

Conference:

Gender, War and Culture: From the Age of the World Wars to the Cold War, Anti-colonial Struggle to the Wars of Globalization (1910s-present)

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GENDER, DEMOBILIZATION AND SOCIAL ORDER: POST-WAR SOCIETIES IN EUROPE AND THE UNITED STATES AFTER 1918 AND 1945

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The twentieth century's two World Wars required the unprecedented involvement of men, women, and children both in battle as soldiers and in supportive roles on the home front. Citizens' involvement in war was orchestrated by nations and their governments. At-war governments forced men to bear arms through the passage of conscription laws, militaries confiscated farmers' produce and draught animals to mobilize and supply armies, and governments encouraged women to perform paid and voluntary war work through wartime propaganda. Governments and their militaries controlled male soldiers' sexuality through anti-Venereal Disease campaigns and female sexuality by regulating prostitution, ostensibly to make their fighting men more efficient on battlefields. At war's end, the demobilization of great numbers of soldiers and returning POWs created immense political, social, and economic problems for the postwar societies. Welfare and special job-training programs were created to serve wounded veterans. As a result of dealing with war-related problems, the power of governments increased tremendously, although many nations had well-developed social programs before the Great War began.¹

Generally, industrialized, capitalistic postwar societies desired political, social, and economic order after the chaos of war, and they expected to achieve order in part through a return to traditional gender roles within the family and in the nation as a whole. This return, however, was contested and was by no means completed. In addition to exploring the historiography of gender as it relates to the aftermath of war, the aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that the process of demobilization resulted in an enhanced control of populations by nations and their governments. Despite the winning of woman suffrage after the Great War in the three nations scrutinized here—Great Britain, Germany, and the United States—traditional interpretations of masculinity and femininity were prioritized as men and women were expected to form families based on breadwinning males and consumer-oriented, homemaking mothers.

This chapter will borrow Adam R. Seipp's temporal construct of World War I demobilization from 1917 to 1921.² In addition, following Alan Allport's *Demobbed: Coming Home After the Second World War*, I will use 1944 to 1946 for demobilization after the Second World War.³ Significantly, both these authors use the year before the war actually ended to define and discuss demobilization. This is because nations create and plan for demobilization well in advance of the cease-fire or armistice that marks the official end of war.⁴ This temporal and spatial framework enables me to discuss the demobilization and resulting changes in gender roles in the nations that experienced those changes most acutely, as Great Britain, Germany, and the United States nations mobilized their resources most profoundly.

In addition, I am indebted to Seipp's elucidation of the terms mobilization and demobilization. Nations and their governments prepared for war—defined here as the use of force against an enemy identified by the nation—in industrialized societies by mobilizing their populations to take up the weapons on battlefields, or by fashioning arms in factories to be used in battle, or other supportive, home-front roles. Seipp quotes a turn-of-the-twentieth-century German military manual as defining demobilization as the dissolving of war formations, the release of military personnel, the sale of military equipment, and the handover of military weapons. The 1999 *Oxford Companion to War* defines the term as “the release or draw down of wartime military forces as the nation resumes peacetime status following a war or major buildup The extent of the process of demobilization depends upon the mobilization that preceded it.” True enough, notes Seipp, but mobilization and demobilization are not mirror images of each other. Both involve their own tensions and complications.⁵ Those tensions and complications involved gender roles. Nations were loath to release soldiers all at once, fearing a glut in the labor market. To create jobs for veterans, governments, trade unions, and corporations in Great Britain, Germany, and the United States worked hand-in-hand to push women out of the workforce when war ended.⁶ Nation-states justified this removal of female laborers as a strategy to mitigate the political/economic problems created by the frustration of returning soldiers and POWs. However, given the industrial, mechanized nature of both wars, many veterans returned physically and mentally unable to assume their former positions in the labor force. The traditional, idealized notion of male breadwinner and female homemaker broke down as veterans found themselves unable to provide a living for their families. The nation-state intervened by offering veterans pensions, but also special training programs to try to reintegrate its former soldiers back into the work force. By forcing women out of their wartime jobs, and by aiding veterans in their efforts to return to their breadwinning roles within the family, government and industry supported conformity to traditional gender roles for men and women.

Seipp continues his discussion of demobilization by explaining that there are four different ways in which societies demobilize after wars. The first involves physical demobilization, or the release or reassignment of armed forces. Economic demobilization occurs when nations rescind wartime regulations on economies, including production, wages, labor and price controls. Bureaucratic demobilization involves the recall of regulations and institutions designed to facilitate a nation's prosecution of the war. Finally, cultural demobilization involves the ways in which societies, both government and private entities stop encouraging citizens' participation in war.⁷ To illustrate the combined efforts of government and private enterprise in the business of generating enthusiasm for war, but at

the same time the assurance that the war would not last forever, one need look no further than a 1942 *Life* magazine advertisement produced by a cookware manufacturing company called Revere Copper. The advertisement features a uniformed naval officer sitting with his arms around (presumably) his wife. The couple sits together, imagining different types of houses that they might inhabit, once the war is over. “Beyond the War Waits Happiness,” according to the ad’s caption. Not only does the advertisement indicate that as early as 1942, companies that supported the war were already preparing consumers for peace, it also indicates the ways in which “happiness” was defined, according to the ad’s copy, as a heterosexual couple: man-and-wife, and mother-and-father.⁸

I am indebted to Jason Crouthamel’s definition and use of the terms gender, masculinity, and femininity, as well as his understanding of the ways in which nations and their governments constructed “hegemonic gender roles” that citizens are aware of, but to which they did not necessarily conform. Crouthamel’s study of German soldiers and veterans, *An Intimate History of the Front*, reveals an “all-pervasive” image of the ideal man as having nerves of steel and being a disciplined warrior. This image, however, was contested. Soldiers may “lip synch” those hegemonic roles linguistically and rhetorically, but may “perform” gender roles very differently, for example by revealing their need for intimacy to girlfriends or wives back home, or to their comrades. Crouthamel cites trench newspaper cartoons mocking the manly ideal as evidence that soldiers did not simply conform to the hegemonic soldier image.⁹ Some veterans presented themselves publicly as the crippled ex-warriors they were, rather than the ideal warrior they were supposed to be, begging for government assistance. These wounded veterans joined war widows parading in December 1918 Berlin, in a grisly parody of the invigorating send-off parades that had bedecked the capital’s streets in August 1914.¹⁰

Other veterans’ behavior suggested that they had, indeed, internalized the hegemonic, militarized male role. Demobilized soldiers joined veterans’ organizations such as the *Stahlhelm, Bund der Frontsoldaten* (steel helmet, association of front soldiers) and *Reichsbund jüdischer Frontsoldaten* (national association of Jewish front soldiers). Both organizations tried to reinvigorate the masculine ideal after the war. Alan Allport outlines the rising tide of armed domestic violence that followed demobilization in Great Britain.¹¹ In perhaps the best illustration of ex-soldiers internalizing masculine ideals, Allport quoted a newspaper report that noted an upswing in returned soldiers murdering their wives who had been unfaithful during the war, and an increasing number of juries letting the murderer off with minimal punishment. “Men acclimatized to violence on behalf of the state were, it seemed, finding it hard to restrain the instincts that had been released by war—and a bloodthirsty section of the public was egging them on.”¹²

People performed gender roles and class, race and ethnic roles, at the same time. While nations wielded greater power and control over societies during and after total wars, that control affected individuals differently depending on their class, race, ethnicity and sexuality. British Second World War veterans, for example, felt themselves to be “temporary gentlemen” in the army, and although by law they were entitled to their pre-war jobs back (at the expense of the woman who may have held it during the war) many thought themselves above menial labor after their soldiering experiences.¹³

The nation-state’s desire to return to traditional gender roles is also evident in the ways in which the state perceived of and provided care for war veterans and war wounded (primarily male, especially in the First World War), as opposed to war widows. Pension

programs for wounded veterans were designed to support a man's wife and children, while the amount of a pension paid to a war widow fell short of providing a living for the woman and her dependent children. Lawmakers specifically stated that war widows should rely on other family members to supplement the pensions paid to them by the government.¹⁴

The restrictive nature of the war widows' pensions paid by the nation-state underscores the continuing importance of the family in the reconstruction of postwar societies. The family persisted as the essential building block undergirding the nation-state's political and economic system. Governments actively reinforced the paradigm by determining the nature of the economy and the society in which families functioned. After the Second World War, for example, economies in Western Europe and in the United States became increasingly planned and controlled by governments, as opposed to the capitalistic, "free market" model. The U.S. government provided college educations for returning veterans through the 1944 Servicemen's Readjustment Act (also known as the GI Bill), loans for the purchasing of homes through its Veterans Housing Administration program, and planned communities where veterans' wives and their growing numbers of baby-boom children would thrive and, theoretically at least, stave off a return to the economic depression that had plagued the 1930s. College educations and high levels of home ownership among returning soldiers implied a breadwinning male and homemaking wife and mother. This traditional familial paradigm was designed to yield a secure, consumer-oriented society and culture that would act as a strong bulwark against the communist threat during the Cold War.¹⁵ In this way, the power of the nation-state that had increased after the First World War continued long after the Second World War had ended.

Historians of both wars are looking beyond traditional war periodization. Current First World War scholarship has considered the so-called "long war," often using 1914 to 1923 as periodization, to explain the inability of nations and their governments to neatly end a war with a peace treaty. Women's and gender historians have been at the forefront of this re-periodization as war is no longer conceived of as solely "men's business" involving only a nation's (largely male) politicians and its military. Nations' ability to make treaties with one another still matters, of course, as citizens' movements and economic trade between nations is often curtailed until peace agreements can be worked out. But the inability of the nation-state to control all aspects of postwar society is evident, for example, in the exodus of Germans during the 1920s, a phenomenon that the German government tried mightily to impede.¹⁶

Another current trend is the focus on history "above and beyond" the paradigm of the nation-state, for example in the role played by transnational humanitarian organizations during demobilization. Although still tightly connected to the nation that sent them to war, some historians are looking at the ways in which veterans joined forces internationally to prevent wars in the future.¹⁷ Transnational history, too, owes a debt to women's and gender historians, as women have historically been less connected to the nation-state. Newer studies are also considering the intersections between sexuality and foreign policy, and sexuality and international relations. Historians have revealed the ways in which sexual deviance, for example, has been interpreted as weakness among policymakers and war-makers. Robert Dean's 2003 book *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* traces gender conformity among the United States' post-World War II foreign policy elite.¹⁸

Postwar societies experiencing demobilization underwent significant changes in relation to gender and sexuality. The increase in the power that governments granted themselves shaped those changes. Generally, demobilization included the forcing of women from their wartime jobs back into the home as consumer-oriented homemakers and mothers. The degree to which this phenomenon signaled change from the past, of course, depended on pre-war gender and labor patterns. Fertility rates among U.S. women climbed from 2.23 in 1940 to 3.61 in 1960. The percentage of the female population in the paid labor force, however, rose only slightly from 23.9 percent in 1920 to 25.4 percent in 1940. Post-World War II, the figure climbed to 29.1 percent by 1950. The U.S. government's desire to keep women out of the labor force, then, did not entirely pan out.¹⁹ German fertility declined from a high of 3.5 in 1920 to a low of 2 in the early 1930s. The rate rose again to a peak of 3 in 1939, then declined again to 1.5 in 1945.²⁰ The proportion of women in the labor force changed little in Germany during WWI (only thirty percent of German women participated in the wartime labor force, as opposed to 60 percent in Britain; compare the United States, where less than a third of women worked for wages). Claudia Koonz explains that Nazi propaganda to keep women out of the work force during the war worked, in that women stayed away from industrial labor, but at a price in terms of the German government's ability to prosecute the war.²¹ Overall, then, while women did to some degree return to household labor after the wars, this return did not last very long (in the United States), nor involve very large numbers of women. Elizabeth Domansky is also skeptical of the too-simplistic "return to patriarchy" school of thought. She contends that in Germany after the Great War, the generation of young men broken by war could no longer protect their wives and children, so the state took over men's roles with enlarged social welfare and economic planning programs.²² One obvious way that the end of the First World War dismantled patriarchy was the acceptance of woman suffrage in Germany, Great Britain, and the United States. The franchise signaled the recognition in these postwar societies of women as political beings capable of self-governance, and also broadened the number of citizens involved—however indirectly—in the inflated governments that controlled demobilized societies.

Statistics do a poor job of capturing the emotions of a phenomenon such as postwar demobilization. British veterans of the Second World War reported returning to families as strangers after six years of grueling combat. Britain seemed to be a nation "quietly tormented by sexual suspicion" in 1945 and divorce rates soared as a result, according to Alan Allport.²³ This same torment destroyed a marriage as seen in the film "Germany, Pale Mother." The film, written and directed by Helma Sanders-Brahms, depicts the breakdown of the relationship between the narrator's mother and father in post-World War II West Germany. The mother had been raped in front of her daughter by American soldiers while her soldier-husband was fighting in the German Army. When the couple tries to put their lives back together after the war, the father is unable to shake his belief that his wife had been unfaithful while he had been away.²⁴

New scholarship could explore the intersection between individual emotional responses, gender, and government power over its citizens. Forthcoming scholarship could also explore more broadly the categories of race and class as they intersect with gender and demobilization. For example, both wars included large numbers of veterans from African nations. How did these soldiers experience their homecomings? How did governments in

colonized societies deal with demobilization? Is there a potential link between colonial soldiers returning to their homelands after World War II and wars for independence within those nations? How did gender relations change as a result? Scholars could also explore the spatial dislocation of World War veterans and survivors, both as emigrants and as refugees. These avenues of research would necessarily be international and transnational, as colonial soldiers returned to their native countries, and emigrants established themselves on foreign shores.

¹ Robert Weldon Whalen, *Bitter Wounds: German Victims of the Great War, 1914-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 83-93; Angela Smith, *Discourses Surrounding British Widows of the First World War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 60.

² Adam R. Seipp, *The Ordeal of Peace: Demobilization and the Urban Experience in Britain and Germany, 1917-1921* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009).

³ Alan Allport, *Demobbed: Coming Home After the Second World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

⁴ Allport, 23; Seipp, 3.

⁵ Seipp, 7.

⁶ Maurine Weiner Greenwald, *Women, War, and Work* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 128; Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin's, 1984), 26; Angela Smith, 54.

⁷ Seipp, 8.

⁸ Robert B. Westbrook, "Fighting for the American Family: Private Interests and Political Obligation in World War II," in *The Power of Culture: Critical Essays in American History*, eds. T.J. Jackson Lears and Richard Wightman Fox (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 214.

⁹ Jason Crouthamel, *An Intimate History of the Front: Masculinity, Sexuality and German Soldiers in the First World War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming). As I am endorsing this book, I have an advanced copy.

¹⁰ Whalen, 124-25.

¹¹ Allport, 173-76.

¹² *Ibid.*, 1-3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁴ Erika Kuhlman, *Of Little Comfort: War Widows, Fallen Soldiers, and the Remaking of the Nation after the Great War* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 79, 83.

¹⁵ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 1-10.

¹⁶ Grant Grams, *German Emigration to Canada and the Support of its Deutschtum during the Weimar Republic* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001), 15-17.

¹⁷ Julia Eichenberg and John Paul Newman, *The Great War and Veterans' Internationalism* (Baskingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

¹⁸ Robert Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).

¹⁹ Nancy Wolloch, *Women and the American Experience* (New York: Knopf, 1984), chart on p. 543.

²⁰ Michael J. Kendzia and Klaus F. Zimmermann, "Celebrating 150 years of Analyzing Fertility Trends in Germany," *Institute for the Study of Labor* (February 2012): 4, <http://ftp.iza.org/dp6355.pdf>

²¹ Koonz, 397-98.

²² Elizabeth Domansky, "Militarization and Reproduction in World War I," in *Society, Culture, and the State in Germany, 1870-1930*, ed. Geoff Eley (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 427-63.

²³ Allport, 85.

²⁴ *Deutschland, bleiche Mutter*, written and directed by Helma Sanders-Brahms (1980, Chicago: Facets Video, 2008), DVD.