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Possibilities for Peace: Germany's Transformation of a Culture of War

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In reaction to its militarist past, Germany has created a strong culture of peace, including solid educational and institutional supports for maintaining popular attitudes critical of war and military operations. Germany has been recognized for these efforts by a number of international organizations, including the United Nations. At the same time, Germany has sought to maintain a policy of active membership in NATO and active cooperation and participation in NATO operations. As the United States applies increased pressure on its NATO allies in the wars of Iraq and Afghanistan, many of the inherent social and political tensions in German policy have surfaced. The German experience of continuing to build a culture of peace while simultaneously participating in unpopular military operations provides a significant case study for all who would seek to build and expand a culture of peace among nations.

Key words: Germany, culture of peace, NATO, military operations

On January 12, 2009 Germany's then Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier wrote an open letter to newly elected President Barack Obama, in which he offered the following reflections on the continued catalysts for global conflict and the necessity of seeking more peaceful alternatives.

The challenges before us are huge: a transparent and reliable architecture for the world financial system ... Establishing trust between East and West. Bridging different cultures and religions alienated from each other. Bringing peace and new perspectives where crises now prevail ... Seeking partners, dispelling hostile stereotypes—nothing is more important in a world where radical forces still misuse religious and cultural differences to stir hatred ... I am convinced that no one can defeat terrorism and hatred with the strongest military battalions alone. Peace becomes possible only once we convince people of a better alternative to animosity and violence. When we succeed in winning their minds and hearts. When we help to make economic development and possible prospects for life ... Only dialogue and cooperation, not suicide attacks and Qassam rockets will usher in enduring peace. ... Without the willingness to comply with internationally respected ground rules, cooperation becomes impossible ... We stand for a comprehensive approach to peace. (Steinmeier, 2009)

Steinmeier's (2009) remarks encapsulate in many respects Germany's postwar values. His letter highlights the importance of international economic development, intercultural understanding and tolerance, the power of diplomacy to resolve disputes, and the use of military force as a last resort. Perhaps more than any other nation, Germany has used its warring past to underscore current imperatives for peace. Germans are proud of their decades-long pacifism and conscious rejection of military heroes (Neukirch & Supp, 2010). Germany is an active European sponsor of events that showcase, educate, and advocate on behalf of global peacebuilding. Prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall, Germany hosted a gathering of artists, scientists, writers, and musicians to develop a "counter-project" to the Cold War stand-off. It was the first nation to establish an International Society for a Culture of Peace, which mobilizes and globalizes cooperation to defuse violent conflict. In 2006, Germany won official recognition by the United Nations for its 30-year contribution to sustainable peace education and its staunch refusal to glorify war.

Gauging Success

Germany's efforts to embrace non-violence as both a political and cultural ethos is borne out in the country's continued positive ranking on the *Global Peace Index* (GPI). The GPI, launched in 2007, rates both developed and developing nations according to their relative states of peace. The index is composed of 24 indicators, ranging from a nation's level of military spending to its relations with neighboring countries and the level of respect for human rights. The *Global Peace Index* seeks to determine what cultural attributes and institutions are associated with states of peace. Countries most at peace are ranked first; a lower score indicates a more peaceful society. Non-volatile nations have higher per capita income, greater freedom, elevated levels of sustainability, and equitable social expenditures. According to the 2010 GPI report, peace creates a society that promotes human potential and its many diverse forms (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2010b). In 2007, Germany ranked 12th out of 121, compared to a ranking of 96th for the United States. In 2008, the number of included nations grew to 140. This time, Germany ranked 14th out of 140. The U.S. remained drastically lower, at 97th. The 2010 edition of the *Global Peace Index* (based on 144 countries) revealed similar findings. Germany stands at 16th, the United States at 85th (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2010a).

Germany's claim to becoming a culture of peace requires an ongoing assessment of its cultural values and an active pursuit of broad-based social justice initiatives. Peace practitioners agree that despite traditional notions that equate peace with the elimination of war, peace is an evolving concept that embraces multiple definitions and approaches. Johan Galtung of the International Peace Research Institute speaks of a *negative peace* or, simply put, the absence of violence (Galtung, 1996). Peace can also be discussed in terms of *deterrence*, avoiding war through a balance of power, or being equally armed for aggression. A further definition focuses on a *positive peace*, with high levels of equity and social justice within and between societies. The most aspirational of all concepts regarding peace is the model of a *culture of peace*, a societal framework that prioritizes the following elements: non-violent conflict resolution;

universal values of human rights; sustainable development; cultural diversity; and citizen participation. The year 2010 marked the final year of UNESCO's *International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence*. The U.N. action, designed to build peaceful futures for the world's children, prioritized attitudes and behaviors that reject violence, prevent conflicts by addressing their root causes, and solve problems through dialogue and negotiation. The U.N. launched its initiative by underscoring the centrality of global peacebuilding efforts not only for human rights advocacy, but for international democratization and security (UNESCO, 2000).

Whither the Military?

Despite Germany's long-standing commitment to a culture of peace, the nation's aversion to war is not without detractors. Critics of a "post-pathos, post-heroic" Germany argue that the European power manifests a lack of passion for protecting its freedoms (Kurbjuweit, 2010). A poll conducted in 2007 revealed that over 60 percent of Germans believed that their army, the *Bundeswehr*, "bolsters Germany's prestige in the Western world" and has a positive impact on people's lives outside its borders. By contrast, over a third of those interviewed posited that military operations have a decidedly negative effect on security within Germany. In terms of an overall appreciation of the armed forces, there are stark differences among Germany, the U.S., and other European countries. When asked if they felt a sense of gratitude towards their own military, 87 percent of Americans said yes, as compared to 64 percent in Britain, 52 percent in France, and a meager 30 percent in Germany. The basic German attitude, say researchers, can best be described as a product of their history: "a benevolent reserve characterized by moderate emotional attachment" (Riecker, 2009, p. 1). This less than enthusiastic response is borne out by statistics produced by Germany's own Ministry of Defense. In 2004, for example, 150,000 Germans were called up for compulsory military service. Seventy thousand served in the military. Eighty thousand served as conscientious objectors, working in non-military institutions (Weimberg & Ryan, 2007). The subject of the German military is so sensitive that September 2009 marked the first time soldiers were memorialized since World War II (Black, 2009).

Culture or Cowardice?

The German peace movement, some contend, represents a dangerous dismissal of geo-political realities. This perceived naiveté is echoed by the director of Germany's Institute for International Security Affairs in Berlin. "We tolerate the military, but we don't want to know about it" (Peel, 2010b). Others go one step further. Pacifism implies a categorical refusal to defend one's nation and therefore betrays democracy. Proponents of a more security-minded agenda do not deny the horrors of Germany's militarist past. Nor do they devalue the nation's success in building a peace-loving society. Support for a more robust defense apparatus is based on the premise that a culture of restraint is obsolete in an age of terrorism. While the German constitution limits the use of armed force to defensive operations or to emergency NATO assistance, some charge that the country is hampered by an imbalanced assessment of its military. The army's restriction to peacekeeping missions has left the homefront vulnerable. It likewise has demoted the German soldier to a beneficent warrior "with a rose in his gun barrel" (Kurbjuweit, 2010). Critics of Germany's anti-war policy claim that for decades the country has clung to lessons from the past and left the fighting to others. Such a position, they say, is no longer tenable. As one commentator posited, "If you want to stop people who are both trying to kill and unafraid of dying, chances are you won't be untainted yourself. That might be hard to swallow, but it's still the truth" (Neukirch & Supp, 2010).

International Leadership

When it comes to war and peace, Germany is between a rock and a hard place. German unification struck fear in the hearts of its European neighbors, who worried the nation could protect—and expand—its economic interests at gunpoint. A similar anxiety surfaced in 1994 when Germany was accused of "nationalistic impulses" for considering armed protection of its trade routes (Peel, 2010b). In the years following the *Wende* (turning point) from Cold War politics, Germany quickly allayed regional angst that it posed a threat to world peace. It entered the political stage as a team player in shaping foreign policy and attempted a delicate balance between

leadership and restraint. Yet, as many analysts observe, the continuation and exacerbation of global conflict confronts the German nation with a host of new challenges. Germany's increased involvement in multilateral decision-making raises expectations that it will contribute not only politically and financially, but militarily if necessary. The days of "checkbook diplomacy" are over.

Observers of German politics, both domestic and foreign, frequently juxtapose Germany's reconciliation with itself and its history with the nation's confusion and anxiety about its role outside its own borders. Timothy Garton Ash, in his 2007 review of the Stasi-related film *Das Leben der Anderen* (The Lives of Others), argues that it is precisely, and paradoxically, the shadow of a violent past that has transformed Germany into a paragon of peace. Ash (2007) writes:

The Germany in which this film was produced, in the early years of the twenty-first century, is one of the most free and civilized countries on earth. In this Germany, human rights and civil liberties are today more jealously and effectively protected than ... in traditional homelands of liberty such as Britain and the United States. In this good land, the professionalism of its historians, the investigative skill of its journalists, the seriousness of its parliamentarians, the generosity of its funders, the idealism of its priests and moralists, the creative genius of its writers, and yes, the brilliance of its filmmakers have all combined to cement in the world's imagination the most indelible association of Germany with evil. Yet without these efforts, Germany would never have become such a good land. In all the annals of human culture, has there ever been a more paradoxical achievement? (p. 3)

Ash's (2007) assessment of German high-mindedness and virtue, born of its *Auseinandersetzung* (coming-to-terms) with a warmongering past, contrasts with that of journalists who accuse the nation of failed leadership on the international stage. According to these less laudatory spectators, Germany's foreign policy continues in a state of transition, from a mid-sized power bolstered by the United States to a cautiously re-unified country sensitive to European fears, to a team player

too timid to flex its political muscle. Critics assert that Germany has repeatedly sacrificed influence for non-aggression. The language of peace, international understanding, and multilateral approaches is, quite simply, shorthand for cowardice—or at the very least, a fear of commitment.

Striking a Balance

Germany's *Catch 22*—damned if they fight, damned if they don't—is nowhere more apparent than in the country's expected involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan. Political debates during the lead-up to the Iraq War expressed considerable ambivalence. The central question was whether the nation could reconcile its identity as a military power, its obligation to uphold global alliances, and its ongoing commitment to peace. In the end, Germany opposed the war in Iraq and refused to join the Coalition Forces. This general suspicion and critique of military intervention was coupled with persistent advocacy of those values enshrined in a culture of peace. Germany demanded the closure of the U.S. detention center at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. A German legal team encouraged U.S. soldier André Shepherd, who went AWOL in 2007, to apply for asylum to escape further combat. Shepherd's lawyers cited an EU mandate that protects deserters who refuse participation in crimes against peace or humanity (Meyer & Kaiser, 2008). In 2005, a German federal court challenged U.S. actions in Iraq, expressing concern that such military incursions failed to conform to the U.N. charter. As recently as March 2009, Germany admitted 2,500 refugees from Iraq, granting the displaced persons special resident status.

As Operation Iraqi Freedom nears completion and NATO increases its presence in Afghanistan, Germany's delicate balancing act between public opinion and political obligations has intensified. Germany, along with most of Europe, celebrated the election of Barack Obama, hoping the new President would transform transatlantic relations. But Washington expects a lot from Europe in return, most notably in regions key to U.S. interests, such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, the Middle East, Russia and China. Germany's *Bundeswehr* is actively engaged in anti-terrorism campaigns and supplies warships to safeguard shipping off the Horn of Africa. Germany has assured Israel that in the event of an Iraqi attack it would provide a

missile defense system as it did in 1991 during Desert Storm. German forces, as part of NATO, are stationed on the Turkish-Iraqi border as well as in Kuwait.

Germany likewise has assumed a commanding role in ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) in Afghanistan. Thus far Germany has continued to couch its role in terms of humanitarian missions. Germany's Parliament-approved presence in Afghanistan has three primary goals: to guarantee security; to facilitate reconstruction efforts; and to assist Afghan security forces in their response to rebel attacks. Former Defense Minister Franz Josef Jung characterized Germany's contribution as a comprehensive strategy of "networked security" that prioritizes infrastructure development, including agriculture, health and education. He described Germany's role as far-reaching, yet inextricably tied to the host nation's own military and civilian commitment—to enhanced democracy, the prevention of terrorism, the promotion of human rights and the rule of law, and an end to extremism and intolerance. For Jung, Germany's commitment as the third largest NATO force in the country is crucial to Afghanistan's overall stability. He therefore expected the German public to honor the bravery of Germany's troops. "Our soldiers are facing these dangers with courage and resoluteness," Jung announced, "for which they deserve our utmost respect and gratitude" (Jung, 2009).

Calls to Action

Nine years into the Afghanistan conflict, the German government finds itself increasingly caught between two contending forces: pressure from Washington to supply more troops and growing public antipathy at home (Black, 2009). U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates expressed deep concern over what he describes as the "demilitarization of Europe" (Editorial, 2010). The growing lack of robust defense capabilities, Gates argued, creates real or perceived weakness that can precipitate aggression. Furthermore, it diminishes Europe's ability to respond when necessary. The Defense Secretary concluded his critique with the following admonishment: Europe's failure to step up militarily and face the threat of terrorism head-on is nothing short of "an impediment to real security and peace" (Schwennicke, 2010). Germany's status as the third largest

contributor to ISAF did not spare the nation from further censure by its U.S. partner. Germany's police training program for Afghan security forces was dismissed as too academic, too long, and ill-suited to the Afghan context (Dempsey, 2010). Former ISAF Commander Stanley McChrystal, as well as his successor David Petraeus, have told Germany to expect and assume more risks. The generals don't just want more soldiers; they want them out on foot patrol. Counter-insurgency, the generals insist, requires direct contact with local Afghans. Large convoys of German soldiers do more to scare village residents than build their trust. And the *Bundeswehr's* limited mandate creates too much distance from the populations NATO is there to serve (Gebauer, 2010). "Situational awareness can only be gained," Petraeus reported, "by interacting face-to-face, not separated by ballistic glass" (ISAF, 2010). While U.S. military officers praise Germany's commitment to the alliance, they are frustrated by the country's continued political debates at home.

Awakening the Warrior

Germany long avoided the term *war* to describe its range of operations in Afghanistan. Germany's refusal to go on the offensive, combined with a clear NATO directive to assist with civil reconstruction, allowed the populace to speak of German operations solely in humanitarian terms. In the early days of the campaign, the majority of Germans supported a national military presence in Afghanistan—with the notable caveat that troop levels were not increased and that *Bundeswehr* soldiers did not participate in aggressive combat. The government-sanctioned escalation of deployments (expected to reach 5,350) as well as the rising number of civilian and military casualties, has changed all that. As one journalist reported in June 2010, Germans "get shot at. They shoot. And they get killed." War is the only word that fits (Editorial, 2010).

Germany's linguistic struggle over Afghanistan—from "humanitarian operation," to "robust stabilization mission," to "armed conflict," to "war"—is more than mere semantics. The country's postwar commitment to pacifism, the pillar of its politics and culture, has ignited a political debate unique in its intensity. Germany's Chancellor, Angela Merkel, has argued

consistently that the war in Afghanistan is necessary to prevent the spread of international terrorism and to keep the struggling nation from descending into chaos (Schwennicke, 2010). While Merkel acknowledges that a Western-style democracy is unattainable in the tribal nation, she insists that Germany must support its NATO partners in creating a more viable government and preventing a Taliban or Al-Qaeda stronghold in the region. German opposition to the Chancellor is wide-ranging. Merkel has been chastised for attempting to talk Germans back into war, for abandoning a culture of restraint in favor of one in which military aggression is "normal, manageable and appropriate" (Neukirch & Supp, 2010). Merkel is likewise accused of failing to explain to the German public the reasons for a more martial approach and for not attending the ceremonies of fallen soldiers (Dempsey, 2010). Others disapprove of a missing timeline for shifting security tasks to Afghan forces, thereby allowing *Bundeswehr* troops to come home (Czuczka, 2009).

A leaked CIA memorandum from March 2010 exposed a belief among intelligence officials that Germans are largely apathetic towards the war. According to the memo, public indifference allows the German government to continue support for the mission. The report concedes that an upsurge in military or civilian casualties could rapidly turn apathy to hostility. The CIA suggested a counter-measure that plays to German fears of "terrorism, opium, and refugees" (Mellen, 2010). Such attitudes severely underestimate Germany's postwar commitment to diplomacy over deployment. When one looks at the German homefront, it is clear that public opinion is decidedly against armed intervention. In terms of Afghanistan, Germany's citizens are quick to point out this unpleasant yet unavoidable truth: the more soldiers ISAF sends in to fight, the more Taliban insurgents rise up to attack them. To date, 140,000 NATO soldiers from 43 countries have not been able to defeat 25,000 Taliban fighters (Neukirch & Supp, 2010).

Defending Peace

Popular opposition to the war is borne out in a series of recent opinion polls. Interviews conducted in April 2010 revealed that 62% of Germans are against the NATO

offensive. This number is up from 55% percent in 2009 and 34% in 2005 ("Immer," 2010). Despite Germany's troop presence in Afghanistan, and Angela Merkel's promises to remain, Germans are doubtful of ISAF's success. The results of a survey sponsored by the German Marshall Fund show that 75% of the country is pessimistic about the military campaign, compared with 62% in the European Union as a whole (Peel, 2010b). German opposition to the war in Afghanistan likewise is fueled by the financial cost. Official government figures price the war at \$1.2 billion per year, although many set the figure at three times that amount (Schwennicke, 2010). An opinion poll conducted in spring 2010 disclosed that 76% of Germans are in favor of cutting defense spending. Germany's new Defense Minister, Karl zu Guttenberg, agrees and proposed terminating compulsory military service in favor of a smaller, professionalized force (Peel, 2010a). Guttenberg admitted that it is increasingly difficult to sell the Afghanistan mission to an electorate that has lost faith in its success (Dejevsky, 2010).

Concerns about the monetary burden of the ISAF mission are far outweighed by mounting fears that Germany is losing its moral compass. Although many citizens support the idea of a voluntary military, along with fewer men and women in uniform, the majority of Germans resist the notion that greater sacrifices in blood and treasure are required at present. One columnist aptly noted that war, whether in Afghanistan or elsewhere, "transforms not only soldiers, but the society they return to" (Neukirch & Supp, 2010). German concerns regarding the impact of current conflicts are wide-ranging. The German media released a series of reports exposing major deficits in the *Bundeswehr's* operations: lack of cooperation with civilian agencies on reconstruction efforts; lack of equipment (vehicles, weapons, aircraft) and training; lack of interpreters to interact with locals; and a lack of sufficiently encrypted computer networks to send mission-critical classified messages (Szandar, 2009).

As of July 2010, the number of *Bundeswehr* casualties stood at 47. Despite this relatively small number of German deaths compared to deaths of U.S. and British soldiers, the German tolerance for war dead remains low. Former *Bundeswehr* Chief of Staff Harald Kujat is convinced that substantive

discussions regarding Germany's presence in Afghanistan will be triggered when the "pain threshold is crossed" (Schwennicke, 2010). In Kujat's view, that threshold is quickly approaching, a view also held by former Defense Minister Peter Struck. Struck realized as early summer 2003 that Afghanistan was not a simple "hit and run" operation. In *Der Spiegel* magazine, he recounted his trip to Cologne's airport, where he met with the families of troops killed and maimed in a suicide bomb attack. "It must have been clear even to the last holdouts that this was not just an aid mission in uniform." Struck then added that the faces of the grief-stricken relatives continue to haunt him (Schwennicke, 2010).

Crisis of Conscience

In contrast to a slate of American films depicting soldiers' experiences in Afghanistan, February 2009 marked the first attempt by German television to depict the story of *Bundeswehr* troops serving with ISAF. The movie, *Willkommen zu Hause* (Welcome Home), is a modern-day version of the 1947 post-WWII classic *Draußen vor der Tür* (The Man Outside), which begins with a young soldier's attempted suicide. *Willkommen zu Hause* offers a similarly sober view of war and its effects. The film's protagonist survives a suicide bombing that claimed the life of his best friend. His return home is a desperate attempt to reclaim his old life and reconnect to his girlfriend, family, and friends. As the plot progresses, the soldier's war trauma gains the upper hand. He cannot sleep, panics at the sound of breaking glass, and vomits when he smells roasted meat. The final scenes show the soldier entering a veterans' hospital, in hopes of finally getting relief. Statistics report that in 2008, 245 German soldiers suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, a significant increase from the 121 cases reported in 2005. *Willkommen zu Hause* created such public outcry that the German parliament engaged in a heated debate over the role of Germany's Defense Ministry in helping soldiers cope with their emotional wounds. The *Bundestag* voted unanimously to assist soldiers in combat operations overseas. Efforts include the opening of a research institute on the effects of war trauma, a telephone hotline for soldiers in crisis, and an online network where troops can talk to one another about their experiences (Lichtenberger, 2009).

U.S. tolerance of combat losses in Afghanistan—1,095 as of mid-August 2010, according to iCasualties.org (Operation Enduring Freedom: Afghanistan, 2010)—is anathema to the majority of Germans. High-risk battle strategies are considered too reckless, too dangerous, and too costly. Yet what most distinguishes the American homefront from its European counterpart is not their differing thresholds regarding soldiers killed or wounded; it is how many civilians are counted as collateral damage. Markus Kaim, in his assessment of the growing German opposition, made the following observation: Germany's discomfort has much less to do with the death of their own troops. What worries Germans most is that German soldiers are killing Afghans (Black, 2009). The turning point in German public opinion came on September 4, 2009. A fuel tanker convoy traveling in the German-patrolled area of Kunduz province was captured by the Taliban. The insurgent forces then ordered local villagers to the site to collect the hijacked fuel. Learning of the attack, German colonel Georg Klein ordered two American fighter jets to strike. More than 140 Afghans died, many of whom were civilians. Before Kunduz, the war in Afghanistan was a hard sell. It was far away. The threat to Europe was obscure. And it violated Germans' commitment to pacifism. After Kunduz, new questions arose about NATO's apparent disregard for innocent Afghans. The *Bundestag* offered assurances that the army's chief priority in Afghanistan is to protect the civilian population. It also approved the payment of reparations to the families of the Kunduz victims. For many Germans, however, the response of military officials revealed more concern about their reputations and careers than about the charred bodies of unfortunate bystanders (Gebauer, Goetz, & Medick, 2009). The tide of popular opinion took another major turn in April 2, 2010, when German troops mistakenly shot dead six Afghan soldiers following an ambush in which three *Bundeswehr* troops also died (Mellen, 2010).

Reconsidering Reconciliation

Germany's involvement in ISAF continues to be a political and cultural minefield. In May 2010, Germany's five leading research institutes added their voice to the nation's growing rejection of the NATO mission and challenged the ability of current operations to bring stability to the war-torn country.

In their report, the respected think tanks argue that the cessation of conflict is contingent on a power-sharing deal with the Taliban—something U.S. forces have thus far dismissed. They insist that reconciliation must replace NATO's reliance on counter-insurgency measures. German peace and security experts overwhelmingly favor Hamid Karzai's strategy of talking to the Taliban, not bombing them (Hessler, 2010).

Germany's growing abhorrence towards the violence in Afghanistan marks a significant return to its most cherished postwar values. The rejection of military engagement—whether by its own troops or those of its allies—signals an unwillingness to compromise long-term peace for short-term geo-political gains. Despite persistent counter-arguments that the nation must show “patience and fortitude” to see the mission through, German citizens remain unconvinced (Kaim, 2007). The country may owe much to its NATO partners, but solidarity has its limits. It is amid this groundswell of support for peacebuilding over war fighting that, in August 2010, the army announced a major offensive in Afghanistan's north. Weary of NATO criticism that German soldiers are too passive in the face of the insurgency, senior *Bundeswehr* officers opted to risk increased casualties—and political backlash at home—to improve their standing among their partners. The new German commander in Kunduz province confirmed that attacks to eliminate the Taliban would begin in October and underscored his resolve to “get this done” (Phillips, 2010). It is ironic that this military sweep would be achieved using Germany's existing reconstruction teams, that is, soldiers serving in a protective capacity as first responders and development specialists.

The Way Forward

Germany's embattled commitment to its postwar ethos offers a compelling case study regarding the possibilities for peace in a time of war. As the debate continues, scholars of German political and cultural history pose key questions regarding Germany's future on the world stage. Will the nation continue to promote peacebuilding and diplomacy? Will it stand as a model for other nations, convincing them we can no longer afford, in Vandana Shiva's words, the “luxury of violence”? (Shiva, 2002). It is worth noting that the recent 40th

anniversary of the Northeast Modern Language Association featured a panel on "Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Reading Resolution in German Literature and Culture." The call for papers reads:

With conflicts raging in Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel and the Palestinian Territories, Sudan and elsewhere, war is a central global concern. But is there room in the age of terror for forgiveness and reconciliation? ... It has often been said that the history of Germany in the 20th century is the history of war and violence, but can cultural expressions ... provide valuable insights into processes of resolution and reconciliation? (Scott, 2009)

In attempting to respond to this question, I encourage all of us—sociologists, historians, literary critics and others—to consider once again the essential distinction between simply managing conflict and truly seeking peace. The German experience provides a constructive road map in this regard. Current political and cultural debates reveal a robust, public, and nuanced examination of what it means to be "secure," both as a single nation and as a community of nations. In July 2010, Germany's Foreign Office presented a comprehensive plan devoted to balancing the country's security concerns with sustained checks on military expenditures and engagements. In reference to Afghanistan, the strategic blueprint underscored Germany's long diplomatic history with Afghanistan and highlighted the presence of 90,000 Afghans for whom Germany has become, more than any other European nation, "a second home" (Federal Foreign Office, 2010). The report reminds its international partners that Germany was the first to host U.N. talks on the future of Afghanistan. Afghan leaders traveled again to Germany to bolster the role of civil society and to discuss the de-escalation of armed force. Germany's ongoing commitment to reconstruction, development, good governance and security is evidenced by heightened financial assistance to the region, which is scheduled to double between 2009-2013. Key projects are the construction of educational facilities to renew Afghanistan's rich cultural heritage, as well as outreach centers to help demobilize and reintegrate former combatants. While the debate about ISAF continues, I am reminded of Timothy

Garton Ash's reference to that "good land" of journalists, scholars and artists indelibly marked by a history of conflict. Seen in this context, it is fitting that the *Goethe Institute*, Germany's premiere agency for culture, is sponsoring workshops in Kabul on music, theater, photography and film. It likewise pledged to restore historical monuments in Kabul, Bamiyan and Herat—many of which were laid waste by war.

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