



## Abstract

### **Forbidden relationships, forgotten children? The relationships between German women and French prisoners of war during the Second World War**

The term « forbidden relationships » refers to contacts between German civilians and French prisoners of war present on the territory of the Reich during the Second World War. Forbidden by the decree of *Verbotener Umgang mit Kriegsgefangenen* from November 1939<sup>1</sup>, such contacts were banned both for military security reasons and in the name of National Socialist racial ideology. Thanks to a substantial corpus of judicial files related to this crime, the thesis analyses the tens of thousands of relationships that have taken place. It shows the gap between “the norm” and reality during this period. It reflects the difficulty in controlling the civilian population during times of conflict and the agency of the actors. The use of this documentary material has also proven to be beneficial in reconstructing the daily life of a society at war, a slice of ordinary life, played out far from the front line. Although not all forbidden relationships were of a romantic and/or sexual nature, they are of particular concern to the authorities. One of the interests of this study is therefore not only to shed light on the workings of the German legal system by revealing the methods used in hearings. It also explores the history of gender relations in the context of war from different perspectives. The role of sexuality is analysed, and the function assigned to women's bodies. Prohibited relationships were also an opportunity to question the attitudes of the captives and their relationship with the “enemy” status been assigned. The significance of these relationships has been questioned over a long period of time, with the most compelling being the testimonies of the children born to these mixed couples. These “children of war”, who more than seventy years after the events have shared their experiences. With the help of these different trajectories, and thanks to the contributions of micro history, this study contributes to approaching war in a different way, through a story of intimacy and love. It defends the hypothesis that forbidden relations contributed to the writing of a different history, one of Franco-German relations at the heart of the Second World War. In order for this to be understood requires a historical anthropological approach and the questioning of relationships to sexuality and the structures of kinship.

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<sup>1</sup> Verordnung zur Ergänzung der Strafvorschriften zum Schutz der Wehrkraft des Deutschen Volkes vom 25. November 1939 (RGBl). I, p. 2319.



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