

Conference

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

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Part 1: Chapter 7

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

SOCIETY, MASS WARFARE AND GENDER IN EUROPE DURING AND AFTER THE REVOLUTIONARY AND NAPOLEONIC WARS

Alan Forrest (University of York)

Revolutionary ideologies alone cannot explain the social effects of war in this period or the changes in gender relations that resulted from it. Of course they played their part, especially during the later 1790s, when France extended its imperium across much of the continent and attempted to impose the political values and the legal codes of its own revolution on the lands it conquered. In France's satellite republics critical constitutional changes were introduced that brought territories with often disparate social and political structures and widely divergent cultural traditions into line with those of revolutionary France. The abolition of feudal structures and elite privilege, the equality of all before the law, the stripping away of much of the temporal power of the Church all followed, and in parts of Europe which suffered such restraints – parts of Germany, the Spanish Netherlands or Ireland – local radicals cheered enthusiastically as they waited for their deliverance. But their enthusiasm was not universally shared, and those parts of Europe which already enjoyed republican constitutions – Geneva, for instance, or Holland – saw far less advantage in having French-style institutions imposed upon them by an outside military power. There, as in parts of Italy, the 1790s were a decade of change and reflection on competing models of republicanism, where local patriots argued about individual rights and constitutionalism even as they reacted for or against the French. War brought political change, and with it opened up new political debates. It is perhaps time, as Pierre Serna has recently suggested, to deconstruct the model of the 'Grande Nation', so popular in French historiography, and to consider the multiple ways in which revolutionary wars affected the self-awareness of people across Europe.¹

Under the Consulate and Empire further reforms followed – as most of continental Europe was subjected to much tighter military control – which sought to reform and modernise societies, in parts of Europe where the individual had often not enjoyed wide rights under the law. Women gained rights, too, sometimes for the first time, in such matters as property inheritance and the right to plead in civil cases; but they were not given equal rights with men. This did not necessarily make French rule popular, however: the image of the Empire in those lands they annexed - in Holland, for instance, or in the various princedoms along the Rhine – was often dominated by its demands for money and men, requisitions and conscription. It was an image heavy with threat, of a society

prepared to incur any sacrifice in pursuance of war; and where conscription was implemented it became 'one of the most pervasive institutions of the modern state'.² In turn it led to huge levels of resistance and draft evasion – as many as one-third of all those called up in the Rhineland, for instance.³ The small number of radicals and Jacobins who rushed to welcome the French when they first arrived in the Rhineland or the Swiss cantons were quickly outnumbered by those who resented the experience of military invasion. It was quickly apparent that what would most affect local society and gender relations within it was less the ideological message of the French Revolution than the demands of a long and grinding series of wars. Even here, of course, revolutionary ideology, like any ideology, can be seen to have played its part: by hardening attitudes between belligerents, introducing an element of moral superiority into military mentalities, and reducing the opportunities for compromise in ending the conflict. In the eyes of the revolutionaries – and to a degree in that of the monarchies ranged against them – this was a war that was fought not over marginal advantage – be they the cession of particular territories, the competition over overseas colonies, or a question of dynastic succession. It was a war fought in the name of absolutes, of moral certainties: for the French it was about protecting the gains of their revolution from the threats posed by aristocrats and counter-revolutionaries; for monarchs who had seen the fate of Louis XVI it was about saving their thrones, and their skins; for many ordinary people in Catholic southern Europe it was 'a war against God', a war unleashed by the French against what Michael Broers terms 'a – arguably *the* – central and social element in Italian life'.⁴ And by the end of the Napoleonic Wars the conflict was beginning to feed another ideological force, nationalism, across wide swathes of the European continent. The scale of the Wars was equalled only by its ambitions.

The scale and duration of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars were such that their effects were felt in all the protagonist nations, and not just in revolutionary France and its satellite republics, among those who spoke in the name of the nation in arms. The war spread inexorably across the continent, from Portugal in the west to Russia in the east, and for three European states – France, Austria and Great Britain – war became the norm, waged virtually without a break from the First Coalition in 1792 until Napoleon's final defeat at Waterloo. Across Europe millions of men were called on to fight, whether by conscription, press-ganging or the enrolment of volunteers, as the armies of all the belligerent states grew to an unprecedented size in the pursuance of mass warfare. The 'nation in arms' that France instituted and others copied might not involve all directly in the fighting (that remained largely the prerogative of men, and young, able-bodied men at that). But it went far to define male experience in these years and to equate men's capacity to enact and endure military violence as one of the most basic characteristics of masculinity.⁵ In some families endurance was not limited to a single generation, as men whose fathers had volunteered in 1791 to defend France against attack would themselves be in uniform in 1814, defending French territory again when the Allies invaded. It was a war that went far to define men's lives and dictated their chances of survival into old age. Women were not conscripted in any of the belligerent nations, and if all armies at this time seem to have boasted a few 'amazoness' who either dressed as men or made no secret of their gender, their number remained small (in the whole of the French army perhaps fifty to a hundred in all) and their role largely symbolic.⁶ In every country war marked out separate spheres for men and women, but not only between men and women. Just as important were the distinctions it forged between combatants and non-combatants, soldiers and civilians, as it increasingly prioritized the needs of the armies in the competition for scarce resources. Large numbers of women, children and the elderly were left to cope as best they could, with little or no welfare provision to which they could turn. Soldiers and civilians had different roles to play, though it should be emphasized that most were expected to make some form of sacrifice in pursuit of the war effort. This was, in David Bell's words, Europe's first 'total war'.⁷ It would leave deep scars – economic, social, demographic and emotional – that would take decades, if not generations, to heal.

At the same time governments called on their people to provide the resources necessary for waging war on this scale. Taxes rose, requisitions were ordered, and economies suffered twenty

years of dislocation as coasts were blockaded, industry turned to war production, and agriculture was called upon to feed the mass armies that criss-crossed the continent. Conscripts had to be trained, armed and equipped, and no army – not even the French in 1813 after the calamitous losses suffered in Russia during the previous winter – required or wanted the services of all. Generals needed soldiers who knew something of their trade, who could handle weapons and sustain the line under fire; the last thing they wanted was an uninitiated mass of ill-disciplined youngsters who would crumble at the first hint of enemy fire. But the whole population was required for fighting, it was mobilised for war support. No country even in wartime can afford to leave its fields untilled or its factories unmanned: in the Napoleonic era, though the phrase was never used, wars were fought on the home front as well as in the regiments. The armies themselves needed civilian workers and military auxiliaries: sutlers to supply the soldiers with food, nurses and doctors for their ambulances and infirmaries, carters to transport military supplies, gunsmiths to forge weapons and to carry out repairs on damaged muskets, seamstresses to make uniforms, cobblers to produce thousands of army boots. Civilians, especially those whose homes were close to war fronts, were called upon to increase their production targets to supply the armies; patriotism demanded it of them. Women for the most part remained at home, as the armies travelled longer distances, and generals were more determined than in previous campaigns to control the activity of camp-followers. But the armies were never a wholly masculine space. The French still used women as *cantinières* right through to the eve of the First World War⁸; while the British army at Waterloo may have been accompanied by as many as 33,000 women, many of them army wives.⁹ Back at home, of course, women were expected to contribute to the war effort in a multiplicity of ways. In the absence of male labour many had to assume the hard manual jobs on the farm which their husbands or brothers would customarily have carried out. One way or another, the wars impacted on their lives and challenged traditional gender roles.

War affected civilians' lives in so many ways. This was a war fought largely on European soil – though with occasional diversions to other parts of the world, the Caribbean, the Cape, Egypt and the Middle East - which spread disruption throughout civil society. War did not spare civilians its physical ravages. Towns and cities lay in the paths of armies, and often paid the price of war. Towns were besieged, villages and cottages were torched, farms looted and livestock driven away as rival armies marched across their neighbours' territory, often pillaging as they went. In German Central Europe the passage of Napoleon's Grande Armée on its way to Russia in 1812 resulted in the seizure of up to 90% of horses and cattle, depriving many of their means of making a livelihood and leaving local agriculture bereft of the draught animals on which it depended. Market lines were disrupted, roads and bridges cut, public buildings requisitioned for the use of the military. The result was an economic hecatomb as everything was sacrificed to the needs of the army. As for crops and flour stocks, the military took what it needed – Napoleon's army was notorious for living off the lands it marched through – and what the army did not requisition legally, desperate soldiers often stole or pillaged. After armies had passed the countryside was often left scarred and stripped bare of the resources local peasants needed to keep themselves alive through the following winter.¹⁰ But it should be stressed, this was not something new or unexpected. The wars of the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had prepared Europe for the return of unlimited martial contests.¹¹

Soldiers carried diseases, too, which did not spare the communities they passed through, and after great battles neighbouring cities were transformed into giant military hospitals to cope with the wounded and dying. In Saxony in 1812-13 diseases brought by soldiers killed as many as 10 per cent of local people, and a far higher proportion of Leipzig's doctors and nurses.¹² And as foreign territories were invaded and occupied, new levels of violence and suffering were released on the local population. In some cases whole populations were displaced, as happened in Hamburg in the winter of 1812-13, resulting on new levels of misery amongst civilians as they were forced, like any refugees, to load their possessions on to carts and head for safety elsewhere, to relatives, to the open countryside, to other cities. Towns and their people could so easily become pawns in the fighting,

as happened when the British bombarded Copenhagen in 1807 or when the Russians torched Moscow in 1812, imposing a terrible price on the citizenry. Major battles were occasionally fought in cities, too, reducing their suburbs and surrounding villages to piles of rubble: Leipzig in 1813 is perhaps the most famous example. Civilians were the victims of economic warfare, too. With the imposition of the British blockade and Napoleon's Continental System, civilians were deliberately targeted by the legislation as states used the economy as a weapon in the conflict. The Continental System was Napoleon's principal weapon in his war against Britain, defended by its navy and after Trafalgar seemingly impregnable to attack at sea. His purpose was deterrence: if civilians suffered too much economically, if traders' profits fell and companies went bankrupt, if Britain was deprived of its markets for colonial goods, the Commons would soon tire of war and sue for peace. Civilians here were seen as collateral damage, legitimate in war. Had the Continental System been fully implemented, much of Russia and the Baltic would have been condemned to penury.

Where there was economic exploitation, of course, there was also the opportunity for protest and insurrection, and in the Napoleonic Wars states showed little tolerance of dissent, often responding by taking immediate and disproportionate reprisals against civilians. In many parts of the Empire Napoleonic officials and gendarmes could seem terribly heavy-handed in their dealing with political protestors, which in turn left local people with a sense of outrage and hurt. In Hamburg and in many other cities of northern Germany in 1813 French rule was pilloried in the press, young men took to the streets and conscripts resisted incorporation into French units; and in the violence that followed crowds destroyed palisades and attacked customs posts, threw French officials into canals and tore down French flags and imperial eagles. But the brutality of the Imperial response only made matters worse, creating a welling-up of anti-French sentiment. The French turned their cannon to face the crowd in show of strength that was intended to deter. A special military court was set up to try those arrested, and summary executions were ordered in a bid to intimidate the rioters; but its effect was also to instil a fear and hatred of the French that ensured that many in Hamburg rushed into the streets later in the year to welcome the Russian army as liberators.¹³

Relations between an occupying army and the civil population were seldom easy – and they all the more fractured when pre-existing tensions and a sense of cultural or political superiority was present. Nowhere was this more true than in southern Spain, where French troops were accosted by peasants bearing primitive weapons and taking guidance from their priests in a sort of holy war against the invader. In Lauria, faced with the possibility of house-to-house fighting and heavy losses, Masséna ordered that the town be torched and its inhabitants slaughtered as they fled. Over 700 – some ten per cent of the population – were killed in the fighting. Another 341 were taken prisoner, to be shot or hanged in the days that followed. It was, says Philip Dwyer, a massacre, symptomatic of so many in Spain, where the army was exhausted by prolonged guerrilla fighting and where priests were described by the French as 'holding bibles in one hand and weapons in the other'. He admits that the attack may have been carried out for purely military purposes, as the standard tactics of a counter-insurgency campaign. But he makes two important points. Firstly, in this as in so many other cases, the commanders who ordered the killing 'dressed it in the rhetoric of an enlightened army fighting the forces of ignorance and superstition'. And secondly, there was nothing exceptional, nothing even unusual, about these tactics. It happened wherever the French army encountered armed resistance from civilians, or where guerrilla fighters took refuge among them. 'It is safe to say', he concludes, 'that there was not a region or country invaded by the French in which massacres did not occur. In Belgium, in Germany, in Switzerland, Holland, Italy, Spain and Russia whole towns were razed and their inhabitants massacred'.¹⁴ And though in the Imperial armies such repression was systemic, there were reported massacres across Europe when the various national armies were let loose on civilian populations. Killing, rape and indiscipline were not a French monopoly. The British in the Peninsula committed atrocities of their own, as did Prussian troops in 1814, in a belated act of vengeance for what they had themselves suffered at Jena. And the

Cossacks were feared in central and western Europe as much by opposing armies as by civilian populations.

If prejudice played its part within Europe – Prussians regarding Poles and Russians as less civilised than themselves, northern Europeans showing scant regard for the peasant communities of the Mediterranean – how much more did a sense of cultural (and sometimes racial) superiority affect behaviour and tarnish the reputation of European armies in the colonies. Again there could be a strong element of vengeance for the high losses they themselves had suffered at rebel hands; or a sense that they had to make examples of those who had abused and massacred their own soldiers. The expedition sent out by Napoleon in 1802 to recapture Saint-Domingue and re-impose slavery in the colony soon found itself with a terrible reputation for mass slaughter, if not wholesale genocide. Clearly the orders did not come from Paris, and a great deal of responsibility for the excessive levels of retribution must lie with local field commanders, men sickened by the torture suffered by their soldiers and by the indiscriminate massacre of white planters on the island. But the levels of violence they meted out, and the degrading forms of punishment they resorted to, were of a kind unknown on the old continent, and a brutality that they reserved for blacks or men of colour. Leclerc, in charge of the expedition, had guerrilla troops and runaways shot and hanged, extreme measures which he justified by reference to the violence of the context in which he was operating. He might talk of the need for ‘a war of extermination’, but there was no attempt to slaughter all the blacks or to conduct the ethnic cleansing of the island. Contemporary observers were content to comment that these were isolated massacres, a normal by-product of war. But Leclerc was replaced in 1802 by Donatien de Rochambeau, a former noble in the Ancien Regime, who went much further, that that would send a savage message to the insurgents. In the months that followed he wanted to speed up the cycle of death. Those convicted were to be drowned in batches, rather as they had been in the Loire under the Terror; and he added new tortures of his own, or reinvented cruel forms of execution that had been abandoned for decades: burning at the stake, an occasional crucifixion, or the particularly horrid fate which the Spaniards had inflicted on natives during their conquest of Hispaniola and which British had visited on Maroons in Jamaica: ‘the use of dogs to flush out rebels from the woods during military operations, but also to devour rebels in makeshift arenas’.¹⁵ In the colonial sphere there were few, if any, limits to the suffering which Europeans felt able to incite.

While on campaign, armies were a largely male preserve, with camps and barracks becoming an increasingly segregated space. As we have seen, women were rarely directly engaged in the fighting: the number who cross-dressed, hid their sex or simply accompanied their husbands on to the battlefield to take part in armed combat was never as great as the symbolic importance of the few might suggest. They had other ways of supporting the cause, however, ways that could differ markedly from country to country. In most parts of Europe they helped to supply the military; they were called upon to make donations, to sew uniforms, to provide nursing support for the wounded. And though the practice diminished with the great distances covered by armies and the need to preserve food supplies, European armies had since time immemorial been accompanied by swarms of camp-followers, those women – and sometimes their young children – who accompanied their husbands and boyfriends, who sold food and drink to the troops, found employment as laundresses for the army, or (and it is often and) sold their sexual favours to the men. Armies tended to treat them with tolerance at a time when there was no provision of military brothels or bureaucratization of the provision of sex for the troops. But the women of the towns the soldiers passed through were also treated as fair game, especially when, following the raising of a siege, an army was let loose on the community for twenty-four or forty-eight hours. At such moments, as at Ocakov on the Black Sea coast (taken by the Russians from the Turks in 1788) or at Bergen-op-Zoom forty years earlier (when it fell to the French), women were seen as fair game, as an aspect – like looting and pillage – of the legitimate spoils of victory.¹⁶ The high moral tone of the French Revolution changed little here.

It is clear that, like other civilians, women were poorly protected from the war or from the violence it generated. But they were not always innocent bystanders. In the northern Italian valleys, and later in Spain and Russia, they took a more actively military role, harbouring guerrilla fighters, bandits, smugglers and others engaged in small wars against invading armies. As in all wars they risked reprisals and degradation at the hands of the enemy, whilst those who associated with soldiers risked forging a reputation for sexual immorality and loose living. Many were caught up in operations over which they had no control – but that was not always the case as whole communities joined in the battle against the invading army. In Andalusia and in western Russia civilians – many of them peasants, including women – earned the hatred of invading troops by the acts of cruelty they perpetrated against them and by their refusal to hand over men whom the military condemned as terrorists. In Spain there are repeated accusations by the French of torture, of the killing and stripping of prisoners, of mutilation and sexual humiliation by village women.¹⁷ Some were surely exaggerated as the stories passed from mouth to mouth. Yet it hardly matters whether the stories are true; they were believed, and they passed into military folklore. And the actions of civilians can sometimes go far to explain the levels of violence and repression that ensued.

In northern Germany – and it may be a cultural feature peculiar to that region – women were to play a notable public role as charity organisers and moral leaders, raising money for good causes and active in their support of the men away at the front. They were the spearhead of the many patriotic societies that sprang up in Prussia, Saxony and some other north German states in the years after 1813, linked to the new nationalist movement which extended its influence following the defeat of Napoleon at the Battle of the Nations. The inspiration for such *Frauen-Vereine* came from above, with elite women – including the ladies of the Hollenzollern family itself – lending their names and their moral authority to the cause and helping to popularise the highly gendered symbol of the *Landesmutter* who cared for the community and honoured her obligations towards it. Elite participation was doubtless key to the success of the *Vereine* in gaining adherents and encouraging generosity, demonstrating the benefits of linking dynastic authority with institutional practices, but the elites played more than just a symbolic role. This was a truly women's movement, and by 1835 it had spread its outreach across much of northern Germany. As Jean Quataert explains, it worked as well as it did because 'the relationship was mutually constitutive – the authority and beneficence of the *Landesmutter* were communicated by the charitable activities of elite women at the local level, and the female ruler in turn oversaw and safeguarded women's public activity in civil society'.¹⁸ It was a tradition that could only evolve in a dynastic society, and it helps explain the extraordinary level of affection in which Queen Luise was held in Prussia and, after 1871, more generally across Germany, where she came to be seen as the archetypal *Landesmutter* and 'the guardian angel of the fatherland'.¹⁹

When peace was signed and the armies were finally disbanded, the problems for civilians, and for women in particular, were not over. The years following mass demobilisation were marked by instability and social unrest in many parts of Europe, as returning soldiers found only poverty and unemployment; and women were often forced back into domesticity by the need to care for wounded and disabled husbands who often faced long years of sickness, misery and depression resulting from their war experiences. In the war commemorations that followed, moreover, their contribution to the war effort was largely forgotten as post-war societies gloried in the masculine values of their warriors and mythologised their part in creating new national identities. In the course of the long struggle patriotic rhetoric had become militarized across much of Europe, with the values of valour and sacrifice inscribed on the escutcheons of nations. Women making bandages or raising patriotic loans could not easily vie with those who had spent their blood defending their people.²⁰ But of course it was not only women who lost status or suffered discrimination in the years following the war. Not all men had fought (indeed, the figure rarely exceeded around 10 per cent of the male population). For those who had escaped the fighting, or who had not been asked to fight, whether because of their age, their state of health or their family situation or because they

worked in a sector that was deemed essential to the war effort, the psychological effect could be almost as damaging. They, too, risked the fate of all outsiders in the post-war years, that of being excluded from the party that followed. They had no tales to tell, no moments of heroism to look back upon. In an era when military sacrifice was so passionately valued and honoured their lives could seem strangely shallow, and it could be difficult to sublimate a lingering shame, a pervasive sense of guilt and worthlessness.

¹ Pierre Serna, 'Introduction', in Serna (ed.), *Républiques sœurs : Le Directoire et la Révolution atlantique* (Rennes, 2009), p. 19.

² Thomas Hippler, *Citizens, Soldiers and National Armies: Military Service in France and Germany, 1789-1830* (London, 2008), p. 7.

³ Michael Rowe, *From Reich to State: The Rhineland in the Revolutionary Age, 1780-1830* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 178-79.

⁴ Michael Broers, *The Politics of Religion in Napoleonic Italy: Then War against God, 1801-1814* (London, 2002), p. ix.

⁵ Christopher E. Forth, *Masculinity in the Modern West: Gender, Civilization and the Body* (Basingstoke, 2008), p. 114.

⁶ Dominique Godineau, 'De la guerrière à la citoyenne: Porter les armes pendant l'Ancien Régime et la Révolution Française', *Clio* 20 (2004), pp. 43-69

⁷ David A. Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It* (New York, 2007).

⁸ Thomas Cardoza, *Intrepid Women: Cantinières and vivandières of the French Army* (Bloomington, IN, 2010), pp. 215-21.

⁹ Catriona Kennedy, 'From the Ballroom to the Battlefield', in Alan Forrest, Karen Hagemann and Jane Rendall (eds), *Soldiers, Citizens and Civilians: Experiences and Perceptions of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1790-1820* (Basingstoke, 2009), p. 139.

¹⁰ See, for instance, the account of the Moscow campaign in Jacques-Olivier Boudon, *Napoléon et la campagne de Russie, 1812* (Paris, 2012).

¹¹ John Childs, *Armies and Warfare in Europe, 1648-1789* (Manchester, 1982), p. 144.

¹² Karen Hagemann, "'Unimaginable Horror and Misery": The Battle of Leipzig in October 1813 in Civilian Experience and Perception', in Forrest et al (eds), *Soldiers, Citizens and Civilians*, pp. 157-78.

¹³ Katherine Aaslestad, *Place and Politics: Local Identity, Civic Culture and German Nationalism in North Germany during the Revolutionary Era* (Leiden, 2005), pp. 266-71.

¹⁴ Philip G. Dwyer, 'Violence and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars: massacre, conquest and the imperial enterprise', *Journal of Genocide Research* 15/2 (2013), p. 124.

¹⁵ Philippe Girard, 'French atrocities during the Haitian War of Independence', *Journal of Genocide Research* 15/2 (2013), pp. 142-43.

¹⁶ Stephen Conway, 'British Soldiers at Home : The Civilian Experience in Wartime', in Erica Charters, Eve Rosenhaft and Hannah Smith (eds), *Civilians and War in Europe, 1618-1815* (Liverpool, 2012), p. 130.

¹⁷ Jean-Marc Lafon, *L'Andalousie et Napoléon: contre-insurrection, collaboration et résistances dans le Midi de l'Espagne, 1808-12* (Paris, 2007), p. 104.

¹⁸ Jean H. Quataert, *Staging Philanthropy: Patriotic Women and the National imagination in Dynastic Germany, 1813-1916* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2001), p. 29.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

²⁰ Karen Hagemann, 'Reconstructing "Front" and "Home": Gendered Experiences and Memories of the German Wars against Napoleon: a case study', *War in History* 16/1 (2009), pp. 25-50.