Introduction

The First World War unleashed a paroxysm of violence, both within Europe and overseas. Marking a major radicalisation of warfare, the extent of this violence and its effect on societies has long attracted the attention of scholars. In the interwar period, accounting for how violence was collectively represented and sanctioned through cultural practices was an underlying theme of the work of Marc Bloch, Sigmund Freud and Jean Norton Cru, among others.[1] Later military historians analysed the brutal nature of trench combat on the western front in enormous detail.[2] More recently, there has been a new wave of historical analysis, exploring the cultural context of combatant violence, both on the battlefield and against civilian populations; this has been accompanied by an ongoing debate as to how the war contributed to a violent European post-war political climate.[3] Yet despite this wealth of scholarship, one

[1] See, for example, Marc Bloch, 'Réflexions d'un historien sur les fausses nouvelles de la Guerre, 1921', in Annette Becker and Étienne Bloch, eds., *L'Histoire, la Guerre, la Résistance* (Paris, 2006), pp. 293–316. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York, 1930); Jean Norton Cru, *Témoins. Essai d'analyse et de critique des souvenirs de combattants édités en français de 1915 à 1928* (Paris, 1929).

[2] See, for example, the work of Tony Ashworth, *Trench Warfare 1914–1918. The Live and Let Live System* (London, 2000); John Keegan, *The Face of Battle. A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo and the Somme* (London, 1976); Wolfram Wette, ed., *Der Krieg des kleinen Mannes. Eine Militärgeschichte von unten* (Munich and Zurich, 1995). See also the related cultural history on the war experience or 'Kriegserlebnis' in Germany: Gerhard Hirschfeld, *Keiner fühlt sich hier mehr als Mensch. Erlebnis und Wirkung des Ersten Weltkriegs* (Frankfurt am Main, 1996).

[3] The surge in recent interest in First World War combatant violence has produced a wealth of new studies. Among the most groundbreaking, see Alan Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction. Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War* (Oxford, 2007); John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914. A History of Denial* (New Haven and London, 2001); Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14–18. Retrouver la Guerre* (Paris, 2000); Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, 'Violence et consentement. La "culture de guerre" du premier conflit mondial', in Jean-Pierre Rioux and Jean-François Sirinelli, eds., *Pour une histoire culturelle* (Paris, 1997), pp. 251–71; Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *Les Armes et la chair. Trois objets de mort en 14–18* (Paris, 2009); Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction. Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca and London, 2005); Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male. Men's Bodies, Britain and the*

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crucial aspect of wartime violence has been largely overlooked. Violence against the estimated 7 to 9 million prisoners of war taken in the conflict has not been addressed in the existing historiography, with the exception of the battlefield practice of prisoner killing; however, even this subject has largely only been briefly discussed as part of broader debates on the nature of trench warfare. The scale of violence against captives remains unknown.[4]

This book sets out to investigate this forgotten issue – violence against combatant prisoners of war – through an analysis of the captivity experiences of British, French and German military prisoners captured on the western front. More specifically, it aims to explore the wide range of different kinds of enemy violence that prisoners endured on the battlefield, in transit, in labour companies and in the prison camp, as well as the ways that governments and the public at large influenced the use of violence against captives; a particular focus here is the public's role in

Great War (London, 1996); Joanna Bourke, An Intimate History of Killing. Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare (London, 1999); Niall Ferguson, The Pity of War. Explaining World War I (London, 1998), pp. 339–66; Antoine Prost, 'Les Limites de la brutalisation. Tuer sur le front occidental, 1914–1918', Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'Histoire, 81 (2004), pp. 5–20. On the broader impact of First World War combatant violence on societies and also on the general relationship between violence and the state, see George L. Mosse, Fallen Soldiers. Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars (Oxford, 1990); Bernd Hüppauf, ed., War, Violence and the Modern Condition (Berlin, 1997); Alf Lüdtke and Bernd Weisbrod, eds., No Man's Land. Extreme Wars in the 20th Century (Göttingen, 2006); Mark Mazower, 'Violence and the State in the Twentieth Century', The American Historical Review, 107, 4 (2002), pp. 1158–78; Michael Geyer, 'War and Terror. Some Timely Observations on the German Way of Waging War', AICGS Humanities, 14 (2003), pp. 47–69; Omer Bartov, Murder in Our Midst. The Holocaust, Industrial Killing and Representation (Oxford, 1996); Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, Annette Becker, Christian Ingrao and Henry Rousso, eds., La Violence de guerre, 1914–1945. Approches comparées des deux conflits mondiaux (Brussels, 2002); John Horne, 'War and Conflict in Contemporary European History, 1914–2004', Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History, Online-Ausgabe, 1 (2004), H3, www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/site/40208266/default.aspx, accessed 18 March 2010; Dirk Schumann, 'Europa, der Erste Weltkrieg und die Nachkriegszeit. Eine Kontinuität der Gewalt?' Journal of Modern European History, 1, 1 (2003), pp. 24–43; Benjamin Ziemann, 'Germany after the First World War – a Violent Society? Results and Implications of Recent Research on Weimar Germany', Journal of Modern European History, 1, 1 (2003), pp. 80–95; Adam Seipp, The Ordeal of Peace. Demobilization and the Urban Experience in Britain and Germany, 1917–1921 (Farnham and Burlington, 2010).

[4] For the total estimated number of prisoners of war taken in the conflict, see Jochen Oltmer, 'Einführung. Funktionen und Erfahrungen von Kriegsgefangenschaft im Europa des Ersten Weltkriegs', in Jochen Oltmer, ed., Kriegsgefangene im Europa des Ersten Weltkriegs (Paderborn, 2006), p. 11. For detailed discussion on battlefield prisoner-killing see Ferguson, The Pity of War, pp. 367–94, and Niall Ferguson, 'Prisoner Taking and Prisoner Killing in the Age of Total War. Towards a Political Economy of Military Defeat', War in History, 11, 2 (2004), pp. 148–92; Bourke, An Intimate History of Killing; Tim Cook, 'The Politics of Surrender. Canadian Soldiers and the Killing of Prisoners in the Great War', The Journal of Military History, 70, 3 (2006), pp. 637–65; Prost, 'Les Limites de la brutalisation'.

defining acceptable violent practices through shifting social, political and legal understandings of what constituted transgressive 'atrocities' or acceptable 'reprisals'. The violent act is thus not considered in isolation: while relating the reality of brutal treatment, with its painful, often traumatic, impact upon individual captives, this book also seeks to contextualise how forms of collective violent practices against prisoners developed in three countries and how these reflected changing societal values, as the idea of what constituted violence against prisoners evolved throughout the conflict.

Enemy violence against captives merits being singled out for this kind of study because it was a very distinct wartime phenomenon: unlike violence between combatants, the prisoner was unable to defend himself, nor could he flee. He was thus part of a very particular, unequal captivity power dynamic, which was inherently coercive: the prison camp system was based upon the long-term submission of the prisoner to his captor's superior ability to use violent force, a submission which began at the moment of capture. In this regard, all Great War captivity, even the most comfortable, to some extent functioned through the threat of violence; indeed, in accordance with international law, all combatant prisoners of war were subject to the military law of their captor army during captivity, which meant they lived with the threat of corporal punishment for certain misdemeanours and often lost certain rights, for example, the right to refuse to work.[5] To become a prisoner was therefore to come under the exclusive control of omnipresent systems of power, ultimately based on violent physical force.

The kind of violence which forms the subject of this book can thus be defined as the use or threat of physical force, both discriminate and indiscriminate, against a prisoner of war, by an enemy subject. It is a deliberately broad definition, as the aim here is to investigate the full range of those acts which contemporaries at the time considered constituted enemy violence against prisoners of war, which was described in public debate using multiple different terms, the euphemisms 'mistreatment' or 'reprisal' being particularly popular. Such public interpretations mattered during the conflict: violations of a prisoner's right to bodily and mental integrity became part of a broader symbolic framework of violence that defined captivity. Shooting prisoners out of hand was one of the most dramatic types of violence, but it was far from the only one, nor was it always the most notorious: making captives work under shellfire, beatings, corporal punishment, mistreating the sick, starvation rations and even

[5] On military law and prisoners in Germany, see Uta Hinz, *Gefangen im Großen Krieg. Kriegsgefangenschaft in Deutschland, 1914–1921* (Essen, 2006), pp. 141–68.

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threats of violence were all equally prominent in the debates on violent treatment during the war and thus feature in this study. The one kind of violence not covered here is sexual violence; due to the complete absence of any mention of this topic in the source material, it was not possible to include it.

There are three key reasons for focusing upon violence against prisoners. First, the kinds of violence against captives that emerged during the First World War offer a fundamental insight into the radicalisation processes at the heart of the conflict: as Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker have argued, 'the specific violence of war is a prism, which refracts many things that are otherwise invisible'.[6] Violence against prisoners, both on and off the battlefield, was not a set of static practices; it evolved as the conflict continued. It can thus show us how wartime extremisms developed. What constituted legitimate forms of violence against captives was a key question that preoccupied European wartime elites and the general public alike throughout the war; it was one which was constantly renegotiated within societies and also at a transnational level in close reciprocal relationship to what allied or enemy states were doing to their captives. This legitimacy debate operated at several different levels: what was actually practised as prisoner treatment; what was known about those practices by the population at large; and finally what was publicly endorsed. By encouraging hostility towards the enemy, violence against prisoners of war thus played a highly significant role in mobilising home front populations. In sum, studying violence against prisoners of war provides valuable insights into the escalation of wartime brutalisation, as well as the cultural limits placed upon this process, through changing understandings of acceptable 'norms', what was considered permissible, and 'extremes', the outer limits of what could be publicly condoned. The assumption here, building upon Walter Benjamin's differentiation in his 'Critique of Violence', is that wartime violence is not a natural constant – rather it is a 'product of history' that is socially and culturally conditioned, emerging in different ways at certain historical junctures; in part, this study also reflects Wolfgang Sofsky's work, with its suggestion that we need to explore the relationship between violence and culture in more detail, although it rejects his idea that because violence is innate in human nature, cultural structures ultimately always serve to facilitate it.[7]

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[6] Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *14–18. Retrouver la Guerre*, p. 25.
[7] Walter Benjamin, 'Critique of Violence', in Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, eds., *Walter Benjamin. Selected Writings*, vol. I: *1913–1926* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1996), p. 237. Wolfgang Sofsky, *Traktat über die Gewalt* (Frankfurt, 1996),

In this way, this book provides a new perspective on some of the existing interpretations of the war. Isabel Hull has argued that there was a cultural predilection for extremes of violence in the German army, a 'dynamic of destruction' which caused it to always opt by default for the most ruthless method to achieve its aims; building on Hull's analysis, Alan Kramer's recent work has suggested that this dynamic existed in other armies too and that 'for all sides in the war, enemy civilians and other non-combatants came to be regarded to a greater or lesser degree as targets of war policy, even as legitimate objects of violence'.[8] By following the evolution of violence against prisoners of war, in three countries, this book is able to show that there was a drive towards extremes in the German army, as Hull has argued; however, this German ruthlessness was only the farthest and most extreme end of a developmental spectrum, whereby mass captivity, as well as new forms of forced labour, unleashed a dynamic of radicalisation of violence against prisoners which affected all three states and their armies. The idea of brutalisation, first posited by George Mosse, is thus presented here as a process which was already occurring within polities during the conflict.[9] The key conclusion that emerges, however, is that in the British and French cases this radicalisation dynamic was ultimately impeded due to political structures and cultural norms in these two countries that differed from the German case; these acted as impediments that offset the drive towards radicalisation.

Second, through studying violence against prisoners this book aims to show the real extent of prisoner mistreatment during the conflict and the policies that facilitated this development. Violence against prisoners is taken here as a crucial indicator for broader mistreatment patterns. In particular, this book argues that the key overlooked innovation of the First World War was the forced labour company. As the war continued, a significant percentage of non-officer prisoners of war were retained at the western front to work for their captor army in labour companies – an innovation adopted by all three national armies studied here. This was a breach of international law: while the 1907 Hague Convention allowed other-rank prisoners to work for the captor state, it stipulated that they should not be put to work directly for their captor's war effort.[10] These

pp. 219–26. See also Sofsky's discussion of societies during war: Wolfgang Sofsky, *Violence. Terrorism, Genocide, War* (London, 2003), p. 118. For a critique of Sofsky's view, see Alan Kramer, 'The War of Atrocities. Murderous Scares and Extreme Combat', in Lüdtke and Weisbrod, eds., *No Man's Land*, pp. 11–34, where Kramer argues that violence is largely determined by historical context.
[8] Hull, *Absolute Destruction*; Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction*, p. 3.
[9] Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*.
[10] James Scott Brown, ed., *The Hague Conventions and Declarations of 1899 and 1907* (Washington, D.C., and Oxford, 1915), p. 109; Hinz, *Gefangen im Großen Krieg*, p. 53.

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men endured a much harsher captivity which contrasted greatly to that of
their peers who were evacuated to home front camps, effectively creating
two contrasting captivity systems. The advent of this 'dual' system, of
home front camps and labour companies at the front, radicalised prisoner
of war treatment; prisoners in labour companies were often exposed to
frequent violence, particularly in the German army. This book reveals the
extent of the labour company system for the first time and emphasises the
importance of reintegrating this early, significant development into
the longer-term historical trajectory of the evolution of forced labour
and the prison camp in the first half of the twentieth century, which
would go on to be marked by the widespread use of mass imprisonment
and forced labour, from the gulags of Russia to Franco's Spain and the
horrors of the Nazi concentration camp system.

   Thus this book provides a new perspective upon an ongoing debate in
the existing historiography on First World War prisoners of war as to
whether captives were generally humanely or badly treated. Until fifteen
years ago, the overall history of captivity during the Great War was largely
forgotten, under-researched due to the popular and historical focus upon
the horrors of the camps of the Second World War, as well as the severe
destruction of archive sources in Germany and Britain in aerial bombard-
ments in 1939–45.[11] However, recently there has been a series of new
publications on Great War captivity, most of which focus on prisoner
living conditions. These can be broadly divided into two interpretations.
The first, presented in the work of Odon Abbal, Richard Speed, Rémy
Cazals, Kai Rawe, Rainer Pöppinghege and Alon Rachamimov, broadly
views the war as the last phase of a nineteenth-century humanitarian
culture, which protected prisoners from the extremes of mistreatment
seen in later twentieth-century conflicts; Rachamimov concludes in his
study of prisoners of war in Russia that 'when we want World War I to be
the worst cautionary example of war' then captivity at best 'has a marginal
place'.[12] More nuanced, Uta Hinz's impressive recent study of prisoners
of war in Germany accepts that significant deterioration in prisoner living

[11] Second World War bombing destroyed the archives of the German army at Potsdam and
damaged First World War British Red Cross prisoner of war records.
[12] Alon Rachamimov, *PoWs and the Great War. Captivity on the Eastern Front* (Oxford and
New York, 2002), p. 228; Richard B. Speed III, *Prisoners, Diplomats and the Great War.
A Study in the Diplomacy of Captivity* (New York and London, 1990), pp. 2–12; Rawe, '...
wir werden sie schon zur Arbeit bringen'. Ausländerbeschäftigung und Zwangsarbeit im
Ruhrkohlenbergbau während des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Essen, 2005); Odon Abbal, *Soldats
oubliés. Les prisonniers de guerre français* (Esparon, 2001), pp. 9–11; Eckart Birnstiel and
Rémy Cazals, eds., *Ennemis fraternels 1914–1915. Hans Rodewald, Antoine Biesse, Fernand
Tailhades, Carnets de guerre et de captivité* (Toulouse, 2002); Sylvie Caucanas, Rémy Cazals
and Pascal Payen, eds., *Les Prisonniers de guerre dans l'histoire. Contacts entre peuples et*

conditions occurred but argues that this was due to 'the structural economic changes caused by the war', rather than any violent radicalisation of wartime attitudes to prisoners; for Hinz, the boundaries set in international law to protect prisoners were largely kept: 'in this regard the First World War was not a total war'.[13] The second interpretation, presented in the work of Annette Becker, Giovanna Procacci and Mark Spoerer, emphasises poor Great War captivity conditions; Procacci and Spoerer point to the high death rates among Italian and British prisoners respectively, with Procacci citing the deaths of 100,000 of the 600,000 Italian captives held by Germany and Austria-Hungary.[14] For these historians, the war was marked by particularly ruthless prisoner treatment; indeed, Becker goes on to argue that it established patterns which later resurfaced in the 1939–45 conflict.[15] At issue in these two diverging historiographical interpretations, which are both represented in the contributions to Jochen Oltmer's recent edited book of essays on Great War captivity, is whether the First World War marked the key watershed moment in Europe's twentieth century treatment of prisoners of war: indeed, one historian, a proponent of the benevolent captivity interpretation of the Great War, François Cochet, contended that it was only after the Second World War that a process of deregularisation set in, as international law protecting prisoner rights in war was sidelined.[16]

These two contrasting interpretations are fully contextualised for the first time through the analysis of violence against prisoners presented here, which reveals the existence of what were, in practice, effectively

cultures (Carcassonne, 2003); Rainer Pöppinghege, *Im Lager unbesiegt. Deutsche, englische und französische Kriegsgefangenen-Zeitungen im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Essen, 2006). See also the work of Katja Mitze, 'Das Kriegsgefangenenlager Ingolstadt während des Ersten Weltkriegs', Doctoral Thesis, University of Münster, 1999, which also largely adopts the benevolent captivity theme.

[13] Hinz, *Gefangen im Großen Krieg*, p. 362.

[14] Annette Becker, *Oubliés de la Grande Guerre, humanitaire et culture de guerre 1914–1918. Populations occupées, déportés civils, prisonniers de guerre* (Paris, 1998); Giovanna Procacci, *Soldati e prigionieri italiani nella Grande Guerra, con una raccolta di lettere inedite* (Turin, 2000); Mark Spoerer, 'The Mortality of Allied Prisoners of War and Belgian Civilian Deportees in German Custody during the First World War. A Reappraisal of the Effects of Forced Labour', *Population Studies*, 60, 2, (2006), pp. 121–36; Giovanna Procacci, '"Fahnenflüchtige jenseits der Alpen". Die italienischen Kriegsgefangenen in Österreich-Ungarn und Deutschland', in Oltmer, ed., *Kriegsgefangene im Europa des Ersten Weltkriegs*, p. 196. See also the negative view of captivity in Jean-Claude Auriol, *Les Barbelés des bannis. La Tragédie des prisonniers de guerre français en Allemagne durant la Grande Guerre* (Paris, 2002).

[15] Becker, *Oubliés de la Grande Guerre*. See also Annette Becker, 'Suppressed Memory of Atrocity in World War I and Its Impact on World War II', in Doris L. Bergen, ed., *Lessons and Legacies VIII. From Generation to Generation* (Illinois, 2008), p. 66.

[16] François Cochet, *Soldats sans armes. La captivité de guerre. Une approche culturelle* (Brussels, 1998), p. 3, p. 4. Oltmer, ed., *Kriegsgefangene im Europa des Ersten Weltkriegs*.

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'dual' captivity systems in Britain, France and Germany; although there
was some bureaucratic overlap in their administration, the prisoner of war
labour system in each country functioned largely autonomously from the
home front camps. What emerges is that the benevolent captivity inter-
pretation is one which is overly dependent upon sources from home front
camps; the darker interpretation of widespread mistreatment stems
mainly from the prisoner of war labour company system. This is not to
claim that home front camps were always benign sites of incarceration –
far from it. However, it is to argue that by tracing levels of violence in both
home front camps and front labour companies from 1914 until 1920,
when the last German prisoners were repatriated from France, the differ-
ent patterns of mistreatment in the two systems emerge more clearly; the
divergent forms and levels of violence to be found in different parts of
these incarceratory systems, and the fluctuating scale of violence during
different phases of the war, help to explain the contrasting historical
impressions of Great War captivity and to present a more accurate picture
of the scale and location of prisoner abuses. Indebted to the work of Hinz
and Becker in particular, this book ultimately contends that the prisoner
labour company system marked a watershed in western European ideas
regarding forced labour.

Third, this book is intended as a contribution to the development of
the comparative history of the First World War, a burgeoning scholarly
field, albeit one which has until now largely focused upon two-way
national comparisons.[17] By deliberately studying three countries, the
different patterns of violence against prisoners across three European
states become visible for the first time; moreover, a central premise of
this study is that comparing states on both sides of the conflict reduces
the risk of partisan interpretations or of drawing overly simplistic
national oppositions between victims and perpetrators of violence.
Methodologically, this book draws upon two key approaches to historical
comparison set out by Marc Bloch and Michel Espagne. As a clearly

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[17] Recent comparative studies include: Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War. Combat,
Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914–1918* (Cambridge, 2008);
Thomas Weber, *'Our Friend "the Enemy"'. Elite Education in Britain and Germany before
World War I* (Stanford, 2008). There have also been a number of edited volumes which
present the history of the war in a comparative way: see, in particular, Jenny Macleod and
Pierre Purseigle, eds., *Uncovered Fields. Perspectives in First World War Studies* (Boston and
Leiden, 2004); Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert, eds., *Capital Cities at War, Paris,
London, Berlin, 1914–1919*, vol. I (Cambridge, 1997), and vol. II: *A Cultural History*
(Cambridge, 2007). See also Pierre Purseigle's thoughtful discussion of the value of
local and regional comparative studies in 'Warfare and Belligerence. Approaches to the
First World War', in Pierre Purseigle, ed., *Warfare and Belligerence. Perspectives in First
World War Studies* (Boston and Leiden, 2005), pp. 1–37.

legally defined category found within all three states, where they generated
very similar source materials, such as interviews with escapers and mem-
oirs, prisoners of war represent an ideal subject for a synchronic compa-
rative study of the kind advocated by Marc Bloch.[18] However, this book
additionally goes beyond the straightforward synchronic juxtaposition of
the three countries as three separate units of comparison, to also look at
these units as wholly interactive with each other; this is the transnational
dimension to this history.[19] The transnational sphere includes multiple
levels of interaction such as bilateral and multilateral relations between the
three states, as well as with other countries, national responses to enemy
policies and constructed popular rumours about enemy practices; it also
encompasses engagement with the international public sphere, with its
discourses and debates about prisoner treatment. All affected how ideas
about violence against prisoners of war were formed and practices con-
doned or rejected. This book attempts to deal with the complexity of this
transnational sphere by building upon the work of Michel Espagne, which
calls for historians to consider historical 'transfer', how ideas travel from
one society to another and are changed into hybrid forms through the very
process of exchange; thus this book treats violence as both a physical
behaviour pattern within each country and a concept partly constructed
through transnational interactions.[20] Both Bloch's and Espagne's differ-
ent approaches to historical comparison are constantly used throughout
this book, although at certain points it has proved appropriate that the
narrative focus in detail upon a particular national experience.

The work of Bénédicte Zimmermann and Michael Werner has recently
highlighted the pitfalls of comparison, contending that selecting one
historical theme to compare across multiple linguistic zones is an arbi-
trary, artificial process whereby the historian creates a framework out of
linguistic categories which do not always directly conceptually translate

[18] Marc Bloch, 'A Contribution towards a Comparative History of European Societies', in
    Land and Work in Medieval Europe (London, 1967), p. 47.
[19] On theories on comparison in history see Hans-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka,
    'Comparative History. Methods, Aims, Problems', in Deborah Cohen and Maura
    O'Connor, eds., *Comparison and History. Europe in Cross-National Perspective* (New York
    and London, 2004); Philipp Ther, 'Beyond the Nation. The Relational Basis of a
    Comparative History of Germany and Europe', *Central European History*, 36, 1 (2003),
    pp. 45–73; John Breuilly, 'Introduction. Making Comparisons in History', in John
    Breuilly, ed., *Labour and Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe. Essays in Comparative
    History* (Manchester and New York, 1992), pp. 1–25; Michael Werner and Bénédicte
    Zimmermann, 'Beyond Comparison. Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity',
    History and Theory, 45, 1 (2006), pp. 30–50; Michel Espagne, 'Sur les limites du com-
    paratisme en histoire culturelle', *Genèses*, 17, 1 (1994), pp. 112–21.
[20] Deborah Cohen, 'Comparative History. Buyer Beware', *Bulletin of the German Historical
    Institute, Washington*, 29 (2001), p. 24.

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between different cultures; indeed, particular concepts may exist in one
culture that are not even present in another.[21] As far as is possible, this
problem is circumvented here by comparing a subject which enjoyed a
common legal definition in international law at the outset of the war in all
three countries studied: what constituted unacceptable prisoner treat-
ment was set out in the 1864 and 1906 Geneva Conventions, which
provided protection for enemy wounded, and the 1907 Hague
Convention on Land Warfare, with its stipulation that prisoners of war
be treated 'humanely'.[22] Thus while acknowledging that, to some extent,
the term violence in English does not mean exactly the same thing as its
counterparts *violence* in French or *Gewalt* in German, this study takes as its
comparative starting point the argument that there was considerable over-
lap in how contemporaries in all three countries conceptualised violence
against captives in 1914; this facilitates historical comparison, even if, as
the war continued, these shared understandings began to break down
along national lines.

    Ultimately, comparison is also a highly suitable approach given that
prisoners of war experienced the war in a conceptually hybrid, transna-
tional way, located in a liminal cultural space between home state and
captor nation. The aid effort which developed to assist them clearly
illustrates this: British, French and German prisoners provoked similar
humanitarian mobilisations in their home countries as charitable organ-
isations used the European postal system, which continued to function
during the war, to send prisoners aid parcels; regimental care associations,
départemental care committees, religious charities, national Red Cross
organisations, and individual families, sustained a mammoth humanitar-
ian aid effort which helped to alleviate prisoner hardship.[23] And from
1916, the French government organised the delivery of bread and biscuits
to French prisoners in German camps.[24] All these efforts involved trans-
national exchanges and a reciprocal learning curve between cultures.

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[21] Werner and Zimmermann, 'Beyond Comparison'.
[22] Brown, ed., *The Hague Conventions and Declarations of 1899 and 1907*, p. 108; Cochet,
    Soldats sans armes, p. 11; Georges Cahen-Salvador, *Les Prisonniers de guerre (1914–1919)*
    (Paris, 1929), p. 17.
[23] On aid to prisoners, see Heather Jones, 'International or Transnational? Humanitarian
    Action during the First World War', *European Review of History*, 16, 5 (2009),
    pp. 697–713. See also Parliamentary Paper, Cd. 8615, *Report of the Joint Committee
    Appointed by the Chairmen of Committees of the House of Lords and the House of Commons
    to Enquire into the Organisation and Methods of the Central Prisoners of War Committee*
    (London, 1917). See also *Reports by the Joint War Committee and the Joint War Finance
    Committee of the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St John of Jerusalem in England on
    Voluntary Aid Rendered to the Sick and Wounded at Home and Abroad and to British Prisoners
    of War, 1914–1919* (London, 1921), pp. 544–87.
[24] Abbal, *Soldats oubliés*, pp. 88–9.