

Conference Report**GENDER, WAR AND POLITICS: The Wars of Revolution and Liberation - Transatlantic Comparisons, 1775 - 1815**

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Institute of Arts and Humanities, May 17-19, 2007

*By Katherine Aaslestad (West Virginia University) and
Judith A. Miller (Emory University)*

The University of North Carolina's Institute for Arts and Humanities hosted an international conference, GENDER, WAR, AND POLITICS: THE WARS OF REVOLUTION AND LIBERATION - TRANSATLANTIC COMPARISONS, 1775-1820 from May 17-19, 2007. Along with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the German Historical Institute in Washington DC, Duke University, the research group 'Nations, Borders, Identities: The Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars in European Memories' funded by the German Research Foundation, and the French Consulate General in Atlanta provided the necessary support for this extremely successful and stimulating meeting. Ninety scholars of different generations from four countries who work on war, gender, race and national liberation during the period between 1775 and 1820 met to address how these powerful forces intersected during the revolutionary era. The rise of the modern military and warfare emerged as the common touchstone among all scholars as they sought to explore how war, in particular wars associated with independence or liberation, emerged as key sites in the negotiation and construction of new gender norms and national identities. All participants probed the degree to which

novel forms of mass mobilization for war contributed to increasingly rigid notions of masculinity and femininity, despite the obvious fact that women participated in the war effort in military institutions and civilian society. A collected volume of selected and revised papers is in progress.

Following a warm welcome by hosts Lloyd S. Kramer (UNC Chapel Hill), Gisela Mettele (GHI Washington), and Alex Roland (Duke University), Karen Hagemann (UNC Chapel Hill), the true organizational force behind the conference, presented an introductory lecture, in which she critically discussed the state of research and developed a gendered concept for the analysis of this period of the first modern world wars, legitimated as ‘revolutionary wars’, ‘national wars’ or ‘wars of liberation’, and fought with mass armies. Despite exciting new scholarship on this era, she pointed out that much remains overlooked. The past dearth of collaboration between military, social, and gender historians has contributed to the general omission of the gendered dimensions of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century warfare. Hoping that this conference would change that state of affairs, she proposed a gendered concept of “total war” of the revolutionary era that requires scholars to sharpen perceptions of the far-reaching consequences of the various modes of mass mobilization for war and mass warfare for the state and the military, economy, society and culture. This approach must look beyond the military and the conduct of war, to the relationship between the state and the nation as well as those between the so-called “combat front” and “home-front,” soldiers and civilians, and men and women. She pointed to the apparent paradox of revolutionary and Napoleonic warfare. On one hand, war offered new and rich opportunities for men and women to redefine their relationship to their state and nation as combatants and civilians.

Yet, war seemed to strengthen an emerging and more inflexible gender order that assigned all men the responsibility of defending their homes and states while defining all women as mothers and housewives regardless of their social status.

The first panel entitled “*Gender, War and Empires*” featured the Caribbean, South America, and the Atlantic World. David Eltis (Emory University) commenced with a discussion of gender in the Atlantic slave trade and investigated how war influenced the slave trade. Drawing on the large database of 35,000 voyages that will soon be available on a website, he revealed that the slave trade reached its peak between 1785 and 1795 and moreover, that there were two slaves trades, one in the North Atlantic and the other in the South Atlantic. While the wars brought a sharp, but temporary, halt in the northern trade, the southern trade continued relentlessly. Of importance to this conference, his team’s data showed that during the Revolutionary era, increasing numbers of women and children were forced onto slave ships. Laurent Dubois (Duke University) followed with an investigation into the evolving relationship between gender, race, and citizenship in the French Caribbean with a comparison of Guadeloupe and Saint-Domingue. He highlighted the intersection of race and gender to redefine new legal categories during a time of war and rebellion, including possibilities for women of color to petition for citizenship based on traditional republican virtues. He also addressed the emergence of a wartime economy and how it offered women new opportunities as they struggled to preserve their homes, rights, and families. Sherry Johnson (Florida International University) explored the highly militarized society of Cuba to underscore that both gender and racial norms could be breeched due to the demands of warfare and Cuba’s vulnerability. The maintenance of codes of military conduct and honor were expected

from both genders and all social strata, just as military benefits to widows and orphans were available to free women of color and white women alike. Johnson traced the passage of Cuban gender regimes from those of the eighteenth century and the wars, which offered greater fluidity and more active roles for women, to those of the nineteenth century, which infantilized free women and brutalized slave women, while developing an exclusionary discourse of race. A significant contrast with other areas was the heavy role of the state in the construction of gender and color regimes—for instance, through military benefits and the encouragement of marriage for soldiers and civil servants. These papers, the comment by Sarah Chambers (University of Minnesota) and the discussion emphasized the diversity in the many labor, racial and gender regimes of the Caribbean, as well as differences in the impact of the wars, and in particular highlighted the need to consider issues of race and slavery in any discussion of the period's evolving understandings of gender.

The second panel featured "*National Masculinities and Femininities and Their Others*" and began with a very interesting discussion of Revolutionary and Napoleonic visual culture by art historian David O'Brien (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign). He traced a transformation in history painting that highlighted the male body and the performance of gendered identities on the canvas as artists, often with difficulty and ambivalence, sought to redefine honor away from an aristocratic privilege toward one associated with merit, and finally, with Bonaparte and the Empire. Jane Rendall (University of York) then explored the world of British women poets and their diverse renderings of war and empire. Though most British reviewers did not consider it appropriate for women to write about war, that criticism did not stop women from

composing poetry focused on both the horrors and glories of warfare. Rendall explored the works of two poets, Anna Barbauld and Anne Grant, in order to underscore the diversity in women's war poetry as well as the politicization of war and empire in the public realm. Understood by the public as political commentary, these two poets asserted their rights to assess the moral and military state of Britain. Matthew Brown (University of Bristol) addressed the construction of national heroes during and after the Spanish Wars of Independence between 1810 and 1826. He argued that with masculinity under pressure during war, those who would be commemorated as heroes had to be killed at the right time, in the right way, and by the right person. He especially examined gendered notions of honor to emphasize that personal honor and morality were tied tightly to political ethos and operated within the commercial and literary networks of the Atlantic world. The discussion, spurred by comments by Anna Clark (University of Minnesota), focused on the many issues of representation that the papers had raised, especially the contested typologies of masculinity, and the ways in which the war reenergized the question of gender differences while making warfare and empire palatable to a broader public.

Linda Colley (Princeton University) provided the keynote lecture for the conference entitled, "Grand versus Francis: Gender, Imperial Warfare, and a Wider Atlantic World." Her lecture featured the notion of the "privilege of masculinity" absent a martial emphasis, as well as the self-fashioning opportunities for women in the "frontier community" of India. She analyzed the lawsuit of Philip Francis and George Francis Grand in late eighteenth-century British India to illustrate that the local environment initially could trump traditional notions of identity: gender, nationality, and religion.

Grand sued Francis for “criminal conversation” with his sixteen-year-old French Catholic wife, Catherine Noëlle Verlee (Worlee), who had been born in the Danish colony of Tranquebar (Tarangambadi). The case showed that eighteenth-century India, with fewer, yet more visibly active women in a colonial community that, itself, was made up of many nationalities and religions, offered a more fluid environment than the British imperial rule of the nineteenth century. Ultimately, though, under the stress of war and intensifying British nationalism, unconventional female conduct, even on the frontier, presented too great a challenge to the emerging political order, indicating the increasingly close assignment of masculinity and politics.

The conference commenced the following day with the panel “*Men at War: Masculinity and Soldiers’ War Experiences.*” Alan Forrest (University of York) explored the relationship between masculinity and military qualities under the Revolution and Empire. Forrest highlighted the military’s complex situation after 1792 as new notions of revolutionary honor, morality, and selflessness redefined both civil and martial conduct. Forrest illustrated that if the military recognized women soldiers, they praised their masculine qualities, rather than the women themselves. He concluded with a fascinating description of enduring conscription rituals, the *fêtes des conscrits*, as celebrations of masculinity. Stefan Dudink’s (Radboud University, Nijmegen Centre for Gender Studies) paper on the relationship between masculinity, politics, and military careers continued the theme of military masculinity. Dudink drew an interesting comparison between two Dutch officers to illustrate different forms of masculinity within the military. His nuanced case study presented clear distinctions between one officer, Herman Willem Daendels, who was strongly committed to revolutionary reforms, and to another, David Hendrikus

Chassé, who instead championed apolitical loyalty and duty to the nation alone. Dudink pointed out that only one successfully survived after 1815 in the Netherlands, the officer who drew on politically neutral concepts of the citizen-soldier in service to the state rather than to a revolutionary ideology. Claudia Kraft (University of Erfurt) likewise explored distinctive and evolving understandings of femininity and masculinity among the nobility in Poland, in particular a shift from an active military identity to an administrative bourgeois masculinity by 1815. At the same time, she traced the transformation of femininity among the Polish elites, which swung from the inclusion of noble women in military mobilization to their exclusion from later bureaucratic performances, rituals that emerged as the new qualifiers for civic engagement in a “manly self-government.” Finally, Gregory Knouff (Keene State College) explored the intersection between race and gender among poor white, free black, and Native American men in western Pennsylvania during the American Revolutionary wars. He argued that whiteness, masculinity, and military service replaced property ownership in defining citizenship in the young republic. Moreover, he asserted that such new distinctions of citizenship emerged on the frontiers in local militias, in western Pennsylvania for example, where white settlers (regardless of their cultural or ethnic background) felt it imperative to distinguish themselves from Native Americans and thus viewed the War for Independence also as a race war. This panel, therefore, offered a variety of important insights into the various manifestations of military masculinities and the politicized transformation of men into soldiers. Commentator Brian Holden Reid (King’s College, University of London) asked, “What are armies for?” and spurred a lively discussion about significance of local and national contexts in any answer to such a question.

As a pendant to the previous panel, the following session, “*Women at War: Female War Experiences*,” explored women’s participation in war. Holly Mayer (Duquesne University) outlined the many areas of female activity in the American Revolution, from camp followers to national heroines such as Molly Pitcher. Despite women’s participation in the insurrection against British rule, Meyer argued that American leaders immediately sought to turn these rough women into virtuous and self-sacrificing mothers and wives in order to generate their vision of a well-ordered society. Catriona Kennedy (University of York) addressed British women’s perception of warfare at the Battle of Waterloo and stressed that women experienced and recorded the war with more than one voice and that they regarded themselves as “eye-witnesses” even though they were physically removed from the field of battle. Her work emphasized that viewing the wounded and dead as they come off the battle field was very much a war experience, as was their fear of rape and pillage by a victorious enemy. Thomas Cardoza’s (Truckee Meadows Community College) presentation featured the vital roles of women in the French military as support personnel. He explored the continuities in as well as significant transformations of women’s status as sutlers and laundresses in the armed services under four different regimes between 1780 and 1830. During the revolutionary and Napoleonic era women were constrained more aggressively in their participation in combat as soldiers, in particular by the law of 30 April 1793, yet gained legal status as holders of licenses (*patentes*) in the armed forces. He pointed out that many women—laundresses or sutlers—could end up in combat as their numbers grew alongside the escalating campaigns; yet, the state only recognized their participation in armed conflict as a purely defensive action and acknowledged them as such, but without pensions for

their service or compensation for their injuries. These papers and the comments, by D'Ann Campbell (U.S. Coast Guard Academy), underscored that women did not have to be active on the field of combat to be participants in the war experience and that, once again, the local context—religious, frontier, and national—did much to shape women's participation and how it was understood.

The final panel of the day, "*Home Fronts: The War at Home*," explored the consequences of war on domestic and civic life. Patricia Lin (University of California, Berkeley) examined the transformation in British pension programs for the families of soldiers and sailors. She argued that the navy's new approaches to state support for widows and orphans broadened the state's responsibilities toward families, most interestingly, by expanding the casualty payments and salary remittances to include interracial marriages and multi-racial children around the globe. Alexander Martin (University of Notre Dame) presented a case study of "civilian masculinity" in a time of war, that of Johann Ambrosius Rosenstrauch. He pointed out that Napoleonic Wars contributed to both the spiritual awakening and financial independence necessary for the self-fashioning of this alternative masculinity. Martin's case study identified a form of masculinity that was not martial, aristocratic, or plebian, which crossed national and religious borders and appeared to contribute to the restrained and prudent bourgeois identity of the nineteenth century. Elizabeth Colwill (San Diego State University) shifted the discussion to the Caribbean and the intersection between the state and free women claiming a civic identity for themselves and their families. Colwill revealed the state's efforts to couple productivity and matrimony through laws that sacralized marriage and banned divorce, while imposing a return to plantation labor. Whereas the Republic

offered new protections and legal status—by encouraging marriage and rewarding large (legitimate) families, as well allowing the registration of children in the state’s *état civil*—women’s responses reveal their nuanced and determined resistance to the new system. Even as they hastened to register their legitimate and illegitimate children to solidify the ties of kinship and to claim “social being,” they rejected both the labor codes and the state’s idea that marriage alone formed the legitimate basis of family. The discussion, sparked by comments by Gisela Mettele (GHI Washington), probed the models, whether generated by the state or broader culture, that underlay the gendering of identities.

The last day of the conference began with the panel “*Gender, Nation, and Wars: Patriotic and Revolutionary Actions and Movements*,” which examined the intersection of gender and patriotism in times of war. Emma V. Macleod (University of Stirling) addressed the forms of patriotism available to British women during the revolutionary era and underscored the evidence of “independent patriotism” based on the correspondence of English bluestockings. This “non-gendered and non partisan engagement with the political affairs of the nation” represented women’s political involvement despite limits on their sphere of action and proscribed conduct for patriotic sentiments. Similarly, Katherine Aaslestad (West Virginia University) traced the eighteenth-century origins of a gender-neutral civic patriotism in the republican city-state of Hamburg. She outlined the decline in this patriotism and the emergence of new militarized and gendered patriotic actions and rhetoric during the Wars of Liberation in 1813. Cecilia Morgan (University of Toronto) addressed the intersection between service to the Crown, patriotic language, and performances of masculinity in Upper Canada during the War of 1812. Her paper probed

the gendered language of patriotism to illustrate the marginalization of women as well as both sexes of Native Americans and Afro-Canadians, though Mohawk narratives asserted their own service to the Crown and masculine courage. Finally, Karen Racine (University of Guelph) addressed the gendering of nation building in Spanish America during the Wars of Independence. Her work emphasized the impact of European rhetoric, especially British models, in the family-based and gendered discourse of the era. The image of the father, the *padre*, as opposed to female allegories of “Liberty,” especially, opened a means to reconceive the bonds of patriarchal authority as the revolutions progressed. She identified a shift from a fraternal identity of “brothers in arms” during the 1810s to the “familial state” of the 1820s, united under the authority of the “founding fathers.” These papers demonstrated the diversity and dynamism of patriotic language and its potential for rapid transformation in times of war and national liberation. Mary Beth Norton (Cornell University) challenged the participants by posing some broad themes that were emerging from the conference, most importantly, the possibility that warfare allowed the consolidation of new trends, most especially, the creation of separate spheres and the linkage, very new, of women, the household and “private” life.

The final panel of the conference, “*Gendering War Memories*” addressed the shifting representations of masculinity and femininity in the gendering of the commemorations of these wars throughout the nineteenth century. Sarah Chambers (University of Minnesota) explored the state’s process of constructing memory in Chile and underscored how it used women, in particular widows, as tools of national reconciliation to highlight common services to the state and presented women as gullible victims, not active resisters in liberation movements. She revealed that once-exiled

“founding fathers” were exhumed and brought back to Chile to heal the memories of suffering and internal divisions. Kathleen Duval (UNC at Chapel Hill) used the story of Nicanora Ramos, wife of the Spanish commandant Cruzat, to explore the lives of forgotten women who were drawn into war against their will. Ramos was kidnapped by a Scottish trader in the dangerous Mississippi borderlands near Chicksaw Bluffs. Drawing on her captors’ notions of honor, Ramos not only negotiated housing for herself and her dependents in the leader’s quarters, but also used her position to secure information that she passed along to Spanish officials when she was released three weeks later. Like many of the women who fled invading armies, or who followed soldier-husbands, Ramos coped as well as she could in a situation not of her own making. Turning our attention to the continent, Ruth Leiserowitz (Free University of Berlin) addressed gender images in literary representations of Russia’s 1812 Patriotic War. Leiserowitz explored fictional heroines from the middle of the nineteenth century who urged their soldier-fiancés to greater acts of sacrifice and heroism. While some renderings portrayed the young women as independent, patriotic and courageous, with time, the representations reduced their roles to that of waiting anxiously and passively for news on a secure home front. Wolfgang Koller (Free University of Berlin) explored the gendered images of the War of Liberation in German feature films during the Inter-War years. Probing the male characters in key Ufa productions, especially those of Gerhard Lamprecht and Kurt Bernhardt, he highlighted the martial cult of the male hero and the ways in which images of femininity and masculinity revealed Weimar and Third Reich wish projections. The commentator, Judith Miller (Emory University), raised the question of the impact of new genres—novels, films—coupled with new modes of representation found in state

documents, such as family registers, in consolidating and naturalizing the emerging gender regimes. This final panel concluded that the process of commemorating, remembering, and forgetting wars remains highly politicized and gendered, as that accounts of post-war trauma, victim narratives, and nostalgia converge in the politics of commemoration and memorialization.

The conference wrapped up with a final panel of distinguished scholars to pull together the many issues raised by the variety of fascinating papers. This panel consisted of Christopher Dandeker (Kings College, London), Catherine Davies (University of Nottingham), Karen Hagemann (UNC, Chapel Hill), Lynn Hunt (University of California, Los Angeles), and Alex Roland (Duke University). The panel emphasized the instability of gender *praxis* in the era of revolutions. Moreover, concepts of masculinity and femininity were not unitary phenomena and instead were profoundly shaped by local conflicts and norms, and the models themselves moved rapidly across boundaries only to be reconfigured in their new contexts. War and revolution placed further strains on those volatile models, raising the essential question about how to channel violence and restore order when old understandings and hierarchies have been swept away. If gender lines appeared to harden during the war, that development emerged from the instability of a new gender axis where manhood was not a given, and instead had to be performed, repeated, and naturalized. The politicization of war and the growing sense of the citizen's "right" to comment on the moral and military state of affairs could not be monopolized by one sex, social group, or ethnicity and this expansion of politics generated new efforts to reorder society. Historians have generally framed these processes within specific national boundaries, but this conference demonstrated that the dynamism of revolution,

war, and liberation must be explored within a transnational structure that includes the very complex and rich concept of gender. The conference ended with an enormous debt of thanks to its principle organizer, Karen Hagemann, whose level of intellectual rigor and organizational energy made this highly productive and stimulating international conference possible, and to Laurence Hare, the conference assistant. The wonderful hospitality of the University of North Carolina was deeply appreciated by all participants in particular the last night with local barbeque, Tommy Edward's Bluegrass Experience and dancing at the Center for the Study of the American South.