
JOHN BORNEMAN
Princeton University

In 1984, when I was a graduate student, the social historian Barrington-Moore advised me that when approaching an unfamiliar topic I should always look first at German publications. “They’ve written about everything,” he said, “and it’s detailed and solid.” Gertrud Huewelmeier’s ethnography of a German village structured by two oppositional moieties, each represented by a men’s choir, is such a book. Huewelmeier concentrates on the structuring role of these two men’s choirs on the moral, social, and economic life of the village. She draws on two years of directed fieldwork (accompanied by her husband and children) as well as on a long-term acquaintance with and intermittent residence in the village. She also reconstructs the last 100 years of these men’s choirs, her history situating the choir within a general discussion of the significance of the Verein (club or union) in German social life. While Huewelmeier devotes the major part of the book to documenting the way the two men’s choirs reproduce the social organization—kinship and ritual—of the village, there are also chapters on labor migration and the integration of refugees, and on relations between Fremde (foreigners) and Einheimische (natives).

The fact that the dual organizations initially observed in non-Western tribal societies are also part of the contemporary Western world was an idea I also explored in Belonging in the Two Berlins: Kin, State, Nation (Cambridge University Press, 1992). I proposed this structure as a mechanism of the Cold War order (1945/49–89) in which the postwar German nation and Berlin were focal sites. Huewelmeier’s study of a West German village supports the universal aspect of the argument—that dual organizations are not located on one side of the primitive and modern divide—but her ethnography also casts doubt on the historical argument that I make. The dual organization of her village both predates and postdates the dual organization of the Cold War. The question, then, is what motivates this pattern—culture or history? In one sense, Huewelmeier’s argument rests on an assumption of universality more like Lévi-Strauss’s idea of universal cognitive structures—the specific motivations and agency are not of concern; only macro-historical processes (such as war or capitalist labor organization) explain the shifts in the content or necessity of the dual oppositions. The obvious conclusion is that most individuals seek to reproduce the social order, resisting change until it is foisted upon them by external factors.

Still, more attention to history and more attention to meaning in this ethnography might have enabled Huewelmeier to link the village to national and global events and to motivate the structuring mechanisms of duality. For example, Huewelmeier provides little information on the life of the two clubs during the two world wars, repeating local silence about the Nazi period when the policy of Gleichschaltung (to create uniformity) and norms of national unity must have had some effect on local divisions. The names of the clubs alone—Harmonie and Frohsinn (sense of joy)—must have provoked some black humor. In discussing the reproduction of authority, Huewelmeier pays particular attention to relations between fathers and sons. Especially when passing into adulthood, young men (and women) frequently must radically change their group of affiliation. As men join the choir of their fathers, they are brought into association circles that “present themselves to the outside as closed units” (p. 147). If the primary function of the clubs is to create tight internal integration and to exclude the outside, then this study presents evidence of a kind of sociality directly opposed to the contemporary U.S. proponents of civil society. These proponents assume that trust is created not through a dissensual public sphere but in social clubs where authority is transmitted automatically through the generations. But in the postwar history of Germany, as Huewelmeier shows, it is precisely the father-son relationship that has changed radically while at the same time creating a new basis for trust. Hitler’s suicide, the loss of a generation of men in the two world wars, and 40 years of Allied occupation prevented the reinstallation of the father. If village life were largely spared Nazi history, then it would be interesting to understand how villagers managed isolation from the larger political context. I suspect they shared this history. That the two choirs now are mapped onto the two major political parties (Frohsein—Social Democrats; Harmonie—
Christian Democrats) suggests that the local, even in a village, is not immune from the national-political. While Huewelmeier describes in detail the activities of sense-making and the institutional structures of the village, I would have appreciated more discussion on the meanings attached to the mechanisms of social order.

Our differences in theoretical orientations and conclusions remind me why I chose to work in an urban site and not in a village. The kind of access Huewelmeier obtained was in many ways dependent on her being able to assimilate (her husband sang in the choir; a women’s choir was started while she was present) to the structures at hand. I would have not been able to react with Huewelmeier’s discrete irony to the response of one of her informants to the question regarding choice of marriage partner: “Das beste Pferd kommt aus dem eigenen Stall” [The best horse comes from your own stable], (p. 106). Huewelmeier goes on to explain that “not all young people share this opinion” (p. 106); she also provides examples of different forms of village exogamy. Still, one senses that these other opinions are merely thought of as external alternatives to the social organization; they have no structuring effects of their own. Village social organization remains intact in its own structuring properties. The kind of assimilation necessary for village fieldwork in Germany would likely not have been readily available to me; but, in any case, it is not something the urban environment demands of an ethnographer. On the contrary, studies in urban space require an ability to negotiate across groups and forms of difference in which belonging is limited and temporary. Both sites present different challenges. Huewelmeier’s very readable and focused study is, then, a welcome and indispensable ethnographic contribution to the study of contemporary Germany.


GREG DOWNEY
University of Notre Dame

Although Eduardo Archetti grapples with the nature of Argentine masculinity in Masculinities: Football, Polo and the Tango in Argentina, this is certainly not the only issue he addresses. The single-word title is misleading—this work includes substantial theoretical discussion of hybridity and Argentine nationalism, and Archetti argues that scholars should address morality as a dimension of masculinity. In individual chapters on football (U.S. soccer), polo, and tango, Archetti explores immigration, the criollo (or “creole”), poetic images of women, the urban-rural contrast, and the history of shifts in the cultural geography of Buenos Aires. While he intentionally eschews presenting Argentine masculinity as monological or an ideal type for theoretical reasons, his attempt to draw these diverse strands together proves the least satisfying aspect of this work.

Three of the seven chapters are devoted to Argentine football. In the first, Archetti outlines how a national playing style emerged in early 20th-century sports commentary. He offers this style as an example of hybridization. Archetti’s excellent discussion of the Argentinian football style describes ways in which it emerged rhetorically in relation both to heterogeneous and English waves of immigrants to Argentina. He demonstrates that commentators on football positively valued the criollo style, and considered it the product of immigrant influences, at a time when contemporary nationalist writers “were against massive immigration, because it contaminated the ‘national essence’ and ‘sullied the country’ ” (p. 64).

In later chapters on football, Archetti describes the moral tension between elegance and efficacy perceived by observers of the national team and the association of child-like qualities and virtuoso athletic skills in the archetypal figure of the pibe—the young boy, exemplified by the international star Maradona. Surprisingly for a book on masculinity, the author inexplicably ignores one of his informants’ statements that defenders rather than forwards or midfielders (such as Maradona) “ought to look and to perform like real men” (p. 183).

In another chapter, Archetti convincingly demonstrates how Argentine discussions of the nation’s international dominance in polo reveal the emergence and negotiation of a distinctively Argentinian character. Polo, like football, was an English import, and Argentines believed their ascendance in the sport in the 20th century resulted from a combination of topographical determinism, gaucho traditions, and moral atavism. Archetti shows that these qualities are perceived in Argentine polo