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Shifting Racial Boundaries and Their Limits. German Women, Non-European Men, and the Negotiation of Sexuality and Intimacy in Nazi Germany

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Abstract: This essay examines the cultural, ethnic, and “racial” boundaries of the National Socialist “Volksgemeinschaft” based on planned, failed, and completed marriages between German women and non-European men in the early twentieth century. From evidence in the relevant files from the Federal Archives and the Political Archive of the Federal Foreign Office, this essay discusses male partners from various countries of origin as examples of the role of the state in racially mixed unions. The reactions of the institutional actors and the couples themselves demonstrated the surprising ambivalence of National Socialist racial policy due to political and diplomatic requirements.

Keywords: gender; race; marriage; demography; family

1. Introduction

At the turn of the twentieth century, German authorities faced increasing instances when German women wished to marry foreign partners. As in other European countries, German authorities regarded ethnically unwanted mixed marriages as dangerous liaisons, for the nation as well as for (female) individuals. After 1918/19, changes in territories and citizenship and the increase in migration led to an apparently greater need for documenting and regulating marriages involving foreigners. The authorities were usually displeased with male partners from non-European countries of origin and thus often rejected their applications for licenses. The mainsprings of these tangible expressions of rivalry (economic, as well as sexual) were xenophobia and ethnocentrism. Such prejudices explained the construction of the “otherness” of the “other” to include marriage partners, at least when they were male, from outside Germany (Bauman 2000, p. 214). These gender-specific, eugenic racial beliefs both promoted and resulted from widespread demographic fears common in the period of Social Darwinism. Indeed, those opposed to mixed unions predicted a dim future for the health of the German people should such mixing become common practice.

Thus, the German civil status system developed mechanisms to deal “appropriately” with marriages to foreigners in the 1880s. This was in part due to changes in international private law, which had complicated personal status and private law requirements. Civil status law, the subject of this article, was a complex, multi-level policy field. Since 1871/75 (the introduction of civil marriage and the far-reaching installation of registry offices), civil status law experienced increasing specialization, growing differentiation, and administrative modernization, all at the same time. Within this field, the registry office played a central role, one hard to overstate. Registry offices and civil registrars were responsible for verifying the legal validity of marriages, so they were gatekeepers to the national marriage market. Because they were the first officials to consider whether (or not) to allow or refuse a marriage, their decisions were correspondingly significant. The registry system, understood as a social functional system (Niklas Luhmann), historicizes the issue of admission or refusal. Registrars

used various factors (origin, ethnicity, age, gender) to determine the conditions for participation in the community. Their power emerged from their place in the bureaucracy, but also because marriages with foreigners came under personal status law during the period under study. As soon as one participant in the marriage was unable to provide proof of German citizenship, he or she had to produce a certificate of non-impediment (*Ehefähigkeitszeugnis*) issued by his/her home authority. This document had to contain a note stating that there was no obstacle to the marriage for reasons of marital status. The fiancées were dependent on the speedy processing of their requests, especially because in many cases the brides were pregnant. As a result, since the end of the 19th century, local governments utilized a comprehensive and highly effective controlling mechanism for the domestic marriage market. To put it bluntly, the *Ehefähigkeitszeugnis* was an essential—and probably the most effective—instrument for regulating access to the “German woman”, because any number of problems could develop in getting the necessary paperwork. Some states, especially outside of Europe, did not know about the requirement or had no way to issue such documents. In these cases, the President of Higher Regional Court of the local territory decided whether to issue an exemption. Both registrars and Presidents gained tremendous power as soon as civil marriage began (Lorke 2017, 2018a). The National Socialists, then, could fall back on an established civil status system to avoid approving mixed marriages.

In general, the German public also rejected “mixed marriages”, reinforcing the distaste of officials. Though the state could not completely restrict intimate encounters between foreign men and German women, social pressure was highly effective in stigmatizing such relationships (see for example the interdependencies between public opinion and the concrete registrar’s modus operandi (Lorke 2017, 2018a)). For instance, in spring 1941, a woman inquired at the editorial office of the magazine “Neues Volk”, published by the Race Political Office (*Rassenpolitisches Amt*) of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (*Nationalsozialistische Arbeiterpartei/NSDAP*), whether she had to marry the Chinese man who had impregnated her and whose name she could “hardly pronounce”. In response, the editors harshly accused her of “racial desecration” and flatly declared, “a marriage between a German and a Chinese is out of the question”. The editors also assumed that the state would revoke the man’s residence permit, and they described the woman’s mother as “oblivious to species” (*artvergessen*) because she had arranged the relationship and lived with a Chinese man herself.¹ This example exemplifies the German state’s attitude to all mixed marriages, an attitude shared by many Germans and, for that matter, most Europeans.

Although we know much about the effects of “racial disgrace” through various studies (e.g., Przyrembel 2003, 2004; Szobar 2002; Schmid 2003), new research has shown the effects of the “forbidden treatment of foreign peoples” through many regional and local histories (e.g., Siemssen 1998; Kundrus 1999; Schneider 2010; Scheck 2018). The same applies to the relations of Wehrmacht members to “other” women in the occupied territories during World War II (e.g., Müller 2003; Mühlhäuser 2010, 2017a; Röger 2014, 2015). Additionally, many historians have presented studies dealing with intimate encounters at the front (e.g., Higonnet et al. 1987; Drolshagen 1998; Virgili 2002; Warring 2006; Muth 2008; Heidenreich 2017; Fahnenbruck 2018), whilst others have concentrated on the “folk-political” (*volkstumpolitisch*) effects on marriage policies in wartime (Heinemann 2003; Kundrus 2009; Strippel 2011; Nichols 2015). This thematic focus points to the importance of studying intimate relations, especially connections to larger social developments (Steber and Gotto 2014; Harvey et al. 2019). Historians also stress the importance of subsequent policies across different regimes and over long periods (e.g., Celesso and Kholoussy 2016; McDougall and Pearsall 2017; Moses 2018). However, social and institutional interaction with other “strangers” continues to be a blind spot of historical research. My essay, which focuses on non-European partners, helps fill this void. This paper reflects on the functioning of the National Socialist migration regime (Oltmer 2012; Schmiechen-Ackermann 2016), its global historical embedding, and the negotiation of boundaries between “own” and “foreign”. First,

¹ Völkische Lebensfragen. 1941. Neues Volk 9: 8.

I outline the prevailing expectations of the “Volksgemeinschaft”. Second, I use examples from different areas to illuminate the theory of forbidding mixed marriages. Third, I explore the actual practices of officials at the local and national level. By doing so, I show not only the Nazi racial hierarchies of non-Jewish persons and the gap between rhetoric and reality, but also the effectiveness of indirect methods in achieving the state’s goals.

2. Quantitative Dimensions

A census in June 1933 revealed 757,000 foreigners in the territory of the Reich, amounting to only 1.2 percent of the population. Germany thus ranked near the median for European populations at that time. The front-runner within the Reich was Berlin with a share of non-Germans in the total population of just under 2.5%. “Foreigners” were overwhelmingly male. In the mid-1930s, three non-German men corresponded to only two non-German women, which inevitably had corresponding effects on the marriage markets. By far, the largest proportion of men came from migrant groups in non-European countries: China ranked ahead of Afghanistan, Thailand, Turkey, Japan, Iran, and Egypt. In all these states, the number of women from their own group was just between 15% and 35%, but most of these women were former German citizens who had lost German citizenship upon marriage to foreign men, so the number of women of color in Germany was quite small. German-born women who lost their nationality upon marriage offered problems to those for whom “race” and “nationality” were aligned, but women’s marital denationalization was common throughout Europe, including in most continental states and Great Britain (Gosewinkel 2001; Fahrmeir 2007; de Hart 2015; for Great Britain, see Frost 2019). At any rate, this gender imbalance led the authorities to fear losing “German women” to new competitors in the marriage market, fears that soon manifested into pseudo-scientific studies against mixed marriages. In view of the low total number of binational marriages, this interest was out of proportion to the number of German women married to foreigners (Statistisches Reichsamt 1936, pp. 14–17; Statistisches Reichsamt 1943, pp. 6–10), showing the level of anxiety such crossings provoked.

Before the outbreak of the war, the number of marriages between Germans and foreigners amounted to 2% of the total number of marriages. In a city such as Hamburg, e.g., the proportion of binational marriages from 1933 to 1938 was between 2.5% and 4% of all marriages.² This percentage might seem negligible, but such marriages led to thorny questions of private law and population policy. In addition, when the war broke out, contact with foreigners increased significantly, and the potential for foreign marriages rose. The occupation of various European states and the employment of hundreds of thousands of foreign workers and prisoners of war in the Reich led to a “strong increase in marriage wishes”.³ Other developments increased anxiety as well. For example, some reports indicated a substantial minority of racially “other” men in foreign unions. In a survey conducted at the end of 1942, only 503 “foreign ethnic” fathers from Berlin youth welfare offices since 1938 counted as “Germans with foreign nationalities”. The countries of origin included Italy, the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, the Soviet Union, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, and the Netherlands, but also 22 Chinese, 15 Iranian, 9 Turkish, 7 Japanese, 3 Iraqi, and 2 Egyptian men. These numbers were the “lower limit”, as they included only those families where a guardian had been appointed. Officials were deeply concerned in light of this evidence that German women had intimate relationships with so many men of foreign races. Indeed, the report estimated the number of children resulting from intercourse between “colored” men and German women at 191.⁴ Such reports fed into racial fears,

² See the overview in: Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 332-4_1.

³ Reich Ministry of Interior to the Reich Minister and Head of the Reich Chancellery, March 1943, Bundesarchiv Berlin, R 3001/20465.

⁴ The Gaustabsamtsleiter: Template for the Gauleiter Joseph Goebbels: Sexual intercourse of Germans with foreign peoples (Verkehr von Deutschen mit Fremdvölkischen), November 11 1942, Bundesarchiv Berlin, R 55, 1220.

driving functionaries and bureaucrats to try to limit the unions and, they hoped, the number of biracial offspring that ensued.

3. Migration, Marriage, and the “Volksgemeinschaft”

As the report mentioned above indicated, migration and marriage to foreigners, as well as the fears they engendered, differed by gender. Relationships between German men and foreign women did not attract great interest, but the reverse configuration evoked concern and, thus, regulation. Clearly, anti-feminism and misogyny played a part in the government’s reaction. Historians have noted the backlash against the emancipation of women of the interwar period, one that aimed to eliminate women’s agency regarding private life choices (Lorke 2018a). In short, the German state punished behavior that challenged the patriarchal hierarchy of marriage, justifying this by arguing that crossing racial borders damaged female honor (*Ehre*). “Shame” and “honor” acted as mechanisms for marking inclusion and exclusion from the social order in this sexual-moral normative space. Many observers believed that female purity was constantly in danger, and thus, men in decision-making positions, such as the registrars, guarded women’s “honor” with vigilance (Frevert 1992). Added to this were discussions about the loss of nationality of a German woman married to a non-German. Women’s marital denationalization was, to a certain extent, an institutionally and nationally imposed punishment for crossing matrimonial borders. In theory, it acted as a preventative measure, though many women were likely unaware of the consequences. A further dimension was the concern about the leaking of political and/or military secrets, fears such marriages had provoked since the German Empire (Lorke 2018b). Taken together, all these structural conditions formed a complex mixture in the assessment of the marriages in question. At times, the motivations were tangled enough to obscure the role of race in the rejection of the marriage license, even in the midst of the unexpected ethnic-racist radicalization after 1933.

The gender and sexual anxiety of the years after 1933 also related to the imagined demographic decline of the German people. Though common in the 1920s, this feeling intensified in the 1930s. Given the losses in the war and general fertility decline, observers insisted that women must practice a “race-conscious” lifestyle, including having “hereditary healthy” offspring. Courtship, marriage, and sexual activity all were part of service to the “Volksgemeinschaft”. Patriotic women, then, had an “intuitive aversion against sexual relations with aliens and racial mixture”. Because of perceived moral laxity in the Weimar Republic, National Socialists wished to counter the supposed “immoralization” and “demoralization” before 1933 with concepts such as “mother power”, to ennoble the “German woman ... as creator and sustainer of popular growth” (e.g., Diehl 1933; Staemmler 1933; Berens-Totenohl 1938). This always meant furnishing women with the necessary “racial and population policy equipment” (Magnussen 1939) and immunizing them against any deviations from it that might encourage “disnordation” (*Entnordung*). Thus, with a view to decreasing birth rates, sexual researchers prophesized a gloomy “racial” situation and, on this basis, spoke out against the “invasion of foreign races and against racial mixture” in general (see for an overview Czarnowski 1991; Herzog 2005a, 2005b; Sigmund 2008; Frietsch and Herkommer 2009; Fischer 2014; Heinsohn 2018).

In other words, fears of “mixing” were not new, though Nazi racial policy, and its firm anti-feminism, was more intense. In addition, National Socialists structured the thinking about mixed marriages through their anti-Semitic racial policy, twisting some of the previously held beliefs. For example, the racist view that the Chinese were sexually “deviant” began at the turn of the century; the National Socialists simply updated these sexualized fantasies (Amenda 2005). Gender differences were also long standing. For instance, the double standard in “honor” and “loyalty” in marriage was not new, but it gained legitimacy in the economic crisis of the depression as well as in the national emergency of war. The mix of racial and gender stereotypes, and their relationship to “honor”, had negative effects on inclusion or exclusion from the community, as historians have argued. Using the example of front-line deployment, for instance, Birthe Kundrus has shown that intimate and sensual urges in a man were decoupled from marriage quicker than those in a woman (Kundrus 1997). Thus,

German women, in particular, were the target audience for the appeal to “Keep your blood pure” (*Halte Dein Blut rein*), formulated in the first years of the war.⁵ The ideas were old, but pressure increased. The National Socialist Race Policy Office insisted that any mixture was a “sin against the future of one’s own people” and that Germany must “continue unperturbed along the path of racial morality”. The government spread this call for sexual self-control through a large-scale campaign; one leaflet was printed over 200,000 times and displayed in schools, among other places (Hansch-Singh 1991, p. 137). Countless newspaper reports supplemented and reinforced the message. The magazine *Neues Volk*, for instance, insisted in the summer of 1941 that, although foreigners may “appear to be worth estimating”, marital or illegitimate connections between Germans and foreigners were “conceivably undesirable” (Schubert 1941).

Such strongly didactic warnings aimed at preventing intimacy with foreigners and controlling female intimacy, ultimately supporting the patriarchy. Those making and enforcing the rules were largely men, and they viewed the behavior of “women and girls” as measures of male honor as well as female honor. Women who crossed racial lines were sexually unpatriotic, burdening the state with “racially undesirable” offspring and undermining the health of the German nation. The Race Policy Office was particularly involved in spreading such propaganda through its magazine *Neues Volk*, which many party members read. One popular column was *Das Rassenpolitische Amt gibt Auskunft* (“The Office of Racial Policy Provides Information”), which offered relatives opportunities to ask for advice. One mother was “concerned” about her daughter, who had been friends with a Turkish student for years. What should she do? The answer was as standardized as it was frightening. Marriages of German girls with foreigners were not only “undesirable”, but forbidden: “If her daughter does not want to hear, she runs the risk of being taken into protective custody”.⁶ Women were expected to bow to national needs to fulfill the promise of the social utopia to come (Danker and Schwabe 2017; Detlef Schmiechen-Ackermann and Roitsch 2018). This propaganda reinforced the common public assessment of the undesirability of cross-border intimacy, and this public included local registrars.

Administrative skepticism regarding “marrying out” interacted with an increasing race-biological interpretation of marriage. As Edward Ross Dickinson stated, “in the course of the 1920s eugenics passed through an important process of maturation” (Dickinson 2004, p. 13). The Civil Registry infrastructure revealed this development, though in some ways it was a side effect of broad efficiency and rationalization. The rationalized decision-making system of “civil registry offices”, ensured “intimate knowledge of their local population”. Civil registrars had already established a “self-image as guardians of the nation’s future” (Caplan 2014, pp. 121, 128) before 1933, and the importance of their role only grew with the Nazi regime. After 1933, cultural, interpretative, and perceptive traditions from the administration continued, while new day-to-day and foreign policy requirements emerged (Lorke 2017, 2018a). After the National Socialist’s “seizure of power”, the Hague Marriage Agreement remained officially in force. This implied that, under German civil law, no obstacles existed to marriage between Reich citizens and foreigners of any “race”. Nevertheless, certain configurations of two-state marriages were diametrically opposed to the main objectives of National Socialist race and population policy.

The new rulers, then, needed to find a legal way to keep the fiction of the Hague Agreement while enforcing race restrictions on marriage. The main way they did this was through the *Ehefähigkeitszeugnis*, because in any doubtful case, the registrars could simply refuse to issue the certificate. Officials then combined this tactic with the *Gesetz zum Schutze der Erbgesundheit des deutschen Volkes* (Marriage Health Act) and the *Blutschutzgesetz* (Blood Protection Act)—both of 1935. These measures showed the mutual influence of (international) marriage policy on racial exclusion considerations, representing a considerable resonance amplifier. The Marriage Health Act prohibited marriages between German

⁵ Halte Dein Blut rein! Wie verhalten wir uns Angehörigen fremdrassiger Völker gegenüber? 1940. *Neues Volk* 8: 9: 4–5.

⁶ Völkische Lebensfragen. 1942. *Neues Volk* 10: 9.

nationals under certain conditions and obliged the engaged persons to prove to the registrar that there was no obstacle to marriage by submitting a certificate from the health authority. Violations of the law nullified the marriage. In contrast, the “Blood Protection Act”—also known as the “Nuremberg Laws”—prohibited marriage and extramarital sexual intercourse between Jews and non-Jews. It was a means of “keeping the German blood pure”, the central component of the National Socialist racial ideology. The act considered any violations of the law as a “racial disgrace” (“*Rassenschande*”) and punished offenders draconically. In addition, the Marriage Suitability Act (*Ehetauglichkeitsgesetz*) of October 1935 was intended to prevent marriages that were not considered to be “hereditarily healthy” (*erbgesund*). This complex tangle of laws provided an effective intervention mechanism for maintaining certain ideas of national and population policy (see, e.g., . Bock 1986; Czarnowski 1991, 1997; Heineman 2005). These techniques showed both continuity and change. Racial laws in 1935 were new, but the role of the registrars was well established. In other words, National Socialist goals, grafted onto traditional control of cross-border marriages, made mixed marriages all but unattainable.

Nazi sexual politics generally sought to control the purity of the “*Volkskörper*” to perpetuate the population’s “racial quality” and to control sexual choices. National Socialist marriage policy meant promoting conjugality (“German and kindred” marriage was under special protection) on the one hand, and monitoring and complicating “undesirable” marriages on the other. Both showed the desire to integrate marriage into the larger goals of the state (Czarnowski 1997), but both were limited by numerous factors. First, as historians have shown, the Nazi regime had a polycratic structure that complicated making and enforcing policies. The Registrars, the *Reichsbund der Landesbeamten*, and the supreme Reich authorities overlapped, contradicted, and competed with each other. In terms of administrative culture, this resulted in a competitive and conflict-laden moderation of “zones of insecurity”, in Wolfgang Seibel’s phrase (Seibel 2016, p. 215). Such conflicts existed in the field of intimate politics, perhaps even to a special degree; therefore, these contradictions offered pathways for couples to get individual exceptions. Only with the outbreak of war did these inhibitions fall, especially in the Foreign Office and in the Race Policy Office, where a general ban on marriages with foreigners was vehemently demanded (Röger 2018).⁷ Second, practicalities made the general ban hard to enforce, so the government never did so. Instead, during the war, the government banned such marriages only in certain occupational groups, such as soldiers. In 1943, the “Führer Decree on the Distance of Internationally Bound Men from Authoritative Positions in the State, the Party and the Wehrmacht” (*Führererlass über die Fernhaltung international gebundener Männer von maßgebenden Stellen in Staat, Partei und Wehrmacht*) also ensured the retirement of most diplomats who were married to foreign women (Moll 1997, pp. 337–38). These professions, involved in national security, were the easiest ones to justify banning. Third, foreign policy and diplomacy limited the government’s ability to pass a total ban on biracial marriages. Indeed, in 1938, the highest Reich authorities concluded that banning biracial marriages was “hardly feasible” in view of the possible foreign policy consequences. This issue is discussed in detail below. In all these ways, then, the apparent Nazi interdiction against marriages between Germans and non-Europeans was less than total. The theory was a firm wall, but the execution often opened small (if very small) chinks.

4. Planned, Executed, and Failed Marriages

Exploring the policies in action is necessary to see both the exceptions and their rarity. Thus, this section of the essay looks at a number of cases in which the regime both approved and disavowed applications for marriage licenses. Most come from the files of the *Bundesarchiv* and the *Foreign Office*. Exact numbers are not possible, but all case files involving mixed-race couples here have been reviewed

⁷ See, e.g., Reich Ministry of Justice to the Reich Ministry of Interior, June 6 1939, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin, R 49686; Template to Martin Bormann: Verhalten deutscher Frauen gegenüber Kriegsgefangenen und fremdländischen Zivilarbeitern (Behaviour of German women towards prisoners of war and foreign civilian workers), October 22 1942, Bundesarchiv Berlin R 3001/23092.

and evaluated.⁸ As the sections above have shown, the major outlines of Nazi policy were not new, but the dynamism and determination to enforce the rules was novel (Bialas 2014; Konitzer and Palme 2016). Still, Nazi policy had ambivalences, especially, but not only in the first years after the “seizure of power”. The two major reasons for exceptions were class and diplomacy. An applicant with high social status got more consideration than one who was poverty-stricken, both because wealthy applicants could lead to public relations difficulties and because they were more desirable as marital partners. The second factor came from changing foreign policy interests. The Foreign Office often argued against refusing marriage licenses to potential grooms from diplomatically sensitive areas. The result was inconsistency in policy, confusing to the applicants, other parts of the regime, the registrars, and the countries of origin of the foreign fiancées.

Originally, National Socialist laws meant to eliminate Jewish men and women from their “own” marriage market. The government took a series of steps towards realizing the “racial state” (Burleigh and Wippermann 1991) by banning marriages and extramarital intercourse between Jews and Germans. Though meant only for Jews, the legislation also influenced the treatment of other “alien races”, because the alien “threatens to penetrate the native group and fuse with it” (Bauman 2000). This “mission creep” created controversies over how to deal with potential male marriage partners from China or Japan, Iran or Egypt, and Turkey or India. Such issues became public through various means, most notably the foreign press, which the Nazi regime could not control. Thus, these instances led to extensive negotiation and discussion; they illustrate which actors took part in the process of drawing (or dismantling) borders and in enabling (or preventing) crossing them.

Only a couple of months after the Nazi takeover, German-Chinese “mixed marriages” created a stir. A Chinese professor of agriculture who was working at the Sunatsen University Kanton sought permission to marry a German woman. The request was denied without any written justification. Shortly after that, the Chinese Legation in Berlin complained, and the “race question” evoked a lively discussion amongst the Chinese students and journalists in Germany. In early November 1933, Joseph Goebbels forbade the press to use the adjective “yellow” for the Japanese and Chinese because of the controversy that these and similar incidents caused.⁹ Nevertheless, the Chinese Legation asked the German Foreign Office whether Nazi race policy was prepared to classify “coloured races” as “inferior”. Such a measure, the Legation concluded, would seriously harm China and have “harsh retroactive effects on the relations” between the two states.¹⁰ To calm the situation, the Foreign Office invited the Chinese diplomat to a tea reception.¹¹ The event brought about only a short-lived peace; in 1935, Chinese diplomats protested certain passages in Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, and again, the German authorities had to take measures to appease them. “Hitler never wished to hurt the feelings of the great Chinese people” was the dampening response of the Ministry of the Interior after a Chinese complaint. At the same time, the Germans intimated that the paragraph in question would be amended in the next edition of the book. This interaction set the tone for future issues. Germans refused licenses but covered the racial overtones with soothing words and vague promises rather than actions. Although a few German-Chinese marriages occurred in the following years, rejections were much more frequent; the officials simply did not justify the rejections in offensive ways. Indeed, the Ministry of Justice asked

⁸ The records of the Federal Archives and the Political Archive of the Federal Foreign Office reveal numerous individual cases, but apart from the percentage figures mentioned above, no reliable quantifiable statements are possible, because the archival records contain only highly aggregated data. In individual cases, these files often simply break off without final decisions. Thus, making statements about the completeness or randomness of the cases handed down is difficult, and quantifying or even calculating probabilities of approval chances is historically dubious.

⁹ Chinese Legation to the Foreign Office, November 1 1933; Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin, R 49700, *ibid.*, Notes, R 85454, IV Chi 2452, see also the letter of the Foreign Office, November 2 and 3 1933.

¹⁰ Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin, R 85454, IV Chi 2452, Memorandum of the Chinese Legation, Berlin, November 2 1933.

¹¹ Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin, R 85454, IV Chi 2452, November 15 1933.

the Federal Foreign Office or the subordinate authorities in several cases “not to justify the decision with racial considerations”.¹²

The situation was even more confused in the case of Japan. The reason for this, in addition to the Anti-Comintern Pact being in force since 1936, was the ambiguity of the term “non-Aryan descent” and the increasing strain on German-Japanese relations by National Socialist racial policy. This, in turn, triggered fears and incomprehension in Japan. The result was a contradictory and confusing treatment of these couples by the authorities. The need to keep the Japanese appeased forced the regime to modify its stance. In other words, even for race-obsessed Nazi civil servants, the “race” of a person differed by class and whether or not the person was from an allied or enemy state. The issue with Japan was especially volatile, due to their importance as an ally. As early as the spring of 1933, cases of discrimination against the descendants of German-Japanese marriages, including one involving the son of a well-known German doctor, caused a sensation in Japan. In addition, statements by prominent officials about the “coloured race” created irritation. In view of such incidents, Japan’s Embassy Counsellor demanded clear reassurance from the German side that Japanese would not face discrimination as “non-Aryans” in Germany; otherwise, a “serious disruption of relations” would follow. The German-Japanese Society argued similarly in a memorandum on the subject, defending the rights of the 500 or so descendants of such connections living in Germany at the time. Ultimately, equating these residents with Jews was unacceptable to them and others. Goebbels’ interdiction on using the word “yellow” for East Asians in 1933 (mentioned above) was partly the result of these incidents. The National Socialists, then, had to modify their racial prejudices, but one should not overstate the effects of such words. As with the Chinese, the “flexibility” of such determinations was limited, because the fundamental principles of Nazi racial policy remained. In other words, racism was the rule, but allied or well-off mixed marriages could be exceptions.

The Nazis relied more on indirect methods than outright discrimination whenever diplomatic issues caused concern, mostly using procedural complications and delaying tactics. The leadership of the NSDAP foreign organization hoped this might dissuade the couple in question from marrying without highlighting “race-political reasons”. Officials were, then, deliberately opaque in their reasons for rejection. This had the advantage of being diplomatic as well as stifling protests from the couples; because they could not be entirely sure of the real problem, they had trouble finding ways to surmount the obstacles. Because these procedures had been in place for decades, the regime had plausible deniability; registrars had refused licenses to foreign grooms well before 1933. As a result, officials often used bureaucratic maneuvers as distractions, especially with the Japanese. Still, such indirect methods had the disadvantage of not being entirely effective, and some couples found ways around them. Marriage abroad was an option, especially for the well-off. Germans and Japanese married in Japan or other foreign countries in several instances. Others used their notoriety to enforce compromises. When the well-known singer Tanaka Michiko married the popular actor and director Victor de Kowa in Berlin in August 1941, bureaucrats feared any refusal would have negative repercussions. The concern was so great that the case reached the Reich Chancellery. Rather than provoking a diplomatic incident, the government instead simply insisted that Kowa promise not to be photographed before the registry office in order to avoid giving symbolic legitimation of such marriages or to provoke any possible imitators (Furuya 1995, pp. 61–62; Riess 1957, p. 508), and the marriage went ahead.

Occasionally, lesser-known couples also got permits to marry, again mostly due to diplomatic concerns or publicity. As late as 1943, a 31-year-old Japanese national who was “German-blooded” received permission to marry a German national. In this case, the Tokyo embassy had expressed reservations against a rejection, citing “Japanese sensitivities to racial issues”.¹³ The special correspondent of the high-circulation Japanese newspaper *Asahi-Shimbun* was also allowed to marry a

¹² Reich Ministry of Justice to the Foreign Office, March 31 1938, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin, R 49702.

¹³ Reich Ministry of Justice to the Foreign Office, November 3 1943, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin, R 49689.

Berlin woman. In view of his position, the authorities involved advocated a release.¹⁴ In the last years of the war, the marriage petitions of Dr. Jiro Miyazawa, the special envoy in the Japanese Ministry of the Interior of the Japanese Embassy in Berlin, were also endorsed and processed with acceleration, as were those of military attaché Sato, who was also employed there.¹⁵ In these examples, both higher class and government contacts helped smooth the way. On the other hand, the intended marriage of a 38-year-old Japanese priest (whether Shinto or Buddhist is not clear from the sources) and a 30-year-old German had failed. The couple had met in Heidelberg in 1938 and wanted to get married; however, in cooperation with the German consulate, Yokohama, Heinrich Seelheim, the Foreign Office, the state chancellery in Baden, the “Reichsführer SS”, and the NSDAP local group in Tokyo-Yokohama, the case was finally rejected after several years (Jochem 2017, pp. 33–51).¹⁶ As this example indicates, when rejections did come, the state was careful to follow their policy of delay and then plausible deniability. For example, the Foreign Office in March 1940 considered any discussion with the Japanese government about German-Japanese “hybrids” as “not expedient”. Instead, in the following months, the Germans used back channels to influence Japanese registrars not to approve such marriages.¹⁷

If the German authorities were ambivalent towards Chinese (see, e.g., Lorke 2019) and Japanese (see, e.g., Furuya 1995; Krebs 2015; Panzer 2016) partners, they were even less enthusiastic about Muslim partners. Their number in the German Reich was estimated at 2000 at the end of the 1930s, with students, engineers, technicians, and military personnel leading the way. Despite the numbers, the German regime had a Janus-faced attitude towards the Middle East (Motadel 2014; Nicosia 2015). On the one hand, the “Orient” in Edward Said’s sense functioned as an intellectual demarcation and imaginary dichotomy. On the other, foreign policy and diplomatic considerations were often at odds with these views. Couples who were eager to marry, then, experienced similar treatment to East Asians, heightened by concerns about polygamy. This tension influenced the probability of approval and rejection of such marriage plans. When German authorities received applications from (male) Muslim marriage partners, they strongly disapproved. Yet, as with the examples above, diplomatic pressure asserted a countervailing force. Particularly since the beginning of 1934, the Foreign Office received letters of protest from various countries in the Far, Near, and Middle East regarding classification as “non-Aryans”. The question of whether it was still possible to uphold racial policy principles or whether legislation could only be restricted to Jews soon came to the forefront.

In order to deal with these questions broadly, the Foreign Office hosted a chief meeting on 15 November 1934. The chiefs concluded that the “rare cases of mixing with other races” did not “carry any weight”, and that the racial legislation was directed primarily against Jews. They therefore proposed to allow exceptions “if the disadvantages of foreign policy considerably outweigh the success of domestic policy”. Furthermore, most agreed that the National Socialist racial policy was not based on the “differences in valence” (*Verschiedenwertigkeit*), but on the “diversity” (*Verschiedenartigkeit*) of the races. Thus, the possible “disadvantages of mixing” were the exclusive factor in the acceptance or rejection of mixed unions.¹⁸ These provisional, carefully weighed constructions were initially intended as a reaction to the “strongly negative effects” of German race policy abroad, but foreign public opinion was only temporarily appeased. Moreover, the “race policy principles” remained inviolate. Exceptions for “non-Aryans” who wanted to marry a “foreign-blooded” foreigner or a member of the Reich were

¹⁴ Reich Ministry of Justice to the Foreign Office, August 24 1944; Reich Ministry of Justice to the Foreign Office, September 15 1944, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin R 49705.

¹⁵ Reich Ministry of Justice to the Foreign Office, September 15 1944, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin R 49705.

¹⁶ Cf. The tradition in: Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin, R 49863.

¹⁷ Foreign Office to the Reich Ministries of Interior and Justice: Mischehen zwischen Deutschen und Japanern (mixed marriages between Germans and Japanese), March 2 1940, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin, R 49925. See there also for the further discussions.

¹⁸ Protokoll der Besprechung über die Frage, wie den nachteiligen Wirkungen der deutschen Rassenpolitik auf die Beziehungen Deutschlands zu auswärtigen Staaten begegnet werden könne (Minutes of the discussion on how to counter the adverse effects of German race policy on Germany’s relations with foreign states), November 15 1934, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin, R 99182.

rare. Such applications also had to go all the way to the Reich Ministries, a far higher authority than the local “registry office”, for a decision, due to their explosive nature. The Reich authorities then made the final decision in consultation with the other government officers.¹⁹

Unfortunately for the Nazis, the racial policy formulations caused a stir in several countries. After the events of the summer of 1935, the Iranian Councillor of State Keviani turned to the Foreign Office and described his experiences with the consequences of National Socialist racial legislation. The diplomat emphasized his view that Iranians should be regarded as “Aryans”—another example of unstable, or at least negotiable, racial categories. The Foreign Office considered the submission of the Counsel of State to be “delicate” for the political and economic relations between the two countries. Officials also feared that this could lead to “undesirable repercussions, especially on the Shah himself”, which in turn could have consequences for “German racial policy on relations with foreign states”. Nevertheless, rather than address the issue directly, offices used evasive and blocking techniques to gain time. No policy changes occurred; instead, the Federal Foreign Office proposed that each case be decided on a case-by-case basis. Doing this without a clear policy statement caused confusion on the part of registrars and couples alike but, in theory, avoided diplomatic incidents.²⁰

In the following months, however, this lack of clarity led to a lively discussion about the “affiliation of the Egyptians, Iraqis, Iranians, Persians and Turks to the Aryan race”. After the problem with Iran, some officials insisted that a clarification of the question was “absolutely necessary”, and not just for Iran. Turkey also wanted its people “to be regarded as Aryan in the sense of the German legislation”. The Foreign Office strongly wished to avoid a “clouding” of relations in that case particularly because of the (military) political and economic relations with Turkey. The reasons given for a positive decision in Turkey’s favor, though, were not entirely practical. Bureaucrats argued that such an affiliation was scientifically derived from Turkish “tribal affinity” with the Hungarian and Finnish people, as well as the “brotherhood in arms” with Turkey in the First World War.²¹ Not least because of the feared provisions on discrimination in racial matters, Turkey should therefore be classified as a nation belonging to Europe, a “related spirit”. Nevertheless, the state did not rule out possible divergent decisions in individual cases.

In principle, the distinction between persons of German and “related” blood or Jews and other “foreign species” were binding for future decisions.²² Yet, when Turkish newspapers reported that Egyptians, Iranians, and Iraqis were to be regarded as “non-Aryans”, the Iranian embassy threatened a diplomatic break if the story was accurate. Similarly, in Egypt, after the publication of a comparable article in the Jewish newspaper *Le Bourse Egyptienne*, great excitement arose among German merchants. They expected an “energetic denial”, otherwise “unpleasant consequences” could damage German-Egyptian economic relations. This question was of far-reaching, even symbolic significance, because it clearly presented the world public with the racial hierarchy of the National Socialist rulers. Even though the regime initially attempted to dismiss the reporting as the product of the “anti-German Jewish press”, the Egyptian envoy also intervened in Berlin, insisting, in agreement with his government, that Egyptian blood was “akin” to that of the German “Nazi”.²³ Such protests forced the regime to consider and determine its interpretation of the “affinity of species”. Bureaucrats had to try to limit the damage of these revelations, especially after the possible consequences of the National Socialist race legislation became clear. Egypt threatened a boycott of the Olympic Games a mere six weeks before the opening, and the Egyptian delegations to Berlin began to return or cancel

¹⁹ Reich Ministry of Interior ruler of the realm (Reichstatthalter) et al.: Ausschaltung schädlicher Rückwirkungen auf die auswärtigen Beziehungen des Reichs (elimination of harmful repercussions on the foreign relations of the Reich), April 18 1935, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin, R 78307.

²⁰ Notes in the Foreign Office, August 30 1935, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin, R 78150.

²¹ Notes in the Foreign Office, December 20 1935, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin. RZ 214, R 99173.

²² Memo in the Foreign Office, March 13 1936, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin. RZ 214/99173.

²³ Notes Consulate Cairo, June 16 1936, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin, RZ 214/99173.

their bookings with German travel agencies. As a direct result, the Germans denied any accusations of racism against Egyptians, partly in the Egyptian press.²⁴

The meeting held by the Foreign Office at the beginning of July 1936 revealed that an official declaration suitable for foreign countries was not yet available. At the same time, the matter needed careful examination. Egypt was satisfied for the time being with the obviously reassuring confirmation that the “Nuremberg Laws” referred exclusively to Jews and the assurance that no obstacles to marriage between Egyptian men and German women existed. Thus, non-Jewish Egyptian citizens were no worse off than citizens of other states.²⁵ Conversely, Iran still posed difficulties, as it considered Turkey’s inclusion in the planned exceptions to be “offensive”. The Iranian people understood the rejection of their Aryan affiliation as humiliating, according to the observation of the German Legation in Tehran. Consequently, Iran also temporarily threatened to stay away from the Olympic Games (Herf 2009, p. 21).

Given these diplomatic controversies, official approvals of “mixed”-marriages, usually minor annoyances, had the potential to create major problems for the German authorities. The civil servants, then, tried to find other reasons for rejecting “unwanted” marriages than race in order to avoid giving offense or getting the issue into the press. When the Inspector General of the Iranian students wanted to marry a German woman in Berlin-Charlottenburg in July 1937, the application could be quickly and easily rejected with reference to the Iranian government, which had forbidden students living in Germany from marrying foreign women.²⁶ In addition to reasons of social, “folk-political” (*volkstumspolitisch*), and individual character, Germans used other aspects—such as economic weakness or the family background or the reputation (*Leumund*) of the applicants. The latter, especially, was an extremely arbitrary category construction that at best only approximated a reasonable rationale for decision-making. Thus, authorities could avoid using racial objections.²⁷ As with Japanese-German unions, the occasional exception also blunted any offense. The Special Rapporteur of the Turkish Government Press Agency, Emrullah Gün (Berlin-Wilmersdorf), and his German fiancée profited from this situationally accommodating approach.²⁸ Government contacts were also influential in becoming one of the exceptions. In the case of one Arab, the registrar issued the license in a few weeks because the man worked in the broadcasting policy department of the Foreign Office. He was, thus, a “special case”, because of his contacts and language skills. In addition, his class was helpful; his family “played an outstanding role as one of the first Arab families of Palestine”.²⁹

Unsurprisingly, given the need for such “special” circumstances, the rejection of marriage applications with partners from the Middle East was much more frequent than approvals. In the case with Muslim husbands, fear of polygamy—and women’s disadvantages under Islam—was a frequently used pretext and one that elided racial prejudices. Not only were these gendered fears shared by many European nations, but contemporaries in the 1920s and 1930s had discussed Muslim-Christian unions in cultural and legal theory terms already. The Nazis, then, need not appear especially biased. When an Arab physician asked for a license to marry a German woman in 1942, the registrar refused, on the grounds of the doctor’s background. The responsible legation councilor, however, insisted that certain considerations should be deleted in the reasoning for the rejection in order not to “allow racial concerns

²⁴ Telegram Consulate Cairo, June 17 1936, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin. RZ 214/99173.

²⁵ Notes in the Foreign Office, July 4, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin. RZ 214/99173. The Reich stopped considering possible disruptions in foreign relations with Egypt after three changes: a law in 1939 that prohibited Egyptian citizens from marrying foreigners, Egypt’s decision to enter into armed neutrality during the Second World War, and, above all, the internment of German citizens.

²⁶ Transcript, July 19 1937, Bundesarchiv Berlin, R 3001/20467.

²⁷ For later years, as an example: Note Consulate Teheran, June 16 1941 Landesarchiv Nordrhein-Westfalen, Abteilung Rheinland, BR 0007, Nr. 47268.

²⁸ Explanatory memorandum: “At the moment German-Turkish relations have to be treated with special care.” Ministry of Justice to the Foreign Office, June 9 and 30 1943, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin, R 49704.

²⁹ Notes in the Foreign Office, August 31 1943, BA B, R 49704.

to emerge externally".³⁰ Instead, the officials highlighted the possible polygamy of the groom, a reason that echoed well-known and generalizing interpretations of "uncivilized" and "backward" matrimonial customs. Christian disapproval of "polygamy" was arguably not racial or anti-foreign, but was part of the usual assumption that clarity, commitment, and stability in marriage came from monogamy.

Marriage policy thus was not a simple imposition of racial categories but was a complicated and dynamic process of balancing race and realpolitik. Modes of justification were more flexible than the law stated; they were adapted for individual rejections, which in turn resulted in loopholes for well-placed couples. This finding again points to the interaction of transnational, national, local, and "glocal" logics of action and shows why historians must investigate national processes of migration, marriage, and sexual history in global terms. Some couples did indeed circumvent restrictions on marriage. Success or failure turned on many factors, including emotional resilience, individual negotiation, and the obstinacy of the ruled. Migrants challenged migration regimes individually or collectively, developed strategies for maintaining their own spatial movements, and found ways to enforce their wishes. Many applicants, in fact, learned to present curricula vitae and adapt them to the new norms. One petitioner from Iran, for instance, mentioned his ability to quote the "Erlkönig" (a famous poem by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe from 1782) since his school days.³¹ Quite a few Muslim men together with their German fiancés avoided the German registry office and instead married abroad or went to a Muslim ambassador or the mosque in Berlin-Wilmersdorf; others went to an Islamic clergyman and asked him to marry them—of course with the risk that a marriage there would not be recognized by the German authorities.³² Couples sometimes were the exceptions that made the rule, if one of the spouses had political importance or a high social standing. In other cases, the authorities preferred to allow a few couples to slip through the net in order to "prove" they were not discriminatory against all races. These couples served the hegemonic function, validating a generally intolerant regime.

Overall, of course, the racial policy badly disadvantaged racially mixed couples. The decision-making processes involved were neither clear nor functional, often not even for the decision-makers. Sometimes, the question of (non-)authorization was simply that of the right timing and/or the responsible agents. What was striking about the increasing "biologization" of marriage was not its presence, but its ambivalence. After all, marriage regulation was an administrative, organized access to the body politic. Racism needs "modern forms of state power" and "needs organization, managers and experts" (Bauman 2000, p. 212); it also requires effective social engineering (in the sense of the politics of rule). For this purpose, the new rulers could rely on well-established civil service procedures and officials, from the locally acting civil registrars to their supervisory authorities and up to the highest Reich ministries. This apparatus points to the multifaceted relationship between "race", state, and the actors, but also to the polycratic structures and often improvised, ad-hoc decision-making processes of German governments, both before and after 1933. "Race" appears here as a diffuse and volatile concept that created scope for agency and self-assertion (Pendas et al. 2017, p. 23) in the midst of general prejudice. In other words, criteria of racial/ethnic categorization in certain moments have been ambiguous, permeable, and open to discussion (see also Mühlhäuser 2017b).

5. Conclusions

Ultimately, the examination of cross-border relationships refers to the everyday dimension and effects of migration and globalization, which reveal fundamental social developments in National Socialism. When the National Socialists took power, marriage was primarily a place of "performance-oriented 'preservation of the species'". All members of the "Volksgemeinschaft", particularly the German wife and mother, needed "racial education" for the preservation of their

³⁰ Letter from the Counsellor Granow, Pol. VII Arab, December 7 1942, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin, R 49703.

³¹ A.M. to von der Schulenburg, February 1 1943, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin, R 49703.

³² See cases in Landesarchiv Berlin, A Rep. 358-02, Nr. 145445.

own species. Various actors appealed to the individual to assume personal responsibility, to prove respectability, and to protect and stabilize “folk community” values—especially in the field of intimacy. Individual sexual behavior became even more strongly entangled with public policy. Those who ennobled the “race” got validation, while those who degraded it faced exclusion. Despite this, numerous contradictions remained, which resulted in highly unpredictable decision-making modes. Depending on the needs of the regime at the time, the chances of inclusion of “foreigners” on the domestic marriage market increased or decreased. Especially with the outbreak of the Second World War, a noticeable “flexibilization of borders” occurred (Röger 2018, p. 98). The “foreign” partner was generally regarded as a threat and unwanted competition, but the need for labor or changes in diplomacy might create new opportunities for intercultural couples to interact.

Particularly in the early years of the National Socialist rule, continuity interacted with change. The Nazis used long-standing rules about marriages with foreigners, based on the local registrars, to cover their intentions, helping them to justify discrimination. Nazi policy towards women also had some continuity with older views of “sexual patriotism”. The gendered approach to cross-national and biracial unions was older than 1933; marriage rules across the early twentieth century offered a striking cultural-symbolic coding of the female body. Even these problems over mixed marriages with allies was not entirely new, because the state had to be diplomatic in its handling of, for example, German-Turkish marriages during the First World War (Moses 2019; Lorke 2020). Yet, change was also clear in the Nazi attitude towards mixed marriages. The intensity of the Nazi racial policy was greater, putting more pressure on those wishing to defy its demands. The Nazis added extra legal restrictions, ones that tended to spread from anti-Jewish laws to other races and which contained harsh penalties. Certainly, the Nazi’s insistence on controlling women’s bodies was more open and draconian than under the Weimar Republic. Mixed marriages were always the exceptions, but the number of successful applications lowered after the regime seized power, despite the protests of non-European governments.

No government, even a totalitarian one, can entirely control family life. The examples given here show that historians must not only analyze how this power relation affected mobility and social (as well as “intimate”) inequality, but also how normative borders were negotiated, shifted, or circumvented by individual couples. Processes “beyond” the nation-states shaped the modes of inclusion and exclusion within the national marriage market. The permanent (re-)definition and negotiation of the boundaries of the “national community” (*Volksgemeinschaft*) involved numerous actors (Wildt 2011). Hence, the example of intercultural or binational marriages show, at the level of the everyday, “the numerous inconsistencies in National Socialist policy-making” (Kallis 2005, p. 6). Strikingly, this was true of race policy as well as others in the beginning of the regime. With the outbreak of war and the intensified efforts for a general ban on binational marriages (which, however, was never implemented), the government acted with less inhibition. The promotion of “good” behavior, heavily coded by gender and race, included a demand for national loyalty. Marriage, at least for women, was an act of patriotism, and deviant behavior was an offense against the “national community”. Yet, even during the war, free spaces, albeit also on a small scale and depending on other factors besides “race” (such as social status and/or foreign policy importance of the actors), nevertheless remained. In other words, “a number of ‘unacceptable’ cases slipp[ed] through the net” (Kallis 2005, p. 15)—ones that left open new possibilities for the post-war regime.

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