

# Conference

## **Gender, War and Culture: From Colonial Conquest, Standing Armies and Revolutionary Wars to the Wars of Nations and Empires (1650s-1910s)**

UNC-Chapel Hill • February 20-22, 2014

### **Part 1: Chapter 1**

#### **CONSOLIDATING STATES, PROFESSIONALIZING ARMIES, AND CONTROLLING VIOLENCE IN THE LONG-TERM AFTERMATH OF THE THIRTY YEARS WAR**

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##### **Introduction**

This chapter will survey the major changes in preparing, conducting and controlling war in Europe from around 1650 to 1780 and assess these changes from the perspective of gender history. It will be necessary to consider some developments prior to 1650, because of their relevance to current interpretations of early modern warfare and especially the place of women in military life. The chapter will follow developments into the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but will not examine how and why things began to change from around 1750/70. These aspects (e.g. impact of Enlightened thought on military practice) are better covered in the chapter on European revolutionary and Napoleonic warfare. Where possible, some reference will be made to navies, but the main focus will be on armies for reasons of space.

The material will be divided into four sections of unequal length (subtitles are provisional):

##### **1) Gender and War in Early Modern European History**

This will examine briefly how gender features in the three main approaches to early modern European military history:

- 1) The 'war and society' (sometimes called 'new military history') approach has dominated since the 1980s. more recently, its focus has move away from more conventional social and economic questions about military personnel, and has broadened to include more cultural aspects and investigations of experience and perception.
- 2) Political history continues to examine the relationship of war and state/institution-building Ce.g. Charles Tilly, B.D. Porter)
- 3) 'conventional' military history has traditionally remained concerned with military organisations and the conduct of war, but has shifted recently towards a more cultural approach, notably in the current attempt to define 'characters' or 'ways' of war

Questions relating to gender have largely been confined to the first approach and, until recently, usually limited themselves to brief discussions of male-female relations as a dimension of wider 'military-civil' relations. Gender issues usually only feature in the second approach as objects of state regulation e.g. the development of martial law and its distinctions between (primarily male)

combatants and (often female) civilians. Finally, gender aspects rarely feature in the third approach, beyond the treatment of women and other civilians as ‘victims’ of violence. I want to argue that we need to combine all three approaches, not only to gain a more satisfactory understanding of warfare, but especially to (re-) integrate gender with military history for early modern Europe.

The rest of the section will [in the final chapter] explore these three aspects (society, state, war) in more detail, using this as an opportunity to convey general findings about each to help guide readers (esp. those approaching the volume without specialist knowledge of early modernity). The main focus will be on defining what might constitute the European way of war in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The discussion will support what follows by outlining, among other aspects, how states sought to legitimate their growing control of violence by restricting how wars were organised, sustained and waged.

A key purpose of this discussion will be to reappraise the current paradigm for gender and early modern European warfare. This has been given shape by John Lynn (2008) who gives the standard political-military chronology a new lease of life by claiming that women were essential in the transition to modern, permanent armies after 1650.

#### *The Current Paradigm*

- Post 1650 warfare is usually labelled ‘limited’ in contrast to the supposed ‘age of religious wars’ in the preceding century and a half, as well as the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars that followed from 1792.
- much current writing describes armies before 1650 as ‘contract armies’ raised by supposedly independent military contractors (‘enterprisers’) who recruited ‘mercenaries’ who, again allegedly, had little motivation beyond pay and plunder
- such armies were simply a transitional stage, used by monarchs who, as yet, lacked sufficiently developed states to maintain large forces directly
- problems of control contributed to what is often characterised as ‘meaningless’ violence’, seemingly exemplified by the Thirty Years War
- this was so destructive, it is argued, because monarchs’ inability to pay soldiers forced armies to sustain themselves through what John Lynn has dubbed ‘the pillage economy’

#### *Campaign Community and the Pillage Economy*

- according to Lynn, contract armies formed ‘campaign communities’: large, mobile groups containing a high proportion of women (half or more).
- These women were (allegedly) essential to the pillage economy, both procuring food and plunder, and disbursing this in camp and through sale and exchange with civilians.

#### *‘State Commission Armies’ and ‘Garrison Communities’*

- renewed institutional development after 1648 (what used to be called ‘absolutism’) strengthened European states and allowed them to replace ‘contract armies’ with ‘state commission armies’ paid directly from taxes raised and disbursed by the central authorities.
- These state commissioned armies were both permanent (‘standing armies’) and fixed, living in ‘garrison communities’ (a term used by Lynn, but coined by the German historian Beate Engelen)
- Troops no longer moved aimlessly in search of food, but were supplied in their garrisons during peacetime, and then marched out on campaign in war only accompanied by much smaller numbers of ‘necessary women’ to provide limited support (cleaning, mending, cooking, nursing) while male civilian contractors supplied food and fodder.
- it was this transition that enabled European governments to ‘limit’ war

### *Importance for My Argument*

- Lynn's work is important and contains much that I agree with, but I must take issue with the overarching thesis as it distorts not only what preceded 1650, but how things changed thereafter. I feel it is important to clarify this, given the significance of early modern developments as a foil to formulate the characteristics used to define and articulate discussions of war and gender in modernity. Much of this will entail deconstructing the clichés of the Thirty Years War as 'meaningless violence', whilst indicating that the cultural memory of that conflict as destructive nonetheless contributed to official efforts to 'tame' war after 1650. It will also cast doubt on John Lynn's paradigm of a transition from a fairly transient, mobile and female dominated 'campaign community' to a more stable, male dominated 'garrison community' after 1650. This paradigm both overestimates the presence of women with armies prior to 1650, and underestimates their place thereafter. It rests on a faulty assumption that pre-1650 armies were sustained by a 'pillaging economy' requiring women, rather than women simply engaging in this 'economy of makeshifts' in order to sustain their presence with the army.

### *Critique*

Both the standard chronology and Lynn's interpretation have a number of flaws.

#### a) *Continuity rather than Change*

- they tend to overemphasise change relative to continuity
- the models of 'contract armies' and 'state commission armies' are better regarded as analytical 'ideal types', rather than an accurate depiction of actual changes across 1650
- on the one hand, military contractors were never the free, economic entrepreneur that the term suggests. Like soldiers, most were actually bound by a range of loyalties extending well beyond a purely economic contract. Both the standard chronology and the 'pillaging economy' argument perpetuate the 'mercenary myth' that soldiers changed fundamentally in their origins and motivations either with the rise of standing armies, or later with the revolution. The vast majority of soldiers already prior to 1650 were subjects of their paymasters and were bound by multiple loyalties, identities and motives, not simply economic ones. There is no real evidence that they cared less for the causes they fought for than other soldiers prior to the 1790s (and in many cases well beyond that - i.e. this is not so much an argument that pre-1790 soldiers were especially motivated, more that those after that date were more indifferent to causes, or at least motivated by more mundane reasons than desired by nationalists and idealists).
- on the other, most European armies did not eliminate personal, contractual elements from their military management until the nineteenth century
- similarly, pre-1650 armies also contained 'garrison communities' as well as more mobile campaign communities, which themselves remained a feature of the operational conduct of war into the early nineteenth century

#### b) *Problems with the Pillage Economy*

- the 'pillaging economy' model is problematic
- warfare prior to 1650 was not 'meaningless violence', but remained closely linked to state policy and diplomacy
- it was thus, in this sense, already limited, since the goals were themselves fairly limited (forcing your opponent to agree honourable terms)
- war was already guided by customs and conventions, and even if these were often breached, these very breaches allowed contemporaries to distinguish atrocities from 'proper conduct'

c) *Women's Roles*

- more importantly, the pillage economy model claims women were essential to sustaining armies, and that their activities whilst with the campaign community were necessary to military logistics
- I would reverse this relationship: armies were not sustained purely by plunder, but pillaging was important in enabling women to accompany soldiers
- pillaging belonged to the 'economy of makeshifts' (a term also employed by Lynn), enabling individuals to survive in a precarious environment, but not fundamental to sustaining the army as a whole

d) *The Contributions System*

- pre-1650 governments did not give commanders a free rein to plunder, since this would compromise monarchs' claims to be fighting a legitimate, just war by proper means (an important element of monarchical cultural capital). The main expect was when destruction was used as a deliberate strategic weapon, usually to intimidate an opponent into negotiating, as when Wallenstein sent raiding parties into Electoral Saxony during the summer of 1632.
- moreover, plundering is ill-suited to the long-term maintenance of large armies - it is wasteful and haphazard. Armies were also never entirely mobile, but always disbursed some units to hold important towns and other places. Some of these garrisons were maintained continually for several years - something that would have been impossible if they relied solely on plunder.
- However, governments did experience serious difficulties trying to collect and disburse resources centrally and so largely gave up paying soldiers directly
- instead, they developed the contributions system whereby commanders were permitted to draw supplies and money directly from local communities using existing local institutional structures and networks.
- this system was open to abuse and failed to provide all that was needed, hence the associated disorder and destruction

e) *Motives for Joining the Campaign Community*

- the arguments Lynn advances to explain why people joined the campaign community work better for men than for women
- though regulated to a degree, the campaign community indeed displayed a libertine lifestyle that may have attracted men to enlist
- however, women's roles were essentially still gender-defined: cleaning, cooking, mending, nursing and food procurement
- moreover, their status suffered by association with soldiers who were generally despised by settled society
- plus, their presence was only tolerated, not encouraged by the authorities, while the campaign community was scarcely a pleasant environment
- the main attraction was that armies did offer a form of community to those who were already marginalised or disadvantaged by settled social organisation, or for those from communities seriously disrupted by war.
- the same motives encouraged men to join the campaign community as camp followers (Lynn exaggerates the proportion of women - armies were also accompanied by large numbers of male grooms, servants and transport personnel)
- in particular, the campaign community allowed both men and women without property to form at least approximating to the post-Reformation social ideal of the household headed by man and wife

- this is an important point, since this remained an attraction of military life after 1650, despite growing official efforts to restrict soldiers' marriages

## 2) The Post-1650 Regulatory Framework

This will be the shortest section and will explain and outline the normative framework developed after 1650 to regulate soldiers' lives and their interactions with civilians. The discussion will provide an opportunity to provide more coverage of important characteristics of post-1650 military institutions and how they relate to gender: greater permanence of military formations and tighter enforcement and supervision. The key argument will be that this was not a period of innovation. All the norms and the methods to enforce them had developed from about 1520 (and especially 1570). The difference was that the more secure fiscal base and the greater permanence of military subunits (i.e. regiments, as opposed to armies) assisted the authorities in enforcing the desired norms.

### *Greater Permanence*

- there was no peace dividend after the wars of the first half of the seventeenth century as rulers used the argument of 'necessity' to convert wartime contributions into permanent military taxes, now under central supervision
- these paid for the now permanent armies, especially with the prolonged renewed warfare after 1672
- these armies are usually called 'standing armies', since they were maintained in peace as well as war
- however, it is better to think of them as cadres - a permanent core which was expanded in wartime by recruiting additional soldiers, and/or drafting militiamen into regular formations

### *Tighter Enforcement and Supervision*

- these forces were certainly better regulated than pre-1650 forces, however, rather than new, innovative forms of supervision, the real difference was that the rules were now more tightly enforced -
- the basic regulatory framework had already been developed since about 1500, but especially between 1570 and 1620
- this was revised and made more comprehensive between 1670 and 1714, but very few new features were added
- tighter enforcement was assisted by greater permanence - not so much of armies (most large monarchies effectively had permanent *armies* before 1650), but through the permanence of the *subunits* i.e. regiments, companies and other military formations
- i.e. permanent formations assisted enforcement - closer supervision, greater institutional continuity and administrative routine (including institutional memory)
- plus, the slow, continued development of military professionalism - esp. the consolidation of an institutional culture around the permanent formations and their identities
- plus, the expanded and more effective network of local civil officials who were more effective than those before 1650 at surveillance and at providing resources and manpower for the army

## Part 3) Gendered Roles and Spaces

This part will focus on roles relating to the official purpose of military organisations i.e. warfare and preparations for it. It will examine how these roles and their associated spaces were largely, but not exclusively defined as male. Elite women could assume the role of commander, and could do so as women. Far more women had a place, even in official organisation, as nurses. Women of all social groups were also present as spectators of reviews and even battles. There will be some discussion of women as combatants, both openly as women (e.g. defending besieged towns) and those disguised as men. The latter have attracted a large literature out of all proportion to their numbers. This will be analysed briefly, but will not dominate the discussion. Instead, more space will be given to the definition and practice of masculinity. Here, it will be argued that martial roles were differentiated by social status, with certain aspects being denied the majority of ordinary soldiers. Armies thus shared much with the rest of early modern corporate society. It will also be argued that these social distinctions combined with the military hierarchy to enforce a paternalism affecting male soldiers, as well as army wives and dependants. Soldiers were treated as children, with both negative and positive consequences.

- Formally, virtually everything associated with the military's official function was male:
- preparing for and participating in combat
- the battlefield and exercise ground were officially masculine spaces

### *Women's Unofficial Roles*

#### Cross Dressers

- there were a few (very few) cross-dressing women serving as soldiers and sailors - their significance is primarily in the contemporary discussion of war and gender, rather than its practice
- a minority (within this minority) became soldiers as a life-style choice e.g. Catharina Margareth Linck (1687-1721) was a lesbian who married a woman whilst living as a soldier
- however, the 'push' factors (escaping some adverse circumstances) generally appear paramount in such cases
- though few in number, such cases are historically informative:
  - i) e.g. Linda Gowing: has argued that gender definitions remained fluid prior to the 1770s and that, consequently, early modern gender roles were performative with a person's gender being assumed on the basis of their clothing and behaviour
  - ii) yet: virtually all contemporary accounts emphasise fear of discovery: this suggests that gender was already more solid

#### Urban defenders

- there were many more women assisting in the defence of besieged towns
- however, as already before 1650, their position was ambiguous - they were often expelled as 'useless mouths' - i.e. drain on resources
- plus, changes in operational agendas removed smaller, poorly fortified towns as primary military targets after 1650, reducing the likelihood of civilian involvement in defence (concept of 'open towns' which would neither be defended, nor attacked)

### *Women's Formal Roles*

officially sanctioned roles for women were restricted to:

- political direction - for those elite women in charge of states e.g. Maria Theresia or Catherine the Great
- as nurses - formally part of the military establishment in many countries e.g. Britain by 1683
- as spectators of reviews (e.g. Bemerode 1735) and even battles (e.g. Falkirk 1745)

### *Wives*

- there were also women still accompanying their husbands on campaign
- i.e. this reflects the centrality of marriage to the post-1650 regulatory regime which had two dimensions:
  - first, armies tried to restrict the proportion of soldiers who could marry and to assume the position of parent - soldiers had to obtain their company commander's permission to marry
  - second, the authorities assumed some responsibility for these 'army women' (i.e. paternalism as both restrictive, and as 'benevolence')
- they determined which wives could accompany the regiment when it marched. These wives performed the same tasks as the women of the pre-1650 campaign community
- the pillage economy was curbed, but elements remained as an economy of makeshifts enabling both husband and wife to subsist
- however, the authorities were more likely now to make some provision (rations etc) for both wives accompanying their husbands, and for wives and children left behind
- again, as with the pre-1650 campaign community, there were also male non-combatants, especially to look after the animals and as officers' servants (e.g. the Swedish field army, spring 1709: 24,300 soldiers, 300 artillery transport personnel, 1100 administrators, 4,000 grooms, labourers, draymen, stable lads and boys, 1,700 wives, children and serving girls)

### *Male Roles and Masculinity*

- war was still regarded as the ultimate test of manliness, but martial glory was socially constructed and constricted
- the ethos of the noble warrior was reserved for officers (especially senior, aristocratic ones)
- there is some evidence that soldiers also wanted to share this - e.g. soldiers wanting to fight duels, rather than mere brawls
- but the official masculine role for most soldiers was defined by what John Lynn has aptly labelled the 'culture of forbearance'
- battles were primarily decided by firepower which soldiers had to endure at close range, often without being able to hit back at their opponents
- this required self-discipline and control in tight formations
- there was little scope for individual prowess or heroism
- the social distinctions embedded in the military hierarchy made armies patriarchal for soldiers as well as wives
- officers (and monarchs) referred to soldiers as children
- I have already mentioned that, like children, soldiers had to ask their commander for permission to marry
- officers supervised other aspects of their daily lives (at least whilst on duty)

- paternalism was expressed also in the expectation that soldiers would not grow - they were not expected to show initiative or to gain the skills or experience associated with promotion beyond NCO
- while officers (and civilian commentators) generally wanted soldiers to be pious, thrifty and obedient, they generally also expected them to behave badly - drinking to excess, frequenting brothels etc

#### **Part 4) The Military as Corporate Society**

In contrast to the official military spaces (battlefield, exercise ground) discussed in the previous section, the final section will examine how armies' living spaces were both female as well as male. It will reinforce the growing body of literature that challenges the assumption that 'old regime' armies were segregated from their societies. In many ways, they were more closely integrated than the 'citizens-in-arms' of the nineteenth century. A high proportion of soldiers were married and lived with their families, either in barracks, or more commonly billeted on civilian households. Unlike nineteenth-century armies, where soldiering was usually a rite of male passage (restricted to 3 years or so, with soldiers permanently with their unit and living separately in barracks), later seventeenth and eighteenth century soldiers often served for most of their adult lives, but lived amongst civilians and usually had supplementary employment as labourers etc in their long off-duty hours or furloughs. Thus, they were one of many corporate groups in society, no more separate than other such groups, though their function (like that of the clergy), did give them certain special characteristics.

##### *The Military as a Corporate Society*

- permanent armies were not segregated from society (except to a greater extent in Russia)
- there were very few purpose-built barracks prior to the 1730s, and even in the late eighteenth-century, most soldiers were billeted on civilians (or lodged in inns as in Britain)
- married soldiers lived with their families in the same spaces as unmarried personnel
- soldiers served for long periods (commonly on renewable contracts of 2 to 8 years each, except in countries with limited conscription like Prussia where service was around 25 years)
- however, they were also given large amounts of free time or long furloughs - so they could supplement their meagre pay and rations by working as day labourers and other menial tasks
- thus, in contrast to the period after the eighteenth century:
  - i) military service was not a rite of passage for young males - not all men served, and those that did were often married and continued to engage in the civilian economy (and could live for long periods of the year in their home community)
  - ii) barracks and other military accommodation were not exclusively male spaces, and were rarely segregated from civilian society

This section will also return to the argument introduced in section 1 about the 'pillage economy'. Women's roles in the 'garrison community' were not so different from those in the pre-1650 'campaign community'. Most of these roles were gender defined: cooking, cleaning, childminding, nursing etc. Food procurement continued to be a key task, despite more regular provisioning by the military authorities. Most armies only provided a bread ration in peace time, with meat (or a small cash supplement in lieu) added for units on campaign. Thus, personnel still had to source all other food, as well as prepare their own meals. The specifically female aspect of this reflected women's

continuing ambiguous official position as largely tolerated rather than formally sanctioned. Women, even if wives, did not receive rations and so their material position was not so different from those with pre-1650 armies. The final part of this section will examine women's status, noting only a slight improvement in both official and popular attitudes to women with the army. Women, whether married or not, continued to suffer socially from their association with military personnel who, as a group, remained poorly perceived by the rest of society (occasional patriotic outbursts aside).

### **Some Conclusions**

- I would emphasise continuity over change - there were importance changes, but these were gradual and a matter of degree rather than absolute
- male and female roles and spaces were broadly similar to those prior to 1650 (at least for the preceding 150 years), but were marked by greater regulation and permanence
- women's roles and association with armies remained defined by society's gender roles, not by military logistics
- male soldiers roles were affected by paternalism embedded in the military hierarchy and reinforced by the evolution of military practice which placed a premium on a 'culture of forbearance'
- male-female relations centred on the institution of marriage as a socially-desirable and officially regulated ideal
- though restricted after 1650, most armies were willing to allow older, long-serving soldiers to marry (i.e. the most valued personnel)
- post 1650 armies contained elements of both the garrison and the campaign community, with women having a place in both
- male and female roles were affected by social as well as gender distinctions
- broader social values were important throughout, with, for instance, there being strong parallels between the ideal soldier and the ideal subject (pious, thrifty, obedient etc)
- finally, the social, political and military aspects need to be combined to achieve a better understanding of the relationship of war and gender.