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Conference Report: *Democratization, Re-Masculinization, or What?
Masculinity in the Twentieth Century and Beyond*

by Martina Kessel

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Democratization, Re-Masculinization, or What? Masculinity in the Twentieth Century and Beyond. Conference organized by the German Historical Institute London and the London School of Economics and Political Science and held at the GHIL, 22–3 September 2022. Convener: Martina Kessel (Bielefeld University).

This conference, which brought together scholars working on masculinity in Europe in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, asked what impact democratization processes since the 1900s have had on constructions of masculinity, given that democracy in modern societies rarely meant gender democracy to begin with. Instead, ‘modern’ Western societies often used heteronormative, binary notions of masculinity and femininity and organized other structures, such as the state, the economy, and education, in gendered and hierarchical ways, even though masculinities and femininities were always articulated in many different ways. Processes of democratization therefore affected not only constructions of femininity and the lives of women, but also understandings of masculinity and the positioning of (individual) men, as they might have to share rights, power, privilege, and status.

The first panel focused on different strategies for performing masculinity on television and in live history re-enactments. Haydée Mareike Haass (Institute for Contemporary History, Munich) opened the panel by examining two hugely popular crime series shown on West German television in the 1970s and 1980s: *Der Kommissar* (1969–76) and *Derrick* (1974–98). Both distanced the main character from outright violence, thereby successfully positioning a non-violent masculinity as desirable in public perceptions. However, replacing military drill and bullets with listening and empathy came at the cost of presenting the lead characters as paternalistic figures and representing society and crime as still requiring interpretation by a subtly superior male figure. In the second presentation, Juliane Tomann (University of Regensburg) argued that historical re-enactments, often seen as offering a more democratic approach to understanding history than classical academia, reaffirmed violence as a marker of masculinity and clear-cut gender roles in general, with women mostly in non-combatant roles. The paper ended with the open question of

whether cross-dressing as soldiers by people defined as female destabilizes a dominant masculinity performed by actors defined as male.

The debate underlined that the study of masculinity needs to remain connected to questions of gendered power. This applies to relations between men, asking how competing masculinities are acted out and how younger men need to be represented so that they can be imagined as future paternalistic leaders themselves or as figures who might change hierarchical patterns. It fundamentally also applies to relations between masculinity and femininity, as TV shows from periods often defined as profoundly democratic continued to represent women who choose their own lovers as a threat to motherhood and family.

The second panel discussed connections between citizenship, suffrage, conscription, and the imagined nation in Scandinavian countries. Ann-Catrin Östman (Åbo Akademi University) examined how the notion of a masculine citizen was both extended and contained in Finland in the 1920s and 1930s. With the idea of social cohesion becoming paramount after the country gained independence in 1917, academic elites made peasant society discursively visible for the first time. They inscribed its male members with civic values and capacities defined as masculine and projected democracy as having been created from below by men living in idealized local communities. At the same time, legislation on voting and social and land reforms allowed more men than ever before to qualify for citizenship. In response, the intellectual elites ethnicized masculinity to preserve hierarchies between men by distinguishing the rural new citizens from their urban betters, and by contrasting allegedly civilized and backward forms of agriculture. In the second paper, Anders Ahlbäck and Fia Sundevall (Stockholm University) also emphasized differences created between men through restrictions on voting after universal male suffrage was introduced in Sweden in the early twentieth century. With both suffrage and conscription contentious topics in the 1900s, universal conscription was established first, in time-honoured fashion, in 1901, with universal male suffrage held out as the prize. Yet when this came in 1909, voting rights were withheld if men had not done their military service, had received welfare payments, or had not paid any taxes. Military service

as a precondition was only abolished in 1922, not contemporaneously with the introduction of women's suffrage in 1921, but after it, apparently to appease conservatives who had resisted universal male suffrage.

The panel threw into stark relief how much energy male elites in modern societies invested in negotiating and controlling the extension of rights to men and women formerly excluded. More generally, it remains to be asked whether those who had to share privileges and rights felt the need to change their self-understanding of their masculinity – and if so, how – or whether they shifted elsewhere the notion of honour, which had been tied to military service and a masculinized idea of citizenship. Different sources also remind us to look for cracks in the discursive silencing of femininity while extending symbolic or real citizenship to men, as photographic visuals made women visible both in voting contexts and as irreplaceable figures in idealized agricultural work.

While visions of a cohesive society in the Nordic countries tended to hide property and economic power as signatures of elite masculinity, the third panel turned to markets as an arena for the (re)positioning of masculinity. Priska Komaromi (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin) discussed sex tourism in Hungary from the late 1960s to the 1980s. She showed how Western European clients turned it into a practice of masculinity, as men in a marginalized position at home temporarily changed their status with the help of favourable exchange rates and the possession of consumer goods such as Western cars. Others framed their commercial encounters in terms of conventional emotional relationships, claiming a superior masculinity compared with other clients. Both attitudes relied on denying or ignoring collective and individual claims to women's emancipation by stereotyping Hungarian women as sexy and willing. In the second paper, Chiara Juriatti (Leiden University) outlined the recent development of a digital art market in non-fungible tokens – allegedly forgery-proof digital artworks stored on a blockchain. Rejecting the claim that this market is more democratic than conventional art markets, Juriatti argued that by shifting the value of an artwork from the aesthetic dimension to its purely economic value and making this dependent on the artist's intersubjective standing, this new arena also called for practices

conventionally still defined as masculine, such as networking and the willingness to make risky financial investments. Whether this in fact favours men or reinforces the gendered stereotyping of behaviour remains to be seen, as the market appears to have stalled after an initial gold rush.

The last panel focused on connections between masculinity and religion. While research on Ashkenazi Jews has often highlighted a gentle masculinity in contrast to a non-Jewish aggressive masculinity as the dominant model around 1900, Marius Kałczewiak (University of Potsdam/University of Warsaw) maintained that young Polish-Jewish orthodox students in the yeshiva, the traditional Jewish educational institution, displayed a masculinity that did not differ from other religio-cultural contexts in Western Europe. These young men defined religious education not as an end in itself, but as a road to resources and the status of a socially needed and appreciated man. This turned the yeshiva into a space where they recognized each other as respectable and successful, and fulfilled their yearning for like-minded male friends. Beyond the basic problem that nothing saved Jews from being turned into the ultimate other, one might ask how these young men thought about the resolution of conflict, given that peacefulness was key to the notion of a gentle masculinity. Michael Zok (German Historical Institute Warsaw) did not use masculinity as a lens. Instead, he described how the Communist espousal of gender equality and the definition of women as workers did not fundamentally change gendered education or gendered structures on the job market. Detente with Pope John Paul II, Zok suggested, only revived the influence of the Catholic church demanding a conventional stay-home attitude.

The final paper went back to paternalistic notions of masculinity, which are recurring in present-day Germany. Jacob Lypp (London School of Economics and Political Science) problematized the issue of how today's state-funded Christian civic educational programmes teach young Muslim men about sex and gender. Drawing on the Heroes' Programme that wants to 'combat oppression done in the name of an honour culture', Catholic and Protestant organizations identify the father figure in Islamic culture as a double-edged problem. This figure is both too strong, in the sense of authoritarian, and

too weak, in allegedly not offering an effective model of masculinity – for example, by being economically unsuccessful or by not speaking German. As a result, it is alleged that young Muslim men do not integrate sufficiently into German culture. Lypp convincingly argued that by supposedly problematizing heteronormative patriarchy, Christian men working for these institutions in fact reinforce it by acting as father figures aiming to re-masculinize young Muslim men.

Despite the specificity of the topic, all of the papers reflected larger processes. The granting or withholding of specific constructions of masculinity disciplined men of different social, religious, or national backgrounds, while elites and other powerful mediators of modern culture claimed to be appropriate identity models and interpreters of gendered hierarchy. The desire to cushion processes of transformation by keeping or reinforcing paternalistic notions of masculinity indicates more broadly how differently societies deal with phenomena of pluralization by framing them as an inherent element of modernity, as a problematic but manageable development, or as an allegedly existential threat to the social fabric. The discussions also demonstrated the importance of being aware of analytical methods and conceptual tools. A precise definition of what is meant by ‘democratization’ or ‘modernization’ as interpretative categories allows us to assess more clearly the possibly aporetic nature of societies describing themselves as democratic or as in favour of establishing gender equality. And as has often been stated, a sensitivity to conflicting or co-existing masculinities does not do away with the need to inquire about subtle but pervasive structures of gendered power and the (non-)acknowledgment of the historical impact of femininities. Homosocial contexts beyond the military (in its all-male form), such as the yeshiva in the early twentieth century and Christian educational provision for young Muslim men in the early twenty-first century, tacitly drew upon and reinforced gendered and hierarchized social structures and mentalities, either by self-evidently projecting young men as future leaders, or by suggesting a demure woman as the prize for disciplining their masculinity along paternalistically proffered lines – a woman never given her own voice. The irritating desire or willingness to essentialize religion, also in gendered terms, continues today, still suggesting insurmountable difference in societies self-defining as democratic.

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Finally, among the important problems which still need to be raised are the impact on gender of ideologies – socialism, (welfare) capitalism, or neoliberalism; whether they differ in terms of gendering power; and how gender serves to construct ideologies. Today anti-democratic historical actors in different political systems are again drawing on masculinity either to stop democratization within societies, or to attack democracy as a political system per se.

MARTINA KESSEL (Bielefeld University)