Introduction

Historiography and Purpose of the Study

War and conflict often force men and women to take decisions they had never considered during peacetime. In his 1845 novel *Twenty Years After* – a sequel to *The Three Musketeers* – Alexandre Dumas describes a scene in which one of the book's main antagonists, a man known as Mordaunt, reports to Sir Oliver Cromwell after a battle with the guard regiment of King Charles I, which resulted in the King's capture:

> 'The Colonel of the regiment which served as the escort of the king – I mean Charles – was slain, I believe?' said Cromwell, looking straight at Mordaunt.
> 'Yes sir.'
> 'By whom?'
> 'By me.'
> 'What was his name?'
> 'Lord de Winter.'
> 'Your uncle?' exclaimed Cromwell.
> 'My uncle! Traitors to England are no relatives of mine.'
> Cromwell continued thoughtful a moment, looking at the young man; then with that deep melancholy which Shakespeare describes so well, he said, 'Mordaunt, you are a dreadful servant.'
> 'When the Lord commands, one must not trifle with orders. Abraham raised the knife over Isaac; and Isaac was his son.'
> 'Yes,' said Cromwell; but the Lord did not allow the sacrifice to be accomplished.'
> 'I looked around me,' said Mordaunt; 'and I saw neither goat or kid caught in the thickets of the plain.'
> Cromwell bowed.
> 'You are strong among the strong, Mordaunt,' said he . . .[1]

[1] Alexandre Dumas, *Twenty Years After* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 512.

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Although this fictitious story takes place about three hundred years before the events discussed in this work, the interaction between Cromwell and Mordaunt still manages to address many of the themes that will be examined here. It shows how individuals redefine others within changing situations: Charles is no longer Cromwell's king, Lord de Winter no longer Mordaunt's uncle. These changes have repercussions for the actors' attitudes towards them yet it remains vague what these precisely are. Secondly, the orders Cromwell gave to Mordaunt were evidently ambiguous enough to be interpreted differently to how they were meant, a recurrent issue in warfare. Mordaunt had to make a 'judgement under uncertainty', and, as sociologists have long demonstrated, it is likely that he considered his actions to be 'representative' of the situation, and as the only workable alternative available to him at the time. What to outsiders might appear 'irrational' nevertheless developed from prior ways that actors, such as Mordaunt, had approached and solved their problems and informed their decisions.[2] Cromwell acknowledges this by professing both shock and approval, as such showing the ambivalence and duality in his understanding of Mordaunt's actions. Ultimately, Cromwell's reaction is rooted in pragmatism and utilitarianism: the mission, after all, is accomplished. Finally, it shows war's inherent hardening nature: it takes mere seconds for the traumatic and onerous issue to be put to rest.

Nazi Germany's death knell came exactly one hundred years after Dumas's examination of the different strata in military thought and the way these informed soldiers' actions and concerns. For most Germans, the first months of 1945 became synonymous with unparalleled destruction, seemingly arbitrary death from without and within, and unequivocal and total military defeat.[3] How these three notions related to each other is much less known, if only because '1945' was almost immediately appropriated. In post-war West Germany the notion of a *Stunde Null*, or 'zero hour', was introduced to represent May 1945, highlighting the break with Germany's totalitarian past. Adhering to this concept meant that all misery that had befallen the country had to be traced back to Nazism, which was readily done.[4] At the same time, East German scholars presented the violence in 1945 as proof of widespread disagreement with a regime that had pursued the 'imperialist interest of German

[2] Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, 'Judgment under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases', *Science* (185) 1974, pp. 1124–31.

[3] Richard Bessel, *Germany 1945, From War to Peace* (New York: Pocket Books, 2010), pp. 4–7.

[4] Manfred Görtemaker, *Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Von der Gründung bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1999), pp. 159–60. See for example: *Stunde Null und danach – Schicksale 1945–1949*. Ten volumes (Leer: Verlag Gerhard Rautenberg, 1983–7).

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monopoly capital', while also playing up the role of the anti-Fascist resistance.[5] Moreover, virtually from the moment Allied troops entered their communities, Germans throughout their country drew on the terror and fear they felt in 1945 to present themselves as victims of National Socialism.[6] This study proposes a new approach towards the perception of late-war violence. Above all, it seeks to restore agency to the German armed forces, the Wehrmacht, and examines the mark it left on the German wartime community.

Both the sheer scale and the diversity of violence were unparalleled in German history, and to untangle the various strands of responsibility, culpability, and involvement, this study will restrict itself to an analysis of the events in East Prussia and its capital, Königsberg. We will return to further underlying reasons for this decision below, but first address the general narrative. In 1945, the omnipresent violence throughout Germany led to a sense of 'general hopelessness' among its population, as Allied bombardments reduced city after city to rubble, while revenge-driven Soviet troops molested tens of thousands of women in Eastern Germany.[7] The final months of the war also saw a massive increase in German-versus-German violence, or intra-ethnic violence, mainly in the form of decentralised summary courts. Since this type of violence took place against the background of the widespread racist violence that has come to define the National Socialist regime, it is generally – but inaccurately – grouped together with it. During the previous years, the Nazi regime had persecuted racial minorities and social outsiders, but within its own borders had at least sought to keep repression and mass murder from the public eye.[8] In the final months of the war the violence

[5] Hajo Dröll, 'Die Zusammenbruchskrise des faschistischen Systems in Deutschland', in Niethammer, Borsdorf, and Brandt (eds.), *Arbeiterinitiative 1945*, p. 173; Gerhard Förster and Richard Lakowski, *1945: Das Jahr der endgultigen Niederlage der faschistischen Wehrmacht* (Berlin: Deutscher Militärverlag, 1985); Wolfgang Schumann and Olaf Groehler (eds), *Deutschland im Zweiten Weltkrieg 6: Die Zerschlagung des Hitlerfaschismus und die Befreiung des deutschen Volkes (Juni 1944 bis zum 8. Mai 1945)* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1985).

[6] For example: Jürgen Thorwald, *Es begann an der Weichsel. Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen aus dem Osten* (Stuttgart: Steingrüben 1949); Jürgen Thorwald, *Das Ende an der Elbe. Die letzten Monate des Zweiten Weltkriegs im Osten* (Stuttgart: Steingrüben 1950). See also: Saul Padover, *Lügendetektor: Vernehmungen im besiegten Deutschland 1944/45* (Frankfurt a.M.: Eichborn Verlag, 1999); Bill Niven (ed.), *Germans As Victims: Remembering the Past in Contemporary Germany* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), ch. 1: 'Poor Germany'.

[7] Heinz Boberach (ed.), *Meldungen aus dem Reich: Die geheimen Lageberichte des Sicherheitsdienstes der SS 1938–1945, Band 17* (Herrsching: Pawlak Verlag, 1984), p. 6734.

[8] David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion under Nazism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), chs. 4 and 7; Michael Burleigh, *The Third Reich: a New History* (London: MacMillan, 2000), pp. 631–2; Robert Gellately and Nathan Stoltzfus (eds.),

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against these groups escalated and increasingly took place out in the open. These so-called *Endphaseverbrechen* – 'Crimes of the final phase' – have been the focus of in-depth research. During the first decade of the twenty-first century, these crimes were examined within the framework of their respective organisations such as the Gestapo, the Hitler Youth, the prison system, and the concentration camp system. Scholars convincingly demonstrated that there was not a single Nazi institution that did not resort to radical measures during the final months of the war.[9]

Further research followed shortly afterwards and placed these crimes within the context of the crumbling German community. Scholars like Sven Keller stressed that despite the Nazi regime's failure to meet most of its promises, which was clear to most Germans by the summer of 1944, it was still able to mobilise the German population for the defence of their country by means of increasingly radical laws and orders.[10] The radicalised Party official as the linchpin in the violence towards the German population was fairly readily accepted, since National Socialism and violence are inextricably linked.[11] 'Looking at the ruinous landscape left behind by National Socialism – a landscape shaped by war, racism, exclusion and murder, violence seems to be the common denominator,' Richard Bessel rightly observed, further noting that when the Third Reich broke down in 1945, violence itself was the only aspect of National Socialist system to sustain.[12]

Yet one of the biggest differences in the violence in 1945 and the violence during the years earlier was that it focused on 'regular' German Volksgenossen as well, rather than merely on the different minority groups. In rapid succession, the regime established summary courts

Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Saul Friedlander, *The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews 1939–1945* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2007), pp. 92–3.

[9] Daniel Blatman, *The Death Marches, the Final Phase of Nazi Genocide* (London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011); Nikolaus Wachsmann, *Hitler's Prisons, Legal Terror in Nazi Germany* (London: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 319–31; Michael Kater, *Hitler Youth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 215–30; Gerhard Paul, ' 'Diese Erschießungen haben mich innerlich gar nicht mehr berührt': Die Kriegsendphasenverbrechen der Gestapo 1944/45', in Paul and Mallmann (eds.) *Die Gestapo im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, pp. 543–68.

[10] Sven Keller, *Volksgemeinschaft am Ende: Gesellschaft und Gewalt 1944/45* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2013), pp. 419–26; Cord Arendes, Edgar Wolfrun, and Jörg Zedler (eds.), *Terror nach Innen: Verbrechen am Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2006).

[11] On Party behaviour in Eastern Germany, see: Alastair Noble, *Nazi Rule and the Soviet Offensive in Eastern Germany, 1944–1945: the Darkest Hour* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2010).

[12] Richard Bessel, 'Eine "Volksgemeinschaft" der Gewalt', in Schmiechen-Ackermann (ed.), p. 359.

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(15 February and 9 March), implemented the 'Nero Decree' (19 March), which called for the destruction of the German infrastructure, and the 'flag order' (3 April), which for all German men made hoisting a white flag punishable by death. These orders shared the communality that they were meant to affect the larger German public. Instigated by the Nazi elite and steeped in Nazi rhetoric, they have been considered 'the last gasp of the regime', willing to drag all Germans along with them into destruction.[13] The decentralised and disparate nature of the violence, which, moreover, seemed to flare up with little warning or rationale, further allowed scholars to draw parallels between earlier Nazi political violence, such as in 1932–3, and the violence in 1945.[14] However, the fractured state of Germany by 1945 made it significantly harder for policy decisions taken in Berlin to be implemented 'on the ground'. By confining the research to one province, this study examines how the central decision-making processes translated into intra-ethnic violence on a local level.

Within the historiography of '1945', sustained attention has also been devoted to the violence committed by Soviet troops against German refugees. The persistent narrative is that of a failing Party bureaucracy that prevented, and often forbade, the population of threatened areas from preparing for evacuation, thereby leaving them at the mercy of the Soviets.[15] This study addresses the events in the months prior to and during the East Prussian offensive, the Soviet offensive which started on 12/13 January 1945 as part of a larger strategic effort to destroy German forces east of the Oder river – the final natural barrier before Berlin. Covering the period between July 1944 and May 1945, it will focus sustained attention on the considerations that underpinned the different evacuation measures in East Prussia, expanding on the research of Heinrich Schwendemann who examined the motivations behind strategic and tactical decisions taken by Wehrmacht commanders during the final months of the war.[16] It will closely link it to the research of David Yelton, who examined the establishment and deployment of the Volkssturm

[13] Manfred Zeidler, 'Der Zusammenbruch des NS-Staates', in Ralph Giordano (ed.), *Kriegsende in Deutschland*, pp. 42–9.

[14] Sven Keller, 'Volksgemeinschaft and Violence: Some Reflections on Interdependencies', in Steber and Gotto (eds.), *Visions of Community in Nazi Germany*, pp. 226–39.

[15] Theodor Schieder (ed.), *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa, Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus den Gebieten östlich der Oder-Neisse, Band I*, (Munich: Deutschen Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984). Popular history works addressing this theme are: Cornelius Ryan, *The Last Battle* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1966); Antony Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin* (New York: Penguin, 2002).

[16] See: Heinrich Schwendemann, 'Der deutsche Zusammenbruch im Osten 1944/45', in Rusinek (ed.), *Kriegsende 1945*, pp. 125–50.

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militia during the final year of the war.[17] The two scholars both established that the military was much more closely involved in decisions that directly impacted the German civilian population.

The continuing focus on Party behaviour meant that the largest and most violent player present in Germany in 1945 – the German Wehrmacht – has remained underappreciated as an actor. Although the Wehrmacht's role in the defeat of the Third Reich has been examined, the intra-ethnic violence that took place during the final fighting in Germany is rarely traced back to it.[18] Research into the motivations behind the violent behaviour among the ranks of the Wehrmacht goes back to Bartov's 1985 standard work 'The Eastern Front, 1941–45: German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare', which not only addressed the violent interaction its members had with an environment they perceived as hostile but also provided an insight into the ideological indoctrination explaining the troops' motivations.[19] In the decades that followed, Wehrmacht behaviour on the Eastern Front remained the focus of in-depth studies. The crimes committed by the Wehrmacht during the German occupation of the Soviet Union are central in these works, and numerous scholars convincingly demonstrated that the Wehrmacht was actively involved in the Holocaust, while also participating in countless acts of genocide against local populations. The focus on the policies in the Soviet Union however also means that the examination 'stops' at the German border: the summer of 1944 is generally the end-point of these studies.[20] Whereas numerous studies address the violent behavioural patterns of the Wehrmacht in the occupied cities in Eastern Europe, so far no research exists that asks critical questions about the relation between the Wehrmacht and its own

[17] David Yelton, *Hitler's Volkssturm: the Nazi Militia and the Fall of Germany 1944–1945* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002).

[18] Andreas Kunz, *Wehrmacht und Niederlage: Die bewaffnete Macht in der Endphase der nationalsozialistischen Herrschaft 1944 bis 1945* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2005)

[19] Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front 1941–45: German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001).

[20] See for example: Timothy Patrick Mulligan, *The Politics of Illusion and Empire: German Occupation Policy in the Soviet Union, 1942–1943* (New York: Praeger, 1988); Theo Schulte, *The German Army and Nazi Policies in Occupied Russia* (Oxford: Berg, 1989); Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1998); Hamburg Institute for Social Research, *Crimes of the German Wehrmacht: Dimensions of a War of Annihilation 1941–1944. An Outline of the Exhibition* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2004); Dieter Pohl, *Die Herrschaft der Wehrmacht: Deutsche Militärbesatzung und einheimische Bevölkerung in der Sowjetunion 1941–1944* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2008); Jeff Rutherford, *Combat and Genocide on the Eastern Front: the German Infantry's War, 1941–1944* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

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population.[21] This study addresses this gap by applying the findings regarding Wehrmacht behavioural patterns on the Eastern Front to Germany itself by examining in detail conditions in Königsberg during the final months of the Second World War.

There is certainly scope for this avenue of research: although the breadth of the violence on the Eastern Front has been fairly well examined, the magnitude of the horror ensured that it is too often viewed as being perpetuated by inertia. Its principal actors, it sometimes appears, 'underwent' the violence, whether they were victims, bystanders, or perpetrators. It is not hard to trace back where this notion originates from. Within the scholarship into military behaviour on the Eastern Front, the first occupation years (1941–2) are examined most extensively, since during this period a string of deadly, racially motivated 'criminal orders' were implemented which were subsequently discussed in the field and elaborated on in war diaries.[22] Moreover, the unfamiliarity with the area, and the very human incapability to grasp the size of the Western Soviet Union – a thousand miles separated Leningrad from Stalingrad, over six hundred miles lie between Brest and the outskirts of Moscow – makes us glance over the fact that 'the Eastern Front' is a collective name for what was in reality hundreds of separate battlefields that all impacted their participants in different ways. The learning curve of the ordinary German soldier, the Landser, was determined by the different experiences they underwent, and these would shape their adaptability and responsiveness to the battles that lay ahead. This 'interplay between military developments and the behaviour of the combatants' was first examined by Christian Hartmann, who found that different military circumstances prompted different acts of violence.[23] By the end of 1941 most genocidal orders were in place, and we thus tend to consider the winter of 1941 as something of a 'baseline' in regard to soldiers' brutality. That troops

[21] Stephan Lehnstaedt, *Okkupation im Osten: Besatzeralltag in Warschau und Minsk 1939–1944* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2010).

[22] Christian Hartmann, Johannes Hürter, and Ulrike Jureit (eds.), *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Bilanz einer Debatte* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2005); Alex Kay, Jeff Rutherford, and David Stahel (eds.), *Nazi Policy on the Eastern Front, 1941: Total War, Genocide, and Radicalisation* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2012). See further: Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde: Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrußland 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999); Christian Streit, *Keine Kameraden: Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen 1941–1945* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1978); Felix Römer, '"Im alten Deutschland wäre solcher Befehl nicht möglich gewesen": Rezeption, Adaption und Umsetzung des Kriegsgerichtsbarkeitserlass im Ostheer 1941/42', *VfZ* (56) 2008, pp. 53–99.

[23] Christian Hartmann, *Wehrmacht im Ostkrieg: Front und militärisches Hinterland 1941/42* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2009), pp. 245, 243–423.

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continued to radicalise through interaction with their environment is easily overlooked, and especially during times of military defeat the mental and physical strain led to a sharp increase in violence.[24] As soldiers kept interacting with their environment in reaction to the different war-time developments, 'barbarisation', and thus the nature of violence, evolved continuously. It seems therefore unlikely that after four years on the Eastern Front – either as occupiers or as fighters – German troops could simply leave behind their violent mindset as they crossed back into Germany.[25] Breaking the cycle of violence would, moreover, be a near-impossible task, especially for the army's veteran core groups. As the British military historian Basil Lidell-Hart asserted on the eve of the fighting in East Prussia: 'The only thing harder than getting a new idea into a military mind is to get an old idea out.'[26] Put more bluntly, 'terrorising' had become part of the Wehrmacht's arsenal: it had terrorised foreign civilians and terrorised its own men on a scale unequalled in military history.[27] The move towards the violent maltreatment of their own civilians might therefore be more unassuming to the Landser than we would care to admit.

The rationale behind radical Wehrmacht behaviour has long been sought in the ideological indoctrination of the troops, but although this is undoubtedly important, it meant that other explanations were left largely ignored.[28] Vejas Liulevicius drew attention to the German military's stay in Russia during the First World War, showing that a radicalised Nazi mindset was not at all a prerequisite for a harsh occupation and brutal behaviour towards populations.[29] Similarly, Peter Lieb examined German conduct on the Eastern Front during the First World War and its aftermath, concluding that the events that manifested themselves could not be considered precursors to the war of annihilation 25 years later.[30] Other factors, such the strain of war, are still largely left

[24] Rutherford, *Combat and Genocide on the Eastern Front*; Jürgen Kilian, 'Wehrmacht, Partisanenkrieg und Rückzugsverbrechen an der nördlichen Ostfront im Herbst und Winter 1943', *VfZ* (61) 2013, pp. 173–99.

[25] The experiences of war prompted a 'new normal', a development which, of course, was not at all limited to soldiers. See for example: Ian Buruma, *Year Zero: a History of 1945* (London: Atlantic Books, 2013), p. 7.

[26] Aimeé Fox, *Learning to Fight: Military Innovation and Change in the British Army, 1914–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 1.

[27] Robert Citino, *The German Way of War: From the Thirty Years' War to the Third Reich* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas 2005), p. 273.

[28] Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), ch. 4, 'The Distortion of Reality'.

[29] Vejas Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity, and German Occupation in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[30] Peter Lieb, 'Der deutsche Krieg im Osten von 1914 bis 1919: Ein Vorläufer des Vernichtungskriegs?', *VfZ* (65) 2017, pp. 465–506.

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unexplored. Whereas war neurosis (what is today called 'post-traumatic stress disorder') is examined in depth when it concerns the other belligerents during the Second World War, an examination of the mental state of German troops is still absent.[31] Nazi medicine itself lay at the core of this underappreciation, since troops' mental illnesses did not fit into the idea of a healthy fighting *Volk*. As German soldiers' mental traumas were equated to cowardice, or even considered as treasonous, they remained unaddressed during the National Socialist era, while also in post-war Germany the general advice was to 'trivialise, tone down, consciously forget and suppress' traumatic experiences.[32] The traumas of German soldiers and civilians alike have received little attention in the existing literature, although the topic is gaining in prominence.[33]

Only recently has a group of German scholars, led by the historian Sönke Neitzel and the social psychologist Harald Welzer, set out to assess the 'military–sociological and social–psychological' motivations of German soldiers. With war as a frame of reference, the authors found the views of German troops on 'fighting, killing and dying' to be rather similar when compared to modern-day soldiers.[34] This group also included Felix Römer, who published the landmark work 'Kameraden', using the bugged conversations of German prisoners of war recorded at Fort Hunt, Virginia. Also for Römer, the National Socialist indoctrination is merely one of the dimensions to explain the behaviour of Wehrmacht soldiers. For Römer, the 'actual combat and the dynamics of violence, the historical–cultural framework of the respective society and its military, the culture within the actual unit, and finally also the individual disposition of each combatant' were the main driving forces behind military conduct.[35] The troops' attitude towards their fellow countrymen, however, could not be included in the work, since the time of capture of the examined German POWs mostly predated the allied

[31] See for example: Edgar Jones and Simon Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD: Military Psychiatry from 1900 to the Gulf War* (Hove: Psychology Press, 2005).

[32] Geoffrey Cocks, *Psychotherapy in the Third Reich: the Göring Institute* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1997), p. 82; Hilke Lorenz, *Kriegskinder: Das Schicksal einer Generation* (Munich: List, 2003), p. 19.

[33] Svenja Goltermann, *Die Gesellschaft der Überlebenden: Deutsche Kriegsheimkehrer und ihre Gewalterfahrungen im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Munich: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 2009); Jörg Echternkamp, *Soldaten im Nachkrieg: Historische Deutungskonflikte und westdeutsche Demokratisierung 1945–1955* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2014).

[34] Sönke Neitzel and Harald Welzer, *Soldaten, On Fighting, Killing and Dying: the Secret World War II Transcripts of German POWs* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012); Christian Gudehus, Sönke Neitzel, and Harald Welzer (eds.), *'Der Führer war wieder viel zu human, viel zu gefühlvoll': Der Zweite Weltkrieg aus der Sicht deutscher und italienischer Soldaten* (Frankfurt a.M: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2011); Harald Welzer, *Täter: Wie aus ganz normale Menschen Massenmörder werden* (Frankfurt a.M., Fischer Verlag, 2005).

[35] Felix Römer, *Kameraden, Die Wehrmacht von innen* (Munich: Piper, 2012), p. 468.

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advance into Germany. It is nevertheless noteworthy that among these men the concern for and the treatment of the German population was apparently hardly worthy of sustained conversation. The research into the role of the German armed forces during times of violent transition is currently experiencing a revival, with German military involvement increasingly sought – and found – at the centre of intense domestic violence; this study fits into this new current.[36]

We now turn to the main questions this study addresses. It argues that the violence against German civilians during the defence of their country can only be understood by restoring agency to the soldiers of retreating Wehrmacht units as active participants, thus looking beyond the traditionally viewed actors. To what extent could the arrival of military units in Germany help to explain the spike in violence in Germany in 1945? Was this violence deliberate, or was it a by-product of the fighting; was it ordered, or was it spontaneous? What explains the difference in behaviour between these units and those German troops that were already garrisoned throughout the country? Every possible answer, in turn, only prompts more questions. What could be gained by exercising violence, and who gained from it? Most importantly, why would German troops and Party officials decide to resort to violence against their fellow countrymen, and how did they justify this to themselves? Finally, this study seeks to distinguish continuities and discontinuities in military behaviour as troops returned from fighting abroad to fight on the home front. Thus, its purpose is to determine to what extent the violence in 1945 can be separated from its totalitarian context. By presenting a microhistory of East Prussia and Königsberg, it presents a new view on the role of the Wehrmacht within German society. Research has so far mainly addressed the extent to which National Socialism impacted the Wehrmacht, yet it hardly examined what mark the Wehrmacht left on the German wartime community. Examining the interplay between Party and Wehrmacht bodies, this study seeks to clarify how the two actors shaped late-war German society.

Methodology and Outline

Examining events that occurred in Germany in 1945 means wading through a dense historiography. The secondary literature is virtually infinite, and some of the most highly regarded historians have recently

[36] See particularly: Mark Jones, *Founding Weimar: Violence and the German Revolution of 1918–1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

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written about it.[37] It seems a near impossible task to take a fresh look at the way events transpired, especially when it concerns a loaded topic such as violence. Therefore, rather than examining Germany as a whole, this study will examine the events in Germany's easternmost province, East Prussia, from the autumn of 1944 onwards, with a particular focus on its capital, Königsberg. Soviet troops reached the province's borders in the late summer of 1944 which led to a series of defensive measures being taken. That autumn Königsberg was declared a *Festung* (fortress), and was besieged by Soviet troops between late January and April 1945, after Soviet troops had overrun much of the rest of East Prussia. The German city Königsberg no longer exists; today it is known as Kaliningrad, the capital of the Russian *Oblast* with the same name, an often-overlooked exclave wedged in between Poland and Lithuania. As the area fits awkwardly in the story of (West- and East) Germany, its recent history has long been ignored by historians.[38] This means at the same time that many generalisations still dominate our current perception of the area, and the lack of scholarship means that, in some extreme cases, established scholars have had to resort to citing amateur historians.[39]

The first obstacle in researching East Prussia is the highly fractured source base. Parts of Königsberg's archives were evacuated in late 1944, and due to Germany's turbulent post-war era, archival sources concerning the city are still on the move. Sources that specifically focus on East

[37] See: Stephen Fritz, *Endkampf, Soldiers, Civilians, and the Death of the Third Reich* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004); Michael Geyer, 'Endkampf 1918 and 1945: German Nationalism, Annihilation, and Self-Destruction', in Lüdtke and Weisbrod (eds.), *No Man's Land of Violence*, pp. 35–68; Rolf-Dieter Müller (ed.) *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweiten Weltkrieg Teil 10/1 Der Zusammenbruch des Deutschen Reiches 1945: Die militärische Niederwerfung der Wehrmacht* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2007); Bessel, *Germany 1945*; Ian Kershaw, *The End, Hitler's Germany, 1944–45* (London: Allen Lane 2011); Ulrich Herbert, *Geschichte Deutschlands im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2014), ch. 10, 'Untergang'; Nicholas Stargardt, *The German War: a Nation under Arms, 1939–1945* (London: Bodley Head, 2015), Part 6, 'Total Defeat'.

[38] This point was most convincingly stressed in 2002 and remains relevant today. See: Manfred Kittel, 'Preußens Osten in der Zeitgeschichte. Mehr als nur eine landeshistorische Forschungslücke', *VfZ* (50) 2002, pp. 435–64. Concerning East Prussia, Andreas Kossert is an honourable exception. See: Andreas Kossert, *Ostpreußen, Geschichte und Mythos* (Munich: Siedler, 2005); Andreas Kossert, *Damals in Ostpreußen, Der Untergang einer deutschen Provinz* (Munich: Pantheon Verlag, 2008). See further: Hermann Pölking, *Ostpreußen: Biographie einer Provinz* (Berlin: be.bra Verlag, 2011). The plight of East Prussians in 1944–5 does, however, fit in the story of 'Germans', and played an important role in the *Historikerstreit.* See: Andreas Hillgruber, *Zweierlei Untergang. Die Zerschlagung des Deutschen Reiches und das Ende des europäischen Judentums* (Berlin: Siedler, 1986); Collection of essays by multiple authors, *Historikerstreit: Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung* (Munich: Piper, 1991).

[39] For example, Kershaw, in *The End*, uses the work of Isabel Denny, *The Fall of Hitler's Fortress City: the Battle for Königsberg 1945* (London: Greenhill Books, 2007).

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Prussia and Königsberg were found in the Archiv Stadt Königsberg in Duisburg, the archive of the Ostpreußisches Landesmuseum in Lüneburg and the Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Kaliningradskoi Oblasti in Kaliningrad, although none of these can boast of (as they indeed do not) a coherent or organised collection of primary source material focusing on the era. In 1952, Duisburg, out of a 'general patriotic sense of obligation,' took upon itself the task to become Königsberg's Patenstadt (sister-city, or, more literally: adoptive city), and Duisburg's mayor, Oberbürgermeister August Seeling, immediately encouraged former inhabitants to submit memorabilia, images, files, native literature and the like to serve as a basis for a museum or archive.[40] That these people would be less than eager to provide charged and frowned upon materials from the National Socialist era (which might even be incriminating) requires little explanation. The sources reflect this: a mere six folders contained materials pertaining to the Nazi years, with a strong focus on the last months of the war – the period of East Prussian victimhood. By 1952, some 6,000 East Prussians were living in Duisburg, 1,000 of them from Königsberg, but by 2014 this group had shrunk to a size that no longer warranted the museum and archive. In 2014 they closed their doors and the archival holdings were divided over two museums whose current mission is to preserve the East Prussian cultural heritage, and which are both institutionally funded by the German Bundesregierung. The Ostpreußisches Landesmuseum in Lüneburg in Lower Saxony can boast the longest tradition of the two institutions, having been founded in 1958 as a cultural hub for the tens of thousands of East Prussian refugees that settled in the area after the war. The establishment of the Kulturzentrum Ostpreußen in Ellingen in Bavaria is more recent and dates to 1981, following Bavaria's 1978 appointment as Patenland (adoptive state) of East Prussia. In Kaliningrad itself very few sources dealing with 1944–5 have remained. Many of the holdings of Königsberg's archives were evacuated in 1944 (and are now part of the Geheimes Staatsarchiv – Preußischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin), and therefore the documents that can be found there do not deal with the last year of the war. Innumerable records were destroyed during the siege, and the little that remains in the city can be found in the GAKO.

The broader German context has allowed itself to be reconstructed with considerably more ease, with sources found in the larger archives of the Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichtenfelde, Bundesarchiv-Lastenausgleich in Bayreuth, and the Bundesarchiv-Militärachiv in Freiburg, archives which

[40] August Seeling, 'Duisburg übernimmt Patenschaft für Königsberg', *Ostpreussen-Warte*, January 1952, p. 7.

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all pose their own challenges. These challenges, however, are better established among researchers. In Berlin, documents from the Party and state are often deliberately couched in language that obscures their real purpose, or, at the other end of the spectrum, tell particularly little and merely serve to profess loyalty to the regime. The materials in the Lastenausgleichsarchiv in Bayreuth also reveal a double agenda, albeit a completely different one. In 1952, the West German government enacted the Lastenausgleichsgesetz ('Equalization of Burdens Act'), which sought to financially compensate Germans who had particularly suffered from the war and its aftermath. This financial incentive, however, caused an Opferkonkurrenz: a competition between different victim groups. This, in turn, led to a crude victim narrative that placed the traumatic events of 1945 front and centre, since this was the most straightforward way to ensure compensation.[41] As a result, the sources at the Lastenausgleichsarchiv are filled with heart-wringing stories, but we should keep in mind that this was also the emotion they consistently sought to invoke.

Lastly, the military files held at the Militärarchiv in Freiburg also have their biases, gaps, and oversights. Not only were many military documents destroyed at the end of the war, by then many war diaries were no longer kept at all either. Moreover, seeing that war diarists would often deliberately omit the mention of atrocities in efforts to keep their unit's reputation unsullied, it stands to reason that they had similar reservations mentioning the occasions in which they neglected and mistreated their own civilians.[42] Occasionally, the holdings in these archives could be compared to those at the National Archives in Kew, the Yad Vashem Archives in Jerusalem, and the archives of the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich. The wide range of sources encountered during this Europe-wide search encouraged the reconsideration of the variables at play during the defence of East Prussia. Yet important regional studies, such as that of Jill Stephenson, who analysed Württemberg during the National Socialist era, drew attention to the differences existing between the German provinces, urging future historians not to draw sweeping conclusions.[43]

[41] Bastiaan Willems and Joe Schuldt, 'The "European Boundaries" of the East Prussian Expellees in West-Germany, 1948–1955', *Novoe Proshloe/The New Past* (3) 2018, pp. 32–3; Pertti Ahonen, 'Domestic Constraints on West German Ostpolitik: the Role of the Expellee Organizations in the Adenauer Era', *Central European History* (31) 1998, pp. 31–63.

[42] Wolfram Wette, *Die Wehrmacht: Feindbilde, Vernichtungskrieg, Legende* (Frankfurt a.M.: S. Fischer Verlag, 2002), 119–24; Hannes Heer, *Vom Verschwinden der Täter: der Vernichtungskrieg fand statt, aber keiner war dabei* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag 2004), ch. 2.

[43] Jill Stephenson, *Hitler's Home Front, Württemberg under the Nazis* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006); Jill Stephenson, 'The Volksgemeinschaft and the Problems of Permeability: the Persistence of Traditional Attitudes in Württemberg Villages', *German History* (34) 2016, pp. 49–69.

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If East Prussia is to serve as a case study for the violence in late-war Germany, appreciating the province's unique factors, while at the same time providing a framework that allows us to better understand the larger context of this violence, is the most challenging task of this study. After Soviet forces had cut through East Prussia in January 1945, Königsberg became one of the clearest examples of what is referred to as the late-war *Verinselung*, or 'islandisation', of Germany: the fragmentation of the regime that allowed local authorities to assume a more active role.[44] Between late January 1945 and early April 1945 the city was besieged, limiting its contact with the outside world. As such it might be considered a 'microcosm', whose unicity should be examined before continuing to the main questions this study seeks to answer.[45] At the same time, the inclination to generalise always lures, if only because Nazi propaganda was determined to present a view of an egalitarian society.[46] Moreover, due to years of practice, by 1945 most high-ranking Nazi officials were extremely skilled in presenting their message. As a result, using their decrees can indeed seem more appealing to historians than using the stiff, telegram-style orders of commanders, who had little reason – and even less time – to devote energy to style or sentence structure. The risk of following National Socialist principles as a base for understanding German behaviour becomes particularly apparent in a diary entry of Reich Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels, dated 27 March 1945:

> I express my astonishment [to my subordinate] that in the west not one symbol of resistance has manifested itself, as it has in the east, like in Breslau or Königsberg. He asserts that the population in the west is beaten senseless by the months and years of enemy bombing, and that they prefer a horrible end over an endless horror. I believe it has also to do with the fact that the people in the west are by nature not as tough as those in the east. The people in the west are closer to France, that over-civilized country, while the people in the east are closer to Poland and Russia, the more primitive countries of Europe.[47]

This simplified explanation, routed in the pseudo-scientific Social Darwinist theories held so dear by the Nazis, is logically not at all sufficient as an answer. At the same time, Goebbels's statement highlights that

[44] Wolfgang Franz Werner, *'Bleib übrig!': Deutsche Arbeiter in der nationalsozialistischen Kriegswirtschaft* (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1983), p. 329. Andreas Kunz refers to this process in the military context as 'atomisation'. See: Kunz, *Wehrmacht und Niederlage*, p. 96.

[45] The term 'microcosm' is borrowed from Norman Davies and Roger Moorhouse, *Microcosm: a Portrait of a Central European City* (London: Pimlico, 2003).

[46] Richard Bessel, 'The War to End All Wars: the Shock of Violence in 1945 and its Aftermath in Germany', in Lüdtke and Weisbord (eds.), *No Man's Land of Violence*, p. 85.

[47] Joseph Goebbels, *Tagebücher 1945: Die letzten Aufzeichnungen* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1977), pp. 391–2.

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after twelve years of National Socialist propaganda, there were still local differences that needed to be observed. Despite continuous efforts of different East Prussian expellee organisations, who after the war sought to present the strong local culture as a kind of hurdle that prevented any significant change, it is nevertheless clear that National Socialism reached deep in East Prussia. By retracing its appeal and reach in the province, we can determine what East Prussians identified with as the war reached the borders of their province in the summer of 1944. Borrowing from the field of nationalism studies, we find that most of its scholars 'share the understanding that identities are something opposed to [self-] interests', and, therefore, establishing which actors challenged those interests during the final stage of the war gives us the best indication of the balance of power in Königsberg.[48]

The assessment of these different factors forms a substantial 'preamble' to what is the main aim of this study – examining the role of the German Wehrmacht in the intra-ethnic violence in Germany in 1944–5. Establishing who benefited from the violence is an important aspect of this study, but a Germany-wide approach can lead to a singling out of sources that fit the presumptions of the researcher. By limiting this study to East Prussia, the cross section will seek to uncover actors that have previously been underappreciated. This will be achieved though juxtaposing Party and Wehrmacht orders to a wide variety of situation reports, journals, diaries, questionnaires, and private recollections. These sources allow us to retrace the decisions of victims and perpetrators as well as the motives that lay behind them, and might help us to better understand why Germany's defeat was so total. Above all, it illuminates the priorities of those in charge in the final months of the war.

To do so, this study is divided into six chapters. The first two chapters discuss the actors prior to their interactions with each other and define the core concepts as they will be used throughout this work. Chapter 1 starts with an analysis of the role of the East Prussian community within the Total War Germany was waging, as such defining the mental and physical position that its native population occupied, since, within the scope of this study, these people became the main victims of late-war violence. Subsequently, we will determine what impact the Party and the Wehrmacht had on this position, using the construction of the Ostwall and the establishment of the Volkssturm as 'stress-tests'. The chapter closes with an examination of East Prussians' perception of their province in the light of the ever-nearing front line, and how this shaped their attitude

[48] Siniša Malešević, *Identity as Ideology: Understanding Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), pp. 17–18.

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towards the wider German community. Chapter 2 then retraces the path of the German Landser as they fought their way back to German soil. During its stay on the Eastern Front, the German Wehrmacht had shown an unparalleled disregard for human life, and it is therefore worthwhile to examine to what extent the mindset that was born out of experiences in the East could transfer back into Germany. In this way, it will help to explain why German soldiers continued to fight – and encouraged others to do the same – long after they themselves felt that the war had been lost.

The two following chapters address the late-war environment and the role the different actors played in it. Chapter 3 examines how the direct environment shaped actors' behavioural patterns. The fighting in Germany predominantly took place in urbanised areas yet the characteristics of the urban battlefield have so far not been considered in the examination of late-war violence. From March 1944 onwards, as part of Germany's 'fortress-strategy', more and more cities were designated as fortresses, or Festungen, a decision that was meant to bolster their defensibility. Field commanders immediately lamented the strategy's outdated nature which forced garrisons to become surrounded, while Party members feared that an increased military presence in these 'fortresses' would undermine their authority. These criticisms shaped the relations between the two and would eventually also determine how civilians would undergo the war's final months. During Königsberg's siege, however, Party and Wehrmacht tried to find some common ground, and Chapter 4 explores how this uneasy balance of power manifested itself. It does so by analysing how propaganda in the city presented the different events that took place on a local, national, and international level. An assessment of the themes explored in local media will help to reveal how, in a fractured Germany, local authorities presented their message and how they sought to link it to the larger picture.

Finally, the last two chapters examine how intra-ethnic violence transpired during the final months of the war. Chapter 5 examines in depth the evacuation in East Prussia, where we will consider the collaboration between the Party and the Wehrmacht. It will help to establish their authorities, as well as the radicalising nature of their proximity. Nowadays 'evacuation' is understood as the transporting of civilians, and it is this view that perseveres about the provinces in Eastern Germany as well. Analysing the evacuation measures, and moreover retracing what their exact purposes were can help us to understand the relationship between the Party and the Wehrmacht on one hand, and the civilian population on the other. Lastly, Chapter 6 will continue to explore the consequences of the German troops' proximity to the German population. It focuses on two elements: the introduction of the

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radicalised mindset of the German troops in East Prussia, and the adherence to military law in German society. How did these two elements shape the behaviour in Königsberg? The origins of radicalised legislation as it was implemented in Germany are traced back to pre-existing military law, once again highlighting that this law did not take the need of civilians into account.

This work serves to increase our understanding of behavioural patterns during the final year of the war and brings to light new aspects of Germany's transition from war to peace. Most importantly, it stresses that the idea of the Wehrmacht as an obstacle for the radicalisation of the German late-war society should be revisited, and expounds how the dynamics observed between the different actors in East Prussia could be interpreted to reconstruct a more complete view of violence in defeat.

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