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Gender, War, and Citizenship

Paper given to the Transatlantic RoundTable "Gender, War, and Citizenship" to Launch the *Oxford Handbook of Gender, War, and the Western World Since 1600* and Fritz Stern Seminar in the Memory of Sonya O. Rose (1935-2020),

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"War is men's business, not ladies," Rhett Butler says in the 1939 movie *Gone with the Wind* -- one of the most popular movies ever and one that most effectively perpetuated myths about American slavery, anti-black stereotypes, about the Civil War, and – about war in general.

Myths transform history into nature, Roland Barthes famously said, they convert change into eternity, agency into destiny.

Rhett Butler's statement is one of the most powerful of those myths, in this case one that had been invalidated already by the American Civil War, the subject of the movie and Margaret Mitchell's book on which the movie was based.

The *Oxford Handbook of Gender, War, and the Western World Since 1600* synthesizes and advances more than 50 years of scholarly falsifications of this myth.

It illuminates for the past 400 years that, how, why, and to which consequences war was never only men's but always also ladies' business. This is true not only for era of the so-called total wars in Europe in the first half of the 20th century, but also for the American Civil War and for the colonial wars Europeans waged overseas *since the dawn of modernity*.

My job today is to introduce you to the topic of our roundtable.

I will offer a few remarks on the three key concepts of this roundtable, gender, war, and citizenship, and on the way gender historians have made sense of but also problematized them.

I will conclude by addressing a few questions to which the following papers by Stefan, Richard, and Kimberly will respond.

First, the concept of gender. Gender is, to quote Karen Hagemann's introduction to the volume, "an amalgam of ideals and practices that give meaning to and socially differentiate male and female."

Norms, ideas, and practices addressed as masculine or manly, as feminine or womanly are not emanations from biological givens. They are socially and culturally constructed.

They change over time, and they vary between different societies as well as within societies. Gender

is a marker of biological sex and of social practices, imageries, and ideologies that organize power relations, hierarchies, and identities between and within the sexes.

In this spirit, gender scholars have unmasked the myth of men as universal actors and made women visible as historical actors,

- as auxiliaries, nurses, partisans and soldiers in modern wars; as targets of air raids, mass rape, and genocide;
- as victims, accomplices, and perpetrators of mass violence.

Gender scholars have also made visible men as gendered subjects and analyzed how different notions of masculinity and manliness have informed men's choices at different times and in different spaces.

This way, gender scholars have not only challenged binary juxtapositions of male warriors and peaceful women.

They have also challenged the binary corset of gender ideologies.

They have exposed the manifold ways in which notions of masculinity work not only in men but also in women and vice versa, notions of femininity are working not only in women but also in men.

Gender is a relational category, not only in that it manages relations between men and women and between femininity and masculinity.

As a category of social difference, gender works in conjunction with other categories of social differences, including class, race, age, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, and nation.

Now, the concepts of war and citizenship. These are no less stable than the concept of gender, and the *Handbook* probes into their fluidity in synchronous and diachronous terms.

In a naïve fashion, war, our second concept, may be understood as violent conflict between two or more groups of combatants.

But probably at no point in history and certainly not in the history under consideration in this *Handbook* does such a definition comply with the practice of warfare.

Even in the so-called cabinet wars of the 19th century, the lines between combatants and non-combatants were blurred by franc-tireurs or partisans and their enemies. …

All sides blurred those distinctions in order to radicalize their own military violence into phantasies and realities of *absolute destruction* of the enemy, total mobilization of the own population for the war project, and not least the distinction of entire populations, as Europeans did first in their colonies, then in Europe itself.

Thirdly, the concept of citizenship.

For the purpose of our historical inquiries, citizenship is best understood "not simply as a legal formula." Instead, it is, to quote Rogers Brubaker, a "salient social and cultural fact," a "powerful instrument of social closure."

It decides about inclusions and exclusions, about who belongs and who doesn't, and where people are placed in the hierarchy of political rights.

It establishes boundaries and identities.

While aiming at or claiming for stability, any given citizenship is subject to contest. Gender, class, race, not least age (an often-ignored category of social difference), they all intervene into these contests, and often they do so guided by ideas about individuals' social merit, earned, for instance, in war on behalf of the nation.

Pointing into the historical volatility of the concepts of gender, war, and citizenship is not the end but the *beginning* of historical inquiry.

In modern times, war and military service have been among the most impactful arenas to negotiate the type of merit that entitles to citizenship.

A key question of this roundtable is how

- changes of warfare,
- different types of war, and
- the place of war and military in modern societies

have *informed* disputes on citizenship, …

and how gender relations have intervened in and been affected by these disputes.

A prominent line of research has pointed to a seemingly constructive or progressive effect of war and even genocide.

In the "total wars" of the first half of the twentieth century, Europeans experienced the systematic erasure of boundaries between combatants and non-combatants.

Civilian populations, including women, were mobilized for and targeted by war, with genocide as its ultimate consequence.

Women's mobilization during the First World War included work as factory workers and nurses, in the Second World War increasingly also as military aids, resistance fighters or even regular soldiers.

Thanks to this mobilization, women gained suffrage after the First World in many European countries, … and some historians have argued that this war catalyzed the liberation of women, politically as well as socially, by expanding women's work opportunities and lives beyond motherhood.

Processes like these continued for instance in Nazi Germany.

The exclusion of Jewish men and women from citizenship in Germany went along with a new, enlivened sense of belonging to and empowerment of 'Aryan' women in the racist nation, now called *Volksgemeinschaft* – notwithstanding the fact thas both women and men were simultaneously robbed certain political rights.

Analyzing how Jews, on the other hand, coped with persecution during the Holocaust in ghettos and camps, historians have also diagnosed a role reversal of men and women during the Holocaust.

Nazi persecution robbed Jewish men of their traditional roles of providers and protectors of their families; at the same time, women took over, secured food and shelter for their families (including men), provided mental survival kits, performed roles that had previously been performed by men.

But none of these changes lasted long after those wars or genocides, or if so, only partially.

In a groundbreaking essay, Margaret and Patrice Higonnet introduced in 1987 the metaphor of the *double helix* to explain this "paradoxical progress and regress" and the underlying constancy of a "gender-linked subordination."

Paradoxes of change and continuity have since challenged historians of women's and men's roles, lives, and representations.

These historians have paid particular attention on studying the – historically volatile -- interplay of representations and experiences.

Often, powerful representations of polar, hierarchical and patriarchal gender orders proved immune to change.

They countered, contained or even neutralized short-term changes of objective conditions and subjective experiences of, for instance, female empowerment or liberation.

With this agenda in mind, the following three presenters will explore the wartime politics of citizenship in various historical and geographical contexts, ranging from late eighteenth-century Wars of Revolution and Independence to Word War II.

Three sets of questions are central to their exploration:

1. How have specific gender orders informed specific historical wars and types of war? How have, vice versa, specific historical wars and types of war shaped gender orders and gendered politics of citizenship in particular?

2. How have wartime politics of citizenship been shaped by the intersection of categories of difference and inequality such as gender, race, and class?

3. What were the long-term effects on gender orders of wartime politics of citizenship? What explains the persistence or subsiding of wartime reconfigurations of gender and citizenship?