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Maria Fritsche, 'Correct German Conduct?' German Requisition Practices and their Impact on Norwegian Society during World War II

Abstract

The article analyses the German requisition and quartering practices in Norway in the light of international law and traces their impact on everyday relations between the enemies. With an average of 350,000 soldiers stationed in Norway, the German demand for housing was enormous. Space became a highly coveted resource. It was both the object of power struggles and a reflection of those struggles. The German seizure of private property exacerbated the existing housing shortage and was thus very unpopular. Yet the fact that the Wehrmacht also paid good money for requisitioned private properties and, for the most part, followed 'proper' procedure fostered acceptance of the measures. Moreover, the spatial proximity with quartered soldiers inevitably led to frequent contacts between the enemies and resulted in a rapprochement. Many auto- biographical accounts of Norwegians lauded the Wehrmacht soldiers' 'proper' or 'correct' behaviour and described the relations between Norwegians and German soldiers during the war as harmonious. The Norwegian narratives of the German occupation are thus highly ambivalent, oscillating between a positive assessment of the ordinary soldier, and condemnation of the occupation and Nazi rule. This ambivalence, the article argues, was both the result of German requisition policy, aimed to win popular support, and of the felt need to justify the close contacts with the Germans.

Keywords

German occupation, Norway, Second World War, requisition, quartering of soldiers, international law, everyday history

‘The Germans needed housing. They confiscated schools, youth clubs, houses of prayer, hotels and all kinds of meeting houses. And a good number of large private houses.’¹ These words, from a Norwegian who was 21 when Nazi Germany attacked his country on 9 April 1940, illustrate the extent of German requisitions. An average of 350,000 German soldiers were stationed in Norway throughout the war, which then counted a population of about three million. The German demands exacerbated the existing housing shortage and affected the lives of many Norwegians, who had to give up rooms to the Germans or were forced out of their homes altogether. How did this impact the everyday relations between the occupier and the occupied?

Particularly in the northern part of the country, where ‘there were people who had 4-5 Germans in their house,’ many described relations with the Germans as very amicable.² For others, the term ‘requisition’ conjured up feelings of anger: ‘I can still remember the rage and bitterness we felt when the Germans requisitioned our blankets,’³ recalled a witness from southern Norway concerning an order issued by the German administration in autumn 1941.⁴ Yet, while German requisitioning often deprived people of essential goods and infringed upon their property rights, it also laid the ground for some kind of rapprochement between the enemies. This produced ambiguous feelings, as the often-contradictory statements about the German presence in autobiographical accounts of the war illustrate.

Situated in the field of *Alltagsgeschichte*, this study analyses how the German requisition and quartering practices impacted Norwegian society, focusing on individuals’ experiences and interpretations of requisitioning. Combining archival sources with autobiographical accounts, it asks how the occupiers implemented their demands for housing and how this shaped the Norwegian responses. How did frequent contact with the enemy, which the quartering of soldiers inevitably entailed, influence attitudes towards the other? How were these encounters remembered? The billeting of German soldiers provides a perfect lens through which to examine the everyday social relations that developed between the occupiers and the occupied.⁵ Recent years have seen a rising interest in the remnants of the Wehrmacht’s physical presence in Norway, and some of these studies also address the seizing of buildings by the occupier. However, they focus predominantly on public buildings in the cities.⁶ Many autobiographical accounts of the war mention the requisitioning of housing, but this issue has attracted only marginal scholarly attention.⁷ One reason for this lacuna might be that housing belongs to those seemingly mundane social phenomena

1 Norsk Folkeminnesamling (NFS) 96BUS.051.

2 Cited by K. Olsen, *Krigens barn: De norske krigsbarna og deres mødre*, Oslo 1998, 244.

3 NFS 96BUS.057.

4 Verordnung über die Ablieferungspflicht von Wolldecken, 20 September 1941. *Verordnungsblatt für die besetzten Gebiete* Nr. 10, 25.

5 R. Gildea, *Marianne in Chains: In Search of the German Occupation, 1940–1945*, London 2002, 68–72; L. Fahnenbruck, *Ein(ver)nehmen: Sexualität und Alltag von Wehrmachtssoldaten in den besetzten Niederlanden*, Göttingen 2018), 166–170.

6 A. Alsaker, *Tysk rekvirering av norske eiendommer: En samtidsarkeologisk studie av okkupasjonen i Trondheim*, MA thesis, NTNU, Trondheim 2019; K.H. Brox, H. Hansen and K. Sivertsen, *Bunkeren: Trondheim under hakekorset*, Trondheim 2015; J. Wilberg, ‘Puslespillet om andre verdenskrig i Oslo’, in: *Byantikvaren i Oslo* 6 (2015): <https://byantikvaren.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/puslespillet-om-andre-verdenskrig-i-oslo.pdf> (accessed 1 Nov. 2021).

7 M. Fritsche, ‘Spaces of Encounter: Relations between the Occupier and the Occupied in Norway during the Second World War’, in: *Social History* 45 (2020) 3, 360–383; R. Sindt, ‘Krigens Hverdagsliv: Krigsminner fra Kirkenes 1940–44’, in: F. Fagertun (ed.), *Krig og frigjøring i nord*, Stamsund 2015, 75–84; L. Gislås, *Oppdal: Okkupasjonen*, Oppdal 2011; E.D. Drolshagen, *Der freundliche Feind: Wehrmachtssoldaten im besetzten Europa*, Augsburg 2011; R. Sindt-Weih, *Alltag für Soldaten? Kriegserinnerungen und soldatischer Alltag in der Varangerregion, 1940–44*, PhD Diss., Kiel 2005.

that are seldom ‘consciously perceived.’⁸ Another is that the topic raises potentially uncomfortable questions about possible collaboration: how should one react when the enemy who attacked your country moves into your home? So far, only one scholar, Øystein Eike, has addressed the requisitioning of private homes, looking into the municipality’s requisitioning practices in Oslo during and after the war.⁹

Due to the lack of research, I had to chiefly rely on primary sources. I researched the two vast ethnographic collections of autobiographical accounts produced by the *Norsk etnologisk gransking* (NEG) and the *Norsk Folkemminnesamling* (NFS) to find out how Norwegians remembered German requisitions and the presence of German lodgers.¹⁰ Published and unpublished autobiographical accounts of Germans who were stationed in Norway were used to complement the Norwegian perspectives.¹¹ The investigation of Wehrmacht court records yielded rich details on how Norwegians and Germans lived together.¹² The *Meldungen aus Norwegen* – secret reports by the German security service *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD) on resistance activities and on the general mood in Norway – provided information on the extent and impact of, as well as responses to, German requisition practices.¹³ Finally, I investigated the archive of the Norwegian *oppgjørskontor* (settlement offices), which in 1942 took over the handling of German requisitions and also processed proprietors’ compensation claims after the war.¹⁴

The first part of the article explains the implementation of requisitions as part of German occupation policy. It shows that the practices differed considerably between Norway and Eastern Europe. To properly assess the German requisition practices and to better understand the Norwegian responses to them, it also explores how the appropriation of enemy property in occupied territories was discussed in international law. The analysis in the second part focuses on the experience of German requisition and billeting practices and their impact on everyday relations between the enemies. The conclusion reflects on the narratives that emerge from Norwegian autobiographical accounts regarding the presence of German soldiers.

1. German requisition and quartering practices

Amongst Nazi Germany’s multiple breaches of international law during the occupation of Europe, the destruction of the lives and livelihoods of millions of civilians and prisoners of war certainly weighs heaviest. The Nazis’ disregard for the stipulated rules of war is also evident in their encroachments on private property, as Jacob Robinson had already pointed out in 1945, citing as examples the ‘Aryanization’ of Jewish property and the expropriation and forced removal of 1.5 million Poles from their homes early on during the occupation.¹⁵ Several decades later, the topic

8 H. Dehne, ‘Have We Come any Closer to Alltag?’, in: A. Lütke (ed.), *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, Princeton, NJ 1995, 123.

9 Ø. Eike, ‘Rekvireringen av husrom på 1940-tallet’, in: *Tobias. Tidsskrift for oslohistorie* 25 (2016), 38–47.

10 *Norsk etnologisk gransking* (NEG), Norsk folkemuseum, Oslo; Minneoppgaver (memory exercises), *Norsk Folkemminnesamling* (NFS), Institutt for kulturstudier og orientalske spark, University of Oslo.

11 D. Schmitz-Köster, *Der Krieg meines Vaters: Als deutscher Soldat in Norwegen*, Berlin 2004; H. Christen, *Okkupantens dagbok: Heinrich Christens dagbok fra Bergen og Trondheim 1941–1943*, Oslo 2009; Johannes Hennig, *Nordnorigisches Tagebuch*, BAMA, MSG2-12304.

12 Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (BAMA) Freiburg, PERS15.

13 S.U. Larsen / B. Sandberg / V. Dahm (eds.), *Meldungen aus Norwegen 1940–1945: Die geheimen Lageberichte des Befehlhabers der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD in Norwegen*, München 2008.

14 Riksarkiv (RA) Oslo, S-1056 Justisdepartementet, Oppgjørsavdelingen.

15 J. Robinson, ‘Transfer of Property in Enemy Occupied Territory’, in: *The American Journal of International Law* 39 (1945) 2, 216–230, here 219.

remained under-researched. In 2004, Loukis Loucaides thus again drew attention to the subject, insisting that Nazi Germany ‘entirely ignored’ individuals’ rights to property in the occupied territories.¹⁶ His assertion, however, calls for closer investigation, since Nazi Germany’s occupation policies varied considerably across Europe, both with regards to the level of violence inflicted and the degree to which they exploited a given territory’s economy and its people.

The Nordic countries, and partly also the Netherlands, fared comparatively better than most other occupied territories, including France.¹⁷ This was in considerable part due to National Socialist ideology, which assumed a ‘racial kinship’ between Germans and Scandinavians.¹⁸ Heinrich Himmler’s obsession with the Nordic race translated into a plan to build up a pure Germanic elite that could ‘Germanize’ Europe. Norwegians, considered to be at the ‘pinnacle of racial superiority in SS racial ideology,’ played an important role in Himmler’s vision of a Great Germanic Reich, as the establishment of *Lebensborn* institutions in Norway and the efforts to recruit Norwegians into the Waffen-SS illustrate.¹⁹ The exaltation of the Nordic race not only shaped the Germans’ view of the North but also served as a means of propaganda to sell the idea of a ‘new Europe’ (under German dominance) to the people in Western and Northern Europe.²⁰ Hitler allegedly sent off the future Reichskommissar of Norway, Josef Terboven, with instructions to win over the Norwegians to the National Socialist cause.²¹ By presenting themselves as well-meaning occupiers who treated the Norwegians correctly, the Germans hoped to convert the Norwegian population to Nazism.²² However, as in Western Europe, where the Germans also behaved cautiously in the first months of occupation, the kid gloves were soon removed and replaced by a more heavy-handed approach.²³

The belligerents’ rights in occupied territories

The Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, which codified the laws and customs of war, curbed the belligerents’ hitherto almost absolute powers. However, the victorious nations retained considerable rights, such as the right to confiscate an occupied state’s assets and property.²⁴ Private property, as well as the property of religious, charitable, educational, cultural and scientific institutions, were nominally protected.²⁵ However, ‘requisitions in kind and services [...] for the needs of the army of occupation’ were permitted. The relevant ruling, Article 52 of the Hague Regulations, was vague on what exactly ‘requisitions in kind and services’ encompassed. The 1912 edition of Lassa

16 L.G. Loucaides, ‘The Protection of the Right to Property in Occupied Territories’, in: *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 53 (2004) 3, 677–690, here 686.

17 See W. Röhr, ‘System oder organisiertes Chaos? Fragen einer Typologie der deutschen Okkupationsregime im Zweiten Weltkrieg’, in: R. Bohn (ed.), *Die deutsche Herrschaft in den ‘germanischen’ Ländern 1940–1945*, Stuttgart 1997, 11–47.

18 T. Emberland / M. Kott, *Himmlers Norge: Nordmenn i det storgermanske prosjekt*, Oslo 2012, 56–108.

19 T. Emberland, ‘Pure-Blooded Vikings and Peasants: Norwegians in the Racial Ideology of the SS’, in: W.W. Anton / Y. Rory (eds.), *Racial Science in Hitler’s New Europe, 1938–1945*, Lincoln, NE 2013, 108–128, here 111 and 117.

20 G. Hirschfeld, *Fremdherrschaft und Kollaboration: die Niederlande unter deutscher Besatzung 1940–1945*, Stuttgart 1984, 24–26.

21 Carlo Otte, cited in R. Bohn, *Reichskommissariat Norwegen: ‘Nationalsozialistische Neuordnung’ und Kriegswirtschaft*, München 2000, 57.

22 Emberland / Kott, *Himmlers Norge*, 127.

23 Hirschfeld, *Fremdherrschaft*, 22, 39.

24 Art. 53, Regulations Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land: Annex to the Convention on Laws and Customs of War on Land (Hague IV), 18 October 1907, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hague04.asp (accessed 2 November 2021).

25 *Ibid.*, Art. 46, Art. 56.

Oppenheim's authoritative treatise, *International Law*, argued that the phrase applied to 'all kinds of articles necessary for an army,' including the 'quartering of soldiers in the houses of private inhabitants of enemy territory.'²⁶ International law thus acknowledged the belligerent's right to seize whatever was necessary to sustain the army of occupation, within certain limits. Where these limits lay was not precisely defined. 'Although it may be ruinous to the private individuals upon whom they are quartered,' Oppenheim argued, the quartering of soldiers was lawful because during wartime, soldiers 'together with their horses, must be well fed by the inhabitants of the houses concerned.'²⁷

However, the Regulations required that requisitions (unlike confiscations) had to be paid for in cash; if this was impossible, a receipt had to be issued and the owner of the property reimbursed as soon as possible. According to Oppenheim, the local commander who requisitioned property had the right to 'fix the prices himself, although it is expected that the prices paid shall be fair.'²⁸ The question of who had to shoulder the cost of reimbursement was not directly answered by the Regulations; German legal opinion held that it must be the occupied country.²⁹ Indeed, Articles 48 and 49 granted the occupying power the right to collect taxes and other financial contributions to pay for the army and the administration of the occupied territory (including expenses for requisitions).³⁰ Yet contributions and requisitions still had to be proportionate to the resources of the occupied country and could only be used to cover the costs of the occupying army, not the larger war effort.³¹

The German military and most German jurists disagreed with this ruling, and had long flouted it.³² During World War I, the German army had transported food, machinery and the raw materials it had requisitioned to the Reich, first in Belgium, and then later in Eastern Europe.³³ This met with considerable criticism, even inside Germany, but critics of the system 'ran up against the argument of military necessity.'³⁴ The army leadership and German law experts justified the violation of international law by pointing to the Entente's 'hunger blockade,' which had cut off Germany from access to needed supplies.³⁵ Andreas Toppe argues that although the Wehrmacht claimed to adhere to the international rules of war, Germany's inadequate engagement with international law before, during and after World War I also shaped German warfare and occupation policy in the World War II, even in Western Europe.³⁶

26 L. Oppenheim, *International Law: A Treatise, Vol 2: War and Neutrality*, 2nd ed., London 1912, 186, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/41047/41047-h/41047-h.htm> (accessed 2 November 2021).

27 Ibid., 181. It is noteworthy that later revisions of the treatise reiterated this passage almost. See L. Oppenheim / H. Lauterpacht, *International Law: A Treatise, Vol. 2: Disputes, War and Neutrality*, 7th ed., London 1952, 405.

28 Oppenheim, *International Law*, 186.

29 K. Strupp, *Wörterbuch des Völkerrechts und der Diplomatie*, Vol. 2, Berlin, Leipzig 1925), 356; A. Toppe, *Militär und Kriegsvölkerrecht: Rechtsnorm, Fachdiskurs und Kriegspraxis in Deutschland 1899–1940*, München 2008, 156.

30 Both Oppenheim's original *International Law* as well as later editions edited by the international law expert Hersch Lauterpacht argue that contributions can be used to pay for requisitions. L. Oppenheim / H. Lauterpacht, *International Law: A Treatise, Vol. 2: Disputes, War and Neutrality*, 6th ed., London 1940, 319.

31 Ibid. See also I.V. Hull, *A Scrap of Paper: Breaking and Making International Law during the Great War*, Ithaca, London 2014, 98.

32 As the German delegates had already done at the Brussel and Hague Conferences. Ibid., 99.

33 Oppenheim / Lauterpacht, *International Law*, 6th ed., 318; Hull, *Scrap*, 112.

34 Hull, *Scrap*, 112.

35 Karl, *Wörterbuch*, 355.

36 Toppe, *Militär*, 428–432.

German requisition practices in Norway

On average, 350,000 Wehrmacht soldiers were stationed in Norway throughout the war: fewer in the beginning and considerably more by the time the Germans withdrew from Finland in autumn 1944.³⁷ The requisition lists of the *Ortskommandanturen* illustrate the Wehrmacht's enormous need for space. In the small commune of Surnadal on the Norwegian west coast, the 181st Infantry Division requisitioned numerous rooms in addition to school and church buildings during spring and summer 1942.³⁸ Particularly affected were people in thinly populated northern Norway, where the German troops amassed. In the north-eastern district of Sør-Varanger, bordering on the Soviet Union, there were 30,000 German soldiers compared to 8,000 civilians.³⁹ It was inevitable that 'almost all households in the Kirkenes region had Germans living with them over shorter or longer time periods.'⁴⁰ Even as the enlisted soldiers were moved into newly built barracks, the housing situation barely improved, since many officers continued to lodge in private homes.⁴¹

Norway's capital Oslo, with its 280,000 inhabitants, was overwhelmed by the occupiers' demand for space.⁴² Oslo served as seat of the Reichskommissariat – the civilian administration – as well as a military headquarters and important transfer hub for troops and supplies. Janne Wilberg estimates that around 40,000 soldiers were in the city at any one time during the war.⁴³ While the troops were mostly housed in schools and increasingly in military barracks,⁴⁴ high-ranking officers and female Wehrmacht staff, as well as members of the German police and the civilian administration, were assigned hotel rooms or rental apartments. Particularly popular with the Germans were the modern apartment buildings in the wealthy western part of the city because they provided comfort and privacy.⁴⁵ By November 1942, the Germans had requisitioned approximately 2,350 flats in the capital, 2,000 rooms in hotels and guesthouses, and a 'higher number' of single- and two-storey houses for officers and high functionaries. 'There are still no indications that the occupying power's need for space is abating', noted a despairing mayor on 23 November 1942.⁴⁶ In the adjoining Aker municipality, the Germans seized a further 3,319 rooms and 567 apartments during the war.⁴⁷ In the strategically important city of Trondheim, which counted a population of about 80,000 in 1940, the Germans had requisitioned 185 houses, 96 apartments and 438 furnished rooms at one point, as well as all 17 of the city's hotels.⁴⁸ However, the Germans' demand for housing varied widely and also changed over time as troops relocated or were moved into military barracks.

The Wehrmacht's need for space was not limited to accommodation. It claimed spaces that it needed for offices, storage and repair shops, and stables for its large number of horses. In addition, it seized extensive amounts of supplies, forage, heating and building materials. The Wehrmacht, due to its large numbers, was responsible for the bulk of requisitions and appropriated properties

37 K. Korsnes / O. Dybvig, *Wehrmacht i Norge: Antall tysk personell fra april 1940 til mai 1945*, Tromsø 2018, 27.

38 Ortskommandantur Surnadalsøra to H.U.V. Andalsnes, 1 June and 29 June 1942. RA, S-1056/J/Jb/Jba/L0157.

39 Olsen, *Krigens barn*, 244.

40 B.H. Borge, 'Krigsbarna i Sør-Varanger: Et vitnesbyrd om utstrakt norsk-tysk kontakt', in: *Heimen* 51 (2014) 1, 82–95, here 87.

41 Ibid.

42 Estimate based on numbers given by Statistisk sentralbyrå, ed., *Statistisk årbok for Norge 1946–48*, Oslo 1948, 24.

43 Wilberg, *Puslespillet*, 7.

44 At least 870 barracks were erected in Oslo. Ibid., 15.

45 *Meldungen*, August 1942, 777.

46 Ordfører Stenersen to Innenriksdepartement, 23 November 1942. RA, S-1056/l/h/L0002.

47 Eike, *Rekvireringen*, 38. Aker had a population of 131,000 in 1948 when it was integrated into Oslo.

48 Alsaker, *Tysk rekvirering*, 4.

across the country, whereas the Reichskommissariat's claims were limited to the cities. Often forgotten is the fact that the Norwegian authorities, too, seized private property, both on behalf of the occupiers but also on their own authority, to cushion the impact of the German requisitions. To the person affected it was not always evident who had actually requisitioned the space; nor was the line between requisition and confiscation clear-cut. A woman from southern Norway remembered how the local constable, who was also a member of the Norwegian Nazi paramilitary organisation *Hirden*, handed her an eviction order. He claimed to be acting on behalf of the Wehrmacht, who wanted to set up an infirmary in her home. The woman suspected that the constable had targeted her for political reasons because her husband had been deported to Sachsenhausen concentration camp. She was left on the street with five small children, feeling completely 'helpless.'⁴⁹

During the first two years of the occupation, the Wehrmacht directly requisitioned properties using a *Bescheinigung*, a receipt which itemised the rooms and furniture and gave details of the rental start, number of lodgers, as well as the rental fee. The local Wehrmacht command paid rent to the proprietors, but seldom immediately and often with considerable delay.⁵⁰ From 1 January 1942, Norwegian authorities started to play a more active role in the requisition process, following an agreement between the Wehrmacht and the Norwegian administration. It was decided that requisitions should no longer be made by the occupiers directly, but by the newly established *oppgjørskontor* (settlement offices) and their local representatives, usually the mayor or the local sheriff (*lensman*). These 'settlement offices', set up in each municipality, also handled the owners' claims for rental payments and compensation for damages.⁵¹ The reason for this organisational change was probably the Wehrmacht's lavish spending. Since a special occupation account with Norway's central bank covered the Wehrmacht's expenses, the Wehrmacht was able to pay generous salaries to attract Norwegian workers, and was presumably not stingy either when it came to payment of rental fees.⁵² The German military's careless use of Norwegian funds was a matter of concern not only to the Norwegian collaboration regime but also to the economic experts at the Reichskommissariat, who feared an economic collapse which would weaken the position of the occupier.⁵³ By taking over the handling of requisitions and payments, the Norwegian administration was given a greater degree of control over the compensations paid.⁵⁴ Even so, the Wehrmacht's enormous need for housing continued to drain the state budget.⁵⁵

The settlement offices were also tasked with securing alternative housing for tenants who had been forced out of their homes by the Germans. Already in 1941, the Norwegian administration tried to ameliorate the acute housing shortage by allowing municipalities to seize flats and houses that stood empty.⁵⁶ On 7 November 1942, the Quisling government passed a law which gave municipalities the additional right to seize 'surplus' rooms in private homes to house people who had become homeless.⁵⁷ The German quartering practices thus had a ripple effect on wider society, now affecting people whose properties the Germans had spared up to that

49 NFS 96A-A.012.

50 The height of the rent was negotiated with the owner or based on the rates determined by the local authorities. Oslo kommune (ed.), *Beretning om Oslo kommune for årene 1912–1947*, Vol. 1, Oslo 1952), 174. Tveit Lensmannkontor to Innenriksdepartement, Oppgjørsavdeling, 4 January 1946. RA, S-1056/I/c/L0040.

51 Vorschriften über Vergütung von Eigentum, RA, S-1056/I/h/L0007. Payments for properties seized by the Reichskommissariat were handled by the Oslo *oppgjørskontor*. See Oslo kommune, *Beretning*, 174.

52 Bohn, *Reichskommissariat*, 306.

53 *Ibid.*, 309, 315–318.

54 *Ibid.*, 225.

55 Lensmannkontor Tromsøysund to Innenriksdepartement, Oppgjørsavdeling, 1 June 1942. RA, S-1056/I/c/L0040.

56 *Deutsche Zeitung in Norwegen*, 13 September 1941, 5.

57 Oslo kontrollnemnd (ed.), *Pris- og Husleieforskrifter for Oslo*, Oslo 1943), 48. Eike, *Rekvireringen*, 38–39.

point. However, it is also part of the story that the occupiers' housing needs represented a welcome business opportunity for some Norwegians. Only a few weeks after the German army had invaded Norway, some citizens eagerly offered their villas as 'lodging for German officers' or advertised their properties 'for the use of the German administration.'⁵⁸ When at the beginning of May 1940, the Requisition Department at the Ministry of Justice placed an ad in the newspaper looking for a 'stately home' with 8–10 rooms in Western Oslo, the offers flooded in.⁵⁹ While the ad made no mention that the property was intended for the commander of the Wehrmacht in Norway, General von Falkenhorst, those answering the call could easily guess that the prospective tenant was a representative of the new power.

Violations

When assessing the German requisition practices in Norway, we find that they largely complied with the Hague Regulations: the Germans financially compensated private property owners (though not in cash, as required), and also paid rent for seized municipal schools and church buildings.⁶⁰ On closer inspection, however, we find numerous violations of international law. As in other parts of Europe, the Germans confiscated private property in clear breach of the Hague Convention's Article 46. Amongst the most obvious victims were the Norwegian Jews, who, in the mind of a Nazi, represented the direct opposite of the glorified Nordic race. Yet, because the Jewish community was small, with only about 2,100 people, and fairly poor, the anti-Jewish measures were implemented more selectively and unsystematically than in Western Europe. The Germans targeted the Jews individually rather than collectively – until 26 October 1942, when all male Jews were arrested and all Jewish property impounded in preparation for the deportation of the Jews starting November 1942.⁶¹ One of the first victims of German appropriation was Moritz Charles Blumenfeld, who ran the popular restaurant Humlen in Oslo's city centre. Reichskommissar Terboven wanted to establish a beer cellar in Oslo and realised that it was 'considerably easier to confiscate the tavern than to force Blumenfeld and the brewery who owned it to sell.'⁶² Particularly ruthless was the commander of the German Security Police (Sipo) of Mid-Norway in Trondheim, Gerhard Flesch, who in spring 1942 had several Jewish businessmen shot and their homes and shops confiscated, pocketing the profits.⁶³ And it was not the SS alone who exploited Jews. In April 1941, the Wehrmacht impounded the synagogue in Trondheim to use as a military dormitory.⁶⁴

Other groups suffering unlawful expropriations were citizens who had fled the country, supported the Allies or joined the resistance.⁶⁵ The Sipo could confiscate the property of anybody defined as an 'enemy of the Reich.'⁶⁶ Members of the exile government were the initial targets,

58 F. Mack, Sigurds Syr Gt., 7 May 1940; Hans Bang to Justisdept. Rekvissionskontor, 12 June 1940. RA, S-1056/1/h/L0002.

59 RA, S-1056/1/h/L0002.

60 NFS 96BUS.028; List of requisitions 1940–41, Ortskommandantur Molde, RA, S-1056/J/Jba/L0156; list of requisitions Ortskommandantur Sunndalsøra, 7 April 1942, RA, S-1056/J/Jba/L0157; Berechnung Kommandant der Seeverteidigung Sandnessjøen, RA, S-1056/1/c/L0033.

61 B. Bruland, *Holocaust i Norge: Registrering, deportasjon, tilintetgjørelse*, Oslo 2017), 447, 478–80.

62 Ibid., 120.

63 Ibid., 125–137. A Norwegian court sentenced Flesch to death for the killing of members of the Norwegian resistance. See B. Nøkleby, *Krigsforbrytelser: Brudd på krigens lov i Norge 1940–45*, Oslo 2004, 130, 154.

64 Bruland, *Holocaust*, 126.

65 Robinson, *Transfer*, 219.

66 Verordnung über die Vermögenseinziehung, 26 October 1941. See Bohn, *Reichskommissariat*, 300.

but soon Terboven extended his grasp to seize the assets of other Norwegians who had left the country. The Sipo also expropriated actual or suspected members of the resistance or evicted their families.⁶⁷ When the Reichskommissar imposed a state of emergency in Trondheim at the beginning of October 1942 and had ten prominent citizens shot, the industrialist Lorentz Cappellen-Smith only escaped death because he happened to be out of town.⁶⁸ Terboven's regional representative, Heinrich Christen, confiscated Capellen-Smiths' grand country house and turned it into his own residence. 'I believe I made a good catch,' Christen congratulated himself in his diary.⁶⁹

The Germans thus followed a two-tier system in Norway, which respected the private property of the majority in accordance with the Hague Regulations but violated the rights of those defined as racial or political enemies of Nazi Germany. On the one hand, the occupiers thus demonstrated their 'correctness' and apparent good-will by issuing receipts and paying rent to most owners of requisitioned properties.⁷⁰ On the other hand, they left the threat of punishment hanging in the air through the strong military presence and demonstrated determination to clamp down on any form of dissent.⁷¹

Space became a highly coveted resource in occupied Norway. It was the object of power struggles within the occupied society; it also reflected those struggles, as the following section illustrates.

2. Requisitions and everyday relations with the enemy

In summer 1942, a 13-year-old boy from the city of Bergen on the southwest coast witnessed a German military unit in full uniform marching down the street, stopping at every house. An officer inspected each home and inquired about the number of people living there. If the family was small, the officer would command two soldiers to take up residence.⁷² Sverre Skarsheim from Oppdal in mid-Norway remembered a more brutal approach. His family was woken in the middle of the night by the banging of a German officer who threatened to shoot the door open. When they came out, they found the front yard brimming with soldiers and horses, all needing to be accommodated.⁷³

Whereas quartering in private homes was for most soldiers a welcome change to living in barracks, it left Norwegians in a dilemma. They had to navigate between the demands of the exile government, which called on its citizens to behave coldly towards the enemy, and traditional social norms which made it difficult not to acknowledge the Germans whom they met on a daily basis. How, then, did the occupiers' claims to space impact society and everyday relations between the enemies? How did the Norwegians experience and remember the German requisition and billeting practices and their own responses to them?

Discontent and acquiescence

A man from Western Norway explained his family's position when the Wehrmacht presented its requisition order: 'There was no point in refusing. If you did not go along with their demand,

67 Ibid., 185, 300. See the case of Knut Fjæstad and Olga Jensen, RA, S-1056/1/b/L0019.

68 Capellen Smith was later arrested and imprisoned in the Grini concentration camp until 1944. E.A. Smith, *Vår historie*, <https://www.smith.no/om-oss/var-historie/> (accessed 2 Nov. 21).

69 Christen, *Okkupantens dagbok*, 185.

70 Affidavit Richard Schreiber. *Trial of Major War Criminals before IMT*, Vol. XLI, Raeder-107, 62, https://www.loc.gov/frd/Military_Law/pdf/NT_Vol-XLI.pdf (accessed 2 Nov. 2021).

71 For an overview of repressive measures, see O.K. Grimnes, *Norge under andre verdenskrig, 1939–1945* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 2018), 133–134.

72 NFS 96HOR.043.

73 Gislås, *Okkupasjonen*, 103.

they would take it anyway.⁷⁴ Another man, describing how a Wehrmacht unit installed soldiers, horses and carts on his family's farm in May 1940, concluded that 'it wasn't worth denying them it.'⁷⁵ The phrasing indicates a careful weighing of cost and benefit. By refusing to comply with the demand, one risked being subjected to violence, but also of losing out financially. Considering their military might, it is hardly surprising that the Germans' demands met with little open resistance. And the fact that the Germans followed 'proper' procedure and compensated the property owners further eased acceptance of this unpopular measure.

The German efforts to go by the book did not apply to all Norwegians, as shown above. Nor did they quell discontent completely. The seizing of public buildings caused ripple effects in the educational, cultural and health sectors that were felt by many. The Wehrmacht's requisitioning of hospitals and mental asylums, for instance, resulted in the reduction of treatment facilities, overcrowded conditions and the early release of patients in dire need of medical attention.⁷⁶ The cultural sector, too, suffered from the German appropriation of cinemas and theatres for the entertainment of troops. Although some of these establishments remained open to Norwegians, the requisitions further reduced the cultural offerings already constricted by other measures, such as the nationwide confiscation of radios in summer 1941 and the ban on public dances in October 1941. Widespread dissatisfaction caused the requisitioning of school buildings for troop accommodation. In Oslo alone, the Wehrmacht had seized 31 schools by November 1942, including all primary schools.⁷⁷ The schools were forced to set up makeshift classrooms, which made normal teaching impossible.⁷⁸ Primary school teaching in the northern city of Tromsø, for example, was reduced to nine hours weekly at different locations in order to provide all pupils with at least some basic education.⁷⁹ A witness from Oslo explained the long-term impact of these measures: 'Throughout the war we had school in primitive rented rooms across the city. We were only taught Norwegian and numeracy, since the rooms and times had to be split with others.'⁸⁰ Many children initially welcomed the closure of schools as it resulted in 'extra-long summer holidays.'⁸¹ One witness clearly remembers the day when the headmaster assembled the pupils to tell them that the school was to be closed indefinitely. The schoolmaster's evident dismay impressed them deeply but contrasted with their own feelings of joy because 'we did not look at it the same way.'⁸² When school eventually resumed, the children also began to feel the negative impact of the requisitions, as they had to travel longer distances and learn in rooms that lacked basic facilities.⁸³

While most communities experienced the closure of their schools, at least temporarily,⁸⁴ the extent to which private housing was requisitioned varied from region to region. In the north, where many troops were stationed, almost everybody had to relinquish rooms to the occupiers.

74 Edvin Brøste, cited in E. Klungnes, *Hverdagskrigen i Rauma* (Åndalsnes: Rauma kulturstyre, 1995), 110.

75 NFS 96AKH.023.

76 Antrag auf Evakuierung der Pflegeanstalt für Geistesranke Hammerfest, 12 December 1941. BAMA, RH26-702/20.

77 Report 'Rekvisisjon av husrom i Oslo og Aker', 23 November 1942. RA, S-1056/1/th/L0002; *Meldungen*, February 1943, 1001.

78 *Meldungen*, February 1943, 1001.

79 *Meldungen*, December 1942, 945.

80 NFS 96A-A.009.

81 NFS 96OSL.025.

82 NFS 96OSL.011.

83 NFS 96OSL.025; NFS 96BUS.001; NEG 96A-A.012.

84 *Meldungen*, February 1943, 1001.

In other regions, the proprietors' social standing and stance towards the new regime could decide whether their homes were targeted or spared. There were also differences between urban and rural areas. Since many people in Oslo lived in small flats consisting of one or two rooms, they were more frequently subject to evictions. In rural areas, most people had to give up rooms but could remain in the house.⁸⁵ Tenants in Oslo were often given only short notice to move out. They had to leave behind all their furnishings and household goods – a measure that caused considerable consternation because of the difficulty in obtaining replacements.⁸⁶ Although tenants were promised alternative housing by the municipality, it was a lengthy process.⁸⁷ The evicted tenants found that the offered alternatives were often too far away from the city or were of inferior quality, with families being forced to live in a single room, sometimes without access to a kitchen.⁸⁸ An internal report from the mayor's office warned that conditions in Oslo threatened to become 'almost uncivilised, not to say 'Russian'.⁸⁹ The statement illustrates the unease felt by representatives of the collaboration regime. Not only were they failing to ameliorate the situation their German ally had created, but the people were now starting to draw parallels with conditions in the communist Soviet Union, the greatest enemy of the Norwegian Nazi party.

The German requisition and billeting practices thus exacerbated the housing shortage which had already existed before the war. Wartime destruction and the Wehrmacht's high demands for building materials further added to the problem as almost no new housing could be built.⁹⁰ Sipo reports voiced concern that Oslo citizens travelling to the rural districts to obtain food were spreading news about the German evictions, thus contributing 'greatly to the incitement of the rural population.'⁹¹ Victims of evictions criticised the arbitrariness and unfairness of German requisitions, complaining that the 'little man' had to bear the burden while the owners of large villas were spared.⁹² The Norwegian collaboration regime did not escape blame, either. Its measures to cushion the effects of German requisitions by seizing spare rooms in private homes were considered unfair, while the initial reduction and subsequent freezing of rental prices were seen as ineffective ways of producing more affordable housing.⁹³ Attempts to reward Norwegian Waffen-SS volunteers who had fought on the Eastern front with flats that had been robbed from Jews also resulted in disputes.⁹⁴ Some of these 'front fighters' protested against the distribution of flats, complaining that high-ranking party officials received the better apartments while they themselves were only offered 'uninhabitable holes.'⁹⁵ Their grievances expressed frustration at the lack of recognition, but also disappointment. The cramped and poorly equipped flats in which many Norwegian Jews had lived before they were deported were difficult to reconcile with the anti-Semitic stereotype

85 *Meldungen*, August 1942, 776. There were exceptions: one witness recalled how his family took in people forced to vacate their homes on an island on the south-western coast; another remembered that the local dentist had to give up his brand-new house to Wehrmacht officers. NFS 96HOR.006, 96HOR.020.

86 *Meldungen*, August 1942, 776.

87 *Ibid.*, 776–7; Eike, *Rekvireringen*, 38–40.

88 The Reichskommissar ordered that those evicted from their homes in Oslo should be housed in the neighbouring municipality of Aker. Reichskommissar, *Entwurf zum Schreiben an die Ordfrörer in Oslo und Aker*, April 1942. RA, S-1056/1lh/L0002.

89 Report, 'Rekvisisjon av husrom i Oslo og Aker', 23 November 1942. RA, S-1056/1lh/L0002.

90 Eike, *Rekvireringen*, 38.

91 *Meldungen*, August 1942, 781; January 1945, 1497.

92 *Ibid.*, 776; *Meldungen*, January 1945, 1497.

93 Prisdirektorat, *Kunngjøring nr. 50*, 12 December 1940; Olso kontrollnemnd, ed., *Pris- og Husleieforskrifter*, 47; *Meldungen*, March 1942, 597.

94 Emberland and Kott, *Himmlers Norge*, 353–354.

95 *Meldungen*, December 1942, 942.

of the rich Jew.⁹⁶ The regime's obvious inability to solve the housing problem further undermined its already weak position. While few Norwegians dared to resist German requisitions, they were more likely to circumvent the measures implemented by the Norwegian authorities. Thus, when the Oslo municipality sent out controllers to inspect private homes for spare rooms, they often found the doors locked.⁹⁷ The contest over space, which had become such a sought-after commodity, thus brought lingering political and social tensions to the fore. It also produced new conflicts.

Living with the enemy

Political orientation, as well as age, gender, class and religious background, influenced how the occupation was experienced and remembered. The testimonials of people who were children during the war often framed the requisition of schools as a positive event which brought a welcome liberation from school duties. The experience of parents or teachers was usually very different. Views of the enemy were also greatly influenced by the frequency and nature of personal contact. To be sure, forcing Norwegians to share their homes with members of the occupying forces, or even with compatriots who had been evicted, did not exactly provide a basis for harmonious co-existence, especially since it often involved sharing kitchens and bathrooms. In all cases lodgers and their reluctant hosts had to negotiate the use of communal spaces and agree on rules of conduct. The results were similar: overcrowding, lack of privacy, disagreements over access to space and inappropriate behaviour. In a village in southern Norway, the local military command had to rehouse a German *Feldwebel* several times following complaints over his drinking bouts, which caused serious disturbances.⁹⁸ However, the conflicts that emerged as result of the German requisition policies did not always run along the obvious dividing line between German and Norwegians. Sometimes, Germans sided with Norwegians to bar a fellow countryman from accessing a Norwegian home.⁹⁹

Complaints about German lodgers were similar to those about any tenant: they made too much noise, cooked smelly food, used more than their share of electricity or hot water, left the common areas dirty, or behaved as if things belonged to them. Magne Dyrkorn, whose family housed a unit of around ten German soldiers on the second floor for much of the war, recalled 'much loud singing and music on the German floor.'¹⁰⁰ Astrid Holden told of how her spirited grandfather exploded when he discovered that the German soldiers wanted to rip out a window in the loft.¹⁰¹ Hjørdis Hagen remembered how a billeted soldier, to her father's horror, trimmed his redcurrant bushes without permission.¹⁰² What is interesting about these stories is that they often end on a positive note: the trimming of the currant bushes greatly increased the annual yield; the unruly soldiers apparently quietened down when the Norwegian proprietor threatened to report them to their commander. These narratives emphasise agency and draw attention to the positive aspects of the Germans' disregard for the proprietors' rights, thereby downplaying the tensions and glossing over the imbalance of power.

Although the looming threat of repercussions undoubtedly kept many from openly voicing criticisms, there were limits to their levels of acceptance. On 21 January 1942, Anna R., a farmer from

96 E. Søbye, *Kathe, alltid vært i Norge* (Oslo: Forlaget Oktober, 2003).

97 Eike, *Rekvireringen*, 40.

98 BAMA, PERS15/139168.

99 BAMA, PERS15/196073.

100 Cited in Klungnes, *Hverdagskrigen*, 111.

101 Gislås, *Okkupasjonen*, 99.

102 H. Hagen, 'Barn under tysk okkupasjon, 1940–1945', *Årbok for Rana XLVIII* (2015): 91–92.

Halsør on the west coast, wrote a letter to the local Wehrmacht command, ‘amicably asking’ them to pay the outstanding rent for the requisitioned house and farm buildings. One week later, the commander’s office gave instructions to transfer the money to her.¹⁰³ In March 1943, another woman, Regine R., filed a report against a German military unit which had been quartered in her house and had removed several furniture items, as well as pictures and a tablecloth. The military police investigated and found that the billeted Feldwebel had taken the furniture to his new lodgings. The missing items were immediately returned.¹⁰⁴ Less positive was the experience of a young man from Lakselv in the north-eastern province of Finnmark, who decided to inquire personally about payment for his hut which the Wehrmacht had requisitioned. He had heard that ‘a general or something similar was living there’ and thus decided to go to the hut ‘to find out who was to pay any potential rent, and potentially how much.’ When he opened the door, the German officer set his aggressive dog on him.¹⁰⁵ These examples indicate that civilians were aware of their rights and expected – or hoped – that their claims would be honoured. They also express a certain level of trust in the German authorities, since these civilians would not have reported damages or thefts to the German military if they did not expect to be treated fairly.

As the Nazi leadership had an interest in integrating Norway into a ‘racially pure,’ German-dominated future Europe, they sought to present Germany as an orderly occupying power.¹⁰⁶ This was reflected in the requisition practices, and also in the willingness to prosecute Wehrmacht personnel who violated Norwegian property rights. While not all soldierly transgressions against civilians were brought before the court, the Wehrmacht made an example of those who stole Norwegian private property, as these were seen as particularly damaging to its reputation. Thus, early on in the occupation, a court sentenced two German soldiers to 2 1/2 years’ prison with hard labour and six months’ imprisonment respectively for having pilfered silver cutlery and several pieces of silver jewellery as a ‘souvenir from Norway’ when they vacated their quarters in a Norwegian home.¹⁰⁷ The Wehrmacht, the judgement underlined, was ‘to do everything to appease the Norwegian population and foster good relationships,’ which included respecting Norwegian homes and property.¹⁰⁸

By taking cases like these seriously, the Wehrmacht reassured the population of its good will and legal authority. Yet it proved much less conscientious when the 46-year-old Johannes I. rang the *Feldgendarmarie* to complain about the soldiers lodging in his huts in Altevåtn in northern Norway, calling them ‘bandits, riff-raff, villains.’ In failing to show the occupying power the respect the Germans demanded, I. himself became the subject of persecution and was sentenced to six months in prison for having ‘insulted the German Wehrmacht.’¹⁰⁹ This example shows that while the occupying forces prided themselves in their ‘correct’ conduct towards the civilians, they brutally clamped down on any form of opposition, thereby stoking insecurity.

103 RA, S-1056/J/Jb/Jba/L0157.

104 BAMA, PERS15/164851.

105 NFS 96FIN.014.

106 D. Eichholz, ‘Die ‘Neuordnung’ des europäischen ‘Grosswirtschaftsraumes’,’ in *Working for the New Order: European Business under German Domination, 1939–1945*, ed. J. Lund (Copenhagen: Copenhagen Business School Press, 2006), 20.

107 BAMA, PERS15/164662. Such severe sentences were not limited to the first months of occupation. In February 1943, the court sentenced another soldier to two years in prison for having stolen several pieces of clothing from a house where he had been billeted. BAMA, PERS15/164817.

108 BAMA, PERS15/164662.

109 Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 242-1 II, Abl. 17, Johannes I.

Rapprochement

In view of the constant threat of violence, as well as the conflicts and hardships the German occupation produced, it is surprising that the overwhelming majority described the relations between Norwegians and Germans during the war as harmonious. Anna P. from Finnmark noted that the ‘Germans were well received by the villagers because of their friendly attitude towards the local population.’¹¹⁰ Kristen Aanstad from Skjåk in central Norway described the Germans in her diary as ‘polite and decent.’¹¹¹ Many Norwegians insisted that – overall – the German soldiers behaved well.¹¹² Or at least, much better than they had feared. A witness told of his apprehension when the first German troops took up lodging on his family’s farm in May 1940. Although ‘both officers and regulars were considerate and never nasty,’ he did not experience their presence as ‘a pleasant visit,’ since the German army was still fighting his fellow countrymen further north. However, over time, as it became clear that the German troops were bound to stay, relations between them relaxed, and the young man regularly engaged in conversations with the German soldiers.¹¹³

Many autobiographical accounts laud the Wehrmacht soldiers’ ‘proper’ or ‘correct’ behaviour: ‘There were never any problems or incidents. They behaved correctly, and we could go on with our business,’ remarked Edvin Brøste.¹¹⁴ A man from Buskerud, north of Oslo, however, insisted that even though the quartered soldiers ‘behaved well, they were little liked.’¹¹⁵ Margit Gundersen from Froland, in southern Norway, described the soldiers who lived in her home and the neighbourhood as ‘friendly and correct,’ apart from a *Unteroffizier*, ‘who was a Nazi.’¹¹⁶ Magne Dyrkorn from Rauma in western Norway, who often talked to the German lodgers, felt that ‘in the main, they behaved themselves nicely towards the civilians around.’¹¹⁷ The qualifying words these narrators use – ‘overall’, ‘in the main’, ‘most’ – indicate that the behaviour of the Wehrmacht soldiers was not always exemplary. German military police reports and court records provide ample evidence of disruptive German behaviour, especially under the influence of alcohol. Some witnesses actually recall incidents of soldiers behaving improperly or even violently towards civilians, though often without going into detail. One man from a coastal village in southwest Norway alluded to ‘a few episodes where soldiers assaulted people, in particular one, but he was removed after some to and fro’, hastening to add that ‘discipline was good, and we never suffered an inconvenience from those who were stationed here.’¹¹⁸ The praise of the soldiers’ apparent exemplary behaviour might be understood as expression of relief. Contrary to people’s expectations, the Germans often turned out to be ordinary, surprisingly well-behaved individuals, and this was, as Ingar Kaldal argues, perhaps precisely what made such behaviour so memorable.¹¹⁹

Over time, the abstract enemy became a familiar face with a name: ‘Some were called Fritz, some Werner, and others Karl-Heinz. We were no longer afraid of these guys, who amongst

110 NEG 24997.

111 Cited in H.P. Hosar, *Skjåk Bygdebok: Historia 1914–1945*, Vol. 4 (Skjåk: Skjåk municipality, 2016), 558.

112 NFS 96HOR.78.

113 NFS 96AKH.023.

114 Cited in Klungnes, *Hverdagsskrigen*, 110.

115 NFS 96BUS.036.

116 T. Christiansen and J. Østreim, ‘Tysk tilstedeværelse i Froland under okkupasjonsårene 1940–45,’ in *Årsskrift Froland Historielag* (2015), published online 4 January 2016, <https://historielagene.no/HentFil.ashx?F=201606131445061926.pdf> (accessed 3 Nov. 2021).

117 Dykorn, cited in Klungnes, *Hverdagsskrigen*, 111.

118 NFS 96HOR.78.

119 I. Kaldal, *Veit og gate: Daglegliv i Midtbyen i Trondheim 1880–1950* (Trondheim: Universitetsforlaget, 1997), 414.

others played football on Mulebanen (the local football ground),’ recalled a man from Bergen.¹²⁰ More than 70 years after the war, Hjørdis Hagen still remembered the names of some of the German lodgers, in some cases also their age, profession and appearance, such as the ‘navy officer with a dashing uniform and white gloves.’¹²¹ Hagen also recounted how she, then a young girl, was allowed to enter and inspect the bedrooms of the billeted soldiers. One of them had a photograph of his daughter hanging above his bed who was of similar age to her own, and this clearly left an impression on her. The photograph might have triggered a conversation between them, revealing a different, private side to the foreign soldier. While her recollections illustrate how the worlds of the occupier and the occupied intersected, they also point to the (invisible and actual) barriers that separated the two sides. Hagen’s family home was encircled by a barbed wire fence, and the soldiers living on the ground floor held the key to the front door and the outside toilet. Even though they were friendly, the Norwegian proprietors were reminded daily of their weakened position as they had to ask permission to use the toilet.¹²²

The relationship between the occupiers and the occupied was thus ambivalent. Private photo albums and local Norwegian history books often depict German soldiers side by side with villagers or holding Norwegian children in their arms.¹²³ Many Norwegians, however, professed that they retained a distance from the Germans, at least if other Norwegians were present, with children frequently acting as intermediaries.¹²⁴ Yet, regardless of whether the relations between the lodgers and their reluctant Norwegian hosts remained polite but distant or became close, a familiarity often developed that was advantageous to both sides. Norwegian accounts tell of soldiers who helped the farmers with their work, or who lent the army’s horses to plough the fields.¹²⁵ Others recounted incidents where billeted soldiers helped cover up unlawful activities or avert arrest by the Gestapo or SS.¹²⁶ When Hagen fell dangerously ill in January 1941, two Wehrmacht medics living on the ground floor organised a truck with a snowplough to transport her 100 kilometres to the nearest German military hospital, where she was operated on.¹²⁷

Less dramatic, but more frequent, are stories of German soldiers who shared their rations with their Norwegian hosts.¹²⁸ All societies that were occupied by Nazi Germany suffered from a scarcity of food and other commodities, albeit to varying degrees.¹²⁹ Although Norway was comparatively better off than many other occupied countries, rationing dominated everyday life, especially in the cities.¹³⁰ Members of the occupying forces had privileged access to rationed products such as sugar, coffee, tobacco and alcohol. They used them both to barter

120 NFS 96HOR.043.

121 Hagen, *Barn*, 92.

122 *Ibid.*

123 Hosar, *Skjåk*, 560–62; Gisnås, *Okkupasjonen*, chapter 5.

124 Klungnes, *Hverdagskrigen*, 111–12; Drolshagen, *Feind*, 47, 164; Gisnås, *Okkupasjonen*, 96–97.

125 Hosar, *Skjåk*, 559, 561; Edvin Brøste, cited in Klungnes, *Hverdagskrigen*, 110.

126 NFS 96FIN.014; Klungnes, *Hverdagskrigen*, 111.

127 Hagen, *Barn*, 93–94.

128 Drolshagen, *Feind*, 169.

129 T. Tönsmeier, ‘Hungerökonomien: Vom Umgang mit der Mangelversorgung im besetzten Europa des Zweiten Weltkrieges,’ *Historische Zeitschrift* 303, no. 3 (2015): 662–704, here 677.

130 G. Hjeltnes, ‘Supplies under Pressure: Survival in a Fully Rationed Society: Experiences, Cases and Innovation in Rural and Urban Regions in Occupied Norway,’ in *Coping with Hunger and Shortage under German Occupation in World War II*, eds. T. Tönsmeier, P. Haslinger and A. Laba (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 61–82, here 75.

and to build up friendly relations with the locals.¹³¹ Soldiers handed out sweets to children or offered their Norwegian hosts cigarettes, brandy or coffee when they visited.¹³² Christmas was a particularly memorable occasion for many and was seemingly far removed from politics: some Norwegians invited their German lodgers to celebrate with them, often out of pity for the lonely soldiers. The latter reciprocated by handing out fine presents or by contributing alcohol and coffee to the feast.¹³³

The spatial proximity and frequent contact gradually broke down barriers and fostered exchange, leading to rapprochement. The approximately 10–12,000 children who were fathered by German men during the war in Norway were the most visible evidence of this rapprochement.¹³⁴ Their existence also illustrates how the German occupation shattered not only the political and social order, but also disrupted gender relations: the massive influx of predominantly male Wehrmacht expanded the pool of possible male partners for Norwegian women and gave them more options.¹³⁵ Although women were under considerable social pressure to refrain from contact with the enemy, the German soldiers obviously held some attraction.¹³⁶ And this had repercussions. While many men had also entertained close contact with the enemy,¹³⁷ it was the women (along with the members of the Nazi party, *Nasjonal Samling*) who were targeted for their transgressions after liberation.¹³⁸ Defamed as *tyskertøser* (German whores), the women, and to some extent their children, suffered humiliation and discrimination. Scholars have interpreted the often publicly celebrated violence against these women as an attempt to strengthen traditional gender order while deflecting censure away from the men's passivity during the war.¹³⁹

However, the acceptance of friendly associations with the enemy, whether sexual or not, varied strongly from region to region. Communities where Germans and Norwegians lived on top of each other showed much more tolerance, not least because almost everybody had been in contact with the enemy.¹⁴⁰ A man from Kirkenes, a northern town close to the Soviet border where the Germans outnumbered the locals, put it this way: 'The fact that we had so many Germans in our district meant that we all had to sin with or against our will.'¹⁴¹ The words 'all' and 'sin' stick out here: the narrator points out that 'all,' not just the women whom society castigated as 'horizontal collaborators,' were guilty of associating with the Germans. By describing these interactions as 'sinning,' he seemingly reinforces the dominant view that such contact was morally wrong. Yet, as he admits, given the large number of German troops stationed in the strategically important north, keeping one's distance was not an option. The Germans moved into their homes and provided much needed jobs and

131 M. Fritsche, 'Alkohol und (Besatzungs-)Macht', in 'Wenn die Norske uns schon nicht lieben ...' *Das Tagebuch des Dienststellenleiters Heinrich Christen in Norwegen 1941–1943*, ed. D. Wierling (Göttingen: Wallstein 2021), 215–236; Fritsche, *Spaces*, 369. See also Tönsmeier, *Hungerökonomien*, 696.

132 Gisnås, *Okkupasjonen*, 96, 102; Baard, *Krigsbarna*, 85; Klungnes, *Hverdagen*, 113; Kaldal, *Veit*, 411.

133 Schmitz-Köster, *Krieg*, 140; Gisnås, *Okkupasjonen*, 82; Hosar, *Skjåk*, 561–562.

134 Olsen, *Krigens barn*, 72.

135 There were 4,806 female Wehrmacht staff in Norway on 10 May 1945. See Schmitz-Köster, *Krieg*, 243.

136 NEG 25001; Drolshagen, *Feind*, 48–50; A. Pedersen, *Vi kalte dem tyskertøser* (Oslo: Spartacus, 2012), 31.

137 Fritsche, *Spaces*, 375–377; Schmitz-Köster, *Krieg*, 167. An estimated 175,000 Norwegians, mostly men, worked for the Wehrmacht. H. Espeli, 'Det økonomiske forholdet mellom Tyskland og Norge 1940–45,' in *Danske tilstander, norske tilstander. Forskjeller og likheter under tysk okkupasjon 1940–45*, eds. H.F. Dahl, H. Kirchhoff, J. Lund and L-E. Vaale (Oslo: Forlaget Press, 2010), 142.

138 See for example Pedersen, *Tyskertøser*, 61–97. See Warring, *Intimate Relations*, for a European perspective.

139 F. Virgili, *Shorn Women: Gender and Punishment in Liberation France* (Oxford: Bloomsbury, 2002); A. Warring, 'Intimate and Sexual Relations,' in *Surviving Hitler and Mussolini: Daily Life in Occupied Europe*, eds. R. Gildea, O. Wieviorka and A. Warring (Oxford: Bloomsbury, 2006), 113–23.

140 Olsen, *Krigens barn*, 244; Baard, *Krigsbarna*, 84; Sindt, *Krigens Hverdagsliv*.

141 Olsen, *Krigens barn*, 244.

business opportunities.¹⁴² Seen in this context, attempting to avoid contact with them would not only have been unfeasible, but also foolish.¹⁴³

3. Narratives of encounters with the enemy

Describing life under German occupation, one witness stated that ‘the German soldiers and their Norwegian helpers lived in a way on the outside of our lives.’¹⁴⁴ In the following passage, the narrator paints an image of two spheres separated by an invisible barrier; a barrier that was nevertheless punctured by numerous encounters:

We watched them walking or cycling in pairs in the city streets, we saw and heard the singing German troops marching past, we heard the loud voices and commands, we saw the grey cars and their big horses, we noticed the guards outside [...] the Russian camp at Flagtveid, we came across German officers who visited our female lodger and heard them partying loudly in the apartment, we saw them occasionally with Norwegian girls in the street, but they were first and foremost people we did not have any contact with, but who were a frequent subject of our conversations.¹⁴⁵

Autobiographical accounts of the war roughly fall into two categories: while some spoke of frequent contacts with the occupiers,¹⁴⁶ others underlined their distance. Those in the second category claimed that they had avoided any contact with members of the occupying forces, even insinuating that this was an act of resistance.¹⁴⁷ In these narratives, only certain young women or ‘German-friendly’ Nazis had engaged with Germans.¹⁴⁸ To be sure, the possibilities for, and the extent of, contact with the occupiers were different in various parts of the country and also depended on personal circumstances. It is, however, noteworthy that claims of no contact were often followed up with stories of how someone gave a German a lift or chatted with a Wehrmacht soldier waiting for the ferry. How does one make sense of these contradictions? The narrators, in an attempt to present their conduct as impeccable, obviously reconfigured the meaning of ‘contact’. By limiting the notion of contact to exchanges motivated by ideological affinity or sexual lust, their own interactions with Germans appear not as contact in the strict sense, but merely as gestures of politeness or a clever strategic move to obtain information.¹⁴⁹

Another narrative strategy used to dispel any doubts about improper relations with the enemy was to present the German soldiers as the active participant: ‘The Germans wanted to get into contact with us, particularly the officers, but also the ordinary soldiers, and I talked to them a bit,’¹⁵⁰ explained one man who recalled lengthy conversations with quartered soldiers about a variety of topics. Another described how in the first year of the occupation ‘individual soldiers tried to strike up a conversation with the civilians, and we were not afraid to say what we thought about the attack on our country.’¹⁵¹ These narratives stress the occupiers’ efforts – *they wanted, they tried* – and thus imply that the Norwegians merely obliged them. This is not to

142 Baard, *Krigsbarna*, 87.

143 See also Tönsmeier, *Hungerökonomien*, 667.

144 NFS 96HOR.024.

145 Ibid.

146 NEG 25118, 24997, 25135, 25134.

147 Kaldal, *Veit*, 411.

148 NEG 25001, 25007, 25077; NFS 96HOR.043. Gisnås, *Okkupasjonen*, 103.

149 NEG 25007.

150 NFS 96AKH.023.

151 NFS 96HOR.020.

argue that their observations were wrong. German accounts confirm their keen interest in coming into contact with the locals.¹⁵² Yet, by emphasising the Germans' eagerness to talk, and even contrasting it with their own fearlessness, the narrators reclaim a position of power they did not have at the time.

Those who admitted to having had frequent interactions with Germans often lived or worked in close proximity to them. In their accounts, the abstract enemy gradually became ordinary human beings with names and with families far away. Children, and the soldiers' reactions towards them, are frequent topics in these stories. They bear a striking resemblance to memories of Allied, particularly of Soviet soldiers during the liberation of Germany and Austria.¹⁵³ The narratives describe German soldiers who handed out sweets to Norwegian children, proudly showed pictures of their own offspring, or started crying when they met the small children of their hosts.¹⁵⁴ Karina Gyldenås remembered how a German soldier stroked the hair of her little daughter, with tears running down his cheeks. She voiced her sympathy – 'he surely also had a little girl at home in Germany' – and interpreted his emotional reaction as evidence of the enemy's humanity.¹⁵⁵

Such accounts often distinguish between the ordinary, decent, even 'nice' German soldier who lived in the same house or neighbourhood and the brutal, anonymous SS and Gestapo men who represented a constant, but for the most part abstract, threat. Phrases such as 'We knew they were not here voluntarily',¹⁵⁶ 'they had no real choice',¹⁵⁷ or 'there were no doubt many Germans who would have rather been elsewhere than as an occupier in Norway',¹⁵⁸ express the belief that the Germans one knew personally could not have been Nazis. Frequently, references to the soldiers' young age or the fact that they were actually Austrians serve to support this assumption.¹⁵⁹ The narratives thus 'denazify' the enemy by presenting him as an ordinary human being and thereby reframe any interactions with him as unpolitical and hence harmless.

Although everyday contact with members of the Wehrmacht did not temper Norwegian opposition to the German enemy, it altered attitudes towards the German *soldiers*. The, by and large, positive views on German soldiers were presumably also influenced by the conduct of the Wehrmacht, which took pains to present itself as a traditional occupying army that seemingly played no part in the suppressive and brutal aspects of the German occupation. When assessing these views, we need to take into account how the passing of time might have altered the memories of the occupation. Many of the recollections analysed here were produced 50 or more years after the war; they were certainly influenced by the realisation that other German-occupied countries fared much worse than Norway. Earlier accounts might have been less forgiving and might have judged the housing practices more harshly. What this analysis has nevertheless been able to show is that the orderly requisitioning process played a central role in the German effort to win over the Norwegians. It has also demonstrated how the quartering of soldiers, as in other parts of occupied Western and Northern Europe, reduced the spatial as well as emotional distance between the

152 See, for example, Hennig, *Nordnordwegisches Tagebuch*, 46, 72, 113; Schmitz Köster, *Krieg*.

153 See, for example, Christel Panzig / Klaus-Alexander Panzig, "Die Russen kommen!" Deutsche Erinnerungen an Begegnungen mit Russen bei Kriegsende 1945 in Dörfern und Kleinstädten Mitteldeutschlands und Mecklenburg Vorpommerns', in *Rotarmisten schreiben aus Deutschland*, ed. Elke Scherstanonij (München: KG Saur, 2004), 340–368, here 366.

154 Klungnes, *Hverdagen*, 112; Gislås, *Okkupasjonen*, 103–04, Olsen, *Krigens Barn*, 244.

155 Cited in Klungnes, *Hverdagen*, 112.

156 Schmitz Köster, *Krieg*, 161.

157 Gislås, *Okkupasjonen*, 104.

158 Liv Kvam Eide, cited in Klungnes, *Hverdagen*, 112.

159 NEG 25077, 25002; Gislås, *Okkupasjonen*, 104; See also Sindt-Weih, *Alltag*, 177–178.

enemies.¹⁶⁰ While this did not alter existing opposition to the enemy, it often led to a temporary rapprochement on a personal level.

160 Gildea, *Marianne*, 68–72; K. Thijs, ‘Die müssen ein bisschen aufgemöbelt werden, die Holländer’: Deutsche Feldpostbriefe aus den besetzten Niederlanden – eine Annäherung’, in *Grenzfälle: Transfer und Konflikt zwischen Deutschland, Belgien und den Niederlanden im 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. K. Thijs and R. Haude (Heidelberg: Synchron, 2013), 85–107, 93, 100–101.