

# **HISTORY LOOMS... RESOURCES, RESTRICTIONS, AND PERSPECTIVES ON MILITARY SOCIOLOGY IN GERMANY**

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The field of military sociology necessitates great deal of self-reflection due to its having strong institutional and personnel ties to the armed forces. This fact also holds true for the author of this article. At present I am employed at the Bundeswehr Center for Military History and Social Sciences (ZMSBw) as a senior researcher in military sociology. The ZMSBw is the central research institution of the Bundeswehr for military history and social sciences, with the latter combining military sociology and security policy. The task of our center is to conduct historical and social science studies, which are assigned by the Federal Ministry of Defense. Research is conducted according to precise scientific standards and the Basic Law for the Republic of Germany guarantees freedom of teaching and research. The ZMSBw Service Regulation states that: “The free and independent scientific research of military history and social science issues is the core activity of the ZMSBw.” Based on these guidelines our studies are first presented to the ministry, and later published for the academic community and the public. A large proportion of the (admittedly few) military sociology studies in Germany originate from our center, which actually puts me in a rather difficult situation, due to the fact that in addition to being a participant, I am also tasked with analyzing the overall situation of military sociology in Germany, listing its strengths and weaknesses and suggesting future programs. Although it is my task to assess our own work at the center, I hope that these assessments are sufficiently objective, fair and helpful.

## **1. Introduction: The marginal position of military sociology in the German academic landscape**

There can be no argument about this assessment: At present military sociology has a marginal professional existence in Germany (as well as at the international level). This has not always been the case. During World War II, American social scientists conducted numerous studies for the United States

armed forces. This was a significant moment in the history of empirical social science as the research that was undertaken provided an important impetus for further developments in the general social sciences – in particular for methodological approaches, but also with regard to concepts and theories.

In Germany, military sociology studies have been conducted since the 1960's. In this context, the works by the *Evangelische Studiengemeinschaft* (Picht 1965/66)<sup>1</sup> as well as the studies of the Cologne group under the guidance of René König (1980: 206f.) are of great importance. These studies have become important references for military sociology literature to this day. Later, military sociology research increasingly fell under the auspices of the institutes and agencies within the Bundeswehr. Especially the former Bundeswehr Institute of Social Sciences (SOWI), which conducted military sociology research, or more specifically empirical social research, for almost four decades (for an overview see Dörfler-Dierken, Kümmel 2016). In recent years, social scientists working in universities have expressed a renewed interest in military-related topics. However, the low degree of institutionalization indicates that a comprehensive, continuous and substantial presence is still missing. Internationally, military sociology is prominently represented by the Research Committee 01 of the International Sociological Association, but there is no such representation at the national level. The German Sociological Association (DGS) currently consists of 36 sections (plus additional committees and associations) but no specific body dealing explicitly with military sociology issues. This also applies to the German Association for Political Science (DVPW). At present there is no department chair at any German university-level institutions for military sociology. (Potsdam University has a chair for military history, which is unique in Germany).

There are several reasons for the marginal status of military sociology. The reservations of many academics in dealing with military topics are well-known, albeit certainly unfortunate. Some researchers tend to distance themselves from the subject as it is a well-known fact that in a university environment military sociology is not career-enhancing discipline, especially since the introduction of the civil clauses at many universities that limit, or even outright prevent cooperation with the armed forces. Nevertheless, in the following, I will not examine the academic or university environment, nor probe its structures and actors in order to discover the reasons for the marginal position of military sociology. I will instead focus on the weaknesses of military sociology itself. The manner in which military sociology is pursued

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<sup>1</sup> At the request of the author the in-text referencing style is used.

in Germany hinders a greater response among social scientists. After all, the alleged reservations of the academic community were also the same justifications that were long given for the neglect of attention paid to the topics of security policy and war. Even so, analysis of security policies as well as military historiography has seen a remarkable boost in recent decades. Yet, for obvious reasons, military conflicts have always played an important role in historical research – and in Germany’s historical research in particular. Over the past 20 years, the status of military history has considerably improved among German historical scientists; it has become quite popular and has started to have an influence on the general public as well as on other disciplines. Although the focus continues to be on the Second World War and the Wehrmacht, the interest in other eras and topics, such as the First World War, the Cold War, the Bundeswehr and the GDR National People’s Army is increasing. Likewise social scientists in Germany are also investigating topics of security, strategy and war in a more intensive and varied manner than was the case a few decades ago. The increase in security and strategic studies reflects this trend. The most prominent and certainly the most controversial discussion in Germany at the moment concerns the theory of new wars. In the aftermath of the Balkan Wars, 09/11 and the emerging war in Afghanistan, Herfried Münkler (2015) provided a template for discussion and reflection that went far beyond the circle of specific academic discussion. In addition, there is a large number of studies on the Transatlantic, and moreover on the European dimension of security policy (often supported by European institutions). Despite this expanding research activity, many security policy studies contain a fatal flaw that could actually prove advantageous for military sociology. In many works, the armed forces continue to be a black box. Too little attention is paid to the inherent logic and the dynamics of military force. As a result, younger researchers, particularly those of Anglo-Saxon origin, tend to reflexively demand the use of military means, without always being fully aware of the implications and limits. This indicates that a sounding board for the sociological analysis of the military does in fact exist. Accordingly, this paper identifies the underlying causes for the marginal position of military sociology research, which is mostly attributable to the condition and structure of the discipline itself. It is the objective of this paper to highlight certain potentials and to provide recommendations for the improvement of the academic standing of military sociology. To this end, I seek to characterize the strengths of the available research as well as to specify the existing weaknesses and deficiencies. I will then offer perspectives with regard to how military sociology research can be carried out in order to encourage a greater response within the social sciences.

## 2. The strengths of military sociology research

### 2.1. Military sociology – a modern social science?

Science likes to give the impression that it is intersubjective and timeless. And yet, it is obvious that contemporary influences as well as influences outside the academic environment have a great impact on modern research. Remarkably enough – and despite its neglect – military sociology fulfills certain essential characteristics that satisfy the current criteria of modern science.

#### **Mixed Methods**

There are a number of projects in military sociology that are based on a single methodological procedure – which means that they are either quantitative or qualitative in nature. There does not seem to be one dominant procedure. Due to the prevalence of applied statistics there is an increased demand for numbers and facts. One such component is the social science survey. Nevertheless qualitative surveys continue to play a large role in various studies. Compared to other fields of research, the percentage of projects that combine social science methods is remarkably high. Triangulation of methods is a standard procedure. For instance, it is often used for the monitoring of deployments abroad as well as for the analysis of multinational structures and cooperation. Relevant projects regularly combine questionnaire surveys with interviews and group discussions and also incorporate participant observations. The result is a more comprehensive empirical study, in which different perspectives supplement and correct one another. However, as is well known, it is easier to demand the triangulation of research methods than it is to implement them. After all, what we are dealing with here is a multiplicity of methods, theories and concepts of science. When examining military sociology literature, it is possible to identify two ways of combining qualitative and quantitative procedures (Flick 2004, chapters 5 & 6): The way used for projects in which qualitative procedures facilitate quantitative studies is to approach a new or, at least, largely unknown field of research first by using qualitative methods. In the process, the first impressions and the results that are obtained will serve as a basis for the generation of future theses. In the second way of research, these theses are once again taken up and transformed into quantitative tools that will engender an empirical verification with the help of statistical procedures. The coexistence of both procedures on equal terms is even more demanding. For this purpose, it is necessary to identify

the strengths and weaknesses of the respective procedures and harmonize them. This requires continuous coordination throughout the entire research process. If these efforts prove successful, then the two methods will supplement each other in an almost ideal way. The quantitative procedures can be used to measure the results of the qualitative methods, verify them and then discern whether there are defining and less defining factors. Conversely, the results of the qualitative study supplement the figures and the data of quantitative. Each can illustrate certain contexts with the help of plausible examples and demonstrate various facets of the subject of research. Moreover, the results of the qualitative study can be used in cases where, in the course of research, further explanation is required but cannot be recorded due to the surveys having already been completed. For almost two decades now, the social science tools used to monitor deployments abroad has provided an impressive and successful combination of methods (cf. for instance Tomforde 2005; Seiffert *et al.* 2012; Keller, Biehl 2016). When evaluating the results, it is evident that, generally speaking, the qualitative studies based on interviews and group discussions tend to provide a more critical picture. Many soldiers seem to regard talks and discussions as the most suitable method for highlighting deficiencies and censuring conditions and actors. In contrast, the participants of surveys tend to provide more balanced and favorable judgments, which is probably due to the fact that the answer must fit within a closed scale and express an overall impression. The mixture of methods requires that researchers with different profiles and competences work together. This condition is largely fulfilled as members of different disciplines often work together on military sociology research projects.

### **Interdisciplinarity**

In Germany, as well as internationally, the term military sociology comprises a number of social science studies that are focused on the military as the object of study. Genuine sociological studies are included, although they are only one part of a diverse spectrum. Studies often take the form of political science analyses dealing with the organizational, the institutional and, above all, the security policy aspects of the armed forces. Military psychological studies constitute an independent field of research. They range from clinical and military medical studies to practical support concerning the selection of personnel, to motivational issues that are also relevant in military sociology contexts. These three core disciplines of military-related research are supplemented by other fields of research, including anthropology, which has

increased in significance in recent years as a result of international commitments. In Germany, theology also plays an important role in military-related research because of the institutional presence of the military chaplaincy. The interdisciplinarity utilized by military sociology makes academic cooperation a challenge, as the different disciplines are characterized by distinct approaches and standards. However, the exchange and the occasional controversies that arise are productive since they prevent research from getting mired in field-related details and debates. With regard to its multidisciplinary approach, military sociology in Germany shares a great deal in common with the research carried out in other countries – especially since it maintains a lively dialogue with scientists abroad.

### **Internationality**

In an almost exemplary fashion, military sociology satisfies the overarching requirements for the international exchange of ideas, transnational networks, and cooperation. A remarkable number of research projects are intended for the international research community or at least internationally coordinated. Studies involving multinational teams of researchers are quite common in military sociology. This naturally applies, to studies regarding multinational cooperation, whether it concerns the coordination of headquarters and units, or the implementation of operations abroad (Leonhard et al. 2008). Issues and topics concerning the western armies in general are analyzed using a transnational approach. This includes the attitudes of the population towards the armed forces and the security policy of the country (Ernst, Kernic 2002; Biehl *et al.* 2011) as well as the consequences of the transition from military conscription to a volunteer army (Haltiner 1998). National experiences inevitably correlate with international developments. Furthermore, military sociologists from Germany are well represented at international conferences where they present their research results. They are also involved in the relevant international associations (RC01, IUS, ERGOMAS). Thanks to the intensive exchange, concepts that are discussed at the international level quickly find their way into research on the Bundeswehr. In comparison to other European countries, German military sociology can be regarded as quite established. Germany is one of several military sociology hubs, together with Great Britain, and to some extent France, the Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands, Switzerland and other European countries. With its emphasis on interdisciplinarity, variety of methods, and consistent international orientation, the German branch is an exemplar in terms of military sociology research

in Europe. This is attested by the great variety of topics that German studies deal with, most of which are empirical in nature.

## 2.2. The wide range of topics of military sociology research in Germany

Military sociology has produced two topics of discourse that represent the essence of the subdiscipline, and that have an impact on other disciplines. The first is the study of civil-military relations, although a distinction must be made between the variants that are primarily based on political science and those that are primarily based on sociology. With regard to political science, the focus is on the nature of the relationship between military leaders and political decision-makers and the way in which this relationship should be organized. Thus emerges the dilemma that those possessing military power will always pose a threat to civilian policymakers. Therefore several questions arise: how best to enforce the primacy of politics and ensure the allegiance of the military? How best to prevent generals from exceeding their powers and using military power against civilian officeholders? At first glance, this debate does not seem to be very important in Germany. In recent German history, there have been only a few instances when the military interfered in politics. And with regard to the current situation, such fears are really quite negligible. Here, the opinion of Timothy Edmunds (2012: 269) applies:

*In most mature western democracies, the issue of civilian control is no longer really about the latent threat of military praetorianism or intervention of military actors into politics, if it ever was. Instead, the key questions and controversies of western civil-military relations have tended to be about appropriate division of responsibility between civil and military actors in the formulation and implementation of defence and security policy and the prosecution of war.*

Some observers in Germany are concerned that the military does not have enough input or adequate influence on political decisions directly concerning security policies and the armed forces. Whether it be the decision to suspend conscription, which despite all previous discussions, came quite unexpectedly for the armed forces (as well as for politicians and the public), or the various decisions regarding armaments or international deployments of military personnel – academic observers and the persons involved have repeatedly complained that there is a dearth of professional military advice in the decision-making processes. And yet, the leadership concept of the Bundeswehr, the

*Innere Führung* (leadership development and civic education), requires that military personnel think in political dimensions. *Innere Führung* concept is the result of historical experiences, and seeks to deeply integrate the military and its personnel into society. According to Janowitz's understanding of military professionalism, the concept of *Innere Führung* represents an army integrated into society because only an army that is compatible with the demands and requirements of a modern society. This normative requirement refers to the second, sociological, dimension of civil-military relations.

The sociological examination of civil-military relations focuses on the relationship between the armed forces and society. As military sociology research has convincingly demonstrated in recent decades, there is an intensive exchange between the civilian and military spheres. Therefore, the formerly much debated conflict between the alternatives of a "militarization of society" and a "civilization of the armed forces" has obviously been evaporated. Instead, research focuses on the question of what significance military force has or should be allowed to have in the society. Empirical studies show that, although the German armed forces are held in high regard, their deployment to operations is met with widespread reservations and disapproval domestically. This could be connected to the theory of a postheroic society developed by Edward Luttwak (1995), which was later popularized and elaborated upon in Germany by Herfried Münkler (2015). Münkler considers western societies to be conflict- and victim-averse as a result of certain secular processes occurring in the society. With regard to foreign and security policy activities of the country, German society is generally considered to be a strategic culture of restraint. Observers argue that, as a result of the historical experiences of the Second World War, Germany tends to refrain from applying military means, which is a characteristic that some observers – occasionally favorably (Krippendorff 2010) – describe as pacifist. Another, widely discussed thesis that is also related was introduced by former Federal President Horst Köhler, and is encapsulated in the buzzphrase "friendly indifference". This term is used to describe the assumed distance between the German people's living environment and the armed forces or the security policy. It is also implicitly based on the theory of the *civil-military gap*, which was formulated with the western states in mind by Peter Feaver and Richard Kohn in their influential treatise from 2001. This theory has also been intensively discussed in military sociology literature. Regarding the transition of the Bundeswehr from conscription to an all-volunteer army, there is also a concern that citizens will increasingly turn away from the armed forces and leave security and defense policy matters to political and military experts. In



contrast to these assessments, military sociology research does not propound the existence of a gap between society and the armed forces per se, but rather analyze a political gulf between the use of military means and its inadequate acceptance in society.

The lukewarm societal support for Bundeswehr missions abroad, in particular for combat operations such as in Afghanistan, certainly has had repercussions for the military personnel employed. This is confirmed by studies dealing with the situations of military personnel serving in international missions, as well as issues related to combat morale and has been continuously pursued internationally ever since. German research on these topics is more recent and dates back to the final stage of the East-West conflict. In recent years, there has been a considerable expansion of research efforts concerning these issues. The reason for this is the transition of the Bundeswehr to an “interventionist army” (Biehl 2008a), which – unlike the “Bundeswehr of the Bonn Republic” (Bald 1994) – defines itself increasingly through military missions.

The former Bundeswehr Institute of Social Sciences (SOWI), in particular, has conducted a number of studies on the operations in the Balkans and in Afghanistan with varying thematic orientations since the late 1990s. The resulting reports and articles confirm that the research being done in Germany addresses concerns that have arisen in international debates and introduces new emphases. Previous studies indicate that family support and social cohesion are very important for Bundeswehr soldiers. In comparison to other nations, German soldiers perceive latent ideology and task cohesion as exerting considerable influence on military motivation. This is probably an outgrowth of the Bundeswehr concept of *Innere Führung* (leadership development and civic education), which conveys the image of soldiers as “citizens in uniform” who think in political dimensions and are integrated into the society.

Another important thematic element of international and domestic military sociology studies concerns the integration of female military personnel. Discussion and research in this area have been conducted since the days of the East-West conflict. The topic thrived after all of the military careers in the Bundeswehr were opened to women in 2001. Surveys within the armed forces examining the climate of integration, the existing reservations among male and female military personnel, and the motives behind it are very important (Kümmel 2016). In addition, there has been a remarkably high number of studies on this topic prepared by researchers from outside the armed forces (Apelt 2010). This distinguishes the research on this topic from many other

subject areas. The broad academic interest might also be due to the fact that the military profession has traditionally been a male domain (Frevert 2001). When women are allowed to take up arms, it not only change the military profession, it changes the overall character of the armed forces as well. Role allocation of the sexes is renegotiated – at least to some degree. This process has been thoroughly examined by many studies on the integration of women into the Bundeswehr.

Another topic that has considerably increased in significance in Germany in recent years is human resource research. This field has been a core topic of research since the beginning of military sociology and has been explored in the works of René König (1968), who wrote articles on the recruitment of military personnel. If we consider the increasing demographic changes, the low level of youth unemployment in Germany, and the end of conscription, the questions of who can be recruited for military service, how they can be recruited and why they can be recruited, have become almost essential for the armed forces in recent times. Studies on the recruitment of personnel and personnel retention have begun to dominate the research portfolio of the Bundeswehr Center for Military History and Social Sciences. The interest focuses mostly on the motivational level and the reasons for choosing the military profession, but also deals with the reasons for staying away from the military. The studies examine different aspects: on the one hand, they refer to the general appeal of the Bundeswehr as an employer among young people. On the other, they focus on the internal military socialization and selection processes. They examine the motives for staying in or leaving the armed forces as well as personnel issues in specific careers and sectors. The findings are too varied to summarize in general terms. Essentially, however, they do show that the Bundeswehr does offer certain material and existential advantages, such as job security and good pay, as well as the attested and appreciated camaraderie, although at the same time, these are offset by the drawbacks regarding normative identification. For this reason, many do not consider the Bundeswehr to be an attractive employer because they are unable to identify with the military's core task, which is to display and provide military force. In view of the general reservations of the population mentioned earlier, it shows how the public perception of the armed forces has an impact on the overall appeal of the Bundeswehr as an employer – which is yet further proof of the social integration of the Bundeswehr, although this may seem paradoxical at first glance. In the field of human resource research, there is a considerable preponderance of internal studies, as this field is largely inaccessible to external researchers. The Bundeswehr permits studies on these

issues by external researchers only sporadically, if at all (see, however Haß 2016). There are, however, important contributions that have been made by external researchers on issues concerning the self-image of the military profession. As it turns out, the transition of the Bundeswehr from a defense to an interventionist army has had repercussions on the overall professional self-image of German military personnel (Leonhard 2007). Whether or not the ongoing combat operations promote the self-image of professional fighters removed from the societal and political context is still a matter of controversy in the literature. While some studies suggest that this tendency exists (Neitzel 2013), other sees hardly any changes (Pietsch 2012; Biehl 2014). Far less controversial, however, is the idea that the multinational character of the missions as well as the generally increasing multinational character of security and defense policies is becoming more and more important to the self-image of military personnel.

As far as research on military multinationality is concerned, German military sociology research can be regarded as broad-minded and innovative – and could even be considered as a leader in the field in some aspects. Initial studies on this topic were conducted as early as in the 1980s. Simultaneous to the formation of the French-German Brigade, French and German researchers studied military interactions, mutual perceptions, existing prejudices as well as cooperative experiences. The research regarding the German-Netherlands Corps was even more intensive and included several examinations and surveys. A detailed study on the Multinational Corps Northeast has also been conducted and arose as a result of a joint effort between Polish, Danish and German researchers. In addition, there are analyses of the multinational aspects of operations abroad (Leonhard *et al.* 2008) as well as studies on cooperation at SHAPE, the NATO strategic headquarters. The results suggest various advantages and disadvantages highlight certain conditions and reveal the overall effects of cooperation. The most striking aspect of the findings concerns the existing difficulties, which range from military hardware to equipment, doctrine and training. Moreover, insufficient language skills still prevent more in-depth integration. As a result the implementation of rules of engagement (ROE) during deployments, which sometimes stipulate the terms for military action in great detail, becomes problematic. Differences also exist in terms of military software: in respective concepts of hierarchy, there are diverging views on civil-military relations as well as different understandings of the relationship between political and military officials. Nevertheless there is a number of studies on multinationality in the military sphere, which show that there are various methods of and means of

overcoming these difficulties and facilitating military cooperation. Moreover this is the most obvious area where military cultures are similar in nature. But even in diverse military cultures there are tools that make cooperation easier – for instance utilization of a participatory leadership style that allows for the moderation of conflicts of different interests and cultures. The issue becomes more difficult if several groups of equal size are merged. An equal distribution of 50/50 from two nations promotes turf battles and conflicts over power and identity. Furthermore, it is easier to cooperate if the representatives of a nation focus on a common cause instead of seeking to represent their own national interests.

In addition to those topics that are the subject of military sociology studies in many countries, there are a number of topics that can be considered specifically German – I will highlight just two: There is a separate discourse dedicated solely to the Bundeswehr's *Innere Führung* leadership concept (including a yearbook and a journal, etc.). Social scientists have contributed to this discourse, including those who take a stand on the issue of *Innere Führung*. Nevertheless, these discussions are not intended for the broader social science audience, but are rather, first and foremost to be understood as contributions to organizational policy. The discussions and wealth of studies concerning the role of the military chaplaincy are also noteworthy. The reason for this is attributable to the institutional establishment of churches in the Bundeswehr. These debates, however, as well as the prominence of the *Innere Führung concept*, are also indicative of a certain sensitivity concerning the discussion of the use of military means in Germany where normative and ethical reaffirmation are continuously required.

The large number of topics and studies has yielded an abundance of empirical insights into the armed forces and their relationship with politics and society. The influential German-language textbook for military sociology (Leonhard, Werkner 2012) is a significant instance of this thematic wealth and empirical abundance. It is a collection of more than 20 thematic articles. In addition to the topics already mentioned, these articles explore the relationship between the military and the economy, as well as between the military and the media and explain the research on military leadership and military tradition. In addition, there are other topical introductions and overviews of military sociology research (Apelt 2010; Gareis, Klein 2008; Heins, Warburg 2004). German military sociology has offered valuable insights into many relevant questions of academic and public interest. The institutional proximity of the research has ensured the provision of sufficient resources. The results of these studies are also continuously and consistently provided

to politicians, to various ministries, and the armed forces. This assures that military sociology remains practical and relevant. These qualities are, unfortunately, often lacking in some of the university research studies. The applied nature of military sociology research has made the general public, over time, more aware of the field – a phenomenon that is confirmed by various media reports about studies, as well as in the annual reports of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces. Military sociologists are valued participants in the administrative and political decision-making process, especially if they themselves are members of the Bundeswehr. Their advice is heard, although not always followed. They are actors in the politico-military decision-making system. This strength, however, is at the same time also a major weakness of military sociology in Germany.

### **3. The weaknesses of military sociology research**

#### **3.1. Military sociology in Germany:**

##### **A science of the Bundeswehr for the Bundeswehr?**

One of the major weaknesses of military sociology in Germany, and internationally for that matter, is its insufficient incorporation in terms of both contents and personnel into the sociology field, and the social sciences in general. There is only a limited number of military sociology researchers in Germany who work outside of the armed forces.

This has traditionally been due to the historical divide between many social scientists and military affairs, as well as to the supposed anathematization of one's reputation and career if the focus of the research concerns military issues and topics. Although to some extent this might be the case it seems rather improbable that such reservations could really be so profound. To believe that researchers would be identified and equated with the subject of their research is too simplistic. The inverse argument is also just as plausible. Many social scientists deal with topics considered problematic or controversial, and with issues that they subject to critical analysis or consider being in need of improvement. Researchers dealing with political extremism often argue against the normative commonplace that a pluralist democracy is the most superior system. Researchers who deal with inequalities between social classes or sexes often seek to reduce the disparities. Therefore, it is an open question as to why there are not more social scientists taking advantage of their critical distance from the military and using it to analyze the armed forces, and thus expose its myths, sham logic, covert power structures etc. In

this context, military sociology could have an enlightening function insofar as it has the potential to bring grievances to light and uncover socially relevant deficiencies. Although from a science policy perspective the question of whether the social sciences should pursue this undertaking or whether it would even be able to fulfill such aims, needs to be further discussed, it should be borne in mind that researchers working within the armed forces still maintain a firm adherence to the principles of enlightenment (Dörfler-Dierken, Kümmel 2016: 352f.). Although thus far, these considerations have not compelled university researchers to deal intensively with the military.

This indifference of social scientists actually plays into the hands of those forces that understand the military as an organization *sui generis*. Conservative military personnel view such topics, in particular those related social science studies, with suspicion. The idea of subordinates rating their trust in superiors, or lower ranks being allowed to express their opinions regarding the sense and purpose of deployments runs counter to their traditional way of thinking. Such surveys also contradict a conservative understanding of military leadership – and are sometimes even perceived as an institutionalized method of eroding trust, as these assessments from the rank and file are communicated to military and political leaders outside the chain of command. Military officials who do not wish for a critical and independent analysis of their actions are satisfied with the non-interference of university-based social scientists.

Yet, the Bundeswehr leadership concept of *Innere Führung* clearly stipulates that the armed forces should be studied in detail, including via social sciences. *Innere Führung* promotes the integration of the armed services into society. It is an essential factor for the Bundeswehr to be aligned with democracy and social responsibility. Only an armed force that is comprised of military personnel who are firmly incorporated into the civilian environment, and who take an active part in public, social and political events as citizens in uniform, can guarantee the necessary political stability. *Innere Führung* categorically rejects any attempts to separate the armed forces from the influences of society is therefore an ideal starting point for an examination of the Bundeswehr. Sometimes, this even actually happens – however, it is primarily done by social scientists already working within the Bundeswehr, or by renowned social scientists who participate in the discussion of the *Innere Führung* concept using a normative approach (see *Innere Führung Yearbooks*). So far, the *Innere Führung* concept has seldom been the subject of an extensive study related to more general social science questions (see, however, Franke 2012).

Most of the researchers pursuing military sociology studies are either employed by, or are contracted to the armed forces (such as the author of this paper). This personal dependency is in itself problematic. There is a danger that as members of the system, these researchers might accept military realities as a given whereas external researchers would question them. There is no doubt that knowledge of the organization and connections are helpful in order to complete projects. Nevertheless, researchers who are members of the armed forces must take care that they do not develop typical organizational blindness. Being employed by an organization that both commissions a study and is its subject does not, per se, invalidate the scientific quality of a work. But it is necessary to take a more critical approach to given parameters, limits and influences. The most difficult problem, which is contrary to the freedom of teaching and research guaranteed in the constitution, is when attempts are made to influence the research process or to withhold results, or to publish only selected results. Such incidents have been known to occur, and in some instances, these scandals have been made public. Due to the personal dependence of the researchers on the organization that commissions the project, the methods utilized for remaining objective can differ from those that are used by researchers who are not members of the organization. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to draw a simple dichotomy between research commissioned by the military on the one hand, and research that is ostensibly completely free and independent on the other hand. The diverse and sometimes severe dependencies of civilian research are well known, especially as new dependencies in this field have been deliberately created in recent years. On the other hand, this is countered by the complex reality of doing research, which cannot be summarized in such a simplified description. In practice, researchers often have considerable leeway. The commissioning agency is aware of the need for autonomy in the research and grants the researchers the right to participate in the decision-making about specific topics and methods as well as the freedom in the presentation and interpretation of the results. Researchers in turn can keep a (semi-)critical distance to the armed forces when shaping their studies. Since they are already confronted with the accusation of being beholden to the armed forces, they should endeavor clearly state their independence in the interest of their academic reputation. Within the military structure it may be possible for a researcher to use existing safeguards in order to protect their interests or to inform external actors as well as get them involved as advocates for their interests.

### 3.2 Actors instead of structures, military personnel instead of armed forces. The conceptual constrictions of military sociology

Less obvious but nevertheless important for academic focus is the specific thematic layout of many studies, which is defined either implicitly or explicitly by the commissioning agency. Looking at the analyses available, it becomes obvious that studies focusing the actor level are dominant. In contrast, there are far fewer studies tackling structures or interactions. At the actor level, the focus is mostly on the view of the participants, and their assessments and attitudes, or in short the motivational level. Public surveys query citizens about their view of the Bundeswehr, security policy or the various international operations. Youth studies gather the views of young people regarding the Bundeswehr, as well as their vocational interests and perspectives as well as their assessment of the Bundeswehr as an employer. In internal surveys, military personnel can express their experiences, evaluate their superiors, articulate their grievances and express their opinions of political decisions and military actions. In this context, it is of secondary importance whether these opinions were gathered using a quantitative or qualitative survey, the focus is always on the individual, and all too rarely does it center on structures and institutional conditions. The emphasis of this thematic layout is on certain areas of the military organization at the expense of others. As a consequence, research projects are primarily connected to approaches and theories focused on the micro level of individual actors. In contrast, it is much more difficult or even impossible to relate such studies to concepts based on the macro level. The result is a military sociology which positions itself first and foremost in the empirical social research camp, and chooses to approach its subject via the micro level of the individual actor.

### 3.3 Military sociology as an organizational sociological method to optimize the military?

This trend is grounded on the fact that research projects are often generated from practical questions and problems, especially if the armed forces themselves specify the research requirement. To give a salient example: there was a surge in human resource research when it became necessary to recruit young military personnel as the armed forces were facing the challenges of changing demographics, a low level of youth unemployment, and the transition to an all-volunteer army. In this context, military sociology research is in danger of degenerating into an applied social technology, the primary objective of which is to contribute to an optimization of the organization. If



military sociology is conducted as empirical social research, then runs the risk of becoming an auxiliary science for military functionalities.

In view of these caveats, it is no wonder that research into military sociology is experiencing an empirical surplus. What is lacking is an orientation towards social science debates outside the closed circle of military sociology research. There are various conditions contributing to this deficit: since the projects have often been developed from practical questions and problems, it is challenging to subsequently transfer their design and findings into the social science debate. Sometimes, due to the vast number of projects, there simply is not enough time and not enough personnel to analyze the vast number of surveys and prepare them for academic contexts. Especially as some of the researchers who work within the armed forces are not interested in focusing on the academic field due to career plans and actually prefer to remain where they are. But this also applies to those who seek to enhance the exchange as they face the difficulty of most social science debates having little in common with the armed forces. Therefore, it is extremely difficult to build on discussions that are already underway. Instead, it is necessary to identify relevant relationships in existing debates and to place them in a context that is relevant to military sociology topics. Many of the existing studies pick up discussions from the field of military sociology. Although this community is very active, it is at the same time, quite isolated from other social science contexts. Nor does it have much of impact on other social science debates. In part this is due to the fact that, it is little more than an abstraction of the practical topics, questions and problems that concern the armed forces. As I have already mentioned, military sociology is characterized by an active interdisciplinary approach. Military sociology discussions can sometimes lack sufficient depth in their topic and argumentation. This shortcoming is, among other things, due to the few number of researchers dealing with these subjects. There can be no doubt that a greater number of articles, studies, and findings would improve the quality of this field. This is a goal that military sociology must strive towards. Finally, in closing, I will outline some perspectives on achieving this objective.

#### **4. Perspectives to strengthen military sociology**

The task of military sociology should be to strengthen its roots in sociology. To this end, it must contribute to general discussions in a much more intensive it has done in the past. Engaging in debates that are only held in a military sociology context will do little to assist in creating a distinctive profile.

Nevertheless, it is possible to connect topics and questions discussed in the military sociology field to broader controversies. To name just a few striking examples: surveys on public opinion regarding security policy are well suited to verifying questions regarding political sociology. Studies on the recruitment and retention of military personnel could be an integral part of general human resource research. Linking analyses on the integration of female military personnel with gender theories seems to be a natural fit, and many research projects on the armed forces could certainly be adapted in organizational sociology debates. The aim of military sociology should be to awaken the academic interest in the armed forces so that it becomes a matter of course for scholars outside the military to dedicate themselves to this object of research. In this way, addressing military sociology issues could become commonplace in social sciences.

Remarkably, the relationship between historical and social science approaches provides hopeful signs for developments to this effect. In recent years, groundbreaking studies have been submitted in this field, which show that such a multi-perspective approach can yield new insights. The volume “Soldaten” by Sönke Neitzel and Harald Welzer (2011) studies the everyday life, the sensory and the empirical worlds of soldiers in war and battle. It is based on the covert transcriptions of Wehrmacht prisoners of war by British intelligence and combines historical sources with social science concepts in a way that provides new impetus for both historical and social science research. The same is true for the organizational sociology study on the Holocaust by Stefan Kühl (2014). With recourse to Niklas Luhmann’s organization theory, it offers new possibilities of interpretation and explanation for the historical processes and contexts that have already been explored extensively. As a result, Kühl presents an interpretation of the escalation of violence based on organizational sociology, which crucially supplements the historical works of Browning and Goldhagen. Such a combination of social science and historical approaches and methods is certainly useful for other events and eras.

Finally, this interdisciplinary perspective can and should be directed towards military sociology itself. When, for example, considering the outlines and conjunctures of armed forces-related research in Germany, the parallels with security policy culture and civil-military relations become obvious. Military sociology, just like German security and defense policy, is characterized by a high degree of internationality and multinationality. The topical focus of military sociology, the relations between the Bundeswehr and society, can be seen in the context of the social integration of the armed forces, which is also a key characteristic of *Innere Führung*. The low, albeit

growing interest among social scientists in the armed forces, is also observable in the society as a whole. It seems that the greater interest is directed towards historical topics that correspond to the German strategic culture. It also appears natural to regard these aspects not as accidental analogies, but rather as causal connections. If sociology is both the science of modern society, yet at the same time an expression of modern societies, then military sociology can be regarded as the science of social conditions of military means, which is also an expression of the social position of the armed forces, as well as civil-military relations. The extent to which such a definition holds true can only be determined by using a wider and more comparative perspective. For the sake of military sociology's self-image, and in order to retain its requisite critical distance from itself, it would be worthwhile to embark on such an undertaking.

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