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Soldiers, Citizens, and the State: East German Army Officers in Post-Unification Germany

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Despite official narratives of a relatively smooth transition, of the merging of "those things which belong together," German unification and the formation of a new German state has been an uneven project filled with friction and animosity. While the West German government celebrated the "victory" of unification, and stated that all East Germans wanted unification, one group of East Germans did not look forward to the dissolution of the GDR: members of the East German military, the Nationale Volksarmee (National People's Army, or NVA). Disbanded immediately upon unification, the overwhelming majority of NVA officers were left unemployed overnight, stripped of their status as officers and portrayed by the West Germans as the "losers" of the Cold War. For these men, unification was not a joyous, desired event; rather, it represented the end of their careers, security, status, and the state they had sworn to defend. As such, the "fall" into democracy for these men was from the start fraught with uncertainty, disappointment, anomie, and a profound sense of loss.

States emerging from periods of dictatorship must often come to terms with officials and soldiers who have committed war crimes or human rights abuses (McAdams 2001). In the case of German unification, the new German state had to disband the East German military and integrate NVA soldiers into its military—the Bundeswehr—and come to terms with the actions of the NVA and Border Guards during the Cold War. On 3 October 1990, all NVA soldiers and officers over age fifty-five were immediately released from the military,

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as were all admirals, generals, and female NVA soldiers and officers; additionally, all officers above the rank of lieutenant colonel (*Oberstleutnant*) were relieved of duty (Leonhard 2004: 717). The Einigungsvertrag—the Unification Treaty—stipulated that by 1994 the Bundeswehr was to be reduced to 370,000 soldiers; 25 percent of the new Bundeswehr was to be filled by former NVA soldiers and officers, and the post-unification Bundeswehr was envisioned as the "Armee der Einheit," the "Army of Unity." When it was dissolved in 1990, the total NVA troop strength was 88,797, with 22,676 officers. The Bundeswehr initially accepted 20,000 NVA soldiers and officers into its ranks, primarily specialists needed to maintain equipment and train Bundeswehr personnel in the use of Soviet weapons systems. The overwhelming majority was subsequently released from the Bundeswehr within two years, often with very little notice, and generally with a demotion. By 2002, only 5 percent of the Bundeswehr was made up of former NVA soldiers and officers (Deutscher Bundestag 2002). As of 2006, out of a troop strength of 250,000, there were approximately eight hundred former NVA officers left in the Bundeswehr (Oberst a.D. Dieter Müller, Deutscher Bundeswehrverband Landesverband Ost, personal communication 2006).

In this article I examine an aspect of German unification unexplored in the anthropological literature: the role of the two Cold War German militaries, the East German Nationale Volksarmee and the West German Bundeswehr (which is also the name of the post-unification German military), in German unification and state formation, as seen through the lives and experiences of former NVA officers. By focusing on West German state and military policies concerning "proper" soldiers, I examine how military tradition in the Bundeswehr, and memories and representations of World War II Wehrmacht and SS soldiers, impact the ways in which former NVA officers are seen and codified. Drawing on ethnographic and historical research conducted in Berlin between 1997 and 2006 with former NVA and Bundeswehr officers, I examine the relationships between the military, citizenship, memory, and state formation, and the practices of state and military legitimation employed by West German military and governmental elites. I also explore the problematic and often disturbing remembrance, valorization, and use of Germany's military past by individuals and the state in political discourse and personal narratives. Through the use of Cold War tropes of "proper" soldiers, and the deployment of specific memories of World War II German soldiers, West German elites have created an internal "Military Other," and have rehabilitated certain forms of German military history, tradition, and identity as means of shoring up legitimacy for the newly unified state and appeasing West German officers. I focus on how ideas about "proper" soldiers shape who can "direct and initiate action to others" and how these "others who [have] to respond" do in fact respond (Wolf 1999: 275). These memories and representations have very real material effects, helping to create policies that make former NVA officers

both second-class citizens and "veterans of a foreign military." Conversely, some NVA and Border Guard officers have used West German military policies of exclusion, and their perceptions of the Bundeswehr as a continuation of the fascist past, as a way of explaining away human rights abuses and military authoritarianism in the GDR, thereby making them—in their eyes—the "victims" of both unification and the Nazi past. Ultimately, the unification process reveals the controversial and problematic use of historical memory by both West and East German state and military elites.

STATES, MILITARIES, AND REPRESENTATION

States, according to Weber, claim a monopoly on legitimate violence. And as Tilly (1999) writes, war makes states. States claim not only the monopoly on legitimate violence, but also have a keen interest in maintaining the monopoly on the representations and images of the men (and increasingly, women) who are to commit violence; that is, they claim a monopoly on who is considered a legitimate, proper, soldier. This includes not only the present, but also the past, for it is more often from the past that role models and traditions are sought. States often "simultaneously express several contradictory tendencies" (Rueschemeyer and Evans 1999: 47), and as Sharma and Gupta write, an anthropological perspective on the state allows us "to pay careful attention to the cultural construction of the state—that is, how people perceive the state, how their understandings are shaped by their particular locations and intimate encounters with state processes and officials, and how the state manifests itself in their lives" (Sharma and Gupta 2006: 11). An anthropological examination of the state can examine how these "contradictory tendencies" are experienced in people's lives through the "banal practices of the state" and the "cultural struggles [that] determine what a state means to its people, how it is instantiated in their daily lives, and where its boundaries are drawn" (ibid.).

One of the main things that states also do is *state*, that is, make statements, about inclusion and exclusion, and about how history and memory coalesce with the political life of the state (Corrigan and Sayer 1985: 3). While states make statements concerning history, memory, and propriety, the various administrative units and administrators of the state are often at odds with one another in regard to just what form these statements or pronouncements should take, with the result that the experience of the "state" is often uneven, contradictory, alienating, and bewildering. As Herzfeld writes, research on the state should focus on "what bearers of power actually do—how they direct institutional controls and classifications to the pursuit of particular ends" (2001: 122). Questions of classification—and the power to classify—are the contested fields of power in the relationship between the two former Cold War enemies after unification.

Identity formation often takes the form of a negative example; by stating that a certain group acts in a certain manner, or has certain characteristics, one defines one's own identity by what one is not. In regard to the former

GDR and the NVA, I argue that such a process is occurring in the representation of former East German soldiers and experiences of "victor's justice." I follow Gill (1997) in her discussion of the relationship between military service and the creation of proper citizens and men, and Biess, who examines military service and citizenship in Germany, and sees citizenship as a "concept of belonging and a marker of subjectivity that is located at the intersection between state and society" (2006: 13). Questions of citizenship, propriety, and otherness directly relate to the political uses of "victor's justice" (*Siegerjustiz*) in the unified Germany, as NVA officers were convinced that West Germans were intent on imposing victor's justice upon them (McAdams 2001: 27). A former NVA general summed up the attitudes of many former NVA soldiers about the trials of former Border Guards and GDR government officials when he stated: "Hey Germany, look here: we've found someone who is guilty. Now we can be satisfied" (Meyer and Collmer 1993: 120). In 2000, Frank, a former NVA infantry colonel, echoed this sentiment, and had this interpretation of what he saw as the misrepresentation of the GDR and the NVA: "The West Germans think they won the Cold War. Maybe they did. They think they're the victors, and can write history as they like. By focusing on everything that was wrong with the GDR, by saying it was a dictatorship, and that the NVA was a 'party army' that supported a dictatorship, the West Germans can easily shift all of the blame to us, and draw attention away from all of the problems they've caused with unification, like right-wing radicalism and unemployment. Unification hasn't gone well, but it is easier to simply blame us for the past, and blame us for the present."

The feeling of being the victims of "victor's justice" runs deep with former NVA officers, and frames the ways in which they view the post-unification German state and their experiences in the new state. Representations of the NVA as highly aggressive and concerned solely with preparations for the invasion of Western Europe or the suppression of internal dissent within the GDR elide the complicated role of the military in East German society (see Ehlert and Rogg 2004). As Gill (1997) and Enloe (1993) argue, militaries serve to create hierarchies among men; I argue that a similar process is at work in post-unification Germany: former NVA officers are coded as the "bad" Germans who served an "illegal" regime and lost the Cold War, while the West German army and its officers are the "good" Germans who served the "legitimate" Germany and won the Cold War (see Niven 2002: 2). Borneman (2001) remarks in his discussion of the practices of state formation, "As a device of power, democracy is as dependent on the externalization or creation of negative others as on the internal dynamics of citizen formation" (2001: 14967). This is evident in the experiences of NVA officers after unification. Hall's theory of "dominant regimes of representation," and the ways in which the "Other" is constructed help explain the experiences of NVA officers after unification (1994; see also Green 1999). Made into the "Military Other,"

NVA officers serve as a foil to West German ideas of proper soldiers, thereby shoring up West German claims to political, cultural, and military legitimacy after unification. NVA officers continue to serve as the "negative sign" of proper soldiers, even though the Cold War is long since over.

COMING TO TERMS WITH THE NATIONAL PEOPLE'S ARMY

The German case is unusual, since the NVA never fought in a war, did not resist its own demise, and willingly participated in the dissolution of the state it was sworn to defend. With the end of the GDR, Germany was forced to come to terms with a dictatorship for the second time in the twentieth century. While Border Guard officers and soldiers, and some high-ranking NVA generals, could be brought to trial for easily identified human rights abuses committed on the Berlin Wall and intra-German border, lower-ranking NVA officers could not be held accountable for easily identifiable crimes. Although the overwhelming majority of NVA officers could not be tried in court for clear-cut crimes or abuses, they could still be "punished" for supporting the Soviet Union and Communism through extra-judicial means, such as cuts in pensions, symbolic marginalization, and their removal from the register of German military tradition and honor.

The Bundeswehr saw the NVA as the primary enemy, as traitors to the "German Nation," as a military that propped up the GDR state and helped perpetuate the Cold War and the division of Germany. Perhaps most importantly, the NVA was allied with the Soviet Union and the Red Army, Germany's arch-enemy in World War II. Because of the carryover of anti-Communist sentiment in the West German military from World War II (the Bundeswehr was founded and heavily influenced by former World War II Wehrmacht officers, who carried over the traditions and worldview of the Wehrmacht), this was seen as the most grievous sin of NVA officers: they sided with the arch-enemy of the German state and people. Given the Cold War rivalry between the Bundeswehr and the NVA, and that no former GDR or NVA officials or officers were in power and in a position to contest such actions (McAdams 2001), West German elites felt that they could do as they pleased with NVA officers after unification. As detailed by Bald (2005), a "conservative consolidation" of the Bundeswehr occurred, with the result that the much-celebrated "Army of Unity" was a misnomer. Bundeswehr officers saw NVA officers as both expendable—in terms of the reductions stipulated by the Unification treaty—and as threats to their careers (Lapp 1992).

As McAdams (2001) writes, one of the various forms of justice used by West German elites to punish East German elites was "disqualifying" justice; that is, even if they could not be held directly responsible for abuses or illegal actions in the GDR, they could still be disqualified from full rights and participation in the new state based on their past affiliation(s) in the GDR. In other words, some former East German elites were punished not necessarily for what they did, but for who they were in the past, and because they "should have known better"

than to have served in the "illegal" military of an "unjust" or "unconstitutional" state (*Unrechtsstaat*). As a blanket condemnation of all NVA officers, and by extension, their families, "disqualifying justice" created serious problems for former officers after unification.

A WAR OF SIGNS, IMAGES, AND MEMORIES: GERMAN MILITARIES IN THE COLD WAR

The Cold War was experienced as a cultural division, a splitting of the "family" of Germans that included an intense rivalry over legitimacy (Borneman 1992; 1993; Boyer 2005; 2006).[1] While the Cold War was always a potentially "hot" war, it was also a war of images and representations, of truth claims about proper German history, memory, and military tradition. The Cold War division of Germany played out with particular intensity in the two German militaries, as both saw the other as the continuation of a fascist and totalitarian trajectory in German military history. Indeed, much of the political battle between the two Germanys revolved around representations of their respective armies, their actions, and their relation to the past. Just as the two Germanys constituted a "mirror" for each other (see Borneman 1992), so too did the two German militaries.

The formation of both armies was under the control of the two superpowers—the United States and the Soviet Union—and was seen by each as a way to further control Germany and shore up their respective military capabilities. Each army reflected the political and economic system of its state and bloc: socialism in the workers and peasant's state of the East, and a capitalist market economy and parliamentary democracy in the West (Bald 1994: 148; Harrison 2003), and both German states drew on the past to create post-war militaries that fit their conceptions of history and their roles in the respective military blocs which they served. German soldiers were stand-ins – signs - of their respective systems and military blocs, condensing and signifying the worldviews of their respective blocs in their very beings.

Both sides of the German divide portrayed the other and its soldiers in the worst light possible, and to a large degree, the propaganda worked. For the majority of West Germans, the NVA represented an authoritarian, ideologically motivated military serving Communism, and given its Wehrmacht-style uniforms and Prussian discipline, it was popularly seen as a continuation of Wehrmacht and Prussian militarism. The Bundeswehr, on the other hand, was officially portrayed as a non-ideological defensive army that did not serve the German nation, but the constitution and democratic state. Conversely, the SED (Socialist Unity Party, the East German Communist Party) and NVA portrayed the Bundeswehr and West Germany as simple continuations of the World War II German fascist state and military, while portraying the NVA as

[1] See also Glaeser's 2000 ethnography of the East and West German police in Berlin.

the "new" German military serving an anti-fascist state which, by virtue of being anti-fascist, considered itself absolved of the past and all its crimes (Herf 1997; Maier 1988; Weitz 1997). Both German armies viewed the other as the largest threat to peace and security, and each side harbored a special animosity for the other, a stance that continued after the end of the Cold War (Herspring 1998; Zilian 1999).

The Bundeswehr was founded in large part by former Wehrmacht officers who had served in World War II. They brought their experiences in the Wehrmacht and that war to the new army, and these experiences helped form the institutional culture and "tradition" of the Bundeswehr (Klotz 1998; Schmähling 1991; Wette 2006). For the officers and soldiers of the Bundeswehr, certain historical-political orientations served as the ideological framework of the new army: the Soviet Union and communism were the "traditional" enemies, and they had a positive—or at least not fully negative—view of the Wehrmacht (Wette 1998: 130; Abenheim 1988; Bald 1994). These orientations, and policies derived from them, played a key role in the treatment, codification, and perception of NVA officers after unification.

The kernels of distrust and resentment felt by Bundeswehr officers towards the NVA were sown in the foundational phases of both armies, beginning in 1949. As both German states began to develop plans for their militaries, the East German SED drew upon officers from the Nationalkommitee Freies Deutschaland—the National Committee for a Free Germany—a group founded in the Soviet Union by captured German officers who renounced fascism after the Stalingrad debacle. The NVA was founded by these officers, and drew upon the Nationalkommitee for its tradition as an anti-fascist army (Bald 1994: 148; Giese 2002; Harrison 2003). The Wehrmacht viewed officers of the NKFD as traitors, as soldiers who betrayed Germany. Additionally, the military-theoretical conceptions of Marxism-Leninism and the civil-military relationship to the Soviet Union fundamentally shaped the SED's conception of the NVA as a new, socialist, "people's army" (Giese 2002: 47). As the Bundeswehr was founded and staffed by former Wehrmacht soldiers with a conservative bent, the NVA was seen as both a communist "party" military and a military founded by traitors to the German homeland and Volk (see Bald 1994: 147–48). Indeed, as Bald writes, "the NVA and the Bundeswehr were not brothers in uniform. That was true from the first hour. There was always mutual antagonism. Because of this and other factors, there was no unification of the West and East armored forces after unification in 1990" (1994: 148).

The NVA was a creation of the Soviet Union, and was intended as a supporting army for the Red Army, as well as Soviet foreign policy (see Diedrich, Ehlert, and Wenzke 1998). When the Soviet Union began to splinter and pull back, the GDR and the NVA became expendable, and the Soviets made clear they would not intervene militarily to support the SED. This was a bitter realization for NVA officers after unification; Stephan Fingerle, in his study of NVA

officer recruitment, quotes General Joachim Goldbach, the former deputy minister of defense of the GDR:

> The NVA was not a German army with a hundreds-year-old tradition. It was a new invention determined by political needs, legitimated by the post-war goals of the eastern superpower and the will of a party oligarchy. It is bitter to have to say this from a contemporary point of view: the NVA was a product and instrument of Soviet politics, and it became superfluous and was allowed to fall, as Soviet superpower politics failed. The NVA served the hegemonic power of the socialist block as a true vassal up until the end, and served the SED as a support and means of its political program (quoted in Fingerle 2001: 1).

With unification, NVA officers lost their status overnight; when not simply forgotten, they were considered by both East and West Germans as pariahs, hard-line communists, or simply anachronisms, and the soldiers who "lost" the Cold War. Thomas, who completed three years of service in the NVA as a sergeant, asked me one day, "Why do you spend time with those guys at the veterans group? They're just a bunch of old losers at the Has-Beens' Club (*Klub der Verflossenen*)."

While not as severe in its approach as the GDR, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) maintained (and continues to maintain) a conscript military. In terms of training and doctrine, the Bundeswehr stressed its role as a non-ideological army in order to officially distance itself from the legacy of the Third Reich. Bundeswehr soldiers were portrayed as "citizen-soldiers," instilled with "*Innere Führung*" (inner leadership), which was, theoretically, to prevent them from following illegal and inhumane orders, and Bundeswehr soldiers were to see themselves as "Staatsbürger in Uniform"—"citizens in uniform" (Kleβmann 1997: 146; Schmähling 1991). This was an attempt to distance the West German military from the authoritarian German militaries of World War II and the NVA. Rather than serving the "German Nation," Bundeswehr soldiers followed "*Verfassungspatriotismus*" (constitutional patriotism), and wore plain, bland uniforms as a means to prevent the nationalistic fervor and blind discipline of the Nazi military. The concept of "inner leadership"—of the German soldier socialized to be morally upstanding and ethically principled, who would not support offensive combat operations outside of the West German border (a prohibition changed after unification, which most NVA officers found troubling), or a totalitarian regime—was used by West German elites as proof that the NVA (which did not have this concept) was a continuation of German militarism. NVA officers were seen as "incapable" of telling right from wrong, as soldiers socialized to uphold an unjust, totalitarian regime. A majority of Bundeswehr officers went so far as to say that NVA officers "never had the same profession" as they did, and because of this "fact," there is a vast mental divide between their worlds and worldviews (Bald 2005). As such, many Bundeswehr officers did not believe NVA officers should, or could, be treated as "German soldiers."

THE COLD WAR RIVALRY AND THE "SOCIAL DEAD END" OF UNIFICATION

The foundational structures and sentiments of the Bundeswehr, plus the confrontation of the Cold War, set the stage for the uneven treatment of former NVA officers after unification, despite worries and concerns that this would happen in the months running up to unification in October 1990. In a speech to the West German Bundestag prior to unification, Social Democrat (SPD) parliament member Walter Kolbow spoke on the necessity of fair treatment of NVA soldiers by the Bundeswehr:

> The concerns of the military representative about comments by officers of the Bundeswehr, comments which lead one to doubt whether they are approaching the process of German unification with all of the necessary tolerance, fairness, openness, and justice, underscores possible fears. . . . We cannot allow the first experiences of these people (NVA soldiers) with the constitutional state (*Rechsstaat*) to lead experiences of shock. The GDR must be allowed to bring its contribution to the new defense structure. For the soldiers of the National People's Army—and this has become obvious by statements made in this chamber—the end of their army cannot be allowed to lead them to a social dead-end (*in das soziale Nichts führen*) (Deutscher Bundestag 1990).

Kolbow's statement makes clear the importance of including former NVA officers in the post-unification military: by bringing them into the fold, and giving them the chance to join the new military, they can be enjoined to embrace the constitution and the characteristics of a soldier in a democracy, a "citizen-in-uniform." He also makes clear that failure to include them can lead to a "social dead end," to anomie, shock, and disillusionment with the new state and system; in other words, marginalization would run counter to the goals of unification. Kolbow's statement was prescient, in light of the experiences of former NVA officers who were not allowed to join the Bundeswehr, many of whom wound up in the "social dead end" of unification, and as a result have had a hard time accepting democracy. Bernd, a very thoughtful former colonel in the NVA rocket troops, told me one day, "an educated East German can't trust anything in this democracy."

Bundeswehr officers both resented and felt threatened by NVA officers, since they presented a threat to the dominance of the Bundeswehr and its claims to legitimacy. As Lapp documents, statements by Bundeswehr officers during the run-up to the dissolution of the GDR concerning NVA officers joining the Bundeswehr made clear some of the potential problems of military unification and the overwhelmingly negative opinion held by Bundeswehr officers of their East German counterparts:

- I don't want to have anything to do with members of a party army and traitors.
- I'll never take orders from a former NVA officer.
- They learned to operate under completely different operating principles.
- A lot of informants (*Maulwürfe*) of the former Ministry of State Security and the KGB were in the NVA. Should we allow ourselves to be infected by those who have gone under cover?

- For every former NVA officer that we do not permanently accept into the Bundeswehr, we can keep an officer of the "old" Bundeswehr in light of the upcoming armed forces reduction (Lapp 1992: 25).

These sentiments were still common in the late 1990s when I conducted fieldwork. Bundeswehr officers were overwhelmingly dismissive of NVA officers' claims of inequality, shabby treatment, and dismissal from the military. At a special meeting of the Bundeswehrverband in 1999, NVA officers were given ten minutes to speak about their concerns and problems after unification. In response to my question about what he thought of the speech given by one NVA officer, Michael, a Bundeswehr major, commented: "Who really cares how they feel—I could care less. They deserve what they get—they kept the SED running, and helped the Soviet Union in the Cold War. Why should we help them, and give them honors they don't deserve? I really don't care what happens to them. I am annoyed by what he [the NVA officer] wore to the meeting, however—he didn't have any class. He was wearing suspenders, and didn't show us any respect. He should have known better, but maybe he didn't."

The general opinion of West German Bundeswehr officers and West Germans with whom I spoke is that these men were on the wrong side, and as such deserve nothing. Not only were they "on the wrong side," but also they chose to stay there, and served in a military and alliance that insured there would indeed be a "side." Fundamentally, because NVA officers had sided sided with the Soviets, West German officers could never see them as "comrades."[2] NVA officers are viewed as willing servants of an unjust regime; they not only stayed, but they actively believed, and are blamed for the division of Germany. As Herbert Becker, former deputy director of the NVA veterans groups in the Deutscher Bundeswehrverband (the German Army Association), and an NVA lieutenant colonel, wrote in an appraisal of the "status question" of former NVA officers: "Surely, the NVA was a different German army from the German armies before it. It was also a different army from the Bundeswehr. But that does not seem to be the problem. The problem is this: the NVA served a different social system. Therein lie the reasons for the belittling and discriminatory treatment of those who served in the NVA" (Becker 1999).

"MEMBERS OF A FOREIGN MILITARY": TRADITION, HONOR, AND THE MILITARY OTHER

While "tradition" is a discourse, it is also a practice (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1988). Through the practice of tradition in the Bundeswehr, a particular version of German history is valorized, marginalizing certain Germans who

[2] See Biess 2006 on the politics of "comradeship" after World War II.

become the living measure against which tradition and identity are based (see Giordano 2000; Koop 1995; Meyer and Collmer 1993). In terms of the "tradition" of the Bundeswehr, there was no place for communists or soldiers who had served a communist regime seen as the continuation of the fascist/totalitarian Wehrmacht. A 1995 study commissioned by the Bundeswehr stated that, officially, the Wehrmacht could not be used as a source of tradition; however, there was concern that unofficially, the Wehrmacht would be used as a source of tradition in the Bundeswehr, and continue to influence its institutional culture (Wette 2006: 276). While the Wehrmacht cannot be used as an official source of tradition, it is the unofficial, "everyday" use and memory of the Wehrmacht and World War II German soldiers that impacts the reception and representation of NVA officers by influencing policy, perception, and notions of "proper" soldiers. German governmental policies, while not necessarily "officially" valorizing the Wehrmacht—and the SS—nonetheless give the appearance of honoring their service, even if these soldiers were members of a German military that cannot "officially" be used for tradition in the Bundeswehr. The Bundeswehr has long used the Wehrmacht as a source of tradition, from the naming of barracks, the singing of Wehrmacht songs in the barracks, to the honoring of famous German soldiers from World War II and their military prowess and bravery (see Klotz 1998; Bald 1994; Wette 1998). Occasionally, this usage comes into the open and causes controversy, such as when the officer in charge of Germany's special forces unit, the Kommando Spezialkräfte der Bundeswehr, declared that the unit's "role model" was the Wehrmacht's "Brandenburg" unit, a unit found guilty of committing war crimes (see Günzel, Walther, and Wegner 2005). More recently, a Bundeswehr unit in Afghanistan created controversy when it used the palm tree symbol (minus the swastika) of the World War II Afrika Korps on its armored vehicles, symbolically linking the Bundeswehr to the Wehrmacht expeditionary force in North Africa (*Der Spiegel* 2006).

With unification, questions of military "status," "honor," and memory took on new importance, and played a major role in the treatment and codification of former NVA officers. Given thirty-five years of Cold War propaganda concerning the NVA and the Border Guards, as well as the actual deaths caused by the GDR Border Guards, the Bundeswehr deemed it a political necessity to distance itself from the NVA. The new German state and military also needed to solidify its claim on the monopoly of state and military violence, and conceptions of "real" German soldiers. Fundamentally, if left unchecked, the "Army of Unity" could have seriously undermined the dominance of Bundeswehr officers in both the state and the military. To remedy this, the Bundeswehr developed a series of policies designed to reinforce their position of dominance; these policies used both symbolic and material practices to undermine former NVA officers, and drew on memories of World War II German soldiers to create continuity with the "real" soldiers of German military tradition.

Since unification, NVA officers are officially coded by the Ministry of Defense as "*Gediente in fremden Streitkräften*"—"Veterans of Foreign Armed Forces" (Holger Reimer, Deutscher Bundeswehrverband Landesverband Ost, personal communication 1998; Deutscher Bundestag 2002). The ministry's classification of NVA officers as "foreign veterans" makes them, at the symbolic level, "non-German." One of their primary goals is to be recognized as "German soldiers." Not only are they "non-German," but also as "Veterans of Foreign Armed Forces," they are not considered "German soldiers." As such, if they were not "real" German soldiers, then the NVA was never a "real" German army; this classification not only removes them from use in German military tradition, it removes them from any claim to be an actual German soldier or full citizen, and makes the Bundeswehr the only "real" German army after World War II.

NVA officers are also officially prohibited from using their military rank, even with the designation "retired," while members of the Wehrmacht and the Waffen SS are legally permitted to use theirs (Holger Reimer, Deutscher Bundeswehrverband Landesverband Ost, personal communication 1998; Deutscher Bundestag 2002). NVA officers are not allowed to use their titles or ranks; that is, they cannot state, "Colonel, Retired" on any official documents or in public, nor are they allowed to claim any academic titles earned in the GDR (this follows a general refusal to recognize GDR academic degrees; see Berger 1995: 148). They are, however, permitted to wear any medals and awards that they received in the GDR, such as the Order of Lenin or military achievement medals.

The level of concern over the use of rank and title can become somewhat absurd, but it is this sort of bureaucratic absurdity and banality that provides insight into how symbolic systems influence politics and policies, creating systems of inequality. Herbert Becker recounted an incident illustrating how Wehrmacht officers are symbolically and historically privileged over NVA officers: "A former NVA general, who had been a lieutenant in the Wehrmacht, wrote a letter of complaint to the Minister of Defense. He signed his letter 'Lieutenant, Retired.' The minister's office wrote back and did not answer his complaint, but warned him that he was not allowed to use his rank in this manner. The general wrote back, stating that he had been a lieutenant in the Wehrmacht and a general in the NVA. The minister's office wrote back informing him it was permissible to use the Wehrmacht rank, but not the NVA rank, as service in the Wehrmacht was officially recognized and legitimate, whereas that in the NVA was not." Despite the heated correspondence, in the end, Becker explained, the general's complaint went unanswered (Herbert Becker, personal communication 1999).

NVA officers see their de-legitimization extending even into matters of death. While mourning is a private matter for the families of former NVA officers, it is a matter of state importance for Wehrmacht and SS soldiers, as well as the Bundeswehr (Hausen 1997). Officially, SS and Wehrmacht members who later served in the West German Bundeswehr can receive a state burial because of their service to the West German state, while NVA officers, who

never served in the Bundeswehr, are not entitled to this honor (Dr. Gerhard Kümmel, Universität der Bundeswehr, personal communication 2003). The belief amongst former NVA officers is that since Wehrmacht and SS soldiers "fought for Germany" (the fascist Germany), they are allowed burials. NVA officers believe that as members of the fascist German military, these officers should not be honored by the state, which claims to have disassociated itself from the Nazi past and its atrocities. Many also believe that the Bundeswehr, as essentially a carryover from the fascist German military, is therefore allowed burials, whereas former NVA officers are denied this because they never "fought" for Germany and served the "anti-fascist" German state and military. For many officers, this is "proof" that the Federal Republic of Germany is a continuation of the Third Reich, or as put by Willi, a former infantry officer, a "fascist state in democratic clothing" (personal communication 1998).

These sorts of bureaucratic actions and classifications on the part of the state—the "banal practices" of everyday state governance—contribute to feelings and experiences of alienation and marginalization on the part of NVA officers in ways that material marginalization do not. For them, it goes beyond a simple question of "favoritism"; at a fundamental level, they simply do not understand how the German state could continue to honor men who served illegal, unjust, and genocidal institutions, and who are, in countless cases, war criminals. As they see it, this sort of privileging of service is a means not only of whitewashing the crimes of the past, but of misrepresenting their own service in the NVA. They also see it as a surprisingly strong statement by the German government that men who fought, killed, and committed atrocities in World War II are more important to the state and military tradition than men who—despite the human rights violations of Border Guards on the Berlin Wall and intra-German border—did not serve an expansionist and genocidal military regime. This is important, because the Wehrmacht—a German military that facilitated Hitler's rise to power and later prosecuted Germany's war—is considered worthy of tradition, whereas the NVA, an army that, despite its reputation, never conducted offensive operations, is considered a threat to German military tradition, and therefore not "usable" in that tradition.[3] The deployment of tradition, and the valorization of World War II German soldiers drive the symbolic and economic marginalization of NVA officers. It leads them to believe that they are correct in viewing the Federal Republic and the Bundeswehr as mere continuations of the fascist past, a belief that in turn helps perpetuate their marginalization and the popular impression that they are "unrepentant communists."

[3] It is now known that the NVA did not cross into Czechoslovakia in 1968. NVA units were moved to the border, but did not cross into Czechoslovakia (Herspring 1998: 23).

LIFE IN THE *KAMERADSCHAFT*: ENGAGEMENT AND RESISTANCE

One of the few avenues of official, state-sanctioned political response open to former NVA officers is the Deutscher Bundeswehrverband—the German Army Association—the official veterans organization of the Bundeswehr. Founded in 1956, shortly after the formation of the Bundeswehr, the Bundeswehrverband acts as an apolitical and financially independent representative for over 240,000 members. Comprised of four *Landesverbände* (state associations), the Bundeswehrverband has veterans groups and offices throughout Germany. Formed on 5 April 1991 with an initial 6,500 members in Magdeburg, Landesverband Ost (Eastern State Association) is the newest state association, representing the states of the former GDR. *Kameradschaften*, veterans groups, give former East German army officers an official, military forum from which to tell their side of unification and German history. They are also "training grounds" in which former NVA officers explore the transition from socialism to capitalism, come to terms with unification, and learn how to become good citizens in a completely different state and social system, a system seen before unification as the enemy.

After unification, the Bundeswehrverband, in the spirit of the "Army of Unity," extended membership to those former NVA officers who were not active members of the Stasi (Staatssicherheitsdienst), the East German secret police. In May 2000 there were 12,500 former NVA soldiers affiliated with the Bundeswehrverband; by June 2006 membership had dropped to about eight thousand, through a combination of frustration, political exhaustion, protest against German involvement in the war in Kosovo and Serbia, and deaths. Many officers viewed the veterans groups as a forum to express political discontent and as spaces where they can "return" to the NVA and reactivate social and hierarchical networks taken from them after unification.

As I see them, NVA veterans groups are state-sanctioned spaces of military performance that allow men to regain their identities as both East Germans and military officers, to become again what they once were, even if only for a limited time in a circumscribed space. *Kameradschaften* function as a space in which to (re)create their identities as former NVA officers, critique the present, and negotiate their roles in the new German state. In addition to providing NVA officers an outlet to voice political concerns, veterans groups act as "sites" of memory by allowing former soldiers to come together to remember the past and discuss the present and future. As such, they form what Winter and Sivan call "networks of complimentarity," where members remember and share complimentary memories and experiences face to face and recreate past identities (2000: 32). However, I argue that through this seemingly benevolent process of identity re-creation and social networking, veterans' groups provide the German state and military a convenient "foil" for the creation of new forms of German state and military identity, allowing for the perpetuation of Cold War

ideas about the NVA, the legitimation of West Germany as the "true" Germany, and the Bundeswehr as the inheritor of "proper" military identity.

One of the primary reasons for participation in the *Kameradschaften* is political representation and resistance to West German policies. As the only officially sanctioned organization representing soldiers' rights, the Bundeswehrverband provides former NVA officers with a forum from which to air their grievances. In theory, the Bundeswehrverband provides former officers with a chance to have their concerns heard by government officials. In practice, however, they are more often ignored, or diverted and put on hold. Attempts on the part of former NVA veterans groups to press for a review of their status have, for the most part, met with a cold reception on the part of the German government and military. In a 1999 statement summing up the overall attitude of West German elites, Rudolph Scharping, the SPD minister of defense, made clear the Bundeswehr's position on the complaints and concerns of NVA officers: "Ten years after unification, it is not in the interest of the majority of Germans to provide former NVA soldiers with rights that would make it seem as if they had served in the Bundeswehr their entire lives" (Becker 1999).

"AS GERMANS AMONG GERMANS": SOLDIERS, HISTORY, AND CITIZENSHIP

While many meetings of the veterans groups focused on local problems and activities, debates concerning the ongoing process of integration, rights, status, and financial prospects were often contentious and embittered. In an address at the 23 March 2000 meeting of the Kameradschaft Ehemalige Rostock, tensions over the "status question," the symbolic coding of NVA officers as "non-German," and the view of the Ministry of Defense of NVA officers as "Foreign Veterans" finally boiled over into a public expression of discontent, anger, and frustration. The meeting was large and well organized, and the NVA veterans group was well connected to the local press. At least three hundred people were in attendance, and a small band played traditional German military marches to rev up the crowd. As the band pointedly played "Ich hatt' einen Kameraden"—"I had a Comrade," a traditional German military song—Gerd Richter, the chairman of the Rostock veterans, took the podium. I quote at length from his address, since it sums up the feelings of disenchantment, anger, and frustration felt by NVA officers.

Reading from an open letter that was to be sent to the West German colonel in charge of the Bundeswehrverband, Richter read in a loud, clear voice:

> We want to underline the fact that no one is above or outside the current laws, and German law applies to every German with equal force concerning content and applicability.
>
> We demand the same for ourselves. We are concerned about equality and our equal treatment as German soldiers. We are concerned with the continued project of the internal unity of our German people.

There has to be a stop to the banning of parts of our biographies from the life of our people. No politician will be able to reach our heads or our hearts if, for purely political reasons, he does not recognize us as German soldiers with the same equality as soldiers of the current German army.

Political opportunism is damaging German unity, and we are no longer willing, ten years after the unification of both German states and its people, to put up with discrimination, belittlement, insults, and the limiting of our legal rights.

We declare our strong resistance to these actions. We want the unity of our people, but with legal equality as Germans among Germans. We call for the state to recognize us as German soldiers. In our opinion, it makes no sense that our fathers and grandfathers, who, in the service of a German government that exploited their oath as soldiers, used them to overrun peoples and states, kill or injure people, and destroy property, may call themselves German soldiers, use their ranks and wear their medals and awards. And they are allowed to sit next to us in this organization as German soldiers, while we, as German soldiers as well, who never attacked other peoples or countries, are officially denied the right to call ourselves German soldiers.

It is incomprehensible to us that the German government and the Bundeswehr accept soldiers of the Polish, Czech, and Hungarian armies as equals, with their ranks, military diplomas, and state awards, while we, who served and carried out military duties with these same soldiers for decades, went to the same military academies, and in some cases, received the same awards on the same day, are denied this respect as Germans from Germans. This goes against all logic.

We are Germans according to birth, ethnicity, and fatherland. It was not us, but rather, our fathers and grandfathers that led us into wars that were lost. In the end, it was they who gave the victors the possibility to divide our country, which allowed for the political developments in the two halves of Germany.

The East German state was either our place of birth or our new home. We could not choose another one, we belonged to it. Seventeen million Germans could not leave it. The other German state would not have been able to survive it, and German land would have been given up.

We remained true to our homeland, served this separate German state and protected it.

We protected the path of our people. We served the will of our people and the laws of the last freely elected government of the German Democratic Republic, up until the peacefully accomplished unification of the Germans. Without a military revolt.

We were German soldiers aware of our duty, and always acted in the interests of our people, never against it. We performed our military service honorably and with a sense of duty, and we were honored for our service, as is common in all armies on earth. That was our life as German soldiers (Richter 2000).

Richter's address was greeted with sustained applause and seemingly universal approval. Throughout the speech, and throughout my fieldwork, former officers stated that they wanted to be treated as "Germans among Germans," as equal citizens, not as "second-class" citizens. This was a call for inclusion in the German state as well as the German "Volk," the German nation; they demanded full acceptance and treatment as German citizens. This feeling of being "inferior" or "non-Germans", sets the stage for political anomie, disengagement, distrust in the democratic process, and a possible move towards nativist politics, the extreme right, and xenophobia, engendered, as they see it, by West German rules, laws, and practices of exclusion. It is the danger of winding up in

a "social dead end" that the SPD politician Kolbow warned of in his address to the Bundestag in 1990.

"UNIFICATION HAS RUINED MY LIFE:" THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE MILITARY OTHER

While the employment futures of many East German citizens after unification looked uncertain and bleak (Berdahl 1999; Flockton, Kolinsky, and Pritchard 2000), this situation was exacerbated for NVA officers, whose military careers were now over. This was particularly true for officers above the rank of lieutenant colonel, who were deemed too close to the former East German government to continue on in the military. Max, a former lieutenant colonel in the NVA artillery, in a 1999 interview summed up the sense of frustration, marginalization, and disbelief concerning the symbolic status of NVA officers. Although unable to find work, Max claimed to be more financially secure than many other former officers, since he received a "mini pension," and his wife had full-time employment which supported the family. Despite this, he still felt like a "second-class" citizen:

> First of all I feel, well, I live well, but I feel like a second-class person (*Mensch zweiter Klasse*); I live well, better than before really, I don't have as many burdens. I get sort of an ersatz pension, a mini-pension, but I can live from it, and since my wife is fully employed, we live very well actually, that's the truth. But what the Federal Government has done is a bad thing. We are not to be recognized; we can't say "lieutenant-colonel or colonel, retired." This is a question of status and it hasn't been solved. If I had been a Nazi officer, or even an SS officer, then I would be greeted as such, with my SS rank and my name, or as a colonel of the Bundeswehr. When I heard this I couldn't contain my surprise that this really happens, that this is the way it is done at meetings; these officers are recognized. In mid-March, Poland and Hungary will join NATO; these officers, who were "communist enemies" of NATO, who are lieutenant colonels and captains, both active and retired, they are still officers. It is only us who are no longer officers, and that isn't right. It is unequal treatment of the first degree, and I don't understand it.

Max's narrative expresses the contradictory nature of unification for NVA officers, both their erasure from history and what they see as a misrepresentation of their service. After the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and Soviet Union, officers of Warsaw Pact militaries simply "switched over" into the new militaries of their states, maintaining their positions and rank. East German officers, on the other hand, lost their state, their military, and their status as soldiers, and their service was compared to the atrocities of the Wehrmacht and SS. While Max admits that he is better off materially, it is the lack of status and recognition, and that former Wehrmacht and SS officers are treated with respect, that trouble him most.

I interviewed Manfred at his home in an eastern district of Berlin in 1999. At age sixty-three, Manfred was an imposing figure—tall, stern, and possessed of both an unwavering gaze and commanding voice. It was easy to imagine him

commanding soldiers, and he was clearly accustomed to commanding respect. Manfred told me about his life in the NVA as a colonel and tank commander until a back injury precipitated a move to a training center, and then a position in the civil defense forces. He also spoke of his life after unification; he had been able to travel, and had visited the United States. While happy about certain opportunities he now enjoyed, he still felt an overwhelming dissatisfaction and despair about his life after unification: "I'm sixty-three-years old, and spent my entire life working in one form or another. My career in the NVA was work. Since unification, I haven't had a job. I've applied to over 120 positions, but have been turned down for each one. I believe it is because I was a career NVA officer. No one wants to hire us once they see "NVA" on the job application. I've just applied for a job at Tempelhof Airport—it's for a baggage handler job that pays DM 13,- per hour. I'm sixty-three and in poor health, and I'm hoping to be a baggage handler. Unification ruined my life."

As Manfred told me his job history, he began to cry. Upon a return trip to Berlin in 2006, I learned that Manfred had died, still unemployed. His was a narrative I heard from the majority of former officers; based on their age and service and training in the NVA, they had an extremely difficult time finding employment after unification. If they found jobs, NVA officers often worked as watchmen, security guards, or truck drivers; very few found what they considered to be suitable employment. Hans, whose experiences were similar to Manfred's, spoke with bitter irony about his job search: "I tried for a very long time to find a job, and no one would look at me. Once they saw 'NVA' on my application, it was all over. I tried for a couple of years to find a job suited to my qualifications, but I couldn't find anything. As a result, my health declined; I had a heart attack, which kept me from working. I finally did manage to find a job as a security guard at the new Allied Museum in Berlin. I found it ironic that the only job I could get was guarding a museum dedicated to the Allies and their 'victory' in the Cold War." NVA officers blamed their experiences on a combination of political, economic, and symbolic factors: they were quick to conceptualize their unemployment as a concerted effort on the part of West German elites to marginalize them because of their membership in the SED and their positions as officers in an anti-fascist army.

In 1995, the "Working Group for the History of the National People's Army" (a research group comprised of former NVA officers and military academy professors) distributed a series of surveys and questionnaires to over ten thousand former NVA officers. The results of the survey showed that based on their experiences since unification, a large majority (87.8 percent) considered themselves second-class citizens because of service in the NVA. Additionally, over half (53.4 percent) complained that they were denied jobs specifically by virtue of having served in the NVA. As a result, their living standard declined, placing increased pressure and instability upon themselves and their families (Fischer 1995). As incomes declined while rents rose, many former officers and their

families were forced to move into low-income housing, either on the outskirts of Berlin or in areas they considered unattractive. In many former officers' households, wives have been forced to bear the brunt of the instability brought about by drastic cuts in pensions, by finding well-paying jobs to support themselves and their husbands, a further blow to the identity and self-perception of former officers.

Economic marginalization is not seen simply as the product of market forces; NVA officers argue that they have been deliberately penalized through reductions in their pensions. This was a serious point of contention for these officers, who stated publicly that they have been mistreated, driven by the political desire to inflict a "*Strafrente*"—punishment pension—on them for having served in the NVA. For example, in 1999, while West German army officers were legally allowed to earn an additional 120 percent of their pensions after retirement, the pensions of NVA officers were capped, allowing them to only earn DM650 in addition to their pensions. On average, NVA pensions were between 30 and 65 percent of that of a West German officer. The official reason given for the discrepancy concerned the number of accumulated "pension points" (Holger Reimer, Deutscher Bundeswehr Landesverband Ost, personal communication 1999). NVA officers, even though they paid into pension plans in the GDR, did not receive points in the former Federal Republic. Service time in the NVA was declared invalid and not included in the calculation of pensions after unification, leaving former NVA officers entitled only to points gained after unification. This, combined with the very high unemployment rate of former officers, made their economic situations tenuous, creating a great amount of stress for themselves and their families.

While I discussed the *Strafrente* with Arndt, who retired from the NVA as a major after thirty years of service, he quickly sketched out his financial situation. After taxes, he and his wife had approximately DM 1400,- per month to cover all of their expenses; his savings had been wiped out, and he had not been able to find a job. It was an embarrassing moment, because he then asked me how much I received per month as part of my fellowship. I replied that I received DM1680,- monthly. This did not go over well: "This is nothing personal, but you're here as a student making more money than I do, even though I was an officer in the NVA and spent thirty years of my life working and contributing to my savings. I have a family. I don't hold this against you—but this—I don't hold it against you, but it's very hard for me to hear this and accept it."

As of 2006, after years of petitions, complaints, and lobbying, the "pension issue" seems to have been resolved, and pensions for former NVA officers have approached the national average, through the gradual accumulation of pension points after 1990. Despite this, Herbert Becker said to me: "Sure, it's cleared up for the most part. It only took them sixteen years to do it. How do you think we feel, and feel about all of the money we lost at the time we needed it the most?"

"WE'RE THE JEWS OF THE NEW GERMANY": HEROIC VICTIMHOOD, FALLEN ELITES, AND THE SLIPPERINESS OF HISTORY AND MEMORY

Just as the German government and military conflates the dictatorships of the Third Reich and the GDR, so too do some NVA officers conflate the German government and the expansionism, policies, and atrocities of the Third Reich and World War II. While Richter's speech to the *Kameradschaft* in Rostock can be seen as an official demand for inclusion, as well as a public, political statement of disillusionment and resistance, some NVA officers expressed their frustration and alienation through a disturbing and troubling form of historical memory. The strongest expression of disenchantment and alienation by former officers constructs their experiences as victims not only of post-unification politics, but of the Third Reich as well.

Over cigarettes and beers with a group of officers from the local *Kameradschaft* at a bar in Hohenschönhausen, a working class district in eastern Berlin where a large number of former officers live, Uwe, who spent his career in the NVA as a motorized infantry lieutenant colonel, looked around, and in somewhat hushed tones stated: "We've had ten years of abuse and belittlement at the hands of the government; we can't use our ranks, they've taken our careers and our pensions from us, and we can't get jobs. I tell you—we're the Jews of the new Germany."

Through the use and deployment of the Holocaust and the remembrance of German military atrocities, some NVA officers place their experiences after unification squarely within a framework in which the Third Reich, the World War II German military, West Germany, and the post-war Bundeswehr, are conflated, made to seamlessly blend into one another. Klaus-Dieter Baumgarten, the commanding general of the GDR Border Guards, and the deputy minister of defense of the GDR, was sentenced to a six-year prison sentence for his role in the deaths of East German citizens who attempted to escape the GDR. As the commanding general, he signed the yearly *Schiessbefehl*, the "Order to Fire" on people attempting to cross the border "illegally" from east to west. During a conversation at his home, when I asked him about his experiences after unification and his criminal trial, he became agitated and angry: "I've been sentenced to six years in prison for following legitimate orders and giving legitimate orders. Keep this in mind: I was a Red General. If they (the Bundeswehr) could have used the Wehrmacht's Commissar Order to simply march me out and shoot me, execution style, they would have, believe me."

When asked if they shared these views, most NVA officers I queried found it offensive and off the mark. Baumgarten was described by a number of other officers as a "hardliner" and a "real Worker's and Farmer's General,"[4] whose

[4] *Ein echter Arbeiter und Bauern General*, that is, a peasant who became an officer, and who is therefore uneducated. This term of derision plays off of the official GDR motto, *Der Arbeiter und Bauern Staat*, "The Worker's and Peasant's State."

views were not to be taken seriously. Egbert Fischer, chairman of the "Working Group for the History of the NVA" said that while he had heard some officers claim they were the "Jews of the New Germany," he found it "an offensive and preposterous statement, a statement of ignorance and desperation." Despite these protestations, a fairly high number of officers said they understood why someone would make such a statement; they simply found it "exaggerated."

Given that the GDR was officially an "anti-Fascist" state, NVA officers were trained and served in an atmosphere heavily influenced by anti-fascist and Soviet experiences during World War II, historical memories which served to frame memories and points of reference in regard to the Bundeswehr and their treatment after unification. For some NVA officers, the anti-Semitism and anti-communism of the Third Reich, and the World War II "Specter of Judeo-Bolshevism" (Bartov 1992; Herf 1997) that framed the Wehrmacht and SS eradication of Jews and communists, are conflated into the Bundeswehr's policies towards them. By considering themselves the objects of "Judeo-Bolshevism," NVA officers see themselves as victims because they were communists and because they see similarities in their treatment and that of Jews in the Third Reich. As they frame their memories and experiences, the narratives of these officers slip, moving seamlessly from a "loser" to a "victim" narrative (Assmann and Frevert 1999: 42–44). They thus relate the Cold War and their experiences after unification to the Holocaust and the actions and atrocities of the World War II German military, conflating the Bundeswehr, the Wehrmacht, and the SS, and seeing themselves as the victims of all three. They draw upon what Alison Landsberg calls "prosthetic memories," imagined experiences of past traumas—such as the Holocaust and the treatment of Jews in the Third Reich—which they themselves never directly experienced, but which shape their experiences of trauma in the present (2004:25). Given their perceptions of their treatment, this is simply further proof for them that (West) Germany is a continuation of Nazi Germany and the Bundeswehr a continuation of the Wehrmacht and the SS, and that what they were trained to believe in the GDR and NVA was true. For this reason, Baumgarten was able to speak without any sort of irony about the "Commissar Order," and other officers could equate themselves with both Communist *and* Jewish victims of Nazi Germany *and* post-unification Germany. As Bartov, Grossman, and Nolan write, the Holocaust has become the universal symbol for inhumanity, atrocity, and trauma (2002: xxiii). Only by invoking the memory of the Holocaust can some officers register and make sense of their experiences, condemning the German government and military in the strongest way they know.

As became clear through discussions around these points, these same officers see a further similarity in the symbolic marking of Jews and NVA officers. As they see it, both groups are coded as "non-German," and removed from the German "blood line," thus removing them from inclusion in the "family" of

the nation by virtue of blood, thereby making them "foreign." Both are denied certain economic and civil rights, assigned symbols to mark them as something outside of civil society (the Star of David for Jews and former medals and awards for NVA officers), and assigned a certain "essential" quality to their identities. Many officers also believed the German government was attempting to achieve a "biological solution" (*biologische Lösung*) to the "NVA problem," that is, refusing to listen to their concerns, and in the process waiting for them to die of old age and illness. As such, many connected this "Biological Solution" to the "Final Solution" (*Endlösung*). This sort of thinking and "theorizing" fits well with Boyer's (2006) discussion of conspiracy theories among former East German citizens as a way of uncovering the "truth" behind political and historical events leading up to, and shaping, unification.

While some NVA officers may perceive and construct certain symbolic similarities to Jewish victims of the Third Reich, the lived experiences of victimization are in no way similar. Despite their feelings of victimhood, they are in no danger of physical violence by the state. They can choose to not wear medals (few if any actually do), are not legally prohibited from finding work (even if they have a difficult time doing so), and while they may be—at least in the eyes of the military—symbolically "non-German," this coding does not in any way have the same impact or level of violence as the coding of "non-German" that Jews and other minorities in Germany faced during the Third Reich. This coding, while keenly felt as an insult by former NVA officers, is more of a form of military "needling" against a former enemy than an explicit act of genocidal violence on the part of the German state. While these policies are troubling in their use of historical memory, they are ultimately a way for the Bundeswehr and the German state to claim an essential legitimacy in the face of historical competition, to remind NVA officers that they lost the Cold War, and that they were, in effect, "traitors" to the German nation.

The linkage of the Holocaust, Cold War rivalries, and post-unification experience by some NVA officers fits well with Todorov's observation concerning the "usurpation of the narrative of heroism by the narrative of victimhood" (quoted in Bartov, Grossman, and Nolan 2002: xxiii). Many NVA officers see themselves as heroes—for their service in an anti-fascist military, and for the fact that they never attacked another country—and as victims of a state and military that to many is a continuation of the Third Reich. They also see themselves as heroes for not preventing German unification, for allowing the GDR to peacefully dissolve. As a number of officers made clear to me, they "could have stopped unification if they had wanted to." It is also an attempt to lend themselves a certain historical importance by equating themselves with victims of fascism, which lends legitimacy to their service and duty in the NVA: in their eyes, it is proof that West Germany was, and is, a fascist state. From their perspective, the only way to make sense of unification, and their treatment after unification, is to fit it within a narrative that they already

know, one that explains both the "inherent" fascism of the Federal Republic and their own roles as the defenders of a new type of German state and military created to counter fascism.

UNIFICATION, SOLDIERS, AND THE MEMORY OF WORLD WAR II

German unification was not simply the joining of two halves of a long-separated whole. It was the fusing of two diametrically opposed systems, two distinctly different ways of seeing the world, the state, economics, the military, and soldiers. In all of this, memories of World War II and the actions of German soldiers loomed large, playing a key role in the shaping of the two German states. The Bundeswehr is a democratic army, fully integrated into the state and subordinate to the civilian government. It is not a military of a totalitarian state, like former German militaries, including the NVA. And despite the claims of many NVA officers, the Bundeswehr is not a fascist military, or a direct carryover from the Wehrmacht. The Bundeswehr has gone to great lengths to distance itself from the crimes of the Wehrmacht and the SS (see Wette 2006). This does not mean, however, that rightwing, conservative, and even Neo-Nazi sentiments do not exist in the Bundeswehr, or that—unofficially, but still powerfully—these sentiments have not influenced the Bundeswehr's treatment of the NVA since unification. Nor does it mean that these same sentiments do not find a certain legitimation through the de-legitimation of the NVA, and the naming and coding of the NVA as an illegal military. It is the daily, active, use of the memory of World War II soldiers and ideas about "proper" soldiers that serve to marginalize East German officers, precluding their use as "tradition." This is one of the paradoxes of the treatment of NVA officers after unification: despite official distancing from the Nazi-era past, the past continues to play a major role in the present. This is seen in both West German policies and East German resistance.

In a contradictory process, the German government and military have stripped NVA officers of their distinction as "German soldiers," yet, by allowing them to take part in *Kameradschaften* meetings, they are, at least unofficially, recognized as German soldiers. From the point of view of NVA officers, however, this is precisely the problem: their status is unofficial. They demand official recognition as both Germans and soldiers, and as German soldiers who did not start or fight in a war, like their fathers and grandfathers did, as Richter stated in his address at the Rostock *Kameradschaft*. They want to be recognized as good men, soldiers, and citizens, and they want to be seen as good men vis-à-vis the Bundeswehr, which they view as a continuation of the military of their fathers and grandfathers. Veterans groups are not only sites of memory and performance, but militarized masculinity as well; they can show Germany that they are indeed good, proper men, worthy of being considered German, and in their eyes, perhaps the best German men, soldiers, and citizens because they did not prevent unification.

NVA officers claim they have suffered a significant loss in symbolic prestige, and feel that their identities have been taken from them. Symbolic loss equals a loss of identity, but also an *excess* of identity. As they counter this loss, they become more and more the "NVA" of stereotype and the imagination—a dangerous spiral, politically: the more they try to keep their identity or address the "absence" of their identity, the more their identity outruns and defines them, further marginalizing them. The more they attempt to redress or counter their "loss," the more they resist the negative representations and codifications of the Bundeswehr and the (West) German state, the more they become the NVA of the West German imaginary. This itself is seen as evidence that they are not fully integrated because *they* do not seek full integration but rather a return to the past. According to this logic, their marginalization is their own fault, and they are victims by their own doing.

In general, veterans groups provide officers a space where they can be soldiers again. But meetings of former NVA officers are exactly that—meetings where *former* members of the NVA come together. While the Bundeswehrverband provides NVA officers a forum to air their concerns, the *Kameradschaften* allow these officers to come together in order to further marginalize them. While this may not have been the original, official intention, in practice, the unintentional result is a network of NVA veterans groups whose members are former NVA officers who come together as the former NVA. As such, they are viewed as *still* the NVA: still unreformed Communists, still hardliners, still militarists to those on the outside looking in. They are still the NVA, still the "illegal" soldiers of an "illegal" state, and by continuing to come together, they are still the Cold War enemy of the democratic, anti-communist West who cannot let go of the past. And while they are still portrayed and seen this way inside the Bundeswehr, outside of the military, participation in the veterans groups lends credence to the notion of the "Army of Unity." Although inclusion in the Bundeswehrverband paints a picture of unification, of welcome into the new, unified Germany (which strengthens the German government's stated desire of full unification and integration), it is only that—an image. It allows an illusion of integration that lets the Bundeswehr shore up the image of the "Army of Unity," making it appear that even in the most contested arena of the Cold War, unification proceeded smoothly and former enemies come together as Germans among Germans.

The German government constructs and presents the East German dictatorship, and the actions of the NVA and Border Guards, as equal to, and in many ways worse, than the dictatorship and atrocities of the Third Reich, Wehrmacht, and SS (McAdams 2001; Niven 2002). Just as the GDR is constructed by West German elites as part of the "abject history" of Germany (Cooke 2005: 52), so too are NVA and Border Guards officers the "abject men" of German history and military tradition. In this instance, state formation, military tradition, and legitimacy are transmitted through the constructions, memories, and

representations of certain types of soldiers. "Positive" military traditions of honor, courage, bravery, and loyalty are based on soldiers who fought and killed in war, rather than soldiers who did not fight or kill in a major war, even if they served a dictatorial government. In his memoir, *Two Armies, One Fatherland* (1995), Jörg Schönbohm, the Bundeswehr general sent to the GDR in the months prior to unification to disband and restructure the NVA, comments that in a discussion with former NVA generals, they reiterated the fact that as part of the Warsaw Pact, they had helped maintain peace and stability in Europe. "Yes, this may have been true," he wrote, "but I had to keep reminding them that they were still Communists."

As the German state attempts to solidify political and historical legitimacy and deal with the East German dictatorship, state and military legitimization are connected to the past and present via soldiers, men who either "fought" for Germany, regardless of the fact that they fought for a criminal government, or did not fight for Germany, or rather, the "right" Germany. Contentious debates continue concerning Wehrmacht and SS soldiers and whether or not they committed war crimes—the recent controversies surrounding the Wehrmachtausstellung speak to this (see Bartov, Grossmann, and Nolan 2002)—but there is no debate concerning the criminal nature of the NVA. In no way is the above an attempt to whitewash the actions or history of the NVA and Border Guards. Rather, it is to question the Bundeswehr's and the German state's use of the history, memory, and idealization of the Wehrmacht and SS in the construction of state and military identity, and notions of full "Germanness" and citizenship in the unification process.

The experiences of former NVA officers, and the sorts of practices and policies enacted by the German state and military, serve as a model for understanding how states deal with former soldiers, particularly if these soldiers were seen as the "enemy" or "losers" of a war, whether hot or cold. This model could prove useful when analyzing the situations and experiences of former soldiers in states such as Iraq, where the dissolution of the Iraqi army and the Baath Party has had disastrous consequences, or possibly even North and South Korea should they ever unify. The German experience serves as a cautionary tale of how state actors should and should not design "reunification" or reintegration strategies for former soldiers, unless, of course, the desired goal is social and political marginalization. The experiences of former NVA officers allow us to examine how soldiers are imagined and represented, how these representations work in conjunction with state and military legitimation, and how these representations affect real people in real situations. It is an insight into how a state celebrates victory and treats its military "has-beens."

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