

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Gender, War and Politics

The Wars of Revolution and Liberation
Transatlantic Comparisons, 1775–1820

Abstracts of the Papers

Panel 1: Gender, War and Empires

David Eltis (Emory University):

Gender, War and the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1775 - 1820

Between 1775 and 1820, the structure of empire, participation in the slave trade in Europe, Africa and the Americas, and attitudes toward the intercontinental carriage of unwilling human beings underwent seismic shifts. Yet the sheer size and horror of the slave trade showed no tendency to diminish over the period as a whole. This paper explores patterns in the slave trade as the latter evolved in response to the above influences, but also examines the impact of the slave trade on war and revolution in the Atlantic World. It concludes that the key elements in the ending of the transatlantic traffic came together after this period ended, and that the origins of these key elements are most likely to be found in the era before 1775.

Kathleen Wilson (Stony Brook University):

Gender Troubles: War, Revolution and the British Empire, 1775-1815

The Revolutionary Wars with America and France had a galvanizing effect upon the British nation. But they also destabilized some of the most important beliefs about the manliness, virtue and humanity of the British national character. These gender troubles were, to be sure, a temporary phenomenon, but they were also a recurring one. For if warfare historically has the effect of crystallizing idealized views of masculinity, femininity and their duties, then it also has

provided examples of savagery, treachery and cowardice quite at odds with its allegedly more uplifting values. This paper will examine both local and global dimensions of the gender crisis inaugurated by the wars of revolution, from the Thames to the Ohio to the Ganges, in order to think about the ways in which the categories and boundaries of national identity were troubled by the encounters and practices of imperial wars. It will then turn to the re-consideration of the sea- change in the politics of representation effected by the Revolutionary Wars and to the ways in which it transformed British people's thinking about rights and liberties in an imperial polity, wherever they may live. Finally, the paper will suggest how the 'first modern war' greatest impact may have been to demonstrate the necessary failure of all national and gender identities, with repercussions that are still being felt today.

Laurent Dubois (Michigan State University):

Citoyennes and War in the French Caribbean

This paper will explore the various roles – economic, military, and symbolic – of recently emancipated citoyennes in the French Caribbean during the period of war and revolution stretching from the early 1790s through 1804. It will discuss the ways in which women of color, many former slaves, participated in and shaped the broader wartime society and economy of Saint-Domingue and Guadeloupe during the 1790s, as well as the cases in which women participated actively in combat either in the insurrections of the early 1790s or in the resistance to French missions in the early 1800s. The paper will also examine the ways in which definitions of citizenship that focused on the military service and virtue of male former slaves shaped and constrained the political horizons of citoyennes during this period.

Sherry Johnson (University of Florida):

Maintaining the Homefront: Widows, Wives and War in Cuba in the late 18th Century

The paper will examine the roles of women in Cuba during two periods of international conflict: the War of 1779-1783, and the invasion of St. Domingue in 1793-1795. During both periods Cuban women were forced to take on roles normally assigned to men. Role reversal came as second nature to many military wives, widows, and daughters, because of Cuba's defensive function in the Spanish empire and the corresponding development of a militarized society. Forced into such roles, Cuban women were able to exert an inordinate degree of agency as compared to other women in Spanish America. Yet, the very agency that propelled them to step outside traditional gender roles also meant that women of all strata would not suffer abuse in silence. Paradoxically, the masculine culture that embraced paternalism also established a system of protections for women who were the victims of domestic violence. This paper will demonstrate that in cases of abuse, victimization, and murder, Cuban women rarely hesitated in taking advantage of the protections afforded to them.

Panel 2: National Masculinities and Femininities and their Others

David O' Brien (University of Illinois, Urbana)

Militarism and Gender Differentiation in French History Painting from the Revolution to the Restoration

Pre-Revolutionary history painting in France was marked by a well-known gender differentiation: artists increasingly chose classical narratives and formal arrangements that assigned passive, private, and emotional roles to women, and active, public, and virile roles to men. This scheme was often reiterated in Revolutionary painting, while the large-scale painting of the Napoleonic period, with its turn to contemporary military subjects, further championed masculinity while removing women almost completely from the scene. This paper explores the effects of this shift on post-Napoleonic large-scale painting. I examine the attempts of the Restoration government to represent itself in an art form that had been dominated by masculinist and martial ideals and closely identified with Bonapartism, and I explore the ways in which ambitious young painters sought to make their way in a profession closely linked to militarism.

Jane Rendall (University of York):

From Eighteen Hundred and Eleven to Eighteen Hundred and Thirteen: British Women Writing War and Empire

In her poem *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* (1812) the English poet, dissenter and educationalist Anna Barbauld wrote of British engagement in the global 'storm of war' as part of the expansion of the British empire and its commerce. She did so not in a triumphalist or patriotic spirit, but to forecast the ultimate downfall of that empire, when London crumbled as Rome had done. The poem was greeted with almost universal critical hostility, as subversive of national morale, its crime exacerbated by its technical accomplishment. The reviewer J. W. Croker wrote in the *Quarterly Review* in 1812: 'we had hoped...that the empire might have been saved without the intervention of a lady-author'. Yet another response, from the Scotswoman, poet, and letter-writer, Anne Grant, in her lengthy poem *Eighteen Hundred and Thirteen* (1814) celebrated recent British victories and growing imperial strength in nationalist terms, and received a warmer critical welcome. Both women wrote with close attention to the current military and political situation, and assumed in both male and female readers a detailed understanding of the conflict. This paper will explore the gendered nature of this complex exchange in the context of a close examination of British periodical literature between 1811 and 1814: it will consider critical responses to women writing about war, and women writers' assumptions of public and civic responsibility in so doing. Taking account of regional and religious differences, it will examine the different discourses of middle-class femininity through which women writers might negotiate

their domestic and public identities in response to the nation's military and imperial engagements.

Matthew Brown (University of Bristol):

Creating National Heroes in the Spanish American Wars of Independence

The Wars of Independence (c.1810-c.1824) catalyzed great changes in society across Spanish America. In 1815 José María Córdoba (1799-1829) joined a revolutionary army to fight against Spanish colonial rule in New Granada (today, Colombia). He rose rapidly through the ranks to serve as a general at the Battle of Ayacucho in 1824. Faced with the imperial army's superior forces, Córdoba declared 'Soldados, adelante; armas a discreción; paso de vencedores!' [Soldiers, forward! Carry your arms, and march on like victors!]. Córdoba was celebrated because of this patriotic and manly rhetoric, and for his bravery, his honourable family, and his relative youth. When he was killed after rebelling against the Colombian government in 1829, Córdoba's heroism became the stuff of enduring national myth (Medellín's international airport is the Aeropuerto José María Córdoba). Why was this so? This paper will argue that Córdoba's story provided a way for Colombians to resist the encroaching British informal empire after independence from Spanish rule had been achieved. Córdoba was courting the daughter of the British Consul in Bogotá at the time of his death; foreign mercenaries in the service of the Colombian state were accused of killing Córdoba in cold blood. Commentators and politicians lauded Córdoba's masculine virtues – his *hombria* – and loudly and repeatedly denounced the foreign 'assassins' as cowardly, effeminate and impotent. An analysis of these texts will explore the ways in which gender and politics shaped the myths of national heroes in Spanish America against a backdrop of international networks of migration, diplomacy and commerce.

Public Keynote Lecture

Linda Colley (Princeton University)

Grand versus Francis: Gender, Imperial Warfare, and a Wider Transatlantic World

This lecture uses an un-examined political and sexual scandal both so as to discuss issues of empire, gender, war, nationality, race and religion, and to argue that Transatlantic comparisons in regard to these issues must pay close attention as well to Asia. At 10:30pm on Tuesday 8 December 1778, two Indian servants used force to stop a European male from leaving a house in Calcutta. The man in question was Philip Francis, an Irishman, a member of Calcutta's Supreme Council, Warren Hastings' fiercest critic, a political theorist and writer, a supporter of the American Revolution, and subsequently of the French Revolution. The house in Calcutta belonged to George Grand, a Swiss servant of the British East India Company; and – while the latter was away – Francis had been illicitly visiting his 16-year old wife, Catherine Grand, a French Catholic.

The lecture will discuss the writings and arguments surrounding Francis's subsequent trial for "criminal conversation" at Calcutta's Supreme Court, an event coinciding with the growing impact on the subcontinent of an American Revolutionary War turned world war. It explores how this scandal in Calcutta can contribute and pose questions to recent scholarship on war and gender in Europe and the Americas. The main theme will be connections across continents: inevitably so given the fate of the major protagonists in this affair. Because of it, George Grand would end up working for the Dutch in the Cape of Africa; while Catherine Grand would flee to Paris, where she would ultimately become first the mistress and then the wife of Talleyrand, Napoleon's Minister of Foreign Affairs. As for Philip Francis, his disgrace in this affair would precipitate his departure from the subcontinent, and contribute to his subsequent campaign to impeach Warren Hastings – the most public and spectacular debate over the morality and immorality of empire in 18th century Britain

Panel 3: Men at War: Masculinity and Soldiers' War Experiences

Alan Forrest (University of York):

Citizenship, Honor and Masculinity: Military Qualities under the Revolution and Empire

This paper will examine the degree to which traditional notions of military honor and masculinity were changed by the French Revolution, and particularly by the emergence of ideals of citizenship and patriotism. How did the political leadership address soldiers and evaluate their efforts? How did the new officer corps provide leadership for an army increasingly composed of volunteers and conscripts, the young men who emerged from the revolutionary levies? Above all, how did traditional ideas of masculinity evolve in what the public discourse of the 1790s portrayed as a new kind of warfare? The paper will discuss military morale and the values which soldiers themselves praised in their correspondence and memoirs of the war. It will look, too, at depictions of the citizen-soldier in art and theatre, at the image of the citizen-soldier that emerged during the 1790s. And by discussing the depiction of the apparent other – those women and boys who found themselves in uniform and the qualities that they were assumed to embody – it will address the relationship between heroism, sacrifice and masculinity in the sphere of revolutionary warfare.

Stefan Dudink (Radboud University, Nijmegen):

The Constancy of War: Politics, Masculinity and Military Careers in the Netherlands, 1780-1815

The dramatic political changes and the general politicization of the revolutionary and Napoleonic years profoundly affected the lives and careers of professional military officers. Although military careers were never immune to political upheaval, (counter-) revolution and nationalism determined the conditions under which these careers were pursued in new ways. They seemed to impose higher standards of ideological allegiance on an officer class that had in some cases had operated under codes of motivation it had itself defined, or had been internationally oriented. At the same time the constant presence of war in these years, and the permanent demand for experienced officers that accompanied it, offered some of these men a particular protection against the demands and volatility of politics. This paper explores these contradictory tendencies in the lives and careers of a number of Dutch officers, some of whom commanded radically-democratic citizen's militias during the Dutch revolution, then joined the French revolutionary and/or Napoleonic armies, to finally serve in the army of the Dutch restoration monarchy. It focuses in particular on the divergent constructions of masculinity present in the socio-political discourse that defined the room for manoeuvre for (aspiring) members of the Dutch officers class between 1780 and 1815.

Claudia Kraft (University of Erfurt):

Noble Knights into Polish Warriors? Reshaping Masculinities in Polish Revolutionary Warfare

The period between the first partition of Poland in 1772 and the participation of Polish soldiers in Napoleonic warfare in the ranks of the Polish Legions at the end of the 18th and at the beginning of the 19th century (until the foundation of the Duchy of Warsaw in 1807) has been crucial for the reshaping not only of a certain sense of Polish citizenship but also for a new definition of gender roles in Polish society. The permanent warfare and the close connection between a revolutionary attitude of national uprising and a new concept of citizenship no longer dependent on noble origin but on civil or military service for the „fatherland in distress“ meant a new notion of soldiership. On the one hand one can observe a development quite similar to experiences in Western Europe, i. e. the pushing aside of women from the public sphere as a consequence of the ever closer connection between professing military duties and receiving political rights. On the other hand the state of emergency during the uprisings and the national struggle for independence opened new opportunities for female agency. Quite an important role played also the legacy of the reshaping of gender roles in the late Republic of Nobles, when the basic layers of citizenship had been renegotiated. Polish political reformers stressed the role of military virtue but they also focussed on the importance of the soldier's education that almost without excep-

tions they saw lying in the hand of the mothers. Unlike than in other European countries in the Polish lands during this period the family received special attention as a place of public education and as one of the most important pillars of state and society – since the public institutions that used to function in the developing civil societies and nation states of Western Europe were replaced in the Polish case by a society that was still organized on informal kinship relations.

Gregory T. Knouff (Keene State College):

White Manhood and National Identity: Pennsylvania Soldiers in the American

This paper argues that Pennsylvania Revolutionary War soldiers linked concepts of white maleness to claims to membership in the American nation. Thus, they created a foundation for political subjectivity in the early United States grounded in imagined biological terms. Soldiers became an effective political voice for the enfranchisement of poorer white men on the radical new Pennsylvania government. Conversely, the state government passed militia laws and test oath acts that defined only white men (regardless of propertyholding status) as subject to them. The soldiers' wartime experience further bolstered a clearer definition of whiteness that united ethnically diverse European Americans. They constructed an identity as white by implicating other groups, primarily African Americans and Native Americans as not white and unentitled to presumptions of membership in the revolutionary community. In particular, cultural convergence in the ways that Revolutionaries and Native Americans fought, necessitated a new hierarchy of difference based on imagined physical characteristics rather than cultural ones. This popular concept of a nation of white men further naturalized the exclusion of women from formal politics. Women, African Americans and Indians would increasingly be excluded from the new republic based on their perceived physical characteristics, not their class status or culture.

Panel 4: Women at War: Female War Experiences in the Military

Holly A. Mayer (Duquesne University, Pittsburgh):

Bearing Arms, Bearing Burdens: Women with the American Army, 1775-1783

This presentation is about actions and attitudes: the actions of women with the Continental Army, and the attitudes of contemporaries and later generations about the appropriateness and patriotism of those women who actively supported the military. It is a study of how people perceived women warriors—those who performed military service whether dressed as women or disguised as men—versus how they ranked the women who followed the army to perform domestic duties. Such an examination may reveal something of the gendered and generational natures of heroism

Catriona Kennedy (University of York):

From the Ballroom to the Battlefield: British Women and Waterloo

In June 1815 a significant number of British women assembled at Brussels would experience for the first time the ravages of warfare. The unusually large female presence in the vicinity of the battlefield would be recorded in the historical imaginary (most notably by Thackeray) through the contrast between the splendour of the Duchess of Richmond's ball and the bloodshed that followed. Such contrasts arguably reinforced gendered distinctions between the military and civilian spheres. Yet, British women's proximity to Waterloo also enabled them to claim the authority of the eyewitness, as they dispatched reports to a nation hungry for accounts of this climactic contest. Drawing on women's personal accounts of the conflict and its aftermath, this paper will explore how women narrated and represented their experiences of the battle and what this reveals about their relationship to the British wartime nation.

Thomas Cardoza (Truckee Meadows, Community College):

Habits Appropriate to Her Sex: The Female Military Experience in France in the Age of Revolution

During the years 1775-1820, French women served the army in three capacities: as femmes soldats (combat soldiers, usually disguised as men), as blanchisseuses, (laundresses) and as vivandières (sutlers). Each role had specific duties and rights, and each changed dramatically in the tumultuous years of the Revolution and Restoration. On the whole, the state tended to reward "appropriate" gender roles, while it discouraged women from acting "inappropriately" by engaging in combat. However, even this generalization is subject to qualification, as each successive regime adopted radically different policies toward military women. Ultimately, the Old Regime was the most permissive for femmes soldats. The First Republic, while implacably hostile to most military women, saw blanchisseuses and vivandières as "essential to the functioning of the divisions" and gave them freedom from spousal control and wide latitude to fulfill their functions, conditions that continued under the Empire. The restored monarchy tried to turn the clock back to 1788 in many respects, but not when it came to military women. Instead, it continued the very practical arrangements instituted by its arch-foes in the Republic, resulting in a stability and longevity in 19th century French female military institutions unequalled in any other European power.

Panel 5: Home Fronts: The War at Home

Patricia Lin (University of Berkeley):

British Soldiers' and Sailors' Families during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars

During the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, the experiences of the families of British common soldiers and sailors were radically transformed. The British central government established a welfare system to provide for these families, who in earlier wars had been left destitute and dependent on poor relief and charities. Among the welfare system's provisions were life-transforming schools for soldiers' daughters and sons and a program by which seamen could regularly send their wages back to their families. In benefiting from this system, family members systematically interacted with the central government in unprecedented ways, both as recipients of relief and as objects of knowledge. This paper explores the experiences of the soldiers' and sailors' families who benefited from the new welfare system and uses the information collected by the government in implementing the system to highlight the national and international character of the experiences of these families.

Alexander M. Martin (University of Notre Dame):

A German in Moscow: Russia's Home Front in 1812 and the Evangelical Awakening

A key legacy of the 1812 war was the deep penetration of the Evangelical Awakening into Russian elite society. Key factors enabling this penetration were the trauma of the Napoleonic invasion and the role of ethnic Germans whom migration to Russia afforded an opportunity to create new identities for themselves. This paper will examine the intersection of war and religion, and of Russia and Germany, through the career of Johann Ambrosius Rosenstrauch (1768-1835). Never before studied by historians, he emigrated from Germany to Russia and refashioned himself from Catholic to freemason to devout Lutheran, and from actor to merchant to preacher. In a newly discovered manuscript account, he narrates how the horrors of Moscow in 1812 prompted the religious conversion that transformed his life, while the circumstances of his life illumine the wider Russian-European encounter of the Napoleonic era.

Elizabeth Colwill (San Diego State University):

“Remember what you owe to the mother country!” State Ritual and Freedwomen’s Politics in Post-Emancipation Saint-Domingue

Slave emancipation, ratified by the French Convention on February 4, 1794, did not end war in revolutionary Saint Domingue. Instead, in conflicts that persisted for the better part of a decade, large swaths of territory fell under the control of France’s imperial rivals, while other areas became enmeshed in internal skirmishes reflecting complex regional allegiances and divisions between colors and classes. Families, like the French republican regime itself, struggled with the depredations of wars that consumed male laborers while shifting the burden of agricultural labor increasingly to freedwomen and children. As French commissioners requisitioned supplies, marshaled troops, and enforced labor codes designed to preserve France’s most valuable colony against the depredations of foreign and internal foes, they sought to construct new familial identities and political obligations through gendered ritual—gestures that met with resistance from freed people, themselves elaborating new conceptions of family and community, education and labor. This paper explores the pathways through which freedwomen, in dialogue with state policy, elaborated their own familial politics: both a practical response to violence and death, and a direct intervention in the political debates of post-emancipation Saint Domingue.

Panel 6: Gender, Nation and Wars: Patriotic and Revolutionary Actions and Movements

Emma V. Macleod (University of Stirling):

The Engagement of British Women with the Wars against Revolutionary America and Revolutionary France, 1775-1802

This paper is set in the context of British women’s practical involvement in the two revolutionary wars, but it focuses on their written responses to these conflicts, analyzing their engagement with the political and military issues raised by the wars. Clearly those women who left written records of their opinions on the wars were a small group; but the question of female views on the conflicts against revolutionary America and France is important enough to be considered on this basis. It is arguable that British women consistently emphasized certain issues and concerns. Did they do so because they were women, or because they thought women ought to do so? Not only were they wrestling with questions posed also for men by these wars, but they also struggled with the issue of their own role as women in a society at war. The paper examines how far they engaged with the political and ideological aspects of both wars, and how far they restricted themselves to commenting only on the more practical issues.

Katherine Aaslestad (West Virginia University):

Female Patriotism in the Hanseatic Cities during the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Empire

This paper explores the intersection of patriotism and gender in the republican city-state of Hamburg during the era of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Based on the perspective of contemporary public discourse, a study of patriotism offers insight into how this concept and the local values it expressed transformed at the turn of the nineteenth century. Between 1790 and 1815 two distinct discourses on patriotism emerge in the local press: one that decried the decline in traditional republican patriotism and a second that nurtured new notions of patriotism in a time of war. This paper explores both narratives of patriotism and the role that gender constructs played in each. As the crisis of war redirected notions of community service away from gender-neutral values to specific gendered roles in defending the city-state, the practice of patriotism redefined the spaces of men's and women's conduct and gendered patriotic activities.

Karen Racine (University of Guelph):

Patria, Patriotism, and Patriarchy in the Print Media: Gender and Nation-Building in the Spanish American Wars of Independence 1808-1825

This paper will explore the uses of gendered and family-based rhetoric in the Spanish American independence era, particularly those metaphors that relate to fatherhood and the evolving conception of the nation as an extended family. Utilizing contemporary journals, gazettes, newspapers, speeches, despatches, personal correspondence, poems, plays, travel accounts, and governmental debate records, the essay will examine the ways in which Spanish American leaders envisioned their role as heads of state institutions, as agents of socialization, and economic enterprises as an extension of the form of authority exerted by a father. By tracing the evolution of preferred revolutionary metaphoric language from that of the fraternal, "brothers-in-arms" notion of the 1810s to the more traditional and authoritarian notion of "founding fathers" in the 1820s, one can discern a shift in the broader conception of the familial nation as the patriots' ultimate victory started to become apparent.

Cecilia Morgan (University of Toronto):

Gender, Loyalty, and Virtue in a Colonial Context: The War of 1812 and its Aftermath in Upper Canada

This paper will examine the gendered dimensions and meanings of the War of 1812 in the British colony of Upper Canada (present-day Ontario). It will examine how patriotism, loyalty, and virtue took on both gendered and racialized dimensions in this colonial context, through pronouncements of the colonial state and voluntary societies, ones in which masculine military

proress were given precedence over women's experiences of sacrifice and loss. These gendered discourses are particularly significant given the War's domestic and 'home-front' nature. They also took on a particular significance in the immediate and long-term aftermath of the war, as they became the site of memories on which notions of loyalty and political subjectivity to both nation and empire were forged.

Panel 7: Gendering War Memories

Sarah Chambers (University of Minnesota):

Constructing Memory and Making Claims: Women's Petitioning of the Chilean State after Independence from Spain

This paper explores women's memories of war as narrated in petitions to the Chilean state in the early nineteenth century. The wars of independence in Chile, as in many parts of Spanish America, were prolonged as insurgents and royalists alternated in power; conflict was particularly intense in the southern regions where the persistent standoff reflected a state of civil war. The toll on families was profound. Households lost providers as husbands, sons and fathers were mobilized for military service. In addition to men leaving for battle, the war arrived on many doorsteps. Throughout the country, each side confiscated properties of suspected enemies, and in the South entire communities were relocated in an effort to prevent the civilian population from providing support to invading troops. The emerging independent state of Chile was deluged with requests for compensation and pensions from women trying to recover from these hardships. Their petitions narrated both their own personal suffering and the sacrifices of their loved ones, keeping alive memories of past divisions at a time when the country's leaders hoped to forge national unity. Widows' woeful stories did not fit the bureaucratic regulations on military pensions, and treasury ministers were eager to find technicalities that would allow them to deny requests in a time of budget shortfalls. Conflicts over confiscated property were even more contentious as they often pitted the native-born wives or children of émigrés against families of patriots who had been awarded houses or farms in the heat of war. In response, presidents (all military officers in this period) and senators used their discretionary powers to "wipe the tears" of the unfortunate in an effort to avoid political embarrassment to the new state. With expanded eligibility for war pensions, for example, widows needed only to provide evidence of their marriages and their husband's military service rather than sorrowful tales.

Kathleen DuVal (UNC at Chapel Hill):

Gender, Memory, and Forgetfulness in the American Revolution

This paper compares the remembered and forgotten women of the American Revolution, arguing that Americans remember women who purposefully crossed gender boundaries to serve their country but forget the majority of women, who were pulled into war against their will. Forgetting these women reflects a glorification and sanitization of the United States' founding war.

Ruth Leiserowitz (Free University of Berlin):

Gender Images of the "Patriotic War" of 1812 in Russian Popular Memory

Separation and the emergence of the heroine are common themes within early Russian novels. The following narrative is typical: A Russian soldier goes to war, leaving behind his true love. The young woman must not only accept separation from her lover, but also take on and master unfamiliar tasks. Yet through her struggles she herself ultimately becomes a patriotic agent in the war of 1812. Despite the widespread nature of this narrative in early Russian literature, the transformation of the young woman from grieving lover into patriotic heroine is not present in the *longue duree* perspective. Indeed, the role of the woman is often forgotten. My paper will examine the construction of masculinity and femininity and the importance of ideal gender types. It will investigate why and how the heroine disappeared from the memory of 1812.

Wolfgang Koller (Free University of Berlin):

Heroic Times: Gendered Images of the Anti-Napoleonic Wars in German Feature Films of the Interwar Period

During the interwar period historical movies on the Antinapoleonic Wars ranked high in the German cinematography. In this phase of rapid social, economic, cultural and gender transformations following the First World War, the Napoleonic time became an important reference point for contemporary discourses that allowed to reinterpret the past and to reconstruct present identity patterns. As film had become a very significant mass media in the 1920s to express these discourses, the historical past was interpreted as a model for national liberation from 'external' suppression. The Napoleonic period in cinematographic memory helped to create a common 'national' past of the German society. These movies transported different gender and collective identity patterns with in many cases evident revisionist tendencies in female images and reconstructions of mostly male heroic leaders. Based on feature movies I will indicate the various filmic constructed gender models and analyze how they were linked to questions of nation, national identity and the transforming gender roles in the German society after the First World War.