



Book Reviews

Militarizing Men: Gender, Conscription, and War in Post-Soviet Russia. By Maya Eichler. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012. 256 pp. \$24.95 paper, \$72.00 cloth, \$14.97 eBook.

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Much of the literature on military masculinity in feminist International Relations suggests that idealized militarized masculinity is consistently valorized among the society of the state that hosts the military — that it is valued in patriotism, in nationalism, and in citizenship. It is this privileged relationship that leads feminist scholars to suggest that the prioritization of masculinity in militarism and the prioritization of masculinity in state leadership and interstate relations are intrinsically related and that both are key to gender subordination, particularly the subordination of women to men.

Recent work has complicated that story. Some research has suggested that the traits we normally characterize as militarized masculinity are actually paired with their opposites in military practice (e.g., Belkin 2012). Other work has pointed out that feminization of enemy belligerents is a common war tactic (e.g., Peterson 2010; Sjoberg 2013). Eichler's *Militarizing Men*, however, is perhaps the single biggest contribution to rethinking militarized masculinities within feminist IR.

Eichler's contributions along these lines are many. The biggest contribution in *Militarizing Men* to this conversation is that there is not a one-to-one relationship between soldiers, militarized masculinity, and honor. Instead, many men struggle with the expectations of militarism, and unpopular wars devalorize men who fight. Looking at the Chechen wars, Eichler suggests that the image of the masculinized warrior-hero held up as the (problematic) ideal-type in much of feminist IR work has been

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replaced by “four representations of the Russian serviceman: unwilling warrior, excessive warrior, fragile warrior, and unrecognized warrior” (location 2263/7357). Eichler explains that the combination of post-Soviet (political and economic) crisis and the difficult situation of the Chechen wars has led militarized masculinity often to be a place of dishonor in Russia.

A second contribution that Eichler makes is the understanding that the place of honor that feminists have seen for idealized militarized masculinity has relied on soldiering being voluntary. Chapter 3 explains how “as conscription relies on and helps constitute masculine identities tied to the military, the difficulties the state encountered with its conscription policy signaled a weakening of the link between masculinity and military service” (location 1248/7357). Since the Chechen wars did not successfully mobilize men, and those who did participate lacked societal and state recognition (or appreciation or support), military recruiting became even more difficult and militarized masculinity less privileged. A third contribution of *Militarizing Men* to understanding militarized masculinity is its characterization of that masculinity as complexly constituted. Eichler accounts for the manner in which the state, popular media, Russian military, general population, and the soldiers’ mothers’ movement all constitute, contest, and reproduce notions of Russian militarized masculinity in the Chechen wars.

With these three contributions, Eichler’s book adds complexity to understandings of militarized masculinities and their place in society, characterizing it as multiply constituted, multiply positioned, and always related to the context of the war being fought. That said, *Militarized Masculinities* is not only a smart contribution to theorizing what militarized masculinity is and how it comes to be. It is also a well-done political ethnography of the contemporary Russian state through the evolution of its militarization. Eichler explains that the post-Soviet history of Russian military masculinities is one where the relationship between prestige, militarization, and masculinity has been continually both challenged and reinforced. It is based on an exciting combination of historical research, media analysis, and first-hand interviews of veterans, draft evaders, and soldiers’ mothers in the Chechen wars. The fieldwork that serves as the basis for *Militarizing Men* was off the beaten path in Samara, a city southeast of Moscow.

The interviews in *Militarizing Men* show men whose experience in the military is anything but privileged. Eichler notes that the troops were

provided little food, inadequate medical care, very few benefits, and very little support during or after their fighting. In addition to being poorly supported by the military, soldiers are often not supported by their compatriots, who express concern about the quality of their service and the political and ethical value of the war they fight. Eichler documents “the constructed and fluctuating nature of gender identities” in militarism generally and in post-Soviet Russian militarism specifically (location 2819/7357).

Militarizing Men, then, not only complicates notions of military masculinities, but it also applies to a new domain in post-Soviet Russia a concept in feminist IR that had largely been limited to theoretical analysis or application to the United States. People in post-Soviet Russia had previously been relatively invisible to IR scholarship, and post-Soviet Russia has been a glaring absence in gender analyses of different locations in global politics over the last twenty years. These are all strengths of *Militarizing Men*, making it a great book both for scholars to read to broaden their horizons, and to assign in an undergraduate classroom as a case study of the complex relationship between gender and war(s).

If there is a complaint to be made about *Militarizing Men*, it is only that the richness of the information in the book is almost overwhelming to someone who does not have first-hand knowledge of Soviet-era and post-Soviet Russia. As a reader who does not specialize in the area, I would find the book easier to read if it had more comparisons to other cases around the world and analogies to other militaries. That said, it is possible that such comparisons could be a stand-alone article and might even detract from the coherence of a very well-organized book as it is written.

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