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MASCULINITY, WAR AND REFUSAL: VICISSITUDES OF GERMAN MANHOOD BEFORE AND AFTER THE COLD WAR

[DISSERTATION PRECIS]

At least since David Gilmore's survey of the literature (1990), anthropologists have widely acknowledged that masculinity is not just an achieved status, but an extraordinarily fragile one. Men are not born but made and once made often must spend the rest of their lives proving their manhood. The "making" of manhood often entails long periods of testing and training that culminates in dramatic rites of passage. Though local constructions of manhood vary in their particulars, Gilmore and others have found that certain traits, if not so universal as to be accounted for by any crude biological determinism, are nonetheless so widespread as to encompass the vast majority of cultures described in the ethnographic record.

Recent scholarship both within and outside of anthropology has noted that the particular traits ubiquitously regarded as masculine—discipline, physical courage, emotional restraint—are also the traits most necessary for soldiers. Even granted the much-described local variations in gender, many particular expressions of the masculine ideal may well be driven by a widespread belief that a particular set of characteristics is necessary to war

fighting—a proposition made more plausible by the fact that the very cultures where war is virtually unknown tend to be the same cultures where these near-ubiquitous male characteristics are less marked and less important in establishing adult male identity.

In my dissertation, I look specifically for evidence of co-variation between demands of the interstate “war system” as it has developed in post-Westphalia Europe and masculine ideals in Germany. In particular I examine the role of the military itself in making masculinity—and in responding to changing masculine ideals. Because of the relative importance of the military as an institution in nineteenth and early twentieth century Germany, and because of the upheavals wrought by the First and Second World Wars, Germany proved a fruitful place from which to study these phenomena.

The ethnographic portion of my work is based on two years of participant observation with various units of the German military as well as interviews with both veterans and conscientious objectors. I highlight and seek to explain the ways in which both German masculinity and the role of the military have changed, and continue to change, in the post-WWII and now post-Cold War eras. I argue that, in the German case, styles of accepted masculinity along with attitudes about the nation pose significant limitations on the possible forms of the military. Significantly “softened” styles of manhood and nationalism—both key components of identity—became possible in the wake of the German defeat *and* under the protective aegis of American power. At the same time both masculine gender ideals and forms of nationalism that were valorized and celebrated in pre-war Germany were tainted by the experience of defeat and occupation. Under these conditions, *refusal* (conscientious objection, disobedience) increasingly became normalized (and even valorized) in German public discourse. In effect, the traditional German emphasis on obedience as one of the

primary masculine virtues was at least partially displaced by refusal, as observed in the choices men made regarding military service and even in the explicit self-understanding of the German military.

From the moment of its reestablishment in the mid-1950s, the German military had to contend with the burden of its own history and the reality that nearly half the population rejected rearmament. The *Bundeswehr*, the new armed forces of the old West Germany, had to accommodate both internal and external critics—who advocated for a more democratic military and forces more integrated into international structures—and the United States, which placed enormous pressure on Bonn to create an effective war-fighting force to counter the Soviet presence in the East. In the midst of this push-pull of national and international forces, the new military developed key philosophical principles—inner leadership and citizens in uniform—that came under almost instant attack from all sides. For the veterans groups and the military conservatives, the new democratic ideals amounted to a retreat from the tradition of manly virtue and a feminizing pretense that joining the army was just like working at any other job. For leftwing critics, these airy concepts were mere window dressing designed to placate a still gullible public and lay the groundwork for the remilitarization of German society.

The story that emerges in my dissertation is how individual men, bringing with them ideas of masculinity infused with class, religious, political and regional identities, accommodated themselves to military service, how changing views of ideal masculinity eventually resulted in the implementation of democratic ideals within the German military, and how the military isolation of Germany during the long years of the Cold War facilitated these changes. At the

same time I look at the ways in which refusal itself increasingly comes to the mainstream of German political life, albeit in narrow, strictly delimited forms, and how encounters with military service, whether as a draftee or conscientious objector, continue to be important rites of passage for German men, even when the military is once again trying to remake itself in imitation of the United States, downgrading the importance of compulsory service in favor of a professional military.