

Chapter 1

**PLURALIZING THE GDR'S SOCIALIST
SOLDIER PERSONALITY**



By directing attention towards individual embodied negotiations of masculinity within military and surveillance institutions in East and West, *Deutschland 83* and *Deutschland 86* invite us to reconceive of norms of masculinity in GDR society. The two series encourage a look back at the history of representations of East German soldiers to move away from an understanding of soldiers as a cypher for state repression or for rigid gender roles. Far from being monolithic masculine ideals disseminated from above, the masculinities in representations of soldiers since the introduction of conscription in 1962 show complex embodied negotiations of military service, in which vulnerability, theatricality, emotions and even same-sex desires are foregrounded.

Discussions of masculinities in the GDR have generally focused on the society's ideals, resulting in the impression that masculinity was relatively constant and so powerful that men had few options to articulate less normative gender roles. Mary Fulbrook, for example, explains her focus on femininity in her chapter on gender in *The People's State* (2005) by suggesting that '[o]fficial conceptions of masculinity changed very little during the forty years of the GDR'.¹ Her assertion that East German masculinities were unchanging corresponds with George Mosse's research emphasizing the continuity of ideal masculinity in German culture since the nineteenth century.² Fulbrook briefly suggests that men were 'challenged to rethink their domestic roles or develop notions of the "new man"' in response to changing constructions of femininity.³ However, her intricate exploration of the development

of women's roles leaves little space to explore how men's gender roles were rethought in relation to '[o]fficial conceptions of masculinity', and she later argues that 'male gender roles were rarely, if ever, explicitly challenged or significantly shifted'.⁴

The premise of this book, which builds on and extends Fulbrook's work, is that the GDR's masculine ideals were themselves always plural and subject to substantial change and revision during the state's forty-year lifespan. Moreover, the negotiation of ideals of East German masculinity continues in depictions of the GDR after reunification. By conceiving of these ideals as negotiated, I am not suggesting rigid, more or less universally accepted standards of masculinity to which men and women were forced to accommodate their everyday gender practice. Rather, these standards were complex composites, influenced by the SED's policies and propaganda – including literature and film – but also by the individual and collective values of East German citizens, the demands of everyday life within the state's institutions, and the limitations of citizens' abilities to emulate, perform and embody ideal masculinities. In this chapter, I show how even the officially sanctioned literature of the NVA's military press presents masculinities that are complex and varied. These works suggest a more reciprocal relationship between official discourses and individual lived experience than is often allowed for in the writing on gender in East Germany. This mutual influence between ideals and embodied negotiations of ideal masculinities shows that the state's gender order supports Fulbrook's wider arguments about the GDR's 'participatory dictatorship'.

Some initial studies have provided a more nuanced picture of gender in the GDR by analysing the complexities of masculinity. For example, Mark Fenemore's work on youth culture has shown that masculinities changed substantially over the GDR's forty-year existence and operated within a complicated system of competing official and subcultural forms of prestige.⁵ More recently, numerous scholars have asserted the necessity of viewing changes to femininity in the context of changing expectations of masculinity. Josie McLellan views changes to gender roles over the GDR's history as part of a dialogue between shifts in femininity and masculinity, and Georgina Paul analyses masculinities and femininities together in her overview of gender in GDR literature.⁶ Numerous publications on East German masculinities, focusing primarily on ideal forms of masculinity, have made important contributions to our understanding of how such ideals were constructed and promoted.⁷

Three intersecting masculine ideals have been identified most prominently. First, as Fulbrook argues, GDR masculinities were often defined in relation to 'the rather muscular ideal of the "traditional" working-class male', the heroic worker.⁸ Holger Brandes's post-reunification interviews with men

from the former East and West have also shown that working-class identity remained an important means of differentiating East German masculinities from post-1990 gender norms.⁹ The second masculine ideal is the antifascist fighter, which Julia Hell has explored in relation to depictions of father figures.¹⁰ Finally, the third masculine ideal is the so-called 'socialist soldier personality' (*sozialistische Soldatenpersönlichkeit*), which has received comparably little attention. Sylka Scholz describes this pluralization of hegemonic masculinities in Connell's terms, relating them closely to men's professions and showing how multiple hegemonic forms can coexist.¹¹ We should see these three forms of ideal masculinity not as competing forms of hegemonic masculinity so much as different manifestations of a set of hegemonic values that are never reducible to a single form of gender practice. They reveal the importance of Connell's plural and shifting understanding of hegemonic masculinity, as men and women could appeal to hegemonic values and norms in different ways. The three ideals are entirely compatible with one another and were always in dialogue: the heroic worker and the socialist soldier are often depicted in an antifascist frame, and most soldiers or antifascist fighters in official publications come from working-class backgrounds.

The socialist soldier personality differs from the other ideals in its high degree of visibility, both in everyday life in the GDR and in literature and film. In GDR society, visibility was achieved using the NVA's uniform: requiring conscripts to wear their uniform even on leave was the institution's way of enhancing and enforcing its visibility as a guarantor of ideal GDR masculinity. As Andrew Bickford has argued, soldiers in uniform are one of the most visible representations of state power, and compulsory conscription ensured that young men were forced to play this representative role themselves.¹² Beyond its visibility, the influence of this masculine ideal became particularly acute during military service, which made it the most actively enforced of the state's masculine ideals. Yet the six-monthly influx of new, often unkempt and unenthusiastic conscripts meant that the ideal was always under pressure and always negotiated by individuals. Literature and films depicting military service therefore offer a chance to explore this ideal. The works suggest that it is rather more complex and less coherent than its bureaucratic label might suggest.

In this chapter, I identify features of the socialist soldier personality by focusing on press statements, soldiers' manuals and photographs. I then turn to two novels that explore these ideals in fictional military units: *Härtetest* (*Endurance Test*, 1978) by Wolfgang Held (1930–2014) and *Es gibt kein Niemandsland* (*There Is No No-Man's-Land*, 1980) by Walter Flegel (1934–2012). Military literature from the late 1970s demonstrates the changes to conceptions of masculinity at this time, after the expatriation of Wolf Biermann and in the context of a growing variety of subcultures that

coexisted in this final period of the GDR's history. These novels show the NVA's ideals having a powerful normative force. Yet with conscripts' diverse range of civilian occupations and identities, the ideals appear both elastic enough to absorb conscripts with many different strengths and adaptive enough so that, in the end, no soldier is excluded from belonging to Held's and Flegel's idealized military communities. As I discuss in Chapters 5 and 6, there is a substantial disjuncture between this image of the socialist soldier personality as a shifting and flexible ideal and autobiographical descriptions of military service by ex-conscripts. Yet such novelistic statements of the complex and fluid nature of military ideals demonstrate the NVA's and the SED's awareness of the need to present military ideals in an inclusive way to meet their recruitment targets. This change in representation may not have increased enthusiasm for the military, but these portrayals show that the NVA's presentation of its ideals was influenced by conscripts' diverse embodiments of military masculinities, and indeed by the refusal or inability of many to reconcile their own values with the military organization.

The Socialist Soldier Personality

In line with Raewyn Connell's emphasis on hegemonic masculinity as a 'configuration of gender practice' and Kaja Silverman's reminder that ideal masculinity exists not in the abstract, but only in 'discursive practice and its psychic residue', the socialist soldier personality depends on the practice of members of the military and on representations that construct and shape gender ideals.¹³ Official pronouncements on the nature of socialist soldier personalities engage closely with the shifting, embodied and representational quality of masculine norms, allowing for varied interpretations and approaches to being a soldier. Speeches and manuals issued to conscripts, including photographs and press images, play an important role in constructing and disseminating the GDR's military masculine ideals. These sources show a continued awareness of the need for these images to reflect a diversity of ways in which a conscript might embody and live up to the socialist soldier personality.

The socialist soldier is defined most clearly against the West German 'mercenary' (*Söldner*), who is reduced to a caricature so that socialist soldiers might be contrasted with the Bundeswehr soldier. As my discussion of *Deutschland 83* has suggested, differences in discipline, behaviour and values were often relatively small, and depended on the ideological framing of masculinity in the two militaries. The framing of soldier versus mercenary posits a masculinity in the East that is more progressive and inclusive than in the West. The term 'mercenary' implies that the Western soldier is both financial

beneficiary and passive victim of the state's belligerence. The East German soldier, by contrast, is depicted as an active class warrior. As Armeegeneral Heinz Keßler wrote:

the soldier in the National People's Army is superior to the mercenary of the Bundeswehr precisely and above all because he fulfils his military duty in the knowledge that he is serving the most just cause in the world, the defence of the achievements of the workers, the defence of the community of socialist states.¹⁴

The ideal soldier, in the logic of Keßler and the NVA leadership, is assured of his social and ideological mission. NVA soldiers are held up as defenders of working people, possessed of a class-consciousness that enables them to understand this task as the highest cause. By contrast, the Bundeswehr soldier is constructed as the foot soldier of capital who acts against the working classes and against his own interests. This argument is made in a 1984 volume of questions and answers for soldiers: 'The soldier in [the Bundeswehr] represents not the needs of the workers, but the interests of powerful monopolists, the profiteers of the arms race and the politics of confrontation.'¹⁵ However, if this class-consciousness is the ultimate factor unifying socialist soldier personalities, then the GDR's military masculinities have substantial latitude for variation, so long as all are bound by their common cause.

In contrast with the individualizing, even atomizing language of the mercenary applied to the West, socialist soldiers were associated with comradeship and collective spirit. As Thomas Kühne has described, the concept of comradeship had been a pillar of German military organizations for many decades prior to the NVA's foundation.¹⁶ This language of brotherhood is common to many militaries, most notably the elite soldiers of the United States Marine Corps.¹⁷ In the NVA, this idea of comradeship was framed in terms of 'socialist relationships' between soldiers, an idea that was fleshed out in soldiering manuals: 'The attitude of each individual towards the fulfilment of his military duties is primarily shaped by the atmosphere in the collective, by mutual respect, trusting relationships and honest, comradely reciprocity.'¹⁸ This extract from the 1984 manual creates an idealized image of a unit in which each soldier looks out for the other, thereby securing collective success.

This idealized community is also suggested in the photographs that accompany the manual issued to soldiers on enlistment, *Vom Sinn des Soldatseins* (*The Meaning of Being a Soldier*), and yet these images always bear signs of the disjunction between theory and practice within these military communities. In the 1974 manual, there are three images of smiling young soldiers together, including one of five young soldiers singing together (see Figure 1.1). Guitar



Figure 1.1 Five soldiers making music together. *Vom Sinn des Soldatseins: Ein Ratgeber für den Soldaten*, 16th edn (Berlin: Militärverlag der DDR, [c. 1974]). © Eulenspiegel Verlagsgruppe Buchverlage GmbH, Berlin. Used with permission.

music and singing unite the men in a tableau of togetherness, as they form close bonds through recreation. Yet the staged, even awkward quality of the scene prevents this togetherness from seeming natural or unself-conscious. All men are, in stage choreography terms, cheating out – facing the camera rather than each other – and the composition is striking, based around a diagonal that focuses attention on the soldier at the front playing the guitar. One man looks directly into the camera. By returning the viewer's gaze, he both draws us into the scene and arrests our vision, calling attention to the photograph's self-conscious construction. The framed print in the background is precisely centred, adding to the photograph's careful composition. The print is of Walter Womacka's 1962 painting *Am Strand (On the Beach)*, showing a young heterosexual couple lounging on a beach. The painting's indistinct, abstracted beach landscape gives it an air of fantasy. Here, the painting reminds us of the temporary nature of the military community, and its fantasy of the young couple suggests the soldiers' absent girlfriends and wives, so as to diffuse any homosocial eroticism. On closer inspection of the uniforms, the man playing the guitar is an *Unteroffizier*, the other men's superior. The music making is therefore framed within the military

hierarchy, with lower-ranking soldiers singing along to their commander's tune in imitation of their obedience in training. The image not only speaks of community and camaraderie, but also reminds conscripts of the boundaries of masculine intimacy and of the pervasiveness of military hierarchies.

The collective, then, was never solely about a brotherly relation, and any group was always subject to military hierarchies. Nevertheless, the NVA emphasized that these collectives were not homogeneous, but rather created the conditions for individuals to realize their potential: 'In your military fighting collective, you can develop into a socialist soldier personality; you can prove your status as a military class warrior.'¹⁹ Press discussions of the military particularly emphasized soldiers' individual prowess, including characteristics such as independent thinking and technical competence that gave an impression of a military that valued members' individual contributions.²⁰ One way, supposedly, that the NVA supported men to achieve their individual potential more than a Western army was by appealing to soldiers' initiative: 'members of the National People's Army are not only permitted, but even required ... to shape their military service on their own initiative [*initiativreich mitzugestalten*]. This is achieved above all by fulfilling the orders of superiors with precision and creativity'.²¹ The verb 'mitgestalten' describes a military created by the actions and interactions of its members, closer to the plural understanding of military masculinity that I am proposing. However, this quotation immediately undermines this impression; initiative was strictly circumscribed and was only to be exercised in finding creative solutions to follow orders.

Traditional characteristics of soldierly masculinity such as obedience do play an important role, then, in the NVA's self-presentation. Obedience and discipline emerge particularly strongly from closer analysis of the NVA's descriptions of socialist relationships and the military community. Even press articles, aimed at the wider public and not just NVA members, describe ideal military men 'who fulfil their every duty to the leadership of the Party and the State'.²² In soldiering manuals too, discipline is essential to the ideal socialist soldier. To answer the question 'Order and Initiative – A Contradiction?', the 1984 guide attempts to clarify this tension:

In our socialist army, orders are the incontrovertible law. An army member is to carry out any order he receives assiduously, within the required time scale, and with the commitment of his entire being ... It is therefore important that any use of the soldier's own initiative should be in accord with, and serve to carry out, the orders he has received.²³

The emphasis on obedience far outweighs individual initiative, and powerful modifiers such as 'incontrovertible' (*unumstößlich*) and 'assiduously'

(*gewissenhaft*) intensify the insistence that one's entire self be invested in carrying out orders. Initiative is a secondary concern and must not detract from unquestioning obedience. Most passages discussing responses to orders echo these almost tautological intensifying phrases: 'every order under all circumstances is to be carried out in an assiduous and timely manner'.²⁴ The socialist soldier personality therefore diverged little from long-established traditions of unquestioning obedience in German military cultures, despite its shift in emphasis onto collective spirit and class-consciousness.

Strict discipline was combined with language of strength, endurance, and even aggression, which sits awkwardly alongside the insistence on trust, respect and comradeship.²⁵ For example, *Vom Sinn des Soldatseins* repeatedly describes the aggression expected of NVA conscripts. It calls for 'strength and endurance, military excellence and iron discipline, an unfettered aggression [*Kampfwille*] and an unbreakable commitment to victory [*Wille zum Sieg*]'.²⁶ The emphasis on strength and endurance is combined with the violence and aggression more usually associated in the GDR with the National Socialist or Prussian military past. Formulations such as 'unfettered' (*unbändig*) and 'unbreakable' (*durch nichts zu brechen*) demand a persistent and unthinking aggression that jars with the army's assertion of its peaceable and comradely nature. Moreover, the disjuncture between emphasis on discipline and the adjective 'unfettered', with its connotations of uncontrolled and uncontrollable aggression, underlines the implicit contradictions even within the military's own presentation of its masculine ideals.

The requirement for strength and aggression at times tips over into the suggestion of violence. In the photographs at the back of *Vom Sinn des Soldatseins*, around ten images show soldiers working with deadly machinery, tanks, missiles, guns and artillery. One example even gestures to the potentially destructive and dangerous effects of this arsenal (see Figure 1.2). This image presents three soldiers crouching down operating an artillery gun. Two at the front are supporting the front legs to prevent inaccuracy caused by the gun's recoil, and a third soldier crouches behind the gun. The barrel of the gun is sending up a plume of smoke, as it has presumably just been fired. The three soldiers' positions mirror one another, each crouched on one knee, hunched forward, eyes and face straight ahead and a determined expression visible under their helmets. The photograph frames the soldiers amidst the destruction caused by such weaponry. Close behind them, a house lies in ruins, with timber and rubble filling the frame. The smoke from the artillery fire is carefully positioned so as not to conceal this ruined building. The windows all seem black and empty, the glass presumably having been blown out. The foreground frames the soldiers on two sides, with a brick wall on the right-hand side of the shot and another destroyed wooden construction diagonally across the bottom of the photograph. These are soldiers aware of



Figure 1.2 Three soldiers show focus and concentration amidst artillery fire in a ruined building. *Vom Sinn des Soldatseins: Ein Ratgeber für den Soldaten*, 16th edn (Berlin: Militärverlag der DDR, [c. 1974]). © Eulenspiegel Verlagsgruppe Buchverlage GmbH, Berlin. Used with permission.

the damage wrought by their weapons, who remain unfazed and focused, and whose concentration on their task is absolute. The image is not just one of obedience, strength and discipline, but of active aggression, preparing conscripts to fire weapons, face the consequences of their actions and continue following orders amidst destruction or chaos.

The NVA fought to temper this image of aggression with a public image of support for soldiers' personal development. The implication was that there was room in the NVA for many different ways of meeting the military's standards, and that with the correct effort and commitment any East German man could integrate successfully. The reason for this was in part a difficulty in meeting Warsaw Pact recruitment targets for soldiers committing to military careers.²⁷ Yet in these manuals and images, any individuality is always subject

to a normalizing force, such that differences are neutralized in the name not only, or even primarily, of military efficiency, but also of the need for a certain kind of socialist man in society. Although Silverman's concept of the 'dominant fiction' can seem more monolithic than the more varied and plural ideal I am delineating here, her psychoanalytic model helps explain this normalizing force. 'The dominant fiction', she writes, 'neutralizes the contradictions which organize the social formation by fostering collective identifications and desires.' She continues: 'both the symbolic order and the mode of production are able to protect themselves from interruption and potential change only so long as that ideological system commands collective belief – so long, that is, as it succeeds in defining the psychic reality of the prototypical subject'.²⁸ In the context of the NVA, fostering investment in certain norms and standards, while retaining space for individual initiative and approaches, can produce a more powerful normalizing effect than a refusal of individual difference. Silverman suggests that individual psychic investments sustain the dominance of certain forms of masculinity through their ability to shape individual values, beliefs and practice.

These speeches and soldiers' manuals were an important means of creating such investments, with *Vom Sinn des Soldatseins* rereleased almost every year. However, literature and film were privileged more highly in the GDR as effective ways of influencing public opinion and, as Silverman would have it, the investments of individuals in the state's dominant ideals and values. In 1956, the Press of the Ministry for National Defence was founded, renamed the German Military Press in 1960 and then, amidst the détente and *Ostpolitik* of the 1970s, the Military Press of the GDR (Militärverlag der DDR) from 1973. Bernard Decker has discussed the output of the Press, arguing that few East German authors engaged with the NVA, even though military fiction was actively encouraged in order to impart the military's values and policies to the public.²⁹ Decker perhaps overestimates the demand for such works, which appeared even in the GDR to limit writers' and filmmakers' engagement with military themes. The attitude to the military and to conscription in East Germany was generally lukewarm, and readers seem to have had little time for military novels, except while preparing for or undergoing their own military service.

The novels' genre is also significant, with the military press continuing to produce a form of socialist realism that was sometimes even self-consciously anachronistic by the 1980s.³⁰ In accordance with this style, many novels published by the Militärverlag are formulaic in echoing official statements about the military and its values of masculinity and socialist citizenship. Their third-person narratives often employ a form of collective free indirect style, as well as pronouncements and even moral judgements by the narrator in a generalizing present tense. Yet, as I will show with Held's *Härtetest*

and Flegel's *Es gibt kein Niemandsland*, even the most conformist writing opens up the socialist soldier personality into a plurality of masculinities, and focuses on the ways in which individuals negotiate and embody the military's expectations. In these novels, these negotiations are invariably successful in integrating the individual into the military unit, but the ideal itself is shown as fluid and writers acknowledge men's struggles to reconcile existing identities with the expectations of military service.

***Härtetest* and the Multiplication of Military Masculinities**

Härtetest is among the best examples of how literary depictions of the NVA broaden the range of masculinities under the umbrella of the socialist soldier personality. Held first wrote the novel as the model for a television film of the same name, directed for GDR television by Hubert Hoelzke and broadcast on DDR1 in February 1978.³¹ The close relationship between literary and television production reflects the interest in creating attractive images of the military across media and meant that the story reached a wider audience than comparable novels. Even though reliable viewing figures are not available, the premiere of *Härtetest* on DDR1 at primetime on a Sunday suggests that the state broadcaster was aiming to reach a wide audience.³² The resonance in reviews was underwhelming, and the book itself hardly featured in the press at the time, so it is likely that the actual audience for the work was smaller than intended.³³ Yet both works, and the novel especially, demonstrate an important trend in writing of this time, broadening out depictions of soldiers to show the socialist soldier personality as an inclusive ideal with space for young men to negotiate their own ways of belonging to the military.

Härtetest focuses on the relationship between recently married Andreas and Doris Jungmann: Andreas decides two months after conscription to sign up as an NCO, entailing an extra eighteen months of voluntary service. Doris, who is newly pregnant, threatens to terminate the pregnancy if he does not retract his commitment. While both film and novel follow Andreas and Doris, the novel goes further in exploring military masculinity by focusing more closely on other men in Andreas's unit. The novel alternates between passages dated across four days from 25 to 28 June, which focus on Doris and Andreas's relationship and a military exercise, and flashbacks to the life of each of the men before military service. These flashbacks, interspersed with the exercise, show how the men have risen to the military's challenges in different ways and reveal multiple different masculinities that are accommodated within the NVA's hegemonic masculinity.

The opening is unusual for a military novel: it begins with Doris on a crowded rush-hour tram towards Andreas's barracks. The narrator emphasizes

her determination and confidence: ‘Doris Jungmann ... is not one for self-pity [*keine Zimperliese*]. She knows what she wants. And she knows that you only get your own way when you do not let up.’³⁴ Her resolve appears in an ambivalent light. First, it is a positive characteristic, giving her confidence to rebuke a man who invades her personal space on the tram. However, Doris’s strong-willed character is cast in a different light during her meeting with Andreas, in which she refuses to allow him to extend his service and threatens to terminate the pregnancy: ‘Your word of honour, Andy, or else the child won’t be born’ (14). Her determination sparks a crisis for Andreas. The restrictions on his leave and on visitors in the first months of basic training prohibit him from talking with Doris at length until the weekend, but she gives him an ultimatum that she is booked into a clinic on the Saturday.

The narration further enhances the melodrama, as we read about Andreas and Doris’s illicit meeting through the wire fence of the base as it is watched by the soldier on sentry duty. The sentry’s observations frame the scene: “Damn playacting! [*Scheißspiel*]” growls the sentry, who from his tower can still see the young woman and the white cloth that she is now holding to her face’ (16). The sentry frames the conversation as an act and Doris’s handkerchief as a sign of her upset that she had hidden in her performance of resolve. Held thus foregrounds the melodrama of this encounter, as well as using the sentry’s observations to place readers in the position of voyeurs. As Silverman has commented in her chapter on Rainer Werner Fassbinder, ‘exterioriz[ing] the gaze’ in this way insists on revealing the ‘external scaffolding’ of identity.³⁵ Rather than something fixed or interior, the process of internalization and negotiation by which identity is constructed is thus foregrounded in Held’s narrative too. As Silverman suggests, focusing on the ‘look’ serves to denaturalize and even challenge the dominance of hegemonic masculine identities.³⁶ The narrative shows Doris and Andreas performing to type, within a gender order and a military order that force them to compromise and prevent them from finding a solution. They cannot reconcile the ideals they are struggling with: the demands of being a military wife versus ideals of family and romantic love for Doris, and the requirements of fatherhood and soldiering for Andreas.

Doris’s ultimatum causes a crisis in their marriage, but also challenges Andreas’s commitment to the military, and the novel is most interested in this second challenge. The next episode cuts to a more conventional military scene: “‘Weapon cleaning’ is on the schedule’ (16). Andreas is not present initially, emphasizing the contrast between his conflict with Doris and the camaraderie exhibited by his comrades. The four men are also cleaning Andreas’s rifle so that he can meet with Doris, and Heinz Körner’s so that he can practise his oboe for the NVA music festival. The atmosphere is friendly, as Egon Schornberger and Michael Koschenz chatter about women, to the extent that their commander, Unteroffizier Brettschneider, has to call for

quiet. Despite Andreas's absence, his obedient military behaviour is central to this scene, as Brettschneider reflects on his delay: 'It would be the first time that Jungmann had drawn attention to himself for the wrong reasons; he had even been praised by his platoon leader for exemplary fulfilment of his military duties' (18). From the start, then, the novel sets up several different ways of living up to the hegemonic standards of socialist soldier personalities. For Körner, it involves representing the unit by playing in the festival; for Andreas, his reputation for good behaviour allows him some leeway; and for the other four men, fulfilling their duty means quietly and meticulously polishing their rifles.

The novel repeatedly emphasizes the men's adherence to the aspects of ideal military masculinity articulated in soldiers' manuals. Obedience and commitment to the cause are the most prominent attributes when the platoon is called to a manoeuvre. In novels from the Militärverlag, military exercises are often a narrative vehicle for characters to perform obedience and endurance, and thus signal their investment in the hegemony of the socialist soldier personality.³⁷ Even though the manoeuvre will prevent Andreas getting to Doris, he is unwavering: 'He is convinced that being a soldier demands more than just good will. The army is not a safe harbour for weaklings and shirkers' (75).³⁸ His language combines the generalized platitudes recognizable from *Vom Sinn des Soldatseins* with the coarser language of the military dormitory. In a long passage in free indirect style, the narrator shows the confusion in Andreas's thoughts between concern for Doris, commitment to the exercise and his future as an NCO. Andreas's adherence to hegemonic masculinity is never in doubt. Rather, his indecision represents the different and often conflicting hegemonic masculine values that young men in the GDR were required to negotiate. As he thinks to himself: 'I have been waiting for this combat exercise, but now the alarm comes precisely when I so urgently need the time for my marriage, for my son, who otherwise may not be born at all ... Or is that all part of the endurance test?' (ibid.). The endurance test of the novel's title is less a test of physical strength than of Andreas's ability to triangulate between forms of masculine hegemony. The phrasing of this sentence even suggests that the real test is the emotional and mental resilience required to withstand and resolve his worries about his marriage.

Displays of physical strength do occur in the novel, but not without some irony. The evening before the alarm, a scene in the dormitory is introduced with the following display of ironized homosocial play:

The table floats, held by a single fist, aloft. Jochen Nickel, watch in hand, watches the second hand and Michael Koschenz's trembling arm muscles all at once. The dormitory's macho man is once again showing off his strength to his roommates. (41)

By inserting the parenthetical phrase ‘held by a single fist’ to break up the idiom ‘floats aloft’ (*schwebt in der Luft*), with its connotations of weightlessness, gracefulness or even magic, this image is set in conflict with the fist as an emblem of power and strength. The bathos caused by the laconic third sentence diminishes Koschenz as a ‘macho man’ (*Kraftprotz*) and uses the phrase ‘once again’ (*wieder einmal*) to evoke boredom or resignation towards such displays. Körner and Jungmann both demand that Koschenz call off the performance. Yet, although Nickel’s perspective is not given directly, his careful observation of his comrade’s musculature suggests admiration and fascination. Again, hegemonic masculinity is mediated through the act of looking, which, using Silverman’s analysis, distances and ironizes the presumption of macho strength. This episode sets the tone for the novel’s ambivalent approach to physical strength. While such displays are one way in which characters demonstrate their suitability as military men, they are also bound up with accusations of showing off and with a rejection of the theatricality of shows of male strength. The novel generally rejects the idea that strength is purely physical, in favour of individual skill, intelligence and technical prowess.

The collective side of military service is prominent in the novel, with understanding and cooperation extending up and down the rank hierarchy, as well as between the conscripts. Their relationships even include physical intimacy. When the exercise begins, and the men are clustered together in their armoured vehicle, the tense situation is mitigated by physical closeness between the men: ‘In the darkness inside, the tension mounts. The ear-splitting noise makes conversation impossible. It is comforting to feel the man next to you [*den Nebenmann zu spüren*]’ (75). The oppressive darkness, confined space and deafening noise are counteracted by an image of tactile intimacy enhanced by the darkness and poor visibility. This intimacy is managed carefully, so that it remains a response to an extreme situation of danger and anticipation rather than acquiring any homoerotic charge. The use of a collective free indirect style, in which the narrator seems to give the combined thoughts of the group of men, is typical of socialist realist military or industrial novels. The technique merges their thoughts and feelings just as their bodies are brought together, showing through narrative the collective effects of shared individual investments in a certain ideal, as Silverman describes. The collective in the novel thus becomes something felt and embodied, not just a theory from official manuals.

Closeness and intimacy between the men are not the only things bringing them together; Held balances such intensity with moments of good humour. At the opening of the novel, when Unteroffizier Brettschneider reprimands a group of soldiers for disturbing Körner’s oboe practice, they mimic his serious tone: “‘Art, comrades ... understand?’” one of them crows, capturing

the Unteroffizier's tone with deceptive accuracy and getting a laugh.' The narrator sets up the expectation that the soldiers will be punished for insubordination, but undercuts it after a playful dash: 'Brettschneider shakes his head and – grins' (20). Brettschneider knows to pick his battles with the soldiers, tolerates their high spirits, and exhibits a degree of self-awareness and self-irony. His understanding of Körner's need for quiet and his ability to take a joke set him up as a sympathetic leader with whom soldiers can feel at ease. The novel thus gives form to the socialist relationships of the military's propaganda, suggesting that a mixture of intimacy, understanding and humour are the basis for the good working of the military unit.

A further episode shows the importance of such humour for avoiding the sexualization of men's communal and often homosocial activities, resonating with Jane Ward's discussion of bromance films and prankster comedy in *Not Gay*.³⁹ On the exercise, the soldiers must swim naked across a river, holding their kit above their heads. The soldiers begin joking about the situation, with Preller calling it 'FKK' (*Freikörperkultur*, a form of naturism or nudism) and Nickel complaining 'but it's no fun without girls' (153). The seriousness of the situation, with the nonswimmer Körner having to be helped across by Schornberger and Koschenz, does not prevent the soldiers from seeing themselves from outside, creating an awkward awareness of their own possible objectification or the homoerotic potential of the situation. A man and two women climb out of a car and watch the men swimming: 'They giggle and point in amusement at the pale, naked bodies of the men, whose helmets look curiously awkward' (155). The narrator here adopts an outside view of the soldiers, but stops short of suggesting that such a gaze might sexualize the men's bodies, with the onlookers focusing only on the awkwardness of the soldiers' helmets and pale skin. However, the soldiers themselves do draw attention to their potentially desirable bodies:

'... Imagine you're watching this: more than a dozen stark naked men ...'

'Well built! [*gut gewachsen*]' pipes up Jochen Nickel, who has now gone for cover.

'With helmets and metal tags on their chests ...' (157)

As in Silverman's discussion of Fassbinder, this effect denaturalizes the soldiers' masculinity and makes them and us aware of their vulnerability to objectification: 'Exhibitionism unsettles because it threatens to expose the duplicity inherent in every subject, and every object.'⁴⁰ The ability to laugh at themselves and not take themselves too seriously again emerges as a central element of the socialist soldier personality, but this exchange indicates a self-consciousness about how they appear to others, as well as an awareness of the potentially desirable effect of their well-built bodies that threatens to

undermine the urgency of their cause. As Silverman argues, no man and no image of masculinity, however dominant, can ever fully possess or control the effects of the gaze.

As well as merging the men's consciousnesses within a collective free indirect style, the structure of *Härtetest* is indicative of the tendency among GDR military novels to show varying individual masculinities successfully subsumed under the socialist soldier personality. Held creates various flashbacks to the preconscription lives of soldiers and thus creates each as an individual with a complex civilian identity that is never completely superseded by his military training. Even minor characters receive equal treatment, such as Jochen Nickel. His flashback switches into the first person with the suddenly combative phrase 'Now will you finally let me say something, people?' (170). It gradually emerges that the chapter is a speech delivered as part of a disciplinary procedure for attacking his supervisor at the abattoir where he worked. Yet the section repeatedly signals its other purpose, encouraging us to understand Nickel's personality in the context of his personal hardships: 'What? Of course it's relevant to this case. How else are you going to build up a picture of me? Of my whole self? And especially of my personality?' (171). Nickel's insistence on a rounded personality formed over a lifetime is essential to the novel's understanding of soldierly masculinity, which is never absolute, but always negotiated by individual conscripts in response to their own experiences. Nickel, who was raised by his grandmother after his parents left him and escaped to the West and who dropped out of school to find work, emphasizes his resilience, but also his pride and lack of patience with authority. Yet the flashback, in which he calls his grandmother 'Mutsch', reveals that Nickel has not always been as resilient in military training. His comrades find an unaddressed letter from 'Mutsch', which responds to complaints expressed in a previous letter about conditions in the military. The soldiers never find out whose letter it was, but the flashback ensures that readers pick up on this indication of Nickel's more ambivalent reaction to military service. His pride and first-person performance of toughness are shown in the context of fragility and insecurity. His obedience and endurance in the exercise show the work he has done to integrate himself into the military and to live up to the expectations of the socialist soldier personality, but the letter shows that this process is long and difficult.

The novel thus balances the endurance and obedience expected of soldiers with an attempt to present them as complex individuals, shaped by civilian circumstances and by their personalities, especially their pride and anxieties about military service. Conscripts' superiors repeatedly show awareness of the need to treat soldiers as individuals and to allow them to find their own way of meeting the military's expectations. As Brettschneider puts it: 'if you look closely, everyone is a totally different case ... Everyone! Whoever you choose!'

(46). Yet at times in the novel this apparent care and individual attention tips over into a more paternalistic style of authority that potentially emasculates the conscripts. The final dénouement of the conflict between Andreas and Doris involves his platoon leader, Leutnant Winter, visiting Doris at the clinic in Andreas's stead as a sort of *deus ex machina*. In an extended passage of direct first-person thoughts, we gain an insight into why Winter has involved himself in Doris's decision:

The characteristics determining a socialist soldier personality are influenced by feelings ... Whatever is eating away at a soldier in my platoon hurts me too, unsettles me, ruins my day. (213–14)

The empathy that shapes the 'socialist relationship' between Winter and Andreas has led Winter to intervene without Andreas's knowledge or permission, apparently because he feels Andreas's hardships too strongly. The novel thus ends by emphasizing the importance of emotions for sustaining the military hierarchy and the comradeship of a unit made up of such different individuals. Yet Doris is outside this empathic community, as Winter accuses her of egotism for allowing her own feelings and difficulties to get in the way of her prescribed role as the faithful wife. Moreover, feelings are not the only thing at stake, as revealed in Doris's conversation with Winter, who echoes the official line about the need to defend the achievements of socialism against Western aggression. The final scene of the novel, with a loving reconciliation between Doris and Andreas, finally associates the military's role with the creation of a certain form of masculinity, even if soldiers have a degree of freedom and variation in how they embody this ideal. The final words from Andreas's first-person perspective underline the sort of heterosexual, paternal masculinity required: 'We will love each other and quarrel with each other and have a child. We will be a family...' (220).

The approach to military masculinities in *Härtetest* thus depends on a tension between its aims as a piece of official military literature. Its audience is not primarily young women like Doris, but current and future conscripts, and it addresses their worries about reconciling military service with their families, civilian lives, and wider ambitions and values. The storyline with Doris threatening to abort the child is undoubtedly sensationalist and ultimately rather moralizing, cementing as it does the importance of certain forms of family. Although Nickel's upbringing by his grandmother is portrayed in positive terms, it is in the context of his parents' escape to the West, so that the heterosexual nuclear family remains the ideal. Moreover, the intervention of Leutnant Winter demonstrates the importance of hierarchy even as it emphasizes empathic connections that hold this hierarchy together. Endurance and obedience, signalled not least in the novel's title, remain the

paramount characteristics for military masculinity. These traits are required of all soldiers and, implicitly, their loved ones, in order to live up to the challenge of military service. Tension arises because of the novel's concern with developing individual masculinities. These men never deviate so much from the military's requirements as to cause problems for discipline or for their own psychological wellbeing. Yet the successful adaptation of each conscript to the military aims to assuage young men's worries that they will struggle to fit in or live up to the NVA's expectations. Individual initiative, as called for in *Vom Sinn des Soldatseins*, is sparse in this novel; obedience and patience are the virtues demanded here. But the masculine ideal in Held's novel is always plural and multiple, and its normalizing force is all the more powerful because of its allowances for variation in how soldiers embody and negotiate military values.

***Es gibt kein Niemandsland* and the Self-Sufficient Soldier**

Flegel's novel *Es gibt kein Niemandsland* shares many similarities with *Härtetest*.⁴¹ Both works create a rose-tinted image of the NVA that pairs kindly officers with respectful conscripts. Both authors present more individualized characters than the generalized and abstract expositions of the socialist soldier personality in the press or soldiering manuals. Their soldier figures largely conform to the military's ideals, notwithstanding occasional, small-scale conflicts. However, unlike *Härtetest*, in which superiors such as Winter or Brettschneider intervene to resolve soldiers' conflicts, *Es gibt kein Niemandsland* presents soldiers working through conflicts themselves. Flegel thus foregrounds the idea of the socialist soldier as self-sufficient, self-aware and personally committed to the cause. His novel also presents moments of unexpected intimacy and shows greater interest in the performative and embodied construction of military masculinities than *Härtetest*, indicating the need for further investigation of masculinities that deviate more substantially from the military's norms.

The novel was released by the Militärverlag in 1980, in a similar context to *Härtetest*, with the NVA concerned about meeting recruitment targets. The 1980s in the GDR were characterized politically by growing environmental and antinuclear movements and resistance to the military and the arms race, as the détente of the 1970s proved short-lived.⁴² The country's cultural scene was becoming increasingly diverse, with flourishing literary underground networks and the state's efforts to use rock music to promote socialism among young people.⁴³ Flegel's writing and narrative remain conventional in their socialist realist mode, but his style is engaging and the story is tightly plotted, avoiding the lengthy descriptions of military procedures and long digressions

that characterize *Härtetest* and earlier works from the Militärverlag. Flegel was among the GDR's most prominent authors of military fiction and served as an Oberstleutnant in the NVA until he retired in 1986, apparently in frustration at the organization's resistance to his efforts to explore the military's problems in his writing.⁴⁴ *Es gibt kein Niemandsland* depicts a cross-section of military and civilian society in a garrison town, and was among the most successful works of its kind, reprinted in several editions and translated into Russian and Czech.

The novel centres on a division manoeuvre and parallel descriptions of the garrison town's civilian society, which consists primarily of women and children and is largely domestic, in contrast with the public roles of the novel's military men. Unlike *Härtetest*, and perhaps reflecting Flegel's seniority in the NVA, *Es gibt kein Niemandsland* takes in the full command structure, from the division's commander Generalmajor Werner and his deputy Oberst Bredow to company commanders Major Wittenbeck and Major Puhlmeyer. Flegel explores the personalities of officers more thoroughly than Held does, showing the different temperaments that were compatible with hegemonic forms of military masculinity. His officers range from the kind, fatherly Werner and the awkward, if handsome, Wittenbeck to the aggressive disciplinarian Bredow. Flegel also focuses on a single platoon, led by Leutnant Ahnert and including the more experienced conscript Gefreiter Eisner and the newly enlisted Soldat Fichtner and Soldat Litosch. The novel's main characters are the family of Oberst Karl Schanz, a representative of high command seconded to the regiment, but in an ambiguous relationship with its chain of command. His daughter, Friederike, is the focus of the narrative in the civilian setting, along with her mother and siblings. By showing the families of soldiers, Flegel demonstrates the pervasiveness of masculine ideals and their effects on women, in line with Connell's hegemonic model, in which the power of certain masculinities is felt across society.

Fichtner is a shy young man more used to being a shepherd than a soldier, and the novel explores his problems integrating into the military environment and adapting to its standards of masculinity. The novel opens with him trying to win Friederike over after a fleeting sexual encounter. The opening chapter sets up a competition for Friederike's affections between Fichtner and the older, more experienced Wittenbeck. When the division goes on manoeuvre, it is separated from civilian society, deferring Friederike's choice until the ball after the manoeuvre, where she chooses to dance with Wittenbeck. The scenes during the manoeuvre focus on Fichtner struggling to integrate: he wanders off, plays his harmonica absent-mindedly, and lacks confidence. Schanz, meanwhile, takes on a fatherly role towards members of the regiment, encouraging Fichtner and helping young conscripts find their place in the masculine collective. He also acts paternally towards Wittenbeck,

whom he visits and recommends for a prestigious job after the two men bond in the homosocial environment of the smoking tent. This nepotistic move jars with Schanz's otherwise meticulous observation of regulations, but also emphasizes his ability to assess Wittenbeck's capabilities instinctively. At the novel's end, Fichtner, despite being rejected by Friederike, realizes his potential and becomes integrated into the military community.

Unsurprisingly from someone so senior within the NVA, Flegel provides a largely affirmative portrait of the NVA and its opportunities for personal development, with an emphasis on soldiers' need for individual commitment to realize their potential. The novel shows the NVA coexisting with surrounding society, and depicts soldiers of all ranks working to find their place amongst the army's expectations, values and gender ideals. Flegel avoids conflict and implies that it is possible for all young men to find a way of conforming to the demands of military service by developing skills and relationships, mastering their weaknesses and discovering their strengths. The movement from diverse masculinities towards increased conformity is mirrored in the plot, as the interwoven strands converge on the manoeuvre ball in the final chapter. Viewed together, Flegel's soldier characters provide an instructive, if occasionally didactic, example that broadens official descriptions of the socialist soldier personality to explore a range of different ways for soldiers to conform with and negotiate ideal military masculinities.

Strength and endurance are less prominent masculine characteristics in *Es gibt kein Niemandsland* than in soldering manuals or *Härtetest*, with the novel focusing on relationships between soldiers rather than on the hardships they undergo. However, Flegel still emphasizes the impressive physicality of certain soldiers, including Gefreiter Eisner, whose name corresponds to his civilian occupation as a steelworker. Eisner is depicted as a muscular figure:

whose shoulders are the same height as Ahnert's eyes. Broad, muscular shoulders, which you would think would cause Eisner to get stuck in the hatch [of the armoured vehicle]. But there must be something about the work of a steel smelter that has made this man so nimble and quick. (57)

Eisner's strength and musculature are a mixed product of the GDR's two masculine ideals: he has been disciplined in the NVA after being, in Flegel's rather unsubtle metaphor, forged in the steelworks.⁴⁵ This training makes Eisner's physique imposing but lithe. By contrast, his platoon leader, Leutnant Ahnert, is less powerful: his short stature repeatedly seems a source of embarrassment, even if it does not impede his military success (53).

Flegel's description of Oberst Bredow encapsulates his approach to the strength and physicality expected of soldiers by combining the need for discipline with the military's attempts to train hardened soldierly bodies.

Bredow is 'a powerful man, stocky, with a slight belly, which he nonetheless manages to hide by accentuating his upright posture' (41). Like Ahnert's stature, Bredow's squat physique is not presented in ideal terms, although he is still described as powerful. Characteristically for Flegel's approach to ideals of the soldierly body, Bredow is disciplined and knows how to compensate for physical weaknesses. The narrative perhaps emphasizes his posture to undermine him in comparison with other officers, but it also demonstrates his ability to overcome bodily imperfections and comply with the military's ideals. Bredow's primary failing is not his belly alone, which he is able to control, but the fact that it represents his lack of self-control more generally (42).

Along with comradeship, Flegel promotes self-control like that exhibited by Bredow most consistently as a central aspect of the NVA's masculine ideal. From the start of Fichtner's service, for example, he enviously views fellow conscripts' ability to conform to the military routine and control their existing instincts and identities: 'They have managed in a short time to lock their previous habits and needs deep within themselves, to put them on hold [*konservieren*] or to forget them entirely' (47). Flegel depicts the pressures on conscripts to change or conceal their identities. Their existing identities are not preserved in their existing form, but internalized, distilled or consciously suppressed, as the military's changes render some existing identities obsolete or troublesome. Self-control particularly restricts the expression of pain or emotions by Fichtner's comrades during exercises and endurance tests: 'With few exceptions, they withstand marches, strength exercises and other strains ... with stoical equanimity' (*ibid.*). Flegel does not explore the negative implications of this repression of existing identities, a subject I explore in subsequent chapters. Instead, he creates an idealized officer figure to embody this controlled ideal masculinity, Oberst Schanz, who combines self-control with a caring, comradely and even fatherly demeanour. Friederike describes the family descending into arguments when Schanz is away: 'Otherwise, his calm and consistency, his logic in both thoughts and emotions are persuasive; they balance out most problems and encourage reflection' (96). Schanz's quiet self-control, paternal good nature and idealized socialist relationships with his men express themselves particularly through his encouragement of Fichtner. Schanz urges Fichtner on several occasions to control his nerves and emotions, obey his superiors and, implicitly, conform to the military ideal.

Representations of military service not only shed light on military masculinities but also, by virtue of the widespread nature of the experience of conscription, offer productive insights into East German masculinities more generally. Conscription is one means by which military ideals are disseminated in wider civilian society, and yet Ahnert despairingly remarks of one wayward conscript, 'after eighteen months, he will take the uniform

off and in most cases, wherever he goes back to, no one is interested in how he was as a soldier' (119). Flegel describes a tension between this disregard for military identities in wider GDR society and the NVA's efforts to shape good socialist citizens during military service. The novel ultimately suggests that conscription does have profound effects on soldiers' later lives, even if these go unacknowledged by families and colleagues. Towards the end of the novel, for example, Litosch realizes the effects of military service on his identity: 'He'll never go back to living like he did before enlisting ... And an external sign of this change will be the fact that he no longer runs around with shoulder-length hair and a mane of unkempt curls' (251). Echoing Held's interest in soldiers being looked at and judged on their appearance, Litosch describes the military's effect on his masculinity using the opposition between his long hair before enlistment and his present military crew cut. In Chapter 3, I analyse the symbolism of the haircut in more detail, but Litosch's example suggests that hair is an important interface between the military's masculine ideals and its more visible changes to soldiers' bodies. In line with Silverman's argument that revealing externally constructed aspects of masculinity can denaturalize it, Litosch presents his masculinity as an ongoing dialogue between bodily changes, external perception and deeper personal change. Flegel depicts an army in constant dialogue with wider society when soldiers return to their families, universities or careers. Even though conscripts' military identities are seen by the career officer Ahnert as more temporary than his own, Flegel uses Litosch's realization to suggest that the military's masculine ideals continue to affect conscripts and the way others see them after conscription.

The tension in *Es gibt kein Niemandsland* between the specificity of the military ideal to the military environment and its longer-term effect on masculinities can be understood using the paradigm of 'boundedness' and 'pervasiveness' advanced by the sociologist David Morgan. Boundedness describes the extent to which masculinities are developed in a total institution cut off from civilian society. Pervasiveness, by contrast, denotes the prestige and influence of such institutionally specific masculinities in wider society.⁴⁶ The boundedness of masculinities developed during conscription is usually emphasized most prominently. Monika Szczepaniak, for example, in her discussion of Austrian and German militaries around the time of the First World War, describes conscripts' experiences of being suddenly cut off from civilian lives and of entering a highly bounded masculine world. These abrupt changes also characterized military service in East Germany, yet conscription is rarely the complete break that Szczepaniak describes.⁴⁷ Before conscription, young men and women were socialized in institutions that promoted the socialist soldier personality. Paramilitary education featured in the Young Pioneers, the Free German Youth (Freie Deutsche Jugend,

FDJ) and even schooling with the introduction of military education as a lesson in 1978. The Society for Sport and Technology (Gesellschaft für Sport und Technik) also provided 'premilitary education' from the 1950s.⁴⁸ The NVA aimed to influence conscripts' lives after military service too: *Vom Sinn des Soldatseins* emphasizes conscripts' duty to return to their communities as everyday defenders of the achievements of socialism.⁴⁹ Moreover, Sylka Scholz's analysis of post-reunification life narratives has shown ex-soldiers asserting the value of military skills or discipline for their careers, revealing that military masculinities in East Germany were highly pervasive as well as highly bounded.⁵⁰ The development of the socialist soldier personality is thus essential to understanding GDR masculinities more widely too.

Even though the masculinities promoted in *Es gibt kein Niemandsland* ultimately support the NVA's ideals and show their normative force on soldiers, Flegel is critical of the military's unrealistic and monolithic assumptions about masculinities. At several points, characters refer cynically to the socialist soldier personality:

Again and again, you hear talk of the creation of socialist soldier personalities. Even new recruits [*Soldaten*] use this term, as if they knew exactly what it meant. But in fact for every thirty soldiers the term hides thirty different meanings [*verbirgt sich dahinter bei dreißig Soldaten dreißigmal etwas anderes*]. (120)

Through Ahnert's voice in free indirect style, Flegel compares the military's masculine ideal and the reality of soldiers' differing individual masculinities. Although Ahnert's thoughts about the socialist soldier personality present the permeation of official rhetoric through all echelons of the military hierarchy, the quotation suggests that use of the term is unthinking or even meaningless. This critique does not completely reject the term, but rather calls for a more nuanced understanding of soldiers' gender roles. Whilst the last sentence apparently describes the tendency for the socialist soldier personality to conceal or hide soldiers' differences, the construction 'verbirgt sich dahinter' also suggest that soldiers' varying masculinities bolster the ideal and even give it its power. Flegel thus hints at a more complicated relationship between individual masculinities and the NVA's ideals than is first suggested by his largely affirmative approach.

The novel in fact depicts a wide range of military masculinities, even though Flegel's purpose is often to show how individual soldiers conform and become useful to the military in different ways. Any gender ideal is unachievable, and by definition everyone deviates from it in some way. Bringing Silverman's and Connell's work together underlines the fact that no hegemonic gender system is possible without marginalized subjects or

peripheral forms of gender practice. In Connell's Gramscian model, the dominance of any masculinity must be relative, potentially shifting and often unstable, because it depends on repeated assertions of hegemony. To pursue Silverman's and Connell's logics one step further, deviant or subordinate masculinities are not only important for understanding masculine ideals. Affording such power and interest to the relationship between dominant and peripheral forms of gender practice requires us to understand subordinate and marginalized masculinities on their own terms, in their full complexity and in appreciation of their centrality to the gender practice of people of all genders, not just men most closely aligned with hegemonic masculinity. The case of the NVA demonstrates the necessity and the productivity of such an approach, given that gender practice was characterized not only by deviation from the socialist soldier personality, but also by widespread cynicism towards the military and its values. Despite the focus on ideals of masculinity in scholarship on the GDR, then, and even though Held's and Flegel's writing supports these ideals and ignores the widespread scepticism towards the NVA, Flegel's novel points to the importance of a broader investigation of masculinities that failed to emulate military ideals, rejected them or negotiated partial forms of acceptance.

Participating through Subordination

The character of Fichtner in *Es gibt kein Niemandsland* provides an example of the complexity of relationships of subordination and hegemony in relation to the military's masculine ideals. Fichtner is young and inexperienced, a shepherd and a daydreamer whose mind is often focused on his sheep or the landscape instead of on the manoeuvre. He is tortured by homesickness (47) and by claustrophobia: 'Always and everywhere this horrible, oppressive confinement [*Enge*]. And Fichtner is used to open spaces. Meadows, rivers, rolling hills and slopes' (48). His yearning for the open countryside, which even seems feminized by the pastoral imagery in this quotation, leads him to wander off from the manoeuvre one evening, where he is arrested by a patrol. Only Schanz's unexplained sympathetic intervention saves Fichtner from punishment.

The novel highlights Fichtner's subordination within the hierarchies of military masculinities through direct contrasts with other men. When Fichtner is first introduced, Friederike is resisting his advances, which, we later learn, follow an initial sexual encounter between them. One of the novel's strands then follows Friederike's choice between Fichtner and Wittenbeck. Friederike remembers Wittenbeck's stiff, soldierly approach to dancing – 'he waltzed almost like he was on the parade ground' (87)⁵¹ – but also his kind, fatherly

play with Friederike's young sister, Ingrid (88). Wittenbeck's strength and ruggedness – 'He must spend his time dealing with hard, heavy objects' (90) – is contrasted with Fichtner's gentle, quiet and remarkably passive behaviour when he and Friederike have sex (9). Ultimately, Friederike chooses Wittenbeck at the ball after the manoeuvre. In a moment of tragic pathos, perhaps with a conscious nod to Georg Büchner's *Woyzeck* (1837), Fichtner sees them dancing through the window, draws his knife and goes into the woods. Instead of turning on Friederike, as the emasculated Woyzeck turns on Marie, Fichtner goes to harm himself. Litosch saves him from his despair by talking him round and, somewhat incongruously, encouraging him to take his harmonica and perform for the guests at the ball. Fichtner's exaggerated and melodramatic response to rejection contrasts with Wittenbeck's reserved and controlled demeanour, perhaps affirming Friederike's choice by showing that Fichtner still represents a more immature, emotionally excessive, subordinate masculinity.

Fichtner's gradual integration into the platoon demonstrates the tendency in Flegel's novel for differences between soldiers and deviation from the socialist soldier personality to be minimized and normalized. Fichtner's knowledge of the land proves indispensable. He stops soldiers using gorse bushes for camouflage, when there are no gorse bushes in the location where they are sheltering, and he shows conviction and self-assuredness for the first time: 'Never, as long as Ahnert had known him, had the shepherd spoken with such determination, showed such energetic commitment to something affecting everyone' (176–77). Here, the NVA's socialization recalls Michel Foucault's influential description in *Surveiller et punir (Discipline and Punish)*, (1975) of an 'organization of geneses', through which institutions encourage the individualization of members so that their personal development contributes to the strength of the institution.⁵² Fichtner's differences from his fellow conscripts do not prevent him from finding his place within the platoon, even though at the end of the novel he remains subordinated relative to Litosch and Wittenbeck. Indeed, in line with Connell's analysis of the construction of hegemony through relations of subordination, Fichtner's failure to live up to the socialist soldier personality is one means by which other conscripts' conformity and the ideal itself are constructed. For example, the brash behaviour of his comrade, Litosch, only seems more military by comparison with Fichtner's silent and solitary nature. Military masculinities are thus constructed in the novel through competitive relationships with other men and through men's willingness to contribute to military efficiency using their own specific skills. Ultimately, Fichtner's integration, despite losing the competition with Wittenbeck, is sealed when his emotional outburst over Friederike is diverted suddenly into not just participating in but even providing the entertainment for the final ball on his harmonica.

Although Fulbrook's focus has not been on masculinities, her work is vital for understanding individuals' complex relationships with ideal masculinities and the central role of subordinate and marginalized masculinities in GDR power structures. Her concept of the 'participatory dictatorship' has proved influential in shifting focus away from the GDR's political and repressive institutions towards everyday experiences: 'the people themselves were at one and the same time both constrained and affected by, and yet also actively and often voluntarily carried, the ever changing social and political system of the GDR'.⁵³ Although various alternatives have since been proposed to characterize the East German dictatorship, from a 'totalitarian welfare state' to a dictatorship based on 'tacit minimal consensus', most either privilege the state's role in disseminating coercive and paternalistic power or exaggerate the extent of any consensus among the population.⁵⁴ Fulbrook's concept thus remains the most instructive for understanding the circulation of power in the GDR through citizens' interactions with each other and with state institutions, bolstering the power of the SED, albeit often unintentionally. Donna Harsch has described citizens' participation in the GDR's power networks as a negotiation with representatives of different institutions: 'individual East Germans navigated and, indeed, negotiated among institutional interests, trying to play this state bureaucrat off against that political functionary, that economic manager against this trade union official'.⁵⁵ Sara Jones picks up on this structure of negotiation in her discussion of writers' encounters with the GDR public sphere.⁵⁶ Through such institutional negotiations, citizens generally aimed to gain privilege or to create freedoms amidst the GDR's restrictive power apparatus, and yet Fulbrook's concept of a 'participatory dictatorship' suggests that such negotiations also supported and sustained institutions and the power apparatus itself.

Fulbrook's work and subsequent scholarly investigations have moved past binary models of resistance and conformity. Although Fulbrook never draws on Judith Butler, her account of the East German state is strongly reminiscent of Butler's discussions of gender performativity. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler argues that what appear to be 'expressions of gender' do not reflect a pre-existing gender identity; rather, these actions constitute the gendered subject performatively as part of a constant and generally unconscious chain of interactions with others and with ideal conceptions of gender.⁵⁷ Fulbrook rightly highlights the extent to which women's gender was negotiated through interactions with the masculine-dominated official culture of the GDR. Although conventional femininity was supplemented with more traditionally masculine industrial labour and the homosocial environment of the work brigade, this was combined with a consistently paternalistic approach to women. As Christine Eifler has demonstrated, representations of women in NVA publications were rather more passive and conventionally feminine

than in other official GDR publications.⁵⁸ However, neither Fulbrook nor Eifler discusses the fact that negotiations of East German gender ideals were not only reactive but also productive in a Butlerian sense, performatively constructing identities through forced interactions with institutions. Given the dominance of a paternalistic masculinity in the state's official culture, citizens' negotiations of gender ideals are crucial to understanding the workings of the 'participatory dictatorship'. Just as women negotiated the gender ideals promoted by the state, so too did men position themselves amongst masculine ideals. They interacted with peers or colleagues and participated in GDR institutions and power structures in ways that performatively resisted, subverted, supported and constituted the normative power of the state's gender ideals and its masculine-dominated institutions.

In refracting the military's ideal masculinity into multiple soldierly masculinities, Flegel's and Held's novels suggest that the socialist soldier personality is constructed through men's participation in the institution and their negotiations of gender ideals. Butler's performative concept of gender and Fulbrook's understanding of the participatory nature of the GDR dictatorship combine to produce an understanding of masculinity constructed through interactions with the GDR power structure. Many institutions, and particularly the military, were constituted and supported by the everyday interactions of members with the institutions' masculine-connoted values and ideals. Gender identity is a central aspect of subjectivity, but it is also crucial to institutional power and to the interactions of individuals with institutions such as the military. Negotiating masculinities in the GDR not only involved performative actions and interactions with gender ideals; these ideals were bound up with the institutions that promoted and disseminated expectations on men and women to conform to ideals of masculinity and femininity.

Jason Crouthamel has discussed negotiations of ideal masculinities as a central feature of soldiers' experience of the warzone during the First World War: 'In the remote, otherworldly universe of the front experience, men created complex notions of masculinity that both reinforced and modified hegemonic gender and sexual norms.'⁵⁹ However, Fulbrook's discussion of life in the GDR in terms of participation in institutions and Butler's account of a performative construction of identity through everyday actions and interactions both suggest that such negotiations were not limited to any 'remote, otherworldly universe'. In fact, soldiers' everyday experiences of military training in the GDR, far from any warzone, show similar negotiations of identity, which provide compelling insights into the workings of gender in militaries and state institutions more widely.

The performative construction of masculinity was explicitly harnessed by military training and as such became part of men's participation in the

institution and their contribution to its power. Techniques such as drill, exercises, sports, cleaning and maintenance, such as the weapon cleaning at the opening of *Härtetest*, aimed to train soldiers to respond automatically to situations but also to turn them into soldiers. For example, Flegel emphasizes in *Es gibt kein Niemandsland* that the tedium of drill conditions soldiers to assert the power of their minds over their bodies and rehearse automatic connections between orders and the desired behaviour (240). Drill is emblematic of the well-acknowledged fact that military service not only aims to construct military efficiency but also to construct men who behave in line with military ideals of masculinity.⁶⁰ In the GDR, because of the importance of masculine ideals in conscripts' daily routines, negotiations to gain freedoms and avoid punishment always appear in representations of the NVA as negotiations of masculine values of independence, endurance, courage, self-reliance and so on. Through limited conformity, conscripts attempt to emulate ideal military masculinity to a sufficient extent to avoid punishment and, literally, pass muster. In creating spaces to avoid military discipline, conscripts seek ways of expressing masculinities that could otherwise invite punishment and censure for transgressing the military's masculine ideals.

In both novels, conscripts' negotiations usually serve to contain their individual masculinities within the acceptable bounds of the military's masculine ideal. These negotiations take various forms, from Bredow's posture as a bodily strategy to hide his belly and render his body commensurate with the military ideal, to Andreas's commitment to the military exercise despite the strains on his emotions caused by his argument with Doris. However, in Butler's work on performativity, she suggests that queer performative negotiations, which reveal the construction of gender ideals, could also challenge such ideals, even if they rarely subvert them entirely.⁶¹ The novels of the Militärverlag appear to be aware of this possibility, as is clear in the repeated efforts of *Härtetest* to undercut any possible homoerotic tensions with humour. One remarkably queer example from *Es gibt kein Niemandsland* is the fashion show organized by Litosch and his roommates: 'On left and right, spectators were standing against the walls and the seven soldiers from Litosch's dormitory walked up and down between them' (158). Litosch presents the men's uniforms, using a fake microphone, as the conscripts model them. His comments mock the ill-fitting, greying items and make explicit the hierarchies constructed by soldiers' clothing. For example, he describes 'a tunic-like, navel-length shirt, well-suited for NCOs and their deputies, as it particularly emphasizes the chest. We even call it the "shirt of authority" [*Autoritätshemd*] for this reason' (158). The fashion show is brought to an abrupt end when the duty officer appears, and within the novel too the episode is a short and isolated example that seems to provide a momentary release of soldiers' critical or subversive energies. Yet it demonstrates the application of Butler's concept

of performativity to the military context: if military masculinities are constituted through ongoing individual negotiations of military ideals, then these negotiations always retain the possibility for soldiers' actions to challenge the NVA's ideals and reveal their constructed nature.

Conclusion

Despite their tendency to create normalized representations of soldiers, both Held and Flegel suggest that literature and film are compelling sources for developing a better understanding of the importance of military service within the gender order and the society of East Germany. Their novels hint at the wide range of military masculinities that existed alongside and in dialogue with the socialist soldier personality, and even at the need to recentre our understanding of the dynamics of gender around subordinate masculinities. *Härtetest* and *Es gibt kein Niemandland* both show a movement from a diversity of backgrounds and experiences towards increasing acceptance of military values and the coherence of the military community. Humour is important in both texts for ensuring that potentially unsettling moments of deviation from the NVA's norms are always defused in favour of light-hearted conformity with its masculine ideals. Yet neither novel aims to homogenize NVA conscripts: both achieve their momentum and narrative interest through differences between soldiers and deviations from military norms and practices. This is particularly the case in *Es gibt kein Niemandland*, in which the interplay between characters such as Litosch and Fichtner and the rest of their unit places difficulties in conforming and even deliberate deviation from NVA gender norms at the centre of the novel. Fulbrook acknowledges in *The People's State* the importance of ideal constructions of masculinity for the SED's power, and in these novels this ideal is explored most thoroughly. However, in the subsequent chapters, I build on Fulbrook's work to make a rather different claim, taking the impetus of Held's and Flegel's novels as a starting point, and drawing on the works of Connell, Silverman, and more recent theories of masculinity and queerness. The workings of GDR society and its institutions more broadly can only be fully understood by taking seriously the participation of men who rejected the state's masculine ideals, failed to live up to them or were forced into marginalized positions.

Flegel and Held invite a more substantial investigation of works that explore the limits of military ideals, as well as the complex relationships between military ideals and the masculinities they exclude. These novels were written by members of the NVA in close discussion with the military publishing house and targeted at an audience of NVA members, ex-members and men approaching conscription. Yet even here tensions in soldiers' masculinities

drive the narrative and the individual characters. These tensions are an important trend across writing and films depicting East German soldiers, and especially in films of the state film studio (Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft or DEFA) and works produced outside the GDR or after its collapse. Flegel and Held's work is representative of the work of the Militärverlag, in that there are few representations of the Border Guard or of the conscientious objectors enlisted as *Bausoldaten*. In the rest of this book, I broaden my sources to account for a greater diversity of images of conscription. Focusing on this diversity and on moments when masculinities failed to live up to the demands of the NVA, we can achieve a more nuanced understanding of masculinities in the GDR. Even in the military context, representations of East German masculinities were never monolithic or entirely true to the state's ideals. Moments of masculine failure or inadequacy are the starting point for the majority of literary and filmic depictions of military service. For all the GDR's reputation as an oppressively male society, its legacy is one of limited acts of conformity, refusal and failure that have had profound influences not only on individuals' lives, but also on the shaping of masculinities in contemporary Germany.

Notes

1. Fulbrook, *The People's State*, 141.
2. Mosse, *The Image of Man*, 3–4.
3. Fulbrook, *The People's State*, 141.
4. *Ibid.*, 174.
5. Fenemore, *Sex*.
6. McLellan, *Love*; G. Paul, 'Gender in GDR Literature', in Leeder, *Re-reading East Germany*, 106–25.
7. E.g. Scholz, "Sozialistische Soldatenpersönlichkeiten"; Bickford, *Fallen Elites*.
8. Fulbrook, *The People's State*, 141.
9. H. Brandes, 'Hegemoniale Männlichkeiten in Ost- und Westdeutschland', in S. Scholz and W. Willms (eds), *Postsozialistische Männlichkeiten in einer globalisierten Welt* (Berlin: Lit, 2008), 59–77.
10. Hell, *Post-fascist Fantasies*. See also S. Allan, 'DEFA's Antifascist Myths and Construction of National Identity in East German Cinema', in Leeder, *Re-reading East Germany*, 52–69.
11. Scholz, "Sozialistische Soldatenpersönlichkeiten".
12. Bickford, *Fallen Elites*, 105.
13. Connell, *Masculinities*, 72; Silverman, *Male Subjectivity*, 48.
14. H. Keffler, 'Soldaten der sozialistischen Revolution', *Neues Deutschland*, 1 March 1969, 3.
15. H. Lindner et al., *Fragen und Antworten zum Wehrdienst* (Berlin: Militärverlag der DDR, 1984), 21–22.
16. T. Kühne, *Kameradschaft: Die Soldaten des nationalsozialistischen Krieges und das 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006).

17. See J.A. Warren's praise of this brotherhood in *American Spartans: The U.S. Marines – A Combat History from Iwo Jima to Iraq* (New York: Free Press, 2005), 18–25.
18. Lindner et al., *Fragen und Antworten*, 150.
19. *Ibid.*, 75.
20. E.g. R., 'Auf Friedenswacht', *Neue Zeit*, 1 March 1969, 2; W. Verner, 'Militärische Höchstleistungen sind unsere revolutionäre Klassenpflicht', *Neues Deutschland*, 1 March 1970, 6.
21. Lindner et al., *Fragen und Antworten*, 155.
22. W. Lamertz, 'Unser Kampfbund zeigt Stärke und Aktivität', *Berliner Zeitung*, 18 November 1972, 1–2.
23. Lindner et al., *Fragen und Antworten*, 156–57.
24. *Ibid.*, 151: 'jeden Befehl [ist] unter allen Bedingungen gewissenhaft und zeitgerecht auszufüllen'.
25. Similar lists of characteristics were discussed within the NVA's command structure; see BStU, MfS HA I/16634, 'Hinweise zur Erarbeitung und Führung der Persönlichkeitsbilder', 3 September 1983, fols 111–13.
26. *Vom Sinn des Soldatseins*, 57.
27. A. Saunders, 'Growing up on the Front Line: Young East Germans and the Effects of Militarism during the 1980s', *Debatte* 13 (2005), 283–97 (at 288–89).
28. Silverman, *Male Subjectivity*, 54–55.
29. B.H. Decker, *Gewalt und Zärtlichkeit: Einführung in die Militärbelletristik der DDR 1956–1986* (Bern: Lang, 1990), 2.
30. I conceptualize this anachronism and simultaneity of genres elsewhere: T. Smith, 'Music, the GDR Military and the GDR Today in the Works of Walter Flegel', in S. Ehrig, M. Thomas and D. Zell (eds), *The GDR Today: New Interdisciplinary Approaches to East German History, Memory and Culture* (Bern: Lang, 2018), 99–116.
31. H. Hoelzke (dir.), *Härtetest* (Fernsehen der DDR, 1978).
32. See television programme listings in *Neue Zeit*, 18 February 1978, 9.
33. See G. Herrmann, 'Härtetest im Dienst und privat: Ein Gegenwartsfilm von Wolfgang Held', *Berliner Zeitung*, 28 February 1978, 6; R. Funke, 'Bewährungsprobe für einen jungen Soldaten', *Neues Deutschland*, 1 March 1978, 4.
34. W. Held, *Härtetest* (Berlin: Militärverlag der DDR, 1978), 5: hereinafter referenced in the text.
35. Silverman, *Male Subjectivity*, 129.
36. *Ibid.*
37. E.g. H. Kruschel, *Der rote Antares* (Berlin: Militärverlag der DDR, 1979); W. Flegel, *Das einzige Leben* (Berlin: Militärverlag der DDR, 1987).
38. 'Nach seiner Überzeugung verlangt das Soldatsein mehr als nur guten Willen. Die Volksarmee ist kein bequemer Platz für Weichlinge und Duckmäuser.'
39. Ward, *Not Gay*, 111–14 and 124–27.
40. Silverman, *Male Subjectivity*, 152.
41. W. Flegel, *Es gibt kein Niemandsland* (Berlin: Militärverlag der DDR, 1980): hereinafter referenced in the text.
42. See e.g. Saunders, 'Growing up on the Front Line'.
43. See K. Leeder, *Breaking Boundaries: A New Generation of Poets in the GDR* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996); T. Ryback, *Rock around the Bloc: A History of Rock Music in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 204.
44. Anon, 'Walter Flegel', author biography, *Märkischer Verlag Wilhelmshorst*, undated. Retrieved 30 May 2019 from http://www.maerkischerverlag.de/php/aut_flegel.php;

- S. Kahlau, *Volksarmee im Wandel? Die Darstellung der NVA im DEFA-Spielfilm von den 1950er bis zu den 1970er Jahren* (Munich: Akademische Verlagsgemeinschaft München, 2015), 95.
45. Steel has a long history of links to masculinity, but in postwar Central and Eastern Europe, it was a particularly common metaphor for hardened masculinity taken from Soviet military literature. See e.g. N. Ostrovskii, *Kak zakalialas' stal'* (*How the Steel was Tempered*) (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1936).
 46. D. Morgan, 'Theater of War: Combat, the Military, and Masculinities', in H. Brod and M. Kaufman (eds), *Theorizing Masculinities* (London: Sage, 1994), 165–82 (at 168).
 47. M. Szczepaniak, *Militärische Männlichkeiten in Deutschland und Österreich im Umfeld des Großen Krieges: Konstruktionen und Dekonstruktionen* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2011), 25.
 48. P. Heider, 'Die Gesellschaft für Sport und Technik (1952–1990)', in Diedrich, Ehlert and Wenzke, *Im Dienste der Partei*, 169–99.
 49. *Vom Sinn des Soldatseins*, 92.
 50. Scholz, *Männlichkeit*, 194–95.
 51. 'Er exerzierte gleichsam den Walzer.'
 52. M. Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 143–51.
 53. Fulbrook, *The People's State*, 12.
 54. P. Grieder, *The German Democratic Republic* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1–18; T. Lindenberger, 'Tacit Minimal Consensus: The Always Precarious East German Dictatorship', in P. Corner (ed.), *Popular Opinion in Totalitarian Regimes: Fascism, Nazism, Communism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 208–22.
 55. D. Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 7.
 56. Jones, *Complicity, Censorship and Criticism*.
 57. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 34.
 58. C. Eifler, "...es schützt Dich mein Gewehr": Zu Frauenbildern in der NVA-Propaganda', in Zentrum für interdisziplinäre Frauenforschung der Humboldt-Universität Berlin (ed.), 'Unter Hammer und Zirkel: Frauenbiographien vor dem Hintergrund ostdeutscher Sozialisationserfahrungen', special issue, *Frauen-Gesellschaft-Kritik* 23 (1995), 269–76.
 59. Crouthamel, *An Intimate History*, 2.
 60. See the demonstrative titles of Morgan, "It Will Make a Man of You", and U. Frevert, 'Das Militär als "Schule der Männlichkeit": Erwartungen, Angebote, Erfahrungen im 19. Jahrhundert', in U. Frevert (ed.), *Militär und Gesellschaft im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1997), 145–73.
 61. See e.g. J. Butler, 'Critically Queer', in *Bodies that Matter*, 223–42.