

WOMEN
AND WAR
IN THE
TWENTIETH
CENTURY

ENLISTED WITH OR WITHOUT CONSENT

EDITED BY

NICOLE ANN DOMBROWSKI

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For Audrey Randolph

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WOMEN AND WAR IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



(Courtesy of the New York Public Library)

Figure 1. World War II war refugees.

ONE
Soldiers, Saints, or Sacrificial Lambs?
Women's Relationship to Combat and the
Fortification of the Home Front in the Twentieth
Century

Nicole Ann DOMBROWSKI

Legends of women warriors date as far back in time as wars themselves. From the jungles of the Amazon to the jagged landscape of Sparta, women as warriors have captured the imagination.¹ Likewise, the ideal of the soldier's wife in waiting has stirred and nourished the morale of fighting men. Perhaps the most evocative of all the female heroines is the defenseless victim raped or ravaged by war, an image that provokes declarations of revenge as well as pity. These three female roles—warrior, maid-in-

waiting, and helpless victim—have existed simultaneously as complements to the vocation of the male soldier and as encouragement to his task. Histories celebrating women's service in the armed forces of any country must be placed alongside those of women victimized by war's violence on all sides of a conflict.

Three historical events recently have coincided to make a scholarly reappraisal of women's relationship to war and militarism timely. The Cold War and its nuclear arms race is temporarily suspended. In ex-Yugoslavia soldiers of the Serbian and Croatian armies raped women civilians, especially Bosnian Muslims, as part of an ethnic cleansing campaign, igniting debate about the specificity of war crimes committed against women. At nearly the same time, women's participation in the Gulf War revived debate on the question of women serving in combat roles in the U.S. and North American Treaty Organization (NATO) military forces. In this context, historical reassessment of women's status as agents, accomplices, opponents, and victims of wartime violence might bring more clarity to current political policies and debates.

All four of these classifications pose problems for a woman's autonomous self-expression and her subjectivity as a private individual and engaged citizen. Women who choose to fight claim a place for themselves among those men who have achieved the respect of their fellow citizens for their willingness to risk their lives for the sake of their country or their ideals. Because military service has acted as an unofficial litmus test for public leadership capabilities, many proponents of women's military service are right to point out that women's access to the highest posts of government office may well be predicated on their ability to show evidence of their capacity to command the armed services in any country. At the same time, militaries have been responsible for atrocities and unsanctioned acts of aggression, and enlisted women become complicit in these acts. How, then, can women access power without assuming the responsibility for the abuses of power as well?

Traditionally, wives, girlfriends, and soldiers' loved ones have played a more passive, but perhaps equally important, role in sustaining and supporting military culture. Politicians and generals alike have insisted that the desire to protect their families and loved ones boosts soldiers' morale. Historians and policymakers may squabble over the extent to which soldiers' commitment to defend their families inspires their acts of self-sacrifice, but the rhetoric of chivalry rings loudly enough that many opponents of women's presence in the military rely on this age-old gendered division of labor to insist upon women's exclusion from fighting forces. If women do bolster soldiers' morale, then what is their political or historical responsibility for atrocities or war crimes committed, in part, in their name? Women are home front heroines when their armies are victorious, but are they equally culpable when their troops lose?

Opponents to war, pacifists, protesters, and activists often wage their arguments for peace in absolute terms. This was especially so after the advent of nuclear armaments. Pacifists argue that we are all victims and losers in war, soldier and civilian alike. Some opponents of militarism argue that women, as bearers of children, are especially endowed to oppose the kind of violence that destroys the very humanity their bodies reproduce. But when do the opponents of war make peace with a status quo that compromises liberty, equality, or even the political freedom that their voices of opposition require in order to speak? When is New Hampshire's motto, Live Free or Die, too demanding a sacrifice?

Finally, trapped behind the lines without the means to defend themselves or exposed under the nuclear umbrella, women fall victim to war, regardless of the determination of their militaries or their own efforts to help or hinder the fight. The complexity of women's relationship to war raises the questions this volume endeavors to confront. Is women's relationship to war really more complex than that of men? The answer is yes, if only because society, with its traditional gender divisions of labor, has assigned the official task of fighting to men. What happens to our standard ideals of "feminine," "masculine," family, and country when women fight? More importantly, how is the category of woman, itself a social construction, further modified when women become warriors? And what happens to the institutions and practices of warring when women set in upon them? In many countries around the world we are witnessing these transformations. The goal in this volume is to recover the varied histories that have led up to what seems like an accelerated process of the militarization of women's lives at home and in battle.

One of the indisputable facts to emerge from the following collection of articles is that within the last century women have been enlisted into military conflicts with or without their consent. The title of the book is meant to underscore the trade-offs between the opportunities and the travesties confronting women in the context of increased global militarization. The articles clearly identify the plurality of roles and responsibilities women assume or have foisted upon them under wartime or peacetime conditions. These articles attempt to survey the personal and political interests that women have as individuals and as a collectivity when nations, ethnic groups, and political organizations wage war.

Many studies already exist that address the issues of women and the military, women and war, women and peace, feminism and pacifism, feminism and militarism, gender and war, and gender and militarism.² What often happens in many of these excellent volumes is that the historical trajectory and global perspective get lost in presentist debates about women's place in the military. Often celebrationist histories of women's arrival into the armed forces neglect the fundamental problem that militaries are institutions predicated on violence. Liberal feminists have argued that women should not be barred from combat positions. They contend that women are not naturally less aggressive than men. The same proponents of women's increased presence in the military have also argued that women can transform or ameliorate military institutions. The problem with the pairing of these two arguments is that one insists that women are not biologically inferior to men, yet they might well be men's ethical superiors. Women are undoubtedly the best agents to challenge sexual discrimination within the armed forces, but does that make them better suited to enforce military discipline toward enemy civilian populations? Women's entrance into combat not only reconstructs combat and its institutions but also reconstructs women in the process. It is naive to insist that women can transform military culture without understanding how military culture could transform "women." Once scholars and policymakers move beyond equal opportunity absolutism, as feminists or antimilitarists, they must address the problem of how to decrease the role of the military in conflict resolution altogether. It is our intention that this book make a contribution to such an effort.

This volume anchors women in time and geography, examining their universal as well as particular interests in relationship to war and peace. It raises the following questions:

Do women, as a global category, share the same stakes in war and peace? Or does gender solidarity, either as a conscious group creation or as a category of experience, necessarily and justifiably break down when other competing identities serve as the foundation of war and peace?

Women's role in the armed services or in revolutionary units has changed to such a degree over the twentieth century that American and Russian women especially, as citizens of the world's largest military powers, must open themselves up to an understanding of the way in which superpower military hegemony affects women in other countries. As scholars and citizens, one of the challenges many of us face is recognizing that the integration of women into the existing military structures of the West in no way ensures that the world is a safer place. Also, scholars and politicians know that military women do not necessarily have a political agenda that transcends national interests. Long after women are integrated into the military, we as a society will face the task of maintaining and negotiating a just peace. Defining what constitutes a just peace in a postsuperpower world demands that female intellectuals, politicians and citizens, civilians and soldiers alike, develop a consciousness and recognition of the circumstances faced by other women and men around the world that lead to military conflict. Thus, while some women pursue liberation and equality through entry into the armed services, others continue to wage these same battles in the institutions of international and domestic politics like the United Nations.

The articles in this volume try to present a historical trajectory that pairs women's experience as victims of war with women's engagement as agents, on behalf of themselves or their countries. Furthermore, by presenting the experiences of women around the globe, the volume tries to begin to place the question of women's relationship to the institutions and the fallout of war in a global context that does not simply place the United States at the center of the story. In so doing, the volume hopes to go beyond a simple celebration of women's entry into the armed services and provoke thought about the consequences of female complicity in imperialism as well as in peace-keeping, and armed resistance movements. The volume attempts to correct assumptions and arguments made by many opponents of women's integration into military forces, that women are essentially or naturally less belligerent or less aggressive. We hope also to spark debate about the degree to which inclusion of women in combat units, whether guerrilla armies or national armies, necessarily leads to a more humane form of warfare or military policy. At the same time, the volume reveals the problems women confront as targeted civilians without self-defense training or international legal protection.

As warriors, in the U.S. military, in the Bosnian defense forces, in the Israeli army, women have moved into new roles as military aggressors. By viewing the trajectory of women as victims and agents or accomplices to these different varieties of war over the century, this volume seeks to trace women's diverse experiences and understand their options for self-defense, national solidarity, and international action as both victims and agents. In addition, we hope to provoke thought about the new problems that accompany women's self-defense and national defense. As war is transformed, how are international legal structures changing to recognize the gendering of war? In what ways are military units prepared to accommodate soldier-mothers? We are increasingly faced with the paradox of a need for child care units for soldier-mothers and abortion clinics for rape victims. Such a study is bound to raise questions and provoke debate about the

responsibility women as citizens or as unrepresented subjects, as victims and as warriors, bear for the increased turn toward violent resolution witnessed during the twentieth century.

A CENTURY TRAVELED

The First World War baptized the century in a pool of blood. The nature of trench warfare in Europe limited the actual violence to the front lines until the very end of the conflict, when aviation made its mark on selected urban centers. But on the home front women were mobilized into the labor force and into civilian defense units.³ Like many of their brethren, women answered the patriotic call to arms as an expression of their national sympathies and their family solidarities. In many cases, they hoped that their participation would earn them a larger role in public and economic affairs after the war. Several Western nations honored women's work and sacrifice with political enfranchisement. But in countries like France and Italy the molders of postwar reconstruction quickly marshaled women out of the factories and offices and back into the homes without much more than polite discussion about granting them the vote.⁴

Not all women, nor all men, in all countries responded positively to the battle cry. Pacifist movements dating from the Bismarckian era organized themselves into a vocal, internationally networked voice of opposition. Women from Europe and the United States pushed their pacifist agenda. Some of these women's opposition movements stemmed from spiritual convictions, but as Annette Becker argues, spiritual convictions could also encourage women to support and endure the sacrifices. Within Europe an important segment of women pacifists came out of left-wing socialist movements whose theoretical critique of capitalism identified war as an instrument of power wielded by the ruling elite to divide, exploit, and destroy the laboring poor. These pacifists, such as the Polish Marxist Rosa Luxemburg, spoke in internationalist terms, urging their contemporaries to rise above competitive and destructive bourgeois nationalism.⁵

The cue for pacifists on the European Left came in September 1915 when Lenin, along with his associate Gregory Zinoviev, led an antiwar conference in Zimmerwald, Switzerland. Lenin's hope was that revolutionaries in the respective belligerent countries could turn the war into a civil uprising that would lead to revolution, the blueprint for subsequent events in Russia. Most of the delegates to the conference, however, sought simply to end the conflict, which Robert Tucker believes created the grounds for the subsequent schism between communism and social democracy. But even within the parties and movements of the European Left, pacifists occupied a minority position. In Germany members of the Social Democratic party voted for war credits. In France the acclaimed leader of the socialists, Jean Jaurès, rallied French workers to the war cause shortly before his own assassination.

Back in the United States, even some prominent industrialists embraced the pacifist position. In autumn 1915 the *Oscar II*, a Norwegian vessel, waited in her berth on the Hoboken docks. Henry Ford chartered her to sail over to Europe to "get the boys out of the trenches by Christmas." The *Ford Peace Ship*, as it was later named, carried an assorted crew of journalists and activists organized under the energy and conviction of a Hungarian, Rosika Schwimmer, and an American college graduate, Rebecca Shelley,

who persuaded Ford that a little publicity and Ford's influence could bring the conflict to an end. The *Peace Ship* had no impact on the conflict, but it was successful in minting a small group of peace activists, mostly women, who carried the tradition of internationalism and pacifism into the interwar years through promotion by female journalists like Lella Secor-Florence.⁶

The First World War marked women's definitive entry into the war machine. For some women, it opened doors to education, as was the case for Vera Brittain. It created new spaces for participation in the various world economies. It eased entry into the political realm.⁷ Entrance also implicated women in the war's destruction. By war's end, whatever victory women pacifists and patriots alike received, either in the form of the franchise, maternity benefits, or widows' pensions, was offset by some form of irreplaceable loss—a brother, father, husband, or future husband. World War I demonstrated that blind patriotism seduced women as well as men. Paul's mother in Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* proudly sanctioned the honorable sacrifice of her son, who himself had come to understand the senselessness of the slaughter.⁸ The poem, "The Hero," by the British poet, Siegfried Sassoon, recounts the story of a soldier who must inform a mother of her son's fatal last stand. The messenger-soldier masks the real cause of the son's death, a cowardly self-inflicted wound. Instead, he lies to the old woman, telling her of her son's bravery:

Quietly the Brother Officer went out.
 He'd told the poor old dear some gallant lies
 That she would nourish all her days, no doubt.
 For while he coughed and mumbled, her weak eyes
 Had shone with gentle triumph, brimmed with joy,
 Because he'd been so brave, her glorious boy.⁹

Sassoon's resentment of the mother's desire and need to believe that her son died a glorious death contrasts with the many postwar memorials built to commemorate lost sons and grieving mothers. In Sassoon's poem the pleasure the mother derives from the tale of her son's heroics points to the complicated system of patriotic and sentimental fervor that sustained and even sanctioned, what for Sassoon, had become pointless sacrifices. In Chapter 2, Annette Becker discusses in more depth how women's religious fervor often fueled men's patriotic spirit.

We do not have a complete count of female fatalities from the Great War, nor do we know how many children perished from attacks on civilian centers. We do know that the war began the incorporation of women into battle via patriotism and politics. The Russian Civil War witnessed women's battle service as an expression of their ideological commitment both for and against the revolution. On the European continent and in the United States, where women did make a marked entry into the public sphere, the politics of pacifism achieved more of a cease-fire during the interwar period than any kind of victory.

FASCISM'S RISE, DEMOCRACY'S FALL

During the interwar period the bellicosity of the first great upheaval continued to create shock waves across the European continent and in the colonies. In 1922 Mussolini strong-armed his way into power in Italy. He instigated violence and aggression at home and abroad, initiating the Ethiopian War in 1935. The war in Ethiopia might well mark the beginning of African liberation movements born of European repression that would explode after World War II. In Europe the Fascist party in Italy extended olive branches to a large sector of women, offering the same type of prenatal and maternity services implemented in the French and British welfare states.¹⁰ But while the struggles of the 1930s adopted a more ideological and less patriotic fervor, the violence committed against women reached new proportions. In Spain the burning of Catholic nuns stands out as one of the most atrocious crimes attributed to the Republican coalition against the supporters of Catholic conservatism and traditionalists who participated in Franco's right-wing coalition. Yet Spanish women joined the very forces that waged war against the obstacles to democratic reform. *La Passionara* (Delores Iburrai), for one, served as the figurehead of the communist/republican resistance. However, by war's end many of these women were in exile, in prison, or dead. The Franco regime subsequently implemented a policy of the restoration of traditional roles for Spanish women.¹¹

In Germany women's gains during the interwar political struggle fueled the Nazis' subsequent reaction against their place in the public sphere. The Nazi determination to keep middle-class women out of the workforce may have had long-term consequences for the German defeat.¹² The German case underscores the need to investigate the responsibility of women in maintaining, supporting, and indeed nurturing bellicose military orders. We are far from concluding that the German women of the 1930s held an important enough place in society to actually challenge, halt, curtail, or topple the National Socialist project of world domination. It is still important to try to identify the level of moral and civic responsibility women actually shared in sustaining or undermining, as the case may be, antidemocratic, militaristic regimes built on violence and aggression.¹³

WORLD WAR II

The interwar remilitarization of Germany and the establishment of exclusionary racial laws meant that German women, Gentiles and Jews alike, experienced the tremors of war before the rest of the world. But by 1939 the full-scale impact of a renewed military conflict reached beyond the borders of the Reich into Poland. In Europe the familiar recruitment of women into defense industry jobs and civilian defense teams paralleled the roles cut out for women in the Great War. But by 1940, with the German invasion of France, and with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, civilian men and women witnessed the tremendous attack on the home front. World War II differed from World War I not necessarily in the fact that military aircraft targeted civilian centers, but in the sheer degree to which those centers became, if not the primary assault targets, then certainly the primary pawns in the psychological game of check and countercheck played by both sides. By the time the *Enola Gay*, named for the mother of the pilot, dropped its

payload over Hiroshima followed by *Bock's Car's* bombing of Nagasaki, civilian and soldier casualties in the war totaled nearly 22,060,000, with approximately 34,400,000 wounded.¹⁴

Women and children figured more prominently than ever in the casualty count. We do not have a precise breakdown of the sex and age of civilian casualties. The estimated figures for the Allied and Axis powers reveal the magnitude of the plunder. The United States lost approximately 6,000 civilians, compared to the Soviet Union's 2,000,000 or more civilian deaths. One set of statistics for Japan and France seems most surprising, given France's early withdrawal from the conflict. France registered between 325,000 and 391,000 civilian casualties, whereas Japan, who suffered the atomic bombings, tallied a slightly smaller estimated loss of 280,000. According to official Japanese statistics, the number of civilians killed in Japan totaled 421,367 against a combined total loss of 2,100,000, or 3 percent of Japan's total population.¹⁵ Between the Germans and the British the figures of civilian deaths suggest that their prolonged engagement did indeed place them in front of France in terms of the percentage of civilian population losses. The British lost approximately 60,000 to 93,000, whereas the Germans lost about 780,000. The figures for German civilian casualties actually grow larger when we add the number of deaths caused by starvation and displacement. Nearly 1,500,000 are thought to have perished due to expulsion and air raids. Another 200,000 German ethnics died largely from reprisals at the end of the war. In total, German civilian and soldier losses amount to 5,300,000, which is still far from the number of losses suffered by the Soviets in their efforts to fight off the Germans.¹⁶ Poland and Yugoslavia registered among the greatest civilian losses, with 5,000,000 and 1,200,000, respectively.¹⁷ The massacre of Polish Jewry greatly increased these numbers in Poland.

When we read these staggering figures, it is hard to keep in mind the individual lives they represented. The fact that France, for instance, withdrew from World War II early, or rather was beaten into submission, did play a significant role in reducing the number of French casualties. The French paid for their civilians' and soldiers' lives in exchange for their liberties and in part in exchange for their Jewish and immigrant populations. Was that price too high? Such a question attacks the very crux of the problem faced by pacifists. Is peace or appeasement at any price a "just price," to avoid the large-scale ravages of total war? In the context of ideological wars, in which people's ideas are firmly entrenched and invested in the outcome, is peace without absolute submission of one set of ideas to another really possible?

Registered among the casualties of firebombings and atomic experimentation, women were not only victims of the war. Women in all countries actively participated in their country's defense. For better or for worse, women, whether in the Soviet Union, in Germany, in Japan, in Italy, or in the United States, inspired by personal motivations, political causes, and patriotic impulses, actively served their country, demonstrating their sense of duty as citizens, their desire for adventure, and their determination to carve a role for themselves in their own nation's history. Many of these women resisted being categorized into negative stereotypes that equated women with pacifism or passivity. In many cases, the pacifists' voices of rationality and even enlightened morality, which echoed loudly after World War I, became the targets of suspicion in the politicized, ideological struggle of World War II. In short, ideology came to matter for women as much as for men in a way it simply had not during the Great War. The struggle for or

against fascism temporarily transcended the national passions of the patriotic battles of World War I.

In the Soviet Union women joined the Red Army to defend the motherland as well as to fight the spread of fascism. Women's antifascist leagues organized early in the mid-1930s in the USSR. Most Soviet sources on the period define "the fascist invader," and not the "German invader," as the enemy in the Great Patriotic War.¹⁸ Yet by war's end, Stalin had urged his people to defend mother Russia. On the European continent antifascism became a political umbrella under which women and men of a variety of political backgrounds—communists, Zionists, socialists, and Catholics—made alliances. They were not necessarily fighting against Germans and Italians, but against fascism or Nazism.¹⁹ In many cases, women who joined resistant and partisan movements during the war in France, Italy and Germany did so out of newly minted convictions of the danger of fascism. Others, somewhat disappointed by the gains made by women during the interwar years, viewed the conflict with cynicism, seeing little difference between the way fascism and democracy ruled women.

A skeptical observer, Virginia Woolf, wrote her treatise *Three Guineas* in 1938 and argued, "We [women] can best help you [men] to prevent war not by joining your society but by remaining outside your society but in co-operation with its aims. That aim is the same for us both. It is to assert 'the rights of all—all men and women—to the respect in their persons of the great principles of Justice and Equality and Liberty.'"²⁰ Clearly, Woolf understood the ideals at the heart of the conflict, but she felt that women everywhere had been marginalized to such a degree from the chambers of politics that had created the catastrophe, that they could now only compromise their own integrity by entering into the fray of male-dominated war games. For Woolf, the reformation of politics at home needed to precede, or happen simultaneously to, the fight against antidemocratic forces abroad.

With Europe's economic and political infrastructure destroyed, the war's end created an opening for women. In France, Italy, and Spain women finally received the vote. Only the Swiss women would have to continue to wait until February 7, 1971, for complete political enfranchisement.²¹ Women also gained a share in the redistribution of postwar wealth. The welfare state expanded, increasing the number of programs improving maternity, national health insurance, education, family allowances for large families, and a number of other state-sponsored initiatives that particularly helped women.²² At the same time the welfare state's expansion helped women, the return to a normal economy forced many women back to the home. Not unlike the normalization process of World War I, women benefited less from the economic achievements of the war. Almost uniformly from the United States to Germany governments and employers encouraged women to leave jobs previously occupied by men. Only in the Eastern bloc countries did governments encourage, sometimes insist upon, women's continued participation in industry.