfriends' homes and the surrogate mothering they received there. The motives of one ex-POW contributor who, after hearing that his mother had died, married a woman twice his own age, may be guessed as at least in part a search to replace her.<sup>83</sup>

Questions of status and suitability of German POWs' British wives are clearly delicate; cross-cultural attraction, especially given a language barrier, may mask social or educational disparity. On meeting his boorish father-in-law, one ex-POW realized he had married beneath his own social class.<sup>84</sup> Several women contributors to this study were in their mid-teens when they met their future husbands.<sup>85</sup> (Mid-twentieth-century young women expected to become engaged in their late teens, and married by their early twenties.<sup>86</sup> Jephcott's study of 1940s teenage behaviour found girls of sixteen 'seriously courting' boyfriends they had met aged fifteen.<sup>87</sup>) The somewhat questionable age disparity between some POWs and their much

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<sup>81</sup> BW27, correspondence. Her husband's marital status in respect of his German ex-wife is unclear.

<sup>82</sup> BW16, interview. A friend warned Thea Burghart she would be classed among "the rubbish some of them have married", if she married a German POW: Burghart, p. 228. Also BW33, telephone interview notes, re 'the type of girls' some POWs had married.

<sup>83</sup> PW14, interview notes.

<sup>84</sup> PW16, correspondence.

<sup>85</sup> Nora R.; Kathleen W.; BW25; Joan Z.

<sup>86</sup> Michael Anderson, 'The Emergence of the Modern Life Cycle in Britain', paper given as the Alderman Sidney Smith Lecture in Social History in the University of Hull, May 1984, reproduced in *Social History*, 10, i (1985), 69-87 (p. 69).

<sup>87</sup> Jephcott, *Rising*, pp. 75-76.

younger teenage girlfriends may reflect the age group POWs were more likely to encounter, while barred from entering pubs or dancehalls. A statistical study of twentieth-century UK marital age differences noted considerable diversity with little evidence of influence of 'strong social norms', and concluded that age differences most significantly reflected 'age distributions of people available for marriage.'<sup>88</sup>

Mutually identified 'outsider' status may have accounted for POWs' attraction to 'disreputable' women, who exercised greater freedom of movement than more respectable young women and had less to lose by further transgressive behaviour. Community condemnation doubtless unfairly branded some women, as Sylvia L. discovered from the names shouted at them when she and her friend were seen leaving a POW camp. Sonya Rose has shown how irresponsible young women displaying "libidinal femininity" were perceived within their communities as a 'danger to the virtuous nation'.<sup>89</sup> Any young woman who associated with a German POW risked acquiring a bad reputation; it seems probable that women who married German POWs risked being viewed as disreputable.

### *Transgressive weddings*

Following official lifting of the ban on marriages between British servicemen and German nationals in August 1946, the military authorities discouraged such marriages through obstructive red tape, including a six-month wait and medical and good character certificates for prospective wives.<sup>90</sup> In Britain, although attempts were made to dissuade British women from marriage with German POWs, there was no formal means of hindering such a marriage.

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<sup>88</sup> Maire Ni Bhrolchain, 'The Age Difference at Marriage in England and Wales: A Century of Patterns and Trends', *Population Trends*, 120 (Summer 2005), 7-14, (p.13) <https://eprints.soton.ac.uk/34801> [accessed 17-5-2017].

<sup>89</sup> Rose, *Which People's*, pp. 92, 106.

<sup>90</sup> FO 1030/174.

However, Muriel Webster and her fiancé received the impression that after separate interviews with the POW camp commandant, he would decide whether to give permission for the marriage. Camp commandants had no such authority.

The War Office memorandum sent to Home Commands in the wake of lifting of the marriage ban had instructed that camp commandants should personally interview any POW intending to marry a woman resident in the UK. They should also ascertain details of the intended bride and if possible her parents, and preferably interview them, stressing that that this was not to create 'unnecessary obstacles', but to fully inform both parties 'of the possible implications of the marriage before the ceremony takes place.' Since commandants could not order civilians to appear for interview, the War Office had unsuccessfully attempted to oblige registrars to acquaint the prospective bride with the implications.<sup>91</sup>

Muriel's account describes a formal interview, in which the camp commandant commented on her character, asked whether she was pregnant, warned her they wouldn't be able to live together or get any allowances if they married; that in Germany they wouldn't survive the anti-British feeling, or the food shortages which drove young women to prostitution. The commandant warned her fiancé not to take her to Germany.<sup>92</sup> Olive Reynolds' MP Leah Manning, having spoken out against the sexual discrimination of not permitting her marriage to Werner Vetter, privately counselled Olive against marrying him.<sup>93</sup> Edna S., who married in September 1947, recalled 'the authorities painted our prospects as black as possible.'<sup>94</sup> But as Joyce W. pointed out: being in love, such warnings had no effect.

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<sup>91</sup> RG 48/2009.

<sup>92</sup> Mae, pp. 136-38.

<sup>93</sup> Olive P., interview.

<sup>94</sup> Edna S., interview.

Delays only seemed to be experienced when wives or fiancées applied for the necessary documents to travel to Germany.<sup>95</sup> Otherwise official obstruction was only mentioned in relation to marrying in church. Non-conformist churches had led the way in overtures of peace, acceptance and friendship towards German prisoners. After reiterating all the camp commandant's warnings, the RC priest agreed to marry Muriel Webster and her fiancé in September 1947. Joyce S.'s RC priest obtained permission from the bishop for their marriage. The Anglican Church, however, took a more conservative stance. Anglican bishops advised against such marriages, and occasionally withheld consent.<sup>96</sup> Kathleen G. married a few weeks after Muriel Webster. The Anglican minister she had known since childhood was 'very nice and friendly', but adamant that marrying a German POW in church 'was not the right thing to do.' Annoyed, she 'went straight to the registrar's!' Other women contributors recalled disappointed hopes of a white church wedding; of having had to settle for 'a quiet register office ceremony,' when marrying without parental blessing, or to avoid causing their parents embarrassment.<sup>97</sup>

Those who married were making, however lowkey the ceremony, a public statement of their intimate connection. POWs had become more visible, with freedom to enter shops, cinemas and travel on buses. Public attitudes had softened, but resentment and hostility remained among some sections of the populace and in certain areas. Wedding rituals between former enemies – in a society recovering from a long, costly and brutal war – presented provocative public theatre. Several sources described the streets being lined with onlookers and the church packed.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Wendorf, p. 43.

<sup>96</sup> Weber-Newth and Steinert, p. 53.

<sup>97</sup> Kathleen G., telephone interview, correspondence; Fay S., Edna S.

<sup>98</sup> Joyce S.; Muriel Palmer; June F.; June K.; Peter R.

Early POW weddings, especially of those whose relationships had been the subject of courts martial, were characterized by widespread media interest and public curiosity, parental lack of enthusiasm and familial and social lack of support, although little overt hostility. Muriel Palmer's account, however, describes 'ogling and abuse' after news of her impending wedding leaked out, the contents of a chamber pot emptied over her on the day of the ceremony and crowds of onlookers along the route to the church, who 'spat and hurled verbal abuse... the church was also packed out. I knew they had come to see Werner's "horns" and me "the trollop".'<sup>99</sup> These details may have been exaggerated for dramatic effect; for most women, adverse reactions arrived afterwards, in the form of (usually anonymous) condemnatory letters, described as having come from those who had 'lost someone' in the war. At least one woman's parents appear to have attempted to preserve their respectability and reinforce their standing in the community, despite their future son-in-law's dubious credentials, by pouring their resources into an ostentatious white wedding.<sup>100</sup> Other weddings were modest and attention-avoiding. Jillian R. recalled the first few weddings as 'a national sensation, but then it all calmed down... We had a very quiet wedding at the Registry office [with...] close members of the family to a reception at home.' However, a 'surprising' number of people saw the small local newspaper announcement they then placed.<sup>101</sup>

Culturally, the public ritual of the wedding ceremony symbolizes a couple's spiritual and physical union in the sight of their community.<sup>102</sup> The modern Anglican marriage service articulates the community's role to 'uphold and honour' marriage. The minister enjoins the congregation, as 'friends and family' of the couple to be married, 'to support and uphold them

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<sup>99</sup> Mae, pp. 143-45.

<sup>100</sup> June K., interview.

<sup>101</sup> Jillian R., correspondence.

<sup>102</sup> Michael Argyle, *The Psychology of Interpersonal Behaviour* (London: Penguin Books, 1994), pp. 147, 149.

in their marriage and in the years to come.<sup>103</sup> The 1940s wording may have differed slightly, but still acknowledged the significance of familial and social support.<sup>104</sup>

### **Family and community attitudes**

Not all POW couples were able to count on such support. Several women described the non-attendance, dismay or disapproval of family members, including relatives who never spoke to them again, one father crying during the ceremony and another looking as if he was at a funeral. One woman described her wedding as a 'miserable' register office ceremony with two strangers as witnesses, their only celebration dancing to her gramophone, alone in the cold farm cottage. Margaret and Paul S. chose for their wedding day the fifth anniversary of the ending of hostilities in Europe; Margaret returned to work to find a swastika scratched on her chair.<sup>105</sup>

Several women perceived themselves in retrospect as proud trailblazers, claiming to be the first to marry a German POW.<sup>106</sup> June Fellbrich married on 14 August 1947 at Southampton Civic Centre. She described feeling like a film star when national and local newspaper reporters and photographers turned up, telling her she was making history as the first British woman to marry a German POW.<sup>107</sup> However, she experienced 'quite a bit of hustle as well', being heckled, kicked, spat at and punched. Following the nationwide publicity, she received

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<sup>103</sup> <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/worship/texts/pastoral/marriage/marriage.aspx> [accessed 23-5-2016].

<sup>104</sup> <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/worship/book-of-common-prayer/the-form-of-solemnization-of-matrimony.aspx> ; <http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1928/Marriage.htm> [accessed 24-5-2016].

<sup>105</sup> BW19; BW25; June K.; also PW15, whose father-in-law wanted the marriage stopped; BW27, correspondence; Margaret S., correspondence.

<sup>106</sup> June F., Joyce S., BW26.

<sup>107</sup> Shukert and Scibetta, p. 144, found many German GI brides claiming to have been 'first' to marry after the ban was lifted. Of officially approved German POW weddings, that of Melora Locock and Heinz Ebert (having met on Guernsey) at Cheltenham Register office, on 10th July, 1947, predates the Fellbrich wedding: 'Prisoner's Patch', *Gloucestershire Echo*, p. 3.

‘two sackfuls of horrible letters from people who had lost relatives in the war.’ Monica Ganter also received many such letters; Rosemary Vinall’s hate letters included one from Australia, suggesting she should be thrown in a bed of nettles; Olive Reynolds, however, only recalled receiving letters of support.<sup>108</sup>

Olive Reynolds’ wedding to Werner Vetter appears to have been stage-managed by a newspaper. Rosemary Vinall’s wedding was filmed for *Pathe News*.<sup>109</sup> Her memory was that the press paid for the newlyweds to travel to London for an evening at the cinema and a night at a hotel, but the train was late, so they missed the cinema. Another family member, however, recalled it differently – that they had been tipped off that a spotlight would pick them out sitting in the audience, and deliberately did not go. It seems likely *Pathe news* organized this outing, intending to turn the spotlight on them after showing the newsreel of their wedding.<sup>110</sup>

June Fellbrich’s account isn’t entirely clear that the ‘hustle’ she described actually took place on her wedding day. Most condemnatory reactions appear to have been private and anonymous. Joyce S. (who believed her wedding in Luton on 23 August 1947 was the first church ceremony) had bought a special licence to avoid the news getting about, ‘but somehow all was found out.’ The church was crowded. Joyce’s father worried they might ‘get stones or insults thrown at us, but [...] people wished us well, shook our hands, and some of the relatives did come too.’ While some women avoided publicity, others appeared to court it, making a defiant public statement. BW34 wanted everyone to know, and paid the local newspaper to print the picture.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> June F., correspondence; BW17, interview; Rosemary P., interview; Olive P., interview.

<sup>109</sup> <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/church-wedding/query/POW+wedding> [accessed 23-5-2016].

<sup>110</sup> Olive P., interview; Rosemary P., interview, correspondence.

<sup>111</sup> Joyce S., correspondence; Jillian R., interview; BW34, interview notes.

June K.'s parents determined to keep up appearances by putting on a good show. Her sister brought the wedding gown and bridesmaids' dresses from Canada, which 'in those austerity days caused a sensation [....]. The streets were crowded [...], the wedding was so unusual.' But parental support ended there. Having forecast she would have a baby a year with 'this rapacious German', the intention seems to have been to undermine the durability of the marriage by reinforcing the reality of the bridegroom's limited prospects.<sup>112</sup> Jillian R.'s friends and family later confessed they had not expected the marriage to last: 'they gave us a year'.<sup>113</sup> This suggests a modern attitude to marriage as a less than lifelong commitment – possibly reflecting the frequent phenomenon of 'service divorces' at that time.<sup>114</sup> Some couples did enjoy family support, living after marriage with the bride's parents, or in one case, with her grandfather.<sup>115</sup> (At a time of severe housing shortage in the UK, when families were squatting in army camps, living with parents after marriage was not unusual. POWs billeted in tied farm cottages without plumbing or electricity were in some respects very fortunate.)

POW brides described emotional desire eclipsing all thoughts of how they would manage in the future. Some marriages were precipitated by pregnancy to create a respectable family unit. At least two POWs, for whom the status of breadwinner even on a meagre agricultural labourer's wage appeared of paramount importance, insisted on waiting until they were free men and earning a proper wage before marriage, even though in one case this rendered the bride visibly in the mid-term of pregnancy.<sup>116</sup> Any POW marrying while still a prisoner of war (and not billeted out on a farm), was obliged to remain living in camp after marriage and not

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<sup>112</sup> June K., correspondence, interview transcript and telephone interview notes.

<sup>113</sup> Jillian R., correspondence.

<sup>114</sup> All three armed services had set up their own legal aid schemes in response to servicemen's marital difficulties; England and Wales divorce petitions granted rose from 25,711 in 1945 to 43,163 in 1946. A submission to the Morton Commission in the early 1950s noted a 'more tolerant public attitude to divorce'. See O. R. McGregor, *Divorce in England: a Centenary Study* (London: Heinemann, 1957), pp. 37, 185.

<sup>115</sup> Roslyn D.; Joyce S.; Kathleen W.; June F.; BW20; Fay S.

<sup>116</sup> BW15; BW20.



officially permitted to claim conjugal rights by spending his wedding night with his bride.<sup>117</sup>

Several POW brides recalled having to bid goodnight to their new husbands, who returned to camp.<sup>118</sup> This was demonstrated in press photographs of June and Heinz Fellbrich, posed kissing across the wire.<sup>119</sup>

Parental concerns, aside from prospective sons-in-law's lack of prospects, focused on fear of daughters being taken to Germany. One woman who recalled her father 'crying as if he was in pain', believed this was because he envisaged her husband 'taking me to the "dreaded" Germany, and never seeing me again.' Another contributor's parents 'were worried we would leave them and return to Germany.' Such fears showed concern for children's welfare but also, on another level, for their own – the daughter's expected role being that of caring for elderly parents. Fay S. moved to Germany in 1950. In 1951, after news of her mother's death, she returned to the UK. 'My father wanted me to have a divorce and look after [him] but I wouldn't give Manfred up, so after six weeks I went back to Saarland.'<sup>120</sup>

## *Conclusion*

Allied to the public debate over relationships between German POWs and British women were two issues within the wider context of fraternisation in the immediate postwar period. These concerned marriages between British servicemen and German women, and the nationality of British women marrying non-British subjects. Public controversy over fraternising with aliens

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<sup>117</sup> PW14 (interview notes) claimed he absented himself from camp for a week after his own wedding in 1948; his was an officers' camp, and camp regulations generally were probably more relaxed by that date.

<sup>118</sup> Joyce S.; June F.; Olive P.

<sup>119</sup> Reproduced in 'Sleeping with the Enemy', *Full House*, 41, 11-10-2007, p.50; and Weathers, 'Sleeping' *MailOnline*.

<sup>120</sup> BW25, correspondence; Roslyn D., interview; Fay S., correspondence. (Parents of GI brides entertained similar fears, expressed by asking daughters 'what was wrong with British boys.' Gardiner, p. 140.)

(whether Allied or ex-enemy) revealed a conflict between perceived patriotic duty and right to pursue personal happiness. Transgressive intimacy with German nationals brought into relief the difficult postwar relations between former enemy populations; it also exposed a contested area between personal liberty to pursue private desires, societal nationalistic expectations in the aftermath of war, and what the state saw as the public good.

Pressure from MPs representing British servicemen wishing to marry German women, and on behalf of conscripted British servicewomen marrying Allied aliens met while serving abroad, contributed to steps being taken finally to amend discriminatory British nationality legislation relating to marriage with aliens, a feminist cause long accepted as unfairly penalising British-born women. The plight of British women and German POWs wishing to marry was, however, generally only taken up in Parliament from the prisoners' point of view. Among British women intimately involved with German prisoners, some claimed sexual equality and risked public condemnation in their pursuit of personal desires, while others submitted to pressure to conform. Following an outcry over one high-profile case, such marriages became permissible. Parties contemplating marriage faced familial and social pressure to comply with patriotic expectations and marry among their own kind. Early weddings between British women and German POWs attracted much public attention, some of which remained hostile, despite lessening public anti-German feeling. Emotional desire led some British women into marriages with German POWs which, aside from alienating relatives and friends, transgressed accepted norms of husbands as providers.

## Chapter 7: Ex-enemy marital alliances

### *Introduction*

Chapter Seven considers the challenges of postwar Anglo-German ex-enemy marital alliances in respect of cultural conditions and individual attitudes favouring or compromising adjustment. It also explores implications of chosen country of residence, affecting conventional gender roles.

From autumn 1946, when German POWs began to be released in groups (usually based on length of captivity), they were repatriated to the location they had given as their home. Some fiancées visited Western zone returnees and married in Germany.<sup>1</sup> Other returnees, after the ban was lifted, married before repatriation; their wives later travelled to join them.

Many POWs from homes in the Russian sector felt ambivalent about or actively dreaded repatriation. Allowing selected released German POWs to remain and work in the UK as civilians had been 'under consideration' since early 1947.<sup>2</sup> The Ministry of Agriculture remained reliant on POW labour on the land, in the face of increasingly rapid repatriation rates to meet international agreement on the release of all POWs by 31 December 1948. A scheme was devised for selected released German POWs to remain as alien civilian farm workers, on the same terms as, but without detriment to British agricultural employees.<sup>3</sup> Werner K.

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret S., Maude P., Joyce W.

<sup>2</sup> 'Selected German Prisoners', Commons, 20-2-1947, *Hansard*, vol. 433, col. 213W; 'Distribution of Man-Power', *The Times*, 20-3-1947, p. 4; 'Maintaining Farm Manpower: Effects of National Service', *The Times*, 7-4-1947, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> 'Germans as Civilian Farm Workers', News in Brief, *The Times*, 12-5-1947, p. 8.

recalled how, in 1947, 'Several of us had to go to agricultural college', where an 'immigration officer' told him he was 'officially demobbed.'<sup>4</sup>

Permission to remain in the UK restricted ex-POWs to low-paid agricultural employment, although sometimes this included accommodation and other benefits from appreciative farmers. One woman's future husband, whose family were refugees from East Germany scattered in West Germany, was offered farm work with live-in accommodation and opted to stay.<sup>5</sup> In early 1948, knowing his brother had died in Russia and his parents had fled their farm as expellees to East Germany, Margaret J.'s fiancé was allotted for a trial six-month period to a farmer who had applied for a POW, and received permission to stay.<sup>6</sup>

When marriages of German POWs to British women were initially permitted, the government had stressed that such prisoners would receive no preferential release date or permit to stay following release. However, in March 1948 it became clear that some POWs married to British women would be permitted freedom to choose their occupation.<sup>7</sup> This policy decision gave more prisoners who would otherwise have been repatriated the opportunity to stay.<sup>8</sup>

Mounting tensions between the Western Allied countries and the Soviet Union manifested in policies directly affecting German POWs. It was announced in September 1948 that German ex-POWs could remain after the end of 1948 if their employers offered them continued employment in agriculture. At the end of 1948, those without promise of work would be

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<sup>4</sup> Werner K., interview.

<sup>5</sup> BW20, interview.

<sup>6</sup> Margaret J., correspondence.

<sup>7</sup> 'Prisoners of War: Civilian Workers', Commons, 25-3-1948, *Hansard*, vol. 448, cols 3315-16. One beneficiary of this policy appears to have been PW14, an ex-officer who married in 1948, and worked in a bookshop from the start. One IWM interviewee recalled the edict being announced on his birthday (April 1948), prompting his marriage: Klaus Steffen, reel 3. Kathleen W.'s marriage in 1951 allowed her husband to move to better-paid factory work: Kathleen W., interview.

<sup>8</sup> LAB 8/107, referenced in Weber-Newth and Steinert, p. 62, n. 70.

repatriated. However, Germans 'married to women of British stock before August 31' might apply to the Home Office for permission to stay.<sup>9</sup> (The phrase 'of British stock' presumably related to the fact that British women married to German POWs were, until the 1948 Nationality Act came into force in January 1949, no longer British citizens.) One woman and her POW fiancé had planned to marry in 1949, but brought the date forward to 28 August 1948, after hearing about this.<sup>10</sup> Her father only agreed to the marriage providing she could retain British citizenship, which she recalled coming into force two weeks before they married.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to fifty former POWs staying to work for individual local farmers, a Lancashire newspaper reported 'the rush' of implied POW marriages of convenience as 'particularly noticeable recently... two young Germans have just avoided the repatriation they did not want by marrying local girls in Kendal this afternoon.' A camp official had explained efforts to find farm contracts for "those Germans who otherwise would have to go to an unpopular zone and who did not wish to do so."<sup>12</sup>

Although he met his future wife in 1947, Kurt K. did not rush to marry. In May 1948, with his repatriation impending, a farmer invited him to stay and work for him. Kurt described himself as 'drifting along with the tide.' Definitely against going back to the East, had he had relatives in West Germany he 'would most probably have gone back there.' With 'nothing to spoil', he stayed on. Werner K. faced a similar predicament. Had his home been in West Germany, he would have gone back. But as repatriation for his 'group 12' approached, having no idea what

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<sup>9</sup> 'Employment of German Ex-Prisoners', *The Times*, 15-9-1948, p. 3

<sup>10</sup> This suggests advance awareness of the announcement.

<sup>11</sup> BW23, correspondence. She seems to have been referring to the fact that the British Nationality Act 1948 received Royal Assent on 30 July of that year; it did not in fact come into force until January 1949. Part II, Section 14 stated that 'A woman who, having before the commencement of this Act married any person, ceased on that marriage or during the continuance thereof to be a British subject shall be deemed for the purposes of this Act to have been a British subject immediately before the commencement of this Act.'

[http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1948/56%20/pdfs/ukpga\\_19480056\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1948/56%20/pdfs/ukpga_19480056_en.pdf) [accessed 6-10-2016].

<sup>12</sup> 'The Bridegrooms Stay Here', *Lancashire Daily Post*, 4-12-1948, p. 1.

would happen in Germany, he became 'a little bit apprehensive.' Hearing he would be allowed to stay if his employer wanted him, he immediately applied, with no idea how long he might stay. 'I didn't marry my wife until some four years later, it wasn't that.'<sup>13</sup>

Fear of returning to the Russian zone of Germany had been felt even in the early stages of captivity. In a Belgian transit camp in 1945, another prisoner persuaded Kurt E. there would be no chance of release if he was sent home to the Russian sector, so he gave an address in the French sector. The others from Kurt's unit were sent home, while Kurt was shipped to Britain. 'My mother wasn't best pleased.'<sup>14</sup> Once contact with families was re-established, however, POWs began hearing stories of Russian brutality; some relatives warned them not to return. British newspapers contained reports of young, able-bodied Germans sent to work in uranium mines.<sup>15</sup> Pat Wendorf's novelisation of her marriage depicts her husband being warned, during his repatriation process in February 1948, that return to the Russian zone risked 'a cattle truck bound for Siberia' and they would never grant an entry visa to his British wife; better to be repatriated to relatives in the British sector.<sup>16</sup>

In October 1948, the case of one POW who returned to the Soviet zone with his British wife received considerable publicity. They had been arrested for speaking English and accused of being British spies. After Joyce Kliesch, the British wife, was re-arrested and beaten, she and her husband fled on foot and by train to Berlin.<sup>17</sup> In May 1948, Nora R.'s fiancé was repatriated to the Russian zone, having failed to remain in the UK. After a fruitless year investigating a way for him to return, Nora received alarming news from his sister. Felix had been sent to the uranium mine; having escaped in transit, he was trying to reach West

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<sup>13</sup> Kurt K., interview; Werner K., interview.

<sup>14</sup> Kurt E., interview.

<sup>15</sup> 'Uranium Mines: Soviet Direction of German Labour', *The Times*, 2-8-1947, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Wendorf, pp. 31-32.

<sup>17</sup> 'Escape from the Soviet Zone: English girl's account', *Manchester Guardian*, 10-10-1948, p. 8; *Daily Mirror*, 7-10-1948, p. 4.

Germany. Nora recalled being 'out of my mind with worry.' She 'cried so many tears' that her parents 'realized how much I loved him.' Eventually after many weeks he reached West Germany, but with no papers 'had to beg for food'. Since all the displaced persons camps were full, he crossed back into East Germany and finally reached friends in West Berlin. 'From there he wrote to say he was safe – oh happy day!' Nora sent him the money to travel to England, where he arrived in September 1949 and was allowed to stay.<sup>18</sup>

By late 1948, it had become clear that Russia was not honouring the Moscow agreement to repatriate all German POWs by the end of the year. In turn, Moscow accused the British of detaining the prisoners who had been allowed to stay on as civilians. The British government then offered released and ex-POWs who had opted to stay and work in the UK the opportunity of a holiday in the British zone of Germany, with the option of returning at the end of a month to the UK if they so wished, all travel expenses paid, which more than 8,000 accepted.<sup>19</sup> This holiday appears at least in part a rebuttal to the Russian accusations. Kurt K. described being told at the end of 1948 that the British government owed him 'a journey to Germany' which he could take if he wished and either stay or come back after a month. Kurt stayed with a friend in West Germany, then returned and continued working on the farm. 'That was February '49 and I stayed ever since.'<sup>20</sup>

Certain women's friends or family suggested that the moment their boyfriends/husbands set foot back in their homeland, they would never see them again. BW20, already married with a small child, knew that for her husband, returning to Germany meant confronting what he had lost. Before leaving, he had started crying, realizing 'his mother wouldn't be there. [...] He said, "the farm's not there"... it won't be like going to my home.'" On returning, he said he had more friends in England, because most of those at home in Germany had been killed. Another

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<sup>18</sup> Nora R., correspondence.

<sup>19</sup> 'Repatriation of Germans', *The Times*, 17-3-1949, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Kurt K., interview.

POW returned to the UK for similar reasons: his home had been destroyed, his mother had died, his father remarried.<sup>21</sup>

Those who went were warned not to cross into East Germany to visit relatives but some inevitably did surreptitiously cross the border, including June K.'s husband and Joan Z.'s boyfriend, whose mother 'advised him to stay in England'. After staying with an aunt near Hamburg, he returned, and their courtship continued.<sup>22</sup> An estimated 15,000 German ex-POWs chose to stay on as civilians in the UK.<sup>23</sup> The vast majority, however, including a number who had married British women, returned to their home country, eager to re-join their families, and/or to further their career prospects.

### *Cross-Cultural Challenges*

#### **Postwar migrant bride comparisons**

British wives of POW returnees to Germany conformed to contemporary cross-cultural marital mores, whereby the bride displaced to her husband's country. POW brides who travelled to Germany faced many of the challenges of mid-twentieth-century cross-cultural marriage, like GI brides before them: a long journey to a strange land with unfamiliar customs, far from family, friends and lifelong support systems; fantasies of joyful arrival and future life often fractured by harsh reality.

Relocation to ex-enemy territory increased the degree of challenge faced by POW brides. The 'acculturation' process, whereby individuals adapt to a different cultural context, is seen as a dynamic interaction between the migrant individual and their adopted 'host' community, with

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<sup>21</sup> BW20, interview; BW32, telephone interview.

<sup>22</sup> June K., interview; Joan Z., correspondence.

<sup>23</sup> Julius Isaac, *British Post-War Migration*, National Institute of Economic and Social Research Occasional Papers XVII (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), pp. 191, 183-84, offers this as a 'broad' figure. Of 24,000 who volunteered to remain until December 1948, by December 1949 civilian status had been given to 15,700 former German POWs. (Of Willi Gerlach's group of about 25 repatriated to the British zone, 12 took up the option to return to England. Fleming, pp. 44-45.)



pre-departure counselling and training advocated for prospective migrants.<sup>24</sup> While British GI brides, via support clubs, had such opportunities before emigrating, advice to POW brides consisted only of negative warnings, although a few sources for this study initiated their own pre-departure education by visiting their fiancés beforehand.<sup>25</sup>

Many GI brides received government-sponsored, conducted group transport to join their husbands; POW brides were obliged to apply for the necessary documents, fund their own journey, and travel alone. Prior to January 1949, when the 1948 British Nationality Act came into force, POW wives were not entitled to a British passport; they had to obtain 'a Home Office certificate of identity of the type provided for aliens'.<sup>26</sup> In addition, application had to be made, via the Foreign Office, to the Control Commission for an entry permit to the British zone. This permit was officially only issued after it had been established that the husband's circumstances were such that he was able to provide reasonable living accommodation for his wife. (In practice, this stipulation does not appear to have been rigidly enforced.<sup>27</sup>)

Application to travel to the other Allied Occupation areas had to be made separately to the American or French military permit office, or the Soviet Consulate General. (Rather than apply in this way, Margaret S. arranged to travel to the British zone, where her husband would meet her and take her, unofficially, to the zone where he was living.<sup>28</sup>)

GI brides crossing the Atlantic in groups formed on-board friendships which offered follow-up support, although for some the re-encounter with demobilized husbands and/or the reality of future living conditions presented a shock.<sup>29</sup> POW wives understood that conditions in their

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<sup>24</sup> John W. Berry, 'Lead Article: Immigration, Acculturation and Adaptation', *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 46, i (1997), 5-68 (p. 28).

<sup>25</sup> Shukert and Scibetta, pp. 33-34; Margaret S.; Joyce W.

<sup>26</sup> Shukert and Scibetta, pp. 46-48; RG 48/2010. (Presumably British GI brides, who mostly travelled 1946-1947, also did so without British passports, and remained stateless before 1949, or until they had satisfied the two-year residency requirement before applying for US citizenship.)

<sup>27</sup> Patricia Wendorf; Joyce S.

<sup>28</sup> Margaret S., correspondence.

<sup>29</sup> See for example Mathilde M. Morris, *Dreams and Nightmares of a German War Bride* (Colorado: Cambridge Writers Press, 1998), p. 59.

adopted country would be difficult, but mostly failed to comprehend the reality: 'My mother had no idea what I was going to, and neither had I.'<sup>30</sup> POWs themselves, prior to repatriation, had failed to appreciate the vast devastation and desperate poverty of living conditions in Germany.<sup>31</sup> (As British Army wives had found, arriving in 1946: 'no prior warning could have prepared them for the unimaginable reality.'<sup>32</sup>) Having skipped through her husband's handwriting in German to read the romantic bits, Pat Wendorf failed to bring the urgent necessities he had requested in his letters.<sup>33</sup>

Whereas GI Brides reached their new homes across America in the care of train conductors, German POW wives and fiancées negotiated solo journeys across Europe, changing trains and crossing borders, usually with very little command of German. Muriel Palmer's travel documents arrived before her husband's; very reluctantly, she made the journey to Germany alone. She had been learning German and had a few French and Dutch phrases. Her journey proved frighteningly difficult: questioned for not having a visa to travel through Holland; fearful to fall asleep or lose hold of her trunk; ragged children begging at the train window for food at every stop in Germany. The long delays meant her father-in-law was no longer waiting to meet her on arrival in Frankfurt; she had to find a taxi.<sup>34</sup>

Margaret S.'s friends thought her 'quite mad' in 1949 to be visiting Germany; that she might never be seen again. Totally trusting her fiancé, she obtained a permit to travel to the British zone, where he arranged to meet her off the train at 2am at Cologne, then take her to the French zone, where he was living. Not realizing the time-zone difference, she went to powder her nose and missed the stop, having to alight instead at Düsseldorf. Barely able to communicate or understand German, she entrusted herself to railway staff, who put her on another train, from which the guard led her to a car and a polite young man, who shook her

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<sup>30</sup> Maude P., correspondence.

<sup>31</sup> Manfred H., interview.

<sup>32</sup> Meehan, p. 135.

<sup>33</sup> Wendorf, pp. 54, 63.

<sup>34</sup> Shukert & Scibetta, pp. 80-81; Mae, pp. 167-72.

hand, picked up her suitcase and opened the car door for her. Being driven down country lanes, unruffled but thinking 'If my mother could see me now', she was deposited at the home of her fiancé's uncle, whose British-zone address was on her luggage. They had no idea who she was. She kept repeating her fiancé's name, which, owing to her pronunciation, was not initially understood.<sup>35</sup>

When, in August 1948, the registrar concluded Fay S.'s wedding ceremony by warning that he didn't know if their marriage would be valid in Germany, she was stunned.<sup>36</sup> In 1950, they moved to the French zone, travelling separately. As a 'railway woman', Fay had no problem with the 36-hour journey via Newhaven and Dieppe, crossing Paris, then changing trains twice before arriving in Dillingen. Speaking no German, she too found herself accepting the kindness of a stranger, who 'looked at the address on my case and just said "*Komme.*"' At her mother-in-law's gate, he 'smiled, dropped my case down and just disappeared.' Fay was also fortunate in being warmly received by her in-laws. 'After being on show for a few days I felt better – Yes, I was Manfred's wife from England!'<sup>37</sup>

## **Adaptation**

Contributors to this study who migrated to Germany as POW brides found themselves living with their new in-laws – in Joyce S. and her husband's case, sharing his parents' bed.<sup>38</sup>

Postwar housing shortages in the UK and USA meant many newlyweds also initially lived with parents-in-law. For migrant wives, the first few months could be traumatic, with cultural,

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<sup>35</sup> Margaret S., correspondence.

<sup>36</sup> A British NCO, who married a German in 1946, recalled that Germany was still using Third Reich civil legislation, under which marriage with a foreign national was not permitted. He managed to find a district legal office where he was able to establish, with German civil service lawyers, a means of marrying. He believed this formed the precedent on which 3,000 other couples were able to marry in Germany. IWM Interview with Jan M. G. Thexton, 7 November 2007 <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80030337> [accessed 23-5-2016].

<sup>37</sup> Fay S., correspondence

<sup>38</sup> Joyce W., Joyce S., Fay S.

language and relationship difficulties. As GI brides discovered, a good rapport with one's mother-in-law proved crucial.<sup>39</sup>

Joyce W. believed her fiancé's father being half-Jewish significantly contributed to her in-laws' acceptance and support. They had prayed for more bombs.<sup>40</sup> But Muriel Palmer discovered her mother-in-law's objections to a British daughter-in-law had extended to writing to ask the British Queen [George VI's consort] to intervene and prevent the marriage.<sup>41</sup> Maude P. felt welcomed by her in-laws – 'as far as my total lack of German allowed me to guess.' However, conflict soon arose about her bridal wear. Discovering Maude planned a grey-and-white dress and hat, her mother-in-law refused to go to the wedding. Ultimately, her dressmaker 'persuaded her that my dress was suitable, but [...] I had to go to the church in a horrid little veil.'<sup>42</sup>

Another migrant wife, an agnostic, felt stifled by the values and constraints in her husband's insular, deeply religious rural *Heimat* near Karlsruhe. Here, women weren't permitted to smoke, wear slacks or enter inns without a male relative. They wore their hair in plaits or buns and eschewed all cosmetics. She felt undressed without powder and lipstick, but wearing makeup encouraged raised eyebrows among the local males. The general disapprobation included her tight-lipped mother-in-law.<sup>43</sup> Another wife described a similar experience, on her first trip to Westphalia. Girls crowded round, staring, when she opened her powder compact. She didn't dare produce her lipstick, and learned afterwards that a wife using cosmetics was regarded as tantamount to her husband allowing her to be a prostitute.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> According to a 1947 government enquiry, almost one-tenth of British households were organized in this way, Allport, p. 75; Shukert and Scibetta, pp. 77, 87-88.

<sup>40</sup> Eddie W., telephone interview. (A bomb had actually saved his father from a Gestapo summons in 1944.)

<sup>41</sup> Mae, pp. 171, 190, 191.

<sup>42</sup> Maude P., correspondence.

<sup>43</sup> BW17, correspondence.

<sup>44</sup> BW16, interview.

The response of Joyce S.'s parents-in-law to news that their son was marrying an English girl had been brief and to the point: "Good luck, hope it works out. Send a food parcel and clothes, we are starving."<sup>45</sup> Despite cultural friction, or disapproving in-laws, most POW brides arrived in Germany bearing gifts, precious supplies of food and other goods that could be bartered or consumed to stave off hunger. One woman's parents had strongly disapproved of her marriage, but sent her the permitted monthly parcel, containing soap, tea, coffee biscuits and sugar, bolstering her acceptance, despite being by her own admission a useless housewife.<sup>46</sup>

Muriel Palmer's heavy trunk contained margarine and tinned food. Official instructions for her journey itemised foodstuffs and other items permitted those intending permanent residence in Germany. Currencies were also restricted, including no more than 10 Marks.<sup>47</sup> Moving in 1949 to Frankfurt, Joyce S. recalled permission for 26lbs of foodstuffs, which she brought in 'coffee beans, and of course this wasn't allowed.' Armed with the customs instruction which did not specify what kind of foodstuff, Joyce took on the airport customs official, but, as an ex-POW and a Frankfurter, he was only swayed when Joyce's husband intervened. After selling the first pound for 16 Marks, they took a streetcar to her parents-in-law's bombed-out flat, where the coffee 'caused a sensation.' As their only means of buying food until they found work, Joyce realized she had to find a place to hide it.<sup>48</sup>

Even those whose husbands had found good employment suffered physical hardship in Germany, from poor, cramped accommodation and food shortage. Muriel Palmer's husband had a good teaching job, but her constant hunger pangs in 1948 were exacerbated by finding the staple food, rye bread, unappetising and indigestible. She helped her mother-in-law buy food on the black market, and joined in a 'hamstering' expedition, foraging in the countryside.

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<sup>45</sup> Joyce S., correspondence.

<sup>46</sup> BW17, correspondence.

<sup>47</sup> RG 48/2010.

<sup>48</sup> Joyce S., correspondence.

This seemed to her a pointless exercise, the tiny potatoes gleaned not worth the effort expended digging for them.<sup>49</sup>

In Frankfurt, Joyce S. also began to understand hunger, playing “‘Battleships and Cruisers” to while away the time’ when not out in winter weather ‘begging for work. My husband got a few Marks from the unemployment office, but nothing for me, of course.’ Joyce shed ‘a few tears on the quiet thinking of my home, parents, and the good job I’d given up.’ But her husband was very supportive and her feelings for him very strong. Their hopes were pinned on the future. In January 1950, food rationing ended in Germany. ‘However, most people couldn’t afford the food in the shops. We mostly lived on lentil soup, bean soup, rice *Brei* and sour black bread.’ By February 1950, they ‘had nothing left. My fur coat (bought from my army gratuity) was pawned.’ Her husband found work paying 2 or 3 Marks a day carrying coal sacks up to fifth-floor apartments, being given ‘a cigarette or a piece of bread or a small coin if they had one.’ Joyce ‘walked miles asking in broken German for work.’<sup>50</sup>

### **Acculturative stresses in occupied territory**

GI brides were encouraged to drop their accents and assimilate.<sup>51</sup> For most POW brides in Germany, on often devastated ex-enemy territory, their presence, with minimal language skills, was harder to disguise. How were they perceived? Joyce’s new neighbours, curious about the English girl, were surprised she did not complain. She felt most people were friendly because she shared their circumstances. ‘They had all lost their homes, possessions, relatives, jobs. They knew I’d given up a lot to be with my husband.’ They possibly also hoped to benefit

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<sup>49</sup> Mae, pp. 214-15. ‘Hamstering’ referred to bargaining or foraging for food. See Ruth Easingwood, ‘Our Daily Bread: Food, Culture and Power in Occupied Germany 1945-1949’, *University of Newcastle School of Historical Studies Postgraduate Forum E-Journal*, Edn 6, (2007/08), 1-13 [accessed 27-7-2017], (p. 6).

<sup>50</sup> Joyce S., correspondence.

<sup>51</sup> Shukert and Scibetta, p. 80.

from food parcels, but Joyce's letters home mentioned nothing about their straitened circumstances to her parents.<sup>52</sup>

And how did British women react, to living among former enemies collectively regarded as complicit in the evils of the Nazi regime? In the UK, they had tended to exonerate POWs individually, as conscripted to fight, just like 'our boys', and absent from Germany when atrocities were committed. BW17 admitted complete lack of empathy at the sight of Allied destruction in Karlsruhe, where only part of a smokestack was left standing, amid columns of smoke from makeshift cellar homes rising through the rubble.<sup>53</sup> Even among the liberal-minded, Maude P. exhibited what she subsequently described as a 'blunting of sensitivities' to German suffering. Travelling for fifteen minutes through Hamburg, she saw 'one broken building and the rest was flat earth. [...] My general feeling was that they had brought it all on themselves.' Much later in life, she was shown round Hanover. At first this confirmed her opinion of German architecture as 'dull', with 'little appreciation of historic values.' But shown 'large-scale models of Hanover before the war, and after' she discovered '90 per cent [...] was devastated by English bombers. I didn't know what to say.' She admitted having been 'very insensitive to the horror that German civilians suffered.'<sup>54</sup> BW29, who moved to Germany in 1957, recalled 'every stranger... feeling the need to apologize for the dreadful past in the Nazi time. I can't stand hypocrisy.'<sup>55</sup> Her irritated reaction, with the comment – 'they knew what was happening. They were too scared' – suggests underlying belief she might have behaved differently; or impatience at retrospectively whitewashing consciences for having done nothing.

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<sup>52</sup> Joyce S., correspondence.

<sup>53</sup> BW17, correspondence.

<sup>54</sup> Maude P., correspondence

<sup>55</sup> BW29, interview.

Realities of life in Nazi Germany were not easy to understand. Lorna H. had been shocked to discover her POW boyfriend had joined the Nazi Party, until he explained that it would have been impossible otherwise to find employment.<sup>56</sup> John Cole (an intelligence officer with the Control Commission for Germany) appreciated at first hand that: 'Citizens of liberal countries seldom realize the lengths to which totalitarian governments go to force their subjects into at least an outward adherence.' It was not necessary to be politically active to become complicit. Even not hanging out a flag risked attracting 'attention of a most disagreeable kind,' confronting ordinary citizens with a choice 'between conformity or ruin.'<sup>57</sup> Frank Donnison, official historian of the postwar military government, made the point that 'in a totalitarian state the certain result of opposition is dismissal or exclusion from employment... It was a brave man who exposed... himself – but particularly his family – to the dangers resulting from refusal to join [the Nazi Party].'<sup>58</sup> As Richard Evans has concluded, 'reaching a moral judgement on the German population's behaviour between 1933 and 1945 requires the understanding that the Nazis had already terrorised the great majority of their own people before 1939.'<sup>59</sup>

Only after returning to England does Pat Wendorf's character in her novel portray empathy, trying 'to visualise rape, [...] imagine widowhood', losing her home; 'discredited in the eyes of the world' and 'having to feel a "communal shame" because she is English [...] along with an empty firegrate, and an empty belly.' She realizes why it is a subject her husband does not mention.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Lorna H., interview.

<sup>57</sup> Cole, pp. 78-79.

<sup>58</sup> Frank Siegfried Vernon Donnison, *Civil Affairs and Military Government North-West Europe 1944-1946* (London: HMSO, 1961) pp. 368-71.

<sup>59</sup> Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich in History and Memory* (London: Little, Brown, 2015), p. 117.

<sup>60</sup> Wendorf, pp. 110, 112.



Joyce W., moving to Hamburg, described being 'so impressed at how the Germans worked to put Germany back on its feet again.' She was often told how 'the English bombed us in the night-time and the Americans... in the day-time' and shown photographs of former homes. 'But nobody made me feel it was my fault.' BW18 described how a stranger, seeming to bear 'no ill will', proudly showed her a photograph of her daughters who, it transpired, 'were both killed in a bomb raid.'<sup>61</sup> BW18 did not elucidate her own response, nor appear to question the woman's motive for producing the photograph: a non-verbal request for personal irreparable losses to be weighed against her nation's transgressions? Cole portrayed the German population in the immediate postwar period as tiptoeing about 'anxious not to offend... [with] sound practical reasons for being as obscure and respectful as possible.'<sup>62</sup>

However, hostility suffered by POW wives (from in-laws or the wider community in their former enemy 'host' country) was in some cases extreme. Jina Mao and Yan Shen underline the difficulty of forming relationships when the host country 'demonstrates high levels of prejudice and... hatred.' They suggest the immediate social context in which expatriates live has greater influence on their cultural identity than the wider socio-cultural environment.<sup>63</sup> The empowerment of Occupier identity brought some material advantages, but British wives remained vulnerable to rejection in their adopted local community. Hostility obstructs integration, reinforcing feelings of isolation and displacement.

Most respondents, emphasizing their in-laws' welcome, played down hostility, although the majority encountered some within their locality. Joyce W. was fortunate to have moved to Hamburg, where the population was largely anglophile; she described being warmly welcomed wherever she went, only experiencing one instance of overt hostility.<sup>64</sup> BW17, protected by

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<sup>61</sup> BW18, correspondence.

<sup>62</sup> J. A. Cole, *My Host Michel* (London: Faber & Faber, 1955), p. 23.

<sup>63</sup> Jina Mao and Yan Shen, 'Cultural Identity Change in Expatriates: A Social Network Perspective,' *Human Relations*, 68 (10), (2015), 1533-1556, (pp. 1538, 1541-42).

<sup>64</sup> Joyce W., taped response.

her father-in-law's status as the local mayor, recalled only three people showing hostility, to which she did not react, or mention. Wendorf's novel suggests she suffered abuse not mentioned to her husband.<sup>65</sup>

In 1948, in the American sector before her husband arrived, Muriel Palmer suffered verbal abuse when left alone with one of his relatives. She told no one, knowing it was best ignored, but it still upset her. She also quickly learned to bypass a certain house in the neighbourhood. The occupant said nothing if she was with her father-in-law. But one day, cycling past alone, she nearly fell off her bike when he shouted, "'You filthy bastard English... It's because of you I've only got one leg.'" She described her terror when treated by a German doctor she recognized as 'an English hater'.<sup>66</sup>

Moving with her husband and children to the British zone in 1952, Kathleen G. had been warmly received by her in-laws, but locally experienced overt hostility, being spat at, kicked and pushed. She stopped taking the children to watch her husband play football, but did have one man prosecuted, and fined. She described people barging into her and her children when walking past, sometimes saying "Dirty Tommy" and "Go back home, Tommy" or "Tommy *Frau*". She stopped going out, and described many times packing to leave, but her husband always talked her into staying.<sup>67</sup>

Among those who mentioned harassment, this appeared most extreme in the British sector, suggesting British wives became a focus of resentment towards the incumbent occupying power, rather than simply an ex-enemy persona, having stolen one of their countrymen. Fay S., who moved to the area occupied by the French, made no mention of abuse or harassment. Her in-laws' house had been 60 per cent demolished by the Americans, not the British: 'We live on the Siegfried Line. Yes, I hang my washing out there every day.'<sup>68</sup> BW19's recollection

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<sup>65</sup> BW17, correspondence. Wendorf, p.67.

<sup>66</sup> Mae, pp. 179-80, 185.

<sup>67</sup> Kathleen G., telephone interview.

<sup>68</sup> Fay S., correspondence.

that hostility lessened considerably after the mid-1950s suggests she was targeted as representative of the occupying power. Frank Biess describes the period after West Germany attained national sovereignty in 1955 as one of crucial political, social and cultural transformation.<sup>69</sup> However, when another British wife moved to Hanover (also in the British sector) in 1957, women threw stones through her window. On several occasions she was dragged off her bike and beaten up, had mud thrown at her and her tyres slashed. She knew the perpetrators.<sup>70</sup>

After his release, Werner Vetter, whose family were in East Germany, had been permitted to stay in the UK. Olive continued working, but Werner failed to find employment. He turned to stealing, was caught and deported to West Germany, in 1949.<sup>71</sup> Having promised to send for her, after some weeks he stopped writing. Olive travelled to Germany with their two children, arriving to discover her husband now had a German girlfriend. Her story is blurred by her limited German and inability to comprehend what was going on around her. Stranded in a hostel without funds to return to England, she found work at the local Naafi canteen. This meant leaving her children in the care of German women, whom she could not entirely trust. She appeared to fall foul of German civil law and the German welfare system. Having saved enough money for the fare back to England, she was informed that, as the children were German, they could not accompany her. In vain, she protested that they were both born in England, the elder's birth predating her marriage. A German acquaintance then took the younger child on a visit to East Germany, returning without her. Deciding she could best fight for custody from England, Olive returned; but never saw her children again.<sup>72</sup> While it is

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<sup>69</sup> BW19, correspondence; Biess, *Homecomings*, p. 227.

<sup>70</sup> Rosemary P., telephone interview notes. Possible reasons for continuing hostility in Hanover are suggested in Peter Speiser, 'The British Army of the Rhine and the Germans (1948-1957): from enemies to partners' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Westminster, 2012), p. 113.

<sup>71</sup> 'The Ex-POW Who Got the Law Changed', *Daily Mirror*, 9-1-1949, p. 1.

<sup>72</sup> Olive P., interview and correspondence.

impossible to judge this story without the full facts, Olive's children may be viewed, at least in part, as compensatory spoils of war, snatched from the victors.

Joyce S., having moved in 1949 to the American zone, had found most Germans friendly. The only abuse she suffered, in 1950, occurred while travelling to work by tram with her husband. Ironically, he, wearing American Express doorman's uniform, was mistaken for American and Joyce for a 'horizontal collaborator', and verbally insulted by other passengers. Otherwise, her only discriminatory experience came from the American official in charge of giving permission for employment. Tired of begging for work, she 'went to an American control office, and demanded to see an official.' The American authorities 'were in complete control of all employment in their zone' and vetted every potential employee. Joyce recalled how 'the bewildered German employees' acquiesced, fearing she was someone important. She passed the typing and general knowledge tests. But the man in charge, who vetted every prospective employee, challenged her: "You are not German, what do you want a job for?" Showing him her German identity card, Joyce replied, "I'm a German. I live here, my husband is German." He said "You are a goddamned English. You can't have a job here." Joyce protested that she had passed their tests, worked in England for Vauxhall (owned by General Motors), had done her duty 'as a soldier' for nearly four years, and needed to earn money. The American remained unmoved: "I'll see to it you never work here." I said "The war is over. We must all try to live in peace. I've done you no harm, why won't you let me work?"

The same man refused to rubberstamp three subsequent work offers, including from the British Embassy, where an official suggested his motives had to be personal. Joyce agreed, speculating he was Jewish, had lost relatives in concentration camps, or witnessed 'terrible things... thought I was a traitor... hated English people... I will never know.'<sup>73</sup> The British official

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<sup>73</sup> Speiser, p. 41, offers a possible clue, citing that British 'officials married to Germans could not be transferred to Frankfurt, owing to the American attitude to the question.'

suggested trying American Express, for unofficial, lower-paid work. To her amazement, they immediately employed herself and her husband.<sup>74</sup>

### **Adaptation Strategies**

Wives able to act on their own initiative, connecting with the community through work or social means, described overcoming the initial challenges of hostility. BW18 found an English-speaking administrative post with the Occupation forces; others found work teaching English. Only two contributors to this study, both living in Hamburg, mentioned support from other British women. Maude P. felt people were 'nice enough', and that 'his parents became very satisfied to have an English daughter-in-law.' Over time, friendships developed, mainly with other English wives, met by chance. By 1965, however, they had all either died or left. 'After that, my contacts were pupils [...] who filled my life for the next twenty years.'<sup>75</sup>

Joyce W., who moved to the same area, made 'lots of English friends'. She worked after marriage 'because we were so terribly poor.' Paid employment relieved social isolation, as Rosemary Vinall discovered, having had no friends, until she found work.<sup>76</sup> Kathleen G.'s experience demonstrated the importance of positive face-to-face contact, regardless of social convention. After her first humiliating attempt to speak German, buying bread, she had retreated, sending her five-year-old shopping, whose German language skills had developed rapidly. She stayed at home most evenings, babysitting while her husband visited his family. One day she banged her fist on the table, announcing she had had enough, and intended introducing herself to the neighbours. Ignoring her husband's protests that uninvited visiting 'wasn't done', she called on her next-door neighbour and was invited in for coffee. This led to other contacts and friendship.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Joyce S., correspondence.

<sup>75</sup> Maude P., correspondence.

<sup>76</sup> Joyce W., taped response. Rosemary P., interview.

<sup>77</sup> Kathleen G., telephone interview, correspondence.

BW17, unable to adapt to a patriarchal catholic community, returned to the UK. Noticeably, wives who returned to the UK were non-working, socially isolated and appeared unable to use their own agency any other way. Muriel Palmer's husband earned enough to support her. Living with her in-laws, Muriel's only power in the situation lay in buying her fare home, by selling personal possessions. In Pat Wendorf's novelised account, she describes feeling insecure and defensive, forever falling short of her husband's expectations of a German wife. In one of many arguments, she announces she is going home.<sup>78</sup>

Having transferable work skills, prior knowledge of the culture she was joining and positive, supportive relationships with her in-laws, Joyce W. made a success of migration to Germany. By contrast, Muriel Palmer's withdrawal and return to the UK may be understood in terms of her immaturity and mistrust of her new family, leaving her vulnerable to wider rejection or hostility. For BW17, it appears that the mismatch between her own values and those of her 'host' community proved too great.

### **Gender roles in Germany – a shifting balance of power**

Instead of the passionate reunion he has fantasized, Wendorf portrays her husband finding her on the station platform in tears, fearing herself abandoned.<sup>79</sup> In a cross-cultural marriage, the spouse in whose home country the couple have settled normally has the advantage of family and societal support. This, together with linguistic fluency and cultural understanding, reinforces their identity, fostering an imbalance of power within the relationship. The spouse in their 'home' culture is less dependent on their partner, while the emigrant spouse has sacrificed established support systems, for the sake of the relationship. Traditionally, in the

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<sup>78</sup> Wendorf, p. 73.

<sup>79</sup> Wendorf, p. 52.

mid-twentieth century, the male breadwinner remained in his own country, and his wife relinquished her home culture.

Several women described moving to Germany to reinforce their husband's breadwinner role.<sup>80</sup>

Joyce W.'s position as a graduate teacher had emphasized the poverty of her husband's prospects in England, where Joyce's family had no useful connections, and the social disparity of their situation. 'Grammar school teachers just didn't marry agricultural labourers.' With limited English language skills, it was doubtful he would have obtained better work in England. Germany seemed their only option. In response to his camp commandant's warning against taking her, Muriel Webster's fiancé replied that he could only get a good job and provide well for her there.<sup>81</sup> Maude P.'s husband, a qualified dentist, could not practise in the UK without taking a two-year course, 'which he wouldn't contemplate.' Maude found him work as a dental technician, but he decided eventually to return to Germany, starting 'without insured patients, which were denied him until 1955.' Maude arrived, with very little German, to 'a very difficult life in two rooms, with hardly any money'.<sup>82</sup>

In occupied Germany however, the migrant gender-role dynamic was not clearcut: German POWs' work prospects and support systems had been fractured by the war. A German male was a second-class citizen; his migrant wife spoke the Occupiers' language. It was Joyce S., not her German husband, who lifted them both out of hunger and destitution, her clerical position more prestigious than his as a messenger, and probably better paid. Emigrant POW wives in Germany wielded power in other ways, through the scarce resources they accessed. One woman's parents' monthly parcel enhanced her popularity, enabling her to give 'genuine coffee parties'.<sup>83</sup> But food in occupied Germany in the immediate postwar period was not

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<sup>80</sup> Joyce W.; Muriel Palmer; Roslyn D; Maude P.

<sup>81</sup> Mae, p. 138.

<sup>82</sup> Maude P., correspondence.

<sup>83</sup> BW17, correspondence.

simply a social asset: access to food demarcated occupier and occupied; in Germany in the late 1940s, food was synonymous with power.<sup>84</sup>

In Kriftel in the American sector, Werner Palmer quickly found a good teaching post. Fixated on his breadwinner role, he insisted his aim was to provide for his wife. But Muriel, lacking opportunity for positive agency, became passive, powerless and depressed. Returning to the UK, she immediately re-asserted herself, finding work and a flat. Her husband followed her, and their roles became reversed. Financially dependent on her and struggling to find work because of his nationality, he finally obtained a laboratory post offering some hope of progression. But repeatedly passed over for promotion through being German, he became despondent and ultimately returned to Germany. Despite still loving one another, Muriel's insecurity and Werner's unwillingness to sacrifice his breadwinner role ended their marriage.<sup>85</sup>

Pat Wendorf's novel shows how arrival in Germany revealed her dependence on her husband in his own country, but also his shortcomings in the role of provider. A refugee in the British zone, he can only find work in a quarry; the best accommodation he secures is a rat-infested attic room. Initially reluctant to exploit nepotism, his wife then easily obtains what he cannot – an interview with a high-ranking British officer, resulting in a spacious, self-contained studio flat. Her husband 'knows that in some subtle fashion the balance has shifted. In her favour.'<sup>86</sup> She is hopeless at housework, sewing or cooking – as a wife, her husband tells her, she fails to measure up: 'In Germany, a girl learns how to cook and sew before she gets married.' But she is feisty, and they argue.<sup>87</sup>

Other POW brides in Germany encountered marital conflict over lack of domestic skills. At first, Joyce W. and her husband lived with his parents. She found work immediately, teaching English, while his mother cooked and housekept. Eventually after moving to their own flat,

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<sup>84</sup> See Easingwood, pp. 1, 7-9, 11.

<sup>85</sup> Mae, p. 228.

<sup>86</sup> Wendorf, p. 60.

<sup>87</sup> Wendorf, pp. 58-65.



Joyce's housewifery deficiencies were exposed. Although 'not a bit fond or interested in housework or cooking,' she considered it her 'duty', and necessary 'to learn to be a good German cook.' They started a family, she gave up paid work, but found 'Housework and cleanliness... much more important here than it ever was for us in England... I had great difficulties in coming up to my husband's standards.' Joyce credited her 'dear mother-in-law' with saving her marriage 'in its difficult moments near the beginning.' She would 'come trotting round' with stews and soups, handing them over 'without saying a word to anyone.' Joyce simply had to warm them up, earning her husband's appreciation: "'Jolly good, Joyce. In fact, almost as good as my mother used to make.'"<sup>88</sup>

Migrant wives described labouring under a constant competitive expectation to conform to perfect German housewife standards. Roslyn D. felt the strain of failing to 'come up to their ankles. When they set the table, it's so *perfect*. I never can get my tablecloths so beautifully ironed and perfectly white.'<sup>89</sup> BW17 had no interest in or aptitude for housework or cooking, and refused to compromise. Living with her in-laws, this eccentricity appears to have been tolerated. However, she objected to 'second-class treatment', which extended, in her husband's rural area, to excluding women from community participation, relegating them to domesticity – 'K.K.K. (*Kirche, Küche, Kinder*).'<sup>90</sup> In an urban setting, she might not have been alone. The aftermath of the war had disrupted traditional sex roles and relations in Germany. Heide Fehrenbach has stressed how German men lost their traditional masculine status as protectors and providers. The dominating presence of military occupiers subordinated them, while in their absence German women had realized greater sexual and social autonomy.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Joyce W., taped response.

<sup>89</sup> Roslyn D., interview.

<sup>90</sup> 'Church, Kitchen, Children.' BW17, correspondence.

<sup>91</sup> Heide Fehrenbach, 'Rehabilitating Fatherland: Race and German Remasculinization,' in *Conflict, Catastrophe and Continuity: Essays on Modern German History*, ed. by Frank Biess, Mark Roseman and Hanna Schissler (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007), p. 341.

Frank Biess contends that former POWs often experienced re-adjustment to postwar society as more traumatic than the war itself.<sup>92</sup> Having idealized their homecoming, German veterans suffered disillusion and downward mobility. Returnees from Western captivity to breadwinner roles faced a daunting task for which they were unprepared: 'When you live as POW you are looked after in every way... Maybe we were afraid to go home and have to face reality.'

Manfred H. reflected on the 'big change in our lives, for the first time forced to do something to make a living' in desperate circumstances.<sup>93</sup>

Several other commentators have described a 'masculinity crisis' in occupied Germany in the immediate postwar years. A representative of German women's organizations stated in 1949 that German men had lost any claim to superiority.<sup>94</sup> Elizabeth Heineman has explored how the traditional housewife role promoted by the Nazi regime lost its rationale in the absence of male providers. In the war's later stages and immediate aftermath, women struggled alone to provide shelter, food and warmth for themselves and their families. The men's return, she contended, produced conflict. 'Few men, even if unemployed [...] considered it appropriate to share the housework.' Echoing their demobbed British counterparts' predicament in an unfamiliar world of rationing and black market bartering, returnee German men were 'in many ways... genuinely incompetent'. Not understanding the black market or how to forage for food or fuel, they also exhibited 'outdated expectations,' including 'refusal to accept changed circumstances. They found household tasks demeaning, or they resisted taking orders from their wives.' Failure to find work encouraged them to cling to patriarchal family status.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Frank Biess, *Homecomings: Returning POWs and the Legacies of Defeat in Postwar Germany* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 120.

<sup>93</sup> Manfred H., interview.

<sup>94</sup> Dorothea Groener-Geyer, cited in Robert G. Moeller, 'The "Remasculinization" of Germany in the 1950s: Introduction', *Signs*, 24, i (Autumn 1998), 101-06, (p. 102).

<sup>95</sup> Elizabeth D. Heineman, *What Difference Does a Husband Make?: Women and Marital Status in Nazi and Postwar Germany* (California: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 121-22.

Sick and emaciated POWs returning from the East symbolized postwar German wounded masculinity.<sup>96</sup> In comparison, US and UK POW returnees arrived as more readily employable, in reasonably good physical condition. In addition to having undergone classification and re-education as POWs, those born after 1 January 1919 benefited from the 'youth amnesty', which recognized them as not responsible in the adult sense for complicity in the Nazi regime. This enabled them to enter the job market without prior screening.<sup>97</sup>

Biess contends returnees' masculinities re-orientated away from their militarised upbringing, that patriarchy in Germany became 'more flexible', although traditional, gendered divisions of labour continued.<sup>98</sup> PW09 recalled idealistic dreams as a POW in England in 1946, discussing a united states of Europe, where brotherhood and peace reigned. He reflected that such plans, given his country's demeaned status, would have been music to his ears.<sup>99</sup> Perhaps the seeds of a softer, non-militarised masculinity were sown in such conversations, soothing the humiliation of defeat. In her novelisation, Pat Wendorf's husband also turned his back on aggressive militarist masculinity, describing himself as a 'man of peace'.<sup>100</sup>

In Wendorf's fictionalised reconstruction of her marriage, the balance of power subtly shifts between husband and wife. She disappoints her German husband, but doesn't defer to him, as a wife should. She even delivers an ultimatum: she is going home, possibly signalling the end of their marriage. But her husband has had to admit defeat in his attempt to better himself in Germany. As a refugee in West Germany, his ambition to own his own land is unrealizable. He applies to return to England. Permission is finally granted because his wife is English: another defeat in their power struggle. She tells him not to come unless he really

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<sup>96</sup> Biess, *Homecomings*, pp. 5, 70-71.

<sup>97</sup> FO 1050/1093; FO 945/242; 'A Generous Gesture', *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 22-8-1946, p. 1; 'Plans for British Zone', *The Times*, 26-8-1946, p. 4; 'Denazification', Commons, 15-10-1946, *Hansard*, vol. 427, col. 147W; 'Armed Forces Amnesty (Aircrews)', Commons, 12-3-1947, *Hansard*, vol. 434, cols 208-09W.

<sup>98</sup> Biess, *Homecomings*, pp. 120-23.

<sup>99</sup> PW09, correspondence.

<sup>100</sup> Wendorf, p. 106.

wants to; he will “‘have to learn to live with all my inadequacies,’” but in her own country, they ‘won’t be so obvious’, so he ‘won’t mind so much.’” Travelling back to a country where he will also be a second-class citizen, he attempts to re-assert masculine authority, telling her to be an obedient wife “‘and then we shall both be happy.’”<sup>101</sup>

Wendorf admits to herself that her retreat centres on fear of her husband’s female compatriots, circling around him. This fear was not confined to an English interloper/outsider wife. Commenting on a late-1940s focus in the German press on “the ‘painful arithmetic’ of the *Frauenüberschuss* (surplus women), Dagmar Herzog has suggested this tended ‘to aggravate every already married woman’s sense of anxiety that she was about to lose her man.’ To hold husbands, advice columnists counselled that wives should spoil, flatter them and accept ‘all manner of male deficiencies (from bossiness to boorishness, to unwillingness to participate in housecleaning or child-rearing).’<sup>102</sup> One source described her husband’s personality change: after they moved to Germany in 1957, he became serially unfaithful and left her to deal with everything relating to the children.<sup>103</sup>

Following the Bizone (East and West Germany) creation in 1949 and formal ending of occupation in 1955, West Germany became a sovereign state – albeit one with former occupiers’ continuing military presence. This political remasculinization, with increased material security and affluence, has characterized the 1950s as a period when German men reclaimed their role as providers and protectors.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Wendorf, pp. 55, 73-76.

<sup>102</sup> Petra Lund, ‘Zwei Frauen? Mir Reicht’s!’, *Constanze*, 20 (1948) p. 7, cited in Dagmar Herzog, ‘Desperately Seeking Normality: Sex and Marriage in the Wake of War,’ in *Life After Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe During the 1940s and 1950s*, ed. by Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann (Cambridge: German Historical Institute, Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 161-63.

<sup>103</sup> BW29, interview.

<sup>104</sup> See Robert G. Moeller, ‘The Remasculinization of Germany in the 1950s: Introduction’, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 24, i (1998), 101-06.

## *Staying in the UK*

'We didn't know how much damage had been done to Germany. In my town, the whole city 150km east of Cologne was all flat.'<sup>105</sup> Many returnees had not realized the extent of destruction.<sup>106</sup> PW09 described arriving in Essen in April 1947, to unimaginable chaos. Refugees (from areas from which the German population had been expelled) suffered especially, having nothing to barter, and no community contacts.<sup>107</sup> He was not the only repatriated POW wishing he could turn around and return to the UK. Refugee returnees found little reason to stay. BW14's future husband returned to find his parents dead, his home gone. His relatives in Munich would have had to share their confined living conditions and support him while he trained. This prompted his decision to return to England.<sup>108</sup>

Repatriated POWs returned to the destruction they had failed to prevent.<sup>109</sup> Returnees from Western captivity faced recriminations. Roslyn D.'s husband was among the first healthy POWs repatriated from the UK in October 1946 who were stoned by German women, presumably for looking well fed, having avoided the worst aftermath of the defeat for which they were held responsible.<sup>110</sup> Henry Metelmann returned in 1948 to a Germany where his home had been destroyed, his parents were dead. His kitbag contained his sole possessions. He felt lost and alone, but also irritated. 'There was no attempt even to talk about the war and what had happened and why.' When a close relative accused him of not having fought hard enough, he decided to return to England, where he had been offered a job. There, through the therapy of work and sport, he felt himself slowly 'returning into the circle of humanity.'<sup>111</sup> It is tempting to speculate on the choice between returning home as a defeated soldier or staying

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<sup>105</sup> Manfred H., interview.

<sup>106</sup> Biess, *Homecomings*, p. 64.

<sup>107</sup> PW09, correspondence. Essen, home of the Krupp steelworks, had suffered heavy bombing.

<sup>108</sup> BW14, interview.

<sup>109</sup> Biess, *Homecomings*, p. 210.

<sup>110</sup> Roslyn D., interview.

<sup>111</sup> Metelmann, *Through*, p. 203.

in (now familiar) former hostile territory, where perhaps the realities of defeat were less obvious. Biess stresses the significance to German POWs of the idealized, escapist fantasy *Heimat*.<sup>112</sup> Facing bitter reality, better perhaps to desert the despoiled home country, return to the foreign land and guard an unsullied memory of *Heimat* within?

Phyllis H.'s future husband had been apprenticed before army service, and hoped to reclaim his position. He wanted to see his parents and conditions in Germany since his last visit in 1941, and arrived back in May 1948. Phyllis resigned herself that, once home, he would 'get sucked into [his] own way of life.' But a few days later, he sent a telegram. 'Karl returned... to my home in Chingford with a visitor's permit in November 1948.' Phyllis paid about £12 for his fare and the permit. They married in 1949. Roslyn D. related a similar story: after many letters to them, she finally received 'a telegram from the Foreign Office one day that my husband-to-be was in a displaced persons camp near the German/Dutch border waiting to make his journey back to Britain.' She sent £11.10s for his fare and met him in London, to catch a train back to her parents' home.<sup>113</sup> PW13, released in July 1948, returned to his family in Germany. However, finding life without his English sweetheart 'unbearable', he returned in 1949 to marry and remain in the UK.<sup>114</sup> What did settling in the UK mean, in terms of work, earning capacity, gender roles within marriage, and experiences of prejudice, discrimination or hostility?

### **Compromised careers**

In the UK, German ex-POWs faced the migrant spouse's task of integrating and earning acceptance. They had usually already made some contacts while prisoners, and generally won people over by being pleasant, reliable, and hardworking, obtaining work or advancement

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<sup>112</sup> Biess, *Homecomings*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>113</sup> Phyllis H., interview; Roslyn D., correspondence.

<sup>114</sup> PW13, correspondence.

through personal or in-laws' contacts. Roslyn's husband found factory work initially, but 'we heard that a teacher was required at the secondary modern school in my home town and he got the post.' As late starters with little or no work experience or training prior to war service and years in captivity, in addition to being former enemies in a foreign country, ex-POWs' earning capacity was handicapped and their work satisfaction often adversely affected. June K. reflected that her husband had given up his parents, his homeland and, as a music student, his career.<sup>115</sup> Ex-POWs' position at the head of the table was compromised by their alien status (although some eventually applied for naturalisation), and lack of fluency both in the language and with the system.

After Rosemary Vinall and Willi Runkel's marriage in 1947, her husband's farm employer offered them a tied cottage, 'but people made a fuss', so he offered instead one room in his house. Concern about ex-POW labour expressed among trade unions, including the National Union of Agricultural Workers, reached a compromise in 1948 whereby prisoners would be allowed to stay if they were lodging on farms rather than living in much-prized tied cottages.<sup>116</sup> (Judging from Fay S. and other sources' assertions, this agreement was not generally adhered to, or policed.)

Ex-POWs' careers were hampered initially by restriction to low-paid agricultural employment, although this often included tied accommodation and other benefits. Their narratives are of constant hard work – perceived by their widows as responsible (together with war-related stresses) for their early deaths.<sup>117</sup> POW returnees to Germany found modest English language skills a career asset, but those who stayed in the UK were often prevented, through insufficient facility in English, from obtaining work at the vocational level they might have achieved in Germany. German ex-POWs also faced discrimination and resentment, which led some to set

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<sup>115</sup> June K., correspondence.

<sup>116</sup> Rosemary P., interview. Weber-Newth and Steinert, pp. 28-29.

<sup>117</sup> Phyllis H.; Betty H.; Margaret J..

up in business themselves, or, like Werner Palmer, return to Germany. BW26's husband worked as a watch repairer. She claimed that every time a British person came along, they would be taken on, in his place. 'So he set up on his own.'<sup>118</sup>

In Wendorf's autobiographical novel, her husband discovers in 1949 that as an ex-enemy alien, he is not allowed to set up in business.<sup>119</sup> Through his in-laws, the opportunity arises to run a neglected farm. At first he tries to manage alone, wary of giving orders to Englishmen so soon after the war. Eventually the problem is solved by employing an Italian ex-POW. He explains to his wife that he and the Italian "start equal," sharing the language "of outcasts, of losers," men "not allowed to be proud", who must walk with "head bowed... I have no voice." Only the winners "are allowed to speak."<sup>120</sup> When Kurt E. set up a business in the late 1950s, he employed another German ex-POW.<sup>121</sup>

The hard work and commitment of one former POW rapidly led to a well-paid supervisory and managerial role. This raised considerable difficulties among the staff he managed, who resented being given orders by a German. The situation was resolved when his father died in 1950. He returned to Germany, and immediately found an interpreter's post at the English garrison.<sup>122</sup> Rudolf R.'s hard work and rapport with his farm employer paid off, when the dairyman's wife began terrorizing Rudolf's wife and child. The situation escalated, prompting the dairyman's wife to threaten "Either the German goes or we will." The farmer replied "You can go on Friday. The German stays here." At another farm, Rudolf's dedication to working overtime, and habit of spending evenings at home rather than in the pub with the men, led to a fellow worker informing the police about his 'new bicycle, and pig and chickens'.<sup>123</sup> BW16 noticed occasional resentment. An ex-POW friend had become a

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<sup>118</sup> BW26, interview. See also Weber-Newth and Steinert, pp. 141-42.

<sup>119</sup> This ruling appears to have been relaxed in the 1950s.

<sup>120</sup> Wendorf, pp. 89-95, 107.

<sup>121</sup> Kurt E., by email.

<sup>122</sup> PW16, correspondence.

<sup>123</sup> Rudolf R., interview.



successful farmer, stirring jealousy among other farmers, who spoke of him as 'that Jerry'; she realized they probably called her husband the same.<sup>124</sup>

When asked whether she ever earned more than her husband, one POW wife, a teacher, responded emphatically 'Always!' She described his career, having had no opportunity for training, as 'ruined', but believed her larger salary was not a problem in their relationship because of his inner self-respect and sense of self-value, knowing, but for circumstances of his youth, he would probably be a qualified engineer. His English was excellent, but his career had suffered through lack of qualifications. With her contacts, and through adult education studies, hard work and personal recommendations, he progressed to become head technician in a grammar school. Other, older ex-POWs acquaintances, having benefited from pre-war vocational training, had done better. (Kurt K. became a maintenance fitter, having served his apprenticeship in Germany.)<sup>125</sup>

### **Blurred marital roles**

The civil service had wanted to dismiss Edna S. after her marriage in 1947, but 'climbed down in the end.'<sup>126</sup> Edna was determined to hold on to her job. Most other women contributors living in the UK described continuing in paid employment, to supplement husbands' income. BW27, whose marriage ended in divorce, presented a noticeable exception. She had fully intended continuing working, in view of their extreme poverty, but described her husband as 'too proud' to permit it, too wedded (perhaps through having been previously married in Germany) to his traditional breadwinner role. Other former POWs were conscious of their low status as husbands. June K. described how, early in their marriage, her husband was

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<sup>124</sup> BW16, interview.

<sup>125</sup> BW14, interview. Kurt K., interview.

<sup>126</sup> Edna S., interview. The marriage bar in the civil service had recently been removed, in October 1946. The question of her dismissal probably related to marrying a German, (initially) losing British nationality and therefore being classed as an alien.

'terribly jealous and insecure. He didn't have a cent and he probably thought I could have done better, but I didn't think so.'<sup>127</sup>

After their first child was born, BW20 carried on sharing the breadwinner role. Eight years later, when another child arrived, a relative helped her husband secure a factory job paying three times his agricultural wage. This allowed her to stop working, but polarised their marital roles and adversely affected her husband's health. Several women described working with their husbands as a team, even after the birth of children. Rudolf R. acknowledged that he relied on his wife's contribution, even immediately after their second child's birth; his farm worker's wage would not have enabled them to save enough to move with three children to Germany in 1953. Jillian R. described settling down in a small tied cottage with no sanitation and borrowed furniture. They began a sideline pig-rearing, then bought an industrial knitting machine and started selling knitted garments, sometimes working all night. In 1953, with a second child, they were working 'day and night'. June K. and her husband had three children. June worked with him, 'driving tractors, etc.' They started their own business which June ran, doing all the accounts.<sup>128</sup>

Viola Klein's 1957 Mass Observation survey was conducted in the context of increasing numbers of married women in paid employment in the 1950s, although Ministry of Labour returns showed only one third of married women gainfully employed: it was not 'general practice' for wives to work outside the home. Even highly educated married women viewed home and family as their main responsibility. Klein's survey showed that, of women in gainful employment, 31 per cent had one child under school age; only 6 per cent had two children under school age. Klein interpreted the increase of married women working outside the home

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<sup>127</sup> BW27, correspondence; June K., interview.

<sup>128</sup> June K., interview.

as a corollary of modernized household techniques and reduced family size, with consequent reduction in domestic responsibilities, together with the ambition to improve living standards. Many men welcomed the positive advantages of wives' involvement in the outside world, and accepted the idea of marriage as a partnership.<sup>129</sup>

For a 1950s husband, this was unlikely to have implied sharing traditional housewife duties. However, POW wives' shortcomings as housewives appear to have been less noticeable within their home country. In Wendorf's autobiographical novel, her husband becomes impatient with her inability to cook, and shows her 'cooking the German way', having learned from watching his mother. She surmises she 'will have to become a *Hausfrau*.' Otherwise, unlike POW wives who moved to Germany, none who stayed in the UK mentioned failing to attain their husbands' standards of domesticity. Several wives described their husbands as good cooks. Phyllis H., having been warned marriage to a German would mean domestic slavery, relied on her husband to sew new zips in her skirts, and Gladys K. extolled her husband as a hands-on parent, having changed as many nappies as she had.<sup>130</sup>

Weber-Newth and Steinert's study found some ex-POWs had willingly ceded all contacts with outside institutions to their wives. The authors speculated this could be ascribed to lack of confidence, insecurity, fear of authority, or simply because it was easier.<sup>131</sup> Female sources for this study also described assuming responsibility for mediating with authority, whether filling in official forms, liaising with their children's schools, or helping with homework. Kathleen W. suggested this more assertive role was not entirely welcome. Although six years younger than her husband, 'he withdrew a bit, because he didn't know the system.' She had done it at first,

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<sup>129</sup> Viola Klein, *Working Wives: a Survey of Facts and Opinions Concerning the Gainful Employment of Married Women in Britain*, Occasional Papers No 15 (London: Institute of Personnel Management, [n.d. ?1960]).

<sup>130</sup> Wendorf, pp. 103-04; Phyllis H., interview; Gladys K., interview.

<sup>131</sup> Weber-Newth and Steinert, pp. 143-44.

‘and it just carried on that way, even once he could fill in forms. It was always Mum the children had to come to, working out their careers, going through their books, and at school meetings... Mum who had to do all the talking.’ Her husband not knowing ‘the system and customs... probably made me more independent than other wives’. However, while acknowledging they did discuss everything and reached joint decisions, she felt ‘it would have been nice to have someone else take the ropes...’<sup>132</sup>

### **Continuing hostilities**

Although many people were friendly, Muriel Palmer’s account refers to a succession of ‘nasty incidents’ in the UK, including ‘a swastika daubed on the dustbin and a dead rat lying beside it.’ Prejudice or hostility (which most UK-resident sources played down) could surface in different ways, generally not so overtly. After word spread that one woman had left her husband for their German POW farm worker, she was snubbed; people would speak *at* her, rather than to her, ‘telling the post so the gate could hear.’ Others encountered the tendency to revive wartime propaganda stereotypes. One woman’s neighbour, looking in the pram, commented ‘Oh, a proper Jerry’; another was taken aback when a friend remarked that her husband was “‘too kind to be a German’”. Gladys K., overhearing anti-German conversation at a bus stop, felt obliged to butt in, saying she wouldn’t swap her German husband for an Englishman. She resented people generalizing without knowing individuals – ‘there’s good and bad in everybody.’<sup>133</sup>

BW14 believed blanket anti-German sentiments would emerge in any conflict situation, stereotypes of Germans as militaristic and aggressive, whereas she knew many kind, gentle Germans and belligerent English people. Children her husband reprimanded for misbehaviour

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<sup>132</sup> Kathleen W., interview.

<sup>133</sup> Mae, p. 158; BW16, interview; BW28, correspondence; BW25, correspondence; Gladys K., interview.

would offer a Nazi salute.<sup>134</sup> BW16's neighbour groused, when a dispute arose, about 'Bloody Jerries'.<sup>135</sup> Weber-Newth and Steinert's interviewees reported similar experiences, and demonstrated the tendency among German migrants in the UK to keep a low profile.<sup>136</sup> One couple running a farm in the 1960s suffered persecution with injured livestock. Fearing for their child's safety, they moved to Germany.<sup>137</sup> Otherwise, perception of hostility depended to some extent on individual outlook and expectation. Kurt K., claiming he never encountered open hostility, acknowledged that a few people snubbed him, but most had been 'civil and friendly'. Soon after arrival as a POW in the UK, as the lorry transporting them slowly passed a group of people, a little boy jumped on 'and gave the victory sign to us... and his mother grabbed him by the collar and swiped him one round the ear for doing that.' Kurt chose to interpret this incident – where the child could simply have been reprimanded for jumping on a moving vehicle – as evidence of respect towards German POWs. He also felt hostility would not come from anyone who had actually served in the war, despite having been 'on the other side'.<sup>138</sup> (Other sources appear to have agreed on this point, although newspaper correspondence columns demonstrated some British ex-veterans' capacity for continuing anti-German prejudice.<sup>139</sup>)

## *Conclusion*

British migrant wives of returnee German POWs held a somewhat anomalous position: marooned in a hostile alien community, failing to fulfil husbands' housewifery expectations, but also initially with greater public power, successfully exercised by some. Migrant wives

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<sup>134</sup> BW14, interview.

<sup>135</sup> BW16, interview.

<sup>136</sup> Weber-Newth & Steinert, pp. 152, 156

<sup>137</sup> BW18, correspondence.

<sup>138</sup> Kurt K., interview.

<sup>139</sup> Cited in chapter 6.

were vulnerable to social isolation, and noticeably conscious of shortcomings in their traditional role as housewives. Although many experienced community hostility, pivotal factors influencing a decision to return to the UK included in-laws' perceived rejection and lack of opportunity for positive interaction and personal validation within the 'host' community. Among POW couples in the UK, most husbands, as migrant spouses, faced restricted career prospects; acceptance of this, as BW14 pointed out, depended on the extent to which career achievement was central to their identity. Relationships which fared worse included those where a husband's expectation of his marital role remained too rigid, or his own personal fulfilment mattered too much. When Muriel Palmer's husband professed that he needed to do well to take care of his wife, he was surely either rationalizing his own ambition, or clinging to too rigid a view of masculine identity. Marital roles in Germany appear to have become more traditional than in the UK.

Among UK-resident sources, housewifery standards were not raised as an issue, seeming to bear out Pat Wendorf's heroine's belief that domestic role shortcomings would be less noticeable in the UK, even, it seems, by German husbands. UK-resident POW wives appear to have shouldered aspects of the traditional male role in their marital relationships. Migrant husbands' breadwinner roles were hampered by discrimination, their own reticence, or language skills inadequate for work at the level their qualifications, skills or previous experience might have achieved in Germany, where basic English proved an asset.

Discussing how the war contributed to 'a new marital objective' manifesting in postwar public discourses which emphasized 'new styles of marriage based on partnership, teamwork and companionship', Summerfield concluded that the new 1950s 'ideal of companionate marriage... was rarely realised in practice.'<sup>140</sup> Glimpses described here suggest that the

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<sup>140</sup> Penny Summerfield, 'Approaches to Women and Social Change in the Second World War,' in *What Difference Did the War Make?*, ed. by Brian Brivati and Harriet Jones (London: Leicester University Press, 1993, p/b edn, 1995), p. 77.

peculiar situation of UK-based POW marriages (with migrant husbands rather than migrant wives) engendered a marital dynamic which possibly encouraged modification of traditional marital roles to a greater extent than achievable within conventional marriages of the period.

Given the importance for any migrant of reception by the 'host' country, it seems clear that, at least in the early stages of POW marriages, both British and German migrant spouses suffered considerable acculturative stress. The strong bond with her husband, her in-laws' support and her own resourceful determination overcame Joyce S.'s tearful regret for the comfortable life she had left behind. However, hostility from in-laws or among the ex-enemy 'host' community appears in some cases to have been extreme. Under such circumstances, pride, emotional support and personal motivation became all-important.

Former POWs returned to Germany having spent several formative years of late adolescence/early adulthood in captivity in the UK, where they undertook work, made social contacts and confronted discrediting of the regime they had been raised to support and defend. This distancing from and 'contamination' of their native identity possibly encouraged relinquishing of that identity, or regression to an idealized fantasy *Heimat*. Admission by some, when faced with the reality of repatriation, to an impulse to return to the country of their captivity, and the decision of others to do so, may perhaps be comprehended in this light.

Those originating from what had become East Germany, or Eastern European areas from which Germans had been expelled, became effectively exiled. One family braved a nerve-racking trip to Saxony in 1955.<sup>141</sup> Concern about the prospect of visiting East Germany (a fear felt more keenly by Gladys K. than by her husband) had the effect of cutting some men off from their roots and families for several decades.<sup>142</sup> Belief in a British passport as a bulwark

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<sup>141</sup> Jillian R., correspondence. At the border, her husband was marched away and interrogated for four hours. (Biess makes the point that East German officials were 'very suspicious of the "released war criminals"' as they termed the last German POWs released from Soviet captivity in 1953-1956, most of whom chose to return to West Germany. Biess, *Homecomings*, pp. 206, 220.)

<sup>142</sup> BW21's husband died in 1984, having never returned: BW21, correspondence.

against detention in East Germany loomed large with some sources for this study. Kurt K.'s wife insisted he acquire British citizenship before returning, after nearly thirty years, reasoning he would be safer with a British passport. Kathleen W.'s husband did not return for thirty-two years. Although he had visited Germany, Gladys K.'s husband, from Pomerania, had not, at the time of interview, seen his home for forty years.<sup>143</sup> Although Weber-Newth and Steinert's former POW interviewees (interviewed in the mid-1990s) recalled pressure from wives to identify more with their British families by becoming naturalised, fear of detention in East Germany appeared, in the wake of reunification, to have been forgotten.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Werner and Gladys K., interview.

<sup>144</sup> Weber-Newth and Steinert, pp. 160-162.



## Chapter 8: Conclusion

This exploration of Anglo-German ex-enemy emotional alliances has endeavoured, through examination and interpretation of ‘subjective glimpses’ from the protagonists themselves, to uncover their relevance to studies of post-conflict transgressive sexual relations. It has also, drawing on UK Parliamentary and newsprint sources, positioned their narrative in the context of women’s rights and nationality issues during the conflicted early post-WW2 period.

It has demonstrated how, at a formative stage of personal development, certain young British women disregarded patriotic expectations to pursue their attraction to German men whose soldierly masculinity had to some extent been ‘feminized’ by captivity and defeat. These transgressive relationships encouraged and reinforced the independent agency many women had tasted during WW2. Identity-challenging experiences, the restrictions of captivity and subsequent migrant status encouraged certain UK-resident German men to adopt a modified masculine role (from that of their childhood and adolescent conditioning) inside part-modernized marital partnerships.

The importance of portraying intimate ex-enemy alliances from both sides, together with the focus on their contested beginnings, has not permitted space for further exploration of some aspects of the ‘subjective glimpses’ contained within this oral history collection: for example, the part these relationships played in the postwar ‘person-to-person’<sup>1</sup> peace and ongoing Anglo-German relations; issues around nationality and divided identity (touched on in Chapter Seven); and another significant outcome – the second generation. Children played a positive role in renewing postwar Anglo-German bonds. Several wives described their first child’s birth as healing any remaining family rift. One woman recalled her husband passing their baby son through the carriage window to his German family, on arrival on their first visit in 1951.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sullivan, p. ix.

<sup>2</sup> BW26, interview.

However, these children also suffered negative reactions to their origins. Several sources (including the children themselves) mentioned shaming, taunting and bullying suffered by UK-resident children of former German POWs.<sup>3</sup>

An estimated one million children born of relationships between enemies in occupied Europe during WW2 have been dubbed 'border children', situated 'at the contested borders of society', whether 'national, political, cultural' or 'discursive.' Border children 'become bearers of deep social conflicts, symbols of painful divisions and discord'. Kjersti Ericsson and Eva Simonsen have examined how such children were perceived in relation to the collective national narrative memory of war and occupation. Inclusion or exclusion, 'us' or 'them', became a central issue through which border children perceived themselves and were perceived for several decades. Embodying the realities of compromise and collaboration, their existence challenged the 'partly mythical' national narratives evolved to come to terms with a non-heroic war record. German paternity engendered shame and guilt, a heavy burden of association with 'evil' in the national narrative.<sup>4</sup>

British memorialization of WW2 and the 'good war' narrative myth exposed Anglo-German children growing up in postwar Britain to greater confrontational moral judgement than their parents faced.<sup>5</sup> Peter Roth recalled his grandson asking, after watching 'a war programme on the television', "'Granddad, who were the goodies in the war?'"<sup>6</sup> A black-and-white narrative emphasizing collective guilt for crimes under Nazism, perpetuating the 'served them right' rationale, has arguably spared the victors from acknowledging questionable brutalities visited upon their enemies. In terms of British national narrative discourse, children of ex-POWs became outsiders, not to a European national memorialization avoiding painful truths of

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<sup>3</sup> BW16; BW14; BW29; Heidi G., correspondence; Trevor K., written account.

<sup>4</sup> Kjersti Ericsson and Eva Simonsen, 'On the Border: The Contested Children of the Second World War', *Childhood*, 15, iii (2008), 397-414, (pp. 397, 398, 400-404). See also Fabrice Virgili, 'Enfants de Boche: The War Children of France' in *Children of World War II: The Hidden Enemy Legacy*, ed. by Kjersti Ericsson and Eva Simonsen (New York & Oxford: Berg, 2005), pp.138-50, (p. 147).

<sup>5</sup> Wendorf, pp. 128-29; Trevor K., written account; Heidi G., email correspondence, telephone interview.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Roth, cited in Weathers, 'Sleeping', *MailOnline*.

collaboration and compromise, but to a British memorialization myth reliant on denial of the enemy's human face: embracing moral absolutes and stereotyped 'goodies' and 'baddies'. National identity issues difficult for ex-POW German migrants became even more challenging for their children, confronted and identified with subjects their parents did not easily find words to discuss.<sup>7</sup> At least one UK-resident child defensively disowned her German identity.<sup>8</sup> Although one mentioned a son ashamed of his English origins, most sources resident in Germany believed their children thrived there without suffering discrimination.<sup>9</sup> Joyce W. believed raising her children as bi-lingual in Germany helped their careers and 'brought them lots of advantages (many more than if one brought up children in England speaking German!).'<sup>10</sup>

To be 'other', with both positive and negative aspects, may be the inevitable fate of the expatriate. For ex-enemy expatriates, in a 'good war' memorialization culture, 'otherness' exacerbated cross-cultural conflict, yet also offered rewarding cross-cultural opportunities. One POW widow, addressing a sixtieth anniversary event in her home town, described how she 'no longer felt ordinary': living reconciliation for sixty years had been 'liberating', broadened her horizons, offering a second language together with 'exciting and enriching' travel abroad, meeting other Europeans.<sup>11</sup> While the voices of my original sources, men and women recalling daring youthful 'border' alliances, have now fallen silent, those of their children have not. Their experiences would offer an important perspective on the UK's post-conflict legacy.

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<sup>7</sup> Joan Z., BW16, BW14, BW28, BW29.

<sup>8</sup> BW14, interview. Subsequently, choosing to study German, she reclaimed her roots.

<sup>9</sup> BW29, interview.

<sup>10</sup> Joyce W., correspondence.

<sup>11</sup> Joan Z., address at a 'Concert of Peace and Reconciliation', 9-7-2005.

## Appendices

### *Appendix 1 Notes on primary oral sources*

#### **Personally collected written and oral sources**

Of British women contributors to this study, 45 had married a German POW or ex-POW. Of those who married, 33 had remained in the UK; 12 at some point moved to Germany or elsewhere abroad; 10 met their husbands after 1947 and 7 were separated or divorced.

Among the remaining women contributors, 16 had a romantic relationship with a German POW which did not last or was ended by outside interference; and 6 women commented on the subject without personal experience.

The German male contributors included 35 former POWs, 1 former PP<sup>1</sup> and 2 former Surrendered Enemy Personnel (SEP), all of whom had been held post-1945 as POWs in the UK. Of these 38 men, 26 had formed a relationship with a British woman during captivity in the UK. (Among 10 whose relationships led to marriage, 3 returned to Germany and 2 divorced.) The remaining 14 male contributors (including 2 non ex-POWs) commented in general, or on non-personal experience.

Of former POW contributors, all but three (one from the *Kriegsmarine* and two *Luftwaffe* airmen) had served in the *Wehrmacht* during WW2. (One transferred from the *Wehrmacht* to the *Waffen SS*.) Nine had seen action in Russia, before transfer to the Western front. Six captured in North Africa in 1943 were sent initially to the US. (Another who did not specify place of capture was also sent to the US.) Of four captured in Europe in 1944, one was captured in France and taken to the US; two captured in Normandy and one (PP) on the Loire

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<sup>1</sup> Protected Personnel – non-combatant *Sanitätspersonal* (medical corps attendant).

were brought to camps in the UK. Six others described capture between February and April 1945, including two close to the German/Dutch border and one at the Austro-German border. Most were held in Belgian camps before transfer to the UK. Two serving on the Channel Islands were taken prisoner shortly after the end of the war and brought direct to the UK. A WW1 veteran and one other ex-POW appear to have been SEP, arriving in the UK in 1946.<sup>2</sup>

## **Other auto/biographical sources**

### ***Published accounts of former POWs***

Bülter, Fritz, *POW: Erlebnisse eines Seemanns in Amerika und England* (East Berlin: Verlag Das Neue Berlin, 1956)

Autobiographical narrative account; held in US and UK; relationship with British woman.

Clay, Catrine, *Trautmann's Journey: From Hitler Youth to FA Cup Legend* (London: Yellow Jersey, 2010)

Biography of footballer Bert Trautmann; held in UK; married British woman.

Fleming, Ian, ed., *From Schöneiche to Alton, a Prisoner of War Who Stayed: Willi Gerlach's story* ([n.p.], 2005)

Self-published, compiled by friend from firsthand account of POW held in the UK; married British woman.

Gebauer, George, *Hitler Youth to Church of England Priest: My Autobiography* (Charleston, SC, USA: Createspace, 2014)

Self-published autobiographical account; held in US and UK; married British woman.

Hennes, Gerhard, *Under the Crooked Cross*, (Indiana, USA: AuthorHouse, 2008)

———, Gerhard G., *The Barbed Wire: POW in the USA* (Franklin, Tennessee: Hilsboro Press, 2004)

Held in the US; not held in the UK.

Hörner, Helmut, trans. and ed. Allan Kent Powell, *German Odyssey: The Journal of a German Prisoner of War* (Colorado, USA: Fulcrum, 1991)

Held in the US and UK.

Lux, Rudi, *From Pomerania to Ponteland: The Youngest Prisoner of War* (Stockport: F. L. Kennington, 2001)

Held in the UK; married British woman.

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter Three.

Metelmann, Henry, *A Hitler Youth* (London: Caliban Books, 1997; Staplehurst: Spelmount, 2004 edn)

—, *Through Hell for Hitler: a dramatic first-hand account of fighting on the Eastern Front with the Wehrmacht* (Wellingborough: Patrick Stephens, 1990)

Held in the US and UK.

Milton, Giles, *Wolfram: the Boy Who Went to War* (London: Sceptre, 2011)

Biographical narrative of German family; centred on POW held in the US; written by son-in-law.

Schulz, Robert, *Trilogie hinter Stacheldraht: als deutscher Kriegsgefangener in den Lagern des Allierten auf drei Kontinenten 1943-1947* (Berlin: Scultetus, 1996)

Autobiographical account; held in US, Belgium and UK.

Wentzel, Fritz, *Single or Return? The Story of a German POW in British camps and the Escape of Lieutenant Franz von Werra* (London: William Kimber, 1954)

Autobiographical narrative; held in Canada and UK.

Zimmermann, Fritz Hermann, *A Stranger in Three Continents: My Life from 1920 to 1951* (Billericay: Acors Press, 2004)

Self-published autobiographical account compiled by son; held in Canada and the UK; married British woman.

#### ***Published accounts of British women who had relationships with UK-held German POWs***

Burghart, Thea, *Loving Mine Enemy* (Bognor Regis: Anchor Publications, 1985)

Autobiographical narrative written under pseudonym; British farmer's wife; fell in love with German POW, whom she married after divorcing British husband.

Dennis, Barbara, *Love was Different Then* (London: Daily Mail PYB00378, [n.d.])

Daily Mail-published p/b; autobiographical account written in the third person; unfulfilled romantic relationship with Austrian POW.

Mae, Muriel, *Enemies in Love* (Edinburgh: Pentland Press, 1994)

Autobiographical narrative of British woman who married German POW; subsequently separated, divorced and remarried.

***Imperial War Museum sound archive recordings***

Behrens, Hans <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80013924>  
Born 1926; POW in US and UK; married British woman, 1952.

Grubba, Erwin Albert <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80009789>  
Born 1925, Berlin; POW in UK; married British woman, 1948.

Liebschner, Hans-Paul Joachim <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80008672>  
Born 1925, lower Silesia; POW in US and UK; married British woman, 1950.

Ranft, Martin Johannes <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80022018>  
Born 1922, Chemnitz area; POW in US and UK; married British woman, 1950.

Schran, Gunther Caspar <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80013291>  
Born 1921, Bochum; POW in UK; married British woman, 1948.

Steffen, Klaus Fritz Hermann <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80012309>  
Born 1922, Silesia; POW in UK; married British woman, 1948.

## Appendix 2

### Copyright considerations

Prior to 1988, British copyright legislation did not cover the spoken word. Interviewee co-operation with a journalistic project assumed consent, rather than formally establishing it with a signed form. The usual courtesy extended to interviewees was to send copies of their quotes in the context of the final typescript, for correction if they felt they had been misrepresented. Most written and spoken contributions to my research were collected between 1985 and 1987, before the 1988 Copyright Act came into force, in 1989. This Act effectively established copyright in speech recorded both before and after 1 August 1989. That recorded after 1 August 1989 remains in force for 70 years after the death of the speaker. In respect of anything recorded before August 1989, copyright remains in force for 50 years from the end of 1989, if this is longer than 70 years after the death of the copyright owner. An online Oral History Society (OHS) guide offered certain recommendations relating to pre-1989 recordings.<sup>3</sup> The following discussion refers to the advice offered when the guide was consulted.

It stated that access to pre-1989 recordings (as opposed to written transcripts, which thereby become subject to copyright restrictions) 'should be unrestricted unless some agreement to the contrary is in existence.' (My published appeals offered to treat replies in confidence; a few contributors expressed an expectation of confidentiality and/or anonymity.) The OHS website further advised that in the absence of an agreement permission must be sought from pre-1989 interviewees or their relatives if *a substantial extract* from an interview is to be published or disseminated. Thus, pre-1989 recordings of interviewees with whom

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.oralhistory.org.uk/ethics.php>; Alan Ward's essay, 'Is your oral history legal and ethical?' is also available at [http://www.concernedhistorians.org/content\\_files/file/ET/187.pdf](http://www.concernedhistorians.org/content_files/file/ET/187.pdf) [accessed 30 January 2015].



confidentiality/anonymity was not a condition of the interview might be freely accessed, and presumably paraphrased, but only short quotes published.

Advice was offered regarding situations where pre-1989 interviewees have died, or attempts to contact them or their relatives fail, that their recorded speech may be used without permission in publications, etc., if, after careful consideration, no one's interests are likely to be damaged. In the case of the some of my material, I felt unable to make that assumption, due to the continuing sensitivity of the subject.

OHS advice offered a strategy that if a contribution has been effectively anonymised and largely paraphrased, some brief actual quotes (which do not identify the speaker) may be included. Paraphrasing carries the risk of distortion, dilution or misrepresentation of meaning. Aside from these perils, the OHS's further legal and ethical guidelines persuaded me it would be advisable to try to re-contact my former interviewees.

The 1988 Copyright Act effectively established three separate copyrights in any interview recording.<sup>4</sup> While copyright in the recording itself generally belongs to the individual (or organization) for whom the recording is made, copyright in the words spoken belongs to each speaker. It can be assigned to another person or organization; alternatively, the owner can grant permission but impose restrictions on access and use. Some 'non-commercial' activities are still permitted, including copying for private research and study and publishing short illustrative extracts.

The Act did not cover oral history interviewees specifically. However, in covering speakers on recordings, it gave oral history interviewees the right to be identified as the authors of their recorded speech and the moral right for their words not to be subjected to 'derogatory treatment', i.e., edited in a way which adversely alters the sense. These rights are retained by

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<sup>4</sup> The Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988, HMSO, <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/48/contents> [accessed 30 January 2015].

interviewees until their death, regardless of the owner of the copyright in their words. The OHS guide emphasized that even after assigning copyright, an interviewee can take legal action if their moral rights are infringed, for example, by confidential or defamatory statements being made public. Legal objections can also be raised by third parties. Any statements made by an interviewee about family members would require consideration in this light.

The provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998 (which only covers living individuals) introduced a further reason – protection from being identified – for obtaining signed clearance forms from surviving interviewees.<sup>5</sup> According to OHS guidance, the Act does not apply to research interviews, as long as they are covered by clearance forms. An exemption for data held for ‘research purposes’ including ‘historical research’ allows data to be kept indefinitely and used for different purposes. However, this only applies ‘if the results of the research...are not made available in a form which identifies data subjects.’ Although oral history practitioners need not register under the Data Protection Act, the Act reinforces the need to obtain permission from informants before publishing interview material from which they or other living persons could be identified.

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<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/29/contents> [accessed 30 January 2015].

### *Appendix 3*

#### **Transcription of**

#### **STATUTORY RULES AND ORDERS**

1940 No. 1389

#### **EMERGENCY POWERS (DEFENCE)**

#### **Prisoners of War and Internees**

THE PRISONERS OF WAR AND INTERNEES (ACCESS AND COMMUNICATION) ORDER, 1940, DATED JULY 27, 1940, MADE BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WAR UNDER REGULATION 18C OF THE DEFENCE (GENERAL) REGULATIONS, 1939.

In exercise of the powers conferred on me by Regulation 18C of the Defence (General) Regulations, 1939(a), I, one of His Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State, hereby order as follows:—

1. No person shall, without lawful authority, enter any place in the United Kingdom where prisoners of war or interned persons are detained.
2. No person shall in any place in the United Kingdom where prisoners of war or interned persons are detained, do any act likely to prejudice the discipline of any prisoner of war or interned person or to interfere with the administration of any place of detention for prisoners of war or interned persons, or shall, without lawful authority, accept for transmission or conveyance on behalf of any prisoner of war or interned person, any letter, written matter or other article whatsoever recording information by words signs or otherwise.

3. No person shall without lawful authority despatch or convey to or for any prisoner of war or interned person any money, valuable security, cigar, cigarette, or any article likely to facilitate the escape of any prisoner of war or interned person.
4. No person shall without lawful authority despatch otherwise than by post, or convey to or for any prisoner of war or interned person any letter, written or printed matter or any other article whatsoever recording information by words, signs or otherwise, or any article of food (including confectionery) or clothing or any liquid or tobacco.
5. In this Order the expression "interned person" means any person in respect of whom there is in force an order for his detention under Part I of the Defence (General) Regulations, 1939, or in exercise of the prerogative of the Crown.
6. This Order may be cited as the Prisoners of War and Internees (Access and Communication) Order, 1940.

Given at the War Office, this 27<sup>th</sup> day of July, 1940.

*Anthony Eden*, One of His Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State.

a) S.R. & O. 1939 No. 927.

London: HMSO, 1940

TNA: MAF 47/117

## *Appendix 4*

### **Transcription of public notice regarding German prisoners:**

Appendix to Home Office Letter No. 85/1946

dated the 30<sup>th</sup> March, 1946

#### **NOTICE**

German prisoners of war are being employed in this neighbourhood. These men are forbidden to attempt to fraternise with members of the public, except in so far as may be strictly necessary for the efficient performance of their work or for their reasonable comfort in the conditions in which they are required to live. They are also forbidden to accept from the public any money, food or cigarettes or any article designed to assist an attempt to escape.

Prisoners may not, except in the course of their duty, enter any private premises other than their billet, or any place of amusement, public house or shop; they may, however, attend places of worship when authorised. Rations for those who are billeted are bought by their employers. Prisoners are forbidden to use public transport or to wear civilian clothes.

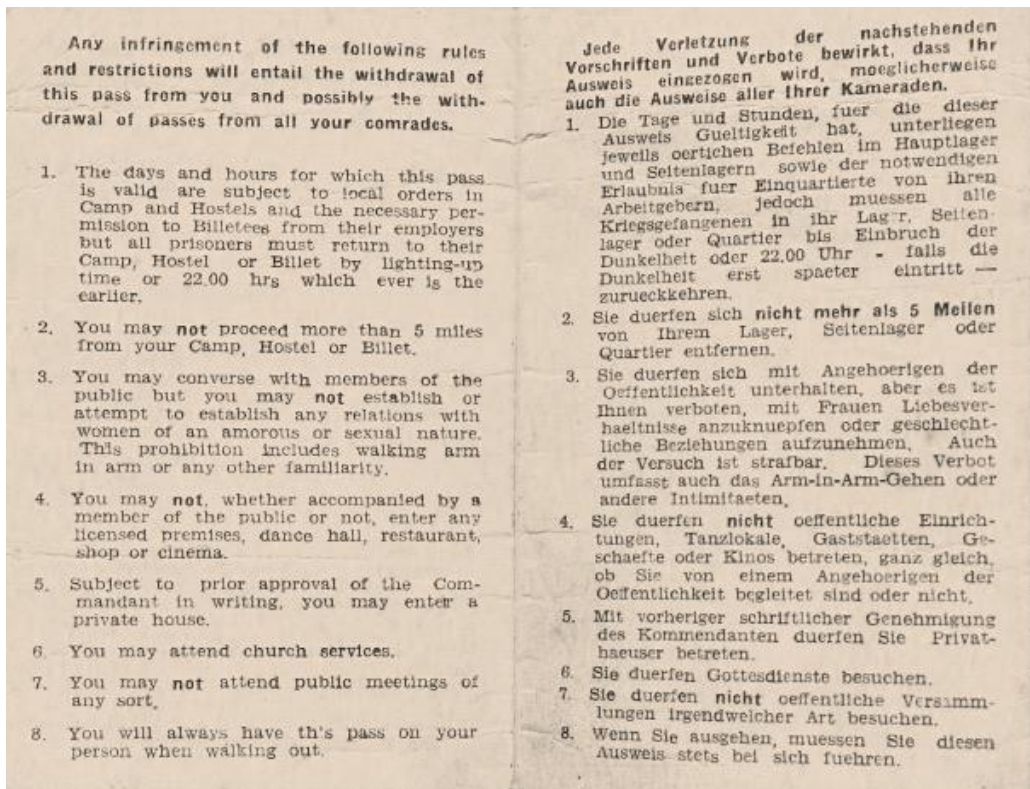
Any breach of the above rules renders the prisoners liable to severe disciplinary action, and the public are requested not to do anything which would encourage a prisoner to misconduct himself in any of these ways.

TNA: HO 45/21875

Appendix 5

Prisoner of war walking out pass:

No. 113 GERMAN PRISONER OF  
WAR WORKING CAMP  
PERMANENT WALKING OUT PASS FOR  
UNESCORTED P.W.  
DAUER-AUSGANGS-BERECHTIGUNG FUER  
KRIEGSGEFANGENE No. 123



## Appendix 6

### Werner Vetter's court martial plea of mitigation statement

transcribed from the *Droitwich Guardian*, 28 June 1947:

'My life until 1946 was quite meaningless. Already as a boy of 17 I was plucked away from my studies in order to fight for an insane war leader, who wanted to conquer the whole world with our young lives or die the glorious death of heroes. Day by day it was driven home to us how one is to despatch one's enemy. They never tired of making promises to us but it was never asked what our feelings were. I parted then with all who were beloved and dear to me. Nearly five years have passed without my having seen any one of them again. I was informed of the deaths of my two brothers at the time when I myself was lying in a field hospital. Then came captivity. We were taken from England to America in order to be employed in Texas in the cotton fields. Here again we were given a taste of the rod of rulers. The same kind of course was used against us as in Germany. If one was not able to complete the amount of work allotted, one was locked in behind iron bars until one promised in writing to work as long as the quota of work required. Don't you think that we sometimes asked ourselves what was the good of our continuing our lives each day more sad than the other[?]. Although it was promised to us in America that we were going to be returned to Germany we landed in England where the things we paid for with our hard earned money were taken from us. On May 12, 1946, my life took on at last a different meaning.

'I learned that in this large world there exists also people who think differently to those who had been speaking to me of nothing but war and destruction. I met a human being to whom I could entrust all my woes while knowing that I was being understood and that that person had no hatred for me.

'Nay, that girl loved me without enquiring whether I was a P.o.W. or not. The whole day I was thinking of joy of the evening hours to come which that girl was going to spend with me. We made plans about the future. We wanted to marry, but then we were again reminded that I was a P.o.W., or to put it in a better way, a member of a defeated army – a man who had not the right to love even, who was there just to fulfil his duty from morning to evening without complaint. But we two were happy – happy beyond words to describe; as happy as only two young people can be who love each other with all their hearts. We did not worry about rules or regulations because love has a law of its own – a law of human nature that people of our nature has claimed its right to; and nature won. That added even stronger ties to our love.

'Then I was transferred and we did not meet again. Whenever there was an opportunity to let her have a letter from me I did so. Unfortunately I was not able to receive a letter from her since it was forbidden to do so from civilians.

'Then at last after six months I received a letter from her. We were going to meet on the Saturday. Now I know she was waiting for that hour, day by day in order to be able to tell me in person that close to her heart she was carrying a baby from me. On April 16 I was informed by her mother that Olive had given birth to a baby girl. I immediately wrote to her asking her to do anything that might be necessary.

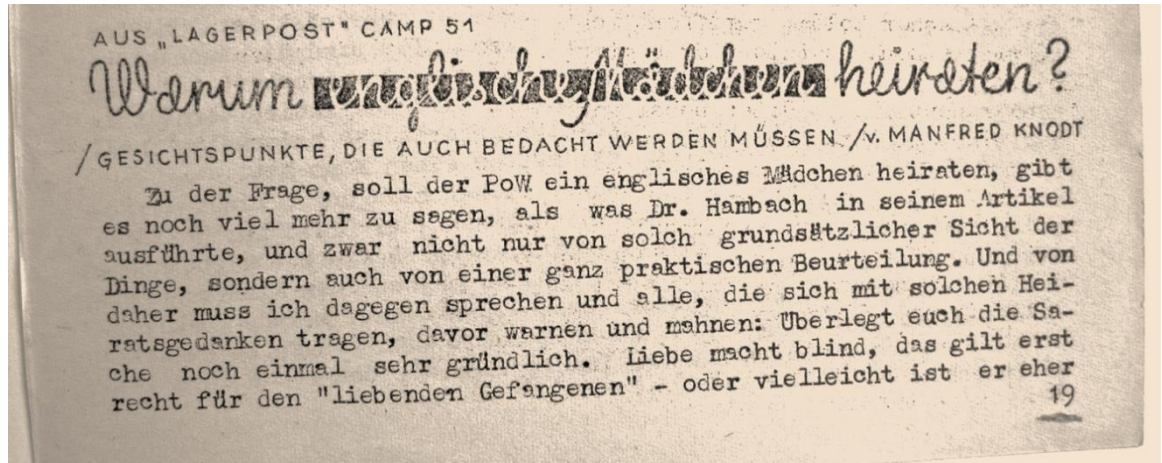
'Happen what may, I know that the mother of my child will be on my side for ever and I also know that no one can prevent us going on loving each other. They can, it is true, forbid us to write each other. They can even make it impossible for us to meet, but no one can ever break the tie that makes us belong to each other.

'Thousands of English, American and French soldiers marry German women and why should not a decent English girl be allowed to marry a German prisoner. 'Are we not children ruled by the same laws given by God? Do we not have the same emotions as your soldiers in Germany? Why do you wish to punish us for something that in the months to come will be permissible? 'I am healthy to the core and full of vitality. Why do you want to bar me from marrying the girl and securing a decent father for the child?'

## Appendix 7

### Manfred Knodt, 'Warum englische Mädchen heiraten?'

#### Allington POW camp magazine article





ein "gefangener Liebhaber", da wie überall in der Welt, auch hier die Männer knapp sind, und manches englische Mädchen kalkuliert, lieber einen deutschen POW zum Mann als gar keinen. Also nicht vor lauter Lichtseiten die Schattenseiten übersehen.

Es liegt mir fern grundsätzlich eine Überlegenheit der deutschen Frau gegenüber der englischen zu behaupten, aber es ist eine nicht wegzuleugnende Tatsache, dass Ehen zwischen Angehörigen verschiedener Nationen oft, sehr oft, nicht besonders glücklich sind. Denn hier kommen noch gewisse Unterschiede hinzu, die eine harmonische Ehe in Frage stellen, mehr als dies bei Angehörigen des selben Volkes ist. Der Unterschied in der Sprache ist viel tiefgreifender, als dass er nur ein Unterschied in den Worten wäre, es ist zugleich ein Unterschied im Fühlen, Empfinden und Denken. Es muss uns sehr zu denken geben, dass die Ziffer der nach dem Kriege zwischen G. I.s (Amerikaner) und Engländerinnen geschlossen und schon wieder geschiedenen Ehen erstaunlich gross ist. Und die englischen Ehefrauen kamen in Amerika doch wahrlich nicht in ärmere Verhältnisse. Zum Teil liegt es daran, dass viele amerikanische Soldaten den Mädchen alles mögliche vorschwindelten, was sie zuhause seien und besässen (die Gefahr besteht für die englischen Mädchen nun durch manchen deutschen POW) und dann kam die Ernüchterung. Wie wird sich das erst auswirken, wenn eine Engländerin in das zerstörte Deutschland kommt?

Dazu kommt noch ein Gefahrenpunkt, die Kindererziehung. Jeder Elternteil möchte das Kind so erzogen haben, wie es bei ihm zulande Sitte ist, falls nicht ein Teil von vornherein bedingungslos kapituliert hat.

Wenn die Ehe und ihr Glück nur davon abhinge, ob die beiden sexuell zusammenpassen und harmonieren, dann wäre die Frage ziemlich einfach, aber die Ehe ist Lebensgemeinschaft nach Leib, Seele und Geist. Sie ist sehr wackelig, wenn sie nur auf ersterer gegründet ist. Und das ist doch bei den meisten POW-Ehen der Fall. Das sind die Ausnahmen, wo das Verhältnis auch geistige und seelische Gemeinschaft ist. Und wie kommt es denn zur POW-Ehe? Meistens ist das intime Verhältnis nicht ohne Folgen geblieben, dann ist die Heirat das notwendige Übel, damit das Kind einen Vater und die Mutter einen Mann hat.

Nicht irgendwelche hohen grundsätzlichen Erwägungen einer vom Sozialismus erstrebten Völkerverbrüderung sind der Grund zur Heirats-erlaubnis gewesen, wie Dr. Harbach meint, sondern man hat es getan aus dem ganz praktischen Gedanken, die Zahl der unehelichen Kinder zu vermindern. Dieser durchschlagende Gesichtspunkt wurde gerade von kirchlicher Seite ins Feld geführt. Ich möchte dazu auch fragen, ob es wirklich die wertvollsten Töchter des Landes sind, die den POW's ihre Liebe schenken.

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Und zum Schluss möge jeder bedenken: Für jedes englische Mädchen, das ein POW heiratet, wird ein deutsches Mädchen um ihre Lebenshoffnung, Frau und Lutter zu werden, betrogen. Wer sich entschieden hat und nicht mehr zurückkann, dem ist zu wünschen, dass er seine Wahl nie bereut und in dieser Ehe sein Lebensglück findet. Wer noch die Möglichkeit hat, seinen Entschluss zu ändern, soll sich ernstlich all diese Gegengründe durch den Kopf gehen lassen und davon ablassen. Wer noch jung ist und zwangsweise die drei Jahre gewartet hat auf Brautschau zu gehen, soll das halbe oder dreiviertel Jahr sich auch noch bezähmen und von seinem unbeherrschten Trieb sich nicht in dieser Notlage zu Entscheidungen und Handlungen hinreissen lassen, die er bei vernünftigen Abwägen (leider ist das bei vielen in der Gefangenschaft nicht mehr möglich) niemals gut heissen kann. Sonst bewahrheitete sich wieder "der Wehn ist kurz, die Reu ist lang". Den Unbelehrbaren, die in der Ehe nur ein Institut sehen, um sich zu amüsieren - und warum sollte man es nicht einmal mit einer Engländerin versuchen, ein Reiz der Neuheit - und die sich einfach scheiden lassen, wenn ihnen die Frau nicht mehr zusagt, denen ist sowieso nicht zu raten.

## Bibliography

### Primary oral sources

Interviews and correspondence with:

67 British women (of whom 61 had relationships with POWs)

40 German men (of whom 38 were former POWs, including 27 who had relationships with British women)

See Appendix 1, 'Notes on primary oral sources'

### Autobiographical and biographical accounts

Anon (believed to be Marta Hillers), trans. James Stern, *A Woman in Berlin*, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1955)

Bülter, Fritz, *POW: Erlebnisse eines Seemanns in Amerika und England* (East Berlin: Verlag Das Neue Berlin, 1956)

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