

Review Essay

New Directions in the Histories of Men, Masculinity, and War

Cheryl Koos

California State University, Los Angeles

Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann, and John Tosh, eds., *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2004).

Paul Jackson, *One of the Boys: Homosexuality in the Military during World War II* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004).

Christina S. Jarvis, *The Male Body at War: American Masculinity during World War II* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004).

Jeffrey S. Reznick, *Healing the Nation: Soldiers and the Culture of Caregiving in Britain during the Great War* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2004).

Sandra Whitworth, *Men, Militarism and UN Peacekeeping: A Gendered Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004).

On 1 May 2003, after two dramatic fly-bys, United States President George W. Bush landed on the USS Abraham Lincoln in a Navy jet, with "Navy 1" and "George W. Bush Commander in Chief" emblazoned under the cockpit window. Bush disembarked from the co-pilot's seat under a massive banner declaring, "Mission Accomplished," waving to the crowd while wearing a green flight suit and with a white helmet tucked under his left arm. Flanked by two Tom Cruise *Top Gun* look-alike pilots with gleaming white teeth, Bush proceeded to gladhand and salute the flight deck. Several hours later, after the controversial photo-op, Bush would declare an end to official combat operations in Iraq.

It does not take a brain surgeon—or even less, an historian—to decode the symbolism of that staged event over three years ago. An image-making White House staff, led by Karl Rove, staged the event to burnish Bush's war credentials prior to the heavily contested 2004 election. Facing withering criticism of his 'chicken-hawk' administration who had largely sat out the Vietnam War (Bush piloted an F-102 fighter jet in the Texas Air National Guard and Vice President Dick Cheney received multiple deferments), Bush playing *Top Gun* was a ploy to show that he truly was, in his own words, "a war president." In other words, strutting in a flight suit made him a more of a certain kind of man

and provided evidence of a persona that played directly to cultural understandings of the integral relationship between war and manhood that have been centuries in the making and foundational to the construction of the modern nation-state.

Similarly, the five diverse books under review in this essay all examine, either centrally or tangentially, how masculinity/masculinities and war seem inexorably linked. From looking at theoretical constructions of the relationship of men, masculinity, and war to the representations of masculinity in times of war and the experiences of men who fight and do not or cannot participate as soldiers and how gender constructions affected their lives in profound ways, these works engage and add to a developing area of scholarship in both the fields of gender studies and history.

Taking their cues from the groundbreaking work of historian Joan Scott and sociologist R. W. Connell, among others, Stefan Dudnik, Karen Hagemann, and John Tosh have assembled a wide-ranging and impressive anthology with *Masculinities in Politics and War*. With its sixteen authors addressing related subjects in a post-1750 global context, covering every continent except Antarctica, the volume raises many important issues about the integral relationship between constructions of masculinity and the modern nation-state. All essays examine how historically contingent manifestations of both have revolved around questions and definitions of citizenship and military service.

Three theoretical pieces anchor the book, two by the editors. The first, by Dudink and Hagemann, identifies the primary questions that the volume seeks to address. In asserting that the book seeks “to situate the history of masculinity in struggles over power, over claims to political and other forms of authority and legitimacy that were made in gendered terms,” they want to interrogate “what masculinities were invoked, produced, and discarded in shaping the autonomy of modern citizens, peoples, and nations” in regard to state politics and the making of war (6). John Horne extends this discussion in the volume’s second chapter, raising important points about the evolution of the modern nation-state’s military as a “source of masculine authority and privileged arena of male activity” (31). According to Horne, following from ideas that Dudink and Hagemann set forth in their essay, historians must consider how republican notions of citizenship (‘nationalized masculinity’) became imbued with and indeed inseparable from ‘militarized’ masculinity. He rightly contends that these constructions would be challenged, though, by the two World Wars. With these total wars, women as well as men could make claims to a form of militarized citizenship, through direct participation in the military, but more often in factories and homes as workers and/or mothers. In addition, with civilians being targeted in bombings and affected by occupation, the line between the front and home was muddied, thus destabilizing the war as a source of masculine authority.

John Tosh explores some of these ideas further in the volume's third introductory essay, "Hegemonic Masculinity and the History of Gender." Tosh examines sociologist R. W. Connell's identification of "hegemonic masculinity" and the category's potential for historical gender analysis, much in the same way Joan Scott did with Foucault and poststructuralism. According to Tosh, this model "seeks to explain how the political and social order of men is created in the image of men, and expressed in specific forms of masculinity" (42). Key to understanding this concept are gendered relations of power, those between not only men and women/masculine and feminine, but also dominant and subordinate expressions of masculinity among men; the examination of unequal social and political power distribution is at the core of this. Among its contributions to the study of history, according to Tosh, is that hegemonic masculinity, à la Gramsci, is always contingent and subject to challenge from those subordinated, thus forcing the adaptation and response of dominant structures and cultures. Tosh underscores an important conceptual tool for studying how certain men, formulating and deploying gendered, social, and cultural constructions, use formal political and military structures for the acquisition and maintenance of power. He rightly lauds Connell for keeping material power relations in view and formulating an interpretive schematic that encourages the examination of how masculinity and its various forms are mediated by other polyvalent yet experientially salient identities, such as race, class, sexuality, and religion.

Thinking about how forms of hegemonic masculinity function or do not function in war provides an analytical tool for examining the remaining four books under review. Jeffrey Reznick's book, *Healing the Nation*, is an excellent monograph that examines the care giving apparatus that served wounded British soldiers during the First World War. Reznick carefully traces how institutions and their employees and volunteers cared for soldiers, from respites set up behind the front lines that were operated by the YMCA and Salvation Army to military hospitals both in France and in Great Britain and rehabilitation centers at home. Reznick argues that a "culture of caregiving" developed between 1914 and 1918 that enabled those left on the home front to participate in the war on some level by taking care of the wounded and helping with their rehabilitation; he argues that the resulting system was perhaps more effective in doing the latter than in dealing with wounded veterans. Using institutional records from non-profit organizations like the YMCA, military hospital records, and magazines published by the soldiers themselves, as well as soldiers' letters and memoirs, Reznick maintains that shared institutional experiences, like those of trench warfare, served to concretize their bonds and comradeship and highlighted differences between care givers and the cared for.

For the purposes of this review, though, I would like to focus on Reznick's claims that the study significantly contributes to a growing field of wartime

masculinity along the lines of Joanna Bourke's and Seth Koven's work on disabled male veterans and their bodies. As he states in the book's introduction, "[it argues] that expressions of and attempts to preserve manliness within the wartime culture of caregiving had outcomes that ranged from reinforcement to destabilization of manliness as defined by the male-breadwinner ideal and by emphasis on independence, moral courage, sexual purity, athleticism and stoicism" (11). While Reznick plants the seeds of such analysis throughout the book, they beg to be developed more fully. Bringing out the cultural dimension of gender in much greater depth would have added a provoking dimension to a fine institutional history. Perhaps by employing a more pronounced theoretical approach to his work, one along the lines suggested by John Tosh, he would have come closer to obtaining his goal.

Paul Jackson and Christina Jarvis, however, more directly analyze how certain forms of masculinity functioned in the arenas of American and Canadian participation in World War II. Jackson's provocative work on homosexuality in the Canadian military offers an important addition by looking at how forms of hegemonic masculinities affected the formation of institutional military policy toward homosexual men as well as their experiences overseas and on bases in Canada. The first half of the book focuses on the military's attempts to regulate homosexual behavior. Jackson's findings are fascinating; he discovers that far from being uniformly applied, military discipline of soldiers caught performing homosexual acts ranged from the severe (dismissal) to moderate (active discouragement) to a slap on the wrist and an admonition; much depended on base commanders and officers' personal attitudes. Enforcement was erratic and court martial proceedings were much more damaging to unit cohesion than the homosexual servicemen. Not surprisingly, fellow soldiers were far more tolerant of such expression than the authorities after a soldier had proven his loyalty (28).

Jackson provides a solidly researched social and institutional history that reveals the complexities of gay life in and around the military. He is an astute observer of mid-century mores that shaped attitudes toward homosexuality as well as the unique cultural opportunities that arose with the dislocation of the war. The result is a rich two-pronged study based primarily on court martial proceedings as well as copious and often frank personal interviews; the complex interrelations of masculinity and queer sexuality are made clear. The book's gender analysis works well and is integrated into the narrative, teasing out subtleties and nuances of attitude and expression.

Inasmuch that Jackson's study is about 'real' men and their experiences at the hand of an intense military regulatory order, Christina Jarvis looks at how American servicemen's bodies were used by military and state officials to remasculinize not just American servicemen during World War II, but also the entire nation. Jarvis provides an important corrective to the study of twentieth-

century American masculinities by investigating this crucial era of history; essentially, she does what Susan Jeffords did for the Vietnam War and post-Vietnam period. Explicitly relying on Connell's idea of hegemonic masculinity as an interpretive tool to examine the myriad meanings attached to white male bodies, Jarvis argues a vision of "hegemonic militarized masculinity" emerged during World War II that was constructed against and in relation to Japanese and German masculinities as well as those of ethnic American minorities (8, 155-56). The resulting ideal of manhood, well-muscled and primarily white, rested on a cult of heroism and sacrifice and emerged as the dominant vision of American masculinity for the latter half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

To do this, Jarvis marshals an impressive array of sources that informed the production of this dominant masculine ideal. She carefully charts official propaganda coming out of the State Department and US Armed Forces, including posters, brochures, and military and governmental reports, and analyzes them within the context of what she calls the "cultural grid" of the era, including popular magazines, films, and novels (6). In this way, Jarvis shows how first the government and the military successfully remasculinized American men in the wake of the Great Depression. This process began with the New Deal and was furthered by the exigencies of war. She argues that the rebuilding of the American body politic occurred through the refashioning and deployment of men's bodies through representation, but also through their physical deployment in war.

Political scientist Sandra Whitworth likewise looks at the construction of a militarized masculinity, but in the context of its impact on Canadian United Nations peacekeeping forces in Cambodia and Somalia. She concludes that an inherent contradiction emerges when soldiers trained in a hyper-masculine environment—that extols brutality and killing and routinely rewards recruits for participating in behavior that subjugates the weak/feminine—are used as peacekeepers in non-combat situations. She finds that the result is a fundamental contradiction in identities, one that produces conditions ripe for the exploitation of women in these localities through sexual and racially-charged violence, as well as those that produce conflicts and contradictions for the soldiers themselves, leading at times to post-traumatic stress disorder (13).

Whitworth boldly suggests that the United Nations has not adequately considered these contradictions between military training and fitness for peacekeeping duties from the perspective of gender and must do so if they want to increase the efficacy of these missions. Using Connell's formulation, she maintains that the militarized masculinity created in the Canadian context, as in most others, becomes culturally exalted or hegemonic to the point where alternative masculinities are subordinated, as are the feminine and traits coded as feminine. To this end, she deftly combines the theoretical with the practical analysis of

soldier training and military culture to argue that the constructed identities of 'soldier' and 'peacekeeper' collide with each other, producing exacerbated contradictions and negative results for both local populations and soldiers. Thus, Whitworth concludes "militarized peacekeeping results in greater insecurity for far too many people ... [it] is founded on a series of contradictions, such that it cannot deliver on the promises it makes to those who are subject to the missions or even to those who are deployed on peacekeeping missions" (186). She worries, along with others that peacekeeping will become more, as a United Nations report calls for, militarized and 'robust,' thus further blending 'peace' and 'war' and raising even more contradictions with serious implications for the warriors who keep the peace and those they are supposed to protect. The words of George W. Bush, eleven months before he put war and masculinity on display on the USS Abraham Lincoln, fit aptly here: "I just want you to know that, when we talk about war, we're really talking about peace."

Whitworth's book and the others under consideration here remind us, as does presidential posturing on an aircraft carrier in the not-too-distant past, that it is incumbent upon scholars to take the connections between masculinity and war seriously when writing the history of each. When analyzing "shock and awe" and missions accomplished and unaccomplished in the past and the present, the physical toll of body counts, missing limbs, and wounds as well as the emotional aftermath that hegemonic masculinity, as expressed and constructed through war, inflicts and inflicts on soldiers, civilians and enemy combatants, is not just necessary but also politically relevant.