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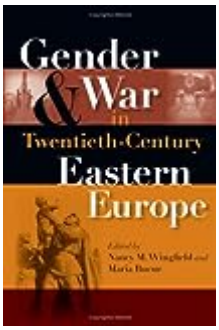

Nancy M. Wingfield, Maria Bucur, eds. *Gender and War in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006. x + 251 pp. $24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-253-21844-5; $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-253-34731-2.

Reviewed by Malgorzata Fidelis (Department of History, University of Illinois at Chicago)

Published on HABSBURG (January, 2008)

Gendering the Front in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe

Few human activities seem more gendered than warfare. At first glance, across time and space, combatants appear overwhelmingly male, while those who stay behind and support the war effort through reproductive and nurturing roles appear overwhelmingly female. Since the 1980s, scholars have engaged in redefining the notion of war as an exclusively male endeavor, and the strict dichotomy between the battlefront and home front engrained in traditional historiography. Rigid boundaries between the battlefront and home front, combatants and civilians, are difficult to apply, in particular, to the two world wars, which involved mass mobilization of societies for economic and political tasks, and unleashed unprecedented terror against civilian populations. "In all these ways, then," we read in a classic study edited by Margaret Randolph Higgonet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel, and Margaret Collins Weitz "the realities of the two world wars contradicted the myth that war compels men to go forth and fight in order to protect their women, who remain passive and secure at home with the children."[1]

Nowhere in Europe was the supposed dichotomy between the male-dominated battlefront and female-dominated home front blurred more than on the eastern front during wars and revolutions of the twentieth century. These territories were repeatedly subjected to military operations, repressions against civilians, ethnic conflicts, civil wars, population movements, and war-related starvation and disease. It is therefore surprising that so few studies exist examining the issues of gender and war in eastern Europe. The collection of essays edited by Nancy M. Wingfield and Maria Bucur, *Gender and War in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe*, fills that void, while at the same time proposing innovative approaches to the study of war and society.

The authors of the ten essays in this collection bring to the historiography of eastern Europe a focus on social and cultural issues enriched with a sophisticated gender analysis. Each essay seems to respond to Joan Wallach Scott's quest to see gender as a signifier of power and to examine "specific ways in which politics constructs gender and gender constructs politics."[2] The authors make arguments that contribute to our understanding of war far beyond the specific experiences of eastern Europeans. They illuminate how war experiences are articulated and

remembered, how they support or challenge official narratives, and how they redefine basic categories associated with war, such as patriotism, heroism, and sacrifice. The editors and authors worked hard to achieve consistent approaches and high-quality contributions.

The book is divided into three thematic parts. The first section, "Challenging Gender Roles/Restoring Order," presents articles on World War I in Austria-Hungary. Alon Rachamimov's " 'Female Generals' and 'Siberian Angels': Aristocratic Nurses and the Austro-Hungarian POW Relief" focuses on Red Cross female nurses from aristocratic families deployed by Austro-Hungary to assist POWs in Russia. The essay uses memoirs of aristocratic nurses to discuss the critical position of women in their traditional nurturing roles of sustaining the war effort and soldiers' morale. Rachamimow reminds us that during World War I these female roles gained prominence in the context of mass mobilization and nineteenth-century middle-class ideals of women as symbols of the home and nation. The mission provided moral and material support for the POWs, and it empowered upper-class women in unprecedented ways, leading one of them to compare herself to a "female general" (p. 33). Rachamimov underscores the significance of both gender and class during World War I, where modern warfare coexisted with an archaic social and political order based on monarchies and transnational aristocratic bonds.

In "Civilizing the Soldier in Postwar Austria," Maureen Healy focuses on Austrian soldiers' transition from the world of combat to that of peace and civilian life. At the center of this process, Healy argues, stood the family and the role of the father as head of the family that demobilized soldiers were expected to reclaim. Healy uses the term *Umarbeitung* (adaptation), which, in this context, denotes the return to a civilian life that was also identified with returning to civilization. Although the transition to postwar order is not a new topic for historians, most works focus on a war's effects on women and female roles. But what about men who are first trained for violence on the battlefield and then expected to function in peacetime societies? Healy poignantly reminds us that men are subject to as much pressure to adapt to the ideal of the warrior as women are to comply with domestic and maternal roles. She points to the dire consequences of the extreme polarization of gender roles by showing that men, induced and encouraged to commit acts of violence, did not transition naturally back to the "civilized" rules of peacetime society. Healy successfully demonstrates the centrality of the family to the process of *Umarbeitung* by discussing the family as both the source of recivilization and a victim of male violence. The postwar increase in domestic violence, in particular, illustrates a compelling connection between domestic and public spheres so often forgotten in traditional political and diplomatic accounts of war.

Eliza Ablovatski's "Between Red Army and White Guard: Women in Budapest, 1919" analyzes the cultural construction and deployment of female images in the political language of two revolutionary forces in post-World War I Hungary: the Communist Left and the Christian National Right. The author convincingly demonstrates that political messages were most effective when they evoked images of sexual disorder, female sexual vulnerability, and disintegration of the family. Right-wing activists used polarized images of good and bad females to promote the nationalist cause. They depicted White women as apolitical and sexually chaste while describing Red women as politically engaged and sexually promiscuous. These women were symbols of moral decadence and a threat to the Hungarian nation. The Left similarly cultivated the memory of the revolution and civil war through the symbolic representations of women. For them, sexual violence against women on the part of the Whites became central to the myth of the Left's martyrdom. Here, the mistreatment of women served to stigmatize the White forces as morally depraved and uncivilized. Ablovatski points to the central role of rape in the images of the barbarous nature of the White government. But even in this case, sexual violation of women was used in a symbolic way. Ablovatski's essay demonstrates that when incorporated into the collective memory, sexual violence against women served to vilify the perpetrators, but did little to help the victims or change perceptions of rape as a social stigma for women.

The second part of the book, "Gendered Collaborating and Resisting," opens with Melissa Feinberg's engaging essay, "Dumplings and Domesticity: Women, Collaboration, and Resistance in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia." Feinberg examines advice on cooking by a right-wing Czech women's organization, the Women's Center, as a way of resisting the Nazis and preserving a distinct Czech identity. Feinberg's main contribution lies in bringing to light domesticity and gender as sites of struggles and adjustments to the wartime occupation. Czech attitudes toward the German occupation, she argues, stemmed from a traditional Czech ethos of combining nationalism with democratic values. But the occupation came at the time when many Czechs reevaluated and modified democratic principles by insisting

on strengthening traditional social hierarchies, including the traditional family and gender roles, as a main requirement for national survival. The Women's Center, a cultural organization approved by the Nazis, published Czech recipes and advice on cooking that, Feinberg shows, carried a national message that went beyond commitment to individual families. The recipes extolled traditional Czech dishes and advised how to substitute ingredients to achieve a supposedly unique Czech taste at the time of food shortages. The organization encouraged women to become nurturers of the nation through cultivating domesticity and a distinct Czech flavor. Clearer definitions of the terms "resistance" and "collaboration" in this essay would have helped show how Czech cooking traditions that seemed to be well within the policies of the occupier could in fact be qualified as resistance.

The next essay continues the discussion of resistance and collaboration in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Looking at court documents from post-World War II trials of suspected Nazi collaborators, Benjamin Frommer, in "Denouncers and Fraternizers: Gender, Collaboration, and Retribution in Bohemia and Moravia during World War II and After," explores two types of aiding the occupier commonly associated with women: denunciation and fraternization. Frommer demonstrates that women were not only victims but also perpetrators of the war. Denunciation and fraternization, practiced mainly in the local and domestic realm, were examples of gendered collaboration that resulted from limits imposed on women's participation in public life (p. 118). One of Frommer's most intriguing insights comes from analyzing the relationships among nationalism, postwar retribution, and cultural models of masculinity. Czech men "failed" to protect their nation by not initiating armed resistance against the Nazis. Instead, the Germans assumed the traditional role of protectors. "But if a German was to 'protect' the nation," Frommer asks, "then what role remained for Czech men? That some Czech women fraternized with German men undoubtedly compounded frustration at the nation's impotence" (p. 121). For some Czech men, taking revenge on these women was an act of reclaiming "their dominant position over public life" (p. 125). This may help explain why the persecution of fraternizers targeted women, and not men who maintained relationships with German women.

In "Family, Gender, and Ideology in World War II Latvia," Mara Lazda analyzes the role of gender and family in the policies of the Soviet and German occupations of Latvia. The author points to a strong link between traditional gender roles and nationalism. For Latvians, the elevation of women as mothers was associated with national independence, which Latvia enjoyed between 1918 and 1940. Not surprisingly, the family stood at the center of struggles between the occupiers and the occupied. According to Lazda, both the Soviet and Nazi regimes sought to impose control by manipulating images of gender and family. While the Soviets claimed to "liberate" women and give them rights equal to those of men, the Nazis supported maternal and domestic roles of women. In both cases, gender ideology served to establish control as well as "build both material and moral support for the war" among the Latvians (p. 134). For Latvians, and especially those brutally deported to Siberia and Central Asia, the family was a tool of resistance and survival. Lazda's contribution lies in demonstrating the fluidity of the concept of family and its use for political purposes. Manipulating familial images and practices was a source of power and a way to achieve different and often contradictory goals. Lazda's analysis of Nazi family policies comes through clearer than that of the Soviet case. This perhaps has to do with multiple and contradictory meanings that the Soviet regime assigned to familial bonds. One is intrigued by the central role of family in executing repressive policies against the Latvians by the Soviets, a regime that officially underestimated familial ties in favor of communal bonds. Why were women and children made responsible for men's "crimes" and deported to the Soviet Union? These contradictions warrant further examination.

The book's last section, "Remembering War: Gendered Bodies, Gendered Stories," demonstrates the power of memory to shape national ideology and popular perceptions of war. Memory is critical to identifying war as a gendered experience, in which men are associated with fighting and women with waiting and mourning. What is particularly striking about this section's essays is that the memory of war as an almost exclusively masculine endeavor starts not after, but already during war, even if in reality women and men play far more diverse roles in warfare.

In "Kosovo Maiden(s): Serbian Women Commemorate the Wars of National Liberation, 1912-1918," Melissa Bokovoy argues that among Serbs in interwar Yugoslavia a distinct two-dimensional tradition of commemorating the Balkan Wars developed. First, it extolled the supposedly special Serbian sacrifice in the Balkan Wars and during World War I. Second, women in their traditional roles as mothers, daughters, sisters, wives, and fiancÃ©s of fallen soldiers transmitted a collective memory of the distinct Serbian sacrifice through mourning and laments.

For Serbs, models of sacrifice came from the poems and legends of the Battle of Kosovo Polje against the Ottoman Turks in 1389. The Kosovo maiden, who lost her beloved in the battle and then took care of his dead body, became a symbol of the proper female role during war. In a multinational Yugoslav state, Bokovoy claims, these images helped solidify the notion of a unique Serbian sacrifice and "elevated the Serbs to a claim of first among equals, a position that they collectively remembered, commemorated and believed to be rightfully theirs" (p. 166). Bokovoy makes it clear, however, that the tradition of female-dominated commemoration only reinforced the official memory of the Balkan Wars as one that "privileged male experiences over female experiences" (p. 167). The emphasis on women's suffering as men's companions obscured the diverse roles women played during the Balkan Wars.

Maria Bucur's essay, "Women's Stories as Sites of Memory: Gender and Remembering Romania's World Wars," explores individual accounts of World War I and World War II in Romania as part of collective historical memory. Using memoirs, diaries, and oral interviews, she focuses on the construction of the gendered self. Bucur suggests that the experience of total war made a significant impact on the self-representation of women. Participation in war as nurses or even civilians gave women a new self-confidence and a feeling that their recollections should be part of the collective memory of war. In doing so, women actively redefined the notion of wartime heroism, which did not have to be associated with combat. Bucur's methodological message about the use of oral interviews in writing history is significant. Oral histories, according to her, demonstrate that women's contributions to official memory are less visible, but significant for small communities as women are primarily responsible for transmitting oral narratives, organizing burials, and remembering the dead in their families (p. 187). How is it then that women are barely present in the collective memory of which they are the primary bearers and transmitters? This is an important point that opens a new avenue for further historical investigation.

Katherine R. Jolluck continues the theme of remembering war through the prism of the gendered self. In "The Nation's Pain and Women's Shame: Polish Women and Wartime Violence," she explores links among national ideology, gender, and experience of exile. Using personal testimonies of Polish women deported to the Soviet Union during the Soviet occupation of eastern Poland between 1939 and 1941, Jolluck argues that Polish women tended to interpret the suffering inflicted by the Soviets in patriotic categories. They explained physical discomfort, disease, hunger, and beatings, commonly experienced by women and men alike, in terms of suffering for the nation. Although, as Jolluck proves on the basis of other sources, sexual violence was rampant in Soviet labor camps, the incidents are missing from Polish women's personal accounts. While national ideology helped explain and continue what Jolluck identifies as "generic" suffering, violations of the female body specifically clashed with the understanding of proper Polish womanhood. According to the author, vague language and a lack of direct references to rape and forced prostitution in women's accounts indicate that these offenses were the most difficult to explain in terms of national martyrdom. "Instead, in cases involving sexual coercion, the women isolate themselves and internalize the offense. Their Polishness means nothing when they are violated as women; neither does the nationality of the man seem relevant. The incident appears to reflect on the victim; not the perpetrator" (p. 210). Jolluck's contribution is to illuminate links between gender and nationalism on a deeply intimate level. Generic suffering intensified national identity, while violations of "Polish cultural norms of proper womanhood" resulted in shame and repressed memories (p. 213).

The collection's closing essay, " 'The Alienated Body': Gender Identity and the Memory of the Siege of Leningrad" by Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, examines the memory and experience of starvation during the Leningrad Blockade of 1942-43. Using diaries, memoirs, and oral interviews, the author centers her analysis on perceptions of the physical body in the context of war. "The Alienated Body," according to Kirschenbaum, denotes attempts of those who experienced the Leningrad Blockade to silence the issue of starvation and subsequent deformation of the physical body. For Kirschenbaum, the merging of the battlefront and home front, the male and female spheres of activity, in the besieged city of Leningrad was exemplified by the emaciated physical body deprived of visible signs of gender. Kirschenbaum points out that the conventional notion of wartime heroism prevented Leningraders from discussing starvation, because doing so contradicted the paradigm of "'heroes of the Leningrad front' " (p. 220). Thus, the memory of the war was fit into the conventional narrative of heroism centered on soldiering, even if wartime experiences directly contradicted that narrative. The author argues that the Soviet state did little to silence the experience of starvation. Rather, it was primarily the power of traditional im-

ages of war and heroism that prevented people from writing about starvation. Kirschenbaum demonstrates how women, in particular, distanced themselves from their own histories while talking about effects of starvation on the physical body. If they broached the subject, they usually talked about other women, not themselves. Similar to the heroines of Jolluck's essay, women in Leningrad chose to stay silent. When doing so they supported the traditional notion of war heroism and clung to an idea of prewar civilization embodied in physical differences between women and men.

Gender and War in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe is an engaging read and a remarkable scholarly accomplishment. The authors succeed in "gendering the front," the task set out by the editors in the introduction. Each essay convincingly defines and analyzes "the war as a historical subject that encompasses more than battlefields and the 'cult of the fallen soldiers' " (p. 1). The authors do a marvelous job of situating their findings within broader historical contexts and current historiographical debates. One would like to see a closing chapter in which the editors bring these points together and make broader conclusions about the eastern European experience of war and gender. Several themes, most importantly the Holocaust, are missing from the collection, but this is a pioneering study that should open a broader discussion of gender and war on the eastern front.

The book demonstrates clearly that there is a need to redefine and historicize basic terms associated with war, such as heroism, sacrifice, and patriotism. Indeed, there is a need to redefine war itself. Why is combat still a privileged experience in historical literature? After all, war makes its way into every aspect of life and affects civilian populations in unimaginable ways. It requires responses that are often more challenging and complex than those expected on the battlefield. This book is essential reading for anyone interested in how war affects society. It is an excellent text for undergraduate and especially graduate classes. By reading this collection, scholars and students can discover multifaceted methodologies and diverse sources useful for approaching issues of gender and war in any historical context.

Notes

[1]. Margaret Randolph Higgonet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel, and Margaret Collins Weitz, eds., *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press), 1.

[2]. Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 46.

Citation: Malgorzata Fidelis. Review of Wingfield, Nancy M.; Bucur, Maria, eds., *Gender and War in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe*. HABSBURG, H-Net Reviews. January, 2008.

URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=14035