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TRANSLATING OCCUPATION

Interpreters and German Authorities in Occupied France, 1940–1944

After the armistice agreement at Compiègne on 22 June 1940 laid the groundwork for more than four years of German presence, France became one of the most important occupied territories of the Reich. Transformed into a huge garrison with military airfields, naval bases, training grounds and local headquarters, France was also a treasure chest whose natural resources, industrial goods, aliments and workforce were mined and milked for the German war effort. Hundreds of thousands of civilian workers, both recruited and enforced, contributed to both the occupation itself and to the war effort. These men and women of the *main d'œuvre* were engaged as construction workers and auxiliaries such as cleaners, drivers and interpreters, facilitating the presence of the occupiers by maintaining their quarters and providing transport and a basis for communication. At the same time, as I will argue by concentrating on the case of interpreters, the civilian volunteers working for German authorities also unmasked the occupiers' dependency on foreign auxiliaries. In any case, the civilian personnel played an important role in everyday life in occupied France. This article seeks to shed some light on a group of civilians working behind the curtain of the so-called dark years[1] that has not previously attracted much scholarly interest.

Historiographical Legacies

As an ambivalent legacy of the Paxtonian Revolution[2], scholars have overemphasized the role of the Vichy regime, resulting in a strange absence of the occupier in many works, as Talbot Imlay recently stated. Although during recent years the pendulum has swung to the other extreme, the question remains how to write an integrated history of the occupation[3], linking French and German perspectives[4]. Here, a stronger focus on everyday life is proposed. This is hardly totally new; but since the historiography of everyday life has mainly spotlighted individual experiences and the daily struggle of handling restrictions, hunger and the persecution of the French population, the German presence has been reduced to violence and collaboration, and the soldiers represented as a grey mass[5]. But beyond legal adjustments, foreign rule

1 Jean Guéhenno, Journal des années noires, 1940–1944, Paris 1947.
2 Robert O. Paxton, Vichy France. Old guard and new order, 1940–1944, New York 1972; Sarah Fishman et al. (eds.), La France sous Vichy. Autour de Robert O. Paxton, Brussels 2004.
3 For some fruitful ideas, see conference report: Alltag am Atlantikwall. Erfahrungen und Begegnungen der Wehrmacht in Nordwesteuropa, 13.06.2013–14.06.2013 Amsterdam, in: H-Soz-Kult, 12.09.2013, http://www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/tagungsberichte-5017 (last visited 11.10.2016).
4 Talbot Imlay, The German Side of Things. Recent Scholarship on the German Occupation of France, in: French Historical Studies 39/1 (2016), p. 183–215.
5 Although the aspect of interaction is treated widely, most authors have limited it to classic topics mostly labelled *accommodation* or *collaboration*. For a more differentiated approach: Philippe Burrin, La France à l'heure allemande, 1940–1944, Paris 1993; Julian Jackson, France. The

included individual implementations through specific protagonists. Everyday life history (*Alltagsgeschichte*[6]) has traditionally focused on topics such as work and rule, highlighting mutuality: »Rule as social practice means a sphere where protagonists meet and interact«[7]. This approach invites us to look for changes in the parameters that shaped daily life. Occupation as foreign rule, understood as a dynamic process of negotiation, caused new constellations of social encounters and interaction. In this sense labour as a contact zone merits further interest, following Richard Vinen: »Work was the single thing that brought the largest number of French people into contact with Germans«[8]. In the processes of adapting to given circumstances and implementing their own structures, resources had to be furnished and managed in practice by the occupiers. One of the most important assets was the labour force.

Voluntary or Enforced? – Working for the Occupier

Although the occupation drafted hundreds of thousands of Germans to France, the occupiers nevertheless required a supplementary workforce[9]. Richard Vinen estimated the number of workers serving at German construction sites as up to nearly 250 000, with half a million employees engaged by other German authorities[10]. Some groups of workers have already gained scholarly attention, among them the Organization Todt[11] and the Service du travail obligatoire[12]. While men were primarily targeted as a potential workforce, women were also drafted

Dark Years, 1940–1944, Oxford 2001; Richard Vinen, The Unfree French. Life under the Occupation, London 2007. The ground-breaking work of Gildea has so far delivered the best example of reconstructing daily life considering both sides, Robert Gildea, Marianne in Chains. In search of the German Occupation, 1940–1945, London 2002.

6 Alf Lüdtke, History of Everyday Life. Reconstructing historical experiences and ways of life, Princeton 1995.

7 id, Herrschaft als soziale Praxis, in: id. (ed.), Herrschaft als soziale Praxis. Historische und sozialanthropologische Studien (1991), p. 9–63, here p. 12.

8 Vinen, The Unfree French (as in n. 5), p. 116.

9 The German apparatus sought to exploit France with a minimum of personnel in order to save men for further war efforts, Mark Mazower, Hitler's Imperium. Europa unter der Herrschaft des Nationalsozialismus, Munich 2009, p. 389 [orig. Hitler's Empire. Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe, London 2008]. With the progress of the war and the losses at the Eastern Front, men were constantly drafted to the East and replaced by female German auxiliaries, particularly in France, Franka Maubach, Die Stellung halten. Kriegserfahrungen und Lebensgeschichten von Wehrmachthelferinnen, Göttingen 2009; Franz Wilhelm Seidler: Blitzmädchen. Die Geschichte der Helferinnen der deutschen Wehrmacht im Zweiten Weltkrieg, Koblenz, 1979.

10 Vinen, The Unfree French (as in n. 5), p. 117.

11 Peter Gaida, L'Organisation Todt en France, Bordeaux 2014; Fabian Lemmes, Arbeiten für das Reich. Die Organisation Todt in Frankreich und Italien, 1940–1945, PhD thesis, Florence 2009 (publication forthcoming); id., Lockung und Zwang bei der Organisation Todt in Frankreich und Italien 1940–1945, in: Dieter Pohl, Tetiana Sebta (eds.), Zwangsarbeit in Hitlers Europa. Besatzung, Arbeit, Folgen, Berlin 2013, p. 83–103; id., Zwangsarbeit im besetzten Europa. Die Organisation Todt in Frankreich und Italien, 1940–1945, in: Andreas Heusler, Mark Spoerer, Helmuth Trischler (eds.), Rüstung, Kriegswirtschaft und Zwangsarbeit im »Dritten Reich«, Munich 2010, p. 219–252.

12 Patrice Arnaud, Les STO. Histoire des Français requis en Allemagne nazie, Paris 2010; Bernd Zielinski, Staatskollaboration. Vichy und der »Arbeitseinsatz« für das Dritte Reich, Münster 1995; Raphaël Spina, La France et les Français devant le service du travail obligatoire, 1942–1945, PhD thesis 2012, https://tel.archives-ouvertes.fr/file/index/docid/749560/filename/Spina2012.pdf (last visited 11.10.2016).

across the border to serve as maids, factory workers or on farms[13]. But it was not only the Reich's industry that was hungry for labourers. The occupation apparatus in France[14] itself created a new demand for jobs[15]. Still relatively unexplored are the men and women working as bus drivers[16] and chauffeurs[17], bartenders, chefs, waitresses[18], housekeepers, doctors[19] and interpreters[20]. Infrastructures and the density of occupation troops framed the demand for and the availability of potential personnel[21].

A minority of the personnel was of German origin, but most were either French or of foreign descent, such as Dutch, Flemish, Polish, Russian, Belarusian, Ukrainian, Spanish or even Brazilian[22]. Recruitment was procured by the French authorities, who announced jobs in newspapers or via public advertisements[23]. Occasionally kinship ties might have promoted working for the Germans: cases exist in which two sisters, or a father and son, were both employed at a German office[24]. As part of the armistice agreement, Germany was able to roll off most of the personnel costs to the French government as part of the occupation charges that were imposed on the Vichy state[25]. One group deserves particular interest, since it was providing an essential service[26].

13 Catherine Offredic, Travailler volontairement au service des Allemands pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale. L'exemple des femmes des Côtes-du-Nord et du Finisterre, à travers les dossiers des procédures judiciaires des chambres civiques, 1940–1946, Mémoire de maîtrise, Rennes 2000; Caroline Robert, Les femmes travailleuses volontaires avec les Allemands durant la seconde guerre mondiale, dans le Morbihan, à travers les archives de la chambre civique, Mémoire de maîtrise, Rennes 2000; Rosine Vergnes, La main d'œuvre française au service de l'occupant allemand dans le département d'Eure-et-Loir, 1940–1944, Mémoire de maîtrise, Angers 1999.

14 Hans Umbreit, Der Militärbefehlshaber in Frankreich 1940–1944, Boppard am Rhein 1968.

15 A list dated 24.10.1940 mentions architects, chauffeurs, concierges, interpreters and guards, Archives départementales d'Ille-et-Vilaine (ADIV), 170 W 90.

16 Archives départementales du Nord (ADN), 1 W 150; Archives Nationales at Pierrefitte-sur-Seine (AN), AJ 40 938.

17 Archives départementales des Yvelines (ADY), 1 W 274.

18 The *Soldatenheime,* run by the German Red Cross, hired local chefs, kitchen aids, bartenders and waitresses, for example in Tours, Archives départementales d'Indre-et-Loire (ADIL), 4 ZA 13; in Paris, AN, F 7 15152; in Lille, ADN, 1 W 1928.

19 Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine, 4 P PRES 1200.

20 One could go further and include craftsmen, grocery contractors, railwaymen, etc. In a larger sense, one might also take prostitution into account, Insa Meinen, Wehrmacht und Prostitution während des Zweiten Weltkriegs im besetzten Frankreich, Bremen 2002; Franz Wilhelm Seidler, Prostitution, Homosexualität, Selbstverstümmelung. Probleme der deutschen Sanitätsführung 1939–1945, Neckargemünd 1977.

21 The municipality of Châteaudun once admitted that they were unable to recruit the demanded 12 charladies and one chef for a German airfield, Archives départementales d'Eure-et-Loir (ADEL), 1065 W 15. In another case, the regional commander of Nord-Pas-de-Calais lacked 320 men and 40 women for various jobs at Lille, ADN, 1 W 665.

22 Archives départementales de la Gironde (ADG), 61 W 16.

23 ADEL, 1065 W 6.

24 Archives départementales du Doubs (ADD), 2 W 89; AN, AJ 40 963. Sometimes whole families seemed to work for the occupier; in one case a mother and two of her daughters were employed by a German office in the Jura region, Archives départementales du Jura (ADJ), 72 W 77.

25 Verordnungsblatt für das besetzte Gebiet der französischen Departements Seine, Seine-et-Oise und Seine-et-Marne, No. 4, 30.06.1940.

26 Only in the last few years have interpreters and translators as intermediaries during conflicts become a topic for scholars, most notably Jesus Baigorri-Jalón, Wars, languages and the role(s) of interpreters (2010), URL: https://hal-confremo.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-00599599 (last visited 27.12.2017); Mona Baker, Interpreters and Translators in the War Zone. Narrated and Narrators, in: The Translator 16/2 (2010), p. 197–222. The project »Languages at War« supervised by

»Wer spricht französisch?«[27] – Interpreters as Intermediaries[28]

The Wehrmacht ordered that administrative communications with their representatives in occupied territories had to take place in German. Except for famous examples such as Gerhard Heller[29], Ernst Jünger[30] or Felix Hartlaub[31], only a small minority of Germans in France spoke French,[32] so the occupiers were highly dependent on interpreters[33]. Among those were former teachers, merchants and clerks whose actual jobs required competence in foreign languages[34]. They were either soldiers/officers or became so-called *Sonderführer*[35]. Aside from these professionals the authorities were constantly looking out for skilled personnel in their own ranks[36]. Female auxiliaries with suitable competences were especially welcomed[37]. The Wehrmacht

Hilary Footitt (University of Reading) and Michael Kelly (University of Southampton) (URL: https://www.reading.ac.uk/languages-at-war/lw-home.aspx) as well as the project of Pekka Kujamäki (University of East Finland, now University of Graz, Austria) »In Search of Military Translation Cultures« (URL: https://translationinww2infin.wordpress.com) have combined historical and translatological approaches and both have widely published on that topic, most recently Pekka Kujamäki, Hilary Footitt, Military History and Translation Studies. Shifting Territories, Uneasy Borders, in: Yves Gambier, Luc van Doorslaer (eds.), Border Crossings. Translation Studies and other disciplines, Amsterdam 2016, p. 49–71.

27 *Es brummt im Karton! Schnurren und Schwänke von der Front* (edited by Josef Stauder), Stuttgart 1942, p. 121.

28 In the consulted documents employees were mostly referred to as interpreters, rarely as translators.

29 Heller served the Parisian branch of the German propaganda authority and was responsible for censorship, Gerhard Heller, In einem besetzten Land. NS-Kulturpolitik in Frankreich. Erinnerungen 1940–1944, Köln 1982.

30 Jünger was a staff member of the military administration in Paris, Ernst Jünger, Strahlungen, Linz 1950;

31 Hartlaub was drafted to a commission scanning French historical records, Felix Hartlaub, In den eigenen Umriss gebannt. Kriegsaufzeichnungen, literarische Fragmente und Briefe aus den Jahren 1939 bis 1945, ed. by Gabriele Lieselotte Ewenz, Frankfurt/Main 2002.

32 Some commanders proved to have French skills due to their pre-war jobs; for example the local commander in Nantes, Colonel Hotz, had been an industrial manager of a German enterprise in Nantes before 1939, Gildea, Marianne in Chains (as n. 5), p. 54.

33 On the education of interpreters in the Reich see Miriam Winter, Das Dolmetscherwesen im Dritten Reich. Gleichschaltung und Indoktrinierung, Frankfurt/Main 2012; Kristina Werner, Zwischen Neutralität und Propaganda. Französisch-Dolmetscher im Nationalsozialismus, Berlin 2014; Charlotte P. Kieslich, Die Dolmetscher-Ausbildung in der Wehrmacht, in: Dörte Andres, Julia Richter, Larisa Schippel (eds.), Translation und »Drittes Reich«. Menschen – Entscheidungen – Folgen, Berlin 2016, p. 121–141.

34 Ibid, p. 58. Even actors were turned into interpreters, see letters of actor Günter Wolf serving at the occupation administration in Paris, http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/konvolut_skizze.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=535&le_keyword=Frankreich (last visited 27.12.2016).

35 *Sonderführer* were skilled German civilians who served in a quasi-military employment status. Some of them passed preparation courses in Berlin, see Bundesarchiv (German Federal Archives Berlin), NS 5-V/64.

36 A letter of the Feldkommandantur in Caen to all subordinate offices, dated 20.12.1940, inviting soldiers with skills of French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Polish, Russian, Bulgarian, Yugoslav and Norwegian to become a *Sprachmittler*, AN, AJ 40 909.

37 Owing to a mandatory rotation of clerks and female auxiliaries every two years, the offices often lost their most competent personnel in exchange for inexperienced beginners with no language skills at all, causing complaints to the superior department, Lagebericht of the Feldkommandantur in St. Cloud, dated 1.7.1943 AN, AJ 40 901.

even organized courses in French as part of the leisure programme[38]. The author Heinrich Böll (who later won a Nobel Prize) spent most of the war as a soldier garrisoned in northern France. Despite his rather basic French skills, he was, owing to the shortage of qualified personnel, obliged to translate conversations and correspondence. In March 1943 he officially became an interpreter (*Sprachkundiger*), although he only scraped through the exam[39]. However, the Germans' own human resources could not meet the demand.

Basically, every local headquarters of the occupation administration was allowed (and needed) to hire civilians as interpreters. The offices of local commanders of temporarily garrisoned battle troops were normally obliged to handle communication with the French through the proper occupation apparatus. This might have served as a means of control to avoid wild requisitions or plundering of quarters, even though it caused delay owing to the number of demands on the military administration. In circumstances in which battle troops urgently needed to communicate directly and an interpreter was required, their senior officer had to give permission first[40].

As with the recruitment of other auxiliary personnel, the German authorities instructed the French public administration to announce job vacancies in local newspapers[41]. It remains unclear whether the prefecture's announcements openly offered employment by the German authorities, or whether they more discreetly offered a job at the *bureau de liaison*. Once hired, interpreters were switched from a French office to a German department or vice versa[42]. Even retired persons were reactivated, the need being so great[43]. Sometimes civilian interpreters were sent from one country to another or were recruited in other occupied territories[44]. It also happened that unsolicited applications arrived at the German authorities[45]. The men and women who directly addressed themselves to the occupier were either of German origin, or (maybe) felt comfortable working for the occupying authority; political sympathies may have played a role. But French people and foreigners both applied voluntarily[46]. Letters of application sent to the prefecture of the Gironde offer various reasons for job-seeking. One man was a travelling salesman before the war; another served in the French army during the Rhineland occupation; a third claimed to be a former teacher, now forced to use crutches after an accident, asking for an office job that would allow him to sit[47]. Teachers and professors were quite numerous among the interpreters[48]. Many applicants had been refugees from Alsace and Lorraine[49] or came from

38 Kommandanturbefehl Nr. 200 of the Verbindungsstab in Lyon, dated 18.8.1944, offering a one-week evening course for basic comprehension, AN, AJ 40 965. A special dictionary with special vocabulary was provided, for example a »Wörterbuch für Wehrmachtdolmetscher, Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv« (German Federal Archives, Military Department Freiburg im Breisgau) BA-MA RHD 8/118.

39 Heinrich Böll, Briefe aus dem Krieg 1939–1945, Köln 2001, Vol. 1, p. 638.

40 ADD, 2 W 16.

41 A letter of application, dated 15.12.1940, refers to the announcement in the local newspaper »La Petite Gironde«, ADG, 45 W 16.

42 Ibid.

43 ADJ, 72 W 94.

44 AN, AJ 40 965.

45 A man of Baltic–German origin, aged 62, a former sales representative, who had been living in France for over 40 years, offered skills of French and English to the local German headquarters in Melun. He claimed he would be delighted to serve the Reich and his »Führer«, Archives départementales de Seine-et-Marne, SC 51332.

46 Vinen states that locally recruited interpreters were rather distant from Nazi ideology owing to their social milieu, Vinen, The Unfree French (as n. 5), p. 115.

47 ADG, 45 W 16.

48 ADIV, 170 W 90.

49 ADG, 45 W 16.

even farther away[50]. War and the occupation, with all the consequent restrictions and limitations to mobility, shortage of resources, or damage to factories by bombings, shattered the job market and left many civilians unemployed. Most of them were absorbed owing to the German efforts at exploitation. The Germans seem not to have been very picky with the selection of potential employees, but this would have been a luxury they could not afford[51]. Nevertheless they not only excluded Jews[52] at their own offices but also mandated their French counterparts to suspend them as well[53].

Analogous to the payment of other auxiliaries, interpreters' salaries were included in the occupation charges levied upon the French state. Unlike blue-collar workers, to whom common French wages were applied, interpreters were considered as salaried employees[54]. Still, salaries could vary according to not only the individual's skills, sex, family status[55] and origin, but also the bond of trust established[56]. Furthermore, regional difference existed. It can be assumed that German authorities paid (or rather: ordered payment of) higher wages than similar jobs at French offices would have earned[57]. However, women received less than men for the same labour.

Typically, 48 working hours per week was the agreed standard, but now and then individual arrangements were made, be they half-time employment or payment by the hour[58]. As evidence shows, interpreters could even count on some goodwill from the occupiers. If individuals demanded it, weekly or bi-weekly (instead of monthly) payment could be arranged to meet their needs[59]. Nevertheless, there were on-going disputes about payment. Frequently, German complaints about unpaid salaries reached the French administration[60]. Often enough, the payment was late[61]. Occasionally extra rations granted by the Germans were refused by French authorities[62]. Whether or not this was due to French *Eigen-Sinn*, however, French authorities themselves had to ask for allowance from their superiors[63].

50 ADN, 1 W 1982, mentions a man born in Hungary; Ibid., 1 W 665, lists Polish- and Russian-born interpreters.
51 Despite rather insufficient skills, the Germans even hired women who only picked up some German words while serving as barmaids to German soldiers, Vinen, The Unfree French (as n. 5), p. 115–16.
52 After the war a witness claimed that the former commander of the German *Sipo-SD* in Bordeaux, Hans Luther, had employed a half-Jewish woman, Bundesarchiv (German Federal Archives Koblenz), BA Koblenz N 1769/48.
53 Archives municipales de Boulogne-Billancourt, 6 H 14.
54 ADN, 1 W 665.
55 The range started at 1,200 Francs monthly for women (if married or not was not considered), classified lowest level of skills, up to 3,600 Francs per month for a married man with extraordinary skills in both languages, ADIV 170 W 90.
56 One interpreter's salary was justified due to his confidential position, ADIL, 5 ZA 7.
57 A decree of the local prefecture granted a monthly salary of 1100 Francs, Archives départementales de l'Aube (ADA), 310 W 148.
58 ADIL, 5 ZA 7.
59 Even interpreters of Eastern European origin could benefit from such preferential treatment. Owing to their financial position, payment is conceded every 10th day for three men working for a German police squad in Lille, ADN, 1 W 665.
60 Archives départementales du Pas-de-Calais, 31 W 10.
61 Given that problem, German authorities sometimes paid in advance, ADD 2 W 1.
62 A female interpreter was granted extra nutrition due to a medical condition. As her mother complained to the German authorities that the prefecture denied higher rations, the Germans took care of it, Archives de Paris, Perotin 1011/44/1 Nr. 35.
63 ADA, 310 W 148.

What tasks did interpreters perform?[64] The local headquarters of the military administration, which, together with their French counterparts (i. e. prefectures and municipalities), processed the daily business of the occupation, employed most of the personnel that handled meetings and translated correspondence. The same goes for interpreters at military headquarters (of regular battle troops). The Ortskommandantur I-914[65], for example, employed 13 men and women to regulate communication with French counterparts[66]. The city of Saint-Malo had 17 interpreters working for the Germans during October 1941 and the city of Rennes counted 39 interpreters at the same time, most of them at military headquarters[67]. But it was not only between the French and German administrations that intermediaries were needed. Owing to the war, German regulations and restrictions had a massive impact on everyday life. Being on the streets after the curfew, or driving a car, required a *laissez-passer* that was only handed out if a plausible justification could be argued; such permissions also had to be renewed regularly. Measures intended to be cautious and protective in fact produced more and more work for the local German offices and, therefore, for the interpreters[68].

Interpreters also became part of maintaining public security – of course, from the point of view of the occupiers. German military police were highly dependent on their assistance while on patrol[69]. Without them, incidents with the population were often caused by communication problems. In order to handle apprehended suspects, criminals, insurgents and others, prisons also needed competent language support for interrogations[70].

A third important task should be mentioned – enabling communication with other civilian personnel at German offices, quarters and even leisure institutions. In Lille, an interpreter was employed to communicate with 68 charladies and 7 janitors at a large German department[71]. Heinrich Böll complained to his wife in December 1942 that he was mostly obliged to instruct craftsmen, chefs and cleaners[72]. The German theatre in Lille, providing entertain-

64 Unfortunately documents of interpreters in their own words are very rare. Only a few Wehrmacht interpreters (i. e. Germans) have left notes on their work, for example in Norway, Richard Linder, Wehrmachtsdolmetscher in Norwegen (unpublished diary), Institut für Zeitgeschichte Munich, MS 557. On this see also Pekka Kujamäki, Im Dienst des Reiches im Hohen Norden. Wehrmachtsdolmetscher im besetzten Norwegen und beim Armeeoberkommando 20 Finnland, in: Andres, Richter, Schippel (eds.), Translation und »Drittes Reich« (as n. 33), p. 51–64. Another case refers to the handling of the Indian Volunteer Forces (Legion Freies Indien) by a German priest who spoke the Hindustani language, Eugen Rose, Azad Hind. Ein europäisches Inder-Märchen oder die 1299 Tage der Indischen Legion in Europa; eine Chronik der »Indischen Legion«, des (Indischen) Infanterie-Regiments 950 in der Deutschen Wehrmacht, nach Tagebucheintragungen eines Stabsdolmetschers, Wuppertal 1979. See also Jan Kuhlmann, Die Indische Legion im Zweiten Weltkrieg: Interkulturelle Menschenführung zwischen Atlantikwall und Wehrmachtsgefängnis, in: Südasien-Chronik 5: Südasien und die Weltkriege im 20. Jahrhundert (2015), S. 91–119.

65 The Ortskommandantur I-914 was responsible for parts of the city of Lille.

66 ADN, 1 W 655.

67 ADIL, 170 W 90.

68 AN, AJ 40 938.

69 An unnamed interpreter's payment is now handled by the Germans themselves as the latter currently serves the German police, as a letter dated 11.11.1941 stated, ADN 1 W 665. One might speculate that given the complaints about late payments by French offices, the Germans may have considered the interpreter's work as important and tried to satisfy their employee by paying him themselves. Another example: French police were likewise concerned as they not only had to work together with their German counterparts, but also provide them with translations of reports on everyday occurrences such as accidents, etc., ADA, 310 W 148.

70 ADN, 1 W 665.

71 Ibid., 1 W 36.

72 Böll, Briefe aus dem Krieg (as n. 39), p. 575.

ment to soldiers, hired an interpreter to mediate between German artists and French personnel[73]. Basically, on every level, be it negotiations with the French government or instructing craftsmen about renovations at requisitioned German housing facilities, interpreters were needed and used.

All these tasks show that acting as an intermediary for the occupier was far from being a neutral task. Interpreters not only provided text translations and interpreted meetings, but were also involved in interrogating suspects, for example[74]. Scholars have pointed out the interpreters' proper agency by referring to them as »gatekeepers in the communication sequence«[75] or as »fixers«[76]. Being in a »fluid position«[77], they dealt with »room to manoeuvre«[78]. Consequently they should be considered as an important group of social actors who actively took part in shaping not only communication but occupation rule itself[79]. The occupiers were at least partially aware of that, and tried to act accordingly.

Although some local commanders ordered that only German interpreters should be used at military offices[80], this was not practised consistently.[81] Still, female interpreters were likely to be occupied at less delicate posts, say at hospitals or in accountancy offices. In general, female workers experienced stronger supervisory control than men[82]. Probably this occurred out of general mistrust, as French women were constantly suspected of working as spies or prostitutes[83]. Furthermore, the Wehrmacht was concerned about its own image. German soldiers publicly accompanied by female interpreters did not match the self-conception of an empowered occupier[84]. The constant German reminders of how to behave in public, and how to conduct oneself towards the French in general and the civilian auxiliaries in particular, suggest that pretence and reality were two different things: one was claimed and the other practised.

The importance of smooth communication is best illustrated by a demand sent to the under-prefect of Montargis by the local German commander, claiming that the prefect's interpreter handled his task poorly, produced misunderstandings and hence hampered the workflow[85]. This example shows how much communication relied upon the skills of a few persons, who

73 ADN, 1 W 665.

74 A German soldier and an interpreter performed an interrogation of two French women, suspected of being illegal prostitutes, in Bordeaux, see interrogation protocols dated 3.11.1942, University Archives of the Heinrich-Heine-University in Düsseldorf, 8/4, no. 11. Since foreigners also served the German police forces in France, they might well have performed such tasks.

75 Baigorri-Jalón, War (as n. 26), not paginated.

76 The term »fixer« refers to someone who may provide solutions based on knowledge about local circumstances and people, Baker, Interpreters (as n. 26), p. 215.

77 Svetlana Probirskaja, Between ideology and ethnicity. Soviet intermediaries in military conflicts between the Sowjet Union and Finland, in: Andres, Richter, Schippel (eds.), Translation und »Drittes Reich« (as n. 33), p. 199–220

78 Ibid.

79 Baker, Interpreters (as n. 26), p. 215; Kujamäki, Im Dienst des Reiches (as n. 64), p. 55.

80 Order of the commander in chief, 5th Infantry Division, dated 5.12.1940, AN, AJ 40 959.

81 Lists including names of interpreters and their affiliations at German offices in the département Ille-et-Vilaine as well as in the city of Saint-Malo prove the contrary, ADIL 170 W 90.

82 In addition to regular medical check-ups (ADY, 1 W 1224 & ADIL, 4 ZA 1), charladies were also checked for STDs, ADN 1 W 780. It is unclear if female interpreters were treated similarly.

83 Standortbefehl No. 24, Kreiskommandantur in Montargis, dated 28.11.1941 disposes that monthly listings of the female personnel had to be prepared to make sure no registered prostitute was among them, AN, AJ 40 962

84 Order of the local commander to all headquarters in the area of Montargis, dated 21.11.1940, not to use female interpreters for external work in public, AN, AJ 40 962.

85 AN, AJ 40 963. This type of case occurred rather seldom, see next footnote.

were put under much pressure[86]. On the other hand, interpreters reached a privileged, although highly ambivalent, position. Selling one's professional skills to the occupier could guarantee special supply and other benefits, such as some flexibility in restrictions[87]. Some took advantage of their language competence to profit themselves, such as a Flemish female auxiliary at a canteen in Bailleul (northern France). She stole the belongings of German Red Cross women, and was able to hide her tracks because she was the only intermediary to assist the French police force investigating the case[88]. Another interpreter of rather dubious reputation tried to prevent his own dismissal by rejecting accusations against his person voiced by the local municipality, claiming he used his position to execute orders unauthorized. Causing a quarrel between the local German commander, the mayor and the prefect, he played one off against another[89]. One might assume that deviant behaviour, such as engagement in smuggling, was even tolerated to a certain degree, but only if the actions were not at the expense of the Germans or reached the public[90].

Mostly, intimacy between French and Germans was officially dealt with only in cases where it conflicted with prescriptions of conduct. Soldiers were urged to keep their distance from civilians and limit encounters to a minimum. Although encounters did not automatically lead to sanctions, Wehrmacht leadership saw the discipline, as well as the reputation, of the Wehrmacht potentially endangered by soldiers spending time with foreign women. So when asked if soldiers basically were allowed to be joined by interpreters (particularly women) at certain leisure events for the German troops, such as cinema or theatre (as had happened before without specific permission), a local commander harshly forbade it[91]. Access to the local *Soldatenheim* (canteen) was likewise denied, not only to female interpreters but also to German female auxiliaries and women in general[92]. Other commanders were less strict and even organized a Christmas party for French auxiliaries[93]. However, personal contact was difficult to prohibit and working face-to-face might have been the catalyst for meetings in private. Announcements of bad examples were published for the purpose of deterrence[94]. Although intimacy was officially

86 Cases of suboptimal translations of even simpler orders lead back to questions of recruitment (see note 51). Many applications may have overestimated or even sugar-coated their actual skills, but their employers surely must have taken account of that. If one scans the archives for French–German correspondence during the occupation, poor translations outnumber the good ones. Still there is barely any evidence that interpreters were dismissed due to unsatisfactory language skills. They were more likely to be fired for betrayal of confidence.

87 Some interpreters were constantly on call, so the occupiers provided them with a telephone connection, ADG, 45 W 16.

88 Final police report, dated 27.2.1942, ADN, 1 W 1952.

89 Ibid., 1 W 865. In the end, it remains unclear if he was guilty at all, since the accusations only referred to rather general things such as his unreliability. The Germans insisted that he was kept in place.

90 A Swiss interpreter profited from his position at a German camp close to the border to Switzerland and French authorities took him into custody for smuggling rationed goods. The prefecture informed the German office about the seizure of the man and about the accusations. It seems unlikely that the Germans had not got wind of his business, ADD, 2 W 141.

91 Correspondence between the Kreiskommandantur in Montargis and the Feldkommandantur in Orléans, AN, AJ 40 938.

92 Ibid., AJ 40 926.

93 The war diary of the Fliegerhorstkommandantur St. Dizier mentions such an event in 1941, GFA-MA, RL 21/181.

94 Once a German officer paid a great deal of attention to a female French interpreter of German origin. He let a soldier take care of her flat, even after she got sentenced to jail for unknown reasons, and collected her when she was released from prison. It is not mentioned, though, whether the officer was sanctioned, AN, AJ 40 926.

undesirable, the opportunities for it under the circumstances of the occupation were widely exploited.

Conclusion

Whereas cleaners, drivers and waitresses were replaceable, language skills could not be acquired easily at need. Employing civilians for dirty work, while letting them get paid by the occupied, might have been, aside from the objective necessity, a gesture to demonstrate power. The daily need for interpreters, on the contrary, questions the effective power of the occupying force. Robert Gildea has stated that occupation predominantly took place locally with German and French counterparts communicating face-to-face and functioning as transmission belts as well as buffers[95]. This being undisputed, it was most notably interpreters who provided the basis for this communication. Higher wages and preferential treatment combined to make this job attractive and to bind the personnel closer to the apparatus of occupation. The legacies of their involvement befell them after the liberation, when they had to face accusations of collaboration. Further research is needed on their factual individual involvement and to what degree their own agency needs to be taken into account, although one might already suggest from the few examples shown here that this particular job created opportunities that many of the men and women learned to use and to exploit. Interpreters, as the embodied language resource, merit further focus, as they help us to understand how communication – which was the fundamental prerequisite to occupation rule – took place in practice. Likewise, this displays the dependency of the occupation apparatus. The occupiers' attempts to regulate their public image in a way that sought to cover this weakness expose German executive power as less self-evident and even fragile, and hence tell a different story of the occupation so far. Following traces of »the means and instruments through which they (people) [in this particular case: the occupiers, B. S.] impropriate the vicinity around and how they transformed it«[96], intermediaries in particular and language in general should be taken into stronger account while working on occupation.

95 Robert Gildea, Mediators or Time-servers? Local officials and notables in the Loire Valley, 1940–1945, in: Bruno de Wever, Herman van Goethem, Nico Wouters (eds.), Local government in occupied Europe (1939–1945), Gent 2006, p. 179–203, here p. 187; Raphael Lemkin, Axis Rule in Occupied Europe. Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress, New York 1944, p. 174.

96 Alf Lüdtke, Was ist und wer treibt Alltagsgeschichte?, in: id. (ed.), Alltagsgeschichte. Zur Rekonstruktion historischer Erfahrungen und Lebensweisen, Frankfurt/Main 1989, p. 9–47, here see p. 12.